



## **Communications from the International Brecht Society. Vol. 28, No. 1 June 1999**

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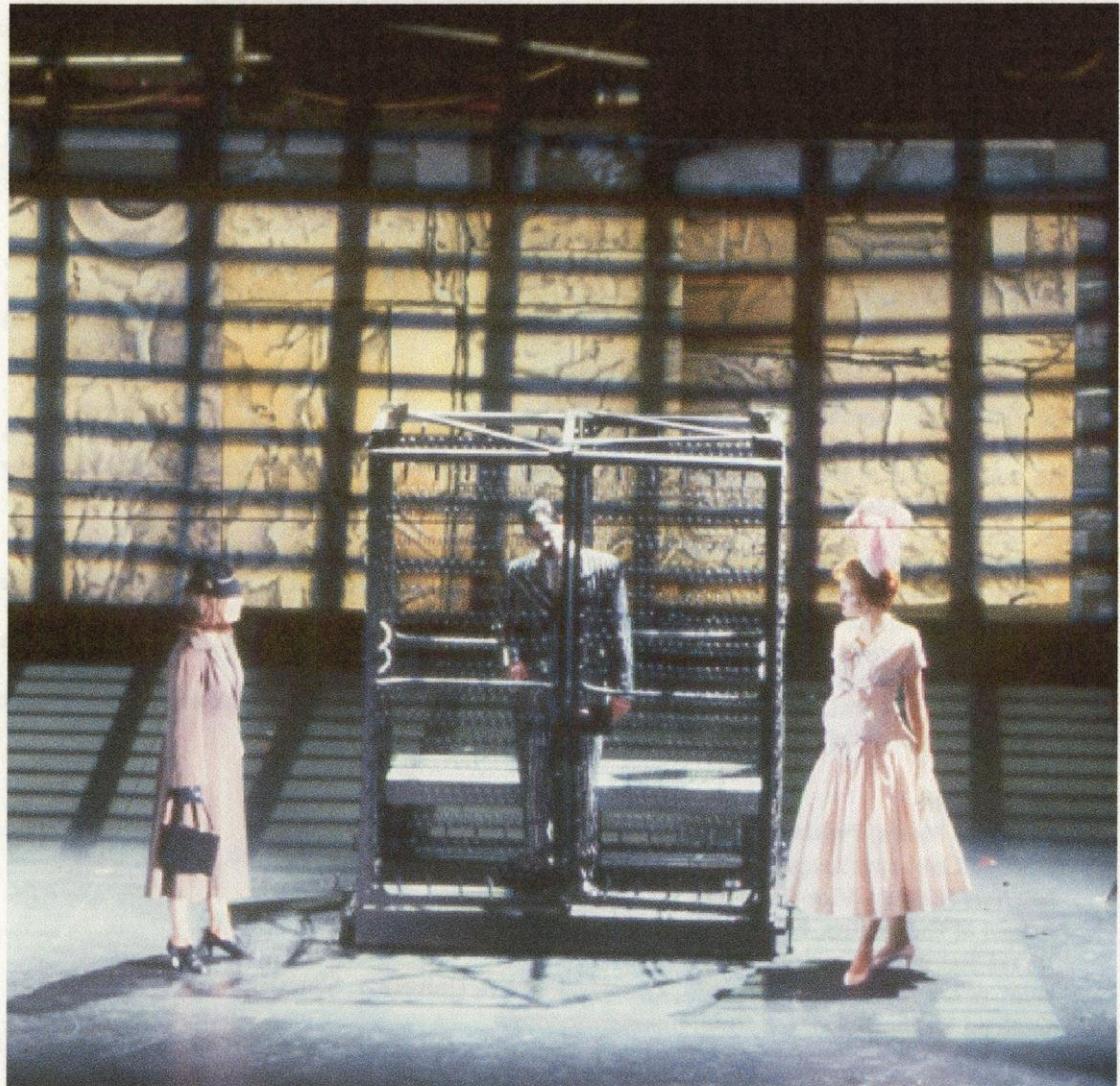
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# COMMUNICATIONS

from the International Brecht Society



Carl Weber's *Threepenny Opera*, Stanford University, February 1999

Volume 28 No. 1

June 1999

# INTERNATIONAL BRECHT SOCIETY COMMUNICATIONS

Volume 28 Number 1

June 1999

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All Correspondence should be addressed to the Editor. *Communications* welcomes manuscripts relating to all facets of Brecht's work. Manuscripts should conform to the *MLA Style Manual* and should not exceed 7,500 words. You are encouraged to include with your manuscript the text in Word Perfect or Microsoft Word on IBM formatted 3½ or 5¼ diskettes.

The Editor wishes to thank Professor Carl Weber, Drama Department, and Professor Russell Berman, Chair of the German Department, Stanford University, for their support.

See the inside back cover for information on subscriptions and membership. Membership in the IBS includes subscriptions to both *Communications*, and *The Brecht Yearbook*. The Managing Editor of *The Brecht Yearbook* is Maarten van Dijk, University of Waterloo, 200 University Ave. West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1

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For International Brecht Society news, information, and to exchange ideas, visit our Home Page  
<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/german/brecht/>

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

In the current post-centennial year, Brecht and Brecht-related events no longer dominate the cultural news. Far fewer conferences, symposia and the like that focus exclusively on Brecht have been scheduled in 1999. Yet this does not mean that interest in his works is waning. Far from it. Last year's feverish activities commemorating Brecht have resulted in his comeback to the American main stage. In the Bay Area two commercial theatres will produce a Brecht play this Fall. The Berkeley Repertory theatre will stage *Galileo*, and *Threepenny Opera* will be performed at ACT, in San Francisco. In March I saw *Good Person of Szechwan* in Ashland, Oregon, and was pleasantly surprised when the audience rose for applause. Part of the current success of Brecht's plays may be attributed to the use of new translations that make it possible for American audiences to relate to the texts.

So the lack of news in the "upcoming events" and "Conference Reports" sections is no cause for alarm. It is not a sign of "Brecht Fatigue" but a return to normalcy after last year's feverish activities. Contributions in the "Performance Reviews and Articles" section are exploring the "Brecht Effect" current cultural context. This season's highlight in the Bay Area was Carl Weber's production of *Threepenny Opera* at Stanford. ( See front cover). He demonstrated what strategies can be used to make Brecht relevant today.

New in this issue is the most recent "uncut" bibliography compiled and transmitted to me electronically by **Helgrid Streidt** from the Brecht Archives as a service to the readers. Should you have any further questions regarding the bibliography, please, contact her directly.

I would like to thank all those who have helped with this edition of *Communications*, most notably **Carl Weber**, and **Marc Silberman** whose advise and assistance has been invaluable.

On a personal note, during the final production phase of this edition my husband had a heart by-pass operation, which was fully successful, but when he tried to restart his computer it was terminally ill. It had caught a virus, for which there is no cure. For this reason, we will not open attachments to emails in the future. Contributors will need to send their submissions on hard copy and IBM-formatted diskettes.

*Gudrun Tabbert-Jones, Santa Clara University*

## President's Report

In my last report in the December 1998 issue of *Communications*, I briefly reflected on the fact that the Brecht centenary year was, at the time of my writing, approaching its end and, furthermore, I sought to indicate the areas in which the IBS might continue to be engaged in order to carry on its work in the postcentenary years. There is no need then to nostalgically reminisce about the virtually unprecedented media presence of BB and the host of commemorative and other affairs during the centenary. Kurt Idrizovic, the driving force behind the *Dreigroschenheft*, a most valuable resource for all matters relating to Brecht, provides a somewhat sketchy survey of the 1998 activities in the most recent issue of that publication (2/1999). He correctly lists some of the major achievements that came to fruition in 1998, including the completion -- albeit with the exception of the apparently troublesome index volume -- of the thirty-volume *Große Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* of Brecht's works that was begun before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as a cooperative venture between East and West and offers a sound basis for further research.

As I pointed out previously, particularly those in the United States who are dependent on English translations of Brecht's texts do not have access to a similarly authentic English-language edition of Brecht's works -- despite the late Ralph Manheim and John Willett's extraordinary efforts in this regard. It would be tempting to suggest that the IBS attempt to tackle the difficult task of providing a usable American translation of the complete works; however, as a loosely organized professional society without adequate financial resources the IBS cannot possibly hope to resolve the complex issues of commercial considerations and copyright questions that a project of such magnitude entails. This, of course, is not to say that the IBS as a whole or its individual members have to remain completely inactive in the important area of translation; however, I gather that individual initiatives rather than collective effort will be the order of the day.

If 1998 was the Brecht year (but also that of novelist Theodor Fontane), the current year is dedicated to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). The chronological proximity of the two commemorative events may remind us that Brecht aspired to the status of a German classic from an early age on; as I mentioned in passing in my last report, Brecht's stature in Germany was clearly enhanced by postwall developments -- even if one would hesitate to put him on an equal footing with Goethe. Needless to say, the status of a classic often carries with it the stigma of irrelevance -- a view formulated with regard to BB more than thirty years ago by Swiss writer Max Frisch. At the same time, the coincidental commemoration of Brecht and Goethe in two successive years serves as a reminder that anniversaries generate media attention, promote interest beyond the comparatively narrow circle of scholars, and stimulate research. Inasmuch as the year 2000 is the fiftieth anniversary of Kurt Weill's death as well as the centenary year of his birth, there is no doubt that the exploration of the troubled relationship between Brecht and Weill and that between the former and Lotte Lenya, wife of the latter, will emerge as an important topic. In view of the fact that the "Americanization" of Weill and Lenya proceeded far more smoothly than that of Brecht -- who actually never became "Americanized" -- we may expect that Brechtians of all stripes will endeavor to shed new light on the American phase of Brecht's biography and on the divergent artistic paths that the two erstwhile representatives of "Weimar Culture" followed in exile. Participating in these endeavors surely constitutes a worthy objective for IBS members.

Siegfried Mews, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## Treasurer's Report

This dues cycle has seen the introduction of a credit card machine. So far, a little under two dozen people have used this payment method, in many cases saving themselves currency exchange fees. I wish to encourage others to give it a try. Contact me for information (see address, p. 66)

The IBS is doing well financially. The figures below reflect our situation after having paid the expenses for volumes 23 and 24 of the Yearbook, meaning that we are facing no large bills at the moment. The executive committee plans to discuss later in the year how our substantial surplus should be invested or otherwise employed.

Here are some recent membership figures gleaned from the database:

Paid Membership	Non-Institutional	Institutional
1997	112	96
1998	165	87
1999	101*	77*

\* figures incomplete

Membership ballooned last year as a direct result of the Brecht anniversary and the San Diego conference. It has sunk back to the prior level, though there are still members sending in dues in early June at the rate of about eight a week. I estimate that by year's end we will see a modest increase in non-institutional membership to around 130 or slightly more. I will send out a reminder postcard in early fall. I will also be watching the institutional numbers closely, since they seem to be in decline.

People who correspond with me will likely come in contact with my assistant, Fritz Rathmann. Fritz is a computer science major and German minor here at Georgia Southern. The IBS is lucky to have him aboard.

