

Full Length Research Paper

Self-Fashioning in Howard Barker's Scenes from an Execution: Artistic Imagination vs. Political Authority

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Abstract

English playwrights of the post-1968 stage, in accord with the socio-political views of Elizabethan dramatists, found themselves in a struggle against authoritarian power to construct their selves as individuals having voice and place in their society, and achieving fame and fortune. However, they are not alone in this process of identity-making since there exist simultaneously some forces of power which mould them from the affairs, whether social or political, from outside. One of these modern playwrights whose stage is a battle against such forces of power attempting to exercise on the characters and hail them ideologically is the controversial Howard Barker. In his drama *Scenes from an Execution* (1984), Barker portrays a sixteenth century female artist's self-fashioning by resisting the political authority of the Venetian State and not to accept its hegemonic power by representing artistically the underlying truth of the carnage of Ottoman Fleet which in the view of the Venetian authorities regarded as a great triumph. Thus, the drama is a designated site about two irreconcilable discourses – the political authority of the State and the resistance mounted by an artist's imagination.

Keywords: Howard Barker; *Scenes from an Execution*; Self-Fashioning; Power; Resistance

Introduction

The unknown territory of death, the individual against collective, seduction, eroticism, and violence are some of the characteristics of Howard Barker's art of theatre in post-1968 English stage. Rabey (2009) has explained that Barker's stage, which is widely known as "the Theatre of Catastrophe," embodies the essence of forcing its audience to wrestle with the drama, and the indeterminacy of meaning attached to it, ultimately, leads to the inference that there is no easiness in understanding of art (p. 6). This anti-Aristotelian theatre introduces characters who, essentially anti-heroic and catharsis-opposers, as Rabey (2006) puts it, become "resistant to social pressures and necessities" (p. 13). As indicated by Gritzner (2006), Howard Barker's 'art of theatre' does meet with opposition to the culture of the late-capitalist society; in concord with Adorno, Barker has taken the contemporary culture into account of being authoritarian containing "false humanistic ideals." (p. 85). She, then, adds that Barker's Adornian stage "places emphasis on the notion of aesthetic autonomy and its interrelated concept of subjective freedom." (p. 85).

Barker's radio drama *Scenes from an Execution* (1984) depicts the tensions and struggles of a female artist, Galactia, against the absolute authority of the Venetian State—especially when the Doge of Venice, Urgentino, formally commissioned her to draw a large canvas of a naval battle, the Battle of Lepanto, in the Gulf of Corinth between the Catholics—the Holy League—and the Ottoman fleet in 1571 which had resulted in the devastating defeat of the Turks. In reality, the importance of the Battle lies in the fact that the Ottomans, after a century of ruling the Black and the Mediterranean Sea, and being conquerors of each previously erupted naval battle in the Eastern Europe, finally fell back with huge loss of 20000 thousand dead and wounded, alongside 12000 Christians freed from the Turk's captivity. As it seems apparent for Barker and for the female artist of the play as well, the Battle of Lepanto, as Crowley (2008) contends, is widely regarded as an upsurge of great violence and a brutal massacre of the retreating Turks and of the prisoners as well (p.276). What seems to be significant while reading the play is that Barker depicts two different subjective perspectives of an unchanging historical event. On the one hand, there is the Venetian

perspective on the Battle, expressing itself in the request of the canvas, which in Urgentino's words, "Great art will always celebrate! Celebrate! Celebrate!" (Barker, 1990, p. 261). On the other hand, there is the view of the defiant Galactia, believing that the primary responsibility of an artist is to "tell the truth" in any circumstances (Barker, 1990, p. 270).

On this account, a closer look at these two uncompromising and distinctive attitudes towards a specific event of history and the intensified struggle whereof the artist as truth-teller has to take up against the political authority of Venice which asks its citizens their reception of its legitimacy and power, in the light of Greenblatt's theory of "self-fashioning," will pursue the study's objectives.

