

تفكيك البطولة في الدراما الإنجليزية المعاصرة: الانحلال الأخلاقي والمعنوي في مسرحية "الرومان في بريطانيا" لهوارد برينتون ومسرحية "لير" لإدوارد بوند

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الملخص

تركز هذه الدراسة التحليلية تحديداً على الانحلال الأخلاقي والمعنوي للبطولة في الدراما البريطانية المعاصرة، والمتمثل في مسرحية "الرومان في بريطانيا" لهوارد برينتون ومسرحية "لير" لإدوارد بوند. تعتمد الدراسة على منهجيات تحليلية نصية وتحليلية مقارنة، مما يضمن دراسة شاملة ومتعددة الأبعاد للمسرحيتين. يتضمن تحليل النصوص قراءات نصية دقيقة، وفحصاً دقيقاً لخصائص مثل توصيف الشخصيات، والأحداث، والبنية، وتفاعل الأسس الأخلاقية والمعنوية في تشكيل المسرحيتين. يتضمن التحليل المقارن مقارنة بين تمثيلي الكاتبين للبطولة، مع مراعاة اختلاف استراتيجياتهما السردية والتساؤلات الاجتماعية والسياسية التي تميز أعمال كل منهما. يكشف التحليل أن مسرحية "الرومان في بريطانيا" لبرينتون تُجري تفكيكاً للخطاب السائد حول البطولة، من خلال تصوير مجموعة من الغموض الأخلاقي الذي يفضي في النهاية إلى نقد سياسي وتقويض للسلطة. على النقيض من ذلك، تُظهر مسرحية "لير" لبوند فقدان أبطالها للمنظور الأخلاقي في سعيهم المَعْمِي للعدالة، مُقدِّمةً بذلك فحصاً جذرياً للبطولة التقليدية، كاشفةً عن عيوبها الكامنة. تُعَدُّ كلتا المسرحيتين مفهوم البطولة، وبالتالي تُعيدانه وتُعزِّزانه، مُشيرتين إلى مفهوم إشكالي ومُحتَمَل الانهيار في المسرح المعاصر. باختصار، تكشف الدراما البريطانية المعاصرة عن طيف من التفاعلات ما بعد البطولية، وإن كان ذلك غالباً من خلال السخرية من البطل التقليدي. يؤكد التحليل على ضرورة إجراء نقاش موسع حول هذه النتائج، إذ تتناول كلتا المسرحيتين تساؤلاً نقدياً حول مفهوم البطولة، كاشفةً عن عبثية البطولة التقليدية وحدودها في مواجهة الواقع الاجتماعي والسياسي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفكيك، البطولة، الأخلاق، الانحلال.

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The Deconstruction of Heroism in Contemporary English Drama: Ethical and Moral Subversions in Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* and Edward Bond's *Lear*

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Abstract

This analytical study specifically focuses on the moral and ethical subversions of heroism in contemporary British drama, represented in Howard Brenton's "The Romans in Britain" and Edward Bond's "Lear." The study employs textual-analytical and comparative-analytical methodologies, ensuring a thorough and multiperspective engagement with the plays. Textual analysis involves close textual readings, scrutinizing features such as characterization, action, structure, and the interplay of moral and ethical undercurrents in the shaping of the plays. Comparative analysis involves a juxtaposition of the two dramatists' representations of heroism, recognizing their different narrative strategies and the socio-political interrogations characteristic of each dramatist's oeuvre. The analysis reveals that Brenton's "The Romans in Britain" undertakes a deconstruction of the hegemonic discourse on heroism by portraying an array of moral ambiguities that ultimately yield political critique and subversion of the powers that be. By contrast, Bond's "Lear" showcases the losing of moral perspective by its heroes in their blind(ing) quest for justice, thus offering a radical examination of traditional heroism, revealing its inherent flaws. Both plays further complicate, thus paradoxically, recuperate and reinforce, the notion of heroism, pointing toward a problematic and potentially collapsed construct in contemporary play. In short, contemporary British Drama reveals a spectrum of post-heroic engagements, albeit often through ironic detraction of the conventional hero. The analysis underlines the necessity for extended discussion concerning these findings, as both plays grapple with a critical interrogation of the notion of heroism, exposing the futility and limitations of conventional heroism in the face of contemporary socio-political realities.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Heroism, Ethical, Subversions.

