



Barker: Plays Five

Howard Barker

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Includes the plays *The Last Supper*, *Seven Lears*, *Hated Nightfall* and *Wounds to the Face*

Howard Barker is one of the most significant and controversial dramatists of his time. His plays challenge, unsettle and expose. Both *The Last Supper* and *Seven Lears* exemplify Barker's way with great religious and literary stories, the first placing the wilful suicide of a Christ-like prophet, Lvov, in the context of modern chaos, illuminating his moral ambiguities with comic or painful parables, the second taking its inspiration from the significant absence in Shakespeare's play, that of Lear's wife, the queen whose murder is here discerned as the origin as the great family tragedy.

The execution of the Russian royal family remains shrouded in mystery - not least that of the identity of two bodies discovered in the mass grave years after the event. In *Hated Nightfall* Barker's speculative imagination leads him to identify these as the children's tutor, Dancer, and a recalcitrant servant, Jane. Dancer is perhaps Barker's archetypal hero, febrile, iconoclastic, yet in search of a self-sacrifice nothing appears to justify. In *Wounds to the Face*, our complex and sometimes violent relations with our own physiognomy form the psychological link between related scenes of wounding, notoriety, shame and vanity in a play of kaleidoscopic energy and imagery.

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