

**EPSOM DOWNS: A PLAY WRITTEN FOR "OTHERS" \***

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**Abstract**

*This paper aims to analyze Epsom Downs (1977) by Howard Brenton in terms of reflecting the microcosm of British society. Depicting the sordid and tragic life conditions in a capitalist society, Brenton highlights the sordid life conditions of the poor families and of the marginalized people because of their ethnicity or their sex. There will be a Marxist reading of the play in order to focus on these mentioned issues because Marxism centers on the relationship between the ruling class and the ruled one. Marx explains this relationship by introducing the terms base and the superstructure. The former is concerned with economic activity and is made up of human production relations, whereas the latter is concerned with awareness as determined by the basis. In Epsom Downs, Howard Brenton has a Marxist agenda because he is writing for the British working class and he highlights this 'economic base' and 'superstructure' relationship in line with the characters' experiences in the racecourse. As a result, harsh conditions under which these characters have to live in the capitalist society where lower class people are marginalized and exploited by the ruling class may be illustrated with a Marxist reading of the play.*

**Keywords:** Howard Brenton, Epsom Downs and Marxism.

**EPSOM DOWNS: "ÖTEKİLER" İÇİN YAZILAN BİR OYUN**

**Öz**

*Bu makale, Howard Brenton'ın Epsom Downs (1977) adlı oyununu İngiliz toplumunun bir mikrokozmosunu yansıtmaya açısından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Brenton, ideoloji ve iktidar sahiplerinin hegemonyası tarafından yönetilen kapitalist bir toplumdaki sefil ve trajik yaşam koşullarını betimleyerek, yoksul ailelerin ve etnik kökenleri veya cinsiyetlerinden dolayı marjinalize edilen kişilerin kötü yaşam koşullarını göstermektedir. Bu konuları analiz etmek için oyuna Marksist bir okuma yapılacaktır. Marksizm, yöneten sınıf ile yönetilen sınıf arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanır ve bu ilişkiyi alt yapı ve üst yapı terimlerini ortaya atarak açıklar. Bu terimlerden birincisi yani alt yapı ekonomik faaliyetle ilgilidir ve insan üretim ilişkilerinden oluşur. İkincisi yani*

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\* In this study, all the rules specified to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were followed. None of the actions specified under the title of "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, were not carried out.

*üst yapı ise alt yapı tarafından belirlenen farkındalıkla ilgilidir. Epsom Downs adlı oyununda Howard Brenton, İngiliz işçi sınıfı için yazdığı için Marksist bir gündeme sahiptir ve bu oyunda da, Marx'ın ortaya attığı alt yapı ve üst yapı ilişkisini oyundaki karakterlerin at yarışı pistindeki tecrübelerini yansıtarak açıklar. Sonuç olarak, kapitalist toplumda egemen sınıf tarafından marjinalleştirilen ve sömürülen bu karakterlerin yaşamak zorunda oldukları ağır koşullar oyunun Marksist bir okumasıyla gösterilebilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Howard Brenton, Epsom Downs ve Marksizm.

### **Introduction**

*Epsom Downs* is set on Derby Day and begins with a small boy flying a kite. As the play unfolds, a panorama of British society is demonstrated with the coming of those who want to see the race. That is, a diverse cross-section of British society is reflected with those who are at the highest of the society represented by the Aga Khan and with those who compose the lowest in the strata of the society represented by the lunatics. For instance, at the end of the play, some inmates of the Asylum are introduced to clear the course which should be ready for the next race. Their reward for this job is just a cup of tea. They are not allowed to watch the race but they are asked to clear the trashes of 'normal' people. In this sense, they constitute the lowest segment of the society. Besides, politically disgraced alcoholic ex-Labour peer Lord Rack, Sandy and Margaret who put their whole money on Derby by hoping to make it big money to buy a house, two evangelists named Mr. Tillitson and Mrs. Motrom, both of whom have been haunted by their past, a gypsy girl named Primrose and an unemployed person named Jocks, etc., are introduced in the play. What brings all these people who constitute the different segments of society is that they are all experiencing the 'ups-and-downs' of life. Through these characters, the issues such as the class system, ethnicity, social progress of female sex, and the criticism of church and politics will be studied.

