

Mert Morali

Transformation through Translation: The Introduction of Bertolt Brecht and Epic Theatre into the Turkish Theatrical System

Abstract: This chapter investigates how epic theatre was introduced to the Turkish theatrical system in the late 1950s and mid-1960s through the translation and rewriting of Bertolt Brecht's plays. The early translations of Brecht's work into Turkish initiated the introduction of epic theatre as a genre into the Turkish theatrical system. These translations were accompanied by a plethora of paratextual materials, including extended prefaces that accompanied the in-print translations of Brecht plays, opinions in local newspapers, play reviews, and theoretical writings on epic theatre. The introduction of this novel genre was further encouraged by the inaugural Brecht performances on the Turkish stage by various theatre groups. The Turkish staging of Brecht led to heated debate and significant division not only among theatre professionals but also within the broader cultural landscape and public sphere. However, the Turkish translations of Brecht plays did not merely challenge the political and intellectual life of Türkiye during the 1960s; the innovative aesthetic and ideological nature of Brecht's works in Turkish translation also facilitated the production of the first Turkish epic plays such as *Keşanlı Ali Destanı* [*The Ballad of Ali of Keshan*] by the Turkish playwright Haldun Taner. The translations, rewritings, and indigenous epic plays collectively laid the foundation for a transformation in the cultural landscape, resulting in the emergence of a new Turkish epic theatre and the creation of a new repertoire.

Keywords: translation, rewriting, cultural transfer, theatre history, epic theatre

1 Introduction

Translation has always served as a driver of innovation within the Turkish literary and theatrical landscape. During the nineteenth century, the theatrical traditions of the Ottoman Empire diverged considerably from Western drama. In essence, drama as understood in the West was non-existent. The popular form of public entertainment was the traditional shadow theatre, known as *Karagöz*.¹ However, the *Tanzimat*

¹ Further information about the theatre in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century can be found in *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839–1908* [*Turkish Theatre during the Reformation and Despotism Period 1839–1908*]. In this book, theatre historian and scholar Metin And (1972) provides extensive information on the theatre of the period. *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi* [*The History of*

[Reformation] period of the nineteenth century witnessed the introduction of new literary forms, such as the novel and play, into the Ottoman literary and theatrical system, facilitated by translations from Western literature (Berk 2006, 3). These translations, particularly those from French literature, spurred the creation of New Turkish Literature in the second half of the nineteenth century (Paker 1987, 31). Multiple actors played pivotal roles in the emergence of this new literary and theatrical system. During the early nineteenth century, an Armenian minority within the Empire, known for its vibrant cultural production, undertook the first translations of Western dramas, thus initiating a transformation in the Ottoman theatre system. Hasmik Stepanyan (2008, 1438) highlights that between 1727 and 1968, approximately 2,000 Turkish translations, including 500 plays, were produced in Armenian letters across fifty printing houses in 200 cities. Furthermore, the governor and statesman Ahmed Vefik Paşa's translations and unwavering support significantly bolstered the development of drama as a genre. Özlem Berk (1999, 95) notes that Ahmed Vefik Paşa aimed to promote theatre and drama within the Ottoman Empire through his translations and staging of plays by Molière.

Echoing its pivotal role within the Ottoman Empire, translation continued to have a formative influence on Turkish culture in the early years of the Republic of Türkiye. Following the abolition of the Sultanate in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established a new Republic that looked to the West as a model and implemented policies aligned with the Westernisation movement. In this context, translation activities once again played a vital role in shaping the new Turkish identity and acculturating the public through a new repertoire heavily influenced by Western works (Tahir Gürçağlar 2008, 51). The Translation Bureau, founded by the Ministry of Education in 1940, compiled an extensive list of literary classics aligned with the Republic's Westernisation policy and undertook their translation (Karantay 1991, 98), resulting in the translation of 1,247 works into Turkish (Tahir Gürçağlar 2008, 71). These translations contributed to a diverse cultural atmosphere. Between 1923 and 1950, the majority of repertoires in orchestras, theatres, ballets, and operas consisted of translations of Western plays (Berk 2006, 11).

Turkish Theatre] by Refik Ahmet Sevengil (2015) focuses particularly on the theatre during the *Tanzimat* and *Meşrutiyet* [the Constitutional Era] in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, Mehmet Fatih Uslu (2015) offers a novel perspective on nineteenth century theatre in the Ottoman Empire, with a particular focus on Turkish and Armenian drama, in his work *Çatışma ve Müzakere: Osmanlı'da Türkçe ve Ermenice Dramatik Edebiyat* [*Conflict and Negotiation: Turkish and Armenian Dramatic Literature in the Ottoman Empire*]. For a more literary and comprehensive discussion of Ottoman literature during the *Tanzimat* period, please refer to *Tanzimat ve Edebiyat: Osmanlı İstanbul'u'nda Modern Edebi Kültür* [*Tanzimat and Literature: Modern Literary Culture of the Ottoman İstanbul*], edited by Mehmet Fatih Uslu and Fatih Altuğ (2020). Finally, for those seeking to gain insight into the role of translation in the *Tanzimat* period in the Ottoman Empire, Özlem Berk's (1999) *Translation and Westernisation (from the 1840s to the 1980s)* is an invaluable resource.

Turkish history witnessed significant upheavals in the 1950s during the rule of the Democrat Party (DP). After years of social turmoil, the extremely tense political climate eased with the adoption of a new constitution following the 1960 coup d'état against the DP. Thanks to the new constitution, theatre circles also celebrated a wave of relative freedom in the early 1960s (Gürün 2020, 40), which in return encouraged theatre activities within the country. The renowned translator, poet, and intellectual Talat Sait Halman (1972, 231), the first Minister of Culture, points out that the booming theatre activities of the 1960s could be the most significant development of the period for the Turkish intellectual life. Halman (1972, 231) also notes the coexistence of theatrical forms and styles, such as vaudevilles, modernised shadow theatre, musicals, and Brechtian epic theatre, alongside social and political satire. Regarding the richness of the theatrical atmosphere in this period, theatre scholar Müzeyyen Buttancı (2010, 65) highlights the creation of the first politically engaged theatres such as the Dostlar Tiyatrosu, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu, Ankara Birliği Sahnesi, and Devrim için Hareket Tiyatrosu.

