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**The Influence of Bertolt Brecht on British Drama**

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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### Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na prvky Brechtova epického divadla ve dvou divadelních hrách od Caryl Churchill (Vinegar Tom, 1976 a Cloud Nine, 1979). V teoretické části studentka objasní specifika Brechtova epického divadla a vysvětlí termíny, s kterými bude pracovat v analytickém celku. Autorka rovněž pojedná o přijetí divadelní společnosti Berliner Ensemble v Británii a o reakci britské společnosti a kritiky na Brechtovo epické divadlo. V analytické části se autorka bude soustředit na vystopování vlivu epického divadla ve výše zmíněných dílech Caryl Churchill. Své vývody bude vhodně ilustrovat primárními texty a konzultovat s kvalitními sekundárními zdroji. Práci zakončí přehledné shrnutí daných zjištění.

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## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis focuses on detailing Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and finding its traces in two plays (*Cloud Nine* and *Vinegar Tom*) by Caryl Churchill. Firstly, Brecht's epic theatre, its elements and goals are discussed. Secondly, the significance of Brecht's epic theatre in Great Britain is explained and his legacy and influence on British playwrights and British feminist playwrights is described. In the analytical chapter of the thesis, plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill are analysed in detail in order to find elements of Brecht's epic theatre.

## **KEYWORDS**

Bertolt Brecht, epic theatre, influence, play, Britain, feminism, Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom*

## **NÁZEV**

Vliv Bertolta Brechta na britské drama

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá přiblížením Brechtova epického divadla a nalezením jeho stop ve hrách *Vinegar Tom* a *Cloud Nine* od Caryl Churchillové. V první kapitole jsou popsány cíl a elementy Brechtova epického divadla. Dále se práce zaměřuje na Brechtův odkaz ve Velké Británii; vliv Brechtova epického divadla na britskou společnost, britské autory a britské feministické autorky. V praktické části jsou podrobně analyzovány dvě divadelní hry (*Vinegar Tom* a *Cloud Nine*) od Caryl Churchillové s cílem nalezení stop Brechtova epického divadla.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Bertolt Brecht, epické divadlo, vliv, divadelní hra, Británie, feminismus, Caryl Churchillová, *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom*

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## INTRODUCTION

Bertolt Brecht was born on 10 February 1898 as Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht in Augsburg, Germany into a bourgeoisie family.<sup>1</sup> His upbringing brought him opportunities to attain higher education and explore his interests in literature and theatre. Brecht started pursuing his career as a playwright after the WWI when he started suffering with depression and resorted to writing and literature as an escape.<sup>2</sup> Brecht's passion for writing grew only stronger and firmer then and he put all his efforts into making a name for himself as a writer. In 1949, Brecht set up his own theatre company named the Berliner Ensemble. As David Barnett writes: "If one were to gather together the most significant theatre companies of the twentieth century, the Berliner Ensemble, founded by Bertolt Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel, in 1949, would surely find itself near the top of the list."<sup>3</sup> Brecht is best known as the creator of the epic theatre. The epic theatre is a collection of theories and principles he put together in order to produce the kind of dramaturgy he felt is socially important. Barnett points out that The Berliner Ensemble served as a tool to apply all his theories about the theatre into real plays and dramas, claiming that the BE was then "the only company in the world dedicated to Brecht's theories and practices."<sup>4</sup> Brecht mainly wanted to create theatre that was political and stirred up a discussion, which was unusual in his era. As Carol Martin writes: "For Brecht, theatre was an occasion for rational thought, not emotional catharsis."<sup>5</sup>

Brecht's epic theatre has influenced generations of writers and many artists have found inspiration in Brecht's legacy. One of the people Brecht's work has had vast influence on is Caryl Churchill. Churchill is considered one of the most well-known British feminist playwrights who employs Brecht's epic theatre elements in her writings. The aim of this bachelor thesis is therefore to find traces of Brecht's epic theatre in selected plays by Caryl Churchill.

The thesis is divided into two theoretical chapters and one analytical chapter. In the first theoretical chapter, Brecht's work and his development of the epic theatre

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<sup>1</sup> Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht: Routledge Performance Practitioners*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Parker, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 131.

<sup>3</sup> David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Martin, Henry Bial, *Brecht Sourcebook*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.



will be discussed. Firstly, Brecht's life will be briefly focused on. Then, his company, the Berliner Ensemble will be introduced and his development of the epic theatre with the Berliner Ensemble will be detailed. Brecht's political beliefs and how they tied to the epic theatre principles will also be discussed. Furthermore, each principle of Brecht's epic theatre will be described. The principles of the epic theatre that will be described include the alienation effect, *Gestus*, historicization, breaking the fourth wall and particular staging which includes props, lighting and music.

The second theoretical chapter of this thesis will focus on Brecht's influence and legacy in Great Britain. One of the countries Brecht staged his plays in with the Berliner Ensemble was Great Britain. Brecht's first visit and debut in England will be described as well as the reaction and response of the British society to Brecht's epic theatre. As Brecht's epic theatre has inspired many British playwrights, few selected will also be examined. The playwrights that will be mentioned include John Arden, Arnold Wesker, John Osborne and Edward Bond.

The third analytical chapter will first shortly explore Brecht's influence on British feminist drama and how Brecht's techniques are used for creating feminist dramaturgy by female British playwrights. Then, two plays by a British feminist playwright will be analysed. The plays chosen for analysis are *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill. Each play will be closely examined in order to find traces of Brecht's epic theatre.

## 1 BERTOLT BRECHT AND THE EPIC THEATRE

In the first chapter of this paper, life and theatrical work of Bertolt Brecht will be discussed.

Bertolt Brecht recognized his talent and passion for writing very early on. Stephen Parker mentions that he is believed to have written his first work *Diary N<sup>o</sup> 10*, which was his personal diary, in 1913 at the age of just 15 (the work was published much later in 1989).<sup>6</sup> Brecht's need to scrutinize and counter other works can be observed as far back as his very first drama. As Parker writes, Brecht's very first drama *Baal*, which he wrote in 1918 at the age of 20, inspects and mocks plays symbolic of the Expressionist period.<sup>7</sup> Despite Brecht's middle-class upbringing, he was a communist who never shied away from hinting at his political stance in his work. In 1926, Brecht wrote: "It was only when I read Lenin's *State and Revolution* (!) and then Marx's *Kapital* that I understood, philosophically, where I stood."<sup>8</sup> Marc Silberman remarks that many of Brecht's plays satirize political ideologies, literary movements, religion, and even ordinary realities of life.<sup>9</sup> In his creative efforts, it is obvious that Brecht was not interested in making art that catered to the bourgeoisie. In *Brecht on Art and Politics*, Brecht emphasizes in one of his essays that he allies himself with people on the left as they understand struggle and he would rather create art for the proletariat who may not be interested in theatricals than for the bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup> Brecht's boldness in expressing his political and social beliefs never diminished and he would eventually look back on his upbringing scornfully in a critical poem called *Driven Out with Good Reason*:

I grew up as the son  
Of well-to-do people. My parents put  
A collar round my neck and educated me  
In the habit of being waited on  
And schooled me in the art of giving orders.  
But when I grew up and searched the world around me  
I came to dislike the people of my own class

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<sup>6</sup> Parker, *A Literary Life*, 38–39.

<sup>7</sup> Parker, *A Literary Life*, 103.

<sup>8</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy," *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 171.

<sup>10</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics*, 36.

I refused to give orders, or to be waited on  
And I left my own class and allied myself  
With insignificant people.

Thus  
They brought up a traitor, taught him  
All their tricks and he  
Betrays them to the enemy.<sup>11</sup>

Later in his life when the Nazi Party rose to power, Brecht was forced to escape Germany. According to David Barnett, Brecht spent 15 years of his life in exile fleeing from the Nazis and dedicating most of his time to writing and the theatre (he wrote some of his most well-known plays such as *Mother Courage and Her Children* or *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*).<sup>12</sup> This is perhaps also when Brecht's desire to have his own theatre company started. Barnett points out that shortly after Brecht returned to Germany in 1948, he founded his own theatre company, the Berliner Ensemble, where he immediately started working as an artistic director.<sup>13</sup> While working, Brecht certainly did not hesitate to introduce new concepts and ideas in his theatre. Barnett remarks that Brecht believed that the creative process of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been largely influenced by the shift into a more socialist society: "The act of creation has become a collective creative process, a continuum of a dialectical sort in which the original invention, taken on its own, has lost its importance."<sup>14</sup> And as the artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht positively embraced a non-traditional perspective on directing. As Barnett explains, Brecht believed that a good director does not need a complete vision which the actors are demanded to follow. Instead, he felt that the director and the actors should both work together to understand the substance of the play and how it ought to be performed.<sup>15</sup>

Brecht's new ideas and principles about the theatre created what is known as the epic theatre. According to Walter Benjamin, the primary goal of Brecht's epic theatre is to try to separate the audience from the performance and therefore force the spectators to analyse and think critically rather than just connect emotionally.<sup>16</sup> This is

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<sup>11</sup> Vera Schwarcz, "Willing in the Face of Necessity: Lu Xun, Brecht, and Sarte," *Modern China* 7, no. 3 (July 1981): 289.

<sup>12</sup> David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 8–9.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 147–148.

perhaps why it is not uncommon for the actors in Brecht's plays to perform their roles rather indifferently. Benjamin further mentions that Brecht firmly believed the audience must never feel as if they are experiencing the play as its characters and should always keep a certain degree of detachment. While they should feel engaged, they must also remain critical observers and must subconsciously know they are watching a play at all times.<sup>17</sup> Brecht himself stated: "the essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feeling than to the spectator's reason."<sup>18</sup>

Brecht's development of the epic theatre and its principles were heavily influenced by the concepts utilised in the Chinese theatre. Parker explains how after seeing a play in Moscow by the Peking Opera, Brecht became increasingly fascinated by the Chinese theatrical style and was astounded by how the Chinese were aware at all times that they were playing out a character, not personifying one.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the Chinese theatre, Marxism also played a crucial role in the evolution of Brecht's epic theatre. Meg Mumford points out that Brecht became interested in Marxism in the early 1920s after struggling with his approach to writing *Fleischacker* – a play about capitalism. Mumford then goes on to explain that in Marxist theory human beings have the capability of creating and producing, which separates them from animals, nonetheless, they are still conditioned by history and the social climate they are born into.<sup>20</sup> These themes of social class and its struggles run through plenty of Brecht's plays. According to Werner Hecht, Brecht knew that creating drama that illustrates social issues relevant to his time period would require the outdated theatrical style giving way to a new contemporary one.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the most infamous principles Brecht implemented to achieve this new style of theatre were the alienation or estrangement effect (known as *Verfremdungseffekt* in German), *Gestus*, historicization, breaking the fourth wall and Brecht's staging.