Howard Brenton has a Marxist agenda in his play *Epsom Downs* as he writes for the lower class people in Britain. He is defined by Patterson as being "eager at least to rattle the gates protecting the complacent British Establishment and to attack a capitalist system that had been deliberately undermining the Labour Party's efforts to create a fairer society" (Patterson, 2003, p. 13). Besides, Brenton claims that he does not write for God or himself but explains that he writes for other people. His play doesn't take place in heaven, or in a library. He mentions that, "as a dramatist, that's your instinct: without other people, the play doesn't exist" (Patterson, 2003, p. 18). Brenton was born in Portsmouth in 1942, and was educated in Chichester and St. Catherine's Collage in Cambridge. After 1960s, he worked in the fringe theaters and experimented in political consciousness-raising since he personally witnessed the 1968 student uprisings in Paris. Brenton claims that he does not write for God or himself but explains that "I write for other people. The play doesn't reside in heaven, or in a library. As a dramatist, that's your instinct: without other people, the play doesn't exist" (*ibid.*). As a political writer Brenton has a mission while writing his plays. He is aware of the fact that there is a progress in history but the social inequality does not become smaller. On the contrary, it is growing day by day. That is why, he focuses on the urgent needs of people such as job, food and shelter since poor people cannot afford them in the present capitalist society. Because of this reason, Brenton do not include elaborated language. That is, while the conversation aspires to realism, it is created to provide an opportunity for discussion rather than to record actual speech in his plays. Contrarily, he tries to reflect the society as it is. For instance, Baker and Barfield describe *Epsom Downs* as "an epic version of a naturalist slice-of-life play, a comedy that shows a cross section

of the population on a particular day” (Baker and Barfield, 2005, p.24). Therefore, in *Epsom Downs* and in other plays as well “the narration of events is organized into a dramatic framework, with the plot structure following the conventional scheme of exposition, development and denouement. The characters are not random individuals but representatives of social types” (Patterson, 2003, p. 17).

### **Theoretical Background**

Marxist ideology is founded on the Marxist worldview, which is described as the ruling class's dominance over the rest of society. According to Marx, class struggle is the main contradiction in the society and when the society is observed carefully its structure will be seen as having built upon a series of social class battles that have been going on for a long time (Bressler, 2007, p. 202). In *The Communist Manifesto*, he also demonstrates that the chronicle of human history is one of class conflict such as freeman and slave, aristocrat and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in other words, oppressor and oppressed who were always at opposition...(2008, p. 9). As it is seen, Marxism sees not only history but also society as a story of class struggle. In addition to history and society, he also sees literature and literary criticism as ideological and political struggles between classes.

Marxism, which arose in the twentieth century but its roots can be traced back to the nineteenth century, emerged as a counter-culture against capitalism and its social consequences. In a capitalist system, the production process is controlled by those who own the capital. In this regard, Fischer explains that “a slow historical process turns the money into capital. As such, money gains a dynamic force and is no longer simply a means of payment, of spending, of saving or usury, not only a measure of value, but the motive force of production” (Fischer, 1996, p. 104). From Fisher’s explanation, it can be deduced that the system operates on two classes: The capitalist class who holds the production process through the capital and the working class who take care of the production process. In addition, Marx emphasizes inequality and injustice resulted from the class distinction in a capitalist system by stating that “the logic of capitalism as a system, premised on the need to generate private profit, produced a system that was both dynamic and capable of enormous productivity but one which was also rooted in class antagonism, inequality, inhumanity and crises” (in Bowles, 2007, p. 62). In addition to injustice and inequality, capitalist system results in inhumanity and crises because the capitalist system relies on the principles of the market economy.

Moreover, the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in a capitalist society. That is why, Marx and Engels defend that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being; but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (qtd. in Farganis 1996, p. 23). In this regard, Terry Eagleton explains that men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity – by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production (1978, p. 6). As a result, it can be concluded that, in a capitalist society, one's social class is determined by the modes of production that the upper class controls. Thus, lower class people’s life styles, their morals and identities are determined by the ruling class and they are forced to accept the rules in order to survive in a class conscious and unequal society. In this regard, Marx explains that “a Negro is a Negro”, and “he only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations. Torn from these relationships it is no more capital than gold in itself is money or sugar the price of sugar” (1976, p. 19). Accordingly, the effects of relations of production on individuals cannot be overestimated and it can also be claimed that “consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product” (Marx, 2017, p. 74). This exploration about individuals

