

## 53-Elements of Brecht's epic theatre in Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* and Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*

Mustafa BAL<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Caryl Churchill's plays thematically embody elements of many *-isms* such as feminism, sexism, capitalism, and socialism, labeling her dramaturgy as an eclectic combination of social philosophies and political ideologies. Although genuinely creative and original in her writing and theatrical practices, Caryl Churchill does not refrain from making use of preceding European theatrical theory, practice, and culture. In this sense, she is a playwright who benefits considerably from the thematic and technical aspects of the Brechtian epic theatre, which can be observed in her *Mad Forest*. Sarah Kane, on the other hand, with her experimental dramaturgy that stretches and twists features of realism and naturalism into new post-dramatic forms, is no less different from her predecessor Caryl Churchill in terms of embracing challenging, confrontational ideas and reflecting them in her plays. Notwithstanding with her openness to novel dramatic styles, Sarah Kane, too, acknowledges earlier dramatic aesthetics as seen in her *Phaedra's Love*, which is an adaptation of the classical Roman playwright Seneca's *Phaedra*. Likewise, it can be observed that Sarah Kane utilizes certain features of the Brechtian epic theater in her *Cleansed*. Considering these, this article studies how and to what extent Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane maintain the Brechtian dramatic elements in their *Mad Forest* and *Cleansed*, respectively. By examining this tripartite interaction among Bertolt Brecht, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane, the study also tries to reinterpret the dramatic relations among these seemingly distant playwrights of different generations.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kane, Caryl Churchill, epic theater, *Cleansed*, *Mad Forest*

### Brecht'in epik tiyatrosunun Caryl Churchill'in *Mad Forest* ve Sarah Kane'in *Cleansed* adlı oyunlarında yansımaları

#### Öz

Caryl Churchill'in oyunları tematik olarak feminizm, kapitalizm, sosyalizm gibi birçok *-izm* içerir. Bu durum, Churchill'in dramaturjisinin toplumsal düşüncelerin ve siyasi ideolojilerin eklektik bir birleşimi olduğuna işaret eder. Oyun yazımı ve dramatik uygulamaları bakımından kendine has bir yaratıcılığı olsa da Caryl Churchill geçmişte Avrupa kıtasında gelişmiş dramatik kuram, uygulama ve kültürden istifade etmekten kaçınmaz. Bu bakımdan Churchill, *Mad Forest* adlı oyununda gözlemlendiği üzere, Bertolt Brecht'in epik tiyatrosunun tematik ve teknik özelliklerinden cömertçe yararlanan bir oyun yazarıdır. Öte yandan, oyunlarında ortaya koyduğu deneyselciliği ile realizmi ve natüralizmi eğip bükerek yeni, post-dramatik bir forma sokan Sarah Kane zorlayıcı, çatışmacı düşünceleri kucaklayışı ve oyunlarında sergileyişi bakımından sefeli Churchill'den farklı değildir. Yenilikçi dramatik düşüncelere ve uygulamalara olan yakınlığının yanı sıra Sarah Kane önceki

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, TOBB Ekonomi ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü (Ankara, Türkiye), dr.mustafabal@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4839-1800 [Makale kayıt tarihi: 10.09.2020- kabul tarihi: 20.11.2020; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide 816670.]

dramatik yaklaşımları da onaylar tıpkı Romalı oyun yazarı Seneca'nın *Phaedra* oyununu *Phaedra's Love* oyunu ile uyarlayışında olduğu gibi. Keza, *Cleansed* oyununda Sarah Kane'in Brecht'in epik tiyatro anlayışından yararlandığı gözlemlenebilir. Tüm bunların rehberliğinde bu çalışma, Caryl Churchill'in ve Sarah Kane'in sırasıyla *Mad Forest* ve *Cleansed* adlı oyunlarının nasıl ve ne derecede epik tiyatro özellikleri barındırdığını irdelemektedir. Bertolt Brecht, Caryl Churchill ve Sarah Kane arasındaki bu üç taraflı etkileşimi irdeleyerek bu çalışma ayrıca görünürde farklı nesillerin birbirlerinden uzak bu oyun yazarları arasındaki dramatik ilişkileri de yeniden anlamlandırmaya çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Sarah Kane, Caryl Churchill, epik tiyatro, *Cleansed*, *Mad Forest*

Caryl Churchill's playwriting thematically embodies elements of many *-isms* such as feminism, sexism, capitalism, and socialism, which labels her dramaturgy as an eclectic combination of social philosophies and political ideologies. Although genuinely creative and original in her writing, Caryl Churchill does not refrain from making use of preceding European theatrical culture. Her play *Mad Forest*, which utilizes many thematic and technical aspects of the Brechtian epic theatre is an example of this. As Janelle Reinelt (2000) claims "[u]sing an epic dramaturgy many have linked to Brecht, Churchill placed her characters as social subjects at the intersection of economic, religious, and political forces..." (p. 175). Sarah Kane, on the other hand, with her experimental dramaturgy that stretches and twists features of realism and naturalism into new post-dramatic forms, is no less different from her predecessor Churchill in terms of embracing challenging ideas and reflecting them in her plays. Notwithstanding with her openness to novel dramatic styles, Kane, too, acknowledges earlier dramatic aesthetics as seen in her *Phaedra's Love*, which she adapts from the classical Roman playwright Seneca's *Phaedra*. Likewise, we observe that Kane utilizes certain features of the epic theatre in her *Cleansed*. As Verónica Rodríguez (2013) points out, "David Greig and Sarah Kane, who studied together at Bristol University, used to say that they liked authors whose surnames started with 'B', namely, Bond, Barker, Brecht, and so on" (p. 77). Considering all these, this article examines Brecht's influence on Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane, and studies how these playwrights employ the Brechtian dramatic elements in their plays, *Mad Forest* and *Cleansed*, respectively.