Brecht's alienation effect probably most captures the essence of the epic theatre. Ronnie Bai observes that Brecht's alienation is sometimes misconstrued to mean the same thing as Marx's concept of alienation as both terms are translated into

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<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 152.

<sup>18</sup> John Willet, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, (London: Methuen, 1964), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Parker, *A Literary Life*, 342.

<sup>20</sup> Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht*, 20–21.

<sup>21</sup> Werner Hecht, "The Development of Brecht's Theory of the Epic Theatre," *The Tulane Drama Review* 6, no. 1 (September 1961): 72–73.

English predominantly as alienation.<sup>22</sup> However, the two vary greatly. J. A. Cuddon defines Marx's alienation as a sensation that is experienced when a man is estranged from nature, other people and mainly products of his own labour, which is most prevalent under a capitalist system, and as a result creates a profound detachment of human beings from themselves.<sup>23</sup> Brecht's alienation effect, however, aims primarily to separate spectators from the plot so they can remain critical. In *Brecht on Theatre*, Brecht emphasizes that alienation should distance the audience and challenge their perception of the most ordinary things which usually remain unquestioned or unexamined, and should be capable of turning any single thing that is considered natural or ordinary into something unusual and distinctive.<sup>24</sup> Brecht eloquently described his alienation effect when he contrasted dramatic theatre with his new epic theatre. In *Brecht on Theatre*, he writes: "The epic theatre spectator says: I'd have never thought of it. The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary. I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh." While the dramatic theatre spectator says "I have felt like that too. The suffering of this man appals me, because they are inescapable. I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh."<sup>25</sup> It is no surprise that Brecht therefore firmly enforced certain emotional coolness and unconnectedness in his plays. In *Brecht on Theatre*, Brecht also noted the three main points which further contribute to achieving alienation of characters as following: transposition into the third person, transposition into the past, and speaking the stage directions out loud.<sup>26</sup> By embracing this way of acting, Brecht created the exact contrary of how the German theatre operated during his era. As Martin Esslin explains, in Brecht's time, German theatrical style was based primarily on exaggerated and excessive emotionality and very vocal outbursts which largely initiated Brecht's desire to reform the theatre.<sup>27</sup>

Another technique Brecht developed for his epic theatre was *Gestus*. Carol Martin defines *Gestus* as a combination of actor's body language, speech, facial expressions, and movements which should always work together as a unit. Its focus lays on the physical part of a character's entity and helps the actor to portray a character

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<sup>22</sup> Ronnie Bai, "Dances with Mei Lanfang: Brecht and the Alienation Effect," *Comparative Drama* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 410.

<sup>23</sup> J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5th ed., (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 138.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," *TDR* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1966): 65.

in its entirety.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, Brecht would eventually alter the meaning of *Gestus* and its essence would shift. Mumford explains that Brecht originally used the term *Gestus* solely to refer to characters' gestures or gesticulation but with time this meaning shifted to also carry certain social implications and connotations associated with a character.<sup>29</sup> Brecht described the new social gest in *Brecht on Theatre*: "The social gest is that which is relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances."<sup>30</sup> Social gest can be an easily overlooked detail and can be observed in his plays as an action or movement which is significant to a certain group or a workplace. Barnett demonstrates how Brecht's *Gestus* and its social indications can be found in the simplest of acts such as drinking a glass of wine:

When it comes to drinking the wine itself, the actors can show their relationship to the drink in the context of an expensive restaurant: do they handle the glasses like wine glasses or beer glasses? Do they sip elegantly or sup heartily? Do they look at home with the act of drinking fine wine because it is an affordable luxury, or instead display their unease because it costs so much? The acts of ordering, receiving and drinking a bottle of wine in a restaurant can show an audience a great many aspects about the figures' social status without them speaking a single word.<sup>31</sup>

There are other epic theatre techniques Brecht imposed on actors such as historicization and breaking the fourth wall. In his writings, Brecht explains how historicization prompts actors to play their roles with relation to history. If spectators are made to believe that the play's happenings are historical, they are less likely to try to empathize.<sup>32</sup> This can further promote a certain level of detachment and overall alienation which helps to create a sense of distance. Historicization and the alienation effect go hand in hand and complement each other. Both aspire to turn events or actions that are perceived as ordinary and mundane into something unique. Barnett further explains how historicization aims to separate past from present and goes on to explain that audiences should look at play's happenings from a perspective of when the events in the play took place.<sup>33</sup> Each time period has its specific characteristics that should be understood in order to understand the essence of a certain play. Brecht described how

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<sup>28</sup> Martin, *Brecht Sourcebook*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 105.

<sup>31</sup> Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, 95–96.

<sup>32</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 140.

<sup>33</sup> Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, 75.

historicization should help the audience understand how characters develop in accordance with the periodical conditions around them:

The actor must play the incidents as historical ones. Historical incidents are unique, transitory incidents associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and “universally human”; it includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history, and is subject to criticism from the immediately following period’s point of view.<sup>34</sup>

Aside from historicization, in the epic theatre it is also essential that actors aim to crash the fourth wall. Brecht defines the fourth wall as a barrier between the audience and the actors which actors should purposefully try to break to make the audience feel more engaged.<sup>35</sup> Most plays produced in Brecht’s time period completely separated themselves from the audience. Barnett explains that actors mostly pretended as if there was no audience while playing which created an illusion that the stage happenings are a reality.<sup>36</sup> To strip the theatre of its illusions, Brecht knew that the fourth wall had to be removed. In Brecht’s plays, it is not uncommon for the actors to acknowledge or directly address the audience. As well as the alienation effect, Brecht’s crashing of the fourth wall was also influenced by the practices of the Chinese theatre. After seeing the Peking Opera in Moscow, he wrote:

The Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage’s characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary.<sup>37</sup>

It is evident that both the alienation effect and breaking the fourth wall existed as theatrical practices long before Brecht incorporated them in the epic theatre nonetheless, they were not utilized in European theatres often. Crashing the fourth wall further intensified alienation and assured spectators were more engaged in the theatrical experience; they remained analytical and logical.

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<sup>34</sup> Martin et al., *Brecht Sourcebook*, 217.

<sup>35</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 92.

Lastly, another equally significant yet less mentioned tool Brecht used for his epic theatre was particular staging (props, lighting, music). To strip the stage of its illusions, Brecht insisted that the set should be very minimal and stripped of unnecessary decorations and props. In *Brecht on Theatre*, Brecht used the play *Macbeth* as an example, pointing out that in the play Duncan: “takes bold sweep, never letting inessential detail or decoration distract from the statement, which is an artistic and an intellectual one.”<sup>38</sup> Music and lighting worked together in the epic theatre and were used to ensure the audience is aware that they are watching a play. Brecht used lighting strictly for illumination purposes. Phillip Hill points out that Brecht believed lighting should not be used to create a visual show or an emotional experience.<sup>39</sup> He often used a single simple light to illuminate the whole stage. Barnett agrees and claims that Brecht “craved the bright white light.”<sup>40</sup> Brecht also often used music in his production. He, however, believed music should not be used as a smooth segue as he wanted the audience to participate mainly intellectually. According to Brecht, music should serve as a break from the dramatic events; it should operate as an independent part in a play and should contain a certain message.<sup>41</sup> Brecht either used music as a way to alienate and historicize the stage happenings or as a gestic element in the play. Martin claims that in the epic theatre “the alienation effect was employed not only through the actors but also through the music. The aim was the historicification of the events presented.”<sup>42</sup> As far as using music as a gestic element, the underlying message of the song should reveal certain social attitudes or relationships. Brecht claimed that gestic music is achieved when “the musician’s attitude to his text, the spokesman’s to his report, shows the extent of his political, and so of his humanity maturity.”<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, by creating the epic theatre, Brecht managed to create a new, revolutionary, and a very non-traditional way of acting. Brecht’s epic theatre was closely linked to Marxism and had underlying political and social messages which showcased Brecht’s beliefs. This meant plays were no longer produced just to thrill and please audiences. Actors no longer strived to create illusions or to completely transform into their characters. In the epic theatre, they wanted to keep a degree of

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<sup>38</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 231.

<sup>39</sup> Phillip G. Hill, *Our Dramatic Heritage*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), 291.

<sup>40</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 127.

<sup>41</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 84–85.

<sup>42</sup> Martin et al., *Brecht Sourcebook*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 105.



detachment in order to portray their characters in an unbiased way. To support the political messages of his theatre, Brecht created specific techniques and principles such as alienation, *Gestus*, fourth wall, historicization and particular staging. Brecht's new theatre style employed these techniques to push the audience to question and analyse not just observe. The epic theatre did not close itself off from the audience as its methods were the exact contrary of the then traditional theatrical style. Altogether, it promoted rationality not emotionality. And although to some Brecht's techniques may appear to be very mechanical and stiff, he claimed that good theatre will always amuse, even if it uses instructive approach.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 73.

## 2 BRECHT'S RECEPTION AND LEGACY IN GREAT BRITAIN

In autumn of 1956, Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble decided to go on a small tour while on a three-week residency in London which would mark their debut in England.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Brecht would pass away unexpectedly shortly before the company's first performance. Many believed the tour would be cancelled nonetheless, it was announced the tour is taking place as scheduled soon after.<sup>46</sup> Margaret Eddershaw remarks that Brecht had attempted to have his plays produced in Britain prior to their London tour in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> His attempts had sadly failed but his work managed to get the very first bit of recognition in Britain. Nevertheless, the attention towards Brecht's work would almost completely fade until the Ensemble performed in London in 1956. John Bull emphasizes that the Ensemble's visit that year became one of the most anticipated events in the English world of theatre and was heavily advertised by various English newspaper.<sup>48</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* wrote a column about the Berliner Ensemble in July 1956, nearing their upcoming visit in autumn, headlining it "Europe's most controversial theatre."

