

Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht for Audience to Be Active and Critical for Social and Intellectual Transformation: A Marxist Perspective.

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Abstract

Of all living beings in the world man is superior and dignified in all respects. Such a man is not living alone but in group: society of human beings. Such a society is not permanently same but differs from in various ways and ever changing on time factors, geographical factors, intellectual factors, etc., It is the base or ground concept to know about the societal change for long years. It can be understood from the point of dramatic theatre or technique. In this respect Bertolt Brecht is the champion to use his ground breaking concept Epic Theatre. This concept of Epic theatricality made him a famous playwright, poet, and theatrical director. Brecht applies the concept of Alienation Effect, for the purpose of this task in his epic theatre. His goal was to make the spectators feel emotionally detached from the characters onstage and to be active and critical thinkers. So, the goal of his theatre was to provoke critical thinking in the audience about the political and social concerns it raised, rather than to have the audience emotionally present. Critical engagement, social and historical context, political didacticism, and new theatrical techniques were the defining features of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. His intention is to promote consciousness, encouraging analysis, and lobbying for societal and political change and tried to fulfil an appetite of intellectual transformation. This paper tries to unravel all these in a Marxian approach that will help the interested audience/readers to know the intention of Bertolt Brecht.

Keywords: Didacticism, Alienation Effect, Epic Theatre, Criticality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Of all living beings in the world man is superior and dignified in all respects. Such a man is not living alone but in group: society of human beings. Such a society is not permanently same but differs from in various ways and ever changing on time factors, geographical factors, intellectual factors, etc., It is the base or ground concept to know about the societal change for long years. It can be understood from the point of dramatic theatre or technique. In this respect Bertolt Brecht is the champion to use his ground breaking concept Epic Theatre. This concept of Epic theatricality made him a famous playwright, poet, and theatrical director. The Alienation Effect is a key idea in Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. His goal was to make the spectators feel emotionally detached from the characters onstage. His goal in writing the play was to provoke critical thinking about the political and social concerns it raised, rather than to have the audience emotionally invest in the characters. The actors broke the fourth wall, used placards, and brought attention to the action's artificiality, among other strategies, to accomplish this. The historical and social

milieu in which Brecht wrote his plays were profound. In his commentary on modern situations, he frequently drew similarities between the past and the present by using historical people and locations. Epic Theatre by Brecht was essentially a didactic work. Theatre, in his view, should serve to enlighten as much as entertain. Social injustice, class conflict, and the repercussions of capitalism were common themes in his plays that had no place in dramatic theatre. Brecht hoped that his theatre could bring about positive social change and increase awareness. Brecht disagreed with the conventional Aristotelian view of theatre as a linear form with a predetermined arc. His use of episodic frameworks, on the other hand, broke up the story and let viewers focus on the larger political and social themes. Critical engagement, social and historical context, political didacticism, and new theatrical techniques were the defining features of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. His artistic identity was moulded by his ambition to utilize theatre as a medium for promoting consciousness, encouraging analysis, and lobbying for societal and political change and tried to fulfil an appetite of intellectual urge. This paper tries to unravel all these in a Marxian approach with a hope that will help the interested audience/readers to know the intention of Bertolt Brecht for social harmony.