A brief literature review reveals that several works examined the epic features found in Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (Yönkul, 2013; Akçeşme, 2009). This article, on the other hand, contributes to these studies in two ways: firstly by presenting an examination of a Sarah Kane play through Brechtian dramatic aesthetics, and secondly, by creating a ground for a side by side discussion and comparison of the two prominent playwrights of British drama – Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane – that originally belong to different generations and decades of playwrighting.

To begin with, a brief outline of the most distinguishing characteristics of the Brechtian theatre should be presented to lead the way for a more comprehensive analysis of the playwrights and plays in question. Brecht was a revolutionary theoretician and a man of drama in that he conceptualized his dramatic and theatrical principles by mainly opposing the features of the centuries-old classical drama. He thought that the components of the classical (Aristotelian) drama was not compatible anymore with the nature of life in the twentieth century – "the scientific age" – and therefore founded the new principles for a new stage labelling it "non-Aristotelian", "epic", "dialectical", and theatre of "alienation" (qtd. in Grimm, 1997, p. 36). He also thought that staging plays in accordance with the traditional drama led the theatre-goers into laziness since the presentation took hold of the emotions of the audience, thus preparing them for the perspective it wants to preach in the end. Edward

Murray's (1990) remarks highlight the difference between Brecht's theatre and the classical tradition it opposes:

In dramatic theatre, according to Brecht, there is action, the spectator is involved in the action, one scene exists for another, and there is linear progression with suspense over the outcome. In epic theater, there is narrative, the spectator is an observer, each scene exists for itself, and there is a curved course of events with suspense over the process, or over what happens in each segment. Brecht could not accept Aristotle's idea of catharsis; he wanted not purgation, but alienation – that is, he wanted a theater which would require decisions from spectators instead of merely subjecting them to an affective experience. (pp. 106-107)

Brecht sought to make the spectators control their feelings through the use their faculty of reason. This could give them a sense of consciousness “to criticize,” as M. H. Abrams (1988) says, “rather than passively accept the social conditions that the play represents” (p. 55). However, he “did not wish to do away with emotion in the theater altogether and to substitute plain reason instead; all he wished to achieve was a sound reduction and curtailment (or, at least, a firm control) of the former” (Grimm, 1997, p. 37). In Brecht's own words “[t]he essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things. At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theater” (qtd. in Willett, 1977, p. 168). This meant that empathy, one of the goals of the classical drama, could be reduced to minimum, and this was only possible by distancing the audience from the staged illusion, thus reminding it that it is a mere representation of life rather than life itself. These qualities of Brecht's mostly politically oriented dramaturgy lead to what is called *alienation effect*, or *A-effect*, which emerges as the core goal of his theatre. Putting it briefly, alienation effect works for the elimination of the familiarity with straightforward and taken-for-granted perception of the world. In this sense, Brecht's stage becomes an investigation arena where the reversal of the familiar with the unfamiliar takes place. In Reinhold Grimm's (1997) words, “Brechtian alienation is an aesthetic device to make us aware, by means of a philosophical method, of our sociological and historical condition and situation. The act of alienation or estrangement produces, dialectically, a bewildered insight into the state of alienation” (p. 43).

That Brecht is arguably the most collaborated-with playwright is a significant point to start the analyses within this paper. From another perspective, it would not be wrong to state that Brecht did not idealise a solitary and all-knowing, ivory-tower resident playwright figure but favoured dissemination of the production to other people of expertise like playwrights and musicians, prioritising the success of the work over the reputation of the author. As James K. Lyon (1980) notes, “[w]orking alone on plays had never been Brecht's forte. Before he ever discovered Marxism, he had surrounded himself with associates...who discussed ideas, fed him material, rewrote his own, and generally helped to ‘produce’ his work. Had the Marxist concept of the collective and collective productivity not existed, Brecht would have invented it” (p. 235), and refers to several of his collaborations with Bentley, Hays, Gorelik and Auden (pp. 236-238). Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane, too, follow Brecht's steps in terms of forming collaborations for their plays. Churchill's *Mad Forest* came out as a joint effort: “In early 1990, Mark Wing-Davey...convinced Churchill to collaborate with him and his students at London's Central School of Speech and Drama to devise a play about the recent revolution in Romania... Their circle of collaborators widened to include students from the Caragiale Institute of Theatre and Cinema... Her collaborators were students instead of professionals” (Gobert, 2014, pp. 151-156). Kane (2001), too, collaborated while producing her *Cleansed* as she reveals it in her acknowledgment of her collaborators on the title page of her work: “My thanks to all

writers, directors, and actors, both at New Dramatists and in the UK, who gave their time to help develop this play” (p. 105).