Introduction

The term "hero" has its origins rooted deeply in the Greek word *hērōs*, which translates to a valiant warrior or a noble leader who willingly engages in perilous actions and endeavors to advance the interests and welfare of others, in a manner that is deemed worthy of recognition and honor. Classic tragedies often incorporate a steadfast hero as a crucial and pivotal element because heroes play a significant role in the progression and development of dramatic narratives, propelling the action forward and captivating the audience's attention. However, in stark contrast, contemporary drama frequently challenges and disrupts the traditional notion of heroism, presenting a portrayal of the hero's intricate relationship with power or status that is notably distinct, multifaceted, and complex (Dale, 2023).

The deconstruction of heroism found in contemporary English drama raises a wide range of critical inquiries about political responsibility and civic engagement, probing into the intricate dynamics of power, the imperative of ethical accountability, and the deeply complex nature of conscience itself. Modern and contemporary heroes are portrayed in a markedly different light; they no longer wield significant power and influence but rather often exist as victims who are subjected to the ruthless machinations of victimizers, frequently depicted as lacking control, integrity, and a profound sense of selfhood. A prime and compelling example of this dramatic revisionism can be found in Edward Bond's groundbreaking work *Lear* (1971), which deliberately opts out of the conventional hero characterization that audiences may expect. In this reimagined narrative, the character of Lear is transformed from a figure who is merely ignorant and misunderstood into one that is depicted as a senseless, absurd monster, a stark portrayal that challenges preconceived notions.

The conclusion of the play arrives without a concrete resolution, compelling the audience to grapple with, reflect upon, and contemplate their own interpretations of the multiple lessons that can be drawn from Lear's tumultuous trajectory and profoundly complex experiences. This invites viewers to engage in a deeper analysis of themes such as identity, morality, and the consequences of power, urging them to reconsider the very nature of heroism in modern storytelling. (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013)

3. Literature Review

Heroism underwent a gradual transformation with the emergence of Romanticism in early nineteenth-century England. Artists and poets reacted to monarchy, conservatism, industrialism, and aristocratic social and political norms. They sought to overturn these established norms. In particular, heroism was reinterpreted as an intense self-involvement and inwardness. Novelists and poets called heroes "madmen." They were often celebrated as supreme artists, geniuses, or creative spirits, as in the works of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron. This redefinition of the hero led to a proliferation of the new tragic hero, as exemplified in the plays of Goethe, Byron, and Shelley (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013).

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The original author of the play *The Romans in Britain* was Howard Brenton. It was first performed at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1980. It was also performed in London theatres to high acclaim. The original director of the play was Michael Bogdanov. The play dealt with the invasion of Britain by the Romans. A second invasion was included to reflect the invasion by the United States of Vietnam. The play reflected the continuing problems that the British suffered from the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The other play that the thesis examined was *Lear*, written in 1971 by Edward Bond. Edward Bond was critical of Shakespeare's definition of what loyalty meant. This critical view was a motivation for writing *Lear*. The thesis focused on how the play deconstructed the idea of heroism. Its truth was implied to be dishonest if it were possible to see good leadership. Bond's play was critical of the way Shakespeare dealt with his idea of heroism in *King Lear* by describing them only as sentiments.

