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NEW USES OF OLD DRAMAS:
THE IMPORTANCE OF JACOBEAN DRAMA
TO PLAYS BY FOUR CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PLAYWRIGHTS

by

Signy Jane Henderson

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

August, 1994

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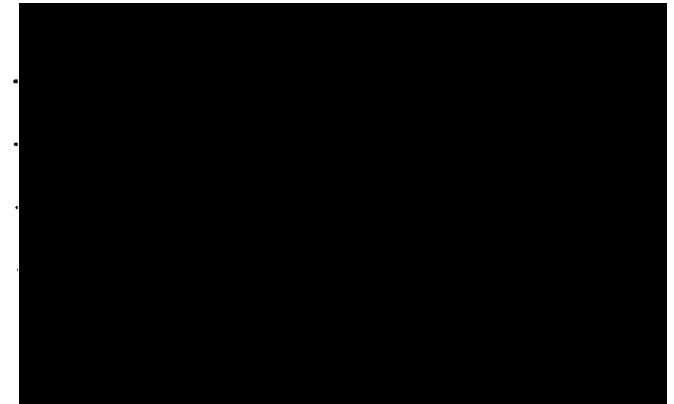
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by Signy Jane Henderson

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

During the 1970s and 1980s it became commonplace for critics of contemporary British theatre to sometimes describe new plays as "Jacobean." This dissertation focusses on plays by four contemporary British playwrights-- Peter Barnes, Edward Bond, Howard Brenton, and Howard Barker--each of whom has produced adaptations of Renaissance plays. It is the aim of the dissertation to identify and discuss the correspondences between these Renaissance plays and original dramatic works by these four writers. The Introduction offers an account of the use of the term "neo-Jacobean" and contextualizes the discussion in terms of other twentieth-century British playwrights who have worked with Renaissance material. Chapter One discusses the development of theatre design during the twentieth century, and argues that the trend towards open stages without proscenium arches creates a physical relationship between audience and performance which encourages greater critical and emotional involvement on the part of audience members. Chapter Two offers an account of the adaptations of Renaissance plays by the contemporary dramatists, arguing that their adaptations focus on issues of power, sex, and money. Chapter Three discusses the implications of dramatic form for the depiction and analysis of politically-motivated violence in the four playwrights' original plays. Chapter Four discusses the depiction of interpersonal violence, especially rape, and argues that its use by the contemporary dramatists in their analysis of power issues on a larger scale echoes some of the uses of violence on the Renaissance stage. Chapter Five discusses violence in the language of the contemporary plays and considers the representation of artists. The Conclusion offers a summary of the main issues discussed, some thoughts on the reasons for the playwrights' attraction to Renaissance drama, and suggestions for further study. A Bibliography and Endnotes are included.

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My supervisor, Alan Andrews, has guided me through every stage of this project, and has always been as generous with advice as he has been tactful in leaving me to ignore it when I persisted in my own errors. There are, I fear, many such to be found in the following pages; all are to be laid solely to my account, none to his. He has read more than enough of my work already, so I will spare him further prolixity with my warmest thanks, and refer him to page 239.

INTRODUCTION

Adapting Shakespeare is nothing new. As Gary Taylor amply demonstrates in Reinventing Shakespeare, successive generations have rewritten Shakespeare to accord with their own aesthetic, moral, or political visions.¹ Thus, Nahum Tate's King Lear found enthusiastic audiences for its happy ending during the eighteenth century, and the Victorians removed sexually or anatomically explicit material from such wicked plays as A Midsummer Night's Dream. The performance histories of many of Shakespeare's plays demonstrate that when they could not be adapted, plays would simply be ignored and left unstaged. A modern example is The Merchant of Venice, the perceived anti-Semitism of which has made staging it in Germany and the United States controversial.

Adapting Shakespeare's contemporaries, on the other hand, is new. There has been no similarly enduring vogue for such Jacobean playwrights as John Webster, Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, and John Marston. Comparatively neglected for more than two hundred years, and staged "straight" (i.e., without extensive alterations) when staged at all, their plays have attracted a significant revival of interest in the twentieth century. This is certainly due at least in part to T.S. Eliot's promotion of them in the period between the two World Wars. This revival of interest in the non-Shakespearian drama of the late sixteenth and

early seventeenth centuries has gone beyond the effect of having the original plays staged again, although (as I note in Chapter One) the initial impetus was often simply to preserve the plays as "authentically represented" museum pieces. More recently, several major British playwrights have devoted considerable creative energy to adapting the work of these lesser-known playwrights, as well as to reworking Shakespeare's plays.

As David Ian Rabey remarks in British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century, "the thematic and stylistic correspondence [between political plays of the 1970s and Jacobean drama]... verges on being a critical cliché" (134). Mary Karen Dahl refers to the "New Jacobean".² Robert Wilcher briefly discusses the use of the term "Jonsonian" by such critics as Irving Wardle and Michael Billington.³ To these observations I would add that it is not only modern political theatre which seems, consciously or unconsciously, to owe much to the drama of the English Renaissance. In 1924 T.S. Eliot considered it necessary to delineate a possible response to that drama sufficiently different from the approach of the nineteenth century (typified, for Eliot, by Charles Lamb's reworkings of Shakespeare) to be meaningful to his own contemporaries. The dominant strain of this search for contemporary relevance in the plays of the Renaissance was the sense of despair and loss typified by Eliot's The Waste Land, and

this accounts for the resurgence of King Lear (with its tragic ending restored) as a popular play. Similarly, the bleak, cynical vision of much Jacobean City Comedy, and the morally non-committal tone of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida and Webster's The White Devil, to name but two, appealed to Eliot and his post-Great War contemporaries more than did Lamb's cheerful and improving tales from Shakespeare, and the productions of the plays that strove for decorative effects.⁴

Along with Christopher Fry and W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Eliot attempted to bring the English theatre back to a tradition which used verse, and especially blank verse, as its most powerful mode of expression. Although there may have been a considerable personal and aesthetic agenda in this reintroduction of verse-drama to English audiences, these coincidental but separate projects can hardly be said to have been, in any meaningful sense, political. John Whiting's theatrical career began in the early 1950s (and ended, with his premature death, barely a decade later), with plays whose intensity and violence of speech and action show the influence both of Eliot's plays and of English Renaissance drama.⁵ Like Fry's and Eliot's, Whiting's is a non-naturalistic theatre, and his language, although written as prose, is as densely structured and rhythmic as free verse. Whiting's agenda is never overtly political, although it is often concerned with the relation

between the individual and his or her society, especially as represented by the Church. Whiting's neo-Jacobeanism is evident largely in this interest in the relation of the public to the private, and in his portraits of characters in situations of such heightened intensity that the consequences of the actions they choose become inescapable, the decisions all-consuming and irreversible. Like the trapped heroes (and anti-heroes) of Jacobean tragedies-- Flamineo and Vittoria in Webster's The White Devil, Giovanni and Annabella in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, or Beatrice-Joanna in Middleton and Rowley's The Changeling-- Whiting's characters are complex, often acting on hidden or barely-glimpsed motivations, and they find themselves in grotesquely heightened states of being where self-determination and self-assertion in the face of political and familial power-structures are achieved only at disastrous cost to themselves and to others.

Like Whiting's, Harold Pinter's theatrical language is a prose full of delicately poised cadence and rhythms, even in the expression of verbal abuse, and in the silences which distinguish Pinter's style. Pinter, more I think than Eliot, has matched poetic intensity to the banality and vulgarity of the real-life language spoken by his financially and personally impoverished characters. Like Whiting's and Eliot's, Pinter's characters find themselves in situations of intense difficulty and danger. Unlike the

Jacobean dramatists', however, Pinter's characters struggle to maintain the status quo, rather than to reach beyond it, shoring up their existences against the ill-defined menaces which hover around the edges of their consciousnesses.

Another playwright with a strong and acknowledged influence on Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, uses a non-naturalistic prose to represent the struggles of his characters to sustain life in a universe which is hostile in general; Godot represents power and authority to the pathetic tramps, but the precise mechanism of that power is unknowable and unimportant. Beckett's interest is in Godot's ability to hold Vladimir and Estragon captive by their own free will, and in their human responses to their situation.

An overtly political agenda combined with some use of verse is evident in the plays of John Arden. His remarkable early play Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (first performed at the Royal Court on October 22, 1959) uses both a heightened prose reminiscent of Whiting's, and snatches of poetry, doggerel, and song in the mouths of a number of characters. The play achieves a moment of ghoulish horror to rival any in Webster's plays when Musgrave sings and dances "with demoniac fury" as he raises on a rope "an articulated skeleton dressed in a soldier's tunic and trousers" (Act III, scene 1). The skeleton, which Musgrave claims is that of a young man from this town he and his men are visiting, is returned mockingly to the boy's former lover, Annie, much

as the Duchess of Malfi is offered the (severed) hand of her husband to kiss in prison, as The Revenger's Tragedy's Vindice offers his long-dead lover's skull to the Duke as a "mistress" (III.v), or as Titus Andronicus's last two sons are returned to him, minus their bodies, after decapitation. In each case the presentation of the corpse or dismembered parts of the victim's loved one is a deliberate act, to punish and torment him or her for some perceived transgression. Serjeant Musgrave's actions are like Tamora's, Vindice's, and Ferdinand's, but his motivation is larger and the statement he tries to make with the grotesque display of Billy Hicks's skeleton is for a whole town, a public event, rather than a private one. Like the Jacobean characters mentioned above, Musgrave is apparently insane, although not for that reason necessarily without insight, and his actions cause the deaths of others and, the end of the play suggests, himself, without achieving the desperate mission he set out to accomplish. The savage intensity of Musgrave's accusation of the townspeople matches the combination of graphic violence and heightened emotion which creates the spectacle of Giovanni's triumphant public declaration (complete with Annabella's heart on his dagger) of his passionate love for his sister. Many of Arden's plays use verse and other non-naturalistic devices in combination with (or to the exclusion of) prose, but none matches the Jacobean horror of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance and

none demonstrates the same interest in using the techniques of the Renaissance stage to create such a striking atmosphere for very serious social comment.⁶

Before the shock of the "new realism" of such British plays as John Osborne's Look Back in Anger and Arnold Wesker's Trilogy, the English theatre's prevalent mode of naturalism was varied by the advent of the Theatre of the Absurd. The first English performances of Waiting for Godot were greeted with mixed critical reaction, and issued in only one notable English practitioner of the form, N.F. Simpson. Certainly Pinter's work owes something to the Theatre of the Absurd, and especially to Beckett's plays, although his later work takes him out of Martin Esslin's early categorization of Pinter as one of the playwrights of the Absurd. It is, however, a movement important for its function in opening up the English theatre to a non-naturalistic tradition that, although not directly related (it seems to me) to the drama of the English Renaissance, nonetheless uses the techniques of symbolism and gesture in ways closer to that earlier theatre than to the naturalistic plays of England's nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps the failure of the Theatre of the Absurd to establish a more lasting place in the English theatre is due to the absence of the Expressionist and Surrealist theatres which prefigured the advent of Absurdism in France, Spain, Italy and Germany. Whiting and the verse-dramatists

mentioned above, too, offer an important degree of variety in English theatre before the more widely recognised revolution which followed the visit to Britain of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, and the English Stage Company's production of Look Back in Anger in 1956.

One of the earliest of British playwrights in the period after George Bernard Shaw to adapt or rewrite Shakespeare, and to draw on the then-new dramatic mode of the Theatre of the Absurd, is of course Tom Stoppard. His Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead--a version of Hamlet from the point of view of these two mutually indistinguishable, marginal characters--captured considerable attention when it was first performed, in several revised versions, in the 1960s. The play continues to attract notice, most recently in a film version scripted by the playwright. Stoppard has also exhibited a passing interest in Jacobean drama, in his play The Real Thing (1982), which stages parts of John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. Dogq's Hamlet and Cahoot's Macbeth (1979) are two short plays by Stoppard which condense the action of the respective Shakespeare plays and give them Stoppard's characteristic twist by shifting perspectives and unsettling received opinions about the originals.

Charles Marowitz has created versions of several of Shakespeare's most familiar plays, including The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure,

Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth. Marowitz's versions (they, like Stoppard's, use the original text as a starting-point and then rewrite it extensively) emphasize the violence and cruelty of Shakespeare's plays and typically resist what Marowitz sees as the moralistic and trite endings of the plays. Indeed, Marowitz's work is so critical of Shakespeare as to be actively antagonistic, and Marowitz himself has referred to his treatment of Shakespeare as a "rape."

Arnold Wesker, too, has written a corrective to what he sees as Shakespeare's anti-Semitism in The Merchant of Venice (The Merchant, 1977); written in a spirit of genuine concern at the dangers of such texts as Shakespeare's, Wesker's play has received few productions. It has found a niche, however, as a classroom text used by teachers in discussions of the potentially objectionable elements in Shakespeare's play.

Similarly angry, although not at Shakespeare, is David Edgar's Watergate satire, Dick Deterred (1974). In this play Edgar demonstrates the striking similarity between Richard Nixon and Richard III, and between the events of the Watergate affair and Shakespeare's plot. Like Barbara Garson's rather less effective Macbird! (1967), in which President Lyndon Johnson and his wife Ladybird become the Macbeths, Edgar's play is an unapologetically topical satire, and despite the quality of its writing and the witty

appropriateness of the parallels between the two Richards, its appeal is limited by this occasional status. Edgar also wrote an angry parody of Romeo and Juliet, called (in reference, presumably, to the movie Love Story) Death Story (1972), which has been largely neglected since its first performances.

Other important contemporary British dramatists work, more or less self-consciously, with Renaissance material. A notable (and notorious) recent instance is Peter Flannery, whose play Singer (Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989) attempted to create a modern version of the Jacobean idiom to describe the life-story of Peter Singer, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps who, after coming to Britain as a refugee, becomes a Thatcherite success story. Flannery paints his (anti-)hero very much in the tradition of the Jacobean malcontent, a man whose sense of morality is so outraged by his victimisation that he adopts wholeheartedly an ethic of self-interest and greed. The play operates as a modern version, too, of the Jacobean City Comedy, with Singer engaging in property speculation and haunting both the low- and high-life of the city. Flannery includes a jibe at the cultural supremacy of Shakespeare; arriving as a refugee with no English and a desperate desire to prove his suitability to be considered for permanent immigration, Singer misquotes the only piece of English culture he knows:

My daughter!
Oh my duck's hat!

Fled with a Christian!
 Oh my duck's hat and my daughter!
 William Shakespeare.
 (Act One, Scene One)

Apart from the satire of recognizing Shakespeare's stranglehold on the English imagination, there is obvious irony too in the fact that Singer--a victimised Jew--should choose The Merchant of Venice to quote at the (gentile) immigration official. Like Shylock, Singer will be in the course of the play both a victim and a ruthless exploiter who attempts to use his money to gain revenge on Gentile society. It is possible to see in Flannery's co-option of the Jacobean an affinity with Peter Barnes's interest in Jonson, presenting audiences with "carnival[s] of sharks and suckers" at what Barnes sees as the beginning of Capitalism in Europe.

Caryl Churchill, generally acknowledged to be one of the most important of the current generation of playwrights, also uses Renaissance material in her plays, but her interest is more in history than in dramatic form. In Top Girls and Vinegar Tom she uses a modern idiom to depict the inequities of life for women and the poor in Renaissance Europe, and parallels that oppressive system, both explicitly and implicitly, with the contemporary realities of life in Britain.

In this thesis I want to focus on four contemporary playwrights who have worked repeatedly with late-Elizabethan

and Jacobean plays. The responses to Renaissance drama by Peter Barnes, Edward Bond, Howard Brenton and Howard Barker are diverse and complex. While exploring this diversity, I also seek to establish the elements of the Jacobean drama which attract all of them, and which are detectable as positive influences on their work beyond the adaptation of Renaissance plays. I am interested in finding answers to a number of questions raised implicitly in the (largely unanalyzed) identification by critics of a strain of "neo-Jacobeanism" on the English stage (referred to above, p 2). I ask whether "neo-Jacobeanism" is a meaningful or a useful term in considering the work of these four playwrights; what, in particular, are the elements of their work that have led to this label? Is the relationship between these living writers and their Renaissance antecedents one of imitation? Do elements of revision or correction enter into their work with regard to the Jacobean? Is the debt to Jacobean drama confined to the language of the plays, or to staging practices, to dramatic form, or to any other single element of theatre? If critics have noted the correspondence between Jacobean drama's violence and the onstage violence of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, what sets their use of violence apart from that of other playwrights?

The reader will guess from the length of the following work that my answers to these questions are productive of

considerable thought about the plays, and that I do see the term "neo-Jacobean" as useful, at least in relation to some aspects of these writers' plays.

Of the playwrights I wish to focus on in this study, Peter Barnes is alone in not having rewritten or adapted any play by Shakespeare, although he has the largest number of adaptations of Renaissance plays to his credit. Barnes shows a preference for adapting Ben Jonson's plays; in 1970, he adapted The Alchemist, in 1973 The Devil is an Ass and, for BBC Radio, Eastward Ho!. Volpone appeared in 1976, Bartholemew Fair in 1978 and The Silent Woman in 1979. Barnes has also adapted two plays by John Marston--Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge--creating one play, Antonio. Barnes adapted Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside for radio in 1979.

Edward Bond shows a similarly varied interest in the drama of Shakespeare's contemporaries. In 1966 he edited A Chaste Maid in Cheapside for the Royal Court Theatre and in 1976 he produced an acting edition of John Webster's The White Devil. In addition to these versions of the original texts, Bond's play Lear is an original play which takes as its genesis the story of King Lear, and uses the audience's familiarity with the older play to create a debate within the theatre about what Bond sees as important power issues Shakespeare raised in King Lear but failed to address.

Howard Barker, too, has written an original play which

has King Lear as its starting-point. Seven Lears has its roots in the mysterious absence from Shakespeare's play of all but the barest mention of Lear's wife, the mother of his daughters. Barker's play speculates about what the conditions must have been prior to the opening of the action of Shakespeare's account of Lear's life that made the suppression of the mother's memory "necessary." Barker's best-known adaptation, and one of his best-known plays, is a version of Thomas Middleton's Women Beware Women. Highly controversial, as Barker's work often is, the play consists of a first Act into which Barker condenses most of the action of Middleton's first three acts, and then a second Act which is wholly original and in which Barker proposes to cure the pessimism he finds in the tragic ending of the original play.⁷

Howard Brenton writes a corrective to Shakespeare in his version of Measure for Measure, but, unlike Barker's counteracting the pessimism of Women Beware Women, the tone of this correction is itself pessimistic. Brenton rejects Shakespeare's resolution of the plot, with its restoration of the Duke and its forgiveness of Angelo, Claudio and Barnardine, and instead has Claudio die and Isabella deported. Like Edgar's Dick Deterred, Brenton's Measure is full of highly topical references to then-current events in Great Britain, specifically the rise of an overtly anti-immigration lobby within the Conservative government of the

day, and is in part a satire. Brenton's Measure has more lasting relevance than Edgar's play, however, dealing more with general political problems than with specific personalities and historical events.⁸ Less topical still is Brenton's Thirteenth Night, which uses a dream-sequence (constituting most of the play) to stage a version of Macbeth in which the protagonist Jack Beaty becomes Britain's first democratically elected Marxist prime minister, only to see himself and his lover, Jenny Gaze, destroyed by their power. Thirteenth Night is not geared to any set of historical facts, but is, rather, a speculation on whether the plot of Shakespeare's Macbeth could have relevance in a modern political setting. Brenton turns the Weird Sisters into three anarchic activists who plague Beaty and Gaze, spray-painting slogans and taunting them by repeating their broken election promises.

My selection of Peter Barnes, Edward Bond, Howard Brenton and Howard Barker for consideration in this study may seem at first a surprising one. They do not form a neat group, having never worked together on any project, nor with the same theatre companies at the same time. The criteria for selection are qualitative and to a degree subjective, but the selection can be justified by reference to specific elements present in plays by all four.

The first of these elements is a commitment to political theatre.⁹ All four playwrights write, as Peter

Barnes says of himself, "to make the world a little better,"¹⁰ and consequently see the theatre as a worthwhile tool for social and political education. All have had plays performed in Britain's mainstream, government-subsidised theatres (the National Theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare Company), as well as writing for smaller, fringe groups, and for independent companies. They have all, too, written for the electronic media of radio and television, and for films, although my emphasis in this dissertation will be on their work in the live theatre. All are acutely aware of the influence on their work and its reception of the conditions in which it is produced. All four have had their work greeted by censorship (actual or attempted), by outrage, and by critical acclaim. While the academic critical attention paid to the drama is less comprehensive than that paid to the genres of fiction and poetry, each of the four has the distinction of having had a book-length study dedicated to his plays. In Bond's case, indeed, several books have been published with the playwright as the sole focus.

The crucial distinguishing factor I would adduce is their interest in the drama of the English Renaissance. What distinguishes the four playwrights I am interested in from Tom Stoppard is their politically inspired view of the theatre (whether in original work or in adaptation) as a tool for radical social change as much as for entertainment. What distinguishes their work on the English Renaissance

from that of Charles Marowitz is their use of a variety of styles and forms in adapting the plays (Marowitz's versions are for the most part collages with specific, and admittedly polemic, agendas). They are distinct from David Edgar in that their interest in the drama of the English Renaissance exhibits itself in an ongoing and complex criticism of the drama of that period, and their adaptations and revisions of the Jacobean are seldom, and never solely, satires or parodies. Unlike many of the other writers I have discussed, all too briefly, in this Introduction, their interest in the drama of the English Renaissance is sustained and affects (in ways addressed in the following chapters) both their ways of thinking about power issues in the public and private spheres, and their ways of staging those issues. Finally, my interest is aroused by their independent uses of Renaissance drama to craft their own theatres of debate, social comment and political commitment.

The full justification of my selection of these playwrights as a group will of necessity belong to the following chapters. I do not seek to prove that any of the writers is slavishly imitative of Jacobean drama. Rather, my intention is to identify the elements in their adaptations that make the earlier drama so compelling a source of material for them. Accordingly, the dissertation begins with a discussion of the physical theatrical conditions in which they work. Chapter Two offers a

detailed discussion of the four writers' Renaissance adaptations, many of which are unpublished. In the next three chapters, I consider the playwrights' work other than adaptation with reference to the important elements that link it to the earlier plays.

A comparative project such as this runs a great many risks. It is not my intention to establish any stable interpretation of Renaissance drama in general, or of specific plays. My interest is in the responses to the plays by these four writers; it is their interpretations, and at times their perceptions of public attitudes to the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, that are foremost in the following discussion. The greatest risk of all is to suggest, inadvertently, that the elements of the plays I focus on here are the only ones worth discussing. This of course is never true, and this study does not propose to be an exhaustive nor a definitive account of the work of these four writers. Rather, I propose an account of the element of "Jacobeanism" that so many critics have referred to in the plays of these disparate playwrights. My intention is to illuminate the plays, and to send readers and audiences back to them with a fresh perspective and an open mind.

CHAPTER ONE

Finding the Right Conditions: Theatre Space and Ideology

Space is fundamental, physically and aesthetically, to the theatre. A performing space of some sort--permanent or temporary, purpose-built or improvised, public or private--is necessary to the creation of theatre. These practical considerations aside, it cannot be denied that the nature of the playing-space, its location, physical characteristics, and even its ownership, are influences on the performance it houses. Since the time of the ancient Greek drama (if not before),¹ the location of performance has been as meaningful a part of the theatrical experience as the text of the play. Civic laws or religious requirements may dictate that some things must be enacted, or that others may not be depicted. The location of the Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatres in London's "Liberties" has long been understood to be both a result of civic laws which were hostile to the professional theatre, and evidence of that theatre's viability and popularity. Much valuable work has been devoted to the complex legal and political status of Shakespeare's contemporary theatre.² The influence of Puritanism, especially, on the theatre, reaching a climax in the closing of London's theatres in 1642, is much discussed.

Of course, the relationship between Puritanism and the playhouses is a complicated one. It is possible to argue that the social phenomenon that was Puritanism was a positive influence on many theatrical practitioners, enriching and varying a number of contemporary political and social debates, and at the least providing such playwrights as Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton with another class of persons to satirize.

While the playing space may be as simple a thing as a clearing in a crowd in a public area, most text-based theatre, the type with which this dissertation is concerned, is performed in more permanent surroundings. My interest in this chapter is in the nature of the theatrical spaces for which Shakespeare and the Jacobean wrote, and in the implications of such theatres for the theatrical conditions in which Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker write. I therefore offer a general (and necessarily brief) discussion of the Jacobean public theatres.

It would be impracticable and redundant for me to rehearse here, even in summary, all that is known or surmised about the stages on which the plays of Jonson, Shakespeare, Marston, Middleton and Webster were first performed. Instead, let me identify what I see as the most significant features of that theatre in relation to modern theatrical practice.

To begin with the physical features of the stage

itself: it was as large as 43 feet wide and 27 feet, six inches deep,³ thrust out into the theatre yard, surrounded by stage boxes and several levels of "rooms" and--largely, at least--open to the sky. It had no proscenium arch, no way of screening the stage from the audience, except at the very back of the stage, in the small discovery space. Stage settings were minimal, largely restricted to the properties carried on by the actors. Despite its large playing area (comparable to the largest permanent stages built since 1950, and considerably larger than most stages with proscenia built in England between 1850 and 1950), our modern impression of the Jacobean public theatre is of intimacy, a sustained and meaningful degree of contact between the action on stage and the spectators.⁴ Actors and audience were both at the mercy of the weather; rain onstage would have meant rain on much of the audience. Without artificial lighting, audience members were as well-lit and as visible as the people they had paid to see.⁵ In short, the actors and audience must have shared the theatrical environment in a way quite alien to the proscenium theatres of the nineteenth century.

These latter theatres, many of them (such as the Haymarket, the Duke of York's, or the Garrick in London, to name a few) still in use now, use the proscenium arch to close off the action of the play, to make it more remote from the audience. Changing patterns of work and leisure,

and improvements in artificial lighting meant that as the Renaissance faded into the Restoration, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, evening performances became the norm, rather than the daytime performances which were the sole option available to the Jacobean public theatre.

The private, indoor theatres of the English Renaissance, such as the Blackfriars, the stagings of plays, masques, and operas in great houses and at Court, presented different challenges and opportunities for theatrecraft. Some of these were technical, like the differences in lighting effects; but the largest difference must have been in the audience. In the private theatres, and to a greater extent in great houses and at Court, the audience was by definition a smaller, wealthier, better educated and less socially diverse group; they developed a sophisticated and expensive taste for more elaborate staging, for novelty, and for spectacle. This type of theatre, as distinct from the Jacobean public theatre, is (along with models imported from continental Europe) an ancestor of the picture-frame stages of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As the enclosed, proscenium-arch theatres evolved, increasingly elaborate, pictorial or naturalistic scenographies placed the actors and the action in environments explicitly different from that inhabited by the audience. As Ronald Hayman notes, "an illuminated realistic set and a darkened auditorium encourage the pretence that

the audience is not really there".⁶ Improvements in the science of architectural acoustics made it possible to build the auditoria larger and to have audience members sitting at greater distances from the stage than would be practicable in the public theatres, which stacked rooms of seating upwards rather than tiering them backwards as modern theatres do.⁷

The implications of all these changes are not merely technical. Changing the nature of the space in which theatre happens necessarily changes the relationship between the play and its audience. Compared to the picture-frame stage, in which virtually all the action occurs behind a proscenium in an artificially lit, representational setting while the audience watches, some distance away and in darkness, the conditions of the Renaissance public theatres must have promoted a more lively and reciprocal relationship between stage and audience. Certainly audiences sitting or standing close to the Jacobean stage must have felt less protected, less anonymous, more a part of the particular theatrical event than their late Victorian counterparts would.

This discussion will suggest that I see the relationship between play (or performance) and audience as important. Any actor can attest to the effect different audiences have on performances; similarly, a spectator's response to a theatrical experience includes a response to

the rest of the audience on that particular evening. Ann Jellicoe has described the way her assessment of her own early play, The Knack, changed according to the audience with which she watched it performed.⁸ Intensely naturalistic stagings separated from the audience by the proscenium minimize two-way communication; other methods of staging, notably those in the round or using thrust stages, actively seek a closer relation between action and spectator.

Much has been written about the development of the stage since 1880.⁹ The reasons for the gradual move during the last 100 years away from picture-frame stages to theatres more closely resembling the Jacobean public theatres are numerous and, often, contradictory, springing from spirits both of innovation and traditionalism. Much of the impetus to build such stages, notable among them the National Theatre's Olivier Theatre, the main stage at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Barbican in London, and the Shakespeare Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, has come from the drive to preserve and promote the plays of Shakespeare as a vital part of the cultural heritage of the English language, and to a much lesser degree, plays by his contemporaries as well.¹⁰ Many older theatres--the Royal Court, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford upon Avon--have from time to time been adapted to add aprons or thrust stages which extend beyond the arch and towards the

audience. Such renovations have often included radical realignments of seating in an attempt to make the stage more flexible and less remote from the audience.

The books I have referred to above give one a sense of the exciting climate of change in thinking about both the physical characteristics of the stage, and its uses, during the present century. A major influence on theatre design in England during the last 100 years has been a commitment to staging Shakespeare, and to creating theatrical spaces which encourage the revival and sustenance of what is traditionally thought of as England's best drama.

These and other important changes in thinking about theatre in England resulted in the establishment, in the course of this century, of the two "national" theatres, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, and the provision of further state funding for the live theatre in the form of Arts Council grants to a variety of theatres. This second group includes the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, which began under the directorship of George Devine with the intention of staging new writing, as well as other, smaller, and often less permanent companies. The provision of public funding for the creation of theatre has a number of effects; primarily, it relieves the theatre involved of having to cover all of its costs, including the generation of sufficient profit to reward investment, with ticket sales. The obvious result of this is that companies

may take risks in staging work which is not guaranteed to be popular, and therefore financially successful, but which has some other value to recommend its performance. A further effect, and one which had been of the first importance to George Devine and others in the period between the wars, is that a stable and reliable, if modest, flow of income over an extended period of time allows the formation of permanent (or at least semi-permanent) companies of actors and other theatre-workers. In the London theatre it had been normal practice to hire actors for a particular show and then to disband the company when that production closed; even in touring provincial theatre, and in the theatres run by the actor-managers, where greater continuity was usual, there was little or no ideological commitment to the formation of a company that would grow creatively by working together repeatedly. The establishment of permanent companies at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre marked a major change of direction for the theatre profession in England, particularly in its attitude to the contribution made by actors to the plays they perform. A third effect of public funding, and one which has a special meaning for the four socially committed playwrights in this study, is its potential to create in the recipients of the funding a sense of public obligation, a duty to give society something of value in return for its financial support. Arts Council grants have been of considerable assistance in directly

funding playwrights, and in providing the companies with guarantees against loss when their plays are produced, as well as helping to create a relatively stable theatrical environment where new writing can be tested in performance without the demand to fill the house in order to break even. As Ronald Hayman notes,¹¹ and as history since 1973 has unfortunately shown, this funding has been subject to political vicissitudes and caprices and is now increasingly under attack, both on the grounds that it is an unaffordable luxury and that it is an inappropriate use of public money to fund plays (such as Brenton's The Romans in Britain) that many members of society find morally offensive, or that the government finds politically offensive. Despite severe cuts to the amount of funding available, and restrictions on the types of activities eligible for Arts Council support, however, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre continue to operate with a combination of public funding and conventional revenue-funding; other theatres, including the Royal Court, operate on a similar basis, albeit with a lower level of subsidy. Bond, Barnes, Brenton and Barker have all benefitted, directly and indirectly, from the availability of State funding for the theatre.

It is in this climate of change and innovation, aimed in part at restoring and preserving the classics, that Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker start writing for the

theatre. This alone cannot account for their sustained interest in Jacobean drama, nor for the more general sense (referred to in the Introduction) among critics that "neo-Jacobeanism" was taking over in the 1980s. It is, however, a vital part of the puzzle that this dissertation seeks to solve. Does the space in which plays are staged contribute to this phenomenon? My contention in this chapter is that a significant element of the "neo-Jacobeanism" exhibited by these four playwrights is their use of the physical qualities of the stage and auditorium to draw the audience in to the action and thought of the plays. The neo-Jacobeanism of these writers, I argue, is not merely coincidental or circumstantial; the form in which the play is staged is a locus of their engagement with Renaissance models.

A typical production in a proscenium theatre, with the audience sitting comfortably in the dark, comes as close as can be imagined to the experience of watching a movie or television; the difference is that the theatre remains a live medium, with all the attendant possibilities of unscripted mistakes and unforeseen changes. The audience is in the presence of living actors, but the distancing effect of the picture-frame stage makes them seem remote. Imagine the scenario of the audience sitting in the darkened theatre, waiting for the play to begin, interrupted by the entrance into the house of a loud and obviously very drunk

man who refuses to take the seat the usher has offered him and actually clambers up onto the stage, and pulls apart the elaborately constructed illusionist set as the audience watches in disbelief and the female usher struggles with him. Exactly this happened in the 1978 production by Michael Bogdanov of The Taming of The Shrew at Stratford-upon-Avon, not once, but at every performance; the drunk patron was the actor (Jonathan Pryce) doubling the roles of Petruchio and Sly, while the usher was to turn into Katherine. Some audience members were, according to Dennis Kennedy, moved to "help the crew suppress the disruption," while some others "fled from the house" at the complete demolition of the set which left the walls of the theatre bare but for the scaffolding.¹² Such a startling way of opening a play, especially one which is set up as a play within a play to begin with, may seem mere gimmickry. Bogdanov's point, however, was more than a clever way to get the characters for the Induction onstage. This opening tore down a perfectly-perspectived set, with a faithful representation of "the real" sixteenth-century Padua, disappointing the expectation it had aroused in the audience of seeing a traditional, mimetic, naturalistic performance of a well-known comedy. The fact that some audience members were drawn into the "real" illusion, that Jonathan Pryce was a rowdy patron and a menace to the set, should remind us that all theatre, however non-naturalistic, is about the

manipulation and creation of illusions. It is interesting too, that Kennedy notes two (by implication three) reactions within the audience: fearing the evening would be destroyed, some people left the theatre altogether, while others attempted to save the set and the performance. A third group--much the largest--must have sat and watched with interest, amusement, consternation, or a knowing smile having read the reviews, to see what would happen next. What did happen next was a production of the play that showed Kate genuinely tamed, brutalized and diminished, and one which had a powerful message about the universal aspects of Shakespeare's text and their applicability to late 1970s England, rather than about their remoteness in Renaissance Italy.¹³ The opening gambit was less a gimmick than a declaration of intention, setting up a definite relationship with the audience that would require its active consideration of the real issues of gender-politics within the play, and not merely a passive admiration of how much the set really did look like a Renaissance painting. Bogdanov's production achieved this by forcing the audience members to begin the play by making conscious decisions about their responsibility to act, rather than allowing them to watch passively, by presenting them with an elaborate, pictorial spectacle in the perspectived set and then destroying that illusion to leave only the bare walls and scaffolding of the stage.

This kind of "deconstructive act"¹⁴ is one way to break down the conventional barrier between play and audience. Bogdanov's strategy in The Taming of the Shrew was to set up, first, something that would look familiar and representational, and then to tear it down as the audience watched and, uncertain of what was happening, was forced into at least an emotional participation by not knowing what to do, how to respond. With the set, the audience's comfortable expectations about what would be required of them were also destroyed and replaced, not by another set, but by nothing.

I have discussed this production, with which none of the four playwrights I am concerned with here have any connection, partly to illustrate the technical means by which the theatre may destroy, rather than create, illusions. In stripping the stage, Bogdanov created to some degree the openness that typified the Jacobean public stage. He created, too, a lack of expectations; the audience would have to rely on the words of the play, and on the actions of the characters, for clues to everything from time of day, to physical location (Inside or out? Public space or private space?) and century. The audience in this type of theatre is forced into a closer, more critical relationship to the play, where nothing is taken for granted and any complexities and contradictions in the text will become prominent. Unlike the first audience I imagined, safely

cocooned from the stage, the audience at Bogdanov's Shrew was forced to start the evening with a difficult decision--to intervene, to leave, to sit there dumbly--and then spent the rest of the evening confronted with a rather brutal depiction of the humiliation and defeat of Kate by the motorcycle-riding Petruchio. The audience was obliged, by the conventions of performance, to watch the brutalization of Kate passively, while aware that the actor playing Petruchio was the same man whose (apparent) disruption of the performance and destruction of the set had earlier startled them into engaging in decision-making. It was not the intention, I assume, of Bogdanov's production to have the audience swarm the stage in outrage and rescue Katherine, nor to offer Petruchio their support; they had already been deprived of the illusion that these characters were "real" people, requiring their assistance, in the clever opening sequence. Such a production thus destroys the illusion of real life at the same time as it manoeuvres the audience into a critical engagement with the text; the illusion persists in the audience's acceptance of the conventions of theatre, so that they watch without intervening physically, but the comforting distance between audience and action, insulating the audience from the harsh events onstage, has been broken down.

