

Book Reviews

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Post-Imperial Brecht. Politics and Performance, East and South. By Loren Kruger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. xiv + 399 + illus. £55; \$85 Hb.

Street Scenes: Brecht, Benjamin and Berlin. By Nicholas Whybrow. Bristol: Intellect, 2005. £19.95; \$ 39.95 Hb.

Reviewed by Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

How are we to teach Brecht today? And what does he still teach us? These two studies, different in style, interest and ends, suggest some answers. Kruger develops her perspective by addressing theatre companies and playwrights who may not be Brechtian in a strict sense, but who still share the conviction 'that performance and politics can create a resonant and effective field of force capable not only of interpreting the world but of changing it'. While agreeing with scholars like Reiner Steinweg that Brecht's *Lehrstücke* should be considered his 'most politically and theatrically advanced work', the major part of Kruger's book focuses on his work after 1945, on its continuation in the works of Heiner Müller, Frank Castorf and others in the German Democratic Republic, and on some 'post-Brechtian' productions of the 1990s. On the geopolitical compass, she generally focuses on the usually less regarded poles of the East and the South. She thus deals extensively with Brecht's reception in South Africa, examining in return the reception of South African Athol Fugard in the GDR, going on to contemplate the limits of the inherited understanding of political theatre in contemporary South Africa.

Her study is well informed in the huge field of Brecht criticism. Kruger thoughtfully evaluates and, above all, makes an original choice of topics, such as Brecht's attempt to versify of the *Communist Manifesto*, which hardly ever gets mentioned. It appears somewhat unfortunate, however, that she does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how to link Brecht's fascination with Marx, on the one hand, with 'asocial' characters like Fatzer, on the other. Nonetheless, and more importantly, her study opposes some fashionable attempts to wipe out Brecht's interest in, and his debt to, Marxist theory.

Nicholas Whybrow is less interested in re-reading Brecht, or in rescuing and reconstructing forgotten aspects of his work. Facing the alternative between plunging into the 'stuffy' Brecht archive and the vibrant city of Berlin, he had no doubt what Brecht

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