The next important point to discuss is about the political function that all three playwrights, Brecht, Churchill, and Kane, assign for theatre. None of these prominent playwrights chose to accept to define their productions as mere entertaining pastimes. They all had certain ideological stance before the happenings of their worlds. While Brecht and Churchill both advocated the socialist principles, Sarah Kane of the 1990s rather had a broader, more embracing, and humanitarian perspective without the dictates of certain political ideologies. Brecht's leftist ideology is evident when he says, “I am for the measures of the Communist Party, which fights against exploitation and ignorance for a classless society” (qtd. in Waulbern, 1972, p. 98), and Churchill's left-wing politics or socialism is obvious in her plays. Observing Churchill's socialism in “The Dramatist as Socialist Critic” chapter of her book titled *Caryl Churchill*, Elaine Aston (2010) writes, “[p]olitically, Churchill moves from the subversive potential of the individual without a clearly defined cause, to the rebellion of a society seeking economic and sexual freedoms, and, stylistically, shifts from realistic dialogue punctuated by stylized moments to a performance mode more fully informed by Brechtian techniques” (p. 53). Kane's rather ideology-free stance, on the other hand, may be seen in the words of Mel Kenyon, who was her agent and co-manager of her literary estate: “The strong Right is full of certainties, certainties which are abhorrent. The Left was full of certainties, certainties which proved to be bogus. So to write these big political plays full of certainties and resolution is completely nonsensical in a time of fragmentation” (qtd. in Urban, 2001, p. 39). Another note that can be added to Kane's non-ideological yet political concerns can be seen in her narration of the story behind her composition of her most controversial play, *Blasted*. Referring to the Srebrenica genocide, Kane notes that she was deeply affected by the atrocities and human predicament that was taking place in Bosnia:

At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said, ‘Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.’ I knew nobody was going to do a thing. Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted to write about was what I'd just seen on television ... Slowly, it occurred to me that the play I was writing was about this. It was about violence, about rape, and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each other. (qtd. in Sierz, 2001, pp. 100-101).

More, Kane's following words (she utters in an interview) that can be interpreted as her declaration of the function of her art are even more explanatory about her understanding that the art of theatre should be assertive in dealing with the ills for the sake of preservation of people's well-being in general:

... sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality. If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched. And anyone – politicians, journalists, artist – who attempts to give people that imaginative experience, faces defensive screams that it's too much from all sectors of the artistic and political spectrum... If theatre can change lives, then by implication it can change society, since we're all part of it. (qtd. in Stephenson et al., 1997, p. 133)

With these expressions, it is obvious that Kane shares Brecht's conceptualisation of theatre as a political zone. Kane's ideology-free political activism she displays through her dramatic art may be even deeper than this. For instance, Ayoub Dabiri (2012) reads Kane's violence-rich *Blasted* even as a play by which Kane, through the representation of violence of the war, actually addresses humanity's indifference against the concept of war from an inverted angle, hoping for a better world (pp. 90-93).

On the other hand, Ken Urban (2001), examining the ideological and political stances of the 1990s young British playwrights including Sarah Kane, writes,

Foremost, the writers are Thatcher's children, a generation raised under eleven years of hard-line Thatcher rule. There is a shared hatred for the Tories's dismantling of the socialist state during the 1980s. But this anger is also coupled with an increasing sense of disillusionment at new Labour's move to the political center (not unlike that of the New Democrats in this country) during the 1990s ... Their plays often critique the conservative ideology that deems certain characters and subject matter unsuitable for art. (p. 39)

The mobilization of people through theatre for making them act for the social change is a prominent feature of the Brechtian theatre. Reinhold Grimm (1997) observes this principle with the following words: "According to Marx as well as to Brecht, man has to be aware of his state of alienation in order to be able to change his conditions, that is, society at large" (p. 42). This idea was the political motive behind the epic presentation and its alienation effect. Churchill, likewise, tried to activate people politically and wanted to achieve this through her plays. Her political approach for social change can be seen when she says, "I desperately wanted to see if I could make things happen" (qtd. in Patterson, 2003, p. 160). Therefore, Churchill wanted to change society by *making things happen* on the stage in a manner, which challenged the audience's perception of reality, thus creating a sense of awareness in them. In this sense, *Mad Forest* is certainly a political play, which deals with the two phases of the 1989 Romanian revolution as before and after the dictatorship of Ceaucescu. The political atmosphere is shown through the ordinary lives of two families, one from the working class – the Vladus - and the other belonging to the intellectual upper-middle-class – the Antonescus. The events are clustered around this highly political atmosphere of the revolution and politics haunt every individual no matter whether they are for or against the revolution.

In more details, the political tension of the play is illustrated through Lucia's relationships with men, in other words, with her marriages. At the beginning of the play, Bogdan is angry with Lucia since Lucia's commitment to her American boyfriend awakens suspicions on the family, and this creates anxiety and tension in the family members since they pose as people against the present communist regime. After the revolution, Lucia returns to Romania, leaving her American husband, never to go back. She even shows discontent towards the American way of life. She now develops a relationship with Janoş, a Hungarian, which is not welcome for the family since there has been enmity against Hungarians as well. Gabriel, Lucia's nationalist brother who heroically fought and was wounded during the revolution, demonstrates this enmity towards Hungarians when he warns him by saying "get your filthy Hungarian hands off [Lucia]" (Churchill, 1996, p. 71). It is obvious that Lucia's relationships first with the American and then with the Hungarian are used to lay the political atmosphere bare for the eyes of the audience. Frances Gray (1993) points out the political strain in Lucia's affairs saying that "Lucia leaves her American husband, coming home to resume an affair with Janoş, a Hungarian... To love can be a political act, like Lucia's love of the Hungarian Janoş" (p. 58).