Plays need not open with such a gimmick to put their audiences effectively on the spot. Edward Bond's Lear

raises expectations in the audience by its very title; we know who Lear is, and we are predisposed (I assume) to sympathize with Shakespeare's "foolish, fond old man." What the opening of Bond's play confronts us with, however, is the character called Lear apparently in good health, having a wall reminiscent of the Berlin Wall built, and shooting a man on the spot for the crime of failing to save his co-worker's life. To confuse our memory of King Lear further, Lear is followed by two apparently kindly adult daughters who beg him to show compassion. If the audience is confused at this opening, the audience at Brenton's The Romans in Britain has even less to guide it when that play opens in "Darkness." The first line spoken, still in darkness, is "Where the fuck are we?" Deprived of any visual clues, the audience cannot even rely, it appears, on the words of the characters to tell us where this is happening, or why. The deliberate use of modern idiom to render the speech of these ancient characters confuses the audience's ability to use language as a clue to the time in which the play is set. Brenton's play further disrupts any straightforward mimesis on stage by having Thomas Chichester, the 20th century British agent, share the space of the stage with the Romans and Druids. There is no physical signal in the text to indicate the evaporation of nearly 2000 years; the play juxtaposes the two periods in order to make an ideological point about the abuses and complexities of colonialism, and

Brenton's use of the identical settings--indeed, Chichester is on stage with the ancient characters, although not interacting with them, for much of the time--forces the audience to confront the identity of the moral situations.

All of this indicates the degree to which a relationship exists between stage and audience. The manipulation of that relationship, whether by writer or director, will be a significant part of the audience's experience of the play, and therefore of the play itself. The difference between watching a play on the proscenium stage, and on the open stage, is one between mediated and unmediated experience. In the former, the audience is offered a single angle of vision on the play (physically and metaphorically).¹⁵ They see it from the front, through the fourth wall, and with the use of spotlighting and other technical effects they may see only part of the stage at any time. In the latter, the audience is invited and, indeed, required to find its own angle of vision on the play, to choose where it will look and what it will give weight to. On the open, Renaissance stage, with spectators sitting and standing around the action, the audience has not one but many possible angles of vision. Spectators at such a theatre have choices about what they will watch; will it be the character who is speaking, or another who has been silent for some time? Will they focus on the suffering of the torture victim, or on the expression on the face of the

torturer? Such small decisions must ultimately influence the larger questions of which characters will have the audience's sympathy, of which moral or political position will seem to have been justified by the play, and thus of the largest issues of meaning within the plays. In theatres where debate is paramount--and among these theatres I classify the Jacobean theatre, including Shakespeare's, the theatre of Ancient Athens, and much contemporary British political theatre--this openness to the audience, inviting the audience's mental if not physical interaction, is a hallmark.

The character of the space in which performance occurs will be determined, in part, by what it purports to represent or depict. Phrases such as "Drawing-room Comedy" or "Bedroom Farce" demonstrate how the physical setting of a play can become its generic, defining element. The pictorial stage, with three walls and the suggestion of a fourth, naturally lends itself to scenes occurring indoors, and especially in small, domestic rooms. Moreover, a theatre whose style is naturalistic and mimetic of "real" life will put on stage the physical accoutrements of that life. It is thus possible--indeed, inevitable--for a production to indicate, before a single action takes place, such elements as period, nationality and social class. On the comparatively bare Renaissance stage, on the contrary, place and time are indicated primarily by textual means, and

with greatly varying degrees of what it is possible to regard as objective, factual accuracy in historical details. Indeed, the much-noted inclination of Shakespeare and his contemporaries to replicate historical or local detail (in such plays as Julius Caesar, or The Winter's Tale) only intermittently seems more in tune with the twentieth-century taste for modern dress productions and for the creative historicizing of material than does the interest of the nineteenth-century in historical "accuracy." This openness of place and time, unhampered by elaborate and definitive scenery, is half the distinctive constitution of the "fluidity" of the Renaissance public stage, allowing plays to flow from scene to scene with minimal (or no) interruption of the action. Many scenes in plays of the English Renaissance have no precise location, and the abrupt divisions between scenes necessitated by a proscenium curtain and set changes would have been impossible on that stage. On the large, open, undefined space of the Renaissance stage, it is even possible for two actions to be played at once, conceived as occurring in different locations, or in different metaphysical spaces. The intensely localized example of this technique is the aside, in which a character on stage speaks, and the audience hears, but the other characters apparently do not. The words are spoken in a separate space, in violation of any realistic representation of conversation. An example of the

larger-scale use of this potential for the division of space is in Middleton's Women Beware Women, where a game of chess is played by Livia and the Widow on the main stage, while the Duke and Bianca enact another scene--one which ends in her rape--"above" (II.ii). Although they have no lines to speak during the attack on Bianca, the Widow and Livia remain on stage throughout the scene; the audience makes the choice between watching them at the chess-board, and watching the more dramatically compelling, but awkwardly-positioned, action on the upper stage between Bianca and the Duke.¹⁶ The two locations are within the same house, but physically distinct; the action of the chess-game is contemporaneous with that of the entrapment and rape. Indeed, the aggression, deception and conquest in the board-game parallel the "game" of sexual predation initiated by the Duke. The interaction between the two scenes is metaphorical, perhaps even symbolic, but not literal; the staging works like a split-screen, or a series of cuts between two scenes, in a movie.

Unlike the private spaces in drawing rooms and bedrooms represented most successfully on the picture-frame stage, public spaces allow for a greater variety of meetings and interactions between characters. Public spaces are also those places in which events occur and decisions are made which are political rather than personal. Truly public spaces--streets, the open countryside, fairgrounds--are less

defined, too, by changing material attributes such as furniture; a street is a street and, in such historically indeterminate plays as Barker's The Bite of the Night and Bond's Early Morning, this literal and metaphorical openness of space in the setting contributes to the effect of the play. In these cases, as in others in the contemporary British theatre, the playwright stages material from another era with the intention of historicizing it: that is, the intention of elucidating the connections between the audience's present reality and the past that make the historical material politically relevant to the audience. Hedda Gabler's stifling, bourgeois drawing-room has immense significance as an indicator of the values which contribute to her destruction, but little relevance for an audience of women in the 1990s. The rubble over which Savage and Hogbin range, in The Bite of the Night, and which is simultaneously the detritus of the historic Troys and of the modern university, creates in its lack of factual specificity a setting which makes possible the play's non-realistic, nightmare journey between realities without privileging one over another, or reducing one to the diminished status of a dreamscape or fantasy.

The picture-frame stage distances the audience-members from the action, allowing them to feel their separateness from the performance and maintaining the illusion of the audience's non-existence. The open stage (in the round, or,

more commonly, partly in the round) attempts by contrast to include the audience in the action, to make of audience and performance one unit. Peter Barnes and Howard Brenton both have sustained associations with the Nottingham Playhouse, of which its architect, Peter Moro, has observed, "the cylindrical form of the auditorium clearly envelops the audience and the performance in one architectural space when the forestage is in use."¹⁷ Edward Bond has written about the necessity in his theatre of a style of staging which liberates the plays from the "theatre of Coward and Rattigan." Referring to his own production of The Woman in the Olivier Theatre of the National Theatre in 1978, Bond asserts that

I used the whole stage not because I was sure how to use it, but because it was important that the company and I faced the challenge, and took the opportunity, of using it. It's a stage that can help us to create the new sort of acting we need to demonstrate our world to audiences. It needs broad, unfidgety acting that moves from image to image, each image graphically analysing the story. When the audience's attention has been won in this way it's possible to do very small, subtle things. This combination of large and small, far and near, is a visual language of politics.¹⁸

In the same article, Bond writes about the use of large playing-spaces to represent "public places, where history is formed, classes clash and whole societies move". All four of the writers with whose work I am concerned in this study seek ways of staging that permit the audience to engage in an active and critical relationship to the play, and all use

the combination of small, personal moments and large, obviously public, political ones to achieve that relationship. Bond, at least, is clearly conscious of the apparent contradiction between the value of the large playing space, on the one hand, and the qualities of intimacy and shared personal experience I have adduced for the Renaissance theatre on the other. Indeed, Bond sees the manipulation of these two features of the stage as vital to the success of the "new theatre" he imagines.

How does theatrical intimacy contribute to the effects sought and, sometimes at least, achieved by Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker? I suggested in my Introduction that violence is the single most meaningful aspect of correspondence between these four contemporary playwrights and their Jacobean antecedents. I return in more detail to the topic of violence under the headings of political action, violence against the body, and verbal violence later in the dissertation; for the present, I wish to concentrate on the effect of violence on stage on an audience, and specifically, on the audience's engagement with the play. It is worthwhile remembering the image I presented a few pages ago, of an audience sitting comfortably in the dark, some distance away from the stage, a lighted area closed off and representing a more or less naturalistic setting quite unlike the audience's immediate environment, the house of the theatre. Whatever happens on stage in this type of

theatre, whatever violence or outrage, the audience is somewhat insulated from it. We watch and may be shocked, or surprised, or even sickened or angered, but the action is contained. We are secure in knowing that the physical effects of the violence are illusory, like the set, and that any gore (fake or otherwise) will land on the stage, not on us. Our horror, or pleasure, is vicarious and alienated; however much we may sympathize with the innocent characters, or deplore the actions of the villains, we are not part of the action. For the audience to become a part of the action in this theatre would be a serious breach of social and artistic etiquette, shattering the illusion so painstakingly created by costume, setting, and acting. We are likewise confident that the conflicts contained in this carefully sealed world will be resolved within it, too; they will be over when the curtain comes down and we go home, to resume lives which have been only momentarily diverted, not altered, by this theatrical experience.

Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" was formulated to work directly and self-consciously against this insulation of the audience from the full, visceral experience of violence on stage. The project was never fully realised but is, nonetheless, a key element in the creation of serious theatre in this century. "We cannot," Artaud writes in the First Manifesto for the Theatre of Cruelty, "continue to prostitute the idea of theatre whose only value lies in its

agonizing, magic relationship to reality and danger."¹⁹ To Artaud, tormented by physical and psychiatric illness and disgusted at the degenerate state of the theatre in 1920s and 1930s France,²⁰ the theatre's true function would be found in "re-examin[ing] man organically through anarchic destruction, his ideas on reality and his poetic position in reality, generating stupendous flights of form constituting the whole show."²¹ The theatre, for Artaud, is not to be about certainties and about the comforting resolution of conflicts within the carefully contained space of the stage, but about representing tangibly "the inescapable necessary pain without which life could not continue."²² As Esslin puts it, "the poetry [Artaud] wanted to deal in transcended the merely verbal, and . . . both the instrument to be used in conveying this kind of poetry and the recipient of that poetry, to be exposed to it so as to properly experience its impact, was in fact the human body."²³ Artaud's use of the word "cruelty" refers to the use of theatre to force the audience through life-changing experiences of violence and pain; "metaphysics," he writes in the First Manifesto, "must be made to enter the mind through the body."²⁴

Artaud is specific in his prescription of how the Theatre of Cruelty is to achieve its effects, insisting in the First Manifesto and elsewhere that such elements of theatre as lighting, costume, scenery (he proposes replacing painted, flat, naturalistic scenery with symbolic, movable

props) and acting technique must be radically re-conceived. He even defines the physical space in which his theatre will occur:

We intend to do away with the stage and auditorium, replacing them by a kind of single, undivided locale without any partitions of any kind and this will become the very scene of the action. Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it. This encirclement comes from the shape of the house itself.²⁵

Artaud further envisioned the audience members in rotating chairs which would allow--or perhaps force--them to follow the movements of the actors as they chased one another from one corner of the barn-like building to the other. There are clearly very real and important differences between Artaud's (largely theoretical) theatre and the theatre of Renaissance England; however, in his vision of an open theatre, in which the mimesis of reality is no longer attempted and in which the primary goal is meaningful contact between the audience members and the actors, there are recognizable elements of that earlier theatre. Like Brecht, Artaud displays an interest in the capacity of the Jacobean stage to manipulate the flow of sympathy and involvement between audience and play. While Brecht is interested in the strategic detachment of the spectator's emotions from the action, Artaud insists on allowing his audience "to experience the full reality of . . . emotions

without involving them in irreversible real life situations in which alone experiences of such shattering power could otherwise be lived through" so that "the theatre could change their basic attitude to life and institutions, their ways of thinking, their entire consciousness and thus transform society and the world."²⁶ Artaud's theatre, finally, de-emphasizes language in favour of the physical: "The reduced role given to understanding leads to a drastic curtailment of the script," he writes in "Theatre and Cruelty" in 1933, "while the active role given to dark poetic feeling necessitates tangible signs."²⁷

Artaud might only be an interesting footnote to English theatre history were it not for an experimental season of work directed by Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz under the auspices of the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964. The season was titled "Theatre of Cruelty," although Marowitz remarked at the time that "we are not trying to re-create the theatre of Artaud, or trying to take his old formulas and make them work as he himself failed to do. We're just using him as a kind of springboard into new areas."²⁸ This experimental work resulted, ultimately, in several productions and public performances of improvisations: the plays included Genet's The Screens, Peter Weiss's The Marat/Sade, and US, a piece about attitudes to the Vietnam war created in collaboration by Brook, members of the acting company, Albert Hunt, Adrian Mitchell and others. The

plays had interpersonal and systemic violence as themes; US uses the body of an actor to represent the division of Vietnam, and Marat/Sade depicts the historical incident of the murder of Jean-Paul Marat by Charlotte Corday in the context of the Terror after the French Revolution. Brook's involvement in the project was part of a longer (indeed, it appears, a life-long) one of radically revising the contemporary theatre to "attain the richness of the works of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, complex totalities so dense in experience as to reflect the nature of life itself."²⁹ It is therefore clear why Artaud's idea of a theatre which uses physical effects to communicate intense experience should have appealed to him. The Theatre of Cruelty season, and the subsequent production of US, were not strictly Artaudian in technique, but derived many of the shocking and striking effects (such as the guillotining in The Marat/Sade, or the burning of the butterfly in US) from Artaud's theory of physical, rather than intellectual, drama.³⁰ It is interesting that Brook should refer to the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as his model for the intensity of experience he seeks to communicate to theatre audiences.

The direct influence of Brook's work in the mid-1960s on Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker is hard to determine. Certainly all must be aware of it, to some degree at least; what is undeniable, however, is that the Theatre of Cruelty

season was yet another in Brook's series of contributions to the contemporary British theatre, one after which violent acts onstage must be considered in a new light. Although the precise nature of the relationship is unfathomable, I see in such theatrical images as the stoning of the baby in its pram in Bond's Saved (1965), the gassing of the Jews in Barnes's Laughter!, the rape of the Druid in Brenton's The Romans in Britain, or the slaughter and consumption of Lvov by his disciples in Barker's The Last Supper an adoption of theatrical practice which, while certainly not directly indebted to Artaud's highly personal view of theatre, is yet a product of a larger theatrical community which has assimilated Artaud through Brook's work.

The handling of images of violence and the manipulation of sympathies and detachment in the emerging "open" theatre of the later twentieth century is a central issue for the consideration of the four playwrights I am interested in here. As I argue in the chapters that follow, it is in violent relationships--relationships where frictions and conflicts are brought to the surface and manifested on stage as interpersonal violence--that the theatres of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker find the common ground that links them, one to another, and all to the Jacobean Tragedy of Blood, as well as to the City Comedy. In an "open" theatre, the experience for the audience of violence on stage is qualitatively different from the experience of violence on

the "closed" or picture-frame stage. The difference is in the mediation of experience. For the audience close to the open stage, physically vulnerable to the actors, perhaps even lit by the same lights that illuminate the playing space, already asked to make their own decisions about where to look, and whom to listen to, graphic physical violence has an element of danger. With no side-walls or wings to hide in, the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear becomes more horrifying; although rationally we know that some trick is being used, it is harder to imagine how the illusion is executed, and to believe comfortably that what we are watching need not concern us. The relative lack of illusionistic devices on the stage makes the violent incidents all the more terrifying, not least because we have to make moral decisions about them. This is not to suggest that the dramatists never have a fixed position of their own with relation to specific acts of violence, or to violence in general; rather, it is to assert that the audience is forced through an independent process of judging for itself when confronted with violence and is, at least for a time, deprived of the certainty that the play will mediate the experience by means of consistently sustained illusion and, finally, present us with a morally stable resolution of the conflicts which the play has depicted.

Much of the technique involved in this "implication of the audience"³¹ derives, directly or indirectly, from

Brecht's Epic theatre and, specifically, from his use of Verfremdungseffekte. It is interesting that Brecht should have written in his journals of

the element of conflict in Elizabethan plays, complex, shifting, largely impersonal, never soluble, and ... what has been made of it today, whether in contemporary plays or in contemporary renderings of the Elizabethans. Compare the part played by empathy then and now. What a contradictory, complicated and intermittent operation it was in Shakespeare's theatre!³²

To assert that Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker may have been influenced by Brecht, whether directly or through contact with other theatre practitioners, is hardly original, nor would a debt to Brecht set these four writers apart from all their contemporaries. I offer the above quotation, however, as tantalizing evidence that the man of the theatre who has done more in this century to cause us to re-think the relationship between stage and audience is not simply fascinated by the plays of the English Renaissance, but understood the essence of its theatrical potential. The remainder of this dissertation will argue that the four modern playwrights share with the drama of the English Renaissance a quality of debate, and a commitment to theatrical practices which involve the audience in the debate rather than preaching. All use elements of violence in their plays reminiscent both of the horrors of Jacobean tragedy, and of the much more recent "Theatre of Cruelty" Season, with a commitment to using the experience of violence to provoke the audience's critical judgement. It

is a theatre which removes its audience from the position of voyeur and puts it instead into the action. The degree to which any contemporary playwright engages with other texts is often debatable, and so I commence my argument with close attention to the documented contact between these four writers and the plays of the English Renaissance, in a discussion of their Jacobean adaptations.

CHAPTER TWO

Adapting Shakespeare and his Contemporaries

The playwrights in this study have all adapted or rewritten plays by William Shakespeare and/or some of his contemporaries--Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Marston, John Webster--and have done so more than once. Renaissance drama is not the only material used for adaptation; Peter Barnes, Edward Bond and Howard Brenton have adapted more modern material, including plays by Bertolt Brecht and Frank Wedekind, and Edward Bond has drawn on materials as diverse as ancient Greek drama (for The Woman) and Japanese history. It is, however, only in the use of plays from the English Renaissance that the four writers' adaptations coincide. Bond and Barnes have both prepared versions of plays by Wedekind, but this is a unique example of such a shared interest. All four adapt Renaissance plays; all have spent a significant part of their careers working on the adaptations. And, as I hope to show, all see adaptation as more than a merely necessary task for the working playwright, bringing older material into line with modern theatre practice. This engagement with plays by other playwrights suggests that all four see adaptation as a productive and valid way of shaping and testing their own

ideas. They respond to the plays they adapt with commitment both to the plays themselves and to their own conception of the relevance of the originals.

The reworkings of Jacobean plays range from the production of "tidied-up" acting editions for the contemporary theatre, through versions of plays which, while still the property of the original author, are substantially altered for the purposes of simplification or brevity, to the wholesale construction of new plays which have an important relationship to a Renaissance original. In the second group of plays it is sometimes possible to detect a corrective tone in the modern playwright's treatment of the older play. In the third group the new plays are by turns hostile, parodic, enquiring, or admiring towards the original plays. The boundaries between the types of adaptations are not definite. Barker's Women Beware Women, for example, belongs both to the second and third categories, while Barnes's The Devil is an Ass belongs both to the first and second.

What ties all the plays I discuss in this chapter together is the fact that they show the playwright, in each case, dealing directly with Renaissance material. Each play, whether an acting edition, an adaptation, or a wholesale reworking, requires the playwright's creative and critical engagement. Each also resonates for the audience with an awareness of the original play, if it is well-known,

or, if it is not, with a sense at least that in a modern staging of a centuries-old play two distinct cultures are meeting. In their corporate authorship, unwilling though it is by the Renaissance writers, each of these adapted plays makes use of the space between present and past and invites the audience to think critically about the differences and similarities between the two cultures of the play, and the implications of them for a contemporary reading of the play.

The drama of Shakespeare and the Jacobean is especially attractive to the modern playwrights as the most widely-known and respected in the English language. The cultural supremacy of this drama alone makes it an alluring subject for renovation. As my discussion of these texts demonstrates, however, there are other, ideological and artistic reasons for re-staging, re-writing and re-evaluating English Renaissance drama to account for these modern playwrights' engagement with it.

Peter Barnes is by any standards a prolific adapter. Since 1969, when he provided a version of Ben Jonson's The Alchemist for the Nottingham Playhouse, he has adapted six plays by Jonson for stage or radio (and in some cases, for both), as well as adapting the virtually unknown Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge by John Marston (Barnes's version, which draws the two plays into one, is called simply Antonio), and for radio both Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and two little-known plays by

the Restoration dramatist Thomas Otway, The Soldier's Fortune (1680) and its sequel, The Atheist (1683). All of these adaptations are unpublished.¹

Barnes's first Jacobean adaptation was the editing of The Alchemist in 1969 for the Nottingham Playhouse. The well-received production was directed by Stuart Burge, who in the programme "gratefully acknowledges the assistance given by Peter Barnes in the editing of the text." Reviews comment on the quick pace of the production, and Barnes insists in his programme notes that "the action does not develop but accelerates; each new episode calls for faster thinking on the part of the con-men and the audience." Irving Wardle commented that the play's "exposure of vice is of less importance than the sheer perfection of its intrigue" (Times, 10/2/70). John Barber (Daily Telegraph, 2/10/69) while generally positive about the production, suggested that the play might have "depths of meanness not quite touched by this production." Similar criticisms would be made of Barnes's next Jacobean adaptation, Jonson's little-known The Devil is an Ass (1973). In this production, again under Burge's direction at Nottingham, Barnes receives prominent credit as "adapter" rather than "editor". Barnes calls his version of the text "a restoration," emphasizing his efforts to clarify Jonson for modern audiences. He further admits that "[i]n certain cases I have added speeches and in one extreme instance, a

whole scene" (programme notes, 14/3/73). Reviewing the production in the Financial Times, Garry O'Connor felt that "cruelty" and "the grotesque" were "missing." "Mr Burge's approach is...laudably good-humoured," O'Connor goes on, "but it makes the play a romp rather than imbues it with savage indignation" (17/3/73). Wardle (Times 15/3/73) added that Donal McCann's Meercraft "trivializes the comedy and substitutes speed for understanding." Whether the production--for which Barnes was present at rehearsals as an advisor--actually achieved what the adapter intended is questionable in the light of these responses. Of The Devil is an Ass, Barnes writes the following programme note:

Jonson's carnival of sharks and suckers is reflected in steel glass. It is a world where hypocrisy and deceit permeate all levels of society, where everyone and everything goes masked, so that even vice and virtue are indistinguishable. ... This is the true comic horror, for without the distinction between good and bad, moral chaos reigns.

Clearly an effect of "comic horror," whether in a Jacobean play or a modern one, would require a specific balance of conflicting elements. In 1969, Barnes gives The Alchemist the comic (and very modern) subtitle "Never Give a Sucker an Even Break," and remarks that "Jonson is a radical artist, a dynamiter. He creates a world and shows us what is wrong with ours." Barnes does not appear to see Jonson's plays as "romps" and indeed suggests that there is an important element of social criticism, verging on the political, in Jonson's radicalism. Wardle, despite his other reservations

about the production, praised The Devil is an Ass as "a ferocious carnival of greed and folly which applies no less to Mr Heath's Britain than to ... Jonson's time" (Times 15/3/73).

In 1976, Barnes and Burge collaborated again on a production of The Devil is an Ass, this time for the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. The production went to the Edinburgh Festival in 1976 and to the National Theatre's Lyttleton Theatre in April 1977. Barnes is credited as both adapter and associate director for this production, a clue to the increasing kudos being accorded him and his contribution to these stagings of Jonson's plays. Barnes's programme notes make it clear that he has not lost his earlier interest in Jonson as a maker of political theatre:

This was the beginning of the capitalist system, we are seeing perhaps, the end of it. Jonson shows us how they lived then and how we live now.

Such a note in the programme would hardly prepare the audience for a "good-humoured romp," whatever the effect of the 1973 production may have been. Jonson's The Devil is an Ass is a comedy, much less well known than The Alchemist, but like that play, it is set in the London of Jonson's day. A minor devil, Pug, begs leave from his master, Satan, to spend one day on Earth causing mischief. The favour is granted somewhat reluctantly and the play ends with Pug begging to be taken back to Hell and in fact having to be physically rescued from the unfathomable evil of the people

he becomes involved with on Earth. For most of the play Pug is absent or ignored, and the main interest of the plot is in the schemes of Meercraft, the Promoter, to gull others, and in the relationship between Mrs Fitzdottrel, the mistreated wife of the gullible Fabian Fitzdottrel, and Wittipol, a young gallant whose romantic attraction to Mrs Fitzdottrel grows into respect and a genuine friendship. At the end of Jonson's text, Mrs Fitzdottrel controls her husband's fortune, Fitzdottrel has been cured of his greed and gullibility, and the tricksters are allowed to go free because, Manly says, they "will sooner make their way / To a true life by shame than by punishment" (Jonson, The Devil is an Ass, V.v.172-3). In spite of the lenience of this ending, Barnes sees the play as "a parody morality play. Instead of Everyman in Hell it is Everydevil on Earth" (Programme note). Barnes's version of the text is considerably shorter than the original and he has omitted or replaced words and passages that have become obscure or meaningless since the 17th century, in order to make the play comprehensible for a modern audience. His technique can be illustrated by comparing two passages, the first uncut from Jonson, the second the corresponding passage as it appears in Barnes's text:

Meercraft I think we ha' found a place to fit you
now, sir. Gloucester.
Fitzdottrel O, no, I'll none!
Meercraft Why, sir?
Fitzdottrel 'Tis fatal.
Meercraft That you say right in. Spenser, I

think the younger,
 Had his last honour thence. But he was
 but Earl.
Fitzdottrel I know not that, sir. But Thomas of
 Woodstock
 I'm sure was duke, and he was made away
 At Calice, as Duke Humphrey was at Bury:
 And Richard the Third--you know what end
 he came to.
 (II.i.376-383)²

Barnes's version is this:

Meercraft I think we ha' found a place to fit you
 now, sir. Gloucester. What say you to the
 Duke of Gloucester?
Fitzdottrel O, no, I'll none!
Meercraft Why, Sir?
Fitzdottrel 'Tis fatal. Richard the third--you
 know what end he came to.
 (1.3)

Barnes both condenses and clarifies the dialogue by excising the references to historical figures and events which would mean nothing to the modern audience, retaining only the one--to Richard III--which would be recognizable. He thus gets quickly to the punchline, without obscuring the joke with now unintelligible references. Similarly, when Wittipol, disguised as the Spanish Lady, offers a recipe for a fucus, Barnes deletes much of the profusion of meaningless mock-Spanish jargon, emphasizing instead the comic possibilities of the male actor dressed in a farthingale, "complete with fan" (2.2). Barnes systematically substitutes the word "lover" for the archaic meaning of "servant," "squire" for "escudero," and translates many of the Latin words used pretentiously by the characters. To prepare the audience for the appearance of Ambler, Lady Tailbush's steward, who

is missing for most of the play, Barnes inserts three separate casual comments about the fact that Ambler is missing before the scene in which Jonson has his name mentioned for the first time (IV.i. 16-18).

The majority of these changes are minor and predictable ones, made in the service of the text and the audience, to fulfil Barnes's stated aim of "restoring" texts of the Renaissance so that they are fully accessible to modern audiences as entertainments, rather than merely museum pieces. Other changes made by Barnes to the text of The Devil is an Ass were more controversial and involve considerably more ideological comment on the play than does the straightforward, though sensitive, task of clarifying obscurities and shortening the text. In a now quite famous attack, Bernard Levin objected to the production when it arrived for a short run at the National Theatre in the following terms:

The National Theatre, possibly as their special contribution to the Silver Jubilee, appear to have inaugurated Ben Jonson Bugger-the-Text Week.... Stuart Burge's production of Mr Barnes's mongrel work is excellent fun for those who know no better, such as the other critics...
(The Sunday Times, 8/5/77)

There were numerous published defences of the production, of Burge, and specifically of Barnes, to whom Burge referred in response as "the man who helps the audience" (The Sunday Times, 15/5/77). Levin's objections--and the objections of a few other critics--focus on the material that Barnes has

added to Jonson's text, and to his radical alteration of the play's ending. Levin's vehement objection draws attention to the wider issue of the validity (or otherwise) of the staging of adapted or amended versions of old plays. The debate over whether plays are best "updated" for modern audiences, or "preserved" by being staged in the manner deemed to be as much like their original stagings as possible (William Poel's method, a full century ago), is complex and, one suspects, irresolvable. Dennis Kennedy at once expresses the full implications of the latter position, and collapses the two sides into one, when he comments that in attempts to stage "authentic Shakespeare,... [t]he use of costumes was a dead end; Mario Borsa commented in 1908 that if the Elizabethans made all periods contemporary, the consequence today should be modern dress" and that until modern audiences "bec[o]me Elizabethan, the scenery and costumes on the stage [of Poel's mock-Elizabethan theatre] sp[ea]k the language of antiquarianism loudly and self-consciously".³ It is not my intention to resolve (or even to engage in) that debate here, but merely to acknowledge its currency. Barnes has described his work in adapting Renaissance plays as "restoration," suggesting that while aware of this debate, his engagement with the texts is intended to facilitate their reception by modern audiences. Other adapters, as I show later in this chapter, acknowledge a more antagonistic relationship with the Renaissance plays

they revisit, and Barnes's changing of the ending--the definitive part of a play, especially in performance--reopens the debate, with questions about the privileging of a modern writer's (or director's) view of the "real" intentions of the original playwright. The changes to The Devil is an Ass go far beyond simple editing and qualify the version for consideration as a true adaptation.

Barnes sets the opening scene of his play very concretely in Hell, while Jonson's, typically for a play of its period, does not indicate an identifiable physical location. Only Barnes, it seems to me, could open a "comedy" with this stage direction:

Darkness. Screams and cries of agony incessant and unending.

Like the opening of Brenton's The Romans in Britain, this opening leaves the audience quite literally in the dark, with no clues to the physical or temporal location of the play. Darkness itself is a device completely unavailable to the Renaissance theatre,⁴ and one which adds to the lack of specificity of setting. Ultimately, however, the use of darkness as a mask for the stage has to be given up; except in such plays as Beckett's Breath, and in bedroom farces, the sustained use of total darkness onstage is counter-productive for the dramatist and frustrating for the audience.

Where Jonson has only one vice--Iniquity--appear to

offer its services to Pug on Earth, Barnes invents speeches for three others: Wrath, Lady Vanity, and Covetousness.

Each Vice appears as a "seven foot high" figure, accompanied by the emblems traditionally associated with it, in an exaggerated version of the Vice in the medieval morality plays:

Spot up Stage Right on the seven foot high Lady Vanity. Her gown is covered with small mirrors and she has a long peacock's train. There are mirrors embedded in the halter round her neck so she can see herself which ever way she turns. There is another mirror attached to the back of her head and her face is elaborately patterned with black and white markings. She carries a powder case and continually dabs her face.

As each Vice finishes its speech, written in verse imitating the form in which Jonson's Iniquity speaks, it assaults Pug with its particular emblem: Wrath smashes the rotten melon he has been gouging over Pug's head, Lady Vanity blows powder in his face, and Covetousness hits him with a bag of gold. Barnes thus achieves an element of slapstick in Hell not present in Jonson's text, and which seems to anticipate such later plays by Barnes as Laughter! and Red Noses. He also specifies properties--a man hanging from a gallows, a spinning globe suspended above the scene in Hell--which aim at strongly visual effects. Of course, any Renaissance text gives directors scope to do this; few of the plays that survive from the 16th and 17th centuries have detailed instructions on such things as properties and stage-business, which must have been features of the Jacobean

stage as of the modern. It is significant here that Barnes scripts so much of this detail into his version of the play, making it as much a part of the editing as changing a single word or line.

Barnes invents a fight between Manly (Wittipol's friend) and Everill (Meercraft's cousin) which occurs in Lady Tailbush's house (2.2). Jonson has Tailbush and Meercraft refer briefly to an argument (over Everill's slandering Manly) in IV.i, the equivalent scene to Barnes's 2.2. Barnes expands this brief reference into a full-scale physical and verbal confrontation at the start of the scene, thus exposing more of the two men's characters to the audience in preparation for the end of the play than does Jonson's text. The fight is serio-comic, with Manly ready to draw and defend his honour, and Everill using verbal tricks to avoid a fight:

Manly Untruss I say!
 I'll slit thy rogue's tongue!
 Everill I'll not untruss my sword or my breeches
 In the presence of a lady.
 'Twould be unmanly Manly!
 I'll away!
 (He hurries out Stage Left)
 (2.2)

By showing the altercation, Barnes introduces an element of physical danger to the play which undercuts its comic tone. The invented fight also adds physical action to a scene which is otherwise quite static; indeed, for much of it, most of the characters on stage are seated to listen to the "Spanish Lady" recount her experiences, and Pug alone has

the opportunity to move around practising his newly acquired accomplishments as a footman.

It is clear that with these additions, Barnes is adding imaginatively to elements that are already at least latently present in Jonson's text.

The major innovation in Barnes's text, and I suspect the one which most angered Bernard Levin, comes at the end of the play. Jonson ends the play with Pug safely back in Hell and essentially forgotten on Earth, and the evils of the human characters charitably forgiven in Manly's final speech, which takes the place of an epilogue. Barnes cuts the last 30 lines of Jonson's text altogether, thus cutting all of Manly's final speech, along with the exoneration of himself, Wittipol, and Mrs Fitzdottrel. Barnes ends the play with comments from Satan and Pug, who observe the action from Hell. Perhaps predictably, Satan finds Earth too wicked for any of his devils to visit and declares it "out of bound for all my demons" (2.7). The scene is too long to bear quoting in full, but the stage directions in Barnes's text indicate clearly how he envisages the close of his play:

The Men assault Manly and Wittipol whilst the Women continue attacking Mrs Fitzdottrel amid loud curses and shouts of abuse. These turn into metallic screams and cries of Hell as the lights dim down. No human voice now as the dark figure of Satan rises up, Up Stage Centre from the shadows and towers over the scene. Beside him is Pug, a yoke around his neck and his arms stretched on a wooden frame. Satan gestures and all the characters freeze in position. The cries and

screams fade slightly...

[Pug] hops into the darkness Up Stage after Satan. Single spot remains on the slowly spinning globe. The sounds of Fitzdottrel, Meercraft and the others still shouting and fighting are heard in a savage babble: "Cozzened!...My garnish! ... Gorgons!...Monsters!...My conscience!... Thieves!... Save us!..." The voices fade away. The world spins in silence till its light slowly fades out. Darkness.

The End.
(2.7)

Barnes clearly aims for an effect at the end of the play very different from the neat resolution Jonson gives it. Barnes does not have the "innocent" characters--Manly, Wittipol, and Mrs Fitzdottrel--exonerated, but attacked; the con-men and gulls have not modified their behaviour. Barnes does not share Manly's assertion in the original text that shame is an adequate punishment; his depiction of these characters makes it clear that they are incapable of feeling such an emotion, and rather than giving them the chance to save themselves from their inherent viciousness, Barnes leaves them, and their victims, trapped in a final tableau of recrimination and greed.

It is thus clear that Barnes rejects Jonson's pat resolution of the comedy as over-simplistic, and changes the ending of the play to reflect his own socio-political view of the play as "a carnival of sharks and suckers where ... petty vice and petty virtue are indistinguishable....Jonson shows us...how we live now" (programme notes). On its own terms, Barnes's version of the play is largely successful.

