



# Theater & Propaganda

*George H. Szanto*

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This original and insightful study explores the points at which theater and propaganda meet. Defining propaganda as a form of "activated ideology," George H. Szanto discusses the distortion of information that occurs in dramatic literature in its stage, film, and television forms.

Szanto analyzes the nature of "integration propaganda," which is designed to render the audience passive and to encourage the acceptance of the *status quo*, as opposed to "agitation propaganda," which aims to inspire the audience to action. In Szanto's view, most popular western theater is saturated, though usually not intentionally, with integration propaganda. The overall purpose of *Theater and Propaganda* is twofold: to analyze the nature of integration propaganda so that it becomes visible to western readers as a tool of the dominant class in society, and to examine the manner by which unself-conscious propagandistic methods have saturated dramatic presentation.

In discussing the importance of propaganda within and between technological states, the author examines the seminal work of Jacques Ellul. In this chapter he analyzes the function of integration propaganda in a relatively stable society. The following chapter defines and analyzes three theaters (in the sense of performance) of propaganda: the theater of agitation propaganda, of integration propaganda, and of dialectical propaganda. In this section he uses examples from a variety of plays, movies, and television commercials. In succeeding chapters Szanto discusses the role of integration propaganda in the medieval Wakefield mystery plays and the plays of Samuel Beckett. The appendix, "Contradiction and Demystification," provides a general model that suggests ways of breaking down and overcoming the propagandistic intentions of an artwork and discusses theater's possible role in this breakdown.

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