

The Evolving Theatrical Styles Of Howard Brenton's Socially-Committed Theatre from 1960s to 1980s

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolving theatrical styles of Howard Brenton by selecting representative plays respectively in the fringe period of 1960s, the transitional period in the 1970s, the climax period in 1980, and a temporal retreat to the Fringe in the era of Theater's government. Through tracing the evolving characterization, dramatic themes, dramatic scenery and dramatic structures, this paper attempts to give a sketch view of the main characteristics of Howard Brenton's plays in light of their indebtedness and transcendence of the influences both in and outside the Red theatre, such as the naturalism of the first dramatic wave and Brecht's epic theatre.

Keywords: Howard Brenton, Theatrical Styles, Characterization, Dramatic Themes, Dramatic Structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most celebrated and representative playwrights, Howard Brenton established his status from the start of the Second Dramatic Wave in the 1960s and managed to remain in audience's sight all the way from 1960s to present. From the Fringe to the main stream, from a left-wing red theatre dramatist to a humanist with a more sophisticated and complex cultural perspective, Brenton is surely the most important and indispensable dramatist one can never ignore in the post-war British drama history. Despite the changing political environments and varying public tastes, Brenton's plays succeeded in tailoring themselves in terms of dramatic devices and themes on the one hand and exhibited recurrent character archetypes and eternal socially-committed perspective on the other hand. This paper examines the evolving theatrical styles of Howard Brenton by selecting representative plays respectively in the fringe period of 1960s, the transitional period in the 1970s, the climax period in 1980, and a temporal retreat to the Fringe in the era of Theater's government. Through tracing the evolving characterization, dramatic themes, dramatic scenery and dramatic structures, this paper attempts to give a sketch view of the main characteristics of Howard Brenton's plays in light of their indebtedness and transcendence of the influences both in and outside the Red theatre, such as the naturalism of the first dramatic wave and Brecht's epic theatre.

II. THE EVOLVING THEATRICAL STYLES

A. *Christie in Love*: The Fringe Period:

As a result of the abortion of the drama censorship in the Britain in 1968, clusters of fringe theatres flourished, expressing the alternative political point of views as against that of the official culture. Dramatists affiliated with such small theatres often sought to express their disillusionment and despair about the collapse of socialist faith after the Paris Riot cracked down in 1968. "This desperation translates readily into the angry and occasionally vicious satire that informs most of the plays of this stage of his career." [1] Once a Fringe Theatre dramatist, Brenton's plays in the 1960s manifested an agit-prop style of confident and energetic satire of social injustice in the form of unpredictable, confrontational "aggro" in the personal and private domain.

In Brenton's early works, there were often images of individuals who stand in sharp contrast against the public masses. He or she often challenges the public institution or morality taboo singlehandedly regardless of just or unjust purposes and legal or illegal method. One of the examples is the notorious criminal Christie in *Christie in Love* (1969) who killed his lovers and buried their remains in his garden. Instead of the horrifying stereotype in the audience's mind, Christie is presented with a curious honesty and integrity that draw the audience's sympathy toward him. It is the public indifference represented by the police in the play which seemed intolerant. To some extent, the obsessive criminal with his insane way of love symbolically sought to "drive a straight line in a society that has become very distorted". [2] In fact, the image of such an obsessive hero has become the typical Brenton characterization in some of his later plays such as Wesley in *Wesley* (1970) and Scott in *Scott of the Antarctic* (1971), Jed in *Magnificence* (1973) who uses a gelignite to blow up the representatives of authoritarian violence, and Shelly in *Bloody Poetry* (Foco Novo 1984) who defies social morality but also pays a heavy prize for his liberal way of life. Indeed, the image of "perverse saints" with singleness of purposes is one of the most remarkable characteristics in Brenton's plays. The Brenton character surpasses John Osborne's Jimmy Potter in that he actually takes actions against the corrupt society rather than merely feeling anger and boredom like Jimmy Porter.

