

A Dissident Reading of Seduction in Howard Barker's The Gaoler's Ache and 12 Encounters with a Prodigy

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Abstract: Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe aims at displaying the contradictions and inconsistencies in the rationally social, political and conservative processes. This theatre which is characteristically irrational represents characters whose obstinacy makes them uncompromising individuals as encountering and struggling against ideologies in post-chaotic situations. These figures by using deception and sexuality reveal themselves as Dionysian seducers to open up the rifts within rational communities and to oppose power authorities. In this respect, Barker's The Gaoler's Ache and 12 Encounters with a Prodigy stage two child protagonists whom by their seduction and ingenuity attempt to make changes in the situations they have found themselves in. they are engaged in continuing battle against the external forces that mould their identities according to their hegemonic discourses. The researchers, thus, by using dissident reading and close reading, have explored the forms of dissidence and how these forms are going to be shaped by Dionysian impulse as an opposition to authority and power in Barker's aforesaid plays.

Keywords: Howard Barker, Dionysus, Gaze, Dissidence, Seduction, Eroticism.



1 Introduction

Howard Barker (b. 1942) is one of the greatest contemporary British playwrights whose stage represents the concurrence of two antithetical discourses of authority and dissidence. Lamb (2005) maintains that authorities in Barker's plays are identified as rational, patriarchal and sometimes authoritarian, while the dissidents are vividly described as irrational, defiant and seductive (pp. 1-4). Rabey (2009) too observes that what for Barker matters most is the representation of the crucial moments that irrationality – mainly taken the forms of eroticism, seduction and irrationality – reveals itself and, thus, develops serious cracks in the skull of the religious and political authority (p. 5). Barker stages the thoughts and actions of individuals side by side with the religious and political discourses in order to explore how these discourses may have deep effects on the processes of self-making and self-discovery, especially if those are of dissident and sexual identities. One way of fulfilling this objective in theatre is to create catastrophic situations in which the unpredictability of characters together with their refusal to accept the existing social order to reveal themselves (Lamb, 2005, p. 13). As a result, Barker's stage is widely regarded as the Theatre of Catastrophe.

Barker's common catastrophic themes in this connection are war, terrorism, class conflict and murder. As an illustration, Barker in Europeans (1987) stages a Christian society in the aftermath of a devastating war with the Ottomans in which it desperately seeks to create a new religio-political order for itself, and there is the suffered Katrin whose process of fashioning the self is not inseparable from her opposition to the ideologies of the authorities of the city. As Dahl (2006) notes, these "connections between the body, power and political system through images that violates

boundaries" (p. 95) in a typical Barkerian play are the essence of his art of theatre that attempts to create a feeling of anxiety or uneasiness in the audience. Furthermore, Wilcher (1993) states that Barkerian play is about staging "the conflict between individual impulse and society's internal and external mechanisms of control" (p. 177). Taking everything into account, Barker's *The Gaoler's Ache* (1998) and *12 Encounters with a Prodigy* (2001) represent two child protagonists, Little Louis and Kisster respectively, whose power of seduction and disorderly conduct are sexually and politically subversive, and in this respect they invoke Dionysian impulse to achieve their goals.

The first Barker's play to explore in this paper is *The Gaoler's Ache* which sets in post-Revolutionary France where the members of the royal family are incarcerated and put under surveillance by the revolutionaries. In the play, in order to overcome the surveillant gaze – and its two outcomes, violation of privacy and defamation – and to defy the new authority, seduction and sexuality will be two effective modes of resistance. Not only does Little Louis, "one of Barker's philosophically curious children" (Rabey, 2009, p. 86), but also her mother, Caroline, use their seductive quality to subvert the rationalist authority of the revolutionaries. More importantly, the mother-son incestuous passion in the text, as Butler (2004, pp. 152-4) comments on the practice of incest in her study, is aesthetically to transgress and subvert the exiting order.