In this atmosphere, Bertolt Brecht's works and epic theatre were introduced to the Turkish theatrical system through translations in the mid-1950s (Erkazancı Durmuş 2020, 87) and gained significant traction in the mid-1960s. These initial efforts to introduce Brecht can be interpreted as a response to a demand for a novel theatrical form based on new aesthetics. Brecht and his epic theatre could potentially revitalise the Turkish theatrical landscape and serve as a political tool by prompting audiences to engage in critical discourse regarding societal and political issues within the country. Brecht's epic theatre demonstrably possesses such potential as a distinct theatrical approach. It actively encourages audiences to critically analyse what unfolds on stage and fosters a critical perspective towards real-life socio-economic and political developments.

This chapter examines a modern instance of the emergence of a new theatrical form in the Turkish theatrical system with a focus on the notions of translation and rewriting.² To this end, it investigates how epic theatre was introduced to the Turkish theatrical system through the translations and rewritings of Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht's works, which sparked heated debates within Turkish society in the 1960s and paved the way for the birth of the first indigenous epic works in Turkish. For

² It is challenging to draw a clear line between the notions of translation and rewriting since the boundaries between original and translation may be blurred in numerous instances. Nevertheless, I refer to the notion of *translation* to denote translation proper, whereas I employ *rewriting* to refer to forms of textual production such as essays, interviews, reviews, columns and to a certain extent, indigenous texts, since these forms of textual production rewrite texts, authors/playwrights and on occasion, a whole theatrical tradition. Still, in certain instances, these "rewritings" can unite translations and original works within the same text. To illustrate, a theoretical essay may draw upon the translation of various sources and the original writing of the author, thereby blurring the distinction between the two.

understanding the introduction of novelties through translation and the impact of Brecht's work on the Turkish theatrical system, Itamar Even-Zohar's (2012 [1990]) polysystem theory offers valuable insights that facilitate conceptualising the entire transfer process and the interaction between the translated literature and target systems. In his theory, Even-Zohar (2012 [1990]) posits that culture is comprised of interconnected systems. These systems collectively constitute a polysystem where various systems coexist in a constant mode of change and interaction. In a literary polysystem, translation plays a pivotal role, even though it is often considered a secondary. It shapes the home literary system and leads to the creation of new repertoires. Even-Zohar (2012 [1990], 163) considers translated literature "not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but as a most active system within it." He emphasises that translated literature interacts with the target system in two ways: (1) In the selection of source texts based on the conventions of the target system and (2) in the adoption of "the norms, behaviours, and policies" prevailing in the target system – both evidently reveal Even-Zohar's view on translated literature (Even-Zohar 2012 [1990], 163). He explains that these positions can vary significantly, such that translation and translated texts may play different roles and affect the system in contrasting ways. If translation holds a "central" position in the target system, it plays an "innovatory" (primary) role that influences the creation of repertoire by importing new forms into the target system. On the other hand, when it holds a "peripheral" position, translation plays a "conservational" (secondary) role, preserving the established norms and conventions of the target system instead of serving as a source of innovation (Even-Zohar 2012 [1990], 163). There could be three situations in which translation will fulfil a central role in a target system:

(a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is young, in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either peripheral (within a large group of correlated literatures) or weak, or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. (Even-Zohar 2012 [1990], 164)

The late 1950s and 1960s in Türkiye present a case study that aligns with the final situation outlined in Even-Zohar's framework. Faced with potential stagnation in the production of novel theatrical forms, intellectuals (authors, playwrights, translators, critics, etc.) in the early 1960s turned their gaze to new modes of expression within Western theatre. This shift can be interpreted as similar to the dynamics that unfolded in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. In this context, it can be argued that translation facilitated the importation of novel theatrical forms into the Turkish theatrical system, ultimately leading to the emergence of epic theatre as a new form and repertoire.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that translation, despite its innovative and central role, is not the sole medium for introducing novelty into a target system. More often than not, it coexists alongside other forms of textual production, including rewritings and the composition of indigenous texts – the nascent forms of the same

literary form expressed in the language of the target system. Much like translation, rewritings play an active and transformative role in the introduction of new works or theatrical forms altogether. However, it is crucial to recognise that this form is far from being objective or neutral. André Lefevere (1992, 9) posits that rewriting constitutes an effective form of manipulation. He elaborates that rewriters “adapt and manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in,” ultimately constructing “images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature [. . .] under the constraints of certain ideological and/or poeto-logical currents” (Lefevere 1992, 5–8). It is through these manipulated representations that the target audience encounters the work. Consequently, Lefevere (1992, 4) argues that rewriting is not merely “ancillary” and is, in fact, “the lifeline [. . .] [between] high literature [and] the non-professional reader.” In other words, individuals engage with literature through the lens of those who rewrite the original, regardless of the specific form this rewriting takes.

This chapter argues that diverse forms of rewriting, including essays, interviews, reviews, and columns, and translations occupied a central position and played an innovative role in the creation of a new epic theatre repertoire in the Turkish theatrical system. Rewriters, acting as social agents, contributed to shaping a particular image of Brecht’s work and laying the groundwork for a new theatrical form during a period of crisis or vacuum within the Turkish literary and theatrical system. It is also important to emphasise that these rewritings often drew upon translation, frequently combining translated material and original writing to varying degrees, thus blurring the lines between the two. Furthermore, the roles of rewriters and writers often overlapped, with individuals functioning in both capacities.

