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*Pandas* (2011)

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# **Following in Caryl Churchill's Footsteps: Rona Munro's neo-Brechtian Didactic Paratext in *Pandas* (2011)**

**Virginie Privas-Bréauté**

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Rona Munro is a contemporary Scottish woman writer (born in 1959 in Aberdeen) interested in the issue of women's place in Scotland in a context of social mayhems in which the notions of feminism and nationalism need to be articulated. Through her work she aims at conveying a national identity for Scotland in which women have a role to play and have stories to tell. Therefore, she finds devices to inscribe her plays among that of playwrights whose objective is to give Scotland a national identity artistically and who stage working-class women (re-) telling their stories and voicing their versions of history. Munro's aim then reminds one of Caryl Churchill's since they both advocate the use of new dramatic techniques, including Brechtian devices, to denounce the political treatment and conditions of women oppressed by patriarchal and capitalist societies.

Caryl Churchill has been an icon for feminist socialism since 1976, the year when she met Monstrous Regiment on an abortion march.<sup>1</sup> Throughout her career she has addressed questions of ethical and a political natures concerning life in a world considered alienating, and with a view to show how the women who long for more than the ordinary have had to take on challenges and overcome confrontations. In her article 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', Janelle Reinelt praises the innovative quality of her dramatic strength and deduces:

[her] experiments with creating characters that confront the reality of historical constraints while also revealing themselves as the product of artistic manipulation of the means of representation enabled her theatre pieces to capture the questions about difference that were critically engaging feminists in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'One of the earliest British feminist theatre groups and one of the few original groups still operating in Britain, the Regiment was set up as a permanent collective committed to both feminist and socialist ideals.' Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London, 1993), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Janelle Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics' in Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond

That is one of the reasons why her style still ‘enlivens political landscapes that speak to the contemporary moment.’<sup>3</sup> Churchill has audaciously combined ‘classical mimesis’ and ‘deconstructive anti-realist strategies such as Brechtian gestus, myth, dreams, and fragmented narrative structures’ on stage so as to investigate contemporary issues engaging women and show that their experiences were neither general nor static.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, we may think about *Mad Forest* (1990) which features all the characteristics of a neo-Brechtian play according to a study by Jean-Marc Lantéri in ‘Forêt folle, déraison des hommes ou brechtisme et postmodernité dans *Mad Forest* de Caryl Churchill’. Indeed, like Brecht before her, Churchill ‘has repeatedly examined revolutionary conditions, and engaged ambitiously with the artistic dilemma of how to represent political turmoil on stage.’<sup>5</sup> That is why she peoples her plays with British and non-British characters involved in political and economic issues.

Similarities between Munro and Churchill, notably in terms of feminist worries both on political and aesthetic aspects, emerge then. In fact, both women playwrights share the same aesthetic objective; they also deliver a subtle political message through their pieces. That is how the stage directions and the paratext as defined by French literary critic Gérard Genette are studied as didactic tools to teach the readers of *Pandas* about the social conditions of women in Scotland and about the (re-) definition of its national identity. There will only be little examination of the representation of the stage directions and the paratext on the stage yet because the main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the Brechtian apparatus which might well be used to explore the performance of *Pandas* can be adopted to study its script. This script first and foremost addresses stage directors and actors and then general readers who can thus get the same impression as if they were attending the play.

Genette distinguishes the ‘peritext’ from the ‘epitext’, two textual elements that make up the paratext and complement the voice of the author in the stage directions. Under the word ‘peritext’, Genette refers to the name of the author, the title, the dedication, the epigraph, the preface and the notes. To all these, Marie Bernanocce, a Senior Lecturer in performing arts at the university of Grenoble (France), adds the sub-titles, the table of contents,

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(eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill* (Cambridge, 2009), 26.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Reinelt, ‘On Feminist and Sexual Politics’, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Luckhurst ‘On the Challenge of Revolution’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 52.

the list of characters, the summary, the first and last covers and any picture, including the bill, that illustrates the play. Both Genette and Bernanoce omit the stage directions but it seems that they can be considered as notes from the author and be included in the list. Under the word 'epitext' Genette lists the mediations, the interviews, the colloquia, the correspondence and the diaries to which Marie Bernanoce adds the texts of any work done with the actors before they act in the play and the programme of the performance. If we do not have all these pieces of information in *Pandas* as published by Nick Hern Books in 2011 especially as far as the 'epitext' is concerned we do have a lot of elements to work on and with.