Barker's other play under scrutiny is *12 Encounters with a Prodigy*. The play centres round the life of Kisster a teenage boy of twelve years old and his fight against control and coercion. He was born in secrecy and his mother had to endure a lot of suffering to bring him up. He, unlike Little Louis that experiences catastrophe (the French Revolution) during his childhood, is a post-catastrophic born. Thus, according to Tomlin (2006), as a curious and speculative protagonist, Kisster endeavours to translate the order and the situation he takes part in as his "own subjective and autonomous reality" (p. 114) and to practice being an authority and making others his subordinates.

Taken as a whole, *The Gaoler's Ache* and *12 Encounters with a Prodigy* together form a dissident discourse based on two post-catastrophic situations in which the child protagonists try hard to forge their identities. Although, the plays may differ slightly about the characterisation of the two child protagonists, they represent dissident politics and a stage of irrationality and contradiction. In the subsequent sections Howard Barker's mentioned plays are going to be further explored by using cultural materialist dissident reading and close reading.

2 Little Louis and Royal Identity in *The Gaoler's Ache*

Barker composed *The Gaoler's Ache* in 1998 on the basis of the historical Marie-Antoinette's false accusation of incest and sedition which eventually resulted in the execution of the French Queen in 1793. In this respect, the topoi of the play are surveillant gaze, defamation of the monarchy, and how sexual dissidence may violate the Revolutionary order. The defeated and incarcerated royal family of France is under constant observation by the revolutionaries. The gaze or surveillance is significant to the revolutionaries because as Foucault (1977, p. 200) points out, it is the most effective means that ensures the continuity of power exercise and the observer can observe without being seen. The reference of this concern can be understood in the beginning of the play when Caroline is about to make love with Witt, her lover and a revolutionary, tells her son Little Louis not to interfere and remember to "fix your gaze firmly on the wall" (Barker, 1998, p. 190). Barker's drama is mainly concerned with violation of privacy and demonisation of the incarcerated monarchy. The main character that authorises this violation and he himself commits it several times throughout the text is Trepasser, Little Louis's demagogue and a radical revolutionary. He is also the prosecutor of the revolutionary regime whose intention is to defame Caroline and the monarchy and justify the court to execute her along with Big Louis, the King. For this reason, he frequently expresses words such as "plague" (ibid, p. 231) to refer to the monarchy and the current situation of France.

Little Louis has a central role in the play. He is a precocious child thinker. He is the rightful successor to the throne as well. Unlike the orphan Kisster's erotic desires in *12 Encounters with a Prodigy*, Little Louis is somehow passive spectator of erotic and sexual ecstasy of the women in the

play. Yet this is Caroline whose mode of resistance involves the use of her sexuality actually allures Little Louis. Little Louis's innocence is significant in a way that because he is a child, he has not been taken seriously, and hence he is free of being guilty, though his words and ideas are represented potentially subversive. He criticises his mother to rise up and oppose the revolutionaries resolutely – Trepasser in particular. Louis's self-confidence and self-expression are typical examples of a Barkerian character (Rabey, 2009, p. 8).

What is more, his power of articulation and his effective use of language give him confidence to express his opposition against the revolutionary State. To illustrate an example, although the revolutionaries deny his being a monarch, after his father's execution, he calls himself the right king of France and begins to order Caroline and other characters in the play (Barker, 1998, p. 211). His curiosity and sense of wonder to know more about his situation and the new order of things has thus enabled him to recognise the fact that his society has become a society of gaze and observation, as he declares, "modern world's like that" (ibid, p. 233). On this account, he is more determined to become resistant in his own terms: having a royal identity and using his sexuality along with his mother to subvert the established order.

However, Little Louis's situation is somewhat different to that of Kisster in *12 Encounters* (he is free and practices to have control over everybody round himself) in that he is under constant observation by the revolutionaries and his identity as a monarch is not accepted by the new authorities. Yet it seems his situation, and of Kisster, according to Sinfield (2006), is a "site of struggle" (p. 17); that is to say, a bitter conflict between dissident voice and hegemonic power can be seen. In this way, McAfee (2004) explains that in societies of gaze people would become "tools" for authorities in power (p. 108) and their feelings and desires have consistently been ignored. As a consequence, Trepasser regards privacy as a major problem for the new State: "what's privacy after all, but the pretext for a sordid criminality...?" (Barker, 1998, p. 212).

