

breath away again (Job 34:14; Pss 104:29; 146:4; Eccl 12:7). When someone's breath is hindered, e.g., by fear or pain, this status endangers that person's life (Job 9:18 [*rûah*]; Jer 4:31 [*nepes*]; Dan 5:23; 10:17 [*něšāmā*]) as well.

2. God's Breath. Breath (*rûah*) also rendered as "wind" or "spirit" is also an expression or manifestation of divine activity. According to Gen 2:7 God is the origin of (man's) breath and therefore of human (and animal) life. It follows logically that God himself is provided with breath. By contrast, idols do not have any breath, as they are only lifeless substance owing their existence to human craftsmanship (Ps 135:17; Jer 10:14 = 51:17; Hab 2:19). Thus the life-giving phenomenon of breath originates with the God of life, the Creator (Job 33:4, setting *rûah* and *něšāmā* in parallel) and Lord of life (Job 12:10). At the same time the idea that breath emanates from God contributes to an anthropomorphic concept of the divine. God's breath is a synonym of his word as the means by which he created the universe (Ps 33:6). But God's breath may also effect destruction (Isa 11:4; 30:28; 40:7), having a fiery (2 Sam 22:16 = Ps 18:5; Job 4:9; Isa 30:33 [*něšāmā*]) or an icy (Job 37:10 [*něšāmā*]) quality.

3. Breath as Metaphor. The term "breath" is sometimes employed as a metaphor of transitoriness and vanity. In seven instances the Hebrew text uses the word *hebel* which designates a gentle breeze or very soft exhalation. Being hardly perceivable this is next to nothing. Hence "breath" designates something transitory, vain, or even nothing. Human thinking (Ps 94:11) and more often human life is described in this way by Job (7:16) and in Psalms (39:5, 11; 62:9; 78:33; 144:4). Rarely, *rûah* (Job 7:7; Isa 57:13 set in parallel with *hebel*), and *něšāmā* (Isa 2:22) have a pejorative connotation and also refer to the vanity of life.

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Brecht, Bertolt

- I. Literature
- II. Music

I. Literature

The German writer and poet Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), arguably the most significant contributor to both the theory and practice of 20th-century drama and theater, has been the topic of numerous critical examinations, with the majority concentrating on the aesthetics of his epic theater theory, and on Marxist, feminist, and more recently postmodernist

interpretations. However, few scholars have studied the impact of his reading the Bible upon his oeuvre. However, as Martin Esslin mentions, it was not the Bible itself that influenced Brecht; rather, it was "the vigorous, outspoken language" of the Luther Bible that pervades the writings of Brecht the atheist (Esslin: 106).

Born in Augsburg to a Catholic father and Protestant mother, Brecht was confirmed in the Protestant faith in 1912. He continued to study the Bible in his university years, taking a course on "Research on the Life of Christ." That the young Brecht was very much under the thrall of Luther's language is evident from an early entry in his diary:

... certain sayings from the Bible are indestructible. They go clean through one. You sit there shaken by shudders that get under your skin and run right down your back as in love. (Brecht 1979: 36)

He thinks about the power of Luther's language, commenting:

In the beginning was not the word. The word is at the end. It is the thing's dead body... O God, please let my sight always cut through the crust, pierce it! (Brecht 1979: 40–41)

Brecht's early attempts at combining parables and quotations from the Bible with experimentation in stagecraft is evident in his precocious short one-act play *Die Bibel* (The Bible) which appeared in the student paper *Die Ernte* in January 1914. Borrowing the barest plot from the book of Judith, the 15-year-old Brecht situated the action in a Protestant Dutch city besieged by Catholics during a religious war. What attracted him to the story of Judith was neither her religious belief nor her personal motivation but the "utility value" of defining a social problem. Thus, even before his study of Marxism, Brecht was thinking dialectically to present blind belief in Christianity versus urgent societal needs.

The Girl in *Die Bibel* is the first archetype of all the touching maiden figures in Brecht's work who are prepared to make the supreme sacrifice to save their cities from destruction, and ultimately the parallel between the Girl's ethical choice to save others and Brecht's character the dumb Katrin in *Mother Courage and her Children* (*Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, written 1938–39) to give up her life to save the city is striking. Thus, revealed by both one of his greatest plays and his childhood play is that Brecht has already created his famous *Verfremdungseffekt*, or distancing effect, by situating the two works in the same remote historical context of the Thirty Years War (1618–48) and the Catholic-Protestant struggle in order to present contemporary problems.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, when Katrin is shot dead by enemy soldiers and the sound of those shots alerts the town to resist and save itself, one of the soldiers comments, "Sie hat's geschafft," or "she has accomplished [or finished] it." This