The Berliner Ensemble is criticised from opposing ends. The average citizen says that it is too realistic, for it provides no escapes and provokes no passions. Moreover, it is didactic: those who want to remain politically untainted – in their Communist purity – keep well away from it. The sophisticated critics decry its lack of realism, and allege that it has the flavour of a circus troupe. The support for the ensemble is equally inconsistent. The admirers and critics of Brecht's work are united in recognising his creative genius and the worth of his innovations.<sup>49</sup>

It is obvious that the reaction to Brecht's theatre in Britain was not unified but rather mixed as some regarded him as a mastermind and some as rather a mediocre playwright. However, it is also extremely important to point out that at that time most of Brecht's essays and writings were not accessible in English. As Martin Esslin explains, the correctness in understating Brecht's ideas and principles was hard to

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<sup>45</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," 64.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> John Bull, "Trumpets and Drums in the Night: The 1956 Berliner Ensemble Season in London and its Aftermath" in *Anglo-German Theatrical Exchange*, ed. Rudolf Weiss, Ludwig Schnauder, and Dieter Fusch (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 44.

<sup>49</sup> "Europe's most controversial theatre," *The Guardian*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2011/jul/18/archive-europes-most-controversial-theatre-1956>, (Interview was originally published in the *Manchester Guardian* on July 16, 1956).

determine as most actors and directors had to depend on loose translations.<sup>50</sup> Brecht's plays had basically never been performed in Britain except for rare exceptions. Bull mentions that probably the most significant attempt to stage Brecht prior to his English debut was done by Joan Littlewood. In 1955, Joan Littlewood acquired rights to the first production of *Mother Courage* with the Theatre Workshop company.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, her attempt turned out to be a complete failure. Esslin describes how the production was completely stripped as the Workshop company's finances were very frail causing many crucial elements to be missing from the play.<sup>52</sup>

Brecht was aware that the English audiences were not very familiar with his work. Thus, he made sure to prepare for the Ensemble's London debut diligently. In his last note before his passing, he left important pointers for his Ensemble on how to perform in front of an English audience:

For our London season we need to bear two things in mind. First: we shall be offering most of the audience a pure pantomime, a kind of silent film on the stage for they know no German. [...] Second: there is in England a long-standing fear that German art must be terribly heavy, slow, laborious and pedestrian. So our playing needs to be quick, light, strong. This is not a question of hurry, but of speed, not simply of quick playing, but of quick thinking.<sup>53</sup>

The London season started on 27 August 1956 and the Ensemble's repertoire included *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, as well as an adaptation of *The Recruiting Officer* called *Pauken und Trompeten (Trumpets and Drums)*.<sup>54</sup> Reactions to Brecht's debut in Britain varied. David Barnett points out that critics showed appreciation for Brecht's innovative theatre however, the Ensemble performed without translators or subtitles which at times caused hesitancy; some plays were received better than others.<sup>55</sup> It was obvious that despite Brecht's efforts to avoid excessive dialogue, there was still a prevailing language barrier. Still, the Ensemble earned one enthusiastic fan. Esslin remarks that the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan had been following Brecht's work long before the Ensemble headed to London.<sup>56</sup> It is also important to note that Tynan likely understood Brecht's epic theatre better than the

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<sup>50</sup> Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," 65.

<sup>51</sup> Bull, "Trumpets and Drums in the Night," 46.

<sup>52</sup> Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," 66.

<sup>53</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 283.

<sup>54</sup> Martin et al., *Brecht Sourcebook*, 146.

<sup>55</sup> Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 136.

<sup>56</sup> Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," 64.

general public. In 1955, he wrote a review in *The Observer* on the Ensemble's Paris performance of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* labelling the whole production as superb and pointing out how Brecht's work often gets overlooked in England:

I have read a great deal about Brecht's theory of acting. The whole production is superb. [...] Unless we learn it soon, a familiar process will take place. Thirty years from now, Brecht will be introduced to the English critics, who will at once decry him for being thirty years out of date.<sup>57</sup>

When the Ensemble finally performed in England in 1956, Tynan was delighted. His review was foreseeably very positive. He did not hesitate to spread the word about Brecht's brilliance and to thoroughly explain Brecht's epic theatre, the effects he uses in his plays, and how his theatrical style differs from the typical Western theatre.<sup>58</sup>

Another notable person who saw the Ensemble in 1956 during their London debut was William Gaskill. Janelle Reinelt explains that Gaskill along with Tynan had both been curious about Brecht's work long before their London debut and eventually became the biggest first-generation promoters of Brecht in England.<sup>59</sup> Aside from Kenneth Tynan, it was probably Gaskill who played a fundamental role in initially spreading Brecht's work in Britain as he brought Brecht's theories to life on stage. Brechtian theatre would turn into a lifelong influence on Gaskill's production and he later stated about the Ensemble's debut in London:

For me the visit in '56 was the most striking and influential theatrical experience I shall ever have. *Courage* really shattered me, it was extraordinary. Everything suddenly clarified and came into focus I don't think we heard much about it [Brecht's dramatic theory] from the political point of view or understood that it was largely political.<sup>60</sup>

It was perhaps this experience that launched Gaskill's desire for implementing elements of the epic theatre into English stage productions. He would ultimately incorporate Brecht's theories into various plays nevertheless, he later admitted to sometimes struggling with his directorial approach in the beginnings. In his earlier attempts to create a Brechtian experience, he acknowledged that it sometimes led to plays appearing amateurish and borderline parodic.<sup>61</sup> However, Gaskill persisted in his

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Tynan, *Theatre Writings*, ed. Dominic Shellard, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), 95.

<sup>58</sup> Tynan, *Theatre Writings*, 160–161.

<sup>59</sup> Janelle G. Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 58.

<sup>61</sup> William Gaskill, *Words into Action: Finding the Life of the Play*, (London: Nick Hern, 2010), 88.

efforts and he was not afraid to take risks. Bull writes that in 1960, Gaskill applied Brechtian theatre elements in two plays by Shakespeare (*Richard III* and *Cymbeline*).<sup>62</sup> The act received positive reviews on the whole. Kenneth Tynan praised the production describing it as “a resplendent panoramic achievement that would assuredly never have happened had Mr. Gaskill not caught the Brechtian bug.”<sup>63</sup> After Gaskill’s production of Shakespeare’s plays, his career thrived. Bull highlights that in March 1962, Gaskill directed *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, staging perhaps the most significant production of Brecht in Britain.<sup>64</sup> The performance received immense praise and admiration, and succeeded in introducing Brecht to new British audiences. Eddershaw further points out that it even won the respected Evening Standard Theatre Best Play of the Year award.<sup>65</sup> In 1965, Gaskill mentioned in his writings that he had been appointed by George Devine, his predecessor, to work as the artistic director at the Royal Court Theatre.<sup>66</sup> As the artistic director, Gaskill would go on to produce plethora of other plays for the Royal Court. Eddershaw remarks that in the years he worked for the Royal Court Theatre, he produced plays such *Mother Courage*, *Macbeth*, and *The Recruiting Officer* further spreading Brecht’s legacy.<sup>67</sup>

Apart from the first-generation admirers (Gaskill and Tynan), when exactly Brecht’s epic theatre started influencing British playwrights and artists across-the-board is hard to trace. Esslin stresses that John Willet’s translations of Brecht’s essays in 1964 (*Brecht on Theatre*) marked a pivotal turning point.<sup>68</sup> Brecht’s ideas and writings were suddenly accessible in English to all in a clear and direct form. Eddershaw argues that while many continued to remain sceptical about Brecht (whether that was because of his strong left-wing political views or because of his sharp and distinct theatre), it is undeniable that his significance in the 1960s in Britain started growing immensely.<sup>69</sup> Many directors and playwrights aspired to a Brechtian production and began to slowly incorporate Brecht’s practices into their programmes. Considering the most prominent first-generation playwrights who started following Brecht’s theory and implementing his principles into their writing, according to

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<sup>62</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> John Bull, *Vanbrugh & Farquhar*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 136.

<sup>65</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 57.

<sup>66</sup> Gaskill, *Words into Action*, 143.

<sup>67</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 63.

<sup>68</sup> Esslin, “Brecht and the English Theatre,” 66.

<sup>69</sup> Eddershaw, *Performing Brecht*, 55.

Michael Patterson, John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond and John Osborne are some of the most noteworthy.<sup>70</sup>

Of the four, John Arden's work is probably most authentic to Brecht's philosophy. Javed Malick emphasizes that even in his earlier work, Arden's dramaturgy was significantly more politically and socially oriented than that of other British playwrights.<sup>71</sup> However, it seems that Brecht's work has influenced Arden almost unknowingly. When Arden began writing, Brecht was far from being eminent in Britain; nevertheless, him and Brecht both despised the overly-dramatic theatrical style of their era.<sup>72</sup> Although Arden acknowledged that Brecht's work has influenced him, he also emphasized that he never tried to emulate Brecht's practices. Plainly, they both happened to hold similar views about dramaturgy and they both strived to strip the theatre of its illusions. In 1966, when Arden was asked whether he regards Brecht as one of his influences, he stated:

Yes, but I don't copy Brecht; I don't use him as a model. After I had started writing plays I decided that Brecht was inspired by the same sort of early drama that was interesting me: The rather conventionalized plays of the European Middle Ages, the Elizabethan writers and various exotic styles such as the Japanese and Chinese theatre. I was not interested in naturalistic Ibsenite writing.<sup>73</sup>

It is apparent that both Brecht and Arden found inspiration in similar types of theatre. Moreover, Patterson argues that their frequent comparison was enhanced by the fact that Arden eventually became a Marxist.<sup>74</sup> Philosophically, Arden as well as Brecht were of anti-bourgeois attitude and believed that the theatre should serve as a tool to speak on social issues. In an interview, Arden explained why he thinks the theatre only appeals to the middle-class, claiming: "If the working class is taught anything about theatre in school it's come from a bourgeois point of view with which they can't identify."<sup>75</sup> In 1959, Arden wrote his perhaps best known play, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Patterson remarks that despite its initial poor reception, the play is now

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>71</sup> Javed Malick, "Society and History in Arden's Dramaturgy," *Theatre Journal* 42, no. 2 (May 1990): 209.

<sup>72</sup> Malick, "Society and History in Arden's Dramaturgy," 213.

