

Bridging the Gap between Vision and Reality: History and Audience Engagement in Howard Brenton's *Weapons of Happiness*

Kim, Yoo

차 례

- I. Introduction
- II. Moving to the National: Searching for the Middle-class Audience
- III. Representation of the Working-class: the Absence of History
- IV. Josef Frank, a Representative of the 'Macro' World of Stalinism
- V. Reconciling History and Reality, the Past and the Present
- VI. Conclusion

I. Introduction

Howard Brenton's 1976 play *Weapons of Happiness* seems to be caught between the political situation, where positive, constructive utopian designs are no longer possible, and the critical atmosphere, where even sympathetic left-leaning critics join in the general criticism of the lack of clear political vision in the play. In fact, to a degree, *Weapons of Happiness* avoids the definition of the socialist ideal, and the achievement

of vision is postponed. The frustrated factory workers at the end of the play seem to provide the audience with a daunting picture where it is not possible for the oppressed to break out of the subjugating structure of the capitalist society.

The huge gulf between vision and reality in *Weapons of Happiness* misleadingly has made the critics condemn Brenton's lack of political message or has forced them to find the core of the play only in apocalyptic aspect.¹⁾ However, the nature of the conflict between historical vision and social reality in *Weapons of Happiness* should be examined in terms of more complex, sophisticated relationship with the audience. *Weapons of Happiness* tackles the problems of contemporary British socialism from the wider outlook of modern European socialism, especially in relation to Stalinism, which has been mistaken for true socialism. As Brenton says, the play clearly deals with the critique of Stalinism by exposing it as a sort of "state capitalism," a "curious form of autocracy" which has haunted socialist history (Mitchell 200). Brenton's critique of Stalinism, which is reflected in the historical reality of the horror of communist domination in Eastern Europe, can be interpreted as a warning against the birth of a new form of socialist bureaucracy in Britain in the mid- 1970s. However, the main focus is on how the working-class could be emancipated in a situation of immense discrepancy between the historical lessons of international socialism and the stark realities of everyday life. The historical perspective provided by the political leaders at the 'macro' level of history including revolutionary vision and heroism seems to be very

1) For example, John Peter found Brenton's vision in this play paranoid, regarding the final scene as the "requiem for still-born revolutions" (12). In a fundamentally similar vein, Charles Marowitz interpreted the last scene as a total retreat to a utopian idyll, criticizing the author's escapism (18). Maybe J. W. Lambert's critique of the play's political vagueness would suffice to gather the general drift of critical misunderstanding among the critics who failed to notice the dialectical relationship between the play and the audience (37).

contradictory to the dreary reality of the workers at the 'micro' level of history. In this gap, a crucial question is raised for the audience in *Weapons of Happiness*: in a situation where the realistic, urgent need of the daily survival overwhelms the abstraction of historical vision or lessons — even if they are based on vivid historical reality — is the need for and value of historical vision still emphasized? How does Brenton deliver his historical message to the audience, keeping his anti-humanistic and anti-heroic position, where history is dismissed as a great fraud, an ideological construct which is controlled by the ruling class? The paradoxes in *Weapons of Happiness* are developed in a wider historical context of the past, the present and the future. This essay argues that instead of the failed revolutionaries, it is the audience who must confront and reassess the value of their own active role in history in *Weapons of Happiness*. Stridently direct propaganda has never been Brenton's main theatrical weapon. As Brenton says, "[T]here is no dialectic on the stage. The true dialectic happens between the audience you address and the play itself" (Zeifman 133). The critical territory of dialectics belongs to the audience and their responsibility increases in the play, where words and actions collide, contradictory narratives fight and reality stands against history.

II. Moving to the National: Searching for the Middle-class Audience

Commissioned by the National Theatre, *Weapons of Happiness* was performed in the new Lyttleton Theatre in 1976. The commission offered by the National was appealing to Brenton, who was desperately searching for a large space in which to expose his socialist drama to the public as much as possible. Considering that the National was a stronghold of

traditional naturalistic drama based on individual psychology, or Beckettian absurd drama with fatalistic humanism, however, performing his political play there meant bearing the risk of the play being appropriated by the established taste of the largely middle-class audience. John Osborne's and Arnold Wesker's naturalistic political concerns had been very well enjoyed, and, although the working-class reality and consciousness had been introduced as a new sort of theatrical theme, they had not been accompanied by a substantial change of the audience's attitude into a radical consciousness towards the existing society.