Due to Trepasser's assertion, the act of medical examination of Little Louis serves the purpose of the Revolution that there must be no hidden secret and agenda. Borrowing from Foucault, in the mechanism of disciplinary power, the purpose of such kind of examination, particularly when the subject is under observation, is to have control over the subject and to make his body docile (1977, p. 170). Nevertheless, Little Louis resists the doctors and persists that he is the monarch and hierarchically superior. He then outwits the doctors by describing revolution as "disease" and "that if the revolution is a sickness, the counter-revolution must be medicine" (Barker, 1998, p. 212).

2.1. Little Louis and Dissidence

Little Louis's practice of authority in the text is his use of language to argue and outwit the opponent. He verbally assaults not only his mother for not having a strategy of resistance, though it is not true and Caroline's sexual dissidence considers a serious threat to the State, but also revolutionaries like Trepasser and the Gaoler. He has freedom to act and express his ideas loudly. Like Kisster, he is fearless in his use of language and speech. In the first half of the play, he asks three servant women to expose themselves and express the past experience of their sexual passions. The servants, by their intense sexual and seductive language, fulfill the political ends of Louis's dissidence, although he is not directly involved himself in eroticism because in the text Louis is an object of erotic desire for the women, especially for Caroline. As has been said, due to the royal family's being subjected to the surveillant gaze on the walls, and because of the authoritative rationalist discourse of revolutionaries like Trepasser, a scene filled with women's seductive appeals and sexual fantasies, as Dollimore (1991) suggests, would in itself threaten to subvert the social order of an authoritarian society such as the one present in *The Gaoler's Ache* (pp. 88-91).

The issues of sexuality and eroticism are not simply confined to the characters opposing the State. The new Statesmen such as Trepasser and the character the Gaoler, whose job is to observe regularly Caroline's and Louis's actions, benefit from sexual pleasure by gazing. It can hence be summarised that the surveillant gaze here has two main purposes. Firstly, as mentioned above, the

primary goal is to have control over the subjects; this means their bodies – as well as their selves, significantly related to the bodies – would be taken away from them; in effect, they are the properties of the State. Caroline repeatedly complains that her body is not hers. Therefore, she is an echo of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. In 1982 Kristeva has written that an abject is "the excluded" (p. 5) who has been deprived of having a self. Yet at the same time she is potentially capable of challenging the very power that has abjected her (p. 3). In this respect, in the last trial that eventually leading to Caroline's execution, the exchange between Trepasser and her is telling, especially after she undresses herself as her final attack:

TREPASSER: [...] Very well. You have exposed your breasts to the People. The reason for this eccentric exhibition is not far to –

CAROLINE: Not my breasts. (Pause. He stares)

TREPASSER: Not your breasts –

CAROLINE: Not mine, no. And did you discover a physician for my eye? I say my eye.

I see through it but is it mine? I don't think so. (Pause. There is discomfort in the court. She suddenly laughs) (Barker, 1998, p. 242)

At the outset, her erotic desires for Witt and Little Louis are as a consequence of the fact that she can feel that her body is really hers. Moreover, as long as the walls have eyes and ears in the play, her eroticism is her mode of resistance to surveillance and incarceration. Caroline's characterisation is not much different from Little Louis; in fact, these two figures are complementary. Secondly, "the gaze" according to Trepasser "is never without its ambiguities..." (ibid, p. 213). Throughout the play, in some moments he expresses his sexual tendency towards Caroline and in others he expresses his anger against her, and thus attempts to condemn her and justify the court to issue death sentence for her as one did for Big Louis. In brief, as a woman with erotic feelings she is regarded as a real threat to the State; for this reason, Dollimore (2004) maintains that "gender" and sexuality are indeed inseparable, and they are closely related to the "social order" (p. lxiv).