There can be little doubt of the genuinely critical, even cynical depiction of human relations in Barnes's revision of Jonson's world. Formally, Barnes's version is not a "comedy" in the sense we ordinarily apply to the Renaissance, but is in our contemporary sense a black comedy. The play runs the risk of thwarting its own purpose; the final image of the play is funny but not hopeful. Barnes co-opts Jonson to "show us how we live now," but offers no hope that we may find a way to live better. The very fact that Barnes found Jonson's comic ending unsatisfactory, with its neat picture of virtue rewarded and vice gently rebuked, suggests that Barnes despairs of the likelihood of improvement. Barnes displays a similarly dark view of human behaviour in such later, original plays as Leonardo's Last Supper and The Bewitched, as well as the more complex mixture of optimism and despair evident in Red Noses. I discuss the dilemma for politically committed playwrights of describing the evils of the conditions against which they work, on the one hand, and on the other prescribing remedies, in Chapter Three, but pause here to note that The Devil is an Ass's failing, if such it is, is its apparent hopelessness and resignation to existing evils.

Barnes's adaptation of Jonson's The Alchemist for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1977 shows no such dissatisfaction with the existing text. The cuts, once

again, are for the most part of the type that shorten and clarify the text, without mutilating the plot or excising any characters. The most remarkable pattern of editing in the play lies in Barnes's treatment of Sir Epicure Mammon's long speeches, where he gloats over the decadent delights he will enjoy with the Philosopher's Stone; these are largely left intact, although they show the type of repetition and amplification which Barnes edits heavily in other plays. Much of the elaborate use of alchemical jargon in The Alchemist is cut, however, and these two facts taken together suggest what may have attracted Barnes to the play in the first place. Most of the alchemist's jargon is merely nonsense to a modern audience; almost no-one would be expected to take any of it seriously now. For Jonson, of course, the jargon served a more pointed satirical purpose. In an environment where alchemy was still an experience within living memory, Jonson's satirical target is meaningful. Much of the alchemical jargon, the obscurity of which Subtle defends as a necessary defence against the vulgarization of the science, would be familiar to Jonson's contemporaries. To Barnes's audience, however, it is a joke which does not bear such constant repetition: the joke runs along the lines of, "In the Renaissance some people actually believed in alchemy." Barnes clearly senses that this may be funny once, but not much more. What is more applicable to an audience of Barnes's contemporaries is Mammon's

gluttony, his love of luxury, and his offensive fantasies of trading money for sex, power, and prestige. Barnes thus retains many of the speeches intact or virtually so, giving the audience a full dose of vices more familiar than an interest in turning base metals into gold. Similarly, the other gulls--Dapper, Drugger, and Kastril--are satirized for failings recognizable to us now. As Barnes put it in his programme notes for the 1969 production, "the attack is on general vices: avarice, intolerance, pride." To emphasize Kastril's irrationality, rather than his faddishness, Barnes cuts down the number of references in his exchanges with Face and Subtle to fashions current in Jonson's day. On the whole, however, Barnes and director Trevor Nunn seem to have found in The Alchemist what Barnes did not find to his satisfaction in The Devil is an Ass: an attack on the inherent viciousness of human nature that gains in effect from being temporally removed from us and is yet strikingly current in its delineation of the way people cheat each other and deceive themselves. To underline what they see as the play's central message--that no-one is ever to be trusted--Nunn and Barnes set Face's cruelly triumphant closing speech in a final tableau with the actor grinning, and pawing the gold he has finally cheated Dol and Subtle out of. In making Face a contemptible, avaricious miser, Barnes removes from Jonson's play any trace it had of an attractive character redeeming the audience's opinion of

human nature.

Barnes notes that the two Marston plays which make up Antonio "were...first performed in 1601. There is no record of any subsequent stage productions" (promptbook, Antonio). Indeed, although Marston enjoyed considerable popularity during his brief career as a dramatist, he is not as familiar to modern audiences as are some of Shakespeare's other contemporaries. Of the pre-Restoration dramatists Barnes adapts, Marston is unarguably the least highly regarded in the twentieth century. After the adaptations of Jonson, Barnes may have relished the prospect of bringing to the stage the work of a playwright of whom most audiences could have few if any expectations. Further, all the Jonson plays adapted by Barnes are comedies while Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge, when taken together, are tragic (with important deviations from the conventions of Renaissance tragedy which I will return to shortly). Few critics, I expect, would disagree that Marston's plays are in most respects inferior to Jonson's. The performance history of each writer's surviving plays alone indicates that modern directors and their audiences have found little appeal in Marston's plays. That the Antonio plays attracted Barnes's attention, and that his 1977 radio version and the 1979 stage version were widely acclaimed, suggests that the neglect may have been unjustified, and that in his adaptation Barnes has identified those elements of the

original plays most capable of engaging a modern audience.

It is stating the obvious to say that Antonio is very much shorter than the two plays from which it is adapted, and is heavily edited. Barnes insists that his adaptation "consists mainly of shortening [the two plays] and replacing certain obsolete words and phrases" (programme notes, Antonio). Despite the extensive cuts to the text, Barnes loses none of the coherence of the plots of the original plays and retains all the characters named in the Dramatis Personae. The bulk of the cuts made by Barnes to speed up the action and to eliminate the repetition and variation upon themes prized in the Renaissance are in the long speeches by many of the characters. This can be illustrated by a comparison of the closing lines of Antonio's Revenge and the corresponding passage in Barnes's version:

Antonio First let's cleanse our hands,
Purge hearts of hatred, and entomb my love;
Over whose hearse I'll weep away my brain
In true affection's tears.

For her sake here I vow a virgin bed,
She lives in me, with her my love is dead.

2 Senator We will attend her mournful exequies;
Conduct you to your calm sequestered life,
And then --

Maria Leave us to meditate on misery,
To sad our thought with contemplation
Of past calamities. If any ask
Where lives the widow of the poisoned lord,
Where lies the orphan of a murdered father,
Where lies the father of a butchered son,
Where lives all woe, conduct him to us three,
The downcast ruins of calamity.

Antonio Sound doleful tunes, a solemn hymn
advance,
To close the last act of my vengeance;
And when the subject of your passion's spent,
Sing "Mellida is dead"; all hearts will

relent
 In sad condolement, at that heavy sound.
 (Antonio's Revenge, V.iii. 154-174)

Now compare Antonio:

Antonio I'll weep away my brain. Mellida lives
 in me, with her my love is dead.
Maria We leave to meditate on misery, to sad our
 thought with contemplation of past
 calamities.
Antonio Sound doleful tunes, sing "Mellida is
 dead" in sad condolement.
 (Antonio, 2.12)

Barnes contracts the original and rids it of its repetitive, formal tone, without removing the factual details of plot (the withdrawal into a contemplative life of mourning) or the pith of the poetry in Antonio's lament for Mellida. Indeed, in cutting the rhymes and making Antonio's mourning a simple command to "sing Mellida is dead" (followed by the song itself, in the Nottingham production), Barnes gives the speech and the emotion more simple dignity than a modern audience would find in Marston's deliberately artificial rhyming couplets. This type of cutting, preserving the sense of the original but condensing its dramatic energy for audiences used to modern speech, naturalistic acting and entertainments closer to two hours' duration than four, is not unusual for any modern "acting version" of a Renaissance play.⁵ Barnes, however, makes other changes in Antonio of a more intrusive and more telling nature.

Antonio and Mellida is structured as a comedy, rather in the tradition of Shakespearean comedy identified by

C.L.Barber as "festive." Antonio and Mellida, two young people of high birth, are in love but are prevented from marrying by the enmity between their fathers. As the play opens, Piero, Duke of Venice and Mellida's father, has just defeated Antonio's father Andrugio in a sea-battle. It is not until the first scene of Antonio's Revenge that we learn that Piero's politically-expressed malice is really motivated by jealousy over Andrugio's wife, Maria. In the first play, Piero's motives are unexplained and unexplored by Marston, and Piero is thus cast in the role of pure villain, acting apparently out of spite and malice. Antonio adopts two disguises in the course of Antonio and Mellida, and finally fakes his own death; in the meantime Andrugio and Piero have been reconciled. In the play's final scene, Piero is persuaded by means of a trick graciously to accept Antonio as his future son-in-law and the play thus ends happily, with the strife ended and the young couple preparing to marry.

Act One of Antonio consists of this first, comic play, but Barnes uses some of Marston's Prologue to Antonio's Revenge as an epilogue to Act One, spoken by Piero in soliloquy immediately before the interval between the two Acts:

Laugh on, laugh on, another soon will laugh;
 Laughter perhaps that freezes on the breath.
 If any spirit breathes within this round
 Uncapable of weighty passion,
 Who winks and shuts his apprehension up
 From common sense of what men were, and are,

Who would not know what men must be--let such
 Hurry amain from our black-visaged shows.
 For summer's gone now and drizzling sleet
 Chilleth the wan bleak cheek of the numb'd earth.
 (Antonio, 1.7)

This clearly signals to the audience that Act Two will not continue the comedy of Act One. After the interval, the banners of St Mark which have decorated the stage throughout Act One have changed colour from gold and green to gold and red. Act Two of Antonio, like Antonio's Revenge, opens with the brutal murder of Feliche by Piero and his henchman, Strotzo. To torment and discredit the innocent Mellida the night before her planned wedding to Antonio, Piero has Feliche's bleeding corpse suspended over Mellida's bed; Piero claims he found them in the bed together and in his rage at Mellida's inconstancy killed Feliche.

Although Act One is funny--it retains most of Marston's comic material intact, with extra business added by Barnes (and, no doubt, by Barnes's co-director, Geoffrey Reeves)--the overall effect is not comic. Assuming an audience unfamiliar with the plot of Antonio's Revenge, Barnes is able to manipulate the audience completely. He does not allow Marston's hopeful, comic ending to close the first Act, but rather undercuts its effect with Piero's soliloquy (quoted above). The two plays thus become one, joined seamlessly, with the success of Antonio and Mellida now merely a temporary hiatus in Piero's continuing perpetration of evil. The audience has almost no opportunity to follow

Marston in seeing Good triumph over Evil before the expectation of comic resolution is disappointed.

Antonio's Revenge is, as the title suggests, a Revenge tragedy in the tradition of Kyd and Tourneur, with striking resemblances to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Between the two plays, Piero has murdered Feliche and Andrugio (who, like Old Hamlet in Hamlet, has been poisoned, his sudden death passed off as "natural causes"). In the course of the play, Mellida dies, apparently of a broken heart upon hearing of Antonio's supposed death, and finally Antonio kills both Piero and his young son, Julio, in revenge for the deaths of his father and fiancée. Marston's play is an anomaly among the Revenge dramas of its time in that Antonio and his fellow revengers commit murder to gain their revenge but survive the play. In addition to escaping punishment, they actually receive the gratitude of the Venetian state:

2 Senator Blessed be you all; and may your
honours live,
Religiously held sacred, even for ever and
ever.
Galeatzo [to Antonio] Thou art another Hercules
to us
In ridding huge pollution from our state.
(Antonio's Revenge, V.iii. 127-130)

Antonio and his fellows decide to withdraw from the world for which they now have a profound distaste, into a contemplative life. Before the closing speeches, Marston's stage directions specify that "the curtains are drawn; PIERO departeth" (Antonio's Revenge, V.iii. s.d. [l.153]). Thus, the playwright removes the body of Piero (and, probably, the

body of the child Julio, which has been served to Piero as a Thyestean feast to torment him before his death) and allows Antonio a final, long speech to close the play without the reminders of the brutal act of revenge remaining visible. Barnes, on the contrary, specifies that the bodies of Julio and Piero are to remain onstage at the close of the play. He cuts Antonio's lines to the minimum and completely erases Marston's Epilogue, which is joined seamlessly to Antonio's final speech and is, in part, an elegy for the "virgin faith" of Mellida. There is a tendency in Marston's text to downplay the blameworthiness of Antonio and his fellow revengers, and to present the play as a story of fated lovers (in the manner of Romeo and Juliet). It is true that Marston's text lacks a positive moral recuperative force, but it is equally lacking in any sense of moral condemnation (consider that even Hamlet and Laertes are neither excused nor left alive at the end of Shakespeare's play, and Vindice in The Revenger's Tragedy, whose quest for vengeance is also spurred by love for a woman, is punished severely at the end of that play). By refusing to remove the compellingly physical evidence of the brutality of which the "lover" Antonio is really capable, Barnes makes the bodies of Piero and especially the pathetic Julio silent condemnations of acts of violence committed in the quest for revenge. The final image presented to the audience of Antonio is of a huge, golden crown which has hung over the stage throughout

the play being lowered over the mutilated and tortured corpses of Piero and Julio. In Marston's version, the final image is of Antonio, his mother and his fellow revengers preparing to follow Mellida's coffin to its funeral in a formal display of mourning.

The final scene is not, moreover, the only point at which Barnes is more inclined than Marston was to ascribe blame to Antonio. Marston has Mellida die mysteriously, presumably of a broken heart (IV.i), in the presence of Antonio who has been obliged once again to adopt a disguise and fake his own death. Mellida faints and is recalled briefly to life by Antonio in the Fool's costume. It is not clear from Marston's text whether Mellida recognizes Antonio, but the two exchange words and Mellida is reportedly comforted by hearing her lover's name one last time. Mellida's death itself is recounted by Maria and not seen by the audience, and the story inevitably causes the audience to wonder why Antonio would not have revealed his identity to Mellida in time, perhaps, to save her life. It is an irresolvable speculation, especially as the physical cause of Mellida's death is unknown. Barnes alters the story Maria tells of Mellida's death very little, and not at all in the details of her final reunion with the disguised Antonio. But in Antonio, the cause of Mellida's death is unambiguous; Maria reports (2.11) that she stabbed herself in order to be reunited with Antonio in death. Making

Mellida's death a clear suicide not only makes the play more comprehensible to a modern audience more familiar with the operation of daggers than with the effects of a broken heart, it also lays the blame for her death on the failure of Antonio and Maria--who both know Antonio is alive--to prevent Mellida's acting in grief and desperation. Antonio is responsible, not only for the deaths of Piero and Julio, but also for that of Mellida. At the end of Barnes's Antonio, the audience is left, as they were at the end of The Devil is an Ass and The Alchemist, without any sense of possible redemption or restoration. Barnes's adaptations offer little hope for the ability of human beings to improve their lot by exhibiting superior virtue; indeed, despite the comedy and slapstick in all of Barnes's adaptations, his view of human affairs remains bleak.

More than any of Barnes's adaptations, Howard Barker's two adaptations of Renaissance plays--Thomas Middleton's Women Beware Women, and Shakespeare's King Lear--are complete rewritings of the texts. In fact, Barker's method of re-working the original text changes radically and his aims and methods differ greatly between Women Beware Women (first performed in 1986) and Seven Lears (1989).

Barker's Women Beware Women is in part Middleton's and in part Barker's own. Part One is in Middleton's language and is, like many of Barnes's adaptations, simply cut and rephrased for the sake of performability, concision, and

clarity. Barker condenses the material of Middleton's first four acts into his own Part One, and then replaces the original fifth act (with its troublesome Masque scene, in which the principal deaths occur) with a Part Two of his own conception. In terms of plot, at least, and at the literal level of language, this second part has nothing to do with Middleton. It is written wholly in modern English, and includes allusions to such anachronisms as newspapers and automobiles. The audience returning to the auditorium for the second part of the play is greeted by Leantio's celebrated and typically Barkerean line, delivered "undressed," "We fuck the day to death" (Barker, Women Beware Women, 2.1.). The second part of the play is perhaps most helpfully seen as the corrective, or the antidote, to the "pessimism of the soul" Barker sees in Middleton (Barker, Women Beware Women, unnumbered p [iii]). Barker is interested in the failure of Middleton's text to find satisfactory resolutions for the characters and situations of the first three acts. In an imaginary dialogue with Thomas Middleton, Barker accuses his Renaissance "collaborator" of giving up:

The solution to so much corruption can only be mass-murder, people falling down trapdoors and so on. It is as if you threw up your hands on human beings and wished them to hell.⁶

Barker, of course, finds his own "solution to so much corruption" as the characters of Women Beware Women exhibit, and he scripts it into his new conclusion to the play.

Middleton's final masque, with its elements of theatre, disguise, and deceit, becomes in Barker's Part Two a public spectacle of a larger kind: the wedding of Bianca (who describes herself, tellingly, as "pretty as a doll" in her wedding clothes, at 2.7 p 54) to the man who raped her in Part One, the Duke of Florence. That Bianca still has a husband living (Barker deviates from Middleton's text in having the plot to murder Leantio fail) is irrelevant to this wedding. Bianca becomes, for the people of Florence as for their Duke and therefore for the State, a dehumanized adornment, a trinket "flashing like some encrusted gem, blinding discontent and dazzling the cynic" (2.4. p.43).

One of the central critical problems of Middleton's Women Beware Women--that of how an audience is to respond to the spectacle of a woman agreeing to marry, and apparently falling in love with, the man who has raped her--is at issue for Barker here. Middleton makes it clear that Bianca is raped by the Duke; the language of the text, in the absence of stage directions, indicates that the Duke overpowers Bianca both by physical force and by threats (Middleton, II.ii. 319-389) and, in the aftermath of the rape, she decides with bitter cynicism that she must learn to take advantage of a power structure which has just taken advantage--in a brutal way--of her:

...since my honour's leprous, why should I
 Preserve that fair that caus'd the leprosy?
 Come, poison all at once!
 ... I'm made bold now,

I thank thy treachery; sin and I'm acquainted,
 No couple greater...
 (Middleton, II.ii 426ff)

Abandoning Leantio's relatively poor home, Bianca becomes the Duke's mistress, accepting the wealth and ease he offers her in exchange for sex. Leantio becomes a parallel, in Middleton's play, to his wife; on her deserting him, he agrees to become the lover of the infatuated noblewoman Livia, and like Bianca he accepts in return the gift of material wealth.

Although Barker's version of the play retains Bianca's story largely as it appears in Middleton's, there is a significant change in the story of Leantio. Leantio is initially attracted to Livia (as Middleton's Leantio is) by the promise of material reward, and by a cynical realization similar to Bianca's that the powerless will remain so, even over their own sexual choices, unless they learn to join in and aggressively take part in the sexual economy of this world. However, Leantio's relationship to Livia changes fundamentally in the space between the two parts of Barker's play, and it is sexual intercourse which liberates both Leantio and Livia from the commodification of sexuality which has marked all the marriages and couplings in the play so far. Leantio has discovered "the utter fuck" and Livia has undergone, in her own words, a "transformation" from the woman who had always "wanted to be free of ... [a]ll other men" (2.1. p 32), the woman who had engineered both the rape

of Bianca and Isabella's unwitting incest with her uncle, to the person who will ultimately devise the antidote to Bianca's dehumanization after the rape.

Barker views the rape of Bianca by the Duke as a dehumanizing act; it deprives her of her subjectivity, of her power to choose, and turns her into the "doll," the object the Duke and his people look at without relating to. Livia devises a plot to rescue Bianca, in spite of herself, from the "lie" which the "ducal marriage" is. Livia wants to "liberate Bianca from herself ... who uses cunt as property, to buy her way up floors of privilege" (2.6. p 52). She confesses to Leantio that it was she who engineered Bianca's first "violation" by the Duke, and proposes that Sordido rape Bianca, teaching her that "the thing she sells can just as well be stolen..." (2.6). In Middleton's play, Bianca, Livia, the Duke, and other characters escape the commodification of the body, and of love, only by dying violently. In Barker's version, all except Sordido are left alive at the end of the play, and there is a rush to fill the power vacuum created by the failure of the Duke's attempt to create stability and political harmony by means of his marriage to Bianca. The Duke appoints Livia and Leantio as his successors, and the play closes with his desperate and surprising injunction, "Don't love! Don't love!" (2.7).

Middleton's Women Beware Women is a highly problematic

and complex play, one which resists resolution and which seems, at least from the perspective of the late twentieth century, irretrievably misogynist. In the "dialogue" with Middleton, Barker has Middleton claim that "[w]hat [the title] means in my version is clear enough,"⁷ but that Barker should not continue to use the title for his play. Barker responds that

In yours, a woman engineers the fall of a woman, for a man. That is the role of women in your time. In mine, a woman engineers the fall of a woman, but for her own enlightenment. But the pain is terrible. So the title finds an irony it never had in your play.

Here Barker is in danger of missing the irony very much present in Middleton's title: that although Livia is the engineer of Bianca's "fall" (a choice of words that links her inevitably and significantly to Eve), the Duke is the person who rapes her, and the one whose superior power robs Bianca of her subjectivity. Livia is not the rapist, and is in Middleton's text as much a victim as Bianca is. Livia, trapped in the unequal power structures of the Renaissance, has to "buy" Leantio in order to maintain her independence (III.ii. 303-310; I.ii. 50-52). The irony of Middleton's title is that it perpetuates the belief, subverted by the play, that women rather than men are the enemies of sexual equality.

Barker's use of a second rape as the antidote to the first is controversial and critically problematic. It implicitly elevates Sordido to the position of Saviour, the

man whom Livia must employ to effect the liberation of Bianca. Livia is Bianca's liberator, but physically incapable of performing the act of rape. Barker recasts the gender relations in the play and in part removes women from the victim positions they occupy for much of Middleton's Women Beware Women. In so doing, Barker empowers the women far more than Middleton did, but at the same time creates a problem for the audience by depicting a second act of sexual violence instigated by a woman. By giving Livia the subject position (even though Livia's actions, as intended, restore Bianca's power to choose paradoxically through the violent denial of that power), Barker makes her, potentially, more blameworthy than Middleton does. Livia's very ability to act and to control events, both in her own life and in the lives of others, makes her a complex figure, neither easily accepted nor easily dismissed for her morally questionable actions in Part Two of the play. As William Hutchings notes,⁸ Barker has Livia offer Bianca an "impulsive sisterhood" (Barker, Women Beware Women, 2.7. p 61). What Hutchings fails to comment upon is that it is not only Livia's un-Middletonian offer of sisterhood that Bianca rejects; she also rejects Leantio's sentimental loyalty to her, calling it a "little spasm of male pity. Male violence, male pity Get off!" (2.7. p 61). Barker's play ends with the crowd threatening to riot in the streets, having been cheated of the spectacular wedding, the symbol

of the State's control, that they were promised. Only Bianca, in the aftermath of her rape by Sordido, is calm. As the other characters panic at the prospect of what a popular uprising would mean to their privileged positions, Bianca is able to disregard the threat of her "tattered trousseau in the alleys" (2.7. p 61). She strikes Livia, in a wordless gesture which at once signals her resumption of the power of choice and seals her rejection of the woman who helped her regain that power. Bianca is hurried away by Isabella, whose silently offered sisterhood she does accept.

If it is the failure of Middleton's play to find positive alternatives for his characters in Women Beware Women that intrigues Barker, then in Shakespeare's King Lear what attracts him is a "possibility" (to use Barker's own term) that is even more latent in the original text. "Shakespeare's King Lear," he writes in the Introduction to Seven Lears, "is a family tragedy with a significant absence. The Mother is denied existence in King Lear." Barker goes on to conclude that Lear's wife must have been "the subject of an unjust hatred" which "may have been necessary." Barker focusses on the gap in Shakespeare's text and attempts, by speculating in his own play about critical stages in Lear's life prior to the action of Shakespeare's play, to explain why it was "necessary" for Lear and his daughters to "expunge [the mother] from memory" (Introduction, Seven Lears, unnumbered p [vii]).

Barker's version of Women Beware Women assumes no prior familiarity with the Renaissance play. The shift from Middleton's language in Part One to Barker's own distinctive idiom in Part Two in itself sets up for the audience the necessary quality of debate within the play, with Part Two clearly offered as an alternative to the values and assumptions implicit and explicit in Part One. Seven Lears, on the contrary, relies on the audience's awareness of Shakespeare's play and is in fact more a reaction to the original play than an adaptation. If Barker were to try to repeat the effect he achieved with Women Beware Women, then Seven Lears would presumably have to be played first, followed after an interval by a condensed version of Shakespeare's King Lear. If the structure of Barker's Women Beware Women suggests that Part Two is intended to correct Middleton's original, then the relationship between Shakespeare's King Lear and Barker's Seven Lears is less one of correction than of inquiry. Like Bond's Lear (1971), the new play takes issues present--albeit suppressed--in the original and, by exploiting the audience's awareness of the earlier play, creates a dialogue between the modern play and the audience's idea of the original. For English-speaking audiences, particularly, the preconceptions and assumptions about Shakespeare's plays are uniquely powerful. Like Bond's new version of the thematic material in King Lear, Barker's play is rather a new play than an adaptation. In

neither version of King Lear is the plot the same as Shakespeare's, although Bond's Lear attempts a parallel emotional journey for the protagonist; both playwrights use the Shakespearean text and what it conceals or omits as the impetus to ask (and to a limited extent answer) questions about the original play, and about our responses to it, in the form of completely new plays.

Seven Lears focusses on Clarissa, Lear's wife, and their problematic relationship, to explain the absence of the mother from the royal family of King Lear. Clarissa is presented as an uncompromisingly truthful woman forced to marry Lear. Barker's Lear changes in the course of the play from an honest and loving child to a tyrant who finally drives his wife away (in Seven Lears, Cordelia is fathered by Kent) and destroys her. Seven Lears thus has a "prequel" quality which invites the reader or viewer to reassess King Lear, and in particular complicates our perception of the relationships between Lear and Cordelia, Lear and Kent, and Kent and Cordelia in Shakespeare's play. Like much of Barker's work, Seven Lears does not purport to supply a definitive analysis of its literary model, but asks, rather, "What if?..." and thus encourages a radical reappraisal of one of the central texts of English-language culture. The reappraisal is guided by Barker's speculations on the "possibilities" of King Lear to focus on gender-relations and their political implications.

Bond's Lear is, similarly, an original play that gains much of its effect from our knowledge of Shakespeare's play. Lear is in part a corrective to, and in part an inquiry about, King Lear. Bond projects an overtly political conflict onto the basic outline of Shakespeare's story, and complicates the figure of Cordelia considerably. No longer Lear's daughter, she is rather the metaphoric than biological product of Lear's kingship; her response to the brutality she experiences as a result of systemic injustice is not, as it is in Shakespeare's play, to lead an army and thus to restore the previous political order, but to head a revolutionary guerilla force which ultimately becomes the government and is barely distinguishable from Lear's brutal government which it replaces.

It would certainly be possible to watch Lear without a knowledge of King Lear, but such a reception of Bond's play would rob it of its deepest resonances. It is central to Bond's method, as it is to Barker in writing Seven Lears, to juxtapose old and new plays in the audience's minds. The unexplained cruelty of Goneril and Regan in King Lear is given a psycho-social motivation in Lear. Bond introduces the "ghosts" of Lear's two daughters as children, and shows their suffering and insecurity as the motherless daughters of a distant, demanding and brutal father (2.2). Bond recasts Cordelia into a ruthless perpetrator of ideologically motivated violence, and her survival at the

end of the play (in contrast to the death of Shakespeare's Cordelia) sounds an ominous note for the future, when no progress has been made away from brutality and oppression. Shakespeare's play has a tragic ending, with Lear and Cordelia dead and Edgar inheriting the crown; at the end of Lear power is already firmly held by Cordelia's morally tainted revolutionaries. If the ending of Shakespeare's play is muted, pervaded by a sense of what has been lost, the end of Bond's play gives no grounds even for the consolation of nostalgia. What has been lost was little better than what survives the play, and Lear's final act of personal resistance--he is shot dead while trying to tear down the wall--is obviously futile, and thus hardly a credible manifesto for effective action.

Bond's acting edition of Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, which opened at the Royal Court Theatre on January 13th, 1966, attracted generally positive reviews, being called by the reviewer for the Times (14/01/66) "much the best thing that has appeared in the new Royal Court season." Other reviewers called it "boring" and "intellectual," while the more informative reviews referred to the play's detached, deliberately self-conscious presentation: the Times reviewer noted that "the chorus of gossips wear masks" and that there were "moments when characters step forward to comment on [the production] as a passing show" (14/01/66). The production used a form of

modern dress which combined "Edwardian skirts" and "modern suits," removing the play from its remote Jacobean setting. This updating seems potentially useful in a play which, to a London audience at least, takes place in the familiar setting of streets in the City which still exist. Indeed, Bond could hardly have struck on a more readily modernizable Jacobean play than this one, which is so firmly set in commercial London. Alan Brien, the reviewer for the Sunday Telegraph, commented on the production's use of "sight-gags and slapstick confrontations" but notes, too, that "between the laughs, it is clear that this is a serious and misanthropic work - rather like a clownish and caricatured version of Saved" (16/01/66). The programme does not credit Bond with preparing the version of the play for this production, but Brien's latter comment does suggest that some of the audience at least were aware of the involvement of the (notorious) author of Saved. As far as my information⁹ indicates, Bond kept all five (or, arguably perhaps, four) of Middleton's plot-strands and did not cut any major characters. My surmise is that A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, occurring early in Bond's theatrical career, is typical of the adaptation of Renaissance plays most commonly offered by contemporary writers: it is a "straight" acting version, prepared in conjunction with the director. What may be more interesting than the nature of the adaptation, in this case, is the question of what attracted Bond to the

play in the beginning. I have already suggested that if Bond's interest is to make the Jacobean play relevant and comprehensible to a modern audience, then this City Comedy is a particularly happy opportunity to adapt a play with a still-recognizable physical setting. Moreover, the physical setting of the play is very much a part of the landscape of A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, as it is not in, for example, Marston's The Dutch Courtesan. Middleton's play takes as its central theme the connection between sex and power (power most often expressed in monetary terms), and explores it through the several sexual, familial and commercial relationships it depicts. For a writer with a social agenda and, as Saved had demonstrated, an interest in the family and sexual relationships, the link between money, sex and power that Middleton explores must have been fascinating. Middleton's complex plot and large group of major characters also offered Bond the scope to experiment with an ensemble cast much like that of Saved, but larger still.

Bond's other Jacobean adaptation was less successful. Produced by the short-lived Bullfinch Productions at the Old Vic on July 12, 1976, Webster's The White Devil received few positive reviews, and unlike the 1966 Chaste Maid, Bond's connection with the preparation of the text was announced in the programme and consequently known to all the reviewers. Sheridan Morley, writing for Punch, called the production "eminently avoidable" and lamented the company's "flight

from theatricality, heightened language and bloody drama" (21/07/76). Michael Billington rendered a similar account of the production's verbal weakness, writing that "actors frequently deliver some of the finest stage poetry in English with the apologetic air of someone coughing nervously behind his hand" (Guardian, 13/07/76).

Billington's suggestion as to why the production, which like the 1966 Chaste Maid was played in modern dress, failed is interesting in the light of what I speculate Bond's aims to have been in adapting Jacobean drama. Billington wrote, "although he [director Michael Lindsay-Hogg] was clearly after a contemporaneity and clarity of staging that would let the play leap out at us, his lack of insistence on its black, hard-edged poetry sends it instead into a nervous retreat. The result is a masterwork tamed and muted." Michael Coveney called the production "disappointing... a cunning but ineffective piece of adaptation" (Financial Times 13/07/76), and other reviewers summed the play up with terms such as "underact[ed]," "minimised," and "oddly impersonal." Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts defend Bond's version of the play, saying that he "arrived at his version by editing the text, cutting it heavily so as to give more weight to his interpretation of the play,"¹⁰ and they quote Bond as saying The White Devil is "not about sexual violence and intense personal emotion, but power and money." Hay and Roberts go on to argue that "the overall effect of

Bond's cuts is to defuse the melodrama and to encourage more dispassionate appraisal of Webster's action," but the most complete account of the play I have found makes the production itself sound anything but "defused."¹¹ Hirst quotes the following stage-direction for the murder of Bracciano:

They wind a longish scarf around his neck. They each take an end. Turn their backs on the duke, and strain as hard as they can--like two bookends facing away from each other. Then they remember to look over their shoulders and study the dying duke's grimaces. (5.2.19)

While Bond apparently aimed for extremely contrived and artificially theatrical violence and for a formal detachment in the audience, the production of The White Devil "encouraged an excessively low-key delivery of the verse," Hay and Roberts assert,¹² and "made it very difficult to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Bond's text." As with A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, the most interesting insights to be gained from a consideration of the playwright's work as adapter are those that illuminate the choice of material for adaptation. Bond himself has stated clearly that the "power and money" element of Webster's drama, and not the elements of personal suffering and dynastic destruction, attracted his attention. The production of The White Devil appears to have failed in its method of transposing the play to a modern setting and, thus, confronting the audience with the recognition of the present-day relevance of what Webster's play has to say

about the political elements inherent in the apparently personal affairs of the protagonists. That Bond turned twice to Renaissance plays to make theatrical statements to his contemporaries about power, sex, money and violence, in the same ten-year period (1966-1976) in which he also wrote Lear and Bingo,¹³ indicates the richness of the Jacobean theatre as source-material for his work.

I turn at last to Howard Brenton's adaptations of Shakespeare, Measure for Measure (1972) and Thirteenth Night (1981). Of the four playwrights under consideration here, Brenton is the one with the most clearly antagonistic relationship to Shakespeare and his plays. Brenton, more than Barker or even Bond, uses adaptation to correct Shakespeare and to force the audience to reconsider the original plays. Brenton explicitly criticizes Shakespeare's depiction and discussion of a number of issues.

Measure for Measure is very much a product of its time. Michael X. Zelenak notes that "Brenton's Angelo was modelled on . . . Enoch Powell and the Duke on . . . Harold Macmillan."¹⁴ In 1972, Enoch Powell's racist and right-wing politics were gaining ground in Britain and were a strongly felt cause for protest by politicized writers (among others). An awareness of this background to the writing and production of the adaptation is valuable in explaining what might otherwise seem an arbitrary choice on Brenton's part to make Claudio and Isabella black, indeed

emphatically the only black characters in the play.

This is not to say that Isabella and Claudio may not have suited Brenton's purposes equally well if they had been members of another visible minority; racism was not the only evil present in the "England, now" setting of the play, and neither were blacks the only group specifically targeted for persecution by Powell's most extreme supporters. The fact that Claudio and Isabella are black, however, makes them instantly identifiable by the contemporary audience as the minority group, and (in Isabella's being a "Bible sister" and Claudio a "[Pop] Star") allows Brenton to give the characters recognizable, stereotyped ethnic identities without sacrificing the original play's overtly Christian elements.

Shakespeare does not provide Brenton with any authorization for this singling-out of Claudio and Isabella from among the other inhabitants of their world. In Shakespeare's play, there is no reason to suppose that Isabella and her brother are anything other than members of the Viennese gentry, white, and permitted to participate in the mainstream culture. Indeed, this very identification with the majority is underlined by Isabella's attempt to escape it by entering the convent--an attempt thwarted by Lucio's appeal to her for help for Claudio. Isabella's experiences after leaving the convent show her vulnerability to gender politics, but in this she is no different from

other women of her time and social status. Shakespeare's Angelo sentences Claudio to death, not because Claudio is a member of a persecuted minority, but because he has broken the law against fornication which Angelo has undertaken to enforce. For Shakespeare, the fact that Claudio could be any young Viennese man serves to emphasize the arbitrariness of Angelo's tyranny. Angelo too sees Claudio as typical rather than extraordinary and, therefore, seizes the opportunity to set a cautionary example for all the wealthy young men and women of Vienna. Brenton complicates the text he inherits from Shakespeare by having the crackdown under Angelo's command explicitly motivated by racism and by the impulse to censor, while Angelo's and the Duke's true motivations are complex and often inexplicit in Shakespeare's play. Brenton changes Claudio's crime from the Biblical "fornication" to the unfathomably technical "secondary rape" and makes it part of a list of thirteen charges stemming from Claudio's participation in one of Jerky Joe's pornographic films (Brenton, Measure for Measure, 1.5. p 101). Claudio, in Brenton's text, could not be just any young Englishman; his race makes him vulnerable to an unscrupulous system of law enforcement with a second, hidden agenda.

Claudio and Isabella's race, however, is not the only innovation Brenton brings to Measure for Measure. The Duke in the new play heads an elected government, rather than

ruling by hereditary right as Shakespeare's Duke must. Brenton introduces a heightened awareness of social class to the play, also; although Angelo is (at least according to Mrs Overdone) "a member of the House of Lords" (2.6. p 159), he is dismissed by the Duke as "a grammar school boy" (1.9. p 129). The insistence in the adaptation on the predominance of power deficits based on race and social class pushes Shakespeare's text further in its examination of the effects of the Duke's misplaced trust, and Angelo's abuse of authority. Brenton eliminates Mariana from the play altogether. This cut serves to lessen the importance of personal issues in comparison with political ones (Angelo has no life outside the office, in Brenton's play) and to thwart part of Shakespeare's (admittedly problematic) happy ending. In Shakespeare's play, it is possible to see in Angelo's enforced marriage to the faithful Mariana the chance of his rehabilitation; Mariana's presence at the end of the play, saving Angelo from death, thus has a potentially recuperative value. Jerky Joe, Brenton's version of Lucio, shares that character's dissipated way of life but not his elevated social class; and Lucio's mixed motives for helping Claudio when he is arrested (see Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, I.ii. 176-181) become positively tainted when Jerky Joe admits to Isabella that it is not God, but his own accountant who has moved him to try to help Claudio (Brenton, Measure for Measure, 1.7. p 113).

