SPACE AND TIME IN EPIC THEATER: THE BRECHTIAN LEGACY. By Sarah Bryant-Bertail. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester: Camden House, 2000; pp. 245. $70.00 cloth.

In *Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian Legacy*, Sarah Bryant-Bertail weaves together semiotics, postmodern historiography, and historical materialism, analyzing epic theatre from its inception to its contemporary manifestations in Europe, India, and the US. The book bears some comparison to Freddie Rokem’s *Performing History* in its theorizing about historicity and its broad range of theatrical examples. But instead of theorizing generally about history and its relation to representation, she grounds her analysis specifically in the self-conscious historicity of epic theatre. What distinguishes epic theatre is its foregrounding of the construction of space and time, its “dynamic, self-aware representations of space, time and history” (8), without any attempt to reconcile contradictions or tensions between these representations. According to Bryant-Bertail, Brecht and Piscator closely followed Marx’s historical materialism: “the theater was to demystify the operation of social, economic, and political forces by showing how certain orders of reality had developed historically and were perpetuated” (2–3). In this way, she articulates semiotics itself as a political gesture, echoing Eco’s idea that “because semiotics can reveal the construction of ideological texts, . . . it can be a form of social criticism and thus a form of social practice” (72). In epic theatre, everything is “history in the making,” or, as Bryant-Bertail phrases it, “the staging of historicity itself,” revealing history as “eminently changeable, a continuing work capable of being rewritten” (5). Herein lies its political efficacy, for the present as well as for the past.

After defining epic theatre, her concept of theatrical spatio-temporality, and explaining the ways in which epic theatre specifically acts as a “historicizing critique,” she demonstrates semiotics as a form of social criticism through her often brilliant analyses of specific performances. The first chapter deals with the initial collaboration between Piscator and Brecht, *The Good Soldier Schwejk* (1928). She focuses on the ways they used technology to foreground the play’s own creation and codification of history. She employs Michel de Certeau’s notions of “strategies” vs. “tactics” to reveal the soldier’s agency as well as his oppression. In the next chapter, on Brecht’s 1949 production of *Mother Courage* at the Berliner Ensemble, she demonstrates how *Schwejk* informed Brecht’s representation of time and space and use of technology in *Mother Courage*. The most valuable aspect of this chapter is its materialist feminist analysis, including an interesting overview of the role of the female characters, and also of the history of feminist criticism of Brecht’s plays and theories as well as his life. Chapter 3 rounds out her section on the epic theatre by discussing Brecht’s adaptation of Lenz’s *The Tutor*, written in 1774, and directed by Brecht in 1950 in East Germany, shortly after its founding. Bryant-Bertail argues that Brecht used the play as a warning to the intellectuals of the new republic to avoid subservience to the powers that be. The play is also notable because of its strong emphasis on the subjugation of the body by an oppressive society. Utilizing Foucault and Kristeva, Bryant-Bertail details the ways that Brecht’s production revealed not only this subjugation but also tactics of resistance.

The second half of the book examines several productions which Bryant-Bertail considers “the epic legacy in contemporary theater.” Unlike some other studies of “Brecht’s legacy” which simply examine plays that use Brechtian theatrical techniques, devoid of any political meaning, Bryant-Bertail has chosen well. She shows how these plays stage dialectical ideologies through culturally specific representations of time, space, and history. One of the most intellectually impressive chapters in the book is chapter 4 on *Peer Gynt*, in which she...
theatre: “Above all, treat the contrast between Aristotelian and epic work, the author uses a wonderful phrase to illustrate Iphigenia’s murder. Describing Mnouchkine’s production, through cuts, additions, and alterations, foregrounded one or the other of these two polarities to serve different ideological agendas.

In her final chapter, Bryant-Bertail describes Ariane Mnouchkine’s 1991–92 tetralogy *Les Atrides*. As with her discussion of Mother Courage, one of the strongest aspects of this analysis is its feminist perspective. Bryant-Bertail argues that by simply prefacing the *Oresteia* with Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Mnouchkine created the possibility of a feminist vision of history. Mnouchkine explicitly invited a dialectical (and therefore epic) reading of the play by providing multiple perspectives on Iphigenia’s murder. Describing Mnouch-kine’s work, the author uses a wonderful phrase to illustrate the contrast between Aristotelian and epic theatre: “Above all, *Les Atrides* is a staging not of a tragedy that was inevitable but of a history that did not have to be” (176). As she examines the roles of the women in *Les Atrides*, Bryant-Bertail reveals how “the body-as-sign is not simply in the theatrical time and space of the production but constitutes it, mapping out the Greek imaginary as a geopsychic territorial body to be defended and contested” (178).

In her conclusion, Bryant-Bertail provides one of the clearest articulations of *Gestus* ever, tying the notion of the body-as-sign to contemporary developments in historiography. She also raises the question: “What can be learned from the epic theatre’s stage critique of the representation of space, time and history?” (211). The answer lies in the idea that each era writes its own history in temporal and spatial images. She points out that we need to begin to understand the ways in which our own media represent “war and other complex and fateful events in sound bites and rapid images on the video or movie screen,” in order to “inter-vene critically as spectators,” imaginatively supposing the “history that did not have to be” rather than simply “passively acquiescing to the play of images” (211). Particularly in the wake of the history of the US since this book was written, this advice seems remarkably germane.

**SUSAN RUSSELL**
*Gettysburg College*

**YIDDISH THEATRE: NEW APPROACHES.**
Edited by Joel Berkowitz. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003; pp. xiii + 269. $59.50 cloth.

The claim of novelty runs throughout *Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches*, a collection of essays from some of the leading scholars of the genre, including (among others) Ahuva Belkin, Paola Bertolone, Leonard Prager, Seth L. Wolitz, Nahma Sandrow, and editor Joel Berkowitz. Each chapter stands as a rebuttal, often explicit, to an academy that has historically paid little attention to a body of work considered vulgar, sentimental, or otherwise unworthy of rigorous analysis. Belkin’s essay on “The ‘Low’ Culture of the *Purimshpil*,” for example, notes rightly that “[m]odern scholars addressing the history of Jewish literature have dismissed the *purimshpil* [seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Purim play] texts as examples of literary degradation” (32). Brigitte Dalinger, in “Yiddish Theatre in Vienna, 1880–1938,” notes “[o]nly the end of the twentieth century, however, has seen the beginnings of scholarly research on these topics” (107). David Mazower’s critical biography of composer Joseph Markovitsch, “Stories in Song,” concludes with the declaration that Markovitsch’s “distinctive voice deserves greater recognition” (137). The book’s message is clear: it is time for Yiddish theatre to emerge from the ghetto of “low culture” and assume its rightful place as an object of serious scholarly study.

In his introduction, Berkowitz delineates some of the unique obstacles that Yiddish theatre poses for historians:

Yiddish performers and playwrights were often itinerant not just as entertainers seeking out new audiences, but also as Jews fleeing persecution and economic hardship. Many of them made their careers in a variety of countries, and not infrequently in two or more languages. Their movements can be difficult to retrace, their manuscripts difficult or impossible to recover. Countless performers and writers were murdered in ghettos, concentration camps, and gulags. . . . In short, the usual barriers to historical scholarship are magnified in the case of the Yiddish theatre by the violent upheavals of its modern existence.

When we consider what a daunting task such history can present, the significance of each of the essays in *Yiddish Theatre*, and of their publication in one English-language volume, cannot be underestimated. Where else can a reader turn to find first-rate scholarship on such diverse subjects as purimshpilim, early twentieth-century Yiddish theatre criticism, and the controversial London production of Sholem Asch’s *Got fun nekome* (God of