

EPIC DRAMA HANDOUT

- Beginning in **Germany During the 1920s**, it is associated with **Bertolt Brecht**, whose aim was to transform society.
- Brechtian drama is **didactic** and **political**. It **evaluates the socioeconomic implications**, perceives the **need to alter the economic system** that would, in turn, bring about appropriate changes.
Brechtian plays are in line with Marxism (belief and value are determined by the prevailing economic mode of production and thus, world's problems were caused by Capitalism).
- Brechtian theatre is against a passive audience (where all the problems are solved at the end). It's not entertainment, and instead aims to challenge and awaken the audience to observe, think and draw conclusions from the ideas [which view is correct?]
- Alienation effect/estrangement: Anti-illusionistic. As a means to achieve his goal, Brecht arrived at the concept of **Estrangement**, distancing the audience from the stage events so it can view them critically.

Estrangement

In order to create 'estrangement' Brechtian drama reminded the audience that they were in the theatre by calling attention to certain theatrical elements:

- 1) Leaving **lighting instruments** unmasked, using **fragmentary setting, visible musicians, captions (short explanations)**, map or other images be **projected** onto screens.
- 2) Actors often sang directly to the audience or commented on the action. Use of music to contradict the true emotion that is portrayed in the scene [sad news & happy music= "your child is dead"/misket havası]
- 3) Epic dialectical theatre, in which a method of examining and discussing opposing ideas in order to find the truth. Characters portray either side of an argument e.g. government [let's go to war]/people [we will not]

4) Social realist (not naturalist) divert attention to faraway place to criticize. **Distancing the story either through time or place.** Example in China instead of Germany in another time period.

5) Breaking of the “fourth floor”: Actors often break character and challenge the audience by breaking the fourth wall and talk to the audience [“Tell us what do you think?”]

6) Use of comedy to distance audience from the more serious events taking part on stage.

7) Against the synthesis of all arts (Richard **Wagner** revolutionized opera through his concept of the **Gesamtkunstwerk** ("total work of art"), by which he sought to synthesize the poetic, visual, musical and dramatic arts, with music subsidiary to drama), reinforcing the others fully unified work.

Brecht advocated instead that each element makes its own comment.

E.g. Brecht’s SONGS often set ironic or disillusioned lyrics to lighthearted tunes; the disparity between melody and words was intended to make the listener more critically aware of the song’s implication.

8) Adopted a number of structural devices to create alienation, rather than having one scene flow smoothly into another, he calls attention to the knots tying scenes together. Therefore, he used captions, songs, or other devices to emphasize breaks in the action. **Instead of working slowly for a climax, each scene is developed for its own sake.**

9) Pioneer of ‘gestus’ gesture used to portray an unrelated emotion [using the action of a chicken to portray anger]

Brechtian Tradition in Britain

1-John Arden is Britain’s first Brechtian Playwright. e.g. Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance.

2-Edward Bond, believes that theatre should make them think, but audience’s emotions should be involved as well. e.g. *Lear*