A Desacralisation of Violence in Modern British

Playwriting

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Word count 81,007
List of Abbreviations

I See Satan Fall Like Lightning.................................. ISSFLL

Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World..............THSFW

Howard Barker, Ecstasy and Death: an Expository Study of his Drama, Theory and Production Work..............................................HBED

Howard Barker, Politics and Desire: an Expository Study of his Drama and Poetry...............................................................HBPD
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Abstract

My thesis journey was initially motivated by an interest in the individual’s search for God, the self and the other (neighbour, men/women and enemy) as represented in the play texts. This call for a personal relationship with the ‘other’ highlights the individual’s feelings of unease and strangeness at a time when, one might argue, the majority belittles the role of religion, in support of scientific discoveries and human rights. Here, the French philosopher René Girard - whose anthropological and scientific interest in violence, religion and human culture has shaped my research - argues that the progress of humankind would not have become a reality without what he terms sacrifice. Here, I should confirm that the main influence on the early steps of finding my research topic were Peter Shaffer, Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin rather than Rene Girard. This thesis explores several interconnected relationships, the most important of which is between humour and violence or forms of ‘sacrifice’ in the plays of six British playwrights – Peter Barnes and Peter Shaffer, Howard Barker and Sarah Kane as well as Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin. It is this strange relationship which leads me later on to uncover and explore the representations of the stranger, the victim/iser and the foreigner in their works. The return of the stranger – the dead, the ashes of victims of extreme violence, the ghosts, the prisoners and the children - is inseparable from the search for individuality in a world ruled by the gods of war, money and dark humour. My research findings are viewed in the light of two narratives: the first is to do with the upper world and the second is to do with the lower as defined by Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival and the culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages. The upper is serious, official, exclusive and authoritative whereas the second is festive, comic, mythical and popular. It is hard to describe the relationship between these narratives as simply oppositional (some say iconoclastic) because they are coexistent and rely on one another. At this point, the different professional and ideological positions of the playwrights are important aspects in arriving at an understanding of the ways they collapse the borders between humour and terror, the banquet and the battle, carnivals and trials, the parade and economic exploitation, clownery and politics. Though these playwrights are not preachers or reformers, they challenge our easy laughter and our role as we witness the risen from the dead, those in the flames or in the future signalling to us to halt our participation and face responsibility for the victims.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

I wrote this thesis during a time of war, pain and big challenges. It is hard indeed to draw a line between my experience as a war victim and my research. Sometimes I imagine what my research would have been like had there been no war in Syria. Four years ago when this research project was still a dream, I did not know that I share with victims of violence a history of dark humour, and social and political oppression.

Here I want to give special thanks to Professor Maggie B. Gale, who read the entire work chapter by chapter, helped me by supplying references and gave me a great deal of time, constructive criticism and warm encouragement. I would particularly like to thank Dr Jenny Hughes for her enthusiasm, advice, critical feedback and careful reading of every chapter. My thanks also go to Dr Rachel Clement for her kind assistance, and valuable and constructive suggestions.

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Finally, I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to my father without whom I would not have been able to finish this research. For the last three years of war, economic sanctions and the closure of the Syrian Embassy in London, my father put his life at risk for me and managed to transfer the tuition fees I need from Damascus to Manchester.
For Syria, Adnan and Mariam
Preface

My cultural position as a Syrian is central to the genesis of this thesis. Graduating from Damascus University I received funding for postgraduate study in Manchester. Here, my interest in textual analysis as well as cultural critical theory, rather than performance and the history of productions, stems from my background in literature. My MA dissertation (2010), explored the possibility of love and forgiveness in the face of laughing terror and the need to make peace with ourselves, neighbours and enemies in three plays by Peter Shaffer, and this created the context for my PhD research. The desire to find playwrights similar to Shaffer, who show an interest in the Bible, violence, poetry and imagination, shaped the initial steps of this PhD research. Frustrated by the difficulty of focusing again on Shaffer’s work, I expanded my research to explore a larger group of modern British playwrights – these included John Arden, Samuel Beckett, Edward Bond, Martin Crimp, David Greig, John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Mark Ravenhill as well as Peter Barnes, Howard Barker, Sarah Kane, Caryl Churchill, David Rudkin – some of whom are contemporary with Shaffer. Out of this group, I settled on exploring and comparing the work of what some would think of as an odd selection of six playwrights – whom I hope I have placed in productive pairings: Peter Shaffer and Peter Barnes, Sarah Kane and Howard Barker, Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin. This eventual arrangement of my analysis is the outcome of having identified an implicit dialogue across their works which I hope to unpack through these pairings. Despite the playwrights’ different ideological leanings, this dialogue may be seen in terms of language, their uses and understanding of carnival forms of humour within structures of social and political oppressions, and a shared interest in victims of violence. At this early stage of my research, I had to continue my journey despite the contagious effect of the
Arab ‘Spring’ in 2010, which eventually struck my country in 2011, leading to a war in and on Syria. In other words, I share with these playwrights a similar view about the escalation and production of terror. Violence is not far away from my background; it is here and now in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war on Iraq in 2003, and the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006. The post-World War II generation of playwrights I have ended up with, dare to see and interrogate the perpetuation and celebration of violence in different contexts and how they affect our everyday life. Just as the selected plays opened up my eyes to the terrifying familiarity with violence, so the playwrights hope to take the audience beyond their comfort zones on a journey of terror, death and ‘black’ humour.

In light of these challenges, my research topic is motivated in part by my interest in the way individuals and institutions respond to violence and deal with victims of violence. Here carnival humour as a form of celebration is used as a controversial tool of rebellion and control, inclusion and exclusion, liberation and oblivion. It is important to mention that there are two narrative threads in most of the selected plays: a narrative of celebration and one of death-making. The first seems to work by inclusion of the masses and the exclusion of fear; the other by an opposing strategy. The infusion of the two narratives at the expense of a victim is always possible, and hence my objective with the playwrights is to question and expose the making of death in forms of dance, banquets or parades. Together the plays I explore present a culture constantly evolving from a ‘place’ devoured by world wars, to one where there can be an embracing of alternatives such as celebratory protest (Barnes and Shaffer) or even a highlighting of the individual’s role rather than the community’s in affecting change (Barker). With this in mind and in order to explain the relationship between the narratives of celebration and death, my introduction views
the history of playwriting in terms of a rebirth, paying particular attention to the
element of the popular and carnival forms within certain aspects of modern British
theatre. This connection between the various ideas and manifestations of the popular
and the historical narrative of modern British theatre is shaped by a more general
interest in theories of carnival. The latter also play an important role in the
development of British drama in the second half of the twentieth century, and I
analyse this by making use of Bakhtin’s contribution to the arts and the humanities.
In the following introduction, my intention, in part, is to define the scope, meaning
and function of the popular in relation to post-war British playwriting culture. Here I
use a variety of approaches to the ‘popular’ and the carnival/esque to define the
playwrights’ different positions and finally move on to explain the idea of victim
selection. Thus, in writing this thesis I hope to fill in a gap in literary and drama
studies, and hopefully present a new approach and analysis.

The following chapters give a detailed analysis of the implicit dialogue between
the selected pairings - Peter Shaffer and Peter Barnes, Sarah Kane and Howard
Barker, Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin. In Chapter Two, the texts explored –
and *Laughter* (1978) as well as Shaffer’s *Lettice and Loveage* (1987), and *Shrivings*
(1970) - engage very well with the festive and the comic. Beneath this deceptive
element of celebration, both playwrights look for the victim in places stricken by
war, the plague, social and political injustices. This is followed by a chapter that
records the pain and the emotional status of individual victims of violence in
Barker’s *The Power of the Dog* (1981) and *The Europeans* (1987) and Sarah Kane’s
*Phaedra’s Love* (1996) and *Cleansed* (1998). Here, we shall see that every encounter
with the other – foreigners, poets, clowns, monarchs, victims – creates the possibility
of an encounter with laughter, passive participation and betrayal. In Chapter Four on Churchill’s *Top Girls* (1982), *The Skriker* (1994) and *Far Away* (2000) as well as Rudkin’s *Afore Night Come* (1962) and *The Triumph of Death* (1981), I also look at this clash between carnival forms of laughter (dance, parades, parodies and feasts) and victim selection. After this, in a short conclusion, I bring together the overarching argument of the thesis and explore some of its implications for both the understanding of British playwriting and ongoing research.

The timespan covered by this range of plays (1962 -2000) uncovers and represents an era in Britain where there was significant and sustained sectarian violence and terrorism in Northern Ireland. It was also a time of mass strikes and protests in the 1970s and 1980s, a decline in religion and a rise in secularism, all of which relate to the thematic concerns of the thesis. The focus on the relationship between violence, religion and the comic grotesque is not exclusive to this selection of plays but is of course central to many of the post 9/11 era plays such as Rudkin’s *Merlin Unchained* (2003) and Ravenhill’s *Shoot/ Get Treasure/ Repeat* (2008). In my conclusion I begin to shift my focus onto plays from this post 9/11 period. However, the themes, of violence and religion, for example, are focused far more on responses, reactions to and reflections on the aftermath of a particular event. I was clear from the outset that I wanted the focus of my analysis to be on the post-war period, pre 9/11 to reflect on the themes and theory of a more historically open frame. I am not rejecting post 9/11 works but for the sake of a detailed textual analysis, the scope of this PhD thesis focuses on six British playwrights who share an interest in the comic grotesque, the demonic and the supernatural as well as the festive and the violent. Future research could usefully compare these two periods, pre and post 9/11, in relation to the themes of this thesis. It is curious that there have
been no attempts to consider the works of my chosen playwrights collectively. However, there are a number of excellent studies on individual dramatists such as David Ian Rabey’s *David Rudkin: Sacred Disobedience* (1997) and Graham Saunders’ ‘*Love me or Kill me*: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes’ (2002). From the few studies on the work of Peter Shaffer and Peter Barnes, Brian Woolland’s *Dark Attractions: the Theatre of Peter Barnes* (2004) examines the use of humour and popular forms, and gives a critical and contextual analysis of Barnes’ work. There is also Madeleine McMurraugh-Kavanagh’s *Peter Shaffer: Theatre and Drama* (1998) on Shaffer’s famous themes: alienation, identity and the search/denial of God. What I am hoping here however, is to offer new interpretations of the work of these playwrights, not just as individuals but as a loosely affiliated collective or at least, as a number of playwrights whose works might be grouped in new ways that elicit new readings of them.
Chapter One: Carnival Humour and the Role of the Victim in the Rebirth of a ‘New Order’

The wave metaphor [...] has a sense of comforting inevitability about it, but this conceals the fact that each ‘wave’ has been not only superseded but, in important respects, defeated. (Lacey 6)

Popular culture appears as the reverse of “high” culture, its alter ego, where all pretentions to meanings, relevance, and aesthetic values are travestied by a parodic, mocking dialogue of vacancy, anti-aestheticism and plasticity. (Hoy 13)

Written histories of British playwriting since the early 1950s can be seen as dominated by two waves – the New Wave of 1956 and the new wave heralded in the 1990s. Between these two ‘pillars’ there are three major traits which arguably distinguish English drama: rage, popular forms and cruelty. Critics such as Stephen Lacey, Michael Patterson, John Bull and David Ian Rabey refer to Osborne’s Look Back in Anger as the flame of 1956 which set the theatre on fire, leading to the birth of ‘emancipated working-class’ writers (Lacey 1). However, it is difficult for critics to describe this moment of ‘change’ and flame of theatre ‘uprising’ with certainty as shown in the works of Dan Rebellato, Dominic Shellard and Stephen Lacey. Here, Look Back in Anger often takes the role of splitting history in half, the before and after of 1956, and “marking off a ‘then’ from a ‘now’ in cultural and political history” (Lacey 1). Osborne is “labelled as the vanguard of ‘Angry Young Men’”, a group of confrontational male artists targeting the decadence of prosperity, consumerism and stagnation in post-war Britain (Rabey, English Drama 30). This position is inseparable from the emergence of a popular (street) culture and defined
by the spirit of disturbance – that arguably helped the theatre engage with and be accessible to the working-class (Lacey 125-6). Rebellato explains that the earlier ‘division’ is not simply between a period of silence or repression and one of anger or revolution; the change is not simply from black to white despite the attempts to disqualify the writing of the 1940s and before (Rebellato, 1956 and All That 4).

Though some critics view this renaissance as a sudden explosion in the history of the theatre, the seeds of change can be seen in the social and cultural soil of the early 1950s. Lacey refers to this moment by emphasising the rise of popular forms: thus, ‘It was a period of full employment, of prosperity and social stability, of the birth of the age of television, of the “New Elizabethan Age” and the Coronation; it was also the decade of […] rock ‘n’ roll, of CND, and of the Angry Young Men’ (Lacey 1).

The reliance on popular forms in the 1950s and 1960s also recurs across a wide range of British playwrights. For instance, there is a shared interest in clowning and uncertain laughter (Beckett and Barnes), comedians (Osborne, Barnes and later Barker), cruelty and the comic (Barnes, Pinter, Barker, Kane and Barker), pantomime, verse and folklore (Beckett, Arden and Churchill).

In light of these connections between culture and theatre, Rebellato, Lacey, Bull and others identify a ‘revolution’, a renaissance, an ‘explosion’, effectively a new wave. The appearance of new wave dramatists bears witness to and is linked to a gradual change from a theatre controlled by censorship and financial concerns to the establishment of subsidised theatre. So, for example, the creation of the Arts Council in 1946 is an event of great importance ‘for the theatrical health of the nation as a whole, in that it established the principle of state subsidy of the arts, that was to underpin so much theatrical activity for the next fifty years’ (Shellard 6). However, even years after this ‘enlightenment’, debates over the ‘revolution’ still dominate. To
put this differently, British playwriting has witnessed continuous changes in the conceptions of writing and acting since the mid-1940s, one of which is in relation to the writer’s voice. In this regard, Rebellato and Shepherd differentiate between writing and acting before and after 1956. The emergence of the new wave of plays contributes to the reformation of theatre practice in which the writer is restored to the spotlight and the status of the actor is questioned (Rebellato, *1956 and All That* 82). Here the need to vitalise the theatre and move away from mechanical and superficial acting was urgent (Rebellato, *1956 and All That* 78). In Rebellato’s view, what facilitates ‘the process of professionalisation’ and creates new horizons for ‘the reorganization of the working relationships’ in which the writer functions is the creation of state subsidy (Rebellato, *1956 and All That* 82).

The ‘cruelty’ season in 1963 led by Charles Marowitz and Peter Brook set out to challenge the dominance of the written text with a vibrant, more physical or corporeally defined theatre (Shepherd 165). Simon Shepherd observes in the development of the theatre a move from the dominance of verbal texts to a lesser concern with words and from the readable to the ambiguous (Shepherd 119-20). In the works of Shaffer and Barnes, for instance, one can view the ambivalence between clarity and ambiguity, the verbal and the instinctive. However, a more clear-cut departure can be noted in Barker and Kane which takes us into the less-trodden realm of poetic unknowability. In the 1970s, experimenting with the idea of cruelty within a performance language takes the theatre away from social realism to the realm of the irrational and the subjective. Shepherd explains that it is ‘a laboratory exploration into acting techniques’ invoked by ‘the theatrical philosophy of Antonin Artaud’ and the desire to challenge the writer’s role (Shepherd 165). The engagement with Artaud’s ideas has helped identify a language of performance
embracing “the production of ‘cruelty’ as style” and emphasising “movement and improvisation” (Shepherd 165). In this new less writerly theatre, there is a link between the poetic and the cruel, which disturbs the distance between observation and participation, and defamiliarises both our experience of, and familiarity with, violence. The beauty of cruelty in this theatre lies in transgressing violence for violence’s sake in order to unsettle and challenge our responses (Shepherd 168). Aspects of this experimental theatre can be seen in Barker’s ‘Catastrophic Theatre’, Rudkin’s Afore Night Come (1960) and Red Sun (2003) as well as Kane’s Blasted (1995). Here, to return to the “wave metaphor”, the second moment of ‘explosion’ can be defined by the emergence of a similar theatre in the 1990s or what came to be known as the “1990s wave of British dramatists” (Rabey, English Drama 192). One might also suggest that they represent a sort of ‘counter’ wave, a departure from the social realist drama to a new expressionism and a reaction against a period of control and monetarism created by the Thatcher government. Like Osborne’s 1956 play, Kane’s Blasted came to be seen as the flame leading to the birth of new stage writing (Saunders, Love Me 4).

**Carnival, Counter-Culture and/or the Victim:**

Having raised the issue of the theatre ‘uprising’ in the context of the new waves, it is important to look at the meaning of the popular and its influence on the theatre generally and playwriting more specifically. In viewing the meaning of ‘popular’ and the influence of carnival or/and the carnivalesque on playwriting in the 1960s, I want to define and locate the playwrights’ writerly position in modern British theatre. Here I argue that the influence and application of Bakhtin’s idea of carnival and its folk culture of humour on British playwrights has changed significantly from the
carnivalesque in the 1960s to a post-Bakhtinian position. Whilst Bakhtin’s vague use of the word carnivalesque may be implicitly political, this thesis highlights the different positions or even the difficulty of clearly situating the playwrights’ positions in terms of the carnival/esque. However, most of the selected plays encourage a post-Bakhtinian reading by which the playwrights highlight the dark side of carnival humour. This might be seen as an invitation to question and look beyond carnival liberty (a time of joyful misrule and transformation of fear) and/or the carnivalesque (carnival performance as a political act of activism) at the situation of victims.

The different views and definitions that I shall review next highlight the indefinability of the popular, and reveal a common interest in the popular and the realistic (Lacey and Brecht). In *The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*, Lacey points to the emergence of the popular or “‘illegitimate’ and non-literary theatre forms” challenging the dominance of realism/naturalism at that time (Lacey 124). The term ‘popular’ has ‘both specific and general meanings, referring to both particular performance genres (music-hall, circus) and [...] to a broadest possible audience at a given theatrical and historical moment’ (Lacey 124). Here Lacey refers to four kinds of popular theatre/drama: folk drama in rural societies, commercial theatres in cities, mass media and agit-prop theatre. On this distinction between folk and popular, Morag Shiach explains:

> It has been argued [...] that the terms ‘folk’ and ‘popular’ refer to different forms of cultural hierarchy, and could usefully be kept separate. We would then use ‘popular’ to refer to cultural forms which depend on mass production and consumption, which are essentially urban and industrial, and the term
‘folk’ to refer to cultural forms which are predominantly rural and oral in their creation and transmission. (Shiach 102-3)

At the same time Shiach hints at their rivalry and the imaginary purity of the term ‘folk’ in relation to ‘popular’. Like Brecht, she doubts its claims about historical continuity: “what was popular yesterday is no longer today; for the people of yesterday were not the people as it is today” (Brecht 110). In 1933-1947 Brecht observes that activating popularity is inseparable from understanding reality and the very engagement with reality is inseparable from the people: “truthful representations of life are in fact only of use to the broad working masses, the people” (Brecht 107). Brecht differentiates between people and masses, the commercial theatre which exploits and entertains the masses and the working-class theatre which arguably activates the people. In reaction to the emergence of mass media and the development of film and television, the agit-prop theatre arguably emerged “‘to restore drama to the people as part of the class struggle’” (Lacey 125). This “subversive potential of the popular tradition“\(^1\) is seen as stemming from the working classes whose passion and hostility against order is suppressed by the official culture (Lacey 129). To what extent the popular tradition is effective in negotiating and investigating power and class struggle can be debated. Therefore, this thesis explores several views and contexts in which laughter, the heart of this tradition, is on the one hand silenced and viewed as an oppressive tool. Here and contrary to Brecht, writers like Barker encourage a personal relationship between the dramatist and the spectator sacrificing both people and masses for the rebirth of the

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\(^1\) Tracing back the emergence of popular forms in the late 1950s up to 1990s, Lacey observes a confrontation between two traditions literary/serious and popular, dominant naturalist and emergent, legitimate and illegitimate (125).
individual. The traditional approach, on the other hand, points to the subversive nature of laughter and insists on viewing it as a double-edged weapon (Shaffer and Barnes). Next I will elaborate on the ambivalent or maybe dialectic relationship between the popular, power and laughter and how it contributes to order and disorder in every culture and sub-culture.

Baz Kershaw’s consideration of the popular particularly the problematic nature of the carnival in connection with community and performance is of use here. In Kershaw’s *The Politics of Performance* (1992), the focus is on community theatre or radical theatre as a form of cultural intervention and the evolution of its performance between 1960 and 1990 (Kershaw 68). Aware of the different and opposing views on the carnival, Kershaw argues for a combination of carnival and celebratory protest to facilitate change in a community. The examples of performance discussed in his book represent a theatre culture committed to facilitating change or transformation in the audience and their community (Kershaw 5). Kershaw affirms that British alternative theatre meets this challenge and its practices can be considered “a form of *cultural intervention*” (Kershaw 6).

For the British alternative theatre movement was only one, relatively small, part of the counter-cultural and emancipatory movements of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. As such it played a key role in promoting and popularising oppositional ideologies. […] its chief tactic was allied to the emergence of the aesthetics of anti-nuclear, anti-war and civil rights demonstrations in Britain and the USA. (Kershaw 40)

The important role of counter-cultural movements in the evolution of carnival has perhaps placed performance outside the debate of “resistance to, and incorporation
into, the status quo” (Kershaw 8). Like the kinds of practice Kershaw outlines, one might also suggest that the plays of Shaffer and Barnes point to the dialectical nature of carnivals ‘between iconoclasm and conformity, aesthetic freedom and social constraint’ and warn against passive interaction with the oppressions of the dominant order (Kershaw 69). In this thesis, the emphasis on the relationship between control and play differs in each chapter depending on the playwrights’ treatment of laughter and the carnivalesque. Interestingly here, Kershaw argues that carnival becomes carnivalesque (it effects change) only when it cooperates with “wider cultural/philosophical movements” such as peace and anti-nuclear campaigns (Kershaw 75). In other words, the ideological meaning of carnival (the political carnivalesque) lies in the connections between carnival and community to effect change (Kershaw 74). This ambivalence between political change and play, seriousness and the comic, carnivalesque and carnival, will be the focus of discussion of several plays by Shaffer and Barnes, such as Shrivings, Lettice and Loveage, and Red Noses. Though neither Barnes nor Shaffer directly refers to the work of Bakhtin, they have a mutual interest in humour inseparable from popular forms. However, Barker, Kane and Rudkin, who also make use of parody, humour and feasts, consider catastrophe as the labour pains of individuality or as the individual’s quest for a better understanding of their reality. The difference here from Kershaw’s carnivalesque of cultural intervention and social engagement is the emphasis on the personal experience of pain in the unsettling of collective responses.

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2 Here, it is important to mention that the influence of Bakhtin on contemporary readings of British stage writings can be seen in the readings of Lacey and Kershaw in connection to the writings of John McGrath, David Edgar and John Arden.
After the ‘Uprising’: Daring to be Different

Having looked at the indefinability of the ‘popular’ as well as the debates over theatre ‘uprising’, and since the popular is inseparable from reality, it is important to take into account the reality which the playwrights try to engage with and understand in the written texts. Here their survival as professional playwrights is worth looking at, in terms of the patterns of production of their work, the challenges they have faced and the justifications they have had to make. It is important to note that the selected playwrights are from three or four different generations of writers: Barnes and Shaffer, Barker and Rudkin, Churchill, and finally Kane. We shall see in this thesis that some of them highlight the role of the carnival/esque to effect change (Shaffer and Barnes) whereas others build a personal relationship with the audience member and thus they emphasise individuality in opposition to crowds, carnivals and cultures of consumerism and celebrations (Barker, Rudkin and Kane). Churchill also reveals this culture and its feasts/markets, laughter and victims but she clearly refers to solidarity among women in opposition to individuality. The playwrights’ career journeys take different paths and embrace the unfamiliar in terms of stage techniques, language and themes. Shaffer, well-received by both subsidised and commercial theatres, gained notable commercial success with his two plays Equus (1973) and Amadeus (1979). Barnes, after the initial success of The Ruling Class, adapted to film in 1972, however, did not become as popular as Shaffer, struggled to find theatres for his plays, although for a while he was courted by the RSC, and survived by doing TV, radio and film work. Both Barker and Rudkin reject carnivals for the ways in which it makes violence familiar and acceptable. Having sacrificed the masses and public opinion for the radical, Barker and Rudkin celebrate their
singularity as poet-dramatists and urge the individual to embrace a similar rebirth outside the confines of the crowd. Both have survived as playwrights by different means as we shall see later. Another ‘survivor’ is Kane whose work has suffered a great deal at the hands of critics especially in Britain, but was well received in Germany, although of course she herself died at a tragically young age. Last but not least is Churchill whose career journey is different in that her emergence as a woman playwright might be seen as somehow telling the story of a personal triumph over social and cultural fetters.

Peter Shaffer is known for his reconciliation of the popular and commercial as well as for having emphasised theatricality, subjectivity and imagination over political analysis (Shellard 164). The theatre for Shaffer is driven by an interest in visual as well as verbal effects but is mainly verbal (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 58). While some plays like *Shrivings* and *Five Finger Exercise* (1958) are particularly reliant on text, *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Equus*, and *Amadeus* utilise the visual and the verbal. It is important to mention that Shaffer started in the commercial theatre and revealed his disappointment with the National Theatre:

I’m very grateful to the National for giving me John Dexter and such marvellous rehearsal conditions; we had twelve weeks’ rehearsal for *Royal Hunt*. […]. But I’m also disappointed by the cavalier way they treat plays, dropping success much too quickly. Basically, I prefer subsidized to commercial theatre. […]. I’d be perfectly willing to devote myself to writing for the National, if I could have a regular salary, keeping pace with cost of living, regular holidays and a pension. Then I would abandon commercial motives forever. (Kerensky 57)
Here the emphasis on Shaffer’s interest in the popular and commercial should be inseparable from his understanding of ‘popularity’. Aware of the hostility with which Shaffer’s work is met, particularly from English critics, MacMurraugh-Kavanagh differentiates between possible meanings of ‘popularity’, also noting his international popularity:

One reason why Shaffer’s plays may have received a far less antipathetic critical reaction in the United States is surely that America is not known for its suspicious attitude towards success. In the States, ‘popularity’ is an indication that the playwright has done his work well; in England, ‘popularity’ is still taken as an indication that the playwright has, literally, ‘sold out’. For Shaffer himself, however, popular success simply means that ‘the problems one has tried to solve have in some ways been solved’ and ‘validation’ has resulted. (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 4)

Though his drama may not be considered radical now, some plays (such as *The Gift of the Gorgon* (1992), *Lettice and Lovage*, and *Shrivings*) clearly criticise violence and refer to counter-cultural emancipatory movements. MacMurraugh-Kavanagh even argues that Shaffer’s drama is neither political nor revolutionary and suggests that to classify him in political terms results in a reductive analysis (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 11-2). Despite being labelled as a “‘Tory Playwright, an Establishment Dramatist, a Normal Worker’”, Shaffer uses popular forms to articulate contemporary concerns into a non-conformist view of history (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 7). Some of his plays speak of a sub-culture immersed in non-violent resistance as a counter-cultural action to the ugliness of war, revenge and hate.
In terms of popularity and radicality, Barnes’ position is difficult to describe. He is ‘Peter the heretic, the visionary outsider – constantly being discovered by the Establishment and then cast out’ (Rickman 299-300). Whereas Shaffer’s work ‘has been consistently performed for over thirty years in subsidized and commercial theatres’ (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 1), Barnes struggled to find theatres for his plays: Red Noses, for instance, was staged in 1985 (by the RSC) seven years after it was written (Wolland, *Dark Attractions* xiv). Rabey also comments that ‘Barnes has been unfortunately uninfluential on mainstream British drama’ (Rabey, *English Drama* 100) and in Woolland’s view, Barnes ‘never became a fashionable playwright’ (Woolland, *A Whole New* 23). Views vary in analysing the issues behind this theatrical ‘isolation’: actor and director Alan Rickman explains that this is ‘partly because his collaborators and critics could only rarely match his soaring […] imagination’ (Rickman 299-300). The productions of his plays are very demanding because of his desire to soar above the familiar, his use of rich and dense language as well as his reliance on visual effects. Another reason may be because Barnes’ ‘nihilism coupled with farcical exaggeration […] expressed a radical and highly politicized attack on the Establishment’ (Innes 297). Innes views Barnes’ use of humour as a political weapon; however, it is a double-edged weapon, its power being dependent on how and why it is used. We might thus position his work on the edge of humour/terror, control/rebellion and it is this positioning that may have contributed to his seemingly theatrical isolation. On the one hand, ‘Barnes perceives of himself as a populist. […] he is immersed in popular film, music hall, vaudeville’ (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 49). His use of laughter, jokes, games and clowns ridicules power systems, challenges the authority of religious and political institutions and questions the truth. On the other hand, Barnes is also aware that
these very forms and tools can help control the masses by encouraging a temporary release of fear and repression and by providing a rule of misrule where hierarchies momentarily cease. In light of these borrowings from popular culture, Barnes’ desire to activate audiences show affinity with a wide circle of playwrights, practitioners and film-makers like Frank Wedekind and Bertolt Brecht (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* xv-xvi). The use of popular forms also reflects on his radicality in the way his plays create a moment by which he negotiates the rigid structures of power. Barnes’ drama inserts contemporary concerns into a view of history that is anarchic especially in *The Ruling Class* and *Red Noses*. This anarchy – a kind of rule of misrule - informed by aspects of 1960s western counter-cultures, is realised in Barnes’ cruel comedy where popular forms take the audience into a world of violence, death and oppositional humour.

Like Barnes, Rudkin is known for his distinctive style ‘combining macabre humour, Gothic shock effects and fierce parody’ (Innes 298). Having identified his drama with Gothic art, “the realm of deliberate distortion”, the difficulty emerges in the psychological depths of Rudkin’s work and sometimes in his inaccessible language (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 12). Rudkin also engages with the popular and the commercial incorporating horror, science fiction, fantasy and myth to articulate contemporary concerns into a non-conformist view of history as in the case with his television play *Penda’s Fen* (1974). Though his journey of public performance involved working for the radio, the cinema, (music) theatre and television, Rudkin thinks of himself mainly as a dramatist (*Interview*). Referring to his work experience with Rudkin, actor Ian Hogg gives a testimony relating to Rudkin’s ‘suffering’ in terms of estimation and blames the rationalists in the RSC who refuse to explore or maybe could not fathom the complexities of a world occupied with distortions,
the irrational and ‘black’ humour (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 184). This difficulty, as we shall see later, stems from Rudkin’s distortions of speech, time, history and subjectivity. In terms of the longevity of his currency as a produc-able playwright, Rudkin has written many stage plays, the most recent of which is *Merlin Unchained* (2009). Like Barnes, Rudkin also struggled to find theatres for his plays; for instance, *The Triumph of Death* written in 1976 was staged by Birmingham Repertory Theatre 1981 and *The Sons of Light* was staged in 1975 ten years after it was written. In other words, Rudkin could not live from writing for the theatre but had to do several radio and TV plays, translations and screenplays. Like Barker, one might argue that Rudkin has been professionally side-lined but he somehow manages to survive by writing across a range of forms rather than focusing on one, playwriting.

Both Rudkin and Barker struggled to consistently have their work commissioned and produced in a culture dominated by entertainment, celebrations and comedy. Here Rudkin affirms that “the true usefulness of the playwright to humankind lies precisely in being ‘only a bard’ and ‘a wandering magician’ rather than a politician or educator or social reformer” (Wilcher, *Only a Bard* 247). This poet-dramatist identity is very similar to that of Barker, who was regarded as “an artistic sinner” for his refusal “to enlighten, amuse, and stimulate good thoughts of a collective nature (family, nation, party, community)” (Barker, *Arguments* 53). The fact that Rudkin and Barker use the theatre as a place for their untidy poetic thinking is seen as a ‘shameful’ label which influences their career histories. Barker knew he ‘was never to become a Royal Court writer’ for the theatre which was, then mainly naturalistic, did not encourage his theatre of cruelty and anti-parable, of catastrophe and obscurity (Barker, *Arguments* 32). Describing the weary journey of his texts, Barker eventually established The Wrestling School for the production of his own plays.
Here we have to remember that Rudkin has made a living from writing film scripts and translation whereas Barker had his own company to write his plays.

*Victory, The Castle, Crimes in Hot Countries, The Power of the Dog, The Love of a Good Man, Claw,* all waited years to find theatres. My major play on *Helen of Troy, The Bite of the Night,* has been abandoned by the Royal Court Theatre, who commissioned it, and has found no other home. My play *The Europeans,* commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, has been returned after a silence of nine months. (‘Barker, *Arguments* 34)

Barker’s theatre is a radical and serious theatre which refuses to take “laughter as a weapon of the oppressed”; instead, his use of laughter, a laughter that does not laugh as we shall see in *The Europeans,* encourages disunity and disbelief (Barker, *Arguments* 70). Whereas Barnes uses comedy as a declaration of class war, Barker argues that ‘it is not possible to destroy your enemies by comedy’ (Barker, *Arguments* 33). Later in this thesis, I will look in detail at the role laughter plays in the drama of Barnes and Barker including the similarities and differences in their approaches. In short, Barker knows well that his ‘sin’ lies in embracing tragedy and pain in a populist culture that legalises and subsidises ‘participation’, comedy and happiness (Barker, *Arguments* 215). Both Rudkin and Barker embrace uncertainty in the realm of the tragic, refusing to compromise their poet-dramatist identity for the well-known roles of teachers, politicians or preachers.

Barker’s antipathy to carnival and populist culture situates the critic in a difficult position before the either/or of the political carnivalesque and carnival as passive
participation and tool of oppression. Unlike Brecht who differentiates between the masses and the people, Barker sacrifices both for the individual:

Instead of taking theatre into the street, as if it could automatically speak to all people, it should assert its privileged nature, its secret character, claiming privacy for the very reason that privacy in a populist culture is anathema and the subject of perpetual violation. (Barker, *Arguments* 208)

His rejection of carnival or street theatre does not necessarily mean that Barker’s drama abandons popular forms such as his use of the grotesque-comic, poetry, song or dance. Barker believes that ‘street theatre is about teaching, black box theatre is about imagination’ (Barker, *Arguments* 74). In confirming this view, Peter Barnes says: ‘comedy must carry a message otherwise it is meaningless’ (Rabey, *Peter Barnes* 255). In other words, no matter how radical Barnes may seem to be, his comedy has to give a message because he trusts the liberating power of the carnivalesque in creating a counter-cultural critique. Barker, however, abandons this hopeful link between laughter and change, carnival and teaching for the agony of tragedy and obscurity. Though both playwrights propose a radical theatre, what they mean by this and how they apply it is different. Barker’s refusal of both comedy and carnival is his attempt to disarm the populist State of its two weapons. Whereas Barnes points to the dialectic nature of carnival, Barker can only pin down the fear that surrounds the participants: ‘in all collective culture your neighbour controls you by his gaze. In darkness, he is eliminated and you are alone with the actor. This is why the didactic play occurs in the street’ (Barker, *Arguments* 74). Hence Barker highlights and prefers ‘darkness’ to enlightenment and control, individual liberty to festive/passive participation.
In terms of survival as a playwright, Churchill affirms her socialist views in her relationship with the theatre by avoiding commercial motives in support of the subsidised sector (Aston and Diamond 11). Churchill, the first woman resident at the Court, launched her early writings ‘for student and amateur productions’ as well as for radio such as The Ants (1962) and Not, Not, Not, Not Enough Oxygen (1971) (Aston, Caryl Churchill 3). During the feminist and socialist phase of her writing, she worked collaboratively with many theatre groups such as the Joint Stock Theatre Company (Reinelt 20). Among her main concerns were identity politics, female health and isolation, women’s battle with political, sexual and social control as epitomised in Cloud Nine (1979) and Top Girls. In opposition to Barker’s faith in individuality and tragedy, Churchill hopes for some sort of communication and solidarity among women in a world dominated by patriarchal and capitalist values. Her more recent work engages with ecological issues and examines the effects of globalisation and capitalism on nature and on our relationship with the world particularly in The Skriker and Far Away. The recurrent motifs of mythology, dreams and the irrational in her plays do not hinder Churchill from concerning herself with public and political concerns. On the contrary, the exploration of the private in Churchill’s world is inseparable from the public and the personal from the political.

Unlike Churchill, Kane does not see herself as a woman writer. Her concern with identity politics and gender issues is not exclusive and hence she refuses to be judged on the basis of her “‘age, gender, class, sexuality, or race’” (Saunders, Love Me 30). Her writing is seen to have introduced and launched a new uprising similar to Osborne’s in 1956, a kind of writing new to the British stage (Saunders, Love Me 4).
This new generation of writers, which might include Mark Ravenhill and Joe Penhall, came to be known as ‘the New Brutalists’ after their shared interest in violence and sexuality. Kane’s career from 1995 to 1999 is the shortest journey among the selected playwrights: ‘Apart from writing Skin, a short ten minute film for television, Kane wrote exclusively for theatre’ (Saunders, Love Me 13). Beyond labels and movements, Saunders also indicates an affinity between Kane’s work and the ‘New Jacobans’ – Bond, Barnes and Barker - famous for their exploration of violence, the grotesque and black humour (Saunders, Love Me 19). Kane was well-received in Germany and was considered the most radical among British playwrights of the 1990s (Saunders, Love Me 134). Like Barker, she is innovative and influential in having embraced experiment in both form and content and thus sacrificed the journalistic and the accessible for the poetic and the ambiguous. Despite Kane’s international acclaim, ‘it took several years for revivals of her plays to appear on British stages’ (Sierz, Looks Like 45). Her plays were criticised for their explicit representations of sex and violence; however, Kane’s use of cruelty, which I will explore later in this thesis, is a means to shock the audience and re-awaken a new perception of reality, a reality mutilated by everyday violence.

Having reviewed the playwrights’ different positions and journeys in relation to popularity, populist culture and commercial motives, it is important to draw attention to the current critique on Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival before I introduce its history and work mechanism. Two main camps can be identified with regard to the controversial nature of the carnival: one insists on revealing Bakhtin’s silence in terms of reacting to the pogroms made by Stalin and the Nazis beneath the seeming liberty of carnival humour. This group of critics such as Ralf Remshardt and Sergei
Averintsev view the carnival as licenced misrule incapable of affecting change. For the other group including Michael Gardiner, Baz Kershaw, Mikita Hoy, Sue Vice and Hilary B.P. Bagshaw among others, carnival becomes interventional, critical and capable of mobilising the masses when ‘linked to anti-hegemonic or transformative politics’ (Gardiner 21). Whereas some of these critics view Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival as transformational and anti-sacrificial such as Bagshaw and Vice, Remshardt and Averintsev, as we shall see, highlight the dark and violent side of carnival humour. Unlike Bakhtin, Kershaw, as mentioned earlier, differentiates between the carnival (conservative) and the carnivalesque (critical) (Kershaw 75). In connection to this controversial space, Gardiner is also aware of the manipulation of carnival images ‘by mass culture in order to realize the exchange-value of cultural commodities and facilitate political domination’ (Gardiner 5). The next chapters of my thesis uncover these narratives of death and celebration, commodity and romance in Barker’s criticism of happiness, entertainment and populist culture (Europeans), beneath Churchill’s glamorous market of hell and its banquets (The Skriker, Top Girls), in the carnival march of prisoners (Far Away), or even in Rudkin’s grotesque parody of progress (The Triumph of Death). Regardless of what approach they use, most of these critics see the ambivalent nature of the carnival and place the blame onto the people in power. In this light, it should be no surprise that the focus of this thesis on carnival laughter gradually changes as the playwrights’ interest shifts from laughter to violence revealing beneath its festive gown, a play with terror. Later we shall see that this change may be seen in the very history of carnival from community laughter and the extravagant popular pageants of the Middle Ages to the complete absence of public display by terror, alienation and individuality in the Romantic period (Bakhtin 33). This interchange between laughter and violence is
noticeable in the work of the selected playwrights but varies depending on the contexts they explore, and their understanding, uses and treatment of laughter. The latter can be grotesque and funny, regenerating and degrading, receptive and cathartic or even alienating and threatening. Hence, these varied interests and beliefs in forms of carnival-grotesque laughter also shape the playwrights’ positionings on how to affect change. As we shall see next, in exploring the grotesque nature of carnival laughter and its cultural manifestations in art, literature and speech, some playwrights refer back and forth to the Middle Ages as a moment of terror to question our laughter now.

The grotesque provides them with a view into the strangeness of a world of conflicts that shapes participation and eventually leaves the participants out of balance and without hope of ‘salvation’. On a micro-level, the playwrights make use of the affinity between theatre and the grotesque in order to comment on the bigger picture of a world torn apart by carnival violence. Here, I am using this term of celebratory violence in light of specific contexts wherein the playwrights invite the spectator to witness the collapse of difference and distance between violence and ‘carnival’. The grotesque, according to Philip Thomson, is a view of the estranged and it is this strangeness which makes the world terrifying or comic causing laughter or fear (Thomson 18). Remshardt, a professor of theatre and the writer of *The Grotesque in Performance* (2004), usefully explains this in terms of physical incongruence, ‘The grotesque deformed body also challenges another fixed system, that of physical harmony and proportion’ (Remshardt 33). In light of these views, the grotesque ‘naturally feeds on structures of opposition, on questions of identity and difference’, on the clash of the beautiful and the ugly, familiar and strange, or the
human and the inhuman (Remshardt 60). The theatre provides the selected playwrights the medium which shares with the grotesque its very dynamic and problematic nature. Remshardt suggests that the theatre is grotesque (framed by the notion of the monstrous) for it shows and warns by inviting the in/human, the object/subject, the actor/spectator to view the collapse of boundaries and unmask misrepresentations (Remshardt 65). The theatre does not only share with the grotesque its nature, but it is also carnivalesque the fact that helps the playwrights question and challenge collective responses. We shall see in the next chapter several examples of this collapse between carnival shows and trials, spectatorship and participation, and the festive and the violent. Based on this double discourse, the theatre invites the spectator to witness the revelation of this continuous clash that may or may not bring change. Similarly, carnival performance veils and unveils the monstrous, inviting and tempting, showing and warning, transforming and deforming to participate in its dance. In the Germanic etymology of the word carnival, Bakhtin notes the return of the pagan gods eliminated by the medieval church and views the carnival as a festive time during which the collective subconscious of the early Christians is permitted to celebrate their pagan past (Bakhtin 391). Bakhtin does not deem this return of the pagan cult as a return of the monstrous but as a moment of celebration of the community’s second nature and its primitive history of myth and idolatry. Later we shall see how this narrative of myth and carnivals in some contexts disguises and perpetuates violence, condemns victims and turns them into monsters.

To further illustrate this relationship between carnival and the grotesque, I will first introduce the carnival by mapping aspects of Bakhtin’s theory onto the post-
Bakhtinian critique of the same theory by Remshardt. Later, this will involve looking at the history of the grotesque to locate better my argument in light of the two previous readings. In *Rabelais and His Work* (translated into English in 1968) Bakhtin examines the world of the French novelist Rabelais, a world of folk culture known for its forms of humour such as spectacles, banquets, carnival hells and parodies which also dominate the selected plays (Bakhtin 5). The folk culture provides the Russian philosopher and literary scholar Bakhtin (1895-1975) with an imaginary outlet, a temporary triumph of laughter over fear amidst Stalinist oppression: ‘the prohibition of laughter and the comical in the epoch prior to the Renaissance parallels the rejection of “subcultures”’ in the years prior to the Second World Wa’ (Pomorska ix). Hence, Bakhtin writes about the importance of laughter at a time when Russian writers were prohibited from ‘certain kinds of laughter, irony, and satire […] after the revolution’ (Pomorska xi). In the plays one can also note the co-presentation of two narratives which each represents the ‘upper world’ and the ‘lower’, the official and unofficial cultures. The first, the upper, can be identified as religious, official and serious whereas the second has its own idols, feasts, unofficial spectacles, banquets, parodies and hell. These forms reveal two ways of living in the context of the Middle Ages: official preserves rank and order, celebrates seriousness and rejects change; unofficial represents the carnival of the marketplace and ‘the people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter’ (Bakhtin 8-9). In the Renaissance, Bakhtin saw a similar age to his own, emerging from death to rebirth and from the Middle Ages to the 1917 revolution (Holquist xv). Here, carnival may be seen as the space of the people where religious and political prohibitions are temporarily frozen for the release of fear and repressed desires. Ruth Coates in *Christianity in Bakhtin*, explains that the target of carnival is not religious or political
institutions; rather, ‘it is the captivity of the human spirit as such, its enslavement to fear’ (Coates 127). At the same time, Coates notes that the fear observed is generated by power structures and for this reason Bakhtin’s work can be read ‘as a veiled critique of his own political culture’ (Coates 127). Bakhtin points to the marketplace as the hive of activity where carnival challenges inequality, celebrates change and renewal, and activates participation. However, this may be the outcome of a conflictual relationship between official and unofficial celebrations. The latter, according to Bakhtin, were originally church-based and ‘bore a fully legitimate character. Later they became only semilegal, and at the end of the Middle Ages were completely banned from the churches but continued to exist in the streets and in taverns, where they were absorbed into carnival merriment and amusements’ (Bakhtin 74). This challenge to the official order is a transfer to the material bodily level characterised by abundance and grotesque degradation, dance and slaughter, sex and dismemberment, banqueting and excrement (Bakhtin 223-4). It also involves the ridiculing of all that is sacred in the official culture to help create a counter-cultural space of ‘freedom’. This can be seen in what Bakhtin views as (sacred) parody by which people participate in the lowering of all that is high and spiritual to the material level.

On the development of the carnival in connection with the grotesque, Bakhtin summarises the history of the grotesque imagery by dividing it into three stages: ‘archaic, classic and late’ (Bakhtin 31). Archaic, referring to mythology, is known

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3 Coates describes Bakhtin as “one of the last survivors among the intelligentsia of the early decades of the twentieth century” (2). This is a time defined by oppression, dictatorship and persecution of personal freedoms. It is not quite clear on what charge – political or religious - Bakhtin was sentenced to five year imprisonment which with the help of some friends was changed to “a period of internal exile in Kustanai, Kazakhstan” (Coates 7).
for ‘playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms’ and continues to affect the festivals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with its view of the unfinished nature of body and world (Bakhtin 30-2). Here, the life of the grotesque body depends on both the body of the earth and that of the people, characterised by themes of death, fertility and rebirth. The grotesque is seen as part of a cycle of birth and rebirth in which animals feed on plants, humans on animals and earth on humans/plants; at the ‘end of this cycle, the human becomes the corpse/seed of the earth’ (Bakhtin 25). In the collections of ancient Greek and Roman vases, Bakhtin finds in the laughing figurines of old pregnant hags a good example on the archaic stage of grotesque tendencies (Bakhtin 25-6). The two bodies combined in one, which are defined as grotesque and comic, pregnant and old, deformed dying and generating life, are also used by the Renaissance painters Bosch and Breughel as well as in the plays of Barker, Churchill and Rudkin. This idea of contradictory body images is a key element in the festivals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance where the grotesque degradation of the higher into the lower, the hurling of spiritual matters into the ‘womb’ of the earth reconnects community and universe (Bakhtin 19). The pre-Christian and ornamental grotesque, with its interest in folkloric figures, revenge, feasts and victim selection can also be noticed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama of Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.

The other stage of development of the life of the grotesque is the classic period starting from the seventeenth century through to the early eighteenth. Here Bakhtin refers to a discernible transformation from public carnival display and the festive life of the marketplace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the home as part of family life; this eventually becomes a holiday in the eighteenth century (Bakhtin 33). It is a transformation from community celebrations (the feast of Shrove Tuesday)
into a ‘celebration’ of the personal and the separation of the grotesque-comic.\(^4\) Contrary to carnival laughter and its fearless ‘triumph’ over death, this move is characterised by dark humour, alienation and terror. Despite this narrowing of the carnival principle, Romantic grotesque relies on the tradition of the Renaissance in rejecting the rationalism and authoritarianism of the classic period (Bakhtin 36-7). However, unlike the Medieval and Renaissance grotesque which aims to defeat fear through community laughter, the Romantic grotesque or the “subjective grotesque” is manifest as “an individual carnival”. This is characterised by elements of fear and alienation, darkness and distortion that prevailed mainly in the gothic genre (Bakhtin 37). This transition can be seen in the different treatment of the devil from the spokesperson of unofficial truth to the representative of terror and negative laughter in the Romantic period (Bakhtin 40-1). The view of the grotesque as a negative force fails to acknowledge laughter as positive and regenerative, focusing instead on a laughter that does not laugh as we shall see with Barker, Kane, Rudkin and Churchill. This ‘divorce’ of the grotesque from the comic facilitates the interrogation of one’s laughter, position and participation in places of conflict, terror and oppression. In the light of this short history of the grotesque, the work of these playwrights together with other theatre writers and theorists such as Edward Bond, Jean Genet and Antonin Artaud may in part be identified with the modern grotesque play. “It is a drama that can only be written by an author who has placed himself decisively outside the circle of social discourse: a poète maudit” (Remshardt 182). Thus, it abandons the limits of safety and security for risk, entertainment for

\(^4\) Briefly, Bakhtin points to the disappearance or expulsion of the grotesque from official art to be replaced or live and develop under the disguise of the arabesque in ornaments and the burlesque in literature (34).
ambiguity, enlightenment for darkness as well as it mistrusts, reviles and assaults the audience.

Thus the challenge of this thesis has been to read beneath the festive narrative of Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* depicting a time of misrule, folk celebrations and joyful torture. Beneath this layer of the grotesque/comic, of the two bodies in one,\textsuperscript{5} Remshardt highlights ‘another body double unacknowledged by Bakhtin but implicit in carnival’s dangerous side’ (Remshardt 48-9). This is the body of the victim that is crowned and uncrowned, abused and ridiculed: to be dealt with in the fires of pogroms, witchcraft, death camps and wars. Whereas Bakhtin writes a veiled critique of his culture (Coates 127) and is unable to link carnival humour to medieval and modern pogroms, the playwrights in this thesis rip apart the festive in order to speak for and reveal these victims. Like Remshardt, I also want to rethink Bakhtin without rejecting him, and this may be achieved by restoring ‘history to Bakhtin’s ahistorical body, that is, to stop laughing and return to its death’ (Remshardt 46-8). By this post-Bakhtinian approach, I view Bakhtin’s carnival liberty – the courage to laugh in the pursuit of liberty - during the oppressive rule of Stalin as a cathartic moment, a means of escape into a fantasy world of misrule, myth and laughter. Behind the seductiveness of collective liberation and carnival revolt, I will read the Bakhtinian notion of joyful degradation in the selected plays against the horrors of mass death and organised killing. In this conflictual relationship, Remshardt uses the genre of body-art performance to view the problematic collision of laughing at terror and the

\textsuperscript{5} The two bodies in one refer to the archaic stage of the grotesque development. Earlier I used the image of the old pregnant hags as an example to illustrate this stage. Here the regenerating folk humour is the channel through which the community translates its needs from the spiritual to the physical/material, celebrates its triumph over toil, rank and authority as well as becomes part of the universal cycle of change and renewal (Bakhtin 25-30).
reality of (laughing) terror (Remshardt 50). By insisting on recognising the body in pain, the playwrights also reveal ‘a sacrificial logic in which the performer/outsider/pharamakos’ does not necessarily invite the spectators to inflict pain on the body or to be overwhelmed by the body (Remshardt 55). Rather, this body-art is anti-Bakhtinian and confrontational in recognising the sacrificial rather than the comic (Remshardt 57-9). Though my thesis does not look at body-art performance per se, one might suggest that the selected playwrights raise similar questions, presenting shocking, violent scenes with which they challenge the distance between seeing and participating, and encourage the spectator to question what they witness. In this collapse of distance between performance and reality, artists and spectators, those inside and outside the fire, the playwrights also interrogate whether or not what we are witnessing is “‘pain’ or pain, the possibility of “death” or death, “danger” or danger?” (Remshardt 59). Thus they encourage us to take responsibility for what we perceive as they halt our ‘festive’ dance and in so doing reveal the mis-recognised victim.