Leveraging this theoretical framework, this study is structured into three sections. These sections aim to provide a comprehensive picture of the initial attempts to introduce Brecht and epic theatre to the Turkish literary and theatrical landscape. The first section focuses on *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* [*The Good Person of Sezuan*], the first Brecht play translated into Turkish, and examines the political and social repercussions of this process. The second section investigates two sources classified as rewritings of Brecht in Turkish by the author of this study. The first source is *Bert Brecht Özel Sayısı* [*Bert Brecht Special Issue*] (1964), published by Istanbul City Theatres, which features introductory articles on Brecht in Turkish alongside translations of selected Brecht works. The second source is *Türkiye’de Brecht* [*Brecht in Türkiye*] (1976) by theatre critic, translator, and scholar Özdemir Nutku. Nutku’s book includes his reviews of Brecht plays staged in the 1960s and 1970s alongside theoretical articles and translations on Brechtian theatre. The third and final section centres around the first epic play in Turkish, *Keşanlı Ali Destanı* [*The Ballad of Ali Keshan*] by renowned Turkish playwright Haldun Taner (1970 [1964]). This final section explores the play’s international reception and draws comparisons between the traditional Turkish theatre, *The Ballad of Ali Keshan*, and Brecht’s works from the perspective of epic theatre.

The common thread tying these three sections together is the involvement of the same individuals who were instrumental in the translation, rewriting, and original writing of epic theatre in Turkish. Through the examination of these diverse examples, this three-part structure illuminates the process by which Brecht was first introduced to the Turkish theatrical system and how this gradually ignited a transformative movement. Investigating how translators, theatre scholars and critics, and playwrights engaged in various processes of text production during the migration of Brecht and epic theatre into the Turkish theatrical system can broaden our perspective in multiple ways. Firstly, this study sheds light on how the migration of texts from one culture to another, an inevitable result of global connectivity, shapes the formation and transformation of new literary forms and culture in general. Secondly, it contributes to overcoming the methodological nationalism inherent in philology. An isolated methodology that does not take global connectivity into consideration will fail to illuminate the interconnected practices of textual production and the relationship between various actors and networks. In this sense, this chapter can serve as a testament to the value of a perspective based on Connected Philology³ in elucidating the processes of textual production and the roles of multiple actors in the transfer of Brecht and epic theatre.

2 The introduction of Bertolt Brecht in Türkiye: The translation of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*

Epic theatre was introduced to the Turkish theatrical system via the translation of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (hereafter referred to as *Sezuan*) – the first translation of a Brecht play into Turkish. *Sezuan* can be seen as the catalyst for a new repertoire within the Turkish theatrical system, illustrating the innovative role translation plays as suggested by Even-Zohar (2012 [1990]). The initial reception of *Sezuan* in Türkiye reflected the country's deep political divisions: while facing political bans and violent attacks fuelled by accusations of communism, it garnered praise and sparked heated debates, ultimately inspiring the production of similar works.

One of the most valuable bibliographical sources on Turkish theatre, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Tiyatro Bibliyografyası* [*Bibliography for the Turkish Theatre during the Republican Period*] (hereafter referred to as the *Bibliography*), compiled by Ahmet Borcaklı and Gültür Koçer (1973), provides a comprehensive listing of plays published within the Republican Era. Notably, it identifies *Sezuan* as the first Brecht play trans-

³ I would like to express my gratitude to the organisers of the conference “Beyond Comparison: Towards a Connected Philology” for providing all the participants with the opportunity to share their intriguing works and paving the way for the creation of this book.

lated into Turkish. Published in 1957 by Şehir Printing House, the translation was made by Adalet Cimcoz, with Teoman Aktürel handling the translations of the songs and poems within the play. After a five-year gap, *Sezuan* was followed by Ünal Üstün's translation of *Die Ausnahme und die Regel* [*The Exception and the Rule*], published by Sıralar Publishing House in 1962. This marked the beginning of a surge in Brecht translations into Turkish, with works such as *Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar* [*Senora Carrar's Rifles*] (tr. Teoman Aktürel), *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* [*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*] (tr. Adalet Ağaoğlu), and *Leben des Galilei* [*Life of Galileo*] (tr. Adalet Cimcoz and Teoman Aktürel), all published in the same year. In 1963, the pace of both translations and the first performances of these works increased substantially. Brecht's popularity continued to grow, as evidenced by further translations in 1965, including *Die Dreigroschenoper* [*The Threepenny Opera*] (tr. Tuncay Çavdar), *Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit* [*A Respectable Wedding*] (tr. Hasan Kaya Öztaş), and *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* [*Mr Puntila and His Man Matti*] (tr. Adalet Cimcoz). All translated Brecht works are of major significance within the Turkish theatrical system due to their politically and aesthetically provocative nature. However, the first translation of *Sezuan* stands apart for two key reasons. Firstly, it can be argued that *Sezuan* paved the way for the introduction of a vast repertoire within a new theatrical form – epic theatre – and encouraged the translation of other Brecht works within the Turkish literary and theatrical system. Secondly, it ignited heated political and ideological debates, revealing the deep political divisions present in Turkish society during the 1960s.

The first Turkish translation of *Sezuan* was completed in 1957 by Adalet Cimcoz. Cimcoz had been encouraged by the well-known Turkish playwright Haldun Taner, who would go on to author the first Turkish epic play, *Keşanlı Ali Destanı* in 1964 (Yücekurt Ünlü 2019, 162). In an interview (n.d.), Taner recalls witnessing a rehearsal of *Sezuan* and seeing Brecht himself, an experience that left him with a deep admiration for the play, particularly the epic theatre technique. Upon returning home, he persuades Cimcoz to undertake the translation. According to information from the *Bibliography* (1973), the first edition of *Sezuan* in Turkish also includes various short stories and poems by Brecht. Taner confirms this in his interview, adding that he authored the first Turkish essay on the technique of Brechtian theatre specifically for this edition. This suggests that the *Sezuan* translation was likely conceived as an introductory work, aiming to familiarise Turkish audiences with Brecht's diverse artistic output and the theoretical framework of Brechtian theatre.

Sadly, the initial introduction of *Sezuan* to the Turkish theatrical landscape faced significant political and social challenges. Shortly after its publication in 1957, the book was banned over accusations of promoting communist propaganda (Yücekurt Ünlü 2019, 162). Although the ban was eventually lifted after an investigation had found no evidence of such content, the play had already lost momentum due to the controversy (Ay 1964, 5). Even the prestigious Istanbul City Theatres, which had initiated rehearsals in 1957, cancelled their planned staging. Despite these setbacks, 1964

marked a turning point, as the Istanbul City Theatres announced their intention to stage *Sezuan* in the 1963–1964 season.