evokes the last words of Christ, which Brecht consciously “wanted to evoke . . ., with all their immense allusiveness” (Grimm 1998: 230). His identification of Kattrin’s death and sacrifice with Christ shows how he used the Luther Bible as a means of raising questions about social commitment and sacrifice of one for the sake of many others. Brecht’s plays abound in biblical quotations which are often used to heighten emotional identification with characters such as Kattrin from his play *Mother Courage* or are also often subject to his satirical negation, or what Hans Mayer refers to as “re-functioning” (66) of classic texts, including the Luther Bible. The same references to Christ’s passion were used in Brecht’s childhood play, which opens with allusive paraphrases of Matt 27:42 and 46.

As in *Die Bibel*, in *Mother Courage* Brecht sees the futility of passive religion and encourages the ultimate sacrifice of Kattrin and the Girl in *Die Bibel* to benefit society. In *Die Bibel*, the grandfather says, “We are not willing to recant . . . we will go to our destruction, if need be – for our faith” (*Die Bibel*: 12). From his perspective, faith alone can save them. Thus Brecht’s critique of traditional Christianity is definite, and those Christians who go in heavily for lip service, but pay no attention to active love of one’s neighbor are condemned. The grandfather unquestionably has such traits. “But I say unto you,” he reads aloud from the Bible, “Serve thy neighbor. Break bread with the hungry, and have pity on him who suffers” (*Die Bibel*: 8). And yet, when misery and poverty come close to him, he remains silent. In reaction, the Brother condemns the Bible for being “cold,” and calls on the girl to follow her “heart.” He confronts the grandfather, “Outside men scream and you hear them not; outside flames burn and you see them not. Grandfather, when the Day of Judgment arrives, how will you stand?” (*Die Bibel*: 11).

Later in his career Brecht went so far as to have the Bible itself appear on stage, not only as an object representing a value system but also as an object for the handling by actors as one of the props. In his play *The Mother* (*Die Mutter*, 1931–32) a copy is brought in from the wings, and eventually is torn to pieces during a violent discussion containing Brecht’s wriest observations on Christianity’s cynical worldliness and Marxist materialism’s ascendant spirituality. In the “Bible” scene in *The Mother* a group of women neighbors have come to sympathize with Pelagea Vlassova after the death of her son; the Landlady offers her a Bible for comfort, but Pelagea suggests that the Bible be given to the poor woman whom the Landlady is about to evict; perhaps she will find some explanations for her misery in that book. “Why speak of God?” she argues as she seemingly quotes from John 14:2, “Although they say there are many mansions in ‘our Father’s house,’ there are certainly too few in Russia. But

that they never tell you, and they don’t tell you why.” The Landlady blames Pavel’s death on Pelagea’s atheism, but Pelagea confronts her and the other well-intentioned but passive women with a lesson in Marxist economics. In reaction, the women grow more furious, tearing the Bible to shreds in an effort to it for arguments against Pelagea’s thesis.

Though from the beginning of his career Brecht derided blind religious belief, in 1928, when he was steeped in his study of Marx and fresh from the success of *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, 1928), he received an inquiry from a Berlin ladies’ magazine *Die Dame* as to the most pervasive literary influence on his life. His deliberately provocative response was: “You will laugh: the Bible!” (quoted in Esslin: 106). This is not surprising, for as Thomas O. Brandt aptly suggests, *The Threepenny Opera* is Brecht’s “Bibelcollage” (172). Reminiscent of the Bible-thumping grandfather in *The Bible* and Pelagea Vlassova’s landlady, the play begins with the Bible-carrying model of capitalist enterprise Peachum singing a morning hymn on the desirability of “Being given bread to eat and not a stone” (cf. Matt 7:9). The actions of men under capitalism, Brecht seems to say, are antithetical to the actions Jesus advocated. We would all like to be good, Peachum sings in the first act finale, but economic circumstances prevent us, for according to him man is not wicked enough for the capitalist world we live in. And at the end, Peachum reminds us that if you kick a man he will not turn the other cheek but will kick you back. While we pay lip service to the example of Jesus, we subscribe to the code of conduct of the amoral Macheath.

Though the mimicry of scriptural quotations in *The Threepenny Opera* may appear to be thoroughly biblical, or Christian, the defamiliarized quotations are quintessentially Brechtian, or indeed Marxist with the common unifier for these antithetical points of view stemming from his absorption of the language of the Lutheran Bible.