is very important in the sense that Marx depicts the individual as a social entity in relation to society instead of as self-sufficient and independent entity. In a similar vein, Dupré demonstrates, “against the increasing tendency of Western culture to isolate the individual subject as the sole source of meaning and value, Marx, both in practice and in theory, placed the *social agent* at the origin of the humanization process” (1983, p. 276). As a result, actions of people occur only in relation to society and the society can be summarized as the production relations. A society is constituted of two parts: the base or structure and the superstructure. The former one is about the economic activity and is consisted of relations of humans’ production while the latter one is about consciousness determined by the base. According to Eagleton, in every period, a superstructure evolves from this economic base, consisting of certain kinds of law and politics, as well as a specific type of state, whose primary goal is to legitimize the authority of the social class that owns the means of economic production (1976, p. 5) since the superstructure of society is determined by the people who own the means of production and control the economic base. The superstructure is made up of some particular types of social consciousness, whether it be political, religious, ethical, aesthetic, which is referred as ideology by Marx. The function of the ideology, also, is to legitimize the power of the ruling class in society (*ibid.*).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx suggests that the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force (Marx, 2017, p. 254). Marx and Engels defined ideology as a false consciousness and debated that ideology suggested an ‘upside-down’ or ‘inverted’ vision of reality (Saksena, 2009, p. 65). Ideology tends to make a group of people superior to another one. The subordinate groups tend to see themselves from the perspective of the ruling class. That is to say, if the ruling class labels a group of people in a bad way this group is inclined to consider themselves in that way in time because the discourse of the ruling class decides what is true and false. Although the division between true and false is not arbitrary, modifiable, institutional or violent when it is viewed on the inside of a discourse, it transforms into “a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system” (Selde, 2005, p. 212). Michel Foucault believes that the formation of this division is historical. Just as standards of reason and madness can vary from one society or era to another, standards of how truth and falsity are measured can change. What is and is not considered true are thoroughly affected by the societies’ value system. For instance, while the definitions of some groups as deviance were defined with reference to natural conditions, in the case of the ill, the insane, etc, the reason why the deviant status was ascribed to blacks, the poor, political demonstrators etc, could not be explained. Thus, it is clearly shown that the differentiations between ‘deviant’ and ‘consensus’ formations were not natural or inherent but socially defined or constructions and historically variable. Consensus was also seen as to be constructed, that is to say, it was a kind of social order which included the enforcement of social, political and legal discipline. Therefore, it can be said that “reality could no longer be viewed as simply a given set of facts: it was the result of a particular way of constructing reality” (Turner, 1996, p. 186). In this regard, Marx believes that

Ideas are just material relationship in this capitalist system. The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, and thus of the relationships which make one class the ruling one; they are consequently the ideas of its dominance. (qtd. in Cohen, 1981, p. 5)

What kind of tools the bourgeoisie utilizes to preserve its hegemony over the working class depends on how the dominant ideology creates and governs working-class life and culture. The paper primarily refers to Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, which is complementary to

and developed form of Antonio Gramsci's writings on ideology and hegemony, in comparison to Karl Marx's perspective of ideology in order to analyze and disclose the author's stance on existing ideology. In contrast to the later use of the term 'ideologies' to refer to specific political beliefs or agendas, Marx and Engels saw ideology as a source of confusion or distraction from the actual realities of everyday life (Winders 487). This paper looks at ideology from two perspectives: first, the dominant ideology that each author claims to prevail in capitalist society, particularly in the working community he writes about, both implicitly and explicitly; and second, the ideology that the author consciously or unconsciously reproduces in his work. As the adjective 'unconsciously' implies, many twentieth-century Marxists have absorbed the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis into their social theory, according to Winders (487).

Every social formation, according to Althusser, develops from a dominating mode of production, which he explains as capitalism, which overtook the feudal mode of production of the medieval period and would be supplanted by socialism, according to Marx (Althusser 1483-4). That a result, any social formation, according to Althusser, must recreate the conditions of its production at the same time as it creates, in order to be able to produce. As a result, it must produce: 1) the productive forces; 2) the current production relations (Althusser 1484). Workers and their families are imprisoned in poverty and unemployment as a result of the social development described in the books examined in this paper. According to Althusser, the reproduction of labor power is ensured by providing it with the material means to reproduce itself: wages (1484). Althusser explains

the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e., a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class (1485).