David Robinson

### DOLLAR ACCOUNT SAVINGS 17 November 1998 – 8 June 1999

Receipts:	\$ 10,398.51
Disbursements:	\$ 3,036.66
Opening Balance:	\$ 11,906.78
Ending Balance	\$ 19,268.63

### DOLLAR ACCOUNT (CHECKING) 17 November 1998 – 8 June 1999

Receipts	\$ 6,714.95
Disbursements:	\$ 5,823.59
Opening Balance:	\$ 1,214.22
Ending Balance:	\$ 2,105.58

### CREDIT CARD HOLDING ACCOUNT On 8 June 1999

Balance on hand:	\$ 480.00
DM ACCOUNT	
17 November 1998 – 8 June 1999	

Receipts:	DM 1 066,07
Disbursements:	DM 5 995,70
Opening Balance:	DM 6 680,73
Closing Balance:	DM 1 751,10
TOTAL ASSETS:	\$ 21,854.21
	DM 1 751,10

## IN BRIEF

## News about the Berliner Ensemble

On April 30, 1999, the curtain came down on the final production of Heiner Müller's *Die Bauern* at the Berliner Ensemble, an early end to the theater's current season that also marks the end of this institution as we know it. Established by Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel in 1949 (first housed in the Deutsches Theater), the Ensemble finally moved into the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in March 1954. After reunification in 1990, the Ensemble was transformed into a public corporation with an enormous city subsidy and a collective management team of well-known directors. This team quickly disintegrated, and Heiner Müller, probably Brecht's most critical but also most loyal heir, became the manager and artistic director. When he died in December 1995, the difficult decision about who would manage this highly symbolic cultural institution was exacerbated by another problem: the theater building itself was in the process of being bought by a nonprofit foundation in the hands of dramatist Rolf Hochhuth, who seemed to have his own plans for re-opening the theater. After the city of Berlin negotiated a settlement to everyone's satisfaction, the search for a new director / manager began. Claus Peymann, the provocative and successful manager of the Burgtheater in Vienna was finally appointed to the position and will open the theater in January 2000, after extensive renovations are completed during the next months. Peymann assumes his role with a commitment -- like Brecht's -- to producing political theater for our times, but his point of departure, his definition of what is political and what our times need, will certainly be different from Brecht's. It is rumored that about half of the actors and technical staff have quit or will not be rehired. In addition, to escape from Brecht's shadow, Peymann is considering a change in name, back to "Theater am Schiffbauerdamm," rather than the Berliner Ensemble. In the next issue of *Communications*, we hope to report on the shape of the new season and plans of the new manager.

*Marc Silberman, University of Wisconsin, Madison*

## New Brecht-Handbuch

From 14 to 17 May 1999 approximately fifteen Brecht scholars gathered at the University of Karlsruhe, home of the Arbeitsstelle Bertolt Brecht. They came in response to the invitation by Jan Knopf, director of the Arbeitsstelle, coeditor of the thirty-volume *Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* (1988-1998), and author of the two-volume *Brecht Handbuch* (1980, 1984), in order to discuss the concept of, and organizational details relating to, a projected new *Brecht-Handbuch*. The new *Brecht-Handbuch* is to replace the two volumes that were penned by Knopf in the late seventies and early eighties and that have proved to be indispensable tools for Brecht research for almost twenty years.

The completion of the thirty-volume edition of Brecht's works — except for the volume including the various indices — on occasion of the centenary of Brecht's birth in 1998 has made available a considerable amount of new information that has only been insufficiently taken into account in recent Brecht scholarship. In addition to the extensive commentary of the thirty-volume edition, Werner Hecht's extraordinarily detailed *Brecht Chronik* (1997; see my review in volume 24 [1999] of the *Brecht Yearbook*) offers a valuable source for future research. However, apart from purely scholarly and academic considerations, there is another, significant aspect that would seem to make a reassessment of BB highly desirable. Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unification, the status of Brecht in the new, post-Cold-War Germany has been an issue of interest to a segment of the public that exceeds that of either literati or academicians.

The celebrations and festivities during the centennial year appear to have demonstrated beyond a doubt that Brecht indeed has been accepted as a writer who can no longer be exclusively associated with the former GDR. Rather, he is being claimed by all of Germany — precisely on account of not having embraced a narrow nationalistic attitude. To be sure, Brecht's acceptance has not been universal, and the survival of remnants of the Cold-War mentality is not a uniquely German problem. The

controversy that erupted upon publication of John Fuegi's *Brecht & Co.* (1994) was revived by the appearance of an improved but still deeply flawed German version of the biography in 1997 (see my review in volume 24 [1999] of the *Brecht Yearbook*). This controversy clearly shows the international dimensions and ramifications of the debate about Brecht. At any rate, in the German context, the planned *Brecht-Handbuch* will, without doubt, serve to shore up the playwright's renown as a German classic inasmuch as the handbook is deliberately modeled on a similar project, the four-volume *Goethe-Handbuch*, that was undertaken and completed in conjunction with the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Goethe's birth in 1999. The publisher of the *Goethe-Handbuch*, the highly reputable company of J.B. Metzler in Stuttgart, will also bring out the *Brecht handbook* and thereby implicitly endorse Jan Knopf's endeavors who, among others, has been seeking to promote BB's claim to canonical status for approximately two decades. Elsewhere in this volume I have briefly alluded to the potential pitfalls that the bestowing of such an elevated position entails. But the aforementioned changes in the political and cultural/literary landscape during the last decade or so no longer necessitate engaging in the ideological struggles of the past.

Hence the handbook is designed to offer an introduction to Brecht's texts, to reflect current, up-to-date research, and to serve as a consumer-friendly, reliable reference work. It is a safe assumption that the handbook will attempt to stress Brecht's achievements. At the same time, in focusing on the work rather than the biography, the handbook is also intended to problematize specific areas of Brecht's literary activities such as the concept of the collective, the discussion of which may well lead to a greater recognition of the contributions by the various members of the "Brecht collective" as well as those by composers, actors, and other Brecht collaborators affiliated with the theater; the notion of *Versuche* that introduces changeability as a literary category and opposes closure in and the autonomy of literary works but also reveals a new attitude towards intertextual appropriations; the aesthetics of language that attempts to make visible the reality underlying socioeconomic and other processes; the "documentary" character of Brecht's work that spans

the first half of our century and takes issue with some of its essential questions.

Following the model of the *Goethe-Handbuch*, the handbook is planned to encompass four volumes with approximately six hundred pages each. The volumes are arranged according to genre: plays (vol. 1), poems (vol. 2), prose fiction and film scripts (vol. 3), writings, journals, letters, and reception history, chronology (vol. 4). Although the generic attribution of specific Brecht texts is not always self-evident, for the purposes of a handbook the organizing principle chosen appears to be a both time-honored and optimal solution that was not seriously questioned by the participants in the conference mentioned above. These participants, who included a sprinkling of Brecht scholars from abroad (James K. Lyon, Antony Tatlow, Siegfried Mews; Rainer Naegele was unable to attend), are supposed to function as a "wissenschaftlicher Beirat" of the enterprise and as chief contributors of individual articles.

Because of both the magnitude of the undertaking and tight deadlines for the submission of articles (volume 1, devoted to the plays, is scheduled to appear in early 2001), additional colleagues will be invited to contribute so that a fairly broad spectrum of Brecht scholarship will be represented. Owing to a variety of reasons, it is not uncommon in academic publishing to encounter endless delays. However, in the case of the projected *Brecht handbook* such delays are not likely to occur. The entire enterprise has been meticulously planned and organized by Jan Knopf, Brigitte Bergheim, who is to serve as editor-in-chief, and her assistant, Ana Kugli.

The very fact that the major contributors had a chance to intensively discuss the concept of the handbook and all organizational details relating to it during a two-day conference, provides an indication of the solidity of the preparatory groundwork engaged in by the organizers. Furthermore, the availability and accessibility of a research resource center in Karlsruhe, the financial backing of the Thyssen Foundation, and the commitment of a major commercial publisher augur well for the success of a project that is likely to become as indispensable for Brecht research as the two volumes of the old handbooks have been. There is only one drawback that I perceive, that is, the improbability of obtaining

a similarly comprehensive and up-to-date handbook in English.

*Siegfried Mews  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

### **John Willett Honored**

*Tom Kuhn, Oxford*

At a modest ceremony at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in London John Willett was presented with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit for his services to literature. Presenting him with the insignia of the award on behalf of the Federal President Roman Herzog, Ambassador Gebhardt von Moltke said: "As author, as scholar, as founding member of the International Brecht Society, as editor of the Society's yearbooks for many years and as a lecturer throughout the world, you have opened up access worldwide to this great German writer. Since 1964 (actually it's longer, but this is when *Brecht on Theatre* first appeared) you have been translating and editing Brecht's works into English, a huge undertaking, especially given his characteristically radical and snappy language and his 'Zeitkritik'. To understand and translate Brecht properly, I think needs someone with a similar mind and approach. You have translated his works admirably. In a moving response, John said that he felt he was receiving the award not merely on his own behalf, but on behalf of the many friends and collaborators who had enabled and supported the work over the years. He then read two of Brecht's poems to his select and very appreciative audience. Amongst the guests were: Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Middleton, Donald Prater, Lady Serota, Irving Wardle, Dominic Muldowney, publishers of Brecht in English past and present, and other friends and scholars.

### **A Special Issue on Brecht**

The quarterly journal *Monatshefte* published a special issue on Brecht (Vol. 90, Nr. 3, Fall 1998), edited by Johst Hermand and Marc Silberman. Included are:

Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman: "Introduction: Brecht Today," Robert Cohen: "Brecht in Goldbach," Karla Schultz: "Utopias from Hell: Brecht's *Mahagonny* and Adorno's *Treasure of Indian Joe*," Thomas Eickhoff: "Keuner und Karajan im 'Kalten Krieg' - Die Versuche des Komponisten Gottfried von Einem, Bertolt Brecht für die Salzburger Festspiele zu gewinnen," Helmut Peitsch: "In den Zeiten der Schwäche...": Zu Spuren Brechts in der europäischen Debatte über engagierte Literatur."

The volume can be ordered from:

*Journals Department  
University of Wisconsin Press  
2537 Daniels St.  
Madison, WI 53718-67172  
Tel 800 / 829 - 9559  
Fax 800 / 473-8310*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### IBS SESSIONS AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION (Dec 27-30, 1999)

#### I. Brecht's Theater as Philosophical Innovation: Brechtian and Post-Brechtian Theory and Practice

Presider: Siegfried Mews, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1. "Brecht's Social Philosophy and His Fragment *Aus Nichts wird Nichts*."

Speaker: **Astrid Oesmann**, Univ. of Iowa

2. "Brecht's Political Philosophy in the *Lehrstücke*."

Speaker: **Volker Gransow**, York University

3. "‘Klassiker’ and ‘Dialektiker’: Philosophy and Anti-Philosophy in Brecht’s *Die Maßnahme*."

Speaker: **Josef D. O’Neil**, Indiana Univ.

Respondent: William Rasch, Indiana Univ.

#### II. In Brecht's Footsteps: Drama/theatre, Poetry, Prose, and Film since the 1950s

Presider: David Robinson, Georgia Southern Univ.

1. "Brecht in Literature."

Speaker: **Guy Stern**, Wayne State Univ.

2. "In Brecht's Footsteps or Way Beyond Brecht? Brechtian Techniques in Feminist Plays by Elfriede Jelinek and Marlene Steruwitz."

Speaker: **Britta Kallin**, Univ. of Cincinnati

3. "Beyond Buckow: Brechtian Influence on the GDR ‘Lyrikwelle.’"

Speaker: **Alan Ng**, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison

4. "The Brecht Effect in Cinema, 1960-1990."

Speaker: **Ingeborg Hoesterey**, Indiana Univ.

#### **23<sup>rd</sup> IMISE Meeting – Naples / Italy (13/28 Aug. 1999)**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> IMISE Event will be held in Naples/Italy, at the Anglican Church, a monument built on land donated by Garibaldi to the British Community in Naples; a symbol of estrangement from cultural divides, which crowned the unification of Italy in 1860.

A Theatre Session will be coordinated by Prof. Dr. **Heinz-Uwe Haus** from Delaware University / USA

The "IMISE Paper 1999" will be selected by vote amongst Participants' Papers, during the closing session, on 28 Aug. 1999, and published in *Lo Straniero* #29

**Attendance:** Participants are invited to attend every session of the meeting, but for those unable to stay the entire period, the agenda is as follows:

23-24 Aug = HOMO COGITANS (Education, Feminism, Law, Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, Religion, Sociology, etc.). 25 Aug = HOMO SAPIENS (Anthropology, Biology, Economics, Geography, History, Language, Science, etc.). 26-27 Aug = HOMO LUDENS ( Arts, Film, Literature, Media, Music, Poetry, theatre, etc.)

#### Theatre Session: (Workshops / Papers)

In addition to workshops and papers on the theory and history of theatre, this session is open to projects on the practical implementation of theatrical productions. Informal meetings from 23-25 Aug, upon previous appointment.

*Address:* Via Chiaia 149/A, 80121 Naples/Italy.  
Tel. 0039-81-426052. Fax: 0039-081404384

## Berkeley Rep's *Galileo*: Anatomy of a Play

October 2; Saturday, 10 am – 12:30

UC Berkeley Extension joins with Berkeley Repertory Theatre to present a Saturday program exploring Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo*. This play deals with Galileo's startling discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe, a discovery that will literally awaken the Age of Reason and put at odds with the Vatican.