Evidence that Brecht possessed a Bible came to light when a small pocket Bible was found in his private library, an edition printed in 1924 with a flyleaf identification in typical Brechtian low caps bertolt brecht (Murphy: 474–84). The time of its purchase corresponds with that of his working on the Berlin production of his *Baal*, a play that abounds in biblical quotations and references, and simultaneously his undertaking the study of the “gospel according to Marx and Engels” (Fuegi: 51).

Perhaps, at the time of the query from *Die Dame* Brecht might have had the pocket Bible on his person. According to Murphy’s examination of Brecht’s pocket Bible, certain passages are marked in red pen or pencil. Murphy categorizes them as focusing on: Genesis, Exodus, and the historical books, to provide Brecht with satirical as well as

war-related materials; Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, for the role of death and the futility of individual struggle; Isaiah and Jeremiah, for social comment; and Matthew and John, for Jesus' passion and death (Murphy: 474). Murphy's discovery of Brecht's pocket Bible supports Grimm's comment that "Brecht knew the Scriptures 'extraordinarily well,' considered them literature 'of high quality,' loved their 'imagery,' and kept exploiting them as his favorite quarry and inexhaustible source" (Grimm 1985: 161). However, Brecht evidently did not read his pocket Bible only for religious edification, for pasted on the opposite side of the title page is the image of a smiling Buddha, and, on the back inside cover, a photo of a racing car.

That Brecht considered the Luther Bible superior to other versions of the Bible is evident when, much later in the U.S., he was working with Charles Laughton on the English-language production of his play *Life of Galileo* (1947), and they read the KJV as a source for the biblical quotations that permeate the play. However, later at home, as his daughter Barbara Schall recounts, he used to regale her with comparisons of the Luther Bible and the KJV, while "cussing with biblical (i.e., Lutheran) force and vividness" (quoted in Grimm 1985: 180).

Luther's language also informs one of the fundamental aspects of Brecht's theory of Epic Theater. In formulating his approach to a new style of acting Brecht focused on what he calls gestural language, and to illustrate his method he uses a sentence from Luther's Bible:

The Bible's sentence 'pluck out the eye that offends thee' is based on a gest – that of commanding – but it is not entirely gestically expressed, as 'that offend thee' has a further gest which remains unexpressed, namely that of explanation. Purely gestically the sentence runs 'if thine eye offends thee pluck it out' (and this is how it was put by Luther, who 'watched the people's mouth') ... The first clause contains an assumption, and its peculiarity and specialness can be fully expressed by the tone of voice. Then there is a little pause of bewilderment, and only then the devastating proposal. (Brecht 1964: 117).

Brecht's focus on only segments from Matt 18:9, Mark 9:47, and his omission of the follow-up that the consequence of not plucking out the offending eye is to be "cast into the fiery hell," exemplify typical Brechtian "refunctioning" of the original. Once he founded the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin, the Marxist Brecht used the reading of the Bible for "practice scenes" for actors, and in fact lists a "Bible scene" in the first place ahead of readings from Shakespeare or his own plays to train the actor's sense of the gestural richness of Luther's German.

Ultimately, Brecht's deconstructive approach toward different biblical books has much to do with the sociopolitical structure of Christianity he saw reflected in contemporary society, for in some of his plays the church actively participates in supporting

war: e.g., in *Mother Courage* or the trial of dissidents to established Christian values like in his play *Life of Galileo*. He relies on the social gospel of Matthew and Luke as means of pointing out the situation of the weak and defenseless, and may have absorbed these words from Matthew: "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from our Father who is in heaven" (6: 1). Esslin suggests that ambivalence marked his attitude toward the models he parodied that "under the cover of ridicule he could indulge the 'high-minded' even religious impulses which his rational, cynical self would not acknowledge" (126–27). In the end the mixture of the sacred and profane in Brecht's works reveals how seriously he pondered the lessons he found in Luther's Bible, and in many of his tragedies, his general reliance on the Bible goes beyond "blasphemy, allusion, and alienation" (Mayer: 50) to provide his audience a new way of thinking about society and its many injustices.

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II. Music

Brecht's collaborations with contemporary composers such as Kurt Weill (1900–1950), Hanns Eisler (1898–1962) and Paul Dessau (1894–1979), and Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) have given rise to a "distinctive and coherent body of theater music in the 20th century" (Drew/Robinson). Some of the musically significant texts with biblical references include: Weill and Brecht's two *Mahagonny* works; the "songspiel" *Mahagonny* (1927); the opera *Der Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1927–29); as well as *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, 1928, based on *The Beggar's Opera*); Eisler's settings of Brecht songs and music for several stage plays, e.g., *The Mother* (*Die Mutter*, 1931) and *Life of Galileo* (*Leben des Galilei*, or simply *Galileo*, 1947); and Dessau's music for *Mother Courage* (*Mutter Courage*, 1946 and 1948–49), among other works. Weill and

Brecht's secular cantata called *The Berlin Requiem* (*Das Berliner Requiem*, 1928) features subversive secular hymns with strong biblical connotations (the book of Psalms), and parts of the Requiem Mass. Weill and Brecht's *The Seven Deadly Sins* (*Die sieben Todsünden*, 1933) similarly reflects the "classical" Christian (medieval) deadly sins with their biblical background implying that in the 20th century, "medieval vices have been subverted into deplorable modern virtues" (Breivik 2008: 351).