As a result, it appears that maintaining existing ideology is a more involved process than Marx described. In this circumstance, the bourgeoisie must simultaneously put governmental institutions and private corporations to work in order to maintain control over the working class. These channels are primarily schools, churches, families, the press, and the government as a whole in the novels. Althusser distinguishes between the (repressive) State apparatus as conceived by classical Marxists and the 'ideological State apparatuses' that he developed, recalling that the State is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus, a 'machine' of repression that allows the ruling classes to maintain their dominance over the working class in the Marxist tradition (Althusser 1487). While the State Apparatus (SA) in classical Marxist theory includes the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, and the Prisons, among other things, Althusser defines Ideological State Apparatuses as a set of realities that present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions (Althusser 1489).

Because 'ideology' in the conventional Marxist sense reflects economic interests in diverse ways, 'hegemony' tries to bring this static Marxist term to life (Leitch 1136). A stable state, according to Gramsci, never rules by force alone, but rather by a combination of compulsion and consent (quoted in Leitch 1136). As a result, domination is only guaranteed if a majority of people voluntarily obey the law. In a similar sense, any group seeking to rule must work to acquire the approval of the people, and this task must be completed before any directly revolutionary attempt to grab and maintain 'material force' (Leitch 1136). As a result, domination is only guaranteed if a majority of people voluntarily obey the law. In a similar spirit, any group seeking to rule must work to acquire the approval of the people, and this task must

be completed before any directly revolutionary attempt to grab and maintain 'material force' (Leitch 1136). Hegemony is 'manufactured consent,' created through the articulation of intellectuals in a public sphere in which competing articulations are also voiced; in other words, hegemony is 'manufactured consent,' created through the articulation of intellectuals in a public sphere in which competing articulations are also voiced (Leitch 1136). While the bourgeoisie is constantly attempting to impose desired values, ideas, and economic enforcements on the working class, and puts all available ideological and repressive state apparatuses to work, it does so by naturalizing them, or convincing working-class people that they are a necessary part of the system.

***Epsom Downs: A Play Written for 'Others'***

The play takes place at *Epsom Downs* racecourse and all of the people who compose the different strata of society come to watch the Derby. However, their coming together does not constitute a union among themselves. They are indifferent to each other's pains and everybody suffers for her/his own pain. The gap between rich and poor is unimaginable one as it is a capitalist society. For example, on the one hand, there is the family of Margaret and Sandy who cannot provide their children's basic needs. Sandy and Margaret put their all money in hope of winning the race and buy a house. On the other hand, there is the family of Dorothy and Roger who come to the Derby with their helicopter. For instance, when the Bunny girl asks if Dorothy's horse will win or not Pearce answers that, "a donkey versus the Concorde. Not that woman cares. The owner of a Derby Runner. But to her just another handbag to chuck in the cupboard" (Brenton, 1977, p. 292). It is a good example to demonstrate the big gap between the poor and the rich in London. That is, while winning in the derby means to survive or losing everything in life for the family of Margaret and Sandy it means another handbag for Dorothy and Roger. The thing that differentiates these two families from each other is their class. Although Dorothy and Margaret who represent the working class work hard to survive they earn little. While Dorothy and Roger who represent the ruling class do not work as they hold the power they have the capital at their hand. The system operating in this society is clearly unjust and cruel.

Therefore, the Derby does not mean the same thing for the rich and the poor in this society. For instance, Margaret mentions that she loved The Derby normally but in a queue, with her child yelling, waiting for a common garden pee, she hated the Derby. She looks up to the sky and closes her eyes. Then, she makes a long speech about her real thoughts on the Derby as follows:

I hate the fat, happy people on the grass, with their teeth stuck in chicken drums. Jubilee flags coming out of their hairy ears. Minds red with booze and bets. I hate the little men in pretty colors, who go by on the horses, with their mean, hard little heads and mean, hard little bums...I hate the race officials whizzing along the other side of the rail in their yellow car, chinless wonder masks behind the glass. I hate the jolly boys on the tops of the buses, roaring pissed, stripped to their navels, showing off their lovely tummies in the sun. I hate the coach party lovers. The totties that are pulled. The marriages that are made beneath the great wheel at the fair. Ooooooh I begin to hate my fellow men and women, squeezing my insides, keeping my knees together in this queue. (Brenton, 1977, pp. 319-320)

Margaret is unhappy after seeing that people who can afford enough food and money for themselves while she lacks of them. For instance, her daughter Sharon wants biscuit and orange but Margaret says there is nothing left. While she does not have any food people like Les, a bunter, and Lord Rack, an ex-Labor party MP, eats and drinks most of the time, which makes Margaret angry. This eating may be taken both metaphorically and literally as the rich people

are credited with the all pleasures of life while the poor people try to survive under a cruel system in the society.