The study of the stage directions and the 'peritext' under a neo-Brechtian light will show that the play is didactic in that Munro wants to deliver a particular message which has an impact on audiences and readers.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the latter may be taught about the conditions of women in Scotland through the dialogues of the actors but also through the stage directions and any adjacent textual and visual information (that is Munro's first aim, delivering a political message). In parallel, this analysis will shed light on the way Munro (re) defines the contours of Scottish drama and gives Scotland a national identity thanks to the Brechtian theory of didactic drama (this will be her second aim, an aesthetic one); a national identity that is paradoxically enhanced by the inclusion of Chinese elements, including *pandas*—the thread with which all those texts were sewn together.

## 1. Giving Voice to Working-Class Women: Munro's Political Aim

The editorial peritext is what we first see in the Nick Hern Books edition of Munro's play. This generic heading was created by Genette so as to define all the elements under the direct and main—yet not exclusive—responsibility of the editor, publisher, or edition.<sup>7</sup> It includes the cover of the book, its format, the pictures it shows, its colours. It is important to start with the editorial peritext in so far as it gives information on the play and is somehow didactic. On the purple and black front cover, we can read the title of the

<sup>6</sup> The devices are used in a neo-Brechtian way since, despite the similarities with Brecht's theory used at the time when his plays were performed, the environment is not the same if we think about the time, the place and the evolution of people's mentalities.

<sup>7</sup> 'Toute cette zone du texte qui se trouve sous la responsabilité directe et principale (mais non exclusive) de l'éditeur, ou même de l'édition.' Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987), 21.

play, the name of the author, the logo of the publisher (there is no editor), the logo of the theatre company where the play was first performed and a photograph, not extracted from the performance, showing two young Chinese people standing under a cherry tree in blossom. This juxtaposition of elements sheds light on a first misleading paradox: the play seems to be about China but was written by a Scottish writer. This piece of peritext may first exemplify the neo-Brechtian use of dialectics so as to address the mind of spectators and / or readers and not their hearts, a recurring device throughout Munro's play. Then, as we look at the back cover, there is continuity in terms of colours (yet the purple prevails over the black this time) and picture (it shows the same people but from a closer look and in a different position: they do not face the reader anymore, they look at each other). We also have more information on the play and the writer so as to clarify the contents of the edition and the origin of the author, materials certainly transmitted by the theatre company staging the premiere of the play as a complement or substitute to the show programme—which might lead us to consider this edition as an 'epitext' per se along Bernanoce's analysis.

Recontextualising resources, a preoccupation of both the theatre company and Munro, is shared by the publisher who mentions other authors he/she has published on page 92 and among whom Caryl Churchill appears. This device on the publisher's part has two goals: first it demonstrates that Nick Hern Books has some legitimacy in the publishing of plays industry and secondly, it inscribes Munro's work among those of major authors.

### **1.1 A Post-Modern Revisionism? The Importance of 'Historicisation' of Post-Devolution Playwrights**

Before the play starts, we can find ten pages of what Genette and Bernanoce call 'peritext'. These pages are usually not read, and in this edition, they are even not numbered. For this analysis, they will be numbered from i to x. Yet they are of crucial interest given the fact that they convey information that helps recontextualise the play in terms of place, time and themes in a neo-Brechtian like style, devices that some Scottish women writers have used according to Susan C. Triesman:

Brechtian historicisation of the text, fragmentation of the whole, disconnections, overlappings and variations, metonymy, privileging

of the domestic arena which is seen as women's place, use of the mundane to reach deeper structures, and the foregrounding of non-verbal determinants of meaning from music to kinesics: all are in the playwright's arsenal.<sup>8</sup>

Like Sharman McDonald, Rona Munro is part of a school of Scottish traditional female playwriting characterised by its plurality of styles and contents, expressing the whole range of different experiences and worries. Ksenija Horvat notes that 'firmly rooted in socialist tradition, [Scottish women's] plays dealt with pertinent social issues, they created revisionist histories by questioning the well trodden Burnsian, Scottesque, tartan-clad image of Scotland's past, and they set out on a search for Scotland's identity, its position and function in the modern world.'<sup>9</sup> These women writers have followed in Caryl Churchill's footsteps. Like the British playwright who delivers messages 'through historicised and dramatized events' in her plays, Munro historicises her piece thanks to the stage directions and the paratext which take on a pragmatic status characterised by their situational or communicational value, the nature of the addresser, that of the addressee, and the illocutionary force of the message they deliver, in Genette's words.<sup>10</sup> On the introductory page of the edition, the reader is immediately given the date and the place of the first performance of the play as if it were absolutely necessary to recontextualise it. It says that *Pandas* was first performed on 15 April 2011 at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in other words the play was shown to a Scottish audience in the post-devolution period. Later, on page four, the reader is also informed of the fact that the time of print preceded the time of performance which may cause him to realise that the text 'may differ slightly from the play as performed', another piece of evidence that leads us to become aware of the importance of time in such a political context.