<sup>73</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> John Arden, Brendan Hennessy, "John Arden Interviewed by Brendan Hennessy," *The Transatlantic review*, no. 40 (Summer 1971): 54.

oftentimes labelled a masterpiece and the height of Arden's theatrical brilliance.<sup>76</sup> Traces of Brecht in *Musgrave's Dance* are very evident. Arden uses many epic theatre elements such as *Gestus*, distancing, breaking the fourth wall (by addressing the audience) and commentary songs.<sup>77</sup> Despite Arden's statements about Brecht, to many he remains one of the truest followers of Brecht in Britain.

Both Edward Bond and Arnold Wesker and are also considered to be prominent followers of Brecht. Along with Arden, Wesker and Bond took part in Gaskill's Royal Court Theatre productions of some of the first Brechtian plays in Britain and used Brecht's principles in their work.<sup>78</sup> Bond's inspiration by Brecht's theatre can be traced in many of his plays. He often puts emphasis on social justice and change (plays such as *Saved* and *Lear*). Simon Trussler points out that like Brecht, Bond's plays often "blended a high seriousness of purpose with extreme precision of theatrical execution."<sup>79</sup> Bond himself has openly acknowledged the influence Brecht's theories have had on his work. In a letter to Rudolf Rach, a producer, he wrote: "You know that I regard Brecht as an influence and of course I shall continue to be influenced by him."<sup>80</sup> Unlike Bond, Wesker has never been very outspoken about Brecht's influence on his work. In 1958, Wesker wrote one of his most well-known plays, *Roots*. Patterson remarks that *Roots* is a deeply political play which focuses on class division and differences.<sup>81</sup> From Wesker's work, it is apparent that he shares similar ideology to Brecht. Perhaps the only mention of Brecht by Wesker is in an interview with W.J. Weatherby from 1960. In the interview, Wesker explains his creative process:

I'm not writing to the general, sophisticated audiences anyway. I voted like the man-in-the-street who has never been to a theatre to come into my plays and know what I'm writing about. That's how Brecht works. I've just got on to him.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Simon Trussler, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Drama*, ed. James Vinson, (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 10.

<sup>80</sup> Edward Bond, *The Hidden Plot: Notes on Theatre and the State*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2000), 171.

<sup>81</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> "Breakfast with Wesker," *The Guardian*, accessed March 5, 2021,

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/apr/13/arnold-wesker-interview-archive-1960>, (Interview was originally published on January 18, 1960).

John Osborne is another playwright who has employed Brecht's principles in his work. Similarly to Wesker, Osborne has never been very forthright about Brecht's influence on his work. Nevertheless, Osborne's inspiration by the epic theatre is very evident in some of his plays. In 1961, Osborne wrote *Luther* which frequently gets compared to Brecht's *Galileo*. Kenneth Tynan wrote a review of Osborne's *Luther* in *The Observer* shortly after its release, claiming: "In form the play is sedulously Brechtian, an epic succession of tableaux conceived in the manner of *Galileo*."<sup>83</sup> Aside from Arden, Bond, Wesker and Osborne, there are many other playwrights who have been influenced by Brecht's work, have incorporated his theories into their plays and have continued spreading his legacy in Great Britain. Trevor Griffiths, Howard Barker, Howard Brenton and Caryl Churchill are just a few to note.<sup>84</sup>

To conclude, Brecht's epic theatre has had consequential influence on many British authors. Brecht's plays were not performed in Britain until the 1950s. When Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble finally debuted in London in 1956, they inspired a new wave of artist and playwrights. Theatre critic Kenneth Tynan and director William Gaskill were one the very first promoters of Brecht's work in Great Britain. Gaskill is frequently labelled as the first director who brought Brecht's practices to British stages and directed Brecht's plays in a manner that was authentic to his style. Amongst the first-generation playwrights who were inspired by Brecht, John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond and John Osborne are considered some of the most notable. A crucial moment for the British public was when Brecht's essays were translated into English by John Willet (*Brecht on Theatre*) in 1964. Brecht's writings were suddenly able to directly reach the British and his influence on artists increased. Other significant playwrights who were inspired to use elements of the epic theatre in their work and therefore spread Brecht's legacy include Howard Brenton, Trevor Griffiths and Caryl Churchill.

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<sup>83</sup> Tynan, *Theatre Writings*, 269.

<sup>84</sup> Patterson, *Strategies of Political Theatre*, 4.



### 3 BRECHT'S INFLUENCE ON BRITISH FEMINIST DRAMA

Brecht's epic theatre has had immense influence on British feminist playwrights. Janelle Reinelt explains that the feminist movement in Great Britain is largely centred in socialism and the working class.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, it can be presumed that feminist playwrights mostly share same social and class philosophy as Brecht did. Brecht himself, however, never directly portrayed societal issues of women or talked about feminism. Elin Diamond claims:

Brecht exhibits the blindness typical of all Marxist theorists regarding sex-gender configurations. Feminist theory, however, insists on the presence of the gendered body, on the sex-gender system, and on the problematics of desire.<sup>86</sup>

Despite Brecht's obliviousness, feminist playwrights have been using his techniques in their works as it can highlight gender inequality and women's societal hardships. Reinelt remarks that "Brechtian techniques offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behaviour (how they are internalized, opposed, and changed) and their interaction with other socio-political factors such as class."<sup>87</sup> The feminist theory aims mainly to deconstruct an often portrayed glamorized reality about women, which leads to producing theatre that is not conventional. Carol Martin claims that "Brechtian techniques provide feminist theatre practitioners with tools necessary to create feminist theatre."<sup>88</sup> Lizbeth Goodman further explains how Brechtian and feminist theatre are based in the same ideas: "the task of Brecht and also of feminist theatre is to interrupt and deconstruct the habitual performance codes of the majority (male) culture."<sup>89</sup> As both the feminist and Brechtian theatre share somewhat similar philosophy, feminist playwrights often employ techniques of the epic theatre in their dramaturgy.

Feminist theatre companies and playwrights frequently utilize techniques such as *Gestus*, alienation or historicization in their work. *Gestus* along with alienation is often used to highlight the social or class background. Diamond explains what Brecht's

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<sup>85</sup> Janelle G. Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama," *Theatre Journal* 38, no. 2 (May 1986): 155.

<sup>86</sup> Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *TDR* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 88–89.

<sup>87</sup> Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama," 154.

<sup>88</sup> Carol Martin, "Brecht, Feminism and the Chinese Theatre," *TDR* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 83.

<sup>89</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 18.

*Gestus* achieves in the feminist theatre: “Because the *Gestus* is effected by a historical actor/subject, what the spectator sees is not a mere miming of social relationship, but a reading of it, an interpretation by a historical subject...”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Brecht’s historicization can be used to show the true nature of historical events in various time periods. Diamond claims: “Brechtian historicization challenges the presumed ideological neutrality of any historical reflection.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, historicization allows feminist drama to unveil the inequality of women throughout history. These techniques have been used to create feminist drama by many playwrights. One of the initial most well-known collective efforts to create feminist drama in Britain was likely done by the Red Ladder Theatre Company. They aimed to create realistic drama, “in the Brechtian sense.”<sup>92</sup> In the early 1970s, the company put out plays such as *Strike While the Iron Is Hot* or *Woman’s Work is Never Done*. Lizbeth Goodman comments that the themes of these plays “included women’s roles in the workforce, equal pay, and women’s rights.”<sup>93</sup> Aside from collaborations, some of the most prominent feminist playwrights include Margaretta D’Arcy and Shelagh Delaney in the early 1960s; and the second-wave playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Olwen Wymark, Maureen Duffy in the 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.1 Traces of Brecht’s Epic Theatre in *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill

*Cloud Nine* was first performed in 1979 and is one of Caryl Churchill’s most well-known and successful plays. Janelle Reinelt remarks that Churchill, whose plays are rightfully labelled as socialist feminist drama, often explores topics that confront people’s perception of what is regarded as a social norm.<sup>95</sup> Challenging gender roles and stereotypes, racism and patriarchy are just some of the very common themes that run through many of Churchill’s works. *Cloud Nine* is no exception. Themes of gender inequality, sexual identity and racism are prominent throughout the entire play. Churchill wrote about creating *Cloud Nine*: “It is about sexual politics. [...] We also explored stereotypes and role reversals in games and improvisation.”<sup>96</sup> To highlight issues portrayed in the play as well as to force the spectator to think and be analytical,

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<sup>90</sup> Diamond, “Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory,” 90.

<sup>91</sup> Diamond, “Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory,” 87.

<sup>92</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 47.

<sup>93</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Caryl Churchill, “*Cloud Nine*” in *Plays: One*, (New York: Methuen, 1985), 245.

Churchill uses elements of the epic theatre such as alienation, historicization, *Gestus* and breaking the fourth wall. Although Churchill has acknowledged the influence of Brecht's techniques on her work, she has also stated that most artists and creators have been affected by Brecht rather unknowingly.<sup>97</sup>

*Cloud Nine* consists of two acts. The first act is set in an African colony of the British Empire during Victorian times. A British family starts off the play by singing a song which shows love and admiration for their homeland, England. The family – Clive, Betty, Edward, Victoria, Maud, Ellen, Joshua – is introduced by Clive (the father and head of the family) and each character then introduces themselves to the audience. Clive works in the British colony and brings his family to Africa. Betty is Clive's wife and together they have two children, Victoria and Edward. Maud is Betty's mother and Ellen works as a nanny for Edward. Joshua is a black servant who works for the family. Clive heads out daily to settle conflicts amongst local African tribes while Betty stays at home with the children. Later on, Mrs Saunders and Harry are introduced. Harry is an explorer and an old friend of Clive's who often visits the family. Mrs Saunders is a widow who comes to the family as riots start breaking out as she is worried the locals might attack her. As the act develops, the main focus lays on the characters' struggles with self-identity and sexuality, and they find themselves in a contradiction between their desires and their moral values. It is revealed that Clive has feelings for Mrs Saunders and Betty is attracted to Harry who is gay and seems have a secretive sexual relationship with Joshua and Edward. Edward's governess, Ellen, wishes to have an intimate relationship with Betty. The act ends with a marriage ceremony for Harry who is forced to marry Ellen as their sexual orientation is publicly seen as outlandish and taboo. At the very end Joshua points a gun at Clive and the lights go out, implying he was not so loyal to his white masters after all.