It is important to note here that in both Bakhtinian and post-Bakhtinian approaches the grotesque in ‘performance’ is inseparable from the carnival. However, the meaning of grotesque performance changes in each of these reading strategies and can be best represented both vertically and horizontally. The vertical line depicts a medieval world, defined by upper and lower, heaven and hell, outside the limitations of time. It is a hierarchical world where the body is continually growing, or is in the act of becoming something else. For Bakhtin this becoming, an act of temporary liberty is subject to the play and ambivalence of all forms of carnival humour (Bakhtin 10). However, it is here between humour and terror that Bakhtin locates man’s journey from fear of authorities to liberty, a festive way of
‘living’ with foolish tyrants, comic monsters or saintly criminals. Sergei Averintsev returns Bakhtin’s idea of growing and living outside time to Stalinism:

People must be unfinished, underage, in process of becoming, so that one can educate and re-educate them […] ; there is no need to take them seriously, but at the same time they must not become dejected, because their whole life is still ahead of them – just as in the case of children. In the language of Stalin’s time, career advancement was called “growing” – a human being had the obligation of continuing to “grow” until ripe age. (Averintsev 89)

This link between Bakhtin’s grotesque body and the spirit of advancement under the rule of Stalin helps the modern reader relate to this concept of the grotesque defined as unfinished and formless, old and giving birth, dying, deformed and promising. Though carnival may seem the medium by which oppressors attempt to reform society and reconcile good and evil, the selected playwrights shake off its egalitarianism to realise its false utopia. Like Ruth Coates, Averintsev also defends Bakhtin’s faith in the freedom of the human spirit but reveals the forced innocence oppressors use to control the masses in the name of reform.

In contrast to the medieval picture of the world, the Renaissance abandons hierarchical verticality for a horizontal plane focusing instead on ‘backward’ and forward, past and present, present and future (Bakhtin 367). Here, the transfer of world values was realised and translated in the sciences, arts and literature of the Renaissance placing man at the centre of the universe. Growth (progress) is no longer outside time but influences every way of living. The meaning of becoming also changes, embracing freedom and encouraging discoveries and the limitlessness of the earlier world is replaced by a beginning and an end, birth and death. Here and
for the first time Bakhtin observes ‘a new concrete and realistic historic awareness’ of the world, but still this rebirth, inseparable from the grotesque body, does not help him re-examine his faith in carnival rebellion (Bakhtin 367). Despite this new awareness, laughter remains the free, powerful expression of the people with which to ridicule and undermine authorities. In contrast, most of the selected plays suggest a modern, post-Bakhtinian reading of the grotesque that avoids laughter as a sacrilegious response to the suffering of victims of violence. Thus the emergence of the medieval in modern contexts becomes the playwrights’ motif of a return to the idea of victim selection rooted in the rituals of crowning and uncrowning, praise and abuse, feasts and trials. However, the medieval is not consistently used by all the selected playwrights and is sometimes replaced by the primitive or the mythological (Rudkin and Kane). Although Bakhtin acknowledges the link between carnival and pre-Christian holiday periods such as the tradition of the Saturnalias6, his interest, Bagshaw argues, lies in the change from ritual killings and sites of human sacrifices to ‘the practice of parading effigies representing carnival’ in the Middle Ages (Bagshaw 91-2). Unlike Bakhtin, many of these playwrights avoid this anti-sacrificial carnival optimism and opt for a theatre of pain and cruelty that reveals our inner struggles, stimulates individual responses or raises collective awakening. The playwrights’ use of cruelty is not a festive means to advocate violence, but functions as the beginning of birth pains that may help defamiliarise the spectator’s perception of their role in the world. Pain becomes the mark, the stigmata and the birthplace of

6 On the festival of Saturnalia, Bagshaw writes, that people in agricultural societies used to offer human sacrifices to Saturn, the god of fertility, whose reign “was marked by harmony, peace and common ownership of land and property” (94).
individuality, instead of the market where the crowd witnesses the death of the individual in an atmosphere of celebration and laughter.

The idea of victim selection may seem strange in the discussion of the folk culture of carnival humour. Like Bakhtin, the playwrights explored in this thesis refer to the election of a mock bishop or king as the subject of ridicule on feast days, but they also open our eyes to the reality of terror, persecution and killing surrounding such traditions. The selected dramatic texts defamiliarise or even invert the idea of joyful torture, grotesque laughter, and comic monsters to reveal oppression and pain, humourless laughter, dictators and victims. Violence in this context is the modern “sacred parody” which laughs and degrades, transforms the human into non-human, and brings laughter to its participants. The ‘sacred’ text of this parody is the human body on which violence writes its ‘humour’, wiping out life and turning the body inside out. To return to Bakhtin, sacred parody, one form of popular humour, is the idea of ridiculing and lowering of all that is considered high, sacred and spiritual in the ‘official’ culture (Bakhtin 83). Bakhtin effectively views parody as a manifestation of the medieval comic literature linked with prayers and liturgies such as “The Liturgy of The Drunkards”, “The Lord’s Prayer”, “The Will of The Ass” (Bakhtin 14). Against this triumph of laughter over fear of authority, the texts I explore in this thesis reveal the reproduction of death as the ‘sacred’ that feeds the different channels of dictatorship, nationalism and capitalism. Violence here has become the sacred rule of world politics and of the marketplace transforming the seeming radicality of carnivals – radicalness in terms of inclusion - into alienation, accumulation and consumerism. This parody which makes human into non-human, puppet and monster is not comic but produces and justifies death over life and exclusion over inclusion. Thus, the collision between sacrifice - the ritual of
exclusion and victim selection - and politics is the essence of carnival. Or to put it in another way, the politics/ritual of the carnival hides a scapegoat. The examples are plentiful demonstrating how carnival has shaped human history in ancient, medieval and modern societies as in Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*, Rudkin’s *The Triumph of Death* and Barnes’ *Laughter*. Having survived by means of alienation and elimination, ‘carnival’ now demands a bigger number of victims (the Holocaust in Barnes’ *Laughter*, Kane’s *Cleansed* and Barker’s *The Power of the Dog*). Beyond the horror of death camps, the danger of the carnival is now everywhere as it shape-shifts to fit a modern lifestyle moulded by rapid industrial and technological changes (Churchill’s *The Skriker*).

In the research that underpins this thesis I am interested in the problematic relationship between grotesque laughter and terror, carnival and exclusion as well as the search for victims. A number of thinkers and critics (such as George Meredith, Sigmund Freud, Tim Prentki and Robert Provine) perceive a connection between the grotesque, laughter and the comic, referring directly or indirectly to the relationship between exclusion and inclusion. I take this further in the thesis and map it onto an attempt to speak about victims. While Meredith and Bergson write about the refined role of comedy to enlighten, redeem and civilise, they also refer to the earlier relationship between the grotesque and laughter. Meredith explains: “Laughter is open to perversion, like other good things; the scornful and the brutal sorts are not unknown to us; but the laughter directed by the Comic Spirit is a harmless wine” (Meredith 50). Like Bakhtin, Meredith differentiates between different forms of laughers but for him only comedy can generate laughter that is thoughtful and assertive (Meredith 47). Bergson, on the other hand, stresses the social context as an important location for understanding laughter, affirming its collective nature and
social significance (Bergson 65). Here “laughter is always the laughter of a group”, and it can welcome you into or alienate you from its circle depending on whether or not you understand its codes and gestures (Bergson 64). Put differently, laughter has got its own anatomy with which its participants need to engage. Bergson also views the beauty of the comic and the ridiculous as inseparable from the incongruent, the ugly and the deformed (Bergson 75-9). Similarly, Freud finds a link between jokes and the unconscious and dreams, the comic and the repressed, pleasure and fear (Freud, *Jokes* 238). Beneath this beautiful network of the spoken and the secret, Prentki reveals the double-edged power of laughter that in submission helps maintain social injustices. His work *The Fool in European Theatre* (2012) makes interesting connections between folly and carnival rebellion. Here he views folly as a channel for laughing at our miseries situating the spectator between upsetting the *status quo* and laughing with oppressors. Like most of the earlier critics, Provine in his scientific investigation of laughter distinguishes between different kinds of laughter: dark, inappropriate and healthy. Upon viewing the history of laughter, Provine also holds that laughter can ‘serve as a bond to bring people together or as a weapon to humiliate and ostracize its victims’ (Provine 2). This view of laughter as derisive and grotesque dates back to a historical moment when people with physical disabilities were treated as fools, providing the rich with amusement (Provine 14). Here, one can argue, in the light of this shocking and strange reality, that our moral standards today are not very different from those in the past when ‘torture and executions were public events often conducted in a carnival atmosphere complete with snacks and refreshments’ (Provine 14-5). Despite the constant talk about justice and human rights, one might argue that the contemporary world shares a similar connection with trials and celebrations. The selected playwrights looked at in this thesis provide us
with modern and ancient contexts in which they highlight the inseparable relationship between terror and amusement, violence and laughter.

Therefore, the triumph of death, rather than the defeat of fear is an inescapable response in connection with carnival humour. In the selected dramatic texts death is seen in terms of a “victim mechanism”, a ritual of selection, celebration and elimination that is inseparable from violence. This is an unusual move in scholarship on contemporary British drama, and was initially stimulated by my having noticed an interesting creative sense of play with Christian motifs, concepts and practices in the selected texts – which I found were immersed in explorations of sacrificial violence in ways that are important to explore and identify. For example, the killing of Joan of Arc in Rudkin’s *The Triumph of Death*, seen as a landmark in the birth/progress of ‘civilisation’, is viewed within a vicious circle of violence which has been present throughout history. In theory, this carnival – the grotesque performance of birth, death and rebirth – involves the removal or the raising of ‘meat’, which in the context of Bakhtin’s world of folk humour precedes Lent, the Easter time of abstinence and fast (Bakhtin 8). However, in practice, the carnivals of the Middle Ages were considered as a time of merriment, banquets, physical indulgence, and a time of triumph of the lower bodily stratum over the seriousness of the upper world. Unlike Bakhtin, in this context of abstinence and indulgence, penance and celebration, repentance and rebellion, my reading of the selected plays looks beyond this ambivalence at the actual elimination and exclusion of victims. Here the playwrights highlight the birth-pains of a community surrounded by parades and pogroms, carnivals and witchcraft trials, mass killing and laughter. This involves questioning the ambivalent nature of carnivals and challenging one’s participation in its dance in the hope that recognising the victim becomes possible. It
is important to mention that the reality of and interrelationship between humour and terror in the twentieth century has not changed very much from the Middle Ages and may be described as a celebration of ‘sacrifice’. Later we shall see in the light of René Girard’s theory of religion, culture and violence how this insistence on ‘sacrifice’ is seen as a denial of love and of the ‘other’. The playwrights’ use of Christian motifs and themes helps reveal the different myths of violence and demythologises our responses in regard to the victim chosen for ridicule and abuse. It is important to clarify at this point that my focus on laughter, sacrifice and forms of celebration differs in every chapter depending on the playwrights’ use of these forms and themes. There are different readings of sacrifice which this thesis will not necessarily explore in detail; however, the focus is on those whose understanding of sacrifice is in harmony with biblical revelation – the triumph of love and forgiveness over violence and revenge.

It is also important at this point to define some terms essential to this thesis, and a turn to the work of René Girard on sacrifice, sacred, sacralisation and desacralisation will help here. Sacrifice originates from scapegoating and refers to ‘the ritual of immolation of a human or animal victim. Girard holds it likely that humans were the first sacrificial victims, and only subsequently were animals substituted, and eventually various objects as gifts’ (Girard, Girard Reader 292). This substitution in terms of humans, animals and objects is similar to the problematic relationship between carnival humour and violence explored in this thesis. In the selected plays the ‘familiarity’ with the festive/al that turns into a lynching party is made unfamiliar and the victim (saintly witch, criminal king, royal beggar, fe-male) is revealed. Girard observes in the mythical narrative the capability of the victim to attract good and evil, restore peace and bring disorder, receive curses, abuse and respect (Girard,
Violence and Representation 14). This transition from cursed to ‘sacred’ is part of the victim mechanism by which the community turn the violence on the scapegoat, so what is regarded here as sacred is not really sacred. In his article on sacralisation and desacralisation, Robert M. Doran explains: “there was a vast difference in the respective identifications of the sacred and that difference led to the murder of Jesus and to the beginning of a new “way” in the very tradition in which he stood, a way which, he himself made clear, was completely continuous with the Israelite revelation [...]” (Doran 16). This transition from a false to a genuine sacred involves desacralisation, the disclosure of “false sacralisation” or “the withdrawal of sacrality from what previously had been regarded as religious” (Doran15). This can be seen in Christ’s teachings when he redefines clean/unclean, sacred/profane, religious/secular, divine/violence as well as in his death and resurrection where Christ destroys the old sacred by revealing its violent nature (Girard, Dionysus 14). In other words, Christ dies to the old way of maintaining order and thus he discloses the sacredness of election, selection and elimination. For those in power, Christ becomes the clown of their collective humour, a mock king for his very refusal of earthly rule and military powers. In contrast, the genuine sacred, represented by Christ and his teachings, is pure love and leads to the birth of the church - the new community in this context.

Girard’s theory concerning religion and violence provides us with four insights through which to review ‘sacrifice’: “a hypothesis about the role of violence and religion in tribal societies, the mimetic structure of human desire, the scapegoat mechanism, and the way the gospels challenge these world views” (Swartley 32). The first two accounts of conflict ignited by mimetic desire in human history can be seen in two stories – the original sin in the Garden of Eden and the murder of Abel.
Both stories change the history of humankind, revealing the mimetic nature of human desire, which according to Girard, is good if the model inspiring imitation is God (Girard, *Girard Reader* 291). Negative mimesis, however, is inspired (Satan here is a key model/player) by rivalry over an object (The Tree of Knowledge in this context), leads to expulsion (Adam and Eve exclude God and later they exclude each other as they deny their responsibility for the act) and produces death. This eventually requires God Himself to take flesh and suffer in order to reveal to us the work of Satan and the evils of the mimetic cycle. The second story leads both to the foundation of the first human community and to the first law against murder, which involves the ritual repetition of murder in order to prevent vengeance and escalation of violence (Girard, *ISSFLL* 84). Later further prohibitions and rituals of scapegoating were provided to help humankind reduce and re-channel bad violence (incest, murder, wars and natural disasters) for the protection and welfare of the community. Thus by scapegoating, the afflicted community turns violence onto a victim (usually an animal) so as to restore peace and order. The gospels, in Girard’s view, reveal that the alternative to violence is not violence in the form of ‘sacrifice’ but to die to self in the same way Christ did out of love. The latter is a new non-violent form of sacrifice which dismantles the veil of misrecognition of past, present and future victims, and celebrates the triumph of love and life over (the making of) death. Thus the Bible in Girard’s view reveals the origin of violence and recognises – the ‘sacred’ – “the violence done to victims” which has been “camouflaged in prohibition, ritual and myth” throughout history (Williams, *Foreword* 9). The mis-recognised and misrepresented victim of violence is revealed for the first time in Christ as the innocent victim whose selfless love and teachings refute the idea of the validity of ‘sacrifice’. By dying on a cross Christ reveals to us today that love is the
only potential we have in connection with victimisation. This love must challenge classifications, overcome closure and include enemies: “you have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (NIV, Matt 5. 43-48). His perfect love has set us free once and for all unveiling the scapegoat and unmasking the scapegoaters (Williams, A Note to the Reader vii). The chain of the original sin – the cycle of mimetic desire and victim mechanism - is broken by Christ the New Adam and a new community (the church) is born through his death and resurrection.

The Role of the Model in the Story of the Victim

Following Girard, it can be argued that the playwrights’ extensive biblical borrowings and critical treatment of ‘sacrifice’ at a time of war and conflict assert that “human beings are essentially faced with a choice: total destruction or total renunciation of violence (Swartley 50). The selected playwrights pay particular attention to sacrificial violence and festive death by considering the ambivalence of carnivals between oppression, submission and rebellion. In this respect, my analysis of the texts addresses issues of violence and non-violence, aiming to understand how they represent the dynamic of crowds when inflicting violence on individuals. However, defining this dynamic for Girard is not about violence or non-violence but a question of imitation: whom do you imitate? (Girard, ISSFLL 57). Here, as noted above, Girard differentiates between negative and positive mimesis: the first generates rivalry and conflict; the second generates love when the imitator desires to imitate Christ the perfect model (Girard, Girard Reader 291). The plays always point to “mimetic rivalry” as ‘the principal source of violence between humans’ and seem to be saying: tell me who your model is, I tell you who you are (Girard, ISSFLL 11).
In this context, the playwrights highlight the role played by models or father-figures such as Christ, Satan, Ivan the Terrible, Hitler and Stalin to understand the nature of one’s relationship to desire. According to Girard, desire is mimetic—“the subject will desire the same object possessed or desired by his model”, but conflict is likely to happen depending on what relationship subject and model have (Girard, Antonello, and Rocha 56-7). Girard describes this conflictual energy of “mimetic rivalry” as a destructive machine to which many people are attracted, starting from the two fighting persons (subject and model) and ending with bystanders (Girard, Antonello, and Rocha 64). As this ‘machine’ keeps attracting more people, “there is also the tendency for the object [of desire] to disappear, to be destroyed in the conflict” (Girard, Antonello, and Rocha 64). When this happens, doubling/doubles occur leading to the crisis: ‘the rivals become more and more undifferentiated, identical: doubles. A mimetic crisis is always a crisis of undifferentiation that erupts when the roles of subject and object are reduced to that of rivals’ (Girard, Antonello, and Rocha 57). Following this escalation of collective violence, the community suddenly unites against a victim, a scapegoat whose death shall bring reconciliation and peace. Girard calls this resolution the scapegoat mechanism.

In light of Girard’s contribution to human sciences, which highlights victimisation as the foundation of human culture, the selected playwrights also search and speak for the victim, whom they see as the carnival dummy of political, national, economic and ecological upheaval. On the importance of Girard’s victim mechanism, Pierpaolo Antonello and Joao Cezar de Castro Rocha write:

The entire perspective of contemporary culture is […] built on a victimological principle, i.e. on the centrality of victims in all our ethical concerns: the victims of the Shoah, the victims of capitalism, the victims of social injustice,
of war, of political persecution, of ecological disasters, of racial, sexual, religious discrimination. And no matter how controversial it may sound, Girard claims that it has been Christianity that has been the foremost proponent of putting the innocent victim at the centre of our ethical and imaginative concern. (Antonello and Rocha, *Introduction* 14)

The concern for victims central to this thesis reveals the connection between sacrificial violence and the market, the continuity of which through history can be summarised as: make-death, make-money. In the Middle Ages the making of the ‘sacred’ has been identified with the market where carnival – the selection of someone to be ridiculed or/and eliminated – represents the seemingly inclusive laughter of the marketplace. Elimination and celebration are also inseparable from making profit as we will see in the modern contexts of Rudkin’s *The Triumph of Death* and Churchill’s *Far Away*. For Girard, Christ’s teachings and his unconditional love, reveal the violent nature of the ‘sacred’ which I describe in the context of the plays as a carnivalistic march of death, profit and black humour. Following Christ’s triumph over death and Satan, “It is no longer possible really to ‘purge’ or ‘purify’ communities of their violence. Satan can no longer expel Satan. We should not conclude from this that humans are going to be immediately rid of their now fallen prince” (Girard, *ISSFLL* 185). The gospels reveal to us today that the ancient “truce based on scapegoats” is a short-term solution, a satanic festive form of catharsis (Girard, *ISSFLL* 186). The peace Jesus offers to the world helps differentiate this violence of victim selection from the message of love in Christianity by demythologising our responses. Here Girard’s understanding of and observations on Christianity inseparable from his interest in science and secularism challenges the “reductionist vision of religion” as expressed by “some of the natural
and social sciences”, particularly the recent works of Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett (Antonello and Rocha, Introduction 12). Girard frequently asserts that it is his research defined by an interest in violence and the origin of culture, anthropology and science that drove him eventually to Christianity not the opposite. His work also takes into consideration the bloody history of Christendom and the failure of some Christians to put the teachings of their Saviour into practice as some of the selected plays evidence in this thesis. The idea of ‘holy’ wars, for instance, reveals a general confusion of the ‘traditional concept of participation in the just judgement of God with the idea of struggling in the just national cause’ (Schwager 51). This struggle takes us back to the old form of sacrifice by which communities restored their order and peace by means of victim selection.

In spite of this failure to live up to the message of God revealed in the gospels, which highlight the importance of non-violence, it is important to return to the new community mentioned earlier, the church, the offspring of the resurrection. Here, in connection with scapegoating for the welfare of the nation and in rejection of a God who does not desire sacrifices, there is an interesting link between the ‘sacred’ and the national based on differentiating order from disorder, celebration from exclusion, and identity from margins. To address these issues of inclusion and exclusion, self and other, Julia Kristeva’s notion of strangeness is particularly important to Chapter Three where I explore the use of pain as the individual’s statement against political oppression. In her book Nations without Nationalism (1993), Kristeva introduces the problem with nationalism and the possibility of nations without nationalism explaining that ‘The cult of origins is a hate reaction. Hatred of those who do not share my origins and who affront me, personally, economically, and culturally’ (Kristeva, Nations 3). In other words, nationalism functions by means of withdrawal,
the withdrawal of the self into borders of its own (linguistic, religious and/or secular) in reaction to the foreigner, the other, the neighbour. Hence, Kristeva affirms that the speaking subject (comes into being), or comes into (mis)recognition, of its subjectivity within these borders of defilement (exclusion). To free one’s self from the spirit of nationalism, hatred and persecution, Kristeva invites us to recognise the stranger within ourselves in order not to mis-recognise the stranger outside one’s boundaries. Both Kristeva and Girard refer to the actuality of this recognition in the church where Jews, Greeks, pagans, women and men belong to Christ’s body despite their differences (Kristeva, Nations 22) Upon the disclosure of the old sacred and its politics of exclusion, the inclusive nature of love transcends the spirit of hate and its cult of origins, embraces gender difference and changes persecutors into friends. This shared interest in otherness, identity and community helps both Girard and Kristeva speak for victims and unmask the origins of hate and persecution.

At this point in discussing ‘sacrifice’, it is important to illustrate the making of the sacred by drawing attention to two points: the separation of the political and the religious in Agamben’s conception of sacred life and the collapse of distance between the political and the religious in the making of the sacred in Girard’s theory. This is important to Chapter Three on the survival of the human against the carnivalisation of individual pain and the machinery of death in places of conflict and extreme suffering. However, my interest in this thesis is not comparative with regard to these two thinkers. Like Girard, Agamben holds that ‘the word sacred exhibits a remarkable ambiguity in its semantic history, varying from that which is

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7 In the next chapters, we will see this carnivalisation in the form of festive moments (such as the football match and the pleasure booth in Cleansed, the national programme of humour in Europeans, witchcraft in The Power of the Dog) during which victim and victimiser exchange roles and the boundaries collapse within a carnival of war.
treasured as most pure and precious to that which is most contemptible and must be cast out of the community so as to preserve it from contamination’ (Durantaye 206). Here, Girard differentiates between the function of ‘sacrifice’ for primitive communities, the transition from human to animal sacrifices in the Judaic-Christian tradition and finally the exposition of the genuine sacred in the New Testament. Girard’s scientific research, inspired by an interest in mythical and religious elements in persecution texts, is ‘only indirectly theological, moving as it does across the field of a Gospel anthropology unfortunately neglected by theologians’ (Girard, ISSFLL 191-2). On the other hand, Agamben’s attempts to ‘split the concept of the sacred from notions of sacrifice, holiness and religious experience, and to reveal the concept as a primordial political exercise’ is not new (Ek 366). Arguably, as I have noted above, this is what the Bible does in differentiating the false from the genuine sacred which culminates in the death of Christ, a manifestation of the separation of violence from the divine. In Agamben’s theory the victim is the ‘sacred’ man or the homo sacer⁸ who ‘has been declared unclean’ and may be killed but not sacrificed (Durantaye 206-7). Girard had a similar difficulty at the beginning of his research when he refused to call the death of Christ a sacrifice and hence he introduced his reading of the gospels as non-sacrificial, in opposition to the old sacred. Later on, Girard refers to the same event as a new form of sacrifice. On the surface, Christ - like Agamben’s sacred man - is also excluded from the city and deprived from any juridical and religious protection. Beneath this seeming similarity and in contrast to Christ’s innocence, we should not forget that the homo sacer is

⁸ On Agamben’s interest in the figure of the homo sacer, Durantaye writes: “The first thing to note about this “sacred man” is that he was not sacred in any reverential sense – in fact, he was far closer to the opposite. Homo sacer is a judicial term from archaic Roman law designating an individual who, in response to a grave trespass, is cast out of the city” (206).
guilty (Durantaye 206). In the gospel story, Christ on the cross takes the place of victims (such as the sacred man, criminals and sinners) and reveals to us today that God is ‘completely foreign to violence’ (Stevens 8). Here Christ tears apart this veil of misrecognition and misunderstanding created by the old sacred – the chain of the original sin mentioned earlier - to help us distinguish between divine and sacred, God and ‘sacrifice’, justice and punishment, love and violence.

By the separation of the religious from the political, Agamben invites us to view the nonsense behind the systematic killing of European Jews and he challenges us to refuse the idea of atonement in connection to genocide. Here, Agamben explains that ‘the semantic history of the term [holocaust] is essentially Christian, since the Church Fathers used it to translate – in fact with neither rigour nor coherence – the complex sacrificial doctrine of the Bible […]’ (Agamben, Remnants 28). This term, according to Agamben, implies anti-Semitism for it was used to describe the sacrifices of Christian martyrs and belittle or even exclude the Jewish pogroms in the Middle Ages (Agamben, Remnants 30–1). In this light, Agamben also warns us against making any connections between Auschwitz and the biblical sacrifice or between death in the gas chambers and altars. Thus he opens our eyes to the nonsense of understanding the situations of extreme suffering in connection to the idea of punishment for sins. In contrast, we shall see in the next chapter how Peter Barnes uses Christ’s sacrifice on the cross in Red Noses and Laughter to uncover the massacre of the Jews in the Middle Ages and the ‘holocaust’ in the twentieth century. Barnes also warns against finding comfort in the strange connections between the ashes of burnt offerings and the ashes of victims in Auschwitz. In Girard’s view, “the spiritual goal of Hitler’s ideology was to root out of Germany, and then of all Europe, that calling that the Christian tradition places upon all of us:
the concern for victims” (Girard, *ISSFLL* 171). Thus, some of the selected playwrights (Barnes, Barker and Kane) revisit death camps to reveal the victim in opposition to Hitler’s attempt ‘to bury the modern concern for victims under millions and millions of corpses’ (Girard, *ISSFLL* 175). We shall see later that this making of death is the product of biopolitics in the twentieth century or the intrusion of power in everyday life. By this return to the camp, the playwrights challenge us to feel the wounds and touch the ashes of those who went through the extermination where their humanity was turned inside out. The camp, therefore, becomes the materialisation of this separation between ‘the norms [of the city] governing social forms and human interaction’ and the inhuman (Durantaye 228). To some extent, this rule of misrule outside the city norms echoes the situation of carnivals, the time when law is suspended for a celebration/a feast of abuse, exclusion and elimination.

In this space of misrule, Agamben views the process of dehumanisation and survival mechanisms, including practices of testimony. The exploration of the testimony of mass death is related to my thesis in two ways: the discussion of sacrifice throughout the whole thesis and of death camps especially in Chapter Three. Testimony, concerned with the relationship between the true witnesses and the survivors, may be the survivors’ means of remembering the completely burnt. In contrast to Agamben’s turning away from the religious, and his focusing on the political in the context of death camps, I argue that the work of the selected playwrights highlights the intense interrelationship between the religious and the political. This can be seen in the recurrence of the religious, the medieval and the mythical in modern contexts of persecution (*Cleansed, The Power of The Dog* and *Phaedra’s Love*) and in the clash between the festive and the legal (*Phaedra’s Love*). According to Agamben, those who survived the ultimate ‘devouring’ in the camp
bear the burden of testimony: of having survived the shameful event and yet being unable to give full account of the suffering (Agamben, *Remnants* 26). Agamben insists that the survivor’s duty is to remember and to save the remnants of Auschwitz – the memory of a brother or a sister as we will see in Kane’s *Cleansed* and Barker’s *The Power of the Dog* (Agamben, *Remnants* 164). This reference to the remains in terms of an inability of speaking between the dead and the survivors, the inhuman and the human should be and is revisited by artists – Barker, Kane and Barnes – whose vocation, like the survivors, is, in part, to remember.

The questions which drive this thesis repeatedly show responsibility and concern on the part of the playwrights to reveal victims of persecution and mass killing. Whilst many theories relating to political philosophy, history and violence (such as those of Slavoj Žižek and Simone Weil) have informed the initial steps of this research, my interest in violence pursues a powerful line of inquiry across the territory of carnival humour. Here, the analysis of humour, its forms and function, differ depending on the plays under discussion which cover a wide range of historical contexts and several forms of collective violence inseparable from carnival humour such as burning at the stake and public displays of pain. There are other plays by the same playwrights which are relevant to my research but are not included for the sake of a focused detailed textual analysis. Despite the playwrights’ different positions, their works expose the link between selection, elimination and celebration, a shared interest that has helped me put their plays together. The brief summaries at the beginning of each chapter refer sometimes to the plot or/and historical context, but they do not by any means replace or fully represent the plays. In return to Agamben, what is to be saved is this art, the act of recording the experience of the
playwright, the artist and the critic; the art of playmaking, theatregoing, or in my case dissecting and analysing.

Chapter Two looks at Barnes’ *Leonardo’s Last Supper*, *Red Noses*, *The Ruling Class* and *Laughter* as well as Shaffer’s *Lettice and Loveage*, and *Shrivings*. Here, I examine carnival humour to reveal the scapegoat whilst concentrating on the outcome of participation in popular-festive forms. In Chapter Three, the focus on laughter in Barker’s *The Power of the Dog* and *The Europeans* and Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*, is inseparable from an analysis of moments of violence, fear, and deformity. This involves an exploration of the interrelationship between humour, pain and terror, taking into account the emotions of war victims and the estrangement of their human condition. By using Agamben’s political philosophy particularly his analysis of the Nazi death camps and his treatment of testimony, I examine the dilemma of survivors and the politics of witnessing and the ‘beautiful’ display of pain. In addition to these interests, the geographic landscape in Churchill’s and Rudkin’s works becomes a living anatomy visited by demons and folkloric creatures, devoured by battles, and divided into heaven, earth and hell.

Chapter Four, which considers Churchill’s *Top Girls*, *Skriker* and *Far Away* as well as Rudkin’s *Afore Night Come* and *The Triumph of Death*, explores the ways in which these playwrights have seen the present as being shaped by a history of festive and collective violence. My approach to the selected plays in this thesis lays no claim to being a comprehensive survey of all their work, but is selective and offers, I hope, a detailed textual analysis of a selection of plays connected by their thematic focus.
Chapter Two: Laughter in Persecution Texts: the Victim in the Plays of Peter Barnes and Peter Shaffer

Shaffer’s drama was neither ‘political’ nor ‘revolutionary’ and though debate raged at the time about to what extent this mattered, by the 1970s, Taylor could admit that such debate, though ‘serious’, was ‘rather pointless’. (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh10)

When he [Barnes] presents us with cruelty or comedy, he asks us to interrogate our own responses, and to ask ourselves not simply ‘Why are we shocked?’ or ‘Why do we laugh?’ but ‘What were the moral bases for our responses?’ (Woolland, Dark Attractions 23)

Chapter Two highlights Barnes’ and Shaffer’s mutual interest in the relationship between victimisation and carnivals or what might be called the festive making of death. It explores Barnes’ Leonardo’s Last Supper (1969), The Ruling Class (1968), Red Noses (1985) and Laughter (1978) as well as Shaffer’s Lettice and Loveage (1987) and Shrivings (1970). Through this arrangement I want to draw more attention to Barnes having analysed a number of Shaffer’s plays in a previous work of mine (Alied 2010). Here I also look at their use of popular forms such as banquets, travesty and parody to question the function and significance of carnival laughter. Most of the selected plays in this chapter follow an interesting and perhaps cyclical pattern of order-disorder-order, at the centre of which ‘sacrifice’ is a key component. Here the focus is on a community stricken by violence and how this community restores its order and peace by selecting a sacrificial victim. In searching for the victim in light of Girard’s theory, both playwrights construct the idea of a subculture (such as the culture of folk humour). The latter can be seen as a site for
the marginalised and for a grotesque performance of the community’s second nature in opposition to a dominant culture of rituals, taboos and laws. In this folk culture they look at the continuous clash or ambivalence between upper and lower, oppression and laughter, submission and rebellion. Bakhtin’s theory on carnival laughter is essential to understanding these interdependent aspects of the same culture. Because Bakhtin misses the mechanism of selection and elimination, it is important to restore this laughter to its death, revealing victims of violence beneath its festive gown as they emerge in the plays. As noted in the introductory chapter, I do not reject or devalue Bakhtin’s idea of carnival humour; rather, I use it in combination with Girard’s in order to understand better the function of the veiled, deformed, would-be-eliminated victim. The plays analysed here pay attention to a cycle of violence and counter-violence from which the playwrights would like the participants to break free. Therefore, they question our humour with regard to the spectacle of juggling gravediggers, God’s fools or the performing comedians in Auschwitz. By using the biblical narrative, they succeed in challenging the seeming distance between celebrations and violence hoping to show that whilst victimisation is still at work, it is important to reveal its mechanism.

The work of Shaffer, and to some extent Barnes’, refuses labels and challenges the naturalistic setting for a meta-language by which they explore the human’s relationship to oppression and violence. In *New Theatre: Voices of the Fifties and Sixties*, Michael Billington describes 1956 to 1963 as a period of dynamic change ‘when the British theatre was emerging from a prolonged post-war slumber’ (Billington 11). This rebirth in the history of British theatre, as referred to in Chapter One, is associated with a wide range of British playwrights and practitioners such as Osborne, Arden, Littlewood and Wesker. Although Shaffer and Barnes started their
careers as playwrights during this period, neither the selections from *Encore*
magazine 1956-1963 nor the interviews from *Theatre Quarterly* 1970-1980 shed
light on their work. Clearly Shaffer and Barnes did not belong to the circle of
playwrights of New Drama. Shaffer began his career with *Five Finger Exercise*
(1958), “one of the biggest critical and commercial successes of the New Drama in
its early days” (Taylor 3). However, “there was serious [...] argument whether the
play and its author could be considered really to belong to the New Drama at all,
except by a chronological accident” (Taylor 3). Cautious about classifying Shaffer’s
work, MacMurraugh-Kavanagh explains: “The demand was still for literate,
bourgeois drama which investigates less the class system and social issues than the
individual within that most intimate grouping, the family” (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh
10). Shaffer’s drama, neither political nor revolutionary, takes an increasing interest
in psychology and philosophy. Many of his plays, such as *Equus* (1973) and
*Amadeus* (1979) deal with the individual’s quest for God and/or the meaning of
existence against strands of religiosity or social norms. They also look at the denial
of God and the consequent search for power and immortality in *The Royal Hunt of
the Sun* (1964) and *Yonadab* (1985). Shaffer’s fascination with immortality and
imagination, annihilation and power has helped him incorporate a wide range of
theatrical effects including mime, ritual, chant and dance. Michael Hinden describes
this move from the naturalistic setting of the living room to the spectacular as
Shaffer’s most important achievement (Hinden 14-6). This achievement in terms of
stagecraft epitomises Shaffer’s debt to a number of practitioners such as Artaud
whose influence can be seen in *Equus* where sound and gesture are key components
in Shaffer’s performance language (MacMurraugh-Kavanagh 25). Also, in *The
Royal Hunt of the Sun* and *Amadeus*, which are ‘written for spectacular mounting’,
Shaffer transcends the verbal and the ordinary in favour of the magical, the ritual and the mythical (Hinden 14). This physical language provides Shaffer’s work with what Artaud calls “poetry for the senses” and thus creates a theatrical or a total spectacle that perhaps aims to awaken us to the spiritual death of modern society (Artaud 26-7).

In the context of the selected plays, the playwrights also engage with two narratives which can be viewed as mythical and Christian. One justifies persecution and celebrates the mechanism of selection and elimination of victims, and the other reveals the ancient dance of death and vindicates victims. Here, both playwrights uncover victims of violence in the marketplace of the plague, the ovens of Auschwitz and places of war. In this chapter I want to look at the interconnections of violence and carnival forms of humour, and explore to what extent Shaffer and Barnes embrace the carnivalesque as a possible moment of peaceful resistance. Shaffer’s reading of carnival humour has put his audience on a journey of gradual transformation from the mythological in terms of sacrifice to the symbolic and spiritual forms of non-violent resistance. This change can be noticed in his use of vigils and forgiveness in Shrivings and The Gift of the Gorgon or even in questioning the role of the theatre in Lettice and Loveage and The Gift of the Gorgon. Shafferian drama acknowledges the progress of humankind from a world dominated by mythology and human/animal sacrifices to a time when spirituality and non-violence become possible following the emergence of a new form of sacrifice. The latter is realised in Christ whose trial and death were also immersed in a culture of carnival humour and ritualistic practices of mockery, abuse, torture, laughter, un/crowning and casting lots. Like Girard, these playwrights return to the Bible for its commitment to ‘a radical programme of demythologisation’ so to unmask victims of
violence elevated in mythology to a godlike status (Stevens 4). Thanks to the Bible ‘the discovery of a divine reality that no longer belongs to the sphere of the collective idols of violence’ becomes possible (Girard, ISSFLL 119). By using Christian motifs, the selected dramatic texts arguably highlight the separation of violence from the divine and the potential triumph of non-violence over human sacrifices. This is not to say that the plays end happily; rather, it is within a Christian context that a demythologisation of ‘sacrifice’ is enabled. For Girard, Christianity is the breaking point in the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence by which and for the first time the scapegoat is revealed. In this chapter I will look at the history of the sixteenth-century Fustian House and the medieval House of Shriving in Shaffer’s \emph{Lettice and Lovage} as well as \emph{Shrivings}. We shall see that the challenge to re-present or invert their histories is a challenge of authorship and authority. In his use of comic carnivalistic inversions to reveal trials and persecution, Shaffer revisits anti-war events in post-war England that enable him to activate the individual’s voice over the crowd.

Both playwrights share an interest in the negotiation of authority and in the relationship between ‘sacrifice’ and carnival humour as a problematic form of rebellion and/or submission. Aware of the risks involved when comedy becomes the channel for revolution (Rabey, \textit{Peter Barnes} 254), Barnes subjects himself and his audience to the polemics of humour. I refer to the latter as ‘polemics’ rather than ‘dialectics’ because humour in itself never reveals nor solves its contradictions. In this regard, the chapter raises the questions as to whether Barnes is after a revolutionary or imaginary resolution and explores his writerly use of these polemics. For example, Christopher Innes thinks \textit{Red Noses} and \textit{Laughter} demonstrate and differentiate between ‘humour that perpetuates a system of social
injustice [...] and a politically activist type of comedy’ (Innes 303). However, upon observing Barnes’ uses of humour, Susan Carlson concludes that *Laughter* and *Red Noses* offer ‘a violent world where the chances of the resurrection of a good-hearted, revolutionary comedy are slim’ (Carlson 309). It is hard indeed to speak of the politics of Barnes’ comedy without referring to the problem of humour and *vice versa*. Though his carnivalesque moments of nonviolence may seem romantic and slim, they act as signals in a world dominated and confused by its very making of good/bad violence.

One might suggest that his plays operate through a kind of double structure that can best be understood in his usage of the grotesque. For instance, the symmetrical structuring in *Red Noses* and *The Ruling Class* implies a dialogue in relation to order and disorder, upper and lower, rule and misrule; some scenes are inverted to mirror others in a monstrous way: weddings are replaced by funerals, temples by bathrooms and altars by crematoriums. This grotesque relationship between order and disorder, serious and comic, public and private reveals a collapse of boundaries in the themes of joyful funerals and laughing terror. Therefore, my aim is to open up the field of the grotesque-comic into the discussion of the plays. Equally whilst at first glance they may seem irrelevant or even strange, carnival and ‘sacrifice’ are also relevant. In this regard, Barnes dares the critic to reflect on a possible connection between the Middle Ages and modernity in relation to humour, inverting the festive triumph of laughter over fear into deformity and elimination. Among these dark attractions, Brian Woolland observes in the theatre of Peter Barnes ‘a theatre to be experienced’ in that ‘it contains elements of spectacle, grotesque physical comedy, circus, music hall, vaudeville, dance, lyricism, rhetoric and poetry’ (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 22). Thus in embracing and transcending the physical (the physicality of cruelty and
deformity), Barnes’ work paves the way for reflection and interrogation: “when Barnes deploys comedy at moments of extreme cruelty he is forcing us to reflect not only upon our own individual responses to events on stage, but also upon the collective, social response of the audience” (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 23). In this chapter we will see how his work challenges the laughter of authoritarian systems by providing new techniques of perception and thus he invites the participants to halt their carnival dance to question the reality of their own laughter.

With this in mind, the chapter questions the issue of violence in a comic disguise in light of Girard’s idea of victim selection (scapegoating) and its perpetuation in our lives today and throughout history. Shaffer and Barnes may or may not be aware of the role religion has played in preserving culture and providing the means to re-channel violence (Barnes, *On Class 7*). Here the lecturer and writer Elaine Turner comments on Barnes’ frustration with the critics’ indifference to the spiritual nature of his writing:

His plays have justly been called ‘epic’; they address social and political issues, historical and philosophical concerns, often through large-scale action, cast, and time-span. At the same time, spiritual issues beat at the heart of each one: the function of religion in everyday life; the dynamics of faith; the place of spirit in the material world. (Turner 303-4)

My interest in the works of Peter Barnes is, in part, related to this spiritual element and to his return to and deep understanding of the Bible. “The modern tendency to minimise religion,” Girard explains, “reflects a supreme effort to conceal what is at work in all human institutions, the religious avoidance of violence between members of the same community” (Girard, *ISSFL* 93). In return to the use of Christian motifs
and the desire to uncover victims of violence, Girard states: “The Christ of the Gospels dies against sacrifice, and through his death, he reveals its nature and origin by making sacrifice unworkable, at least in the long run, and bringing sacrificial culture to an end” (Girard, *Girard Reader* 18). It is possible to view history in the work of Shaffer and Barnes as continually shaped by Jesus’ victory over the ‘sacred’ – the violent making of peace via victim selection - and the challenge to speak for victims and to protect minorities. We shall see next that Barnes’ reading of the Middle Ages and the present via a network of Christian motifs helps reveal the mutilated victim beneath the festive gown of laughter.

**Awakening to the Reality of Death in Leonardo’s Last Supper**

Another Lazarus. Wasn’t one such nuisance enough? Dear Jesus, it’s happened. What every burial-man fears. We’ve got a bleeding resurrection on our hands! (Barnes, *Leonardo* 137-8)

As a lecturer announces the Renaissance, the corpse of Da Vinci is onstage waiting for burial in the charnel house of the Lascas who earn their living by burying the dead. Lasca the gravedigger is celebrating Da Vinci’s death with his wife Maria. Their last supper – the corpse – is heaven’s reward and represents their hope to return to Italy their fatherland from which they are exiled. Alphonso their son comes out of darkness disguised as a death-figure. Shaking with fear, Lasca and Maria blame each other for lechery and sin. Their repentance ends shortly when Alphonso reveals his true identity. Lasca who has inherited this death business from his father wants to pass it on to his son. Disguised as a black bird, Lasca starts singing and all join him. As they dance mournfully then joyfully, Da Vinci is raised from the dead putting an end to their dreams. When the resurrected man decides to leave their
charnel house, he is forced to have his last supper of a bucket of excrement and vomit. The family is united for the business of burial and death is perpetuated.

*Leonardo’s Last Supper* depicts a strange ambivalence between carnival liberty and death, rebellion and submission, and later challenges one’s position with regard to participation. This can be seen in the change from the funeral ritual and the ‘Miserere’ lamentation to Lasca’s informal and joyful song. Lasca turns away from the seriousness of the funeral to the banquet table where laughter and dance triumph over the fear of death (Barnes, *Leonardo* 127). This change foreshadows the unofficial feast to come as a place of “continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrownings” (Bakhtin 11). During this feast/funeral, praise is also inseparable from abuse:

Lasca: We bless thy goodness, oh Lord. Those gotch-gutted curs drove me out o’ Florence. Ten years in this French wilderness [...]. I’ll make ‘em grovel like pigs in dung! Oh Holy Virgin Mother, I’ll make ‘em tremble till their breeches stink from their droppings! Oh Lord o’ Mercy, I’ll make ‘em lick pomegranate seeds out o’ me arse! (Barnes, *Leonardo* 127-8)

Lasca thinks his degenerative language will bring renewal, change and a second life back in Florence. Thus, the corpse of Da Vinci becomes the golden carcass, a gift of deliverance sent from the Lord. By this culture of grotesque-comic humour, death-deliverance, revenge-prayer, Lasca and his family create a carnival moment of liberty in opposition to the official order of seriousness, and thus they question its hierarchies and challenge inequality.
Here, Barnes, famous for his borrowings from the culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages, uses the banquet as a symbol of a classless society that inverts power, hierarchy and norms for the relative liberty of carnival humour. The banquet is the place where the ‘king’ eats with beggars and clowns, and the ‘pope’ celebrates with the clergy and the peasants. Beneath this festive inclusiveness, Barnes challenges carnival liberty by pointing to the hidden reality of the Lascas’ death business. In this parody of the last supper and contrary to Bakhtin, death not rebirth has the final word. Here the festive in terms of travesty turns the upper into lower, the social norm into the instinctive when Lasca ‘takes off his overgarment’ revealing a ‘dark hosen and a black leather jerkin buttoned to the neck’ (Barnes, Leonardo 128). At the banquet table, laughter, drunkenness and sex replace decorum and etiquette, morality and prohibitions. The table with bread and wine, death and life is a reminder of Christ’s Last Supper, Lasca’s joyful commemoration of Da Vinci’s death, and Da Vinci’s last supper (Barnes, Leonardo 127). Bakhtin explains, ‘Eating and drinking were also the main features of the commemoration of the dead. [...] Spanish Dominicans drank to the memory of their deceased patrons, toasting them with the typical ambivalent words *viva le muetro*’ (Bakhtin 79-80). Digestion and death, banqueting and commemorating the dead prevailed also in Lasca’s supper when he drank to the dead, toasting them with the same ambivalence. “The ‘Dies Irae’. Dum dum de dum. (*He hums the funeral dirge, and mimes taping his ribs.*) Always been one o’ my favourites. A toast. Here’s to Old Mortality then, our sure and certain provider. The Lord protect us” (Barnes, Leonardo 128). The death/life toast frees the participants from the seriousness of the official order but subjugates them to Death their provider of life. This ambivalence, the coexistence of praise/abuse, death/life, and murder/carnival, leaves the Lascas under the effect of lechery, drunkenness and
lust. Lasca’s toast/ prayer to Death takes him and Maria away from God, the provider of life, and develops into a ‘worship’ followed by laughter, sex, drunkenness and culminates in violence (Barnes, *Leonardo* 130-1). During the banquet and in the presence of the dead artist, both Maria and Lasca gave full rein to their second nature, “the lower bodily stratum which could not express itself in official cult and ideology” (Bakhtin 75). Here laughter becomes the bodily and political expression of sexual pleasure and liberty. Bakhtin suggests that death and carnival laughter are inseparable from renewal and the change of seasons; winter is followed by spring, death by resurrection and merriment, social and political stability by carnival relativity (Bakhtin 81). However, it is the dead Da Vinci who facilitates the Lascas’ move beyond the poverty of their present exile to a better future in their homeland. Therefore, this burial ritual, a symbolic gesture of the rebirth of a better future, is also a burial of the fear of oppressions and requires a victim.

The participants are not totally liberated from their fears, but are haunted by the seriousness and taboos of the official order. “Down, down, we’re in sin. Stark sin and lechery. Oh Holy Father…Oh Glorious Virgin” (Barnes, *Leonardo* 130). Maria struggles to free herself from Lasca and her fear is translated immediately in the sudden appearance of a menacing figure of Death (Barnes, *Leonardo* 131). As a result, they feel ashamed and their body language changes completely from the informality of their intimacy in terms of dancing and lovemaking to a position of aloofness, malice and irresponsibility:

Lasca: […]. I can’t die like this with my breeches down and my bawbell up. Dragged to hellfire ’cause o’ you. (*He hits MARIA who lies moaning.*) Damned to everlasting pain through her everlasting lust. […]. I repent,
sweet Jesus. I repent. I’ll wear a hair-shirt every night caked with my own blood. Spare me. (Barnes, Leonardo my italics 131)

Despite his fear of the official representatives of religious authority, Lasca’s language is still influenced by the unofficial festive spirit: his sexual indulgence, his appetite for banquets and for travesty haunts his repentance. Here, the body of the participants becomes the bearer of these official and unofficial narratives, of fear and laughter, taboo and transgression. The relationship between death and the breaking of wind, for instance, is also characteristic of this transition from their festive liberty to fear. On Farting in the Middle Ages, Valerie Allen notes that ‘to breathe one’s last is more than a figure of speech; the egress of the soul is made audible in the death rattle […] or, as Rabelais calls it, the “le ped de la mort” [death-fart], thereby suggesting that mouth and nostrils are not the only available exits for the departing soul’ (Allen 69). In this play, Barnes highlights carnival laughter and its celebratory forms of participation in the Middle Ages such as the death-fart, urinating on the dead, and putting on a mask to be protected from the vapours and airs sent by the dead. These elements of the unofficial are almost always there on the borders of the official.