Sarah Kane's slightly surrealistic play *Cleansed* is also dense with political tension. Even the mere fact that the setting of the play as a prison like hospital or a hospital like prison that used to be a university whose instruments "are still in Tinker's hands, namely, the application of cold reason to the question of human feelings, as if the situation is a laboratory whose primary purpose is the reified, fascistic dissection of human emotions under controlled experimental situations" (Carney, 2013, p. 276), – hence the transformation of an institution of knowledge and progress to an institution of correction and torture – itself reflects the political overtones of this play. More, Tinker is clearly a dictator that has a full control over the lives of his subjects Graham, Robin, Grace, Rod and Carl. His dictatorship is

obvious when “he handcuffs both arms” of Grace “to the bed rails” to inject and sooth her after she “breaks down and wails uncontrollably” in scene three (Kane, 2001, p. 113) or when he, as Carl is beaten harshly by some men in the university sports hall, “holds up his arms and the beating stops. He drops his arm. The beating continues” (p. 116). Apart from being considered a doctor, Tinker is also seen as a saviour. The Woman in the peepshow booth wants him to save herself in scene 9 (p. 130). In scene 10, he appears out of the war-torn atmosphere, walks through the daffodils, and tells Grace that he is there to save her (p. 133). Tinker is so sadistic, too. He tortures people; cuts their throats, orders to burn their bodies, rubs their faces on urine pools... In scene 15, he first makes Robin wet himself and then holds his head and chafes it in the puddle of urine (p. 141). In another instance, as in Rod’s words “Tinker made a man bite off another man’s testicles. Can take away your life but not give your death instead” (p. 136). Tinker the dictator makes Robin burn his books (p. 141) juts like burning of books that contain opposite views in totalitarian regimes.

In addition to these, it is noteworthy to state that in *Cleansed* there are allusions to George Orwell’s well-known dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These allusions, too, contribute to the political overtones Kane intends to express in the play. Tinker, who watches each and every action of his subjects as in scene 2 when Carl and Rod kiss each other (Kane, 2001, p. 112) or in scene 7 when Grace and Robin talk about Graham (p. 126) can be seen as the equivalent of Big Brother – a notion rather than an actual person that represents the totalitarian power of the super-state Oceania – who gazes, watches almost everything that the citizens do.<sup>2</sup> Another direct allusion, if not an intertextual reference, to the novel is seen when Carl, under cruellest torture controlled by Tinker, begs, “Not me please not me don’t kill me Rod not me don’t kill me ROD NOT ME ROD NOT ME” (Kane, 2001, p. 117), which sound exactly like Winston’s cries when he is tortured with his biggest fear in Room 101: “Do it to Julia! Do it Julia! Not me! Julia! I don’t care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!” (Orwell, 2003, p. 329). Both Carl and Winston betray their love under heavy torture. Still, one more allusion takes place in the play when Rod talks to Carl, who has recently betrayed him, and mentions to him of the torture technique that has not actually been applied to Carl but is practiced on Winston in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “And the rats eat my face. So what. I’d have done the same only I never said I wouldn’t. You’re young. I don’t blame you. Don’t blame yourself. No one’s to blame” (Kane, 2001, p. 129). Tijana Matović (2016), too, detects a close relation between Orwell’s and Kane’s works (pp. 91-93) while Ken Urban (2006) manages to form a parallelism between *Cleansed* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by claiming that the setting of the play has associations to “...(the concentration camps of Nazi Germany and Serbia, the South African prison on Robben Island, the dystopia of Orwell’s 1984)” (p. 119). All these allusions and references to a dystopic novel that is dense with political overtones further contribute to and fuel the political activism Kane displays in *Cleansed*.

What is more, Brecht’s rejection of the progression of a play like a living organism can also be observed in both Churchill’s *Mad Forest* and Kane’s *Cleansed*. A play growing organically means that it has the classical notion of a proper beginning, rising action, initiation of characters, introduction and development of conflicts, most of the time a climax, falling action, and finally a resolution of the events with a comprehensible end given in chronological linearity. Instead of such a classical tradition, Brecht favours “a technical, indeed artificial, construct: the montage and collage of heterogeneous elements

<sup>2</sup> Tinker’s posing as Big Brother when he watches and checks actions of others can further be seen in the following scenes in the play: in scene 8 when Rod tries to speak with now mute Carl (Kane, 2001, p. 129); in scene 13 when Carl tries to dance to the child’s singing (p. 136); in scene 16 when Rod and Carl make love (p. 142); in scene 17 when Robin prepares for his suicide (p. 144).

are to replace the homogeneous 'living organism' (which is, as will be remembered, Aristotle's metaphor, or simile, for the work of art...)" (Grimm, 1997, p. 38).

Churchill applies this Brechtian quality in *Mad Forest* as each scene in the play is a separate entity, staging an event. In relation with this, Churchill says "[each] scene can be taken as a separate event rather than part of a story. This seems to reflect better the reality of large events like war and revolution where many people share the same kind of experience" (qtd. in Patterson, 2003, p. 161). The play consists of twenty-four chapters. Fifteen chapters are presented in Part I named *Lucia's Wedding*, which is followed by a middle part called *December*, which presents several characters telling about the occurrence of the revolution separately from each other. Part III, called *Florina's Wedding*, has the most complex compositional structure in that it embodies eight main chapters; the second, fourth, and eighth of which are divided into sub-scenes: the second chapter has five internal scenes, and the fourth has six. The situation with the eighth chapter of Part III is more complex compared to the other two: it is divided into three sub-scenes, the first of which also breaks up into eleven internal divisions, while the second to fourteen, and the third and the last one to three. All these chapters, scenes, sub-scenes and divisions in the structure of *Mad Forest* demonstrate that Churchill incorporates Brecht's technique of artificial montage and collage of heterogeneous scenes. Montage is defined as "a rhythmic device which exposes reality and truth in a specific manner" (Leach, 1994, p. 137), and both Brecht and Churchill in *Mad Forest* use it as an agent of the alienation effect since "exposing reality and truth" by fragmenting their wholeness calls for the audience's detached attention on what is staged.