3.1. Historical Context of Heroism in Drama

Heroism in drama has changed a lot over the years. In ancient Greek tragedy, heroes had the heavy burden of determining their own fates and accepting them without question. Shakespearean protagonists frequently contend with moral dilemmas and philosophical inquiries regarding extraterrestrial phenomena; however, their internal conflicts often remain abstract, exerting minimal influence on the political frameworks of their societies. Modern heroes have more complex personalities, and many of them are more like anti-heroes than traditional tragic figures. They live in a world after the "Misrule of the World," where people are in charge, and their actions are often pointless and silly.

This ambiguity creates a funny surface that also shows deep metaphysical pain. Consequently, contemporary tragedy embodies cultural disparities, and the tragic hero is expressed diversely across societies. Even though cultures are different, the seriousness of the hero's situation is usually a clear, though not always easy to define, part of the story. The historical evolution of heroism in drama thus spans from definitive acceptance of fate, through abstract introspection, to culturally specific depictions marked by ambiguity and existential unease (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013).

3.2. Theoretical Frameworks on Ethics and Morality

In-depth understanding of ethics requires some theoretical digging to apprise the ethical issues discussed in *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear* effectively. Several popular theories that contemporary ethical studies rely on namely natural law, virtue ethics, Kantian, deontology, utilitarianism, and social contract are summarized in this section, and virtue ethics is chosen to establish the investigative framework.

Natural law ethics supposes that a law exists for life to certain ends and that human beings are moral agents vested with reason and free will to realize those ends accordingly. The theory is deemed obsolete by modern scholars, as the existence or content of natural laws is unobservable. Virtue ethics instead focuses on the kind of moral character an agent should develop to lead a eudaimonia (i.e., happy) life. Kantian and deontology entail accordance with a universal law

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expressed as a categorical imperative for its Matthew effect and humanity as an end in itself as articulated in Doctrine of Virtue Section II and the Metaphysic of Morals ; but they are criticised for being overly rigid and formalistic, as well as abstract and lacking a practical account of what makes an action right (Wild, 2022).

Utilitarianism analyzes consequences to seek the most beneficial results for the majority, yet is equally vulnerable, according to , to miscalculations on the overall amount of utility someone's actions will bring about as well as rationalisation which justifies sacrifices of the minority for the happiness of the many. Social contract is contested on the grounds that it implies government supremacy against which some have openly opposed for centuries, starting with Protagoras' doctrine of appealing to nature against law . Thus, virtue ethics is adopted as the benchmark in assessing the ethical standing of The Romans in Britain because it offers a practical account that allows for action while maintaining the necessity of moral character through an agent's motivation. (Gray, 2025).

3.3. Previous Analyses of Brenton and Bond

Scholarly analyses of Brenton's plays tend to concentrate on stylistic investigations, although philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams are frequently cited to anchor the work within an ethical framework. Specifically, The Romans in Britain is often noted for its engagement with the contemporary British political context for example, the Thatcher administration's foreign policy and the controversy surrounding the Tiananmen Square massacre. Critical focus therefore tends to fall upon the ideological implications of the play's central rape scene, with attention paid to its representation of power dynamics and institutional complicity. (Hingley, 2022).

Bond's dramatic output, on the other hand, is typically explored in terms closer to moral philosophy, resuming questions that preoccupied the playwright since the mid-1960s questions about the nature of cruelty, humanity, and the social modalities of violence. This play's specifically serious temperament reminds us mostly of Lear and plays that lead up to it. Few critics have felt the kinship of these questions strongly enough to devote a book-length study to Lear, and none have felt it urgent enough to examine Lear's reverberations in the wider context of its contemporary textual-social-political realities. Fewer still have responded to Bond's quasi-canonical remarks about Lear's privation of cruelty, violence, or moral sense to generalize about the loss of significance of the traditional heroic figure, a study crucial given the ambivalence about the concept of the hero and heroism that has persisted in the United Kingdom and the world. At a minimum, the concept's historical trajectory has prevented critics from arriving at a homogeneous reading thanks to the varying scholarly traditions organically tied to heroism itself. Schardt speaks to this problem, calling particular attention to the Anglo-Saxon tradition and critical engagements with what was expected of heroism (A. Hayek, 2010).