Little Louis and Caroline are correlative and complete one another. His power of articulation and debate, along with seducing women characters in the play to expose themselves (for example, his demand of servant's past sexual experiences and their exposure) are the constitutive parts of his dissident politics against the revolutionaries. What Barker typically represents in his dramatic writings is that seduction is not simply confined to the feminine; even the masculine can seduce. Given this fact, Baudrillard (1990) describes seduction as "the guise" (p. 1). Barker applies both meanings of seduction here: seduction as invitation to sexual intercourse, as can be seen in the characterisation of Caroline, and seduction as deception, a lie. Certainly, when Louis realises that he is facing with authorities claiming to be rationalist and discreet, as well as being purgers of the "unhygienic" characters (Barker, 1998, p. 232), as Trepasser articulates, he tries to show himself rational, and this rational seducing is as his achievement and his punishment in the play.

Owing to this fact, at the end of the play before Caroline's execution, Louis is violated by one of the wardens. Another reason is that he is the source of inspiration for both the servant women to seduce the gaze on the walls, to expose themselves, and his mother Caroline who after his asking her to undress and placing kisses on her body, revives her confidence and by being naked in the court violates its course and expresses her opposition (Rabey, 2009, p. 87). Little Louis even succeeds to make a deep impression upon the Gaoler – he tells Trepasser "The child's no child" (Barker, 1998, p. 239). On the face of it, there is a paradox about Louis's behaviour. On the one hand, he gets involved in rational arguments and follows logic; and, on the other hand, he seduces Caroline and creates a scene of sexual ecstasy at the same time that on the other side of the wall Trepasser and the Gaoler exchanging words how to defame and condemn the former queen. More importantly, the play ends with the description of Little Louis after Caroline's execution that he "shouts in triumph..." (ibid, p. 247) – a Barkerian theme of ecstasy and death – which simply denotes to Baudrillard's 'the guise'. Rationality and logic are just Little Louis's guises that are parts of his resistant discourse.

To conclude, Barker in *The Gaoler's Ache* stages the process of self-making of a child protagonist and his mother caught in a network of power relations. The play is a manifestation of

notions of disciplinary power, discourse and surveillance discussed in detail by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Barker puts forward the idea that the strategy or mode of resistance to power and its surveillant methods is seduction, which according to Baudrillard it has the power of subverting the rational processes of a society that its mechanisms of power seek to suppress the marginalised and the excluded (1990, pp. 1-2).

In Barker's theatre, seduction is not limited to the feminine; moreover, his use of the word includes all the meanings of the word. Seduction, therefore, uncovers what is latent, meaning, sexuality (ibid, p. 13). Since a revolutionary like *Trepasser* firmly believes in the revelation of the secret, seduction reveals it to subvert. In the same vein, the next section provides the analysis of seduction and the process of self-fashioning of another Barker's child protagonists in a post-catastrophic situation, *Kisster*.

3 Seduction and Dionysus: A Study of 12 Encounters with a Prodigy

Along with the representation of a child protagonist in *The Gaoler's Ache*, Barker stages another child protagonist, *Kisster*, in *12 Encounters with a Prodigy*. The theme of gaze and observation is also present in *12 Encounters*, yet is different from that of in *The Gaoler's Ache*. Here, it is *Kisster* who, most of the times, observes other characters. These two mentioned plays are among Barker's iconoclastic dramatic oeuvre. In these plays, the conventional understanding of children and their role, as well as their moral and sexual representations on the stage are seriously put into question. The child characters are at the same time innocent and seductive; they are also sexually active, like *Little Louis* and *Kisster* (Rabey, 2009, p. 88).

As the name suggests, *12 Encounters* is a representation of the encounters of sixteen characters with *Kisster* in twelve scenes. At the end of each scene, a new character or characters is introduced by the playwright for the subsequent scene. The play begins with the recitation of *Kisster* about the catastrophic situation in which he was born and brought up:

I was born at a roadside. Planes swooped overhead, firing cannon. Five uncles died, three of them clutching clocks... The fields were barley. When the barley burned it gave off dense clouds of smoke. This smoke attracted the attention of looters, rapists and psychopaths. For two days my mother hid me in a drain, lifting the iron lid to feed me and replacing it again. For two days she was subjected to unspeakable barbarities. Her body was the site of more refined depravity with every passing hour. To this day she bears the scars of – (Barker, 2012, p. 115)

The representation of catastrophic situations is typical in Barker's *Theatre of Catastrophe*. Such politics of representation may enable Barker to test and evaluate his characters whenever under pressure, agony or surveillance to demonstrate a tragic effect.