Renaissance Self-Fashioning and Barkerian 'Art of Theatre'

In his influential book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) the celebrating literary theorist Stephen Greenblatt has spoken of a process of identity-making as self-fashioning in the sixteenth century Elizabethan England. Greenblatt contends that in the renaissance England "if we say that there is a new stress on the executive power of will, we might say that there is the most sustained and relentless assault upon the will." (p. 1). The theory of self-fashioning in the English Renaissance drama, faithfully reflected in the plays of Shakespeare, is of a characteristic possessed in the dramas of Barker (Rabey, 2006, p. 19). As a Shakespearean dramatist, Barker portrays the characters, regarded as "aliens" in the view of authorities, in search for their identities they have to encounter the power authorities of whom the lack of imagination is apparent, as in Urgentino, and thus such encounter for Greenblatt is a necessary condition for identity-forging (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9). In other words, Galactia has to resist the political authorities viewing art as a means of "celebration" and as a support for their ideological supposition in order to have voice and form an identity for herself.

In view of that, self-fashioning here means a contradictory however necessary intercorrelation between an individual and an agent of power which Barkerian characters, especially the artist ones such as Galactia and the cartoonist Bela of *No End of Blame* (1981) have to exercise a creative imagination not only to fashion their selves up to a point, but also to call off any possible call for reconciliation with those of power and authority. A closer look at Greenblatt's observation might serve the point that,

self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves. (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 3)

Galactia, by exposing the horrific violence of the naval battle caused by the Catholics and by portraying a suppliant Ottoman soldier prostrating before Admiral's feet and with arms stretched begging for the halt of bloodshed and mercy, serves a double purpose: her resistance to the prevailing ideology of the Venetian State and her self-fashioning as an autonomously liberated artist (this will further be explained in the subsequent part).

It can be concluded that the affinities between the two periods of time in the historical development of English theater, i.e. the stage in the reign of Elizabeth I and the contemporary stage, are particularly notable. An important case in point is indicating that both periods have witnessed two historically marked turning points. The former was a witness to the successive defeat of Spanish Armada in 1588, and as Airs (2004) puts it, the "unrestrained self-confidence that speaks of the freedom of a nation that had defeated the Spanish Armada" (p. 481) has put a considerable impact upon the theatrical activities of such playwrights as Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and so forth to a certain extent that a number of compelling theatrical productions, which were celebrative of nation and monarch, yet at the same time were personally concerted attempts which aimed for fashioning the selves, especially in an era of Inquisition and intense theatrical censorship. And the latter that has experienced the student uprising in May 1968 and the emerging of police state in some European megacities subsequently, politically engaged the post-1968 generation of dramatists in a fight for their selves alongside a refusal to submit the neo-conservative ideology of the British governments of the 70s and 80s, particularly the one ran by Margaret Thatcher.

The Politics of Artistic Resistance in *Scenes from an Execution*

Scenes from an Execution, a drama which composed of twenty separate scenes without following particular linearity, is set in the late sixteenth century in Venice Republic. The graphic imagery in the play, a typicality of Barker, put great stress on all aspects of physicality and concreteness. In the first scene, after Galactia's argument with her lover Carpeta (whether he would desert his wife for her sake or not) when Prodo, a veteran, pays her a visit, the references to concrete vocabulary in the play such as hand, head, blood, bowel, and guts are notable. Simply, the reason is that Barker, as a Foucauldian true follower, takes on the notion of "docile body" – explicated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) – that body becomes the machinery of power: "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved (Foucault, 1975, p. 136). The docility of body, this physical aspect, manifests itself in play, in the relationships among the characters, and in Galactia's painting as well.