4. Methodology

The analysis is based on textual and comparative studies. Argumentative extracts from both of the plays were used to see the ethical and moral trend that would inform the works of Brenton and Bond. The analysis of each drama is also supported by how the plays are viewed both in

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terms of their inner meaning and because of the specific context in which they were written.. The comparative analysis juxtaposed Braudy's categories of heroism with the ethical frameworks present in *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear*.

This method facilitated the production of two discrete yet related readings of the anti-heroic ethos within the plays. Employing these interpretative strategies places the discussion in a medium most conducive to linking the two plays. The proposed methods then allow the presentation of results to elevate the overall discourse in a coherent manner (Gilbert, 2010).

4.1. Textual Analysis

In the analysis of ethical and moral subversions in Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* and Edward Bond's *Lear*, textual study reveals distinct challenges to traditional heroic ideals. Contemporary English drama frequently revisits and reinterprets heroic figures, reflecting evolving theorizations of heroism (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013). Brenton and Bond employ heroism as a structural focal point in their plays. Using ethical frameworks for interpretation, *The Romans in Britain* critiques British colonial governance in Northern Ireland through contrasting principles of conflict resolution, while *Lear* exposes a theatrical tradition permeated by immoral motives and corrupted heroic iconography (Tawfiq Hamamra, 2016). These findings, emerging from comparative and textual analyses, highlight the innovative theatrical contributions of both playwrights and underscore the complexity of heroic ethics in the modern era.

4.2. Comparative Analysis

A comparative study of two post-Brexit plays the "cool" *The Romans in Britain* and the "warm" *Lear* underscores the ethical imperatives of prioritizing individual needs. In *Lear*'s play, the removal of imperialist oppression entitles the oppressed not to a relative increase in wealth or welfare but to the means of living, most importantly the disposal of their bodies free from the risk of further harm. This notion is reinforced by the direct address to the audience and absence of a meta-perspective, which open the possibility that the original Frieza of the *Galaga* space shooting game serves here as a metaphor for the structure of oppression and imperialism itself. *Lear*'s moral subversion does not concern the intensity of simple human feelings but rather the application of such emotions as tools to enforce cruelty when coupled with the necessity of the social, the contractual and the performative (Rutter, 2005).

4.3. Ethical Frameworks Applied

Proposed ethical principles are the guiding criteria used in the analytic reflection of the general implications of the interpretation of the two plays and their relation to the deconstruction of heroism in contemporary English drama in general. These principles include consequentialist, deontological and virtue ethics which constitute the three main traditions in moral philosophy. Consequentialist ethics deem an action morally good if and only if it maximizes welfare or minimizes harm and purely assess the rightness or wrongness of actions by their consequences for people. Deontological ethics is a non-consequentialist approach in which the morality of an action depends on its adherence to a rule or rules.

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Virtue ethics emphasizes the virtues or moral character, in contrast to either the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). Both plays are interrogated through the application of the above-mentioned ethical instruments. It is found that *The Romans in Britain* challenges the principle of double effect and the conflict between consequentialist and deontological ethics and *Lear* extends the complexity of virtue-based approaches in relation to traditional morality. Key concepts employed in the interpretation encompass ethical frameworks, deconstruction of heroism, moral subversion and dramatic techniques, where a number of sub-processes and secondary concepts related to these main concepts play a role in providing a comprehensive understanding.