Barnes also highlights the marketplace of carnival activities as the place of grotesque penetrations of praise and abuse, science and magic, physicians and charlatans, faith and humour (Bakhtin 159). For example, Lasca makes profit from the Black Death, the plague of 1494 in the market: “so many deaths the market was glutted” (Barnes, Leonardo 141). In Lasca’s account of his history as a gravedigger, there is a link between death, the plague (disease) and business, or the quacks and the juggling gravediggers:
Lasca: […]. You [da Vinci] said to look to facts as they are and not to rank superstition and magic. […]. In time o’ pestilence I noted that tomturd men and privy cleaners never fell sick. They were protected by the stench o’ their work. […] I set out to manufacture medicinal smells. I bottled farts. (Barnes, Leonardo 142)

Under the increasing demands of the plague-market, Lasca forms a team of wind-breakers, feeds them on radishes and beans to produce medicinal shit such as ‘Lasca’s Sweet Morning Wind’, ‘Lasca’s Excremental Goodness’, and ‘Jumbo Family Jar’ (Barnes, Leonardo 142). In the process of manufacturing this bottled shit, life and death, grotesque and comic indistinguishably recur in the representation of carnival bodily topography: “the way they’d lift up their skirts, drop their breeches and stick a green bottle up their arse” (Barnes, Leonardo 142). Then patients would use these bottles as nostrums and medicinal smells or powders. Here, the wind that gives life is inseparable from the killing wind and the solid matter the body throws out is its life powder. In this ambivalent carnival imagery, death is the beginning of rebirth and ‘the play of the upper with the lower sphere, is strikingly set into motion; the top and the bottom, heaven and earth, merge in that image’ (Bakhtin 163). Their farting is a kiss of life and their death farts; praise is their abuse and abuse is their ‘praise’. This carnival humour does not challenge the quacks to see a general status quo of social injustices; rather, the plague provides them with a golden opportunity to go up the social ladder. Beneath this fake equality inseparable from carnival ‘liberty’, Barnes reveals revenge, loss and punishment, an unfinished metamorphosis from praise to abuse and from abuse to praise (Barnes, Leonardo 144). Next we will see that this grotesque but ‘regenerating’ change does not challenge their position with regard to the risen Da Vinci.
The Lascas have not learnt a lesson from the plague experience - they even hope to return home and abandon poverty by means of a corpse. Leonardo’s Last Supper, similar to the artwork of Hieronymus Bosch (Barnes, Interview 2), creates a theatrical spectacle where images speak louder than words, which is also a characteristic of Artaud’s concept of the theatre (Artaud 50). In other words, the play is a rich parody infused with different grotesque and clownish images from deriding and peeing on the dead to a travesty of Lazarus and the Lord’s Supper. By these parodies, Barnes not only plays with the most ‘sacred’ – money, power and authority - in the official culture, but also challenges our easy turn to laughter today. He reinterprets these biblical texts in the contexts of motifs of eating, drinking, sex, defecation, death and rebirth and therefore transposes them to their carnival material level. For instance, Christ’s words during the Last Supper, ‘And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me”’ (Luke 22.19) are travestied into Leonardo’s ‘come... take... eat’ (Barnes, Leonardo 146). Leonardo’s Last Supper embraces ‘obscenities and curses, profanities and swearing, with travestied sacred texts turned inside out’ (Bakhtin 87). In this parody of the supper, Barnes insists that grotesque laughter does not liberate the individual but immerses the family in a strange ritual of death and humour: they are always at the edge of vernacular/Latin, official/unofficial, seriousness/laughter, and veneration/abuse.

Lasca: ‘A cloud-topping man. But now he’s wrapped in cool crepe. His mind was the light o’ the world, they saith, but his flesh’ll rot, red, green and black, just the same. […] Misere, misere…”
All (*singing softly, mournfully*): ‘Dies irae, dies illa, solvet saeclum in favilla
teste David cum Sibylla…’

*They sway in lamentation but imperceptibly their voices grow lighter. Despite*
*themselves they start to chuckle, chuckles turn to laughter, as, clasping, they*
*dance around to the now jaunty dirge.* (Barnes, *Leonardo* 136)

Later Barnes uses the resurrection-motif to turn this carnival funeral inside out,
undermining its liberty and revealing the Lascas’ refusal to perceive the resurrected.
What impresses the medieval man about this laughter is its ‘victory’ over fear of
authorities, prohibitions, death, hell and punishment (Bakhtin 90-1). Looking back at
the Lascas’ derision of the dead does not mean they don’t fear death; they actually
fear God, death and hell. Bakhtin explains, “Victory over fear is not its abstract
elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation”
(Bakhtin 91). However, Barnes looks beyond carnival laughter and its temporary
transformation of fear into a possible connection between carnivals and the
elimination of victims.

In insisting on their carnival rebellion against life, the juggling death-makers
reject the risen artist and his art/life value to humankind. This reaction to the
Renaissance and the resurrection event occurs at the beginning of the play as the
New Man/artist is swallowed by the Medieval Charnel House. Out of that hellish
place, ‘Lazarus’ comes forth, shocked and later joyful to join the banqueting crowd
not knowing they are celebrating his funeral. The risen Da Vinci confesses his sins
of omission and the desire to finish his unfinished paintings. However, the Lascas
completely ignore him and start a juggling act using rubber balls (Barnes, *Leonardo*
148). Their festive performance shows no interest in the miracle, and their juggling
mocks the good news of his resurrection. Da Vinci’s mission to double the beauty of the world is rejected. Instead, he is served his last supper of excrement, urine and vomit (Barnes, Leonardo 150). From the Lascas’ behaviour we know how involved they are in this carnival funeral: Da Vinci’s revelation is mocked and travestied; he becomes their meat and salvation (Barnes, Leonardo 149). Like Christ, Da Vinci is crowned as the new man of the Renaissance, then uncrowned and abused until he dies. He is the new Lazarus, who is rejected for not acting as the dummy or the corpse of the joyful funeral. Similarly, in the culture of folk carnival humour “the king is the clown […] elected by all the people and is mocked […] abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter […] is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or drowned even in our time” (Bakhtin 197). Bakhtin here is not interested in the Pre-Christian feast days and the actual ritual killing of a royal figure held at the harvest time or at the end of winter. Unlike Bakhtin, Barnes opens our eyes to the violent origins of carnival performance as the Lascas’ behaviour undermines the spring which follows the mock death of the clown-king. In other words, the juggling gravediggers deny the resurrection and replace Da Vinci’s good news for the perpetuation of their death business. Here Barnes emphasies that Bakhtin’s idea of praise that follows abuse does not lead to the mock death of the elected king, but to the actual killing of the risen artist. By this literal rather than symbolic elimination of victims, Barnes leaves the spectator no channel of comfort or comic relief in the Lascas’ religious ritual:

Alphonso: Father.

Lasca: Son.

They embrace emotionally. MARIA joins them, crying.
Maria: Ave Maria. Bless the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We’re family again.

(Barnes, *Leonardo* 150-1)

Beneath the deceptive equality of this carnival triumph and its seemingly sacred language, there is the market of the plague, murder and death. Barnes’ interest in the recurrent motif of carnival and death can also be seen in his next play *The Ruling Class* (1968) wherein he relies on a similar pattern of parodies and comic inversions of power.

**Power: The Ruling Class’ Most Sacred Travestied**

“In reality he’s [Jack] an earl, an English aristocrat, a peer of the realm, a member of the ruling class. Naturally, he’s come to believe there’s only one person grander than that – the Lord God Almighty Himself.” (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 24)

This play, “a satirical attack on the English class system”, examines “the close relationships between the political establishment, the Church of England and social stratification” (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 28-9). Following Ralph Gurney’s death, the Gurney family dispute who the heir of England would be. Jack, Ralph’s schizophrenic son, resigns his life in a monastery and comes back to rule thus fulfilling his father’s last will. The family feels frustrated by Jack’s teachings on love, the cross and the need to serve others. In taking Christ’s teachings too seriously, his “anti-materialist hippy ideology of the late 1960s” poses a threat to the family/Establishment values (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 30). His uncle Sir Charles plans to get his nephew a wife in order for Charles to rule through the new heir by having Jack certified as mentally insane. Thus, Jack who thinks himself Christ gets
married to Charles’ mistress Grace Shelly. Doctor Herder introduces Jack to McKyle, a patient who thinks himself the electric Messiah. The latter subjects Jack to electroshock therapy; the plan is to put an end to Jack’s hallucinations. As Grace delivers the newly-born heir, the therapy works and Jack returns to his senses, believing himself now to be Jack the Ripper. In Act Two, Jack the Ripper thinks himself God the Father, who is to take revenge and restore justice. Everyone feels happy because Jack is sane enough to rule. Jack kills Charles’ wife Claire and Tucker a communist servant is arrested for dancing at the murder scene. At the end, Jack arrives to the House of Lords, preaches his ‘religion of modern insanity’ on revenge, murder and punishment, and is welcomed by the dummies/Lords of the parliament.

In returning to the banquet, Barnes invites the spectator to look beyond the seriousness of the ruling class at the grotesque play of humour and death, sex and fear, crowning and uncrowning. The official speech at the banquet is serious and formal replacing the informality of the marketplace and the cries of hawkers and quacks for the Gurneys’ palace: “The 13TH EARL OF GURNEY stands in full evening dress and medals at a banqueting table. On it a silver coffee pot and a half-filled wine glass” (Barnes, The Ruling Class 7). The Earl’s speech implicitly differentiates upper from lower class, the ruling family from the servants, and friends from enemies (Barnes, The Ruling Class 7). At the end of this official celebration, a different feast begins one in which the official image of England changes as his lordship undresses:

Tucker: How was your speech, sir?
13TH Earl of Gurney (*dropping his jacket absently on floor*): went well, Tuck.

Englishmen like to hear the truth about themselves. (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 8)

Ralph Gurney, who is getting married again for the sake of the family, has a strange ‘sport’ to release his stress: breath control play. As a result, he is found hanging‘dressed in three-cornered hat, ballet skirt, long underwear and sword’ (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 10). This grotesque ‘sport’ contains abuses and blows, shouts and debasement, gasping and trembling. Ralph is unable to be sexually stimulated unless he is dangled from a noose; he is only productive under the stress of fear and suffering. Here Barnes is ridiculing the political establishment represented by the earl, it is a form of ‘debasement of suffering and fear’ directed at the system’s official truth of seriousness (Bakhtin 174). Thus, in the prologue Barnes travesties the spirit of seriousness into the comic bodily language of desire and pain moving away from the political norm into the cross-dressed judge Ralph Gurney. The grotesque/comic performance of breath control/play may help Ralph temporarily become the artist he wanted to be, release him from his duty with regard to appointing the heir, and liberate him from his fears of a second marriage. Contrary to what Bakhtin thinks, this grotesque/comic practice is not crowned by laughter; his lordship is literally uncrowned and the 13th Earl of Gurney becomes Ralph again – free of his duties - only after his death. One might also argue that this grotesque sport is Ralf’s unofficial laughter at the ruling class; however, in making a statement through grotesque laughter he risks his own life.

Like medieval parodies, Ralph’s last will plays with what is most important and sacred from the viewpoint of the ruling class: power. By this travesty, Barnes
transforms the rule of the upper class into the misrule of prostitutes (Grace Shelley), servants (Tucker) and servant-kings (Jack), power games and prohibitions into transgressions and parodies. Bakhtin explains that travesty, an important element of folk festival and parodical literature, relies on ‘the renewal of clothes and of the social image’ (Bakhtin 81). For example, the schizophrenic Jack, who thinks himself Jesus Christ, becomes heir of the estate and Tucker the butler is given twenty thousand pounds and becomes Mister Tucker. This ‘reversal of hierarchic levels’ is essential to the culture of folk humour (Bakhtin 81). Ralph’s last will represents his silent laughter (or even Barnes’) at the seriousness of the ruling class and their ideology. It is a parody that mocks their power and gives voice to the voiceless, such as Jack who desires to burn his coronation robes as a vow of love for a classless society (Barnes, The Ruling Class 28). This inversion of power also involves a transition from the taboos of the ruling class to the liberty of the bodily lower stratum. For instance, his lordship’s willingness to help open the little church fete uncovers this grotesque comic body of misrule: “Now ladies, tell me my part in this gala opening. Do I charm bracelets, swing lead, break wind, pass water? (Barnes, The Ruling Class 35) There are also parodies of the verses of the New Testament:

Earl of Gurney (advancing after them): Mrs Pamela Treadwell, can you love?

Can your blood bubble, flesh melt, thighs twitch, heart burst for love?

Mrs Treadwell: Your lordship, I’m a married woman.

Earl of Gurney: Sexual perversion is no sin.

..........................................................
Earl of Gurney (advancing): Remember the commandment I gave you, love one another as I love you. (Barnes, The Ruling Class 37)

Such parodies free the Earl from the chains of seriousness and the oppression of official ideology. Also, they help expose the laughing aspect of the world where upper becomes lower, love becomes perversion, king becomes servant, servant becomes king, and mistress becomes queen. Wanting to stop this game, Sir Charles has his own parody in which he ‘elects’ his mistress Grace Shelley an ephemeral queen for his mad nephew. Convinced he is married to the fictional Lady of Camellias, Jack rejects his uncle’s idea. As a result, Grace Shelley dresses up as the Lady of Camellias and deceives Jack. Bishop Lampton, however, refuses to solemnize his nephew’s marriage ‘during the period from Advent Sunday till eight days after Epiphany’ (Barnes, The Ruling Class 52). This period of fasting and feasting is significant within the medieval festive culture when mock kings and queens were elected on feast days (Bakhtin 81). Aware of this popular tradition, the bishop, representing the official voice of church, temporarily rejects such travesty of marriage and power during this holy season. Later and despite his grave misgivings, the bishop plays his role in this game of uncrowning by consecrating his nephew’s travestied marriage.

This emphasis on travesty and the change of roles in the spirit of carnival humour may be seen as a continuous challenge to power relationships within the established order. However, the power to affect ‘change’ seems to be the privilege of the

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9 Here we note the similarity between her name and that of the actress Grace Kelly who famously married the King of Monaco in the mid-1950s.

10 Lady of Camellias is a fictional character from the mid-nineteenth century popular novel/play La Dame aux Camellias by Alexandre Dumas fils.
powerful (Sir Charles) not the privilege of the fools (Tucker or Jack). In this ambivalent movement between upper and lower, order and disorder, Barnes reveals a bloodline of terror and victimisation that leads us away from the passive participation of the juggling gravediggers, mad kings and stripper queens. Here the idea of humour and the act of becoming, constantly pregnant with another body is the carnivalistic language of the marketplace, the performance of the grotesque body, which is also connected with death. In Bakhtin’s theory ‘the grotesque body is the comic body laughable and racked by laughter alike, laughing its guts out’ (Remshardt 47). Remshardt interprets the grotesque body as ‘Bakhtin’s utopian super-sign into which all folk activity is subsumed and through which it is expressed’ (Remshardt 47). For example, Leonardo’s last supper is the Lascas’ ideal moment of joyful funeral towards a better future in their homeland. The marriage of Jack and Grace is also seen as the Gurneys’ festive plan to restore the crown. In these plays and unlike Bakhtin, Barnes invites us to look beyond the carnival and its grotesque laughter at the making of death. The stage in The Ruling Class facilitates this revelation of death in the festive where terror and trial meet at the heart of carnival. Split in two by a wooden cross, the stage uncovers this tension between upper and lower, heavenly rule and earthly misrule which is also apparent in the roles of Grace the performer, Jack the mad saviour and Tucker the anarchist. Grace is continually in the act of becoming someone else: mistress, entertainer, stripper and wife. Following her travestied wedding, she steps out of her wedding dress and halts this cycle for a while. “I always get my first night nerves. Any good performer does. […] I’ve done it all from Stanislavski to Strip. Never think I once worked as a stripper, would you? […] (Takes off her stocking and throws it absently at the audience)” (Barnes, The Ruling Class 62). Tucker also steps out of his social role as
a servant and speaks of his fear to break free from the habit of serving in the palace: “Born a servant, see, son of a servant. Family of servants. From a nation of servants. […]. Me, this tired old creeping servant, I’m the real England, not beef-eating Johnny Bullshit. I know my history. Masters and servants, that’s the way of it” (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 31). However, this awareness of history does not take Tucker beyond the walls of servitude having defined his true identity as a comic relief:

*Just ’ere comic relief.* Know who I really am? […]. Alexi Kronstadt. Number 243. Anarchist – Trotskyist – Communist – Revolutionary. I’m a cell! All these years I’ve been working for the Revolution, spitting in the hot soup, peeing on the Wedgewood dinner plates. (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* my italics 31)

In light of his personal history as a servant, the seeming rebellion or rather carnival misrule is inseparable from his dependence on the official order. Tucker’s passive participation has transformed him from the servant Tucker into Mister Tucker to be finally deprived of his title and rendered a foolish victim. Carnival has helped Grace and Tucker live with this duality rather than question or overcome their fears outside their given roles. This festive game frees Grace from one master only to be passed on to another, from being a stripper to becoming Charles’ mistress, then from Jack’s wife to Jack the Ripper’s victim.

Victimisation, a key motif in *The Ruling Class*, is a useful idea in exploring the connections between carnival and trial, terror and laughter, the false and genuine sacred. This festive making of death can be seen in Dr. Herder’s experiment when he uses two patients to demonstrate the insanity of Jack and his teachings on love
and equality (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 28). Here Barnes brings up the problematic biblical issue of love and justice in the confrontation between two ‘gods’: Mckyle (God the Father) and Jack J.C. (God the Son). Under Mckyle’s imaginary electrical charge, Jack surrenders and a beast bursts in. Interestingly, “*none of the others sees the beast, which grabs the Earl and shakes him violently, to the accompaniment of high-speed jabber from the tape-recorder, thunder-claps and Mckyle’s harsh chants* ‘two million volts zzzzz three million zzzzzzzz’” (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 73). This confrontation (treatment) is based on misunderstanding about the nature of God in connection to the Old Testament as a mad figure full of wrath and hungry for bloody sacrifices. Here Barnes may be attacking the political institution and psychotherapists as they unite against the victim (Jack and later Tucker) using a religious misunderstanding or a mythical pretext to justify violence and protect their rule. Because of their ignorance and refusal of Christ’s teachings, the family accuse Jack/Christ of madness and godlessness and thus they fail to recognise the monstrous beast of their sacrificial plan (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 72). Their refusal of love accumulates more victims (Claire, Tucker and Grace) and effectively perpetuates murder: in this way they maintain hierarchy and power. In opposition to their justification and mythologisation of violence in the name of God, Jack/Christ cries out that he is the loving Father (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 73). The family rejects this revelation hindered by their love for power and revenge. Hence, they project their hunger for sacrifices onto God who is banished for a bestial worship: “I [Mckyle] made the world in mae image. I’m a holy terror. Sae that accounts for the bloody mess it’s in” (Barnes, *The Ruling Class* 72). Accused of causing unrest and troubles, the victim is humiliated, mocked, disfigured to be eliminated by the community (the family in this context). This stratified society opposes Jack’s peaceful revolution of
love for a continuation of its practices of persecution. According to Girard, laying the blame and turning the violence on a sacrificial victim is an ancient custom and is thought to help restore peace and social harmony (Brooke 5). Thus, upon eliminating the evil-doer, the scapegoat (Jack) is exalted and becomes the god of divine wrath in Act Two. In this process of sacralisation, the bestial and the troublemaker are also the ‘saviour’ whose death provides the essential hope for the community. Against this grotesque culture of ‘sacrifice’ (represented by Mckyle and the Christ-like Jack) and its divinisation of victims (transforming Jack into the god of revenge), Jack’s earlier cry may be seen as Girard’s biblical counter-narrative to the old sacred and its victim mechanism. However, the family turn their back on Jack’s revelation and their refusal of a loving God leads to the perpetuation of violence and the accumulation of more victims.

Restoring order to the community, following Jack’s ‘rule without rules’ and his teachings on love, requires a victim and the activation of prohibitions and laws. Whereas Jack/Christ welcomes the marginalised and challenges hierarchy, the ruling class worship power, marginalise God and persecute the weak. Thus, in Act One as we have seen, Jack/Christ is condemned for misrule and the ‘priest’ who conducts this treatment/sacrifice is Dr. Herder. In Act Two, the deformed Jack is ‘cured’ to rule as God Almighty, the law-giver and the Judge (Barnes, The Ruling Class 90). The expulsion of the Christ-like Jack for the revengeful Jack encourages further selections and justifies elimination. The ‘expulsion mechanism continues to operate’ today; however, the audience should not be deceived by this substitution for ‘we are no longer capable of worshipping our victims’ (Stevens 5-6). This change might be seen as the fruit of the cross of Jesus that reveals and destroys the false sacred having established a new understanding of sacrifice based on the separation of love from
murder, peace from violence, divine from ‘sacred’ (Girard, ISSFL 119). By pointing to the continuation of worship in the House of Lords, Barnes wants to open our eyes to these multi-narratives and to review our position as spectators/participants. Now Jack, the god of vengeance is made ‘normal’, he starts enacting prohibitions and performing rituals (Barnes, The Ruling Class 92). He is also proud of his coronation robes; there is now no question of burning them for they are the symbolic attire of parliamentary ritual. On the importance of this ritual of prohibitions, Girard writes:

    Prohibitions attempt to avert the crisis by prohibiting those behaviours that provoke it, and if the crisis recurs nonetheless, or threatens to do so, ritual then attempts to channel it in a direction that would lead to resolution, which means a reconciliation of the community at the expense of what one must suppose to be an arbitrary victim. (Girard, THSFW 25)

Order involves enacting prohibitions, performing rituals, selecting a victim and making laws. In Act Two, re-establishing order requires a new victim and hence Tucker, accused of murdering Claire, becomes the next surrogate in this cycle of disorder-order, violence and counter-violence. Selecting Tucker as the substitute is significant, for both Jack and Tucker are accused of being rebels, they also represent the marginalised in society, and they choose to serve others. “Since sacrifice is always a question of substitution, it is always possible to make a new substitution and henceforth to sacrifice only a substitute of the substitute” (Girard, THSFW 53). Thus Jack offers Tucker as a sacrifice or a substitute of the earlier victim, the god of love in this context. This also shows that sacrifice, as a means of peace and establishing order, is not the end of the cycle of violence but acts only as a temporary
closure/solution in times of disorder. Barnes’ fascination with and revelation of victim selection and substitution also occurs in his next play *Red Noses* in which he is equally interested in victimisation and the intersections of carnival/terror.

**Red Noses: From Carnival to the Carnivalesque**

Seven Cardinals including the noble Giovanni Colunna, and one hundred and five bishops are already plague-pitted, plague-dead. So in return they hang two scrawny Jews. Those were the only two left for slaughter. That’s the size of the problem. (Barnes, *Red Noses* 13)

Although Barnes does not acknowledge that he was consciously exploring aspects of 1960s cultures, the play is concerned with the development and survival of an essentially pacifist independent group. (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 102)

*Red Noses* (1985) is the story of Flote, a Franciscan monk challenged by the suffering of his plague-stricken people in medieval France 1348 to bring them Easter laughter. Like Christ, he looks for disciples to help the suffering laugh despite their pain. Together they make up Christ’s clowns - Father Flote (a wave) jerks violently, Rochfort (rock fort) is a soldier, Sonnerie (or Master Bells) makes sounds, blind Le Grue (a monster), Marguerite a nun and others. Their unofficial truth of laughter and their debasement of suffering are in contrast to the official truth of seriousness represented by the Pope, some of his clergy, the Flagellants, and Black Ravens. Given a red nose each, Red Noses ‘an early symptom of the plague’ is also the name given to God’s fools (Woolland, *Dark Attractions* 87). Like *The Ruling Class*, the play is structured in such a way that scenes create a double image: black death-
order, elimination of Jews and lepers – elimination of Flagellants and Ravens, official Floties – unofficial Floties, the performance of *Everyman* during Easter Laughter – *Nativity* and the massacre of boys at the end of the plague, carnival – an oppositional laughter. Following the Pope’s permission, they perform *Everyman* to help the infected confront death with joy. Through laughter, Father Flote acts in love and challenges the flagellants’ salvation of pain. Ravens and Flagellants unite with the Floties despite the end of the plague and the Pope feels threatened by Floties’ increasing power of joy and love. Now the plague is over, the authorities have to make sure the Floties’ laughter is under control by enabling prohibitions and laws. As the Floties perform their final piece The Nativity of Christ urging people to think not to laugh, the authorities support a military campaign to crush the Flagellants and the Black Ravens proclaiming them anathema (Barnes, *Red Noses* 94). Since the plague is over, Floties are asked to perform under the Pope’s rules otherwise they will be killed. Flote consents for he wants to save his friends; however, his last reaction to the Pope’s order is a dance. He dances and laughs despite the orders. Floties join him one by one. Father Flote witnesses their death and like Jesus, he is killed by the Judas-like Rochfort.

The play contrasts the salvation of suffering and pain preached by the medieval church and Christ’s salvation of laughter, revealing and later challenging the regenerative aspect of folk humour: “When St Francis came before Innocent III, His Holiness told him to caper in the dirt with pigs. St Francis did so and God opened the Holy Father’s eyes and Pope Innocent blessed and sanctioned St Francis and his Franciscan Order” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 49). Like Francis of Assisi, Father Flote, determined to serve God and man, set out to gather his disciples God’s jugglers, whose laughter reveals God’s love and defeats the seriousness of the plague. These
clowns, like the medieval clown - the spokesman of the unofficial truth - are on a mission to tell the good news of the heavenly kingdom and help people overcome fear of death and prohibitions. Father Toulon one of the Red Noses has no faith in laughter: “How do you know God is interested in our joy and laughter? Perhaps he wants our tears and suffering? […] The link between God and man, and man and man, is fear. God wants to be feared not loved. Make them bow down and tremble” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 23). In order to fulfil their mission despite the fear of the official truth, their laughter must be legalised within a Christian time frame: “On the Octave of Epiphany we hold the Feast of Fools when the Mass is brayed and water is poured over the clergy […] I’ll hold a daily Fools’ Feast. With thy blessing others’ll join” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 14-5). This unofficial festive day of clergy and fools praying and braying is immersed in ‘the triumphant theme of bodily regeneration and renewal’ (Bakhtin 75). For example, Marguerite, a nun, is saved from rape, but she is still eager to be raped for penance. Her attempt to join the public orgy fails for she is not a member of the whores’ guild. Finally her attitude with regard to suffering is changed and she becomes one of the Floties: she is in tune with Master Bells with whom she dances and whose bells she rings. The flagellants, who scourge themselves for Christ, also change their attitude when confronted by Flote’s salvation of laughter and love.

Now the plague is over, the Floties’ laughter as the free expression of bodily lower stratum and the fearless offspring of disorder needs to be redefined. Laws, sacrifices and official carnivals are enabled instead to bring back fear and order. Throughout his plays, Barnes insists that the restoration of order is inseparable from rituals, prohibitions and counter-violence.
First, increase the taxes on the clergy and loan Philip fifty thousand gold florins for his war against the English. We’ll support his coming campaign to crush the Black Ravens by proclaiming them anathema. In return, Philip will support us against the Flagellants. (Barnes, Red Noses 94)

During the plague, the same procedures were taken against Jews and lepers accused of starting the plague by poisoning the wells. This elimination of the unclean does not put an end to the plague; rather, it is the system’s failure to function in the face of disorder: “if the wells were poisoned, we did it – the Black Ravens. They know but they’re too frightened to move against us” (Barnes, Red Noses 72). Scapegoats are needed to maintain order: Jews and lepers are sacrificed as the surrogate victims responsible for the Ravens’ crimes committed against the community. “The Black Ravens, former slaves who have earned their freedom by burying the dead, welcome the plague, seeing it as an apocalypse which opens possibilities for revolution and the establishment of a new social order” (Woolland, Dark Attractions 87). Whether or not authorities approve of the Ravens’ rebellion, the latter help ventilate the system at a time of collective death. The Floties’ humour has also helped the authorities control social upheaval by distracting the people’s attention from pain, death and injustice (Barnes, Red Noses 95). Now that the plague is over, order has to be maintained through the selection and elimination of those likely to affect the rebirth: Ravens, Flagellants and Floties. “What’s to become of the most profitable business of the Holy Office – selling salvation – if men can cleanse themselves? If they are getting it free from the Flagellants we’ll be forced out of the salvation

11 Here it is important to mention that both Barnes and Shaffer engage with a history of persecution and reveal its “stereotypes of accusation” – poisoning, homosexuality and incest among others - that mobilise the crowd at times of conflict and natural disasters (Girard, The Scapegoat 16-7).
business” (Barnes, Red Noses 95). There is even a better reason to kill them since they have abandoned their faith in suffering and united with the Floties.

However, by stepping out of their roles, the Floties challenge the carnival licence of their performance and create a counter-cultural carnivalesque moment of non-violent resistance. “Certainly, the play is informed by the social changes that took place in the 1960s, and by Establishment responses to those changes; but it is no more ‘about’ the 1960s than it is ‘about’ the Black Death” (Woolland, Dark Attractions 103). On the one hand, Barnes uses God’s jugglers in connection to the carnivalesque to uncover a post-war culture characterised by ‘a refusal of authority on behalf of the young’, a concern with pacifist groups and community theatres (Woolland, Dark Attractions 103). On the other, the plague in the play is bigger than a disease and becomes a metaphor for socio-political unrest. In examining the plague in literature and myth, Girard also articulates a similar view: “Historians still argue whether the Black Death was a cause or a consequence of the social upheavals in the fourteenth century” (Girard, The Plague 3). During the plague, Christ’s clowns are the mask behind which authorities hide their failure to serve and save the people. After the plague, the Pope himself must redefine the temporary liberty given to and provided by Floties:

Clement VI: Please the populace with passing shows: relax them with culinary delights [...]. But give them no meat to chew on.

Flote: But the Lord is my consuming fire. (Barnes, Red Noses 109)

Carnival, a festive time of folly and deceptive equality, must not bring the crowd enlightenment concerning the Lord’s teachings. On the contrary, it should help the
people live in fear of both God and authorities for the perpetuation of selling ‘salvation’. The Floties perform their last piece the Nativity and shout their obedience to God instead. Frustrated with their humourless performance, the audience refuse to face the recurring reality of oppression: the massacre of the newly-born boys in Bethlehem, of the Flagellants, the Ravens and the Floties in medieval France. It is a refusal to meet their responsibility for these victims. However, Floties insist on taking off their red noses and refuse to dance in this carnival of Black Death. This body gesture is their shout against the perpetuation of social and political injustices after the end of the plague (Barnes, Red Noses 113). Their final dance of disobedience is their peaceful resistance not to be disengaged from their living faith. However, when carnival humour transgresses the regulations set for its growth, revolt must be eliminated. Here, the danger lies in having united with the Ravens and the Flagellants under the banner of love. Thus, Floties challenge the licence they are given by embracing those who are ideologically different from them. It is a carnivalesque gesture by which the community celebrates its unity and triumph over the hegemony of central authority, the medieval church in this context.

Under threat, the community defends and protects itself through selection and elimination. Here, René Girard views the scapegoat mechanism as a foundational element to the birth of the first human community: “The account of this murder [Cain’s murder of Abel] is not a founding myth; it is rather the biblical interpretation of all founding myths” (Girard, ISSFL 83). The biblical “refusal of mythic expulsions” is important to the understanding of Barnes’ world particularly in connection to the theme of victimisation and the dance of Red Noses, another name for the plague (Barnes, Red Noses 112). In this light, Barnes’ use of the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers should warn the audience to Rochfort’s lie as he betrays
his master and his fellow Floties to the Pope: “I entered my father’s house another Joseph and it was all mine. How my family embraced me when I returned and how they wept when I kicked them out” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 108-9). Unlike Rochfort, the story of Joseph highlights the triumph of love and mercy over ‘sacrifice’ and revenge. Whereas Rachfort rebels against his ‘brothers’ by submitting to the church, the Floties’ rejection to obey rules and orders is a rejection of worldly possessions and hierarchies: “there’s no buying or selling here at Avignon [...]. We hold all things in common. No man is wronged where no man is a possessor” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 109). Their faith can only generate peace and love as it transcends suffering and rivalry; however, this unconditional love is the very threat confronting church authority. Thus, their performance of the Nativity can be seen as an invitation to stop laughing and to reconsider any approval of carnivals and victim selection. Barnes at this point is connecting the festive Christmas time with the historical background of the biblical story to reveal persecution – the divine family\(^{12}\) flee to Egypt away from King Herod’s decree to slaughter the newly born boys in Bethlehem. The audience, blind to collective murder, demand a light subject for they want to laugh: “mirth and jolly’s not enough for them now. They want to make us think” (Barnes, *Red Noses* 106). Taking off their red noses marks the Floties’ decision not to submit to the church authority, but to condemn the executions practiced against the Jews, lepers, Flagellants and Ravens. Their refusal to participate in the ‘sacred’ and its making/celebration of death is Barnes’ recurrent journey in his next play *Laughter.*

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\(^{12}\) The divine family stands for Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus.
The Challenge to Look Beyond Laughter

Peter Barnes’ *Laughter* (1978) consists of two parts: focusing on the Tsar in Moscow 1573 and the Gestapo bureaucrats in Berlin 1942. Both parts evoke terror, bloodshed, tyranny and scenes of torture contrary to the title of the play. Tsar Ivan the Terrible and Abbot Semeon exchange roles, but as they struggle to free themselves from authority, they realise how trapped they are in power, carnival games and trials. Tsar Ivan puts many people to death including Prince Nikita his enemy, Semeon and his own son Tsarveti. Semeon is put to death for his refusal to act as the Tsar’s dummy and Tsarveti for daring to ask his old father for the throne. At the end the authoritarian Tsar fights the angel of death and is willing to fight God so to obtain authority over life and death. Despite his attempt to subjugate death, the Tsar eventually dies. In part II, 1942, Hitler puts a mass of people to death in the ovens of Auschwitz. Cranach and his workmates work for WVHA, the Economic and Administrative Main Office of the Nazi party. Driven by jealousy, Gottlieb visits the office to spy on the Department Head, Cranach and his workmates, but his attempt fails. Now they are drunk Gottlieb makes each one of them confess the truth, they cry out their pain, dance, laugh and tell jokes. Gottlieb thinks he is triumphant for he has recorded their laughter on a recording machine. He switches on the recorder to hear nothing but dissonant sounds. The others, in their fear, try to prove their loyalty to Hitler and his party. Gottlieb appeals to Else and Stroop to report against Cranach if they want to inherit his job as a reward or else he will report against all of them. Cranach appeals to his workmates against Gottlieb providing them with the security of their job. Gottlieb remains an outsider whose

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13 Ivan of Russia known as Tsar Ivan the Terrible was the Prince of Moscow from 1533 to 1547 and Tsar of all Russia from 1547 until his death in 1584.
record of the group’s laughter is mere noise. Next Gottleb decodes the security of their work codes and symbols; however, they deny responsibility for the blazing flames of Auschwitz. At the end they repeatedly chant the ritual of their security, protecting themselves against the bestial reality of their work.

By returning to the culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages, the focus on the banquet is also central here as Barnes explicitly struggles to break free from its humour. This can be seen in the first scene as the audience welcomes the ‘author’ figure with a custard pie. Even before giving his speech, the ‘author’ is ridiculed: “A hand slaps a large custard pie straight in his face. As he wipes it off a laughing Voice declares: It’s going to be that kind of a show, folks!” (Barnes, Laughter 343). By this gesture one can anticipate the banquet atmosphere and its invitation to laugh and be ridiculed. Contrary to their expectations, this ‘author’ is not the barker of the marketplace who invites customers to his booth as part of the performances at the fair (Bakhtin 153). At these fairs the Barker who does not maintain his clownery would be accused of heresy because of his attempt to mock church authority (Bakhtin 164). Here the ‘author’ rejects this clownery and thus he is rejected. His refusal to be led by the audience in turn challenges their judgment: “A sense of humour’s no remedy for evil. [...] Laughter is the ally of tyrants. It softens our hatred. An excuse to change nothing. For nothing needs changing when it’s all a joke” (Barnes, Laughter 343). Thus Barnes explicitly challenges laughter refusing the ‘certainty’ of passive participation and questioning any authority including his: “in the face of Atilla the Hun, Ivan the terrible, a Passendale or Auschwitz, what good is laughter?” (Barnes, Laughter 343). Not far away from the ‘author’ and his struggle to subdue this humourous performance, Barnes points to the first victim outside a Moscow Chapel reminding us of the official order.
At the crossing-borders of the author’s performance and the audience’s laughter and participation, Barnes reveals several victims: the enemy at the stake, the monk as Tsar’s carnival dummy and Tsar’s foolish heir. The emphasis on the temporal liberty of carnival laughter and its travesty of power should challenge us to see the victim in the relationship between dictatorship and religious authority. Tsar Ivan comments on this exchange of roles between the political and religious father-figures: “I made you tsar whilst I took the name Ivan and retired to pray. F’ two years I’ve monked t’ humble, you’ve throned ‘t mightily” (Barnes, Laughter 350). However, beneath this equality, we know that Abbot Semeon is the mock tsar of carnivals, a ridiculed emperor humbled by the community for the sake of its peace and harmony: “Let me go back t’ Tver and be crowned Tsar o drunkards, eat sweatmeats on Sundays, [...] sleep on my wife’s belly [...]” (Barnes, Laughter 350). The thin line between ‘rule’ and misrule, Tsar and abbot, official and unofficial becomes more and more evident:

Semeon: Sire, you gave me staff, Monomachus’s crown and the sacred name o’ Tsar [...]. Yet in peace and war governance is still thine. [...].

Ivan: Despite my orders. I order ‘em t’ disobey me, tis the only order they disobey. (Barnes, Laughter 350)

Barnes warns us from the beginning not to be fooled by this performance of carnival misrule and boldly points to Prince Nikita crucified or impaled on a stake (Barnes, Laughter 343). In light of these interconnections between carnival and trials, folly and power, laughter and penance, Barnes comments on the ambivalent nature of carnival and reveals its monstrous side. Carnival, which also means goodbye to meat in relation to the celebrations of Mardi Gras (Bakhtin 222), ridicules its victims and belittles their suffering travestying their exclusion into temporary equality. The
unofficial truth of laughter and debasement of suffering is inseparable from obedience. After the carnival, there is no actual change in terms of the social and political injustices. One could also argue that carnival perpetuates victimisation or disguises victims transforming their passion stories into a new beginning. In this connection, Tsar Ivan believes he comes closer to God in having his enemy crucified: “Red is the colour of the Cross whereon God had a God killed. I came closest t’ Him, where men die [...] new Christianed in their gore” (Barnes, *Laughter* 344). This, according to Girard, is based on a misunderstanding of Jesus’ death and the role of sacrifice in both the Old and New Testaments. In this myth and contrary to the Bible, God is represented as a dictator hungry for bloodshed and sacrifices, a figure who takes sides in war rather than as a loving father eager to die to save the life of his children. The Tsar uses this religious blind to later justify killing his own son. The teachings and the death of Jesus, however, has opened our eyes on the myth of holy terror, which is in harmony with victim selection (Girard, *ISSFLL* 131). By this myth and in response to this carnival mania/freedom, Tsar Ivan bangs his forehead on the ground seeking redemption in his own blood and that of his victims. In his view the church must consecrate this blood; however, such consecration perpetuates violence and denies the message of the Gospels – the triumph of unconditional love over the cult of victim selection.

Behind this carnival scene of dance, humour and travesty, Barnes reveals misunderstanding, selection and trial. During this game of submission and rebellion, crowning and uncrowning, Semeon the mock Tsar struggles to dramatize and summon authority and Tsar the mock abbot cannot obtain salvation (Barnes, *Laughter* 348). In the guise of obedience the Tsar remains a dictator and Semeon longs to submit: “I’ll give you the power t’ choose, t’ judge when a man’s ready"
judgement. Legs!” (Barnes, *Laughter* 352). It is even worse now that Semeon is given permission to participate in the punishment of victims and thus they both pull on Nikita’s legs. “There is a great jangling of bells as the stake rips up into the victim’s body” (Barnes, *Laughter* 352). Carnival both alienates and subjugates its participants to monstrosity, where a victim’s legs are mere bells that a dictator rings. The use of bells is an important reminder of God’s call for believers to be united as a church family. Instead, Semeon accepts the Tsar’s invitation and they become united in acts of murder. Whether or not actual bells exist on the victim’s legs, the ringing of legs/bells is a reminder of the body language of jugglers and of the fact that carnival is a puppets’ show controlled by Tsar-abbot. “Ah God was near us then. F’ He is the author of all punishment. [...] Didst feel His well-streams showering us wi’ His grace?” (Barnes, *Laughter* 353). In laughing at terror and conducting carnival trials, Ivan/Semeon thinks he is closer to God and becomes sanctified by the blood of the scapegoat: “taste the smart o’ t, Christ’s precious blood, blessed sacrament. I’ll give thee the right t’ play butcher, Semeon. Divide those t’ be slaughtered from those fit f’ breeding according t’ age, weight and quality. [...] I’ll give thee the authority o’ death” (Barnes, *Laughter* 352). This is based on Tsar’s misunderstanding of God whom he thinks is a butcher; however, the biblical narrative clearly states that God does not require sacrifices (Hos. 6:6). The separation of love and divine justice from violence manifests itself in the Christ of the gospels who dies against all justifications of violence and counter-violence, condemns persecution and vindicates victims (Girard, *Girard Reader* 18). This is the kind of God that most of Barnes’ characters fail to recognise or accept for a perpetuation of scapegoating and the march of laughing terror. Here Tsar Ivan’s relationship with his son the Tsarevitch is not different from the earlier relationship with his enemy for his kingdom of power
in opposition to God’s kingdom of love excludes friends and enemies (Barnes, *Laughter* 361). In contrast, Christ’s death challenges this earthly rule and its materialist rewards. Had he defended himself against the cross, Christ would have become like military leaders who justify the use of violence (Girard, *ISSFLL* 140).

Unlike Christ, the Tsar in love with his own idolatry of power rejects God and the Tsarvetich: the first for His selfless love and the second for seeking power (Barnes, *Laughter* 263). Tsar Ivan does not only kill his own son, but he also expresses his desire to “pierce the side o’ Him who made the world” (Barnes, *Laughter* 366). His final battle with Samael, the angel of death, reveals the Tsar’s true worship and his refusal to give the crown (Barnes, *Laughter* 364). *Laughter* provides many examples through which Barnes rips apart the disguise of the ‘sacred’ – the idolatry of power in this context - to reveal dictatorship, dark humour and victimisation. In light of the Tsar’s narrative of humour and its carnivalisation of punishment, the angel points to the future making of a greater ‘devouring’, Auschwitz 1942.

By this extended metaphor of laughter and bloodshed, Barnes investigates a possible link between the Middle Ages and modernity. His uses of travesty and parody are not meant to make the spectator laugh at the Middle Ages but should challenge us to look beyond the mask of clownery at the dark side of carnival humour. The significant use of the biblical references in Part One should help us view the two parts in juxtaposition. Barnes, as we have seen in Moscow during the rule of the Tsar, demythologises the idea of good/bad violence to speak for victims and thus he invites us to reconsider a similar understanding of the work of Gestapo bureaucrats in Berlin. The journey from Moscow (1573) to Berlin (1942) and the

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14 This reminds us of Constantine the Great who killed his own son Crispus for the sake of the empire in 326 (Cherniavsky 200).
exploration of dictatorship in the two parts reveal Barnes’ interest in the festive making of death. Gradually, the play moves away from the festive and carnival laughter to focus on hierarchical classifications, religious discrimination and persecution as in *Red Noses* and *The Ruling Class*. The interest in the ovens outside the Gestapo bureaucrats’ office is Barnes’ invitation to look beyond the workers’ files, jokes and laughter at the real suffering of victims and the production of death. In this hell, Barnes challenges the triumph of laughter and jokes over fear and suffering, and reveals the tortured ‘dummies’ behind the work of ‘comedians’ (Barnes, *Laughter* 405). The latter are the conductors represented as monstrous figures dressed in black rubber and gas-masks. They are the new ‘priests’ who prepare the disfigured bodies for the ovens and whose laughter produces death rather than renewal and fear rather than liberty.

*Laughter* as a whole differentiates between a religious language used to justify violence and a deep understanding of Christian elements used as a daring reference in the face of violence. This trap or religious disguise provides the WVHA workers with a feeling of security by means of travesty, symbols, numbers and repetition as they automatically type the numbers of people marked to die in the ovens. They are proud of their job thinking it provides the world with one of the Inca Temples (Barnes, *Laughter* 409). Like every rite of expulsion, this grotesque performance of extermination requires a certain degree of misunderstanding and participation (Girard, *Girard Reader* 76). Barnes does not directly use the word sacrifice in the second part of the play, but his use of religious language in connection to the selection and expulsion of victims is interesting. Here as well as in the previous plays, cleansing is inseparable from the extermination and is meant to purify and to protect the community. The new priests are travestied into sanitation men, the
temples into gas-chambers and the altars into crematoriums. Blind to the reality of mass death outside their offices, the WVHA workers find security in the familiarity of their files: “You know extermination facilities were established in Auschwitz in June for the liquidation of all Jews in Europe. CP3(m) described in E(5) is the new concrete flue for the crematoriums” (Barnes, Laughter 401). Despite Gottleb’s attempts to make his colleagues aware of the horror of Auschwitz, they chant their spell-like prayer to protect themselves from identifying the victims in the fires outside their office (Barnes, Laughter 407-8). This is their triumph of a bestial worship by which they insist on misrecognising the victims. It is the chant of avoidance, a veil of authorised violence, which provides them with the illusory prospects of a status quo defined by blind obedience and fear. Similar to their jokes and their laughing at oppression, these forms of humour, including their ‘prayer’, provide them with a momentary triumph under the rule of Hitler, and relieve them while simultaneously subjugating them to Nazi carnival ‘games’. Recording their laughs as an evidence of betrayal does not help Gottleb report these ‘clowns’ to the authorities. However, Barnes records this failure to show his audience the multifaces of laughter: free and conservative, popular and terrifying, collective and isolating.

Laughing loudly, Else, Stroop and Cranach produce children’s toy squeakers, put on Christmas paper hats and advance triumphantly on Gottleb who defends himself by also putting on a paper and whipping out his toy squeaker. They blow furiously at each other. But Gottleb is outnumbered. (Barnes, Laughter 400-1)
The workers laugh Gottleb out and their laughter transforms the joy of Christmas and its message of salvation into the bad news of extermination. By this ‘weapon’ of recorded laughs and jokes, Barnes reveals the difficulty in bringing about change through laughter. In other words and paradoxically, the workers, in the spirit of Christmas celebrations, unite by laughter against the dying voice of the victims and thus refuse to take any responsibility for the persecuted.

Whereas the language of their office work has been diminished to simply consist of numbers and laughter, Barnes points to the non-language of victims in the furnaces of Auschwitz. In this gap between the inside and the outside, the workers ‘no longer believe in a secure sentence structure. Neutral symbols have become the safest means of communication’ (Barnes, *Laughter* 379). In living by rules and regulations, there is also an insecurity of being deprived of communicating what the workers feel and think. “This is war, Gottleb, a million words’ve died on us” (Barnes, *Laughter* 379). They have become paper beings that cannot communicate or even think for themselves; instead, they provide the ovens with the numbers/bodies needed for the continuation of production. Agamben notes that, in ‘Auschwitz people did not die rather corpses were produced. Corpses without death, non-humans whose decease is debased into a matter of serial production (figures)’ (Agamben, *Remnants* 72). The workers in their comfortable seats refuse to see the link between their files and the burnt ashes in the crematoriums (Barnes, *Laughter* 401). Because they never use words to describe the devouring ‘machine’ outside, Gottleb challenges them to see, smell, listen and articulate.

‘Our Wash and Stream’ll Help you Dream’. The dressing rooms’ve signs in every European language, […], Tie Your Shoes Together and Fold your
Clothes’, ‘The Management Take No Responsibility for any Losses Incurred.’

Oh we’re clever […]. It helps calm those marked down to die as they go naked along carpeted passages to the communal wash-room. (Barnes, Laughter 403)

The gas-chambers and crematoria are made to look like public baths and altars, the signs and numbers act as a modern disguise behind which the Nazis hide their desire to obliterate human features and facilitate the speed of corpse-production. In Laughter, Barnes draws attention to the perpetuation of institutionalised murder and insists on the unmasking of the victim. This is achieved in his challenging of the religious security of political rituals and practices of mass death, in the light of a biblical reading that aims to unmask the victim.

**Turning Away from Carnival Trials in Peter Shaffer’s Lettice and Lovage:**

Next we shall see with Peter Shaffer a similar thematic concern with victims, trials and carnival forms. Generally speaking, Shaffer’s characters are on a quest for meaning, worship and identity in a world drained of its spirituality. In Lettice and Lovage (1987), Shaffer ‘temporarily abandons the experimental techniques’ for the verbal and the realistic (Gianakaris 145). Like Barnes, Shaffer turns power systems inside out revealing laughing terror and exclusion rather than inclusion. Lettice and Lovage highlights issues of violence and the inability to feel reconciled with the present in the London of the 1970s-80s. It also returns to the history of public executions – the execution of King Charles I, Queen Mary of Scots and Marie Antoinette – where the laughter of the people and executioners is heard loudly (Averintsev 85). Clearly, the play is about the tour guide of the sixteenth century Fustian House Lettice Douffet, who tells her own story of the house, negotiates the authority of the Preservation Trust and activates the visitors’ participation. However,
because a few people report her fabricated stories of the Fustian House, Miss Lotte Sochen, who works for the Trust, questions Lettice’s power and she loses her job. Following this ‘trial’ in Act Two, Lotte visits Lettice to tell her about a job opportunity where she could make use of her love for history and theatre. They are reconciled over a sixteenth-century cordial and become friends. Lotte is an idolater in love with historical facts and architecture; Lettice is a romantic in love with Tudor England and Shakespeare’s history plays. The racial tensions, the expansion of companies and of unemployment haunt their talk and are typical symptoms of social discontent in the timeline of the play. In Act Three, Lettice, charged with attempted murder, is being interviewed by her solicitor Mr. Bardolph. Because she is innocent, she refuses to tell how she struck Lotte with an axe believing Lotte will eventually come to her defence. Under fear of persecution, Lettice tells him about the historical trials and persecutions she enacted with Lotte in her basement flat. It becomes clear that during one of these theatrical displays, Lettice's cat startled Lotte in the midst of their performance, causing her injury. The lawyer tells them they must testify to this in order to get the case against Lettice thrown out of court. Scared that her career will be ruined, Lotte claims Lettice tricked her into participating in the acting games and accuses Lettice of taking revenge on her. Lotte walks out but Lettice stops her with a speech about the technological modern world in which she is merely a ghost. Lotte storms back in, outraged at Lettice giving up and they decide to re-invent E.N.D. (the ‘Eyesore Negation Detachment’), only without bombs. They plan to give tours of the ugliest new buildings in London, using Lotte's architectural knowledge and Lettice’s passion for the theatre. The play ends with the two women toasting the audience.
For the selected playwrights explored in this thesis, the banquet has become a metaphor for the thin line between authority and the voice of the people, upper and lower, serious and comic. Thus, in her carnivalistic sub-narrative of the Fustian House, Lettice uses the banquet as an imaginary prop to negotiate the power of the given text and the authority of the Preservation Trust. This negotiation helps change Lettice’s response from one of suppression and dejection into one of liberty and joy as well as win the attention and appreciation of her audience. In Scene 1: B, the Grand Staircase becomes the ‘stage’ on which she travesties the historical figures of the Fustian House and the house itself into a festive drama of masks, virgin queens, beasts and culinary delights. Her sub-narrative also provides the ‘props’ needed for the banquet: dates of festivals such as the Feast of Candlemas, Fast Days of the Church as well as festive verbs and adjectives such as ‘endored’ and ‘juicier’.