The day begins with morning talks by **Carl Weber**, head of the Graduate Directing Program at Stanford University who was Brecht's assistant director at the Berliner Ensemble; **Roger Hahn**, Professor of History at UC Berkeley and an expert on the historical Galileo; **Tony Taccone**, Artistic Director of Berkeley Repertory Theatre; a leading actor in the production. The forum takes place from 10am to 12:30 pm, and the performance is at 2 pm.

### Forum:

10:00—10:45

“Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble”

**Carl Weber**, Professor, Dramatic Art Department, Stanford University

10:45—11:15

“The Historical Trial of Galileo”

**Roger Hahn**, Professor, History Department, UC Berkeley

11:15—11:30 Break

11:30—12:15

“The Staging of Galileo”

Conversation between **Tony Taccone**, Director of Berkeley Repertory Theater and a leading actor in *Galileo*

12:15

Q and A with speakers

## The Berliner Ensemble in Berkeley

Fifty years after its founding by Bertolt Brecht, the controversial and ground-breaking German theater group The Berliner Ensemble will make its long-awaited United States debut in Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. The performances mark the company's very first appearances in the United States and will be the final performances anywhere in the world. In August 1999, the world famous company will disband forever, ending its 50 year history. The Berliner Ensemble performances at the Cal Performances, in German with English subtitles, are presented in association with the Goethe-Institut, San Francisco.

### Call for Papers: Performing the Politics of European Comic Drama

Special Issue of *European Studies Journal*

Co-editors, Susan Carlson and Jim McGlew  
Iowa State University

Since Aristophanes, comedy has been a site of political contention, offering contradictory possibilities for subversion, resiliency, and restriction. This special issue of the interdisciplinary *European Studies Journal* will feature the work of scholars who are investigating the political ramifications of comic drama and theatre. Scholarship on the dramatic text as well as on the performance of comic drama are invited. Investigations of the following issues are particularly invited: what are the effects of actual performance on the ideology and politics of comedy's audiences? How are collective responses to the staging of drama measured and understood? What are the radical / subversive possibilities and/or conservative impulses of comic performance? How have racial, ethnic, religious, and gender differences affected the politics of comedy?

Papers may focus on a single author, on a period, or on a grouping of comedies or performances.

We are seeking work on any period of European dramatic history, from classical Greece to

contemporary Europe. Only work on European literatures will be considered. Papers should be in English.

Deadline: November 1, 1999.  
Either a 700-1000 word abstract or a completed paper (double spaced, around 8000 words in length, MLA format.)

For further information contact:

*Jim McGlew*

*Department of Foreign Languages/  
Classical Studies Program  
300 Pearson Hall  
Iowa State University  
Ames, IA 50011  
Jmcglew@iastate.edu*

**The Eastside Sinfonietta presents  
Brecht Songs**

The Eastside Sinfonietta, a Los Angeles performance group with lead vocalist Weba Garretson and musicians Joseph Berardi, Ralph Gorodetsky, J. Payne, and Tracy Wannomae, has put together a successful program of Brecht songs that was performed to rave reviews at the West Coast Brecht Festival (at the Los Angeles Public Library in February 1998). The program includes "Lily from Hell," "Sailors Tango," "Solomon Tango," "Supply and Demand," "Surabaya Johnny," "Mandelay," "Hollywood," "The Swamp," and "Mack the Knife." The group is preparing a musical event to commemorate Kurt Weill's centenary in the year 2000 as well.

*For information, contact:*

*PO Box 2727  
1615 North Wilcox Ave.  
Hollywood, Ca 90078  
Tel. 323 / 664-1404  
Fax 353 / 913-1762*



*Edward II* will be produced by the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company in NYC, January 2000.

English version by Eric Bentley, published by Grove Press.

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

**Brecht-Tage 1999**

7. — 11. Februar  
Chausseestraße 125

11 Uhr: **Klaus Wagenbach**: Kafka als Antipode  
Brecht's? Furcht und Staunen als politische Haltung

Montag, 8. Februar:

20 Uhr: Antipoden Lyrik

**Lothar Kühn** über Kurt Tucholsky  
**Ursula Heulenkamp** über Zbigniew Herbert  
**Theo Buck** über Gottfried Benn

Dienstag, d. 9. Februar:

19 Uhr: Lesung — **George Tabori**  
20 Uhr: Antipoden Prosa Dramatik

**Patrick Primavesi** über Artaud  
**Günther Heeg** über Zuckmayer / Frank  
Castorf / Einar Schleef  
**Marianne Streisand** über Gerhart Hauptmann

Mittwoch, 10. Februar

19 Uhr: Lesung — **Katja Lange-Müller**  
20 Uhr: Antipoden Prosa

**Klaus Völker** über Elias Canetti  
**Thomas Anz** über Freud und die  
Psychoanalyse in der Prosa der Moderne  
**Horst Domdey** über Hans Sahl

Donnerstag, 11. Februar

20 Uhr: Antipoden Ästhetik / Philosophie

**Helmut Lethen** — Einführung und  
Diskussionsleitung  
**Gertrud Koch** über Siegfried Kracauer  
**Michael Großheim** über Politischen

Existentialismus

**Vladimir Koljazin** über die Gegner Brechts  
in der *Wort*-Redaktion

Freitag, 12. Februar

20 Uhr: Musiktheater Werkschutz (Köln) —  
Brecht-Hommage

Von Julia und Volker Seewald 1991  
gegründet, arbeitet die Gruppe vorwiegend im  
experimentellen Performance-Bereich.  
Seewald lebte in den Monaten Januar und  
Februar 1998 im Svendborger Exil-Haus  
Brecht's und erarbeitete dort eine szenische  
Collage aus Zitaten und eigenen Texten mit  
musikalisch-tanztheatralischen Elementen.

**Eine Öllampe für den Klassiker  
Brecht-Tagung in Kerala, Indien**

23. — 25. September 1998  
*Judith Wilke and Patrick Primavesi*

Von 1930 stammt Brechts Feststellung, daß  
der Weg zum großen zeitgenössischen Theater über  
das 'asiatische' Vorbild führe, allerdings mit  
gewissen Einschränkungen: "... Sehr schwierig ist es  
etwa schon, jene pompöse und exotische Fassade zu  
demolieren, die bei dem Wort 'asiatisch' vor dem  
'geistigen Auge' nicht nur eines mittleren Lesers  
aufzutauchen mag ... Nehme man also an, daß auch für  
uns der Reiz soweit wie für unsere Importfirmen  
im 'Exotischen' dieses 'Milieus' liegt. Und, um  
noch einem Mißverständnis von vielen möglichen  
vorzubeugen: es handelt sich auch nicht um jenes  
aus einer Reihe von billigen Büchern bekannte  
'Asien, in dem man dreißig Jahre gelebt haben muß,  
um zu begreifen, daß man es nicht begreifen  
kann'." (BFA: 21/380f.) Worum es statt dessen mit  
jenem Vorbild gehen sollte, hat Brecht dann

bekanntlich erst nach der Begegnung mit dem Schauspieler und Regisseur Mei Lanfang und seiner Theatertruppe in Moskau, im März 1935, präzisiert. Besonders "herrlich" etwa fand er, wie Mei Lanfang ein Mädchen spielte und damit gleichzeitig mehrere Figuren und das Zeigen selbst zeigen konnte (22/126ff.), und auf solchen konkreten Beobachtungen aufbauend sind Notate über die Besonderheiten des chinesischen Theaters in die Theorie des epischen Theaters und einer auf Verfremdung basierenden Inszenierungs- und Spielweise eingewandert.

Für das traditionelle indische Theater finden sich zwar bei Brecht keine ähnlich unmittelbaren Bezüge (die wohl von Kipling entlehnten Indien Klischees in *Mann ist Mann* führen in dem Kontext kaum weiter), allerdings lassen sich Brechts Vorbehalte und seine Faszination am asiatischen Theater auch in Bezug auf Indien produktiv machen, insbesondere, um den einseitigen Blick auf die Relevanz Brechts für das moderne indische Theater um die umgekehrte Perspektive zu erweitern. Oft genug wird zwar der große Einfluß von Brechts Werken und seiner Theatertheorie beschworen, die Auseinandersetzung in der Praxis bleibt aber zumeist auf wenige, ins Englische übersetzte 'Meisterwerke' beschränkt. So wäre zum einen der überkommene Kanon von Brechttexten durch weitere Übersetzungen (auch in die zahlreichen indischen Dialekte) aufzubrechen, zum andern aber Brechts Theatertheorie auch für den Versuch fruchtbar zu machen, die in den letzten Jahrzehnten nur knapp vor dem Untergang bewahrten traditionellen indischen Theaterformen jenseits ihrer exotischen Fassade neu zu verstehen.

Einen vielversprechenden Schritt in diese Richtung machte eine Tagung in Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), Hauptstadt des südindischen Bundesstaates Kerala, anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags von Brecht vom 23. bis 25. September 1998. Die für dortige Verhältnisse durchaus ungewöhnliche Veranstaltung wurde vom Department of German und dem International Center for Kerala Studies an der University of Kerala organisiert, das weitgespannte Thema lautete: "Brecht Theatre in the Western Context and its Influence on the Theatre of Kerala." Vorträge wurden gehalten vor allem von Referenten aus

Kerala und von den Verfassern dieses Beitrags aus Deutschland (mit Unterstützung des DAAD, der eine Gastdozentur gefördert hat). Nach indischem Brauch hatte die Tagung, zu der etwa 100 Zuhörerinnen und Zuhörer gekommen waren, einen besonderen zeremoniellen Rahmen. So wurde die Veranstaltung nicht nur mit Ansprachen von Honoratioren der beteiligten Institutionen eröffnet (Dr. P. K. Rajan vom International Centre for Kerala Studies, Dr. Cyriac Thomas, Vizepräsident der Universität, Claudia Richter vom DAAD u.a.), sondern auch durch den Kultusminister von Kerala, Shri T.K. Ramakrishnan, der die Tagung zu Ehren Brechts feierlich einweichte: Er entzündete vor dem Pult eine goldene Öllampe, wie sie bei traditionellen Theateraufführungen brennen.

Dr. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, Direktor einer renommierten Theaterschule aus Thrissur, dessen Ensemble Brechts *Mutter Courage* in der keralesischen Landessprache Malayalam aufführte, betonte in seinem Beitrag zunächst die praktischen Probleme mit der Vermittlung zwischen Emotionalität und Distanzierung. Diesen Aspekt behandelten auch die Vorträge der deutschen Gäste zum epischen Theater, zum *Fatzer*-Fragment und zu den *Lehrstücken*, die in Indien kaum bekannt sind. So wurden die Spannung zwischen Rationalisierung und fortbestehenden sakralen Elementen des Theaters bei Brecht und seine Auffassung des Körpers und des Asozialen erörtert. Wie die Diskussion zeigte, ergeben sich von da aus zahlreiche Anknüpfungspunkte auch für das Verhältnis des indischen Theaters zu Brecht. Die anschließenden Vorträge bezogen sich auf die Definition des Theaters als einer -- durch die gleichzeitige Anwesenheit von Schauspielern und Publikum -- immer schon politischen Institution (P. Govinda Pillai), sowie auf den Einfluß des Films, vor allem Chaplins, auf die Entwicklung von Brechts Theaterarbeit (Shri P.K. Venkuttan Nair). Aber auch der Lyriker Brecht wurde gewürdigt. So sprach Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker auf Englisch und Malayalam über verschiedene Deutungsmöglichkeiten des Gedichts 'Von der Kindesmörderin Marie Farrar.' Die Frage nach dem kulturellen Transfer bei der Übersetzung von Brechts Gedichten wurde zusätzlich erhellt durch kurze, zwischen die Vorträge eingestreute Lesungen in Deutsch, Englisch und

Malayalam: 'Laßt euch nicht verführen,' 'Vom armen B.B.,' 'An die Nachgeborenen,' 'Von den großen Männern.'

