



Brecht and Method

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Like several other modern playwrights, Bertolt Brecht wrote not only a large body of work for the stage but theoretical manifestos as well. Of central importance to practitioners who came after him is his notion of distanciation or estrangement—the famous V-effect—that is the hallmark of the epic form of theater: an episodic play that narrates events and characters from the outside, asking audiences to confront what they see, thereby provoking analytical thought, judgment, and action rather than empathic feeling. Such didactic intent is generally seen as inimical to modernist aesthetics, and so Fredric Jameson sets out in *BRECHT AND METHOD* to recuperate Brecht for modernism and appropriate him, through his attention to information technology as a form of production, for postmodernism.

Although Jameson discusses the elements that contribute to Brecht's innovative dramaturgy—scene titles or synopses; commentative songs; summative morals or proverbs—his book is too densely written to ever serve as a primer on Brechtian theater for the uninitiated. Yet shining through many sections are brilliant moments of textual analysis, as when he reads *THE LIFE OF GALILEO* (1943) as “autoreferential”: If Galileo's scientific innovations are analogous to modernism's agenda, then by his submission to the Church, he commits the cardinal sin against the New, making him prototypical of Brecht's own decision to compromise a stark proletarian theater with adumbrations of spectacle that make it more obviously pleasurable.

What is primarily studied and taught in other Brecht plays such as *MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN* (1941) and *THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE* (1948) has to do with the nature of business and capital, with production and consumption. This concern adumbrates as well Brecht's collection of political parables, *ME-TI: BOOK OF TWISTS AND TURNS* (1965), parts of which Jameson newly translates here. This almost perfect meshing of Jameson as Marxist critic and theorist with Brecht as Marxist practitioner and artist makes for a rarely achieved confluence of author and subject.

Source for Further Study

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