Furthermore, they have to live in a dormobile in Margaret's friend's garage. Sandy is worried about the fact that the dormobile's going to start smelling soon as there's a limit to what half a dozen airwicks can do (Brenton, 1977, p. 285). Because they do not have a job and a place to live with their two children this family decides to invest all they have on horse racing:

Margaret: Throw our lives away!

Sandy: Before the flashing hooves of a horse, going at forty miles an hour! (Brenton, 1977, p. 287)

As it is seen clearly, they are completely hopeless about their future. If the horse on which they put all their money does not win the race there is nothing for them to do in future. This bet seems to be their only chance, which shows the fact that how much they feel desperate about their future.

Moreover, they decide which horse they will bet on by pure chance. That is, when Margaret and Sandy meet two street musicians, one of whom pretends that he were blind, they decide to put their money on the horse called Minstrel suggested by these two street musicians. These musicians are not reliable people as they lie to people in order to manipulate and take their money. Although the family does not know they are unreliable it is still unbelievable to invest all they have on a horse suggested by two men they have just met. It seems that these people live according to law of chance instead of according to cause and effect relationship. In other words, it seems as if they did not have any control on their lives and on their future. As for the power which makes them so miserable and weak, it is explained by Les, a punter, as follows:

Margaret ( to Les): What are you giving for the Minstrel?

Les: Lester seven to one darling.

Margaret: Will that price get any shorter?

Les: That depends upon the market. Before market forces, we are but trees in the wind. (Brenton, 1977, p. 301)

Obviously, the antagonistic force for the poor people is the capitalist system. As it is discussed in the introduction part, the capitalist system divides people into two antagonistic classes: the working class and the ruling class. On the one hand, there is a homeless family who cannot afford their basic needs and their children, and they only try to survive; on the other hand, there are rich families such as Dorothy and Roger who arrive at the Derby race with their helicopters. For instance, Charles Pearce, a horse trainer, waits for the helicopter of this family:

A MAN WITH BATONS – like two orange table tennis bats- backs on to stage. A whoosh of air and litter as a helicopter lands. Roger Coyle and Dorothy Delaune run on, crouching from the blades, their bats held to their fronts. They straighten, putting their bats on.

Bunny girl: Your car is waiting.

Pearce: It's getting a bit crushed down there in the dip-

Dorothy: We will go by car.

Roger: She is afraid she will get raped by the London poor.

Dorothy: Don't play up Darling. No doubt the Daily Express is lurking in the bushes. (Brenton, 1977, p. 291).

From above given dialogues, it can be deduced that the ruling class people believe the myth they have created about the poor. In order to legitimize their power on the poor through employing law, police, education, etc., the ruling class makes up the myth that man is violent by

nature. This is resulted with the need of more severe punishments and control of individuals. In this regard, Edward Bond explains that “in order to protect those institutions (social institutions), society has two powers. One is force and the other is the manufacture of myths or false world views. An obvious example is that ... ‘all men are sinful’. On that false worldview you can build all sorts of political institutions” (Stoll, 1976, p. 417). Similarly, Pearce, a horse trainer, states that “it’s just a fact of life you live with- that the shits are always with us, like the poor” (Brenton, 1977, p. 280). Poor and shit are brought to the same level because both of them are useless in the capitalist society. As another example, Les claims that

Les: It gets to me! Talk of codes. We all want the same thing, right? Us. The mugs. The boss on the Club Stand, glass of champers in his hand. The working man on the Downs, in his hand a doctor’s sick note. And what do we want? Why, just a big front room. Cocktail cabinet in the shape of the World. Malt whiskey and pearly telephones. And all the rest codes- is a bit of a mashed turd. (Brenton, 1977, p. 302)

From Les’s statements, it can be concluded that the only desire of the capitalism is to gain more for the sake of it and Les’s only motive is in material gain, or money. As it is discussed earlier, the capitalist system is based on the principles of the market economy in order to maintain the existence of the market which relies on consumption. For instance, Les claims that he wants to gain to drink Malt whiskey and use pearly telephones. There is no point in using pearly telephones. If a telephone does not have pearls on it still has the same function. One wonders what Les wants to buy after a pearly telephone which is not a real human need.