On that day of Candlemas –which by the way has nothing to do with Christmas as some of you may think, but falls on the second day of February – John Fustian gave a great feast in this hall to honour Queen Elizabeth. We do not know what he served at this banquet, but no doubt it contained hedgehogs.

(The scratching man is startled. A woman cries out in disgust). (Shaffer, Lettice 9)

This counter-narrative of banquets, by which high becomes low, royal foolish and tyrant comic, provides Lettice with temporary liberty from the given text she is required to deliver as part of her tour guide job. Thus, by means of travesty, she steps down the staircase and upsets the balance of power for a celebration of multiplicity. Here we find a continual growing from the Grand Staircase, the Staircase of Advancement to the Staircase of Aggrandisement as illustrated in scene 1: C
This is a reminder of the grotesque concept of the body – unfinished, open and inseparable from the festive atmosphere of banquets. It is useful here to return to Bakhtin who describes the banquet as the place where people from all ranks eat and drink together. The banquet represents man’s triumph of labour over the world and of life over death: “man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage” (Bakhtin 281). In other words, Lettice’s use of culinary delights is inseparable from the grotesque degradation of suppression and helps liberate her speech from fear. Scene 1: D also describes this ambivalence of carnival humour in connection to the wedding day of Miss Arabella Fustian. Her journey down the Staircase of Ennoblement is turned inside out after she falls, an event caused by the bestial mastiff of the family (Shaffer, Lettice 14-5). As a result, the deformed Arabella decides to stay in her chamber for life and employs “as domestics only those were deformed in the legs and haunches: knotted women, hunchbacks, swivel-hips, and such as had [...] misalignment of limbs” (Shaffer, Lettice 15). This ambivalence or inversion of beauty and bestiality, festivity and deformity travesties the power game, challenges inequality and gives room for the voiceless in society. Thanks to her fall, Miss Fustian’s deformity helps her change and feel for the marginalised. Later, in the play we will see a similar invitation to Miss Lotte to resist power, weapons and trials for the peaceful resistance of the arts.

In light of this carnival revolt and its festive liberty, Lettice is to be ‘tried’ by Lotte for having challenged the authority of the Trust and eliminated hierarchical differences. Her carnival speech/performance negotiates power, enlightens and invites the public to smell, imagine, taste and feel the banquet/the staircase (Shaffer,
Lettice (22). However, she fails to provide all the references needed to prove the authenticity of her speech. Lettice is aware of having eliminated the distinctions the Trust maintains and of being under their scrutiny.

Lotte: Your position is to be reviewed, actually. [...] I have no choice in the matter.

Lettice: Like the headsman.

Lotte: I’m sorry.

Lettice: The headsman always asked forgiveness of those he was about to decapitate.

Lotte: I would really appreciate it if we could exclude historical analogies from this conversation. (Shaffer, Lettice 21-2)

The role of the headsman and the victim is inseparable from Lettice’s carnival performance; however, Lotte refuses to see the victim and blames Lettice for putting the institution in danger. Though Lettice has got the support of many visitors of the Fustian House, Lotte neither takes their views seriously nor does she approve of Lettice’s successful performance in the tours.

Lotte: (Protesting) [...] This is my desk!

Lettice: (Hotly) [...] There is my defence. The Voice of the People! ... Read!

Lotte: (Exploding) I will not! I will not! This is nonsense [...]! They don’t matter! ... None of this matters – your mother – your childhood [...] I don’t care! (Pause: struggling to control herself) I am not in the
entertainment business – and nor are you. That is all. We are guarding a heritage. Not running a theatre. That is all. (Shaffer, *Lettice* 25-6)

Lotte does not care for the voice of the people, their laughter or the rich narratives of their lives. Thus the temporary liberty of Lettice’s carnival tours, theatrical performance and unrestrained language must be silenced. Now that she is condemned and suddenly unemployed, Lettice performs her final piece of the execution of Mary, the Queen of Scots, who questions the authority of her ‘executioner’. “It was the costum for victims on the scaffold to shed their outer garments to avoid soiling them with blood” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 29). However, Queen Mary appeared in a black dress which when removed another garment was revealed: “A garment the colour of the whoring of which she had been accused! The colour of martyrdom – and defiance! Blood red!” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 29) This travesty turns the table on the accusers and gives her the liberty she has been denied; Lettice does the same by stepping out of her cloak to reveal a red nightdress reaching to her feet. In the same way as Queen Mary steps out of her nineteen years’ humiliation and confinement, so Lettice steps aside from her unemployment and undermines Lotte’s authority.

Following the ‘trial’, Lotte visits Lettice and this leads to several role-reversals from opposition in Act One, to friendship and back to opposition in Act Two. Lettice’s love for travesty reveals a vicious circle of violence or a history of violence and counter-violence, fanaticism and counter-fanaticism. The next part of Lettice’s carnival performance takes place in her basement flat in a room full of theatrical relics where Lettice and Lotte exchange roles of victim and executioner (Shaffer, *Lettice* 39). On this ‘stage’ the boundaries between these roles collapse and their
inequality is suspended. Both women suddenly realise they share a common disdain
for the unadventurous masses who easily settle for the mediocre.

Lotte: This entire city [London] is actually crammed with fanatics from all
over the globe fighting medieval crusades on our ground. Isn’t it time
we became a little fanatic ourselves on its behalf? … People in the past
would not have endured it. But, of course, they had spunk. There’s no
one left now with any spunk at all.

Lettice: Just the Mere! … The Mere people! That’s all who remain. (Shaffer,
*Lettice* 42)

United by their hate of the ‘mere’ and the ‘fanatic’, Lettice and Lotte are attracted to
the excessive, the terrorist, and the carnivalistic. The absolute antithesis of the mere
is, in Lettice’s view, Falstaff who resembles the ambivalence of the medieval
carnival: young and old, harmless and wicked, fat and comic, a coward and a glutton,
innocent and witty, knight and fool (Shaffer, *Lettice* 42). Ironically, the antithesis of
the mere described as fanatic is the fanatic itself. Here Lotte unable to find
reconciliation with post-war London and its ugly architecture is also executioner and
victim, mere and fanatic, non-doer and rebel. This is revealed in her desire to destroy
the Shell Building and hang the people behind it for having debauched the public
imagination (Shaffer, *Lettice* 45). By the end of World War II few British have come
to realise the beginning of a new age: the “Age of Destruction – the late fifties and
sixties”, characterised by the birth of fanaticism and the coming of bulldozers
(Shaffer, *Lettice* 45). Some have suggested that the renewal of London following the
war was nourished by erecting characterless boxes of ‘new brutalism’ causing
eyesores (Porter 437-9). “You realize the British destroyed London ultimately, not
the Germans. There would be gangs of workmen all over the place, bashing down our heritage. Whole terraces of Georgian buildings crashing to the ground” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 45). In the 1940s there were problems with residential and industrial areas, traffic and pollution: “The recommendation was for rigid development controls to stop further mixtures of homes and industry, action to remove factories from residential streets, and redevelopment of housing” (Porter 426-8). In reaction to this, Lotte steps out of her role as a ‘victim’ to reveal her true story as a bomber with her friend Jim the Blond Bombshell and how they formed “the Eyesore Negation Detachment” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 46). Contrary to the plans, Lotte, frightened to put her bomb into the building, ended up working for the Fustian House among the ‘mere’ and the non-doers and ironically Jim worked for a Shell Company abroad (Shaffer, *Lettice* 47-8). Bombing is Lotte’s only reaction to the destruction of cities in World War II: “when I imagine Dresden burning, all I see are those exquisite shapes of the Baroque […] If I could save a great Baroque city or its people I would choose the city every time. People come again: cities never” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 44). It is an exclusive form of ‘rebellion’ based on categorisation, differentiating non-art from art, mere from fanatic, people from cities.

This continuous unmasking of violence and counter-violence finally leads to the uncrowning of Lotte in her role as Mary of Scots. It is important to mention that this revelation occurs in Lettice’s basement flat where everything is theatre. “It was the custom after decapitating someone for the executioner to hold up the severed head to the crowd and say, ‘so perish all the Queen’s enemies!’” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 50). Having intentionally put on a wig for the occasion, the queen had the very last laugh!

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15 Lotte’s father came from Dresden as a refugee. Dresden is a city of east-central Germany; it was severely damaged in bombing raids during World War II.
Lettice’s love for history and theatrical carnivals of Tudor England has worked so far to her advantage. Following Lettice’s narration of Queen Mary’s death, Lotte kneels before Lettice her ‘executioner’: “LETTICE touches LOTTE’s hair and then pulls it. It comes away in her hand: it is a wig. Beneath it is revealed a head of fluffy grey hair” (Shaffer, Lettice 51). Lettice’s response: “So perish all the Queen’s enemies” might be Shaffer’s critique of a regime of fanatics and bulldozers. This turning point, however, is situated on the stage of Lettice’s basement flat in the dungeon of her carnival world. Therefore, “Lettice takes off her black cloak and lays it ceremoniously at the base of the staircase, in the manner of Sir Walter Raleigh assisting Queen Elizabeth”: thus, she closes the show reminding her audience of the stage and its carnival: “Come, madam. Your hedgehogs await!” (Shaffer, Lettice 51)

In the play this reference to royalty, persecution and trials plays an important role in connection with stereotypes of accusations and victimisation. Lotte’s love for the historical and Lettice’s love for the theatrical meet in carnival trials. Their carnival games of execution eventually change from performance into a real trial in which Lettice is the accused. “As we got to know each other better, we came more and more to sit upon the ground, as Shakespeare has it, and tell sad stories of the deaths of kings” (Shaffer, Lettice 58). They even performed these stories motivated by their enthusiasm for the heroic figures of the past, especially ‘those whose distinction earned them death at the hands of the Mere’ (Shaffer, Lettice 58). The people of spunk selected for the shows are: Queen Mary of Scots, Sir Walter Raleigh, King Charles I, and Marie Antoinette. This selection is significant as they meet Girard’s stereotypes of persecution:
The suspects are accused of a particular category of crimes. Certain accusations are so characteristic of collective persecution that their very mention makes modern observers suspect violence in the air. […]. First there are violent crimes which choose as object those people whom it is most criminal to attack […]: a king, a father, the symbol of supreme authority. (Girard, *Girard Reader* 109-10)

The category of sexual crimes (rape and incest) which eliminate distinctions in a community can also be seen as accusational stereotypes (Girard, *Girard Reader* 110). Here Shaffer points to the case of Marie Antoinette: “That was her finest hour, poor Queen, her ordeal in court. Did you know she was accused of unnatural sexual practice?” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 60). Girard elaborates that Marie Antoinette ‘is not only a queen but a foreigner. Her Austrian origin is mentioned repeatedly in the popular accusations against her. The court that condemns her is heavily influenced by the Paris mob’ (Girard, *Girard Reader* 114). In other words, the victim is selected for three stereotypes of persecution: her incestuous relationship with her son, being a foreigner and a queen. King Charles I also belongs to several religious and cultural stereotypes. The religious is represented in his failure to help the Protestant Forces during the Thirty Years’ War and in his marriage to a Catholic princess which brought the Church of England too close to the Catholic Church. The cultural also brings to light his kinship to his grandmother Mary of Scots and the accusation of secret treaty with the Scots.

The interesting link between carnival celebration and prosecution becomes apparent as the execution of King Charles I turns Lotte and Lettice from performers
into participants. Having played the executor many times, Lotte reverses roles with Lettice and she plays the victim (King Charles I).

Bardolph: This was the day of the accident?

Lettice: Yes. January the thirty-first. The anniversary of the execution of Charles I in 1649. Charles the Martyr. She said to me […] ‘I want to play the king tonight. I’m tired of headsmen and prosecutors!’ (Shaffer, Lettice 64)

This game of persecution in which Lotte identifies with the king is a reminder of Lettice’s negotiation of power and activation of the voice of the people. “‘I would like to know by what authority I am brought here. The Commons of England was never a juridical court. I would first know when it came to be so’” (Shaffer, Lettice 65). The king’s denial of the legitimacy of the court does not devalue the voice of the parliament and by this game Lettice reconfirms the message of Act One: questioning the truth of the official voice in order to pave the way for freedom of speech and enlightenment. Unaware of this, Lotte accuses Lettice of fabrication and describes her as a storyteller whose testimony cannot be relied upon in court:

Bardolph: I’m afraid I can’t do that. She is making a statement to me. I am her solicitor.

Lotte: Rubbish! Miss Douffet is a compulsive story teller. I am surprised you haven’t gathered that by now. (Shaffer, Lettice 61)

The execution of Charles I marks the end of colourful England and the birth of Puritanism, the greyness of Cromwell’s age of iconoclasm and ban on the theatre. In
parallel, Act Two draws attention to the end of the age of colour and of Georgian buildings in the fifties and sixties and the birth of grey London dominated by poverty, bulldozers and ‘new brutalism’ as mentioned earlier.

Beneath the humour of their performance, Shaffer reveals death, punishment and the collapse of distance between carnival games and persecution. Having struck Lotte with an axe during their final performance, Lettice expects Lotte to come to her defence in court. This change from the stage to the court, from games to trial demands that Lotte (King Charles I) defends her executioner in public (Shaffer, *Lettice* 72). At the beginning of the play, Lotte put Lettice on trial and refused to hear the voice of the people in their defence of Lettice. Now forced to step down to help her friend and aware of the danger of being ridiculed in court, Lotte recalls the time when she subjected Lettice to ridicule and embarrassment in the Fustian House (Shaffer, *Lettice* 73). Deprived of her power, Lotte recognises that she suddenly belongs in the ranks of the unemployed just like Lettice. Carnival travesty works by suspending hierarchy and inequality, and invites people from all ranks to its banquet in order to eliminate boundaries. This suspension turns into elimination when the carnival moves from the private (basement) to the public (the trial), from the grotesque-ridiculous to the legal: “Let’s not go on. It’s entirely my fault. If one embraces the ridiculous, one ends up becoming ridiculous” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 74). In reaction to this, Lettice unable to cope with the modern world confesses that she is also ghostly and ridiculous:

That’s what *I am*. A Ghost. [...]. Everyday there is something new I don’t understand […]. Computers. Screens. Bleeps and buttons. Processors. […]. You talk about Europe gone – that’s just buildings! *Everything*’s gone for me. I
can’t work any of it. I’m the foreigner – not Mr Pachmani. [...]. You’re right. That’s the precise word for me – ridiculous. Ridiculous and useless. [...].

Useless glories. (Shaffer, *Lettice* 75)

Lettice, who lives in the past and feeds on its ridiculous glories, shuns the hideous technological world hiding in her chosen dungeon of useless stories. Upon hearing Lettice’s cry of despair, Lotte commands Lettice to fight this spirit: “I am an experienced organizer of tours. You are the most original tour guide. That must suggest something” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 76). Together they start a revived form of the E.N.D. but without bombs focusing on the ugliest new buildings in London to help enlighten the people on the present and the problems with poverty, homelessness, architecture.

Here we can see Shaffer’s optimism and faith in the possibility of change when Lotte originally the victimiser comes to rescue the victim. The latter supported by the voice of the people eventually wins this carnival trial leading to reconciliation and cooperation between Lettice and Lotte. Together they hold up the blazing torch of history and theatre to show the ugliness of modern London for what it is. In the eyes of Lotte and Lettice, England no longer produces legendary moments and this is its gravest indictment (Shaffer, *Lettice* 58). Its people of spunk are dead; therefore, the ‘Eyesore Negation Detachment’ is the best ‘weapon’ to tear the masks off and invite the audience to see modern brutality. “*(Theatrically)* ‘E.N.D. Tours Presents Lettice Douffet’s Dramatic Guide to Disgusting Buildings! Hear her Devastating Denunciations of Modern Design!’” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 77). Together they unite against the ‘murderers’ from architects, builders, engineers to city planners, and thus they reveal confinement, unemployment, immigration and rebellion: “you may like to
know that these grim stairs were recently the scene of the most dramatic protest yet to be made by ordinary people against British brutalist architecture” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 77). Revolt in 1960s-1980s is the cry of pain, despair and poverty in the face of rotten housing, homelessness, violence and demolition. The purpose of carnival tours is to draw attention to the eyesores of brutalist London and challenge one’s perception of such horrors. As Lotte concludes the tours, she offers the audience Lettice’s Tudor cordial in hope that the three Es are fulfilled: “Enlargement for shrunken souls. Enlivenment for dying spirits. Enlightenment for dim, prosaic eyes. (Pause.) In short – Lovage” (Shaffer, *Lettice* 78). *Lettice and Lovage* might be seen as Shaffer’s “comic parable on preserving the best of a culture’s past” and by which he turns against carnival trials and its identity of collective persecution to reach out to the victims (Gianakaris 158). Thus, E.N.D. without bombs becomes the possibility of this unity between victim and victimiser to restore the colourful London from the visual carnage caused by World War II.

**Turning Away from Satan’s Laughter in the Battle of *Shrivings*:**

In the previous play, laughter is not Shaffer’s response to trials and executions, but the theatre is his means of reconciling victims and executioners and of criticising the age of bulldozers. In *Shrivings*, the battle again highlights the idea of turning away from carnival and its making of death and laughter, abuse and banquet into the activism of non-violence, vigils and peacemaking. The action takes place at Shrivings, a medieval house of retreat and penance, the home of Sir Gideon Petrie in 1970s England (Shaffer, *Shrivings* 103). Gideon, whose house is open to all people, is a philosopher and President of the World League of Peace. The play is divided into three acts during which the Peace Movement leads a vigil of peace for the
banning of all weapons. Act One announces the arrival of Mark Askelon, poet and former pupil of Gideon. He is introduced to Gideon’s American secretary Lois Neal and feels disappointed to see his son David who had given up his studies at Cambridge working as a carpenter at Shrivings. After his recent arrival Mark, who cannot find rest or reconciliation after the ‘death’ of his wife, decides to fight Shrivings and its founder Gideon, the President of the Peace Movement. This battle, according to Shaffer, has a personal and historical significance:

_Shrivings_ has always been an ‘American’ play. I associate it most strongly with sojourns in New York City in 1968 and 1969. The encounter between Mark and Gideon naturally sprang out of a division of feeling in myself, but it was charged with the violence of this angry city during one of her angriest times, when streets were choked with raging protestors against the Vietnam War […] (Shaffer, _Lettice_ 99)

In the second act Mark suggests a game of abuse in which he acts as the carnival dummy to instigate the peacemakers’ laughter and violence. Lois and David enjoy the game but David eventually reacts violently. In Act Three, Lois denies her chastity vows and turns her back on peace activism for a sudden affair with Mark. When Gideon and David come back from the vigil, two fights take place: one between David and Mark which ends with David kissing his father; another between Lois and Gideon ending with Gideon slapping Lois violently.

The battle of Shrivings highlights the coming of an outsider (Mark) who provokes the peacemakers’ participation with his games of ‘humour’ and challenges their faith in peacemaking and non-violence. Some of his tricks prevail in times of carnivals and are related to the material bodily life such as the eating and drinking traditions,
abuse and games, fertility and death (Bakhtin 235). Knowing Gideon declared the vigil a time of fasting, Mark, an atheist, decides to have some lamb and wine upon their arrival to the house. Lois is shocked to see Mark teasing them at Shrivings, where visitors choose to turn their back to a materialist and violent world by avoiding meat, alcohol and sex (Shaffer, Shrivings 144). Mark’s behaviour is typical of carnival traditions in the Middle Ages; though the action in the play does not coincide with a Christian calendar, one cannot escape Shaffer’s deliberate choice of eating and fasting at Shrivings. The carnivals which preceded Lent, the Christian season of abstinence, penitence and fasting, gave full reins for sexual indulgence, comic inversions of power and ‘sacred’ parodies (Bakhtin 222). Convinced that the fashions of making terror have not changed since the inquisition and medieval holy wars, Mark wants to prove that the names of movements may have changed but their content has not (Shaffer, Shrivings 152). Thus, he invites the peace activists to a game during which he acts as the victim of the ‘experiment’ but demands full freedom of speech. Mark, tied by his son to Gideon’s throne of reason, fakes suffering as the participants press on a few apples, which are the buttons16 of the tree of knowledge in this game (Shaffer, Shrivings 156-7). The show which contains grotesque-comic elements of uncrowning, travesty and thrashing is probably Mark’s parody of man’s first rebellion, the old biblical motif of sin. In this game, the uncrowning of Mark is the image of the fool-king on the throne of knowledge but who is in ‘full’ licence of abuse. Viewed on Gideon’s throne, Mark is not the god of peace and reason but Satan or the accuser, who makes “false accusations so convincing that they become the unassailable truth of entire communities” (Girard,

16 These apples are used in this game as torture buttons; the harder you press on them, the worse the victim feels. One of the apples is deadly.
The first stereotypical accusation Mark points at Gideon is related to his homosexuality. Knowing that the very sign of sexuality at Shrivings against the father figure of the house will invoke the peacemakers’ violence, Mark dares to transgress the taboo:

Why do you imagine, Miss Neal, that your employer gave up sex? […] Don’t you know that the only sex Gideon ever really enjoyed was with boys? […]. In the end he gave up everything. Guilt, nothing but guilt! […]. All she [Gideon’s wife] saw was a self-accusing pederast, pretending to be Ghandi! (Shaffer, Shrivings 161)

This accusation against Gideon, the father of the Peace Movement, is deliberately made to attack the very foundation of the family and love community at Shrivings. According to Girard, “Certain accusations [homosexuality in this context] are so characteristic of collective persecution that their very mention makes modern observers suspect violence in the air” (Girard, Girard Reader 110). The ‘death apple’ David picks up to silence the voice of the accuser and the victim brings the game to an end, and Mark rises triumphantly having misled David to imitate him.

Here the apple, a symbol of aggression in this game, reveals the recurrent bloodline theme of sin/transgression. In Mark’s view, this revelation of the peacemakers’ true identity is his proof that humans are inherently aggressive. Mark proceeds further in his battle against Shrivings during which he makes accusations and confessions seeking not to reconcile or be reconciled. The affair between Mark and Lois follows the apple scene of the original sin. Lois denies her chastity vows when she replaces Gideon the father of peace for Satan/Mark, the father of lies. Like David, she imitates Satan and as a result, she does not attend the vigil and refuses to
serve old Gideon. “Not unlike Jesus, Satan says to us: “imitate me” and he, himself, is an imitator. His ultimate model is God the Father, the same model that Jesus has” (Girard, Girard Reader 197). When Lois imitates the father of peace, she lives at peace with people and she serves them with love. However, she is filled with hate, mockery and arrogance when she follows Satan and this leads to denial, confrontation and violence. Whereas “Satan imitates God in a spirit of rivalry”, Jesus “imitates God in spirit of childlike and innocent obedience and this is what he advises us to do as well” (Girard, Girard Reader 197). Through her imitation of Satan/Mark, Lois denies Gideon as father of peace and becomes his persecutor. Like David in the apple game, Lois’s failure to resist Mark’s temptations is seen when she confronts Gideon:

Do you know what a phoney is? Someone who says Peace because there’s no war in him. I don’t mean he drove it out – I mean he never had it. It’s easy to be chaste when you’ve got no cock, Giddy. It’s easy to give up bloodshed when you’ve got no blood to shed! […] No wonder she left you, your wife. […] she found what a phoney she was hitched to. […]

[Deliberately, GIDEON strikes her as she leans over him. She recoils. He rises. She retreats. He strikes her again more violently. She stares at him in horror. Pause.] (Shaffer, Shrivings 193)

This is exactly what David does to his father (Mark) in the apple game of abuse. Lois, victim and imitator of Satan, receives the final blow from the master she denied. Unlike Jesus, Gideon strikes his disciple back not once but twice thereby contradicting his own teachings on love and peace. This return of disorder shows the vicious circle of violence and the thin line between victimisation and persecution.
Both Gideon and Lois fail to follow the peace principles they preach to the masses and their retaliation disturbs their mission in the world as leaders of non-violence at the House of Shrivings.

In contrast to Gideon’s failure, the father-son confrontation ends with David’s refusal to meet Mark’s lies and accusations violently. David in the end does not run away from the voice of Satan nor does he resist evil with evil. Instead, he receives his father’s ‘strikes’ with love:

> [Silence. Then DAVID moves, quickly. His hands fly up, join violently above his head. For a long moment they stay up there, poised to smash his father down. Then he begins to tremble. Slowly his arms are lowered over his father’s head. He pulls MARK to him, and kisses him on the face. They stay still. Below neither LOIS nor GIDEON moves.] (Shaffer, Shrivings 194)

It is probably this act of love that changes Mark’s attitude towards Gideon. This helps Mark realise the importance of forgiveness and the need to stand against the idea of victim selection in the making of peace:

Mark: Have you no word for me? No word at all?

Gideon: Dust.

> [Appalled, MARK sits down at the table. He takes up a spoon. He dips it in the soup, and presents it to Gideon.]

Mark: Peace! (Shaffer, Shrivings 196)
Dust in Act One was Mark’s word for his paralysis or inability to help victims of collective violence. This dust (paralysis) is now in the mouth of Gideon whose failure to confront evil with love results in violent resistance, passive participation and the perpetuation of violence. Gideon’s imitation of Satan/Mark brings violence, but Mark’s imitation of David may bring peace. At the end, Gideon confirms to everyone that they must stay in this house of retreat and confessions to receive healing and reconciliation no matter how tough the battle might be. Shrivings, a place where peace has the final word, welcomes all sorts of people violent and non-violent. Though theories, hopes, vigils and fasts may seem the “lovely nothing” of Shrivings, Shaffer continually emphasises the power of peace, love and forgiveness over violence (Shaffer, Shrivings 185). In this regard, his theatre may be seen as an educational and enlightening tool at a time characterised by technological changes, lack of communication and justification of violence.

The repeated theme of this chapter has been the mis-recognised victim who is viewed as the missing link or indeed, the strange connection between carnival liberty and violence. By looking at several works by Barnes with reference to Shaffer, I have attempted to unlock this apparent contradiction of the victim ridiculed to appease the masses and whose death is thought to restore peace and order. The varied plays covered in this chapter and connected by the stated thematic concern challenge the audience to look beyond laughter and carnival forms to the perpetuation of terror and violence. Shaffer goes even further by turning away from carnival trials in Lettice and Lovage and in Shrivings to the possibility of the carnivalesque to affect non-violent change. In Red Noses and The Ruling Class, there is a similar interest in the carnivalesque, but Barnes does not share Shaffer’s
optimism. As he questions our laughter today, Barnes’ work highlights the triumph of death and uncovers a history of dictatorship, oppression and social injustice. The selected plays explore a wide variety of historical contexts and the use of parody helps Barnes invert authority, and makes these stories perhaps more accessible to a modern audience. *Leonardo’s Last Supper*, a parody of Christ’s Last Supper and the risen Lazarus, uncovers the justification of violence and the triumph of death in the making of power. *The Ruling Class* also reveals a stratified society obsessed with power and money, a society that ridicules God and his teachings of love and peace. In *Red Noses*, another parody of Saint Francis of Assisi and his followers, Barnes draws our attention to God’s fools ridiculed and killed for challenging our laughter and for pointing to victim selection at a time of social and political unrest. This constant focus on love, peace activism and classless society is shaped by a time of counter-cultural movements in the 1960s and 1970s. By returning to the Bible, Barnes creates a sub-narrative of radical love in opposition to the rigid teachings and practices of religious and political institutions. This biblical narrative has also helped me deconstruct the festive, halt the dance of carnival humour and reveal the mechanism of victim selection. Unlike Barnes and Shaffer, Bakhtin does not talk about victims in connection to carnival humour, but his reading of folk culture highlights community laughter as a timeless moment of peace and togetherness, a triumph over fear and hierarchies. I do not share with Bakhtin this optimism, but like the playwrights I have insisted on talking about the victims of violence in places of war and post-war, before and after the plague. Using René Girard I wanted to reach out to victims in order to retell their stories, stories of passive participation, resistance or/and personal struggle.
In the next chapter my interest in the recurring bloodline of victimisation and oppression, ‘liberty’ and the passion of (war) victims continues. At this point in my research I had to turn away from Barker’s Judith and The Last Supper despite their return to the Bible. Here my main challenge and concern is whether or not I can still view the emotional status of victims or/and victimisers without the need for a biblical sub-narrative. The plays I look at – Europeans (1987), The Power of the Dog (1981), Cleansed (1998) and Phaedra’s Love (1996) - may or may not provide different sub-texts to negotiate power, question laughter and undermine passive participation. Again, though this may seem oppositional and hopeful, death always has the last word in these plays. Some of the selected texts play with Christian motifs and concepts, but the emphasis and the use of these elements is not as dense as in Barnes’ work. There is also a mutual focus on laughter and festive forms of humour – banquets, ‘trials’, folly, torture and sex – despite the playwrights’ different understanding and treatment of laughter. Whereas Barnes and Shaffer turn away from the carnival to the carnivalesque, we shall see that Barker and Kane pay particular attention to the individual and the im/possibility of survival in the face of organised killing, persecution and entertainment. Here pain not laughter becomes the individual’s means of overcoming fear of oppression, exclusion and otherness.
Chapter Three: Recording Pain - a Continuing Encounter with Laughter in Plays by Howard Barker and Sarah Kane

You have attempted to assert the value of tragedy in a culture which is resolutely bent on endorsing comedy as being both ‘healthy’ and moral. Though what comedy does more than anything else – as Bergson points out – is reinforce collective values and attitudes. (Barker, Arguments 216)

And if there is one truly infernal and damned thing left today, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like those tortured at the stake, signaling through the flames. (Artaud 7)

The first quote, from a conversation between Howard Barker and Charles Lamb, clearly locates Barker’s voice as a playwright in favour of tragedy. In the second, there is also an emphasis on the tragic as a revelation of pain and as a possible channel for renovation. Interestingly, Artaud uses the image of the ‘victim’ in the flames as an empowering tool reversing the passive idea of pain. In the realm of the tragic, Barker turns away from the collective values of comedy for the deformed and maybe voiceless ‘language’ of pain. Here, “tragic personages are educated by calamity and they reach their fulfillment in death” (Steiner 169). Barker’s tragedy, as we shall see later, does not aim to educate the audience; on the contrary, it is individualising and confrontational in using catastrophe as its sole mirror of enlightenment. This chapter takes us on a journey with Howard Barker and Sarah Kane as they reveal the concealed victim and record the pain of those tortured at the stake or cleansed in death camps. The encounter with the other or its remnants helps these playwrights interrogate the issue of carnivalisation (the triumph of collective laughter over fear of the other) as inseparable from the question of passive
participation and active witnessing. In this chapter, the return of the other or/and its elimination is a fascinating moment of liberating or intimidating force which encounters the self at the interconnection between murder, entertainment and cleansing. Thus the plays, located in cultures of shame and celebration or sites of death, show an interest in purification, cremation and burning at the stake. In this encounter there is the choice of recording pain and witnessing the suffering of those returning others and maybe ourselves. Barker’s The Europeans (1987), for instance, considers pain and unhappiness as key elements that help war victims avoid using their deformity for carnivalesque display. The Power of the Dog (1981) also focuses on victims and victimisers in 1945 Eastern Europe and views the im-possibility of intimacy with the other –neighbour, enemy or even the dead. Again, the survivors cannot live without their memory of pain, the record by which they should refuse carnival laughter in order to reach out to the victims. In Kane’s Cleansed (1998), where the boundaries collapse between education, entertainment and torture, hospital and prison, clinging to one’s pain involves intimacy with lost relatives. It is a familiarisation with the past by which survivors risk their own lives to reach out to the other and to themselves. In Phaedra’s Love (1996), the return of incest, rape and murder is also a carnivalesque moment in which reconciliation between monarch, law and people is founded on the elimination of others. Pain in these contexts is the instrument by which the individual re-locates his/her self in a culture that constantly consumes and penetrates one’s very privacy. Thus the chapter considers pain as a channel of individuality at a time where the self is handicapped by an increase of fear, organised killing, sex and materialist rewards. In my analysis I rely on varied tools of theories, the use of which differs depending on the context, such as
Kristeva’s interest in strangers, Agamben’s idea of survival and witnessing, Bakhtin’s carnival humour and Girard’s work on sacrifice.

From this perspective I will review the critical evaluation of their work and then analyse Barker’s *Europeans* and *The Power of the Dog* as well as Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love* and *Cleansed*. Here, however I want to introduce Peter Barnes’ and Barker’s different views and uses of laughter and comedy, as well as their desire to reveal victims of violence, despite the seeming unity of carnival humour. By representing their philosophy of theatre, Barnes’s and Barker’s critical engagement with laughter puts the audience at the cross roads of comedy and cruelty, pain and disunity or/and tragedy and individuality. While both playwrights depart from mainstream theatre’s naturalism and return to the imaginative for a better exploration of reality, each takes a different route to achieve his goal: Barnes uses comedy as his revolutionary medium for change (Rabey, *Peter Barnes* 254). By this, his work rejects collective values, affirms the relationship between the tragic and carnival forms of humour and even challenges laughter as seen in *Laughter* and *Red Noses*. Barker, however, adopts tragedy to disunite and disturb rather than change the audience, and refuses naturalism, comedy, and documentary theatre so prevalent in British theatre since the 1950s (Barker, *Arguments* 32-3). His interest has developed from socialism in *Claw* (1975) and *A Passion in Six Days* (1983) to a deeper interest in history, ‘neither official history nor documentary history, […] but the history of emotion, looking for a politics of the emotions’ (Barker, *Arguments* 23). Before I explore the emotional status of victims in this chapter, it is important to emphasise that Barker’s approach challenges official laughter and carnival unity, but his tragedy is not totally devoid of laughter: “I would argue that it is not possible to destroy your enemies by comedy. The comedy that exists in my work is a cruel one, and the laughter that emerges
uneasily from it is a laughter of disbelief [...] not a laugh of public unity” (Barker, *Arguments* 33-4). Barnes too uses history to negotiate the politics of carnival laughter signalling for each individual to dismantle the laughing mask of public unity. The purpose of his revolutionary comedy is not to destroy enemies but to challenge and invert the ‘sacred’ authority of religious and political institutions. His fascination with parody and carnival forms, as we have seen in the previous chapter, helps him create a space for an encounter with the marginalised and the powerless. However, Barnes warns us against the tendency to laugh or romanticise this space. Despite their seeming differences, both playwrights are particularly interested in the poetic, the imaginary and popular forms. For me, the ways in which they each engage with and dispute humour and laughter provide a rich field for critical analysis.

Barker clearly argues for a theatre in which the experiential, the tragic and the poetic triumph over the materialist, comic and the accessible. It is important to note here, however briefly, that there are forms of comedy and comedians committed to taking risks, making the audience uncomfortable by questioning their assumptions and beliefs or emphasising ambiguity and uncertainty. For Barker, it is through a ‘theatre of anti-parable’ that he seeks the consolations of catastrophe, lays the ground for his theory of the tragic and dismantles the State’s carnival of reconciliation, which medievalises us and teaches us the laugh of public unity instead of the cruel laugh of disbelief (Barker, *Arguments* 33-4). Barker explains that, the ‘imperative to enlighten, amuse, and stimulate good thoughts of a collective nature (family, nation, party, community) clings to the carnival mania of the left and the moral crusade of the right’ (Barker, *Arguments* 53). Therefore, Barker’s theatre does not enlighten, preach or give a message, but rejects official interpretations and disunites the masses
for a taste of catastrophe. In other words, Barker swims against the stream(s) of journalism, naturalism, comedy, prescribed politics (leftist and rightist) and humanism for the rebirth of individuality in the flames of war and death camps. The moment of beauty in Barker’s theatre is the moment of collision between official and unofficial, carnival and catastrophe, the moment of collapse of moral certitudes (Barker, Arguments 59). For these reasons Barker embraces tragedy, a solitary experience where the self is dislocated from the crowd and forsakes reconciliation and catharsis. His theatre of catastrophe replaces clarity with obscurity, catharsis with catastrophe to complicate the individual’s perception of the truth. In what Barker perceives as a culture of entertainment, collectivity and absence of ambiguity and secrecy (Saunders, Howard Barker 153), death becomes Barker’s favourite subject and pain his tool by means of which individuality becomes possible. Barker finds a relationship between the tragic and the art of the theatre which in his view lends anxiety and abolishes clarity: ‘Death in the art of the theatre is the condition of beauty and anxiety the price of its revelation’ (Barker, Death 26). This serious art belongs to actors not to entertainers because it involves risk: “The actor entering the art of theatre must know it might cost him his life. Who would risk his life to be an entertainer?” (Barker, Death 27). Barker adds that this art leaves the audience without ethical garments, opinion or any solutions (Barker, Death 33-4). Thus, he abandons the limitations of entertainment for the unknowable experience of pain, security for risk and enlightenment for darkness.

In contrast to the role of pain in Barker’s tragedy, Ian Rabey and Michel Baker highlight the use of desire in the history of submission and passive participation in opposition to the anti-history of the individual’s pain. In “The Miracle that Happens When Desire is Dead”, Michel Baker views the subject’s desire as the State’s means
of control over the growth of an individual experience. Rabey also highlights Barker’s use of desire and tragedy in ‘landscapes of shame’ where ‘official definitions of tradition, religion and culture’ nourish shame to justify submission (Rabey, HBPD 101). By means of catastrophe, Barker shatters the official unified vision (the historical) for the beautiful pain of transgression and rebirth (the anti-historical) in The Europeans and The Power of the Dog. Here, Barker emphasises the value of pain and tragedy over the illusory hopes of carnival entertainment by reactivating the individual’s role outside carnival unity and passive participation. Rabey notes that “Barker opposes History – the imposition of ideological and moral narrative form – with Anti-History – the disruptive fragmentation of this form by the testimony and performance of individual pain” (Rabey, HBED 7). The right to hold to individual pain is Barker’s refusal to be consumed, devoured and eventually cleansed by carnival bonfires. Pain is an empowering tool in the individual’s struggle to be outside the herd even if this risks his/her very being. Rabey believes that Barker’s work continues to dismantle ideologies for an individual experience towards self-discovery and increasingly explores the ‘uncanny’: “that which generates a moment of anxiety about what it might mean to be (in)human in the context of a specific social and moral value system” (Rabey, HBED 6). Later I will examine this moment in connection to Barker’s exploration of the release of the repressed and the encounter with the strange/r as a liberating or intimidating force.

Barker’s engagement with the catastrophes of European history such as the holocaust and Stalinism helps him interrogate what Karoline Gritzner calls “the fate of individuality” or “the possibility of individual experience” (Gritzner, Towards an Aesthetic 85). The aesthetic as a form of resistance ‘to the dominant cultural mode of late-capitalist consumer society’ is Barker’s statement against the market of
entertainment and its dissemination of the self (Gritzner, *Towards an Aesthetic* 85). Here the cultural present is shaped by desire as passive participation and carnival display as reconciliation in opposition to pain as the rebirth of individuality.

Barker, very much like Adorno before him, defines the contemporary cultural mode as authoritarian and reactionary in its false humanistic ideals and its hostility towards individualism. The conventional theatre of today is a form of entertainment and its use value is entirely determined by the criteria of economic viability. (Gritzner, *Towards an Aesthetic* 85)

In other words, Barker’s work engages with the possibility of individual experience in a celebratory culture of consumerism and entertainment. Here Barker’s ‘Theatre of Catastrophe’, which is perhaps similar to Kane’s theatre, ‘explores the category of individuality as an experience of transgression and transformation’ (Gritzner, *Postmodern Subjectivity* 331). In their reformulation of the tragic the disruption of public unity leaves the self before pain as the means by which the rebirth of an individual experience becomes possible. Here the encounter with aesthetic/the theatrical is seen as a form of “resistance to the reification of the self in post-Auschwitz culture” or “as a counterforce against the dominant liberal-humanist ideology of mass-culture” (Gritzner, *Towards an Aesthetic* 328-32). Thus in the realm of the tragic, Barker refuses solutions or catharsis for an explosion of forms, ideology and morality, transforms pain from passive into active, and emphasises the value of pain in a world of feel-good entertainment and security.

At this point in my discussion the individual’s resistance to post-war culture and to the demands of a market of celebration and entertainment is a helpful move in order to locate the problem of language as a medium for translating the painful
experience of war victims. Barker, as we shall see in this chapter, engages with many other mediums, such as the theatre, paintings and photography, to explain this (im)possibility of language to bear the wounds of war and extermination. In this light, George Bas and Thomas Freeland explore the role of language to bear witness to brutality and situations of extreme suffering. For instance, Bas finds Barker’s indispensable use of obscene language and indecent scenes in Victory (1983) true to character and situation and conveys the sense of real people in a real society (Bas 35). Despite the unease such situations create in the audience, Victory, a remarkable history play, ‘achieves a broad, imaginative or imagistic picture of the Restoration as “Reaction”, showing that it means, among other things, violence and animality expressed through obscene sex’ (Bas 39). Likewise, Thomas Freeland examines the relationship between pain and the role of speech as ‘a mode of bodily presence’ (Freeland 79). Here the very inability of language to present the marks of pain or bear witness to the unsayable leaves the individual before the nonsense of situations of extreme suffering. Despite this instability (of language), ‘pain [...] testifies to the necessity of language’ (Freeland 87). To use pain in the service of beauty is to make use of our witnessing. That is why Barker’s Europeans and The Power of the Dog look at the history of emotions of war victims and the condition of speech at the limit of the human. “The very reliance on language per se as the ontological ground of this theatre also brings the immanent instability of language to the surface” (Freeland 98). Barker’s use of obscene language, violence and shockingly indecent situations challenges and upsets the comfort zones of morality and certitudes thus leaving the spectator to think about what they have witnessed and what they can make of their witnessing. Thus, Freeland urges the audience to rethink the function of violence in Barker’s ‘Theatre of Catastrophe’:
Is there any way to frame an ethics of spectating, so that, while we are not conducted smoothly past the [...] horror of the violent spectacle, neither are we abandoned simply to wallow in our own heightened sensitivity in responding emotionally to the spectacle? (Freeland 95)

Within a theatre that resists categorisation, bears no message, demythologises and complicates individual responses, I think Barker defamiliarises such ethics for an experiential taste of the poetic and the tragic. His hope may not be for an ethics of any kind, but having ‘abolished’ the domestic walls of the Royal Court theatre, the home of English playwrights and its certitudes, he embraces the disturbing beauty of pain (Barker, Arguments 33). In this ‘Theatre of Catastrophe’, ‘the moment of beauty is the moment of collision between two wills, the will of the irrational protagonist (the non-ideological) and the will of the irrational state (the officially ideological)’ (Barker, Arguments 59). At this moment, Barker the poet-tragedian, signals through the flames of a “historical nightmare”, not to communicate a message or to frame an ethic, but “to effect self-identification” at a moment of annihilation (Barker, Arguments 59). The poet reminds me of Barnes who also examines the tragic in Laughter: “Adorno said that after Auschwitz there could be no more poetry. He was wrong. The atrocities committed by human beings must be recorded for the world and the future. The best way to do this [according to Barnes] is through art, not through journalism. Art is news that stays news” (Rabey, Peter Barnes 254). In light of a history of pogroms, these poet-dramatists uncover the victim from the market or the museum of reification (Laughter and Europeans) using their art to record this continuous pain for future generations.
Thus both playwrights look beyond carnival laughter within cultures of shame and entertainment (Rabey) to the possibility of individual experience (Gritzner) so as to reveal those signalling in the flames (Artaud), tortured and deformed. Barker achieves this by restoring death to laughter, redefining tragedy and challenging passive participation: “Unlike street theatre, unlike the carnival, unlike the national theatre with its political objectives and its false unities, this theatre, Barker’s “Theatre of Catastrophe”, does not proclaim its universality at all. It is non-participatory in the social project” (Barker, Arguments 147). Thus, Barker’s theatre puts the carnival to death(s) by means of disunity, anti-history and tragedy. On the one hand, by restoring history to Bakhtin’s carnival rebellion of “joyful degradation” and universal togetherness, Barker’s use of a cruel laughter of disbelief challenges the spectator to see the pogroms beneath the seeming inclusiveness of carnivals (Remshardt 44). Here it is important to understand conventional tragedy in contrast to Barker’s tragedy which abandons catharsis: “The goal of tragedy is the same as sacrifice. It always aims at producing, among the members of the community a ritual purification, the Aristotelian catharsis, which is an intellectualized or ‘sublimated’ version of the original sacrifice effect” (Girard, ISSFLL 78). By removing purification – the effect of sacrifice – from his tragedy, Barker restores history to laughter, challenges participation in the festive programme of death-making and embraces pain to make use of our witnessing. On the other hand, Barker provides anti-history as the nonlinear fragmented story of individual experience by which he challenges the authorities of those who want to use our pain for their ‘medieval crusades’ as a carnival object in the ‘museum’ of war. Therefore, I argue that Barker problematises notions of laughter by turning against catharsis to uncover the victim and thus explores the penetrations of individual pain and State reconciliation,
strangeness and laughing terror. In other words, his tragedy tells the anti-parable of the victim in opposition to the story of the crowd. The first as we shall see is characterised by silence, gaps, fear, ambiguity and pain whereas the second by joyful degradation of individuality, abuse, mockery and carnival unity.

Like Barker, and despite her short-lived career, Sarah Kane is also known for her interest in victimisation, explicit representations of sex and violence and for having sacrificed the journalistic and the accessible for the poetic and the ambiguous. It is difficult for critics – Michel Baker, Thomas Freeland, George Bas, Karoline Gritzner and David Ian Rabey – to escape Barker’s use of language in connection to witnessing, violence and pain. These signposts also occur in the works of Sarah Kane, the evaluation of which reveals two camps: One (Ken Urban, Aleks Sierz, Ulrich Broich) focuses on the violent side of Kane’s drama and her use of obscene language and indecent shocking scenes. Another (Graham Saunders, Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, Kim Solga, Elaine Aston, Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, Edward Bond) goes beyond violence towards “the beauty of brutality” and the ethics of catastrophe. In his book ‘Love Me or Kill Me’ (2002), Graham Saunders draws attention to some of the labels applied to her work but is thoughtful as to how one might apply terms such as the “Theatre of Cruelty”, the Jacobean Theatre and New Brutalism. On the affinity between Kane, Barker and Artaud in terms of their use of cruelty and beauty, physicality and spirituality, Saunders writes:

Artaud’s call for a rejection of ‘psychological theatre’ and Barker’s assertion ‘of no official interpretation’ to a play are shared concerns; so too are other aspects of Kane’s work, which at times seem to come close to Artaud’s vision
of ‘total theatre’: Kane’s use of imagery that is often violent and extreme, or what Howard Barker calls ‘beauty and terror’. (Saunders, Love Me 16)

Like Barker, Kane’s theatre transcends ethical strictures, rejects solutions, and awakens our hearts and nerves to the body in pain and the trauma of war victims. The cruelty in her work also reminds critics of the ‘New Jacobians’ - Edward Bond, Peter Barnes and Howard Barker – famous for their interest in the grotesque, bloodshed, rape, incest and black humour (Saunders, Love Me 19). In light of such indecent violent scenes, the ‘New Brutalism’ of the late 1990s also includes Sarah Kane, among other playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill and Joe Penhall, known in Germany as the ‘Blood and Sperm Generation’ (Sierz, Still In-Yer-Face 17). Here Aleks Sierz argues for the term ‘in-yer-face theatre’, a political theatre that breaks taboos and exploits shocking scenes in order to explore “the extremes of human emotion” (Sierz, Still In-Yer-Face 19-21). Though Sierz thinks “the choice of the name you use is a political choice”, these dramatists, in my view, swim against the mainstream of labels, public unity and conventional forms, and this act in itself is also a political choice (Sierz, Still In-Yer-Face 18). In his reading of Blasted (1995), Ken Urban also struggles to keep his head above the stream of labels using the name “Nihilists” a few times whenever Kane and her generation of playwrights are mentioned (Urban, An Ethics 37). However, Mark Ravenhill affirms that Kane’s is a theatre beyond labels because in pushing form to its limits, she does not justify violence but adopts “the beauty of brutality” (Ravenhill, The Beauty 1). Others, such as Kim Solga, give a feminist analysis of Blasted challenging our perception of rape and its history. However, in her two articles “Reviewing the Fabric of Blasted”, and “Feeling the Loss of Feminism”, Elaine Aston’s reading of Blasted fluctuates between a feminist analysis to feeling the loss of feminism in women’s playwriting
for the British stage. Since Kane does not define herself as a woman playwright and since she refuses the labels/schools I referred to earlier (Saunders, Love Me 32), my reading of Kane’s work will move beyond these classifications to look at her interest in the human/inhuman, beauty/brutality in situations of extreme suffering.

It is helpful to move on at this point to the second group of critics (Kiemeier, Laurens De Vos and Bond) and to look beyond the physical at the non-physical and evaluate the beauty and ethics of brutality and catastrophe in the plays of Sarah Kane. Kiermeier examines the role of “ritualized cruelty” - love, eating, religious and medical rituals - in Kane’s Blasted and its effect on human relationships (Kiermeier 80). In these rituals, one can view their aesthetic and moral significance as well as experience their spiritual and physical aspects in a dysfunctional cultural system where the ‘communion’ of body and mind is missing (Kiermeier 83). Here De Vos refers to the role of the artist in bringing about the integrity of the physical and the spiritual, the body and the representation, or the canvas and the truth. Cruelty towards the canvas is required on the part of the artist to unite form and content and by this cruelty, the artist hopes to liberate the prenatal, the unsayable and the pre-linguistic (De Vos 127-8). Thus, when the artwork bears the artist’s strokes/marks of cruelty and pain, it challenges the barrier between beauty and brutality, transgresses the divide between theatre and drama, and crosses the threshold between actor and writer (Bond 209). According to Bond, Kane rediscovers drama in a society whose morality concerns itself with revenge and consumption and where the essential need for ‘the logic of humanness and imagination’ is missing (Bond 209-18). Kane’s suicide becomes her laughter at a society without tragedy; it is the materialisation of her crossing the barrier between life and drama, the personal and the aesthetic (the canvas) (Bond 210). This dark humour inseparable from cruelty is also at the heart of
Kane’s theatre and is meant to intensify our pain and challenge our perception of the world, leaving us before our moral responsibility for the victims (Urban, *The Body’s Cruel* 154). It is important to note here that Kane’s use of laughter is similar to Barker’s laughter of disbelief which does not unite us or relieves us of pain; rather, by means of tragedy, cruelty and catastrophe, they question and criticise our passive participation. “The mark of Kane” is Bond’s expression for a most painful and cruel process where “in the pursuit of the botching, the perforation, the scratching and the laceration” of the canvas, Kane is staking her own life (De Vos 128). This mark – her suicide – might be seen as the artist’s signature – her wish not to be driven out by the comic and her refusal to entertain or change the audience. The torn curtain or the botched canvas has left her audience divided: “After Kane’s death, there were two camps: one saw her entire body of work in the light of her suicide, the other mourned her death, but declined to even try to connect her death and her work” (Singer 23). In short, most critics are interested specifically in Kane’s *Blasted*, but in general the elements they examine in her work are: violence, subjectivity, form, politics, sex and death. As Kane rejects labels, I also look beyond Kane’s and Barker’s use of violence at the ugliness of laughing terror, the situation of war victims and the lack of distinction between public/personal and human/inhuman.