Apart from the updating of language and idiom, Brenton's most striking deviation from Shakespeare's text is in his treatment of the character of the Duke. Shakespeare offers the audience a number of ways of reading the play in the light of the Duke's manipulation of the other characters and of the events depicted. Lucio represents him as both "the Duke of dark corners" (Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, IV.iii. 156) and the "meddling Friar" in his disguise (V.i. 130). The Duke is the arch manipulator, at times barely in control of the game he plays with the lives of his subjects, and also the embodiment of Providence, exposing evil and cleansing the State of it without doing any lasting harm to the people he governs. Brenton is not interested in retaining in his adaptation all the conflicting features it is possible to see in Shakespeare's Duke. As Barbara Murray says, with appropriate bluntness, "Brenton dislikes Shakespeare's Duke intensely",¹⁵ and it suits Brenton's purpose to depict the Duke as a power-hungry and arrogant member of a privileged class. Unlike Shakespeare's Duke, Brenton's never regains his power; he is finally eliminated as a political figure by Angelo's superior ability to manipulate the systems of government for his own ends (see, for example, 2.6. pp 161-2). Before being permanently sidelined by Angelo to a nursing home, the Duke interferes in Claudio's case and, sentimentally overestimating the loyalty of the Civil Service to the

previous ruler, fails to save Claudio from execution.

If this overt criticism of the Duke's role in the play were insufficient to convince an audience that Shakespeare is in some way wrong, or naïve, about the personal and political issues that Brenton sees in the play, then Brenton's handling of the play's problematic ending must make the corrective tone unmistakable. The conclusion of Shakespeare's play has, as part of its complexity, a number of comic elements in it: Barnardine is pardoned, Claudio allowed to marry Julietta, Angelo married to the faithful Mariana, and Lucio forced to marry the woman he has made pregnant and then deserted. The Duke twice offers marriage to Isabella and, in what is surely the most noticeable gap in Shakespeare's canon, receives no verbal answer.¹⁶ Angelo's vice is exposed and punished relatively leniently, the Duke returns to the proper government of his state, and in its series of actual and projected marriages, the play has the potential to recall Shakespeare's early comedies. Any production of the play will have to make decisions about the extent to which it will represent the ending as happy; but Brenton's ending polarizes the contradictory elements of Shakespeare's, reducing it to two, mutually exclusive, alternate endings.

The ending of Brenton's play bears no resemblance to that of Shakespeare's. The Duke's trick fails, and Claudio is beheaded. Angelo is never publicly discredited and

retains power. Isabella is deported and the other characters who have resisted Angelo are incarcerated and silenced. Shakespeare's Provost, a highly principled official willing to take personal and professional risks in the interests of justice and fairness, is replaced in Brenton's text by a prison governor only too willing to trade such abstract goals for the knighthood Angelo promises him (2.6. p 162).

Brenton has Pompey, the pornographer, tack a perfunctory "happy end" onto the adaptation (2.7. p 164). The best Pompey can manage is to have all those sentenced by Angelo escape to an unspecified destination, including Claudio who is unconvincingly resurrected from the dead "carrying his head under his arm" (2.7. p 164). This ending is further undercut by the fact that the ship they sail on is the SS Political Utopia. Brenton's offering the audience this alternative ending, with the possibility of escape for the characters disenfranchised and persecuted by the political system that the Duke and Angelo dominate, merely reinforces the pessimism of the first ending. In that scene, which immediately precedes Pompey's attempt at a comic ending, Angelo brandishes Claudio's severed head and assigns the characters, including the Duke, to their punishments. Angelo's power is real in this play, and the SS Political Utopia--like all Utopias--is not. This alternate ending is an intentionally crude replacement for

the ambiguities of Shakespeare's text, suggesting in its parodic tone that a "happy" ending is not a genuine option.

Brenton's play is a partial reading of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, one which resists the plurality of the text and follows one particular interpretative and didactic line through the play. Brenton is not interested in whether the Duke and Isabella will marry, as Shakespeare must have been. Indeed, the difference in race and class between Isabella and the Duke makes the possibility of a marriage almost nil--Brenton's Duke would be prevented by his own prejudice and the ostracism of his peers from considering Isabella a suitable wife. Brenton is interested in the question of whether the Duke is in control when he is in disguise (a question very much at issue in Shakespeare's text), and whether the Duke has any moral justification for what he does. The artistic whole of Brenton's play answers these questions, replacing Shakespeare's potentially beneficent political system with one in which power, not principle, is the sole motivation for the government. Brenton thus achieves a resolution--albeit a pessimistic one--that Shakespeare's play does not for late twentieth-century audiences. Brenton suggests, by his directly corrective and antagonistic approach to the original text, that its view of the nature of power and the powerful is naïve and hopelessly optimistic. Brenton's further implication is that the play's inability to communicate a

strong sense of satisfactory resolution to the modern audience is due to its naïveté, or, even more damning to its author, to Shakespeare's complicity in the system of power-brokering which makes him unwilling to face honestly the realities of the power deficits present but smoothed over in his text and, by extension, in his society.

Equally valuable as a criticism of Shakespeare is Brenton's Thirteenth Night, which is in large part an adaptation of Macbeth. Jack Beaty and Jenny Gaze are beaten up as they leave a Labour Party meeting and Beaty's dream (which comprises most of Thirteenth Night) while unconscious is the story of Macbeth, with himself as Macbeth and Gaze as Lady Macbeth. The setting is contemporary Britain, both for the frame of the dream and the dream itself.

Beaty's dream follows the plot of Macbeth closely, with most of Shakespeare's language converted into modern idiom and with the members of Britain's first elected Marxist government in the places of the Scottish nobility. Beaty, with Gaze's encouragement, murders Prime Minister Bill Dunn (the Duncan figure) and takes power himself. With the power of a major bureaucracy supporting him, Beaty becomes increasingly tyrannical and isolated, abandoning the ideals and principles of his party and withdrawing into a secure network of underground bunkers. Jenny Gaze, haunted by the memories of the people who have been killed to gain and keep power in Beaty's hands, and by her disillusionment with the

realities of socialist government, commits suicide. Beaty dies, in an oblique and much condensed version of the battle at the end of Macbeth, in an underground bunker which he appears to have destroyed himself. The audience hears only the vague noise of a riot above ground, and it is never clear who is rioting, nor why. After the long dream-play, Beaty and Gaze are seen walking on a beach recuperating from their injuries.

If Brenton's method in adapting Measure for Measure was to close off parts of the play and to stress particular parts of his own interpretation in order to convey a clear message about certain types of power structures, then his method in adapting Macbeth is the opposite. With the earlier play, Brenton takes a text which is confusing in its many, coexistent interpretative possibilities, and simplifies the range of political issues for discussion in order to make his reading of the play clearer. Brenton takes up the Macbeth story as one familiar to modern audiences as a study of the will to power running out of control. In adapting the basic plot of Shakespeare's play, Brenton is at pains to stress its complexity and moral ambivalence in the undeniably evil acts of the compellingly attractive Macbeths. When Beaty murders Dunn, there is a potential justification: Dunn is thought to be negotiating secretly with the United States for a loan and thus betraying the Marxist government's mandated commitment to

British independence (Sc.5, p 119). Beaty kills the Special Branch officers who serve as Dunn's bodyguard; but unlike the innocent, drugged grooms who are framed by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth for Duncan's murder, Dunn's bodyguards are complicit in the plot to kill the man they are supposed to protect, and calmly watch Beaty commit the murder without intervening (Sc. 10, p 128). Gaze insists that these means of seizing power are justified:

Gaze Socialists have every right to be the government.

Beaty Majority vote or no?

Gaze You believe in a vanguard in power or you don't. Political power is political power. Got by the farce of a General Election or other means.

(Thirteenth Night, Sc. 5, p 119)

For audiences committed to the idea that parliamentary democracy is the best, and perhaps only civilized, way to validate a government, Gaze's assertion will be unconscionable. In the exchange quoted, Beaty voices the objection of the mainstream voter in the Western democratic tradition. In Gaze's defence of the right of socialists to govern, however, Brenton is acknowledging an important and (in 1981, at least) current strand of thought among socialists which, given what many socialists see as the massive inequities of the present social and political system, rejects "democracy" as a sham which can ultimately only perpetuate the same system at the expense of the least powerful members of a society, and instead validates government by popular revolution. Although Brenton does not

take a side on this issue--it is an important debate between Beaty and Gaze through much of the play--we cannot assume that Thirteenth Night endorses democracy exclusively at the expense of revolutionary socialism.

Gaze's viewpoint is given further weight by the interest Brenton shows in gender issues, linked to political ones, in Thirteenth Night. Jenny pictures Britain as a woman raped by the bigger, more powerful, male America (sc. 5, p 118). Gaze's feminism is linked to her socialism and both are intensely personal, growing out of her sense of powerlessness:

I am a political animal and a woman in a man's world.
I despise women who say "I am a woman" and don't say, in the same breath, "I am a revolutionary socialist."

(Sc. 5, p 121)

[To Beaty] Sentimental lover, bastard man.
Tyrants make the countries they rule one vast panorama of their private lives. Well, look about you --

(Sc. 16, p 155)

Brenton has found in contemporary feminism a version of Lady Macbeth's "Unsex me here" speech. But Lady Macbeth has no philosophical or dialectic outlet for her frustration at having to act through Macbeth, and therefore being so limited in power (but not in ambition) that she is reduced to wishing she could change her gender. Gaze, on the contrary, has at her disposal the rhetorics of feminism and socialism to legitimize and express her anger. When Brenton draws on the discourse given validity by the women's

movement, he is aware that his audience is familiar at least with the basic elements of the larger societal debate that has produced that discourse. The very existence of such a discourse seems in part to validate the issues raised by Gaze, and the audience is thus able to take seriously what Gaze says in both social and political contexts. Gaze has much of Lady Macbeth's oratorical power, but benefits as Lady Macbeth could not from the fact that the discussion of gender inequality is gaining legitimacy. Gaze, unlike her Renaissance counterpart, does not have to be "unsexed" to fight for what she wants, and clearly recognizes that Beaty himself, being male, is one of the enemies.

The crucial difference between Brenton's version of Macbeth and Shakespeare's is apparent, once again, in the way the two close their plays. Shakespeare has Macbeth killed in battle. Immediately Macbeth's severed head is produced, and MacDuff hails Malcolm as King in place of the "tyrant" Macbeth. Malcolm assumes command directly, making decisions about the correct government of Scotland; there is no anxious searching about for a successor (as there was in Barker's Women Beware Women). The play is firmly closed at the end and, although it is called the "tragedy" of Macbeth (and his wife), it in fact exhibits the rapid and assured resolution that accompanies the orderly transition of power typical of the English history plays, rather than of such plays as King Lear and Hamlet, where power passes by default

to the few survivors. Brenton's ending is even less closed and tidy than the endings of Shakespeare's great tragedies. Beaty dies, possibly having killed himself, while a partially-perceived battle or riot goes on outside the wrecked bunker. No-one is present to take Beaty's place; in the absence of a reliable figure with an inherent right to the throne, there is the prospect of an unstable and probably violent interregnum at the end of Beaty's dream. Brenton does not try to reassure the audience that "good" government--even assuming such a thing possible in the light of the crushing political realities Beaty and Gaze encounter--will be restored now that Beaty is dead. The ending is bleak, open, and disquieting.

This seems to be Brenton's technique in adapting Macbeth; by emphasizing the complexity and ambivalence of the original, he creates an independent play which can stand effectively on its own. Further, he exploits the gap between his complex view of the story and the audience's memory of Shakespeare's assured conclusion of a situation that has become, in Brenton's analysis, almost irresolvable. The tension between the two versions--between what the audience thought they knew, and what they have just been shown about the Macbeth story--again implicitly criticizes Shakespeare and the way he presents political conflict. The implicit criticism of what Brenton sees--and expects his audience will remember--as Shakespeare's orthodoxy and his

reliance for dramatic closure on hierarchical power structures becomes, by extension, a criticism of all such thinking, and of the culture that produced and continues to revere Shakespeare.

What can be said, then, about the similarities evident in these various adaptations of Renaissance drama? In many respects, it is the differences which are striking. Barnes sees himself as a "restorer" of old texts, enabling a revived relationship between Jacobean plays and modern audiences. Bond's adaptations are sometimes, like Barnes's, acting editions, and at other times are closer to the radical adaptations by Barker and Brenton. The action in Brenton's adaptations is explicitly political, while Barker foregrounds gender issues in his discussion of power struggle.

Yet there are shared elements. With the exception of King Lear, all the plays I have discussed in this chapter belong to one of two well-recognised categories: Revenge Tragedy, and the Jacobean City Comedy. Even Measure for Measure, in its topical criticism of contemporary vices, comes in Brenton's version to resemble the latter form. Other types of Renaissance drama, among them domestic tragedy, the history play, and festive comedy, do not it seems attract the attention of these modern playwrights. The final moments of a play are definitive of its larger nature, and it is often the ending of a play which Barnes,

Bond, Brenton and Barker change most radically when they execute adaptations and editions of them. I argued above that Barnes's alterations at the conclusion of Antonio have the effect of resisting the forgiving ending of Antonio's Revenge, with its suppression of the cruelty inflicted on Piero and Julio, emphasizing instead physical violence and psychic pain. Barnes's use of the comic Antonio and Mellida as the first half of his long tragedy robs that play of its festive potential, effacing its happy ending with the anticipation of the tragic second Act to come. The revision of the ending of The Devil is an Ass shows Barnes cutting altogether the happy ending of that City Comedy and replacing it with an inconclusive final tableau of physical assaults, complaints, and verbal abuse. Although not tragic, it is certainly no longer the comeuy Jonson wrote, and Barnes considerably complicates our response to the play with this open ending and its resistance of facile resolution. Similarly, Barnes exploits the highly ambivalent "comic" ending of The Alchemist in the direction of bleak satire; the final image is not of Face's lucky escape, in accord with a comic reading of the play, but of Face's avaricious contempt for his former colleagues and the audience. Brenton, similarly, resists such comic closure as Shakespeare's Measure for Measure offers and turns the play into a tragedy, with the execution of Claudio and the deportation of Isabella. In adding the second ending, with

its transparently inadequate comic resolution, Brenton draws the audience's attention to his overhaul of conventional genres. The title of Thirteenth Night evokes Twelfth Night, a favourite comedy, yet stages a version of a tragedy, Macbeth. Even the conventionally tragic ending of Beaty's dream, however, is complicated by its unreal status; the play finally returns us to the idyllic scene of the wounded Beaty and Gaze walking on a cold beach, recovering from their assault. The ending is not comic, but, like the ending of Barnes's The Devil is an Ass, is open, refusing to supply closure or resolution. In rewriting Women Beware Women, Barker engages in the opposite progress; he rejects Middleton's conventional (although imaginatively executed) tragic conclusion, and leaves all but one of the play's characters alive. Women Beware Women comes closer to comedy in Barker's version, with the restoration of Bianca to her full self, and with the appointment of Livia and Leantio to replace the Duke. In withdrawing from tragedy, Barker resists the conventional resolution of the Renaissance play much as Brenton and Barnes do.

In adapting King Lear, Bond and Barker both go far beyond the straightforward editing of the play and radically re-script it. Barker's version evades the original play's tragic ending by being set prior to its action; rather than change the ending, indeed, Seven Lears offers a new reading of the deeper meanings of both the first and the final

scenes of King Lear. Seven Lears threatens to end tragically, with the drowning of the baby Cordelia, but Barker has her survive, and sketches in sinister beginnings for the adoring relationship between her and Lear with which Shakespeare's play will open. Although clearly without any authority over Shakespeare's play, Barker's "prequel" both complicates and illuminates the family dynamic of King Lear. Bond's Lear is an alternative version of the original play, and like King Lear ends with Lear's death. Bond echoes the tragic ending of the original play by having Lear killed in the process of making a futile, but symbolically powerful, contribution to the correction of the political damage he has caused, much as Shakespeare's Lear dies while rebuilding his relationship with the now-dead Cordelia. Lear's death does not effect ideological closure in Bond's play, and on the larger political scale his death has little significance. There is no power vacuum left as there is at the end of King Lear; Cordelia's revolutionary government remains in control, and the wall stands. The ending of Lear is neither tragic nor comic, rejecting such values as belonging to a theatre created by a bourgeois individualism which emphasizes personal, rather than collective, concerns.

Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker all insist in their adaptations on a political, rather than a personal, view of the conflicts which drive the plays, and emphasize the

violence--interpersonal or systemic--that both results from and expresses conflict.

The evidence I have now presented, from a detailed consideration of their Jacobean adaptations, of the precise elements of Jacobean drama which apparently attract the contemporary playwrights' attention and artistic engagement sets the agenda for the next three chapters. In tracing the ways in which Jacobean drama permeates the work of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, the remainder of this discussion will focus on the way that their contact with the Jacobean staging of violence and political conflict--in short, of power relationships--influences their non-Jacobean, original plays.

CHAPTER THREE

Political Drama: Comedy or Tragedy?

I have argued that the distinction between comedy and tragedy, and the degree of closure in plays, is an important indicator of the criteria used by these four contemporary playwrights in adapting Jacobean drama. In crafting their own plays, do they continue to engage with these generic distinctions, or do the distinctions become irrelevant beyond the narrow focus of Renaissance drama? David Ian Rabey suggests that there are two elements of Jacobean drama that influence contemporary British drama: the figure of the malcontent, and the genre of satirical anatomy.¹ The malcontent is a topic I will return to in Chapter Five; what I find lacking in Rabey's observation, astute as it is, is a discussion of the issue of dramatic form implicit in the two correspondences.

I noted in Chapter Two that with the exceptions of King Lear and (arguably) Measure for Measure, the Jacobean plays discussed fall into the categories of either Revenge Tragedy or City Comedy. Revenge Tragedy, with its debates over the mechanics and the morality of an individual's pursuit of justice, connects to the contemporary political dramatist's discussion of the place of violent action in attaining

political ends. Not only does Revenge drama consider the moral nature of the act of retributive violence, it also examines the consequences of that act. The fact that most Revenge dramas (including Hamlet, The White Devil, and The Revenger's Tragedy, to name some of the most familiar) involve characters at the top of political hierarchies--Dukes and Kings--means that the consequences of the decisions made about using violence to achieve justice have political and strategic ramifications for the state as a whole, and not merely for the private individuals concerned.² It should be noted, also, that the involvement of corrupt heads of state is not merely coincidental, nor a symptom of the fascination with socially superior figures on the stage. The failure of the public legal system, in the Renaissance still invested in the figure of the hereditary ruler, is what impels the revenger to seek private justice. Thus, Revenge Tragedy at its most refined will occur when the ruler is (or is perceived by one or more characters to be) corrupt and tyrannical. In modern drama, the injustice against which a character, or group of characters, struggles is less likely to be personal--the murder or rape of a family member--than it is to be explicitly political. The pursuit of violent action in the attainment of political ends involves the same opposition, between the underempowered and the powerful, that the struggle of the Renaissance revenger engages in; and the modern struggle

also involves the play in a consideration of the potential for anarchy and greater social injustice which the condonement of acts of violence implies. This last issue is a particularly pressing one for playwrights, like Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, writing in a democratic country and for audiences who are predominantly middle-class and thus benefit from the maintenance of the status quo. It is perhaps not particularly difficult to persuade the homeless in London that the way resources are distributed within British society should undergo a radical, and probably violent, alteration; these are not, however, the people who buy the tickets at the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

City Comedy, with its prevalent mode of satirical anatomy, is also set in a climate of immorality and corruption. "Satirical anatomies," Rabey observes, "work by referring to a latent sense of morality, all the more striking by its absence from a play's heightened image of ...society engaged in its characteristic processes."³ City Comedy typically offers social commentary on contemporary vices, and will thus clearly be attractive to dramatists critical of present political and social conditions. Satire, however, has limitations as a form. I have already suggested (see the Introduction, pp 9-10) that plays which are purely topical satires, such as David Edgar's clever Dick Deterred, have a short shelf-life. For genuinely

committed dramatists, it is necessary but not sufficient to describe political ills and invite the audience to share in the condemnation of them. It is necessary, further, to explore an agenda for positive political change, if the play is to achieve a tangible goal. A third goal, which is perhaps not strictly necessary but which is artistically attractive, is to describe the ideal situation to be achieved by the appropriate political action. Satirical anatomy, whatever its value in persuading audiences of the validity of the playwright's view of contemporary conditions, will clearly have to be abandoned in the creation of such Utopian plays. This depiction, if it is possible, will be of particular value in the playwright's attempt to "sell" his agenda for change to the middle-class audience. Satire, being an intentionally funny, if not "comic," form, has the advantage in regard to this delicate relationship between performance and audience of using laughter to reduce resistance to any message the play attempts to communicate. In discussing the elements of Bakhtin's idea of "carnival" in Renaissance drama, Michael D. Bristol notes that "[t]he mixture of jest and earnest has been a well-understood norm of literary practice since antiquity," and that "[l]aughter is a saving response because it places everything in a down-to-earth perspective."⁴ When presenting an audience with what will probably be uncomfortable interpretations of the society

they participate in, a technique of presentation which can combine seriousness with some "saving response" will be of value.

Peter Barnes's The Ruling Class (1968) is clearly a political play; in its speculation on the likely career of a homicidally insane member of the English aristocracy, a career which takes Jack from a Messianic complex, to the belief that he is Jack the Ripper (a belief he acts on), and culminating with his installation in the House of Lords, the play distills the madness Barnes sees not only in Britain's "ruling class" but also in the other members of British society who help to perpetuate the power of that class and thus participate in their own oppression by it. Barnes's satire of the class itself is pointed:

DR HERDER: You must realize the Earl's [Jack's] strange position. It's what makes him such an interesting case. Remember, he's suffering from delusions of grandeur. In reality he's an Earl, an English aristocrat, a peer of the realm, a member of the ruling class. Naturally, he's come to believe that there's only one person grander than that-- the Lord God Almighty Himself.

SIR CHARLES: {suspiciously} Are you English?

DR HERDER: No.

SIR CHARLES: Ahhh....

(Act 1 Scene 3 p 24)

Tucker, Jack's family butler, claims to be an "Anarchist - Trotskyist - Communist - Revolutionary" (1.5 p 31) but chooses to hoard the huge cash legacy he received from his late master, Jack's father, and remains in domestic service out of "fear and... the habit of serving ... masters and

servants, that's the way of it" (1.5. p 31). Despite this self-knowledge, Tucker still lacks the courage and will to abandon the identity forced on him by the existing hierarchy and thus continues to help perpetuate its power.

Ironically, Tucker understands that he is "needed" by Jack and his family on a personal and practical level, but fails to see that the whole hierarchy depends upon Tucker's willingness and, by extension, the willingness of his whole class, to continue to play this assigned, subordinate role.

In the course of the play, its protagonist Jack is changed from the obviously insane but harmless "JC" to Jack the Ripper. Under this second delusion Jack murders both his aunt Claire and his wife Grace, but is outwardly "normal" enough to take his place in the House of Lords and contribute to that body's debate on bringing back the death penalty. The Ruling Class ends with Grace's dying scream; Barnes dissects a magnified version of a social system he sees as corrupt but so effective in its self-protection that it will not be supplanted. He proposes no agenda for change, with Grace's final scream functionally expressing the author's (and the audience's?) despair and terror. In its denial of the possibility for goodness represented by Jack in his "JC" role, and in its final bleak view of human relations--and specifically sexual relations--as destructive and sadistic, The Ruling Class prefigures Barnes's adaptation of Wedekind's Lulu, which Barnes subtitles "A Sex

Tragedy" in ironic reference both to its rejection of conventional dramatic forms and to its focus on the impossibility of the survival of individual goodness in a social climate of perversion and repression.

As remarkable an achievement as The Ruling Class is, the foregoing discussion suggests a problem inherent to the play's form. The "anatomy" exposes and lampoons social evils and political abuses, but without proposing alternatives to the system which is responsible for them. Indeed, the play's ending is resigned to the continuation of the system it satirizes. The play thus triggers the audience's sense of what is right, in response to what is depicted on stage, but does not attempt to exploit that response to militate for positive change and, further, seems in its resignation actively to discourage even the attempt. Tucker's drunken and possibly meretricious claim to be a KGB agent suggests one form of resistance, but its viability is undercut by Tucker's lack of credibility and effectiveness on the one hand, and by the audience's mistrust of the methods and aims of the KGB on the other.

Howard Brenton and David Hare's Brassneck (1973), like The Ruling Class, is a satirical portrait of a sub-group of society which, the authors assert, is responsible for the misery and oppression of other members of the larger society. The "boss" clan of the capitalist hierarchy is the principal object of the satire here. Like Peter Flannery's

Singer, Brassneck covers the period since the end of World War Two and concerns the business dealings of three generations of the Bagley family. The play opens with the elderly Alfred Bagley returning to the Midlands town of his birth after being bombed out and widowed in London. Bagley uses his savings and government compensation for the loss of his shops in London to set himself up in business as a slumlord, and within a few years builds up considerable wealth and influence within the town of Stanton. The childless Alfred co-opts his nephew, Roderick Bagley, to expand his business into large-scale property speculation, using illegal methods to win contracts from the corrupt government. By the end of the play, Alfred has died and Roderick, bankrupt, has been sent to gaol for fraud. Roderick's son Sidney is now a strip-club owner and, in the play's final scene, is joined by Roderick's wife, children, and former associates to set up a new family business: importing and distributing Chinese heroin.

This synopsis is perhaps enough in itself to suggest the satirical thrust of Brassneck. Property speculation and drug dealing are, in the play's terms, business activities on the same level and conducted by the same people, and always with the motive of profit. This play is strikingly similar to Brenton's adaptation of Measure for Measure, written the year before, in its satirical depiction of a political system in which the Old Boy network and the

Freemasons' Lodge wield tremendous power and undermine the functioning of democratic government. Part at least of Brenton's agenda in rewriting Shakespeare's play was to undercut any possible confidence in the integrity of government and in the ability of the political system to cleanse itself of unhealthy and unjust elements. Measure for Measure in Brenton's version emphasizes the satirical, cynical, City comedy elements of this, the most complex and problematic of Shakespeare's "comedies." In the Jacobean City Comedy, ruthless self-interest is the norm of behaviour and, as Rabey puts it, "clever rogues ... prove the only dramatically attractive alternative to dull rogues."⁵

Like Yellowhammer in Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and Sir Epicure Mammon in Jonson's The Alchemist, James Avon and Roderick Bagley in Brassneck try to exploit the corruption of local and national politics for personal gain but are unsuccessful. Both are finally outwitted by people similarly motivated but both more adept at this exploitation and more ruthless in their personal relationships. Avon's fate echoes that of the Duke in Brenton's Measure for Measure, who mistakes his privileged social position for one of invulnerability against the "grammar school boys" like Angelo. As Angelo out-maneuvres the Duke, pensioning him off to a harmless state of political impotence, so Avon is sidelined by his brothers in the Masonic Lodge, excluded from the real centre of influence and power, and allowed

responsibility only for arranging the Lodge's Ladies' Night.

Brassneck is specific in its analysis of the mechanisms of this corrupt political system. Alfred Bagley is invited by James Avon to join the Masonic Lodge in order to strengthen the Tory faction against the rival faction led by Harry Edmunds, the town's newly-elected Labour MP. By means of the contacts he makes in the Lodge, Bagley is able to build up his own business and, later, to pass on to Roderick the ability to win government contracts illegally. Roderick continues to win contracts for public building projects even though his qualifications as an architect are not valid and his company's work is substandard. The political left is tainted equally; Harry Edmunds tells his ambitious colleague, Tom Browne, that to advance on Town Council Browne will have to join the Lodge. Edmunds explains this cryptically: "The English Social Structure is a complex and beautiful thing. Interlocking escalators" (Act 1 Sc. 4 p 28). Later, Edmunds offers a fuller and more sentimental assessment of his involvement in this political process:

My sleeves 'ave been rolled up for thirty years. ... In there with the best of them, slamming up houses, motorways, 'ospitals, swimming pools, mobilizing funds and spreading loads. I've worked with 'em all. Dicky Councillors, fixers, pushers, old family firms, political wild boys saying I'm no socialist, and Old Etonian ministers crapping on about Maynard Keynes. I've dragged myself down among 'em, knuckled, elbowed, pushed and shoved, jostled in the speculative melee, I'll work with anyone to do good for the people of this country.
(Act 2, p 71)

Brassneck shows that the result of Edmunds's efforts has not

been "good for the people" but "a tower block ... in Burnley" designed and built by Roderick's firm in which "water ran down the living-room walls" (Act 3, sc. 2 p 97). Finally completely disillusioned with his political career, and sitting in the House of Lords with "all the other refugees from scandal and debauch" (Act 3, sc.2 p 97), Edmunds makes the decision to become the "clever rogue" of Jacobean city comedy and joins Sidney Bagley's heroin business.

Like most city comedy, Brassneck does not propose an alternative to the system of dishonest dealing in public money that it depicts. The play is, however, clear in its rejection of the traditional and (in Britain, at least) accepted form of resistance to the supremacy of the socially and financially privileged upper middle and upper classes. Harry Edmunds and Tom Browne, the play's only representatives of the Labour Party (depicted both in government and in opposition), are seen throughout the play collaborating with the supposed "reactionaries" and serving their own interests above all. Their decision to participate in Sidney's scheme to import heroin and sell it to schoolchildren finally identifies them totally with the profit-motivated Bagleys and their Tory associates. If the play does not specifically point out to an audience a moral imperative for any reforming action, it does at least, in its satirical portrait of influence-peddling and behaviour

motivated by political expedience rather than principle, caution the audience against a complacent and unquestioning reliance on the integrity and efficacy of Britain's established left-wing politicians.

Edward Bond's Narrow Road to the Deep North and Early Morning (both 1968) satirize aspects of British government and political action but are set, unlike The Ruling Class and Brassneck, and unlike a City Comedy, in the past. Early Morning offers a revised version of the received assessment of Queen Victoria, showing her as a brutal and hypocritical politician who employs Machiavellian tactics to retain the outer semblance of order in her family and in her country. Narrow Road to the Deep North, set in "Japan about the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries" shows the tyranny exercised by Shogo over his countrymen. Shogo's rule is interrupted by the arrival of the Commodore and Georgina, very Victorian English colonisers-cum-missionaries. They supplant Shogo and impose their own form of government on his city-state. Georgina tells the poet Basho,

...Instead of atrocity I use morality. I persuade people--in their hearts--that they are sin, and that they have evil thoughts, and that they're greedy and violent and destructive and--more than anything else--that their bodies must be hidden, and that sex is nasty and corrupting and must be secret. When they believe all that they do what they're told. They don't judge you--they feel guilty themselves and accept that you have the right to judge them. That's how I run the city; the missions and churches and bishops and magistrates and politicians and papers will tell

people they are sin and must be kept in order. If the devil didn't exist it would be necessary to invent him.

(Part 2 sc 1 p 208)

Narrow Road to the Deep North anatomizes Shogo's use of physical brutality to rule, and does so with a humour reminiscent of Barnes's in lampooning the effects of physical violence. The satire of the methods of Georgina and the Commodore is closer in tone to the satire of The Ruling Class in that it is initially comic but becomes very much darker when five children in Georgina's care are murdered by Shogo's soldiers and Georgina, "haunted," as the Japanese characters say, by her guilt and grief, lapses into insanity and sexual obsession. The end of the play is bleak, as the morally uncommitted Basho is appointed by the Commodore to run the city, and the young priest Kiro commits suicide. Kiro has for most of the play sought a wise man to follow on his quest for enlightenment and, unable to find one and disillusioned by the experience of the war between Shogo and the Commodore for control of the city, chooses a final act of self-annihilation. The satire in this play operates as a bleak warning: the aimlessness and ultimate futility of Kiro's life is a cycle doomed to be repeated unless people like himself, those with a genuine and unselfishly motivated desire for social change and enlightenment, can find a workable mechanism to bring it about. Both Shogo's violent regime and the manipulative, repressive hypocrisy employed by the Commodore and Georgina

do massive damage, but no viable alternative is proposed.

Perhaps the most striking of Bond's satirical anatomies is Early Morning, in which the chronological distance between Victoria's society and our own is bridged (and, effectively, eliminated) by the use of anachronistic details, such as the existence of airfields, radio broadcasting and "the State Cinema, Kilburn High Street" (Sc. 4, p.147). The satire in Early Morning is aimed at the whole social scale, from Queen Victoria herself to the working-class cannibals Len and Joyce, and at the pervasive hypocrisy that characterizes that society. The administration of justice proves a useful target for Bond's satire, and in the course of the play the audience witnesses three trials over which Victoria presides and one kangaroo court run by Gladstone, leader of a revolution against Victoria's reign. There is of course no historical veracity to the assertion that Victoria took so active a part in the administration of justice. By making her the judge (and, in her son Arthur's trial in heaven, the defence counsel), Bond at once attacks the supposed impartiality of the legal system and emphasizes the crushing influence Victoria and the morality which she has come to symbolize in the twentieth century have had, and continue to exert, on society as a whole. The inherently and self-consciously theatrical quality of courtroom behaviour has been a favourite device of dramatists since the Renaissance, if not

before, and Bond is equally attracted to this method of depicting the conflict between an individual's behaviour and the demands of his or her community. The rigged trials of Early Morning, with their sham of proper procedure, recall the arraignment of Vittoria in Webster's The White Devil and the accusation of Hermione in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. Victoria's matronly but utterly unmerciful behaviour in the courtroom recalls the behaviour of Bodice and Fontanelle at their father's trial in Bond's own Lear. In all of these trials, the public system of justice is manipulated by the powerful to attain iniquitous ends with the spurious moral sanction of impartial legality.

The repression of sexuality--both her own and that of others--ascribed by Bond to Georgina in Narrow Road to the Deep North has a more pervasive influence on life at Victoria's own court. Florence Nightingale is engaged to George, the Prince of Wales, whose marriage is necessary to the continuation of Victoria's dynasty but complicated by the fact that he is a conjoined twin whose brother, Arthur, is hostile to the marriage. Florence is raped by Queen Victoria and feels herself "changed" (sc. 5 p 155). In the aftermath of the rape Florence becomes, by turns, a dominatrix, a cross-dresser (she impersonates John Brown, at Victoria's request, to avoid the public scandal of a lesbian relationship), England's "first hangwoman," a nurse (with the Crimean War replaced in Early Morning by a civil war

between Victoria and an army led by Disraeli and Gladstone for control of Britain), and a prostitute. At the simplest level, Victoria's rape of Florence mocks both the Queen's reputed virtue, and her much-quoted refusal to believe that lesbianism existed. On a more complex level, it is an encapsulation of the Victorian hypocrisy about sex that a public appearance of heterosexuality, in the context of a legal marriage, can mask private acts of brutality and exploitation. Victoria's dishonest attitude to sex is an emblem of her attitude to all human relationships. On the eve of a civil war instigated in part by her husband, Prince Albert, she chastises her son Arthur for dissenting in the public court, announcing "I will not permit family bickering in public!" (sc. 3 p 145).

Scenes 16 to 21 of Early Morning take place in heaven, where Victoria insists "[t]here's only peace and happiness, law and order, consent and co-operation. My life's work has borne fruit. It's settled" (sc. 21 p 223). The surprising feature of this heaven, over which Victoria assumes control, is that in it there is no taboo on cannibalism:

ALBERT: In heaven we eat each other.

VICTORIA: It doesn't hurt.

ALBERT: And it grows again.

GEORGE: Like crabs.

VICTORIA: Nothing has any consequences here - so there's no pain. Think of it - no pain. Pain is just a habit. You forget all your habits here. Bon appetite.