Because poor people cannot afford even their basic needs in the existing capitalist society they have lost their interest in religion. That is why, religion is ridiculed in the play through the characters named Mr. Tillotson and Mrs. Motrom, both of whom used to have bad habits in past such as gambling and heavy drinking. They claim that they find Jesus Christ and relief in church. It feels that religion is not interested with worldly issues, which is not true to human nature. That is why, Mr. Tillotson cannot help himself gambling on the Derby and wins at the end of the play. He confesses to Mrs. Motrom that “that’s no good, religion? A hypodermic needle called God. I mean I tried to get it in me- the manger and the tomb. I’ve just ended up punctured all over running sores of goodness up my arm” (329). Besides, Mrs. Motrom is also succumbed as she drinks champagne. At the end of the play, these two evangelists state that

Miss Motrom: What are we going to do Jimmy?

Mr. Tillotson: Pub? On to an all night casino? Then dice with the winos on Waterloo Station, ‘til the betting shops open, eleven o’clock in the morning?

Miss Motrom: I want to knell down and pray-

Mr. Tillotson: That’s no good, religion? A hypodermic needle called God. I mean I tried to get in me-the manger and the tomb. I’ve just ended up punctured all over, running sores of goodness up my arm-

Miss Motrom: You’ve got to flood your life with Jesus. If you don’t, you’ll just flood it with beer. (Brenton, 1977, p. 329)

Obviously, when the unpleasant conditions under which poor people have to survive are taken into consideration religion seems a very insufficient social institution in which people have lost their confidence. Moreover, poor people try to gain their basic need they have lost their confidence in other institutions such as politics represented by Queen and Lord Rack.

The politics is demonstrated as a hypocritical and superficial institution embodied by Lord Rack. He is described as follows: “He wears a fine but bulbous tweed coat, a bomburg bat, ostentatiously large binoculars hanging around his neck beside their case. On his back there is



an old army haversack. The neck of an unopened bottle of champagne pokes out of it. He carries another bottle of champagne which is nearly empty” (Brenton, 1977, p. 266). Although he is talking about socialism and criticizes the House of Lords he does not take any action for the improvement of people. He only drinks expensive drinks and is an ineligible person about helping the poor. For instance, he takes out a wodge of dilapidated newspaper cuttings, rustles them and states: “Grubby wreathes and flowers- on the grave of a political career. Hey ho, read ‘em. Promised your wife and ‘Leader of the Party in the House of Lords you would. Still. When you’re caught with your trousers down and your cock in the till. That’s all you’ve got left” (Brenton, 1977, p. 267). It is quite ironic to see that this is the person who promises a good future for the poor people in the country. As a result, there is a criticism of politics in the play with the introduction of ex-Labour party peer Lord Rack who is politically disgraced.

Furthermore, Lord Rack claims that the derby is important for all people by saying that “see, ordinary men and women are cut off from decision making. Only time in their lives they make a decision” (Brenton, 1977, p. 298). Although he tries to show that derby is a good thing for people as they make a decision in their lives his real desire is to earn money. This is one of the myths created by the rich people to persuade the poor about the validity of existing social system. It is interesting to see that even people from the working class also believe the myths made up by the ruling class. For instance, when Sandy wins the race he says that “Lester Piggott, five to one...God bless you, Lester! Wherever you are. Sipping your half glass of champagne, chewing your Ryvita biscuit” (Brenton, 1977, p. 335). Clearly, the poor people are aware of the luxury conditions under which the ruling class lives but they do not protest against them. He does not see any problem about Lester Piggott’s drinking champagne and chewing Ryvita biscuit while he does not have even an orange to give his daughter. Therefore, both the ruling class and the lower class accept the existing unjust and unequal system in the society as natural and indispensable. Lord Rack summarizes this situation by stating that: “Go and sleep it off in ‘car. Perfect end to a perfect day. Hey, after a day’s racing like that, even an old atheist, socialist life peer has to say- God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world” (Brenton, 1977, p. 331).