Churchill uses various tools to alienate her characters. Diamond highlights that feminist playwrights like Churchill who “seek to expose or mock the strictures of gender usually use some version of the Brechtian A-effect. That is, by alienating iconicity.”<sup>98</sup> The first scene of the first act of *Cloud Nine* is supposed to show a notion of an ideal and traditional family; nonetheless, this notion is disrupted when Betty and Edward (mother and son) are played by the opposite sex and Joshua (black servant) is

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<sup>97</sup> Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Diamond, “Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory,” 84.

played by a white man.<sup>99</sup> During the opening scene, each of the characters introduce themselves to the audience. Churchill therefore breaks Brecht's fourth wall right at the start by directly addressing the audience. Besides engaging the audience, by breaking the fourth wall, Churchill also reminds spectators that what they see on stage is not reality but fiction. Betty, Clive's wife, proclaims to the audience:

I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life  
Is to be what he looks for in a wife.  
I am a man's creation as you can see,  
And what men want is what I want to be.<sup>100</sup>

Betty is a very submissive and stereotypical female character who feels her entire life's purpose is to serve her husband. Churchill wrote about the character of Betty: "Betty, Clive's wife, is played by a man because she wants to be what men want her to be."<sup>101</sup> Next instance of alienation comes with the characters of Joshua and Edward. Joshua is a black servant who is played by a white man. He serves a family that oppresses his people. His character does not want to be associated with his tribe and strives to please his white masters. Edward, Betty's son, is a 9-year-old boy played by a woman. He is portrayed as a very feminine character as he likes to play with dolls and try on his mother's necklaces. Churchill further uses alienation with the character of Victoria, Betty's 2-year-old daughter. Victoria is played by a dummy.<sup>102</sup> She portrays the submission of the women in the play. She does not speak and is seldomly noticed by any of the other characters.

Churchill set the first act in Victorian times to highlight the colonial and patriarchal issues.<sup>103</sup> The Victorian setting also helps to achieve a sense of distance that Brecht often used. When historical events are presented, spectators are usually made to inspect the dramatic happenings in an objective way. It can also push the audience to contrast the present with the past as Brecht's historicization is also "intended to suggest the continued impact of the dramatized conditions in other historical

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<sup>99</sup> See Churchill's stage directions.

<sup>100</sup> Churchill, "Cloud Nine", 251.

<sup>101</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*.

<sup>102</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*.

<sup>103</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*.

periods.”<sup>104</sup> Churchill opens the first act with the entire family singing an ode to England.

Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride.  
Now meet the world united, now face it side by side;  
Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam.  
From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'.  
Then gather round for England, Rally to the flag,  
From North and South and East and West  
Come one and all for England!<sup>105</sup>

Similarly to Brecht, Churchill uses the song to highlight the historical aspect of the play and further promote alienation. She historicizes the first act right at the beginning as she showcases the mentality of British people during Victorian colonial times to the audience. Spectators are therefore likely to contrast the Victorian era with modern times and reflect on how social norms have changed. Besides historicization, Churchill also manages to further alienate Joshua. The opening song is sung by everybody, including Joshua. By letting Joshua sing, Churchill shows the absurdness of having a black slave serving British colonizers sing about his love for England.

Churchill, however, mainly alienates the character of Joshua by letting a white man depict him. The British mindset towards Africans during colonial times can be seen through his character. His people were seen as savages and had to be civilized by the white man. Joshua knows he is a slave therefore he thinks and acts like a white man in order to please his masters. He intentionally betrays his people. While working as an informer for Clive, he provides him with information about which of the local tribes might be planning an uprising. Even when his own family is murdered by the colonists, he still remains faithful to his white master.

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.  
I hate my tribe. My master is my light.  
I only live for him. As you can see,  
What white men want is what I want to be.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Martin et al., *Brecht Sourcebook*, 218.

<sup>105</sup> Churchill, “Cloud Nine,” 251.

<sup>106</sup> Churchill, “Cloud Nine,” 251–252.

Joshua knows he has to serve the family and entertain them. In one scene, Joshua is again ordered to sing, this time a Christmas carol. He proceeds to happily sing a song about winter, snow, and Christmas time while the whole family watches. By letting Joshua sing a Christmas song, Churchill alienates his character again and shows a certain absurdity. Joshua is a black servant from Africa who is most likely not Christian and is not familiar with winter, snow, carolling or celebrating Christmas.

In addition to alienation, Churchill's cross-casting also causes a prevailing social gestic element in the play. Brecht noted that the social gest is "the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people of a given period."<sup>107</sup> For instance, with Betty's character, the audience sees a man dressed in women's Victorian attire on stage. By having a male actor try to mimic stereotypical female mannerisms and body language, Churchill seeks to mock and further alienate the construct of male and female roles in society fabricated by patriarchy. Diamond claims: "A gestic feminist criticism would "alienate" or foreground those moments in a playtext in which social attitudes about gender could be made visible."<sup>108</sup> There are also minor gestic Churchill uses to accentuate the play's anti-patriarchal message, such as with the character of Victoria. Victoria is played by a doll and is treated as such most of the time; she is often passed from one person to the next. In one scene, Clive tosses Victoria as if she is an actual object, showing his indifference towards her.

CLIVE: Yes, it's manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We'll say no more about it. Tomorrow I'll take you riding with me and Harry Bagley. Would you like that?  
EDWARD: Is he here?  
CLIVE: He's just arrived. There Betty, take Victoria now. I must go and welcome Harry. [CLIVE tosses VICTORIA to BETTY...]<sup>109</sup>

Clive's action in this scene can be regarded as Brecht's social gest. Through Victoria's character, Churchill tries to point out how most women were treated and perceived in Victorian times. They were dismissed, overlooked and often treated as objects.

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<sup>107</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 139.

<sup>108</sup> Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory," 91.

<sup>109</sup> Churchill, "Cloud Nine," 257.

The second act of *Cloud Nine* takes place in London in 1979 yet only 25 years have passed in the characters' lives. Churchill decided to historicize the acts and work with two different time frames as she felt it would show the audience how the societal standards and values have changed from the Victorian times: "The first act, like the society it shows, is male dominated and firmly structured. In the second act, more energy comes from the women and the gays."<sup>110</sup> The characters in the second act experience personal and sexual liberation. James Harding explains why the revelation of sexuality in the second act is substantial for creating a Brechtian experience.

From a Brechtian perspective, it is paramount that the play somehow bring the sexual identities of the performers out of the closet if it seeks to alienate the ideological presumptions that sustain heterosexuality.<sup>111</sup>

There are nine main characters in the act. Betty, Edward and Victoria who all appear in the first act. Martin, Lin, Cathy, Gerry, and Tommy are newly introduced in the second act. Martin is Victoria's husband and together they have a son, Tommy. Lin is Victoria's friend and she has a daughter named Cathy. Gerry is a turbulent relationship with Edward. Joshua and Clive are not portrayed in the second act to symbolize the end of slavery and patriarchy. The plot mainly revolves around the characters building relationships, discovering themselves and embracing who they are. Everybody seems freer, more open, and self-accepting of themselves and their sexuality and desires. Betty is played by a woman as she has fully accepted her femininity and Edward, Clive's son, is played by a man as he has accepted his sexuality. Victoria is played by a woman, not a dummy. Her character is intellectually engaged in the play; she reads books and has discussions with people.<sup>112</sup>

The beginning of the second act starts in a park in London. Victoria and Lin sit and chat while Cathy, Lin's daughter, plays in the park. Unlike in the first act, Churchill only alienates the character of Cathy, 5-year-old girl, in the second act by letting an adult man portray her. Churchill wrote about Cathy: "Cathy is played by a

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<sup>110</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*.

<sup>111</sup> James M. Harding, "Cloud Cover: (Re) Dressing Desire and Comfortable Subversions in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*," *PMLA* 113, no. 2 (March 1998): 266.

<sup>112</sup> See Churchill's stage directions.

man, [...] to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl.”<sup>113</sup> As Cathy plays in the park, she sings a song:

Yum yum bubblegum.  
Stick it up your mother's bum.  
When it's brown  
Pull it down  
Yum yum bubblegum.<sup>114</sup>

There is a clear contrast between the patriotic song that was used to open the first act of the play and Cathy's song that is used to open the second act. Churchill uses Brecht's historicization to clearly divide two different time periods. She brings the audience to present time by displaying the sharp difference and change in society from the Victorian times. The alienation of Cathy's character also creates a certain social gest as Cathy (an adult man) has the mannerisms of a small child. Cathy's character does not have interests typical of a little girl; she is often seen carrying toy guns and mimicking fights. Churchill again seeks to deride the construct of gender roles through her character.

As the act evolves, the characters explore their sexuality and become freer and more self-accepting. Betty decides to leave Clive and becomes financially independent, Martin and Victoria separate, and Gerry and Edward break up. Churchill includes more songs to historicize the actions and chip away at patriarchy. In Brecht's manner, the commentary songs are used to distance the audience, break away from the plot and convey a message. In the song "Cloud Nine", Churchill shows how with changing times, the characters are able to fully accept themselves and their sexuality:

It'll be fine when you reach Cloud Nine.  
Mist was rising and the night was dark.  
Me and my baby took a walk in the park.  
He said Be mine and you're on Cloud Nine.  
Better watch out when you're on Cloud Nine.  
Smoked some dope on the playground swings  
Higher and higher on true love's wings  
He said Be mine and you're on Cloud Nine.  
Twenty-five years on the same Cloud Nine.  
Who did she meet on her first blind date?  
The guys were no surprise but the lady was great  
They were women in love, they were on Cloud Nine.

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<sup>113</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Cloud Nine*.

<sup>114</sup> Churchill, "Cloud Nine," 289.



Two the same, they were on Cloud Nine.  
The bride was sixty-five, the groom was seventeen,  
They fucked in the back of the black limousine.  
It was divine in their silver Cloud Nine. [...] <sup>115</sup>

The “Cloud Nine” commentary song is sung by the all characters. The actors step out of their roles completely and sing the song from an outer perspective. This breaks the fourth wall and interrupts the actions on stage as well as reminds the audience they are watching a play. Towards the end of the act, Betty starts to except her own sexuality and femininity. Edward and Gerry make up and Gerry has a discussion with Betty in which she finally accepts her children’s sexuality. Cathy’s character then sings one more silly song as she did at the beginning of the second act. Churchill again employs historicization to put emphasis on the different time periods.

