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The Influence of Bertolt Brecht On Some of the Plays of Alfred Farag, Naguib Sorour and Mahmoud Diab

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirement of The Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature

Submitted by

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To

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To my late mother

Professor Faten Abouleila

With Love.

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Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to detect and identify the influence of Bertolt Brecht and the Epic Theatre on three Egyptian dramatists with special reference to some representative plays: Alfred Farag in his plays, Solaiman Al-Halaby (Solaiman the Aleppan) and Al-Zir Salem, Mahmoud Diab in Bab Al-Futuh (Gate To Conquest) and in Naguib Sorour's trilogy, Yassin And Bahia, Ah Ya Leil Ya Quamar and Quolou L'Ein Al-Shams. Chapter I will be a survey of Brecht's theory of the Epic Theatre. This will be respectively followed by critical analyses of each of these plays.

Bertolt Brecht (1898 - 1956) is one of the most celebrated and most performed playwrights of the 20th century. His theories of stage presentation exerted more influence on the course of mid-century theatre in the West than did those of any other individual. "This was largely because he proposed the major alternative to the Stanislavsky oriented realism that dominated acting and the "well - made play" construction that dominated playwriting" (Online - Epic Theatre of Brecht). It was Brecht's preoccupation with Marxism and the idea that man and society could be intellectually analysed that led him to develop his theory of the "epic theatre". Brecht believed that the theatre should appeal not to the spectator's feelings but to his reason. While still providing entertainment, it should be strongly didactic and capable of provoking social change. In the Realistic theatre of illusion, he argued, the spectator tended to identify with the characters on stage and become emotionally involved with them rather than being stirred to think about his own life. Brecht felt that drama would instruct and change society; therefore, it should be political. He believed that the effective theatre should bring the audience to the point of decision and action. To encourage the audience to adopt a more critical attitude to what was happening on stage, Brecht developed his Verfremdungs effekt ("alienation effect" or "distancing effect") i.e., the use of anti-illusive techniques to remind the spectators that they are in a theatre watching an enactment of reality instead of reality itself. Brecht preferred a loose narrative form in which he used such distancing devices as asides and masks, to create a historical frame around the action. He also made use of a bare stage, exposed lighting and scenic equipment, short scenes, ballads, intentionally interrupting the action at key junctures with songs and directly addressing the audience.

In Brecht's theatre, the stage began to tell a story. The narrator was no longer missing, along with the fourth wall. The actors refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the characters they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of them. The spectator, also, was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically by means of simple empathy with the characters in the play. The production took the subject matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation which is necessary for understanding. Brecht believed that when something seems "the most obvious thing in the world" it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up.

Brecht believed in the mission of the stage as the centre of political and moral teachings. In his many plays, among them Mother Courage and Her Children (1963), The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1948) and The Good Woman of Setzuan (1948), he wrote dramatic parables to educate his audience. Brecht's influence was worldwide, and many younger writers adopted the dramatic techniques he developed, and among these writers are the three writers dealt with in the thesis.