(Sc. 16 p 200)

Heaven for Victoria, though finally not for her anguished son Arthur, is a place where the final prohibition has been lifted. For Victoria and Albert, reconciled to each other in heaven, the new possibility of cannibalism seems to resolve their conflicts and they indulge happily in the consumption of themselves and each other (with typically macabre domesticity, Victoria draws up a roster of who will be eaten and, leading by example, puts her own name at the top of the list). For Arthur, who is not yet fully dead and at the end of Early Morning rises up from his coffin to another, perhaps truer heaven, cannibalism is unacceptable. He eats himself when his hunger becomes intolerable in preference to eating others, however much he is assured that the eaten feel no pain and suffer no permanent damage (sc. 19 p 209). Arthur is alone among his family in refusing to accept the illusion of guilt-free physical gratification that this heaven offers. The desire to eat people--present in the earlier scenes of Early Morning in the trial of Len and Joyce for cannibalism outside a cinema--comes to symbolize all the forbidden and repressed desires experienced during a life subject to the controls of a restrictive society. Bond's satirical point is clear although, perhaps, not obvious: unlimited consumption, without regard to moral principle and divorced from the considerations of human suffering and cost, is a fantasy whose satisfaction annihilates the tendency to resist

authority. Victoria knows that by feeding the people Arthur has persuaded to follow him in heaven she will win them back to her side, and Arthur is the only character who successfully resists the temptation of cannibalism. For Victoria, cannibalism in heaven fulfills the function played during life by raping young women; for Albert, it deadens his drive to use people "to build empires and railways and factories, to trade and convert and establish law and order" (sc. 2 p 141). Albert's vision is a capitalist one, in which people are viewed primarily not as individual agents, but as means to the end of material wealth. Thus cannibalism in heaven is a sub-capitalist fantasy: the perfect harmony of supply and demand, a system where material goods--human flesh--are offered and accepted as the sole good. Further, eating the uniquely valuable commodity of human flesh is the ultimate instance of conspicuous consumption. Arthur's resistance is the only blot in Victoria's otherwise spotless heaven and his death and ascension mark his progression beyond the thinking of the people around him. Arthur is an analogue to Kiro in Narrow Road to the Deep North, but one whose ability to offer positive resistance to the violence of his society is greater. Kiro's death is an absurd and nihilistic act, chosen by him as the only way out of a life which has become insupportable in its contradictions and complexities. Ironically, Kiro kills himself at the moment when he could

have helped another human being; as he dies, a man pulls himself out of the river and, too preoccupied to notice that Kiro has committed *suppuku*, berates the young priest for failing to help. Arthur's death, preceded by his sincere although unsuccessful attempt to bring Florence with him out of Victoria's heaven, effects his transcendence of a world where all desire and motivation can be subsumed into the consumption of human flesh, the greed of consumption for its own sake, consumption not as a physical necessity but as the solely pointful achievement of human activity.

This condemnation of the effects of Capitalism on human culture is an important part of Bond's political agenda. In the essay "On Violence," written as an introduction to Saved, Bond writes,

[Capitalism's] destructiveness is caused not so much by its naked force as by its false culture ... its destructiveness can be clearly seen in its waste of life, resources and human energy ... whenever you walk quietly down the orderly street of a capitalist society you are surrounded by the hidden debris of waste and destruction and are already involved in a prolonged act of communal violence.

(Bond: Plays One, p 17)

Victoria's heaven is Bond's vision of the fantasy of a Capitalist society: a place where pain, dirt and consequences have been eliminated, along with human conscience and the ability to distinguish between material goods as property (in the form of food) and the autonomous human individual.

Bond picks up the artistic expression of this seductive

but inescapably destructive lure of limitless materialism from as unlikely a source as Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, which he edited for performance at the Royal Court Theatre in 1966. In that play, socially ambitious parents and a self-interested suitor attempt to prevent the marriage of the young lovers, Moll Yellowhammer and Touchwood Junior. Moll is unable to persuade her parents that keeping a daughter prisoner and depriving her of all autonomy cannot be justified by their expectations of material gain to themselves from her marriage to Sir Walter Whorehound. The lovers respond to this parental tyranny by faking their own deaths and having their coffins brought together for a double funeral. At the funeral, they rise up out of the coffins and are married by the priest who was to have buried them. The play ends with Moll's parents reconciled to her marriage to Touchwood Junior, the exposure of Sir Walter as a fraud and the preparations for a wedding feast.

Like Moll and Touchwood Junior, Arthur is alienated from his family in his unwillingness to accept the instant but degrading gratification offered by the acquisition of material goods. Arthur, too, undergoes an apparent death which is followed by a rebirth, rising in a shroud-like garment out of his coffin. Unlike the happy couple of Middleton's play, Arthur rises alone, and he permanently leaves the world represented by the stage image of his

mother's hermetically sealed heaven. He tries to bring Florence with him, begging her not to eat and to come "somewhere" with him (sc. 19 pp 209-210). Florence is torn between her love for Arthur--evidence that she is less susceptible to degradation than the rest of Victoria's society--and her belief that "there is nowhere" other than Victoria's heaven. She is unable to transcend as Arthur does. As the royal family picnics on Arthur's coffin, Florence "sits a bit on one side," and as Arthur "starts to rise in the air... Florence doesn't see him. She cries silently" (sc. 21 p 223). The close of Bond's play is less definite in its hope for the future than is A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. Arthur goes forward alone, to an unknowable future which his intuition suggests must be better than his mother's heaven. He leaves behind him Florence who is now unable to sit contentedly with the family and enjoy the meal of human flesh. To explain her tears, Florence tells Victoria she has dirt in her eye; Victoria responds that there is no dirt in heaven. The dirt that Victoria is so anxious to deny, literally in heaven as much as symbolically (dirt equalling sex) on earth, becomes a positive good. Arthur has put "dirt", the awareness of complexity and the need for individual responsibility, into Florence's eyes and thus enabled her to begin at least to resist the pressure to conform yet again to the ideals Victoria represents. Middleton's play dramatises an escape by the human will from

the interference of mercantilism, a force gaining prominence in seventeenth-century London as the powerful middle class is created and the possession of wealth shifts from the exclusive privilege of the upper class. Bond, writing after a considerably longer experience of the lure and trap of the ever increasing availability of and demand for material goods, sees hope in Arthur's ability to transcend the capitalist society but does not attempt to define what if anything Arthur will find in his own heaven. Like that of the City Comedy, the ending of Early Morning is open; Arthur's angel-like escape from Victoria's Heaven is positive for him, but the rest of the cast is left behind, like the greedy and dishonest citizens of Middleton's London, and will continue to engage in cannibalism under Victoria's repressive and hypocritical leadership.

The style of the satirical anatomy in Early Morning is clearly different from the more factually accurate method of Barnes's The Ruling Class and Brenton and Hare's Brassneck. Unlike those plays, Bond's is not set in a roughly contemporary England, but its relevance to the audience's present is made clear by the use of anachronism. Our society, Bond asserts, is suffering as much from the destructive effects of a system of government which depends on personal repression and political hypocrisy as if we were living in the mid-nineteenth century.

Howard Barker's plays to date can be divided usefully

into two groups: generally speaking, his earlier plays (those written before 1982) use socially realistic situations and depict political events more or less factually, while his later plays seem closer to Bond's method in such plays as Early Morning, Narrow Road to the Deep North and Restoration in their use of anachronism and ahistorical settings that emphasize historical truth above historical accuracy.⁶ Barker's earlier plays offer an anatomy of society that is not truly satirical but that gains specificity from depicting in painstaking detail a situation recognizable to the audience from its own experience. Credentials of a Sympathiser (commissioned by BBC Television but unproduced by them, and staged by the RSC in 1979) portrays a session of peace talks between representatives of the British government and representatives of an unnamed Irish terrorist organization clearly intended to suggest the IRA. Like Brassneck, Credentials of a Sympathiser is highly specific in its discussion of the mechanism of political corruption. The government representatives are, the audience discovers, bargaining in bad faith, taking part in the peace talks not with the stated aim of opening up genuine negotiations for a truce, but to "[f]ind out the compromisers. That's all we had to do" (sc. 25 p 97). The play shows the fine details of how political will--as well as the individual will of the corrupt or self-interested politician--is translated into

action and result by means of manipulation. Barker is clear both in his understanding of the mechanisms employed and of the results of those mechanisms. In That Good Between Us (first performed 1977), Barker anatomizes life in Britain under a Labour government so obsessed with security that it completely abandons its stated principles of personal liberty and tolerance of the expression of political difference. Barker opens the play with the apparent execution by drowning of McPhee by two other men, Knatchbull and Bleach. The action of the play then goes back to the beginning of McPhee's association with these men, who turn out to be security operatives--presumably members of MI5--working for Orbison, the Home Secretary. McPhee becomes an undercover agent for the government and when he proves insufficiently controllable, Knatchbull and Bleach are charged with disposing of him.

The function of McPhee and the play's other irregular undercover operative, Godber, is to infiltrate a breakaway group connected to the British military called the "Court of the Democratic Movement." McPhee attempts sincerely to become a double agent, serving the CDM, and is almost executed by the government; the final scene of the play shows McPhee arriving on the shore, almost miraculously, after being forced by Knatchbull and Bleach out of a boat far offshore. Godber vacillates between allegiance to the government, to the CDM, and to Rhoda, the bitterly resistant

anarchist daughter of the Home Secretary. Although Rhoda has no identifiable political affiliation, she is shot along with Godber by the CDM's assassins at the end of the play. That Good Between Us offers a complex portrait of the unseen and largely unadmitted methods used by supposedly democratic governments to protect themselves from forms of resistance which are difficult to control by more openly acceptable means. The deaths of Rhoda and Godber in the play's penultimate scene emphasize the practical futility of such methods. Like revenge on the individual level in the plays of the English Renaissance, acts of violence on the part of the government--the dispenser of public justice--aimed at quelling rebellion have the almost inevitable effect of forcing the opposition into ever more desperate positions, and the level and arbitrariness of the violence escalates indefinitely. Like the revenger, the Labour government in That Good Between Us resorts to the methods of its enemies and, in gaining power, becomes itself the enemy of the ideals it professed originally to protect. The self-elected CDM is similarly morally tainted by its indiscriminate use of violence. What Barker's anatomy is intended most obviously to show is the tendency of the use of force to trap the perpetrators and their victims in a cycle of retaliatory and controlling violence that can only end with the destruction of one or other of the sides. Like his Jacobean counterparts, Barker seems unable to offer a

detailed agenda for social change to break out of the cycle. McPhee's survival, however, strikes a hopeful and redemptive note at the very end of That Good Between Us which, like Arthur's escape from heaven at the end of Early Morning, suggests the possibility of a future existence outside the cycle of oppression and violence.

Barker's later drama moves away from such familiar social and political situations and uses instead settings of a fantastic nature. The Bite of the Night, for example, shows Savage, a Classics professor from an abandoned and partly demolished university, travelling through the lost Troys, encountering characters from Greek myth including Helen, and accompanied at times by his wife, his son, his elderly father and his former student Hogbin. The physical setting is at once the ruined campus in twentieth-century England, and the site of Troy at different times in its history. Savage's encounter with Helen of Troy imitates and parodies the gift made to Dr Faustus by the Devil of a night with Helen, in Marlowe's play; in the contemporary world, Savage is not the brilliant seeker after forbidden knowledge, but the jaded, sadistic and now dispossessed professor of a university destroyed by a political system which no longer values learning. Barker attempts no logical resolution of the tension between the play's two physical and temporal realities, allowing them to exist together in a more sophisticated version of the factual anachronism of

Early Morning.⁷ Human experience, Barker suggests, is not necessarily subject to the artificial divisions and distinctions made by the discipline of history. Although it is not physically or logically possible for Savage to exist simultaneously in two centuries and two geographical locations, it is possible for the human mind to fuse the two settings conceptually into one, the logical impossibility of which does not interfere with its emotional and ideological truth. Helen of Troy thus becomes at one and the same time an historical personage, a metaphor of commerce and trade disputes in the Adriatic, and a dramatic character, interacting on stage with Savage and, in some of the play's most intriguing moments, with his wife.

Barker's technique for outlining social, political and personal problems in his later plays differs on the surface from the more conventional anatomies of Barnes, Brenton, Bond and, indeed, of his own earlier plays. Part of the interpretive difficulty of much of Barker's work lies in his use of oblique rather than direct methods to present the specific evils against which he sees personal and political action as necessary. Barker's satirical anatomies focus specifically, in his later plays, on the plight of the individual living in a corrupt world; his intense interest in such self-tormenting and morally repellent heroes as Savage challenges the audience to consider the malcontent character without enabling any easy, sympathetic response.

Savage, the dialectician Sleen (the eponymous hero of The Early Hours of a Reviled Man), and even the politically naïve McPhee occupy the space in Barker's drama of political criticism that Marston's Malcontent, Jonson's Morose (in Epicoene), and Shakespeare's Malvolio do in their plays. These figures, marginalized critics of the comic world around them, are rather anti-heroes than heroes; Morose and Malvolio survive their plays but are diminished and punished by them. Their inability to participate as romantic heroes in the corrupt societies of the plays they inhabit makes them, like Sloman in Barker's The Last Supper, "not less but greater cynic[s]." Barker's later work goes beyond the description of problems and, making less use than do Brenton and Bond of conventional narrative forms, depicts these evils in the friction of personal relationships. The depiction and discussion of the response to political oppression and systemic injustice is an obvious, practical, and controversial function of political drama. This is especially the case in agit-prop theatre, where the purpose of the production is not only to depict such responses but to exhort the audience to consider practical responses in their lives outside the theatre.

In 1978, ten years after writing Narrow Road to the Deep North, Bond returned to the character of Basho in The Bundle, or, New Narrow Road to the Deep North. The second of the plays, like the first, opens with Basho refusing the

opportunity to save an abandoned child on his way to the deep north in search of enlightenment. In Narrow Road to the Deep North Basho reports that he arrived at his destination and after twenty-nine and a half years of "staring into space" realised that there was nothing to learn there and this realisation constituted his enlightenment. In The Bundle Basho wanders for fourteen years and, as the main action of the play begins, finds that he has mistakenly walked in a circle and returned to his own village. The child he refused to save, Wang, has been brought up by the Ferryman and is now apprenticed to Basho, newly appointed as a judge.

Basho's account of one of the cases over which he presides is telling of his attitude:

Mrs Su-tan broke her neighbour's arm because she stole her thatch and sang at night. The neighbour came round, screamed in the street and threw stones through Su-tan's door. Su-tan's husband held the neighbour's broken arm while Su-tan broke the fingers on it. Such acts of human nature are so bestial, the times so dark, that it is not possible to see what we can do to help ourselves or change the times.

(Part 1 sc.4 p 23)

Basho's mistake is in believing such acts of brutality as Su-tan's to be the result of a basic evil in human nature. In a city where parents are forced to leave their babies to die beside the river in order to save the rest of the family from starvation, thatch may very easily be valued more highly than is human suffering. Bond clearly sees this as a result of the feudal system (rapidly being replaced by

mercantilism, in the person of Kung-tu) which inflicts terrible poverty on the majority of the population and forces them to commit inhuman acts in order to survive. Instead of using his education and position of influence to improve these conditions, Basho dismisses the possibility that people could help themselves or change the conditions in which they live, believing the evil to be inherent in human life. One of Basho's poems at once expresses his self-satisfaction and his fatalism:

At the moment of enlightenment
The devil springs
What is knowledge
Except that the world is evil!
(Part 1, sc. 2 p 10)

In seeing the world as evil and incapable of improvement by human means, Basho colludes with the economically powerful whose privilege is guaranteed by the existing social system. His contribution to the problem as he sees it--the problem of crime--takes place completely within the context of a system which causes lawlessness by its perpetration of injustice and exploitation. Basho treats the symptoms of the problem, and in so doing not only fails to do good for the people who genuinely need his help, but further disadvantages them by adding a legal system to the list of oppressors under which they suffer.

When Wang joins a gang of robbers and organizes them into the beginnings of a popular armed revolution, Basho's collusion with the system of oppression becomes more active

and damaging. He tries to enlist the Ferryman to act as an informer against Wang, with the superficially benevolent plea, "Help me to be a good judge." When the Ferryman does not respond quickly and positively enough, Basho's tone changes, becoming threatening:

Your son will cause great mischief. A few will benefit by a brief happiness. A few wrongs will be righted. Anyone can do that. But those who stand the river on end, drown the country. Do not be misled. Better to stop him now. That is hard, but true.

(Part 2, sc.6, p 43)

Basho's perverted efforts to do good are aimed only at perpetuating the system, not changing it, and stem from his fatalism about the place of individuals within the hierarchy. Basho aligns himself with a justice system that serves only the interests of the powerful. At the end of the play, the landowner is defeated by Wang's revolution and the shaken, elderly Basho returns meaninglessly to his quest for enlightenment.

Basho's response to the system of oppression is not unlike that of the camp Doctor in Brenton's The Churchill Play (1974).⁸ Captain Thompson is the Recreation Officer for Camp Churchill (Britain's 28th Internment Camp in a near future set in 1984). He sees his role as helping the prisoners to survive their period of detention and openly expresses his concern over their deteriorating condition, to the annoyance of the other military men running the camp (Act 1, p 117). While Thompson attempts to defend the

rights of the internees while in the camp, he does nothing to protest their unjust detention, and when asked by a new prisoner for practical help is too preoccupied to give it (Act 1, p 129). Thompson's wife accuses him of staying at Camp Churchill to assuage his sense of guilt at being "the English Doctor. Of an English concentration camp" (Act 3, p 149). Thompson admits the truth of her accusation, and his one attempt at solidarity with the prisoners under his care fails miserably. Some of the internees attempt a breakout after taking weapons and hostages, and Thompson offers to go with them to care for the wounds they will probably incur while on the run. The men do not respond to this offer. It is typical of Thompson's position within the play; he offers with sentimental compassion to patch wounds, metaphorically and literally, but this, like Basho's dispensation of the landowner's justice, is, finally, merely participation in the system that keeps these men like animals. Indeed, Thompson's conscientious provision of medical care facilitates the operation of the camp by giving it the public appearance of providing proper care for its inmates. The play's final image of Thompson has him lying, silent and impotent, on the concrete floor of the aircraft hangar with the camp's commanding officer and visiting dignitaries, as the thwarted escape attempt is about to be crushed by soldiers on motorcycles (Act 4, pp 175-77).

In the dream-episode of Brenton's Thirteenth Night

(1981; see also the discussion of this play in Chapter Two, pp 100-106), Jack Beaty is another character caught in the trap of trying to bring about positive change from within the political system. The lesson of the dream (as much a parody of the lovers' bad dreams in A Midsummer Night's Dream as it is of Macbeth) is that the corrupt system inevitably corrupts those who join it, whatever their intentions in doing so. Jenny Gaze rejects the prevalent acceptance of Western democracy as the ultimate political good. Beaty sells out his democratically elected socialist government by becoming, as Orbison does in Barker's That Good Between Us, so obsessed with threats to his own safety that he sinks to using the self-justifying and dishonest tools of government to isolate himself from the perceived danger and, thus, from the people he has been elected to represent. Brenton's Berlin Bertie (1992) shows the middle-class Alice Brine assuaging her guilt by slumming in a chaotic South London flat with a working-class boyfriend and abusing drugs. When her older sister, Rosa, confronts her with the self-destructiveness of her life, Alice responds, "I don't have to feel anything 'cos I know I am excrement... alright? Happy?" (Act 3, p 52). Alice's alienation stems from the failure of her pseudo-missionary career as a social worker; she failed to protect a baby eventually murdered by its parents. Her disillusionment, however, goes deeper than this personal crisis and attacks the system she has tried to

work in: "What had I, in the West, to whinge about? We've got democracy here, we've got the FREE MARKET in bashed baby's heads..." (Act 3, p 57). Rosa, fleeing disillusionment with her work as a Christian Socialist in East Berlin, sums up her own and her sister's failure:

What could be more despicable than you and I? We wanted to put the world to rights. We were the high achievers, we were the technicians for DOING GOOD, we were the "change the worlders." But we're despicable, we're the lowest of the low, because we failed...

(Act 3, p 59)

Efforts to change the repressive system, or certain of its effects, by non-violent, rational means which employ the avenues for change sanctioned by the State are doomed to fail in these plays. The orthodox Basho, as much as the unorthodox Alice, fails to see this and is destroyed by the sudden realization that his moral posturings have been futile. The successful programme of change in The Bundle is that of Wang, who stands as a counterpart to Kiro in Narrow Road to the Deep North. Kiro was unable to channel his desire for change into a practicable form of action. The resulting violence is turned by Kiro not against the system which oppresses the powerless, but against himself. Wang, raised like Kiro in poverty and tutored by Basho, learns instead to turn his violence directly against the source of injustice, the landowner and his supporters. Aided by a principled ruthlessness, and a compassionate but unsentimental sense of the sufferings of others, Wang leads

a successful revolution:

... the government makes not only laws, but a morality, a way of life, what people are in their very nature. We have not yet earned the right to be kind. I say it with blood in my mouth. When the landowner is no longer feared then our kindness will move mountains. That is our morality, Tiger. Today we should look on kindness with suspicion. Here only the evil can afford to do good.

(Part 2, sc.7, p 54)

We wait by the river. My mother came here. And left me. Do you call her a criminal? Perhaps a month later she was dead in the gutter. Perhaps she reached up out of the gutter to put me here. Now we'll help those like her.

(Part 2, sc.8, p 65)

Wang's successful action is of course violent, and violent struggle is depicted in these plays as the primary method of resistance for the truly disenfranchised for whom working within the political system and its power-structures is either impossible, as it is for the Japanese peasants of Narrow Road to the Deep North, or completely ineffectual, as it proves to be for the Irish terrorists manipulated by the government in Credentials of a Sympathiser.

Not all violent actions in these plays are successful. The internees in The Churchill Play resort to violence as their only hope of escape and, when the attempt fails, it seems unlikely that they will survive retaliation by the prison guards. One internee is resigned to probable death, asserting that he "declared war on the bastards a long time ago" while another is more positive about the value of life, even in such miserable conditions as Camp Churchill: "I say

survive. In the cracks. Inside or outside the wire. But not at any cost... " (Act 4, p 176). Jed's spectacular attempt to blow up a Tory cabinet minister in Brenton's Magnificence (1973) goes wrong and kills Jed instead, and his friend Cliff laments, not the violence of Jed's action, but "the waste of [Jed's] anger," stressing the need for those intent on change to find positive and workable avenues for their energy rather than wasteful self-annihilation. It is interesting to note that Cliff is the superior thinker to Jed in the play, but has little to offer as a more effective way of channelling Jed's energy. Magnificence, like Thirteenth Night, leaves its audience uncertain of the play's attitude to constructive, as opposed to self-defeating, acts of rebellion.⁹ This effect is similar to the audience's uneasiness at the end of Renaissance tragedies like Hamlet or King Lear, where the most attractive, active and engaging characters have been killed and their place is taken by less interesting characters who, it is assumed, will make no attempt to continue the programmes for personal and political re-definition that we have been fascinated by.

Bond's attitude to the value and political correctness of violent action as a response to oppression has developed over the course of his career and has become more radical and permissive. Narrow Road to the Deep North emphasizes the appalling wastefulness of the war between Shogo and the

Commodore, and clearly condemns Shogo's initial use of violence to gain and keep control of the city. Although at the beginning of his career Shogo is in the position of underdog, his continuing use of brutality to maintain order in his city undermines any moral authority he could have had. In The Bundle, however, Bond revises the earlier play to make a clearer distinction between futile and self-serving political collusion, on the one hand, and effective and necessarily violent political resistance, on the other.

Brenton's attitude to the dramatic depiction of the socialist future, like Bond's to violence, clearly changes in the course of his writing. In 1972, he tacks a "happy ending" onto his version of Measure for Measure in order to cheer the audience up; but, of course, the ending is a self-consciously implausible one, with the characters sailing on the SS Political Utopia (see the discussion of this scene in Chapter Two, pp 92-100). In Greenland (1988), Brenton offers in the fantastic second part, set 700 years in the future, a sincere vision of a socialist Utopia. The effect risks failure because Brenton cannot be specific about the mechanisms by which this peaceful and non-aggressive society supports itself. Similarly, the hopeful ending of Barnes's Red Noses shows the clowns on their way to heaven, remembering their funniest and most poignant lines from the play, but this hardly constitutes a credible mechanism for change. Our nostalgic attraction to what Flote and his

companions represented cannot make us forget that they have been murdered as dissidents by the Pope's returning régime.

In the modern political theatre, satire alone is insufficient; it can fulminate against evils, but does not have the capacity to propose solutions. Revenge Tragedy, in order to fulfill the political dramatist's agenda, must be converted into comedy, or into some other generic hybrid to allow the play to be more than a cautionary tale about what happens when things go wrong. Bond's Lear is perhaps the clearest example of this blending of genres; although Lear dies at the end, the play's ending eschews the sense of loss and diminution that pervades the close of King Lear and thus avoids tragedy. Lear is honest in its rejection of a simple-minded optimism in the face of the problems of revolutionary government, facing "the symbiotic relationship between state terror and revolutionary terrorism" in Cordelia's government.¹⁰ Barker's McPhee survives his dangerous political involvement, but only just; the optimism of this ending is muted. The combination of comedy, satire, and tragedy in these plays not only reminds us of the creative mixing of genres in Renaissance drama, but also approaches the grotesque. The plays of Barnes, especially, employ laughter and physical violence in combinations that force the audience to reconsider its response to suffering on the stage. This however, is a question for my next chapter, on the phenomenon of the body onstage.

CHAPTER FOUR

Making It Personal

The project of depicting and analyzing the injustice and repression of political systems onstage is one which presents obvious practical problems. In the previous chapter, I offered a discussion of the way the playwrights I am interested in adapt the Renaissance models of City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in staging politically-motivated conflict in their original plays. Clearly, the chief instrument available to the playwright for the expression of ideas is the human body, including the actor's voice. In radio drama, and in the use of the offstage voice, that voice may be "disembodied." In this chapter, I describe the distinctive exploitation by Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker of the physicality of the human body, its sexual capacity, its co-option as a political emblem, and consequent struggles for possession of the body among individuals and larger social groups. In addition to arguing for a link between the contemporary playwrights and their Renaissance antecedents in this fascination with the literal, physical body, I discuss the attitude in the two theatres to gender, and, specifically, to the relation of female characters to power-structures, and what I perceive as a profound

ambivalence on the part of the playwrights with regard to that relation.

The primacy of language in naturalistic modern plays makes moments of intense physical action--moments where physical action has meaning beyond the simple mimetic representation of people going about life--onstage particularly striking. Lady Bracknell is shocked at finding Ernest (or Jack) Worthing down on one knee to propose to her daughter, and her outrage at this piece of physical communication emphasizes the dominance of verbal communication in the world of the play (Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Act One). Tired of talking without being heard and respected, Beatie Bryant achieves the one visually memorable moment in Arnold Wesker's Roots when she jumps on a table to speak to her family. It is at the moment of this physical leap, literally above her preoccupied and heedless family, that Beatie makes a metaphorical leap above her family's small-mindedness and Ronnie's condescension to find her own voice and ideas. This is the final image of the play, and Wesker chooses unconventionally to end the play on this moment of opening out, rather than on one which suggests closure or resolution. Such physical action, which adds to the verbal content of the play, seems reserved for sparing use as an effect, to emphasize a point or to illustrate an idea in these traditionally-structured plays, descendants of the

Well-Made Play and of the European social realism represented by Ibsen and Chekhov, which often reserve a striking, non-verbal image for the final one of the play.

By contrast, Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker adopt a theatrical practice of using physical action to propel, enhance, and sometimes to make ironic comment upon, the explicit or implicit discussion of issues carried on within the verbal part of the play. The plays exhibit a balance between the importance of speech and language, on the one hand, and equally meaningful physical action on the other. The thematic discussion of these playwrights' depictions of violence in Chapter Three (above) now brings me to focus on the role played in those depictions, and in the theatrical exploration of power issues in general, of the phenomenon of the human body onstage. Increasingly (and, of course, the increase is greater after the abolition of state censorship of the theatre in 1968), acts of realistic violence occur onstage and the audience's experience of them is therefore immediate, unmediated by language as it was in the Ancient Greek theatre. It is a convention of Ancient Greek drama that important events of a physically violent nature happen offstage, and are recounted (or their results displayed) by a witness to the violence for the audience (an audience which thus consists both of the characters onstage, and of the people sitting in the auditorium as spectators).

Howard Brenton's Christie in Love depicts the discovery

by policemen of the remains of the victims of serial killer John Reginald Christie, hidden in his house and garden. The victims are represented on stage by a "doll" which "is a little larger than life size" (Author's production note, p 3). Brenton stresses that the doll "must not be in any way a pornographic object." Brenton's intention is to de-objectify the victims of Christie's aggression, not, in using the Doll to represent them on stage, to make them again objects of his own, and the audience's, dehumanizing gaze. The inanimate doll takes on agency when she is manipulated, marionette-style, by the Constable as he forces Christie to re-enact the pick-up of one of his victims. The Constable speaks the doll's lines "in a falsetto voice, over the DOLL's shoulder" (sc 9 p 23) and Christie acts out the sexual assault and murder of the woman (sc 9 p 27). The Constable's presence is effaced behind the large Doll and thus the faceless and objectified victims regain some degree of living presence on stage. The Doll gives the victims a physicality for the audience, and "her" murder and burial by Christie in the makeshift garden onstage is thus a more immediately appreciable act of personal violation than a merely verbal repetition of the facts of Christie's crimes and victims could make it. At the same time, however, the Doll is an object, manipulated by the male Constable, and the woman's voice is parodied in the Constable's falsetto. Brenton's intention, in a play which has the serial killer

Christie as its anti-hero, is to "lampoon all forms of authority and conventional standards of justice and decency... [as] no more than inadequate and hypocritical responses from a public whose real interest lay in a salacious voyeurism."¹ The Doll is as much the Constable's, and a hypocritical society's, victim as she is Christie's.

I have already briefly discussed the location of City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in corrupt societies (Chapter Three, pp 111-114). It is almost a commonplace to remark that the feature of Jacobean society most consistently satirized in the City Comedy is its hegemony of seeking material wealth, and especially money and gold, at the expense of human virtues.² The rise of money-based value, replacing the feudal system which relied on wealth based in land ownership, is satirized explicitly in such plays as Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, Jonson's The Devil is an Ass and The Alchemist, and Marston's The Dutch Courtesan. The topic of satire is the mania for possession and consumption of the material, displacing higher concepts of value such as romantic love, filial loyalty, and religious duty. This hegemonic tendency extends to the commodification of the human body and its innate capacities, including its capacity for sex and procreation, and its use as a symbol.

Arguably the ultimate imaginable expression of the

desire for, and consequences of, possession by one person of another's physical body is cannibalism. Such Renaissance plays as Titus Andronicus and Antonio's Revenge depict acts of unwitting cannibalism, deliberately engineered by other characters as punishments for transgression. Giovanni's murder of his sister and their unborn baby in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, and his appearance onstage with Annabella's heart impaled on his dagger, recalls Caligula's murder of his pregnant sister, an act which also involved cannibalism.³

The human body is also used as food in plays by Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker; cannibalism becomes the apotheosis of Victorian repressed fantasy in Bond's Early Morning (discussed in Chapter Three, pp 124-132). Antonio and his fellow revengers serve the wicked Piero a meal of his son Julio's body in Antonio, and Barnes heightens the effect he finds in Marston's text by insisting on having Julio's still-recognizable body revealed on the platter, rather than disguised in other food (as Titus Andronicus concealed Tamora's sons' heads in a pie). In Barker's The Last Supper, the Christ-like Lvov insists that his disciples kill and eat him both as the final acceptance of his teaching and as an act of total, irrevocable destruction of the individual man:

LVOV: If I wish to live forever, I have to die.

CHORUS: **Feed them!**

LVOV: But more than die...they must consume me...

(Pause. JUDITH sways.)

JUDITH: Why -
 LVOV: To live in the memory.
 (Pause.)

(p 47)

Lvov's version of the Christian last supper thus makes literal the idea of transubstantiation inherent in the Eucharist. Lvov's death, however, finally becomes unwilling; as his disciples kill him, he says, "It's not what I want...changed my mind!" (p 52). In spite of his protests, his disciples carry out his plan but, typically of Barker's work, the effects of the consumption of the prophet's body are ambiguous. The dissenting Sloman agrees to eat the body,

because this scheme of his is nothing but a plot to bind you in mystification. I will call the corpse's bluff. Butcher! I will swallow and be not less but a greater cynic.

(p 53)

When challenged by an officer who has come to arrest Lvov, the disciples respond that Lvov is both "gone" and "here" (p 55). The formerly cynical Sloman urges the disciples to "hold hands" to keep Lvov together, to continue his existence (p 55). As the play ends, the disciples are physically tied together, drifting aimlessly on the stage, and torn between the urge to describe the experience of eating Lvov, and a fear of doing so. Lvov has forced himself on his disciples and, paradoxically, in being eaten by them has found the one means of controlling them after his death. Having consumed Lvov, his disciples have not defeated him, as Sloman expected to, but have internalized

him and guaranteed his continued existence through their own. His very physicality, his finite and transitory body, has become the means for Lvov to attain eternal existence, an end his teachings could not achieve.

In other religious contexts, the physical body is seen as a hindrance to the perfection of the soul, and is therefore scorned. The aspiring saints in Peter Barnes's Noonday Demons starve and punish themselves in order to achieve God's favour; in Red Noses, Father Toulon criticizes the pious Flagellants for taking pride in possessing their bodies and choosing self-punishment, when, he says, "Bodies belong to God" (2.2 p 78). Like Lvov and the hermits of Noonday Demons, the Flagellants attempt to use their bodies to forge a privileged relationship with God; Toulon, himself an ambivalent character in Red Noses, interprets that physical humility as a form of sinful pride.

The Lasca family of Barnes's Leonardo's Last Supper, as undertakers, necessarily see human corpses as items of business. As it is for the Patris family of Red Noses, who collect the bodies of plague victims after the scavenging Black Crows have finished with them, the human body is simply a way to make a living and both families are steeped in the physical details of death. To the Lascas, the apparent miracle of a resurrection of the physical body is a "nuisance ... what every burial-man fears" (Leonardo's Last Supper, p 137). The (apparently) dead body of Leonardo da

Vinci is valued for the prestige it brings to the people paid to bury it, rather than for the significance of the achievements of the living man. When da Vinci comes back to life, the Lascas assure themselves of the material benefits of burying such a great man by drowning him in a "bucket of excrement, urine and vomit" (p 150). Da Vinci becomes the victim of an economic system where he is, to those who have physical power over him at this moment, worth more dead than alive. The literal possession of the physical body expresses value for these hegemonic figures from Barnes's vision of Renaissance capitalism.

Unburied bodies, too, figure in plays by these modern playwrights. Peter Barnes's version of Jonson's The Devil is an Ass has its first scene on Earth dominated by the image of a corpse swinging on a gallows, gibbeted as a public warning. A young vagrant woman is hanged for prostitution in Bond's Bingo, and her gibbeted body fascinates Shakespeare as he nears death. Shogo's dismembered and crudely reassembled body is carried in triumph by a crowd at the end of Narrow Road to the Deep North as a symbol of the defeat of the tyrannical ruler. In Barker's Victory, which dramatizes the return to England and to power of Charles II and his supporters, the new rulers of England search the country for the concealed bodies of the heroes of the Commonwealth. Once found, Bradshaw's body is dismembered and put on show at strategic points around

London. Bradshaw's head, as the most significant part of his corpse, is placed within sight of Charles II's palace and becomes a target for the King's skittles (1.3 p 145-6). The Loyalists who retrieve Bradshaw's corpse emphasize its physicality to his widow:

We have the rat-gnawed, stinking thing you clutched in bed once. That is what we have. What stuck up you when the cold mood took him, when God commanded fuck thy spouse or what you Bible-suckers term it, him who made you buck or whimper, is a nest of worms now and in our possession.
(1.2 p 137)

Bond's Lear opens with the image of the body of a man accidentally killed while working on the wall Lear is building around his kingdom, and ends with the image of Lear himself shot dead as he scrabbles with his bare hands to tear down the same wall, now being continued by Cordelia's revolutionary government. Lear's daughter Fontanelle is shot for her treason in the course of the war against her father, and her autopsy is conducted onstage. The doctor who performs the autopsy, like the undertakers in Leonardo's Last Supper and the corpse-collectors in Red Noses, does his work in the hope of personal gain and professional advancement (2.6 p 72-3). Watching the autopsy, Lear becomes fascinated by Fontanelle's anatomical makeup and the relationship he expects to see between it and her moral character:

LEAR: But where is the ... She was cruel and angry
and hard...

FOURTH PRISONER: (points). The womb.

LEAR: So much blood and bits and pieces packed in

with all that care. Where is the
... where?

FOURTH PRISONER: What is the question?

LEAR: Where is the beast? The blood is still as a
lake.

Where...? Where...?

FOURTH PRISONER: (to soldier O) What's the man
asking?

(no response)

LEAR: She sleeps inside like a lion and a lamb and
a child. The things are so beautiful. I am
astonished. I have never seen anything so
beautiful. If I had known she was so
beautiful ... Her body was made by the hand
of a child, so sure and nothing unclean ...
If I had known this beauty and patience and
care, how I would have loved her.