**Exploring the Meanings of Strangeness Within and Outside the Carnivalistic Display of War Victims in Barker’s *The Europeans Struggle to Love***

Set in the liberated Austria 1683 and taking as its background the struggle in Central Europe against Islamic imperialism, the protagonist [Katrin] is the victim of an atrocity who refuses to forgive, and in her intrepid will to live her
pain in public profoundly offends the reconciliatory state. She is a screaming exhibit in the museum of Reconciliation. (Barker, *Arguments* 98)

My analysis of *Europeans* considers two main themes: the first is the fate or the cost of individuality in a culture of shame and entertainment; the second looks at the possibility of individuality outside maternal/national obligations and why it is considered a grotesque crime. *Europeans* (1987) describes the end of the Viennese siege of 1683 by the Ottoman Empire. The Turks have been repulsed from Europe and the Emperor Leopold hails Vienna’s military Commander, Starhemberg. The latter refuses honours in search of something more fulfilling, the love he finds with Katrin. Raped by the Turks, the pregnant Katrin insists on a public examination of her disfigured body under the supervision of doctors and artists. The birth takes place in public, Katrin is denied her labour pain but the baby, named Concilia by the emperor, is born. In the final battle Starhemberg gives Concilia back to her Turkish fathers rejecting reconciliation between East and West. Inventing Europe is not an easy birth but the act of self-recognition of how distorted and broken every Katrin and Starhemberg are.

Here my reading of the selected plays is motivated by a large group of characters who may be viewed as strangers or others - such as prisoners, war victims, foreigners, scapegoats, clowns, survivors or even religious and military leaders – and whose exclusion I shall explore in this chapter. In her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Kristeva looks at the history of foreigners, explores the meanings of foreignness and questions the possibility of a State without foreigners. She explains that the foreigner is “The one who does not belong to the group, who is not “one of them”, the other” (Kristeva, *Strangers* 95). By this definition, Kristeva draws
attention to inside and outside, us and them, inclusion and exclusion: “if one goes through time and social structures, the foreigner is the other of the family, the clan, the tribe. At first, he blends with the enemy. External to my religion, too, he could have been the heathen, the heretic” (Kristeva, Strangers 95). In Europeans and The Power of the Dog, we shall see that the passage to the other/ the foreigner is enabled when the self dares to look within and points to its own ghosts and fears. The relationship with our ‘beasts’ determines and shapes the relationship with those strangers. Kristeva explains: “Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode [...]. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself” (Kristeva, Strangers 1). This invitation to reach out to the other is a personal journey that begins within ourselves and helps achieve healing and reconciliation. In my next analysis of Europeans and The Power of the Dog, I will look closely at the emotional and/or the legal status of many ‘foreigners’ to see what challenges they face as they struggle to be different, strange and excluded.

Europeans begins with Vienna’s military victory against the Turks, which is a festive moment of death and rebirth. This interesting beginning reminds me of Peter Banes’ use of carnival forms of humour such as banquets, parodies, clownery and travesty. In Europeans, the triumphant procession of death and battle depicts a carnival atmosphere of play and power, liberty and confinement, inclusion and exclusion, praise and abuse, comic and grotesque. Even before Leopold and his wife make their spectacular entry, their military triumph is seen as the rebirth of Europe. Following the battle, Leopold’s “I LAUGH” (Barker, Europeans 92) may be a silent laughter yet it stands for the beginning/end of birth pains:
Oh God, oh, God I stoop, let all this Muslim flesh manure Christian ground, oh, God, I bow, let all this scrag of Islam bring forth crops to feed the lowest labourer and he shall situate the crucifix above the lintel of the door and hang his weapon on its hook, and in the frosty fields his child shall kick the Tartar skull that ploughs dislodged. (Barker, Europeans 91)

This transformation of the battle into a harvest or a banquet in praise of the bowels of the earth describes the perpetuation of death under the disguise of victory and carnival humour. Here the feeding and the devouring are inseparable from the grotesque-comic imagery of this triumphant procession where the dead are swallowed by the earth and become food for the living. On the life of the grotesque body, Bakhtin says: “Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination [...] as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and the new body” (Bakhtin 316). In Leopold’s grotesque feasts, the dead Muslim is seen as the manure of Christian Europe which will feed the labourers and the newly-born at harvest time. This praise of the life of the grotesque body hides and justifies the violence done to the victims and the banquet becomes an expression of the triumph of the ‘labourers’ over the ‘victims’ and of ‘labour’ (battle in this context) over death. In this battle-banquet, death is inseparable from the harvest, abuse from praise and freedom from victimisation.

Beneath this carnival triumph, Barker clearly points to the difficult position of the artist in redefining art and emphasises the artist’s responsibility for revealing the victim. In commemorating the event, Leopold selects an artist from the Turkish prisoners to pin down the battle-feast imagery. However, the artist/prisoner struggles
to make his canvas articulate the ‘death’ of his friends. The artist’s canvas ‘appears as an adversary, and to draw or to paint comes close to a battle or a conquest. It should suffer under the pen or paintbrush as a living being that is cut [...] in order to take hold of the pure expression of life’ (De Vos 127). In other words, to subjugate the canvas the artist must unite the representation and the truth, the spiritual and the physical, the present and the past (De Vos 126-9). The past is the missing unarticulated life the artist had before becoming a war hostage. This cruelty towards the canvas puts the artist before his moral responsibilities bearing witness to slaughter: “I have this – I am under this – terrible illusion I am a decent painter – and as yet have little evidence –so” (Barker, Europeans 92). To depict the defeat of his fellow prisoners is to get involved in the State’s celebration outside their suffering:

Leopold: [...] No fucking Seljuk lancer will cut you free, Ali! Draw them, record their bewilderment, they cannot understand why their god’s quit, draw them!

Officer: The Turks! The Turks!

Leopold: Oh fuck your alarums, I am discussing art! (Barker, Europeans 92)

Art is the State’s means of reconciling the loss of home with a present of oppression and mass death; it is the State’s object to reconcile the prisoners to their new status as war hostages. The procession that follows the battle can be seen as a carnival display and an objectification of victims, the purpose of which is to appropriate the improper that is the experience of death-making.
This carnivalistic tradition of political clownery\textsuperscript{17} does not leave humour out but assimilates the borders between humour and politics, violence and justice, love and hate. It is a negative assimilation in the institutional body of art, politics, and/or religion to which Barker refers in connection to the status of ‘foreigners’. By viewing carnival through the lens of tragedy, Barker strips his characters of their fake sanctity inviting us to view their strangeness in a world of shame and humour. Briefly, Leopold the clown-politician laughs, invites people to laugh and then to be \textit{ashamed} of the laugh. The Empress urges Starhemberg to cast \textit{shame} away and to stick to his role in the circus of politics. Katrin \textit{is not ashamed} to push language to its limits; however, by summoning carnival authority, she becomes its object. Starhemberg feels \textit{ashamed} and refuses the reification of carnival consumption and its rewards. Next I will review each of these situations to explain the relationship between humour and shame and how in a culture of shame and entertainment that swells with happiness, unhappiness is a dilemma for authorities.

In Katrin’s case, Barker explores the reification of war victims as they struggle to display their pain and retell their stories with oppression, rape and deformity. Katrin’s birth pains recall the banquet atmosphere of the battlefield and its theme of death, renewal and fertility. The gaping mouth of the earth in the earlier scene, reminiscent of the folk tradition of humour, is now the gaping mouth of Katrin’s womb. The earth swallows the ‘dead’ and its fruits are swallowed by the living. Like Muslim flesh in the battlefield, Katrin’s raped and deformed body is another grotesque puppet in the State’s carnival humour at suffering. Her birth pains - “the gaping mouth, the protruding eyes, sweat, trembling, suffocation, the swollen face” -

\textsuperscript{17} Here it is important to remember that both Barker and Barnes look at clownery and politics or clownish politicians (such as Leopold, Stalin and Ivan the Terrible).
are “typical symptoms of the grotesque life of the body” (Bakhtin 308). The image of swallowing and of the gaping mouths is an ancient symbol of death and destruction (Bakhtin 325). In recording her testimony to the passage of Islam, Katrin refuses to forget her pain or forgive the rapists. Orphlus the priest does not absolve her of any sins and her confessions do not help her adjust to the past. Instead, her main confession is a confirmation of the need to return to pain: “I can’t go home because [...] home is the instrument of reconciliation [...], home is the suffocator of all temper [...], I wish to hold on to my agony, it’s all I have” (Barker, Europeans 99). Therefore, Katrin offers her disfigurement to an institute of science for the physicians’ scrutiny. Her negotiation of power and the politics of her body momentarily challenge authorities and censorship. This can be seen when she commands a publication of her misfortune to be distributed in the shops:

Katrin: […]. Do arrange and hurry with the proofs. If you have not my face, I’ll sit here longer.

Painter: if the Duke commissions this, I –

Katrin: What Duke? It’s me has all the copyright (Barker, Europeans 110)

The imperatives for this bodily remapping must not clash with or trespass the official carnival but must ensure its continuity. “The birth is for the seventeenth. I want it public in the square, and banks of seats. […], and let actresses be midwives if nurses have their scruples” (Barker, Europeans 110). At this stage of her ‘performance’, Katrin, blind to the dangers of public display, avoids ‘home’ - Barker’s metaphor for institutions and control. By expressing her pain loudly, Katrin thinks she is rejecting and demolishing the ‘walls’ of fear and shame to claim her right to individual
pain/experience. However, her voice comes out of the very carnival in which she is the grotesque dummy and her command for bodily remapping becomes a mere show in which the midwives are actresses.

In the light of this seeming liberty, Starhemberg, who is given the clown’s licence as we shall see later, also challenges the given roles of victims and victimisers. Katrin’s refusal to go home and the public scrutiny of her grotesque suffering places her at the edge between iconoclasm and conformity. Likewise, Starhemberg’s refusal to participate in the official reconciliatory programme places him at the edge between heroism and treason. The State’s carnival is its means of control, of laughing at pain and reconciling victims to a status quo of oppression. Both Katrin and Starhemberg embrace pain, but unlike Katrin, Starhemberg chooses anonymity in a celebratory culture:

Leopold: [...] Someone is writing his biography, but he will give no evidence. And the city sculptor has sculpted him for Starhemberg Square, but without a face. It is ridiculous, when can he do the face?

Starhemberg: Let it have no face.

Leopold: I LAUGH. I LAUGH.

Empress: Are you loyal to the Hapsburgs?

Starhemberg: I can conceive of no improvement in the nature of the government. (Barker, Europeans 106)

As a result, his heroism and his loyalty to the State are interrogated upon his refusal to become a saintly murderer in the State’s reconciliatory programme. Here carnival
is the State’s ritual which perpetuates national violence nominating Starhemberg as killer and redeemer, cursed and sacred, traitor and patriot. The Empress would even have sex with Starhemberg to keep him involved in the State’s programme which does not necessarily help reinvent Europe: “Starhemberg, we must invent the European now, from broken bits. Glue head to womb and so on. [...]. And stop being ashamed. Now, go, you excellent actor, do go” (Barker, *Europeans* 107). Starhemberg has to play his role as a military saviour and even find security in carnival laughter. The rebirth of Europe out of the grotesque body of war victims is a rebirth from broken bits, from the broken limbs of people like Katrin and Starhemberg.

Shame in this context might be a double edged weapon by which one recognises or fails to recognise the struggle between order and disorder, passive and active participation. Thus the Empress is keen to eliminate shame because shame might help the victimiser rethink the role laughter plays in disguising the victim and rooting out responsibility. “In shame,” Agamben clarifies, “the subject [...] has no other content than its own desubjectification; it becomes witness to its own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject. This double movement, which is both subjectification and desubjectification, is shame” (Agamben, *Remnants* 106). To bear witness to the disorders of such dysfunctional body (the European subject) is to be passive with respect to oneself and active with respect to the reconciliatory programme. Passivity, Agamben explains,

does not simply mean receptivity, the mere fact of being affected by an external active principle. Since everything takes place here inside the subject, activity and passivity must coincide. The passive subject must be active with
respect to its own passivity; it must “behave” [...] “against” itself [...] as passive (Agamben, Remnants 109).

Starhemberg, the military saviour, is not permitted to feel passive with the reformulated (European) subject. At the end of the siege, the Emperor negotiates issues such as the collapse of morality, humour and economic instability from a festive view of humour: “I can only tell you all these feelings I permit. So laugh when the urge seizes you, and then be ashamed of the laugh. The Emperor only acts the insecurity of all order. Do you accept the truth of that?” (Barker, Europeans 102). It is alright if Starhemberg feels ashamed upon participating in this licenced humour but first he is obliged to participate in the carnival display of deformed war victims for national welfare. Laughing terror, passive participation and carnival reification sustain the national body and maintain political clownery represented by the Emperor or even Starhemberg at this stage.

Feelings of passivity, of shame mixed with pleasure at activating one’s passivity are best articulated by Starhemberg in the cellar scene, where he is depicted as a fool among the outcasts and the spokesperson of carnival insecurity. The image here is one whereby Starhemberg is swallowed up by the gaping mouth of the earth (the cellar), following his refusal of national rewards such as ‘sainthood’, celebration and fame. “The cellar has a similar connotation, with the theme of death, of swallowing down, more strongly accentuated. Thus, the earth and its orifice acquire here an additional grotesque element” (Bakhtin 329-30). In the underworld Starhemberg quits playing his role as a national ‘saviour’ and is transformed into whom he really is – a clown among the beggars in search of education: “Deliverer, did you say? Redeemer, over there? No, didn’t catch it [...] (He fondles the FIRST WOMAN
BEGGAR.) Fuck with me, [...], I’ll be a Christ to you, an ageing Christ who slipped the crucifixion” (Barker, Europeans 118). Unlike Christ, Starhemberg is willing to kill in the name of the nation but will never die to save others. His position among the outcasts is one of his many roleplays: “As with the debate over carnival, so with the figure of the fool, it is not a question of being either radical or conservative but rather being both radical and conservative for the mode of ‘both/and’ is the one which more nearly represents the intervention of folly” (Prentki 7). Starhemberg is indeed a foolish saviour for his ascension into ‘heaven’ and his descent into ‘hell’ reflect the ambivalent nature of carnivals in which he is the State’s spokesperson among the outcasts. Therefore, to depict the history of folly ‘in terms of an alternative, revolutionary, popular discourse [...] is ultimately a misunderstanding’ (Prentki 9-10). The fool may be subversive but he cannot be revolutionary; he may be radical in his carnival performance but it is only a joke (Prentki 10). Starhemberg’s carnival performance is not revolutionary but by his jokes and games of travesty, he casts aside his role as a military leader and thus he temporarily reaches out to the outcasts:

Fourth Beggar: (sitting by Starhemberg.) [...], shall there ever be a system with no poor?

Starhemberg: Never. Unless they gaol the poor in the palaces. I don’t rule that out.

Fourth Beggar: And shall the poor men burn the rich men’s houses?

Starhemberg: Yes, again and again, or how else could the rich feel happy?

Fourth Beggar: I follow nothing ’e says! Nothing!
Starhemberg: (Grabbing the FOURTH BEGGAR by the collar.) Describe what hope you have, your hope, what is it? (Barker, *Europeans* 120)

In other words, hope is defined by those in the upper seats of power systems and who live on the backs of fools and poor people. Starhemberg’s entry into the gaping mouth of the earth helps him view the upper order from the eyes of the deprived outcasts. However, this foolish Starhemberg is given a carte blanche which helps him escape the crucifixion. His unrestricted authority is like a ladder between two worlds and by which he ascends or descends without taking responsibilities.

In return to the idea of battle-harvest, the relationship between the siege and the birth of the nation is inseparable from that of ‘sacrifice’ and carnival. Here the blood of victims and victimisers waters the battlefield for the (re)birth of Europe: “The siege was simultaneously a moment of degeneracy and of the highest moral order. On the one hand, every fence to immorality was torn down, and on the other, peculiar sacrifices were made in the spirit of human love” (Barker, *Europeans* 111). Barker probably and arguably uses the filial obligation (the mother-son relationship) in the play as a metaphor for the relationship produced from national obligation, according to which one is defined as a friend or enemy, citizen or foreigner. To understand this relationship, I will explore the status of ‘foreigners’ in the play and their loss in terms of strangeness and belonging. It is also important to explain how carnival uses and abuses these strangers and whether or not Barker is suggesting a solidarity or togetherness of foreignness in the face of this threat. This “notion of human strangeness” beneath the grotesque disguise of humour helps identify the foreigner’s loss or the dilemma of unhappiness (Kristeva, *Strangers* 113). Whether or not ‘happiness would arise from a reconciliation with our marvels and monsters’,
the story of the stranger in terms of victimisation is essential to my discussion of the carnival (Kristeva, *Strangers* 115). In this light, the fulfilment of happiness, according to Bakhtin, can be seen as a utopian moment of carnival humour by which pain is made entertainment and the boundaries between self and other temporarily collapse. Though Kristeva is not making a link between carnival and strangers, she is interested in the possibility of a society reconciled with foreigners. The hope that ‘foreigners’ can be recognised is met in carnival, the State’s reconciliatory programme in the play. Far from Bakhtin’s vision, Kristeva observes the encounter with the other in terms of a clash which causes “uncanny strangeness” – the release or return of the repressed / other (Kristeva, *Strangers* 188). Bakhtin’s carnival is about this return which embraces others in the veil of laughter. Here the carnivalistic overcoming of fear over the return of the repressed is a temporary reconciliation with others that fails to transcend the moment of celebration into the whole community. Behind its strange laughter, the selected playwrights in this thesis reveal the other as disguised to be abused, mocked and eliminated. Unlike Bakhtin’s romantic vision of the integration of strangers in the community, Kristeva discusses the legal status of strangers and emphasises the need to detect the stranger within ourselves in order to reduce exclusion, hate and persecution (Kristeva, *Strangers* 191).

Barker also views this relationship between strangers and citizens, mothers and children to comment on the idea of belonging in the celebratory culture of *Europeans*. Two ‘foreigners’ Orphuls and Starhemberg reveal their true identity as they meet their ‘mothers’ and unite against the call of the motherland. Like Starhemberg, Orphuls’ relationship with his mother is full of hate and ‘love’, obligation and fatigue, sin and tolerance. However, Starhemberg and his mother deny their filial relationship (Barker, *Europeans* 123). The presence of the two
mothers is somehow unreal for neither of them is given a name, their coming and going is reminiscent of memories of the siege, hunger and hardship. Also, the dark room where Starhemberg’s ‘mother’ lives is a place for rodents, dirt and skeletons of gorged mice (Barker, Europeans 123). Like Starhemberg, Orphuls is another fool whose marginality and powerlessness are his licensed transgression.

Orphuls: SOMETIMES I THINK I COULD MURDER YOU.

First Mother: (kneeling brushing the crumbs.) I know. It’s love. (Barker, Europeans 114-5)

Orphuls is an insider for he is the ‘priest’ every corrupt system entertains and the outsider who later kills his mother. He is the “madman of the siege” who feeds on the degeneracy of political systems (famine, war, immorality) and the ‘priest’ who facilitates the passage of victims/victimisers from chaos to hierarchic stability (Barker, Europeans 115). The (m)other in the play is not only a metaphor for the homeland but she also reveals a hidden otherness, the otherness of father-figures, victims of violence and prisoners.

Here the emphasis on foreignness tears apart the carnival disguise of madness, otherness, and folly to reveal the grotesque outcome of participation in a national programme based on celebration and reconciliation. Kristeva defines the ‘foreigner’ as a stranger to his mother or as someone who ‘has lost his mother. Camus understood it well: his Stranger reveals himself at the time of his mother’s death’ (Kristeva, Strangers 5). Likewise, Orphuls reveals the stranger who becomes a criminal at his mother’s death. Leopold describes this filial criminality as a national threat to the newly-born order: “Are you mad? COVER THE GRAVE! What is to
become of Vienna? You want to be a bishop and you kill your mother [...] . We are building a new Europe and you do this, you are in love with Starhemberg, he eats your soul, you horrify me!” (Barker, *Europeans* 143). The military and religious ‘fathers’ challenge their filial obligation to the motherland when they break out of the ‘box’ of national duty into the enlightenment of pain; the crime is the grotesque fruit of this disobedience. According to Kristeva, a foreigner is not only someone who stays in a different country from his own but it can also mean someone who excludes himself from the laws made by the main group in a society (Kristeva, *Strangers* 59). Indeed, by killing his mother, Orphuls excludes himself from the laws and becomes a foreigner in a nation the rebirth of which is inseparable from eliminating enemies and friends. The nation is depicted as an old mother imprisoned in a dark room, whose survival depends on its avoidance of mirrors, the symbol of enlightenment.

Orphuls: […].

*(He holds Leopold.)*

It is a second birth and like the first, induces such a rush of air to unopened lungs, I struggled on the ground red as an infant […], and he carried me […] home like the maternal nurse! […].

Leopold: A new morality we asked for. And we get this.

Orphuls: Feel me! I’m NEW.

Leopold: Take your claw off me! You should shrivel in a furnace, and the skull as it popped, should invite spontaneous applause! (Barker, *Europeans* 144)
The revelation of the stranger – “Take your claw off me!” - is Orphuls’ invitation to Leopold to embrace his monstrous and painful enlightenment but the dictator does not condone such foreignness. The latter is only permitted in the guise of humour, folly or madness. Orphuls’ freedom from filial obligation to the motherland is his response to destroy the disguise of his role as a priest and his reaction to the State’s carnival liberty. However, the State undermines this rebellion, as we shall see next, by using Orphuls’ revelation for carnival entertainment. The latter inseparable from murder and characterised by humour and applause, is Leopold’s response to Orphuls’ rebirth. In other words, filial obligation is the bond by which the nation makes sure the religious and military fathers stay inside the puppet-show of submission and celebration.

The State’s carnival conceals this foreignness by means of travesty and humour making sure the fool remains inside the ‘box’ of carnival performance. Rewarded and suddenly crowned the State’s bishop, the Empress fools Orphuls into giving a speech on what he has learnt from his criminal experience (Barker, *Europeans* 145). This carnivalistic trap is Orphuls’ last chance to share his knowledge with the crowd some of whom may be workmen. By means of travesty, the participant workmen are assured that equality is possible, that a corrupt ‘fool’ of their rank can become a bishop. However, this temporary change of upper and lower recalls the Feast of Fools in which the lower clergy would select ‘one from amongst their ranks to serve for a day as their ‘bishop’ and to lead them in parody of the liturgy’ (Prentki 25). Elected a bishop by the workmen in a mock festive service, the criminal priest’s oration reveals his monstrous enlightenment:
Do not hold hands in false gestures as if by crowding you could exclude the groan of God, no, you must hear the sound of His despair, and we must learn from Judas […] who stood alone, for Judas did not sell Christ nor was he corrupt, but Judas was cruel for knowledge, and without Judas there could be no resurrection, Beauty, Cruelty, and knowledge […]. (Barker, *Europeans* 146)

The priest’s cruelty (for knowledge which has set him apart from the crowd) embraces the beauty of pain as the individual’s journey of rebirth. As a result, he is guilty and a betrayer for having abandoned his maternal/national obligations. By identifying himself with Judas the betrayer not with Christ the martyr, Orphuls confirms the beauty of cruelty. It is not only this identification that puts the ‘bishop’ to death but the fact that his crime transforms him from the carnival’s puppet, monster, and fool into a puppeteer. The latter is a ‘privilege’ given to people in power those faithful to the reconciliatory State. In this parody, the corrupt Orphuls becomes a ‘bishop’ or a Judas only to be deprived of this monstrosity.

Another carnivalistic ‘rebirth’ takes place in a public square whose author and protagonist is the deformed Katrin in an attempt to reclaim her body, her maternity and her voice. However, Katrin becomes an object of art circulated among surgeons, artists and politicians; her experience is assimilated with the birth of a new Europe, and her motherhood with the liberated Vienna:

Starhemberg: Have you given birth?

Midwife: To a proper bastard.

Starhemberg: Tell me then, what to expect.
Midwife: Abuse, ducks.

Starhemberg: Abuse? Why abuse? It’s supposed to be a miracle.

Midwife: So was the saving of Vienna, but all I heard was blasphemy. (Barker, *Europeans* 137)

In this scene of childbirth, the female body is similar to the battlefield where life is inseparable from abuse, the national from the personal, and the festive from the violent. “It’s cold,” Leopold says “I shan’t stay for all of it. And what’s her game, in any case? I told Elizabeth this had to be illegal. No, she said, not yet!” (Barker, *Europeans* 138). Katrin’s need to reclaim her body and uncover her pain is viewed as a show in which national saviours, foolish politicians, monstrous priests and witch-like midwives play a game. Contrary to Katrin’s intentions, Leopold redefines the rules of this game-show to belittle her pain. The crowd stops Starhemberg from protecting Katrin’s right to labour pains: “her pain she needs. Her suffering she requires. NO THIEVING BY THE COMPASSIONATE!” (Barker, *Europeans* 139).

The art of celebration claims the people’s attention and deprives them of pain because it does not ache for truth but swells with happiness and deprivation.

Here the dilemma of the foreigners’ unhappiness in the context of maternal loss or belonging threatens to undermine the State’s product of happiness. In their insistence of the loss, they try to relocate the self by means of pain. Barker highlights the foreigners’ happiness – Orphuls, the artist and Starhemberg - in the trial scenes where folly is inseparable from punishment and reconciliation from betrayal. The concern with happiness in the play should challenge us to understand the foreigners’ dilemma as summarised by Kristeva:
those who have not experienced the near-hallucinatory daring of imagining themselves without parents – free of debt and duties – cannot understand the foreigners’ folly, what it provides in the way of pleasure (“I am my sole master”), what it comprises in the way of angry homicide (“Neither father nor mother, neither God nor master…”). (Kristeva, Strangers 21)

Barker’s foreigners feel hungry for this painful pleasure and tendency to homicide, so as to free oneself from the maternal/national bond; as a result, their ‘happiness’ is folly for those in power. In this light, Orphuls the priest is not ashamed to be hanged for killing his mother and his sole desire to be unhappy helps him challenge the happiness of the established order (Barker, Europeans 144). Unhappiness requires both Orphuls and the Turkish artist/prisoner to swim against the stream of celebration whatever the cost might be. Like Orphuls, the artist, whose foreignness is the loss of his maternal/national belonging, cannot paint happy paintings because it is not a happy time (Barker, Europeans 133). His art is mocked by the State’s artists because his unhappiness is seen as an insult to the status quo (Barker, Europeans 135). In reaction to this mockery, the artist desires to kill those who laugh at his pain.

It is the same with Starhemberg as he defends Katrin’s right to labour pain against the will of the State and ‘midwives’, he is keen on unmasking the participants in the national carnival:

Midwife: Hang yourself.

(Pause. STARHEMBERG nods, as if in appreciation. The MIDWIFE squeals with laughter. He seizes her hand. She senses danger.)

Starhemberg: It’s you that must hang.
Midwife: Only a joke!

Starhemberg: Yes, but I have no sense of humour.

(*The Empress appears. The MIDWIFE hurries away, off.*)

…………………………..

Starhemberg: She is a witch, the midwife. She must hang. (Barker, *Europeans* 141)

With the help of this carnival team, Concilia, the State’s product, is born in spite of the foreigners’ desire for pain. The foreigners’ attitude to killing someone confirms their wish to break free from the maternal burden of loss or belonging: Orphuls kills his mother, Starhemberg’s mother is ‘dead’ and he wants to kill the midwife, the artist deprived of the ‘mother’ desires to kill the national artists, Katrin is deprived of her child.

In other words, unity among these foreigners is a continual travelling outside the norms and laws but within the dimensions of their human experience of pain. Accused of matricide, obscurity and foreignness, Orphuls, Starhemberg and Katrin are united by their foreignness. Referring to this externality, Kristeva notes that there are laws which define and exclude the foreigner: “the law according to soil and the law according to blood” (Kristeva, *Strangers* 95). The first excludes the artist/prisoner and the second defines Katrin as an outsider because of her impure blood upon being raped by the Turkish soldiers (Barker, *Europeans* 129). Barker is not saying foreignness necessarily leads to criminality; rather, the *status quo* of individuality in these states requires one to emphasise the limits of national laws. Kristeva explains that the foreigner
psychologically […] signifies the difficulty we have of living as an other and with others; politically, he underscores the limits of nation-states and of national political conscience that characterizes them and that we have all deeply interiorized to the point of considering it normal that there are foreigners, that is, people who do not have the same rights as we do. (Kristeva, *Strangers* 103)

In the play, Barker rewrites history from the perspective of strangers and victims of violence to reveal the ambivalent nature of national practices and to challenge one’s perception of participation. The importance of rewriting history is in opposition to State-control: “What History spoiled, let History mend. I christen her – Concilia!” (Barker, *Europeans* 140). It is actually the carnival and the blood of victims which facilitate the movement from disorder to order reconciling upper and lower, heroes and foreigners, State and people. The State allows Katrin to display her deformity so to use her body as an object of State control rather than give a voice to the voicelessness of the raped. Katrin is cheated and her horrors are made into reconciliation (Concilia):

Katrin: HISTORY THEY MADE OF ME.

Starhemberg: Yes but we will deny them yet. (Barker, *Europeans* 141)

To deny the oppressors their victory that is to question the official view of history, Starhemberg suggests “we reproduce its mayhem in our lives” (*ibid* 154). By returning Concilia to her Turkish fathers, “Starhemberg seeks the demolition of Concilia’s symbolic role within the state pageant, and thereby of Katrin’s symbolic role” (Rabey, HBPD 239). Katrin, therefore, breaks free from objectification and
gains access to her deformity/identity. The State can no longer claim paternity to the child for the maternal-filial relationship is broken. Concilia is elsewhere and this elsewhere-ness is finally identified as foreignness.

This last scene in the fort in Wallachia (at present southern Romania) is where Starhemberg has made the restitution of Concilia, the property-foreigner, in exchange for foreignness and individual pain. Here it is worth mentioning that the fort located on the border is a place of conflict between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire over Balkan territories from 1591 to 1606. Ironically, at the borders foreignness is recognised and denied. Starhemberg and Katrin are united by the very foreignness (Concilia) they cast away. The State’s public display of foreigners as if they were objects in a war museum is its means of control over their deformity and identity. In this carnival the foreigners are displayed as monsters, perverts or enemies. However, as they reject the State’s re-Concilia-tion, Katrin and Starhemberg cling to their perverseness and their deformity ‘in order to be reborn not with a new identity but within the enigmatic dimension of human experience that, with and beyond belonging, is called freedom’ (Kristeva, Strangers 148). These strangers, especially Katrin who is always at the border conflict of foreignness, are lost in perverseness and hence she is free in the abysmal fact that she may not be recognised as a citizen of any State. Katrin by means of her ‘deformity’ is more likely than other foreigners to pass from ‘the infernal dynamics of estrangement’ towards a ‘trans-historical dignity’ (Barker, Europeans 153). Thus, catastrophe – reclaiming one’s pain - is Barker’s turning point from the programmes of State control and celebration to a new possibility of rebirth outside history.
Rekindling Intimacy: Daring to See or Not to See the Victim in *The Power of the Dog*

The idea of rebirth – writing against the history of oppressors – also recurs in Barker’s *The Power of the Dog: Moments in History and Anti-History* where I look at the possibility of individuality in situations of extreme suffering. As the title of the play explains, Barker here examines Stalin’s moments in history and the fate/cost of individuality as moments of anti-history:

The action unfolds near the end of the Second World War, around 1944. There are two settings – the Kremlin and the battlefields of Poland – and three major groups of characters: Red Army soldiers at the Polish front, Stalin and his entourage at the Kremlin, and two Hungarian photographers, Victor and Ilona, who have been photographing war atrocities. (Weeks 62)

In this context, I want to study “the operation of politics [and violence] on the field of human intimacy”, the possibility of witnessing and of communicating with our ghosts, friends, enemies or even with ourselves (Dhal 99). The body *in extremis* might have lost its language and its trust in the world as we shall see in both *The Power of the Dog* and *Cleansed*. However, Barker highlights and problematises the witnessing of pain and engages with the beauty of suffering as a possibility of rebirth and self-creation (Dhal 97-106). Though Mary Karen Dhal does not look at the selected plays, Barker’s plays are connected by an encounter with a notion of strangeness within the subject - the strangeness, the burden and the responsibility of the artist/poet to be different and to fly outside the flock.
In *The Power of the Dog*, the focus on death camps and the practices of the secret Soviet police puts the viewer before a group of strangers (photographers, victims, the dead, prisoners, clowns, poets). This encounter or clash with the other reveals a relationship between the intimate (familiar?) and the ‘foreigner’ (stranger), which I shall view in the light of Kristeva’s definition of strangeness and Agamben’s reading of testimony and survival. The play takes us to the camp-site where the (im)possibility of intimacy with the inhuman is but the painful indistinction between man and non-man, human and inhuman. Rabey refers to this moment “about what it might mean to be (in)human” as “the uncanny - a moment of anxiety” (Rabey, HBED 6). In the earlier play, I described this as the return of the other and the release of the repressed, which are inseparable from the official programmes of celebration and public display of war victims. Similarly, this play concerns itself with the boundary work of “uncanny strangeness”. This both marks and problematises the distinction mentioned by focusing on joyful terror at the Kremlin, the interrogation of the dead, the restoration of the trust of those in the flames, the holding of one’s camera in a combat zone, and the different encounters with Stalin as a victim/iser. Barker uses these moments of great anxiety which evoke fear and dread (Frud, *The Uncanny* 123) to liberate one’s perception and encourage the birth of individuality in places of conflict and war. The play begins at the banqueting hall of the Kremlin where Churchill meets Stalin. There the translators struggle to interpret the words of their masters and fail to translate their definitions of history. Outside the Kremlin, the oppressed such as Ilona and Victor take risks in relating to the inhuman reality of war. Ilona, a Hungarian fashion model and photographer, has wandered for 3 years with Victor a Jew around Europe photographing atrocities. Together they find Ilona’s sister hanged. Ilona confronts Sorge a Russian officer
about the ‘death’ of her sister. Unable to leave the camp, Victor and Ilona are forced to work for Sorge taking photos of prisoners. The play ends in the Kremlin where Ilona meets Stalin and fails to keep her historical documentation of pain.

As in the previous play, the banquet (the triumph of Stalin’s collectivisation) and its folly are inseparable from famine, persecution and death. Churchill thanks Stalin for Stalingrad\(^\text{18}\) and they drink a toast to the collective farms (Barker, *Power* 4). The “collectivisation of agriculture” is Stalin’s vision to help his country “‘pass from the socialisation of industry to the socialisation of [...] agriculture’” (Kuromiya 77). The transformation of individual farms to collective or state farms involved “dekulakisation” or the persecution of kulaks (rich peasants) (Kuromiya 77). The purpose of this plan by which industry and agriculture should become the State’s suppliers is to put an end to capitalism, starve the rich to provide for the State and defeat the Nazi.

On his visit during the Second World War, Winston Churchill asked Stalin about the collectivisation of agriculture. Stalin said that he had had to deal with 10 million peasants […] lasting 4 years. Dealing with the kulaks was very bad and difficult – but necessary. (Kuromiya 103)

The implementation of this four-year plan – Stalin’s vision for a “revolution from above” – leads to the birth of the Stalinist regime (Kuromiya 74). Barker’s use of the banquet is a metaphor for this violent triumph of the State over the rich, and his comedian, Archie McGroot, is the spokesperson of Stalin’s political clownery. The latter ‘was now [December 1944] confident enough about his power to joke about

\(^{18}\) The Battle of Stalingrad in 1943 was a major battle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union over the city of Stalingrad (Kuromiya 158).
terror’ (Kuromiya 162). This recurrent theme of the banquent where we witness the lack of distinction between folly and persecution is important. Here the politician jokes about dictatorship, the waiters are the dictator’s spies and the comedian is the dictator’s clown. The latter fills the gaps of the politicians’ talk with jokes referring to the missing truth in their political discourse - the destructive starvational birth\(^{19}\) of the Stalinist regime. This triumph which celebrates the temporal reversal of hierarchic order embraces expulsion, ‘expelling knowledgeable and experienced experts and placing in their stead inexperienced and poorly educated people (workers and peasants)’ (Kuromiya 85). Through this brutal implementation of collectivisation, an upward social mobility, the idea is to support industry against capitalism (Kuromiya 85). In return to the banquet scene of folly and terror, the elimination of the rich and the educated in the name of Stalin’s classless society is based on the lack of distinction between carnival/persecution, socialism/purges, upper/lower, experience/ignorance.

It is at this point in the writing of history by the powerful, that Barker reveals the missing voice of the victims in the politicians’ speech and the inability to tell their pain. The comedian in this context who reveals their suffering is not revolutionary for his humour is an instrument in the hands of Stalin.

Stalin: History? (*Pause*) The incredulous overwhelmed by the incredible …

(*Pause. He sits*)

Sov Interpreter: Er… the unbelievable…er…

\(^{19}\) This is in reference to Stalin’s collectivisation by which he starved and persecuted the rich peasants to make use of their lands for the State’s welfare. The poor peasants who opposed Stalin’s plan were also persecuted (Kuromiya 91).
Eng Interpreter: The unlikely … triumphing over …

McGroot (emerging): History! A will tell ye wha’ history is, it’s a woman bein’ raped by ten soldiers in a village in Manchuria … (Barker, Power 4)

The comedian’s answer challenges Stalin’s obscurity and points to the unsaid in terms of a history of rape and violence. However, the politicians drink a toast to the Red Army, persist in their celebration of terror and avoid the comedian’s warning: “Noo funny! That’s noo funny! Tha’ is a fucking disgrace!” (Barker, Power 6). What matters most is Europe, the party cake of this political banquet, which they divide into pieces and devour for colonial interests (Barker, Power 6). Here the desire for more power regardless of the future of the people ignites the fires of this bloody carnival by starving and eliminating the rich to facilitate the rebirth of a new order.

In a strange dance of death, Churchill reveals the monstrosity of this history:

Churchill: Is it not awesome power, ask him, that no one in this continent, no child nor woman, shall live without our caveat?

Diplomat: He doesn’t mean caveat … he means …

Churchill: No medieval prince, howsoever unrestrained, could reach down as we do –

..............................................................

Churchill: Into the lives of the as yet unborn, and stir their entrails … history … history … hold my hand … hold my hand … (He extends it in a
Stalin’s “revolution from above” is a move downward to raise the poor and the uneducated from the bloody mouth of capitalism. As he holds the socialist ‘wheel’ in order to drive his country away from the capitalist beast, Stalin devours or stirs the entrails of the rich and educated. The interpreters repeatedly fail to communicate this truth that living outside the prescribed conventions of history and of a divided and raped Europe is impossible. In the banquet scene Barker opens our eyes to the reality of death outside the Kremlin and warns us not to join the dance or be misled by the politicians’ humour.

**Intimacy with the dead**

No I wouldn’t touch her underwear! Silk notwithstanding I – *(she lifts the dead woman’s skirt quickly)* Anyway, it’s not, so – *(she poses)* I look up, I *(a protest)*. This is my human condition face. *(Murmurs)* You say it’s stockings, I say it’s human condition – *(protests)*. *(Barker, Power 10)*

Next we shall see that the journey to identify the human condition in the wreckage of Poland and to *(re)view history in the human remnants is Barker’s attempt to rekindle a lost or maybe buried intimacy with the estranged human state. Beneath the festive image of political banquets lies the question of survival in a world of foreignness where the viewer can hardly tell the human from the inhuman. Barker uses the fool and the photographers to uncover the mis-recognised victim. The moment Ilona finds her sister hanged on a rope she identifies the human condition. She protests as she poses before Victor’s lens to take a photograph with the dead
woman. Having roamed through Europe collecting eighteen boxes of historic photographs, these two foreigners end up in partitioned Poland. There the human condition is hanged on a rope and the play views the question of intimacy with this condition from two perspectives: the first is through the unofficial lens of Victor and Ilona. The second is through the official lens of the student Matrimova “of the school of Film and Poetry of the University of Sverdlovsk, temporarily attached to the Support Unit of the 72nd Motorized Division” (Barker, Power 12). In the play the relationship between the intimate (the familiar?) and the strange (other) is pretty interwoven. This intimacy of the friendly and the uncanny can be seen in the human condition - once familiar and now unfamiliar (hanged on a rope). Kristeva explains, [... that which is strangely uncanny would be that which was (the past tense is important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges’ (Kristeva, Strangers 183). Arkov, the Russian officer and poet, reminds Ilona and Victor of this change when he asks: “Have you certification entitling you to photograph in a combat zone?” (Barker, Power 10). His questioning puts the survivors in fear of a forgotten (lost?) intimacy with the human condition:

Arkov: Will you take my photograph and never mind the combat zone certificate? (VICTOR nods agreement) May I stand close to you as if to indicate we are acquainted, if not intimately, then at least –

Ilona: That is my sister on the rope. (Barker, Power 11)

Intimacy with Russian authorities reveals a sense of betrayal of the human condition in Poland. The photographers’ unofficial lens juxtaposes atrocity and power, the question of kinship and the remnant of intimacy with the human in the presence of autocracy. The need for a photographing certificate shows that the ‘human'/survivor
is not permitted to live in intimacy with the uncanny present which once was familiar (a sister, brother or friend). Who is the human in this context: the one on a rope, the one behind the lens or those in between? Can the familiar (viewer/survivor) pass by atrocity and autocracy without the unfamiliar?

The question of survival involves participation the definition of which becomes the human dilemma for many in the play. Agamben describes this question as “the most specific trait of twentieth-century biopolitics” - producing “in a human body, the absolute separation of the living being and the speaking being, […], the inhuman and the human” (Agamben, *Remnants* 155-6). For instance, the possibility of survival for Ilona’s sister involves separation of love from sex:

I believe that every murder is acquiescence, and every victim possessed the means of her escape. I believe […] you own the means of your salvation, whether you want to be loved or whether you want to be saved. […]. She thought so, too, which is why she put her best things on. (Barker, *Power* 10)

The active participation with the Nazi-Soviet powers occupying Poland is passive agreement with the murderer. “You walk through History... in polished shoes... you dance on tanks... you don’t refuse... and if you die... you may not feel it... arbitrary, you can’t conceal it” (Barker, *Power* 10). This dance of death is the means of escape available for Ilona’s sister who might have been dancing on tanks selling her body to earn her living. The exclusion of her political life from her natural living or the exchange of one for the other produces death. For Victor, the possibility of survival outside the camp is inseparable from testimony:
I’m only saying [...] we have the most comprehensive collection of documentary suffering in the history of photography. We have hanged and murdered people from the Adriatic to the Barents Sea, which is marvellous, [...] but it is also a terrible responsibility and I – I want to go to America. (Barker, *Power* 16)

Ilona turns away from the tangible photographic evidence to the real but intangible lost body of her sister in a desire to interrogate the dead: “we will find my sister, and ask her how she died” (Barker, *Power* 17). To speak to the ‘dead’ is a question of remembering and testimony too. The survivor’s responsibility is not to forget the intimacy they once felt for the living-dead (the once were living but now ‘dead’). Ilona is not willing to forget but is happy to risk the means of escape to find an answer about how her sister died: “if we now return to testimony, we may say that to bear witness is to place oneself in one’s own language in the position of those who have lost it” (Agamben, *Remnants* 161). Ilona opens her eyes (her lens) to bear witness and to be educated “in the beauty of the ordinary, lifeless thing” (Barker, *Power* 17). This moment of beauty is the moment she decides to stay in the camp to interrogate the dead in order to disinter an intimacy with the past. It is the moment she makes love with the enemy so as to be educated about the death of her sister restoring thus the ‘language’ of those who lost it.

This interconnection of intimacy between the lifeless past and the living present is a moment of beautiful pain and knowledge in which Ilona exchanges her ignorance over her sister’s ‘death’ with a piece of soap from Sorge, an officer in the Soviet secret police. To wash her body is to passively agree with whatever he asks off her, an exchange of intimacy for knowledge: “How have you survived the fascist
occupation?” (Barker, *Power* 21). As Sorge interrogates Ilona about the basis of her arbitrary illegal survival and the selection of scenes for her photography, she insists on asking him about her sister. To speak of her ‘dead’ sister is a question of forbidden intimacy, an act of remembering by which she hopes to reveal the hidden reality of her death in the camp.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Sorge: I have stood in doorways in the drizzle, watching a guilty lightbulb throb through dirty curtains […], and hour after hour kept warm from knowing there was a child somewhere whose life would […] be spoiled like all his ancestors had been spoiled until Comrade Lenin got his fingers round *the mad dog’s throat* […].

Ilona: She said that, didn’t she? *History is a mad dog*, I know that’s her …

(*Pause*)

When the mad dog comes for you

Don’t run, you’ll only stumble.

Instead lie down and show your throat,

Some dogs don’t bite the humble… (Barker, *Power* my italics 23)

Ilona prefers Sorge’s guilty and dirty lightbulb of knowledge to the darkness of ignorance. The power of the dog is Ilona’s hope that she might gain some intimacy with her sister from rubbing her body against Sorge’s. She accepts his piece of soap in the hope that the ‘dog’ will not bite her and thus she rubs her body against the dirt of experience so that the lifeless past might return. The unfamiliar (forbidden past) will be once again familiar/intimate when she offers herself to the enemy. Access to
forbidden intimacy with her sister (the witness) is enacted by a forbidden intimacy with the victimiser. One could argue that this intimacy with the victimiser, her attempt to bridge the gap between the human/inhuman, the witness/survivor, involves betrayal. However, the survivor’s hope is to hold onto this remnant/song of “the mad dog” as she thinks the victimiser’s speech breaks off. The victimiser tosses this piece of song, of soap, of information intentionally to this desperate survivor (Ilona). Here we can turn to Agamben on the controversial dilemma of survival which in his view is inseparable from testimony. Agamben refers to ‘an impossibility of speaking’ on the part of the complete witness (Ilona’s sister) and a possibility of speaking on the part of the survivor (Ilona) which cannot be split apart (Agamben, Remnants 158). In this regard, “the power of the dog” is the remnant between Ilona’s sister (the witness), Ilona the survivor and Sorge the victimiser. It is the dead woman’s impossibility of speaking in Sorge’s mouth. This impossibility is the power of history to which Ilona gains access by forbidden intimacy with Sorge. On the one hand, Ilona risks her survival for the painful experience of knowledge. On the other, this seeming betrayal is the coexistence of testimony and ‘salvation’; intimacy with the enemy is intimacy with the estranged past with her sister.

In his use of the poet, Barker dares us again to meet and familiarise ourselves with the stranger. The stranger this time is not the lost corpse of the witness but the ghost-like enemy who is also another living dead in the flames. Here one can view intimacy as a moment of anxiety, an uncanny encounter with our ghosts, dictators and ‘foreigners’. It is this threshold between fear and enlightenment, strangeness, familiarity and poetic ambiguity. Kristeva explains, “By recognizing our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no
foreigners. Therefore Freud does not talk about them” (Kristeva, *Strangers* 192). Arkov, another ‘foreigner’/poet expelled by the Stalinist regime in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat, cannot hide behind his role as a Russian official.

Arkov: You are not to censor my letters.

Sorge: There is too much death in them. Write more about victory and less about death. (Barker, *Power* 20)

To express and to write about one’s pain is a political and conscious decision towards self-fulfilment and self-identification. Therefore, pain has to be censored if the machinery of the camp is to keep going: “Put your death interest in some poems. The letter, you see, has too much authority. Later, the poem will have authority and the letter none at all, but by then it won’t matter. […]. I let all poems through” (Barker, *Power* 20). Authority has nothing to do with writing letters or poetry; rather, the individual’s experience of pain questions the very relationship between dictators and subjects, death-making and victory, the poet’s experience of “self-loss” without others. The poet, in Agamben’s view, is *the most unpoetical of things, since he is always other than himself; he is always the place of another body* (Agamben, *Remnants* 122). Pain becomes the channel that helps Arkov release the foreigner/the poet from reification in favour of disintegration. “Freud brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours” (Kristeva, *Strangers* 192). Thus Kristeva’s notion of strangeness highlights the fracture within us between self and other, inside and outside. Arkov in search of his identity should be on a constant journey from himself a stranger to another stranger. Unlike Agamben who views the poetic experience as a
place of alienation, desubjectification and irresponsibility, Barker encourages us to reveal our disintegration by uncovering the inner stranger – the poet in his situation - who invites us as we shall see next to relate to the other. Agamben does not clearly explain his lack of faith in the poetic experience but this recalls Sorge’s uncertainty at the poet’s ability to hold responsibility for atrocities or pain.

Barker challenges this passive view of the poetic experience and rethinks the poet’s identity as a ‘foreigner’ in relation to authority and the possibility of responsibility in the face of censorship and dictatorship as a move to the political. Unlike Agamben, Barker views the poetic as an experience fully accountable for the estranged human. This can be seen as the poet makes a stand, reaching out for the ‘foreigner’ at the crossroads of witchcraft and Stalinism. Here the chanting of Russian soldiers is the point where Barker makes possible the non-coincidence of (medieval) witchcraft and Stalinist dictatorship using fire, ritual and magic:

All: Party card, party card, Number Twelve million, six hundred and sixteen thousand [...], all your power, lend us at this hour [...] Uncle Joe, Uncle Joe, guarding us wherever we go ... (A photograph of STALIN is added)

..........................................................

Arkov: Hurry up... (MELANKOV strikes a match, ignites the papers) Begin.

Gassov: [...] bit of Private Shenko’s jerkin, splashed with brain...

Neeskin (similarly): Grease off the wheels of the hospital train ... (Barker, Power 23-4)
Releasing their fear and summoning the ‘dead’ German Sonia require the symbolic burning of the father-figures Stalin and Hitler. The soldiers’ ritual helps unleash the repressed and brings to the bonfire ‘meal’ thoughts (memories) of murder, fear, female sex and ghosts. This return of the other – “the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive” - is the uncanny (Kristeva, Power 191). Summoning the ‘dead’ Sonia refers to the soldiers’ inability to forget the murders they committed in the name of Stalin. In their panic some soldiers flee, Melankov swoons, but the poet Arkov remains staring at ‘Gloria’, a woman in a dirty SS uniform. This phantom could be a Gloria, a Sonia or a limitless number of murdered women; here Barker’s deliberate use of these names uncovers a history of violence and rape. The name may vary but only one soldier is moved by agony to hold accountability for the crime – the poet.