While the National's patronage for staging *Weapons of Happiness* was a part of the whole program for introducing young fringe writers' new plays, Brenton's intention was to penetrate and displace the bourgeois cultural trends dominating the National. He insisted that *Weapons of Happiness* should be produced in the Lyttleton Theatre, which is bigger and has more facilities than the Cottesloe Theatre, and considered his production team as "an artistic armoured charabanc full of people parked within the National walls" (Hayman 56). Moreover, for Brenton, this move to the National was made with a realization of the middle-class audience as a potential political vanguard, and it also meant the subsequent process of re-definition of his own idea of political theatre. Brenton argues:

Writers on the left have to be a vanguard. They have to provide survival kits for people who are active politically. That is how I've seen the work so far. Also their work has to be at the service of the working-class. But in ways that are difficult to describe because you are addressing them to the people who are a potential political vanguard. And that is why the plays often have painful issues. Like Stalinism; what the party is; what violent action is; the actual reality of working-class life; working-class consciousness, which a lot of people on the left

have to be told — that people are up to their knees in concrete out there — which is the subject of *Weapons of Happiness*. (Itzin 196)

Here, Brenton focuses on a service for the working-class through a fundamental change in the middle-class audience's consciousness. Although Brenton did not think of the National as a lasting stage for his subsequent plays, and he continued to produce many works for the fringe afterwards, he also believed that he could set up a potential political vanguard in the established audience in the National. His main focus was on making the National audience analyze the bourgeois ideology infiltrated into themselves and examine the existing oppressive society from a different angle to fatalism and humanism. The big theatrical venue was considered as a forum of debate, in which dialectical relationships between the audience and the play, and the audience and the characters could be achieved.

Above all, the large stage of the National provided Brenton with a more active theatrical space, in which large-scale historical and social themes are introduced and developed through the depictions of the interrelationships between the characters who have various kinds of social and political experience. And, more importantly, the dramatic space of *Weapons of Happiness*, unlike that of classic realism, involves more dialectical and active participation of the audience. Naturalistic drama based on classic realism excludes the possibility of leaving the audience to confront the contradictions it may have offered, or it makes the audience recognize the contradictions in the world as inevitably tragic, simply ironic, or absolutely resolved. On the other hand, the contradictions in *Weapons of Happiness* invite the audience themselves to produce the answers to questions it raises, neither giving orders to the audience nor aligning the audience in identification with the dramatic figures. In *Weapons of*

Happiness, the series of contradictions largely revolves around the huge gap between historical vision and contemporary reality. In two separate but interrelated storylines, one relates Josef Frank's fragmented recall of his revolutionary past, and the other charts the on-the-spot events of the workers' endeavor to achieve the revolution. The two series of events collide with each other, and are interwoven at the point of the conflicts with the capitalists.

Ⅲ. Representation of the Working-class: the Absence of History

Weapons of Happiness begins with the crisp factory workers' revolt against its owner's unfair plan to sell the factory secretly without the workforce's consent. Ralph Makepeace's secret documents reveal that the factory is financially on the brink of bankruptcy and he is going to remove the factory machinery without proper preparations for the workforce's livelihood. A group of resentful young workers take a measure to meet the situation, but they are short of the tactics and the ability to take advantage of their anger in order to propose any viable alternative. The workers are uneducated and illiterate, and the audience, from the outset, cannot expect from them any intellectual and heated political arguments. Their "individual unpredictability and volatility could be a fundamental potential if well directed" (Boon 124), but their animal instinct of fierce struggle for existence is not accompanied by a keen insight into the nature of the oppressive forces.

What is more emphasized is the workers' crude and childish ways of thinking and their isolation from outside reality. Ken, the hot head of the group, is hardly literate and acts before he thinks. What makes him join

the revolutionary group is undirected anger. Billy, another radical member of the group, gets his political education from the songs of Bob Dylan, who was one of the great cult figures of the 1960s. Liz is simply desperate to marry a rich man before her young body falls apart (187).²⁾ Alf, the old man, thinks of the young people's revolt as useless, but he is not capable of proposing any constructive alternative to their reckless adventure. Stacky, a deaf-mute, has a vague and uncontrolled anger like Ken's. His isolation and difficulties of communication stand as "an index of the social and political condition of the whole group" (Boon 123). Janice, the only person to understand and translate Stacky's sign-language, is represented as the leader of the isolated group. However, her combative history begins with reading some "shiny" books about Lenin and Trotsky, of which she could not understand a word (209). She encounters communism by reading a book entitled 'The Evil That Was Lenin,' which was written for the purpose of expelling "vicious" communism, but, on the contrary, instilled enormous curiosity about communism in her mind. She once joined a group of middle-class revolutionaries in order to change the world, but she soon found herself in the wrong place (210).

The description of the factory workers seems to be a worn-out depiction of gross and aggressive working-class young people. Though it reveals a sense of the solidarity of the working-class and their power of survival reflected in their rough humor, this overall representation of the reckless workers comes "dangerously close to confirming middle-class suspicions about them," especially in the context of a play intended for production at the National Theatre (Haxo 19). More importantly, what makes the workers seem particularly wretched and confined is the increased pressure of everyday survival and their more acute need for escape. To them, history is an increasingly repetitive force of oppression.