The personality of Galactia, (as her name resembles, "galaxy," referring to her great imagination), is a cantankerous, lusty, and messy female artist whose opinion about art, as "I do not trust beauty, it is an invention and a lie" (Barker, 1990, p. 258), may resonate

two important points. Firstly, the world of the play is of masculinity and male authority, and this provokes violence and power which clearly reflected in Galactia's painting of the Battle. Secondly, it echoes Barker's view of art which is political, and is not entirely an aesthetic of beauty or pleasurable. Consequently, she accepts the Doge of Venice's commissioning to paint a large canvas of that Battle as a public celebration, thus far with the intention of expressing her own political position and her resistance against the authoritarian politics of the Venetian State. In this respect, the most effective weapon is to spark her creative imagination in manipulating the fundamental message of the execution. Relatively, as Barker (1997) writes in *Arguments for a Theatre*: "Unconsciously, I was resisting the reconciliation that the home enforces, for behind all domestic drama lies the spectre of reconciliation. Once the walls were taken down and the home abolished, imagination was liberated and speculation became possible." (p. 33).

In the second scene, we see Galactia and Urgentino arguing about the portrayal of Urgentino's brother, the Admiral of the Catholic Fleet, in the painting. Galactia drew the Admiral in the corner of the canvas, not in the center. Although the Doge contends that his brother in the canvas is big enough, he is not satisfied for his place in the canvas: "only an artist with a sense of humour would place the Admiral of the Fleet in such an obscure position!" For all his size, he does not dominate the drawing." (Barker, 1990, p. 261). By doing so, she decentralizes the conquerors by marginalizing their commander (the Admiral), and on the other hand centralizing the others (the Turks), the Doge brings forth his aggressive response that "this is a State commission, an investment, an investment by us, the Republic of Venice, in you, Galactia. Empire and artist. Greatness beckons, and greatness imposes disciplines" (Barker, 1990, p. 260), and a while ago he stated that "I pride myself on my good taste, and my good taste extends to artists too." (Barker, 1990, p. 260). Taken as a whole, the distinctive nature of Doge is of a humanist prince who takes on the artists and expresses himself the patron of arts since he does have a "good taste." He is the art-loving and pleasant face of the authoritarianism that by keeping Venetian artists under close surveillance, e.g. when he tells Galactia that all artists of the city do hate each other (Barker, 1990, 260), he attempts to undermine the artists and to eliminate any possible opportunity of dissidence: the nature of art is political; it never stops criticizing, and it is uncompromising enough for any power discourse (Eagleton, 1996, p. 170). The Doge's plan of containment of the artists, very much like the dictator knight of *The Castle Stucley* (1985), as Lamb (2005) observes, "concerned with appearances and power" (p. 112); hence, submission to his will and power is of vital necessity for persistence of his ruling.

However, along the path of her resistance, Galactia is completely alone; she has to act without assistance. What Barker tries to achieve here, especially by depicting a lonely discontent female artist, is that there is no unity and concerted play among the Venetian artists. Moreover, the

same issue is applied to Barker's own contemporary counterparts. As the Doge once mentioned and as Sordo, a Venetian painter, stated emphatically "They call us a school of painting but we never meet, except at funerals. Funny school!" (Barker, 1990, p. 282); this lack of concordance and unity among the artists not only wastes their efforts, but also constitutes an impediment to the political and aesthetical act of resistance of an individual painter. As Hannah Arendt (1970) asserts that "to act in concert" (p. 82), the forms of resistance would be effective, but there is no such kind of act among the artists in the drama. On the other hand, the forms of power in play, political power of the Doge and the ideologically religious power of Cardinal Ostensibile, do act collectively. Whether this power is defined as domination sought by political authorities or as an act of resistance exercised by the dissidents, it "springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow. Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past..." (Arendt, 1970, p. 52).

The power asks the artist the denial of the truth which is an assertion of its authority; it seeks to expose rather a lie taken from an event of history. And yet the artist, from Barker's perspective, is a truth-teller which echoes Edward Said's (1994) definition of an intellectual whose characterization is of a person in "exile" and in margin "that tries to speak the truth to power" (p. xvi). Patterson (2003) too mentions that Galactia is an example of 'catastrophe' indicating an "uncompromising" situation (p. 93). That is why in the eighth scene, as Galactia proceeds her painting, she drowns in her work, and interestingly enough, she finds herself surrounded by the dead soldiers and sailors talking to her, and she admits that "the Admiral is a hypocrite" (Barker, 1990, p. 278). She gains more power and confidence in what she has started. Her encountering with Admiral Suffici is an instance of the case. When Admiral realizes that his hands are not painted in a favorable manner, and the way that the Ottoman soldiers becoming victims of large-scale violence, he involves himself in argument with Galactia to persuade her. The kind of task which other characters before himself, like Urgentino and, to some extent, Carpeta and Galactia's daughter Supporta have tried to do so. Yet Galactia's response remains the same:

GALACTIA (*refusing*): Sometimes you have to admit they get things right, the bureaucrats; for all their corrupt deliberations, they pick up an artist who might just tell the truth. And then God helps us, it's blood and mayhem down the cold museums.