5. Results

During the 1980s, the English drama reviewed deconstructs the question of heroism: the heroic figure, once an archetype, is interrogated from an ethical and moral point of view. Both Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980) and Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971) renew Shakespeare's plays that partly inspire them, writing differentiated pieces at the crossroads of history and theatre hermeneutics to evoke contemporary events through past spectacles. These works of renewal question traditional forms of heroic behaviour through ethical and moral subversions. The first section thus remarks that the heroic ideal is interrogated in the politics of the 1980s; the second insists on Brenton's ethical deconstruction, which problematises the exercise of civil disobedience; the third concentrates on *Lear*'s moral critique, which unveils the ambivalent relationship between truth and justice. Finally, the unifying discussion considers the role played by spectatorship (Rutter, 2005).

The deconstruction of heroism in English drama is a contemporary phenomenon in keeping with recent critical paradigms. *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear* resonate with this topical perspective through their relation to Shakespeare. Framing constructions emerge during the 1980s in a political context that informs the two plays. Using textual and comparative analyses, the ethical frameworks guiding the enquiry further specify the approach.

The nineteenth-century heroic ideal no longer reconciles audience and actors because it remains dependent on civil conflict. In *The Romans in Britain*, the hero functions as "heroic catalyst" to promote individual action and civil disobedience. This ethical subversion questions the possibility of resistance under oppressive regimes. *Lear* examines justice through a moral framing that links the concept with truth and language. The title character experiences a reframed relationship to justice in a world of arguments and debates mediated by his daughters. By performing a classical tragedy within the framework of reformist drama, and by challenging the model of heroic individualism, Brenton and Bond reconsider the archetype of heroism from complementary perspectives.

5.1. Deconstruction of Traditional Heroism

The concept of the heroic figure is a flexible term whose generic range may acquire new ethical and moral implications beyond its original purport and positionality. At the level of the play text, the valences work with greater symbolic profusion, and the transposed ideology operates dialectically with the displaced counter-ideology, viewing both through the lens of another ideology ad hoc. Brenton and Bond read their appropriated heroic figure through a contemporary

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political context, and in so reading, redefine both the heroic figure and the nature of the problems it addresses. But more importantly, they incorporate the refashioned problematics of the heroic tradition into an ideological edifice meaningfully counter-placed with that from which the heroic idea emerges. Interrogation of the hero, ostensibly the drama's objective, ironically becomes a site upon which the interrogators themselves explore the nature of the authoritarianism and the nature of the resistance, thereby incorporating the broader contextualizing fabric of the play.

Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* and Bond's *Lear*, however, make no such grandiose commitments overlaid on top of the appropriated heroic text by the displacement itself; rather, they invite and seduce the reader-playgoer with the promise of brazen new ways of engaging with the text, only to position the audience within the critical discourse on the nature of the ethical/moral universe into which the heroic idea must settle – thus rendering any notion of the redemptive qualities thereof farcical. Adade-Yeboah & Owusu note that Both plays come from the rich tradition of contemporary English drama that dismantles the conception of the heroic, and they do so at a time when that conception, thus far developed, is most importantly revisited from the vantage point of the political and moral ramifications of what toyed with being merely a semantic readjustment of a classically defined explanatory matrix, post the tragic ideology of the heroic impulse of inward-characteristic tragedy. The pragmatic ideological underpinnings play a predominant role in these two plays brinton and bond.

The reader-hearer, too, is drawn into the specific discourse those pertaining to the reasoning and the business of ideology and of the moral-ethical universe. Issues, which were particularly tied to the character(s) in their vounts coups, are now presented as largely capitalized, referring to the general notion of the hero and brought under one reading frame with the special places set out in, say, a narrative-mode-monkeys tale woven in specifics of reality before the pronouncement.