2) Howard Brenton, "Weapons of Happiness," *Plays: One*, London: Methuen, 1986. All subsequent text quotations are taken from this edition.

For Janice, the context of history is a bulky obstacle: “Don’t care about history ... And there in’t no history. Never happened ... Goodbye history. Now ... That’s what I love. The now. My now. Lovely sexy here and now” (232–33). Naturally, the force driving Janice into the pressing need for everyday survival and into ignorance of the historical context makes her choose Makepeace as the embodiment of the oppressive force. Sometimes, her ignorance of history, ironically, seems to be the power that is pushing her revolutionary task forward. Even if it furthers the dramatic development, however, it does not bring out any fundamental change in the repressive bourgeois structure.

The oppressive bourgeois structure is represented by a group of capitalists including Makepeace, his wife, a police inspector, a union representative, and a factory foreman. They do not develop and change through the course of the play, only representing the social structure which the workers are resisting. The workers’ contact with these characters proves to be a total failure. In Scene Nine, the workers approach Stanley, a factory foreman, and Hicks, a union representative, in order to discuss the issue of unionizing the workers. But it is quickly revealed that they chose the wrong discussion partners. Despite the fact that he is the Labour Party’s union consultant, Hicks’ main concern lies less in advising the striking workers than in sustaining a good relation with Makepeace. Stanley is described as a devoted vassal to the Makepeace family. He complains that Makepeace is not as paternalistic and severe as his father, a “saintly man” who “ruled with a rod a iron” (237). His vision never goes beyond the post-Victorian age, which is characterized by conviction, discipline and uniformity. For both Hicks and Stanley, the dialectical relation between the past and the present does not exist; the past is a succession of disgraceful defeats or a beautiful remembrance of order and discipline. Hicks’ idea of change only exposes his cynical and defeatist

attitude when he tips advice to the workers:

See, the best you can hope for in this world is to nudge.
Give it a bit of a nudge ... Industrial relations, that's a mighty
animal. Bit of a dinosaur. Or, to look at it another way, bit of
a giant oil tanker. (214)

Hicks emphasizes that the formidable unifying force of the massive mechanisms of the capitalist economy has already dominated all the social structures; capitalism unifies and levels all the social conflicts, enveloping them in the same law of profits and productivity. In this capitalist economic system based on the capacity and the necessity for unlimited self-development, capital, the foundation of the system, exists only by increasing its own substance and must constantly be invested in new activities. It continues generating more surplus-values and therefore more capital, gradually exposing itself as "a mighty animal." According to him, this is an irrevocable fact. Against the oppressive social structures, in the position of the powerless workers, there is no other way but giving a sort of impact, enough to confirm their employer that 'we are here,' not starting a revolution vainly.

After the negotiation with Hicks collapses, Ken, in a fit of fury, carelessly reveals that the workers have stolen Makepeace's documents, which he actually cannot even read, finally denouncing themselves as the criminals. He sticks his knife several times into Makepeace's briefcase, and screams: "We had a go, Jan! Hate and anger! Wan't enough, that's all!" (219). The workers' impotent and childish way of dealing with their enemies is due to their inability to interpret and understand what is going on around them. They do not even have any genuine sense of opposition and conflict between employers and employees in modern capitalist society. To a degree, hindered by the employers' paternalistic attitudes

towards them, they lose their ability to perceive Hicks and Stanley as their opposition. They do not know the face of their opposition, and their immediate anger does not make them see what course of action is needed by them.

IV. Josef Frank, a Representative of the ‘Macro’ World of Stalinism

When we consider that the workers’ present actions are re-examined through Josef Frank’s historical past, Brenton’s intention becomes clear. He wants his characters and his audience alike to analyze their society from a wider, less insular outlook. That is, through the character of Frank, a representative of the ‘macro’ world of Stalinism, Brenton delivers vivid historical lessons to both the characters and the audience. Brenton works from a real model, the historical Josef Frank who was hanged in Prague on the 3rd of December 1952 in the turmoil of Stalin’s notorious political purges. Brenton’s imaginary resurrection of Frank as a former Czechoslovakian Communist Party member, who is now in a self-exiled state, brings the old, experienced communist into contact with factory workers, by making him work in a South London crisp factory, skipping over twenty five years. Brenton does not give the audience any concrete and clear information about how Frank has spent the years in between. What is important is the fact that Frank is described as a victim of international communism and he is now desperate to escape his nightmarish history (232). Frank’s desperate desire to escape history despite the value of his historical past which, if delivered to the workers properly, could be a vivid historical lesson to them, increasingly keeps the audience’s critical distance from Frank’s own obsessive actions and

reveries. What is finally deconstructed in *Weapons of Happiness*? Is it the revolutionaries' naive passion, which is reduced to a mere game compared with Frank's historical experience, or Frank's own cynical retreat into apathy towards contemporary reality? When the play develops, Frank's gradually increasing contact with the workers becomes a meeting point of history and reality, the past and the present.