Reinelt reminds us that feminist scholars in the United Kingdom and the

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<sup>8</sup> Susan C. Triesman, 'Sharman McDonald: The Generation of Identity' in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (eds) *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh, 2000), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Ksenija Horvat, 'Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility/New Voices Breaking Through', *Études Écossaises*, 10 (2005), 145.

<sup>10</sup> Ars Gör Banu Akcesme, 'Epic Theatre as a Means of Feminist Theatre in Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*', *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sayı*, 26 (2009), 95; 'Le statut pragmatique d'un élément du paratexte est défini par les caractéristiques de son instance, ou situation, de communication: nature du destinataire, du destinataire, degré d'autorité et de responsabilité du premier, force illocutoire de son message, et sans doute quelques autres qui m'auront échappé.' Genette, *Seuils*, 14.

United States became interested in historiography as the theory of historical methods and objects and how to do history. She explains that

Women formed a group and challenged male hegemony with regard to the production of history. One of the buzz-words of the time, 'her-story', emphasised the exclusions from history of the agency of women and the importance of their roles, the neglect of research on ordinary women and the dearth of material about their everyday life, and the significance of sex and gender differences to the conceptualization of socio-political life in any era.<sup>11</sup>

For Reinelt, Churchill's work engaged with every aspect of this feminist scholarship. Similarly Munro cares about feminist historiography in *Pandas* and her concern about time reflects that in as much as this post-devolution period allows Scottish women to voice their feelings freely.

If time is crucial, place is similarly important throughout the play. On page ii, the Traverse Theatre is said to be 'Scotland's New Writing Theatre' which 'has embraced a spirit of innovation and risk-taking' since it was built in 1963. Here the publisher's information, transmitted by the Traverse itself, is pragmatic, semantic and didactic since he/she lays the stress on the inventive, energetic proprieties that characterise the place. It is further explained that the Traverse's policy is to help all artists—we may then think about women more specifically—express themselves in Scotland at this particular time, telling the stories they want to tell, because they have been silenced for too long or simply ignored. This idea is shared by Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell who assert that many Scottish female playwrights have developed 'concepts of dislocation and space in their work' to try and gain their rightful place.<sup>12</sup>

These issues of place and time have become themes in feminist post-devolution playwriting and Rona Munro is no exception to the rule. If she now lives in London and had this play published by a publishing house in London, it only adds to the urge to let Scottish women tell their stories as Tom Maguire explains:

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<sup>11</sup> Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', 21.

<sup>12</sup> Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Lara Jane Bunting: Echoes and Open Spaces' in Christianson and Lumsden (eds), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, 65.

Mobility ... is a crucial way of interrogating place's social significance. It is also a means to expose the ways in which space is gendered ... where female characters transgress boundaries of place; they face isolation, exclusion or confinement as prisoners or mad women. Yet in moving into new spaces, female characters are also able to reinvent themselves and the sense of the world they inhabit.<sup>13</sup>

Munro, a Scottish expatriate in London, writes about matters affecting both the Scots and the Chinese since the play, entitled *Pandas*, precisely deals with this transgression of national frontiers for both love and business sake.

Maguire adds to this that worries about time—because it is ‘unstable’—also pervade new Scottish play writing. He mentions three other plays by Munro, *Bold Girls* (1991), *Fugue* (1983) and *Your Turn to clean the Stair* (1992) and writes that ‘Munro counterpoints the progression of events in contemporary time with the unveiling of the past they provoke ... Slippages or movements between temporal states also give way to moments of non-time in specific plays.’<sup>14</sup> This device, far from giving a naturalistic representation of the world, can further prove that Munro resorts to the Brechtian dramatic theory; it is part of the anti-realist strategy which she also puts to the fore through both her own notes on the text and the stage directions. In her note, Munro explains the genesis of her play, when and where the action takes place—all this meant to be understood as information strengthening its importance in the whole economy of the play—as much information to help the reader understand he / she is in a theatre and not in real life. If we refer to Genette's definition of the notes on the text from the author, we realise to what extent they are a guide for any reader to understand the text but also to orientate his / her reading.<sup>15</sup> This illocutionary force is also what characterises the paratext: it has an impact on the reader like Brechtian drama on the audience.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Maguire, ‘Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s’ in Ian Brown (ed.) *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh, 2011), 161.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>15</sup> ‘La préface auctoriale assumptive originale, que nous abrègerons donc en préface originale, a pour fonction cardinale d’assurer au texte une bonne lecture. Cette formule simplette est plus complexe qu’il n’y peut sembler, car elle se laisse analyser en deux actions, dont la première conditionne, sans nullement la garantir, la seconde, comme une condition nécessaire et non suffisante : 1. obtenir une lecture, et 2. obtenir que cette lecture soit bonne.’ Genette, *Seuils*, 200.