Außer den jeweils von Diskussionen begleiteten Vorträgen gab es noch ein ambitioniertes Rahmenprogramm, angefangen bei einer Ausstellung zu Brecht mit Photos, Texten und BE-Plakaten, die vom Max Müller-Bhawan (Goethe-Institut) aus Madras beigesteuert wurden. Auf großes Interesse stieß auch der Film "My name is Bertolt Brecht: Exile in USA" (1989) von Norbert Bunge und Christine Fischer-Devoy und eine Reihe weiterer Theaterveranstaltungen. Außer der nach westlichen Maßstäben eher konventionellen Adaption der *Mutter Courage* auf Malayalam gab es noch zwei jeweils extrem entgegengesetzte Aufführungen. Zunächst eine Performance der kolumbianischen Gruppe Cocombia über die Geschichte eines jungen Mannes, der Kokain in die USA zu schmuggeln versucht und schließlich auch wegen Mordes im Gefängnis landet. Der Versuch allerdings, zur Vorführung dieser aktuellen Story Bewegungsformen des klassischen indischen Theaters mit krassen Schaeffekten zu verbinden, stieß bei vielen jüngeren Zuschauern auf Skepsis, bei den älteren auf Ablehnung, als bloße Entstaltung der ja immer noch als heilig angesehenen traditionellen Darstellungsmittel.

Verständlich wurde diese Haltung bei der darauffolgenden, wirklich bemerkenswerten Aufführung der Margi School aus Trivandrum mit einem Kootiyattam-Stück, einer Vorform des populären, ebenfalls in Kerala beheimateten, aber erst im 18. Jahrhundert entwickelten Kathakali-Theaters. Die ältere Form verwendet noch das originale Sanskrit, und anders als bei der Begleitung durch Sänger im Kathakali singen im Kootiyattam die ausschließlich männlichen Darsteller selbst: jeweils einen Vers, der dann mit Gesten, Mimik und Tanz "nacherzählt" wird. Die Stoffe dieses Theaters sind die traditionellen großen Epen, in diesem Fall war es eine Episode mit der Bezeichnung Agnipravesankom aus dem Mahabharata. Es ging um den Moment, in dem Sita, die Frau des göttlichen Herrschers Rama, nach ihrer Errettung von den Feinden der Untreue angeklagt wird und zum Beweis ihrer Unschuld freiwillig den Feuertod wählt, aus dem sie aber unbeschadet hervorgeht.

Die traditionelle Form der Aufführung, die Kostüme sowie das Repertoire der Handstellungen (mudras) und der Mimik, die dem Darsteller das pantomimische Erzählen beinahe wie mit Worten in epischer Breite erlauben, wurden beibehalten. Dennoch waren auch bei dieser Aufführung Abweichungen, Eigenheiten und eine gewisse Komik zu beobachten, die sich gerade aus dem virtuosen Umgang mit der Tradition ergeben konnten. Die Meister dieser Kunst haben jedenfalls das Recht, nach langem Studium und noch längerer Praxis, auch Änderungen in das komplexe Zeichengefüge einer Aufführung einzubringen und so mitunter eine neue Sicht auf die mythischen Ereignisse zu entwickeln.

Die Dialektik von jahrzehntelang erarbeiteter Tradition und ihrer Durchbrechung faszinierte Brecht am chinesischen Theater, das einen ästhetischen und politischen "Aufruhr" erregen könnte, weil es Neuerungen aus dem alten, über Generationen beibehaltenen Gedenkrepertoire entwickeln und so "viel gewaltsamer" wirken könne (22/127ff.). Und eben diese Spannung lässt sich auch heute noch am traditionellen Theater in Indien beobachten. So gehört nicht viel Phantasie dazu, sich Brecht unter den weiß gewandeten Experten in den vorderen Reihen vorzustellen, die ebenso kritisch wie leidenschaftlich einer Kootiyattam- oder Kathakali-Aufführung folgen und manchmal plötzlich auflachen, während der Großteil des Publikums keine besonderen Reaktionen zeigt.

Angesichts der tiefen Kluft zwischen dem "modernen," seit der britischen Kolonialzeit verwestlichen Theater und den klassischen indischen Spiel- und Tanztraditionen bleibt gerade an Brechts Skepsis gegenüber dem Fortschritt in der Theaterkunst zu erinnern: "Tatsächlich ist eine Umwälzung der Schauspielkunst bei uns so schwer, weil es schwer ist, umzuwälzen, wenn da nichts zum Umwälzen vorhanden ist" (22/129).

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## History of the Berliner Ensemble

The Berliner Ensemble was founded by Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel in 1949, following the much acclaimed production of his play *Mother Courage*. After Brecht's return from exile the company first worked at Wolfgang Langhoff's Deutsches Theater (Schumannstraße). In 1954, it moved to its own home at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, a theater with a lavish, ne-Baroque interior that had survived the war without

much damage and was home in 1928 to the premiere of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. Here Brecht directed his plays *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and, together with Erich Engel, *The Life of Galileo*. His students Benno Besson, Egon Monk, Peter Palitzsch, and Manfred Wekwerth were given the opportunity to direct plays by Brecht that had not yet been staged. The stage designers Caspar Neher and Karl von Appen, the composers

Paul Dessau and Hanns Eisler, and the dramaturge Elisabeth Hauptmann were among Brecht's closest collaborators. After Brecht's death in 1956, Helene Weigel continued as the company's artistic manager. Young directors including Manfred Karge and Matthias Langhoff started their careers with the Berliner Ensemble. The company made its mark with such productions as *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* starring Ekkehard Schall as Ui and with Helene Weigel's memorable performances in *Coriolan* and *The Mother*.



## PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND ARTICLES

### *Puntila* as a Site for Alienation and Despair

Marna King

Brecht did not individualize the characters he placed on stage in his dramatic parables. Instead the characters were to serve as representative social types who demonstrated dialectical oppositions within particular economic and social conditions; however, once the production of a Brecht play fails to serve a meaningful political or social purpose through its dialectics, the audience member has no choice but to find another frame of reference in which to view the dramatic action.

In *Puntila and His Hired Man*, Brecht offers no motives or closure for the conflicted persona of Puntila or his relationship to his chauffeur Matti. The spaces he left unfilled tempt a director, actor and/or audience member to focus on character to provide a meta-meaning. In the two Hamburg productions of *Puntila* I have used as case studies in which character is central, existential rootlessness provided the needed anchor for a reworking of the *Puntila* materials. Both were presented by the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg within the last fifteen years and both foregrounded the psychic consequences of the self-inflicted isolation into which Puntila had driven himself. Since the feudalistic Puntila, "Der Gutsbesitzer," had been reshaped by Brecht as a typical capitalist representative, the play seems an especially appropriate choice to challenge audiences in the "chilly businessman's city" that Arnd Wesemann described in his 1996 *Theater der Zeit* article on Hamburg (Wesemann). A city which has long enjoyed a dominance in trade and industry and which

is now poised to become one of the major regional centers in the global schema of business hubs has "more than 85,000 firms and businessmen currently registered with the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce" (Chamber Way). A considerable number of these prosperous businessmen form the backbone of the subscription subsidy for Hamburg's two major theatres: The Deutsches Schauspielhaus and the Thalia Theater. The 1983 *Puntila*, directed by Frank-Patrick Steckel, refocused the material through strategic casting, visual imagery and internal cuts in the text, while the 1996 *Puntila* directed by Frank Castorf used the major relationships Brecht presented -- but not Brecht's text -- as a springboard for a contemporary exploration of alienation and despair. Much of the impact in the Castorf exploration is also projected through its theatrical images.

Frank-Patrick Steckel's personal and professional history contributes to his reputation as a well-regarded director of Brecht. His father, Leonard Steckel, originated the role of Puntila in the Zürich and Berliner Ensemble premieres of the play. When the Brecht boycott of the 1960's had in effect removed Brecht's plays from the public theatres of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Patrick Steckel, a student at the University of Hamburg, and other emerging leaders of the next generation of theatre directors, those who would criticize the material and social complacency of the West German society, were busy exploring Brecht's plays, theories, aesthetics and directorial process on their university theatre stages.

For Steckel's production the action began in a light, playful vein. As the curtain opened on a sparse but aesthetically pleasing scenic space, beer hall accordion music cut through the silence. The first movement on a stage littered with three inert bodies signaled the sense of fun to follow when suddenly the drunken Judge fell over backwards in his chair without dislodging himself from his seated position. The comedy and accelerated tempo in the beginning scenes worked in counterpoint to the despair beneath Puntila's blustering facade. Actually the first clue to the thrust of Steckel's direction could be found in the casting of the actor Ulrich Wildgruber as Puntila. Whenever Wildgruber is cast in a production, the resulting

symbiosis of actor and character projects a character unable or unwilling to contain the devils which torment him. The reviewer for *Die Welt* described Wildgruber's Puntilla as follows. "When he is drunk he is "not sentimental." "He drinks not for enjoyment but as a desperate flight from the absurdity of existence." When he is sober Puntilla is "not calculatingly cold....Wildgruber is never entirely drunk and never entirely reasonable" (Schmidt-Mühlisch). Half posing, half believing in his great capacity for enjoying life and dispensing largess, Wildgruber's half-drunk Puntilla tilted at windmills to keep his torments at bay. Yet no matter what tactic he used to avoid the truth, he could fool neither himself nor the audience. In existential terms Puntilla remained responsible for his actions.

By means of internal cuts to the text Steckel streamlined the play to focus on Puntilla's inner devils and his conflicted relationship to Matti. No moment between them was free of a palpable tension which resulted from the inner need of each character to connect with the other despite the barriers of class and position -- a need neither could admit even as they drank together following the engagement party (Figure 1). Yet Steckel did not allow the conflict between master and servant to overshadow Puntilla, the specimen under critical examination. In the text it is Matti's function to serve as the cynical stage manager, the gaze through which the audience is to

view Puntilla. Steckel increased this sense of distance for his non-communist audience by assigning to Matti's character several of the verses of Dessau's "Puntilla's Song" between scenes and many of the political lines Brecht had written for Surkkala. As for Eva and Matti, the relationship had been minimized throughout. Their scenes together served only to develop Matti and Eva's mutual ambivalence to any emotional connection.

Puntilla's female servants and the four fiancés he recklessly collected were all that remained of the idyllic countryside so important to Brecht. All scenes were staged on a bare stage in front of an abstract blue sky-drop streaked in measured diagonals (Figure 2). This artificial horizon could be brightly illuminated or soberly shrouded in gloom or darkness. The 1940's Studebaker in the center seemed poised for flight. However, the spectator soon realized that the car was permanently positioned on a turntable which allowed for a change of position but no escape into the great beyond.

Until the bathhouse scene at The Puntilla Farm the audience had been encouraged to laugh at Puntilla's antics and discomforts. Brecht did intend his well-fed capitalist to be shocked into sobriety by having cold water poured over his head. For this production not one but twelve buckets of water cascaded over the hapless drunk. Long before the last bucket had been emptied on Puntilla, the

spectators had been figuratively transported to the stage to experience the shock of the freezing water on their own bodies. The critical objectivity which Brecht had felt so necessary to the reception of his dialectic had been turned to visceral empathy and would remain so.

After the intermission Steckel sharpened the nature of the associational references for his Hamburg audience. For the engagement party, Puntilla and his daughter were costumed in elegant evening attire indistinguishable from that worn by audience members to formal functions. Steckel also intensified the effect of alcohol as a means of self-destruction.