In these early Fringe plays, Brenton's dramatic theme often advocated a revolt against the social injustice in a violent and bloody way. In fact, aggro elements could be seen so often in his plays that one of his interviews was even entitled as "Petrol Bomb through the Proscenium Arch". Already in *Christie in Love*, the brutal elements have emerged while the policemen dig out of the victims' remains in the criminal's garden. What is more, in *Magnificence* (1973), the protagonist even adopted the petrol bomb as the right way to destroy the political system. Such bloody, brutal and cruel images kept appearing in works such *Fruit* (1971), *Revenge* (1969) and even the throat-cutting scene in *Romans in Britain* (1980) is a reflection of such violent legacy. This violent dramatic inspiration originated from the series of terrorists' attack happened during 1971 and 1973 by The Angry Brigade. "Brenton's intension is clearly to enable spectators to go home and make their own." [3] petrol bombs and in this sense the purpose of agit-prop play is self-evident. In fact, the emphasis of the action rather than thinking was one of the defining characteristics of Brenton's fringe theatre. Brenton once said, "I think the theatre is a bear-pit. It is not the place for reasoned discussions. It is the place for really savage insights..... Theatre does teach something about the way people act in public." [4] In fact, the aim is to evoke emotional affirmation for positive models for social change. Years later, however, this radical dramatic theme of agit-prop theatre failed to change the power structure, which led Brenton to an outright rejection of agit-prop and a turn toward the less radical cultural perspective like in *Greenland* (1988).

Under the influence of Brecht's epic theatre and the French situationist theory prevalent during 1969 and 1973, Brenton's dramatic stage presentation in the Fringe period exhibited highly minimalism with bare stages with alienating effects which avoided any possibility of simulacra of the public deception. Compared with conventional theatre's naturalism like the "cup-and-saucer" drama as well as the "kitchen drama" by Arnold Wesker in the first dramatic wave, Brenton's adopted the alienating effect to distance the audience with the normality of common life and enlightened them with a new perspective. In *Christie in Love*, for example, Christie's dwelling is presented as a chicken pen, made of wire and full of tattered and torn newspaper, providing an expressionistic image of filthy and decay. This alienating image served rather to remind spectators of the filthy social environment. Brenton is very careful that the scenery is not representational.

Indeed, the Fringe theatre period of Brenton's plays featured strong emotional agit-prop provocation in the form of highly symbolical scenery and aggro elements. Characterization like perverse saints singlehandedly fighting against public symbols continued to shadow many of Brenton's later works. In a sense, the dramatic theme and way of representation is more or less monotonous. Their single aim is to "disrupt the spectacle, in particular, the challenge is to what are perceived as the 'easy answer' of humanism" [1] which provided by conventional theater.

B. Magnificence: The Transitional Period from the Fringe to the Established Theater

From early nineteen seventies, Brenton saw the doom of the Fringe Theater because the audience became "theatrically literate and the discussions afterwards stopped being about the plays' content and began to be about their style." [1]. "Audiences do not generally expect to have to accept a vicious, deformed monster as their hero, instead, they become more sophisticated." [1] In other words, the audience turned very self-regarding and sought to disrupt the very "spectacle" of their artistic fringe theatre. In addition, fringe writers like David Hare and David Edgar had come to realize that 'the values of presentation' in conventional theatre were "actually enabling writer to say richer and more complex things than

they would.....Dealing with broader social questions than the single-issue Agitprop required more sophisticated techniques and equipment.”[3] Brenton himself also felt that the alienating effect of the epic theatre should be supplemented with the realism of the conventional theatre and meantime the Agit-prop enthusiasm was added to express character’s sensations.

As for the characterization in *Magnificence*, there are two aspects to be noticed. Firstly, The perverse hero image is no longer limited within his own private domain fighting against the public singlehandedly rather is defined and negotiated within the larger group he is in. In earlier works, the social concern is represented through a private humanity in contrast against an authority figure whose bathetic insight pierce the flat face of the public. But here in *Magnificence*, the private and public political aspects within an individual’s mentality cannot be separated any more. Besides the “perverse saint” image which dominated the Fringe period plays, people of all walks in the early nineteen seventies Britain were included in the play, therefore the cast is of a larger size than that of the fringe. There are in *Magnificence* the protagonist Jed and his anarchist group of young people, the old beggar, the new image of a Tory official, and also two security squad personnel. Brenton once commented on the failure of the Fringe, “the truth is that there is only one society—that you can’t escape the world you live in.”[4] What is more, the personality is no longer a flat one rather the double sides of a personality could be detected within every character in the play. For example, though the security constables repressed the young people with violent means but through their talk, audience could also detect their feeling of guilty and doubts for the government housing policy. Secondly, particular notice should be given to the introduction of an outside watcher style character that though belongs to the group but tries to elevate himself out of the group and gives comments. In *Magnificence* the character is Cliff who laments aside on Jed’s death and the similarly character could be seen in *Bloody Poetry* as the biographer of Shelly Dr. William Polidori who watches and comments on Shelly.