‘Guider le lecteur, c’est aussi et d’abord le situer, et donc le déterminer.’ *Ibid.*, 215.



As we read the play, we may notice that there is regular symmetry given by the publisher: in the top left-hand corner, we always find the number of the page and the title of the play whereas in the top right-hand corner, we find the number of the act, and the page number. This device is both pragmatic and didactic because it enables the reader not to be lost, all the more so as it is at the top and not at the bottom, so it is the first element we come across as we read the play. Yet it is not the most important in the play and this paradoxical characteristic is precisely one of the elements on which the piece is based. Likewise, in the biographies of the people involved in the staging up of the play included in the edition by NHB, the information about Crystal Yu, the actress playing Lin Han, stands out. Her biography reads as follows: ‘Crystal has also appeared in a variety of international commercials for brands including HSBC, Danone Aqua, MTV, Nokia, Orange, and most notably appearing alongside Madonna in a campaign for her H&M fashion line.’<sup>16</sup> If feminist playwrights have strived to deconstruct the image of woman as an object, we may wonder why the stage director took in Crystal Yu—a symbol of capitalism—to precisely deconstruct it. Knowing that Munro’s play is precisely about the failure of a trading partnership between a Chinese family company and a Scottish wholesaler involved in suspicious negotiations, we can consider that having Crystal Yu as the actress is a way to historicise the female body in so far as now women have the power to choose for themselves. It might also well be added to the dialectical strategy to enhance the neo-Brechtian use of dramatic techniques.

## 1.2 Social Feminism: Criticising Capitalism?

If *Pandas* is a play about the business transaction of rugs from China to Scotland and the denunciation of a capitalist system in which love yields to economic worries, the reader can measure how economic matters pervade the paratext. The very first page (page i) of the edition reminds us that Munro’s play does not simply need actors. There is a staff of people ‘working’ behind the stage and referred to as ‘directors’, ‘designers’, and ‘managers’, providing all the material support needed such as light, sound, and costumes for example. The idea that this staff belongs to an organism is further strengthened by the presentation of the Traverse Theatre as a ‘company’ with a board of

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<sup>16</sup> Rona Munro, *Pandas* (London, 2011), vii.

directors.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Traverse requires money to operate as the publisher mentions on page viii: he thanks many 'corporate sponsors for their recent support' among which we find well-established firms like Habitat or Heineken to mention a few. Steve Cramer explains that the Traverse Theatre has indeed always needed external financial support to produce plays.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, these economic pressures are undergone by feminist theatres: as Lizbeth Goodman writes: 'while all theatre is influenced to some extent by audience reaction, feminist theatre depends for its survival upon audience support—personal and political as well as financial'.<sup>19</sup> This financial aspect at the back of a play is also exemplified by the edition we are analysing. If we are told that Nick Hern Books is a global company—the publisher laying emphasis on its legal department in charge of coordinating any performance of the play worldwide—we also understand that it sells books, including plays.<sup>20</sup> That is the reason why we can see the price tag on the back cover along with the bar code since books are marketable products, which reminds us of the possible economic value of a work of art in today's society.

Today's society is precisely the preoccupation of feminist writers, as Lizbeth Goodman further argues. She explains that 'feminist theatre has shifted its boundaries in accordance with social and economic movements'.<sup>21</sup> It is no surprise then that Munro should be interested in social feminism and more particularly in social gendered differences as defined by the historical construction of women's roles in society and also in political considerations of women in society. Like Churchill before them, numerous women playwrights, including Munro, have explored social issues in which women's roles have been redefined. In addition to the dialectical recruitment of Crystal Yu, the numerous stage directions pinpoint Munro's worries. We can notice that there are objective and subjective remarks, notably on the movements of the characters and their feelings. Yet readers can also notice that the expression of feelings tends to portray women whereas movements tend to characterise men, thus strengthening the traditional difference opposing men and women. If Munro's women are sometimes 'offended' or 'clearly upset', her men

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>18</sup> 'There does seem some connection between aesthetic experiment's advancement and financial emergency's exigencies in the mid 1980s Traverse Theatre's case.' Steve Cramer, 'The Traverse, 1985–87: Arnott, Clifford, Hannan, Harrower, Grieg and Greenhorn' in Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 57.

move.<sup>22</sup> Andy, one of the characters involved in the business with China for instance ‘takes a coin out of his pocket and starts to toss it’ and ‘tosses’ it for a while.<sup>23</sup> Yet, playing with money, in the literal and figurative senses, will be of no avail, since, in the end, the business fails but love prevails. The power of emotions is not developed pointlessly in *Pandas*, it is part of the playwright’s politics inscribed in her socialist literary experience.

