



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Malthouse Melbourne Present

BAAL

Adapted from Bertolt Brecht by Tom Wright



PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

BAAL

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2011

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Simon Stone

Set Designer – Nick Schlieper

Costume Designer – Mel Page

Lighting Designer – Nick Schlieper

Composer and Sound Designer – Stefan Gregory

CAST

Baal – Thomas Wright

Ekart – tba

Johannes – Chris Ryan

Performer – Brigid Ballacher

Emile – Katherine Tonkin

Sophie – Shelley Lauman

Johanna – Geraldine Hakewill

Performer – Lotte St Clair

Landlady, Louise the barmaid – Luisa Hastings Edge



THEMES

Non-conformity

Anarchy

Misogyny

Epic Theatre

BAAL

2

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2011

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For the anti-hero poet-singer Baal nothing is sacred. He is self-indulgent, egotistical and sexually promiscuous. Baal is both a beast and a child and lives in a world as divided and as contradictory as he is himself. The new star of the literary world, he sneers at his success and members of the middle class – businessmen, university students and critics - who praise his talent. He seeks only pleasure, revelry, and to shock. Baal craves the company of social misfits and the disenfranchised – alcoholics, sex workers, the homeless. He wages a personal war against civilized society taking refuge in the increasingly threatened forests of his homeland. Despite his disdainful behavior toward women he fraternizes with his friends' wives and girlfriends. When his friend Johannes introduces his fiancée, Johanna he seduces her. Distressed and guilt ridden Johanna drowns herself in the river. Haunted by her image, Baal consoles himself by taking up with another young woman, Sophie. He tells Sophie he loves her, but brutally rejects her when she becomes pregnant. Dissatisfied with his relationships with women Baal turns his homosexual affections toward his musician friend Eckhardt. They travel the countryside moving from bar to bar, drinking and brawling. The ghost of Johanna returns to haunt Baal. Eckhardt falls in love with a young woman they have both seen by the river. She disappears.

Eight years pass. Johannes has become a disheveled alcoholic and although Eckhardt says he still loves Baal he resents him for his controlling behaviour. Their relationship ends on the day after the death of Baal's mother. In a fit of jealousy, Baal kills Eckhardt when he refuses to stop dancing and flirting with a group of women. Baal returns to the wilds of his beloved forest, alone again seeking free. Lying under a blanket he takes refuge under the night sky until the law catches up with him the next morning.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The original *Baal* was written in 1918, when Brecht was a 20-year-old student at Munich University, in response to the drama *The Loner (Der Einsame)* by the dramatist Hanns Johst. *The Loner* was a dramatization of the life of anti-Semitic playwright-poet Christian Dietrich Grabbe. Grabbe was represented as a romantic lone figure suffering for his art, which was rejected by Brecht as a show of bourgeois sentimentality. As a counter-play Brecht named his anti-hero poet Baal, taken from the pagan Phoenician deity of the same name. The worshipers of Baal would sacrifice their children to appease the god for rain and protect them against thunder. Baal could also manifest as a god of fertility and sexual excess. Baal searches the forest as a metaphor for freedom and anarchy, a place where all his desires can be met without consequence. He lacks remorse and is incapable of empathy or moral reflection. Baal is dangerous to himself and society. Brecht, intended for audiences not to identify with Baal, and he expected them to reject him; arguing Baal is “anti-social in an anti-social society”. Baal was written with the conscious intention of not winning the audience’s approval but their disdain for a society that could create such monsters in the guise of art. Brecht described *Baal’s* world as one “whose form of production is designed for exploitation not usefulness”.

The play’s first production in the German city of Leipzig in 1923 divided its audience causing a riot in the theatre compelling city authorities to close it down after opening night. A critic in the audience observed: ‘Amidst the fighting sounds of whistles, boos and applause, there appeared [on stage] a shy, pale, slender youth, the poet Bertolt Brecht, who then retreated immediately to the wings and fearfully came back to the protecting hand of the theatre manager. The look on his [Brecht’s] face : “My god, what have I done here ...” ‘

Baal is considered by many theorists to be a self-portrait of Brecht as a young man. Brecht was also a poet and singer-musician who explored anarchist ideologies in response to the rise of fascism and his disillusionment with Christianity before he settled for a Marxist political platform. As a dramatist Brecht saw himself as a revolutionary who was driven to bring conflict and disagreement into the theatre. He believed that the experience of a catharsis of emotion made an audience complacent. Instead, he wanted his audiences to use their intellectual

capacity for a critical perspective to identify social problems and be motivated to effect change after leaving the theatre.

