

Books

(ed., with Robert Gillett): *Bertolt Brecht – A Reassessment of his Work and Legacy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

Even 50 years after Brecht's death, the complexity of his personality and the sheer richness of his work have lost none of their power to fascinate. In the intervening period, though, his influence has been pervasive. This semi-centenary volume of essays has been carefully designed to reflect both facets of the 'Brecht phenomenon'. It covers the whole of Brecht's career, from the early one-acter 'Kleinbürgerhochzeit' of 1919 (which is the subject of Marielle Sutherland's piece), to the *Sinn und Form* years immediately preceding his death (which Stephen Parker examines), while also paying careful attention to his predecessors (notably in the contribution of Frank Krause), his use of tradition, and his legacy. By way of redressing a tendency in Brecht reception to regard him mainly as a dramatist, the volume covers novels, poetry, film, photography, journalism and theory as well as plays. The approaches adopted too are equally multifarious, ranging from detailed exegesis to cultural criticism in the broadest sense and illuminating Brecht's work from a wide variety of different perspectives.

At the same time, the volume is carefully structured in order to constitute a coherent whole. At one level it is chronological, following Brecht's career from its lyric beginnings through his encounter with expressionism, his move to the city, and his experience of exile and GDR, to his death and afterlife. Within this broad sweep, there are also tighter clusters. With regard to each of the major genres, for example, questions of tradition, achievement and legacy are addressed. Thus the contribution of Ernest Schonfield details Brecht's debt to the picaresque. Klaus-Detlev Müller gives a careful account of Brecht's anti-aristotelian novels. Gerhard Neumann offers a subtle reading of Brecht's *Buckower Elegien*. David Midgley takes a careful look at poems on the subject of mortality. And Karen Leeder follows the traces of Brecht and his death in contemporary poetry. Michael Patterson revisits the question of Brecht's debt to Expressionism and hence of the roots of his theatre. Hans-Harald Müller takes a careful look at the *Leben des Galilei* and Robert Gillett discusses an avatar of this play in Grass's *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*. At the same time, the deliberate juxtaposition of different genres, which is such a feature of Brecht's dramatic theory, is shown to pertain in other contexts also. Thus the relationship between poetry and photography is explored in Tom Kuhn's contribution; that between poetry and dramatic enactment in the contribution of John and Anne White; while in Steve Giles's piece the notion of 'Verfremdung' is shown to be of central importance in critical theory as well as in the theatre.

Thematically, there is a concentration on two particular constellations: the city and mortality. The former is here enriched by a new investigation into the relationship between Brecht and *the* theorist of the modern city, Walter Benjamin, in the contribution of Erdmut Wizisla, but also painstakingly contextualized in that of Ulrike Zitzlsperger and seen from a post-modern, theoretical perspective in that of Andrew Webber. The latter of course dominates the poems of the *Svendborger Gedichte* analysed by Ron Speirs. It also constitutes a locus classicus where issues of tradition and legacy meet – here expressed in the typical Brechtian paradox of encompassing in the traditional guarantor of posterity the injunction 'verwische die

Spuren'. (It is no accident that the relevant poem is discussed in no fewer than three of the essays in the volume.) And these 'Spuren' themselves, are the subject of Martin Brady's contribution on 'Brecht in Brechtian Cinema', as well as of the final essay in the book, in which Godela Weiss-Sussex uses judgements about translations in order precisely to reassess Brecht's work and its legacy and thus summarize the concerns of the volume as a whole.