It should be pointed out that in her note on the text Munro adds her name in the end as if to sign it.<sup>24</sup> We may consider this signature as a social gestus as Brecht defined it. It seems to be an act of vindication of who she is and what she writes about. Munro lives in a post-devolution period in Scotland, twelve years after the agreement was signed, at a time when women can express their ideas more freely, when they are no longer considered as mere wives and mothers. Her female characters in *Pandas* have a social role to play: they are academics or business partners with working-class and middle-class family backgrounds. In keeping what characterises women, she subverts the articulation between emotions and politics, rendering emotions, and thus women, more powerful. Yet, Goodman would say that feminist theatre must be ‘directly and uncompromisingly political in order to effect social change’.<sup>25</sup> Feminist socialism in the 2010s has had new worries and orientations somehow initiated by Caryl Churchill according to Sheila Rabillard.<sup>26</sup> The political revolution under way in *Pandas* has to do with the protection of the environment and more particularly the preservation of pandas in China, as conveyed through both the text and the paratext. Munro’s aim is shared by her publisher since, on the last page, at the bottom of the information about

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<sup>22</sup> Munro, *Pandas*, 17, 39.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 24, 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Caryl Churchill’s drama shows a sustained and deepening engagement with ecological issues from her 1971 radio drama *Not Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, through *Fen* (1983) (developed for the stage with the members of the Joint Stock theatre company), to the collaborative combination of dance, song and drama *Lives of the Great Poisoners* (1991), the more recent play *The Skriker* (1994) and *Far Away* (2000), and her 2006 choral work *We turned on the Light*. Her focus moves from localized environmental concerns (as in *Fen*) to the ecological effects of globalization and the alienated consumerism of late capitalism (for example in *Far Away* and *The Skriker*), but there is not so much a simple progression in her work as a recursive, intense dialogue in which elements of her earlier plays are repurposed and complex issues are revisited.’ Sheila Rabillard, ‘On Caryl Churchill’s Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps’ in Aston and Diamond (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, 88.

the NHB company, we can find the logo of FSC—the forest stewardship council—an organisation ‘promoting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests’.<sup>27</sup> It means that the paper on which the play was printed was recycled. Moreover, on the back cover price tag, there is also an ecology-friendly indication: it says its paper has been recycled.

Such is Munro’s new dramatic strategy to let women’s voices be heard in post-devolution Scotland. The paratext, which is in fact a combination of what the Traverse Theatre had the publisher publish and Munro’s texts, is a powerful medium to help female voices reshape the contours of social feminism or feminist socialism. It is part of an aesthetic of her politics of emotions.<sup>28</sup> Yet, Brechtian theory is based on the idea that plays are didactic as long as they address the mind of the audience, not their heart. So, as demonstrated on several occasions, Munro’s play is based on paradoxes giving way to dialectical approaches leading to debates. It seems that these dialectic didactic elements create enough distancing to allow for re-imagining Scotland and Scottishness.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. The Stage Directions and the Paratext as Forging a National Identity for the Scottish Theatre

Ksenija Horvat notes that the changes in themes and preoccupations of female Scottish playwrights started in the 1990s, ‘reflecting the current changes in Scottish society’, notably when it comes to finding new definitions of ‘nationhood’ within the UK and the world.<sup>30</sup> In *Pandas*, the alienating power of capitalism striking Scotland is particularly denounced. Like Churchill, who put the stress on ‘consumerist attitudes causing environmental degradation’

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.fsc.org/vision-mission.12.htm> [Accessed 6 July 2012].

<sup>28</sup> As Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond say about Churchill’s work: Aston and Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’, 10.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Questions of inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and borders, whether real or imagined, have for a generation of Scottish playwrights working in a post-devolutionary context, affected their terms of engagement with issues of identity and difference ... The establishment of the new Scottish parliament in 1999 created cultural momentum and provoked a “general sense of an incoming tide” (Tom Nairn) which enabled and indeed required reimaginings of Scotland and Scottishness.’ Trish Reid, ‘Post-Devolutionary Drama’ in Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Horvat, ‘Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility’, 151.

in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971), Munro uses the theme of environmental protection in China to urge the readers to become aware of the social changes needed in Scotland.<sup>31</sup> Some distance is effectively beneficial and she deliberately creates defamiliarising effects through the stage directions and the paratext so as to reach her aim.