CATHY: Under the bramble bushes,  
Under the sea boom boom boom, [...]   
When we are married,  
We'll raise a family.  
Boy for you, girl for me,  
Boom tiddley oom boom  
SEXY. <sup>116</sup>

Before the end of the second act, Churchill further interrupts and distances the actions on stage by letting characters of Edward, Ellen and Clive reappear. Edward from the first act professes his love for Gerry. Ellen and Betty have a same discussion as in the first act. Then, Clive reappears and tells Betty:

CLIVE: You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can't believe you are. I can't feel the same about you as I did. And Africa is to be communist I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a high ideal. I came out onto the verandah and looked at the stars. <sup>117</sup>

It is apparent that Clive experiences a dissolution of the ideals that once seemed so important. The second act of *Cloud Nine* ends with Brecht’s *Gestus*. After Clive talks to Betty, Betty from the first act reappears and does a simple gest as she embraces the new Betty in the second act, implying she has fully accepted herself.

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<sup>115</sup> Churchill, “Cloud Nine,” 312.

<sup>116</sup> Churchill, “Cloud Nine,” 313.

<sup>117</sup> Churchill, “Cloud Nine,” 320.

Throughout the play, Churchill utilizes elements of Brecht's epic theatre to underline the strong political message of the play. Similarly to Brecht, she uses the epic theatre techniques to bring awareness to important social issues. With *Cloud Nine* she created a body of work that talks about sexual and racial oppression in society. To highlight these issues and engage the audience, Churchill alienates her characters by letting male actors portray the female characters and female actors portray the male characters. She further supports their alienation by using Brecht's *Gestus* to ridicule the construct of gender roles. Churchill also prompts the actors to break the fourth wall, by addressing the audience, to ensure spectators remain intellectually involved and analyse the play's message. Furthermore, Brecht's historicization is utilized by moving in two different time frames and using commentary songs to emphasize how the social norms in the two acts have changed.

### 3.2 Traces of Brecht's Epic Theatre in *Vinegar Tom* by Caryl Churchill

*Vinegar Tom* was written in 1976. Churchill cooperated with a feminist theatre company and wanted to create a body of work that would show hardships of women in society.<sup>118</sup> The play explores gender stereotypes and power roles in society during the 17<sup>th</sup> century witch trial in England; it displays historical oppression and discrimination towards women. Churchill wrote the following about *Vinegar Tom*: "I wanted to write a play about witches with no witches in it; a play not about evil, hysteria and possession by the devil but about poverty, humiliation and prejudice, and how the women accused of witchcraft saw themselves."<sup>119</sup> As in *Cloud Nine*, Churchill uses various tools from Brecht's epic theatre, such as social gest, switching between time frames, alienation, historicization and various songs to call attention to the historical oppression of women. Churchill further clarified about the setting: "the play takes place in and around a small village over a period of a few weeks in the seventeenth century."<sup>120</sup>

*Vinegar Tom* follows a story of a poor young woman named Alice and her mother Joan Noakes. They live in a small village with their cat, Vinegar Tom. Alice and Joan are accused of witchcraft by their neighbours, Jack and Margery. Joan often

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<sup>118</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Vinegar Tom*.

<sup>119</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Vinegar Tom*.

<sup>120</sup> See Churchill's stage directions.

pays visits to Jack's house to ask for food as her and Alice cannot afford much. When Margery refuses to give her yeast, Joan curses her and leaves. Jack and Margery have already suffered many hardships on their farm when their cattle became sick and died. As Jack and Margery have had these misfortunes and do not want to feel as if they are being punished by God, they resort to believing Joan and her cat, Vinegar Tom are capable of witchcraft. As a result of this, Joan and Alice are subjected to endless interrogation and investigation by witch hunters and doctors. All this investigation, however, has a predetermined ending. There are other female characters in the play who have a similar fate to Joan and Alice. For example, Betty. Betty is the daughter of the landowner of the estate where Margery and Jack work. She is seen as insane and deemed a witch because she does not want to marry. Other women who are deemed as witches are Susan and Ellen. Susan is Alice's friend who is killed because she tells witch hunters that Alice met with the devil and is capable of witchcraft. Ellen is referred to as a cunning woman in the play, she tries to heal women who are sick and as a result gets accused of witchcraft. All women are put in prison and executed in the end. The plot of the play is often interrupted by various songs which revolve around how bad treatment of women still prevails. This ties the play together and demonstrates how these issues from the past are still very much relevant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century society.

The first scene in *Vinegar Tom* shows Alice having sex with an unnamed man who is also sometimes referred to as the devil or Satan in the play. Alice is a poor village girl who is a single mother and therefore completely discarded and rejected by society. The man and Alice then have a conversation in which the man mentions that he once saw a witch burnt. Churchill historicizes the play at very beginning and brings the audience to a time period when witch trial and witch hunts were taking place in England. Alice then begs the man to help her escape the tiny village she lives in and take her somewhere new. She wants to leave the familiar and start a new life. It is apparent that the man only uses Alice to satisfy his lust as their exchange ends with the man calling Alice a whore and telling her that he cannot and will not take a girl like her anywhere. The disparity between the liberty and choices of the characters is shown, the man can leave but Alice has to stay.

ALICE: Will you take me with you, to London, to Scotland? Nothing happens here.

MAN: Take you with me?

ALICE: Please, I'd be no trouble...

MAN: A whore? Take a whore with me?  
ALICE: I'm not that.  
MAN: What are you then? What name would you put to yourself? You're not a wife or a widow. You're not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are.  
[...]  
ALICE: Stay with me!  
MAN: Get away, will you.  
ALICE: Please.  
MAN: Get away. [He pushes her and she falls.]<sup>121</sup>

Churchill distances the man's character by not giving him a proper name. He is referred to simply as a man. Brecht mentions in his writings that distancing and alienation "intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotions, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the characters portrayed."<sup>122</sup> By not naming the man and showing him as indifferent and cruel to Alice, Churchill makes the spectator be more likely to empathize with Alice's character. Churchill also uses small Brecht's social gesticulations in their conversation. The man insists Alice told him what she is. He wants her to identify herself with a certain category and give him a name that would assign her to a certain social group. At the very end of their conversation, the man pushes Alice and she falls. This gesture can be interpreted as a metaphor for the domineering and tyrannical treatment of women in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the second scene, Betty, the landowner's daughter, visits Jack and Margery who are Alice and Joan's neighbours. Jack and Margery argue over whether they should buy new cattle or a field showing the contrast between their issues and those of poor Alice. Betty visits Jack and Margery's house to tell them she was locked in a room because she refused to get married nevertheless, she managed to escape.

BETTY: Margery, can I stay here tonight?  
MARGERY: They'd worry for you.  
BETTY: Can I? Please?  
JACK: There's no bed fit for you, miss.<sup>123</sup>

Betty hoped to find a shelter in their house. However, even though she escaped, her running away is pointless. Churchill employs a minor yet powerful gesture here. She uses this fleeing yet not achieving anything as a gesture to show that though she escaped, she can never be truly free in society.

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<sup>121</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 137.

<sup>122</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 94.

<sup>123</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 140.

Churchill also includes several commentary songs in the play. In her production note, she wrote: “The songs take place in the present [...] The songs, which are contemporary, should if possible be sung by actors in modern dress.”<sup>124</sup> In the third scene of *Vinegar Tom*, Alice and her mother Joan have a conversation in which they candidly discuss their sexual desires and the absence of men who could take care of them in their lives. Joan says that despite her husband’s abuse, she and Alice would have more money if he was still alive. Churchill then uses a commentary song “Nobody Sings”. The song interrupts the dramatic events and is used to talk about women’s reproductive journey, from the commencement of menarche all the way to menopause.

I woke up in the morning,  
Blood was on the sheet,  
I looked at all the women  
When I passed them in the street.  
Nobody sings about it  
But it happens all the time.[...] <sup>125</sup>

Brecht maintained that the use of music in the epic theatre should have “reflective and moralizing” nature.<sup>126</sup> Churchill uses the song to highlight how this natural process is still seen as taboo in society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, repeatedly using the phrase “nobody sings about it but it happens all the time” in the song. In the song, Churchill also highlights how in patriarchy young women are only noticed and valued for their beauty while older women are only seen as their age.

In scene four, Joan comes to Jack and Margery to ask for a little yeast. They refuse to give her yeast and accuse her of stealing. Then, Churchill employs Brecht’s gest. Brecht clarifies that gest does not equal gesticulation: “It is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes.”<sup>127</sup> As Joan leaves, Margery keeps trying to churn butter however, without any success. The action of churning yet not achieving anything shows the predetermined fate of all the women in the play.

MARGERY: Butter won't come. Mother Noakes said damn the butter to hell.  
JACK: Lazy slut, get on with it.

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<sup>124</sup> See Churchill’s production note.

<sup>125</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 141.

<sup>126</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 85.

<sup>127</sup> Willet, *Brecht on Theatre*, 104.

MARGERY: Come butter come. Come butter come. Come butter come.  
Come butter come. Come butter come. Come butter ...<sup>128</sup>

In the following scene, Susan and Alice have a chat. Susan is Alice's friend who is pregnant for the second time. Alice suggests to Susan that she should go visit "the cunning woman" who heals with herbs and might help her abort her child. Then, Jack interrupts their discussion. Alice and Jack then have an interaction where Churchill uses another social gest. Alice is talking to her friend Susan outside of her house when Jack is sent to Alice's house by Margery to confront Alice's mother about stealing. Instead of searching for Joan, Jack immediately turns his attention to Alice.

JACK: I'm forgetting. I brought something.  
[He gives her two apples.]  
ALICE: Thank you. What then?  
JACK: Am I not handsome enough, is that it?<sup>129</sup>

He shows interest in her and offers Alice two apples. Churchill employs this gest to demonstrate the value of a girl in society. She implies that Jack regards Alice as something that can be traded for two apples.

In scene six, Betty, the landowner's daughter, is shown tied to a chair about to be bled by a doctor. Betty does not want to get married. As a result, she is subjected to various invasive procedures by her family who try to cure her desire not to be married. During the procedure, the doctor tells her: "Hysteria is a woman's weakness. Hysterion, Greek, the womb. Excessive blood causes an imbalance in the humours."<sup>130</sup> Then, Churchill interrupts the plot with a song called "Oh doctor." Churchill aims to reveal the oppression of women through the song. How women were vilified, belittled and made believe that they are evil and inferior by the patriarchal society.

