

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

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Sabine Berendse and Paul Clements, ed. and trans.

Brecht, Music, and Culture: Hanns Eisler in Conversation with Hans Bunge

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014.

312 p. £50.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-2435-5.

It has taken almost four and a half decades for an important book in German, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht*, to appear in English as *Brecht, Music, and Culture*. The English title is perhaps more accurate than the original, *Ask More Questions About Brecht*, in that Brecht is not always the central focus and wider issues are also considered and debated. The final conversation, for example, contrasts composer Eisler and Germanist Bunge's experiences of the First and Second World Wars respectively. This thematic shift appears to have little to do with the preceding thirteen conversations, but with hindsight it provides an unexpected prism through which to read the book in its entirety.

Eisler contrasts the class-based perspectives with which he entered the army with those of his interlocutor Bunge, who freely admits to his erstwhile enthusiasm for the Nazis' wars of aggression and his lack of insight into the workings of Hitler's Germany. Bunge thus differentiates himself from Eisler, and so the latter's utterances are retrospectively 'historicized', as Brecht would say. Eisler becomes an object of curiosity, whose standpoints may appear curious, dated, or even quaint today, yet it is the remarkable achievement of this book that the conversations preserve Eisler as a lively and committed commentator whose views still have something to tell us about his life and times. His reminiscences of his many and varied experiences with Brecht, and his reflections on art and socialism, provoke the modern reader with their wit, modesty, and candour.

The edition is a labour of love. Berendse dedicates the book to her father, Hans Bunge, and this affection is more than evident in the translation itself. Together with Paul Clements, she has crafted not only a readable but a highly engaging rendition of a series of conversations whose length makes them suitable for a sustained read or a more relaxed series of perusals. The editorial apparatus is largely informative and helpful, although references to the most recent German edition of Brecht should have been included. This minor niggle aside, the English edition offers rich anecdotal accounts of Brecht, the German Democratic Republic, and disquisitions on the relation-

ship between music and politics. The conversations, that span the years 1958 to 1962, live again and provide the contemporary reader with lively and unapologetic testament from a proud Marxist and Communist.

DAVID BARNETT

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Andrew Maunder, ed.

British Theatre and the Great War, 1914–1919: New Perspectives

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. xvi, 303 p. £55.00.

ISBN: 978-1-137-40199-1.

This book offers a timely and stimulating collection of essays, some of which provide more convincing new perspectives than others, but together make a substantial contribution to a growing field of scholarly engagement. Divided into sections – 'Mobilization and Propaganda', 'Women and War', 'Popular Theatre', and 'Alternative Spaces' – the volume covers areas from melodrama in Brixton, representations of women and work, music hall, and variety, to case studies of practitioners and practices, including Lena Ashwell and Edith Craig, British cinema regulation, Shakespeare in the war years, and entertainment in prisoner-of-war camps.

There are some excellent and well-focused essays such as Veronica Kelly's on the cultural circulations of the ill-fated Edith Cavell on stage and screen, Katharine Cockin on Edith Craig's Art Theatre in London in a 'khaki-clad and khaki-minded world', the volume editor's own essay on 'Melodrama and Suburban Theatre in Brixton 1915', and 'Entertaining the Anzacs' by Ailsa Grant Ferguson. Equally useful are Steve Nicholson on 'War on Stage' and Sos Eltis on women, war, and work, in which she accomplishes her usual sharp critique of works few have looked at since their original productions, fully contextualizing them in close readings of their relation to the complex gender politics of their time.

There is much in the volume for those who know little about the British theatre and its operations during the 1914–1918 war, and while some of the pieces are not as original or thorough in their coverage, there is also plenty for those more familiar with the period. Maunder has gathered a canny mix of essays and has done good work in making them cross-refer and connect with each other. There are some odd editorial mishaps (the assertion that Izrael Zangwill was an American goes unchallenged: he was actually an East End