Similarly, Kane's recession from the traditional Aristotelian dramatic progression of a plot in *Cleansed* strengthens the epic characteristic of the play. As Dimitrova (2016) observes, "*Cleansed* exposes one such auto-generative quality in that it appears to recompose from within and alter its ontological texture as it progresses arbitrarily, without much appeal to an Aristotelian plot striving towards a foreshadowed purpose and completion" (p. 234). For one thing, the rapid seasonal change between just in the first two pages of the play is enough to break the traditional, organic, linear progression in favour of the Brechtian inorganic development of the play. While in the opening scene of *Cleansed*, the stage directions signal the winter with "It is snowing" (Kane, 2001, p. 107), on the next page, with the beginning of the scene two, it suddenly becomes the "Midsummer – the sun is shining" (p. 109). This time-travel that occurs quick enough to shatter the traditional chronological linearity is also evident in the last scene of the play, which starts with rain and soon ends with sun light that turns bright enough to blind eyes (p. 149, p. 151).

Another feature that breaks the Aristotelian narrative in the play in lieu of the Brechtian aesthetics is about the stage directions. In *Cleansed*, as David Greig (2001) observes, "Kane stripped away the mechanics of explanatory narrative and presented the audience with a series of poetic images and pared dialogue" (pp. xi-xii). In this sense, it is significant to see the abundance of the stage directions in the play. As Ken Urban (2001) claims, "A quick glance at the text reveals that there is almost as many stage directions as dialogue, and the spoken lines convey a sense of immense compression" (p. 42). Stage directions detail the action and the abundance of them in the play make it clear that the *unspoken* action is as important to the structure and the content of this play as dialogues.

Besides, it is significant to see Churchill's employment of an episodic structure in *Mad Forest* to grasp the epic theatrical aspect of the play. In relation to the rejection of the organic in favour of the montage technique is Brecht's dismissal of a tightly knit plot that develops in a linear way with a beginning, a

middle, and an end. In other words, this is the Aristotelian concept of the unity of action. Once more, this falls under Brecht's conceptualization of a non-Aristotelian drama. The unity of a play, according to Aristotle, denotes that the whole dramatic presentation will collapse, and meanings will be lost if any part of the play is removed. However, "this tectonic structure (often pictured as a pyramid) is broken down by Brecht into a loose sequence of more or less independent scenes, or little pieces within the piece (*Stücken im Stück*) according to his terminology, to be arranged and rearranged in a nearly unlimited fashion" (Grimm, 1997, p. 38-39). Churchill adopts and applies the technique in *Mad Forest* as she composes the play creating snapshots taken from life - particularly from the Romanian revolution and from the lives of the members of two families. These scenes and their sub-pieces in *Mad Forest* can be changed, replaced, edited, rearranged, or several pieces can even be omitted from the play, and still the outline of the play might not change. For example, in Part II – December – where a painter, a translator, a girl student, a boy student, a bulldozer driver, a second boy student, a student 1, a doctor, a securitate, a soldier, a student 2, a housepainter, and a flower seller are given asides, many speeches of these characters might be rearranged or some parts might be omitted, and the meaning reached at the end of the play will remain unaltered. Thus, it can be claimed that in Churchill's play "events on stage simply follow each other, rather than logically or cogently following from each other as prescribed by Aristotle" (Grimm, 1997, p. 39) and opposed by Brecht.

Kane's *Cleansed* follows the same principle. Kane does this as she partitions *Cleansed* in twenty scenes, which are rather intrinsically independent from one another. Ken Urban (2001) strengthens the episodic structure of *Cleansed* when he claims, "[t]he play is Kane's radical riff on Büchner's *Woyzeck* (which she directed at the Gate Theatre in 1997), and like Büchner's play, she sought to create a series of twenty episodes that could be played in a variety of orders and which could exist almost independently" (p. 42). This is clearly in harmony with Brecht's idea of the episodic partitioning of the play in lieu of linearly narrative progression. In this sense, looking more closely at the text, one can realise that many scenes are actually interchangeable; that is, for example, interchanging the scene 10, where Grace is severely beaten with baseball bats and then raped by one of the Voices, with the scene 11, where Robin visits the booth Tinker also visits in scene 9, or the scene 1, where Tinker prepares and injects heroin to Graham with the scene 2, where Carl and Rod converse about marriage as Carl forces Rod to exchange rings, would not cause drastic changes of meaning. Therefore, the happenings in the play are not based on a logical flow of interdependent events, which can be clearly and smoothly followed and grasped by the viewers. Each of the twenty scenes presents almost an expressionistic picture rather than narrating an easily discernible, tracible, coherent set of events tied to each other with strong causality. *Cleansed* is rather a presentation of snapshots, which look like vague memories, if not a horrible nightmare. Each scene appears self-sufficient as an episode, highlighting another Brechtian feature for the play.