However, in March 1964, this enthusiasm was tragically overshadowed by a reactionary attack on the Tepebaşı Dram Stage where the play was being staged. As reported by Lütfi Ay (1964), a mob stormed the theatre, vandalising and burning posters, accusing the play of communist propaganda. Strikingly, the attackers set fire to the printed translations of the play to reveal their supposed subversive content. This incident sparked a heated debate among intellectuals, reflecting the substantial political polarisation within mid-1960s Türkiye. While some viewed the attack as an assault on democracy and freedom (Nutku 1976, 61), urging the Istanbul City Theatres to stand firm against such reactionaries, others, like Tarık Buğra, condemned Brecht as a communist sympathiser (Gürün 2000, 83). Ultimately, although it is unclear whether this was directly or indirectly linked to this incident, Muhsin Ertuğrul, the esteemed head of the City Theatres, was removed from his position in 1966, and the theatre did not stage another Brecht play until 1975.

Despite the unfortunate events surrounding the attempted staging and their aftermath, *Sezuan* garnered significant appreciation from some theatre experts. In his column, Lütfi Ay (1964) lauded not only Beklan Algan's direction but also the translation by Adalet Cimcoz and Teoman Aktürel. Ay (1964, 32) praised Cimcoz's translation for its clarity and fluency, while commending Aktürel's translation of the poems for preserving their poetic value. He further noted that the play's most significant contribution to Turkish theatre was its introduction of epic theatre to both audiences and playwrights, potentially inspiring them to create similar works (Ay 1964, 32).

This tumultuous journey of *Sezuan* through the Turkish theatrical landscape highlights the resistance new forms can encounter, not only on aesthetic grounds but also politically. Texts inherently embody the ideology of their creators. When crossing cultural borders, they may face challenges due to their incompatibility with the norms of the target system. In this context, Even-Zohar's (2012 [1990]) observation regarding the two ways translated literatures engage with the target system is particularly relevant: the selection of source texts and their adaptation to the norms, behaviours, and policies in their use of target literary repertoire. Viewed from a broader perspective, it is unsurprising that Brecht – a figure perceived as novel and oppositional by certain segments of Turkish society – encountered resistance from conservative forces. However, as will be demonstrated in the following sections, this resistance ultimately could not prevent the transformative influence his works gradually exerted on the Turkish theatrical system.

3 Rewriting Bertolt Brecht in Turkish: The cases of *Bert Brecht Special Issue* (1964) and *Brecht in Türkiye* (1976)

Building upon the impact of *Sezuan* on Turkish theatrical system and intellectual discourse, this section investigates two significant contributions to the reception of Brecht's theatre in Türkiye. Firstly, the *Bert Brecht Özel Sayısı* [*Bert Brecht Special Issue*],⁴ published by the Istanbul City Theatres in 1964, just prior to their unfortunate attempt to stage *Sezuan*, is examined. This dedicated publication serves as a historical document, revealing the Istanbul City Theatres' enthusiasm for staging the first professional Brecht play on the Turkish stage. An analysis of this publication provides valuable insights into the early theatrical engagement with Brecht's work in Türkiye. Secondly, *Türkiye'de Brecht* [*Brecht in Türkiye*] (1976) by renowned Turkish director, translator, scholar, and critic Özdemir Nutku is explored. This work compiles Nutku's own reviews of Brecht plays staged in Türkiye during the 1960s and early 1970s. Beyond mere reviews, the book also includes informative essays on Brechtian theatre that aim to educate the audience on the principles and techniques of epic theatre in a clear manner. Nutku's contribution goes beyond mere documentation; it serves as a valuable resource for Brecht's reception within the Turkish theatrical landscape.

3.1 *Bert Brecht Special Issue* (1964)

In 1964, as a prelude to their historic staging of *Sezuan*, the Istanbul City Theatres dedicated an entire issue of their renowned journal to Bertolt Brecht. This publication served as a platform for key figures involved in introducing Brecht's work to Turkish audiences, including the prominent playwright Haldun Taner. Taner's contribution to the special issue is noteworthy not only for its biographical information about Brecht and introductory overview of his work but also for its expression of profound admiration for *Sezuan*. This is particularly striking considering Taner's familiarity with Brecht's more established and canonical plays. It suggests that *Sezuan*, despite its relative obscurity in Turkish theatrical landscape at the time, held a distinct allure for Taner and potentially reflected a wider enthusiasm surrounding the play's upcoming Turkish premiere.⁵

Adalet Cimcoz ve Teoman Ektürel'in Brecht'in sanatı hakkında Türk okuyucusuna, belki de seyircisine bir fikir vermek için çevirip sunduğu *Sezuan*'ın İyi İnsanı, epic tiyatro estetiğinin en usta

⁴ It is difficult to comprehend why the publishers decided to abbreviate Brecht's name. As I understand it, there are no explanations for this abbreviation.

⁵ All translations from Turkish are my own unless stated otherwise.

ve canlı örneği olmak bakımından da ayrıca ilgiye değer. Bu piyeste mimik, söz, satir, müzik, şiir, şarkı tam dozda bir ahenk içinde birleşmişlerdir. Yabancılaştırma efektleri hiç bir piyesinde bundaki kadar Rahat ve güzel taksim edilmemiştir. (Taner 1964, 7)

[*Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, translated by Adalet Cimcoz and Teoman Aktürel to familiarise the Turkish readership with Brecht's art, deserves attention as one of the greatest and most colourful examples of epic theatre. The play masterfully harmonises gestures, lyrical elements, satire, songs, and poems, creating a nuanced and impactful theatrical experience. Alienation effect has never been created so delicately on the stage.]

Several factors might have contributed to Haldun Taner's praise of *Sezuan*. Firstly, it is significant that this play had marked his initial encounter with Brecht's work, experienced live during a performance in Munich. This first-hand exposure might have influenced Taner, fostering a strong emotional connection with the play. Secondly, it is plausible that Taner's enthusiastic description was aimed at attracting a large Turkish audience to the upcoming performance. The deliberately vibrant and slightly exaggerated tone could have served as an invitation to potential viewers. In other words, by highlighting the play's captivating elements, Taner might have aimed to arouse curiosity and encourage attendance at the Istanbul City Theatre's new production.

