

Heart's

BRIAN She's taking her time.

ALICE Not really.

They all stop, BRIAN goes out. Others reset to beginning and do exactly what they did before as BRIAN enters putting on a tweed jacket.

BRIAN She's taking her time.

ALICE Not really.

They all stop, BRIAN goes out. Others reset and BRIAN enters putting on an old cardigan.

BRIAN She's taking her time.

Desire

by Caryl Churchill

A Playgoer's Companion

"You're pretending this isn't your life. You think it's going to happen some other time. When you're dead you'll realise you were alive now."

The Author



Caryl Churchill was born on September 3, 1938 in London and grew up in the Lake District and, after World War II, in Montréal, where her family moved when she was ten years old. She received a

BA in English from Oxford University. *Downstairs*, her first play, written while she was still at university, was first staged in 1958 and won an award at the *Sunday Times* National Union of Students Drama Festival. She wrote a number of plays for BBC radio and *Owners*, her first professional stage production, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1972. She was resident dramatist at the Royal Court Theater from 1974-75. During the 1970's and 1980's, she collaborated with Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment theater companies, both of which had an impact on her later works.

With her continuing interest in theatrical experimentation, Churchill was able to incorporate expression of feminist insights into contemporary views, all the while encouraging audiences to actively criticize institutions and ideologies that had been previously taken for granted, both in theater and society itself. Her work has had a lasting effect on theatrical practices, traditions, gender stereotypes, and socioeconomic ideals throughout the past two decades, and until the present day.

Her use of non-naturalistic techniques and feminist themes, the abuses of power, and sexual politics has won her awards and built her reputation as a playwright. She is acknowledged as a major playwright in the English language. Her early work was inspired by, and developed, Brecht's modernist dramatic and theatrical techniques of "Epic theater" to explore issues around sexuality and gender.

We've got ninety-nine per cent the same genes as any other person. We've got ninety per cent the same as a chimpanzee. We've got thirty percent the same as a lettuce. Does that cheer you up at all? I love about the lettuce. It makes me feel I belong. – Caryl Churchill

The Structure of the Play

Churchill has been known to experiment with the form in which her plays are structured and *Heart's Desire* is no exception to this. *Heart's Desire* focuses on the manipulation of time: the speed of time, the reversal of time and the restarting of time. Churchill creates a non-linear time line in order present the audience with a “different situation created in the mind of one of the characters in order to distract themselves from the monotony and unpleasantness of their situation” (Philip Roberts). Amelia Kritzer suggests that Churchill disrupts the normal structure of a play in order to “examine and question a social construct.”

Repetition plays an important role in the play, including the repetition of the first and the last line of the play – “She’s taking her time.” This repetition gives the audience the sense that the play has no conclusion but that the dialogue is limitless. Robert L. King suggests that this feeling is deliberate: “we end where we began because melodrama is a dead end.” Although it may feel like the play is going nowhere Churchill is definitely making a point. In an essay published in 1960, Churchill stated “Playwrights don’t give the answers, they ask the questions.” “Always playful, Churchill here comes close to reviving absurdist theatre. . . . In *Heart's Desire* the tensions and trivial exchanges that characterize the common domestic experience of waiting for one's ‘heart's desire’ are reflected in constant repetition and break out into surreal events from frustration at the tedium.” – *Encyclopedia of Literature*

What's poetry? It's not real but maybe it's more than real. It's dreaming while you're awake. – Caryl Churchill

“Churchill's dramaturgy is above all the staging of desire, and more particularly the desires of those members of society who are least able to realize them.”

– Peter Buse, contemporarywriters.com

What happens?

“A family is waiting for the return of their daughter from her holiday in Australia. However, instead of focusing on the impact of the event, it is the very act of waiting which dominates the text. The tone of the piece is set from the start when the opening four lines are spoken, then the piece is reset and the opening is repeated a further two times. The repetition of everyday routines highlights the monotony in their lives. They appear to lack purpose and direction. This is coupled with the fear of the future as the family reacts in extreme ways to the imminent arrival. As each increasingly absurd event happens, the play returns to the beginning, capturing the audience in the futility and frustration that the characters themselves are experiencing.” – *e-book browse documents*

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