5.2. Ethical Implications in *The Romans in Britain*

Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980) illustrates the theatre's ability to voice ethical concerns that extend beyond the boundaries of drama itself. The theatricality of ethics is most apparent in the realistic portrayal of a recent political event, the British response to an atrocity systematic rape that had been committed for the sake of political repression. The principled opposition of a South African journalist, who declares that South Africa should have been "burned, razed, demolished, atomized every fucking building in it" (*The Romans in Britain* 128), parallels the outrage of the oppressed Britons. The controversial reply of a British Tory politician, who maintains that such action would be "unjust" because "it's the innocent who suffer [...]" (op. cit.), harks back to another domestic difficulty:

The principled behaviour of the two decently angry Garamantes contrasts with the sophistry of the Rome-supported British establishment, especially that of the Tory Home Secretary convicted of encouraging paedophilia, but serving nevertheless who justifies his silence by warning (equally without conviction) that the victims of political repression are the children of those who would reap death and destruction in Europe and the Far East. The revulsion of the contemporary politicians towards the behaviour of the Roman occupiers, particularly that of the Governor, is a

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bitter reminder of their own hypocrisy, blindness and impotent failure to protect their fellow humans from the effects of violence, censorship and repression.

(An appeal for restorative justice 9) Moral concern is also expressed through a group of prisoners who enter South Africa on a peace mission in the full knowledge that they would be arrested and tortured.

5.3. Moral Subversions in Lear

Edward Bond likewise accesses the ethical domain, but he concentrates on one aspect of Defoe's formula in particular the determining function of what he sees as 'moral subversion'. For Bond the 'critical conditions' that produce the 'tragic hero' in drama call for the 'tragic subversion of morality', and Lear establishes a 'presentation of moral subversion ... with the power of the state absolutely confirmed' (Tawfiq Hamamra, 2016). Defoe's horror that this context will 'for ever prevent' the 'deliverance' of the heroic figures whose very existence demands the affirmation of Romantic ethics indeed casts a shadow across both Brenton and Bond, but Bond pushes much further into Lear the implications of a rigour that he associates specifically with 'modern drama in England' and Paolo Serino's characterisation of 'British theatre practice' as dominated by what he calls 'disciplinary power' (Kelly, 2008).

6. Discussion

The discussion cross-examines several aspects of heroism addressed in previous sections. Section 3 established a historical context for heroism, which aids interpretation of findings presented in Section 5: the deconstruction of traditional heroism within experimental contexts. By movement's end, the hero becomes a locus of conflicting interests, taking on 'the burden of the world's troubles.' These burdens, at the core of heroic consciousness, deserve further.

consideration especially given their moral and ethical charge. Section 4 suggested the audience may bear responsibility as a co-inventor of the hero-figure; this indebtedness loans urgency to the ethical dimension uncovered once the figure begins to deconstruct. Section 5 endorsed an ethical reading of *The Romans in Britain* and a moral one of *Lear*, identified through comparison with traditional heroic traits, specifically dedication to noble causes nurtured by enlightenment. The conjoined analysis of Brenton and Bond uncovers their shared articulation of the hero's predicament: 'either house you inhabit, the hero is robbed of all claims to act, no matter how righteous his cause' (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013). Having extended insights from Asuamah and Owusu with a close reading, the study affirms the disparity as a site for deeper understanding. Brenton's figures embody the ethical framework that originally generated the label 'hero'; Bond's dramatics offer insight into its denaturation.

Section 5 emphasizes the centrality of ethics and morality to the contemporary deconstruction of heroism, a concern already discernible in the historical account of Section 3. Heroism does not simply vanish but returns as a metonym for the challenges involved in resolving conflict inseparable from questions of right and wrong, good and evil. While the sense of an ethical or moral representation endures, the nature of this representation is always in flux sometimes irretrievably altered. Fittingly, deconstruction's hallmark is the absence of a horizon onto which a stable form might emerge. In *The Romans in Britain*, ethical imperatives regarding imperial

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violence reformulate individual responsibility and the broader ‘continuum between private ethics and politics’ (Saunders, 2010). In *Lear* the moral ‘text’ inheres ‘within the dramatic fabric, but without any explicit articulation’. Despite the impracticability of heroic resolution amidst widespread ‘excess of suffering,’ the liveliness of the problem dramatizes involvement in a closed world and ‘forecloses the imagined alternative to the ineluctable conditions of existence’.