Another contributor to the special issue was the translator of *Sezuan*, Adalet Cimcoz. In her contribution, Cimcoz provides a thematic analysis of the play and connects it to the principles of epic theatre, informing the Turkish audience about this novel theatrical form:

Oyunda insanın yalnız duygu yolu ile, acımakla iyi olamayacağı, ama yalnız akıl yolu ile de tam bir iyiliğe ulaşamayacağı verilen örneklerle belirtilmiştir. Seyirciye hiç bir öğüt verilmiyor. Tanrılar bütün dünyayı geziyor, çeşitli ülkelerde yaşayanlardan iyi insanı bulmak istiyor, ama bulamıyorlar. İyi insan olmak, mutluluğa ermek, aradaki ölçüyü bulmakla olur. Bu olaydan yalnız biri ile mutluluğa varılamayacağını açıklayan Brecht, aradaki ölçüyü kendisi de gösteremiyor. Epik tiyatronun bir özelliği olarak bu ölçünün bulunmasını seyirciye bırakıyor. Olayın Çin'de geçmesi, Brecht'in Batı tiyatrosuna aktardığı Epik tiyatro yurdunun Çin olmasından ötürüdür. (Cimcoz 1964, 9)

[In the play, we see that it is not possible to be "good" merely via emotions or mercy or reason. In other words, the audience is not preached to by the playwright. The gods travel around the world, but they cannot find the good person they are seeking. To be "good" and "happy", one needs to find a balance between emotions and reason. However, Brecht himself cannot show how to find the balance. As a feature of epic theatre, the audience are expected to find it by themselves. The play is set in China because China is the homeland of epic theatre which was transferred to the Western theatre by Brecht.]

Apart from these remarks, there are two other contributions by Cimcoz in the special issue. Cimcoz translates a piece by Niessen "How *Sezuan* was performed in other countries?", offering detailed insights into the technique and aesthetic of epic theatre:

Hannover’de oyunun daha çok lirik yanı ortaya konmuştu. Brecht’in istediği kuruluk ve kesinlik yoktu. Bu tiyatroun sanat gücü Berliner Ensemble ile boy ölçüşemediğinden Tanrılar sahnesinde halk gülmeğe başlamıştı. Dekorlar da pek başarılı sayılmazdı [. . .] Brecht’in istediği açık-seçiklik yoktu. Göz yaşından kaçınma ya da boş verilmişti. Başarıya ulaşamadı oyun. (Cimcoz in Niessen 1964, 27)

[In Hanover, although the lyrical side of the play was highlighted, it lacked the dryness and precision Brecht wanted. Since this theatre group was no match for the Berliner Ensemble, the audience started to laugh at the scene where the Gods arrive. The prompts and stage design were also not very successful [. . .] There was no clarity that Brecht wanted. “Avoiding tears” was also ignored. The play was not a success.]

Furthermore, Cimcoz translates an essay by Bertolt Brecht, *Letter to Actors*, highlighting essential aspects of performance in epic theatre: “Halkın konuştuğu dile kulak verin, o dilden yararlanmayı bilin [. . .] Karşıtlıkları ortaya çıkartmayı bilin” (Cimcoz in Niessen 1964, 30) [Listen to the language spoken by the people, know how to make use of that language [. . .] Know how to reveal contrasts]. All these contributions by Cimcoz bear a particular significance since they highlight the features of epic theatre plainly. Cimcoz thus contributed to the Turkish theatre system not only by translating the play, but also by actively taking part in the production of theoretical information on Brechtian theatre.

Finally, this special issue features the essay *Ozan Bert Brecht [Bert Brecht the Bard]* by Teoman Aktürel, in which he not only provides biographical information about the playwright but also shares a critical appreciation of his poetry. He praises Brecht’s poetry with the following remarks: “Üç yanlıdır toplumsal sesi: Ezeni, ezileni, eleştiren ozanı dile getirir Brecht’in şiiri, tek sözcükle, devinmedir” (Aktürel 1964, 31) [His social voice is three-sided: Brecht’s poetry expresses the oppressor, the oppressed, the criticising poet; in a word, it is movement]. Aktürel (1964, 32–33) also presents his translations of three Brecht poems: *Ode to Learning*, *Hollywood*, and *Smoke*.

The contributions of Taner, Cimcoz, and Aktürel reveal the ambitious project of introducing a new theatrical form, epic theatre, and playwright, Bertolt Brecht, to the Turkish audience and theatre professionals. More importantly, their work transcends translation in multiple ways. It encompasses insightful theoretical analyses of epic theatre, key textual interpretations, and renderings of poetry, highlighting the overlap between rewriting, translation, and writing. Through these diverse efforts, it is evident that these actors aimed to not only publicise Brecht prior to the staging of *Sezuan* but also to cultivate a fertile ground for its reception within the Turkish context. Indeed, as Lefevere (1992, 4) notes, rewriting serves as a connection between high literature and non-professional readers. Rewriting may serve as a bridge, connecting potentially inaccessible works with new audiences while enriching the target literary and theatrical repertoire. In this context, one can argue that the selections and interpretations of these rewriters effectively reconstruct Brecht for a new audience. Their efforts stand as a testament to the transformative power of rewriting, which not only

bridges cultural differences but also enriches and shapes the target theatrical and wider cultural landscape.