2. Impact on Brecht's Formation of Theatre

An outstanding writer of his time, Bertolt Brecht deftly negotiates the complex social, economic, and political currents of his own time. With keen insight, he meticulously records these occurrences. In order to address these complexities Brecht keeps his unique perspective. Thematically and aesthetically, his writings maintain this contrast while he concurs, dissents, and criticizes these societal features. Even as a young man, Brecht showed a talent for expressing societal critique in clear and succinct ways. His early discontent, which began in his hometown of Augsburg, was more of a rebellion against the social conventions of his day than an attack on social classes. The regimented military parades on princely birthdays, the mandatory violin and piano lessons, the authoritarianism in the family, the paternal tantrums, and his mother's tendency to prioritize peace due to fear were all aspects of his upbringing that he despised. This had impacted a lot on the way of Brecht's thinking and in the formation of his theatre. There has always been a certain amount of ambivalence in the author's relationship with both his hometown and Berlin. At first, he had a terrible impression of Berlin, calling it "cold Chicago," since he imagined a brutal atmosphere full of people who were constantly pushing, shoving, and overwhelming one another. But after relocating to Berlin for good in 1924, he became a part of the city's vibrant culture and eventually became a famous writer. But Brecht wanted more than just the applause of the Berlin theatregoers. At this early point in his career, he is clearly impacted by modern expressionism, the works of the young playwright Georg Büchner, and the models set by the emerging "Storm and Momentum" movement. But Brecht's work quickly adopted a critical stance, replacing the idealistic sorrow of expressionism.

3. Epic Theatre: Dichotomy in Nature.

A revolutionary theatrical idea called "epic theatre" was born from the mind of the great Bertolt Brecht. The conventional Aristotelian model is drastically at odds with this dramatic method. Brecht calls his style of theatre "dialectical theatre," which combines philosophical and rational ideas against traditional theatrical techniques. In contrast to what one might expect, Brecht's epic drama is not a coherent theory but rather a web of related ideas and notions built around central themes. There isn't a finished version of Brecht's concept of epic theatre. Through discussions between a philosopher and other theatrical

specialists, this effort sought to clarify the basics of epic drama. Poetry, stage scenes, and essays were all intended to be included. Brecht made sporadic attempts to develop this piece during his lifetime, but unfortunately, it remained unfinished.

As a broad introduction to the notion of epic theatre, the work *On Experimental Theatre* is an integral aspect of this idea. In order to familiarize the actors with the concept of epic drama, another text that incorporates passages from the "Messingkauf" is the *Small Organon for the Theatre*. Epic theatre, according to Brecht, differs significantly from the Aristotelian paradigm. His writings examine the essential characteristics of the epic theatre and compare them to the Aristotelian model of theatre in order to draw this contrast. Only Bertolt Brecht among the contemporary epic-dramatic writers produced academic works alongside his plays. Brecht drew on his extensive background as a director, playwright, and ideologist to develop a comprehensive theory of the theatre, which is included in his theoretical works with a dramaturgy of modern drama. Despite using his "epic theatre" as a jumping off point, his theoretical works do not examine performativity in a vacuum. In this paper, I will examine how his theoretical framework informed his theatrical work. The director Ervin Piscator's "Proletarian Theatre" had a profound impact on Brecht when he was a young man.

Maybe this is one of the main reasons why playwrights like Brechtian were encouraged to be creative with their dramaturgical approaches. Aristotelian dramaturgy was inadequate to express the new worldview and massive global transformation that followed the communist revolution. Instead of being presented in fragments as Aristotelian theatre demands, he had to place specific episodes brought back in time in the social and political context with a general vision. Another factor is the need for what may be referred to as a pedagogical theatre, which, via the use of commentary, aims to educate. The epoch also required an objective, scientific theatre that rises beyond the individual, which found embodiment in epic dramaturgy. Though it was undoubtedly Piscator's theatre that sparked interest in this style of theatre, Brecht was instrumental in giving it form in terms of ideas and artistic merit. Based on Marxist theory, Brecht establishes the groundwork for his new worldview in his theoretical work *Small organ for the theatre*. Also included in this text is his description of the theatre's evolving role in light of recent societal upheaval. Brecht argues that epic dramatists establish events and situations in a definite perspective by using them independently of place and time. Because of this, events can be shown in real time, with the ability to react on them, observe them from other angles, interject and remark on them, and so on. Epic dramaturgy is better suited to the new visionary theatre because of the freedom it offers in connection to the material it deals with, the chance it gives to critique.

