



# **Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage (Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs)**

*Laura Bradley*

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This production history of *The Mother* provides substantial new insights into Bertolt Brecht's theatre and drama, his impact on political theatre, and the relationship between text, performance, and politico-cultural context. As the only play which Brecht staged in the Weimar Republic, during his exile, and in the GDR, *The Mother* offers a unique opportunity to compare his theatrical practice in contrasting settings and at different points in his career. Through detailed analysis of original archival evidence, Bradley shows how Brecht became far more sensitive to his spectators' political views and cultural expectations, even making major tactical concessions in his 1951 production at the Berliner Ensemble. These compromises indicate that his "mature" staging should not be regarded as definitive, for it was tailored to a unique and delicate situation.

*The Mother* has appealed strongly to politically committed theatre practitioners both in and beyond Germany. By exploiting the text's generic hybridity and the interplay between Brecht's "epic" and "dramatic" elements, directors have interpreted it in radically different ways. So although Brecht's 1951 production stagnated into an affirmative GDR heritage piece, post-Brechtian directors have used *The Mother* to promote their own political and theatrical concerns, from anti-authoritarian theatre to reflections on the legacies of state Socialism. Their ideological and theatrical subversion have helped Brecht's text to outlive the political system that it came to uphold.

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