(2.6 p 73)

Later, Lear dips his hands into Fontanelle's body and brings them out covered in "dark blood and... viscera" (2.6 p 74). The awareness, as if for the first time, of his daughter's physical existence brings Lear to a new resolution regarding his duty to his fellow human beings; through this experience of the perfection of the physical body, Lear overcomes his former, power-driven disdain for the value of human suffering.

In Barker's Fair Slaughter, an elderly English socialist attempts to return to the grave the severed hand of a Bolshevik killed by the British Expeditionary Force in 1920. Young Gocher had cut the man's hand off to keep as a reminder of the young Russian, whom he calls Tovarish. The hand, preserved in a bottle, becomes a symbol for Gocher in his lifelong and rather unorthodox struggle against capitalist oppression, but by the end of the play the hand is merely, to Gocher, a severed body part which should be

given decent burial with the rest of Tovarish's corpse. The hand, in its bottle, is on stage and visible for most of Fair Slaughter, and is used literally as a weapon by Gocher. The image of the pickled hand is grotesque and the symbolism Gocher accords it as the "working hand" (sc. 5 p 13) of the Proletariat is satirized by Barker. Gocher's use of the severed hand as an icon of his socialism is implicitly compared with the Russian Orthodox icons the English officer Staveley loots from the churches in Murmansk (sc. 5 p 13). Old Gocher's Gloucester-like journey, led by the young prison officer Leary, to find Tovarish's grave and bury the hand is comic, not heroic or tragic. Finally the previously sane Leary becomes more convinced than Gocher of the authority and symbolism of "Tov," the hand, and refuses to give it up for burial, sentimentally asserting that "Tov belongs to the people. No one can own Tovarish" (sc.21 p 48).

The hand in the bottle is an unusually sustained use on the stage of an inanimate human body-part. Its overtly symbolic nature brings to mind such Renaissance images as Annabella's heart, brought on stage by Giovanni in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, and the severed finger of Tomaso de Piracquo with which de Flores presents Beatrice-Joanna, as a love-token, in Middleton and Rowley's The Changeling. Unlike those images, however, and in a rejection of the shock-effect they are designed to achieve, Barker leaves the hand

in plain view for so long, and has it treated so much as an ordinary object, that it becomes mundane, not shocking, and laughable. Further, the hand's symbolism is undercut by the play's refusal to accord it the status that first Gocher and finally Leary want it to have.

Part Two of Peter Barnes's Laughter!, which depicts the bureaucratic machine responsible for the routine construction of the gas-chambers and punishment blocks of the Nazi concentration camps, uses inanimate human bodies (actually straw dummies) to make the play's central connection between what Hannah Arendt has described as "the banality of [the] evil" in that political system, and its effect on individual human beings. After an argument among the characters about what exactly is the purpose of this apparently innocuous office, the following action occurs onstage:

As the sound of the gas-chamber door being opened reverberates, the whole of the filing section Up Stage slowly splits and its two parts slide Up Stage Left, and Up Stage Right to reveal Up Stage Centre, a vast mound of filthy, wet straw dummies; vapour, the remains of the gas, still hangs about them. They spill forward to show all are painted light blue, have no faces, and numbers tattooed on their left arms.

(Part Two, p 404)

As the horrified office workers watch, a "Jewish Sonderkommando Sanitation Squad" (p 405) strips the bodies of glass eyes, wedding rings and gold teeth in preparation for their eventual destruction. Barnes evidently wants to

personalize the horror of the deaths of millions of people, and to counter the tendency (shown by the play's office workers) to see human lives as mere statistical units, by confronting the audience with the most realistic possible display of the brutality they suffer. The large-scale, bureaucratically organized violence done to millions is thus depicted dramatically in a way that forces the audience to acknowledge the violence and cruelty inflicted by a political hierarchy on powerless victims that may otherwise be seen as a meaningless set of numbers.

For Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, questions of the relationship between the individual and his or her society, with specific reference to the body as a site of political and economic struggle, are central. The disposition of the body becomes a crucial indicator of power and control issues. In The Woman, for instance, Bond uses the Dark Man to represent in narrative the injustice of the Athenians' use of slave labour to build their city:

The work's shaped round our lives as naturally as the seasons. At five I dragged baskets of rock through the tunnels. The rope around my waist cut a groove in my flesh. I was glad when the groove was cut. I was a machine with a gulley--here--for the rope. That pain would be kept there. An iron cable and a pulley are oiled where they rub together. The gulley in the flesh can't be oiled. The flesh would go soft. The rope would tear it. It must be two stones. Rubbing together. The flesh of a child. Each day. All day! When the child--with his nipped-in waist like an ant--can lift an axe--he's sent to the face. First we break it with fire. Then we crawl in while it's hot--Athens is built fast! Our hands and knees

are hoofs! We don't dig in a straight line. We follow the bend of the seams. They're put there by the devil. Our bodies are twisted round his finger in the dark. Like string. When we're too old to dig we go to the top--corpses surfacing! Old men and women--the difference went long ago, their sex is small knots on the skin--empty the children's baskets and crouch by the trough, sorting and sorting, their hands going up and down, sorting, like the legs of a beetle turned on its back.

(2.6 p 257-8)

The bodies of the mine workers are physically adapted and dehumanized in order to enable them to perform the arduous menial tasks which the building of the new Athens for its privileged citizens requires. Although the Dark Man's account is verbal, it uses physical images--the description of what happens to a human body treated in this way--to express concretely the results of this systemic oppression. What may be seen with detachment as an economic issue becomes in Bond's treatment an acutely painful, personalized account of the way larger, systemic injustices come down to the infliction of pain and physical damage on the system's victims, even to the point of taking over and changing their physical existences. The Dark Man's appearance--"[h]e is deformed, short and has dark hair and pitted skin" (s.d. 2.2. p 233)--is further, visible evidence of the violence done to him, as to other, unseen victims. Similarly, the stoning onstage of the baby in Saved is an act of violence and cruelty first, but is also a visual metaphor for the violence inflicted on the weaker members of a society by the stronger. The stage-image of the abandoned or abused child

is a recurrent one in Bond's work (Saved, Narrow Road to the Deep North, The Bundle, The War Plays). The vulnerability and dependence of the infant, who is incapable of engaging in violence to defend himself or herself, focusses and clarifies the issue of victimization by condensing the multiple, anonymous victims into a recognizable physical emblem onstage. Bond also shows servants as victims (Bob and Frank in Restoration, Patty in The Fool, or the Chauffeur kidnapped and shot in place of his employer in The Worlds), but their responses to being exploited are generally more complex than can be the case with the abused children. Frank, Lord Are's London servant, expresses his dissatisfaction with his removal to the country by stealing from the household and is hanged for it. Some of the tenant farmers in Bingo actively oppose the enclosure of their common land but in the process, one of the young men accidentally kills his (brain-damaged and therefore childlike) father.

The large-scale political repression in Brenton's vision of 1984 Britain in The Churchill Play is expressed, simply enough, by the play's prison-cum-concentration camp setting. The play depicts the physical demands and risks involved in escaping from the camp and shows the inefficacy of the inmates' attempt to use violence, in the form of stolen guns, to escape, when faced with the superior resources of the State which runs the camp. The play ends

with the names of the rebellious inmates mechanically repeated as the men themselves are trapped by searchlights and oncoming motorbikes. Rather than attempting a description of the political system in force--there is no indication of whether the government is left or right wing, democratically elected, revolutionary, a monarchy or a dictatorship--Brenton shows the effects of its injustice in the physical confinement of the prisoners.

Barker's Seven Years uses the Chorus of the Gaoled-- "the Dead who aren't dead yet"--in a similar way to summarize and embody the lives of the victims of Lear's increasingly distant and irresponsible government. Barnes depicts the cruelty of Ivan the Terrible's rule in Part One of Laughter! by the grotesquely funny stage-images of his torture victims, representing the "120,000" Ivan claims to have "grimed t' death, yold t' the sword" (Part One, p 349).

What is crucial in all these examples (examples which I hope are representative of each writer's work in general) is that physical violence and suffering on the personal level come to represent wider injustice, aggression, and social inequity. Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker make their large-scale analysis of political injustice highly personal and immediate by locating its struggles, its damage, and its processes in the human body, the body which, in theatre as in no other literary form, is present, living and breathing, before an equally live audience. The

physical connection between stage and audience possible in the theatrical conditions I described in Chapter One enhances this foregrounding of the body. They thus avoid abstraction and, to a large degree, theoretical discussion (Brenton's Weapons of Happiness and The Genius and Barker's The Early Hours of a Reviled Man, with their explicit engagement in dialectic, may be notably excepted), in favour of a sharply focused and provocative form of theatre which uses violence, as John Fraser puts it, in such a way that

one is made to feel more or less deeply uncomfortable ... because one is being confronted with facts that one hadn't known, or hadn't thought seriously enough about, or is still reluctant to feel intensely enough about.⁴

The depictions by Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker of interpersonal cruelty and violence serve a purpose beyond any artistic or ideological objective to be gained by shocking or offending an audience; they are, at best, inextricably related to the playwrights' political projects.

Brenton's The Romans in Britain is clearly the most graphically violent of the plays I discuss in this dissertation. Of the play's fifteen scenes, ten depict acts of interpersonal violence and cruelty including rape, murder (with a variety of weapons), torture and human sacrifice. Brenton's stage directions insist on the physicality of the acts, and the responses of the victims:

The SECOND and THIRD SOLDIERS catch BRAC and give him a bad stomach wound.
BRAC rests, pulls himself along the ground,

screams, rests--a progression that continues during most of the rest of the scene, gradually slowing.

VIRIDIO stops, turns and stares at his brother's agony.

(Part One sc. 3 p 32)

The language of the play both contains and describes violence. Corda recalls her father raping her when she "was barely a woman;" before she murders him, the Slave tells the audience that she was raped in the forest by Conlag. Captain Thomas Chichester brands himself the generic colonizing oppressor, not only of modern Northern Ireland, but also of the different civilizations of early Britain as they were taken over by successive invaders. The play's intensity of language and action resulted in the prosecution of its director, Michael Bogdanov, under public indecency laws.⁵

More than half of the perpetrators of violence and cruelty become in the course of The Romans in Britain victims themselves of others' cruelty or desperation. Brenton avoids simplistic moralizing on the topic (in his Preface in Plays: Two he insists that "[t]here are no 'goodies' and 'baddies'" p viii). The play does not offer extensive motivation for the acts of violence; Brenton seems content to provide the audience with the event to observe and avoids quasi-narratorial, novelistic analysis. Acts of violence are neither excused, nor explained, nor explicitly condemned. Even acts of what one might term, for want of a better phrase, impersonal or indifferent violence--such as

military attacks or religious sacrifices--occur with an air of spontaneity, presented as human responses to a specific situation. What strikes the audience--and the metaphor is an apt one--is the unalleviated, unmediated cycle of violent acts. Brenton describes his intentions thus:

What you must never do is pretend, by stagecraft sleight of hand, that the cruelty is not as bad as it is. If you are not prepared to show humanity at its worst, why should you be believed when you show it at its best, in a play that attempts to show both in equal measure. You must not sell human suffering short.

(Plays: Two p x)

The human suffering Brenton focusses on in The Romans in Britain is physical, rather than mental, anguish. However, part of the cruelty that is inflicted on some of the characters in the play is a lasting, inescapable destruction of the individual's sense of inviolate self, and through it of his or her community and culture, without which life is difficult or impossible. Damage to the physical body, damage which occurs in various forms, is both physically real and metaphorical, both literal and figurative of damage to the self which owns the body. Marban, the Druid, survives the scene in which his foster brothers are murdered and he is beaten and raped by the Roman soldiers. He survives, too, a flogging ordered by Caesar, and finally rejoins his own people who, their village destroyed by the Roman army, are hiding in the forest. Marban's last act, however, is to commit suicide, unable to face the fact that his people will be forced to "abandon the life we know.

Change ourselves into animals... Something not human... The ghosts of our ancestors, shrink away. The fabulous beasts, their claws crumble. The Gods grow small as flies" (Part One, scene 7, p 54). The casual damage inflicted on Marban by the Romans, to their perception merely physical and meaningless, is, in Brenton's words, "to the Celts ... the end of their world" (Preface, p viii). At the literal, physical level, what The Romans in Britain shows is the use of physical means to gain or assert control over others. At the metaphorical, figurative level, rooted in physical experience, it shows the annihilation, by means of brutality, of cultures by the successive colonizers of Britain.

Like the persecuted Druids of The Romans in Britain, and more obviously like that play's Corda, the victim of her father's sexual aggression, Judy in Brenton's Sore Throats is a victim of physical violence, meted out not by an invading army but by her (now ex-) husband Jack. As the play begins, Judy is "hiding away" in a bare London flat, "scaveng[ing] off the leftovers of [her] marriage" (Sore Throats, Act One, p 340, and Act Two, p374). She attempts to live in a way that will counter the dehumanizing, alienating role of "housewife" she played during her marriage. She and her new housemate Sally therefore spend money recklessly, do not work, and do not do housework; the flat they share becomes a filthy, disorderly den into which

they lure adolescent boys for sex (or so, at least, they claim). Judy is beaten severely by Jack in Act One, and at the same time recounts, in a non-naturalistic flow of asides, the violent history of their marriage. An equal source of horror for Judy, however, seems to be the isolation of being the perfect housewife, "bleached ... so very clean" and "alone, in silent... light" (Act One, pp 350-351). Like the successive groups of victimized natives in The Romans in Britain, Judy suffers from the infliction of physical pain, which is depicted realistically, but also from a simultaneous and inseparable violence to her sense of self, her identity. Much of Judy's deliberately haphazard scheme for self-recovery is potentially self-destructive, as Sally points out to her (Act Two, p 372). Judy imagines recreating her own physical (and specifically sexual) characteristics as a means both of defence and attack against men:

I would like bits of ferocious animals grafted onto me. Adders' heads for breasts? Nipples that suck, rather than get sucked? And for a womb, what for a womb? Yes. A tiger's head for a womb. And I will roam the streets in a sort of wire, see-through blouse and leather zip, zip up the front skirt. Won't I be a nice surprise for middle aged men, cruising in cars? Or whatever your kind does, in the streets, out for a poke. Poke me, see what you get. Something really hot and surgical. Tiger snake woman. Remade. For a new life.

(Act One p 342)

It is arguable whether Judy seriously contemplates this surgery, or whether the speech alone is intended as an act

of aggression against Jack. Such an operation would entail the radical alteration of the woman's body and her identity. As with her other projected strategies for living, Judy's vision of the changes she could make to herself to gain immunity from Jack's violence (and, by extension, the potential violence to all women of all men) risk self-destruction as they attempt personal reconstruction.⁶ Crucially, Judy expresses her sense of the link between her physical identity, its perception by others, and her personal well-being.

The play ends with ambivalent optimism; Judy stands over the ripped-up remnants of her money--the "fallout from [her] little mushroom cloud. In the married suburbs" (Act Two, p 375)--with a burning match. She tells Sally and Jack, "I am going to be fucked, happy and free" (Act Two, p 390). Brenton is not specific, nor even pragmatic, about Judy's future, and the audience cannot be sure that she will survive and manage to re-create herself as she hopes to do. Like Brenton's political Utopias (see Chapter Three), the personal discovery of an ideal and sustainable way of living is tentative, tenuous, and risky. As Jack's repeated reappearances in Judy's flat demonstrate, there is no guarantee that she (like the native Britons of The Romans in Britain) will not be physically, and thus psychologically, victimized again in the future. Her survival is a muted positive note, not a fully assured comic resolution.

Brenton depicts violence both as overwhelmingly physical, cruel, and painful, and as metaphorical. He challenges his audience to make connections between acts of violence and wider issues of political oppression and personal destruction. He discusses sexual function and sexual difference in uncompromising physical detail, explicitly and concretely relating the act of rape (for example) to political oppression, whether at the level of gender politics (in Sore Throats), the national political level of Thirteenth Night, or the level of colonization (in The Romans in Britain).

I have already discussed (see Chapters Two and Three, above) the complex issues of gender, sexuality, and rape in Middleton's and Barker's versions of Women Beware Women. In Barker's play, Bianca is raped by the Duke of Florence and as a result cynically accepts a political role in his government. Already objectified by the Duke's use of her body for sexual gratification, Bianca becomes a "doll... perfect" as she is prepared for her public wedding to the Duke. The wedding is portrayed by Barker (as by Middleton) as a state occasion, the public importance of which eclipses the personal. For the purposes of the wedding, Barker's Duke has Bianca officially declared a virgin; this denial of the actual physical state of her body is necessary because, for a woman, others' perceptions of her spiritual perfection are contingent upon their belief in her physical purity.

Her perfection, her "toy-virginity," is offered as an object for the adulation of the Duke's subjects. At the same time, Livia and Leantio have liberated themselves from their psychological pain through the experience of complete physical gratification and seek to restore Bianca's alienated physical self to her, by means of a second act of rape. The apparent paradox of this liberation from the effects of the first rape by means of a second is not lost on me, nor was it on members of Barker's audience, many of whom were troubled or outraged by the implications of his reasoning.⁷ The second rape occurs--violently, on stage--and Sordido, the rapist, is killed immediately afterwards by the Duke, enraged at the damage done to Bianca, his "property" (2.7). No critic, to my knowledge, has discussed the murder of Sordido, a lower-class character who is in essence sacrificed by the powerful Livia as part of the project to restore Bianca's lost personal integrity. Most concentrate on the effects of the rape on Bianca, but in performance it must be impossible to ignore the dead body of Sordido. Bianca is, apparently, restored to herself, refusing to "act the coronation" (2.7 p 58). Barker makes Bianca's response ambiguous; she strikes Livia, the woman who has engineered both rapes, and then thanks her a moment later. Bianca expresses no regret for the public persona she now gives up, but the return of her selfhood to her body is a traumatic and problematic event not susceptible of

simple evaluation:

Catastrophe is also birth. Out the ruins crawls the bloody thing, unrecognizable in the ripped rags of former life. Ghastly breaths of unfamiliar air! Like the infant, expelled from the silent womb, screams red its horror, then tastes oxygen. I have to find my life! (LIVIA goes to embrace her.) Don't touch. (she freezes.) Too new to be suffocated by your impulsive sisterhood. I'll bruise. I'll crush in your embrace...

(2.7 p 61)

Bianca describes her emergence from her doll-like existence, appropriately enough, in the very physical terms of birth, and uses the metaphor of her fragility, her susceptibility to physical damage, to emphasize the fragility of this newly created self which unites the physical and metaphysical selves alienated one from the other by her first experience of rape. The language of the play here suggests that physical and psychological selves are no longer artificially separated in Bianca but have coalesced. Like Livia and Leantio, Bianca must now begin a process of learning this "new" life.

Katrin in Barker's The Europeans, raped, made pregnant and mutilated by Turkish soldiers before the play begins, responds to her rape by insisting on making her body an object, a spectacle, but in ways tellingly different from Bianca's objectification. Her breasts cut off, Katrin poses naked for a self-commissioned portrait; when she finds on enquiring that sales of the print are unlikely to be in the tens of thousands she hopes for, she orders the pictures

distributed for free, through letterboxes (1.4 p 14). She plans a second picture, this one depicting her holding her baby, who will seem to plead with her for milk which she, of course, cannot give it. It is hard to judge--and perhaps futile to try--whether Katrin seeks an effect which is pathetic, or accusing, both, or neither. What is certain is that Katrin is determined to force a recognition of the physical reality of her victimization on the people of Vienna, to interfere in their enjoyment of their military victory. By insisting on attracting the gaze of the whole city, even to the extent of drawing a large crowd to watch the theatrical spectacle of the birth of her rapists' baby on an undraped bed in the town square, Katrin regains some of the self-determination taken from her in the act of rape. Rather than attempting to forget the event, as she is urged to, or becoming an appropriately silent symbol of Christian Womanhood, Katrin acknowledges the rape and its lasting effects on her body and mind as her present reality, and forces the city to do the same. Shortly after Concilia's birth, Katrin forms an association with Starhemberg, Vienna's military hero. Starhemberg says of the people of Vienna, "[t]hey pretend to pity her, but they steal her pain" (2.1. p 35). The pain Katrin tries to communicate is instead assimilated and neutralized. Starhemberg betrays his commitment to help Katrin in her crusade of self-assertion by taking the baby and giving her back to her

"Turkish fathers," in order to make concrete the diplomatic bond between the former enemies. Katrin initially resists but finally acquiesces, in a series of actions remarkably reminiscent of Bianca's response to her second rape, as Barker's stage directions show:

STARHEMBERG takes the CHILD from KATRIN, who is as if petrified. Suddenly she is seized by a physical delirium. SUSANNAH embraces her, overcomes her, stills her. She emerges, smiling, from the ordeal.

(2.4 p 45)

This "ordeal" and Katrin's response to it are no more penetrable by rational analysis than is Bianca's response to her second rape. In an apparent reversal of the process Bianca undergoes, Katrin abandons self-assertion to embrace instead the societal values of reconciliation and peace between former enemies. It is with apparent difficulty in adjusting to the demands of this new role that Katrin insists once again on being a spectacle when she says to Starhemberg, "Look at me. What do you see?" (2.4 p 45). He never answers her question as the Empress interrupts. The answer to the question is to be found, however, in Katrin's explanation of the role she has been co-opted to play by Starhemberg; she describes herself as "merely ... Curator" of the Turks' "property," the baby, which has been returned to them (2.4 p 45). Katrin thus defines herself as a purely physical object, an incubator for the fetus, rather than as its mother. Barker's stage direction describes Katrin speaking at this moment "with infinite calculation" and now

her insistent self-objectification is complete. The Emperor Leopold "is horrified" by Katrin's speech, recalling the horror of the Duke at the end of Barker's Women Beware Women. The play ends with Katrin and Starhemberg embracing and kissing.

Barker depicts a third woman whose body is taken over by the State in Judith, a reworking of the apocryphal story of the Israelite woman sent to seduce Holofernes and then murder him in his sleep, thus becoming a hero of the Jewish resistance. Barker's play is subtitled "A Parting from the Body," and shows Judith's apparent difficulty in going through with the physically necessary parts of the plan to save her people from destruction in the battle Holofernes is due to fight in the morning. Barker's Judith is not simply a duplicitous seductress who coldly uses her beauty to trick the powerful Holofernes, but nor is she the untainted heroine of Jewish history. She is shown instead as a woman of considerable moral integrity who finds herself confronted in Holofernes, not by the expected monster, but by a human being of equal complexity to herself. After a long conversation, watched by Judith's servant, Holofernes apparently sleeps and Judith prepares to decapitate him. As Judith takes the sword, Holofernes speaks, and although awake does not resist as Judith and the Servant hack his head off. The Servant goads Judith into striking Holofernes with the sword by repeating the official Jewish

assessment of him, but Judith becomes "stuck between slogan and action" and the Servant finally resorts to a lie--that Holofernes is smiling--to make her use the sword. All the force of her patriotism and the preparation for this murder are needed to force Judith into the act of cutting off her lover's head.

After Judith acts, the Servant ecstatically praises her in all the (mutually exclusive) traditional and conventional terms of approbation for a woman:

Immaculate deliverer!
 Oh, excellent young woman!
 Oh, virgin!
 Oh, widow and mother!
 Oh, everything!
 (p 61)

Like Bianca, for Judith to be the hero her people demand, her bodily reality must be revised and edited to suggest the appropriate moral condition. Judith imagines herself enjoying the elevated status of a popular saviour:

I shall so luxuriate in all the honours, I do not care what trash they drape me with, what emblems or what diadems, how shallow, glib and tinsel all the medals are, I'll sport them all... No, I shall be unbearable, intolerably vile, inflicting my opinions on the young, I shall be the bane of Israel... they will wade through my opinions, they will wring my accents out their clothes, but they will tolerate it, for am I not their mother? Without me none of them could be born, He said so.
 (p 66)

Like Bianca, Judith's status is elevated by the creation, through a sexual relationship, of a new sexual persona: Bianca became the fantasy virgin-bride, and Judith is to become the virginal mother of all future Israelites, who

will owe their lives to her sacrifice. As in Bianca's case, too, this personal recreation requires a denial or revision of physical reality and the woman again becomes alienated from her body. Judith's words close the play:

My body was but is no longer
 Israel
 Is
 My
 Body!

(p 67)

Thus, Judith has parted from her body, and has effected a division of physical and psychological existences which is necessary to the giving up of her personal integrity to murder Holofernes, for which the reward is elevation by the State to the status of a hero.

Barker picks up the character of Judith again in "The Unforeseen Consequences of a Patriotic Act," the eighth play in The Possibilities (it should be noted that the first performance of this play predates that of Judith). Judith is now shown a year after Holofernes's death, dealing (as the title suggests) with the long-term consequences of the murder. We learn that Judith became incapable of speech after the murder, and "because she was the heroine of Israel and looked so sick... they sent her to the country" (p 55). In the course of the play, a Woman arrives from the city to ask Judith to return and allow the people to admire her, but Judith refuses. Judith attempts to destroy the image the Woman wishes to create of her, as one who made "the greatest sacrifice a woman can" in having intercourse with

Holofernes, by insisting that she felt physical desire for Holofernes. Her sacrifice thus becomes that of having to kill her lover, not the conventional, sexual sacrifice of her self. When the Woman will not accept that Judith's sleeping with Holofernes was anything but a sacrifice, and even tries to call it a "tragedy," Judith symbolically repeats the true sacrifice--the murder of Holofernes--by cutting off the hand the Woman offers her in friendship, crying "I cut the loving gesture! I hack the trusted gesture! I betray! I betray!" (p 57). Judith, like Bianca and Katrin, struggles to resist the State's co-option of her body, her sexual capacity, and her suffering for its own political purposes.

Barker's depictions of these three women and their ambivalent responses to the roles their respective societies ask them to play are controversial and open to varying interpretations. Certainly, however, they represent a serious commitment to the discussion of the relationship between the individual and the State, and that between the individual's will and her body. Barker rejects the notion that the physical being is merely physical and insists on the necessity of physical integrity and self-determination in the use of the body for total psychological health.

Bond's Lear also depicts a woman character coming to terms with having been raped. Cordelia (in Bond's play no relation to the King) is raped by soldiers as her husband,

the Gravedigger's Boy, is killed. As a result of the rape, her baby miscarries. Cordelia survives the rape physically and becomes the leader of a rebel army which eventually takes power in Lear's former kingdom. She makes the link between her own victimization and her commitment to a revolution explicit:

You were here when they killed my husband. I watched them kill him. I covered my face with my hands, but my fingers opened so I watched. I watched them rape me, and John kill them, and my child miscarry. I didn't miss anything. I watched and I said we won't be at the mercy of brutes any more, we'll live a new life and help one another. The government's creating that new life - you must stop speaking against us.

(3.3 p 97)

Cordelia's "new life," however, is dependent on the same methods of control that Lear's government used to maintain power. She continues to build the wall and Lear is finally killed attempting to destroy it.

Bond's point is that the traumatic and dehumanizing effects of the rape of Cordelia have at once given her the desire to change her world and robbed her of what he sees as the essential qualities of compassion and mercy. In protecting herself and the new order she is trying to create, Cordelia simply duplicates the conditions of the old order which led to her own rape and the deaths of her husband and child. The rape victim here, as in Barker's plays, is forced into a new relationship with her society and its government. Like Katrin, Judith and Bianca, Cordelia becomes a public figure, taking a formal role in

revolution and subsequently in government. In forming a new government, she has gone further than the other victims in countering the brutality of the rapist by seizing real political power, but is ultimately seen as co-operating with the oppressive conditions attending the exercise of that power.

Peter Barnes shows a real interest in the lives and deaths of women in the sex trade, an activity which blurs the distinction between sexual uses of the body and economic ones. Barnes's plays are littered with prostitutes and their clients. His radio play, After the Funeral, depicts three pimps after the funeral of Anna, the companion of one of the men, and reputedly the finest prostitute any of them has ever worked with. The three pimps, all in late middle age, eulogize Anna in terms of her professional prowess and earning power. Barnes's ironic tone is sustained throughout, and the short play is, like his monologues and other short plays for radio, a clever and witty exposition of character. Barnes's humour is at its nastiest, perhaps, when one of the men makes a comment of uncharacteristic seriousness about the lives of the prostitutes they work with, in saying that "girls" without pimps are in danger of "getting raped. And they don't even get paid." The second sentence undercuts the seriousness of the first, but not completely. Even the pimps are capable of defining what happens to prostitutes as "rape," but they do not have the

capacity to see the rape as anything but an economic crime, a theft of what the woman and her pimp are offering for sale. The apparently sentimental pimps mourn Anna's loss and, in token of her importance and distinction, insist that the man who kept her will not contact her replacement until the next day. Barnes refuses to forgive the pimps for their use of women's bodies and, while painting them in characteristically warm human tones, the playwright dismisses their sentimentalism as essentially false and self-serving.

Noel Biledew, the title character in Barker's Claw, achieves independence from his family and a brief rise in social and political status by becoming a pimp, recruiting waitresses and friends to work for him with promises of "fabulous wages," the chance to "[e]at out with celebrities" and "prosperity" (1.4 p 26). Noel's possession of the women's bodies is, however, unsatisfying to him; none of his prostitutes will have intercourse with him, and he starts an affair with Angie, the wife of a Cabinet minister. Noel is arrested and incarcerated in a mental institution, where he is murdered and his death passed off as accidental by Clapcott, Angie's husband. Throughout the play Noel is a pathetic character and his death is neither ennobling nor genuinely lamentable. Before he dies, Noel is visited in prison by the ghost of his father, a lifelong Marxist, who tries to remind Noel that his misfortunes are due to the

injustices of the class system. Noel acknowledges that his schemes to make money--pimping the principal one--were an attempt to buy into the capitalist system which excluded him. However, Noel's acknowledgement of his failure to wage the class war effectively in pursuing self-interest fails to take account of his use of women of his own class for profit and is thus undercut. Noel's self-pity cannot allow him to see himself as the betrayer of other people, equally subject to oppression as himself, and doubly oppressed when used by him for economic advantage.

These writers, committed to an ideal of universal justice and equality but lacking an acceptable, workable model for it, turn to the figure of the woman to express that unknowableness. Clearly, especially for Barker and Brenton, the barely-glimpsed potential of the ideal represented by these imagined female governments is promising, but without the solid evidence of experience, is not reliable. All four playwrights are, of course, male. What I detect as their sense that the female can be usefully opposed to the male-defined way of governing current now is worth discussing. If women are seen, potentially at least, as the antidote to the evils of capitalism, there is clearly an emphasis on the strengths and positive capacities of women. As the foregoing discussion indicates, however, woman-as-victim is at least as common an image in their plays as is woman-as-hopeful-option. Is there a creatively

exploited tension here, or do these playwrights simply fall into the traps of gender-stereotyping, essentialist classification, and even the objectifying idealization of women that Barker satirizes in the official Jewish opinion of Judith? This ambivalence about the depiction of women--and about their roles in society--parallels attitudes to female characters on the Renaissance stage. Women in the modern playwrights' work are not merely or exclusively victims, however. As it was for the playwrights of the English Renaissance, the position of women and their place in the prevailing hierarchies is highly complicated. Middleton's Women Beware Women expresses a complex, even confused, view of the roles women choose, or are forced, to play. Renaissance plays show strong female characters wielding political power and power over others: examples include, but are by no means limited to, the Duchess of Malfi, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, and the ambivalent figure of Livia in Women Beware Women. Whether the power they seek is within the family, or within a larger, political context, the effects of the struggle for female dominance (or equality) are complicated by their gender, which renders them physically vulnerable and politically expendable. In Shakespeare's comedy, female power often rests on the denial and disguise of female bodily identity, and a cross-dressing character's return to women's clothing entails accepting the diminishing effects of marriage.

Howard Barker's anachronistic professional women read 20th century facts back into much earlier periods of history; the lawyer Prudentia in Seven Lears is clearly an example of what Barker terms a possible, rather than an historically factual or even probable role.⁸ Barnes depicts and satirizes the entrapment of capable, ambitious women in restrictive domestic roles, and the destructive consequences of that entrapment, in plays that are strikingly reminiscent both in form and content of the plays of the Renaissance: The Bewitched, Red Noses, and Leonardo's Last Supper. Bond's discussion of sexuality, sexual difference and gender roles is haphazard and generally subsumed, as it is for Shaw, in a larger, socialist-humanist view of the struggle for justice and equity. Bond's roles for women are often, further than this, restrictive and stereotyped in that he sees women as having "natural" functions involving nurturing and domestic work in distinction to the roles men play.⁹ Brenton addresses, sometimes directly and often indirectly, the issues of women holding power and the importance of sexual difference in power-struggle. He focusses clearly, even shockingly, on the body, sex, and cruel interpersonal violence. Barker picks up on the paradoxes represented by Livia and Bianca's dual natures, as both victims of their gender and manipulative exploiters of others. Bond sees Shakespeare's Cordelia as "a menace" and in Lear makes her both victim and

oppressor. Brenton turns Lady Macbeth into the revolutionary socialist and feminist Jenny Gaze, an unmistakably 20th century figure. She remains, nonetheless, trapped as her Renaissance model was in male-defined power-structures which constrict her options for political action and ultimately thwart her goals. Barnes re-creates Renaissance women trying to gain political power in The Bewitched, a play concerning the struggle by Carlos II of Spain to produce an heir and avoid a succession crisis. Mariana, Carlos's ambitious and politically experienced mother, and his equally able and pushy wife Ana compete to gain the imbecile (and apparently sterile) king's favour for the potential successors they support. Ana's body becomes the focus of much of the play's action as she claims to be pregnant; while Mariana tries to disprove this claim by producing Ana's blood-stained undergarments, the King's confessor Motilla persuades Ana to allow herself to be made pregnant by a courtier to ensure a peaceful succession. Unable to act autonomously, both capable and ambitious, Ana and Mariana can only exercise power if they gain it through the favour of the incapable but anointed King Carlos.

Bond's Hecuba and Ismene try in The Woman to negotiate a peaceful end to the Trojan War. Their co-operative attempt to bypass what the play represents as the male politics of aggression, the politics responsible for the war and siege, is unsuccessful as they are betrayed by Hecuba's

son and the Trojan priests. Troy is sacked by the victorious Greeks and Ismene is punished for her defection by being immured in the ruined city wall. In the play's (putatively) Utopian Part Two, Hecuba and Ismene have been shipwrecked on their way to Athens as prisoners and live on a peaceful island where the blind Hecuba is revered as a priestess. The idyllic peace of this working community is destroyed by the arrival of the Greeks, seeking the statue of their goddess lost in the shipwreck. Hecuba finally defeats the Greeks by means of ruthless cunning, asserting her ability to protect the villagers from the aggression of the Greek men, but she dies at the end of the play and the islanders express their fear of the return of the Greeks to enslave them.

Like Hecuba, many of Barker's female characters enjoy considerable political power (Praxis in A Hard Heart, Ann in The Castle) or influence with the powerful (Galactia in Scenes from an Execution, Skinner in The Castle, and Riddler in A Hard Heart), and typically the plays show that power exercised with rationality, a commitment to the social good, and compassion. However, like Hecuba, Barker's female rulers are unable to sustain their control in the face of political aggression from more conventionally-minded, male opponents.

All four playwrights use these female figures in a way that is markedly non-literal. It is less accurate to say

that all these Utopian states governed by women fail because the rulers are women, than it is to say that the rulers are women because the mode of government will fail. In much the same way as the abandoned baby serves for Bond to embody the weakest element in a human society, so women are used by these playwrights to represent an ideal of government-- usually a socialist, or socialist-inspired form of government--that cannot survive. Wendy J. Wheeler and Trevor R. Griffiths (in connection with David Hare's Plenty) discuss the case of

the woman who bears the burden of socialism, of wanting but not bringing forth what she wants. Here, the old, unanswered, Freudian question, 'What do women want?' finds an easy transition into a political discourse. Susan [Traherne] stands for the failure of socialism to say clearly what it wants, and, most pertinently perhaps, to say what its pleasures really are.¹⁰

Barker and Brenton, and, to a lesser extent, Bond and Barnes, use an awareness of sexual difference to exploit the co-existent fears and hopes inherent to untried political systems. Their depictions of the workings of these systems are never (with the possible exception of Brenton's Greenland) unproblematic or simple-minded. The optimism of A Hard Heart, Sore Throats, The Woman and The Ruling Class is disappointed by the eventual victory of the forces of conventional, male-dominated politics (politics perpetrated, it should be noted, by characters of both genders). Such disappointment is, perhaps, inevitable when the latter

system is the only one that is known by experience, and when the ideals of a different form of government are represented by women, a physical victim-class of that system.