Bertolt Brecht draws a line between epic and dramatic forms of theatre in his notes to the opera *The Rise and Fall of the Mahogany City*, noting that this comparison and contrast to show only to shift prominence not point out absolute disapproval. In this sense this article has an intention to spread light on a large number of discussions especially, regarding the opposition "emotion - reason" of dramatic and epic theatre respectively. (Brecht, 2000) This is to show how epic theatre is void of emotions, as Brecht makes clear. It is my belief that the aims of Brechtian theatre might provide light on the context for this conflict. The "emotion - reason" dialectic is a tool that Brecht uses in his epic drama to get the audience thinking critically and participating. Instead of erasing emotions, Brecht's drama uses them to great effect by drawing the audience apart. Brecht aims to draw attention to the emotional manipulation taking place on stage, rather than letting the audience become totally engrossed in the characters' emotions in dramatic theatre. Viewers are encouraged to engage in critical thinking regarding the social and political themes brought up in the play by this awareness. In this way his epic theatre is embraces 'emotion' and provokes

reasoning tendency on the part of spectators. So his theatre is dichotomy in nature that is well employed in his play *The Caucasian Circle*.

4. Alienation Effect

Therefore, "emotion" in a Brechtian sense is the audience's intended emotional reaction, but "reason" is there to help them make sense of it all by prompting them to think critically about their feelings and the play's larger issues. Here Brecht applies his concept of Alienation Effect as a modern technique to the greater extent as a paradigm shift in the role of audience. Conventional theatre typically involves the passive absorption of emotions and storylines; this approach challenges that. In brief, the contrast between "emotion" and "reason" in Brecht's theatre is an intentional tactic to stimulate critical thinking and intellectual engagement with the content, as opposed to merely appealing to the audience's emotions.

This is where Ernst Bloch's description of Brechtian theatre as a "paradigmatic institution" and Brecht's drama as an instructional drama both hold water. If you think of it as a simple school play, though, you would be mistaken. This instructional theatre, on the other hand, is more intellectual and illuminating in tone. Bloch stresses that the audience is not given ready-made solutions and examples in Brechtian play. On the contrary, Brechtian theatre is perceived by the audience more as a "rehearsal" that serves as a model for future learning. A "laboratory for blending theory with practice," Brecht's plays take different turns, offering fresh examples to debate while also allowing for the constant exploration of different possibilities in an environment free from dramatic repercussions. It should be noted that these experiments are guided by the Marxist perspective. (Bloch, 1953)

5. Theatre as a Medium for Social and Intellectual Change

This is not about detaching from feelings, as Brecht makes clear. It is my belief that the aims of Brechtian theatre might provide light on and context for this conflict. Brecht's use of the "emotion-reason" dialectic in his epic drama is an attempt to get the audience towards intellectual and critical scenario and make able to think critically and participate rather than just react emotionally.

Theatre, according to Brecht's "Small Organ for the theatre"—a "workshop in which the sketching of society is practiced, being able to influence it"—is something like that. Furthermore, Brechtian theatre is an instrument for improving one's "thinking" abilities. Stalinists have criticized Brecht's plays because they highlight issues without offering answers. Take his dramatic piece *The Good Man of Szechwan* as an example; just as the struggle is about to reach its climax, the protagonist suddenly emerges before the audience and demands to know how the conflict will be resolved. Similarly, the drama ends without Mother Kurajo realizing her errors and without providing a remedy to the audience. However, Brecht believes that the public can learn from Mother Kurajo's behaviour to be active and critical than passive and emotional while in the theatre.