SUFFICI: My eyelid.

GALACTIA: I don't know whether Venice is a good republic or a bad one, I am not political –

SUFFICI: Me neither, what about my –

GALACTIA: The moment you go in for politics, you cavil, you split up the truth – (Barker, 1990, 270-71)

It seems that Galactia's statements are referring to the corrupt State and its politicians who just covered up the unvarnished truth, and her responsibility towards her own policy of truth-telling, yet Suffici is only obsessed with his own aspects of representation in the painting.

The other agent of power in the play who visits Galactia in her studio is the art critic Gina Rivera – the person ordered by the Doge to conduct surveillance over Galactia's artistic production: "A critic should watch a painter. How many critics witness the moment of production? None!" (Barker, 1990, p. 271). She tries to preserve her established position as the State's critic and to occupy a central place among the Statesmen (Rabey, 2009, p. 97). Rivera had made an affirmative response to the State for its ideology, as Althusser (1971) puts it, "hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects..." (p. 162). The role of Rivera is very akin to the Polidori's in Howard Brenton's *Bloody Poetry* (1984) who, as a biographer and a physician, accompanies Lord Byron and Shelley in exile, and documents his own sardonic comments on the two poets. When talking with the Doge about Galactia, Rivera confesses that "the critic is afraid of the artist and envies her power" (Barker, 1990, p. 272). To conclude, she is the friend of the State, and is regarded as a strategy of power to observe and contain the political discourse of resistance in Galactia's that "moment of production."

The confrontation of the artist and the critic is sufficiently interesting in the scene eight. The dialogue between them is, to some extent, the prevailing trend in Barker's own society of the 80s. Margaret Thatcher constantly unleashed her seething rage upon those who questioned and attacked her domestic or international policies; in effect, according to Kritzer (2008), a large number of protesters, predominantly British writers and dramatists, did not maintain silence and instead: "Their attacks targeted specific policies, directions, and effects of the Thatcher government" (p. 6). As Pattie (2006) points out, Thatcher was a fan of some genres of literature and art that should be part of "the Creative Industries" (p. 389), that is to say, there would be no chance for the funding and devoting attention to critical genres as political stage of a dramatist as Barker. As a whole, it would seem that Thatcherite policy of arts was of a populist favoring in a sense that serious literature (such as dramatic art) were viewed from the perspective of being able to prove profitable in the free market. Accordingly, the issue is clearly echoed in the conversation between Galactia and Rivera:

RIVERA: There is a climate very favourable to painting here. To poetry, to sculpture. It is a climate that permitted the appointment of a controversial painter like yourself to represent the greatest triumph of Venetian history —

GALACTIA: Represent what?

RIVERA: The greatest triumph of Venetian —

GALACTIA: I think you've come to the wrong studio. On my contract it says – I can't find the contract at the moment but it says – I'm sure it

says – 'The Battle of Lepanto.' Nothing about triumphs of – triumphs of what? (Barker, 1990, p. 277-78)