Baal was written to challenge the Aristotelian heroic vision and he continued to write 'counter-plays' (Gegenstucke) as an attack on the status quo. Brechtian actor's were also trained and directed in a form of 'counter-practice' (Gegenpraktik) where they were instructed to not indulge in expressions of emotion that would enable the audience to emotionally identify with the character they were portraying. The actor must remain conscious of their character 'from the outside, from the standpoint of society'.

Baal as one of Brecht's earliest plays consists of short episodic scenes, disregards the conventions of cause and effect and a climatic catharsis of emotion that would remain typical features of his work. The application of non-naturalistic elements such as songs to describe the action, poetic prose, an improbable storyline, exotic and strange settings, would be further developed in his theory of 'Epic Theatre'.

Reference: 'Brecht and actor training: On whose behalf do we act?' Peter Thomson

Chpt 5 P98 -112 *Twentieth Century Actor Training* Ed Alison Hodge 2000

Writer Tom Wright on Brecht's Epic Theatre

Selected excerpts from HSC STC Brecht workshop transcript, 2008

In Brechtian Theatre, by the end of the evening, if the experience has been enough, you feel as though you have been in a room with a person, not just the role, and you understand where they are coming from.

**

A final thing that's perhaps worth saying in terms of the Epic theatre stage is what's called 'Bearing the Device'. Bearing the device is its famous idea of 'gestic' theatre and the idea of 'gestus' and the idea of Epic Theatre. All 'Bearing the Device' is fundamentally about is "the opposite of illusion". The opposite of saying to the audience "we want you to suspend your disbelief", "pretend all of this is real", "ignore the fact that you know there are lights there", "ignore the fact that you are in a theatre", "let's act as what you are seeing is reality". Bearing the Device is quite the opposite. It says "we will show you what we are using to create theatre."

**

The actors aren't required to do that interior work, in fact there is no interiority in Brecht. Brecht's work is about the external. It's one of the hallmarks of Epic Theatre. The principles of Epic Theatre were in reaction to two things principally. One was the theatre that went before, which was an artificial theatre, one might describe is as a romantic theatre.

**

Second thing was that it was in response to a society, a society that demanded and called upon change and so it was a theatre that was designed to help people feel part of a community experience. The big one that we haven't spoken about, the big effect the *verfremdungseffekt*, the 'alienation' of Epic theatre, is the removal of the fourth wall.

**

And all Brecht did with the creation of Epic Theatre was bring back some of the key components of theatre, going back to the Greeks, the Romans, the Elizabethans, late Renaissance theatre even right through to the courtly theatres of the 17th C. Things like Placards which we haven't even spoken about, you know the idea of placards that announce the scene, any of these devices actually had their roots, their origins elsewhere.

**

Consider

Brecht's Epic Theatre was a reaction against the cinema.

Brecht wants you to stay awake in the theatre and not fall into the sleep of nostalgia.

The Brechtian actor is not interested in showing feelings.

In the Epic Theatre you the audience are under the spotlight.

The Epic Theatre recycles devices used by the Greek, Roman and Elizabethan dramatists.

Additional Resources



An online Biography Summary of Brecht

<http://www.gradesaver.com/author/bertolt-brecht/>

Brecht's Acting Training

'Brecht and actor training: On whose behalf do we act?' Peter Thomson

Chpt 5 P98 -112 *Twentieth Century Actor Training* Ed Alison Hodge 2000

Performances of *Baal*



David Bowie played the title role of Baal in the 1982 BBC television production and recorded the songs in English.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmP0tWMNgJk>

David Bowie's 'Baal's Hym'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inYXoFlyB1Q>

David Bowie's Part 1/3

<http://www.teenagewildlife.com/Albums/B/Title.html>

Song Lyrics of 5 songs in Baal (recorded by Bowie in 1982)



AIM: To examine Brecht’s representation of anti-social behaviour in *Baal*.

Brecht described Baal as “ anti-social in an anti-social society”.



Discuss

When have you behaved badly in a social situation?

Have you observed some-one else act in an anti-social manner?

Describe what happened.

What caused you to act inappropriately?

What would you do differently next time?

List examples of anti-social behaviour. What are some of the causes of anti-social behaviour in society today? In your local community?