## 2.1 Distanciation: The Creation of a National Drama

In 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', Elin Diamond reminds us that 'the cornerstone of Brecht's theory is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the technique of defamiliarising a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to see or hear it afresh.'<sup>32</sup> In the NHB edition of *Pandas*, distanciation is first conveyed through the first three blank pages which separate the paratext from the text of the play. These virgin pages might act like the French tradition's strikes struck before the curtains rise and meant to arouse the audience's interest. They might also echo another technique used by Munro and other Scottish women playwrights who 'develop images of open, empty space to depict woman's inner world of imagination and desire.'<sup>33</sup> They can thus be seen as a threshold before we enter the play and more particularly women's qualms since that is one of the leading themes in *Pandas*.

Diamond further explains that the V-Effect has an impact on the audience in so far as it is meant to trigger off a sense of alienation: 'the A-effect consists of turning an object from something ordinary and immediately accessible into something peculiarly striking, and unexpected.'<sup>34</sup> Such has been the objective of many women playwrights according to Susan C. Triesman:

Scottish women's playwriting is characterised by the transformative and the transgressive, presenting the classic experience of the Other, where otherness becomes crucial to character's structure and where the poetic and the comedic engage with the underlying structures of the dominant culture in order to deconstruct them. It is especially

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<sup>31</sup> Sheila Rabillard, 'On Caryl Churchill's Ecological Drama: Right to Poison the Wasps', 90.

<sup>32</sup> Elin Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory /Feminist Theory toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 32 (1988), 82–94.

<sup>33</sup> Horvat and Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Lara Jane Bunting', 77.

<sup>34</sup> Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory', 84.

important that, since they inhabit the structures they are destabilising, women dramatists render the familiar unfamiliar.<sup>35</sup>

In this respect, the study of the font of the script is particularly interesting since it gives precious information on this alienation process. If we take the example of the very first page, we find eight different fonts that shed light on the name of the theatre, that of the theatre company, the title of the play, the name of its author, the cast, the names of the characters and those of the actors, the time and place of the first performance. If we take a closer look at the cast, we read the names of the characters in italics, while the names of the actors embodying them are not. The aim—be it that of Munro and/or that of the publisher for publishing norm reasons—seems to add further distanciation between reality and fiction. Diamond indeed recognises that ‘in performance the actor “alienates” rather than impersonates [the] character’.<sup>36</sup> There should be no identification between the actor and her/his character, and even between the characters and the audience / readers, the point being to enable the audience / readers to ‘remain free to analyse and form opinions about the play’s “fable”’.<sup>37</sup> That is why the cast of characters is repeated on page 4, and the reader is only given the names of the protagonists, there is no other information precisely to prevent any identification with them.

Another defamiliarising device is to be found in the note from the author on page 3. Indeed, the note—it is striking that this term should be singular—is written in prose, a style that stands out from the rest of the play. Then the study of the personal pronouns sheds light to a possible confusion in the reader’s mind since Munro uses ‘I’ and then ‘you’ as if she was addressing the reader when in fact she is still talking about herself. She says: ‘once in a while you write a play and you can’t pinpoint where it comes from’, distancing herself from this general remark; yet that could be misleading for the reader who might feel addressed to directly.<sup>38</sup> Genette explains that one of the main *raison d’être* of the paratext is to have an influence on the reader, even to manipulate him.<sup>39</sup>

In this respect, dedications are ambiguous for Genette. He explains that they always have at least two addressees: that whom the dedication is written

<sup>35</sup> Triesman ‘Sharman McDonald: The Generation of Identity’, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Diamond, ‘Brechtian Theory’, 84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>38</sup> Munro, *Pandas*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> ‘L’action du paratexte est bien souvent de l’ordre de l’influence, voire de la manipulation, subie de manière inconsciente.’ Genette, *Seuils*, 412.

for and the reader. As soon as the dedication is made publicly, the reader becomes the witness of the dedication<sup>40</sup>. In *Pandas*, there are two dedications. The first is addressed to 'Dave' whose identity is not specified.<sup>41</sup> It is humbly written in small font and in italics. The second dedication is more subtle since it is written in the author's note. Munro mentions Fiona Knowles, the long-time colleague with whom she co-founded the MsFit so as to produce her work, and says: 'Bless you, darling, this one's for you too.'<sup>42</sup> Therefore, readers should take some distance from the paratext as well and stop believing that everything said is unjustified and taken for granted.

Studying the paratext comes down to having a distanced critical analysis on who wrote what and for whom. If Munro attributes herself as the author of the note on page three as shown previously, we may wonder who wrote the second note on the text on page four. This note is about the problem of translating Mandarin into English for audience's comprehension; it is thus overtly didactic. It seems to address the readers but can also aim to give directions to the stage director and actors. The same situation arises on the back cover: we are clueless about the writer's identity, yet the information given is didactic since it orientates our reading of the play.