Oh, doctor, tell me, make me well.  
What's wrong with me the way I am?  
I know I'm sad. I may be sick. I may be bad.  
Please cure me quick, oh doctor.<sup>131</sup>

The song sings about a woman believing something is wrong with her as Betty is being bled. The woman wishes to be cured as the people around her have indoctrinated her into believing she is sick. Reinelt points out the metaphorical meaning of the song as

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<sup>128</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 145.

<sup>129</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 147.

<sup>130</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 149.

<sup>131</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 149.

she writes about Betty's character: "She is visibly drained of her lifeblood, and symbolically drained of her strength to fight."<sup>132</sup>

In the following scene, Churchill uses another song called "Something to Burn." The song highlights how in times of distress, society often selects a certain group of people who are then blamed for any hardships. As a result, these people are subjected to torturous practices and treated poorly. This song ties these marginalized groups together with the poor treatment of women and their humiliation during witch trials. In the preface to *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill wrote: "Witches were a scapegoat in times of stress like Jews and blacks."<sup>133</sup> Breaking the fourth wall and Brecht's historicization is applied in the song in order to tie the past to the present and show the audience how women are still treated as marginalized groups in the present. The last verse of the song also serves as a gest for the burning of the witches in the play.

Sometimes it's witches, or what will you choose?  
Sometimes it's lunatics, shut them away.  
It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews.  
We'd all be quite happy if they'd go away.  
Find something to burn.  
Let it go up in smoke.  
Burn your troubles away.<sup>134</sup>

In the next scenes, many of the characters visit Ellen, also known as the cunning woman. Susan and Alice visit to ask for help. Betty visits to ask if she could cure her desire not to be married. Then, Jack and Margery visit Ellen as they believe they have been bewitched. The cunning woman hands them a mirror and asks if they see the face of the witch who has cursed them. After a while, Jack and Margery conclude that they see Joan Noakes in the mirror. When they ask Ellen for approval, she says: "Not for me to say one's a witch or not a witch."<sup>135</sup> Then, Jack asks if the cunning woman can return his erection as according to him, Alice has stolen it. Through *Gestus*, Churchill shows how just someone's arbitrary conviction can lead to women being deemed as witches despite there being no concrete evidence or if, evidence that was fabricated. Jack and Margery looked into the mirror and saw what they wanted to see. They

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<sup>132</sup> Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama," 162.

<sup>133</sup> Churchill, introduction to *Vinegar Tom*.

<sup>134</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 154.

<sup>135</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 158.

already had their mind set about Alice and Joan just as society has had its mind set about women and held many prejudices against them throughout history.

In scene twelve, Joan stops by Jack and Margery's house to make up and to assure them that she does not want any distress between them. Margery, however, makes it very clear that Joan is not welcome at their house. She tells Joan she is making a potion that attracts witches and as she came to their house, she must be a witch. Then, the song "If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me" follows.

[...] Nobody loves a scold,  
nobody loves a slut,  
nobody loves you when you're old,  
unless you're someone's gran.  
Nobody loves you unless you keep your mouth shut.  
Nobody loves you [...]<sup>136</sup>

Churchill again alienates and historicizes the plot. She shows how women are often discarded by society. They can try endlessly but they will always mostly be valued for the tangible body, not the character inside. And as the body grows old, the woman inside is completely forgotten; it is a no-win situation.

In scene thirteen, Alice and Susan meet. Alice makes a figurine of the man who abandoned her in the first scene out of mud. Alice wants to try if magic is real and take revenge on her lost lover; Susan urges not to attempt anything. As Alice starts poking the mud man in the head and heart, Susan tries to grab him, but he falls and breaks on the ground. This can be perceived as a gest that shows the fate of witches. Women were accused of being witches by the public and then humiliated, subjected to torture and killed. Alice and Susan then bicker over who broke the mud man when Jack suddenly approaches the two. Jack runs to Alice and confronts her about his lost erection, demanding: "Give it me back. You know. You took it from me these three months. I've not been a man since. You bewitched me. You took it off me."<sup>137</sup> Baffled Alice then touches his groin and pretends to give him back what she took from him not knowing she has just fallen into Jack's trap. Jack regards Alice's gest as a proof that she is capable of witchcraft. Susan then panics and also accuses Alice of being a witch.

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<sup>136</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 160.

<sup>137</sup> Churchill, "Vinegar Tom," 163.



Churchill then uses the song “If You Float”. This song is used in similar fashion as the “Nobody Loves You” song except from a more historical aspect of when witch trials were taking place in England. Reinelt points out how the song achieves alienation and historicization by creating “a critical distance from the historical events which allows comparisons to contemporary time.”<sup>138</sup> As in Brecht’s manner, spectators are therefore likely to contrast the time period of the play with modern times.

If you float you're a witch.  
If you scream you're a witch If you sink,  
then you're dead anyway.<sup>139</sup>

In the next scene, a gathering in a public square is shown as the witch trials have begun. The character of Goody and Packer are introduced. Packer is a witch hunter and Goody his female assistant. All the women accused of witchcraft (Joan, Alice, Susan, Ellen) are then searched for “devil’s marks” and put in prison. They are then executed as Margery start praying. In her prayer, Margery thanks God for destroying all the evil witches and asks him to protect her husband. This can be perceived as a gest that shows how society tries to protect and preserve patriarchy.

You have shown your power in destroying the wicked [...] Bless Miss Betty's marriage and let her live happy. Bless Jack and keep him safe from evil and let him love me and give us the land, amen.<sup>140</sup>

Unlike in *Cloud Nine*, in *Vinegar Tom* Churchill only uses cross-casting with the characters of Kramer and Sprenger who she remarks should be played by women.<sup>141</sup> Kramer and Sprenger are the authors of the book *Hammer on Witches*, which contains clues on how to recognize a witch, who appear towards the end of the play. Witch hunting was an activity done by men. Churchill again uses Brecht’s alienation by letting women in men’s clothes portray their characters. Kramer and Sprenger then have a speech in which they try to find reasons for why women so often resort to witchcraft.

KRAMER/SPRENGER: she is more carnal than a man  
KRAMER: as may be seen from her many carnal abominations.  
SPRENGER: She was formed from a bent rib  
KRAMER: and so is an imperfect animal.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Reinelt, “Beyond Brecht: Britain’s New Feminist Drama,” 161.

<sup>139</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 170.

<sup>140</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 174.

<sup>141</sup> See Churchill’s stage directions.

<sup>142</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 177.

After Kramer and Sprenger list reasons to why women frequently become witches, they then thank God: “blessed be the Most High, which has so far preserved the male sex from so great a crime.”<sup>143</sup> Churchill purposefully used women to deliver this misogynistic speech to create and even deeper Brechtian alienation effect. Elaine Aston remarks that Churchill uses this speech as “a theatrical strategy, this comic turn cools off the brutality of the scene’s violence toward the women characters while linking it to historical beliefs and authority.”<sup>144</sup> After Kramer and Sprenger’s speech, Churchill ends the play with one more commentary song called “Evil women”.

Evil women,  
Is that what you want to see?<sup>145</sup>

The song directly addresses the audience asking them if evil women is what they desire to see. Churchill therefore uses the song to break the fourth wall, create an alienation effect and historicize. Aston points out that the final song reveals “mythical but still present association of women with evil and lust to contemporary audiences.”<sup>146</sup>

Churchill employs various techniques of Brecht’s epic theatre in *Vinegar Tom*. Elements such as the alienation effect, *Gestus* and historicization as well as breaking the fourth can be found in the play. As in *Cloud Nine*, Churchill uses these techniques in order to call attention to social and gender issues. Small social gests are used throughout the play in order to highlight the social inequality of women. Furthermore, *Vinegar Tom* contains seven commentary songs. These songs are used mainly to achieve alienation and historicization in the play. The songs connect the past with the present and force spectators to contrast two different time periods and remain critical. Unlike in *Cloud Nine*, in *Vinegar Tom* Churchill does not rely so heavily on cross-casting. Cross-casting is used only with characters of Kramer and Sprenger who, as mentioned earlier, are played by women in order to further promote the alienation effect.

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<sup>143</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 178.

<sup>144</sup> Elaine Aston, Elin Diamond, *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>145</sup> Churchill, “Vinegar Tom,” 178.

<sup>146</sup> Aston, *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 24.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to introduce and examine Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and its influence on British drama. In the first chapter, essential background information about the epic theatre were provided. Brecht's epic theatre used specific techniques and elements. In order to help understand these techniques, each element of his epic theatre was explained in detail. First, the chapter focused on explaining Brecht's alienation effect, its history and Brecht's use of it. Brecht's alienation effect was inspired by the Chinese theatre. He mainly used it to turn ordinary and mundane events into something impressive and thought-provoking. Then, the chapter focused on understating Brecht's *Gestus* and historicization. Historicization and alienation were interconnected as one usually achieved the other. Historicization meant that the actions on stage were to be played as historical ones. This usually achieved alienation in ordinary things. After historicization, Brecht's *Gestus* was detailed. As Brecht held strong left-wing political views, he developed *Gestus* in order to bring attention to social relationships hidden behind the plot. *Gestus* was either an action on the stage or a movement that contained a hidden meaning which revealed certain social links in the play. Finally, breaking the fourth wall and staging were discussed. Brecht insisted the audience should not be cut off from the events on stage but at the same time should not get overly attached emotionally. Therefore, breaking the fourth wall was essential in the epic theatre so spectators would participate intellectually. As Brecht also insisted on particular staging, his usage of props, lighting and music were also discussed.

Brecht's epic theatre has left immense legacy in Great Britain. The second chapter of this thesis therefore focused on Brecht's reception in Great Britain, the legacy he left behind, as well as British directors and playwrights he influenced. As Brecht did not debut his work in Great Britain until the 1950s, many artists were not familiar with his theories until his essays were translated into English in the 1960s. The chapter examined artists who drew inspiration from Brecht's epic theatre. The first-generation promoters of Brecht in Britain, William Gaskill and Kenneth Tynan, were discussed. Unlike the general public, Gaskill and Tynan were familiar with Brecht's epic theatre even before the Ensemble debuted in London. Tynan was perhaps the first theatre critic in Britain who often included and praised Brecht's productions in his reviews. Gaskill played a crucial role in incorporating Brecht's techniques into British productions as he worked as a director for the Royal Court Theatre. Apart from

Gaskill and Tynan, playwrights who employed Brecht's techniques in their productions were also examined. Names like John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond, John Osborne and their association with Brecht were discussed.