Rivera's notion of art, which is mainly visual arts, is intended to celebrate "the greatest triumph of Venetian history." Thus, the main purpose of art from her view is to be a celebrative discourse of politics; and yet Galactia's faithful version of history representing, obviously far from the one realized by the State, is "to devastate the received wisdom of the collective" (Barker, 1997, 93). In her approach for doing such, as stated by Potolsky (2006), she is generally inclined towards implementing Platonic reflection theory of *mimeses* which is the very essence of modern realistic representation becomes more functional with realistic techniques and styles (p. 98). As Galactia in her talk with Suffici lays stress on the nature of her art: "And when I show meat sliced, it is sliced, it is not a pretext for elegance. Meat sliced" (Barker, 1990, p. 271). And when Rivera interprets the compass in Galactia's painting of the Battle to the Doge, she defines her as "a realist" (Barker, 1990, p. 272). Because her prime objective is to challenge the State by depicting the real nature of war and violence on people, either domestic or foreign, and because she cannot ignore the oppressed voices of the canvas informing her about their agony and pain, she tells Rivera that "this figure of man dying of wounds sustained during the greatest triumph of Venetian –" (Barker, 1990, p. 278). To sum up, Rivera's ideological argumentation with Galactia with the purpose of 'hailing' her towards the acceptance of the State's ideological objective in the representation of the Battle.

On the one hand, Galactia's confrontation with history (the Battle), her manipulation of the Doge's commission of how the essential parts of the canvas should be painted, embraces her the role of an imaginative historicist who, as McGann (1983) puts it, views "the past seen in and through the present; and the historical task is to attempt a reconstruction of the past; including, perhaps the present of that past" (p. 105). On the other hand, White (1975) quotes from Lévi-Strauss that historical event are also being written for particular individuals (p. 51). For Urgentino and other Venetian authorities, like Cardinal Ostensibile, the event of past, which is here the Battle of Lepanto, would certainly reinforce the continuity of their hegemonic sovereignty. And the best means of attaining such goal would be achievable by visual arts. What Barker sounds much interested in is not just generating an accurate representation of a past event, as Megson (2006) observes, "but to subject its constitutive discourses, and their deleterious effects on the individuals, to a voracious imaginative scrutiny" (p. 495). As Galactia reiterates the change she has made in the painting to Dementia, her second daughter, supports the very idea:

At first I thought, paint him dead. With arms flung up and backwards, falling headlong from the Muslim deck, and then I thought, what a waste of a head, because who will look at a head which is upside down?... So instead I did a suppliance. I

did a figure begging for his life. And I put him at the feet of the great Admiral, with his palms extended, and I thought I would put into his expression the certain knowledge he would be murdered on the deck. So with one figure I transformed the enemy from beast to victim, and made victory unclear. And I suspect, even as I draw it, they will hate this...! (Barker, 1990, p. 266)

After the failed interpellation of the State, in the tenth scene, the Doge and Cardinal Ostensibile – ‘the Sectary of State for Public Education’ – enter into negotiation with Carpeta to set him as a rival in the execution of the Battle. Carpeta is a religious painter rather than a reactionary one as Galactia. He is highly ambitious and greedy of position and honor. His reputation is largely for a painting of his named ‘Christ Among the Flocks.’ In this scene, Cardinal and Urgentino plan to commission Carpeta to draw their ideologically favorable execution of the Battle – occurring at the same time in the course of Galactia’s production. Here, Carpeta’s dialogues were interrupted by Urgentino and Ostensibile. Whenever he tries to express his opinion or to simply reply a question, his speech is interrupted, and remained unfinished. And when he tries to voice his opinion once at the moment of Urgentino’s talk, he is blamed by the Doge: “Don’t interrupt–” (Barker, 1990, p. 283). Broadly speaking, Carpeta does not have a voice and a place among the authorities of Venice; nevertheless, for the sake of the city and regarding the resistance of Galactia, he is promoted by the Doge as a Venetian master (Barker, 1990, p. 285). In brief, he is another exploitation of power to confront Galactia. While looking at Carpeta he makes clearly known that “art is opinion, and opinion is the source of all authority” (Barker, 1990, p. 282), and by doing so he is echoing an assertion of the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci (1971) about hegemony: “...it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well” (p. 57).