To a great degree, Barker's theatre, as Rabey (2009) and Tomlin (2006) and Lamb (2006) explore, is of Nietzschean. Nietzschean notions of power, nihilism and *Übermensch*, and so forth have representations in Barker. Yet among these influences, Nietzsche's *Dionysus*, god of wine, ecstasy and theatre, is almost present in all Barker's dramatic writings. In this respect, the portrayal of *Kisster* is Dionysian. *Kisster* is a seducer; he has established sexual relationships with the women characters with the exception of *Gabriele*, a rich girl of 12, or touched them sexually. According to *Cologne*, his governess, and *Gnash*, a female vagrant, *Kisster* has seen them both "naked" (Barker, 2012, p. 147). The scene of his birth, as *Kisster* narrates several times throughout the text, is outside of a town in nature, similar to *Dionysus* that was born secretly in wilderness, and when he mentions that the "fields were Barley" (ibid, 115), barley is used for making alcoholic drink which is an indication of the ecstatic joy of the essence of Dionysian *Kisster*.

In the play, *Cologne* tries to educate *Kisster* to lie and seduce. Throughout the play he practices lying and deceiving and this catches the attention of two angels, *Olmütz* and *Pressburg*, descending from heaven to encounter him. And *Kisster* not only deceives them, but also coerces them to do his

will: "I bribed the angels...!" (ibid, p. 177). Cologne asks him about "first law of human behaviour" his answer is "coercion" which is practiced by the exercise of "violence" (ibid, p, 116). Kisster, as is seen from the text, is an authority who to some extent resembles to Prince Hal of Shakespeare that undergoes a process of monarchical self-making in the first part of the Henry IV. Kisster's erotic attraction is a real challenge to male characters in the text because he attracts the women and this goes unpunished, due to the fact that he is a child and yet an adult. His power of seduction and eroticism enables him to have self-knowledge. As Bataille (1987) maintains, eroticism is a fusion of the self with the other (p. 17), and this may present an opportunity for Kisster – the one who is the wonder of Behemond as playing chess with him to express "I have never seen a child of such leaden inflexibility..." (Barker, 2012, p. 138) – to form his self. The process of self-making that Kisster experiences in the play is based on violence, seduction and ecstasy.

Kisster does not like to be under control or gazed by another; for this reason, he observes other characters. For instance, when Cologne and Gabriele, a girl who becomes Kisster's erotic attraction, express love to one another by kissing and hugging, Kisster intently gazes at them. In this fashion, he rejects education based on books and written material presenting by a tutor such as the blind Toledo. Toledo has no influence on Kisster but on Tuesday, another child character in the play. Unlike Kisster's Dionysian impulse and abusive behaviour, Tuesday is conservative and a disciple of Toledo. When the tutor asks Kisster about what page of the book they have to study he pays no attention and plays football by himself. Here, Barker's attitude towards education by using books is an echo of Wordsworth's (1991) verse:

**Up! up! my friend, and clear your looks,
Why all this toil and trouble?
Up! up! my friend, and quit your books,
Or surely you'll grow double (p. 130, ll. 1-4).**

In Barker's view, as well as in Wordsworth, education ought to be pursued in nature. Interpreted another way, nature is the proper source of education which is also a part of self-definition. For Kisster, the more does he develop his skills and abilities – including lying, seducing and gazing – the closer may he be to ecstasy.