3.2 *Brecht in Türkiye (1976)*

In his book *Brecht in Türkiye* (1976), the renowned Turkish director, translator, scholar, and critic Özdemir Nutku compiles his Brecht reviews and writings on epic theatre. Although the book was published in 1976, Nutku penned the majority of reviews and essays in the 1960s. Many of these reviews offer the Turkish readership and audience a chance to familiarise themselves with Brecht's work from a theoretical perspective in an accessible and informative manner. Particularly Nutku's introductory article to the book, "On Bertolt Brecht," serves as a guide to Brecht's theoretical framework, using a captivating blend of analysis and source material. In this article, Nutku seamlessly integrates excerpts from Brecht's poems and plays, and employs both his own translations and existing Turkish translations where appropriate. In the beginning, he emphasises the importance of *Kleines Organon für das Theater* [*A Short Organum for the Theatre*] (hereafter referred to as *Organon*) as a key text to understanding Brecht's works and proceeds to share his own translations from the *Organon*, offering readers a first-hand glimpse into Brecht's theoretical approach towards theatre:

Tiyatroyu, estetik bir tartışma açısından uygun olduğu oranda, bir eğlence yeri olarak kabul edelim, ama ne çeşit bir eğlencenin bize en uygun olduğunu keşfedelim. Bilim çağının tiyatrosu diyalığı hoşlanılır bir duruma getirecektir çünkü bütün sanatlar en üstün sanat olan yaşama sanatına hizmet eder. (Nutku 1976, 12)

[Let us accept the theatre as a place of amusement, insofar as it is appropriate from the point of view of an aesthetic discussion but let us discover what kind of amusement suits us best. The theatre of the age of science will make dialectics enjoyable because all the arts serve the highest art, the art of living.]

Beyond the *Organon*, he investigates various aspects of Brecht's development as a playwright, drawing connections between his theoretical pronouncements and specific works. After analysing Brecht's early conception of humanity, Nutku transitions to Brecht's mature work by citing a lengthy translated passage from *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* [*Mother Courage and Her Children*]. He also goes beyond mere theoretical exposition and offers translations of Brecht's poems alongside insightful interpretations. Following a passage explicating the play *Baal*, Nutku (1976, 17) presents his translation of the poem *Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen* [*On Swimming in Lakes and Rivers*] and offers a nuanced commentary: "Hiçbir şey yapmadan kendini suya, akıntıya bırakmak, varlığı yok eden pasifliğe yönelmektir; işte genç Brecht, ilk yapıtlarında böylece cinsel, bireysel bir sürüklenmeyle topluma başkaldırmaktaydı" [To throw oneself into the water, into the current, without doing anything, is to turn to-

wards a passivity that destroys existence; this is how the young Brecht, in his early works, rebelled with a drift marked by sexuality and individualism]. Here, Nutku's remarks offer the audience the opportunity to comprehend Brecht's ideology, which is interwoven in his poems. In his works, Brecht consistently opposes passivity in life and, in contrast, encourages his readership and audience to adopt a more active and questioning approach towards phenomena and events in life. Nutku highlights this worldview and ideology, which is evident even in his early poems and forms a throughline in Brecht's later plays.

Furthermore, Nutku incorporates the perspectives of renowned directors and critics to create a more comprehensive picture of Brecht's reception. He quotes a technical statement by Jacob Geis, director of *Mann ist Mann* [*Man is Man*]: “[Brecht tiyatrosu] gizli kapaklı, belirsiz ışık oyunları ile hazırlanan bir düzen değildir. Duygusallığın arka düzeye atılması, öyle boğaza bir şeyler takarak değil” (Nutku 1976, 33) [[Brechtian theatre is] not based on a secretive, ambiguous arrangement of light effects on the stage. It indicates the facts, relegates sentimentality to the background]. Immediately after quoting Geis's words, he reinforces this point by referencing Brecht's critique of the contemporary German theatre, providing a translated excerpt from *Theaterarbeit* to illustrate the playwright's own views (Nutku 1976, 33–34).

Each essay and review in Nutku's compilation provides us with extremely interesting information. However, two reviews, focusing on *Leben des Galilei* [*Life of Galileo*] and *Sezuan*, stand out for their critical analysis of translation and staging of a play. While Nutku (1976) praises Ülkü Tamer and Mütekin Ökmen for their adept translation of *Leben des Galilei*, he laments the director Metin Deniz's inability to fully harness its potential on stage and meticulously details how the translation could have been more effectively utilised in terms of the principles of Brechtian theatre, emphasising the need for directors to understand not only the text but also its inherent theatrical demands:

Edebi bir çeviri olarak Türkçesi ve anlamıyla Mütekin Ökmen ile Ülkü Tamer'in çevirileri doğru ve güzeldir ve onlar görevlerini başarıyla yapmışlardır. Ama yönetmen olarak bu güzel çevirinin gestus'a o anki tavırlara oturtulması Brecht için bir gerekliliktir [. . .] “Seni rahatsız eden o gözü çıkart gitsin” tümcesi “O gözü çıkart gitsin, seni rahatsız ediyorsa” tümcesinden daha zayıftır. Çünkü ilk tümcede gözün çıkartılması sona geldiği için, tümcenin en önemli noktası, dolayısıyla gestus'u geciktirilmiş olacaktır. Onun için, burada tavır açısından doğru tümce gözün çıkartılmasını başa alan ikinci tümcedir. Uygulamada güzel çeviri tavır açısından değerlendirilmediği için gözün çıkartılması eylemi tümcenin sonuna gelmiş, böylece oyuncu için tavır vurgusu konulamamıştır. Bu örnekte belirttiğim önemli gereklilik, öbür replikler için de geçerlidir. (Nutku 1976, 127)

[In terms of being literary, the translations of Mütekin Ökmen and Ülkü Tamer are correct and beautiful. These idiomatic translations have done their job successfully. However, to call the play Brechtian, the director should have utilised this beautiful translation in a way that complements

the *gestus*⁶ of the actors [. . .] The line “If it bothers you, take out that eye” is weaker than the phrase “Take out that eye if it bothers you”. Because in the former, the removal of the eye comes at the end. As a result, the most important point of the line, the *gestus*, is delayed. The correct use, on the other hand, would be the latter, which puts the removal of the eye at the beginning [. . .] This critical requirement I have mentioned in this example also applies to the other lines in the play.]

In this example, it can be argued that Nutku’s criticism is extremely important because it clearly reveals the connection between lines and *gestus*, translation and staging, in Brechtian theatre. His critique of Teoman Aktürel’s translation of the song *Lied vom achten Elefanten* [*Song of the Eighth Elephant*] serves as a prime example of this connection. Nutku (1976, 145) argues that the translation of *zähm* as *uysal* (“docile”) misses the mark, suggesting *eğitilmiş* (“trained”) instead. According to him, this choice carries significant ideological weight since it implies that the eighth elephant’s betrayal resulted from their training by the bourgeoisie, which aligns with Brecht’s Marxist perspective. He further criticises the lack of gestural effect in other songs in the play, arguing that the characters’ ideological stances are not reflected adequately (Nutku 1976, 146). For this reason, he appends his own translations of the play’s songs in the book, showcasing his alternative approach alongside a selection of his translated Brecht poems and songs (Nutku 1976, 148–159).