Why is the body so important, so insisted upon? In the theatre the body, being the physical, material part of the human being, is that which acts as a medium for all forms of communication, of exploitation, and of possession. All the uses and abuses of the body I have focussed on here hinge on the possession, literally and metaphorically the ownership, of the individual's body, whether one's own (as it is with Katrin and Bianca), or someone else's (examples are Katrin's baby Concilia, the prostitute Anna, and the corpse of Fontanelle). All these ideas of possession--of living bodies, of long-dead corpses, of the body's innate capacities--coalesce in the notions of control and power-struggle. Victims of rape, notably Barker's and Bond's, struggle in their plays to regain the control over their bodies and their sexual choices which have been stolen from them. My use of the word "stolen," implying as it does a property crime, is of course not accidental. Jenny Gaze sees America's domination of British politics as a rape, with America as the man and England as the supine woman (Brenton, Thirteenth Night, sc 5 p 118; see also the discussion of this play in detail in Chapter Two, pp 100-106), and identifies her own feminism with her commitment to radical socialism. For the returning Cavaliers of Victory,

possessing the otherwise valueless corpses of their now-defeated enemies is a symbol of their total power over the Republicans. The corpses of criminals are gibbeted in Barnes's The Devil is an Ass and Bond's Bingo to discourage others from committing similar crimes against the state, its laws, and the private property those laws exist to protect.

Arthur in Bond's Early Morning transcends the horrors of capitalist-inspired cannibalism, in a moment of powerful imagery. Lvov, by offering his own body as food, transcends the fact of his own inevitable death.

For the modern playwrights under discussion here, as for the playwrights of the English Renaissance, life and its processes are seen as a struggle, intensely physical, for control, for power, and for possession. Dialectic and formal analysis are only implicitly present when these dramatists are at their best; nothing expresses the horror of the Duchess of Malfi's world so clearly as the severed hand she is offered to kiss in prison, or the description of her brother running across country with a human leg in his mouth. Similarly, nothing rivals such simple images in the modern plays as the abandonment of a baby on a riverbank (which occurs, with different consequences, in both Bond's Narrow Road to the Deep North and his The Bundle), or the heap of gassed bodies in Laughter!, or the beating of Judy in Brenton's Sore Throats. The brutality of spirit and of language in these modern plays is visually expressed and

receives its most effective analysis in the depiction of struggles over the possession and use of the most essential of human attributes: the body, its capacities, and its potentialities.

CHAPTER FIVE

Art and Language

Violence is clearly central to the plays of the four writers I am interested in here; it is the theatrically visible response to oppression and conflict, it is the means of political and sexual oppression, and its function in resolving or complicating conflicts is central to the plays' depictions of relationships among individuals and between individuals and the larger social unit of the State.

I wish now to set aside the issue of physically violent responses in these plays and to turn to another important, and I believe highly innovative, set of responses to personal and political conflict present in the work of all four modern playwrights. I have titled this chapter "Art and Language," and I mean to focus on those two human constructs as they are shown in these plays as responses by characters onstage to the same conditions which I suggested in Chapter Three caused physically violent responses.

Barker centres one of his most critically successful plays, Scenes from an Execution, on the character of Galactia, a woman painter in Renaissance Italy, and her attempt to execute the State's commission to paint a celebration of the Venetian victory at the Battle of

Lepanto.¹ The Doge of Venice commissions the painting, reminding Galactia that "a canvas which is one hundred feet long is not a painting, it is a public event" (scene two, p 261), and demands that the figure of the Venetian commander at the battle (the Doge's brother) dominate the painting. For much of the play, Galactia struggles against practical, logistical difficulties as well as against ideological resistance from the State in her attempt to paint the battle in accordance with her vision of what the victory meant and the function the finished painting must serve. She tells a man, mutilated in the battle, who has come to model for her:

I am painting the battle, Prodo. Me. The battle which changed you from a man into a monkey. One thousand square feet of canvas. Great empty ground to fill. With noise. Your noise. The noise of men minced. Got to find a new red for all that blood. A red that smells. . . .
A midwife for your labour. Help you bring the truth to birth. Up there, twice life-size, your half-murder, your half-death. Come on, don't be manly, there's no truth where men are being manly

--

(Scene one, p 257)

Galactia's painting is, unequivocally, an artistically structured and politically committed response to the hypocrisy and injustice of the Venetian State. She decides to submit to the Doge, as required, "another drawing in which the Admiral is given greater prominence," but far from complying with the Doge's unspoken yet obvious requirements for the painting, Galactia's revised drawing will "show him not only prominent but responsible. And a face which is not exulting but indifferent" (scene four, p 264). Finally

Galactia is imprisoned for her refusal to capitulate but the painting is exhibited anyway, and the Doge engineers conditions in which it will lose its effectiveness:

To have lost such a canvas would have been an offence against the artistic primacy of Venice. To have said this work could not be absorbed by the spirit of the Republic would be to belittle the Republic, and our barbarian neighbours would have jeered at us. So we absorb all, and in absorbing it we show our greater majesty. It offends today, but we look harder and we know, it will not offend tomorrow. We force the canvas and the stretcher down the gagging throat, and coughing a little, and spluttering a little, we find, on digestion, it nourishes us!

(Scene 18 p 301-2)

Galactia's male rivals dismiss the painting as "The Slag's Revenge," and insist that it reflects not the horror and injustice of the battle, but Galactia's jealousies and frustrations:

LASAGNA: If it had been painted by a man it would have been an indictment of the war, but as it is, painted by the most promiscuous female within a hundred miles of the Lagoon, I think we are entitled to a different speculation.

SORDO: It is very aggressive. You and I, we wouldn't have been so aggressive. A woman painter has a particularly -- female aggressiveness, which is not, I think, the same as vigour. Do you agree with that distinction?

(Scene 18 p 302)

Galactia's anger, and her artistic project of showing the evils of the Venetian victory, are neutralized in the absorption of the painting into official Venetian culture and in Galactia's release from prison, to be a guest at the Doge's dinner-party because, he says, "I hate to miss a celebrity from my table" (scene 20, p 305).

In Galactia, Barker shows a woman responding to a war and, as Katrin did with her injuries and continuing suffering, putting the physical consequences of a supposedly glorious victory on public display in a way that resists their smug co-option into the official culture of the victorious city-state. Like Katrin's, Galactia's struggle to frame (literally as much as figuratively) and artistically to interpret actual experience in order to stress its essential truth is complicated by her gender. Galactia's work is dismissed as "not virile, but shrill" by the male painters, and Katrin is turned into an emblem of the suffering (but silent) woman for whom the men of Vienna have fought, and is forced into playing the role of passive vessel for peace. Sex and sexual behaviour are used against both women to deny the validity of their visions and, ultimately, both women are silenced and coerced into conformity. Galactia's attempt to use her art to invade "the palaces of power" and "tear their minds apart and explode the wind in their deep cavities" (scene 12 p 288) fails because the power and hypocrisy of the State is strong enough to resist even such a direct ideological assault on it.

Barker's No End of Blame depicts two male Hungarian artists, Bela Veracek and Grigor Gabor. Grigor attempts to escape the iniquities and corruption of the human world by retreating with his partner to live in the forest in a state

of nature--which Bela derisively calls "the woods option"--and eventually goes mad. Bela, by contrast, embraces political involvement, becoming a satirical cartoonist in WWII England. Scenes in the play are associated with particular sketches or cartoons by the two artists, and one which nearly has the newspaper Bela works for closed down is described thus:

'There Always was a Second Front'. An English Soldier is struggling with Hitler. A profiteer is trying to strangle the soldier from behind.

(Act Two, scene 2, pp 110-1)

After a lifetime's ineffectual struggle with social and political injustice, Bela renounces his art and attempts suicide. Placed in the same mental hospital as Grigor, Bela is finally persuaded to take up cartooning again and to "[a]ssign the blame," and the play ends with Bela's febrile but committed appeal to the audience to "give us a pencil" (Act Two, scene 6, p 132). Bela and Grigor are both, like Galactia, faced with the problem of defining the relationship between their art and the society they passionately wish to serve; Grigor, unable to find a solution, attempts a withdrawal of his artistic and personal existence from the greater social and political system and goes mad as a result. Galactia makes her great statement and goes to prison for it, but is thwarted in her attempt to become a martyr by the well-meaning curator, Rivera. Rivera misunderstands the political element of Galactia's work.

Thinking that Galactia "wanted the picture to be seen," she has the artist released from prison because, she says, "it is art I am interested in. I have saved your art" (scene 19, pp 303-4). Galactia is finally forced to continue life on the only terms apparently available to her, accepting her celebrity status at the Doge's corrupt court. Bela's final, hopeful re-commitment to important and meaningful artistic endeavour is severely qualified by the setting in which it occurs, an English psychiatric hospital, and by Bela's advanced age.

Barker's interest in dramatizing the complexities of the artist's place in his or her society is shared by the other playwrights in this study. Bond's Bingo focusses on the last days of Shakespeare's life, in which Shakespeare (Bond imagines) agonizes over what, if any, lasting effect his life and work may have had for good or evil, and at the same time participates, albeit mostly passively, in a scheme for land-enclosure which will cause deprivation and suffering to the poor farmers whose right to farm common land will be lost. Realising that he is nearing the end of his life, Shakespeare asks himself repeatedly, "Was anything done?" and concludes that "[e]very writer writes in other men's blood... There's nothing else to write in. But only a god or a devil can write in other men's blood and not ask why they spilt it and what it cost" (Part Two, scene 5, p 57). Shakespeare's failure to practise his art in a

socially responsible way echoes King Lear's failure (in the historical Shakespeare's play) as a monarch to make his government beneficial to all his subjects, including the weakest. As it does in King Lear, the word "nothing" echoes through Bingo. It is the answer to Ben Jonson's enquiry of Shakespeare, "What are you writing?" (Part Two, scene 4), it is what Combe tells Shakespeare to do, think and say about the proposed enclosure of the common land (Part One, scene 1, p 20), and the answer to Shakespeare's question of himself, "Was anything done?" The word "nothing" occurs five times in the final minute of the play, as Shakespeare's embittered, materialistic daughter Judith searches for her father's new will as he commits suicide. Bond thus imaginatively scripts Shakespeare's life into an oblique version of one of his own plays, and the questions that are raised about Shakespeare's behaviour as a writer, as a businessman and as a citizen reflect on the roles of all writers as social beings and, of course, on Bond's own part in the process of "writ[ing] in other men's blood."

Barnes is similarly critical (and self-critical) of the spurious divorce of the artist from social responsibility in such plays as Laughter! and Red Noses. The latter play begins with the discovery by the Flagellant Father Flote of his true calling during the Black Death:

I hear you loud, Lord, in the sound of their
laughter. I hear and obey. I now know what
I must do. Heaven's to be had with my
humiliation. God wants peacocks not ravens,

brights stars not sad comets, red noses not
black death. He wants joy. I'll not shrink
from the burden, Lord. Only turn away thy
wrath. Give us hope.

(Act One, scene 1, pp 13-4)

Flote immediately gives up self-flagellation and instead offers sympathy and comfort to those dying of the plague, accompanying his administration of the last rites with a series of bad old jokes and popular songs, wearing "a clown's bulbous red nose." The play shows Flote gathering a troupe of performers whose response to the plague will not only be to alleviate suffering by making people laugh, but more importantly, the comic theatre and performance they present will include serious attacks on the corruption of the Church, the State, and the wealthy merchants and doctors who profit from the misery of the poor and sick. Ultimately the Red Noses are executed by the returning hierarchy of the Church, and the optimism of the play is qualified, as was the optimism at the end of Barker's No End of Blame, by the certainty that good individuals will die while inherently evil institutions, like the medieval Church, will survive. Flote believes that "[e]very jest should be a small revolution," but the play also offers a competing and troubling vision of the political uses of laughter in the words of Pope Clement VI, who gives the "Floties" status as a Religious Order so that they can be a "useful lubricant" and "[d]azzle 'em and take what's left of their minds off the harsh facts of existence" (Act One, scene 6, p 51). Far

from being a small revolution, laughter may be used instead as a subtle means of oppression, robbing the oppressed and abused of the awareness of their own misery and thus removing the motive to do anything to alleviate it. This issue, of the true artistic and political nature of laughter, is addressed again by Barnes in the aptly (and, typically, somewhat ironically) titled Laughter!.² Barnes dramatizes himself in the character of the Author who opens the play and delivers a stern warning about comedy:

Comedy itself is the enemy. Laughter only confuses and corrupts everything we try to say. It cures nothing except our consciences and so ends by making the nightmare worse. A sense of humour's no remedy for evil. ... Laughter's the ally of tyrants. It softens our hatred. An excuse to change nothing, for nothing needs changing when it's all a joke. ... Laughter's too feeble a weapon against the barbarities of life. A balm for battles lost, standard equipment for the losing side; the powerful have no need of it. Wit's no answer to a homicidal maniac. So, in the face of Attila the Hun, Ivan the Terrible, a Passendale or Auschwitz, what good is laughter?!
(Part One, "Tsar," p 343)

The Author's speech is sabotaged by his being subjected throughout to a series of music-hall slapstick gags, including a custard pie in the face and a revolving bow tie. Barnes's play, in two parts, proceeds to answer precisely the last question, staging first Ivan the Terrible engaging in horrific tortures to hilarious effect and then a group of Nazi functionaries maintaining the concentration camps in an atmosphere of drawing-room comedy. Barnes's highly controversial confrontation of this problematic relationship

between serious artistic intent and the use of comedy goes further, I think, than any other play by these writers in using a self-conscious theatricality to discuss the role of the artist in society. Laughter! ends with another highly theatrical, non-illusionist device: an Announcer's Voice tells the audience, "Stop. Don't leave. The best is yet to come. Our final number" (Epilogue, p 411), thus introducing a stand-up comedy routine by two Jews dying in the Auschwitz gas chamber.³ This Epilogue proves that comedy and laughter can in fact be shocking and effective, rather than, as the Pope in Red Noses intended, a harmless sedative. Barnes succeeds in combining laughter and appalling injustice, and the audience's complicated response--we find ourselves laughing at the jokes as the men stagger, cough, and "die in darkness"--is the point of the exercise. If Barnes stages himself in the Author who opens the play, he stages the audience at the play's end, causing us to respond in a way that will surprise us and then using our sense of a distance between our actual response and the expected response of shock, pity and outrage to force us to consider the whole issue of how we respond to the manipulations of art. The Author's speech about the dangers of comedy is undercut by the 'inappropriate' slapstick to which he is subjected. The audience's response to the jokes--some of them funny--told by Bieberstein and Bimko is juxtaposed with the fact that we are forced to sit and watch as they are

gassed and die. The laughter here is not the joyous laughter evoked by the Red Noses, but the "laughter which freezes on the breath" of Antonio. The illusion of the theatre--of the audience's non-presence in the theatre--is shattered by our conscious reflection on this unexpected, inappropriate response.

A similarly direct, and almost as savage, self-criticism occurs in Brenton's Bloody Poetry, in which Percy Bysshe Shelley and his family are seen in their exile in Italy, exercising a more physically comfortable version of Barker's "Woods Option." Mary Shelley, grieving the death of her daughter, attacks Shelley for his selfish detachment:

Oh! Can't you hear yourself? Do you know what you're saying?

Is the price of a poem - the death of our child?

'The Mask of Anarchy'! No one will publish it. Will Hunt, in The Examiner? No, he knows he will go to gaol for seditious libel.

[She scoffs.]

The great revolutionary, English poem - unpublishable! Bury it in your daughter's coffin, poet.

(Act Two, scene 9, p 302)

Like the Shakespeare of Bond's Bingo, Brenton's vision of the actual poet Shelley questions the relationship between artistic greatness and personal commitment. Both Bond and Brenton deal with the writer's political commitment, or lack of commitment, but tellingly both also are interested in the personal politics of the writers' families. Shelley and

Shakespeare are depicted as failed fathers, apparently indifferent to the sufferings of their wives and children.

Bond's play The Fool depicts the life and madness of John Clare, the 19th-century working class poet, primarily in terms of his relations with his family and friends. Clare's retreat into madness, unlike the choices to withdraw made by the middle-class figures of Shakespeare and Shelley, is caused by an inability to divorce his personal experience of the real suffering of the poor from his artistic practice. Misunderstood by his peers and rejected as politically dangerous by his social "betters," Clare's poetry can find no audience and he refuses (or is unable) to compromise the truth of what he writes in order to make it saleable.

Gaukroger, the artisan-hero of Barker's Pity in History, is at one remove from the savagely committed artists Galactia and Bela, and even from Bond's Will Shakespeare. A carver of monuments trying to continue his trade during the English Civil War, Gaukroger refuses to take sides in the fighting and resists the impulse to elevate the value of his own craftsmanship:

You spend three years on a chancel-screen and
 twenty yobbos break it. Across the floor the bits
 go, and end up in a garden. Come another century,
 some antiquary restores it, lovingly, with brush
 and ruler, then a cannon brings it down again.
 Well, only a fool cries at chaos, it's the
 condition. I foresee nothing, I expect nothing,
 and because I do an angel's wing near perfect
 gives it no rights...

(Scene three, p 71)

As an artisan, Gaukroger is as much a representative of a working class as he is of the artistic class, a situation that his employer, Venables fails to appreciate when he requests an advance payment for his work. "I thought you were an artist," she tells him, "[s]uperior in sensibility. Above all mercenary consideration" (scene six, p 78). Venables's insistence that art and money have nothing to do with each other is ironically undercut by the later scene in which she is seen hiding valuable paintings in the family crypt to save them from the invading soldiers (scene thirteen, p 87). Gaukroger's genuine commitment to his art, apart from its function as his living, is to it as a living form, one which is not immortal but human and mutable. Finally exhausted by the destruction of the monument he has been making for Venables's late husband, and overwhelmed by the sense that history is advancing on him, Gaukroger is exhorted to continue working by his apprentice, Pool: "Find the language. Find the style. New manner for new situation. When in doubt, invent. Copy. Cheat. Get by" (scene sixteen, p 92). Pool ends the play emphasizing that art is not a separate experience, and one less real than the experience of life, but a part of it. Pool's exhortation stands as a motto for Barker's own theatre, which is intensely responsive to the social and political conditions which produce it. It is also a motto for Barnes, Bond and Brenton, all of whom borrow material from other writers and

all of whom are theatrical innovators. Equally, it may be applied to the dramatists of the English Renaissance, who find themselves creating ad hoc their country's first professional theatres in a time of change, in which every situation--political, religious, educational, economic--seems one of Pool's "new" situations.

In a general way, it is clear that Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker are interested in exploring through their work in the theatre the political significance of choosing art--whether graphic or literary arts--as one's medium for responding to events and conditions in the "real" world. Whereas Alice, Rosa and Joanne in Brenton's Berlin Bertie choose performance as a way out of their desperate personal situations and hope, perhaps, to "achieve something by accident" (Act Three, p 76), the committed artist in these plays--and by extension, the writers of them--uses art consciously as a response to a political situation. I have already hinted at a degree of self-depiction by these playwrights, in Barnes's staging the Author in Laughter! and in Bond's putting Shakespeare on stage in a fact-based play that is reminiscent of King Lear, which in turn reflects of course on Bond's revision of that play, Lear, and thus on Bond as writer, businessman, and citizen. This element of metatheatricality, of the theatre staging itself self-consciously, is an element shared with the theatre of the English Renaissance.⁴ Marston's Antonio and Mellida opens

with an Induction to the stage in which the actors--present in the script under their real names--are given their parts and get into costume for a play called Antonio and Mellida. Barnes retains a version of the Induction in his Antonio. The Taming of the Shrew, The Spanish Tragedy and The Knight of the Burning Pestle all use Inductions as framing devices which persist in reappearing throughout the "actual" plays they belong to. Plays of the Renaissance too numerous to list exhaustively include the device of some type of play within a play; memorable examples are Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Women Beware Women, and Bartholomew Fair. These, of course, are distinct from those plays which include verbal references to the art of theatre, such as Jacques's "All the world's a stage" speech in As You Like It, although such references form an important part of the texture of the highly self-regarding Renaissance theatre. The illusionist theatre does not stage itself in the same way. By definition, the illusionist theatre strives not to attract attention to its own artificiality, to its status as an artistic construction, but to maintain a mimesis of "real" life. In staging themselves, the theatres of the English Renaissance and of the four contemporary British writers I focus on seek a relationship between play and audience that is crucially different from that imposed by the convention of the fourth wall. I have offered some discussion, in Chapter One, above, of the influence of the

relationship between stage and audience on plays and playwrights. I am interested here in the very specific practice of enfolding one play in another, in what seems to me one of the clearest debts owed by these four modern writers to their Renaissance antecedents.

Perversely, I turn first to Barker's Women Beware Women. I say "perversely" because, although the Middleton play has its climax in a masque presented within the play by characters central to the main plot, Barker completely excises this highly theatrical episode. In Middleton's play, the masque is the vehicle for the final series of spectacular deaths, and in Barker's play there is only one death, that of Sordido immediately after the second rape of Bianca. The practical reasons for Barker's sacrifice of such richly theatrical material are obvious enough; he needs to save most of the characters as his play is not conceived for a theatre of tragedy, as Middleton's was, but for his new Theatre of Catastrophe. In his imagined conversation with Middleton, Barker accuses that writer of promulgating "reactionary ethics" in his play, and says "I always insist people can be saved" (Arguments for a Theatre, p 23). However, Barker sees the use of the theatrical device to "inflict slaughter on all the participants in the interests of morality" as "unrealistic" and "fulfilling a convention" (p 22). For a writer of Barker's style to berate another for presenting the unrealistic onstage is at least a little

ironic, but the key to understanding why he jettisons the device of the masque within the play lies in his view of its conventionality. If Barker is right that when Middleton included the masque he "did not believe in that [himself]," then the artistic reasons for including it must be discovered. Barker's sense is, it appears, that the theatricalized device is the only sufficiently spectacular way to kill off "five or six" characters when there is no more probable way to achieve their deaths, deaths which are formally necessary because "[t]he solution to so much corruption can only be mass-murder" (Arguments for a Theatre p 24). Barker's revision of the play attempts to counter the pessimism he sees in it, so that the new version of the play must "insist on the redemptive power of desire" (p 22). If the masque within the play is both the symbol of, and the vehicle for, the intensely conventional, moralistic resolution of the Renaissance tragedy, then Barker must reject that device in order to escape the convention. Thus, rather than being drawn by the use of the Renaissance convention to stage a series of deaths, Barker's play resists the pattern of tragedy and leads, through a rape and a vengeful murder, unconventionally to a re-birth. Working directly with a Renaissance play, Barker makes the material (or, more accurately, his vision of it) work against itself to produce the modern theatre--the "new manner for new situation"--he seeks to create. The second rape of Bianca

is "staged" by Livia and Leantio, with Sordido as the actor. Bianca, of course, has a role to play as well, but her response is not scripted by Livia. Livia's intention is certainly to return Bianca to the full sense of herself, and this is achieved. Bianca's new-found autonomy expresses itself, however, first in her rejection of Livia's sisterhood, and we must conclude that Livia is not perfectly in control of her "play."

Brenton's Greenland includes a performance by a lesbian street theatre group of the Crucifixion with a female Christ and an explicit political message, urging women not to vote in the General Election. The performance is the dramatic opportunity for a confrontation between Betty, an anti-pornography campaigner, and her adult daughter Judy, who plays Christ. Like the play within A Midsummer Night's Dream, a play with which Greenland shares some interesting features, this play within the play is conceptually related to the political themes of the main plot and is framed as being performed on this day and in this place for a specific, public purpose. Thus the play within Greenland is integrated both into the plot and into the play's ideological framework; and in the group's performance there is an element on Brenton's part of self-parody, as his optimistic, Utopian play attempts, as the street theatre group's play Passion of a Woman Voter does, to make a meaningful political statement and change the audience's

mind about an issue.

The Nativity play performed by the Red Noses is similarly consciously intended both to entertain and enlighten its audience; Bembo introduces it by saying,

Oyez! Oyez! Christ's Clowns present a brand new activity. It is our version of the Nativity. The Christ Child is born into a world much like this one. Will you laugh or weep when you see what's said and done?

(Act II, scene 4, pp 95-6)

The play rewrites the traditional story of the birth of Jesus, making Herod a laughable idiot and the Holy Family much like any other bickering couple with a new baby. The comedy turns sour, however, when the Floties stage the murder of all the firstborn boys. Using dolls to represent the corpses of the slaughtered children, much as he used the life-sized dummies of the gassed concentration camp victims in Laughter!, Barnes has his play-within-the play sharply change its tone. Pope Clement VI objects, "It isn't funny!" and Flote's reply, delivered as he stands in the baggy breeches and paper crown he has worn to play Herod, summarizes Barnes's political project in using comedy to resist oppression:

No, it isn't funny. In the days of pestilence we could be funny but now we're back to normal, life is too serious to be funny. God's a joker but his jests fall flat. [He takes off his red nose.] It isn't funny when they feed us lies, crush the light, sweep the stars from the heavens. Isn't funny now inequality's in, naming rich and poor, mine and thine. Isn't funny when power rules and men manifest all their deeds in oppression. Isn't funny till we throw out the old rubbish and gold and silver rust. Then it'll be funny. [He tosses

the red nose on to the ground.] Holy Father, I can't submit. I tried to lift Creation from bondage with mirth. Wrong. Our humour was a way of evading truth, avoiding responsibility. Our mirth was used to divert attention whilst the strong ones slunk back to their thrones and palaces where they stand now in their saggy breeches and paper crowns, absurd like me.

(Act II, scene 4, pp 103-4)

Flote's dilemma--of having had his well-intended art used by the powerful to distract the populace--is of course Barnes's own dilemma. The sudden shift of tone in the Nativity play from broad comedy to realistic violence and pathos does not signal a shift in Barnes's larger play, nor in his work in general, away from the use of the comic to more serious purpose. Barnes remains committed, not only to an artistic response to what he sees as social and political injustices, but also to the use of comedy as part of that response.

Arguably, perhaps, the most notable example of Bond's self-conscious theatricality is the play The Sea. Unusually for Bond, whose career began with such contemporary plays as Saved and The Pope's Wedding, populated by working-class characters, The Sea features upper middle class characters in important roles and has an Edwardian setting. The texture of the play is reminiscent of the drawing-room comedies of Wilde and other turn-of-the-century playwrights, and is Bond's ambivalent homage to that genre. The play's opening scene, of a fierce storm at night, punctuated with the sounds of men shouting, clearly derives from the opening scene of The Tempest. Bond's attitude to his dramatic

models is not uncritical, however; he subtitles The Sea "A Comedy" but has it open with the death of Colin, drowned in the storm. Bond's play features paranoia and conflict throughout, but finds its comic ending--in a formal, Shakespearean sense--in the final union of Rose, Colin's fiancée, and Willy, his friend. Louise Rafi, Rose's aunt, plans in the course of The Sea to stage a version of "Orpheus and Eurydice" for the town's annual fête, but Colin's death provides her with an opportunity to stage instead a recitation at the occasion of scattering his ashes. This recitation at the cliff-top is, in Mrs Rafi's usual style, histrionic and self-important, and fails to create the effect she seeks, partly because it is interrupted by Mrs Tilehouse's search for her smelling-salts. The failure of Mrs Rafi's performance serves also to remind the audience of the tenuousness of theatrical illusion, set within a play which makes conventional use of the illusion of the fourth wall to frame its action. The Sea maintains its illusion to the point of claustrophobia, culminating in Mrs Rafi's self-accusing lament over the waste of her confined life "in this ditch" (scene seven, p 161). Bond draws deliberate attention to the dramatic form of the play. The audience's awareness of the constrictions of that form coincides with an awareness of the damaging personal and social constrictions of the society satirized in it. Like Mrs Rafi, the playwright who is content with

engineering theatrical opportunities for set-pieces (Mrs Rafi insists that her character Orpheus sit down beside the Styx and sing "There's No Place Like Home" because, she says, "the town expects it of me," scene four) will inevitably fail as an artist. The Sea, itself different in form from much of the rest of Bond's work, is a warning that habit--in life or in art--is finally stifling. Bond thus matches the conventional form of the play to its thematic content. The Sea offers little debate over issues and is, uncharacteristically for Bond, a straightforward criticism in the style of Ibsen and Shaw of the values of this stifled, bourgeois existence.

Lest I seem to have implied that verbal drama is not important to the playwrights under discussion here, let me now turn to the use these writers make of language in their original plays. I hope to show that they share with their Renaissance antecedents a sense of the theatrical potential of the distance between speech and action; that they share, too, a vision of the theatre as a forum for political (in the broadest sense) debate, rather than as a tool for social normalization; and that both groups of playwrights use the exclusively human constructs of language and art to frame, mediate, and complicate the plays' depictions in physical terms of human interactions.

This last proposition suggests that the language employed by these playwrights must somehow match,

qualitatively correspond to, the physically expressed qualities of these plays: their savagery, their brutality, their complexity and their variety. The Renaissance theatre exhibits an interest in a variety of forms of language, staging prose, blank verse, rhymed verse (in various forms), songs, masques, oratory, regional accents and the modes of speech of characters of different social classes. Modern drama, and most pertinently, the drama of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, similarly differentiates the voices of its characters, so that Bond's agricultural labourers are distinct from their employers, Barnes's St Eusebius and St Pior speak an invented ancient dialect, and Brenton's Saxon soldier speaks Old English. At the same time, all four writers consciously use anachronism in speech, as in other aspects of the drama, resisting the impulse to create an illusion of historical accuracy.

The physical qualities of the plays--the sense they give of exploring and expanding the limits of what is theatrically possible--are reflected in their language. The emphasis for these contemporary playwrights is not on the replication of naturalistic patterns of speech for its own sake, nor on the creation of a theatre which will serve as a model of ideal social propriety. Language is both a vehicle for ideas and a vitally expressive feature of the plays' textures.

An obvious form of language in the plays of the writers

I am interested in here is verbal violence--simply put, the use of words to express aggression--between characters onstage. The violence may range from simple name-calling (of which these plays furnish examples too numerous to list), to the gross and complex personal imposition perpetrated by Sleen in Barker's The Early Hours of a Reviled Man:

There, now, I have used you as badly as you have used me, I have poured my learning and contempt on you as a drunk vomits intolerance into a listening ear, I have played the genius and master to you, I have employed you as a mirror - not a very clean mirror - to reflect my own wit and unhappiness.
(Scene 1, p 50)

Verbal violence unaccompanied by any act of physical aggression against the victim may be an expression of impotence, and may suggest that the aggressor is unwilling or unable to engage in actual physical confrontation. In the theatre--a physical and visual medium, distinct from the exclusively verbal media of the novel and poetry--verbal violence will almost inevitably carry with it a sense of the possibility of physical violence. When that possibility remains unfulfilled, unrealised, one of two effects is achieved. Either the aggressor is seen as powerless, impotent, and his or her violent language therefore as empty; or, the menace and wounding caused by the verbal assault is genuinely felt by the recipient of the aggression, who thus becomes a victim. As with physical assaults, Bond, Barnes, Brenton and Barker are highly

inventive in staging verbal aggression, giving their characters a range of vocabularies, from the modern to the archaic and atemporal, in which to assault each other.

As Jeannette R. Malkin points out,⁵ Bond's "socially and culturally deprived characters are shown as the prisoners of a severely circumscribed language and the victims of their own violence." This correspondence between economic factors and personal uses of language by groups of characters suggests usefully that language, far from being an equally available and innate human attribute, is in fact a capacity which is socially and externally constructed, imposed upon the individual rather than the individual's own construction. The heightened atmosphere of the theatre emphasizes the "real-life" fact that facility with language equates to power, and thus the poverty and lack of opportunity in the lives of Bond's characters in plays such as Saved and The Pope's Wedding (both of which Malkin discusses at some length), are matched by the poverty and lack of sophistication in their language. The characters' personal languages thus reflect and express their impoverished condition, so that much of the verbal violence on the modern stage is a symptom of an oppressed and deprived state of being. There is in these plays a character--almost as clearly defined a type as the stock figures of the Commedia del'Arte--who perfectly embodies this phenomenon. He is the foul-mouthed, poorly educated,

slovenly and usually unemployed young working-class man, for whom language is a generally ineffectual means of keeping the hostile and incomprehensible world at bay. These figures appear most commonly in plays set in contemporary Britain. Sandy, the apotheosis of these "lager louts," has an outburst at Alice in Brenton's Berlin Bertie that clearly demonstrates how his verbal violence is more an attack on his own sense of inadequacy than it is one on her:

I mean you are driving me mad, do you know that? Right I've decided, say nothing, I'll clear up the fucking TV screen myself, right? [He is lost at how to do so. He returns to the attack.] And where WAS you last night anyway? Me stuck here, waiting ... I even watched the FUCKING NEWS for you ... some fucking supergun ... going in and out of some fucking country or other, Greece, Israel, Iran ... I tried to remember, but I don't know foreign places, they just don't stick, I just don't know 'em, in't nowhere on the map 'cept ENGLAND far as I'm concerned ... And anyway fell asleep, didn't I ... right ... clear up the ... Right how do I do that?

(Act One, p 2)

This verbally-represented violence does not, however, preclude the possibility of acts of physical violence and, like their precursors the malcontents of Renaissance drama, these linguistically impoverished characters are often destructive of themselves and of others. The crucial difference, of course, between the Jacobean malcontent-- usefully defined by Rabey as "a man of high principles now disillusioned, if not deranged, by their lack of congruence with the society he now perceives"⁶--and these contemporary British lager louts is articulacy, the conscious sense of

there being such abstract things as principles at all. On a stage which is able to represent variety in social class and correspondingly in language, and in a society which so grossly fails its poorer members as to leave them without even the basic language skills with which to analyze logically their own sense of a discrepancy between the way things should be and the way things are, the Jacobean malcontent is modernized and split into two figures -- the inarticulate lager lout, helpless to change his situation, and the more articulate activist who chooses political (whether democratic or revolutionary) action to correct the discrepancy. Bond's Cordelia, Brenton's Jack Beaty, Barnes's Jack, 14th Earl of Gurney, and Barker's Bela, are examples of this articulate half of the split character. I have discussed these figures more fully in Chapter Three; what interests me here is the lager lout as an oblique analogy to the true Jacobean malcontent. The fundamental impotence and poverty (in many senses) of these young, uneducated malcontents are reflected in their language, which is violent, abusive, repetitious, and as Malkin notes, ritualized within its social context.⁷ The language of the gang, or of the lone lager lout, is depicted by the playwright deliberately as an impoverished, diminished rhetoric. This rhetoric functions as a parody of the superior rhetoric of the Jacobean malcontent and, by contrast, expresses the genuine degradation experienced by

that sector of the contemporary population. Like the Jacobean malcontent, however, the lager lout's habitual verbal expressions of hatred and violence express both his alienation from his society, and his self-loathing. The lager lout is, like the malcontent, his own nemesis; it is an important difference to note that in the modern period, the articulate splits of the traditional figure can use political action to achieve the restitution or reform they desire.⁸ The action of the less articulate is rarely constructive and often destructive: Brian rapes the futuristic anthropologist Annette in Greenland; the young men in Saved kill Pam's baby. In many cases, it is the gap between what these characters are capable physically of doing and their ability to conceptualize it intellectually that strikes the audience, as much as the act of violence itself. Thus, Pat and Scopey attempt to talk about his murder of Alen in The Pope's Wedding:

PAT: Hello... (She comes down towards Scopey.)
 Where's the owd boy? (She looks at the
 tins.) Scopey? (She sees the bundle on the
 floor and starts to go to it.)
 SCOPEY: I 'oisted the flap a month back. 'Is
 'ead's like a fish.
 PAT: 'E's dead.
 SCOPEY: All silver scales.
 PAT: Why 'ent yoo come?
 SCOPEY: I took one 'and on 'is throat an one 'and
 'eld 'im up be the 'air.
 PAT: Why?
 SCOPEY: One 'and.
 PAT: That's 'is coat.
 SCOPEY: I stole it.
 PAT: They'll 'ang you.
 SCOPEY: One be the 'air.
 (Scene 16)

Like the inarticulate lager lout, Scopey barely has the language to describe what he has done, much less to explain his reasons for doing it. Pat--like many women in these plays, slightly more articulate than the men around her--is able to foresee the legal consequences (hanging), but still responds only monosyllabically to the murder. The conversation is disjointed, the two characters only intermittently connecting; although Pat asks "Why?" she immediately abandons this line of thought to notice the comparatively trivial detail that Scopey is wearing Alen's coat. There are, we assume, complex reasons for Scopey's murder of Alen, for Brian's raping Annette, and for the stoning of the unresponsive baby in the pram; but the plays refuse the audience easy or comfortable resolutions by insisting on the inarticulacy of the characters and making their linguistic deprivation a barrier to their assimilation by the audience. If the audience expects art to explain or analyze human experience, then they will be disappointed by the withdrawal in these plays from the use of language as a mediator.