During the course of their conversation and just before Urgentino’s ultimate decision that Galactia needs to be lock away, he asks Carpeta about the morality and sanity of Galactia which Carpeta’s opportunist reply assures the authority’s conviction: “Mad? Is she mad? She – yes, she may be a little mad” (Barker, 1990, p. 285). In accordance with what Foucault (1988) has written in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), one preferred method of power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the deceleration of individuals as insane, whether for humanitarian, healthy, political, or any other reasons, in order to imprison them, to keep them in such places as madhouses or in extreme cases in prisons or dungeons; it was a system of removal of those from their society; even though, sometimes, they were quite sane (pp. 59-60). The Doge of Venice, having failed in all his previous attempts, cannot hail Galactia to celebrate “the triumph of Venetian history”; therefore, he arrives at his final decision: “I think prison is – a little prison, not too much – is what this desperate woman wants...” (Barker, 1990, p. 285).

Notwithstanding, Galactia anticipated her punishment for telling the truth and be resistant to the dominant ideology of the State, as she is taking to her daughter Supporta: “and it will tear their minds apart and explode the wind in their cavities, and I shall be punished for screaming truth where truth is not allowed” (Barker, 1990, p. 288). Here Barker, actually, draws a parallel between the encounter of Venetian State with artists and Margaret Thatcher’s the same confrontation with this specific group. The widespread disillusionment among many writers, especially playwrights, in the 1980s was caused by the nature of Thatcherite policies towards arts in general (Patterson, 2003, p. 83). Barker’s artist continues a lonely fight with an authoritarian regime, and despite the fact that her daughter’s name is Supporta, one who supports, ironically there seems no active and solid support from her. Therewith, Galactia puts the blame on her daughter’s inclination to paint ordinary human affairs and trivial things: “You are a drapery painter, Supporta, you could not understand where I was headed... I don’t care for your method anyway” (Barker, 1990, 287).

Subsequently, Galactia eventually has to face with the Doge, Cardinal, and a prosecutor named Pastaccio in the fourteenth scene, that are all determined to lay a charge of treason to the Republic against her. In this prosecution scene of the play, the verbal violence of the Doge and Cardinal is escalating. Throughout the play, he tries hard to reason with her to agree on a compromise, yet Galactia’s substantial resistance, regardless of violent behavior of the Doge is still uncrushable.

GALACTIA: I don’t see what that —

URGENTINO: Shut up. (*Pause*) This is my place. This is my cushion. You have your empire, I have mine. (Barker, 1990, p. 290)

He, then, warns her how much the Republic is offended by her hideous act of treason (Barker, 1990, p. 291). During her prosecution, Galactia’s voice is taken from her, and she is not able to defend herself, “Why can’t I make a statement?” (Barker, 1990, p. 21). The more the three authorities assail her with harsh words, the more she keeps repeating her statement that arguing with them is a futile act, simply because they will not listen. In spite of being severely attacked from triple sides, she is still capable of replying sternly and sarcastically:

GALACTIA: It is a painting of a battle at sea.

OSTENSIBILE: It is a slaughter at sea.

GALACTIA: A battle is a slaughter.

OSTENSIBILE: No, it is the furtherance of political ends by violent means.

GALACTIA: I showed the violence. (Barker, 1990, 292)

As the aforesaid naval battle, that event of past is fixed and unchangeable, but the idea of it is subjective and unstable. This truth-telling audacity of Galactia casts her in role of a fearless intellectual who retains loyalty to her responsibility even facing with authorities of power (Said,

1994, p. 8). And a few lines later, by this sharp reply, she reasonably announces her alternative perspective of the Battle: "I painted death because all I saw was death" (Barker, 1990, p. 292).

As the final point, by the order of the Doge she is sent to prison. A prison where is rather more a dungeon. It is very dark, almost with no beam of light penetrating. The entire scene is dark, and besides Galactia there is another prisoner in this scene too. This new character in the drama prisoner is called The Man in the Next Cell – without any human name to be known by. As she steps in her dark solitary confinement, she asks about candlelight, a pen for drawing, comparing her present dark situation to her black color in her studio, simultaneously, the voice of the male prisoner of the next cell interrupts her protesting. As it turns out, he is an intellectual who has been in prison for seven years. Obviously, he is a foe of Venice, and what Barker tries to illustrate is that in an authoritarian regime, there is no freedom of expression and the consequence of being a political dissident in such regime is to be put in jail:

MAN IN THE NEXT CELL: Who says I'm not an intellectual? Who says I'm not?