The only common theory between Aristotelian drama and Brecht's theatre is that they both accept the central role of *plot* in a play. In other words, plot is seen as an element, which must attract the audience's attention more than any other components in a play. It should be made superior to characters, especially to the protagonist. To Brecht, as Reinhold Grimm (1997) notes, "the story – the interaction of the characters with other characters or their struggle with blind societal or historical forces – is much more relevant than any subtle probing into depths of an individual psyche" (p. 39). *Mad Forest* accords with this idea as well. For one thing, Churchill does not find a protagonist, a hero or a heroine from the country in chaos, but rather chooses to give more or less equal importance to the characterization of each of the characters. Almost all the Romanian society is made the protagonist of the play. Apart from this equalization of the characters, Churchill mainly narrates the events of the



revolution. What remains in minds at the end of the play is not the individuals like Flavia, Bogdan, Gabriel, Flowerseller, Vampire and their relationships among each other, but the revolution, and how and to what extent the public, represented by the characters in the play, reacted towards it. Therefore, plot is emphasized while the characters and their relationships, like the wedding, upheaval, or hospital scenes are used to illustrate the situation presented in the play.

Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* follows a similar approach in terms of prioritizing plot over other elements of a play. Four sequences of plots – of Tinker and the rest of the characters; of Tinker and the Woman in the peepshow booth; of Rod and Carl; of Grace and Graham run simultaneously and each with an emphasis on a certain story.

In relation to the issue of the superiority of plot over character comes to the foreground Brecht's idea of giving multiple roles to players in the play. This is an element of his alienation effect; the character should not be individualized through one single role so that the audience will not be able to identify themselves with them. Brecht (1978) clarifies this idea with the following words:

In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. [...] At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played. The verdict: "he didn't act Lear, he was Lear" would be an annihilating blow to him. He has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it. (p. 193)

Churchill in *Mad Forest* follows Brecht's above-mentioned attitude to characterization and practices it especially in Part II of the play. With the beginning of *December* the players who appeared as characters Vladus or Antonescus and several others now act in different roles. This breaking up of the roles leads the audience take a detached, if not estranged, stance towards the characters, directing them to see the characters not as individuals but only as the representatives of a community. It is conducive to expand and focus visions on the highly political and sociological issue – the revolution – rather than narrowing it down to perspectives and experiences of several individuals. As Patterson (2003) argues "[such] a fluid approach to casting, which challenges the conventional identification of actor with role, is not only playful and expedient; it also focuses attention, in a Brechtian manner, on collective events rather than individual fates" (p. 162).

Giving multiple roles for the sake of alienation effect can also be seen in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* in a highly different manner. In fact, the term 'multiple-roles' is not exact enough to define Kane's practice in this play: hers can rather be called an evolution of cross-casting to *trans-casting*, taking a step further from the Brechtian conceptualisation of multiple roles. Robin, in Graham's clothes, seems to be an incarnated version of Graham. As Zornitsa Dimitrova (2016) observes, "Graham ... is replicated onto another figure, Robin, who appears to have been spontaneously generated out of the play's fabric as Graham's imperfect substitute, wearing his clothes and speaking through his lines" (p. 233). Grace is trying to look like her brother Graham, whose death she has recently learned, by wearing his clothes on that Robin takes off from himself in scene 3, as she tells Tinker "I look like him. Say you thought I was a man" (Kane, 2001, p. 114) whereas in the same scene Robin dresses Grace's clothes up, thereby enhancing the trans-casting through cross-casting. Later, in scene 5, Grace and Graham start dancing and as they do, Grace gradually copies Graham's movements and eventually even her voice turns more like his (p. 119). In scene 7, Graham calls both Grace and Robin who are still wearing each other's clothes "Boys" (p. 124). Later, in scene 10, as Grace is violently beaten by Voices, Graham, in order to sooth her "presses his hands onto Grace and her clothes" – which are still Graham's clothes on her

anyway – “turn red where he touches, blood seeping through. Simultaneously, [Graham’s] own body begins to bleed in the same places” (p. 132). Once again, it is seen that Graham, though dead, and Grace show signs of becoming each other. In scene 18, however, all these trans-casting gets even more complicated as Grace wakes up to find herself, or now himself, a male with genitals taken from Carl and stitched-on herself while her breasts have also been cut and removed from her body. Tinker calls his new subject “Graham”, making Grace a second, if not Grahamised, Graham before the eyes of the actual, if not virtual, Graham on the stage. Furthermore, in scene 19, the Woman in the peepshow booth that Tinker occasionally visits calls herself Grace – in line with what Tinker wants to see her as – after she and Tinker make love (p. 149). Finally, in the last scene of the play, Grace’s cross-personification has been completed now that she “looks and sounds exactly like Graham” (p. 149). In this scene, Grace/Graham is wearing Graham’s clothes while Carl is dressed in Robin’s clothes, which are originally Grace’s. All in all, with this eventual dismembering of Carl’s body and stitching his genitals to Grace’s body that completes a process of cross-personification comes as an update in the form of trans-casting for the Brechtian multi-casting for A-effect.

Furthermore, Brecht’s attribution of importance to the separateness of each scene with a title is also reflected in *Mad Forest* while *Cleansed* lacks this Brechtian element in its twenty-scenes structure. For Brecht “[if] spectators discern the links which separate each part of the play, they will be in a better position to think about what the playwright is saying. Each scene will have its own independent structure as a play within the play. Titles would help to focus the social or thematic point” (Murray 107). Churchill’s (1996) giving titles to the montaged scenes like “Lucia are patru ouă. Lucia has four eggs” (p. 13), and their announcement by a character first in Romanian, then in English, and then once more in Romanian also complies with the norms of Brecht’s alienating dramatic aesthetics.