Burning their party cards is a symbolic carnivalistic act by which the soldiers release their pain and temporarily overcome the fear of Stalin. However, this also brings the memory of the victims of their past actions. The medieval carnival is powerful imagery in this scene beneath which Barker reveals victims of violence and questions the soldiers’ participation. Carnival, the return of the deformed or fascinating (female) other, is the soldiers’ cathartic moment at a time of mass death and political oppression. Here the spectator is challenged to chant with the soldiers or to halt the dance and rethink one’s position with regard to the victim, the summoned ‘Gloria’ in this context. The latter, raised in the fires of witchcraft/death camps, thinks Arkov is going to rape her when he only wanted to save her:

\[20\] The Schutzstaffel, abbreviated SS, refers to the Protection Squad or defence corps used under the rule of Hitler and the Nazi. See Agamben’s The Remnants of Auschwitz (24-5).
Arkov: Throw your uniform away. *(She looks at him)* Get rid of it. *(Pause)*
Before they hang you. [...] *(She stares, not understanding. [...]*. *With the resignation of the defeated, she starts to unbutton. Thinking she is submitting to her fate, she lies on the ground. ARKOV slowly comprehends)* I don’t mean that. *(Pause)* Get up. [...] **I hate that.** *(Terrified, thinking to please him, GLORIA loosens her hair) [...] **I don’t mean that!** *(Mad with despair, he drags his pistol out of its holster. MELANKOV, revived, sits up, sees it).*

*(Barker, Power 25)*

Arkov shoots his penis off to help the astonished Gloria trust him. Twice in this scene salvation and death coincide: the moment Gloria thought she will be raped and the moment Arkov shoots his penis. “To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts” *(Kristeva, Strangers 191)*. Before Melankov’s horror and Gloria’s astonishment, and my own ‘laugh’, Barker questions Gloria’s familiarity with her enemy, Arkov’s familiarity with her and our own familiarity with the strange at the return of the repressed familiar. “The violent, catastrophic aspect the encounter with the foreigner may assume is to be included in the generalizing consequences that stem out of Freud’s observations on the activating of the uncanny” *(Kristeva, Strangers 190)*. The violent encounter with the foreigner does not release carnivalistic laughter but agony, astonishment and horror: Kristeva affirms that we must come back to these symptoms which the foreigner provokes rather than eliminate the foreigner himself *(Kristeva, Strangers 190)*. To watch Gloria/Sonia at the stake beckoning for help in the flames causes astonishment and horror to the soldiers because this gesture puts them face to face with their responsibility for others. The poet, however, does not flee but *touches* Gloria asking her to get rid of
her SS uniform and be saved. To flee and deny responsibility is shame for the poet. Gloria’s moment of misunderstanding shows her little familiarity with the foreigner. The ‘dead’ Gloria who was probably once raped by soldiers cannot but expect rape from them again and again. Arkov is not only astonished but terrified and mad with despair to see her reaction of defeat. Indeed “the poet can be trusted to castrate himself”, take action, claim authority and hold responsibility for an estranged humanity (Barker, Power 19). The symbolic act of burning Stalin and Hitler might be the first daring step the foreigner must take to overcome fear. While Kristeva suggests the need to come back to this open wound – one’s relationship with the past and its phantoms - to clean the pus, the poet goes further still. Arkov cannot stand this wound/ this dash between soldier-poet, rapist-stranger, puppet-human and hence he tears this ‘division’ apart. Instead of surrendering to fear, he embraces ‘uncanny strangeness’. Thus by means of castration, he opens his eyes on the other within himself to utter one word: trust now, trust me Gloria I am a stranger too.

Returning to the Kremlin, the final encounter in the play between Ilona and Stalin is an encounter between history (Stalin’s story) and its antithesis (the foreigner’s story). Earlier in the play Stalin imagines this encounter between Europe and a stranger from another planet. The shock and the confusion on the stranger’s face is an inescapable reaction to the viewing of the broken limbs of Europe, the destruction and the armies:

Is it chaos? Or is it a building site? A building site, to the uninitiated, is the essence of chaos, but to the foreman, merely the first stage of the plan. […] Of course, if you are sitting in a puddle with raw, bloody feet, it is hard to
appreciate the beauty of the structure. I understand that! I am perfectly human.

(Barker, *Power* 27-8)

The stranger is Ilona whose bloody feet roamed round Europe to record the foreman’s (Stalin’s) work. Can this photographer be trusted to open the lens of her camera to Stalin’s reality? How familiar is the foreman with the stranger’s suffering? Kristeva thinks ‘there is no uncanny strangeness for the person enjoying an acknowledged power and a resplendent image. Uncanniness, for that person is changed into management and authorised expenditure: strangeness is for the “subjects,” the sovereign ignores it, knowing how to have it administered’ (Kristeva, *Strangers* 190). This is exactly the difficulty Ilona encounters when she is asked to take photographs of Stalin: no one can take hold of who he is.

Ilona: [...] Isn’t it a face like any other? (*POSKREBSHEV coughs in alarm*)

........................................

Stalin: It is possible I do not actually know my face, and being presented with it, I may become enraged. Have you considered that?

Ilona: No.

........................................

Stalin: [...] it is not a face I have here, it is a history. (*She photographs him, emerges from the hood*)

Ilona: But at the same time you are very ordinary! (Barker, *Power* 41-2)

If Stalin does not know this history and being presented with it from Ilona’s view, then he may become enraged. The encounter with the familiar unfamiliar such as the
bloody feet of photographers, the photographic plates of intimacy and death is not
the task of the foreman. Such uncanny strangeness is for workers in the socialist
machinery (like Ilona, Victor or Arkov) but not for Stalin. To say Stalin is ordinary
is to say Ilona is familiar with the monster, with his laughing terror and indeed she is
quite familiar with his bloody work. I think this is not the first time Ilona has
encountered Stalin; every time she opened the lens of her camera in a combat zone
or death camp is a choice to encounter the monster. Now she meets him in ‘person’
though the ‘monster’ is depersonalised and is actually everywhere; it is hard indeed
to capture who Stalin is. Does she see him in the famine and terror, in the face of the
persecuted kulaks, in the death camps, in the ‘death’ of her sister? Who is Stalin?

Every time Ilona goes under the hood of her camera, she encounters the other, her
dead sister/Sorge, Gloria/the poet and prisoners/Stalin. Stalin, whom she describes as
ordinary, takes her courage as a sign of fear and her arrival to the Kremlin as defeat
rather than successful survival.

Stalin: I think she is afraid of me.

McGroot: Afraid of yoo! Noo, it’s no possible, who cud be frightened of a nice
ol’ man like yoo? A cud put ma head on his chest an’ say, gi’ us a
cuddle, uncle! [...].

Stalin: I enjoy frightening people. [...]. Really, Poskrebyshev, it’s despicable,
isn’t it? (Barker, Power 43)

The comedian mocks the possibility of intimacy with this monster. One would think
that Ilona’s familiarity with Stalin’s history of laughing terror should help her
reconsider any form of intimacy – passive participation – with Stalin. If such
intimacy is possible upon viewing and recoding atrocities, then her survival becomes questionable:

Stalin: I understand you are under sentence of death. [...] Lieutenant Sorge had evidence that you posed on a mass murderer’s lap. (Pause)

Ilona: Oh?

Stalin: For some reason the lieutenant neglected to act on the evidence. He continually filed your case to the back. (Barker, Power 43)

Ilona cannot run away from her encounter with the strange, the human condition on a rope or the lover-victimiser. Every time she goes under the hood of her camera, her humanity is veiled as she opens her eyes to meet the monster. Stalin challenges Ilona to reveal her humanity and to reach out for Sorge. Unlike the poet who reaches out for the victim/enemy in the flames, Ilona temporarily recognises the other inside her but is afraid to take full action: “Save him, please. (Pause) Save him. (He looks at her a long time. Ilona sees her mistake, struggles) No, that was silly, where were we? We were doing -” (Barker, Power 44). Ilona’s recognition of the other, a moment of dire consequences, must be an unforgivable mistake, a misunderstanding or even insanity:

Ilona: (Closing her eyes). Am I going to die?

Stalin: (Turning). Dying? Who said anything about dying? (He turns to POSKREBYDHEV) Have you been frightening Miss – (he loses the name) with tales of dying? [...] What are you, a sexual pervert? (He turns to Ilona. He extends his arms. She falls into them) there ...
Ilona: Are we safe?

Stalin: There ....

McGroot: Oh Christ, it kills all comedy, I have no joke for it. (Barker, *Power* 44)

In fear of death, Ilona closes her ‘eyes’ to fall into Stalin’s arms. Unlike the poet who burns the ‘father’ and opens his eyes (castrates himself) to help ‘Gloria’ trust him, Ilona in the arms of the ‘father’ shuts her eyes/camera lens to the suffering of others, to atrocity, to history, and to ‘uncanny strangeness’. Survival without the lens is Ilona’s salvation at the gate of the camp. This salvation without the records is in the gaping mouth of the monster. Ilona prefers to blindly trust the ‘father’ who administers the building site of sexual perversion, ‘death’ camps and wars. The ‘clown’ reveals the bestiality of this moment as Stalin extends his arms to expel Ilona’s records (memory of pain) and his refusal to laugh can be seen as a withdrawal from the State’s reconciliation.

*Cleansed: The Production of Death in the Normalcy of Everyday Life*

Not far from the strange intimacy explored in the previous play – the encounter with death and death-makers, with the other on a rope or in the flames also recurs in Kane’s work. In the chambers of *Cleansed* (1998), Kane explores the theme of love in a world where the boundaries between life and death, human and inhuman disappear. Whereas Kane in an interview with Nils Tabert (1998) believes that the use of violence in this play is a metaphor (Saunders, *About Kane* 74), my reading of *Cleansed* will consider the operation of politics and violence on the field of human intimacy. *Cleansed* shows that Kane is well acquainted with the literature of the
Holocaust; however, Kane refuses to use people’s pain to justify her work (Saunders, *Love Me* 94). Instead of explicitly referring to the Nazi Holocaust, *Cleansed* pays attention to ‘what people will do under extreme suffering’ and reveals the collapse of borders between medicine and politics, hospital and prison, education and entertainment (Saunders, *Love Me* 126). In a similar way to Hitler’s medical programme of painless killing, Graham in the play dies of an overdose and is sent to the gas chamber where he is cleansed – completely burnt. The word cleansed ‘can mean so many things – like clean from drugs, cleansed in a religious sense or cleansed as in ethnic cleansing’ (Saunders, *Love Me* 139). When translating the play into German, Kane went for ‘the meaning of ethnic cleansing, *Gesaubert*, mainly because it sounded better. *Gereinigt*, the religious aspect, in German would also have references to dry cleaning which would have been rather awkward!’ (Saunders, *Love Me* 140). The play takes place in what looks like a university or hospital on the surface but beneath maybe a death camp or a prison. Each chamber in this institution has a double function: the Red room which was the university sports hall is now the torture chamber. The White room is the university sanatorium to which the prisoners are transferred to receive special treatment at the hands of Tinker who is a jailer, drug dealer and ‘doctor’. The sanatorium room reminds me of the crematorium where the victim is cleansed and recycled or incinerated. The Black room with showers which are converted into peep-show booths and finally the Round room is the university library where prisoners come together to find peace and later warmth from the burnt books.

This ‘academy’ reveals situations of confinement and extreme suffering in what looks like a death camp wherein the distinctions between education, entertainment, religion, politics and medicine fall apart. Here, *Cleansed* presents us with “the
growing inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanics and calculations of power” (Agamben, Homo 119). Though Kane does not directly refer to a specific context, Cleansed invites us to recognise its metamorphoses and disguises when natural life is politicised and the threshold in life separating personal from public, sacred from profane, life from death becomes indistinguishable. In this regard, Cleansed points to other medical rituals which obliterate the thin line between human biology and politics performed by the Nazi on “human guinea pigs” or VPs (Agamben, Homo 154). German physicians and scientists conducted experiments the cost of which was fatal on VPs, who were ‘sentenced to death or detained in a camp, the entry to which meant the definitive exclusion from the political community’ (Agamben, Homo 159). Carl and Rod are the VPs or the rats of Tinker’s experiments. In this light, the use of rats in the play as an instrument of torture also refers to the dehumanised ‘prisoners’. Agamben explains that experiments on prisoners had been performed several times in the twentieth century in totalitarian and democratic countries alike (Agamben, Homo 156). Because these victims ‘were lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence, and yet were still biologically alive, they came to be situated in a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they were no longer anything but bare life’ (Agamben, Homo 159). In almost every scene Kane keeps our eyes open on this inside-outside border such as the weather outside the ‘institution’ or the sound of the football match on the other side of the fence. Carl and Rod, Grace and Robin are still biologically alive (they eat and drink, they feel pain, cold or hot) but came to be detained in a situation where they must live in a vegetative manner. For example, when Tinker forces Robin to burn his books in the university library, Robin is reminded of this limit between inside (desire for education) and outside (empty library) and between
the library and the camp. In this prison/university, progress is forbidden; VPs are hardly active biologically and dead politically. Whereas Tinker fights their desire to make love that is to be politically-active and find self-fulfillment, he himself bridges the gap between inside and outside when he makes love to the dancer in the booth. However, he does not relate to the other’s pain or take any responsibility for Carl and Grace who bleed to death at the end.

In this limit zone between inside and outside, biological and political, *Cleansed* depicts a space where the human cannot be fully human. For instance, Kane’s symbolic use of the football or cricket match is not a coincidence but should be viewed within ‘the biopolitical horizon that characterizes modernity’ and is characterised by the the lack of distinction between physician, scientist and killer (Agamben, *Homo* 159). According to Agamben, the camp represents this inclusion and usurpation of the personal by power systems. On the significance of the match, Agamben writes, one of the witnesses ‘who survived the last “special team” of Auschwitz, recounted that during a “work” break he took part in a soccer match between the SS and representatives of the Sonderkommando’ (Agamben, *Remnants* 25). In other words, the ‘friendly’ match between the perpetrators and the victims is a carnivalistic moment of brief but cruel ‘liberty’ beneath which lies another reality:

This match might strike someone as a brief pause of humanity in the middle of an infinite horror. I, like the witnesses, instead view this match of normalcy, as the true horror of the camp. For we can perhaps think that the massacres are

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21 It is important to note that “The extreme figure of the “gray zone” is the Sonderkommando. The SS used the euphemism “special team” to refer to this group of deportees [usually Jews] responsible for managing the gas chambers and crematoria” (Agamben, *Remnants* 24).
over –even if here and there they are repeated, not so far away from us. But the match is never over; it continues uninterrupted. (Agamben, Remnants 26)

Here passive participation and death production have become inseparable ingredients of everyday life. The non-stop match represents this moment when participants and spectators escape their responsibility for the victims. Outside of this fake liberty, Kane reveals an ongoing suffering in the love ‘match’ between Robin and Grace, Graham and Grace, Carl and Rod, Tinker and the dancer. It is Tinker who makes sure love is not spoken by putting to death every individual attempt at self-fulfillment. In the ‘camp’ love is the forbidden language by which Grace reconnects with the past and the memory of her brother. Interestingly, Kane confirms that the other Grace in the booth with whom Tinker makes love is not the same Grace who makes love to Graham (Tabert 141). Despite this, there are other interpretations which describe the woman in the booth as "Grace’s other side" (Evans 169). This reminds me of Ilona, in Barker’s The Power of the Dog, whose intimacy with the enemy is her means of bridging the gap caused by the loss of her sister. A similar hidden intimacy can be seen - between Tinker, ‘Grace’ and Graham - by which Grace exchanges her body with the killer to restore the memory of her brother. The ‘match’ is this gray zone of indistinction between love and torture, victim and victimiser, physician and drug-dealer. Kane shatters our hope in the football match in order to reveal the penetration of the holocaust into our private lives through the organised deaths of our beloved ones in the ‘camp’. The latter is Kane’s site of a city where we have a university, a hospital, a jail, a playground and peep-show booths. Through the ongoing collapse of private-public, friend-enemy, Kane challenges the audience to see and rethink the intrusion of politics into man’s natural life:
But also hence our shame, the shame of those who did not know the camps and yet, without knowing how, are spectators of that match, which repeats itself in every match in our stadiums, in every television broadcast, in the normalcy of everyday life. If we do not succeed in understanding that match, in stopping it, there will never be hope. (Agamben, Remnants 26)

In Agamben’s view, organised killing has become so familiar and constantly demands one’s participation. Thus defamiliarising our perception of and response to violence is essential at a time it is hard to tell death camps from institutions, politics from love or medicine. Entry into the camp where exception (being deprived of all political rights) is realised normally is the mark or the epidemic of modern politics.

This situation leaves the prisoners/patients confronted by the question of survival which is inseparable from betrayal and/or death. Grace’s intimacy with her dead brother is her means of survival inside the ‘institution’ but whether her love for her brother kills her or keeps her alive is hard to tell. “If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones” (Agamben, Homo 122). Grace’s decision to stay in the institution is not a decision about life as much as it is a decision about death. Life without her brother is death.

Tinker. You shouldn’t be here. You’re not well.

Grace. Treat me as a patient. (Kane, Cleansed 114)

Though this ‘doctor’ cannot save her, he does treat her as a patient whose journey of ‘recovery’ is a journey of remembering and dying. Tinker embodies Agamben’s
territory of indiscernition between life and death, salvation and hell, sanatorium and crematorium. The survival of love between Carl and Rod is another example of the inseparable life/death and love/betrayal. The moment Carl promises to love Rod forever, Rod reminds himself and his partner of the difficulty in keeping such a promise in situations of extreme suffering where survival and betrayal, life and death become indistinguishable (Kane, Cleansed 111). Tinker puts every love match in the play under methodical killing repeating many times that he wants to save his ‘patients’ and to make them feel better, but all he does is to perpetuate death: “I’m sorry. I’m not really a doctor” (Kane, Cleansed 146). This confession does not help the ‘prisoners’ nor does it change Tinker but leaves the spectator terrified when confronted with this political/medical experiment of ‘cleansing’.

Exploring the Grotesque Royal ‘Food’ of Monarchic Stability in Phaedra’s Love

Far from the ‘laboratories’ of death-making and the ‘museum’ of war, the final play in this chapter addresses the questions of happiness and survival of both community and royal family before the scandal of incest, rape and unrequited love. Whether or not happiness would arise from reconciling past and present, pagan and Christian, outsiders and heroes, Girard explains that happiness, welfare and peace of ancient communities were established by means of victim selection. Here René Girard points to several stereotypes of persecution, as mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, such as religious and ethnic minorities, royal figures, foreigners and homosexuals (Girard, Girard Reader 109-110). In the play, the transformation of Prince Hippolytus, Theseus’ son, into an outsider seeking the solitude of his ‘crime’ is an essential element that leads to his (de)enthronement, which also involves a ritual of selection and elimination as we shall see later. By means of this solitude,
Hippolytus desires to abandon his old royal lifestyle of indifference, sexual indulgence and inaction. On his royal birthday, Phaedra his stepmother confesses her love through fellatio, but the prince refuses to take her token of love any further. As a result, she commits suicide accusing him of rape. Strophe appeals to her stepbrother to deny the rape but he confesses the rape and is put in jail. In the solitude of his cell, Hippolytus feels happy and refuses the priest’s appeal to un-confess his confession. In their doubt on the existence of God, both confessor and sinner become alike and the priest performs oral sex on Hippolytus. The latter refuses God, chooses “honestly sinning” over ‘redemption’ and affirms his satiation in a chosen solitude/aloneness (Kane, *Phaedra* 96). The priest fails to restore Hippolytus to the upper Christian world by means of confession for the sake of monarchic solidarity and stability. Hippolytus, as a result, becomes the object of abuse and praise, the royal ‘food’ in a show trial served by/to the crowd. Outside the court, Hippolytus – guided by policemen – breaks free into the arms of the angry crowd. The disguised Theseus kisses him full on the lips and pushes him into the crowd. Strophe, also disguised, appeals to the crowd not to murder her ‘brother’. As a result, she is raped by Theseus her stepfather as the crowd applauds. Theseus cuts her throat and she dies. Hippolytus is disfigured and his genitals are cut for the barbeque. Theseus recognises his daughter and kills himself. It is ironic that in moving from a prince into a prisoner and from a prisoner into a ‘victim’, Hippolytus moves from a lifestyle of idleness into maturity and responsibility by giving himself up to a grotesque ritual of group sex.

The scenario the prince/victim acts out and the role that incest/rape occupies in the plot need further explanation. Kane’s comedy, which originates from Seneca’s tragedy, views elimination and grotesque ritual at the intersection of two worlds,
upper Christian and lower pagan, alongside the role of laughter. Girard’s understanding of violence will help me define the role incest played in the ancient world, the function of sacrifice and ritualistic practices. Here, the role of sacrificial rituals and the scapegoat selected to be eliminated is thought to help protect communities by keeping violence outside (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 92). Girard believes that the violence practiced against the chosen victim(s) in order to eliminate the violence of witchcraft, incest, wars, famine or plagues requires the counter-violence of a different form of sacrifice (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 93). However, contrary to Girard, Sarah Kane rejects God to find her own way to salvation and criticises the hypocrisy of some Christians represented by the priest in the play. For her, Hippolytus, who also rejects God, is ideal: “‘He’s a complete shit, but he’s also very funny, and for me that’s always redeeming. I think there are people who can treat you really badly, but if they do it with a sense of humour, then you can forgive them. Whether or not you should is somehow beside the point’” (Saunders, *About Kane* 71). In returning to the ancient world, the ‘salvation’ Kane offers us in *Phaedra’s Love* depends on our reading of the play. Here the celebration of death and her own denial of the Christian faith can be seen as the tragedy she changes into a comedy. To have a better understanding of *Phaedra’s Love* I suggest a Girardian reading focusing on the renewal rites of incest in relation to monarchy. This similarity between Girard’s interest in incest in the African monarchies and Kane’s problematic use of sex might help us understand the role of the sacrificial rite which the monarch performs in order to protect the community.

Incest and rape develop different, if not inconsistent, meanings throughout the play. The public are not concerned with Hippolytus’ sexual transgressions; rather, his filthiness or promiscuous behaviour is praised as attractive or even tempting.
Hippolytus reveals his incestuous relationship with his ‘sister’ Strophe to Phaedra but no scandal takes place:

Phaedra: You’re just like your father.

Hippolytus: That’s what your daughter said

_A beat, then Phaedra slaps him around the face as hard as she can._

Hippolytus: She’s less passionate but more practiced. […]

Phaedra: Did you make her come?

Hippolytus: Yes. (Kane, _Phaedra_ 83-4)

This sex talk follows the oral sex Phaedra performs on her ‘son’. She is shocked by his indifference to people’s feelings and by his refusal to feel for her. Later Phaedra takes her revenge when her unrequited love/suicide is publically announced as rape. Another example on incest is between Theseus and Strophe:

Strophe: You told her about us.

Hippolytus: Then blame me.

Strophe: You told her about Theseus.

Hippolytus: Yes. Blame me. (Kane, _Phaedra_ 89-90)

Incest flows ‘naturally’ amongst the royal family members. Not only incest but also rape is normal in this pre-Christian culture. At the end of the play Theseus even rapes his disguised ‘daughter’ in a show trial. He also kisses Hippolytus full on the lips in public just before he hands him to the hungry crowd. The sexual behaviour of
this family is confusing and inconsistent. One wonders why Hippolytus and no one else is guilty in such a culture.

The play can be read as a huge carnival of ritualistic incest, a coronation parade of (un)crownings or a Dionysian grotesque feast. In order to understand this feast, its rituals of royal and forbidden incest should be closely considered. Girard explains, ‘In one important group, situated between Egypt and Swaziland, the king is required to commit an act of incest, either real or symbolic, on certain solemn occasions – notably, at his enthronement or in the course of the periodic rites of renewal’ (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 104). The queen ‘mother’ declares her ‘love’ to the prince on his royal birthday and incest is her special present. Hippolytus solemnly and ritually accepts her royal token but he refuses to keep this relationship beyond his birthday.

This rite [incest] forms part of an overall ritualistic procedure that prescribes the other transgressions the king must commit before he takes office. For example, he must eat certain forbidden foods, and commit certain acts of violence. […]. In some societies the whole enthronement ceremony takes place in an atmosphere of blood-stained confusion (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 104-5).

The play mentions nothing on the historical background of the Phaedra-myth nor does it provide any information on Hippolytus’ enthronement. However, it is a long festive carnival in which the prince goes to the bottom of the earth, is swallowed and later ejected to be torn apart by the monstrous crowd. Interestingly incest precedes this (de)enthronement and the prince who becomes the royal/forbidden food is literally bathed in blood in the presence of policemen:
Man 1 pulls down Hippolytus’ trousers.

Woman 2 cuts off his genitals.

They are thrown into the barbecue.

The children cheer.

A child takes them off the barbecue and throws them at another child, who screams and runs away.

Much laughter.

..................

Theseus takes the knife.

He cuts Hippolytus from groin to chest.

Hippolytus’ bowels are torn out and thrown onto the barbecue. He is kicked and stoned and spat on. (Kane, Phaedra 101)

During this festive family time of grotesque laughter, the Prince Hippolytus provides his own flesh and blood for the community and the law permits this lynching. It is a public invitation to an open buffet where the monarchic body is first travestied (disguised in the case of Theseus and Strophe) to be disfigured, dissected and even cooked on the barbeque fire. The hierarchic order between royal and public is also challenged as people from all ranks and ages come together at the barbecue banquet to quench their grotesque humour.

Having refused to practice any ‘love’ connections with his stepmother, he is accused of rape and becomes the monarch-victim of public abuse. This ritualistic
performance of dethronement is thought to help cleanse the nation’s honour and restore peace. However, by this cleansing the community emphasises its acceptance of incestuous relationships. On the role of incest in ancient monarchies, Girard explains:

Clearly the incest, as well as the other “forbidden” acts, are designed to make the king the very incarnation of impurity. It is because of this impurity that the king […] is subjected to the ritualistic insults and abuse of his people. A hostile crowd denounces the misconduct of this miscreant, who is as yet nothing more than a criminal and a social outcast. In some instances the royal army stages a mock attack on the king’s personal bodyguard and even on the king himself. (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 105)

This is exactly what happens to Hippolytus, the royal subject of praise and object of abuse. He is denounced as a criminal monarch. The last scene successfully shows the inseparable judicial-carnival body; the angry crowd wait at the court gate for their monarch whom they salute with ritualistic insults, abuse and rocks. Though the play in my opinion exonerates Hippolytus, he is fully accountable to his subjects as a prince: “your sexual indiscretions are of no interest to anyone. But the stability of the nation’s morals is. You are a guardian of those morals. You will answer to God for the collapse of the country you and your family lead” (Kane, *Phaedra* 94). What exonerates Hippolytus is also the inconsistency of sexual relationships in the play: royal incest is justified if it is not publicly announced as rape. This perplexity leaves the play with an open ending: on the one hand, the last shocking scene can be read as a *mock* attack on the monarch who will be sacrificed as the scapegoat of impurity and this is why Kane considers the play a comedy. On the other, the attack on the
prince can be literal but the play (a tragedy?) would then be an illustration of the
triumph of the carnival dance of death. “In Ruanda, for example, the king and the
queen mother – clearly an incestuous couple – must periodically submit to a
sacrificial rite that can only be regarded as a symbolic punishment for incest”
(Girard, Violence and the Sacred 106). This explains the inconsistency mentioned
and the double role Hippolytus plays as both monarch and scapegoat to keep the
monarchy intact. Therefore, he submits to this incest rite and by his blood he puts an
end to riots and cleanses the community. “It is important to cultivate the future
victim’s supposed potential for evil, to transform him into a monster of iniquity […]
to enable him to polarize, to literally draw to himself, all the infectious strains in the
community and transform them into sources of peace and fecundity” (Girard,
Violence and the Sacred 107). In these incestuous cultures the ‘death’ of Hippolytus
–symbolic or not – should unite the divided monarchy by the very incestuous
polluting bonds the community denies. His ‘death’ can be seen as a new beginning
by which the community restores its peace and order. This ‘beginning’ is
problematic because ‘the ritualistic elements [might] disintegrate into actual events
and it becomes impossible to distinguish history from ritual’ (Girard, Violence and
the Sacred 109-10). Amid this confusion, it is hard to tell the monarch from the
criminal, the birthday party from punishment, incest from rape or brother from
enemy.

The carnival feast inseparable from sacrifice is thought to be the ritual which
transforms bad violence (incest) into good (sacrificial) violence; therefore, ‘it is not
surprising that men are doomed to ritual’ (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 115).
Hippolytus refuses to deny the rape which he did not commit thinking he is doomed
to be collectively rewarded/punished:
Strophe: Deny it. There’s riot.

Hippolytus: Life at last.

............... 

Hippolytus: Are you insane? She died doing this for me. I’m doomed. (Kane, Phaedra 90-1)

By submitting to collective violence, Hippolytus is doomed to leave his disorderly and boring life in the royal palace to receive the blessings/abuse of his subjects. The incest rite in this context is the pretext that facilitates the justification of violence by the crowd. On his journey from royalty to culpability, the prince stoops as he receives collective abuse in order to be ‘crowned’: the scapegoat. “It is by means of incest that the king assumes the mantle of royalty, but the act itself is “royal” only in its demanding the death of those who commit it, in its harkening back to the original victim” (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 112). Indeed, the monarch is chosen and culpable (Kane, Phaedra 93). Kane replaces the bonfire, used in some rites to consume and cleanse the pollution created in the course of the feast, with a barbecue (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 111). However, the collapse of distance between the royal family and the crowd during the ceremony is not a sign of triumph of equality and life over fear. Girard explains that, ‘this loss of differences has nothing to do with ‘fraternization’. Rather, this is the result of the violence that engulfs all participants: father/son, father/daughter, monarch/subjects, chosen/cursed, brother/enemy (Girard, Violence and the Sacred 111). The community turns the blame on a victim whose death is thought to re-channel the bad violence of incest or rape and restore peace and stability. Whether or not incest is the monarchic armour
and its ‘dissolution’, the channel that preserves the royal blood and breaks down familial distinctions, incest is Phaedra’s reward and punishment for her stepson which he ritualistically accepts.

In conclusion, this chapter has viewed otherness – strangers, foreigners, war victims, prisoners/patients, monarchs – in different contexts moving from cultures of shame and entertainment in *Europeans* and *Phaedra’s Love* to death camps in *The Power of the Dog* and *Cleansed*. The main thread connecting these plays is survival seen as the journey taken by different individuals against Stalin’s or Leopold’s laughing terror. Here, the playwrights explore the field of human intimacy in situations of extreme suffering as the only means of survival with or against the evil powers of terror. This intimacy in the arms of Stalin involves survival by betrayal, expelling the historic records of witnessing and betraying those who suffered to death. Another in the arms of Sorge or Tinker involves the hope of restoring those who were completely burnt so as to bear witness to their agony. A third before the victimiser in the flames requires integrity and self-annihilation to rebuild trust. A fourth demands the very exchange of one’s flesh and blood – Concilia - for the de-objectification of deformity in the market of celebration. Survival also means choosing the solitude of lynching and honestly sinning to the joy of royal celebrity in the case of Hippolytus. These contexts have helped me examine the cost of individuality in cultures that celebrate power, laughter, shame and death-making. Both playwrights, particularly Barker, urge the individual to redefine participation outside the given roles of spectators-participants, victims-victimisers. Thus in using pain as an empowering instrument, they shed light on deformity and reach out to victims in unfathomable situations; (those) in the flames, in the ovens or on the barbecue.
This chapter has also looked at the cost and the possibility of individuality that is also related to the question of un/happiness and survival, participation and betrayal, witnessing and death. Here, the playwrights pay particular attention to the operation of politics and violence on the field of human intimacy – intimacy with the dead, victims and victimisers. In the next chapter, Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin look at the fate of communication and solidarity in a world demonised by capitalism, food consumption, violence and slavery. The encounter with the other – mothers, children, slaves, prisoners – should awaken us to bear the cross of responsibility for the victims and to question our participation in the State’s carnival of humour and victimisation. The motif of the feast or the banquet recurs in the next chapter alongside other important carnival forms such as the parade, hell and laughter. Here, Churchill and Rudkin uncover the victim as the food of the meal and review the dance in connection to death and power.
Chapter Four: Demythologising Carnival Triumph and Revealing the Bloodline of the Grotesque Feast in Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin

We should pay close attention to a serious writer who – whatever the difficulties of his densely textured style – is attempting to probe the depths of our tortured psyches, the suppressed elements, personal, political and cultural which form us all. (McAvera 20)

Using the body to explore extremes of violence, passion and ecstasy is also a means of exploding the ‘word’ which binds us to the symbolic ‘order of things’ in the world of the rational. (Aston, Caryl Churchill 85)

In the previous chapter I looked at the representation of violence in a number of plays by Barker and Kane focusing on the suffering of war victims and their desire to swim against the State’s reconciliatory programmes. In considering situations where the political is inseparable from the personal or the mythological from the historical, they reveal the mis-recognised and estranged condition of humanity. This chapter on Caryl Churchill and David Rudkin highlights what I frame as the recurring bloodline of festive violence by which the present is shaped in Top Girls (1984), Far Away (2000), The Skriker (1994), The Triumph of Death (1981) and Afore Night Come (1963). Like Barker and Kane, they discern the tempo at which rituals and politics, myth and history coincide and hence come the need for the uncovering of carnival devouring – the celebratory selection of a victim - not merely in war zones but on a daily basis.

In the theatre, Rudkin and Churchill find the place where the participant – actor and spectator – transcends the realm of the rational into the irrational, order and
stasis into action and motion, familiarity into poetry. The two quotes at the start of this chapter somehow define the personal as the place/means of transition that is inseparable from political, social and environmental changes. Brian McAvera refers directly to Rudkin’s work known for its imagination, gothic form and difficult language. These are key ingredients in the darkness of his theatre where the spectator is challenged to see the victim in the flames and to question the grotesque ritual of parodies and their seeming liberty in *The Triumph of Death* and *Afore Night Come*. Like Rudkin, Churchill also creates situations where the individual is left in the dark at the Skriker’s or Marlene’s banquet accompanied by spirits, folkloric creatures and dead women. This encounter with the strange, incredible and the terrifying might be seen as a personal experience, a battle with our own shadows, fears and traumas. In this realm of dreams, confinement and timelessness (*The Skriker* and *Afore Night Come*), Rudkin describes the theatrical experience as some sort of rebirth and the closure in a play as the beginning of something new: “‘...[...] A play is like an act of birth, [...] a series of contractions, and that’s the last contraction. And the language has to do that work, but the language will not do it of itself’” (Sweeney 103). According to Rudkin, “‘it’s all part of an organism’” between language and the body of the actor which facilitates the birth: “‘you are left with the human body on the space, which has just been born as the beginnings of a person, the beginnings of something, yes. And that to me is what theatre is, that existential place’” (Sweeney 102-3). This Bakhtinian understanding of performance comments on Rudkin’s identity, language and politics which I will view later in this introduction. Here we have two politically different playwrights who situate the political in the personal by using the body to explore the irrational and to exploit/explode the word, and thus they develop “a language of performance” (Aston, *Caryl Churchill* 102). Whereas it
is hard to separate Churchill’s politics from her feminism or the woman writer from
the socialist critic (Aston, *Caryl Churchill* 63), Rudkin’s bisexuality and his refusal
of political labels make it difficult to draw a clear-cut conclusion about his position.
However, the playwrights’ interest in the recurring bloodline of history is inseparable
from a modern view of the present and the personal shaped by a damaged world of
capitalism, wars, as well as social and ecological injustice.

**Churchill and Barker: Re-viewing History**

Before I consider further similarities and differences between Rudkin and
Churchill, it is useful to compare Churchill’s interests in history, terror and humour
with that of other playwrights whose work I have previously explored in this thesis.
A number of critics such as Elaine Aston, Brean S. Hammond (2007) and Helene
Keyssar refer to Churchill’s reviewing of history which involves making connections
between the present and the past. In reviewing history, Churchill refuses
reconciliation for the danger of discovery, relocating the self against the linear
historical narrative of oppression and exploitation, consumption and celebration. Her
work engages with two major themes: illnesses in asylums and hospitals (*Schreber’s
capitalism and ecological fears for the future of family, society and the globe (*The
Skriker, Far Away*) (Aston, *Caryl Churchill* 46). This thematic interest in both the
individual and the community is inseparable from Churchill’s politics dramatised by
the relationship between women and work as well as female health and the struggle
for self-realisation in an increasingly capitalist patriarchal world (Reinelt 18-33). The
early writing in Churchill’s career is shaped by her historical present at a time
heavily influenced by the emerging discourses embedded within the second wave
feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. In *Top Girls*, for instance, exploring the history of women is a question of seeing the gaps and silences of that history ‘within the present’. Aston refers to this mutual shaping of past and present, which can be seen in the modern history play, as “the dual movement between the historical past, and the present history-in-the-making” (*Caryl Churchill* 55). In *Doing Dangerous History*, Helene Keyssar takes the idea of “dual movement” further to suggest the role of drama in shaping the future (Keyssar 137). Churchill, in Keyssar’s view, is engaged in doing “dangerous history plays” and that emerged ‘from the modern women’s movement in both written and performed texts’ (Keyssar 136). These plays ‘take the past as warning that to transform ideas of gender requires changes in culture and consciousness for which there are no precedents’ (Keyssar 136). Doing “dangerous history plays” (*Serious Money* 1987 and *A Mouthful of Birds* 1986) is transformational but maybe utopian: “it can transform the past so that we can imagine the future as other” (Keyssar, my italics 147). This transformational theatre, which makes history without the shortcomings of history, steps back from the terrain of dangerous history to achieve a ‘possible’ reconciliation of past, present and future (Keyssar 136). Later we shall see that Keyssar’s beautiful dreamlike moment of reconciliation is not possible in the selected works of Churchill. Instead, Churchill’s transformational theatre repeatedly embraces risk and danger for the beautiful moment of collision between reality and fantasy, humour and terror, spectatorship and victimisation.

The shaping of the present by the past, the idea of doing danger and Eastern influences are essential features that describe Churchill’s and Barker’s journey of experimentation as it evolves beyond socialism: “It is tempting to read the difference between Churchill and Barker as that between a [socialist] dramatist […], and one
who writing in the Thatcherite 1980s, has accepted the newly prevailing political emphasis on individualism” (Hammond 20). However, Hammond recognises the complexity of Barker’s theatre of catastrophe in opposition to the ‘cult’ of entertainment and collectivism of 1980s (Hammond 20). Thus, whereas Barker moves away from socialism towards individualism and imagination focusing on themes of violence, death and desire, Churchill reconsiders issues of ecology and globalisation more ardently in her work:

the potential conflict within ecological thought, then constitutes part of the interest of Churchill’s plays; an avowed socialist, she is drawn to issues of just use of the environment at the same time as she confronts a prevailing need to challenge all ideologies, socialism as well as capitalism, that have assumed human dominance and taken human use as the measure of justice. (Rabillard 89)

Beneath this political gown, there is a world of nonconventional dramaturgies such as dance and movement (A Mouthful of Birds (1986) and The Skriker), ghosts and folkloric characters (The Power of the Dog, Top Girls and The Skriker), the underground world (The Skriker, Europeans). Keyssar views this experimental aspect of Churchill’s work within a theatre of transformations that gives priority to sound, dance and movement over spoken words (Keyssar 143). In the ‘lowest part of theatre’, both playwrights flee from the “dictatorship of words” to embrace a ‘language’ of performance by which they may rediscover the concept of danger on stage (Artaud 27-30). Therefore, one might argue that their use of time, dialogue and characterisation draws attention to and challenges Western assumptions of the theatre: “[…] whoever said theatre was made to define a character, to resolve
conflicts of a human, emotional order, of a present-day psychological nature such as
those who monopolise current [Western] theatre?“ (Artaud 29) For example, time in
*Top Girls, Cloud Nine and The Skriker* is non-linear, the twin brothers in *A Number*
(2002) refuse definition and the ‘character’ of the *Skriker* is a shape-shifter. Most of
these plays do not resolve conflicts nor offer solutions. The critic Mark Thacker
Brown - who does not refer to Artaud but is quite Artaudian in his reading of
Churchill – also views Churchill’s plays ‘in the light of Eastern traditions and
assumptions’ (Brown 25). This influence can be verified, according to Brown, in
Churchill’s early plays: “The Buddhist practice of self-immolation to protest war or
injustice also comes to mind. Churchill addresses this practice in
*Not...not...not...not Enough Oxygen*, a radio play that includes ecologists who
decide to use this method of protest” (Brown 38-9). Brown also speaks of
‘Churchill’s assault on basic Western assumptions’ such as time and space in
*Moving Clocks Go Slow* (1973) and in *Traps* (1976) (Brown 38-9). The entry into
the body of the earth22 in *Moving Clocks* (Brown 40) and which also recurs in *Top
Girls* and *The Skriker* is not a Western idea. Again, Churchill’s use of few actors in
the staging of her drama may stem from an ‘interest in Eastern assumptions about
personality’ (Brown 45). Drawing clear-cut conclusions on the experimental style of
Churchill might miss the rich network of influences affecting her career.

**Churchill and Barnes: Comic Collisions and Terror**

Churchill’s career journey can be identified in terms of the woman writer, the
dramatist as a socialist and ecological critic, as well as her experimental approach to

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22 I will talk later about this carnivalesque imagery and its function in Churchill’s *Top Girls* and *The Skriker* using Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival and the grotesque treatment of the body.
theatre-making (Aston, *Caryl Churchill*) 1. Together these stages or roles form Churchill’s identity and can also be framed by a number of thematic concerns such as sexual politics and gender studies, ecology and anti-capitalism. Here, however, I am interested in one of the least viewed themes, which also forms the backbone of my thesis, the relationship between the comic and terror to establish a link between Churchill, Barnes and Kane. In *Comic Collisions: Convention, Rage, and Order*, Susan Carlson analyses *Laughter* and *Cloud Nine* looking at Barnes’ and Churchill’s responses to comedy. There are two problems with comedy according to Carlson: the cleansing function of comedy by which rage is let out and its reliance on stereotypes or character-types (Carlson 303). Having limited the playwrights’ responses to comedy to Barnes’s despair and Churchill’s comic hope, Carlson concludes two things about Barnes’ world. The first is that Barnes leaves us no hope for comedy describing *Laughter* as a comedy beyond hope (Carlson 307-9). It is true *Laughter* does not provide us with hope but it challenges our responses by demonstrating the monstrous outcomes of laughter in places of organised killing. In *Red Noses*, Barnes negotiates the possibility of a positive laughter free from order and power. Though *Red Noses* does not meet Carlson’s hopes of a “revolutionary comedy” (Carlson 309), the play’s daring end recalls Barker’s ‘deformed’ characters who prefer pain to comic hope such as Father Flote. Carlson’s second conclusion is that Barnes’s comedy ‘does not […] save us from rage, but only allows it to be used against us’ (Carlson 309). Here comedy allows but eventually chokes laughter and it is not meant to cleanse rage or pain. Rather, it becomes the means by which Barnes writes down the hopelessness not of a revolutionary comedy but of a redeeming laughter.

The use of comic inversions in the works of Churchill and Barnes does not accommodate rage for the ease of reconciliation with those in the comfortable seats
of power. On the contrary, both playwrights bring down the walls of illusion and celebration questioning one’s position in relation to an ongoing ‘feast’ of death. This can be seen in the march of manacled prisoners disguised as an ‘art’ show (Far Away) or in the image of confined mothers in a world demonised by patriarchy, capital and folkloric creatures (Top Girls and The Skriker). The ‘belief in the continuing power of comedy to effect social change’ (Carlson 312) is not solely Churchill’s. Barnes deliberately utilises comedy as a revolutionary medium by which he ridicules dictatorship leaving us face to face with rage, criminality and mass death in Laughter and Red Noses (Rabey, Peter Barnes 254). It is Barnes not Churchill who provides the theatre with ‘directions for a new comedy’ by which exploring the origins of rage become possible (Carlson 315). Barnes breaks down the assumptions of traditional carnival humour and suggests directions for a humour that accommodates rage and intellect in Red Noses (See Chapter Two). Whereas Carlson thinks Churchill ‘has found a way to connect the painful recognitions of twentieth-century dissociations to comic hope’ (Carlson 315), I think both Barnes and Churchill establish this connection not to comic hope but to pain and terror as in Laughter and The Skriker. The latter uses comic inversions of power in juxtaposition with the hidden and painful misrecognitions of infanticide, bestiality and confinement as we shall see in this chapter.

In contrast to Carlson, Elin Diamond explicitly examines the theme of terror as one of Churchill’s earliest concerns and highlights what she calls Churchill’s “unique dramaturgy of terror” (Diamond 125). Questions on the cause and making of terror/ism as well as the state of being terrified motivate Diamond’s article On Churchill and Terror. Diamond argues ‘that the spatial logic of terror’s dissemination, from here to there, there to here, has worked its way into the form
[and content] of Churchill’s plays’ (Diamond 126). The selected playwrights in this thesis look at contexts where people in power play with terror. Thus whilst terror may seem to be a common factor connecting people from different backgrounds, it is actually causing dislocation, chaos and catastrophe. Here I briefly look at this idea of play and terror, dissemination of terror and responses to laughter. In The Skriker and Far Away, Churchill views this terrifying collapse of distance between private and public, order and chaos, democracy and death-making. Like Barnes who tears laughter apart to reveal the ovens of Auschwitz (Barnes, Laughter 343), Churchill in Far Away brings the wall down between Joan’s bedroom and the torture chamber in the backyard of her house. In other words, she looks beyond the seeming laughter/triumph of democracy to the reality of its practices such as the parade of manacled prisoners marching towards ‘death’. Kane also brings the ‘wall’ down in the final scene of Phaedra’s Love: between law and the public grotesque banquet of rape and murder. The fall of walls between institutions is also manifest in Cleansed where patients and doctors merge with prisoners and jailors, universities and hospitals with death camps, brothers and sisters with lovers. From the 1950s onwards, a wide range of British playwrights (from Peter Shaffer to Mark Ravenhill) confirm that ‘our reality […] is one of continuous war, with nightmare sites like Bosnia’, Auschwitz, Iraq and Palestine ‘different in quantity of death and agony but not in kind’ (Diamond 140). In light of this reality, Diamond suggests that ‘state terrorism, no longer far away in refugee camps or military prisons, is not only here, it’s normalized, a central feature of cultural production’ (Diamond 140). The dissemination of terror brings about the collision of connecting events from different

23 Here the act of ripping ‘laughter’ reveals the physicality of carnival laughter seen as a community performance and celebration of man’s and woman’s second nature.
world history such as the mythical and the modern (*The Skriker, Phaedra’s Love*),
the medieval and modern (*Laughter*) and the pre-Christian and the Christian
(*Phaedra’s Love, The Triumph of Death*). For example, *The Skriker* ‘stages a
familiar collision between the far off or other worldly ‘there’ – goblins sickened by
the polluted earth – and a recognizable if disturbing ‘here’ – two rootless young
women, one pregnant, the other having killed her baby’ (Diamond 136). This
shocking yet familiar collision between here and there, now and the past challenges
one’s position that in perceiving these moments the painful process of recognising
the other and ourselves may become possible.

Churchill’s use of terror, punishment and madness in *The Skriker* is similar to
Barnes’ use of folly in situations of persecution and social injustice. The madman
instead of the clown and the comedians is funny yet terrifying and maybe threatening
for he does not behave according to norms. Folly is his means of protection from
punishment as a spokesperson of the truth at a time the truth was solely in the hands
of the church or the State. Reading Churchill’s *Skriker, Top Girls* and *Far Away*
provides another opportunity to uncover similar figures as interesting as the fool
such as devilish nurses, concubine nuns and female popes. These joyful ‘monsters’
will be viewed in the light of an extended metaphor of feasts, laughing terror and
parades, which also link the selected plays and the three chapters of this thesis.
Earlier with Barnes and Barker, I mapped their representations and utilisations of
fools and feasts moving from a Bakhtinian to a post-Bakhtinian reading, from a
world of folly and deceptive liberty to unmask death and its festive march. Here too,
Churchill’s use of folly and madness, grotesque comic creatures and parades will be
seen in terms of Bakhtin’s earlier reading who finds madness ‘inherent to all
grotesque forms’ (Bakhtin 39). However, Bakhtin is not interested in examining
institutionalised madness: “In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of the official “truth”. It is a “festive” madness. In Romantic grotesque, on the other hand, madness acquires a somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation” (Bakhtin 39). On the history and development of the meaning of madness, Foucault also notes this change of collective celebration to individual confinement. Though The Skriker does not provide a psychological reading of institutionalised madness, it reveals this change or interchange of institutionalised and festive madness, of individual isolation and collective celebration. Certain festive forms such as the banquet and the ship of fools (referred to by Bakhtin and Foucault) will be key elements in my analysis of movement and confinement in The Skriker.

Churchill and Rudkin: Politics and Language

Having connected Churchill to a number of playwrights already examined in this thesis, the rest of this introduction will focus on the interrelated aspects of Churchill’s work with that of Rudkin. The collapse of distance between terror and folly should not come as a surprise in the discussion of this chapter on the seemingly different playwrights: the marginalised David Rudkin and the Royal Court resident Caryl Churchill.24 Here I think of terror, imagination and experimentation as a common thread or ‘language’ connecting the plays of both playwrights. However, before examining Rudkin’s ‘language’ I want to draw attention to his ‘politics’ though the two may be inseparable. In A Politics of Body and Speech, Rudkin summarises his social function as a dramatist in two points: commitment and

24 On Churchill’s influences and her support of young dramatists, Rebellato refers to her role as “resident dramatist at the Royal Court in 1975” (On Churchill 165).
‘politics’ (*Lecture*). On the first, Rudkin explains: “If academics and critics – and theatres – overlook me, it’s a poor response for me as a dramatist to complain. My job is to go on doing my job” (*Lecture*). What one might define as the social function of a dramatist – to communicate to an audience and to relate to one’s community - is not necessarily Rudkin’s first concern. Rudkin *is* writing for an audience but his priority and devotion are for the writing itself and the urge to write.\(^{25}\) Interestingly, this commitment which partly forms his social position reveals a poet-dramatist involved in his creation beyond educational or ideological interests. Rudkin emphasises my point when he answers a question in September 2011 on the ‘message’ of his *Afore Night Come*:

> I hadn’t thought about it as saying anything. It was just what it was. What was important to me was writing it […] And what’s important to me […] now is not so much any ‘message’ in it, as the kind of theatre it is – rather like a dream that grips you, and pulls you in, and takes you through a natural-looking world you think you know, down into that underworld you visit only in your dreams, a kind of theatre that enables you to see into the roots of things.

(*Interview*)

Therefore, his “social function” as he sees it challenges, one might argue, the conventional role of the dramatist and puts the critic at the crossroads of poetry and theatre where one’s politics is turned inside out. By redefining his role as a dramatist, Rudkin states his position and the possibility of individuality outside norms and political labels:

\(^{25}\) Similarly, apart from his early plays Barker’s work far from ideological or educational is also written in commitment to the writer not to the audience (Barker, *Arguments* 47). Barker mistrusts hierarchy, claims no better knowledge than his audience and follows his instinct.
In Britain, the term political is narrowly understood. And it tends to denote, of theatre, a drama that espouses a political ideology or polemic, almost always toward the Left. I was never classed as a ‘political’ dramatist, rather as some wild marginal creature, *un*political. Yet I’ve always felt that life has stationed me at the centre of the essential conflict where our authentic identity confronts all that is ranged against it. In that existential sense, I am political. (*Lecture*)

Rudkin, who views identity as an open rather than closed construct, challenges the comfort zones of belonging to rediscover the self, outside the political mainstream and despite the risks of marginalisation. This reminds me of the poet’s dilemma in Barker’s *The Power of the Dog*: the poet wants to gaze at and relate to the humanity of those burnt at the stake but to engage against leftist or rightist domination causes annihilation (Barker, *Power* 25).