Özdemir Nutku’s translation-related criticisms of stagecraft and Brechtian theatre, the expert statements he translated and incorporated into his theoretical writings to bolster his arguments, as well as his translations of poetry and excerpts from plays can all be regarded as acts of rewriting. These diverse examples illuminate the crucial role that rewriting can play in introducing a new theatrical form to the target readership. Moreover, similar to the *Bert Brecht Special Issue* (1964), Nutku’s endeavours exemplify a fusion of translation and rewriting. In this context, Lefevere’s (1992, 8) observation regarding the manipulative and adaptive capacities of rewriters in relation to target systems is particularly noteworthy. Recognising Brecht’s novelty for the Turkish audience and readership, Nutku avoids overly technical language and seeks to facilitate the introduction of epic theatre by employing abundant examples to support his explanations. Essentially, he teaches Brechtian theatrical theory and effectively reconstructs Brecht in Turkish. Target literary and theatrical repertoires are gradually established through the medium of rewriting and translation.

6 Meg Mumford (2009, 53) points out that Brecht initially used *gestus* to “mean ‘gesture’ in the sense of a purely physical expression,” but in the late 1920s, he referred to it as “moulded and sometimes subconscious body language of a person from a particular social class[.]”

4 The emergence of indigenous epic plays within the Turkish theatrical system: *The Ballad of Ali Keshan*

The translations of Bertolt Brecht's plays not only introduced the playwright to the Turkish theatre system but also led to the first Turkish performances of his plays. These performances ultimately paved the way for the emergence of original examples of epic theatre in Türkiye. However, these indigenous plays were not the mere imitations of Brecht's works. On the contrary, they contributed to the Turkish theatrical system via a unique combination of traditional and epic theatre. Renowned Turkish playwrights such as Haldun Taner, Turgut Özakman, Aziz Nesin, and Vasıf Öngören incorporated elements of traditional Turkish theatre and epic theatre into their plays, characterised by a non-illusionistic open form and musicality (Yüksel 2020, 30), with Brecht as a model that offered a brand-new perspective on traditional Turkish theatre (Buttanrı 2010, 65).

It is not surprising that these indigenous playwrights turned to the forgotten forms of the traditional Turkish theatre when creating the first epic plays. In Brechtian theatre, the audience maintains a critical distance and does not become emotionally involved with the characters on stage, thus disrupting the illusion of reality created in the performance. This disruption aims to create a psychological distance between the audience and the play, encouraging them to adopt a critical and analytical lens towards the events unfolding before them. The common features between traditional Turkish theatre and epic theatre are found in their aesthetics and political nature. For instance, *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu*, two of the most famous and popular forms of traditional theatre, heavily utilise songs, dances, puns, and jokes. They often employ varying dialects and mimic animals or even inanimate objects, using opposing figures or themes, such as a fight between cat and mouse or male and female (And 2019, 12–13). In this respect, And highlights the non-Aristotelian nature of *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu*:

For the audience of *Karagöz* and *Orta Oyunu*, play remains play, and actor remains actor. This means that the audience do not lose themselves when watching the play or do not identify with the actors on the stage. On the contrary, there is a certain separation between audience and play. And the audience show distanced reactions. (And 2019, 32)

Similarities extend beyond aesthetics to the critical and political nature of the traditional Turkish theatre and Brechtian epic theatre. In addition to entertaining with a vast repertoire of off-colour jokes, dances, and incessant squabbles filled with mockery and puns, *Karagöz* also had its finger on the pulse of the Ottoman Empire. And (2019, 42–43) posits that *Karagöz* was regarded as “a disobedient newspaper,” as it frequently tackled the political and social problems of the period, overtly and sharply criticising state authorities, including the Sultan himself. However, in the nineteenth

century, particularly during the oppressive regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II, this popular form of political and social satire caused unease among the authorities and some intellectuals (And 2019, 43–44). For instance, Namık Kemal, a prominent intellectual of the period, described shadow theatre as “su-i edeb talimhaneleri, su-i ahlak mektebi” and “rezalet mektebi” (And 2019, 44) [immoral places of training/education].

To exemplify the special blend of the features of the traditional Turkish theatre and Brechtian epic theatre, Haldun Taner, one of the most prominent names of the Turkish theatre, particularly known for his first Turkish epic play, *The Ballad of Ali Keshan*, deserves special attention. In an interview before the premiere of his play, Haldun Taner (1970 [1964], xxv) emphasised that he was influenced by Brecht and his theory of epic theatre. He responds to the question of how he succeeded in writing *The Ballad of Ali of Keshan* in a Turkish epic style:

By realizing a synthesis of our own. We should attempt a new style of people's theatre which should borrow from only the form of our traditional non-illusionistic theatre, and add to that form things rarely seen in our traditional theatre – namely a rational, occidental, awakening content, progressive in its social satire. This is what we attempted to do in the *Ballad*. (Taner 1970 [1964], xxvi)⁷

The traces of epic theatre and traditional elements of Turkish theatre were so evident in *The Ballad of Ali Keshan*. In a review for the German staging of the play in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, the play was described as follows:

We see Brechtian influence in the partially folklorist and partially cabaret-like music of Tura and the *mis-en-scène* of Genco Erkal reminiscent of the Berliner Ensemble. But in *The Ballad of Ali of Keshan* there is much more than Brechtian influence that the author himself admits: the non-illusionist epic elements of the Turkish traditional *Meddah* (storyteller) and *Orta Oyunu* (*Theatre of Improvisation*). Hence, the originality and vitality of this work in the Turkish Theatre. (Taner 1970 [1964], xvii)