Another person representing the ruling class and coming with his own helicopter to the racecourse is the Aga Khan. When the noise of the helicopter comes down the rush of air and litter rises and dies. After the race is over they leave with money as their horse always wins the race by leaving behind their litter. The inmates of the local asylum are asked to clear the litters of the people after the race. They do it in return for a cup of tea.

1st Lunatic: They going to give us a cup of tea, when we’ve cleared this lot up?

2nd Lunatic: It’s a special treat, but your shoes get wet...Terrible to tie up, wet laces.

(Brenton, 1977, p. 335)

They are not even sure about whether they will be offered a cup of tea or not but they still clean the racecourse. One of the lunatics complains about their shoes getting wet. It may be understood that they do not have any spare shoes. While the ruling class is credited with all of life's pleasures and conveniences in the capitalist system lower classes have to work endlessly to survive in the society.

Apart from the lunatics, there are unemployed people in the racecourse represented by Jocks who is a stable boy. He tries to survive with two pound and eighteen p. Just like other poor people, he is in an absolute desperate situation. Because people who belong to the ruling class hold the money or the base at their hand they also hold the control of the superstructure represented by law, justice, morals, etc. They do not see poor people as their equal fellows. They believe that they can do anything they like for the poor people. They set the rules in the society.

For instance, Pearce asks from his two workers to hit each other by explaining that “the two antagonists- in the open air- private place- bucket of water. Beat each other- one acknowledges defeat, pour bucket of water over himself- you come back, shake hands before me- then the three of us have a whiskey. I’ll be on the ‘phone in the Land Rover” (Brenton, 1978, p. 270). He is so confident about himself that he gives the orders and leaves them to fight. He is sure that they will do what he asks from them even after he leaves. Hugh, one of the stable boys, accepts the order of Pearce without questioning and says to Jocks, “hit me then. Go on. I better hit you then” (*ibid.*). In contrast to his friend Hugh, Jocks questions it even if it costs for him losing his job. He mentions that

Jocks: If Pearce wants me bashed up, let him do it himself...No point. Us hitting each other. And if we don’t, who’s to know?

Hugh: That’s the way it is. That’s the rules.

Jocks: Make our rules. Rules Pearce don’t know.

Hugh: You really are a little Red, in’t you. (Brenton, 1978, p. 270)

Primrose who is a gypsy girl can be taken as another example revealing the fact that the ruling class’s rules are arbitrary as they are set according to the desires of this class. When Primrose and Jocks meet he invites her to go to the fair together but she refuses his offer as she believes that she will be refused anyway after he learns that she is a gypsy girl. As it is seen, Primrose internalizes the prejudices about her nation spread out by the ruling class. However, Jocks is not prejudiced against the Gypsies. Because he does not belong to the ruling class he does not decide who is deviant and who is normal. He can also look at people without a class conscious view. For instance, when Primrose says that Jocks does not know anything about her he explains that “Gypsy, in’t you. Steal washing off the lines, don’t you. Drink milk bottles on doorsteps and piss in the empties. Steal babies and eat ‘em” (Brenton, 1978, p. 275). Jocks refuses to believe in the myths created by the ruling class once more and sees Primrose as an individual regardless of her ethnicity or class.

In contrast to Jocks, people from the ruling class do not show any sympathy towards Primrose. They even do not see her as an individual like themselves. For instance, Lord Rack wants to buy a bit of heather from Primrose and she gives him a piece of heather. When she reaches to take the money he holds it back by saying “give us a bit of a cuddle. French kiss?” (Brenton, 1978, p. 275). Primrose grabs the ten pound note and runs off after giving Lord Rack a rude sign- a suck of a finger, the finger held up. Clearly, Lord Rack does not respect for Primrose and he believes that he can do anything he likes with her. He knows that he cannot treat women from his class in this manner. Therefore, while Primrose is an individual who deserves respect for Jocks she is just a gypsy girl who can be abused according to Lord Rack. What makes Primrose as a kind of marginalized person is her class and ethnicity. If Primrose were from the upper class as the same person it would not matter whether she was from a gypsy girl or not since a person’s place is determined according to the money s/he has in a capitalist society.