Churchill is different as she does not face the same identity ‘crisis’; however, gender and the need to create a balance between home and professional commitments might have been the main challenge for Churchill the woman-writer. Combining a prolific playwriting career with marriage and family life might have shaped her politics around women’s health, and issues of identity, women and work – but Churchill herself rarely attests to this as she is notoriously private and shies away from media attention or interviews as a rule. Rebellato holds that Churchill’s career journey and maturity as a playwright surpasses categorisation:

British theatre has tended to divide between its social realist and formally experimental traditions. […] On one side is the tradition of Osborne, Wesker, Hare, Edgar and verbatim theatre; on the other is Pinter, Rudkin, Barker, Crimp, Kane and performance art. These lines are by no means impermeable
and several writers – Mark Ravenhill, for example – pass between the camps for different projects. The Royal Court theatre has tended to slip between both traditions. Churchill, unusually, seems to be widely claimed for both.

(Rebellato, *On Churchill* 166)

Here, Churchill’s politics as well as her interest in a language of performance are motivated by her exploration of public and private, rational and irrational, male and female. Famous for her commitment to state-funded arts, her life at the Royal Court Theatre was also full of challenges and important decisions such as her defence of marginalised playwrights and her refusal of ‘the sponsorship offered by Barclays Bank for a ‘New Stages’ festival of work’ (Aston and Diamond 11). Rebellato explains,

> From the moment she was announced as resident dramatist at the Royal Court in 1975, she declared an interest in working with the Young People’s Theatre Scheme […]. She made important interventions in defence of embattled plays like Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) […], and gave her name to campaigns against the Thatcherite subsidy cuts and in favour of subsidized theatres programming more new plays. (Rebellato, *On Churchill* 165)

Reaching out to the marginalised – victims of violence, women, and children - is not only a recurrent theme in Churchill’s work but it is a life attitude. In other words, Churchill’s professional maturity, a journey shaped by her personal challenges, helps her also engage with the suffering of the oppressed in countries like Romania and Palestine in *Mad Forest* (1990) and *Seven Jewish Children* (2009).
Whereas Churchill paves her way into personal, social and political freedoms in the light of feminist activism and political commitments, Rudkin’s encounter with the theatre is an adventure towards enlightenment and a personal challenge to break away from fears and taboos. Like Churchill, Rudkin’s maturation is the outcome of a long journey in the fields of philosophy, the classics, cinema, poetry and the theatre. As for Rudkin the child, theatre and cinema were the light at the end of the tunnel of religious oppression:

My father was a Revivalist pastor; theatres and cinemas were forbidden places, abodes of Satan. But my mother did take me, secretly, to see films: *Gone with the Wind*, Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* […]. Because we couldn’t risk being seen coming out of a cinema where people might know us, we had to go to distant cinemas far across the city. (Rudkin, Interview)

This adventure of the young Rudkin and his mother toward the ‘sacred’ fire of the theatre reminds me of Alan’s in Shaffer’s *Equus* whose upbringing by a religious mother and an atheist father leads to his personal and psychological suffering. Rudkin’s Irish mother nourished this secret fire against the desire of his English religious father. Here Rudkin defines his language as the language of an outsider: “I was an outsider too, just as in the Army I’d been: a college boy who talked posh” (Rudkin, *Interview*). His Irish speech has singled him out from the time he was a student. At high school, he learnt ancient languages and literature: Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Euripides. This of course kept the fire alive inside Rudkin who ‘grew up with a concept of drama as by nature a thing of murder and blinding and cannibalism’ (Rudkin, *Interview*). Like his fellow playwrights explored in this thesis, Rudkin pays close attention to feasts and carnival, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘salvation’, myth
and religion. Rudkin’s return to myth is not a justification of violence but it is his attempt to see beneath the civilised facade of our world. His education influences his language for the theatre which can be described as intensively referential and poetic in *The Sons of Light* (1977) and *Merlin Unchained* (2009). Rudkin’s ‘language’ is a kind of passport by means of which the individual may be able to view the collapse of borders between rational and irrational, civilised and primitive, violence and enlightenment. It is the fire by which he rekindles the theatre on a world of chaos and violence wrestling the spectator to recognise the victim.

In this light, the power of Rudkin’s transformational theatre lies in its ability to shock and awaken the spectator to a history of massacres, persecution and oppression. This theatre like Churchill’s is influenced by Eastern traditions such as the use of space, “ritualistic body movement” and “nonverbal theatrical expression” in *Red Sun* (Gritzner, *Promise of Myth* 58). Karoline Gritzner views Rudkin as a theatre poet whose desire is not to teach or preach but to reveal to us “the transformational power of art” which is separable from the religious promise of myth to bring “spiritual re-enchantment” (Gritzner, *Promise of Myth* 57). It is by violating conventional representation in the theatre that Rudkin enables new readings of violence and of performance. There is an Artaudian impetus here, the result of which is to restore to the (British) theatre the 'elemental world of storm and sacrifice, of ecstasy and blood” that “happened only in the ‘classics’” (Rudkin, *Interview*). The re-enchantment is not in the use of violence or sex *per se* but in opening up the possibility for creation and re-creation to bring about the collapse of ‘walls’ between self and other, civilised and pagan. In the work of Rudkin and similar to Barker, the moment of beauty and enchantment is this moment of collapse or even collision...
between two worlds: official and unofficial, ‘Christian’ and pagan, ‘civilised’ and primitive. On the transformational role of the art, Artaud notes:

Either we will be able to revert through theatre by present-day means to the higher idea of poetry underlying the Myths told by the great tragedians of ancient times, with theatre able once more to sustain a religious concept […], or else we might […] acknowledge we are fit only for chaos, famine, bloodshed, war and epidemics. (Artaud 57)

Unlike Artaud, Gritzner’s reading of Rudkin challenges this ancient role of the theatre and its religious promise to re-channel violence and bring peace to our communities. The beauty of cruelty in Rudkin’s plays does not have redeeming or healing qualities but helps review one’s position and perception of violence. This can be seen in the presentation of human progress as a procession of death in *The Triumph of Death*, described by Rudkin as a humourless piece of work (Gritzner, *Promise of Myth* 58). Rudkin’s use of (humourless) laughter is important as we shall see in *The Triumph of Death* and *Afore Night Come* where he reveals the cost of individuality against cultures of death and celebration and the possibility of coming back to reality as “transformed, estranged” individuals (Gritzner, *Promise of Myth* 59). This is similar to Barker’s unconventional tragedy where he deprives the audience of the promise of myth and its old channels of a ritual purification referred to in Chapter Three.

Rabey, however, argues that the promise and use of myth in Rudkin’s work is a form of rebellion, a way of reviewing the present as shaped by capital and a history of violence. Having placed Rudkin in a context of “philosopher-poets” such as Julia Kristeva and Jean Genet, Rabey finds Rudkin’s drama unique in its articulation of
“the silences of personal despair”, its “dark poetry of perversion” and its “poetry of otherness” (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 1-11). Rudkin identifies his drama with “gothic art, the realm of deliberate distortion” (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 12) - it distorts dialogue for a creation of expression of agony and self-identification, disintegration and becoming, pleasure and death. Rudkin’s work is also graphic in its use and description of waste and excretion, nonconventional in its approach to sexuality and critical of rationalism (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 13). In other words, this “poeticization of abjection” in the form of the gothic and use of imagery intensifies our feeling of waste and of death production. Here Rudkin’s reliance on mythology to tear apart the beautiful makeup of civilisation is not a return to primitive violence in preference to modern terror. Rabey views Rudkin’s work as both mythological and iconoclastic: on the one hand, it ‘demands the opening up of the imaginative imprisoned’ in moral and mythical taboos (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 13-4). At the same time, it disobeys these ‘sacred’ laws to recreate other (sacred) myths. Here Rabey points to the demon, an important figure in Rudkin’s work, as the flame of new truths: “Rudkin’s drama testifies to the essential hope which resides in the imaginative abilities of each individual to recreate myth in their own individual terms: to recognize […] that there are other paths to truth, beyond laws which enshrine a sealing of their eyes ‘against the light’ of their own flame” (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 14). However, the demon, this recreation of new myths, also resembles the vicious circle of violence seen in *The Triumph of Death* where myth-making is also the perpetuation of death: “civilization’s desire to deliver humanity from its barbaric darkness crystallizes itself into a huge ideological programme of myth-making, in which the myth is that of humanism, the progress of reason and the triumph of capital” (Gritzner, *Promise of Myth* 58-9). Thus, both
Rudkin and Churchill differently challenge this ‘enlightenment’ revealing mothers, children and others as victims of capitalism, wars and a market of celebratory exchange. Whether or not they do so by rejecting the old myths and by making new myths, pain might be the only way of recognising self and other, in a world dominated by entertainment, torn by rapid changes and nourished by violence.

It is a world defined by “endless metamorphosis” as a composite of sacred and profane, order and disorder, grotesque and comic, inclusion and exclusion (Remshardt 212). This occurs on a carnivalistic stage where (re)birth is inseparable from death and where demons speak of redemption and holy wars in *The Triumph of Death*. Also, in *Sons of Light* (1965-77), “Rudkin constructs a dramatic world whose structure is again very much indebted to medieval ideology, partitioned into heaven, earth and hell” (Remshardt 214). This medieval structuring can be seen in Rudkin’s description of the hanging gardens in his *Afore Night Come*. Beneath this seeming Eden, the labourers live and work for Hawkes, god of war and owner of the orchard. *The Triumph of Death* is another example of this medieval ideology of grotesque banquets, trials and carnivals of ‘death’. In contrast to this medieval world which celebrates the triumph of laughter over fear of hell and authorities, Rudkin exposes ‘a history of physical abjection precisely at odds with Bakhtin’s ahistorical celebration of the material lower body’ (Remshardt 213). This revelation is a return to the victim hidden in a context of comic misrule, timelessness and fertility. In contrast, Rudkin insists on the fruitlessness of Bakhtin’s celebration of the lower bodily stratum in *Afore Night Come* and *The Triumph of Death*. Instead of talking about the triumph of laughter, jokes and carnival liberty over fear and taboos, Rudkin rejects Bakhtin’s optimism and the romanticisation of the victim as if it were the dummy of collective humour. Thus his theatre accepts and uncovers ‘the rule of
abjection, the Triumph of Death’ (Remshardt 216). Indeed Rudkin’s work acknowledges this rule of death alongside carnival forms in terms of a history of abjection, of victimisation and death production (Remshardt) or a poeticisation of abjection, perversion and waste (Rabey). We shall see this in The Triumph of Death and Afore Night Come where Rudkin looks at history and the collision between victory and cleansing, banquets and trials, parades, laughter and executions.

Like Rudkin, Churchill also reveals the rule of death and focuses on the role the grotesque-comic plays in The Skriker, Top Girls and Far Away. In the first two plays, I will explain how Churchill takes us on a journey into a medieval topology of the past and the present. As Churchill takes the audience into carnival hell to view the banquet and the battle, she is keen to pull us back to hear the fearful voice of the future represented by a child. In Far Away, carnival terror breaks into the seeming security of a child’s bedroom taking the child-adult from voyeurism to participation. Unlike the medieval carnivalistic world, Churchill exposes a history of death at odds with Bakhtin’s deathless carnival. The Skriker, for example, is a scary play written in the style of a fairy tale but does not have a happy ending. It is not the kind of bedtime story you read to children. However, we cannot escape the motherly voice or baby-talk of the Skriker speaking to your inner child of a future watered by infanticide and the murder of the (m)other. Neither is Top Girls a fairy tale but rather the account of complex life stories of ghosts, ghost-like women, semi-mothers and lost children. The devil is not totally absent from Top Girls but is seen in the life stories of historical women which provide enough evidence on shape-shifters, antichrists and even devils. The child’s nightmare at the end of the play becomes the everyday reality of Joan’s in Far Away which might be short of devils but not of feeders on the banquet table of ‘freedom’. In my analysis of these plays, my focus on
the child and the (m)other, demons and the underworld or even violence and laughter will be viewed in light of a recurrent bloodline of banquets, parades and trials as Churchill reshuffles past, present and future. Re-viewing history and the shaping of women’s present by the past is arguably Churchill’s invitation to (re)think the future as shaped by past and present.

Travelling and Confinement

In *The Skriker*, Churchill invites us to travel against historical restrictions and time frame limitations to view the suffering of single mothers and children in terms of health, employment and sisterhood. The Skriker is a middle-aged woman and a shape-shifter who is also as old as history (Churchill, *Skriker* 16). This limitlessness of the Skriker, a limitlessness of time leaves, the boundaries open for an overview of the history and function of madness and folly in a play unrestricted by contextual constraints. As in the previous chapters where I referred to a kinship between folly and terror in contexts of political oppression, here I return to the role of folly and madness in Churchill’s *The Skriker*. Both Michel Foucault and Mikhail Bakhtin refer to the meanings of folly and to the inseparable aspects of folly and madness. In his analysis of the history of madness from the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century, Foucault refers to the ancient role of folly. Gradually towards the Renaissance the mad instead of the fool of the Middle Ages took centre stage as a representative of personal truth. “A new object made its appearance in the imaginary landscape of the Renaissance […]; this was the Ship of Fools, a strange drunken boat that wound its way down the wide, slow-moving rivers of the Rhineland and round the canals of Flanders” (Foucault 8). In *The Skriker* there is no literal mentioning of such imaginary ships on which the estranged, drunken outcasts travelled in search of
knowledge: “And it maybe that these ships of fools […] were in fact ships of pilgrimage, highly symbolic ships filled with the senseless in search of their reason” (Foucault 10). However, in The Skriker there is a great deal of travelling between different times and worlds. This travelling, in opposition to and inseparable from confinement, is of two outcast mothers, Josie and Lily.

So the ship of fools was heavily loaded with meaning, and clearly carried a great social force. On the one hand, […] entrusting a madman to the care of boatmen meant that he would no longer roam around the city walls, and ensured that he would travel far and be a prisoner of his own departure. But there was more: water brought its own dark symbolic charge, carrying away, but purifying too. (Foucault 10-1)

From the start of the play and even before we meet Josie in the mental hospital, Skriker the madwoman refers to images of madness and confinement, loss of family bonds and revenge. The Skriker takes her ‘fools’ (Josie and Lily) on a journey that keeps them far from the city walls and hence they become prisoners of their departure; however, their transition between times is not purifying but maybe epidemic.

Transformations of folly and meanings of madness are interwoven in the play, from a ‘madness’ of merrymaking to folly as a form of ‘pilgrimage’ and finally to madness as disease or a problem (Foucault 22). The Skriker, however, does not follow a chronological ‘development’ of the meaning of madness: whereas the medieval adopt folly as a message from God (fools for Christ), the renunciation of the world becomes folly in the Renaissance (Foucault 30). Later on classical madness abandons the ship of fools of the Renaissance for the hospital; “madness is
no longer a strange passage from here to the hereafter” (Foucault 41). In The Skriker, madness and confinement are connected as the play opens on the scene of the mad in a “dungeonesse under the castle” and then suddenly moves to a mental hospital where Josie speaks of the unhealthy food, cells and nurses as jailors (Churchill, Skriker 9):

Josie: I’m here to be punished.

Lily: No, you were ill

Josie: Yes and I’m better now so I can come home with you? (Churchill, Skriker 23)

Here we have two mothers struggling to keep their children: Josie accused of infanticide is treated as a mad mother; Lily is ready to take risks to keep her baby. Interestingly, madness appears as punishment whether in a dungeon or mental hospital; however, Josie’s confinement does not end the minute she leaves the hospital; her departure/ ‘embarkation’ becomes her imprisonment and thus Josie sends the derelict Skriker to look after Lily. When Lily kisses Skriker, she feels sick, money comes out of her mouth and she stops talking as a result (Churchill, Skriker 18). Skriker’s visits are also accompanied by the presence of folkloric and mythological creatures (Kelpie, Yellery Brown, Green Lady and Bogle), dance, madness and folly (Churchill, Skriker 18-9). Also defined as an ancient spirit or an army of spirits, Skriker is in charge of devils and hence it is not surprising if she is the source of folly and evil, feasts and hell, rebellion and waste, capital and death, or even madness and disease. Unlike Lily, Josie refuses to kiss Skriker, but still she is punished with toads coming out of her mouth: “Toads, what you do that for, I’m not
toads inside, it’s you that’s toads” (Churchill, Skriker 28). Skriker turns Lily and Josie inside out in an anticipation of the underworld feast. Travesty, though forced on both Josie and Lily, is an element of folk festival which ensures ‘the renewal of clothes and of the social image’ (Bakhtin 81). Whether or not Josie and Lily refuse the Skriker, they cannot escape her. She is there to poison their lives with illnesses, madness, murder and possessions: “Josie and Lily are sitting on a sofa. Lily is wrapped in a blanket. The Skriker is part of the sofa, invisible to them” (Churchill, Skriker 26). Skriker has become a daily nightmare from which there seems to be no escape for the outcast mothers. Travestying the mothers’ reality in terms of money and toads does not challenge their status quo of confinement and alienation nor does it help bring liberty.

Enslavement and Social Idleness

The idea of confinement and punishment of the mad criminal mother also recurs in the underworld banquet supervised by the fairy monster and is arguably Churchill’s statement on enslavement for acting idle (Churchill, Skriker 35-39). Josie is not burnt at the stake for infanticide; instead, she receives the torments of eternal damnation in the underworld, a metaphor for the cell in the mental hospital. In the underworld garden of delights, the glamour of the upper world is inseparable from the perpetuation of slavery and confinement. “Don’t drink. It’s glamour. It’s blood and dirty water. I was looking for my love and I got lost in an orchard. Never take an apple, never pick a flower. I took one bite and now I’m here forever. […]. Don’t eat, don’t drink or you’ll never get back” (Churchill, Skriker 36). Despite these warnings, Josie, now a participant and consumer, eats and drinks not noticing the difference between cake and twigs or water and blood. The festive attempt to bring the patient
back to health brings Josie down on her knees, not redeemed but enslaved: “Silence and gloom. JOSIE appears on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor. A MONSTER comes to watch her. It is the SKRIKER” (Churchill, Skriker 37). The glamour of capitalism is the blood of consumers; Josie’s and later Lily’s participation in the feast threatens their lives and the future of their children: “when I [Skriker] go uppety, follow a fellow on a dark road dank ride and jump thump out and eat him how does she taste? Toxic waste paper basket case, salmonelephantiasis, blue blood bad blue blood blad blood blah blah blah” (Churchill, Skriker 37). Josie and Lily, who taste of toads, twigs and money, are used as if they were two ‘products’ in the Skriker’s circulation of the festive, which can be seen as the mark of the market and the place of exploitation. The ‘clown’ of this devouring feast, accompanied with mimes, dancers and folkloric creatures, is funny and evil, human (an old woman and a child) and inhuman (fairy queen and monster). “As Elaine Aston notes, it is not coincidental that The Skriker […] arrived at a moment when the British government was accelerating its dismantling of the welfare state. Aston observes that single mothers were especially at risk for funding cuts” (Amich 398). No wonder seeing Josie on her hands and knees following the feast is Churchill’s screaming gesture at the vulnerable position of single, unemployed mothers. The latter is “a direct consequence of all forces of neo-liberal globalization, which aim to eliminate all traces of social welfare” (Amich 398). At this moment in the play, madness develops a new meaning: “From the classical age, and for the first time, madness was seen through an ethical condemnation of idleness in the social immanence now grounded on a community of work” (Foucault 72). In this sense, Josie’s madness can be seen as her punishment for being idle and useless in the competitive community of work in the 1990s. Whether Josie is punished for
infanticide or for being a single mother, the play does not quite answer. However, that community of neo-liberal globalisation is classical in excluding single motherhood as a form of social uselessness. Amich views the throwing of stones at the beginning of the play as a political act and a manifestation of Churchill’s critique in regard with the attack on single motherhood (398-99): “JOHNNY SQUAREFOOT, a giant riding on a piglike man, throwing stones” (Churchill, *Skriker* 9). *The Skriker* reveals “a romance of commodity” which exploits women for a competitive ‘market’ that breeds waste and inequality instead of love and maternity (Amich 406).

**The Ambivalence of Pregnant Death**

In returning to images of confinement and degradation such as the ‘dungeoness’ at the beginning of the play, Churchill’s deliberate choice of femininity recurs in her use of the underworld banquet. Here Josie’s journey of ‘madness’ takes on an ambivalent meaning of death and life, confinement and ‘liberty’, folly in the Skriker’s banquet and exclusion in terms of unemployment. “Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (Bakhtin 21). Inside the earthly ‘womb’, we are reminded of Josie’s downfall and fertility, confinement and maternity, death and life. “To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum […]” (Bakhtin). Despite Bakhtin’s insistence on the positive and fertile image of degradation, Churchill instead highlights Josie’s experience of confinement, loss and ‘death’: “years and years, longer than I lived here […]. I’ve got children there, Lily, and they’re grown up, but I didn’t mean to leave them, I thought I’d just die, won’t I
ever see them? I don’t want to go back. How can I live now?” (Churchill, *Skriker* 40). The grotesque and its relation to time define this image of the underworld experience which reminds Bakhtin of the cyclical change of nature: “sowing, conception, growth, death” (Bakhtin 25). Lily is unaware of Josie’s (or perhaps women’s) confinement within a similar cycle into which Churchill draws the social injustices facing single mothers in a world demonised by capitalism. Unlike Bakhtin, Churchill is concerned with the real terror these women face in the ‘dungeoness’, in the hospital, at work and in the underworld. She probably borrows the figurine of the old laughing hag from Bakhtin to comment on Josie’s journey, a journey defined by infanticide, illness, madness, fear and pregnancy (Churchill, *Skriker* 35). The senile laughing hag in the Skriker’s banquet of death resembles an old tradition of grotesque system in art, and is described as dying and life-giving (Bakhtin 25-6). Her dismembered and old body which gives birth is also being devoured by the banquet guests/prisoners. Here there is a link between Josie’s pregnancy and food, degradation and the earth, the womb and the belly, decay and growth, and death and confinement. Whereas Bakhtin views this collapse of borders between upper and lower, life and death as part of the ambivalent life of the grotesque body, Churchill points to the horror of exploitation, the death of children, the poisoning of nature, life and of food.

In the upper world far from the Skriker’s grotesque feast, this drama, like all parodies, presents the death of the old (family) and the birth of the new, as suggested by Amich, “a romance of commodity” (Amich 14). This romance is the disintegration of the family and nature but the birth of the end, the beginning of catastrophe. Unlike fairy tales, the brave knight does not come at the end to rescue Josie and Lily from the fairy monstrous queen. Josie participates in the banquet
thinking this might help save her sister Lily from the Skriker and so does Lily. Josie’s temporal liberty in the underworld is a long-term enslavement and her return to the upper world helps entrap more victims. Her hallucinatory talk about the underworld experience she had does not help her win Lily’s support.

Josie: But I did go.

Lily: Josie I was with you all the time.

Josie: But I did go.

Lily: All right. (Churchill, *Skriker* 42)

Lily too decides to participate in the Skriker’s world thinking her return will take no time at all. However, Churchill takes the banquet scene out challenging both Lily and the audience to take action for future generations: “And this old dear me was Lily’s granddaughter what a horror storybook ending” (*ibid* 56). The horror lies in the continuing feast of death which strikes our lives with its folkloric creatures, mimes and the dancing Passerby. Midst this chaos, Churchill leaves the final ‘word’ to Lily’s granddaughter whose wordless rage at Lily gives voice for the future and helps uncover the hidden line of victimisation that connects past, present and future.

**Grotesque Beating and Celebration**

A similar feast-line of blood shapes the past, present and future events of *Top Girls* (1984). The latter begins with the banquet of historical women, views Marlene’s success as a director of Top Girls Agency, returns to Marlene’s past and her failure as a single mother and closes with Angie’s frightening future. In both *Top Girls* and *The Skriker*, Churchill engages with the idea of travelling in time, the
banquet, work and female health among many other issues. The banquet, the opening scene of historical and fictional women, is Churchill’s imaginary ship where women from the past come together to celebrate Marlene’s success. What makes this puzzle-like meeting possible is an invisible bloodline revealing identity conflicts, failure/success, persecution and celebration. *Top Girls* discusses the failure of “material success for a few women” to “build solidarity or foster change for the majority” (Reinelt 30). The last part of the play, mirroring the scene of the historical feast, shows an unresolved struggle between the two sisters: Joyce a working-class, single mother who has raised Marlene’s daughter Angie, and Marlene the newly middle-class career woman. The recurring banquet is an unavoidable motif which helps re-think the fragmented and disarranged history of grotesque beating, ‘sacrifice’ and celebration.

The murder of the (m)other and the grotesque beating are festive images of Marlene’s banquet seen in the different life stories of the banquet guests. Lady Nijo, for example, is a concubine/Buddhist nun who was brought up to please the Emperor. She did well as an object of male desire, never questioned her role, and was not allowed to keep her children. When she was eighteen at the Full Moon Ceremony, a tradition during which the Emperor beats women, Nijo and other women became the banquet/object of humour and abuse: “they make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks, and then they beat their women across the loins so they’ll have sons and not daughters” (Churchill, *Top Girls* 26). Because the women were beaten by his attendants too, the concubines had a plan to beat the Emperor. The beating recurs in the story of Joan, an extraordinary female-pope whose identity as a mother and pope is seen as the Antichrist. Joan was in exile from her womanhood as she was never accustomed to having a woman’s body, but lived a
man’s life and was educated like men. Though “women, children and lunatics can’t be Pope” (Churchill, Top Girls 15), ‘Joan’ was chosen to become the Pope. She had sex with one of her chamberlains but could not recognise the time of her pregnancy. As she was in a procession followed by the clergy of Rome and crowds of people, she had uncontrollable spasms and had to get off her horse. “Far away I heard people screaming, ‘the Pope is ill, the Pope is dying.’ And the baby just slid onto the road” (Churchill, Top Girls 17). One of the cardinals thought this must be the Antichrist; she was stoned to death outside the town and the baby died. Joan’s description of her carnival suffering invokes horror and humour because the Antichrist in her case is nothing but a pregnant Pope. The latter meets Bakhtin’s description of the ambivalent life of the grotesque body: “The images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum. […] Death and death throes, labor, and childbirth are intimately interwoven” (Bakhtin 151). Beneath Bakhtin’s comic treatment of these transgressions, Churchill points to the horror when the (bodily) margins between childbirth and death, femininity and religious authority, pregnancy and fatness suddenly disappear. Thus Joan becomes the comic monster and the dummy of a processional laughter simply because she defies official authorities and transgresses notions of fixed identities. Her travesty becomes a real threat because it is not a momentary change of social costumes but her way of living within patriarchal roles. As a result, she is grotesquely debased and beaten in public for casting the mask off and so she becomes the object of carnival humour.

The story of Dull Gret also emphasises the grotesque beating and highlights the women’s inability to unite at Marlene’s banquet. Gret, a folklore figure known as Mad Meg, is the subject of a 1562 painting by Pieter Bruegel (see fig.1) which
shows a peasant woman leading an army of women through hell to fight the devils. Whereas Joan was beaten to death, Gret and other women do the beating in the underworld. “We come into hell through a big mouth. Hell’s black and red. / It’s like a village [...]” (Churchill, *Top Girls* 27). Hell represents the bodily lower stratum but as it represents death, it also represents life: “Carnival’s hell represents the earth which swallows up and gives birth, it is transformed into a cornucopia: the monster, death, becomes pregnant” (Bakhtin 91). Churchill keeps referring to this ‘marriage’ of earth and womb, hell and women, Antichrist and life to uncover persecution. Gret adds describing her hellish experience,

There’s a big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he’s scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it’s falling down on us, and it’s money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. There’s lots of devils, our size, and we get them down all right and give them a beating. There’s lots of funny creatures [...] like rats and lizards, and nasty things, a bum with a face, and fish with legs and faces on things that don’t have faces on. (Churchill, *Top Girls* 28)

This description is similar to Churchill’s writing style in *The Skriker* where the devil is central in terms of its role and speech. Here, Gret’s use of the images of thrashings and abuse meets Bakhtin’s explanation of the idea of the carnival as a feast: “the kitchen and the battle meet across each other in the image of the rent body” (Bakhtin 197). This image of battle-feast recurs in the story of Nijo and the concubines who were beaten with hot sticks used for stirring special rice gruel. Gret and her neighbours fight the devils while wearing their aprons using kitchen utensils for weapons. In other words, Gret unites women to fight a world dominated by money
(the devil’s excrement), deformities and evil. This unity in a world of grotesque feasts and social injustices highlights the gaps in women’s narrative on family and sacrifice, education and health, work and domesticity (Churchill, *Top Girls* 27). In this narrative, similar to *The Skriker*, Churchill uncovers a ‘dialogue’ dominated by binary oppositions, the rule of the ‘patriarch’ and a mythical and folkloric tradition/past that makes communication among women impossible.
Fig. 1. At the centre of Pieter Bruegel’s *Dulle Griet*, Gret is seen leading an ‘army’ of peasant women into the hellish mouth/asshole of the devil at the left. Churchill’s description of the battle is as beautiful and as picturesque as the painting: Gret is armed with weapons and kitchen utensils ready to fight devils and ‘funny’ creatures such as a fish with legs (on the right side) and a bum with a face (on the left).
In this connection, the bloodline of abuse and beatings recurs in the 1980s as the story of Marlene’s success unfolds to reveal Angie a victim of a materialist world ruled by competition and consumption. Marlene’s celebration with the dead women reveals a common grotesque history of abuse and death, and invites further investigation of a so-called common identity and life story. In terms of Bakhtin’s carnival, Marlene’s banquet is the rebirth that follows death, the new ‘spring’ that follows her denial of maternity in a patriarchal world dominated by the devil’s excrement. However, Churchill is keen to look beyond the celebration at the cost of individuality and a history of discrimination and oppression against women. We can understand this in terms of a bloodline that connects history with Marlene’s ‘success’ and Marlene’s life story with the marginalisation of other women such as her workmates, Joyce, Angie and her own mother. The women’s banquet can be seen as the continuing murder of the (m)other during which celebration is inseparable from violence, absence of communication, laughter, sickness and death (Churchill, *Top Girls* 29). In light of the play as a whole, the celebration is inseparable from the triumph of death over life, of individuality over family and of independence over maternity. Unlike Bakhtin’s carnival, Marlene’s banquet fails to create a community of women that transcends the past for a better understanding of the present.

The mothers’ failure to unite should be viewed in contrast to Angie’s carnival disobedience. Angie’s search for her own identity is a struggle between finding her real mother (Marlene) and killing her adoptive mother (Joyce). The question of reconciling these sides of motherhood becomes the daughters’ focal point towards a balance between past and present for a healthy future identity. However, the horror of the grotesque feast and the agony of ancestor mothers haunt the future lives of these daughters (Angie and Kit). Fear of blood, of an on-going war and of aging
characterises the children’s grotesque talk and games (Churchill, *Top Girls* 37-8). Angie’s little rebellion as she changes ‘into an old best dress, slightly small for her’ (Churchill, *Top Girls* 43) is her means of overcoming fear and of identifying with her real mother. This old dress is Marlene’s present to Angie a year earlier. Not satisfied with her childish revengeful travesty, she even picks up a brick to hit her adoptive mother.

Angie: I put this dress on to kill my mother.

Kit: I suppose you thought you’d do it with a brick.

Angie: You can kill people with a brick.

Kit: Well you didn’t, so. (Churchill, *Top Girls* 44)

Angie’s carnival disobedience emphasises the perpetuation of the bloodline between past, present and future. If this rebellion is to help Angie reconcile the conflicting sides of her identity, it must be far from bloodshed, far from the bloodline of her ancestors. In other words, this return to the past to identify with her real mother is a double-edged journey by which she might find reconciliation or be tempted to join the celebration of the dead. Angie, who takes the challenge of visiting her auntie/mother Marlene in London, has no prospect at all of finding a job in Top Girls Agency (Churchill, *Top Girls* 66). Marlene is even surprised to meet her daughter (the future) because the mother herself is not reconciled with the past of her family or of women in general.

Churchill refers to the many gaps in Marlene’s life story not only in the banquet scene where Marlene fails to define success but also by going back a year earlier when Marlene visits Joyce and Angie (Churchill, *Top Girls* 80-1). In this family
scene described as a moment of celebration for Angie, I see a continuous return to Marlene’s feast (Churchill, *Top Girls* 72). The sisters, quite surprised to see each other after six years, find out it is Angie who has arranged for the visit. This emphasises Angie’s repeated attempt to find the maternal voice and her ‘earlier’ desire to kill her adoptive mother is the outcome of this failed reconciliation. One might argue that these voices are the very identity of Angie and the praise/abuse of an identity complex cross each other in the image of the torn female body when the two mothers discuss female anatomy and politics in Joyce’s kitchen. In the carnivalesque image of the kitchen ‘battle’ – reminiscent of the historical banquet and the story of Dull Gret in particular – Churchill reminds us of the banquet table where Marlene shares with women a history of loss, persecution and oppression: “I have been on the pill so long/ I’m probably sterile” (Churchill, *Top Girls* 81). Marlene, the present bearer of the murder of the (m)other, prefers sterility and individual success to having a relationship with her own mother and daughter. In this scene, Churchill undermines Bakhtin’s positive and regenerative images of the belly and the womb, of the kitchen table and the temporary collapse of boundaries between the participants. Bakhtin describes the banquet as a place of liberty and equality: “Man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage” (Bakhtin 281). The two sisters, however, do not celebrate the fruit of their labour and the act of devouring food is replaced by death and sterility. Unlike Gret and her ‘army’, Joyce and Marlene fail to unite or even use their kitchen utensils to fight the ‘devil’ who might be Thatcher in this context. Thus Angie becomes the symbol of the lost womb and the future bearer of the bloodline of the recurring feast in her wish to murder her
‘mother’ Joyce. Like the banquet scene, Marlene and Joyce cannot relate to the other’s maternal experience; instead, Marlene gets drunk as they argue, laugh and cry (Churchill, *Top Girls* 82). One might see this as a ‘festive’ moment full of grotesque blood talk, as nightmarish and frightening but it makes the audience confront their responsibilities. By shuffling past, present and future, Churchill attempts to stop the circularity bloodline in order to uncover murder and to challenge constructed identity. The play offers no solutions but its reliance on gaps, silences, nightmares, and a language of laughter, cries, illness and blood encourages the finding of voices that are the missing discourse of female solidarity.

Not far away from the contexts of feasts and carnival terror, Churchill invites her audience to view another grotesque ‘party’ from the perspective of the child and then the adult, Joan in *Far Away* (2000). Churchill takes us from the historically-framed *Top Girls* and its social and political fabric to plays that integrate less history such as *The Skriker* and *Far Away*. Though the history is not clearly stated in *The Skriker* and *Far Away*, these two plays are not completely ahistorical for the history in them is somehow implied in the images of war, persecution and environmental poisoning. *Far Away* opens our eyes on issues of global ethics and environmental justice as in Rabillard’s *On Caryl Churchill’s Ecological Drama* or on the subject of terrorism as in Diamond’s *On Caryl Churchill and Terror*. Churchill constructs a similar nightmarish ‘party’ in which the jailor is a ‘helper’ and the shed a prison. Later this nightmarish ‘party’ takes over the world in the form of war and a grotesque parade of prisoners. *Far Away*, Churchill’s exploration of justified violence is a short but detailed journey along the bloodline of past, present and future similar to *Skriker* and *Top Girls*. In the first scene, Joan enquires about the noise coming from the shed of her aunt’s house. Harper’s attempt to dissuade little Joan from questioning the
purpose of the ‘party’ does not work (Churchill, *Far Away* 12). Joan finds out about Harper’s lies and the violent practices of the ‘party’ in the name of democracy: “you’re part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think […] I’m on the side of the right people who are putting things right […]” (Churchill, *Far Away* 20). In this ‘party’, making the world a better place is a nightmare that transforms the peacefulness of the home into the horror of the torture chamber.

In the next act, Joan is a graduate working with Todd on making hats for trial-parades. This carnivalesque grotesque imagery encourages a post-Bakhtinian reading in which I argue there is no parade without a trial or in the context of *Top Girls* there is no celebration without ‘sacrifice’. In other words, the recurrent bloodline of historical banquets and parades lies beneath this carnivalesque grotesque imagery. As Joan and Todd discuss art and hat-making, we know they receive their low wages from providing extravagant hats for the parades of prisoners. The grown-up Joan no longer feels for the prisoners as if their march of ‘death’ was a fact of life and she is unable to perceive the prison bars behind the carnivalistic costumes of the ‘party’. Joan is now part of “a society that turns to the art and cultural practices to beautify itself, and to cover up systematic violence” (Hughes 122). In another interpretation, Aston refers to the role of arts ‘in reproducing rather than resisting capitalism’ (Aston, *But Not That* 13). Hat-making – the art/industry of providing for trials – becomes a mere object of art in the eyes of its makers: “it seems so sad to burn them with the bodies” (Churchill, *Far Away* 31). Joan is not even sad for the prisoners - “A procession of ragged, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution” - and she never speaks of them (Churchill, *Far Away* 30). When Joan and
Todd choose to expose the corrupt financial basis of the hat industry in order to get a raise, we know how fettered they are:

   Todd: We might not get jobs in hats again.

   Joan: There’s other parades.

     ........................................

   Joan: Unless all the parades are corrupt. (Churchill, *Far Away* 33)

Their discussion of parades and the job opportunities they provide for people leads Joan to think that parades may be corrupt. However, they never notice the victims beneath their preposterous hats nor do they pay attention to the recurring violence in these processions. On the contrary, their carnival rebellion is a play within a play and they seem to have no means of breaking this chain.

   In the last act, nature poisoned by the fact of war and capitalism is also another example of the circularity bloodline. Joan and Todd, now married, can no longer find a hiding place even in Harper’s house. In a world that views ‘parties’ as the beginning of something new, violence becomes the solution not the problem:

   Harper: You were right to poison the wasps.

   Todd: Yes, I think all the wasps have got to go. (Churchill, *Far Away* 34)

In *Far Away* and *The Skriker*, Churchill is concerned about “the ecological effects of globalization” and the consequences of capitalism on the individual in terms of alienation and reproduction of death (Rabillard 88). In other words, the humanity in *Far Away* is ‘lost to and consumed by capitalism’s global reach’ (Aston, *But Not That*). Justified violence leaves no room for peace or a just use of environmental
resources: “I’ve shot cattle and children in Ethiopia. I’ve gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. […] So don’t suggest I’m not reliable” (Churchill, Far Away 40). Reliability is defined by the violence men and women commit. This vicious circle has poisoned everything in the world from food to animals and humans: “there were piles of bodies, and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach […]” (Churchill, Far Away 43). The chain of poisoning recurs also in The Skriker depicting the intertwined human and non-human oppressions. Churchill’s use of “many homely details” should bring the audience to recognise that violence is not far away but is a fact of everyday life (Rabillard 101).

At the end of the play, the symbolic act of stepping in the river of madness is inevitable, on the other side of which the global struggle for resources and power never ends. Whereas in Top Girls Angie fluctuates between the desire to kill her adoptive mother and the desire for reconciliation, Joan’s early search for the truth behind festive violence does not save her from participation. One can see in Joan’s confinement the perpetuation of the bloodline of the feast; like the prisoners in her aunt’s shed Joan at the end is seeking shelter and help. There is no way Joan can break free from the vicious circle of violence at the beginning of which she was a mere viewer, a child seeking the truth, but later she becomes a participant and finally a prisoner/asylum seeker.

**On Abjection and Rectal Parody of Birth**

The same narrative of justified violence, trials and grotesque feasts recurs in Rudkin’s The Triumph of Death (1981) in the form of the Inquisition, capitalism and myth. There are also comic monsters similar to The Skriker and Top Girls such as
Papatrix a female pope and the witch/saint Joan of Arc. Before I introduce and respond to Rudkin’s representation of the processional triumph of death, I will briefly refer to Rabey’s and Remshardt’s readings of the play. Robert Wilcher divides the narrative of the play into three parts: the story of children during the Crusades, the story of the Iron Age men in the forest who get persecuted by religious authorities for heresy, the Passion of Jehan (Joan of Arc) and her trial at the hands of the Inquisition (Wilcher, *Communal Dream* 576). The final epilogue shifts to modern times to show the anal travail of Martin Luther in an asylum for the insane. Luther claims to be Jehan’s daughter, and is being treated by the devil as a psychiatrist. The journey in *The Triumph of Death* is similar to that of a time machine wherein one is plunged into the horrors of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Reformation. Remshardt views this breathless journey as ‘a broad picture of the progress of human corruption’ (Remshardt 210). In Rabey’s description, the play is also “Rudkin’s densest and bleakest *Song of Experience*, [...] an intense exploration of the mechanics by which the human imagination is driven into self-amputation and self mutilation” (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 102). Within these two perspectives, the play can be viewed as an interesting exploration of the personal via the historical, of the present via the past which eventually leaves the audience with the identity disorder of Joan’s ‘daughter’, Martin Luther. This is Rudkin’s procession of death by which progress is turned inside out to reveal the abject. The latter is “the criminal with a good conscience” (monk Artaud), the traitor (the fleeing soldiers or the Iron Age men), or “the killer who claims he is a savior” (Papatrix and

26 This reference to the Romantic poet William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *of Experience*, which depicts the situation of humankind before and after the Fall, is also similar to Rudkin’s *The Triumph of Death*. The latter can be seen as an illustration of man’s journey after the loss of paradise.
mother Manus) (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 4). In another view, the play presents Rudkin’s “ ironic pageant of history’s cruel tyranny over the hopes and ideals” of the so-called less civilised ancestors (Wilcher, *Communal Dream* 576). Remshardt clearly illustrates a relationship between carnival and death that beneath Bakhtin’s ahistorical carnivalistic world, the play reveals “a history of physical abjection” (Remshardt 213). Though Rabey briefly refers to this procession of death, he also uncovers the abject which is misrecognised or deliberately cast out as defiling and irrational by systems of power (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 94). In this context, I propose to reveal Rudkin’s post-Bakhtinian reading of the carnivalistic procession of death in *The Triumph of Death*, which takes its name and atmosphere “from a phantasmagoric Breughel canvas” (see fig.2) and presents the Passion of Joan within a folk tradition of parodies, banquets and trials (Remshardt 210). To explain this recurring bloodline of terror, carnival and trial, Bakhtin’s study on the carnival is a foundational input to my analysis of the play, influenced by Remshardt’s and Girard’s recognition of violence beneath the festive and collective parade of death-makers.
Fig. 2. In Pieter Brueghel’s *The Triumph of Death*, at the banquet table a whole community from peasants, to fools, musicians, kings and children transform the ‘language’ of labour or man’s triumph over both the earth and death into a feast. However, beyond this carnival atmosphere of games and merrymaking there is also an army of skeletons fighting the living and transforming their life into hell, their harvest into a wasteland. Unlike the empowering figure of Dull Gret in fig. 1 by the same painter, the living in this painting are unable to push the danger of death any further and scenes of trial and execution replace the humour of fig. 1.
The play opens on a “rectal parody of birth” which puts the spectator before the penetrations of life, fertility and death (Rudkin, *Triumph* 1). Papatrix or the ‘mother’ in labor, whose identity defies definition, is “a monstrous female Kunstfigur compositing Pope, God, and Death that appears lifted from an image by Bosch 27 or *a danse macabre*” (Remshardt 210-11). Here Papatrix’s grotesque parody of birth and the speech ‘she’ gives on the importance of war against the Saracen are inseparable (Rudkin, *Triumph* 1). “Children. Last night the Saracen appeared to me again. He stood astride Jerusalem. Our Golden Mother, with milk and honey blest! Oh children dream with me. The filth in his eyes. The Saracen” (Rudkin, *Triumph* 1). Beneath this ceremonious speech full of gasps, rectal spasms and anguish, the ‘Pope’ justifies war against the Muslim to chasten Mother Jerusalem from the defiling Saracen. However, it is not only the Saracen who causes abjection but also ‘what disturbs identity, system, order’ such as Father Papatrix, a female monster in rectal labour (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Abjection is ‘what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, […] , the killer who claims he is a savior’ (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). This female Pope is the ambiguous composite of mother-father and killer-saviour who puts the children at the border between life and death to protect Jerusalem. Unlike Bakhtin’s grotesque body that dies and gives birth, the Pope gives birth to death, perpetuates violence and produces terror. The rectal parody of birth puts the children in front of this perpetual loss – Papatrix or the triumph of death. Here, the death of both the children and the Saracen becomes the manure that will fertilize the earth and announces the beginning of a new spring, the chastening of Jerusalem. In 27 Brueghel whose painting (*The Triumph of Death*) referred to earlier was strongly influenced by the style of Bosch.
contrast, ‘Jesus’ in the play invites us to question the chastening purpose of death and its grotesque celebration as he appears to Stephen a peasant boy sitting on a medieval jakes. “Oh Stephen. But in this life. In this body Stephen’s victory over death: what might that be? Love me you say. [...] How?” (Rudkin, Triumph 6). At this point, Mother Manus, a nun-demon, intervenes to provide the answer to how Jesus’ triumph over death can be applicable to our lives today and to the lives’ of these children: “I am Jerusalem. Look Stephen where the Saracen’s defiled me [...].

King Jesus calls you for a soldier Stephen. Love Him he says. He means, Oh Stephen be a golden soldier, make me clean” (Rudkin, Triumph 6-7). Like the Skriker, Papatrix’ energy doubles when the blood of children is shed. Upon the ‘intercession’ of mother Manus, Stephen, now a soldier, is impaled by Arabs, other children are deformed by war and some flee into the forest (Rudkin, Triumph 7).

Beneath this parody, Rudkin reveals the perpetual bloody march of death by which ‘progress’ is fulfilled by elimination - the ‘progress’ of the Crusaders eliminates ‘filthy’ Muslims - and ‘chastens’ the holy city by putting the life of every child under slavery and abuse.

This march led by Papatrix and Mother Manus does not cease at the end of the Crusades but expands and constantly demands a larger number of victims. The children who survive the battle run away into the forest and build their own community of love. They are now the Iron Age men whose new ‘society’ is governed by matriarch Heniot and their spiritual ‘leader’ Lord Enester in contrast to Mother Manus and Father Papatrix. Both worlds follow sort of a ‘religious’ ritual or calendar: the ‘civilised’ struggle with salvation and death; the ‘primitive’ relate to a seasonal linkage with the earth shifting between Christian and pagan worship. Their religious practices involve the Sun worship, the sowing ritual, incestuous polygamy,
Lent and the Great Supper. Fleeing from the Crusaders and their ‘holy’ wars, nature becomes their shelter from further participation in war and its carnivals of death.

Mother Manus: None came home. Their estrangement dies with them. That’s the beauty of war. We must not blame ourselves. We were wrong. They just as much. They would go. We were in delirium in those days. An age of unreason. Long ago. Now we know better. The Saracen is not a moral problem to us anymore. We are rational now. (Rudkin, *Triumph* 8-9)

Here, mother demon announces the end of the Crusades and the birth of an age of ‘reason’: the Inquisition, the time “when heresy (or witchcraft) has replaced the Saracen as the great threat to Christendom” (Wilcher, *Communal Dream* 575). Rudkin mistrusts this progress and uncovers other scapegoats beneath its festive garment. Trapped in the vicious circle of violence, the Crusaders replace the Saracen for Iron Age men and hence they renew the chain of victimisation. Rudkin articulates this repetition in his opening statement to *The Triumph of Death* with: “the past is another country. The past is not another country”. In this chain of ‘change’, the children are punished for their failure as soldiers and for their peaceful rebellion in the forest. Here progress inseparable from elimination leaves out the question of rationality for the festive march of death. To break free from this vicious circle of violence and be capable of love, Girard argues that it is urgent not to be tempted by the piles of dead victims and thus he warns us against using victimisation as a weapon to reap revenge (Girard, *Girard Reader* 209). The Iron Age men transformed and estranged by their past refuse revenge and thus they become the substitute for the Saracen since the beauty of war is the *raison d’être* of the ‘new’ age.
In these two worlds Rudkin contrasts different parodies and religious practices: the rectal parody of birth and the parody of the great supper. In the first, death rules in the figure of Papatrix recruiting children to fight for Jerusalem. This parody, different from Peter Barnes’ use of medieval parodies, is not openly comic or joyful: “School and university recreation had great importance in the history of medieval parody. These recreations usually coincided with feast days. All feast day privileges granted by tradition to laughter and jokes were fully accorded to recreation” (Bakhtin 83). Papatrix’ speech about holy wars during ‘his’ rectal parody of birth is humourless; however, unlike Pope Joan in Top Girls, Papatrix is not even stoned to death. On the other hand, the second unofficial parody of the Last Supper is joyful, comic and deathless, yet it is always haunted by both the scapegoat and the figure of death. “These gay parodies of the sacred were [...] filled with the same popular sense of the changing time and of renewal on the material bodily level. Here, too, is the prevailing logic of the ambivalent lower stratum” (Bakhtin 83). In other words by keeping the great supper the foresters ridicule what is considered sacred to their ancestors, the crusaders. Their celebration of the supper follows Lent and uses travesty as an indispensible element of folk festival and the collective meal (Bakhtin 81): Lord Enester earlier Jesus becomes Pan the pagan god at the great Supper. The priest-like horned god (Pan) meets his friends (disciples): the misshapen Jehan (later Joan of Arc), Sister Agnes, Sister Martha, a brother in wool and others. Rudkin’s use of travesty is not a mere “renewal of clothes and of the social image” (ibid) but it is a complete metamorphosis of sex too. “The oldest grotesque parody, “Cyprian’s supper” [...] transformed all sacred history from Adam to Christ into a fantastic clownish banquet using in grotesque fashion its important events and symbols” (Bakhtin 84). Similarly, Rudkin’s parody of the great supper transforms all sacred
history from Cain-Vitus (who refuses a life of toil) to Christ-Pan into a grotesque banquet filled with festive leisure, freedom and bisexuality:

Brans: (*torment*). Master. Thy stretching of me feels so black. Thy cock is crowned wi’ thorns!

Pan: I harrow Hell? I vanquish Death? I make your sty parts glad?

Brans: Ha a….I truly ride thy broomstick now….

Pan: I brother you. (Rudkin, *Triumph* 34)

This grotesque parody preserves “the easy equilibrium of communality and sexuality” shared among the clan members (Rabey, *Sacred Disobedience* 97). Whereas the official parody of rectal birth perpetuates violence and maintains hierarchy, the unofficial parody of love brings change and equality to the community, uncovers violence, and heals dispute and pain. Pan, for instance, heals Jehan’s crooked back after he pleads for the group’s consent. Unlike the official parody of pregnant death, the foresters’ pagan parody of love and fertility does embrace the troublemakers (Cain-like Vitus) and heal the mis-shapen Jehan.