In relation to the Romanian titles, it can be claimed that Romanian language is emphasized throughout the play. The play opens with a poem in Romanian, which is accompanied by Romanian music, in praise of Elena Ceausescu. The characters in Part II are Romanians who speak English in Romanian accents. What is more, the players speak in Romanian with English translations in brackets throughout the whole last scene of the play. Not everyone watching the play on stage might be expected to know Romanian. Therefore, the conscious insertion of translations at the beginning of each scene and throughout the last one serves for Brecht’s alienation effect on the audience. With the addition of Romanian captions and translation, Churchill conveys the message that the viewers should come to realize that not everything in their life might be within their reach and familiar, thus leading them to awareness before their societal conditions. Moreover, the selection of lines from the earlier speeches of the characters and putting them in Romanian language at the end of the play also serves for strengthening the alienation effect. Characters are shown as if they have been stuck in the post-revolution disorder as they do not say anything new but repeat what they already said earlier, but this time in Romanian, referring to the confusion created in the nation’s identity:

MIHAI. 8. Nimic nu e pe baze realiste. (Nothing is on a realistic basis.)

[...]

FLAVIA. 2. Nu este istoria ce e in cartea de istorie? (Isn’t history what is in the history books?)

[...]

RADU. 9. cine a tras in douazeci și doi? Nu e o intrebare absurda.

(Who was shooting on the 22nd? That's not a crazy question.)

[...]

JANOȘ. 7. Ești acuzat de genocid. (You're on trial for genocide.)

[...]

GABRIEL. 10. Aș vrea sa fi fost omorit. Glumesc. (I wish I'd been killed.)

[...]

ANGEL. 13. Nu libertatea din afara ci libertatea interioara. (Not outer freedom but inner freedom.)

[...] (Churchill, 1996, pp. 85-87)

These selected lines also seem to be providing the audience with flashbacks from the earlier parts of the play, thus highlighting and reminding the important themes once more. In this way, the audience is also led to awareness and realization of the events that took place in Romania in 1989 for a last time.

The Brechtian search for a more complex theatrical presentation is the next dramatic element to be studied to further the analyses within this paper. Edward Murray (1990), interpreting Brecht's idea of complexity, asserts that "[p]lays must become more complex, more like novels and scholarly works" (p. 107). Brecht does not accept a mere classical presentation of action. Plays should not only progress horizontally but also vertically. For this, plays need more than action on the stage. Therefore, Brecht's plays often involve songs, recitations, and dances as well as use of signs, slides, and even motion pictures. (Murray, 1990, pp. 107-108) Churchill's *Mad Forest* benefits from the Brechtian idea of complexity as well. Enriched with a recitation, mime scenes, musical performances, and a dance at the end, *Mad Forest* presents more than regular dramatic action. As Francis Gray (1993) claims, "[a] Churchill play is not a linear argument but a mosaic; each piece, whether concerned with bodily, spiritual or social being, is equally important. It makes up a mirror which does not simply reflect but transforms political and social relations" (p. 58). This mosaic structure is evident even when the play opens with the recitation of a poem, which is accompanied by a Romanian music, as it is stated in the play's opening directions:

The company recite, smiling, a poem in Romanian in praise of Elena Ceausescu.

Stirring Romanian music. (Churchill, 1996, p. 13)

Then follows a whole scene of miming, which is again not compatible with the usual and traditional dramatic action. Bogdan, Irina, Florina, and Lucia only mime to the accompaniment of now louder music as Bogdan has turned the volume up of the radio. All that the audience can perceive in this first scene of miming is the characters' smoking cigarettes, Bogdan's angry manners, Florina and Lucia's laughing, Lucia's bringing four eggs, Lucia's offering American cigarettes, Bogdan's breaking one of the eggs Lucia has brought home, and lastly Florina's attempt to scrape up the broken egg from the ground to a cup. Speech is an indispensable feature of the classical dramatic action and Churchill, by consciously absenting the speech component from the action in this very first scene, wakes the spirit of the alienation feelings up as early as possible.

On the other hand, the dialogue in Scene 7 of Part I called “Ascultati? Are you listening?”, ironically with its title, develops through Lucia’s and Doctor’s use of notes to converse with each other:

While they talk the DOCTOR writes on a piece of paper, pushes it over to LUCIA, who writes a reply, and he writes again. (Churchill, 1996, p. 19)

With this scene Churchill’s message is twofold: on the one hand, she expresses that proper speech is broken in a society under oppression; and on the other, she captures the audience’s attention to the corruption in the society, thus trying to awaken the political consciousness.

Miming continues in Scene 11 called “Uite! Look” as well. Here, while a soldier and a waiter stand smoking in the street, one of them sees a rat and they begin chasing it. In the meantime, Radu, Janoş, and Gabriel are passing by and they join chasing, too. Then they begin kicking the rat like a football, and shortly afterwards everyone goes back to their previous action. Moreover, another scene acted in silence is Scene 13 in which Lucia and Janoş stand with their arms round each other as Lucia checks time by looking at her watch and Janoş puts his hand over it.