The Ballad of Ali Keshan, which premiered in 1964, gradually gained popularity internationally. Taner (2011 [1983], 22) notes that his play was translated into many languages and staged 342 times by 1983. The eighth volume of *Der Schauspielführer* includes the following comment: “*The Ballad of Ali Keshan* is the first epic work of Turkish theatre literature. The author synthesised Brecht’s technique with the anti-illusionist elements of Turkish folk theatre and arrived at a Turkish folk epic style bearing his own personal stamp” (Taner 1970 [1964], 139). In another article published in *Nürnberg Zeitung* in 1964, a direct analogy with a Brecht play is made: “The audience greeted this lively, colourful, agile, and almost stormy play with endless applause. It is not for nothing that German critics regarded *The Ballad of Ali Keshan* as the Turkish Threepenny Opera!” (Taner 1970 [1964], 141). Still, despite its sensational

⁷ Taner (1970 [1964]) was translated by Nüvit Özdoğru. Titles are printed in bold in the original. The emphasis is mine.

popularity, *The Ballad of Ali Keshan* was not immune to censorship. The play was not staged by the State Theatres until 1984, and even after that, it did not feature in their repertoire until 1994. Furthermore, another epic play by Haldun Taner, *Gözlerimi Kapanım Vazifemi Yaparım* [*I Will Close My Eyes and Do My Duty*], written in 1964, was staged by the State Theatres in 1978 but it was removed from the repertoire after that season until 1989.

It is worth noting that Haldun Taner played a pivotal role in introducing both Brecht and epic theatre to Turkish audiences. He not only encouraged and commissioned Adalet Cimcoz to translate *Sezuan* (the first Brecht play translated into Turkish) but also actively contributed to its dissemination through introductory essays. These essays appeared in various publications, including his own theatre magazine, *Oyun*, and the seminal *Bert Brecht Special Issue* (1964) published by the Istanbul City Theatres. Moreover, Taner consistently drew comparisons between his own play, *The Ballad of Ali Keshan*, and Brecht's epic theatre whenever introducing it. This suggests a deliberate attempt to familiarise Turkish audiences with the genre by using a familiar point of reference. In essence, Taner's contributions extended beyond mere translation. He participated in various textual productions, including the translation of *Sezuan*, the rewriting of Brechtian texts, and even the creation of original epic plays. This multifaceted approach indicates a conscious effort to facilitate the creation of a new epic repertoire in Turkish theatre, making his contributions particularly noteworthy.

5 Conclusion

Brecht's plays, with their scathing critiques of the status quo and exploitative practices inherent in capitalism, resonated deeply with the *zeitgeist* of 1960s Türkiye. Unsurprisingly, as demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, Brecht's introduction to the Turkish literary and theatrical scene occurred through translations in the mid-1950s, with his popularity peaking in the mid-1960s. The initial attempts to import Brecht may have reflected the need for a new form of theatre built upon new aesthetics that could revitalise the Turkish theatrical system and serve as a political tool, prompting audiences to engage with societal and political issues within the country. Indeed, the initial ban on the translation of *Sezuan* due to alleged communist propaganda, followed by its delayed staging at the Istanbul City Theatres, can be seen as a testament to the play's potential to provoke political discourse. Furthermore, the subsequent attack on the stage and the heated debate among intellectuals illustrate not only the polarising power of theatre in Turkish society in the 1960s but also the nature of translation, which is more than the mere act of transferring words from one language to another.

As suggested by Even-Zohar (2012 [1990]), translation can introduce novelties to the home repertoire by potentially reshaping and transforming existing practices. In this instance, Brecht translations introduced novelties to the Turkish theatrical system, both aesthetically and politically. They facilitated the introduction of epic plays to the home repertoire and paved the way for the creation of indigenous epic plays, a new form of theatre. Furthermore, these translations initiated significant debates within society and among intellectuals, contributing to the introduction of transformative ideas. However, translation does not often come in its abstracted form as exact reproduction of a proposition in another language. It frequently intertwines with rewriting, which “adapts and manipulates the originals [. . .] to make them fit in” (Lefevere 1992, 8). Both *Bert Brecht Special Issue* (1964) and *Brecht in Türkiye* (1976) exemplify this transformative potential. Even in their selection of materials to translate and expound on, these works construct a new image of Brecht in the Turkish theatrical system through their attempt to familiarise Turkish audiences and readers with the works of the playwright.

In connection with these translations and rewritings on Brecht, the first Turkish epic plays emerged in the mid-1960s combining the elements of both traditional Turkish theatre and Brechtian epic theatre. *The Ballad of Ali Keshan* by Taner was not the only example of such combination. The influence of Bertolt Brecht and his epic theatre could be seen in the other playwrights of the period such as *Ayak Bacak Fabrikası* [*The Factory of Hands and Legs*] by Sermet Çağan (1965) and *Asiye Nasıl Kurtulur?* [*How to Save Asiye?*] by Vasıf Öngören (1970). Furthermore, the 1960s witnessed the establishment of the first socialist and politically engaged theatre groups, such as Dostlar Tiyatrosu, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu, Halk Oyuncuları, Ankara Birliği Sahnesi, and Devrim İçin Hareket Tiyatrosu, which continued to stage Brecht’s plays throughout the 1970s despite facing systematic bans (Buttanrı 2010, 65). As the 1970s saw an increase in censorship and oppression, private theatre houses like Dostlar Tiyatrosu, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu, and Ankara Birlik Tiyatrosu turned to staging politically charged plays by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Heinar Kipphardt, and Peter Weiss. Conversely, during the same period, City and State Theatres “served as a sort of state department” (Dicle 2020, 46). For instance, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu staged *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* [*Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*] by Bertolt Brecht only six times in 1972 until it was banned by the state authorities under martial law (Nutku 1976, 91–92).

These examples collectively illustrate how translation can spark the initial steps of transformation, which may ultimately lead to the production of rewritings and original works within the same genre imported into the target system. What began with the translation of *Sezuan* eventually paved the way for further translations of Brecht, theoretical essays on epic theatre, and the emergence of the first Turkish epic plays. This gradual evolution transformed the Turkish theatrical system, fostering a more critical and politically engaged cultural environment in Türkiye.

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