By comparison with the workers' imminent struggle against their vague enemies, what is emphasized to the audience is Frank's reticence and lifelessness. He does not occupy centre stage, only hovering uncertainly at the edge of the main action revolving around the conflicts between the capitalists and the revolutionaries. However, the simple fact that Frank was a witness to the robbery of Makepeace's secret documents makes him come to public notice; he is requested by the police to stand witness for Makepeace, and at the same time, he is threatened by the workers to remain tight-lipped upon the incident. In the dramatic development, Frank's reluctant involvement provides the audience with an opportunity not only to examine Frank's mysterious past but also to investigate the present of the workers and the capitalists in the wider context of the revolutionary history Frank extracts from his past.

The contact point of the past and the present is dramatized through Scenes Three, Four, and Five. In Scene Three, Frank is summoned to the factory office and required to complete "a simple statement" (194). The flickering of strip lighting causes Frank's headache and blinds his vision. In an instant, the factory office is transformed into a torture room (195), and Frank's past, like a furnace door, opens in front of the audience's eyes. Through this 'window' on the past, which is thrust between two contemporary scenes, it is explained to the audience how Frank's revolutionary life has been ruined by false confession and severe torture. It is revealed that Frank, in the name of saving the party in a crisis, is

threatened into confessing that he is an enemy of the socialist world as an American spy. First of all, the audience is naturally forced to connect two scenes (Scene Three and Four) in the context of thematic similarity. Brenton suggests that the oppressive force working in contemporary capitalist England is fundamentally not unlike the torture inflicted on Frank over twenty five years ago. However, what is further emphasized to the audience is the fundamental difference between two worlds. While Scene Three is seen as a sort of farce, where Frank is not really threatened by Makepeace's disorderly henchmen (it is his haunting past that really torments him), Scene Four contains a more realistic tone of tragic irony. Through his asides, Frank speaks directly to the audience on how all his life was "made a lie" and how the severe torture went on for a year (198). Frank's torture scene is more directly felt by the audience, and the contemporary people's insensitive attitude to the same oppressive force in Scene Three is reinforced and criticized. The audience which returns to the contemporary reality of Scene Five through the interjected 'window' of Frank's past in Scene Four, is no longer the same audience that belongs to the complacent world of Scene Three. Through this dialectical process of realization, the audience becomes able to investigate the contemporary reality from a new angle.

Scene Seven is another 'window,' which explains how Frank lost his conviction about communism. With Clementis, a Czech Foreign Minister, who leads the delegation, Frank negotiates with the Soviet Minister of Trade about bartering Czech steel for Russian food. Frank, insisting that the "communist nation is world wide" (204) and emphasizing the wretched state of starving Czech people, asserts that the Soviet's generous economic aid will help the Czech communist party obtain the people's support. When there has been no progress because of the Soviet minister's attempt to get the most advantageous terms possible, all of a sudden, Frank is told by

Clementis that all the contract terms they asked for have been accepted. When Frank feels in his bones that Stalin personally intervened, a choir sings and the huge portrait of Stalin glows through the snow: “*Stalin advances, smiling, smoking a pipe. The snow ceases to fall*” (206). By bringing Stalin directly onto the stage, Brenton makes the audience feel the weight of the history of Eastern Europe and the legacy of Stalinism. Frank’s past which has traumatized him so that he has abandoned a belief in socialism, is connected to his experiences under Stalin. The huge gulf and striking contrast between the depiction of Stalin as a great historical figure and the description of the Czech working-class on the verge of starvation is emphasized. The audience faces head-on the frightening legacy of communism, the outsized ghost of Stalin. At this point, the audience’s emotional sympathy with Frank through their knowledge about his past reaches a climax. However, Brenton refuses to present *Weapons of Happiness* as only an emotional memorial to the victims of Stalinism. He, further, tries to demonstrate the hard-going process in which Frank’s past comes to terms with the present of the workers, which is suggested as a more pressing realistic problem.