In addition, the whole Part II becomes the presentation of many separate narrations. Characters each tell the revolution from their own perspectives and “each behaves as if the others are not there and each is the only one telling what happened” (Churchill, 1996, p. 29). In a traditional play, dialogues would accompany such asides. Yet, in the play, characters continue their intermittent narrations without having any replies. This requires the questionability of the reality on the one hand while it also serves for the Brechtian way of complex presentation in the play.

Finally, the dance at the end of the play closes the issue of what is meant by complexity of a dramatic presentation. This dance both colours the play and contributes to its mosaic – complex – structure. After a fight, the couples are formed, and music is heard. Conversations throughout the dance are also made quite complicated, as if it is a scholarly calculation. The instructions make it clear:

Then they start to talk while they dance, sometimes to their partner and sometimes to one of the others, at first a sentence or two and finally all talking at once. The sentences are numbered in a suggested order. At 14, every couple talks at once, with each person alternating lines with their partner and overlapping with their partner at the end. So that by the end everyone is talking at once... (Churchill, 1996, p. 85)

This confusion thematically also points out to the reflection of the new chaotic and complex situation the country has been dragged into recently. As Gerald Weales (1993) comments, “[t]he play ends with the wedding of Florina and Radu, but the supposedly happy occasion turns into a free-for-all in which all the old hatreds – class, ethnic, and gender differences – re-emerge” (p. 20). This open-ended structure at the end of the play also mirrors the unresolved ends of Brecht’s plays. William Demastes (1996) points out Churchill’s similarity to Brecht when he writes, “Churchill’s plays typically conclude with the central question resolutely left unanswered. This open-ended format, evidence of a continually evolving engagement with Brechtian dramaturgy, challenges and invigorates audiences to think about answers rather than simply identifying with or against an idea generated by the playwright” (p. 114).

Similarly, Sarah Kane employs Brechtian complexity in her *Cleansed*. In scene 5, Grace wakes up only to find that her recently deceased brother Graham is sitting on her bed next to her. They stand up and start dancing – a dance that gradually make Grace appear and act like Graham. Their dance is followed by their singing the first verse of ‘You Are My Sunshine’ (Kane, 2001, p. 119). Another example of

singing and dancing takes place in scene 13 when Carl and Rod listen to a child singing Lennon and McCartney's 'Things We Said Today' and then Carl starts dancing. He first intends to make a romantic dance for Rod but then it turns, as the stage directions reveal "frenzied, frantic, and Carl makes grunting noises, mingling with the child's singing. The dance loses rhythm – Carl jerks and lurches out of time, his feet sticking in the mud, a spasmodic dance of desperate regret" (p. 136). Moreover, the sunflower that suddenly sprouts up from the floor and grows up above Graham and Grace's heads as they finish their incestuous relation as well as the growing up of daffodils from the ground in scene 10 is another item that shatters traditionally realistic action in lieu of the alienation effect. In addition to these, in the play, there is another sort of dancing that takes place in the form of peepshow as in scene 6, and Tinker takes the Woman who dances in the booth in return of tokens as Grace (p. 123). Later, in scene 10, a brief war scene, with a heavy gunfire that fills the wall with bullet marks and causes the fall of parts of plaster and bricks from the wall, suddenly erupts into the ongoing action with Voices' "Kill them all" order (p. 133). Another untraditional action that leans towards Brechtian complexity occurs in scene 15 where Tinker, having seen chocolates that Robin bought for Grace, gets angry and forces Robin to eat each one of those chocolates, one by one, in a long sequence of action of him throwing Robin a chocolate (pp. 139-140). All in all, the dance, the singing, the surrealistic appearance of the sunflower in scene 3 as well as the peepshows in scenes 6 and the erupting war atmosphere with the machine gun break the monotony of action and add up Brechtian complexity to the play.

What follows is also conducive to understanding Kane's connection to the Brechtian epic theatre. When asked about why she, as the director of her own play *Phaedra's Love* (1996), chose to stage it with the audience sitting randomly on every spot of the theatre and the actors appearing among them, Kane, in her own words, revealed her affinity to the Brechtian, epic way of dramatic representation: "...I think it meant that for any given audience member, the play could be at one moment intimate and personal, at the next epic and public. They may see one scene from one end of the theatre and find themselves sitting in the middle of a conversation for the next" (qtd. in Stephenson et. al, 1997, p. 134). Considering these expressions, it can be deduced that Kane furthers her embracing of the epic representation in her *Phaedra's Love* with her *Cleansed* she put the stage two years later.

In conclusion, this study shows that both Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* and Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* reflect important aspects of the Brechtian epic theatre. While *Mad Forest* is rife with the Brechtian aesthetics, *Cleansed* is slightly more selective in terms of mirroring some major characteristics of it. Another important conclusion of this study is its contextualizing, for the first time, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane through Brechtian epic theatrical aesthetics. More, this article furthers the discussion of Churchill's *Mad Forest* as an epic play by comparing it with one of the plays of one of the most prominent playwrights of the 1990s British drama, Sarah Kane. Besides, the article contributes to the Kane and 1990s British drama studies by conducting a first-time thorough examination of a Kane play – *Cleansed* – through Brechtian theatrical devices. All in all, by examining this tripartite interaction among Bertolt Brecht, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane, this study reinterprets the dramatic relations among these seemingly distant playwrights of different generations while it also shows that although Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane do not belong to the same generation of playwrights, with the plays they both produced in the 1990s that harbour epic elements, they hint and reveal a continuity in the playwriting in the twentieth century British drama as a whole.

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