6.1. Impact of Historical Context on Heroism

Heroism is not limited to physical prowess but embraces moral and ethical strength; yet contemporary English drama has arisen with its overwhelming preoccupation with its deconstruction and destruction. The situation has become so pathetic that only a “herowhore” – in the ironic reversal of the traditional “hero-worship” – is to be found in Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* and Bond’s *Lear*. Howard Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain* explores the ethical issues about heroism. Inspired by the events of the H Treatment allegedly suffered by a white female prisoner of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, the play uses the events of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43 as an allegory to present British complicity in the Illegal war in Iraq. This approach ensures an effective suspension of “a preoccupation with the contemporary subject.” Edward Bond’s *Lear* showcases the negative and tragic outcome of moral subversion. It explores various issues such as repression, power, loyalty, companionship, and self-interest. Bond’s stage direction suggests that *Lear* be played “larger than life” to an audience composed largely of teenagers, who would be “aghast” at its political failures. Bond’s *Lear* thus becomes a reflection by the contemporary young generation on the ethical, political, and moral dilemmas of the twentieth century (Adade-Yeboah & Owusu, 2013).

6.2. The Role of the Audience in Ethical Reception

Since Aristotle’s outlines of the specific aims of tragedy and comedy, Western society has expected moral discourse from the drama and a moral experience from the audience. Certainly, the realist-psychological drama of the late nineteenth century reinforced this view with its emphasis on catharsis and on the concolatory and enlightening aspects of tragedy, its demand for a better social condition and an equitable re-distribution of wealth through its comedy, and its belief in the educative and guiding function of the theatre. Within these moral parameters, according to the analysis of the plays listed in the introduction to *Subversion*, the nature and essence of heroism still remained a significant dramatic focus in the plays of Brenton and Bond.

Subversion has argued that: firstly, perspective and presentation are all-important. If heroism is deconstructed in *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear*, it is replaced in the two plays not merely by an anti-hero or Common Man but by a specific political-ethical or moral critique that demands the active and intellectual involvement of the audience. *Subversion* proceeds to demonstrate in separate sections on *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear* the individual playwright’s specific intervention; and secondly, the removal or dispossession of heroism in *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear* marks the beginning, not the end, of tragedy. A significant questioning of the nature and essence of heroism occurs in both contemporary dramas, leading to the replacement of a traditional tragic hero but not of the tragic form.

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6.3. Comparative Insights from Brenton and Bond

The plays *The Romans in Britain* and *Lear*, respectively by Howard Brenton and Edward Bond, confront the absence of heroic values in a troubled epoch by reshaping classical figures to expose ethical and moral disorder. While Brenton examines the deep-rooted imperialist savagery in the violent depiction of the Roman and Briton conflict and through the lens of the Northern Irish political climate, Bond opens his late play with an equally confrontational depiction of child abuse for the stage. Within both the Arctic and the post-Arctic reality of these playwrights, we encounter a caustic dismantlement that foreshadows the toxic terrain of the Anthropocene, resulting in a state where differentiating between human and animal becomes obsolete.

7. Conclusion

Heroism in modern English drama: definitions and values that underlay the conception of the hero. In both plays, contemporary heroism is shown to be an impossibility. *The Romans in Britain* outlines the complications and contradictions of the political oppressions and social injustices of contemporary life, inviting the audience to attain an ethical understanding of these issues.

Lear uses the problem of finding an enduring political order, firstly, to open the play, and then, beyond the limits of its actions, to explore the conditions of moral behavior. Thus, both plays make a contribution to what we can understand by heroism in the contemporary world. *The Romans in Britain* maps out the network of moral problems, the play *Lear* suggests the essential meaning of that play for thinking about morality. Since heroism has constituted the framework for much of the dramatic canon, these problems will form a necessary part not simply of a theory of drama, but of a proper theory of drama criticism

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