Brenton, in *Weapons of Happiness*, attempts a critical redirection of the humanist heroism. Frank’s action is described as pragmatic, and his relationship with the workers is anti-romantic. First of all, Frank himself rejects the attempt of society to wrap his bitter past up in historical curiosity. He does not want to stand high in public notice and esteem as a living historical symbol (240). He also refuses to have his afflictions looked up to as a noble sacrifice by the people who cannot and would not understand them in a genuine sense. His commitment is not suggested as melodramatic one. Frank’s isolation is very often criticized, and the details of his psychological change are avoided. The two stories interjected into the play make the audience analyze Frank’s psychological situation, rather

than making them react to it emotionally. The stories about 'a Jewish violinist' and 'the Grand Inquisitor' are told by Frank himself to Janice and Clementis in the play. They, in the same thematic trajectory with dramatic events, deliver to the audience Frank's opinion and position more objectively. Unlike Frank's emotional monologues, this narrative technique makes the audience look at Frank's political attitude and mental state more critically. The audience becomes more actively participatory in the play through the process in which they try to discover a thematic connection between the stories and the dramatic events.

As Janice, criticizing Frank for his isolation, presses him for commitment to the workers' revolt, Frank tells her the story of a Jewish violinist. Successfully concealing his origins from the Nazis, the violinist was made to perform Beethoven's Violin Concerto in front of Hitler. But, the moment he was to play, he realized that he could not, and left the platform. After the war, one of his friends visited the violinist, who has secluded himself from the world, and gave him a record of the Beethoven for his birthday present. He "put it on the gramophone. The orchestra played the introduction. The moment for the violin to play came ... And went. No violin. It was a practice record" (211). He looked at his hand and killed himself. To the violinist who, in fear of the Nazis, wanted to conceal his race, which is his most significant and inescapable nature, the silent moment he confronted in the practice record invokes the moment that he betrayed himself, his real self before Hitler. It was the moment that he was forced to deny his being. The violinist's 'race' is equivalent to Frank's belief in socialism. Stalinist prosecution forced him to betray his belief in socialism through torture and deception. In that hushed moment in the practice record, Frank sees his own vacuum and void, which has been caused by the loss of enthusiastic idealism. While giving an account of the violinist, Frank suggests that the pursuit of revolution carried out by young

workers might force him to encounter his old despair again. He, just like the violinist, dares not go through the same nightmare again.

In the first scene of Act Two, another story is introduced in Frank's remembrance of his last meeting with Clementis. At that meeting, Frank tells a story to Clementis who is trying not to believe in Stalin's intervention in the political purges: a fable about 'The Grand Inquisitor' from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Christ turns up on earth during the Spanish Inquisition. He works many miracles, bringing the dead back to life. The Grand Inquisitor, disguised as a monk, sees these miracles and orders Christ's arrest. That night, he goes to Christ's cell and says to him:

You left love. A few pure words of truth. How often has truth been spoken on the earth only to be lost in war, riot, the massive movements of the people? It is in the Church that your truth survives. The feared, cruel, impregnable Church. I am the Church. My dungeons, my racks and my tribunals endlessly purify the unbelievers so that the Church may survive, through this dark age. But now you come with miracles. Sentimental gestures. Anarchy. Everything you taught will disappear in a morass of exultation and false hopes. My Lord, the Church is Christ on earth. That is why, in the morning, I will hang you and burn you. (229)

The Grand Inquisitor is quickly identified with Stalin. The Grand Inquisitor distorts Christ's idea of love and truth through the Church. Arguing that love and truth are impossible to accomplish without the presence of the Church, it implants in the oppressed a sort of defeatism. The oppressed are degraded to passive beings, who are deprived of any potential ability to change the existing social order and have only to obey the ruling class's orders. In the same logic, the audience realizes how the

socialist vision has been corrupted by Stalinism.

These two stories epitomize Frank's emotional state and his logical understanding of the situation. Frank's despair is compared to the violinist's frustration, and Stalin is identified with The Grand Inquisitor. The audience is clearly forced to react to the subsequent dramatic events more critically, with more mind than heart. The process in which the audience examines Frank's action becomes analytic: the audience's concern is on whether Frank will commit suicide just like the violinist; or how Frank will cope with his death-like despair, standing against Stalinism. His death indicates not only Frank's own new challenge to Stalinism, but also, more importantly, suggests a new relationship between past and present which Brenton may establish at the end of the play.

V. Reconciling History and Reality, the Past and the Present

Frank's reluctant but inevitable contact with the workers is developed into a more constructive relationship. In the beginning of their relationship, according to Frank, he is dead to the workers and they are also dead to him. He describes himself in turn as "a hole in the air," "nothing" and "a vacuum" (200). He does not want to see and hear anything involved in the children's game of the workers. The situation is the same for the workers. Frank is seen as "a spooky" by the workers (200). He is a dirty, old man who is "all fucked inside" (201). Throughout the opening part of the play, the decaying state of his body is matched with the dilapidated condition of the factory. To most of the young workers, his old body is identified with infirmity and failure. His age does not represent "any access to history or to knowledge, simply physical decay" (Bull 101).