Once Puntilla began to drink at the engagement party he did not stop. Figure 1

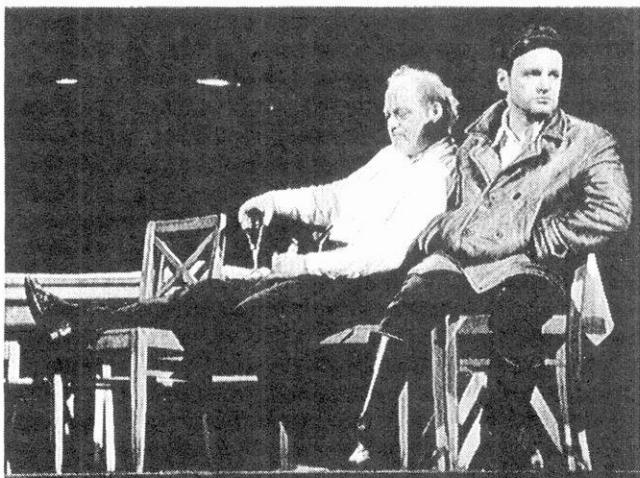


FIGURE 1

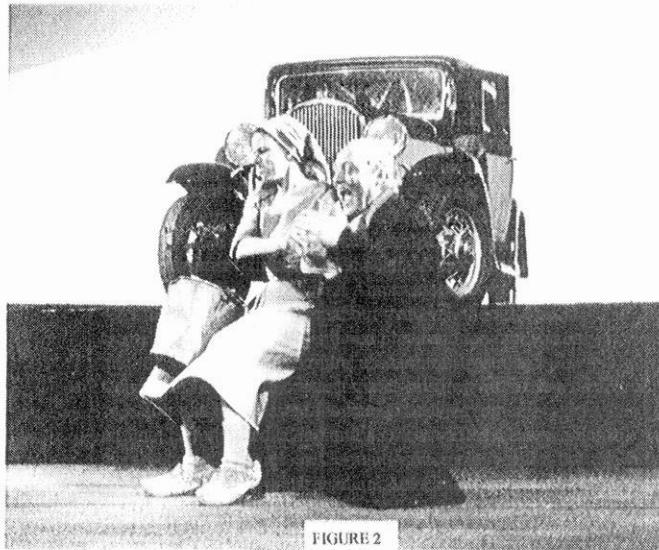


FIGURE 2

depicts a man whose supposed power over others could provide no resolution to his own self-inflicted alienation. Steckel cut all intervening text between the engagement party and Puntila and Matti's smashing of the furniture to build Mt. Hatelma. The mountain consisted of the central platform turned on its edge by the farm workers. Puntila and Matti then climbed to the top of this twenty-foot high plane by means of a stage ladder upstage of the platform. After waxing eloquent about the beauties of nature, Puntila passed out. He lay there precariously supported on a one-foot wide surface -- a beached whale exhibited at a very dangerous height. Matti descended. He offered his disclaimer of responsibility and left, albeit reluctantly (Schmidt-Mühlisch). Puntila's bottle dropped from his hand and the curtain descended.

Frank Castorf, the controversial director from the former German Democratic Republic who is now Intendant of the Volksbühne, "mistrusts traditional narrative structures," especially those canonized as classics (Schütt: 14). He reduces a text to rubble in order to discover the inner world that lies hidden behind that which the author has woven into his written text. In Castorf's words, "A work must always have a secret that cannot be explained....I enter a play and then climb out and around it. Whatever path I pursue it pulls me magically in other directions." When engaging "with an

hermetically closed text" he "never forgets the relativity of the contemporary world which presses in from the outside (Schütt: 109)" because for Castorf the theatre is the playing space for what he calls "the lunatic asylum of life" (Nagel: 7). Biography, history, text and contemporary life interrelate to form a new construction which he and his actors then explore on stage. This includes the political history and personal biography of the director and his actors. Castorf assumes the spectator will be able to identify the various references as the open-form, multi-layered performance unfolds.

In the prologue of Castorf's 1996 production, Puntila and Matti appeared along with the judge in the midst of the same nightmare as the three rolled and twitched -- seemingly manipulated as puppets dangling from a string. As they continued to move and turn together to the raucous beat of rock music, the spectator understood that Puntila and Matti were to be identified as doubles of the same person. To make sure his audience would reflect on the idea of duality, Puntila and Matti at times traded lines and identities, while the program featured Hegel's famous lordship and bondage section from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The physical appearance of Matti suggested that of a young "Ossi" intellectual from the Prenzlauer Berg section of the former East Berlin, a man who had been permanently marked by his history. Hesitant to assert himself and unable to take the responsibility for personal freedom, Matti remained locked within his frozen self. His glasses also reminded the audience of the early Brecht and a younger Castorf. Michael Wittenborn, who played Puntila the older self in this production, signified one layer of identity as Puntila, the East German (perhaps Castorf himself) and one that could be recognized as the West German "capitalist." Regardless of the specific identification, he was to be seen as the cynical observer as well as the master who controlled all action, a tired and melancholy middle-aged man who no longer had the energy or will to fight against his spiritual death. Both Puntila and

Matti were costumed as Becket clowns who had been striped to their underwear -- Puntilla's felt hat further underlined this layer of signification. For the first sequence in the tavern, Puntilla assumed the role of master by wearing a fur coat. He refused to recognize Matti until he appeared in obligatory costume for the character, that of the proletarian leather jacket. After Matti put on the jacket, he then identified himself as Puntilla's chauffeur. Puntilla refused to accept this introduction. He wanted Matti to identify himself as an individual. He forced Matti to exit and return many times in what became a futile attempt to make Matti accept a self-identity.

Castorf also used Brecht's sexual desires and opinions as revealed within his diaries, stories and poems to inform "the lunatic asylum of life" he created for four characters within Brecht's text:

Puntilla, Matti, Eva and Fina. The theatre program provided excerpts from Brecht's writings as well as two Castorf quotations which helped to explain Puntilla's conflation of alcohol and sex as a medium for escape: "Alcohol is a euphoric means by which a man can leave the circumstances in which he feels caught. Alcohol is also a medium of

flight in which man can immediately enter into another world: It is exactly the same with love and sex" and "The longing for love, after drink, is very human" (*Programm*).

The multiple persona representing Puntilla/Brecht/Castorf (?) attempted to satisfy his own sexual desires just once within the dramatic action. While standing on the stage though he became transfixed by Fina, who personified the ideal female for a typical male fantasy (Figure 3). Lean and



FIGURE 3

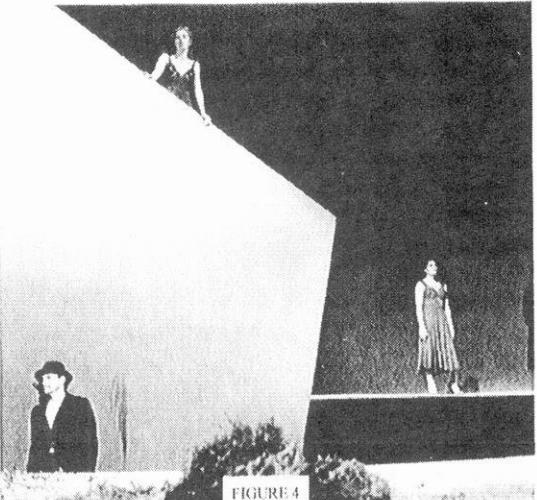


FIGURE 4

inviting, the beautiful Fina stood tantalizingly out of reach above him. Wordlessly she descended to dance with him. One could see Puntilla had entered the fantasy with a feeling of futility, and indeed the fantasy soon turned grotesque as Fina inexplicably transmuted and multiplied into three transvestites -- later identified as Puntilla's Finnish fiancées. After this one last attempt to act for himself had failed, Puntilla returned to his original intention, to examine his own history through that of the younger generation: Matti, Eva and Fina. He failed to find any answers which would ease his pain.

At various moments songs or musical selections interrupted or underlined the action. Such pauses gave the spectator a chance to reflect on the alienation which afflicted all the characters (Figure 4). Castorf pushed Brecht's characterizations to their logical extremes. [The attache's whose sole obsession, his own self image was physicalized as a eunuch in perpetual evening attire.] Played as an hysterical, repressed nymphomaniac, Eva too wore a representative costume, an unattractive red cocktail dress, the straps of which would not stay on her shoulders.

The playing space, as in all Castorf productions, had been designed by Hartmut Meyer as a colorful, abstract playground on a turntable in which steep rakes, heights and chasms physically challenged the actors. The messy, glutinous byplay Castorf actors usually indulge in had been

eliminated and spontaneous effects were limited to the gleeful throwing of hay from the Finnish countryside onto the set, the flooding of the auditorium with the steam from Matti and Eva's bathhouse encounter and the cast's violent smashing of empty whisky bottles at Puntila's feet.

After the stage crew placed the furniture, Puntila climbed the symbolic mountain. He then attempted one more time to pair off Matti, this time with Fina. Eventually he coerced Matti and Fina to change places with him on Mt. Hatelma so Matti could learn to enjoy sex (Figure 5). While Matti and Fina fornicated listlessly beneath Matti's newspaper, Puntila stepped to the front of the stage to tell the audience of the beauties of Finland. The audience was then redirected to the forced coupling. After the sex act had been completed, Matti weakly waved a tiny red flag and Puntila moved above Matti. From behind Matti's head he flashed the hand signal which could be understood as either a victory sign or ass's ears. The music changed from "The Internationale" to "All You Need Is Love" as the performance ended.



FIGURE 5

Most reviewers considered the production a plausible extension of the *Puntila* materials, however they were divided as to whether the production had been a success. The audience had no such doubts. *Puntila and His Hired Man Matti* became one of the most popular productions of the 1995-96 Deutsches Schauspielhaus season. An invitation to the Berlin Theatertreffen 96 allowed a wider audience to debate its merits.

The dominant perspective of the theatre in the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1970's and early 1980's is often referred to as the "The Theatre of Subjectivity." Young theatre artists had turned inward to contemplate the state of man within contemporary society. Accordingly, Steckel successfully reshaped *Puntila and his Hired Man* as a viable means for expressing existential concern. Thirteen years later Frank Castorf in a radically different Germany used the same material as a framework for a chaotic, multi-layered, production which explored as well as broadened the range of factors which contribute to alienation and despair. Both productions used Puntila as an associational figure for a middle-aged male audience likely to be afflicted with similar miseries. The Hamburg 1983 and 1996 productions of the text also demonstrate a principal reason why *Puntila and His Hired Man Matti* will continue to be one of Brecht's most viable plays precisely because the author does not define the relationship between control and self-destruction.

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 \_\_\_\_\_ *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*. Deutsches Schauspielhaus Programm (10 January 1996)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ "Success with Hamburg - An Economic Region of Great Promise." *Chamber Way*. (December, 1997): 14-15, 32

## **Pauken und Trompeten zum 100. Geburtsjahr von Brecht in Tokio**

Monika Ayugai

Nicht nur mit Pauke und Trompete (auch nicht mit Flöte, Fagott und Bratsche wie bei der Uraufführung 1955 mit Benno Besson in Berlin am Schiffbauerdammtheater), sondern mit Trommel, Trompete und Piano wurde am 2., 3. und 4. Oktober 1998 Brechts "weniger berühmt gewordenes, zugleich letztes Stück," wie das schlichte blaugrüne Programmheft informiert, mit viel Tempo, Temperament und Engagement unter der Leitung des Regisseurs und Germanisten Tatsushi Iwabuchi, Professor der bekannten Gakushuin Universität, in Tokio in der Azabu Kumin Senta Horu (was sich mit "Halle des Gemeindezentrums Azabu" übersetzen läßt) anlässlich des 100. Geburtsjahres des Stückeschreibers aufgeführt. Die Erwähnung des Ortes ist wichtig, verweist sie doch auf das Halbprivate dieser Aufführung. Zwar wurde die Halle von dem Stadtteil Azabu (Verwaltungsbezirk Minato-ku) zur Verfügung gestellt, alles andere jedoch, von der Erstellung der Kostüme bis hin zur Herstellung der Bühnenbilder, vor allem aber die Kostenfrage selbst, mußte von Regisseur und Schauspielern allein gelöst werden, da in Japan Theater im westlichen Stil (wenn es zudem kein "Klassiker" der Klassik ist) nicht subventioniert wird, sofern es sich nicht um Aufführungen des kommerziellen Theaterbetriebs handelt.

Unter diesen Bedingungen ist man ständig auf der "Suche nach Gelegenheit," sagte Iwabuchi mit einem vieldeutigen Lachen. Die Gelegenheit bot sich, als Iwabuchs Theaterplanung mit den Interessen der Stadtverwaltung Minato-ku, nämlich "zur Förderung der Ortskunst," zusammenfiel. So erklärt sich auch die Gründung des Ensembles eigens für diese Oktober Aufführung aus Mitgliedern der sechs Theatergruppen (bzw. einiger Musikgruppen) aus Minato-ku und dem Iwabuchi vertrauten Schauspielerstamm. Daß Iwabuchi die Schauspieler und Musikanten "nicht richtig bezahlen kann," gibt ihm manchmal ein "Schuldgefühl," andererseits funktioniert Iwabuchs Theatertätigkeit durch das Einverständnis aller, gemeinsame Einnahmen und Ausgaben gleichmäßig zu teilen.

