The Life And Works Of Bertolt Brecht Essay, Research Paper

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Bertolt Brecht was one of the chief innovators of modern theatrical techniques. He was both a poet and a playwright all in one. His epic theatrical creations developed drama as a forum for social and idealistic causes. Brecht?s imagination, artistic genius, and social views distinguish his work and his life.

Eugen Bertolt Brecht was born February 10, 1898 in Augsburg Germany, a town in Bavaria. His family was of middle class, which he came to resent, in favor of a Marxist proletarian society. In 1917 he attended Ludwig Maximillian University, in Munich, where he studied medicine.

Towards the end of the First World War, Brecht served in a military hospital. During this time in 199918, he wrote his first piece of work Baal, however it was not published until a later time. In 1922 he wrote his first success, Drums in the Night. In 1923 Baal was finally produced.

Until this time Brecht had lived in Bavaria. In 1924 he moved to Berlin, where he developed a strong antibourgeois attitude. Several people of his generation developed similar attitudes, as a result of the disappointing post World War I society in Germany. Among his friends, at this time, was a group of Dadaist, who aimed at destroying what they called the false standards and ideals of the bourgeois society. Brecht also became acquainted with a prominent theoretician named Karl Korsch, who taught him the elements of Marxism. During this time period from 1924 to 1933, Brecht worked briefly with the directors Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator. However he mainly worked with his own group of associates. In 1924 he wrote his first professional production Edward II. In 1927 he wrote A manual of Piety. In 1928, while working with the composer Kurt Weil, Bertolt Brecht created what many believe to be his finest piece of work; The Threepenny Opera; a satirical and successful ballad opera. In 1930 he wrote The Rise and Fall of the Town of Mahogany. Also during this year he wrote his first ?exemplary plays,? A Man?s Man, which introduced his unorthodox idea of ?epic theatre.? Epic theatre is a technique created by Brecht, which causes the audience to feel no emotions about a play, but to think critically about its content. This would become a well-used and important technique in Brecht?s later plays.

In 1933 Brecht?s Marxist political beliefs forced him to go into self-imposed exile, from fascists Germany. His writings had made him a natural enemy of the National Socialists, rising to power in his native country. He first managed to escape to Switzerland, then to Scandinavia. With help from some of his fellow artists and exiles, especially Lion Feuchtwagner, Brecht was able to come to the United States of America. He became anti-Nazi writer for a periodical published in Moscow, and produced the 1938 drama Fear and Misery of the Third Reich.

During this time Brecht wrote what are critically regarded as his greatest works. In 1943 Brecht?s desire to motivate social concerns, in his audience, led to the play The life of Galileo. In this play, through the character Galileo, Brecht reexamines the recurrent theme of obstacles to social progress. In 1949, he created Mother Courage and her Children, which enlists the spectators? feelings as well as their reason. This play was both a success and a failure. It was a success because it was highly popular, but it was a failure in that it caused the audience to feel sympathy for its characters, which violated Brecht?s technique of ?epic theatre.? In these mature works Brecht overgrew the single-minded didactic message of his earlier pieces, and achieved complex themes that would be impermissible under the official policies of communism.

For a brief period of time, Brecht lived in Hollywood on1954 argyle Avenue. He then moved into a house on 817 25th Street in Santa Monica, from 1941 to 1942. In 1943 Brecht moved into a house on 1063 26th Street. Brecht described the latter house in his diary saying this about it ?one of the oldest is about 30 years old, California clapboard, whitewashed, with an upper floor with two bedrooms. I have a long workroom (almost 7 meters), which we immediately whitewashed and equipped with 4 tables. There are old trees in the garden (a peeper tree and a fig tree). Rent is $60 per month, $12.5o more than in 25th street.? Brecht stayed in this house for the remainder of his time in the United States, until 1947. Around 1947 The United States of America was going through a red scare, or fear of the spread of communism. The House Un-American Activities Committee, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, questioned and accused anyone remotely suspicious of being a communist. After being summoned before this committee and being forced to give evidence, Brecht left the country on his own. He then spent the rest of the year and the whole year of 1948 in Zurich, where he worked mainly on the play Antigone-Modell; an adapted work from the translation of Sophocles.