Different from the Fringe period, the agit-prop purpose of smashing “the spectacle society” is redeemed as a charade and lamented as a waste with a sigh. Evoked by the French situationist theory, radical left-wing Trotskyist sought to achieve the “magnificent gesture of defilement of the bland face of public life.”[1] They usually adopted violent means in their attack on public spectacle through which they believe the English “society of the spectacle” maintains its grip. In fact, in the early nineteen seventies, the English society witnessed many such terrorist events by enthusiastic radicals. It is partly out of the rethinking of these paranoid behaviors and also the consideration of how his plays could better serve the society on a mainstream stage that Brenton in *Magnificence* dramatizes the failure and vacuousness of such “magnificent” behaviors. Jed in the play after release from prison for his protest against the government housing policy sought to revenge his enemies and defend his grand Marxist belief by kidnapping a Tory official and trying to kill him with a gelignite bomb which he strapped around the official’s head. Despite the fact that the official is not responsible for Jed’s arrest and appears civilized and humane during his conversation with Jed, Jed only regarded his humanism as the obfuscation of the English upper class and his aim is not “simply to kill the official but to destroy his image which represents a deeply-fraudulent myth of public life”[1]. “But instead of blowing up the representative of authoritarian violence, the explosive destroys his idealistic captor”. [3] Just as another character in the play Cliff said, “Jed, the waste, I can’t forgive you that. The waste of your anger. Not the murder, murder is common enough. Not the violence, violence is everyday. What I can’t forgive you Jed, my dear, dear friend, is the waste”[5] , Brenton expressed his rethinking of the idealistic dreams the left-wing radicals persisted in and lamented their futile attempt and the waste of their lives.

One big step further for Howard Brenton in terms of dramatic theme is the way he dialectically rather than didactically conveys his ideas in the play. Both within the anarchist group and between their repressors exchanged conversations that are argumentative. In these argumentations, audience can detect a Shavian style of discussion on the moral blacks and whites. For instance, one of the constable repressors thinks himself corrupt in that he knows how much the government has profited from its housing policy but still he helps the government in forcing people to move out of their house. And also Veronica, one of the squatters in the anarchist group who occupied one deserted house in protest, said thought-provokingly, “there is nothing simple in this complex world except the simple-minded.” [5] Indeed, the dialectical thinking in *Magnificence* renders the dramatic theme more complicated and sophisticated.

As a transitional work, *Magnificence*’s dramatic scenery is a combination of naturalism, Shavian style, surrealism and elements of the Fringe theatre. In a sense, it is a collage with parts that have different styles but link to each other in a chronological and causal relationship structure. There are totally eight scenes in the play. Scene One and Three present naturalistic scenery: the young squatters inside a shabby room with a beggar. Scene Two and Four are like Shavian discussion of the moral black and white in the society respectively between constables and between two tory officials

Alice and Bab. Scene Five gives a surrealistic presentation of the fantasy of Jed, the paranoid Trotskyist, in which Lenin appeared on the stage with his heroic gestures and his inflammatory words. This fantasy surrealistic style could be seen later also in *Bloody Poetry* when Shelly's wife's ghost appeared on the stage symbolizing Shelly's spiritual torture. In addition, agit-prop setting elements of red banners, slogans and mass chants were added to Scene One and Three to reflect the strong emotions of these Trotskyists. These young people chanted together words from Maoist theory with strong beat. Despite the verified styles within the play, its structure is organized chronologically and causally. Jed took revenge because the constables in Scene Two invaded their anarchist camp and caused his girlfriend's abortion. Therefore, chronologically in the following scenes, Jed schemed with his comrade and took revenge. Precisely speaking, the structure of *Magnificence* showed Brenton's immature dramatic skills in the transitional period in that the link between different parts is little loose and Brenton is still in a stage of figuring out how he could serve the society with drama.

In *Magnificence*, the characterization is no longer focused on the individual hero rather emerges into the public masses. As for the dramatic theme, the magnificent gesture of smashing the "society of the spectacle" by the obsessive left-wing people is reconsidered as a waste. As a transitional work from the Fringe to the main stream, the dramatic scenery is a collage of naturalism in the conventional theatre, elements of the Fringe Theatre, surrealism and Shavian discussion of the society's problems. As for the dramatic structure, different parts link with each other in a chronological and causal way, which, however, is not very mature considering its dramatic effects and the depth of thought.

