



ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

Bertolt Brecht—A brief history

A lot of Dario Fo's writing and performance is said to have been heavily influenced by Brecht.

Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898. He studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Munich. He was a medical orderly in a military hospital during the first world war. After the war Brecht returned to university but his interest in literature soon overtook that of medicine. He produced many plays often with socialist and marxist messages.

Brecht wanted to create a new approach to the theatre. He wanted audiences to be constantly reminded that they were in the theatre and move away from the stage's traditions of make believe. For him the theatre was a forum for political ideas, a place to be educated to be made to think and feel.

He developed the alienation effect (Verfremdungseffekt). This was designed to constantly remind the audience that they were watching a play and to encourage them to reflect on what they were watching. The following techniques tend to be used to create the alienation effect:

- playing with locations and times in plays,
- unnaturalistic speech,
- using a chorus or narrator to either sing or tell the story.
- the use of masks,
- actors sitting amongst the audience when not in a scene.
- visible staging equipment.
- use of large signs to summarise scenes.
- acting in the third person
- no elaborate props,
- use of placards with instructions written on them.
- musicians on stage and often announced before playing.
- use of non-naturalistic techniques such as montage {series of still images}.



Brecht fled Nazi Germany during Hitler's reign and wrote many anti Nazi plays. After leaving Germany in 1933, Brecht lived in Denmark, Sweden, the Soviet Union and America.

In 1949 Brecht founded the Berliner Ensemble and over the next few years it became the country's most famous theatre company. Bertolt Brecht died on 14th August, 1956.

Brecht was one of the most influential theatre practitioners of the 20th Century.