Later that year Brecht worked on a play called A Little Orangum for the Theatre. Through this work Brecht revealed his theory of drama, which is that a truly Marxist drama must avoid the premise that the audience should be made to believe that what they are witnessing is really happening here and now. Brecht argued that the theatre should not seek to make its audience believe in or relate to the characters on the stage, but rather make the audience realize that what it sees on stage is merely an account that should be watched with critical detachment. A Little Orangum for the Theatre, thoroughly explained Brecht?s theory of ?epic theatre.?

In 1949 Brecht went back to Berlin to stage Mother Courage and her Children, with his wife Helene Weigel, in the title part. This led to the formation of Brecht?s own theatre company, the Berliner Ensemble. From that point on, Brecht devoted all his time and energy on the Ensemble and on staging his own plays. He was often criticized in Eastern Europe for being unorthodox; and was sometimes boycotted in the West for being too communistic. However, he had a great triumph at the Paris Theatre des Nations in 1955, and in the same year in Moscow he received a Stalin Peace Prize. Unfortunately this streak of success was to be short lived. Brecht died the following year in East Berlin.

Bertolt Brecht was an ingenious and skillful writer. He was a masterful poet who commanded many styles and moods. As a playwright he was a restless worker and a man in pursuit of idealistic change, by properly presenting his beliefs to the public. Bertolt Brecht was a man of rare humor, musical, and visual awareness. He did have some faults and did encounter difficulties in his life. However his strong character and intelligence helped him overcome these obstacles and become a success. He is remembered today, and will be throughout history, as one of the greatest authors of his time.

Mother Courage and her Children

Bertolt Brecht had two main periods of maximum creativity. The first period came at the onset of his manhood. During this time his writings were greatly influenced by the Dadaist group and by Marxism. Still though he created some of his finest poems before the age of twenty-five. The second period came when Brecht had to somewhat abandoned his hectic political activities during the depression years, and go into a self induced exile. This is the time, which many critics believe to be, when Brecht created his greatest plays. The Good woman of Setzuan, The Life of Galileo, and the Caucasian Chalk Circle were all among them. His greatest piece of work created at this time was Mother Courage and her Children, a play that many regard as his masterpiece and finest mature creation.

Mother Courage and her Children, is the story of a woman who, with her family, follows around the Thirty Years War to make a living as a peddler. The main characters of the play are Mother Courage, her daughter Kattrin, her older son Elif, her younger son Swiss Cheese, and several soldiers and officers.

Mother Courage?s real name was Anna Fierling, but all her children have different last names and different fathers. They are a rag tag bunch but are making a good living following the war and being peddlers. As the play goes on things only get worse. The army becomes desperate and starts taking things from Mother Courage without paying. Her peddling wagon is robbed and she ends up losing almost everything. As the war rages on, violence, death, and destruction surround her and her children. In the end she is ruined, and yet seems to have e learned nothing new about the nature of war, from her experience.

Mother courage was a very important play because it showed how peasants and lower class citizens could be used as tools for the socially elite. It exposed the commercial aspect of war, which some individuals take total advantage of. Mother Courage herself was one of these people. It never dawns on her that one must be high up in society and wealth to make a prophet from war. She seems to think of this somewhat in the middle of the play, but stops thinking about it towards the end. However, Bertolt Brecht?s main goal was not for Mother Courage to think about these topics, but for the audience watching the play to thing about them. Mother Courage and her Children succeeded in getting across the social issues that Brecht wanted to be noticed, while it used his style of ?epic theatre.? The Audience was never supposed to feel sympathy for Mother Courage, but to think of the reasons of why she was going through her ordeal. For these reasons Mother Courage and her Children is considered to be one of Bertolt Brecht?s finest works and one of this lasts century?s greatest plays.