At the other end of the scale (intellectually at least) from these disaffected, illiterate young men are the true dialecticians of these plays, characters for whom language structured as argument and debate is the path to social and political reform. Brenton's Greenland presents such a character, somewhat ambivalently, in Severan-Severan, "the

last dialectician" in the play's second-act Utopia. He is "a declared reactionary" whose function is, he says, "to make as much trouble as possible, in their insipid ideal" (Act Two, scene 13 p 388). Severan's bitterness and verbal violence clearly separate him from the gentle and accepting Greenlanders, and this suggestion of dissent problematizes the play's staging of "a society of free communistic value" (p 388) in which "all value is the value of labour" (Act Two, scene 11, p 379). Severan's insistently nasty presence foregrounds by contrast the blandness of a culture in which conflict has become so unknown that it can hardly even be grasped conceptually, much less expressed linguistically. When Brian rapes Annette, importing the mindless violence of his own culture to the future, she describes the act of sexual aggression in terms which are simply expressive of the inadequacy of her language to define violent behaviour:

Just because a man put his thing in me, why should I weep? A rodent. Falls in your lap. [A gesture] Knock it away.

(Act Two, scene 10 p 378)

Indeed, much of the communication among the Greenlanders, notably the couples A'bet and Draw, and Annette and Sasha, and the married trio of Oh, Lai-Fung and Sally, has become telepathic, no longer relying on verbal expression, and co-operative, one character expressing another's thought for her, thus suggesting the breakdown even of boundaries between individual consciousnesses.

Despite acknowledging the desirability of the way

Greenland's society works, the twentieth-century Joan finds herself drawn to Severan, apparently the only Greenlander capable of a conception of history. Severan insists on using language--both rational discourse, and simple invective--to resist the anodyne Greenland culture whose very peacefulness and lack of conflict constitute for him "a living death" (p 390). Like the Jacobean malcontent, Severan offers intellectual resistance to what he sees as a corrupt society, and ironically wishes for a tragic (rather than an heroic) death as the final victory over this too-perfect, non-oppositional culture. I describe Severan's wish as "ironic" because a tragic death is usually the unwelcome but inevitable fate of the Jacobean malcontent.

Like the malcontent, then, the inarticulate young man of these plays uses language as a weapon against the social/political system which disgusts him; but unlike the malcontent, and in telling contrast to that figure, the modern lager lout is intellectually and educationally underequipped to use language to do battle. The modern stage presents a society as corrupt and hostile to its members as any depicted on the Renaissance stage, but shows a response to it that is inadequate and unattractive, in individuals far less empowered than the Jacobean malcontents and revengers.

The same sensitivity to using theatre language to suggest changes in social conditions, or changes in the

groups represented in the theatre, is to be seen in these playwrights' uses of languages and modes of speech suited to (or indeed, invented for) particular characters.

Renaissance drama loosely observes the practice of reserving verse dialogue for characters of higher social rank, and for issues of greater public importance, while poor or dishonest characters speak in prose, often with added dialect to particularize their speech and to set them apart from the educated speakers within the play and the audience, whose language is a version of what we would now call standard English. It is wrong, of course, to overemphasize this verse/prose convention; Shakespeare, Webster, Middleton and Ford all give verse lines--often the finest verse in a play--to characters of dubious moral integrity or lowly social station, and characters such as the Prince Hal of Henry IV Part I move tellingly between verse and prose idioms without being supposed therefore to change character. What this casual convention (as well as its obvious flexibility in practice) points to among the playwrights of the English Renaissance is an acute awareness of and interest in the varieties of language that are stageable, and the possibilities that the presentation of linguistic variety opens up for the theatre. The brief revival of verse-drama in English in the period between the two World Wars predates the theatrical careers of the writers I am interested in here, and as such it is perhaps unsurprising that most of

their output is in prose, whether it be the naturalistic dialogue of Bond's earliest plays, or the surreal, pseudo-archaic speech of Barnes's 392 A.D. hermits. All, however, work occasionally in verse, and Bond has produced one play which is entirely in verse. Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker all use verse occasionally as part of the prose plays, as well as producing poems to accompany some plays as programme notes or material for use in mounting productions of the plays.

Howard Barker's plays show a sustained use of verse inserts as part of the chorus roles he creates; the Chorus of the Gaoled in Seven Lears is undoubtedly the most consistently applied example of this, although the semi-choric figure MacLuby in The Bite of the Night and the eponymous Judith use it also. The use of verse introduces an element of heightened artificiality to the plays, setting the material presented in verse apart from the prose speeches within the play. Of course, the first half of Barker's version of Women Beware Women is in verse-- Middleton's verse, as amended by Barker--but the second half opens with a scatological and bluntly insistent reversion to prose for all the play's dialogue.

Barnes, too, is obliged to work in verse when he adapts or edits for production the plays of Ben Jonson and John Marston, and as Bernard Dukore points out, Barnes is perhaps not at his best when attempting to match his own style to

iambic pentameter. Barker increasingly sets his plays in temporal settings that fuse chronological details of different periods, and has his characters use modern idiom without making any attempt at recapturing what their language may have sounded like. Barnes, on the contrary, creatively constructs pseudo-archaic dialects for his characters that emphasize their historical, if not political, distance from his contemporary audience. These invented dialects include made-up words (especially terms of abuse and names for parts of the human anatomy), although Barnes succeeds in using the invented vocabulary in sufficient context that the meanings are clear to the audience. Indeed, some of Barnes's most memorable archaisms are in fact just that--borrowings from earlier versions of the English language--and not his inventions at all. Bond achieves a similarly atemporal effect in Lear with the superimposition of the machinery of modern warfare onto the original story of the pre-Christian King of Britain, and in Early Morning Queen Victoria's Britain includes fast food outlets and cinemas. In such plays as Human Cannon, Bingo, Restoration and the two Basho plays (Narrow Road to the Deep North and The Bundle), however, he is at some pains to maintain consistency in historical and practical details. Brenton, too, shows in some plays (Bloody Poetry, and parts of The Romans in Britain) an interest in historical verisimilitude, and in others (Greenland, Measure for

Measure, Weapons of Happiness) is clearly interested, as Bond and Barker are, in the tensions created when the play juxtaposes different historical time-frames.

I would argue that these modern writers share this interest in history and in its creative tension with the contemporary with the greatest writers of the English Renaissance. This is an interest which pervades the modern theatre and has resulted in such practices as modern-dress productions of Renaissance plays, and in the use of colour- and gender-blind casting. For decades, directors have confronted audiences with such spectacles as The Merchant of Venice in Edwardian dress, or Volpone in Victorian costume, and indeed Bond's adaptation of Webster's The White Devil was presented in a 1930s decor (although I have no evidence to confirm that this was Bond's innovation). In the highly visual theatre, breaches of temporal consistency in the language have the same effect as putting the play in some form of dress perceived as alien to the original text. The audience is forced to acknowledge and consider a connection that the production (and/or the writer) is making between two apparently unconnected things, and thus to view the play from a new critical angle. This is perhaps the primary form of what I will call verbal violence within these plays, and it is a violence directed not by one character onstage against another, but by the play as a whole at the audience. Whether the language (vocabulary and syntax) is itself

abusive, filled with threats and images of violence, or not, the use of language which disrupts the audience's ability to be drawn into the illusion of an historical play is an act of artistic violence. When Jed in Magnificence yearns to "disrupt the spectacle", his verbal violence--as well as the appalling physical violence he will soon perpetrate--is aimed as much at the audience sitting comfortably watching the play for their amusement as it is at his political opponent, Alice.

Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker use the minutiae of language and the larger structures of theatrical forms to disrupt illusions, to force the audience to acknowledge the artificiality of the play. In their use of metatheatrical devices, they mimic the self-regarding and self-problematizing theatre of the Renaissance. They ask, in their considerations of the figures of artists, questions about the real value of merely artistic responses to political problems. Further than this, however, they demand that the audience consider both its participation in the theatre, and its attitude to the political questions that theatre addresses. In making the audience complicit in the creation of theatre, Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker insist upon the individual's commitment to the response to social and political problems through the construct of art. The audience in the open, Renaissance-inspired theatre can no longer hide in the anonymous darkness and watch the play

passively; these plays oblige the audience actively to reflect and to make decisions along with the characters.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has attempted to answer one, very broad, question: What is it about Renaissance Drama that so powerfully attracts the creative attention of modern writers for whom theatre is not merely entertainment, but a site for debating, and perhaps ideally achieving, social and political change? It is a simple question, on the surface, and one which numerous critics have addressed from time to time over recent years.

I have argued that violence--the physical and ideological friction between individuals and groups--is the key element all the contemporary writers share with, and indeed in part derive from, the drama of the English Renaissance. The issue for the playwright becomes the depiction in theatrical terms of the process by which that violence between two orders of being occurs in human relations. What will be the personal, individuated results of the change in system? Will the violence be felt as such?

In Chapter Four, "Making it Personal," I argued that the interest in showing physical violence and relating it to attitudes to the human body was similar in the plays of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker, on the one hand, and the plays of the English Renaissance on the other. In Chapter Three I discussed the modern playwrights' depictions of political action, and their attempts to describe in

practical, theatrical terms the socialist Utopia that might be achieved. In Chapter Five I focussed on the highly dynamic, self-regarding and artistically responsive theatre of the English Renaissance and the aspects of that non-illusionist theatrical practice that are most clearly a part of the theatres of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker. But violence, or at least conflict, has always been the raw material of drama. What makes the link between the drama of the last three decades and the English Renaissance so persistent that it should have become a critics' cliché to remark on it? What is it about the later twentieth century which finds such fertile material in that drama, rather than the drama of Ancient Greece or of seventeenth-century Japan?

The twentieth century is undeniably a time of considerable change. Scientific discoveries, in realms ranging from genetics to astronomy and including the computer revolution, have helped to redefine for people in the developed world the way we think about ourselves. We live in an age of science. Like the English of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we live too in an age of pluralism. Much as Renaissance England had to learn to live for the first time with institutionalized religious difference within the kingdom after Henry VIII's excommunication and the establishment of the Church of England, so Western Capitalist democracies have come to terms with the existence of officially Communist nations.

This, of course, is all changing again, but the advent of further change does not negate the effects of the awareness of this huge ideological difference. As Christian Humanism changed the way the Church interceded in the relationship between individuals and their God in the Renaissance, so modern psychology and psychiatry have changed the way the later twentieth century thinks about human identity. Just as the spread of the printing press made literacy a hot commodity among the general populace, so progressive ideas about access to education have changed the outlook of members of different social classes, offering them access to jobs and prospects their parents and grandparents would never have had. Puritanism, I would argue, was Western European culture's earliest form of political correctness, insisting on both private and public commitment to the approved principles, and threatening some freedoms at the same time as it championed the right to respect and freedom of opportunity of some members of society previously discriminated against by the majority. Under the somewhat ironic term "political correctness," currently fashionable, I include such important and well-defined movements as the women's suffrage movements around the world, feminism, the civil rights movement in the United States, Christian Fundamentalism, Islamic Fundamentalism, and others less widely recognized, such as disparate projects to integrate the physically disabled into the "mainstream" life of the

able-bodied and the recent decision by the medical community to cease to define homosexuality as a disease.

All of this change inevitably produces conflict, and when it is put in such concrete and personalized terms as these, I think it becomes evident how the frictions of larger, systemic changes come to be expressed in the terms of interpersonal violence. The theatre of such a time will not be a theatre, like those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concerned with providing didactic models of social behaviour, but one, like the Renaissance theatre, which constantly examines itself and its audience to ask whether the theatre is achieving an adequate representation of the political realities and possibilities of the society that produces it.

Revenge Tragedy and City Comedy are dramatic forms that focus on political corruption and personal greed, and individual responses to such inimical conditions. City Comedy uses satire to criticize vice, and sometimes depicts the dilemmas facing members of a degenerate society who do not participate in its degeneracy. Revenge Tragedy similarly examines the plight of an individual at odds with his or her society--whether on the large political level or on the domestic level--but is more interested than is the City Comedy in active responses and their consequences. Revenge Tragedy stages conflict on the surface of the drama, most strikingly in the characters' use of physically violent

means of gaining revenge. However complex the issues are for a revenger such as Hamlet or The White Devil's Lodovico, they are finally and compellingly reduced to an act of personal violence. For all its reputed (and very real) Machiavellian duplicity, Renaissance drama in fact uses very straightforward, diagrammatic means of staging its fascination with the mechanisms of power.

The attraction of such drama for committed contemporary playwrights is obvious. Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker seek ways to discuss power and politics onstage during what is generally perceived to be an increasingly violent phase of human development. Satire, with its inherent quality of depicting and criticizing human weakness and vice, is a form which will have a readily apparent appeal for playwrights involved in the creation of political theatre. Similarly, in offering a dramatic analysis of the consequences of a choice of actions, Revenge Tragedy provides a means of staging the possible outcomes of the political and social behaviour which the modern plays discuss, foregrounding individual responsibility and the dilemma of acting violently in order to redress perceived injustices. Explicit commentary within the plays on the objects of satire and on individual choices is made artistically acceptable by the playwrights' rejection of strictly naturalistic approaches to staging, in favour of a self-conscious, deliberately artificial theatrical presentation.

The non-illusionist theatre can introduce explicit commentary, whether in Hamlet's soliloquies or in Cliff's lament for Jed in Brenton's Magnificence, without abandoning its own defining conventions. However fine the discussion of problems is in a play by Ibsen, for example, such commentary within the play must be achieved by indirect means. The urgency of what the four contemporary playwrights see as their society's problems demands a response through art that is not only committed but that encourages commitment in its audiences also. Renaissance drama, most strikingly in the forms of Revenge Tragedy and City Comedy, provides an effective theatrical model for staging conflict explicitly, without sacrificing an acceptance of the contradictions, dangers, and moral ambivalences that the real-life political situations involve.

It is one of the genuine pleasures of studying the arts that conclusions often lead, directly or indirectly, to other questions and lines of thought. The comparatively narrow focus of this dissertation has suggested a number of issues which, while not relevant to this study, are closely related to it. The issues which occupy the creative energies of Barnes, Bond, Brenton and Barker are general ones of social injustice, conflict in interpersonal relationships, and the choice of appropriate responses to such universal problems. The playwrights find (I have

argued) that the drama of the English Renaissance is a valuable background for their discussion of the issues, and for the physical staging of conflict. It is perhaps not surprising that English playwrights should look to the English theatre for precedents; but if the problems they concentrate on are so universal, so non-specific to England alone, then how do playwrights working in other languages and cultures come to grips with the dramatic discussion of these issues?

The questions this raises are completely beyond the scope of the present work to answer, but are fascinating to consider. Does Sam Shepard's dramatic analysis of violence owe anything to the theatre of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, or is it more obviously indebted to Classical tragedy, perhaps in the tradition of such other American dramatists of this century as Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams? Earlier twentieth-century French writers, notable among them Jean Cocteau and Jean Giraudoux, turned to Ancient Greek drama for their discussions of violence and politics; are these depictions of violence, motivated by political ambition, personal hatred, or revenge, qualitatively different from those inspired by plays of the Renaissance? How do contemporary Spanish writers handle the legacy of their Golden Age? I have argued that the Revenge motif is particularly attractive to modern political dramatists; it is a pervasive (and

enduring) concern in the theatres of Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca. Do they enjoy the same kind of prestige in Spanish-language cultures that Shakespeare and his contemporaries do in the English speaking world? Are their analyses and stagings of conflict taken over on the contemporary Spanish stage? Are they similarly open to criticism, radical reinterpretation, and adaptation by modern playwrights?

These are questions which I do not propose to answer here; some of them would, perhaps, be the material for another dissertation, while others might yield little or no interesting inquiry. They are, however, questions raised by my sense of the universality of the problems and issues discussed by the four contemporary playwrights in this study.

Finally, there is another question which relates more idiosyncratically to my thinking about these issues. In the current climate of official distaste for violence on television and in the movies, why does the theatre seem to be becoming more violent at the same time as it becomes more socially committed? If we as a society are in the throes of redefining our relationship to violence (in life and in art), what role does the theatre seem likely to play in that redefinition? My suspicion (and it is, I admit, a partial view) is that the serious and demanding depiction of violence in the theatre is a positive attempt to come to

grips with an increasingly urgent issue. Brenton's Greenland stands out among the plays I have discussed in offering the audience a glimpse of a society where violence is almost unknown. Such a vision is striking in its rarity; in the serious theatre, problems are more often discussed than resolved. The use by contemporary playwrights of Renaissance drama shows that there is a long tradition in the English theatre of the serious discussion, by intensely theatrical means, of the questions of violence and systemic injustice. If the English theatre is to continue its creative engagement with earlier dramatic traditions, without stagnating, it will be interesting to watch which way it jumps in the next two generations. Will it become an analogue to the dark, cynical comedy of the Restoration, eventually adopting the rigidly formal conventions of that theatre? Or will it find some new, less predictable direction--perhaps borrowed from the drama of another period, or another culture--in which to take its graphic representation of the way we live?

NOTES

Introduction

1. Gary Taylor, Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, From the Restoration to the Present (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989).
2. See her "Stage Violence as Thaumaturgic Technique," Themes in Drama 13: Violence in Drama, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 251.
3. See "Pravda: A Morality Play for the 1980s," Modern Drama 33 (1990): 42-56. Other critics who have noted the connection at some length include Ruby Cohn, in Modern Shakespeare Offshoots, Ronald Bryden, and Peter Ansorge.
4. I am indebted to Alan Andrews for his observation that the inter-War sense of a "wasteland" illuminates the revival of interest in the darker, bleaker plays of the Renaissance.
5. Ronald Hayman notes that both Pinter and Whiting "were deeply influenced by T.S. Eliot," but that Pinter took from Eliot the demotics of Sweeney Agonistes while "Whiting showed that a heightened prose dialogue was far more viable than verse" (The Collected Plays of John Whiting, Volume One (London: Heinemann, 1969) viii).
6. Arden's other plays exhibit a constantly changing interest in a variety of theatrical forms and devices. The Happy Haven adapts from Ancient Greek drama the use of masks and a chorus; Armstrong's Last Goodnight uses historical fact alongside a narrator who is both a participant in and a commentator upon the play's action; and The Royal Pardon, a play designed for audiences including children, uses a staging-in-the-round.
7. Barker is not the first dramatist in English to use such a strategy to "correct" a Jacobean play; George Bernard Shaw's Cymbeline Refinished (1945) provides an early model for Barker's revision of Women Beware Women. Both the original plays have masques in their final moments, which the revisers delete, thereby rejecting what they perceive as the plays' enslavement to the dictates of faddish contemporary tastes. It is important to note, however, that while Barker intends to correct the pessimism he finds in Middleton's ending, Shaw states his project as being to "rewrite the last act as Shakespear [sic] might have written it if he had been post-Ibsen and post-Shaw instead of post-Marlowe" (Foreword, 136). In offering his revised final act to twentieth-century directors, Shaw does not fundamentally

change the original consignment of the characters to their fates, but rejects what he finds "a tedious string of unsurprising dénouements sugared with insincere sentimentality" (135). Thus, Shaw's Imogen openly rebukes Posthumus for his attempting to have her murdered but concludes, without sentiment, that "I must go home and make the best of it / As other women must" (149). Even such a short quotation betrays Shaw's interest in the politics of marriage and the Woman Question, the same issue which occupies Barker in his adaptation of Women Beware Women.

8. This is due in part to censorship at the time of the play's first performance, when Brenton was obliged by the management of the Northcott Theatre in Exeter to remove pointed, topical references and names from the text of the play.

9. Some explicit, though provisional, definition of "political" drama may be helpful here. In thinking and writing about such drama I have been influenced by David Ian Rabey's definition of it as "that [drama] which views specific social abuses as symptomatic of a deeper illness, namely injustice and anomalies at the heart of a society's basic power structure" (British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century, 2), and which "communicates its sense of these problems' avoidability" to its audience (1). He argues, further, "that political drama is successful when the audience's morality is poised against contemporary society," and then can use the sense of a contradiction thus created to have the audience re-evaluate and modify its view of the status quo.

This is at its best a complex process, requiring the audience to think critically about the events on stage, even to such a degree and in such a way that they change their minds--or form opinions for the first time--about issues which are presented as political. My own understanding of this word is that the political is not restricted to the mechanisms of government in human societies, nor to "party politics," but involves the whole structural organization of human society; it comprehends the ways in which a society uses hierarchies, laws, and the enforcement of laws to regulate the distribution of material wealth, resources, liberties and rights among all its people. Whatever its trappings and refinements, politics is always about power. It is central to a view of political structure that there is a sense of the possibility of effecting change at the top of the structure, whether the mechanism of the change is democratic or revolutionary; thus the Catholic Church, with the Vatican and the Pope conceived of as its highest level, may be understood as a political structure, but the same Church with God conceived of as its highest level cannot. Peter Barnes's Red Noses shows characters awakening, in the

play's final scenes, to an understanding of this distinction; Father Flote and his Red Noses have offered their performances in the service of God, but openly rebel when they discover that they have in fact been serving the political agenda of the Pope instead.

Political drama may or may not engage with, or even promote, ideology--the more or less clearly defined assumptions and agenda of a particular activist position--as part of this process of making its audience confront situations on stage as political rather than (or as well as) social. In the cases of the four writers I am concerned with in this dissertation, there is a general commitment to a left-wing or Socialist ideology, one which sees the redistribution of wealth and the products of labour as essential to the achievement of greater justice and equality, but this ideology is presented and espoused only in a general way and never (as far as I am aware) simplistically, as the single and sufficient route to the Socialist Utopia. The significant differences of approach among these four writers are not unusual in the context of the continuing debate within contemporary socialism.

10. Plays: One, Introduction.

Chapter One

1. For some interesting reflections on the nature of theatrical space and its relationship to social and political functions, see Mary Karen Dahl, "State Terror and Dramatic Countermeasures," Terrorism and Modern Drama, eds. John Orr and Dragan Klaic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990), 109-122.

2. See, for example, Richard Southern's The Seven Ages of the Theatre (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), Steven Mullaney's The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988), Glynne Wickham's Early English Stages 1300 - 1600 (London: Routledge, 1959), and E.K. Chambers's The Elizabethan Stage (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923).

3. Southern 171-84.

4. I realise that many readers will find my use of the term "intimate" for the physically enormous Jacobean public theatre odd, and I acknowledge that it is used somewhat idiosyncratically. By "intimacy" I mean here not the sense of physical closeness between audience and actors (as the Barbican's Pit theatre is often described as "intimate," holding only a few hundred spectators and having them

grouped tightly around the small playing-area), but the sense of intensely personal experiences being shared, so that the two parties involved in an encounter leave it with a greater knowledge and understanding of each other; the sense of sexual intimacy is the closest parallel. In the case of the theatre, this intimacy may be accepted willingly, even sought, by the audience, allowing the performance of such a play as King Lear to move us emotionally as we share Lear's journey through suffering to an enhanced understanding of the human condition. The intimacy may also be forced on the audience, in the manner of a rape; without consenting to, or wishing, the adjustment of its opinions on a particular issue, the audience may be manoeuvred into a position where it has no option but to submit to a play's violently forcing it to confront that issue. This type of theatre does what it can--and in practical terms, it must be admitted that there are limits to the way an audience's mental or physical participation can be enforced--to prevent the audience from viewing the play with a detachment from its controversial issues. The audience is forced, in other words, to become involved--emotionally, intellectually--and to accept the demands of the performance's agenda. The manipulation of both the audience's empathy, and its critical distance from the attitudes expressed and situations depicted, will be part of the mechanism of this theatrical intimacy.

5. Of course, many sources remind us that theatre-going was often as much about being seen as it was about seeing the play; and, as Dennis Kennedy notes, it was not standard practice to darken the house during performances until Henry Irving's time, in the later nineteenth century (29).

6. Ronald Hayman, The Set-Up: An Anatomy of the English Theatre Today (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973) 64.

7. It is worth noting here that the Ancient Greek amphitheatres must have achieved marvels of acoustic architecture in the open air, and it is these theatres which are the basic model for the modern, fan-shaped auditorium.

8. Quoted in Hayman, The Set-Up, 297-98.

9. See the book already cited by Hayman, and his The First Thrust: The Chichester Festival Theatre (London: Davis and Poynter, 1975), especially chapters 1-5; Gredna A. Doty and Billy J. Harbin, eds., Inside the Royal Court Theatre, 1956 - 1981: Artists Talk (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 1990), especially Chapter VI, "Designers Talk: Objects in Open Space;" Dennis Kennedy's Looking at Shakespeare; Irving Wardle, The Theatres of George Devine (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) and Sally Beauman, The Royal Shakespeare Company: A

History of Ten Decades (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982).

10. Terry Hands has suggested, in an interview in Gambit 6.22 (1973) that the Royal Shakespeare Company should be joined by the "Republican Ben Jonson Theatre," as a challenge to Shakespeare's cultural supremacy (20).

11. The Set-Up, Chapter Five.

12. Looking at Shakespeare, 2-3.

13. See Dennis Kennedy's discussion of this production, cited above; and see, also, Paola Dionisotti's reflections on this experience of playing Katherine in Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, 1989).

14. Kennedy 2.

15. William Gaskill, a director who has a long and important association with the vitally influential Royal Court Theatre as well as with the plays of Edward Bond and Howard Barker, has written about the implications of exactly this difference in the audience's visual perspective on the play, remarking that "on [Tyrone Guthrie's] ... thrust stage movement was essential if all the audience were to see the actors' faces, at least some of the time. ... When I came to work on Brecht's plays I started to realize the exact political significance of each stage picture and the movement between one static picture and the next. ... Each moment is meaningful--in their work politically meaningful--and the movement from one picture to the next must indicate change. It's a theory that can never work on Guthrie's open stages where there is no fixed viewpoint shared by the whole audience" (A Sense of Direction: Life at the Royal Court, London: Faber, 1988, 18-19). Gaskill's book has only very recently come to my attention; in it he offers a lucid and fascinating account of his experience as a director and as a theatre administrator during three decades of rapid change and development in the English theatre.

16. For further ideas about Middleton's use of the upper stage in Women Beware Women, see Leslie Thomson, "'Enter Above': The Staging of Women Beware Women," Studies in English Literature 26 (1986): 331-343. Thomson's useful discussion of what seems to be an unusual use of the main stage unfortunately does not analyze the rape scene in any detail, nor does it consider the implications of the upper stage being used as a location out of physical contact with the main stage.

17. Quoted in Hayman, The Set-Up, 67.

18. Edward Bond, "Us, Our Drama and the National Theatre," Plays and Players October 1978, 9.
19. Quoted in Claude Schumacher, ed., Artaud on Theatre (London: Methuen Drama, 1989) 100.
20. For a fascinating introduction to, and account of, Artaud's life and works, and especially the interrelation of the two, see Martin Esslin, Artaud (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1976).
21. Schumacher, 101.
22. Letter to Jean Paulhan, 14 November 1932, quoted in Schumacher, 107.
23. Esslin, Artaud 70.
24. Schumacher 105.
25. Schumacher 103-4.
26. Esslin, Artaud 83.
27. Schumacher 109-10.
28. The quotation is from an interview with Brook and Marowitz by Simon Trussler, reprinted in Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook, compiled by David Williams (London: Methuen, 1989) 29.
29. Williams 61.
30. For descriptions and discussions of US and The Marat/Sade, see the Casebook compiled by Williams, 28 - 126.
31. This term is Rabey's, from British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century: Implicating the Audience (New York: St Martin's, 1986).
32. Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1986) 161.

Chapter Two

1. All of Barnes's Jacobean adaptations are as yet unpublished. I have had access to promptbooks of The Devil is an Ass (1976-77) at the Birmingham Central Reference Library; The Alchemist (1977) at the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon; and Antonio (1979) at the Theatre

Museum, London.

2. References to Renaissance texts are noted by Act and Scene (in Roman numerals) and line numbers (in Arabic). References to unpublished adaptations are to Act or Part and Scene numbers (in Arabic). References to published adaptations follow the format of Act or Part and Scene numbers in Arabic, plus page numbers where appropriate.
3. Kennedy, Looking at Shakespeare 40-41.
4. I am indebted to Alan Andrews for this observation.
5. The fact that most uncut Renaissance texts, when played in modern theatres, are of four hours' duration should not, of course, be taken to imply that the same texts lasted as long on the Renaissance stage.
6. Arguments for a Theatre (London: Calder, 1989) 24.
7. Arguments for a Theatre 25.
8. "'Creative Vandalism' Or, A Tragedy Transformed: Howard Barker's 'Collaboration' with Thomas Middleton on the 1986 Version of Women Beware Women," Text and Presentation, ed. Karelisa Hartigan (Lanham, MD: University Presses of America, 1988) 98.
9. I have not had access to any full script or promptbook for this production, nor for the production of Bond's version of The White Devil. My sources of information about these productions are the published reviews, other material I cite in my discussion, and the stock of materials, including photographs and programmes, held by the Theatre Museum, London.
10. Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of His Plays (London: Methuen, 1980) 218.
11. David L. Hirst, Edward Bond (New York: Grove Press, 1985) 22.
12. Bond: A Study of His Plays 218.
13. Bingo, Bond's play about the last months of Shakespeare's life, is discussed in detail in the following chapters, and especially in Chapter Five. The subtitle of this play is, tellingly, "Scenes of Money and Death."
14. "The Politics of History: Howard Brenton's Adaptations," Theater 18(1) (1986): 52.

15. "Reshaping Shakespeare, 1965-1975," The Durham University Journal 79 (1987): 207.

16. The debate over this gap--and indeed over the whole final scene of Measure for Measure--is too lengthy to do justice to here. Brenton's changes to the play's ending, however, render such discussion in relation to his response unnecessary.

Chapter Three

1. British and Irish Political Drama 134 and 4.

2. Mary Karen Dahl offers a discussion of this issue, and indeed of many other issues connected to violent political action, in her book Political Violence in Drama: Classical Models, Contemporary Variations (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1987), esp. 1-2, and Chapter 6, "The Executioner and Pollution." Her discussion of the issues is in terms of the relationship between contemporary drama and Classical drama, and is thus slightly different in emphasis from my own; in essentials, however, it is relevant in its illumination of the Revenger's dilemma.

3. British and Irish Political Drama 4.

4. Michael D. Bristol, Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England (London: Methuen, 1985) 125, 133.

5. British and Irish Political Drama 4.

6. This distinction is a useful one for identifying two quite distinct strains in Barker's work, but for the sake of total accuracy requires some qualification. His earliest performed plays--written for radio in the very early 1970s--in fact are closer to his most recent work for the stage in their use of non-realist, non-contemporary settings to suggest the unreliability of what we call "history" and to make points about the problematic relationship between people, money and power very much pointed at contemporary society but divorced from the specific circumstances of the audience's experience. I am indebted for information on these three early radio plays to David Ian Rabey's Howard Barker: Politics and Desire (New York: St Martin's, 1990).

7. On the staging of The Bite of the Night, see Chapter One, p 38.

8. I have not had access to Brenton's latest revision of the

play for performance in 1988. The text I discuss was revised in 1978.

9. See Ansorge 9-10.

10. John Orr, "Terrorism as Social Drama and Dramatic Form," Terrorism and Modern Drama, eds. John Orr and Dragan Klaic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990) 60-61.

Chapter Four

1. Richard Boon, "Politics and Terror in the Plays of Howard Brenton," Terrorism and Modern Drama, eds. John Orr and Dragan Klaic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990) 139.

2. For brief discussions of this concept of "hegemony," see Anthony B. Dawson, "Women Beware Women and the Economy of Rape," Studies in English Literature 27 (1987): 303-320, Jean R. Howard, "Women as Spectators, Spectacles, and Paying Customers," Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (London: Routledge, 1991) 68-74, and Gamini Salgado's Introduction to Four Jacobean City Comedies (London: Penguin, 1975).

3. This connection may explain why productions of the play--including the RSC's most recent production, staged first at Stratford in 1991 and transferred to London in 1992--often have Giovanni appear, not merely generally blood-splattered, but with blood around his mouth. I find nothing in the text to insist upon an act of cannibalism, but the Caligula story is an important source for some of the play's action, and the fact that the scene Giovanni interrupts is a feast strengthens the link.

4. Violence in the Arts 47. Fraser's book provides valuable insights into the general nature of the relationship in the arts between thought and depictions of violence and cruelty, and he offers a useful series of observations in this connection on Artaud.

5. The prosecution was unsuccessful, but clearly was a considerable nuisance to the individuals involved and acted as a threat of the renewal of censorship through legal means to the artistic community as a whole. Howard Brenton offers a sketchy account of the experience in his Author's Preface to Plays: Two, and a fuller account is to be found in Philip Roberts's article, "The Trials of The Romans in Britain," Howard Brenton: A Casebook, ed. Ann Wilson (New York: Garland, 1992) 59-70.

6. An interesting literary analogy is to be found in Fay Weldon's The Life and Loves of a She-Devil (1983), in which the eponymous protagonist finally revenges herself on her faithless husband, vainly beautiful women, and a repressive, sexist society by having herself cosmetically remade at enormous medical risk into the conventionally desirable Mary Fisher.

7. For an interesting, although brief, critical response by a male critic to this second rape, see Dawson.

8. See, however, the fascinating and apparently impossible Galactia, the female artist in Scenes from an Execution. Germaine Greer has written about the life of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 - ?1653), an Italian woman artist of the 17th century whose career is remarkably similar to Galactia's. It is interesting to note that Gentileschi executed at least two large-scale paintings of the story of Judith and Holofernes, was herself a victim of sexual assault, and had daughters of whom at least one was a painter. See Germaine Greer's chapter on Gentileschi in The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work (London: Pan Books, 1979).

9. See, for example, Bond's "Author's Preface" in Plays: Two, p 6.

10. Wendy J. Wheeler and Trevor R. Griffiths, "Staging 'The Other Scene': A Psychoanalytic Approach to Contemporary British Political Drama" in The Death of the Playwright? Modern British Drama and Literary Theory, ed. Adrian Page (New York: St Martin's, 1992) 186-207.

Chapter Five

1. On the character of Galactia, see note 8 to Chapter Four, above.

2. Barnes is picking up here some of what Bakhtin has brought to prominence in his concept of Carnival; Michael D. Bristol notes that Bakhtin's "presentation of the people as unfailingly generous, hopeful and continually oriented to a better life in the future is not, of course, an objective description of any actual state of affairs that ever existed in history. It functions in Bakhtin's various analyses as a teleology, inserting into every analysis of the past the idea of a purposeful drive towards an authentic socialization of both practical and spiritual life" (23). The relevance of this hopeful aspect of Carnival laughter to Barnes's use of comedy is obvious; so, too, is Barnes's

doubt over the honesty and efficacy of the use of laughter as a tool for the committed dramatist.

3. This stand-up routine is reminiscent of Gethin Price's bitter "turn" in Trevor Griffiths's Comedians (1975). Price rejects the idea that comedy is appropriately used to divert an audience's attention from its own, or other people's, problems, and delivers in his routine a savage attack on the pretensions and selfishness of the life-size dolls who represent upper-middle class opera patrons. Price's turn ends, not with his own death, but with a physical assault--drawing "blood" from the female doll--on the objects of his scorn.

4. Among the large and growing number of critical works on the element of metatheatres in Renaissance drama, I have found the following useful: Richard Hornby, Drama, Metadrama and Perception (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986); Jackson I. Cope, The Theater and the Dream (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973); James L. Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971); and Sidney Homan, When the Theater Turns to Itself (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1981).

5. Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 126.

6. British and Irish Political Drama 134-5.

7. Malkin says of the gang of young men in Saved who murder Pam's baby: "Paradoxically, the group-language, impersonal and vicious as it is, also serves as a common bond among its members. ... Aggression is easily sustained within the gang where personal identity merges into the larger social unit and, so it seems, the individual draws comfort from the expected style of flippant abuse" (128-9).

8. It is of course important to remember Marston's The Malcontent (1604), a play which shows the malcontent of the title finally victorious over the unscrupulous people around him. As with the two Antonio plays, Marston seems here to anticipate in his own work the development of modern sensibilities by those twentieth century writers whose work will draw on his own. Like the modern articulate malcontents, Jack Beaty, Bond's Cordelia, or Barker's Bela, Malevole is at best a morally ambivalent character, not an avenging angel.

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