Minty, Primrose’s mother, is aware of the fact that they are marginalized group in the society. She also warns her daughter by explaining that “you don’t know the dangers. The Gypsies got no friends in this world. You just sell the heather and stay clear of men. And I don’t mean just in books” (Brenton, 1978, p. 273). Therefore, Primrose should be careful both as a gypsy and as a woman. In this society, the double marginalization of women is another harsh reality. Women’s situation in the society is important in Marxism as it claims that “social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex” (qtd. in Freeman, 2014, p. 84).

Brenton agrees with Marx about the social position of the female sex as he creates a ghost named Emily Davison in *Epsom Downs*. The ghost recalls what happened to her on the first day of June, nineteen thirteen. Emily Wilding Davison got off the Derby Day train at Tattenham Corner Station and maintains that, "I had two flags, the green purple and white of the Movement. I had learnt the colors of the jockey who would ride the King's horse. Purple and gold. Through the morning, through the crowd, Emily Wilding Davison steered herself" (Brenton, 1977, p. 288). As a figure in the suffragist movement, she did this to catch the attention of the King. When she was taken to the hospital Queen sent a message and the King did not ask about her; instead, he asked about his jockey.

When people are waiting Queen in the racecourse the ghost appears and apparently is angry with Margaret. Seeing that there is not any change in the social position of the female makes the ghost sad. In addition, she accuses Margaret and all women for doing nothing to improve their positions in the society. She feels that she died for nothing. She expects Margaret to be as brave as herself and suggests her to kill the Queen but Margaret finds it unnecessary:

Margaret: There is nothing wrong with being a mother, there is nothing wrong with making the food, there is nothing wrong with sitting on the grass.

Ghost: No. Everything is wrong. (Brenton, 1977, p. 305)

Margaret's words represent the mindset of the capitalists and their ideology. On the other hand, ghost in this play mirrors Margaret's false consciousness. According to Marxist theory, the false consciousness occurs when the proletariat thinks that they are not oppressed or exploited by the bourgeoisie. In other words, "when such cultural conditioning leads the people to accept a system that is unfavorable for them without protest or questioning, that is, to accept it as the logical way for things to be, they have developed a false consciousness" (Dobie 92). The ghost thinks in a similar vein and wants Margaret to question her life from a critical view. For instance, she has a quarrel with Margaret as follows:

Ghost: Family cow.

Margaret: Bobby only hit Sharon a couple of times Sharon only piddled her bed once in the night-

Ghost: And that is success?

Margaret: And we backed the winner of The Derby.

Ghost: Stupid, crass dozy bitch of a family cow. Is it me who'd dead or you? (Brenton, 1977, p. 333)

Ghost finds Margaret's being happy with her children's not piddling in their beds once in the night quite ironic and asks Margaret about whether Emily or she is dead. That is, ghost thinks Margaret lives like a dead person. The ghost might be right if Margaret's life is consisted of only with the children's piddling and hitting each other. Margaret does not live like an individual, instead, lives like a domestic slave. However, ghost makes Margaret as being responsible with this situation as she does not put any effort to change her current situation. According to the ghost, Margaret should be brave to sacrifice even her life in order to get what she deserves. Then, the Ghost and Margaret embrace and, the Ghost remains on the Down until the end of the play.

In conclusion, the play shows the stratified British society from the top to the lowest strata and avoids using an elaborated language and a complex structure in accordance with its aim that is to reflect the society as it is. Brenton illustrates the sordid and tragic life conditions in a capitalist society ruled by ideology and power holders' hegemony. He especially focuses on the lives of poor people, marginalized people because of their ethnicity and women whose social

status is not improved. A Marxist reading of the play has been done in order to examine the problems faced by lower class people as Marxism centers on the relationship between the ruling class and the ruled one. Marx explains this relationship by introducing the terms base and the superstructure. Therefore, in *Epsom Downs*, Brenton highlights this 'economic base' and 'superstructure' relationship in line with the characters' experiences in the racecourse. With the help of the characters coming from the different strata of the society, the reflection of different forms of superstructure in the capitalist society, be it political, religious, or ethical, have been discussed. For instance, religion and politics are discussed with the introduction of Mrs. Motrom, Mr. Tillotson and Lord Rack while poor conditions of the lower class people are discussed with the characters named Sandy, Margaret, Jocks. Marginalization because of people's ethnic difference is discussed with the character named Primrose. As a result, harsh conditions under which these characters have to live in the capitalist society where lower class people are marginalized and exploited by the ruling class have been illustrated with a Marxist reading of the play.

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