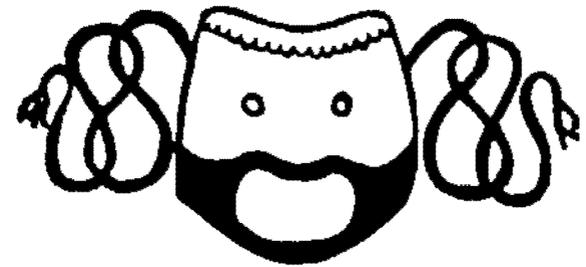


Frederic Wood Theatre

**BLOODY
POETRY**

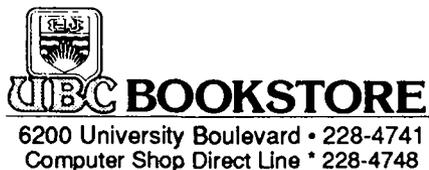




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University of British Columbia

Frederic Wood Theatre
presents

Bloody Poetry

By
Howard Brenton

Directed By
Gerald Vanderwoude

October 18 - 28
1989

A Note
on
HOWARD BRENTON

Howard Brenton was born in 1942 in Portsmouth, England. His father was a policeman who later changed careers to become a Methodist Minister. Although well-educated at Chichester Grammar School and Cambridge University, where he read English, Howard Brenton's major early influence may well have been his father who acted in, and directed, plays at the amateur level. Indeed, one of his most magical theatrical memories was a visit with his father at age six to see *MOTHER GOOSE*. By the time he was nine years old he had written his first play, based on a character in the *EAGLE* comic. Brenton acted in plays at school and university and while there wrote mostly poetry and fiction. He regards this unpublished work as his necessary writing apprenticeship.

After Cambridge, he worked as an Assistant Stage Manager for a number of repertory theatres. He wrote extensively for fringe companies and for unusual spaces. *GUM AND GOO* was conceived for a teachers' conference; *SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC* was realized in Bradford's Ice-Rink. Sadly, Brenton's idea of an adaptation of *MOBY DICK* to be "staged" in a municipal swimming pool did not receive enough support for its production to go ahead.

Brenton's first major success was *REVENGE*. The play probes the corruption of authority figures, an obsessive theme in Brenton's political work. In terms of support, he received two years of Arts Council subsidy following this play's success. He then went on to be Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court Theatre. He has been a full-time writer ever since.

Brenton, like Edward Bond, David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare (with all of whom he has close professional association), is a committed socialist. He joined a collective of writers to be able to work on a project dealing with the Irish question. *ENGLAND'S IRELAND* which charts the transformation of an innocent bystander into a fully fledged member of the IRA found few companies prepared

to perform it, so intense was the political heat at the time. Brenton's later play *THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN*, unfortunately distorted by the furore over the "buggery scene", is perhaps the writer's most reasoned, though largely allegorical, statement on England's political failure in Ireland.

Political failure in his own country also drives much of Brenton's writing. *THE CHURCHILL PLAY* is a bleak vision of 1984 England as a political concentration camp. *WEAPONS OF HAPPINESS* develops as an argument between different kinds of resistance to oppression. It was written at a time of deep disillusion with the Labour Government. *A SHORT, SHARP SHOCK* uses the techniques of agit-prop to criticise the euphoria that accompanied Margaret Thatcher's rise to power. *THE GENIUS* tries to deal specifically with the dangers of scientific knowledge converting to military secrets and weapons. The play ends with protesters outside a Cruise Missile base.

In his career, Brenton has moved his work from tiny fringe venues to the largest theatrical spaces available in England. He wishes to be anti-establishment within the theatrical establishment. He has chosen this "conventional" path to communicate his socialist ideas to as wide an audience as possible.

Brian McIlroy

Brian McIlroy teaches Film History & Criticism in the Department of Theatre at UBC.

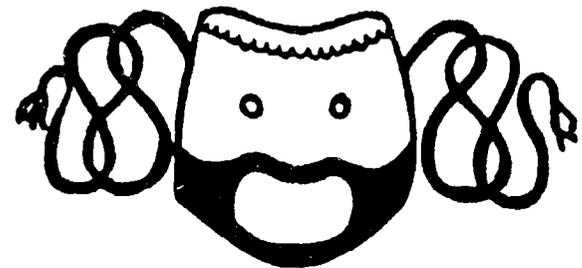
A Note
on
BLOODY POETRY

Howard Brenton is one of England's leading marxist/radical playwrights, or in the words of one reviewer, "the theatre's leftist sex 'n' violence merchant." He composed BLOODY POETRY in 1984 and it has come to be included as part of a loose trilogy called "Three Plays for Utopia", the other two works being SORE THROATS and GREENLAND. How does a play primarily about Shelley and his encounters with Byron fit into a utopian trilogy?