Als Zuschauer kann man nur bewundernd

vermuten, daß das Ensemble die Lösung aller äußeren Probleme in der eigenen Theaterbegeisterung, persönliche Opfer rigoros überwindend, gefunden hat, eingedenk der Tatsache, daß, um nur eines unter vielen herauszugreifen, allein für das Leihen noch vorhandener Kostüme im Haiyuza Theater, insbesondere der roten Offiziersuniformen (von Iwabuchs Inszenierung 1960) ca 400 000 Yen aufgebracht werden mußten.

38 Jahre liegen zwischen Iwabuchs erster und vorläufig letzter Aufführung von *Pauken und Trompeten* im Oktober 98, eine Zeit, in der der Name Brecht wie allerorten, besonders aber in japanischen Theaterkreisen einen beachtlichen Wandel durchgemacht hat -- war er wie zur Erstaufführung dieses Stücks in Tokio in den politisch unruhigen sechziger Jahren aktuell und wurden Brecht Stücke zur politischen Erziehung, Reflektion und Agitation benutzt, so flachte von den siebziger Jahren an das Interesse wieder ab, der Name Brecht wurde mit dem für Japaner bedrückenden Gefühl behaftet, er sei zu theoretisch, einerseits schwer zu verstehen, andererseits zu direkt, dunkel, schwierig, daher unzugänglich. Eine Einstellung übrigens, die auch jetzt noch von vielen der mitspielenden Schauspieler zu Anfang der Proben geteilt wurde, genauer gesagt: bis zu Anfang der Proben -- wie es sich an den im Programmheft abgedruckten Einzelnotizen der Ensemble Mitglieder ablesen läßt. Daß Iwabuchi diese Ressentiments überwinden konnte, war sein persönlicher Erfolg. Wer übrigens in den Publikumsreihen sein Programmheft aufmerksam gelesen hatte, konnte also eine Art Parallelsituation entdecken: Hatte Brecht mit dem Berliner Ensemble für ein Gastspiel in England, wo die deutschen Künste als schwer und dunkel galten, die Absicht, diese "Vorurteile" zu brechen, wofür sich ihm seine kurz zuvor beendete Bearbeitung der Komödie *The Recruiting Officer* von George Farquhar mit Erfolg anbot, so gelang es Iwabuchi, mit dieser in *Pauken und Trompeten* umbenannten Bearbeitung den "anderen Brecht" in Tokio zu zeigen: verständlich, mit einer gewissen Leichtigkeit, mit Komödienhaftem, ja, sogar mit Spaß, kurz, mit einer neuen Zugänglichkeit.

Kōji Yamashita stellte überzeugend die vielseitigen Funktionen des Friedensrichters Balance

dar -- zunächst als Vater, der, besorgt um das moralische Verhalten seiner einzigen Tochter Viktoria, mit ihr ein für den Zuschauer spritziges Zwiegespräch führt, um herauszufinden, ob eine Liebesbeziehung besteht zwischen ihr und dem Werbeoffizier Plume, was die lebhafte Viktoria (Nori Morito) aufs heftigste bestreitet, ein Dialog, nicht ohne Komik, der Balances Mißtrauen sowohl gegenüber den englischen Offizieren als auch den englischen jungen Mädchen deutlich zum Ausdruck bringt. Köji Yamahita zeigt hervorragend, wie entschieden der Friedensrichter in seiner Haltung ist, soweit es sich um seine eigene Tochter handelt: als Simpkins die Ankunft des Captains Plume meidet, brüllt er mit einem unjapanisch großen Volumen seinen Befehl, die vierjährige Kutsche vorfahren zu lassen, um Viktoria zu Onkel Harry in die Grafschaft und somit in die vermeintliche Sicherheit zu bringen. Gleich darauf versteht er es, sehr charmant den Captain mit ausgebreiteten Armen zu begrüßen, jegliche sich auf Viktoria beziehenden Bemerkungen des Captains wie selbstverständlich zu ignorieren, was den Effekt einer gewissen Komik in sich trägt, stattdessen sich auf Plumes Anlaß des Besuchs zu konzentrieren: die Rekrutierung in Shrewsbury für ein Söldnerheer König Georges im Kampf gegen die Rebellen in der Kolonie Amerika mit ihren neuen Ideen von Unabhängigkeit und Menschen in Gleichheit und Freiheit, die -- und in diesem Punkte sind sich Balance und Plume einig -- nicht akzeptabel seien.

Dieses Stück um Liebe und Liebesintrigen einerseits und unglaubliche bis absurde Werbemethoden für ein imperialistisches Söldnerheer andererseits sowie die untrennbare Verknüpfung beider, die Liebesintrige bringt immer auch die Werbung voran und umgekehrt, ist mit seiner spannenden Schnelligkeit dem Tempo des pulsierenden Tokioter Alltagslebens angepaßt.

Herrlich auch die Wiedersehensszene der beiden jungen Damen, die sich wie als Auftaktszene für das Liebesintrigenspiel heraushebt: Harfe spielend und singend empfängt Melinda (Yuriko Naru) ihre Freundin Viktoria, die dem Landaufenthalt bei Onkel Harry zu entgehen versucht, mit großem Charm (allerdings überzeugt sie als Schauspielerin mehr als als Sängerin). Der anfänglichen freundschaftlichen Umarmung folgt

eine rasche Hinführung zu dem, was Melinda und Viktoria wirklich im Innersten bewegen: natürlich der Auserwählte. Für den Zuschauer breitet sich nun folgend auf amüsante Weise die lebhafte Entwicklung eines Dialogs aus, nicht nach Art einer romantischen Liebesschwärmerie, sondern gereizt und erhitzt kommt es zu Äußerungen der gegenseitigen Werteinschätzung bzw. - Abschätzung -- Viktoria erbost Melinda nicht nur durch ihre Behauptung, ihr Liebhaber Worthy sei kein Held, sondern darüber hinaus durch ihren Vorwurf, sie solle diesen anständigen Menschen nicht so unmenschlich behandeln, ja, schlimmer noch, nicht wie einen Hund dressieren. Melinda schlägt mit scharfen Worten zurück, Viktoria's Verhalten ihrem Geliebten gegenüber verurteilend, der, wie sie meint, in der ganzen Welt herumtobe und in jeder Stadt ein Mädchen habe. Melindas schmähender Ausruf, Viktoria habe jeden Stolz verloren, und folglich der abrupte Abbruch der freundschaftlichen Gesten, das theatralische Abräuschen Viktorias und Melindas letztes zorniges Wort, der hinausrauschenden Viktoria hinterherschmetternd, diese Szene wird vom Zuschauer nicht schnell vergessen, zugleich werden ihm/ihr aus weiblicher Sicht zwei konträre Charaktere vorgestellt, die Intrigenspiel und Werbeaktion in wechselseitiger Beziehung vorantreiben: Der Schuhfabrikant (Shotaro Tasaki, der bieder seine Rolle spielt) mit dem sprechenden Namen Worthy braucht, um Melinda für sich zu gewinnen, das etwas gefährliche Zwischenspiel mit Captain Brazen, der seinerseits zur Eroberung der schönen, reichen Melinda seine Offizierslaufbahn aufgibt und kurz darauf, als er vom vermeintlichen Verlust ihres Vermögens hört, unverzüglich seine Offiziersuniform zurückverlangt, welche inzwischen anderweitig verarbeitet wurde. Es ist daher nicht ohne Ironie, daß er am Ende die Uniform des Werbeoffiziers von Plume selbst übernimmt, da Plume sich verbürgerlicht und unter dem Druck des Friedensrichters in die Heirat mit Balances Tochter mit dem sprechenden Namen Viktoria einwilligt. Welch ein Wert bzw. Unwert den Uniformen und dem, was sich dahinter präsentiert, beigemessen wird, wird trotz des Komödienhaften dieser Szene deutlich zur Frage erhoben. Auch wird der Zuschauer die Ironie gespürt haben, daß es

ausgerechnet der Werbeoffizier ist, in den sich Viktoria verliebt, deren Liebesverlangen sich so sehr steigert, daß sie die gefährliche Initiative ergreift, in die erfundene Rolle des Fähnrichs Wilful zu schlüpfen, um Plume mit List und Tücke vom Kriegsdienst in Amerika abzuhalten. Zu den zwei Hauptdarstellern: Plume (Hajime Tawara) verlor etwas von seiner beeindruckenden Forschheit in dem Moment des Wurfs seiner Uniform in Brazens Arme. Und Viktoria, die in ihrer Hosenrolle keß und selbstsicher wirkte, verwandelte sich mit Rückkehr zu sich selbst, als Verliebte, Tochter und in einem schönen Kleid, in ein niedliches Mädchen, wobei die Betonung des Niedlichen vielleicht dem westlichen Zuschauer stärker auffällt.

Alles in allem wird in dieser letzten Szene, im Haus des Richters, das gesamte Geschehen zum Höhepunkt getrieben, in dessen Zentrum die grotesken Werbemethoden stehen. Die Unmöglichkeit der Werbung sowie die Unwilligkeit aller Geworbenen ist offensichtlich. Hier gibt es keine Freiwilligen, die für den König in die Schlacht übers Meer ziehen. Also, wer geht nach Amerika? Kurze Rückblende an den verulkten Liebesort im Wälzchen am Severn: Lucy, Melindas Zofe, und ihr Geliebter, der Schankbursche Mike, wollen nach Amerika, aber aus ganz anderen Gründen: sie sind es, die die Idee von Freiheit geschnuppert haben und ein glückliches Leben eben in dieser neuen Freiheit suchen. Umso aufgebrachter ist Lucy, als sie von der Zwangsrekrutierung Mikes erfährt. Sehr eindrucksvoll stellte Mami Hirata die selbstbewußte Zofe dar, die unerschrocken den Friedensrichter erpreßt, entweder Mikes Freilassung aus dem Söldnerheer oder sie will der ganzen Welt Viktorias Fähnrichsabenteuer verkünden. Lucy's Schrei war gellend und zwingend. Natürlich wird Mike entlassen. Selbst dem müden Zuschauer mußte hier auffallen, wie sich die Gesetze zur Rekrutierung drehen und wenden ließen.

In dieser letzten Szene liegt auch die Gleichzeitigkeit der Dinge, die bei allem Komödienhaften zu denken gibt: auf der einen Seite die Zwangsrekrutierung unter himmelschreienden Argumenten -- auch Taschendiebe und Gauner sind tauglich für den Heeresdienst -- auf der anderen Seite das Happy End der besseren Gesellschaft; während der Zuschauer das Heer vorbeiziehen hört,

sieht er die glücklichen neuen Paare mit dem Friedensrichter, Champagner trinkend und auf die alte englische Freiheit, daheim und Übersee, anstoßend. Dem Umtrunk folgt der fröhliche Aufbruch zur Fasanenjagd.

Ein Theaterstück diesen Inhalts auch heute noch einem Publikum interessant und sehenswert vorzuführen, erfordert Überlegung und Geschick, zumal heute das japanische Theaterpublikum im allgemeinen nicht viel mit Brecht verbindet. Es lag an dem guten Spiel, daß über das Komödienhafte gelacht und dennoch der ernste Hintergrund verstanden werden konnte. Keine Extravaganza stifteten Verwirrung oder Kontroversen. Auch die Bühnenausstattung, die tragbaren Bühnenbilder, waren einfach, klar und frisch in den Farben, je ihrer Funktion entsprechend.

Den Schauspielern und Musikern gebührt Applaus. Sie im einzelnen aufzuführen, würde den Rahmen dieses Berichtes sprengen. Sie imponierten als gut aufeinander eingespieltes Team, allerdings stellte sich heraus, daß trotz Beibehaltung der Originalmusik von Rudolf Wagner-Régeny die Songs nicht ohne Verlust an gezielter Wirkung übertragen werden konnten, was seine Ursache teils in der übersetzten Sprache (z.B. Ungleichheiten in der Silbenzahl, Fehlen des Endreims im Japanischen u. a.), teils auch in der mehr lyrischen Gesangsaufführung der Japaner haben mag, eine Schwierigkeit, über die sich Iwabuchi wiederholt bei früheren Stücken, auch in einigen Schriften geäußert hat. Auch geht bei der Übertragung in die japanische phonetische Silbenschrift das Assoziationsspiel mit den sprechenden Namen (wie Viktoria, Balance, Plume, Wilful, Worthy, Smuggler etc.) leider fast gänzlich verloren.