C. *Romans in Britain: The Summit*

Just as *Magnificence* is inspired by the Paris event in May 1968, Brenton's later plays are also responsive in this way, re-aligning themselves to changing political circumstances. However, though their political perspective remained the same, the means are different. Another way of serving the society with drama is explored by Howard Brenton since his work *The Churchill's Play* (1974) and reaches the summit by his work *Romans in Britain* (1980). Howard Brenton continually used his play to challenge the society's tyranny by deconstructing the political, cultural and historical myths of Britain, or the "Englishness"[6]. It is such sort of play that marks the highest dramatic achievement of Howard Brenton. It should be noticed that the early persistence in Marxist belief has now transferred into a broader humanist insight. Also it is in such plays that Brenton began to design "theatre on a large scale, dealing in the great issues of history and public life mediated through the private and domestic lives of its characters".[1]

In order to fully appreciate *Romans in Britain*, one has to look at *Churchill's Play* first. *Churchill's Play* is set against the historical background of the internment without trial in Northern Ireland in August 1971 and also the Industrial unrest in that year. In Brenton's vision, "England looked 'right' but in which everything was wrong, everyday life is distorted by the loss of basic freedom". So in *Churchill's Play*, Brenton sought to warn the public of the tyranny tendency in the country's politics by deconstructing the country's very political icon, Winston Churchill whom the public thought had brought freedom to the Britain citizens. In the nineteen seventies, "in the wake of a massive political crisis—terminal breakdown in Ulster, terrorist activity and crippling industrial conflict on the mainland—, a government of 'national unity' has taken power".[1] The coalition reminded people of Churchill's coalition government during World War Two. Coincidentally, it was also the time of the memorial birthday of Winston Churchill, therefore, Brenton created this *Churchill's Play* in which the prisoners in an Ireland concentration camp were required by officials to rehearse a Churchill's play for an entertainment of the delegation group. "By combining a demythologizing analysis of the recent past with a nightmarish vision of the future a critique of the present is produced; a 'black satire'." [1] Apart from the historical background, the theoretical ground behind this sort of de-mythologizing play is also the theory of the society of the spectacle. Rather, the method of smashing the spectacle is targeted against the received stereotype about the nature of the past. Brenton's attack on Churchill in this play is "what he has come iconically to represent".[1] The broader humanistic view lies in this, "Brenton felt it was vital to get English people to believe that democracy was not some kind of sacred flower that is always going to grow in England, not a natural thing. " [1] Beside a more comprehensive humanistic concern, the *Churchill's Play* is "the first of Brenton's plays wholly to achieve a detailed, complex and rich account of communal activity which integrates political analysis with an authentic portrayal of social life." [1] From Churchill on, though there are still elements of mixed theatrical styles, the authentic portrayal of social life is the dominant theatrical design for Howard Brenton.

In 1980, under the severe Thatcherism policy, *Romans in Britain* sought to demythologize another national myth; the Romans' conquer in the fifth century B.C. led by Julius Caesar. In a commonly held view, the conquest brought

civilization to Britain which was then inhabited by the Celts. However, in Brenton's view, this conquer is just a tiny war event considering the invasion ambition of the war-addicted politicians. "The history is nothing but a series of conquering steps". [7] In fact, the play challenged a number of the key precepts of Thatcherism. Under the conservative social atmosphere under Thatcher's government, homosexual behaviors, the use of nudity and bad language are obvious a kind of public offense. Years later, the present Britain Prime Minister Cameron has apologized for the overly conservative policy practiced in Thatcher's government. But in the 1980 Play *Romans in Britain*, Brenton already challenged the Thatcherism by adding elements of sexual rape scenes in his play and also by attacking on "nationalism and on the notion of a unifying cultural heritage", which just came at the time that "Thatcherism was seeking to re-assert them in its effort to make Britain 'Great' again.