Write/Present a scene where a character acts in an anti-social manner at a social event.

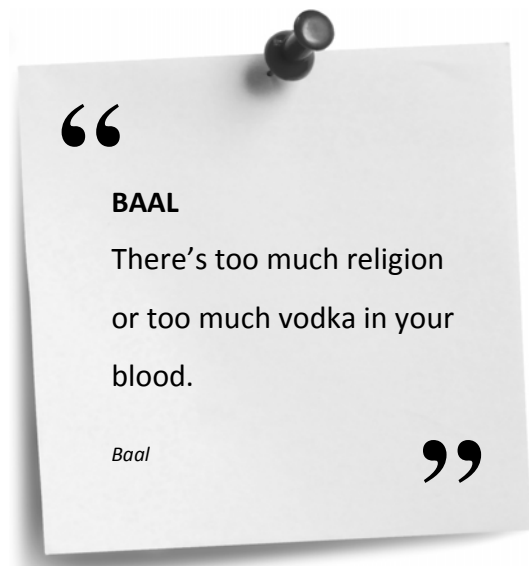
For example:

21st Birthday party

Awards Ceremony

Debutant Ball

Religious/Cultural Event



Consider how will the character’s actions affect others around them.

What will the consequences for the character be?



Extension –

Write a poem or a song on the theme of anti-social behaviour.

Include the poem/ song into your scene presentation/creative writing text.





AIM: To examine how theatre can be a vehicle for political activity, social commentary and debate through the application of Brecht’s Epic Theatre principles.

Brecht wrote *Baal* as a reaction against the values of the ruling middle and upper classes of Germany in the late 1920’s that would eventually lead to the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. He wanted his audience to observe and reflect on the social problems represented in the play. He hoped it would motivate them to take action against the individuals and cultural institutions he believed were the cause of growing divisions in German society.



Research Brecht’s Epic Theatre Principles

List Key features (refer to Tom Wright’s comments on Brecht’s Epic Theatre)

Apply to a Real-Life Case Study



Case Study in Bad Boy Behaviour

Research the story of Australian teenager Corey Worthington. And how his out of control house party causing over \$20,000 of damage became a topic of debate in the media as people argued for and against supporting his behaviour.



See newspaper article entitled, “Legend, moron or just naughty boy?”

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/01/15/1200159449772.html>

DEBATE Is Corey Worthington a ‘Legend, moron or just a naughty boy?’



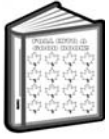
Extension -

Research a real-life case in which a teenage girl is the perpetrator of ‘anti-social’ behaviour.

DEBATE the similarities and differences between male and female bad behaviours.



Write/Devise & Present a scene based on the Corey Worthington story (or other selected case study) that demonstrates how the social world contributes to the character's anti-social behaviours.



Change the names of the real-life people in the story to names that symbolize who they represent rather than who they might really be in reality.

For example Brecht named *Baal* after a pagan God who was deemed a monster. By giving him a symbolic name the character is no longer allowed to belong to the ordinary everyday naturalistic world. Baal becomes epic and a symbolic device in the world of the theatre where the audience are asked to observe and judge his behaviour.

+ **Extension** - Brecht's Alienation Acting Exercise *'Said the Man' 'Said the Woman'*

Where the actor both plays the character and the commentator on the behaviour of the character. The aim of this exercise is to make the actor and the audience conscious that they are presenting and watching a 'representation' of behaviour (not as in naturalist drama where the audience and actor believe what they are enacting and seeing is 'real').

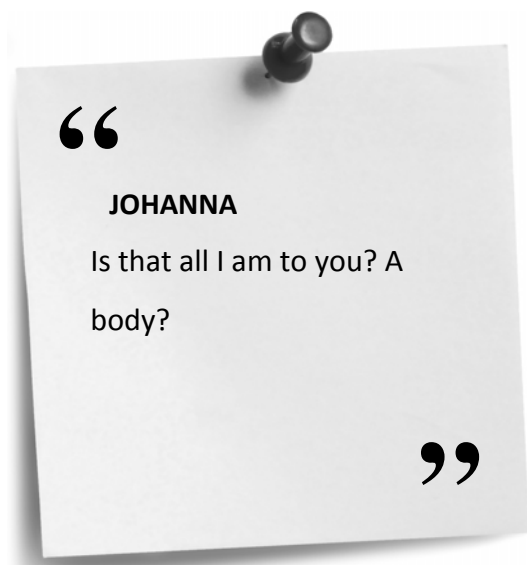
Repeat your scene based on the real-life case study.