In the parody of the Supper, Rudkin reveals the transformational power of love as the cross that the individual should take against the very mechanism of scapegoat selection which can be seen as the official means of cleansing and peacemaking. Beneath its carnivalistic tradition of folly and murder, the victims (Joan and Moralis) are selected to save the community and restore order. Determined to know where the cult of these rebellious primitives is, Mother Manus disguised as a victim sets a trap for its master Lord Enester: “(*Beneath the habit we see she is in a young man’s tunic; she changes sex before our eyes.*) I shall surprise his heart. Burn him alive.
[...]. World, Devil, Death, I’m on my way to Him” (Rudkin, *Triumph* 20). Lord Enester (later Pan) decides to save Moralis (Mother Manus) a prisoner, because of witchcraft, from burning. Their encounter - the crossing of Inquisition and the Pagan feast of Pan – also highlights the Germanic etymology of the word “carnival”. The latter is derived “from Karne or Harth, which means a holy site, that is, a pagan community and its priests, and from val or wal, which means “dead”, “killed”. “According to this theory, carnival meant “the procession of the dead gods”” (Bakhtin 393). The rejected pagan god in this context is Pan whose brotherhood of love will be slaughtered after supper, but before this, Enester (Pan) is challenged either to march for death with the dancing crowd or to relate to the pain of the scapegoat (Moralis). “This, for burning? Oh here shall be some spit and crackle Thursday. Male breast shrivel, roasted arm drop sheer off. [...] If I were a married man, my children would bring chestnuts Thursday afternoon, to roast at your feet” (Rudkin, *Triumph* 22). Challenged by the tradition of carnival processions which disguises violence for celebration and death for triumph, Enester decides to bear his cross and save Moralis:

Enester: You are my second Cross. Gladly I bear you. Today’s Green Thursday, and you should have burned. Tomorrow’s Bad Friday, but I rise already... This is their holy ground.

Moralis: Where is this wise woman you say shall set me right? [...] So innocent you describe them, they have no place for me in their theology.

Moralis comes in time to join the clan and share their ‘communion’ as Enester refuses to break and share the body of the victim in the carnival-feast of collective violence. Instead, he takes his cross (Moralis) to the safe shore of non-violence (the secret clan of love). Embracing victims within this primitive community challenges the carnivalistic practices of the official order represented by Papatrix and Mother Manus. Here, the cross which eventually leads to the uncrowning of the Christ-like Enester is the triumph of love over Satan’s laughter. It is a kind of bridge by which Enester reaches out to victims of violence although it does not save him or the community from death.

The safe arrival of ‘Moralis’ at this secret supper where pagan rituals are being celebrated in opposition to religious authorities facilitates the end of their cult at the hands of the Inquisition led by Satan. At the supper Enester bearing his cross/victim becomes or is ‘crowned’ as the Pan god: “Now Enester is donning: cloven buskins of horn, rank gloves of cloven horn; an artificial phallus, a little broader and longer than average human size, testicles pendant like a bull’s – a desultory squeeze, fine jet of water” (Rudkin, Triumph 29). In this metamorphosis before the supper, the persecuted Iron Age men originally medieval find reconciliation between their pagan past and Christian present and that can be viewed as a non-violent rebellion against the church authority: “The gods of antique mythology which Christianity had turned into devils and the images of Roman Saturnalia which lived on during the Middle Ages were thrown by Orthodox Christian consciousness into hell […]” (Bakhtin 391). Bakhtin thinks that pagan practices were only permitted during carnivals where pagan gods were thrown into carnival hell to control the crowd and help it unleash the ‘monsters’ of the past. The crowning of any pagan gods outside this ‘ritual’ defies the power of the church the head of which (in the play) is: Papatrix (female
monster) and Mother Manus (Satan). Pan and his secret clan, who live in harmony with their pagan-Christian heritage, pay a high price for their desire to save other victims: “Smoke. Gradual flamelight. Moaning: amid trees heard burning, falling, bodies lie quivering, meat that had been people, rendered into heaps we cannot read” (Rudkin, Triumph 34). This elimination of the Iron Age Men and their idols perpetuates violence and renews the terrifying past of the Saracen and subsequently the burning of Joan of Arc renews that of the Iron Age men. One could argue the repetition reflects an ongoing vicious circle of violence and shows history (of progress) as a movement towards death. Unlike Bakhtin, Rudkin challenges the spectator to see the victim despite the aim of celebrations to openly indulge the community in games, banquets and sex. Beneath the seeming spring and rebirth of the carnival tradition, Rudkin uncovers winter, death and victim selection which is thought to eliminate threat and bring peace to the community: “Witchcart; soldiers PEEK, PICKAVANCE heap indiscriminately the living and the dead, bodies, pieces of bodies. [...] At the cart stands MOTHER MANUS, [...] riven with redeemer’s joy” (ibid 35). However, Rudkin emphasises that such ‘redemption’ or carnival catharsis works by exclusion, division and destruction, and its satanic laughter celebrates the triumph of death over life.

**Travesty and Trial**

In this heap of dead meat, pregnant Jehan deformed by soldiers is found and she becomes another victim of their brutal ‘redemption’. She is on trial for heresy judged by Mother Manus (Satan), Papatrix and monk Artaud. Returning to Girard, “the word “Satan,” originally, signifies the accuser, the one who brings a law suit against someone else” (Girard, Girard Reader 201). Jehan rejects Satan’s attempts to ‘help’
her engage with the ‘civilised’ world by christening her as Joan. This new name is a travesty meant to give Jehan temporal equality in her new environment where civilisation and peacemaking are inseparable from murder. Mother Manus views Jehan’s refusal to change as a form of carnival rebellion: “when we first took you into care, you seemed very much to seek positive relationship with us. […] After a while, you seemed not to want to hear us anymore. You became uncooperative. Irresponsible. To all our questions, you gave carnival answers. As though you held us in contempt” (Rudkin, Triumph 37). Contrary to Satan’s accusations, Jehan-Joan is actually on trial for her refusal to participate in the carnival programme of chastening death. She even feels sick when told her husband-brother is burnt to death:

Mother Manus: You have to understand. If Brans die sick, how can he be admitted to the lovely garden? We must burn his body before he die. For him to be clean. He is at peace now, in the garden above. So cleansed. He looks down upon you Joan. In pity, how you stray here. Stumble. He so yearns to reach his hand to you.

Jehan: Burn? Brans? A living man? (She begins to vomit.) (Rudkin, Triumph 41)

Jehan and her tribe are judged for burning the dead without any hope of resurrection; however, the execution of this tribal community – or what I call the carnival devouring of the living - in the civilised world is incomprehensible. By this elimination, Satan and his followers hope to restore order and peace by the blood of a victim. The latter becomes the comic-grotesque dummy of their humour the burning of which resembles the death of the old world with its foolish values, futility
and wickedness (Bakhtin 394). However, Bakhtin does not explicitly refer to actual victims but points to the old pagan world which has to step down to give birth to the new ‘Christian’ world.

I see in The Passion of Joan the burning flame of carnival hell, a tradition that dates back to Renaissance festivals, and its laughter which Rudkin tears apart to reveal the agony of the victim (Bakhtin 393). Earlier I referred to some variations of “carnivalesque hell” - Papatrix and later Gil28 devouring children, an old devil ‘eating’ the foresters, the ‘grilling’ of the primitives and money as Luther’s excrement – which according to Bakhtin are ‘ambivalent and include in one way or another the symbols of fear defeated by laughter’ (Bakhtin 393-4). The powerful image of Jehan shouting through the flames challenges the passive participation of witnesses and players in this trial-show. At the time of her birth-death, Jehan’s answers in mockery of the ‘tribunal’ carnival may resemble her triumph over fear. This collapse of distance between the legal and the festive, the religious and the political, the civilised and the tribal reminds me of Kane’s last scene in Phaedra’s Love where the whole community come together in a moment of temporal equality to celebrate the restoration of stability by the elimination of a victim.

Jehan: […] I were a filth in the earth, among you – good folk … Now I burn to give you light.

Artaud: You chasten us all.

Jehan: I know the flame shall hurt. […] Brother Artaud. Do not weep … I leave the earth clean! I found these! […] Bake they in my fire for thy

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28 Gilles, a leader in the French army and a companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc, is now an outcast marginalised by his record of abuse, rape and crime.
children. *(They are small early potatoes. Artaud uncertainly takes them).* (Rudkin, *Triumph* 45)

Her gift to Artaud is a gesture of love uncovering the grotesque humour of carnival entertainment. By this gesture, she also desires to communicate and urge every Artaud in the theatre to relate to her pain. However, unlike Enester, Artaud\(^\text{29}\) accepts her gift but refuses to bear his cross. During this trial-show, children including her own infant are among the participants in Jehan’s birth-giving death. In her last agony at the stake after she gives birth, Jehan recognises Jesus/Lord Enester in the crowd and calls him by name recalling his words even at the moment of death (Rudkin, *Triumph* 13). Jehan never disowns her true identity but Enester fails her by refusing to reach out to the victim this time. Having buried his garb of Pan, Lord Enester now married to Mother Manus promises his disciples no reward, no heaven and no salvation. Jehan-Joan the comic monster of this feast dies alone.

**Defecation and Demonised Capital**

Returning to Rudkin’s use of the rectal parody of birth, Luther, daughter of Gilles de Rais and Joan of Arc, is also in ‘labour’ similar to that of Papatrix at the beginning of the play. However, their speeches mark the sharp but inconsistent change from medieval certainty and its holy wars to the modern Protestant world characterised by doubt, guilt, labour and death. Here there is a continuation of the same tradition of carnival hell but the action has moved forward to the Protestant Reformation and later to the twentieth century. The hole of Martin Luther is the

\(^{29}\) This Artaud should remind us of the earlier ‘bonfire’ which rendered Jehan’s people into heaps of ‘meat’ (Rudkin, *Triumph* 34). In Remshardt’s view, “Rudkin leaves no doubt that he means this to be a drama of pestilence and cruelty: the recurring character of a fanatical monk is appropriately named: Artaud” (212).
entrance to hell: “Medieval legends describe many […] holes in various parts of Europe. They were believed to be the entrances to purgatory or hell […]” (Bakhtin 377). Luther who introduces ‘himself’ sitting on a monastery privy is in a madhouse treated by Satan (Mother Manus). Like Papatrix, it is difficult to tell who or what Luther is but ‘his’ defecation is inseparable from giving a speech on redemption and Creation. Luther begins by pointing to the vicious circle of Adam’s evolutionary change from an ape: “What else is Adam’s evolution? Unease to shame. Shame to guilt. Guilt into debt. Debt to mortgage. Ever, ever to be ‘redeemed’. […] By work be justified? Making our good pile?” (Rudkin, Triumph 50). Luther is literally making ‘his’ own good pile of excrement/money mocking man’s modern means of redemption. Finding it futile to make money and seek redemption, Luther dreams of Eden and a life of innocence. Eden may resemble a vertical view of the world: a world without toil, progress or even death. “God was our wholeness all along. Our fracture is our fall. This world is an antic of the Devil” (Rudkin, Triumph 51). Now man’s image is fractured, Luther relies on his own power for redemption: “Get thee behind me, world. No such redeeming’s needed. I’ll shit when I am able. I’ll fuck where I am welcome. I’ll die when I must. My shitting and my fucking and my dying come from God. Here is my garden. […] The Resurrection of the Body is in this life” (Rudkin, Triumph 51). Wilcher relates this change to the “new theology of the Reformation” by which the individual is driven to carry his own burden of sin being “bereft of the mediation of the Church” (Wilcher, Communal Dream 580). Here in Luther’s words there might be a strange return to the medieval view of the world, to a childlike moment of enlightenment that reconnects the higher sphere and the lower body or the Edenic man and the grotesque and materialist world. Rudkin’s ambivalent use of the bodily lower stratum is part of an old carnival tradition which
views the anus as a symbol of resurrection and dung or urine as a joyful matter: “it is not the breath of the mouth but the flatus that appears as the symbol of life and the true sign of resurrection” (Bakhtin 382-3). Luther’s view of the body and the world, of creation and redemption is not joyful but leaves us before our own limitations in terms of defecating, fucking and dying. Like Satan in the story of Dull Gret, Luther is also pushing with ‘his’ bottom to produce banknotes: “My bowel moves. I see Father in Heaven, Pope on earth, Emperor, Judge, Usurer, turn to skeleton and dust. My rectum relaxes. […] Remission is upon me. And all the centuries of banked pathology that we call History come down to be undone” (Rudkin, Triumph 51). By this abject moment, Luther confirms momentary freedom from the chains of medieval hierarchy placing emphasis on forward and backward instead of upper and lower. Such ‘transfer of the world from the vertical to the horizontal was realised in the human body, which became the relative center of the cosmos’ in the Renaissance (Bakhtin 363). Here Luther (man and woman) has become the new centre of the universe, the vessel of these scientific, economic and global changes.

The meaning of salvation only starts to make sense at the end of the play when Luther’s body is revealed as the medium/factory for the transference of excrement into banknotes. However, Luther’s inconsistent speech reveals his discontent with his own argument:

For all which I am in the madhouse still. My shitting was your pass to salvation, now it’s sold. The Devil’s dead, you say. Old hat. Behind you. Say that, he smiles. Devil’s an old nickname, for our compulsion to death. The past is another country. The past is not another country. There is no escape from history. (Rudkin, Triumph 51)
Luther questions our road to salvation warning the modern audience not to be fooled by this old joke: the hole in question is no entrance to heaven but to a world dominated and demonised by capital and death. Here I am reminded of Barnes’ *Leonardo’s Last Supper* where a family of undertakers sells bottles of excrement and wind to help people overcome the plague (Barnes, *Leonardo* 142). Like Barnes, Rudkin questions our position and perception of history and its making of death which cannot be undone by laughter or Satan. Rudkin’s insistence on bringing Satan out of the box even as the play moves forward to the twentieth century is important. Girard explains that the end of Satan and the undoing of history – a history of scapegoating - is the victory of the Cross (Girard, *Girard Reader* 209): “the specific character of the modern world can be ascribed to the victory of the Cross over Satan in the sense of a growing concern for victims everywhere in the world (Girard, *Girard Reader* 208). Discontent with his own road to salvation, Luther struggles and fluctuates between a world of grotesque humour and a world of labour and death without any hope of redemption. It is possible, according to Girard, to read history “as dominated by the consequences of the victory defined first by Jesus himself […] a process of vindication and rehabilitation of more and more persecuted victims” (*ibid*). In a world where the market replaces this key (the cross) to salvation, Luther’s seemingly grotesque liberty does not free him from Satan’s power. Satan, however, mocks Luther’s death wish - his means of ending man’s daily struggle in a world of labour and capital, excrement and death. Confined in a madhouse, Luther in the end lays his head in Satan’s lap: “Capital is the sublime conclusion” (Rudkin, *Triumph* 54). This carnival imagery of Luther is similar to Dull Gret’s world dominated by demonised capital and to Lily who speaks money when she first encounters the Skriker. Luther of the twentieth century is probably the prisoner and object of
capital/excrement and no matter how much s/he tries to break free from its carnivalisation, Satan (the Skriker) is always there to medievalise our responses and help us trust in its redeeming power.

**Hanging Gardens Carnivalised**

A similar interest in the relationship between victimisation and redemption can be seen in Rudkin’s *Afore Night Come* (1963). Here I will view their carnivallistic combination in light of Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival tradition and Girard’s reading of violence. The play depicts a group of seasonal labourers who gather in an orchard for the pear harvest, the carnivalisation of which is a continual travesty inseparable from death. Nothing in this orchard - or what the labourers call the hanging gardens - is what it seems to be. These gardens are similar to the Skriker’s underground gardens but without glamour: “Something’m wrong in this place. Every year some picking time, it’m the bloody same. Shambles. Pande-bloody-monium” (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 70). This hellish garden provides Johnny (tractor driver) temporary freedom from his confinement in the colony:

Hawkes: Warning you. If I hears another word from you, I s’ill not ask for you no more. You s’il be in there forever, Hobnails. [...] Don’t seem to realize. It’m most rare, the way I hire you from the colony, Hobnails…

Johnny: NO!


In this ‘marketplace’, Hawkes, the owner of the orchard is described as god of war, Johnny is seen juggling with pears, Roche/Shakespeare is a tramp and the labourers
are prisoners. We do not know much about this god of war who exploits tramps and prisoners making them work in his orchard, but this image reminds me of the Skriker and her exploitation of women in the underworld garden of delights and in the outside world. The labourers work in the orchard for life and those who freely come to work such as Roche are not even free to leave (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 46). The oppressive atmosphere of the orchard and its pest-control poisoning is unhealthily warm for ‘Shakespeare’ and causes disease among the workers:

Spens: Didn’t ought to spray when the blokes’m a-picking, Hobnails. [...].

Make all their hair come out. Make them so’s they won’t get no babies.

Mrs Trevis: Dangerous stuff, that spray. Radioactive.

Spens: Ah. Make an Hiroshima on us. Eh, don’t you laugh, Hobnails. (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 44)

In this orchard, what looks like Eden is a place of sterility and disease inseparable from pandemonium. Unlike the Christian hell, “the carnivalesque hell affirmed earth and its lower stratum as the fertile womb, where death meets birth and a new life springs forth” (Bakhtin 395). The only birth I perceive in this orchard is the harvest itself for which the (sterile) labourers risk their lives. Though pesticides help protect the harvest, they can make a Hiroshima of the labourers. The hanging gardens are not a shelter from wars, massacres or even natural disasters to which ‘Shakespeare’ draws our attention reminding us of similar concerns in *Far Away* and *The Skriker* (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 55).

Watered by the labourers’ blood, the pear harvest from which Roche is excluded symbolises the triumph of the working people over the world. The use of the banquet
is not totally absent from *Afore Night Come* but is referred to in two different forms: the labourers’ lunchtime and the blood of the lamb. The food or banquet imagery is important to the carnival world: in the act of eating, humans overcome the world by the power of labour and they celebrate their triumph over death (Bakhtin 281). Old Roche from the Kingdom of Munster (Ireland) is never seen eating with the labourers partly because he does little work in the orchard. This shows Roche’s inability to conquer life and foreshadows his defeat: “Mr. Hawkes, sir... the half dollar of it, only, would suffice [...]. To enable me to buy a sausage roll and a cup of tea ...and a newspaper” (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 100). Roche is fired and denied his day’s wages; he cannot taste the world nor introduce it into his body. Eventually Roche becomes the food of the ‘party’ or the ‘lamb’ whose blood shall cleanse the orchard.


Tiny: It’m marvel the way he juggles with they pears. Should see him juggle.

Johnny: We’m baptized. Both. In the Blood (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 38).

The blood of the Lamb, an indication to Christ’s sacrificial love and the triumph of salvation over death, is Johnny’s sign of distinction to tell good from evil and it is also the sign of salvation and triumph over death. Though Johnny’s understanding of the Lamb of God is inconsistent throughout the play, he does not participate in the labourers’ slaughtering. He also helps Larry avoid witnessing it but he cannot protect Roche.
Victim Carnivalised for Persecution

The selection of Roche, one of many victims in the orchard, can be seen within ‘the traditional system of [carnival] images: uncrowning, travesty, thrashing’ in the context of which the labourers provide their reasons for persecution (Bakhtin 198). From the start Roche identifies himself with a royal ancestry: he comes from the Kingdom of Munster, speaks Gaelic the language of kings and writes poetry. In the orchard, Roche, a tramp and a poet is given the title Shakespeare in mockery of his distinction:

Jumbo: Some blokes. Just ain’t the kind. For this job. Things between boxes and bloody trees. Sacrifices.

Taffy: Whole world’s bloody human sacrifice. Slaughterhouse, three quarters of the bloody world, to feed the privileged. […] Shakespeare was privileged, wasn’t he? Working-class, I don’t doubt it; but he was privileged. God give him a orb and golden scepter. And he bloody smashed it. (Rudkin, Afore Night 80)

Here is the better reason to beat him; Roche becomes a labourer and his metaphorical royal robes are removed. He is uncrowned to be travestied into (Shakespeare) a labourer among the labourers. Temporarily free in the orchard, introduced to labour but not allowed to eat the fruit of his labour, this privileged poet-labourer is among the groups most likely to be persecuted: “A mere glance at world history will reveal that the odds of a violent death at the hands of a frenzied crowd are statistically greater for the privileged [such as the monarch] than for any other category” (Girard, Girard Reader 113). As with most types of persecution, the powerful and the rich
are more likely to be persecuted during periods of crisis (Girard, *Girard Reader* 113). “For instance. Where was Shakespeare during the war?” (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 80). World War II in this context has eliminated all distinctions between privileged / labourer, educated / illiterate leaving people without jobs. The uncrowning of the privileged helps break down the hierarchy, but does not help the English labourers trust the Irish foreigner. His foreignness is one of many criteria by which Roche is selected as a victim and upon whom the labourers heap other stereotypical accusations based on sickness or epidemics. In light of such selection, Girard explains: “In order to blame victims for the loss of distinctions resulting from the crisis, they are accused of crimes that eliminate distinctions” (Girard, *Girard Reader* 115). Therefore, Roche is accused of polluting the orchard community and causing death to the world. “His hands’m the hands on a dead man. His voice am the voice of a dead man. […]. Don’t drink nothing, don’t eat nothing… what am he, then? (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 75). The undead Shakespeare/Roche is also Cain the first murderer wandering the earth: “Aint gone… I know… he’m hereabout. […]. Come to plague us: never shake him off. Hang on to us. Blight us” (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 78). Roche’s physical condition also attracts other types of accusations: “Got no eyes… no eyes, Shakespeare… […]. All diseased. Got leprosy, Shakespeare?” (Rudkin, *Afore Night* 95) Though Roche suffers from no disability or leprosy, these are among other examples on the stereotypes of persecutions observable in history and which the labourers use against Roche to justify the slaughtering.

In the history of carnivals, the popular festive forms of crowning and uncrowning are symbolic of the triumph of the crowd over kingship and power as well as they reveal the connection between festive laughter and the change of seasons (Bakhtin 81). Here Shakespeare/Roche, a tramp among the labourers, becomes the carnival
dummy of their bitter humour to be crowned the scapegoat of their hatred. “In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected [...] and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter [...]” (Bakhtin 197). In the orchard Roche, from the kingdom of Munster and who speaks the language of kings, is a tramp. He is given the name Shakespeare, abused and beaten when as king-tramp he becomes a labourer. “Here appeared the relation to the change of seasons, to the phases of sun and moon, to the death and renewal of vegetation and to the succession of agricultural seasons” (Bakhtin 81). The complete action of the play is at harvest time and it is in this light that the uncrowning of the king-tramp should be viewed. The harvest time is important in order to save the fruit despite the bad conditions of the workplace and the many risks the labourers take: “Burn your eyen out [...]. Insecticide. Germicide. Bloody eyeicide. Unman you!” (Rudkin, Afore Night 82). Contrary to carnival feasts which celebrate fertility and rebirth, the pear harvest, the crowning of nature, is also the uncrowning of the labourers: “Reckon her needs a-spraying, Ginge. Bloody two on you. Dried blood or some’at; fertiliser. Got a blight on you, I reckon, Ginge” (Rudkin, Afore Night 54). The inseparable fertility of the land and sterility of the labourers reveal more victims in the blood cycle of the harvest. However, the main victim at this seasonal change is Roche whose blood is probably shed to water the orchard and save the harvest. Roche is the blight and the plague who puts the harvest to death and whose death shall bring the harvest to life. He is the comic monster or clown of the harvest who laughs at the pain of the labourers:

Jim: Bend over backways, his eyen do go out…
Ginger: I heard him laugh…! He s’ll laugh no bloody more…! Shakespeare…!

Shakespeare…? (Rudkin, Afore Night 79)

Roche in other words becomes the monstrous victim whose death shall save the harvest and the labourers. This is one of many medieval comic images by which “the defeat of fear” is “presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside out, the comic images of death and bodies gaily rent asunder” (Bakhtin 91). Roche’s broken body and his Irish blood ‘nourish’ the English land only when dead. This is not a sign of reconciliation but a sign of his defeat. The labourers’ festive laughter at the end resembles their victory over fear as they “play with terror and laugh at it” (Bakhtin 91).

By examining the rule of death in this chapter, the selected plays present a world without borders established on and sustained by a bloodline of connected historical moments. Indeed, the past of holy wars and scapegoating is not another country but it is here and now in the same old terms of parody and ‘carnival’ hell inseparable from social or environmental injustice. By revealing the victim, both Churchill and Rudkin succeed in demythologising our perception of carnival triumph and its laughter. The use of grotesque-comic characters such as female popes, concubine-nuns, witch-saints and shape-shifters helps the playwrights make connections between past, present and future in terms of a bloodline/carnival of humour. Thus my reading of the selected plays has examined the extended metaphor of feasts, parades and trials in places where the surrealist or mythical notion of time - the timelessness of laughing terror – is juxtaposed against the agony of the victim and the responsibility of the spectator. Both Rudkin and Churchill challenge the sense of familiarity with and repetition of grotesque parties and festive trials by tearing apart
their laughter, questioning participation and revealing death. My post-Bakhtinian position has helped me reveal the rule of death hidden beneath the motif of feasts and carnival hells. It is true that their career journey shaped by different socio-political interests has taken them on opposing paths; there are many similarities in terms of imagery, poetry and anatomical representation of geography.

The nonconventional return to the primitive or mythical may be viewed as a double-edged weapon. On the one hand, Rabey as mentioned earlier views the use of myth as a helpful tool that questions the power of those who claim to have the truth and thus it is revolutionary. However, myth like carnival is part of the very order against which it wages war. Its seeming liberty is a disguise of merry-making and terror making, and its promise to achieve redemption or transformation is empty. Here, Artaud, Rabey and Gritzner as mentioned in the introduction highlight the ‘religious’ promise of the theatre to transform via a network of elements: the grotesque, the gothic, the abject, the poetic. Both playwrights have successfully embraced the mythical - ambiguous and ambivalent, rebellious and submissive, sacred and profane – in the form and content of their plays. The mythical is the violent, the demonic, and the festive: it is the battle led by Gret against the demon in contrast to the failure of Marlene and Joyce to unite against the myths of capital. In *The Triumph of Death* and *The Skriker*, the powers of evil – labour and slavery, capital and division - are now everywhere and the demon a shape-shifter is fully in control. The battle in *Afore Night Come* is not over yet where the god of World War Two has reshaped living in terms of employment, freedom and even (in)fertility.

In this chapter, I have looked at the seemingly joyful and triumphant battle/feast which the playwrights tear open to reveal alienation and destruction. The entrance to
hell is important to these plays and reveals a relationship defined by division, murder of children, sterility, confinement and madness. Gret and her army of peasant women dare to enter hell and fight the demon – the temptations of money, exploitation and sexual ‘liberty’. This powerful image in Top Girls highlights the failure of the two sisters and their ancestors (the banquet women) to find a common language which would define their experience and unite them before the increasing challenges. In The Skriker, there is no way the two sisters can escape the devil, hell and its delights. Again this play is concerned with single motherhood and the related issues of infanticide, pregnancy and economic exploitation. In a world dominated by the festive, the mythical and alienation, the Skriker may be seen as the women’s failure to strike back or even speak for their bodies, children and history. The devil as a figure is absent in Far Away; however, the same images of the party and the parade are inseparable from persecution, trial and war. In Rudkin’s The Triumph of Death, the entrance to hell recurs in Papatrix’s rectal parody of birth, in the image of a teenager/soldier on a privy, and finally in Luther’s excrement/ money. This recalls Churchill’s use of the same image in Top Girls and The Skriker, the purpose of which is to invoke some kind of unity among women to fight the demon, the father of lies and accusations. However, in The Triumph of Death, as I explained earlier in this chapter, there is no hope that the victims can break free from laughter and its brutal redemption. Like Josie and Lily, Luther produces money, the excrement of toil and Satan’s way to ‘salvation’. The same bloodline waters the hanging gardens in Afore Night Come where sterility is the fruit of labour and labour the outcome of confinement.
Chapter Five: Daring to See Within Ourselves

With the end of full employment and de-sanctification of welfare, the old liberal urge to please a morally confused and unhappy public by uniting it behind shallow collective responses became overwhelming. The conditions for the creation of the Populist Theatre were all present when Thatcher took office.

(Barker, *Arguments* 34)

Against this background, we have seen that Barker’s Theatre of Catastrophe refuses to sell the audience ready-made recipes, a moral lesson or even easy solutions. Howard Barker is perhaps the only playwright examined in this thesis who explicitly distinguishes his theatre from carnivals - “the carnival mania [the revolutionary hopes] of the left and the moral crusade [the holy wars] of the right” - and thus he steps back from a culture of collectivism and entertainment (Barker, *Arguments* 53). In the main introduction to this thesis, I tried to locate the positions of the selected playwrights in light of the problematic carnival/esque, which also shapes a number of things such as their popularity, rebellion or obscurity, the return to and the focus on individuality as well as the desire to communicate, educate or change the audience. This post-war generation of playwrights engages with the problems of unemployment, poverty and violence (Shaffer), myths of solidarity and the return to individuality (Barker) or an exclusive market dominated by male values, violence and exploitation (Churchill). I have explained in Chapter Three that the rebirth of individuality in the realm of tragedy and catastrophe is oppositional to a celebratory culture controlled by comedy, collective laughter, clarity and fame. Churchill, however, does not abandon hope in female solidarity but she does criticise patriarchal myths and their products - the individuality of the marketplace. The
success or the failure of this unity among the marginalised and the oppressed recurs in the plays of Peter Shaffer and Peter Barnes, who hope to make a stand or send a signal to bystanders, victims and victimisers. With Churchill, Shaffer and Barnes, there is clearly a move from the carnival to the carnivalesque, from the seeming liberty and release of fear to actual freedom. It is hard to differentiate between these narratives; however, in moving from party sex, games, abuse and banquets to view ‘hell’, where food and sex are used for torture, I have removed the masks to reveal a bloodline.

In this light, the language of confinement and exclusion should not be seen as a surprising end to my research on carnival forms of humour. Having set out to explore the different contexts of battle, persecution and death camps, the plays analysed give the feeling of unease and discomfort as they eventually reveal the straitjacketing situation of certain individuals. We have seen that confinement is inseparable from delivering a speech, defecating and being released (chosen for elimination) as the refuse/manure of the earth. This return to the mother earth symbolised by the imagery of hell, the (demon’s) hole and the cell takes on different meanings in the earlier chapters. In Chapter Two, confinement is Leonardo’s (the artist’s) last supper of vomit for the welfare of the juggling gravediggers. It is the plague, a marketplace of bottled excrement, wind and corpses, a hell of laughter (Leonardo’s Last Supper and Red Noses). It is also execution by hanging or the ruler’s means of achieving sexual stimulation (The Ruling Class). Confinement and release also recur in Laughter where the author is ridiculed as he delivers a speech on the dangers of laughing off victims and the doors of the ovens eventually shut out the victims of the holocaust. These penetrations of death and laughter, inclusion and exclusion, liberty and fear transform reality to the realm of the physical in terms of
games, eating, drinking and wind-breaking. Shaffer’s protagonists also perform their games of execution in a *basement* flat and their battles in a house of *retreat*.

The festive in Chapter Three is brief, ambiguous and less comic despite the persistence of the grotesque feasts and (comic) trials. Here the emphasis on deprivation, helplessness and entrapment has been translated into the survivors’ need for the dead and their inability to live without their memory (*The Power of the Dog* and *Cleansed*). Behind this intimacy, the ‘free’ return to the camp also reveals confinement and (passive) participation. The laughter in this chapter silent and humourless or painful and strange provides no outlet or relief but leaves the spectator face to face with violence. Here, Barker and Kane look closely at scenes of torture in the forms of castration and dismemberment, challenging our perception of resistance, participation, individuality and the collective. The image of the mad mother confined in mental hospital (*The Skriker*) is inseparable from the old laughing hag whose body is falling apart to be consumed by the banquet guests in hell (*Top Girls*). Like Churchill’s hag, the raped and disfigured mother in *Europeans* is the object of humour at the banquet table of national belonging and freedom. We have seen in this chapter that the possibility of individuality lies in the rejection of State reconciliation for the painful reality of dismemberment. The latter is not only an expression of physical deformity but it is also the decision not to belong in places defined by the spirit of hatred and persecution as well as dominated by laughter, terror and exploitation.

My aim in my PhD research, as indicated in the title, has been to speak for victims, and to investigate why these victims are selected and how laughter and carnival forms of humour provide or fail to provide an outlet. However, it is
important to mention that the texts do not necessarily provide a direct answer to my questions. In this thesis I have tried to interrogate these issues by stripping off the disguise of laughter, parades, banquets and parodies to reveal victims, trials and death. Thus every chapter returns to the playwrights’ different use of laughter and carnival forms to uncover a culture of humour and death with which the plays engage. In this culture divided into upper and lower, serious and comic, official and folk, the coexistence of two narrative threads of death and humour form a vicious circle that takes me again and again to the victim. Instead of turning my back on the victims of violence by pointing to dummies and clowns, sexual liberty and rebirth, my thesis pays particular attention to the mis-recognised victim. Through this unveiling, I have questioned, with the playwrights, the community of laughter which excludes the individual in preference for the collective or invites the individual to participate in its collective dance against the labour pains of difference. In the next few pages, I will highlight how my search for victims has helped me to open up these narratives, which I describe in terms of the following themes: (de)carnivalisation of pain, the scapegoat and the role of the cross, cleansing forms in contrast to tragedy as the birth-place of individuality and finally the return to the medieval.

This thesis has revealed two inseparable narrative threads of laughter and death, the collective and the individual, inclusion and exclusion. The selected plays tell the passion stories of many victims such as the passion of Joan of Arc and the passion of Katrin, and thus by giving flesh and blood to their suffering, voice to their voicelessness, they become real and tangible. In the attempt to tear apart their halo, the victims cease to be the heroes we think they are and instead highlight their corruption, failure and cowardice in Europeans and The Power of the Dog. This
creates a distance between the spectator and the participant, and prevents sympathy with the ‘victims’, some of whom run away from the cross and from their responsibilities for the other. Breaking away from the culture of entertainment and its rewards - from the classifications of victims within the categories of martyrs or heroes of war - is the beginning of the path towards recognition of self and other. In addition to recognising the victims, this research has also served to criticise and so reveal the carnivalisation of pain. The latter hides the victim in the forms of pageantry attended by comic monsters, shape-shifters, female popes, folkloric creatures and deformed mothers. Beneath this layer of celebratory culture, the selected works have successfully pointed to the festive march of prisoners, the banquet of ghost women, the lynching party and Satan’s laughter. Here the fate and the possibility of individuality require writing against this collective fear of the other and turning its laughter inside out to halt the dance and reveal the victim. In Chapter Two I described this encounter with the other as a critical moment that challenges the norms and reaches out to the human outside the categories of neighbour/enemy, civilised/primitive, male/female or citizen/ foreigner.

Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival shows no real interest in the festive forms of thrashing, abuse and ridiculing except for humour and community celebrations. However, the interesting theories by Girard, Kristeva and Agamben have helped me return to the victim so as to reveal his/her agony from different angles. In this research, Girard’s reading of the scapegoat mechanism and its function at times of political and social upheaval has enlightened my understanding and enabled me to arrange the selected plays according to their interest in the victim. The selection of a scapegoat is essential for the restoration of order in the context of Chapter Two. Here we have seen that this order and peacemaking process does not guarantee a genuine
justice but is inseparable from the rule of death, social and political oppression and inequality. Both Barnes and Shaffer insist on showing the temporality of this victim mechanism (the peace process) by pointing to the perpetuation of violence and injustice (*Red Noses, The Ruling Class* and *Lettice and Lovage*). In spite of their heavy reliance on a ‘language’ of carnival forms, both playwrights question the ambivalent role of laughter, warn us not to participate and bring us face to face with its hidden monsters and victims.

Similarly, in Chapter Three I tried to highlight the playwrights’ interest in the victim/iser despite the frightening and overwhelming reproductions of death. It is hard indeed to explain the role of the mechanism of victim selection in the context of death camps especially if the playwrights provide no historical framework (*Cleansed*). However, Barker and Kane give a name, a face and a voice to the victim focusing on their individual narrative of pain and on a personal encounter between self and other or friend and enemy. Thus, both playwrights refuse to treat the victim as if it were a number in a heap of corpses. We have also seen the perpetuation of victim selection in *The Europeans* and *Phaedra’s Love* where communities heal themselves by means of the blood of war victims or the monarch who dies to save his people. In light of these challenges, cleansing is inseparable from selection and elimination in the furnace of war, death camps and lynching parties. The fruit of this cleansing is the seeming reconciliation of war victims, prisoners and leaders at the expense of their personal history of rape, confinement and healing.

Chapter Four also referred to different forms of cleansing – abortion and infanticide, parties and parades of prisoners, ‘hell’ as banquet and market places of devouring and exploitation. Despite the continuation of the festive, Churchill has
challenged us to recognise the bloodline of laughing terror – a metaphor for the two narratives of humour and death - and the ignorance of its participants. Here the encounter with the other in terms of eating and drinking - in the Skriker’s banquet of human limbs or in the harvest of Afore Night Come - is similar to the gravediggers’ supper in Barnes’ Leonardo’s Last Supper. The central image of this chapter is the victim whose flesh and blood is thought to pollute and nourish the community. It is the shape-shifter (the mother, the bisexual and the poet) whose pregnancy, menstrual cycle and sex are perhaps inseparable from disorder. This is the scapegoat crowned to be persecuted, selected to be abused and the cause of evil and good. In this chapter, by emphasising the encounter with leprosy, pregnancy, bisexuality, defecation and vomit, all of which affirm the human body, I wanted to uncover the frightening encounter with the other – dead children, exploited women and women rivals.

Throughout this research and as discussed earlier, there is a continuous clash between the festive and the violent, laughter and terror, the clown and the dictator, God and Satan or the dummy and the victim. By talking about sacrifice – the selection and elimination of a victim(s), this thesis at no particular point justifies counter-violence nor affirms the permanent return of peace and order. However, my position, as illustrated earlier in this thesis, is post-Bakhtinian; I do not reject Bakhtin’s reading of the carnival but I build on his theory of humour aiming to look beyond the ‘party’ at the possibility of individuality in situations of social and political unrest. By this approach, I have made many connections that Bakhtin failed to reveal between the inanimate and the living, the comic-grotesque and the other, the witnesses and the survivors, the dead whose ashes are life-giving powder. For Bakhtin, it is all a play of pressure and relief, a festive rule of misrule by which
deformity befriends the healthy, the rebel embraces the dictator, and hell is the passage from poverty to wealth and from fear to laughter. Similar situations also recur in the selected plays as this research has shown, and despite this black and white chess-board, the playwrights would not want their works to be defined simply as hopeful or pessimistic. In fact, the selected playwrights halt this dance of beauty and violence to question our role and challenge our positions as individuals.

One of the elements that helped me find my way to the victim despite the intertwined narrative threads of humour and death is the playwrights’ recurrent use of the medieval. The return to the medieval in this thesis as a bloodline which nourishes folly and trials is a motif of (games of) persecution. Here the reason behind this motif is to question our laughter today and our subsequent participation. Having looked at different texts of persecution, the medieval here has become a metaphor for the fire of battles, executions, pogroms and hell. It is the playwrights’ reference to the victim concealed for slaughter, mocked to deliver the community from evil. Though the word sacrifice is not always used in the texts explored, the playwrights have often used familiar words or situations related to sacrifice such as the scapegoat, anathema, victims in the flames or at the stake, meal traditions, the cross, slaughter, rebirth and cleansing.

The role of the cross in particular and the reliance on Christian motifs in general has encouraged me to question the crowd mentality and their festive triumph over fear in the name of democracy, laughter and power. For example, Churchill and Rudkin used Satan as a representative of trials and accusations, rule and misrule, laughter and death, as a figure that demands new victims and new followers (*The Triumph of Death* and *The Skriker*). However, the focus on the cross in Chapter Two
as a manifestation of love and the birthplace of a new form of sacrifice
demythologises Satan’s work (Girard). In this thesis, the cross directly or indirectly
has contributed differently for these playwrights in their mission to give voice to the
voiceless, to disinter the dead and reveal the forgotten narratives of prisoners. I am
aware that some of the selected playwrights are not religious, but their interest in
Christian concepts and practices is a significant part in their writings for the theatre.
Their return to the Bible, which might speak of their spiritual journeys, has helped
me speak for and relate to victims of violence. In the light of the cross, some of the
selected playwrights have revealed the passion stories of new victims within the
drama narratives of human history (the passion of Leonardo da Vinci, God’s fools,
the poet-soldier and many others). Here the texts explored have pointed to the
possibility of a new rebirth of a responsible individuality capable of communicating
with the other, alive or dead. That is to say the cross has become the bridge between
self and other, persecuted and persecutor, God and people. In my search for the cross
in the selected texts, few individuals take up their cross and my challenge throughout
the thesis has been to translate their struggle as they accept or deny responsibility for
others. Thus in every chapter I have given several examples to illustrate this
dilemma: some sell salvation and deny the cross (the medieval church in Red Noses)
whereas others show their love in action (God’s fools) and die for it. In the Power of
the Dog, the soldier-poet castrates himself for his inability to live for the other
whereas Ilona turns her back on the historical records of massacre and denies her
testimony in the arms of Stalin. Also, the monk Artaud in The Triumph of Death
does not stretch out his hand far enough to save Joan of Arc in her trial.

In the light of these examples, my thesis is also about love or at least has been
motivated by love. Here, I should confirm, as I mentioned earlier in the main
introduction, the influence of Peter Shaffer on the birth of my PhD topic. My interest in self and ‘other’, love and betrayal, salvation and death stems from my MA research on the drama of Peter Shaffer. The central theme then was the search for God and the subsequent fall which follows every denial. Here Shaffer depicts life without the ‘other’ as a hell, a place of deformity, fear and imbalance. By returning to the passion stories in this thesis, the cross is not only about the rebirth of a responsible individuality but it is also about infinite love. However, it should be mentioned in light of this thesis as a whole that the use of the cross varies from literal to symbolic. In *The Ruling Class*, the new heir casts aside his crown and stands on a cross for hours, but power and order are restored by the denial of this cross (of love and responsibility for others) at the expense of victims. The god of Pan in *The Triumph of Death* holds his cross, the sign of celebration of love and inclusion, to protect a victim from the Inquisition. However, Satan in the disguise of a nun turns the last supper into a massacre and redemption into a laughing terror. Red Noses also die for their refusal to sell salvation and laughter as the Black Death becomes a metaphor for social and political upheaval. Strangely, holding to one’s pain becomes the only rebirth available for Joan of Arc and the poet-soldier. By this action they hope to communicate a message in the flames of their trial.

The selected texts play with this flame of hope - of death and salvation, cruelty and beauty, black and white - and unravel the possibility, the fate and the cost of individuality. Here we have examined how growth and rebirth can be the prisoners of fear and the festive. Unlike Bakhtin, the playwrights insist on the realisation of rebirth outside the collective no matter what the cost might be. For most playwrights, rebirth is the outcome of pain, of the crucifixion, of tragedy rather than the fruit of carnival humour and its temporary triumph over fear. Thus some texts elaborate on
the ambivalent role of laughter to effect radical change or cause catharsis. In this thesis, the temporary release of negative emotions such as anger and fear are also connected with the temporary return of peace and order to the community. This link between victim selection and ‘peacemaking’ is Barker’s tragedy without catharsis in contrast to Bakhtin’s carnival without victims. All of the playwrights explored in this research concentrate on the victim as they write their tragedies but only Barker explicitly expresses his disbelief in laughter and exclusion. There are many moments of comic relief and forms of carnival ‘disobedience’ in the selected plays; however, every time the playwrights take these forms out of their box of humour, they uncover the victim and challenge our perception of laughter. In Chapters Three and Four, this ‘relief’ is mixed with pain, tragedy and eventually becomes a decision to take up the cross of responsibility for others and encounter death.

So far, in this conclusion I have tried to put together the main jigsaw pieces (themes) that make up this thesis. However, without my decision to study the playwrights in pairs, I would not have noticed or been able to make these connections. All these little pieces have in one way or another motivated me to write this thesis. Most of the selected plays embrace the festive and thus create a theatrical spectacle that involves imagination, speaks to the senses, and penetrates the realistic for comic-grotesque inversions. Here we have seen that the community of laughter is too busy with games of beating and abuse, death and rebirth to even speculate about its own violence. I am aware of the presence of a huge literature on humour and violence which this thesis does not necessarily cover. In this research I have also been selective in terms of the plays and the themes explored for the sake of a detailed textual analysis. However, my research topic has opened many doors for me into the fields of religion and theology, drama and literature as well as humour and violence.
By looking at this post-World War II generation of British playwrights, the selected works have also helped me make unexpected connections between the medieval and the modern and thus facilitated encounters with students of medieval and Renaissance studies.

If this research project were to continue, I would look at another pairing to explore a world dehumanised and ruled by machines, human trafficking, war and environmental injustice in the works of Mark Ravenhill and David Greig. In light of this unborn chapter, I would examine Ravenhill’s *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), *Faust is Dead* (1997), and *Shoot/ Get Treasure/ Repeat* (2008) as well as Greig’s *The Architect* (1996) and *The Speculator* (1999). Ravenhill, as mentioned in Chapter Three, also belongs to a group of playwrights, which includes Kane and Barnes, known for their interest in ‘black’ humour, violence and sex. This selection of plays also intersects with the playwrights’ interest in the escalation and effect of violence on our life today (Kane and Churchill). Interestingly, these plays return to the collapse of borders and change in terms of space and identity, deportation and evacuation in contrast to Rudkin’s and Churchill’s travelling, confinement and defecation. I am keen to know more about this group of eight playwrights because they look beyond Britain or perhaps because the world has become a small village transformed by both violence and technology. The meaning of boundaries, of self and other has rapidly changed, developing for these playwrights a desperate cry to reconnect with every victim. For Girard, this is not a new discovery but it is the way of the cross by which the blinds of ‘sacrifice’ have been removed. The challenge for these playwrights and for me is to look beyond our geographical zones and outside the box of national and sexual identity. This has helped the playwrights take strange journeys to ‘Israel’/Palestine, Iraq, Syria, medieval France, and the unknown (in
Seven Jewish Children (2009), Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat, Damascus (2007), Red Noses, Far Away and Cleansed). In the initial steps of my research I was aware of the risks these playwrights take to make the impossible possible. Though my thesis did not cover all of these plays, it is an appropriate ending to return to the contexts I mentioned in the Preface, and thus emphasise through this research journey the collapse of borders and the need to engage with the suffering of other people. This encounter with the ‘other’ reveals the playwrights’ insistence on challenging our/their fears and the need to cross to the other side, the side of the oppressed so as to hear their account of the story in terms of colonisation, and economic exploitation as well as political and social oppression.

Also, in discussing the significance of this research and how it might expand, Chris Megson’s recognition of a ‘metaphysical turn’ helps me review the position of the selected playwrights in relation to the place of religion, spirituality and secularism (Megson 34). Here the desire for a new world beyond ideological and religious values or the return to and the deliberate use of Christian motifs, concepts and texts is an increasingly debated ground. Through my unfinished journey, I have tried in this conclusion to draw attention to the common ground I share with these poet-dramatists such as a shared interest in a language of performance and poetry, the poetry of deformity and exclusion, of waste and unhappiness, of otherness and individuality. Their de-carnivalisation of pain has challenged me to look closely at victims of violence and has shocked me and pushed me to speak despite my fears. In this regard, the writing process of this thesis - an act of sculpting, of shaping and reshaping or even digging for the self - is painful and can be defined by the disturbing content of the selected plays and my background. Here, in light of these challenges I came to realise the presence of an invisible button inside my head by
which I monitor what to write and what not. It is like a secret police figure or a little dictator, which dictates to me what I should say. This fear is also the fear of many victims in the plays such as Kane’s *Cleansed* and Barker’s *The Power of the Dog*. In this struggle to express myself, and having almost finished writing my thesis, I am not quite sure who has eventually won the battle. At the same time and paradoxically, by studying violence and examining the emotional status of victims in places of conflict, war and persecution, I find in writing about them a means of identification and realisation that a similar ‘dark room’ exists within me. In this sense, my research topic may be seen as an encounter with my own memory and those ‘prison’ writings, with home, the unsaid and the secret. However, the selected playwrights dare to give voice to the voiceless, to call the victims by their names and refuse to hide their stories of resistance against political oppression and social injustices. In other words, as performance texts the plays highlight the gaps and the silences in the making of history when it is rewritten by those outside power: in this context the playwrights. By revealing the victims, they challenge and question our spectatorship and participation as the borders between here and there, one country and another, self and other suddenly disappear. Thus the playwrights speak to every one of us no matter where we are and who we are because violence is not far away.

Having revealed parts of this personal history, it is important to say that in the dark room of their theatre - the theatre of cruelty and catastrophe, Barker, Kane and Rudkin have succeeded in releasing this information from me. It is here, inside me, where I locate the function and the significant role of their work. I recall at this point describing my first experience of Barker’s plays as a state of nausea. Now having looked at some aspects of his work, I can confirm that the earlier personal links I made are a form of vomit. In other words, here I find myself between two difficult
positions, my resistance to making these personal connections and the playwrights’ confrontational attitude to uncovering the victim/iser within me. Perhaps it is useful at this point to draw attention to an analogy between confession and my ‘vomiting’. In the darkness of the confessional, the penitent emerges into the light of absolution reborn and healed. Similarly but strangely, the individual audience in the dark box emerges into Barker’s, Kane’s and Rudkin’s tragedy where pain is viewed as the only cross, the only reality/rebirth towards a responsible individuality. In their own ways, these three dramatists are the new ‘priests’ that abstain from absolving the spectator or healing the broken bits for perhaps it is in weakness that the deformed mothers (Katrin and Joan of Arc), the castrated poet, and God’s fools are strong. However, the purpose of their work as explained in this thesis is not to educate and change the audience nor to entertain and preach. The hope for Barker, Kane and Rudkin may be to develop a personal relationship with the audience member. In the dark box of their theatres, the individual should be ready for a unique experience defined by entrapment, exclusion, violence, fear and dark humour.

In contrast, I view Barnes and Shaffer as the pacifist playwrights in this thesis who hope to take carnival humour to a different level of political activism in *The Ruling Class*, *Red Noses*, *Shriving* and perhaps *Lettice and Lovage*. Whereas the theatre is not a space for entertainers, preachers or politicians according to Barker, Kane and Rudkin, the work of both Barnes and Shaffer entertains, and aims to give a message and change the audience. We have seen that this is a theatre of parables that involves so much preparation and cooking before it is revealed. However, the theatre of Howard Barker, and perhaps Kane and Rudkin, is a theatre of anti-parable that celebrates risk and experiments to probe the depths of the personal. Some critics divide the selected playwrights into labelled groups; others look beyond labels to
make new pairings and discover new connections such as my thesis. The selected plays may also be defined by an interest in rape, incest, violence, sex and death; however, the degree to which the spectator is exposed to this material differs from one playwright to another. There are always new connections to make in relation to these playwrights and different ways of looking at their work in terms of violence, laughter, language or/and religion. My research topic has moved me towards looking at the intersections of these areas in the selected works of the six playwrights. This arrangement and the relationship explored in this thesis are completely new to literary studies. There is no way one could avoid the gaze of the victims in the selected texts, but critics have looked at this link with oppression from different angles. Through this journey into a world of parades and banquets, I hope to have revealed the victim as the entrance to our inner fears, the notebook on which gods of war write their dark humour.
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