Sprachliche und inhaltliche Übertragungen aus anderen Kulturbereichen bringen wohl immer Differenzen, aber auch neue Möglichkeiten. Welche Gedankenverbindungen schlägt nun Professor Iwabuchi dem Publikum von *Pauken und Trompeten* vor? Es sind eigentlich zwei Hauptthemenkreise. Wer sich nicht nur mit dem Spaß der Komödie begnügte, der konnte anhand des Programmheftes, den geschichtlichen Leitfaden verfolgend, größere Zusammenhänge herstellen. Hatte Brecht die Bearbeitung von Farquhars Komödie *The Recruiting Officer* 1954, zur Zeit der Ost-West-Konflikte,

gegen die bevorstehende Gründung der Bundeswehr geschrieben, so lag diesem Konzept eine Antikriegshaltung zugrunde. Nun hat ein Antikriegsstück zu jeder Zeit seine Allgemeingültigkeit, aber als "Brechtianer" besteht Iwabuchi immer auch auf dem Gegenwartsbezug der Brecht Stücke. Dieses Stück gewann zum gegenwärtigen Zeitpunkt hier in Japan neue Aktualität in Bezug auf das, was man in Deutschland als Vergangenheitsbewältigung bezeichnet, und was in Japan vergleichsweise noch aufzuarbeiten ist. Professor Iwabuchi spielte hier auf die im Herbst 98 öffentlich ausgetragene Kontroverse an, ausgelöst durch neu aufgeflammtre Fragestellungen (Führte Japan im 2. Weltkrieg in Asien einen Verteidigungs- oder Invasionskrieg? Ist eine "Verjährung" der Kriegsverbrechen, wie es in Japan nach dem Gesetz der Fall ist, wirklich möglich?), wobei Professor Iwabuchi eine äußerst kritische Haltung kompromißlos vertrat. Doch um bei seiner Inszenierung von *Pauken und Trompeten* zu bleiben bzw. auf seinen zweiten Bezugspunkt durchzustoßen -- er sieht die Eröffnung einer weiteren Perspektive durch Brechts Verlegung von Ort und Zeit der Handlung bei Farquhar, vom Spanischen Erbfolgekrieg, zum amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg, die den Vergleich ermöglicht, wie dereinst die Neue Welt der Freiheitsbestrebungen von den Europäern unter feudalistischem System gesehen wurde, mit dem gegenwärtigen kritischen Blick auf Amerika als Weltpolizei. Mit diesen Denkanstößen entließ Professor Iwabuchi sein Publikum und lud es zu weiteren Brecht Aufführungen schon im folgenden Monat (21.-25. November 1998) ein, in einem ganz anderen Rahmen. In einer großangelegten Gemeinschaftsproduktion im bekannten Kommerztheater Nissay wurden in einer gut publizierten Doppelaufführung das Radiolehrstück *Der Lindberghflug* (*Der Ozeanflug*) und das Ballett *Die sieben Todsünden der Kleinbürger* auf Deutsch vor vollem Hause aufgeführt. Auf dieses Theaterereignis mit zwei Stücken und zwei Regisseuren zum 100. Geburtsjahr von Brecht und zum 35jährigen Bestehen des Nissay Theaters kann hier aus Raumgründen nur noch kurz hingewiesen und ein kurzer allgemeiner Eindruck wiedergegeben werden. Vorweggenommen sei eine wichtige Pointe

beim Zustandekommen dieser Aufführungen: Milva war der "Lockvogel." Die italienische Sängerin, die sich durch mehrere Gastaufführungen in Japan großer Beliebtheit erfreut, war von Iwabuchi nach Tokyo gelockt worden, was wiederum von Iwabuchs guter Kenntnis des Publikums, das hier ausgesprochen Star-orientiert ist, zeugt. Milva spielte Anna 1 in den *Sieben Todsünden*, inszeniert von Kuniaki Iita (Musik Dirigentin: Mari Watanabe), während Iwabuchi den *Ozeanflug* als erstes Stück inszenierte (Musik Dirigent: Victor Symonette). Auch in dieser Aufführung war wieder die gradlinige Entwicklung der Dinge zu beobachten: der Flieger, der Atheist, der Eroberer der Natur, über dem Meer, das realistisch in seinem Wellengang auf der Bühne zu sehen war und einen bleibenden Eindruck hinterließ, und schließlich der Erschöpfte, hinter dem sich bei Ankunft die Tore der Scheune schließen und vor der Zudringlichkeit der jubelnden Menge schützen.

Dieses den menschlichen Verstand verherrlichende Stück heute, da der Mensch die dort gefeierte Beherrschung der Natur mittels Technik mittels Verstand eher als eine Bedrohung als einen Triumph verspürt, mit Gegenwartsbezug auf der Bühne zu zeigen, ist eine Herausforderung. In einer glänzenden Konzeption ist Iwabuchi etwas Neues unter Beibehaltung des Gegebenen gelungen durch Abänderung in eine Rahmenhandlung d.h. konkret durch einen Prolog (drei deutsche Lektoren, von großer, starker Konstitution, als Flieger, mit Abstand nebeneinander, im "spotlight" auf der kahlen Bühne rezitieren den Bericht der abgestürzten Flieger, dem expressionistischen Drama *Der Bettler von Sorge* entnommen) und ein extrem kurzes, fast erschreckendes Nachspiel: während sich alle Schauspieler zum Schluß, wie üblich, noch einmal auf der Bühne zeigen -- die Projektionsschrift "Das Unerreichbare" ist noch fixiert -- erscheint im Hintergrund ein kurzer Filmausschnitt mit der Weltraumrakete. Kaum hat der Zuschauer das Film-Bild wahrgenommen, läßt ein explosionsartiger Knall den ganzen Theaterraum vibrieren, wobei die Schauspieler mit einem Aufschrei nach dem Film-Bild herumschnellen -- das Weltraumraketenprojekt ist gescheitert. Durch diese neue Rahmenhandlung erfährt "das Unerreichbare" der Zukunft bei Brecht jetzt eine Umkehrung, die dem Heute entspricht.

Zwischen dem *Ozeanflug* und den *Sieben Todsünden* ist eigentlich kein Übergang herzustellen. Auch Spielart und -Technik unterschieden sich, was vordergründig allein schon daran liegt, daß die *Sieben Todsünden* als Ballettstück ganz andere Forderungen stellt, die sich wiederum aus der wechselseitigen Beziehung zwischen getanzter Handlung, Musik und Text ergeben. Was auffiel, war, daß allein durch die Anwesenheit Milvas sich die wechselseitige Beziehung verschob, es wurden andere Akzente gesetzt. Milva war der absolute Mittepunkt. Schon rein äußerlich unterschied sie sich in ihrem funkelnden Abendkleid mit tiefem Decolleté, ihren langen, wallenden, roten Haaren, ihrem diva haften, durchaus charmanten Auftreten von der bescheideneren japanischen Ballettgruppe, die trotz sorgfältiger Einstudierung in Milvas Anwesenheit wie Hintergrundfiguren wirkten. Alles um Milva herum wurde zur Schattenfigur. Auch Milvas Stimmvolumen übertönte das von Anna 2, womit auch die Wechselbeziehung zwischen Anna 1 und Anna 2 sich dahingehend veränderte, daß das dahingehauchte „Ja, Anna“ der Anna 2 in ein Verhältnis der Unterordnung zu Anna 1 geriet, was den Gesamtinhalt veränderte. Trotzdem raste das Publikum. Es war begeistert -- von Milva, dem Star? Interessanterweise gab der japanische Komponist und Musikkritiker Hikaru Hayashi besonders dem *Ozeanflug* eine sehr positive Rezension, obwohl das Thema des Stücks heute nicht mehr relevant sei. (*Asahi Zeitung*, 2. Dezember 1998). So ergaben sich nach den Brecht Aufführungen im Nissay Theater mehrere Diskussionsansätze, am augenfälligsten war wohl die Frage, wie Schauspieler „östlicher“ und „westlicher“ Mentalität oder Herkunft zusammen Brecht spielen können -- ein weiterer Grund, über Brecht selbst zu diskutieren. So ist der Name Brecht hier wieder ins Bewußtsein gerückt. In der japanischen Zeitschrift *ON STAGE, The Performing Arts Journal* (11. Dezember 1998, von Miyuki Shiraishi) hieß es sogar, daß diese zwei experimentellen Musikstücke Brechts mit der Musik von Weill voller Originalität steckten und sehr geeignet gewesen seien, das Brechtjahr zu feiern.

## Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the Comédie-Française

Petermichael von Bawey

For the 1998-1999 theater season one of the four plays in the Comédie-Française repertoire was Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Under the direction of Jorge Lavelli, an Argentinean born director associated with the Théâtre de la Colline in Paris, Brecht's drama received thirty-seven performances in the Grand Salle Richelieu. The play was well attended by enthusiastic audiences, yet received mixed reviews by theater critics.

The Comédie-Française has not staged many Brecht works. Jorge Lavelli's production is only the third Brecht drama to appear in its repertoire. It was as late as 1976 that the Comédie-Française made its Brecht debut with *Mr. Puntilla and His Man Matti*. And only fourteen years later did the company perform *The Life of Galileo* in 1990.

By the time the Comédie-Française turned to Brecht's theater, his works were already well known by the French public. Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire (TNP) brought Brecht's *Mother Courage* to the attention of the French as early as 1951. The TNP was a “people's theater” or the opposite of the Comédie-Française, which Napoleon had declared the “official state theater” in 1806. The TNP performed *Mother Courage* for nearly a decade to audiences of “more than 140,000 people,” as Peter Thompson noted in his recent book on the history of the play.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the triumphant success of the Berlin Ensemble's production of *Mother Courage* at the Paris International Theater Festival in 1954 contributed further to the popularity of Brecht. Studies of Brecht's method by leading cultural critics, for example the semiotian Roland Barthes, brought greater theoretical understanding of Brecht's work to French intellectuals, who preferred his dramas to those of contemporaries like Beckett or Ionesco.

For the Brecht Centenary the general administrator of the Comédie-Française, Jean-Pierre Miquel, sought to enhance the company's program with a “classic of the German theater,” as he put it. Miquel stated that Brecht “...had with his humanity and innovations obtained importance comparable to Kleist, Schiller, Lessing and Goethe.”<sup>2</sup> Apparently

the once iconoclastic Brecht who had advocated “plundering the classics” had himself joined the classics. Miquel’s evaluation for the Comédie-Française staging *Mother Courage* merely confirms what certain critics have argued for some time: Brecht has joined the classics and his theater has been historicized.

That view is shared by the critic Georges Schlockner (*Handelsblatt*, 12, November 1998), who evaluated Jorge Lavelli’s direction of *Mother Courage* at the Comédie-Française as “true to (Brecht’s) form” (“buchstabengetreu”) without the “slightest conviction” and as “having the forceful impotency of the classics.” The Comédie-Française, so the critic, has not been criticized unduly for its formal perfection at the expense of intellectual engagement (“geistiges Engagement”).

Indeed, it is easy to identify the Comédie-Française with the staging of classic works of the theater. In this season’s selection Brecht was in the company of Gogol and Molire; the latter a regular in the company’s repertoire. Still, Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia* was staged too, a rather youthful addition and of recent lineage.

But there is another, more relevant issue to consider. The critic implies that the Comédie-Française’s staging is merely formal and the Brecht classics impotent. As I understand, the point is that neither the Comédie-Française’s polished performance nor Brecht’s drama address issues of contemporary relevance. I would like to suggest another view of the production.

As is commonly known, Brecht had argued for taking the “material worth” of classic works and applying it “against the historical grain,” what Walter Benjamin had suggested in his “Theses on History.” It is of interest to recall that in its second production of a Brecht drama, the Comédie-Française followed a similar approach. Under the direction of Antoine Vitez, *The Life of Galileo* (1990) was contemporized with the Vatican hierarchy represented in the style and manner of the Soviet secret service, the KGB. With that historical analogy, Vitez drew an obvious relationship between Galileo’s seventeenth century struggle to events of our time, the closure of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, perceived then as the end of ideology and the emergence of a new world.