In order to convey such magnificent theme, the play's adopts the grand epic structure. "What impressed Brenton about Brecht's play was its success in making huge and complex issues publicly available, and the way its 'massiveness of content' was articulated through 'a suppleness and subtlety of argument'"[1]. It set in contrast three historical conquests together which occurred respectively 55 BC, 515 AD, and 1980. The first part deals with the Romans' conquest of the Celts in 55BC, in which the killing occurred so frequently. First the three Celt boys killed one of the two escaping Irish prisoners by cutting their throat, and then the two of the three Celt boys were killed by Romans soldiers and the third one is humiliated sexually by the soldiers and also hung on the neck a Venus necklace, afterwards, the escaped Irish prisoner raped a maid servant from the Celt farmer's family but was at last stoned to death by this servant. The second part is a non-chronological juxtaposition of two parallel plots dealing respectively the England's invasion of Ireland in 1980 and the Saxon's invasion of Britain after that of the Romans. The sudden shift from the first part to the second part is a spatial and temporal confusing scene in which the English soldiers from the helicopter shoot the servant in the 5th BC. Though the structure of the play is a timely disorder, the innate connection is strengthened by the mutual violence elements that run all the way through the play. The key point Brenton wanted to convey is the deconstruction of the war hero King Arthur whom the British citizen regard as the national myth but in Brenton's eyes is just the symbol of the conquering desire of the humankind.

Different from his earlier plays, Brenton adopted an authenticity way of dramatic presentation. "Finding Brecht's epic theatre too limiting and artificial, Brenton was experimenting with very different standards of stage realism...At its simplest, Brenton's concept of theatrical authenticity was based on integrating performance space and dramatic material." [3] In his foreword to *Romans in Britain*, he confessed that he had looked through many prehistoric materials in order to fully reproduce the prehistoric Britain. "I did find after a few months of research I could hold my own in an argument with a professor about whether the eaves of Celtic roundhouse were or were not painted and decorated with gods." [8] The field, the forest and the farmer's houses are all authentically presented and the precise religion influences and remains in that historical period are also precisely presented.

With a non-chronological collage of the historical events, *Roman in Britain* adopts the grand epic theatre with an authentic dramatic presentation. In a continuously challenging spirit against the dominant philosophy of the cultural mainstream, Brenton avoids the clichés and the easy answers of humanism.

D. Bloody Poetry: A Temporal Retreat to the Fringe in the nasty late 80s:

In late 1980s, with the advent and continuing domination of Thatcherism, the society became more and more conservative in its values and the idealistic spirit seemed disappear. The Age for Brenton and his fellow dramatists was a period of grave situation in which "a pervasive cynicism paralyses public life".[1] "British drama hasn't found a language to deal with the 1980s, when the issues are starker, politics tougher, and the moral choices more extreme." [9] What's more, beside the loss of direction, the British government's cutting subsidies for art also made a grand dramatic performance less realistic. Under such environment, Brenton in the later eighties made a move towards smaller, more private plays in which the dramatist laments the loss of idealism. *Bloody Poetry* created in 1984 with the Fringe theatre Foco Novo is such a work that reflects the situations in the late 1980s.

Instead of criticizing the idealists as the "perverse hero" who is paranoid in the early nineteen seventies, Brenton in *Bloody Poetry* expressed his yearn for idealistic dreams embodied by the liberalist Percy Bysshe Shelly. The play depicted the poet caught in the most tortured moments of his last days in life when he was on exile with his lover Mary Shelly through an extramarital affair. His wife's suicide has always haunted him as a moral condemnation in the form of a ghost. In fact, the magnificent image of the great poet Shelly is compromised by many awkward situations in reality; their

inability to afford a comfortable accommodation and the scold from the public at the homeland and so on. Indeed, the image of Shelly is being painted here as a picture of a generation of political dramatists which lost its way in artistic creation. Nonetheless, the image of Shelly is a sacrificing hero that is given approval by Brenton. He followed the step of Brenton's perverse hero who tried to drive a straight line in a complex society and ready to meet his death. Shelly in the play claimed, "I have come to the opinion that there must be a revolution in England, I write for it, every morning." [7] In a sense, this reflected the dramatist's inner thought about the late 1980s' society.

In fact, the utopian and romantic idealism in the Fringe period has never disappeared from the left-wing dramatists' dreams. Though their means have changed, their aim has always been the construction of an ideal humanist utopia, which is reflected as the dramatic theme in *Bloody Poetry*. In *Bloody Poetry*, the human utopia is embodied by the free love relationship between Shelly, Byron, Mary Shelly and Claire Clairemont. In contrast, the ghost of Harriet Westbrook, Shelly's former wife, symbolizes the moral shackle that limited the true nature of humanity, just like the conservative atmosphere which makes people feel suffocating. In a sense, this is a revolt against the Thatcherism's conservatism. Shelly in the play said, "A war. If only there were a war in England, not that endless-slow, sullen defeat. Why don't the bastards take up arms against such a government? Then we poets would be of some use, we'd do the songs, the banners, the shouts, but no. Sullen silence." "For Brenton, this is perhaps the difference between the early nineteen seventies and the mid eighties".[1] However, despite the harsh and severe environment in the 1980s which were symbolically dramatized as the compromises and awkwardness Shelly met in his great romantic affair in the play, Brenton still presented it as a "bloody beautiful fire"[7] that would shed light on the others.