It would appear that Brecht's intention is to provoke thought. The growth of awareness is facilitated by its constituent elements. As a dramaturg, Brecht initially encountered "Epic Opera" in *The Three Penny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of Mahogany City* in particular. At first, readers' impressions differed from the author's goals. This proved without a reasonable doubt that in order for an audience to understand Brecht's drama, they must be mentally equipped to do so. Because they were used to seeing different kinds of performativity, the first-run audience of *The Three Penny Opera* didn't get the proper cues to think critically about what was happening onstage; they got it all at once through epic theatre. Brecht mostly employs parody as a device in it. The author distances these views by having convicts reveal their civic

and Christian character. He uses sardonic writings—actualized through tables, projections, etc.—to highlight the epic progression of the action. There were multiple alterations to the play because, although the epic form was humorous and provocative, it failed to achieve the author's goal by highlighting just the ideological aspects.

The Rise and Fall of Mahogany City is Brecht's operatic portrayal of a capitalist utopia gone wrong. The setting is the made-up North American town of Mahogany during the turn of the twentieth century. While traveling to the coast in search of gold, three criminals become stuck in a desolate area. They decide to establish a city of entertainment, Mahogany, where the wealthy may enjoy the bars and brothels and leave their wealth behind. We should live in a city where everyone gets along.

Brecht presents a concrete political condition in Mahogany, describing it as anarchy stemming from the society's flaws that render it susceptible to crises. The author witnessed the capitalist world around the turn of the twentieth century, and Mahogany reflects that reality. Lifelikeness was essential for the city. The rule of money governs and establishes interpersonal interactions in Mahogany. All of the new laws— anarchy, theft, murder, and treason—are permissible in Mahogany. Brecht mocks and criticizes the illogical social system depicted in Mahogany City through the opera, which is defined as gender unrelated to reason.

From a formal standpoint, Brecht once again employs the episodic tools—titles, projections, songs, etc.—from The Three Penny Opera and depends on epic dramaturgy. The piece was conceived by Brecht and Kurt Weill as a criticism of conventional opera and was a joint creation of the two artists. Reality is mocked in The Three Penny Opera and comparable works by purposefully appealing to the audience's "irrational" wants, taking them to ridiculous extremes, and then putting them back in their proper place within the parody. It reminds me of what we've seen in Pirandello, where the mask is revealed for what it is: a mask. The brazen and inflammatory Brecht is even more apparent in his previous plays. He plans to accomplish his educational goal by directly influencing amateur painters. Brecht argues that this style of theatre is necessary for the working class and the student body since they are the parts of society that need art education the most. Brecht hopes to turn art into a field of education with this approach.

6. Conclusion

To conclude Bertolt Brecht brought something fresh and original to the stage with his idea of epic theatre. His goal in developing this style of theatre was to evoke action and criticism in the spectators at the same time as they were entertained. Traditional theatre, in Brecht's view, failed to engage in the critical and analytical engagement essential to bring about social and political change since it mainly aimed at emotional identification with people and events. The goal of Brecht's epic drama was to let the audience actively participate, rather than just observe, the theatrical experience. His goal was to have the audience become analytical thinkers and doers rather than passive observers of the characters' feelings. He did this by employing a number of strategies, such as the alienation effect, which he coined to encourage critical thinking and analysis rather than passive empathy by removing the viewer from the story and its characters. Participation from the audience was crucial to Brecht's epic drama. He hoped the audience would put the actors on stage to the test by discussing and debating what they witnessed. Brecht continually reminded the audience that they were watching an action and not reality by interjecting placards, music, and projections into the narrative flow. Because of this deliberate disturbance, they had to use both their emotions and their rationality. He had the belief that art had the power to evoke strong emotions while also challenging one's mind. It was Brecht's hope that his plays would make an impression

on audiences so strong that they would continue to consider the political and social themes long after they had left the theatre. Thus, Brecht's epic drama served as a vehicle for intellectual and social transformation, rather than merely an entertainment. Its goal was to start conversations, question the current quo, and motivate people to take action by appealing to their emotions as well as their rationality. Playwrights, directors, and actors all over the globe are still shaped by Brecht's belief in the theatre's dual role as an art form and an educational tool. This ensures that his legacy will be felt for years to come in the drama and theatre industries.

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