3.1. Kisster, Death and Ecstasy

Howard Barker's idea about death is expressed repeatedly in his dramas and his philosophical monograph *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre* (2005). In it, Barker views death as "the first enemy of the political systems" (p. 3). It is, in addition, "beyond life" (p. 9); it is a mystery. Kisster encounters with death four times in the text. The first is during his focusing on playing football; his tutor Toledo has had a seizure which causes his death onstage. Unlike the panicked Tuesday attacking Kisster for his carelessness, Kisster remains calm and ignores the situation. Kisster's anger releases when Tuesday starts hitting him for Toledo's death. Kisster is authoritative and free of being punished by any other characters in the text; his main principle is to coerce everyone around himself to comply:

**KISSTER: Help me up –
TUESDAY: Help you up...?
[...]
KISSTER: (Insistent) Help... (Tuesday goes to Kisster, lifts him by the hand...)
(Barker, 2012, p. 125)**

Tuesday is under power of Kisster, whether his story-telling which is mainly the story of his birth, or his coercion. In the seventh scene in the forest they both encounter a decaying dead body. This is the second encounter with death. The dead speaks to them and Kisster forces Tuesday to approach the

corpse and when Tuesday refuses to do so, Kisster tells him that the best thing he wants to see is Tuesday's mother's private parts and then threatens to undress his mother (ibid, pp. 156-8).

Kisster's own contact with the dead, named Ragsit, and the fear which as a result of this raises, therefore, has dual functions. Firstly, character's encountering with death, as Gritzner (2006) puts it, generates the effect of "sublime" and a sense of "beauty" (p. 88). Example of this can be seen at the end of the play that Cologne's dead body, her feet in particular, would become an aesthetic pleasure for Kisster (it will be further discussed later). Secondly, in Barker's view, death drive, *thanatos*, is the recognition of the life drive, *eros* (2005, p. 89). Kisster's contact with Ragsit awakens his deep interest in life. Although, he expresses from time to time that he is not afraid of death and occasionally he thinks of his death, saying to Behemond that "I have already contemplated suicide" (Barker, 2012, p. 138), he mentions he has no fear of dying yet he is "not immune to poisons" (ibid p. 173).

Kisster's third contact with death is when he looks at the dead body of Cologne in a morgue. As it is apparent, she has taken her life due to her doomed love of Gabriele, the cruel girl becoming Kisster's erotic fantasy as well. The forest that Gabriele and her father, Mendel, live is a parody of Shakespeare's Arden in *As You Like It* (1599). Gabriele is very protective of her place of living; she would like to be free and far from a city; she also compares herself to Diana, the Roman goddess of moon. In her encounter with Kisster, she defies him by not caring about Kisster's story of his birth, and the angry Kisster by imitating to be her one of her dogs and grabbing her pants by his teeth irritates her. As a result, she and Cologne, out of her sexual envy, hit Kisster by sticks. Here, Kisster, having failed to catch her attention, seduces her by this act and finally obtains the girl's pants. Interestingly, Cologne starts to struggle with Kisster over the possession of the pants. Here, the pants function as an object of desire, a sign of the absent beloved which is a reference to Baudrillard's idea of simulation that, according to Lane (2000) the image precedes its concept and becomes the object of desire itself (p. 30).

At the close of the play Kisster's fascination with the corpse of Cologne is interesting. The image of the body is very significant in almost every Barkerian drama. For him, body is a text that can be written over and over again. In addition, as has been previously shown in *The Gaoler's Ache*, Amèry (1980) contends that body is closely related to self (p. 28); it is thus an idea that fascinates Kisster to the extent that Canny, the mortician, is confused by his behaviour:

KISSTER: These feet, have you observed them? In all your years have you observed such spoiled and sordid feet?

CANNY: I don't make s point of –

KISSTER: Come here and tell me –

CANNY: Feet are feet –

KISSTER: If you have ever witnessed such (Pause)

(Barker, 2012, p. 178)

Moreover, in the early scenes of the play the cause of a quarrel between Kisster and Cologne is the remaining fluid of Samuella, Kisster's mother, on Kisster's clothes, after having smelled and touched her body sexually. In response to Cologne to wash off the fluid, Kisster angrily exclaims that "It is my body" and the fluid is "holy" (ibid, p. 131). Throughout the play, Kisster smells and examines the bodies of women such as Samuella, Gabriele in a scene in the forest before the eyes of the girl's father, and Teresa, Tuesday's mother, in order to feel sexual ecstasy. His fascination with women's body, quite opposite Little Louis that is particularly focused and interested in Caroline, reveals his Dionysian impulse which is also his identity in the play.