According to Brenton, these poets "were utopians trying to live a juster, different life. They failed but I loved their attempt. Hence BLOODY POETRY" (*Plays & Players*, April 1988). The title itself springs from Brenton's recognition of what he calls "the philistine playground attitude to poetry and...its cost – literally in blood" (*P & P*). Accordingly, the play examines the poet and his poetry as a voice of revolution in which blood and suffering are an inevitable part of the price to be paid for a new millenium. BLOODY POETRY is very much concerned with examining the poet's relation to revolution, or more expansively, art's role in the making of history, relying heavily in the process upon Shelley's own work. Brenton quotes liberally from such poems as "Mount Blanc" (1816), "Julian and Maddalo" (1818), "The Mask of Anarchy" (1819) and the ironically unfinished "Triumph of Life". Read as an expletive, of course, the play's title also signals a turning away in disgust from Byron's and Shelley's personal callousness and cruelty, the work itself charting the complex interplay between personal accountability and social and political revolution. It should be noted, however, that Brenton himself insists that "I didn't make any moral judgements. Shelley was a fierce man without any small talk" (*P & P*).

Nor should one ignore the parallels drawn in the play between Shelley and his chronicler, the committed marxist, Brenton, both writing as it were during a politically reactionary period. Through Shelley's reflections upon Wordsworth and his poetry of defeat following the debacle of the French Revolution, Brenton records his own frustration at the failed revolutions of the 1960s. And in this as in much else he was influenced by his major source, *The Pursuit* (1974), Richard Holmes's biography of Shelley. According to Holmes, "my own Shelley has a distinct touch of post-sixties itinerant radical, looking for the ultimate commune in the sun." Brenton's recognition of the parallel between his own experience as a radical and those of Shelley is most aptly signalled by the quotation from Holmes included on the title-page of BLOODY POETRY: "Shelley's life seems more a haunting than a history".

Sheila Stowell



BLOODY POETRY

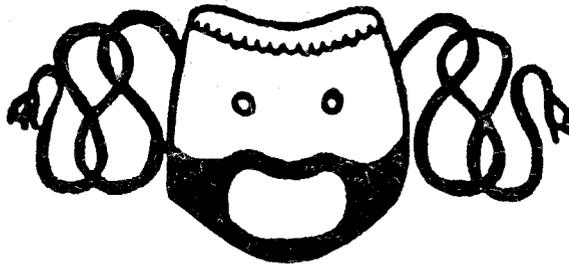
by
Howard Brenton

Directed by Gerald Vanderwoude

Set Design by Robert Gardiner
Costume Design by Mara Gottler
Lighting Design by Don Griffiths
Sound Design by Darryl Patterson

CAST

Percy Bysshe Shelley Peter Wilds
Claire Clairemont Michelle Porter
Mary Shelley Beverly Bardal
George Gordon, Lord Byron Barry Levy
Dr. William Polidori Neil Gallagher
Harriet Westbrook Susan C. Bertoia