Although Brenton sought to resume an idealist dream under the conservative environment, the critical habit of presenting more sophisticated themes and dialectical thinking also works here in *Bloody Poetry*. The extramarital affair depicted in this drama also indicates a kind of selfish indulgence in personal desires. Mary is not only Shelly's lover but is also loved by Byron and Claire has affair with Shelly despite the fact that she is carrying Byron's child. Indeed, *Bloody Poetry* is another deconstruction of the cultural icon in which Shelly is regarded as the great symbol of freedom fighter because the sexual freedom is overly abused here in the play.

Compared with the large cast, the characters in *Bloody Poetry* are of a relatively small number, with only six characters. The dramatic structure also follows a chronological order which centers on the domestic relationship between these lovers, presenting their conversations, their entertainments and their poetic inspirations. From now and then, Shelly adopts the form of monologue in his citing poems and the surrealist elements appeared when Harriet Westbrook's ghost haunted on the stage. In a sense, the elements of the Fringe theatre returned here in this play.

Bloody Poetry is a Fringe theatre work in response to the conservative politics of Thatcherism. Because of a limited subsidy from the government, the grand theatrical endeavor is not realistic. Therefore, *Bloody Poetry* adopts a simple chronological domestic structure with a small cast of five characters. In this play, Brenton outlined the awkward position in a cynical society where the spirit of revolution has gone. The dramatist casts the anxiety of these left-wing fellow writers into the torture and suffers of the great romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelly. By dramatizing the last days of Shelly on exile with his lover Mary Shelly and their meeting with Byron at the side of the Geneva Lake, Brenton somehow also demystifies the cultural icon of the great romantic poet in presenting their overly self-indulgent love affairs.

III. CONCLUSION

In tracing the course of evolving styles of Howard Brenton from 1960s to 1980s, this paper found that Howard Brenton's style present a gradual evolution from the Fringe theatre to that of the conventional theatre. As for dramatic presentation, influences of naturalism, Shavian discussion and epic theatre could all be detected though the whole course of evolution, but the dominant style within a particular play differs from one another in different periods. In the Fringe period plays, shock and aggro elements are often detected, which surpasses the Frist Wave dramas in its strong dramatic effects. As a transitional work, *Magnificence* exhibited an immature collage of different styles. But its dramatic theme made a step further in that the dramatist lamented the agit-prop instigation of smashing the "Society of Spectacle" with a petro bomb is a vacuous waste and turned to demystify the cultural Spectacle of Englishness, which led him to his mature works such as *The Churchill's Play* and *Romans in Britain*. As Brenton's masterpiece, *Romans in Britain* exhibited a grand epic structure of historical events collaged together and a more sophisticated insight on the series of cruel invasions that shaped the historical progress of the Britain. Finding the epic structure too limiting and alienating, Brenton also added

stage of realism in his plays which presents an authentic setting of prehistoric social life. What is more, the single purpose of agit-prop has been transferred to a more complex vision which gives no easy answer to humanism. Moving into the late 1980s, under the extremely conservative and cynical environment under Thatcher's government, the magnificent theatrical endeavor is unrealistic and Brenton retreated to a Fringe style with a small and private structure in *Bloody Poetry* in which Brenton on the one hand yearned for the idealism they had lost by dramatizing Shelly's struggle, on the other hand, as always, he also demystified the cultural image of Shelly.

Beside the evolving styles of Brenton, certain elements recurrently appeared in Brenton's plays constituted the dramatist's unique styles, for example, the image of the "perverse saint" who drives a straight line through a complex society could be found within *Christie in Love*, *Magnificence* and also *Bloody Poetry*, and also the surrealistic element of fantasy appeared both in *Magnificence* and *Bloody Poetry* in presenting the mentality of characters.

All in all, Howard Brenton's plays are all in instant response to changing political events and the purpose of these socially-committed play as Howard Brenton has confessed is his dream of "a play acting like a bushfire, smouldering into public consciousness." [4]

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