Clever as Janice is, her conviction about the revolution in England rings hollow. Not fully aware of Frank's psychological agony, she keeps forcing him to go into action, and this relentless confrontation seems fruitless. But, on the other hand, she points out that Frank's isolation will never be successful because he cannot escape the present reality. Janice's ignorance of the historical context is criticized, but at the same time, Frank's lack of commitment to the worker's reality is also criticized. Despite a wide gap in two people's experience of the world, the reasons why their relation is steadily maintained and gradually progresses are Janice's curiosity about Frank's old body and her ceaseless questions about Frank's career as a communist. Frank's tortured body kindles Janice's interest in history. Janice tries to wake Frank up from his reverie through their physical contact. As Billy ironically points out, Janice's body is a "real thing" to "gormless" Frank (207). By the means of the body which once betrayed him (for Frank, his tortured body is a symbol of human weakness), Janice attempts to get Frank alive. But Brenton does not describe their physical contact romantically and emotionally. In some way, it is the only means of communication between them, considering the huge gap in their experience.

Scene Ten of Act One is a case in point, taking the audience to the London Planetarium when Janice and Frank visit it to see a filmed simulation of a journey through the galaxies. Using the planetarium show effectively, Brenton demonstrates in a dialectic way Janice and Frank's developing relationship. The human sufferings which Frank experienced are strikingly contrasted to the massive and apathetic spectacle of the planetarium show (219). While the massive system of the universe reminds Frank of his old despair, Janice's fantasy still reflects her socialist desire. Against the backdrop of the impersonal universe, Janice embraces Frank on the floor (222). The moment the audience's attention is drawn from the massive universe to a clumsy human contact, the dramatic effect

reaches climax. The capacity for mutual caring and human understanding — even if it is very often limited by a huge gap in experience or knowledge between people, and the human contact between Frank and Janice has neither any transcendental nor ideological significance — is the most fundamental weapon of happiness prior to some useless gesture or a spectacle of heroic revolt. At the end of Act One, Frank’s action dramatically visualizes the process in which his capacity for caring is revived. When the factory has been suddenly occupied by the impulsive workers, and they make a stand against the Makepeace group, Frank responds to the workers’ call with “his dash toward the factory” (224).

On the other hand, the complacency of the capitalist class, represented by Makepeace, provokes Frank into active commitment to the reality of the workers. While Janice’s ceaseless demand for his commitment and the caring physical contact with her give him new energy, the capitalists’ narrow-minded ignorance and selfish search for peacefulness become the objects of his anger. Makepeace protests to Frank that the workers’ merciless occupation of his factory has spoiled his whole enterprise. But Makepeace’s genuine object of opposition is not the workers’ illegal occupation of the factory but the relentless capitalist economic system, which vaguely approaches him as the faceless “monoliths of crunch world” (240). It is this cruel capitalist economic reality that drives Makepeace’s small company into inevitable bankruptcy. His ignorance explains why he has a hostile feeling for the workers’ revolt: “God, the little shits! Children of Revolution? I want them to ... To bleed like pigs in a ditch” (250). Brenton exposes Makepeace’s acceptable face of liberal conscience and paternalism, and then exposes his ignorance and the real cruelties of power and domination. This play is designed to “invite the audience’s identification with a liberal voice, only to defeat and cancel it, exposing the creed as a terrible deceit” (Rylance 128). Even if people, temporally and

spatially, cannot get any direct experience of other people's sufferings, their complacency or ignorance can be overcome by using historical imagination, which makes people analyze the relationship between present and past. It is the active mental working which makes the people understand their present through historical views and forces them to interpret the present oppression in the context of the past. Makepeace simply escapes the present, avoiding the responsibility for other people's suffering and pain.

In the growing sense of solidarity with the workers and in hatred for the capitalists' complacency, Frank decides to intervene in the workers' struggles for the revolt. He one by one questions the workers, who, on the impulse of the moment, occupied the factory:

And how do you run the factory? And how do you buy the potatoes? And the cellophane, for the packets? And pay the printers, for the funny faces in pretty colours, upon the packets? And the oil in the vats? ... You do not have the chance for revolt often. And, often, it is ridiculous. Fleeting. Difficult to think through. But it is rare. And not to be thrown away. It is the most precious thing on earth. (244)

