

CFP: GSA 2023 Panel: Of Robbery and Revolution: 100 Years of *Im Dickicht der Städte* and *Trommeln in der Nacht* (International Brecht Society) Deadline: March 1, 2023

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Dear all,

Below please find the Call for Papers for the official International Brecht Society panel at GSA 2023 in Montréal, Quebec, 5-8 October 2023.

Of Robbery and Revolution: 100 Years of *Im Dickicht der Städte* and *Trommeln in der Nacht*

On May 9, 1923, Nazis in Munich stormed the Residenztheater with insults and stink bombs in order to disrupt the premiere of a new play, Bertolt Brecht's *Im Dickicht*, which would later become *Im Dickicht der Städte*. This work, which is about the intractable conflict between lumberyard owner Shlink and bookseller Garga in a stylized 1912 Chicago setting, was directed by Erich Engel, who would then collaborate with Brecht for the next 30 years. Actor Erwin Farber took on the role of Garga after another Munich debut with Brecht just a few months earlier: the late-expressionist anti-war play *Trommeln in der Nacht*. Both *Im Dickicht der Städte* and *Trommeln in der Nacht* concern the way the working class is robbed by the wealthy. *Drums in the Night* features war profiteer Murk (played by Hans Leibelt at the premiere) trying to steal beleaguered soldier Andreas Kragler's (Faber) fiancée Anna (Wilhelmine They). Meanwhile, *Im Dickicht der Städte* sees Shlink (Otto Wernicke) using his wealth and power to subjugate Garga, only to have Garga exact violent revenge for his perceived losses. The explosive and poetic qualities of these struggles on-stage continue to attract theater companies and audiences to this day. In hindsight, Nazi thugs only added fuel to the flame.

This panel concerns *Im Dickicht der Städte* and *Trommeln in der Nacht* in retrospect. Both plays were monumentally impactful, with critic Herbert Jhering going so far as to say *Trommeln in der Nacht* "changed the literary physiognomy of Germany overnight." Crucial to our understanding of these early works is Brecht's own evolving idea of the human subject toward history and revolution. Who has agency over labor, over violence, over the domestic sphere? These two tumultuous Munich plays provide no easy answers, only a haunting sense of unease about the nature of human suffering and its systemic causes. Moreover, 1910s race relations (cf. Kragler's Africa tour, Shlink's Malay ethnicity) play a decisive and under-examined role in both works. New perspectives as well as revisitations of previous scholarship are both welcome.

Possible discussion points in relation to the works include, but are not limited to:

- Urban imaginaries
- Revolutionary allegories
- Brecht's struggle with conventional dramatic form
- Weimar Republic gender relations
- Race and critical whiteness studies

- Echoes of early Brecht-Engel seen in later Brecht-Engel collaborations
- Performance and production histories

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words to Dr. Evan Torner (evan.torner@uc.edu) no later than **March 1, 2023**.