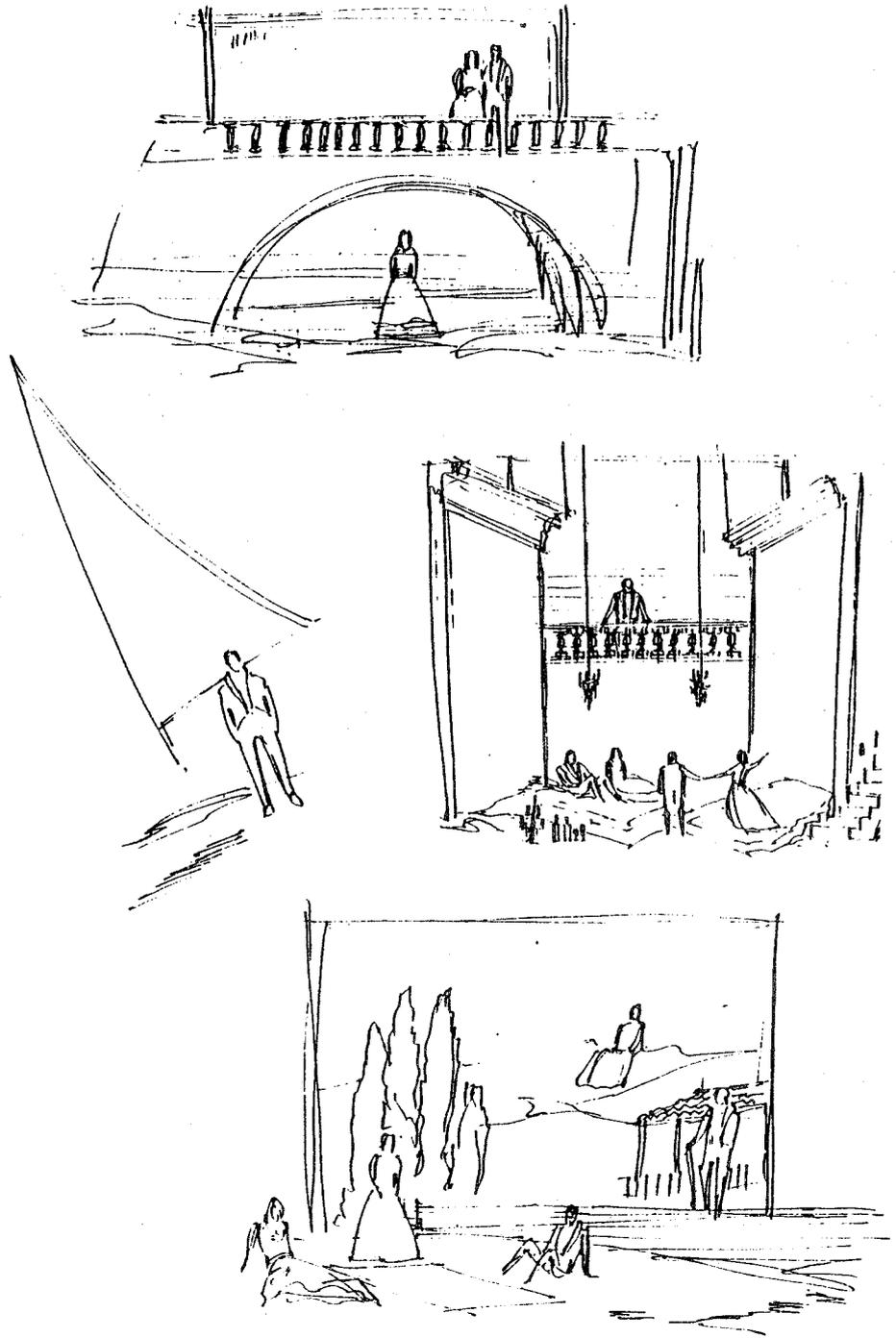


PRODUCTION

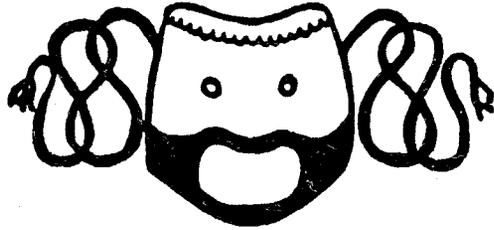
Technical Director Ian Pratt
Set Construction Don Griffiths, John Henrickson
Robert Moser
Costume Supervisor Chelsea Moore
Cutters Jean Driscoll-Bell, Leslie White
Properties Sherry Milne
Stage Manager Nik Von Schulmann
Assistant Stage Manager Jo Howitz
Lighting Operator Lisa Roy
Sound Operator Jeff Rankin
Scenic Artist Robert Gardiner
Scene Painting Theatre 352
Assistant Set Designer Cricket Price
Props Assistants Celine Boucher, Karen Gunther
Wardrobe Mistress Nancy Canning
Costume Accessories Carin Christensen, Jo Howitz,
Eileen Lumley, Glynis Lumley,
Decima Mitchell, Laura Morrison,
Nancy Canning, Jeanna South,
Christine Tan, Carla Weaver,
Barbara Wilson
Make Up Nick Davis
Hair Stylist Elizabeth Nichol
Crew Jacqueline Bazley, Ken Kaneko,
Lynda Phillips, Noyus Poon,
Barbara Wilson
Program Book Coordinator Nadene Rehnby
Box Office Carolyn Preiswerck, Mariascha Wright
Business Manager Marjorie Fordham
Production Manager Robert Eberle

Acknowledgements

The Vancouver Playhouse
Corinne Nurse



BOOK CORNER



Ten Further Plays by Howard Brenton

<i>Revenge</i>	1969
<i>Christie in Love</i>	1969
<i>Scott of the Antarctic</i>	1971
<i>Hitler Dances</i>	1972
<i>The Churchill Play</i>	1974
<i>Epsom Downs</i>	1977
<i>The Romans in Britain</i>	1980
<i>Sleeping Policemen</i>	1983
<i>The Genius</i>	1984
<i>Pravda</i>	1985

The plays of Howard Brenton are published by Methuen. They can be ordered through the UBC Bookstore.

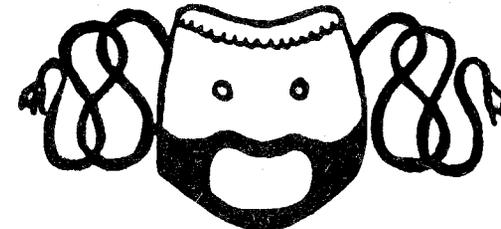
HOUSE CALLS

ROD MENZIES, the Theatre Department's voice teacher, played Mercutio this summer in a production of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" with Canada's only horse-drawn company, "Caravan Theatre".

ROBERT EBERLE, the production manager of the Frederic Wood Theatre, toured South America in July to recruit new talent for the Vancouver Childrens' Festival.

CHRISTOPHER GALLAGHER from the Department's Film Division has just completed principal photography for his new feature movie "Where is Memory" in Germany and France.

Last year's MFA graduate BRUCE DOW is in Toronto on a 8-month stint with the sell-out production of "Les Miserables".



Frederic Wood Theatre
Coming Attractions

**SHE STOOPS
TO CONQUER**

by OLIVER GOLDSMITH

November 15 - 25
Directed by Kevin Orr

**SWEENEY
TODD**

Music and Lyrics by

STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Book by HUGH WHEELER

January 17 - February 3
Directed by French Tickner

**HERR PUNTILA
AND HIS
SERVANT MATTI**

by BERTOLT BRECHT

March 7 - 17
Directed by Arne Zaslove

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