His advice is very realistic and his attitude is hardly heroic. He emphasizes that they must not waste themselves. Frank's advice is focused less on any particular revolutionary ideology than accessible and viable action in the feasible sphere. After the other workers have run away from the factory through a drain, Frank gives his weapons of happiness to Janice, who has come out again to take Frank with her. Judging the characters of the workers respectively, he says that Alf is so old and weak that he has to be put in a hospital, and Liz, whose luxury-loving character is basically unfitted for the revolutionary task, should be returned to her

home. He also points out that Ken, first of all, must learn to read and Billy's utopian tendencies must be squashed. His advice to Janice is that she must not waste herself (248-49). After his advice is finished and Janice has disappeared, Brenton describes Frank's death with his last fantasy:

As the light of the lamp disappears he holds his forearms against his body in pain. The blackout is almost restored when brilliant light snaps on all over the stage. At the back stands a tank with Russian insignia. Stalin stands beside it. Josef Frank stands and takes off his coat. He runs at the tank, leaps and flings his coat over the end of the barrel of the tank's gun. He sinks to his knees, exhausted. Stalin laughs.

Stalin : Incurable romantic. (249)

Frank re-defines revolution and relocates it within the practical realm. His commitment to political reality takes the form of the practical advice to the workers, and now he wants to establish a new relationship with Stalin. It is new in the way Frank attempts to confront the ghost of Stalin with the knowledge of the huge gap between vision and reality, which has deprived him of the hope for socialist ideals. Now, Stalin's laughter sounds ironical to the audience because Frank's actual advice to the workers is a well-founded and well-directed resistance which can dispel the Grand Inquisitor's sardonic attitude and repressive violence without wasting the revolutionary force. Frank and Stalin have a common recognition of a huge gap between the ideal and the real. While Stalin's realization leads to the great fraud of the betrayal of reality by vision and to the use of violence in order to keep the facade of the vision, Frank acts for his vision despite fragile reality.

VI. Conclusion

The last scene in the play is set in a winter orchard in Wales. Janice is trying to make use of Frank's advice: she put Alf in a hospital; Liz is continuously urged to go back to her home; Ken is trying to read some note on the door of the abandoned farm; Billy is making the farm work. Janice plans to go to the city as, according to Frank's advice, revolution will not happen in the country. But the final conversation between Billy and Janice makes the audience wonder whether the workers' attempts will be successful or not:

Billy: Yeah? 'Ere Jan, that old man. Old Joey. You really got funny for him, didn't you?

Janice shrugs. She and Billy begin to walk off, their arms round each other.

Janice: So?

Billy: What was he?

Janice: He was a Communist. (253)

Billy's last question seems to be directed less to Janice's answer than to the answer of the audience. Though Janice's last compliment to Frank seems to dismiss Stalin's derision of Frank's wild idealism, Janice's answer, "He was a Communist," sounds hollow. Brenton's revaluation of Frank's last action seems to be less at the hands of the characters within the play than at the hand of the audience. Frank's anti-Stalinist position, in the form of his reverie, is never seen by the workers. The workers do not seem to have realized the genuine meaning of Frank's Stalinist legacy. Billy does not get hold of Frank's revolutionary history, and we are not sure that even Janice fully understood Frank. On the other hand, the audience is given a chance to observe and examine Frank's internal

historical dialogues with Stalinism, which are very often dismissed by the workers as only his personal and hallucinatory memories. In *Weapons of Happiness*, the dialectic of the theatrical event happens not on the stage and between the characters but in the active relationship between the stage and the audience.

In *Weapons of Happiness*, Brenton's focus is on the gap between vision and reality. The political idealism, which is epitomized as a creation of a new Marxist human being, very easily yields to the political reality which Frank's tortured body proves. The Grand Inquisitor story suggests this huge gap between theory and praxis. In fact, this contradiction has been considered as rather ambiguous and vague by some critics. One critic asserted that "Brenton's love of comedy and violent theatrical confrontation robbed him of a much-needed analytical element," arguing that "there is simply very little contest in the play between the capitalist classes and their real or potential opponents" (Grant 121). For Nightingale, this play shows only the lack of any concrete debate of the socialist issues:

Weapons of Happiness strikes me as profoundly implausible, and also lacking in commodities badly needed when the subject is nothing less than our collective future: intellectual penetration, mental rigour, the will to interpret rather than casually evoke. The National is right to present work which might upset the politically squeamish; but it is not going to achieve much with a play that shares the vagueness, the lack of focus and force, of its potato crisp revolutionaries. (257)

But Nightingale's criticism seems to be off the point, because Brenton's main concern is not providing the audience with a concrete political plan. Brenton's focus is on the political circumstance itself where "any realistic analysis of the contemporary situation demands this lack of articulation"

(Innes 200). As Touraine says, *Weapons of Happiness* is maybe an expression of “the encounter between a revolutionary movement and a non–revolutionary situation” (64). It is the conflict between the existing revolutionary conditions and absent revolutionary consciousness. The substantial change in the audience’s revolutionary consciousness is prior to any concrete political debate. In this aspect, the subversive nature of Brenton’s text involves and seeks more active relations with his audience. In this play, Brenton does not push his definitive ideological prescription at his audience. Instead he encourages his audience to question its own political attitude through the dramatic method of presenting the situation of social contradiction. *Weapons of Happiness* is open–ended. Brenton suggests the potential vision for social change, but, at the same time, his future is not isolated from the past and the present. The past is suggested as a fundamental foundation on which the present is constituted, and against the future, the present is measured and founding wanting. The utopian potential of final word depends upon the audience.