GALACTIA: Look my squalor, look at my filth, this is what happens to the one who loves the truth, I fully expected this... (Barker, 1990, p. 295)

Having served a month in prison, Galactia is finally released by the order of the Doge for the reason that Carpeta's execution of the Battle, from the perspective of the Doge, is not as great as Galactia's. The Doge, by conversing with Rivera, illustrates the point:

URGENTINO: He has no imagination of his own, what do you expect me to do?

RIVERA: He is very sound painter of religious subjects, he is not an epic painter — (Barker, 1990, p. 298)

And the moment Carpeta visits Galactia in her prison cell to accompany her out of that dark place, the interesting point which Galactia makes is that prison is the true place of truth-tellers:

"What is this? All the truth tellers live here" (Barker, 1990, p. 300), or **"Expose the truth and back I'll come!"** (Barker, 1990, p. 301).

In the final scene of the play, Galactia in an art gallery, facing with the Doge and observing other people's critical opinions about her canvas, finally reaches agreement with the Doge by accepting his dinner invitation. One convincing reason is that she stood alone in her fight for truth and was a faithful and realist painter of non-ideological history. And the other is that the authoritative power of the State has exercised itself upon her and contained her artistic production in favor of itself. This is a new chapter for Venetian authorities because they can at last call upon all the city's artists to embrace their

ideological thinking, whether it is by promoting them as the case of Carpeta, or by humiliating or torturing Galactia in a dark prison cell. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that Galactia does not compromise with power; what she, after a long wait, achieves outstandingly is that her own interpretative execution of the Battle remains untouched by the ideological infiltration of the Venetian State; in consequence, it can be said that Galactia resists all varieties of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Howard Barker has explored a controversial and central issue of his day in his radio drama *Scenes from an Execution* (1985): art versus politics. The central character of the play, Galactia, as a daring painter, from the very beginning of the play, resists the absolutist authority of the Venetian State from the moment she is subject to Urgentino's commission to draw a canvas based upon the historic Battle of Lepanto took place in 1571. The Doge, in pursuit of the reflection of the city's ideological thinking in the canvas representing itself as the celebration of Venetian impressive victory over the naval fleet of Ottoman Empire, when faced with Galactia's unexpected resistance to that ideology, makes use of different strategies to interpellate the female artist and at the same time to contain her in order to suppress any anticipated resistance of the civic. The Doge personally visits the artist in her studio and attempts to attract her attention to the ideology of his State. When his effort is doomed to failure, he orders the art critic Gina Rivera to engage in, and before her, Suffici and Carpeta exerted such an effort to accomplish the same objective. Finally, the Doge and the other leading authority of Venice Cardinal Ostensibile do commission Galactia's lover Carpeta to carry through the execution of Lepanto for public exhibition. They finally decide to imprison Galactia under the pretext that she is an explicit threat to the political unity of Venice. After a month of imprisonment, Galactia is released by the Doge's order and her painted canvas, which is greater than Carpeta's, displayed publicly, and the painter somehow at the end of the play contained by the Venetian State.

Scenes from an Execution is a drama reflecting the theory of Greenblatt's self-fashioning of an artist who undertakes an effort to establish her identity both as a female artist and as an individual, is keenly expectant to resist the dominant ideology of Venice. In spite of that, there are some forces of power and author which are beyond the reach of her – creating an indelible impression upon her individuality. Such is the way self-fashioning works. It is a theory saying that there has to be a confrontation between an agent of authoritative power and an outsider or the other, which in the play is the reactionary painter Galactia whose justification of answering affirmatively to Urgentino's invitation at the end is just an after-effect of her uncompromised execution echoing that the essence of all imaginative representation is politically resistant and uncompromising to any ideological assumptions of authoritarian states. Thus, it reverberates the core of Barker's political 'art of theatre.'

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