Brecht advocated the use of such devices because he considered didactic drama as a social apparatus which had the power to change the mentalities of audiences. Similarly, the role of the audience in feminist theatre is particularly important according to Gillian Elinor, 'because of the diversity of perspectives of its members, and because of the theatre's potential to 'convert' some spectators to a feminist way of seeing'.<sup>43</sup> The same idea can apply to the readers of the script, if they have attended the play or not. The effect wanted by the theatre company, the playwright and the publishers in the script equates

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<sup>40</sup> 'Quel qu'en soit le dédicataire officiel, il y a toujours une ambiguïté dans la destination d'une dédicace d'œuvre, qui vise toujours au moins deux destinataires: le destinataire, bien sûr, mais aussi le lecteur, puisqu'il s'agit d'un acte public dont le lecteur est en quelque sorte pris à témoin... Typiquement performative, je l'ai dit, puisqu'elle constitue à elle seule l'acte qu'elle est censée décrire, la formule n'en est donc pas seulement: 'je dédie ce livre à Untel' (c'est à dire, je dis à Untel que je lui dédie ce livre), mais aussi, et parfois bien davantage: 'je dis au lecteur que je dédie ce livre à Untel'?' Ibid., 137.

<sup>41</sup> Munro, *Pandas*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3. 'One response for [women] writers to exclusion from Scotland's theatre institutions was to produce their own work. Munro co-founded the MsFits with Fiona Knowles, producing satirical sketches and cabaret performances.' Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', 156.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 223.

that expected in the performance. From this observation, Goodman argues that 'feminist theatre is not only received and interpreted, but also influenced by its audience'.<sup>44</sup> In the paratext of *Pandas*, we can consider the appearance of the word 'beat' in the stage directions throughout the whole play, as wake-up calls for both the spectator and for the reader with at least two objectives. First it aims at constantly arousing their attention, and secondly it is meant to remind them that it is not real life on the stage but fiction. This repetition is part of the anti-illusionist devices used by Munro in a neo-Brechtian way. Munro previously warned readers, potential stage directors and actors that, when staging the play, 'it's crucial to pin down who knows what and when they know it... and to mark the moment each character really falls in love'.<sup>45</sup> That is why precisions like 'a moment, they're noticing' appear in the stage directions as if to suspend the status of the real.<sup>46</sup> Reinelt asserts that Churchill also 'create[s] precisely calibrated suspended realities where temporal and spatial coordinates are impossible to secure and the action skirts the surreal' especially in *Far Away* (2000), *A Number* (2002) and *Drunk enough to say I love you?* (2006).<sup>47</sup>

The analysis of the stage directions both in terms of content and form finally gives us precious information on didacticism in so far as they convey a visual sense of fragmentation within the play. As a matter of fact, they sometimes appear in parenthesis, sometimes in brackets (especially when language is concerned) and are sometimes written in italics depending on what information they disclose.

## 2.2 Non-Linear Structures and Fragmentation

As argued previously, Susan C. Triesman demonstrates that female Scottish playwrights have recently resorted to many techniques, including the fragmentation of the whole, to reshape the contours of Scottish national drama. Ksenija Horvat adds to this that non-linear structures have been traditionally used by female playwrights in Scotland to tell stories.<sup>48</sup> Likewise Aston and Diamond write that one of the characteristics of Churchill's plays is

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>45</sup> Munro, *Pandas*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>47</sup> Reinelt, 'On Feminist and Sexual Politics', 27.

<sup>48</sup> Horvat, 'Scottish Women Playwrights against Zero Visibility', 146.



the ‘non-linear’.<sup>49</sup> If the repetition of the word ‘beat’ throughout Pandas as well as the many pauses, moments of deep breath and silences, can be tools to give some rhythm to the play, in a neo-Brechtian fashion since they echo Brecht’s use of ‘songs’ and music to fragment his pieces, other elements also convey an identical impression of fragmentation and absence of linearity. From the very first page, the use of different fonts can be seen as the announcement of anti-linearity. This effect is then kept in the following page on which we find information on the Traverse Theatre: the text of the publisher is interrupted by extracts from national journals, periodicals and newspaper reviews lauding the theatre and supporting his/her words. The ‘epitext’ is here at the service of the ‘peritext’ to strengthen this notion of a didactic paratext.

For Brecht, drama had to be built up by various bits and pieces. In *Le Réalisme épique de Brecht*, Bernard Dort asserts that Brecht was not interested in the unavoidable unveiling of events in a chronological order from one scene to the next as developed in classical theatre. On the contrary, he advocated montage and juxtaposition.<sup>50</sup> This is precisely the impression that we get when we read the back cover where numerous pieces of information have been juxtaposed without any obvious coherence. They are all introduced in the same way, be they about the content of the play, its premiere, its author. They give a sense of visual uniformity but they do not deal with information of the same nature.