Works Cited

- Boon, Richard. *Brenton: The Playwright*. London: Methuen, 1991.
- Brenton, Howard. *Plays One*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Bull, John. *New British Political Dramatists*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Grant, Steve. "Voicing the Protest: The New Writers." *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*. Ed. Sandy Craig. Ambergate: Amber Lane, 1980. 116-44.
- Haxo, Paul. "Opening the Door for Revolution: Images of Political Action in *Magnificence, The Saliva Milkshake, and Weapons of Happiness*." *Howard Brenton: A Casebook*. Ed. Ann Wilson. New York: Garland, 1992. 3-28.
- Hayman, Ronald. "Ronald Hayman Talks to Howard Brenton about his Work." *The New Review* 3.29 (1976): 56-58.
- Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*. Cambridge: CUP, 1992.
- Itzin, Catherine. *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968*. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Lambert, J. W. "Plays in Performance—London." *Drama* 122 (Autumn 1976): 35-38.
- Marowitz, Charles. "Review of *Weapons of Happiness*." *Plays and Players* 23.12 (1976): 18-19.
- Mitchell, Tony. "The Red Theatre under the Bed." *New Theatre Quarterly* 3.11 (1987): 195-201.
- Nightingale, Benedict. "Cheese and Onion: review of *Weapons of Happiness*." *New Statesman* (23 July 1976): 257.
- Peter, John. "Meet the Wild Bunch." *The Sunday Times* (11 July 1976): 12.
- Rylance, Rick. "Forms of Dissent in Contemporary Drama and

Contemporary Theory.” *The Death of the Playwright?: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*. Ed. Adrian Page. London: Macmillan, 1992. 115–41.

Touraine, Alan. *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform*. Trans. L. F. Mayhew. New York: Random House, 1971.

Zeifman, Hersh. “Making History: The Plays of Howard Brenton.” *British and Irish Drama since 1960*. Ed. James Acheson. London: Macmillan, 1993. 130–45.

Abstract

**Bridging the Gap between Vision and Reality: History
and Audience Engagement in Howard Brenton's
*Weapons of Happiness***

Kim, Yoo (Sungkyunkwan University)

Howard Brenton's play *Weapons of Happiness* seems to be caught between the political situation, where positive, constructive utopian designs are no longer possible, and the critical atmosphere, where even sympathetic left-leaning critics join in the general criticism of the lack of clear political vision in the play. In fact, to a degree, *Weapons of Happiness* avoids the definition of the socialist ideal, and the achievement of vision is postponed. This huge gulf between the ideal and the real in *Weapons of Happiness* misleadingly has made the critics condemn Brenton's lack of political message or has forced them to find the core of the play only in apocalyptic aspect. However, the nature of the conflict between historical vision and social reality in *Weapons of Happiness* should be examined in the context of the establishment of more active relationship with the audience. This essay argues that instead of the failed revolutionaries in the play, it is the audience who must perform the hard work of analysis and make the connections in *Weapons of Happiness*.

In *Weapons of Happiness*, the series of contradictions largely revolves around the huge gap between historical vision and contemporary reality. The historical perspective provided by the political leaders at the 'macro' level of history including revolutionary vision and heroism is contradictory to the dreary reality of the workers at the 'micro' level of history. In two

separate but interrelated storylines, one relates Josef Frank's fragmented recall of his revolutionary past, and the other charts the on-the-spot events of the workers' endeavor to achieve the revolution. The two series of events collide with each other, maximizing the audience's critical assessment of their own role in history. In the play, the past is suggested as a fundamental foundation on which the present is constituted, and against the future, the present is measured and founding wanting. The utopian potential of final word depends upon the audience.

Key Words: Howard Brenton, *Weapons of Happiness* historical vision and contemporary reality, Stalinism , audience engagement
하워드 브렌튼, 『행복의 무기』 , 역사적 비전과 동시대 현실,
스탈린 주의, 관객 참여

논문접수일: 2014.05.26

심사완료일: 2014.06.16

게재확정일: 2014.06.21

이름: 김 유

소속: 성균관대학교 영어영문학과

주소: 110-745 서울시 종로구 성균관로 25-2 성균관대학교 영어영문학과

이메일: ykim65@hotmail.com