Say 'Said the Man' after each line of dialogue (or Woman, Girl, Child, Mother, Old Man etc depending on your characters social role and status)

Reflection

How does the scene change with this commentary?

How do you feel when performing the scene having to switch to being 'inside' and 'outside' the role?





AIM: To explore and apply Brecht's acting technique of extreme behaviour to examine social status and situation through role-play and improvisation.

Augusto Boal the creator of 'The Theatre of The Oppressed' was greatly influenced by Brecht and like him believed the theatre should not pacify audiences by merely entertaining them but should promote thought and an attitude to what they were seeing on stage.



Boals' 'The Embassy Ball' teaches an actor to play Brecht's extremes.

NB: Can be enacted as role –play OR Creative Writing task.



Each person chooses a high social status character to play – a judge, politician, business person, etc. A ball is being held at the embassy, or office – any ritualized gathering – and all these characters attend, and are on their best behaviour, dressed in their best clothes. They are announced at the door, they meet, they mingle. Unbeknown to the guests, the waiter is a member of a revolutionary movement; he hands around drinks and slices of cake, which have been spiked with a hallucinogenic drug.

A first serving of cake is distributed, loosening the inhibitions of the guests, who start behaving oddly.

A second serving of cake is served and the guest reveal more of themselves, behaving as they would really like to; their desires come to the surface and override their masks of respectability. The third round of cake drives them to wild extremes of behaviour.

Finally they get a last slice of cake, which contains an antidote, which brings them down and returns them to their socially acceptable selves.

Reflection

How did your character's behaviour change over the role-play?

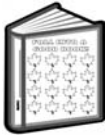
What did you observe about other character's behaviour?

What surprised you about your character?

Reference: Augusto Boal *Games For Actors And Non-Actors*



AIM: To examine how Brecht's early life, his political values and beliefs influenced his writings and approach to theatre making.



Research Brecht's early life.

List three significant political events that had an impact on Brecht as a young man.



Write & perform a monologue

You are Bertolt Brecht.

Dramatize three significant events in your life.

For example you are Brecht at 18 years old; in exile composing your theoretical writings; directing actors in the Berliner Ensemble.



Research Brecht's Berliner Ensemble

You are an Actor in the Berliner Ensemble 1949

Describe your life in East Berlin; what play is being rehearsed and what role are you playing? ; how will you prepare for the role?



Devise & Present a role-play interview

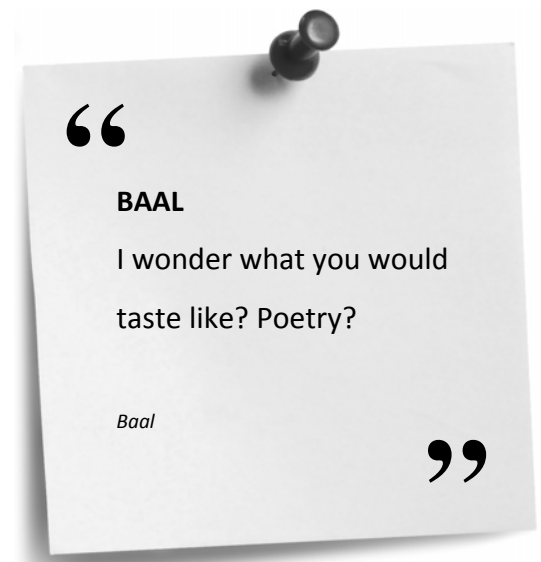
A: You are a journalist (or a student)

B: You are Bertolt Brecht, director of the Berliner Ensemble

OR

A: You are a journalist (or a student)

B: You are a member of the Berliner Ensemble.



When viewing the STC production of *Baal*

What aspects of Brecht as ‘the angry young man’ can you see in the character of Baal?

How are the female characters portrayed in the production?

When trainee directors from the Berliner Ensemble were invited to watch Brecht rehearsing his productions they were asked to write down what they disagreed with. Brecht encouraged his trainee directors to consider there was always more than one way of doing things.

Write down all the things you disagreed with in the STC’s production.

What changes would you make to the production if you were directing?

Consider

Set design

Music & Sound design

Casting & Acting style

Director’s vision

What elements would you keep from the STC production?