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Nils Holger Petersen

See also → Baal (Deity)

Breeches

→ Dress

Brenner, Joseph Ḥayyim

Born in Novi Milni (Ukraine) on September 11, 1881, Joseph Ḥayyim Brenner was killed by Arab rioters in Jaffa in May of 1921. Like other Hebrew authors of the generation of the Hebrew Renaissance at the turn of 20th century, he received his Jewish education in a house of study (*bet midrash*). He studied with his childhood friend, Uri Nissan Gnessin, in the *yeshivah* of the latter's father in Pohep (Bryansk, Russia). As a *yeshivah* student, he read Hebrew literature and even tried to edit literary periodicals together with his friend Gnessin. Because of his attraction to socialist ideologies, he moved to Gomel (Belarus), where he published his first stories in the journal *ha-Melits* (1900, no. 37) and wrote his first short story collection, *Me'emeq 'akhor* (Warsaw 1901). In his first stories one can still detect the influence of neoclassicist Haskalah authors such as Judah Leib Gordon and Abraham Mapu, whose biblical style contributed to the revival of the Hebrew language. (Brenner wrote a monograph in Yiddish about Mapu.) Although the themes of Brenner's works are not themselves biblical, their style is, as can be seen from the title *Me'emeq 'akhor* ("From the Valley of Achor"), which is taken from Hos 2: 17, "make the Valley of Achor a door of hope." In this expression there is an early revelation of his unique conception, which critics have called the "nevertheless" of Brenner, which seeks, even in the accursed, suffering existence of

the Jew, hope for a decent, honorable life. It seems that the biblical element, to the limited extent that it is found in his writings, was a guiding principle for him, symbolic for the most part, as, for example, in the way that he used as the motto for his journal (*ha-Me'orer*; London 1906–7) the sentence: "For I come to awaken you, my brother, to awaken you, saying: Ask, o mortal, for the ancient paths, which is the way?" (no. 2: 1; cf. Jer 6: 16).

In his earliest writings, the Tanakh offered him ancient models of basic Jewish existence, as witnessed by the autobiographical hero Jeremiah Feuerman in the story *Ba-ḥoref* ("In Winter"; Krakow 1904; first published in *ha-Shiloah* 11–12 [1903]). From the Tanakh, Brenner also derived the outline of the form of primordial fatherhood (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), as alluded to in the name of the principal character, Jacob Abramson, in the novella *Misaviv la-nequdah* ("Around the Point"), which is an attempt to stimulate the revival of Hebrew creativity (*ha-Shiloah* 14 [1904]: 254–71, 405–31).

With his immigration to Palestine after a year's stay in Lwow (1908), Brenner became the central author of the Second Aliyah. He forcefully expressed his essential view of the Tanakh in his famous piece "In the Press and in Literature" (*ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir* 5 [1910] 25–26):

As for me personally, the Old Testament does not have the same value that other people ascribe to it, who call it "The Holy Scriptures," "The Book of Books," "The Eternal Book," etc., etc. I have long since been liberated from the thrall of the twenty-four books of the Bible ... but the same importance that I recognize and find in the Tanakh – remnants of memories from days long past, the embodiment of the spirit of our nation and the humane spirit which has been within us over the course of many generations and eras – this importance I find and recognize also in the books of the New Testament.

These words were part of a wider argument of Brenner's that was intended to minimize the importance of conversion, a major source of anxiety for the Jewish community. His stance, which came to be known as the "Brenner Event," triggered a polemic that stirred up public opinion in Palestine and in the Jewish world in the years leading up to World War I (1911–13).

And, indeed, the Tanakh did not represent for Brenner a religious authority, nor even a moral authority, but rather a model of human existence through which it is possible to see how to extract humankind from the tyranny of reality. To the lives of his protagonists, who are thrown into a contingent reality, he ascribes significance through a critical connection to the biblical story. The Tanakh provides a model for self-evaluation and for coping with a changing reality in a history-transcending domain. The prime example for this theme emerges in the story *ha-Motsa* ("The Solution"; *ha-Arets weha-avodah*, vol. 5 [1919]), which tells of the expulsion