Ecstasy and death are interrelated in *12 Encounters*. At the moment of death, ecstasy from erotic desires reveals itself. At the same time that Kisster makes contacted with the rotting corpse of Ragsit, Cologne and Gabriele were kissing one another. In the last scene, likewise, after the dead body of Cologne is taken offstage by Canny, Gabriele's appearance with her lover, Riley, and their kissing before the eyes of Kisster makes the orphan child irritated, Gabriele's father Mendel, a supporter of

Kisster, stabs the lovers to death. This is the last encounter of Kisster with death in the text. As a consequence, he expresses his joy at both being alive (still having eros) and Gabriele's atonement, not for causing Cologne's suicide, but to a larger extent for resisting him. In Barker's *Theatre of Catastrophe* there is a "cycle of birth and death" (Dahl, 2006, p. 227), which is highly associated with self-discovery and ecstasy. Kisster's idea of book remains the same as the beginning of the play. He seeks knowledge in nature; his process of self-discovery is through seduction and eroticism. For instance, as the philosopher Marston gives him a book to read Kisster throws it down on the floor covered with the blood of Gabriele and Riley and "like a washer-woman" starts to sop up (Barker, 2012, p. 185).

To sum up, Barker's representation of Kisster as a child genius is characteristically Dionysian. The same also applies to Little Louis. Dionysian main traits such as sexuality and frenzy, as opposition against authority and power, can be seen in Barker's *12 Encounters* and *The Gaoler's Ache*. In the former Kisster rejects acquiring knowledge via books and tutoring, and in the latter Little Louis seduction scheme is to pretend to adopt the discourse of rationality or logic to encounter Trepasser and other revolutionaries in the play. Despite the fact that Kisster and Louis are innocent because they are children, and hence have more freedom of action and expression than other adult characters, they have to face complexities and to use their seductive power to reveal the contradictions of their surroundings (Rabey, 2009, pp. 88-9). Both Kisster and Louis commit incest with their mothers, Samuella and Caroline respectively, and there is a sense of wonder and beauty in them as they encounter an erotic attraction, a woman's body. The two child protagonists differ from one another in terms of their situation; however, they form a unified discourse which is of dissidence. Dahl observes that Barker's staging eroticism, sexuality and seduction, especially from the behalf of children, is part of his dissident discourse in practicing a theatre based on violation of expectations, inconsistency and anxiety (2006, p. 96).

4 Conclusion

Howard Barker dramatises many child protagonists in order to overstep the traditional boundaries between staging children and issues of morality and innocence. His child characters are at the same time innocent because they are children and away from the pain and suffering of the adulthood, and potentially seductive and coercive. In this regard, his two major plays *The Gaoler's Ache* (1998) and *12 Encounters with a Prodigy* (2001) represent two child protagonists, Little Louis and Kisster, in two different post-catastrophic situations. Both Louis and Kisster are characteristically Nietzschean Dionysian.

The former seduces the people around him by drowning himself in logic and reasoning, and yet in some moments in the text he reveals his true Dionysian impulse in a post-Revolutionary France: sexual intimacy with his mother Caroline and his frenzied and passionate manners in Caroline's last prosecution in the court. Both Caroline and Louis, as the remaining members of the French royal family, are put under constant surveillance by the revolutionaries; throughout the play words like gaze and observation are frequently repeated, and Barker's mode of resistance offered for this unpleasant situation is sexuality. Sexuality is related to the process of self-making, and both Caroline and Louis by their sexual desires towards one another, actually, stand against the gaze of the new State.

The latter is a prodigious orphaned boy whose practice of deceiving and seducing has enabled him to wear the mask of Dionysus. He educates himself by the laws of nature, and his company is vagrants, angels and women. He has strong erotic desires for the women yet aggressive towards the male characters in the play. Kisster's four times of encountering death not only heightens his awareness of the life force or eros, but also demonstrates his mastery over the characters around him. In effect, his seductive power and erotic desire are the main constitutive parts of his Dionysian self-fashioning. Given Kisster's and Little Louis's seductive appeals and uncompromisingness it may be

concluded that Barker practices a dissident stage by using Nietzschean philosophy, especially his theorising of the god of frenzy and irrationality, Dionysus.

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