The third analytical chapter of this paper focused on finding traces of Brecht's epic theatre in feminist dramaturgy. First, the chapter shortly described Brecht's influence on British feminist drama. As both British feminists and Brecht shared similar ideology, feminists often used Brecht's techniques in their work to call attention to social issues of women. The chapter then shortly examined how Brecht's techniques such as alienation, historicization and *Gestus* were used by British playwrights in order to create feminist theatre. Lastly, few British feminist playwrights were named. In the two subchapters, two analysis were conducted.

The first analysis focused on finding traces of the epic theatre in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*. First, brief background information about the play was given. Then, a brief overview of the plot was provided. The play was then thoroughly searched for all Brechtian techniques. The analysis revealed that Churchill utilized many elements of Brecht's epic theatre. Techniques such as the alienation effect, historicization, breaking the fourth wall and *Gestus* were discovered in the play. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill used cross-casting which created strong alienation of the characters. She also used social gests and moved in two different time frames to support alienation and create historicification. As *Cloud Nine* is a feminist drama, all Brecht's techniques were used in order to highlight the treatment of women in patriarchal society and to draw attention to social inequality of women.

The second analysis focused on *Vinegar Tom* by Caryl Churchill. As in the first subchapter, a concise summary of the plot was provided first. Then, elements of Brecht's epic theatre were looked for. As in *Cloud Nine*, Churchill again utilized techniques such as alienation, historicization and *Gestus* to highlight the anti-patriarchal message of the play. In *Vinegar Tom* Churchill, however, mainly employed songs which contrary to the plot, which is set in 17<sup>th</sup> century, are set in the present. The switching of time periods again created historicization. Furthermore, the songs distanced the audience and created an alienation effect that was likely to make spectators think about the treatment of women throughout history. The usage of social gests was also discovered. These gests were used to reveal the treatment of women during witch trials and contrast that treatment to how women are treated in present.

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vlivem Bertolta Brechta na britské drama a nalezením stop Brechtova epického divadla ve dvou vybraných divadelních hrách od Caryl Churchill. Bertolt Brecht byl německý dramatik, který se nejvíce proslavil tvorbou tzv. epického divadla. Epické divadlo je soubor myšlenek a teorií, které Brecht sestavil, aby mohl produkovat dramaturgii, která nevytváří iluze o realitě.

Úvod práce začíná stručným představením Bertolta Brechta a jeho divadelní společnosti *Berliner Ensemble*. Úvodní kapitola se pak soustřeďuje na prvky Brechtova epického divadla. Brecht začal tvořit teorii a techniky epického divadla již ve 20. letech minulého století. Nebylo tomu však až do roku 1949, kdy si založil vlastní divadelní společnost *Berliner Ensemble* a mohl tyto techniky začít uplatňovat v praxi. Brechtovo epické divadlo vzniklo na základě jeho politického přesvědčení. Brecht byl komunista, který pevně věřil, že divadlo má sloužit jako nástroj pro vyzdvižení a zdůraznění společenských problémů. Brechtova filozofie se ale dosti neslučovala s německou dramaturgií produkovanou v jeho éře. Německé divadlo bylo tenkrát stavěno hlavně na emočních prožitcích diváků, kteří se měli především vžít do postav na jevišti a soucítit s nimi. Tuto strategii Brecht neuznával, a rozhodl se tak vytvořit elementy jako zcizovací efekt, *Gestus*, historizaci a prolomení čtvrté zdi, aby divadlo zbavil těchto emočních prožitků a iluzí. Všechny tyto elementy pak v praxi používal, aby zabránil divákům drama pouze prožívat. Brecht chtěl, aby se diváci jeho dramaturgii snažili především pochopit, aby analyzovali i ty nejmenší detaily v divadelních hrách a snažili se je interpretovat.

Zcizující efekt se řadí k nejznámějším technikám Brechtova epického divadla. Původem má kořeny v čínském divadle, nicméně Brecht ho převzal a debutoval s ním na evropské scéně. Skrze tento efekt se Brecht snažil přinutit diváky ke kritickému myšlení a upozornit publikum na to, že co se odehrává na jevišti je pouze fikce, nikoliv realita. Brecht dosahoval efektu odcizení skrze různé prvky, například elementy, které neodpovídaly realitě, písně, rekvizity nebo osvětlení. Další velmi známou technikou epického divadla je tzv. *Gestus*. *Gestus* pomocí gestikulace a cílených pohybů odhaluje společenské postoje postav. Může být nalezen v nejdrobnějších detailech. Například v tom, jak někdo pije sklenku vína. Jakou značku vína si dotyčný vybral a jak ji pije nám může prozradit, jaké je jeho společenské postavení a status. Dalšími známými principy Brechtova divadla jsou historizace a

prolomení čtvrté zdi. Historizace je úzce propojena s odcizením, jelikož jeden efekt často dosahuje druhého. Historizace znamená, že herci se snaží hrát své roli nikoliv v přítomnosti, ale v minulosti. Tento časový odstup umožňuje divákům porovnávat společenské změny v různých časových obdobích. Prolomení čtvrté zdi pak také vzniklo inspirací z čínského divadla. Čtvrtá zeď je pomyslná bariéra mezi publikem a pódium. V klasickém divadle je publikum většinou naprosto odříznuto od událostí, které se odehrávají na pódiu. Brecht se však snažil, aby diváci pochopili skrytý význam a hlubší myšlenku jeho divadelních her. Úmyslně proto prolamoval čtvrtou zeď, například tím, že nechával herce otevřeně oslovovat publikum.

Druhá kapitola práce se zabývá přijetím Brechtova epického divadla britskou společností a odkazem, který Brecht ve Velké Británii zanechal. Brechtův *Ensemble* poprvé dorazil do Velké Británie až v padesátých letech, krátce poté, co Brecht zemřel. V té době nebylo mnoho britských umělců seznámeno s teorií epického divadla, jelikož Brechtovy eseje a teorie ještě nebyly přeloženy do angličtiny. Když *Berliner Ensemble* debutoval Brechtovo epické divadlo v Londýně roku 1956, reakce britského publika se lišily. Největší překážkou pro publikum bylo to, že herci neuměli anglicky, tudíž se snažili hrát spíše skrze pantomimu a především vyzdvihnout prvky epického divadla. Mnohé toto spíše odradilo. Nicméně se našli dva nadšení fanouškové, které epické divadlo okouzilo. Byli jimi Kenneth Tynan a William Gaskill. Na rozdíl od široké veřejnosti byli Gaskill a Tynan okrajově obeznámeni s Brechtovým epickým divadlem ještě před debutem souboru v Londýně. Tynan byl pravděpodobně prvním divadelním kritikem v Británii, který do svých recenzí často zahrnoval Brechtovy hry a chválil jeho produkci. Gaskill pak sehrál klíčovou roli při začleňování Brechtových prvků do britské dramaturgie, jelikož pracoval jako režisér pro *Royal Court Theatre* (britské divadlo v Londýně). Dalšími dramatiky, které epické divadlo ovlivnilo, byli například John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond a John Osborne.

Třetí kapitola této práce je nejprve zaměřena na stručný popis vlivu Brechtova epického divadla na britské feministické dramatičky. Ve dvou podkapitolách jsou pak provedeny analýzy dvou divadelních her od Caryl Churchillové. Britská feministická dramaturgie je tvořena především dělnickou třídou. Feministické dramatičky tak povětšinou sdílejí podobnou ideologii jako Brecht. I když Brecht nikdy nezobrazoval problémy žen ve společnosti, feministické autorky často využívají jeho techniky ve svých hrách. Brechtův zcizující efekt a *Gestus* jim

napomáhá odhalit nerovnoprávnost a podřadnost žen i v těch nejběžnějších situacích. Brechtova historizace pak umožňuje odhalit utlačování a umlčování žen skrze historii. Jednou z nejznámějších britských feministických dramatiček, které používaly prvky epického divadla je Caryl Churchillová.

První podkapitola analyzuje drama *Cloud Nine* (do češtiny někdy překládáno jako *Sedmé Nebe*) od Caryl Churchillové s cílem nalezení prvků Brechtova epického divadla. *Cloud Nine* je feministická divadelní hra, která se snaží poukázat na nerovnoprávnost žen ve společnosti. Hra se odehrává v africké kolonii Velké Británie ve Viktoriánském období. Dějově je hra zaměřena spíše na vnitřní boje hlavních postav, kterými jsou Clive, Betty, Victoria, Edward, Joshua, Lin a Cathy. Postavy se během hry nacházejí v rozporu mezi svými touhami a morálními hodnotami. Churchill v této povídce používá řadu technik Brechtova epického divadla. Nejpatrnější je na první pohled historizace, které dosahuje tím, že první akt hry zasazuje do Viktoriánského období a druhý do 70. let 20. století. Skrze tento časový posun se pak snaží divákům odhalit historickou nerovnoprávnost žen. Dalším velmi patrným elementem epického divadla je jev, při kterém Churchillová obsadila do mužských rolí ženy a do ženských rolí muže. Toto je klasický prvek, který způsobuje zcizující efekt. V neposlední řadě Churchillová ve hře používá různé říkanky a písně, které prohlubují zcizující efekt a historizaci a gesta, která odhalují společenské postavení žen.

Druhá podkapitola se pak zaměřuje na rozbor hry *Vinegar Tom* od Caryl Churchillové. *Vinegar Tom* se odehrává v Anglii během čarodějnických procesů v 17. století. Hra zobrazuje několik žen (Joan, Alice, Susan a Ellen), které byly nařčeny z čarodějnictví a popraveny. Churchillová se snaží poukázat spíše na to, jak se s takovými ženami zacházelo a jak byly vnímány společností. Stejně jako v předešlém dramatu *Cloud Nine*, využívá prvky epického divadla, aby vyzdvihla nerovnoprávnost žen. Hra *Vinegar Tom* obsahuje sedm písní, které se Churchillová rozhodla zasadit do přítomnosti na rozdíl od děje. Pohybuje se tak ve dvou různých časových rovinách, čímž dosahuje historizace a efektu odcizení. Tato technika nutí diváky přemýšlet o společenském postavení žen skrze historii. Churchillová ve hře také používá Brechtův *Gestus* pomocí gest, která slouží k odhalení ponižování a tyranizování žen v období čarodějnických procesů.

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