

Was Bertolt Brecht a Modern Playwright?

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Brecht's style of presentation, the themes he had chosen, the contents of his plays and the anti-fascist politics embedded in them have been the subject of intensive analyses at Brecht conferences world-wide. However, the question of the extent to which Brecht could be considered a 'modern' playwright has not been discussed with the academic seriousness it warrants. The absence of a discussion of the 'modern' in relation to Brecht was the result mainly of the failure on the part of Brechtian scholars to distinguish between 'the Chronologically Modern' from 'the Revolutionary Modern'. Consequently, he has been customarily categorized amongst the 'modern' playwrights and repetitively branded as such, whereas he evinced a theatrical mode that was quite contrary to this, i.e. 'The Counter-Modern' style. If his contemporaneity [1898-1956] to the modern period is taken into account, he is, of course, a modern playwright. But to all intents and purposes, Brecht was an anti-modern playwright *par excellence*. The paper attempts to justify this conclusion by presenting arguments along the following lines. Firstly, whereas modern dramas simply shocked the audience or jarred their sensibilities in order to 'feel' experience, Brecht's creations forced the audience to engage in deep intellectual thinking about the theatre event, which was a startling departure from the prime objective of modern classical theatre. Secondly, '*Man Equals Man*' and '*The Measures Taken*' are two of Brecht's plays which challenged the inequitable economic *status-quo* prevailing under capitalism. These and similar themes of Brechtian plays have never formed the plots of modern classical bourgeois theatre. Thirdly, Brecht steadily developed a Marxist aesthetic tradition against conservative modern theatre, and this fact is quite evident in most of his plays. Brecht is far better qualified to be a 'Counter Modern' or 'Anti-Modern' Playwright than a 'Modern' one. The paper also stresses that it is a miscalculation to place Brecht on par with his modern theatrical counterparts and opponents such as Ibsen and Stanislavsky, the founding fathers of modern theatre. His didactic and epic drama styles, buttressed by his splintering techniques of alienation effect (A.E.), de-familiarization, *gestus*, dialectics and deconstruction, have convincingly demonstrated that his plays stood in stark refutation of 'modern' conservative dramaturgy and were hence 'Anti-Modern'. This paper would substantiate the above observations by presenting examples from his early, middle and mature productions.

Key Words: chronologically modern, revolutionary modern, anti-modern, conservative theatre, radical theatre, alienation effect, de-familiarization, deconstruction