Brechtian drama is indeed made up of fragments of reality extracted from the world particularly to enhance the tensions they bring to the world.<sup>51</sup> Pandas exemplifies this in so far as the three couples of characters—Jie Hui and Lin Han; Andy and Julie; James and Madeleine—all have personal stories to tell; in turn, they give an overview of their own reality, each very different from the other. Fragmentation is also found in the structure of the play. There are only two acts with no scene to divide the play and to give an impression

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<sup>49</sup> Aston and Diamond, ‘Introduction: On Caryl Churchill’, 14.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Brecht rompt avec l’enchaînement inéluctable du théâtre classique où une scène en amène une autre, avec l’irrésistible progression de ce théâtre fondée sur la psychologie ou sur l’exigence d’un moment culminant où puisse se réaliser la catharsis. Selon ses propres termes, Brecht substitue à la croissance du théâtre traditionnel, le montage.’ Bernard Dort, ‘Le Réalisme épique de Brecht’ in idem, *Réalisme et Poésie au Théâtre* (Paris, 1958), 201.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Une pièce de théâtre est faite de fragments de la réalité, de situations brutes révélées à partir de gestes, d’objets simples. Seulement Brecht ne se laisse jamais aller à donner une signification symbolique à ces fragments. Il les situe dans le monde. Il dévoile leur rapport avec l’ensemble de la vie. Il introduit entre ces fragments et le monde, une tension, une contradiction.’ Ibid., 20.

of linearity. Yet, if we look more closely at the internal organisation of each act, we find divisions which help slide from one pair of characters to the next. This slippage is facilitated by the use of light, a device Brecht recommended. Whenever Munro writes in the stage directions 'fade lights into' spectators and readers know the characters, the setting and the subject change.<sup>52</sup> However, from page seventy nine to the end of the play (page ninety one) there is no more clear indication of these changes. On the contrary, the six characters are all on the stage at the same time; if they share the dramatic space and time, they stand in different places, though. James and Madeleine are in China, Jie Hui and Lin Han are in a hotel in Edinburgh and Andy and Julie in a hospital room in Scotland. In Brechtian terms, the fragmentation of the scenes and the absence of linearity are meant to convey a general meaning and the audience's responsibility is to bring it out.<sup>53</sup> The word 'panda' recurring from the beginning to the end comes as one clue for spectators and readers who have to bring all the characters and their stories together so as to find the message conveyed through the play; hence its title.

The paratext is thus at the heart of a pedagogical triangle involving the playwright, the reader and the publisher like the performance is at the heart of a pedagogical triangle involving the playwright, the audience and the theatre company. Adopting Brecht's theory on drama as well as a feminist point of view to analyse the paratext of the play sheds light on its didactic dimension and the strategies used by Munro to reshape the contours of Scottish drama not only on stage but also in this edition. In *Pandas*, China becomes the prism through which it is possible to observe Scotland and the role of women in Scottish society at social, economic and political levels. It is also the medium through which the playwright reaches her aesthetic aim. Its script complements its performance so that the readers realise how powerful neo-Brechtian feminist drama can be.

If Goodman asserts that feminist drama has taken new directions of which the unperformed is becoming an element, then the paratext, since it is not shown on the stage, can be characteristic of feminist drama.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the problem of qualifying Rona Munro as a feminist playwright arises. Like Churchill, Munro's work is 'feminist in impact', but the adjective 'feminist' has

<sup>52</sup> Munro, *Pandas*, 12, 19, 30, 54, 65 and 78.

<sup>53</sup> 'La succession de ces scènes constitue un sens global, mais c'est au spectateur à le déterminer, à le tirer de la pièce: à aucun moment, Brecht ne l'exprime totalement, à aucun moment ce sens global ne s'exprime dans une scène-clef. 'Dort: 'Le Réalisme épique de Brecht', 202.

<sup>54</sup> Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, 192.

been used in such a derogatory way by the media, that it seems better to define it as 'women's theatre' if a label needs to be found for her work.<sup>55</sup> As a matter of fact, Munro explains she is 'a Scottish playwright, a woman playwright and an Aberdonian playwright, not necessarily in that order'.<sup>56</sup>

Of more importance, Rona Munro's *Pandas* is seen as experimental since it borrows many Brechtian devices and adapts them to the present context. Yet, she considers empathy and emotions as part of the human social experience, an idea that Brecht absolutely objected to. Thus, not only does Munro reshape the contours of Scottish drama, she also re-defines a neo-Brechtian apparatus in giving back their importance to emotions.

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<sup>55</sup> Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (1996: London, 2004), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', 154.