Antoine Vitez’s historical transformation of drama material, that is, bringing the play’s theme in proximity to current events, is not unique in the staging of Brecht’s works. Alfred Kirchner in Bochum, Germany, placed *Mother Courage* in the context of the 1981 Iraq-Iran War; also, Peter Palitzsch in his production of the same play in Cologne drew distinct references to World War Two and recent German history; and Richard Schechner in the United States (1975) relocated *Mother Courage*’s Thirty Years War to Vietnam, relating a historical to a contemporary military conflict.<sup>3</sup>

In short, the production of *Mother Courage* indicates that various directors have applied Brecht’s method to his drama, contemporized the historical subject matter and turned it against the historical grain. In the Comédie-Française production a similar approach was taken. In staging *Mother Courage*, Jorge Lavelli sought to show that “the war dominates everything..” that it “..is omnipresent.”<sup>4</sup>

The universality of war was evident on stage. Brecht’s twelve tableaux of the Thirty Years War were presented in the somber, semi-darkness of a “metallic universe” that appeared in three combat zones: in underground trenches, in an empty or wasted land and in ruins of a once civilized world.

The warscape on stage was enhanced by images that referred to previous cultural documentation of war. Stage scenes frequently resembled images of human oppression and violence captured by major films. Reminiscent of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, one brief scene depicted an enslaved human mass crowded in a descending elevator; another showed soldiers scrambling in trenches, recalling scenes of the films *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Paths of Glory*; a third portrayed railway cars of a mechanized military, evoking Trotsky’s Red Army of Russia’s Civil War (as imagined in the film *Doctor Zhivago*). With this staging Lavelli could tap the collective memory of the audience and visualize a cultural reservoir of images to reinforce his statement that “the war is everywhere and enters life as a concrete force...without distinction of sex.”<sup>5</sup>

To emphasize the point further, Lavelli had his minor characters wear World War One uniforms, strengthening historical images of war; most, however, had unisex combat fatigues similar to the camouflage dress of soldiers currently fighting in

Kosovo, the Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India or Iraq.

While the war is an omnipresent force effecting the lives of all, distinctions of sex do make a difference. Lavelli's staging draws attention to the sexuality of the play's central female characters. For example, the prostitute, Yvette Poitier, unlike Mother Courage, profits materially from the war as a consequence of her sexuality. Played with verve by Véronique Vella, Yvette, with the sexual guile of a femme fatale, seduces men of influence and moves up the social ladder. The higher she climbs, the more her health deteriorates; in the end, a poor exchange. Yet, the price of her material success was paid with her alluring femininity (her economic asset) as Lavelli demonstrated.

Alluring femininity is what Katrin, the mute daughter of Mother Courage, desires but does not have. Katrin, acted by Céline Samie with force and sensitivity, is perhaps the most damaged female character of the drama. We learn that her handicap is the result of sexual mistreatment in her youth; and she is further disfigured by soldiers in defense of her mother's goods. But it is Katrin's action that saves a town from certain attack and subsequent slaughter of the inhabitants. With that brave act Katrin emerges as the one positive character in the drama; she saves lives or gives life and thus fulfills her feminine characteristic. Throughout the play, Lavelli's Katrin is depicted as a young woman desperately attempting to fulfill her material longings.

With Mother Courage the feminine characteristics emerge in an ambiguous and complex manner in the play. As is known, Brecht sought to demonstrate with *Mother Courage* that the petty business woman, Anna Fierling, cannot make a profit from war. In her pursuit of financial gain, she loses her three children, one after the other, ending as a lonely woman in a war-torn, desolated land. While Mother Courage attempts to enrich herself, she at the same time wants to protect her children from the violence of the war. Brecht gave the main role such a paradox; consequently, Mother Courage fails in her effort to fulfill both goals. In fact, an aspect of her painful failure stems from her illusion that she could do both: protect her children and profit from the war.

Playing Mother Courage, Catherine Hiegel

brought to the main role a captivating dimension, one that stressed female traits in particular situations and male characteristics in others. Hiegel emphasized male aspects — with gesture, movement, expression — during Mother Courage's hard-driving business ventures and relationship to the chaplain, whom she dominates with her authority. She lets the men know on their own turf — the combat arena, that she is just as tough as they are in dealing with the business of war.

As her obstinate energy and enthusiasm for profit throw her fully into her profession, Mother Courage is often too busy to be a mother, at the cost of losing a child. When that occurs, the drama's implied "concept of mother" emerges in the action: the mother who gave life permits it to be taken away, and the universal linguistic and social connotations of mother — life, care, protection — are negated.

Now, if Mother Courage were a mere "hyena of the battlefield," her character would remain one-dimensional, rather shallow, dominated by base greed, bordering on cruelty. Lavelli broadened the characters scope, and Hiegel offered the audience a Mother Courage whose distinct female traits and motherly side come into view. Certainly, drama content limited expression of that characteristic; yet Hiegel's interpretation made clear that it is Mother Courage's responsibility as mother that compels her to reject the cook's offer to live with him at the price of abandoning Katrin. And after Katrin's death, Lavelli permitted Hiegel to sing Mother Courage's lullaby in a manner that defied Brecht's alienation effect. The scene was not "moving," rather it was a powerful evocation of a mother's grief on the death of her child.

Instead of witnessing only the "inhumanity of the mother" ("die Unmenschlichkeit der Mutter"), Lavelli presented the audience of the Comédie-Française with a more ambiguous, complex character.<sup>6</sup> Rather than aping Brecht, Lavelli discovered sufficient "material worth" in *Mother Courage* to present performances that draw attention not only to the omnipresence of war in the world (and its colonization of the human imagination), but also to the current concerns of gender and social relations.

## Notes

1. Peter Thomson, *Brecht Mother Courage and Her Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 81-139.
2. Comédie-Française, *Le Programme* (Paris: Comédie-Française, 1998), 4.
3. Thomson, 116
4. Comédie-Française, 22.
5. Ibid.
6. Ruth Berlau et al, editors, *Theaterarbeit* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1961), 236.

Stanford University Department of Drama and Department of Music Present



**The Threepenny Opera**

Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill

Memorial Auditorium, Stanford University

February 18, 19, 20, 26, 27

Photos by Chad Bonaker  
Poster by Geoff Koops

## THE THREEPENNY OPERA at Stanford

Gudrun Tabbert-Jones

The Department of Drama and the Department of Music at Stanford University started the new year with an ambitious production of *Threepenny Opera*, performed in a translation by Michael Feingold of the original 1928 text. For those of us who once in a while enjoy a Brecht play without having the text, the music and dramatic strategies altered beyond recognition, this production was pure delight. And who could have done it better than Carl Weber, who worked with Brecht many years ago! The set, the lighting design and the music were absolutely superb. Form, color and light were so finely tuned that in many instances it seemed a French impressionist had been at work here. The production was devised as a collage/construct of many diverging elements: the music, the collages on two screens, the quotes from the original 1928 production, i.e. the curtain and scene titles, and moments of the stage images.

As a half-curtain was drawn open, a colorfully clad ballad singer (John Turnbull) delivered the "Moritat of Mac the Knife" to the tunes of a street organ. Pointing to photo collages of Mac's crimes, he stood out against a darker background where silent figures were walking by, occasionally stopping and glancing at him. There were other optically intriguing images. One of them was a later scene: the whores daintily marching across the stage with opened umbrellas, casting life-size shadows on the drawn curtain behind them.

Equally accomplished was the music. The full score and band parts were used here for the first time. Positioned on an elevated platform upstage, the orchestra presented Kurt Weill's original music, accompanying songs and spoken dialogue most effectively. None of the songs from the 1928 published libretto were missing. Mrs. Peachum even delivered the "Ballad of the Prisoners of Sexuality" which -- at the request of the singer -- had been omitted from the 1928 production.

Carl Weber's *Threepenny Opera* was set in the late forties and early fifties (projected images from the coronation of George V and of Elizabeth II dodged the question of an exact date). Yet what looked like a departure from the original text in

reality was not. As Carl Weber explains in his program notes, one aspect of *alienation* meant setting a dramatic narrative far enough back in time so as to make the events unfamiliar, yet keeping it close enough to the present so that audiences can relate to them. Brecht set his satire on the Weimar Republic in Victorian London. Weber turned the clock back by fifty years from the time of the Stanford production. Bringing the story closer to the present, yet following Brechtian principles was one of Weber's objectives in this production. (See: Carl Weber, Program Notes).

Like Brecht, Weber emphasized the separation of "all elements." As opposed to what happens in most Brecht productions, smooth transitions between scenes were avoided here. True to the spirit of Brecht, each scene stood for itself. The songs were presented as being independent from the non-singing passages. Titles projected on a screen lowered from the top announced each of them while the performers positioned themselves to sing. Even though some of the songs seemed to be part of the action ("Wedding Song," "Pirate Jenny" and the "Cannon Song") while others were not ("The 'No They Can't Song," "The First *Threepenny* Finale," "The Insecurity of the Human Condition," "Ballad of Good Living"), none of them were "arias" in the conventional sense. The unsettling tunes of Weill's music accompanying the songs left no doubt that *Threepenny Opera* was not grand opera in the romantic tradition but a parody on opera. Neither Mrs. Peachum (Annie Sultan), nor Polly (Elizabeth Horn), nor Jenny (Telory Williamson) aspired to *bel canto* standards, save Lucy (Kate Hogan), whose "aria" was as a parodic adaptation in Puccini's style.

The topics of the songs as well as the manner in which they were delivered made it clear from the start they served a very different purpose than the singing in traditional opera. Rather than expressing the grand scale of human passions, they made audiences think about the calamities caused by these passions. For example, hearing the "Ballad of Sexual Obsession" presented by Mrs. Peachum, one could not help thinking of Mr. Clinton and Monika Lewinsky. Not only the songs but the course of the action had a contemporary ring.

In the first scene Mr. Peachum, Filch and Mrs. Peachum were introduced. The manner in which

Peachum conducted his business put us on familiar ground. Pinned to his office chair, Peachum demonstrated how persuasion, pressure and a little blackmail works when dealing with a small-time "competitor." Many among us could not help reflecting on how business is done today. Likewise, Peachum's advise to Filch on how to put people into the "giving mode" made us think of some charities' questionable business practices; and Peachum's sale of "licenses for begging" reminded us of how MacDonald's sells franchises to individuals. Thus, from the beginning the dramatic text offered plenty of opportunities for comparing events on stage to what is happening in real life, which had been the purpose of Brecht's original text.

There were many other instances in this and subsequent episodes which seemed to address timely issues. Take for example the dialogue on love and wedded bliss between Mr. and Mrs. Peachum. When she first entered – a conventional plump *Hausfrau* with a hankering for drink – she behaved like a devoted wife and mother helping her husband and eager to see her daughter get married. However, after learning from her husband who this future son-in-law is and what the risks are to their own shady



operation, she abruptly turns street-wise. Not only does she demonstrate a remarkable flair for dealing with prostitutes but she also gives her daughter some very unconventional council. "What does a girl do when she's married? Use your head. Well, she gets divorced, see." The message here: there is no place for romantic love when one's survival is at stake!

While the Peachums' remarks on love and



marriage may have shocked Brecht's audiences they no longer have that effect on us. We readily accept that marriages don't last and that interest in money, careers and self-gratification take precedence. Even Jenny's "Ballad on Immoral Earnings" with its explicit references to cohabitation, sex and abortion hardly make us flinch. In a world where children learn all there is to know about sex at an early age, where abortion is openly discussed and where access to tele- and online- sex is easily available, Brecht's views on that subject are almost acceptable, in California at least.

The numerous updates in the Stanford production certainly helped the audience relate to the dramatic text. For example: Mac's and Polly's wedding takes place in a garage with an absentee owner and not in a stable. Later, when Polly visits her husband in jail, she informs him that all the money has gone to a "Swiss bank" account and not, as in the original text, "to Manchester." And, in the final scene, the king's messenger does not arrive on a horse but in a biplane which, by the way, was a delightful episode.

Although in the Stanford production Mac was still a criminal from the old school and Peachum practiced a rather old-fashioned trade, their behavior was that of businessmen in today's world. And the idea that criminals are just like ordinary citizens

who, in turn, may be criminals, did not come as a shock either. This is the image many of us already had of our industrialists, CEO's and politicians before we came to see *Threepenny Opera*. And Tiger Brown, who turns a blind eye to Mac's crimes as long as this connection pays off, confirmed what we have read and heard about police corruption. These are only a few of the many noteworthy examples from a production that can be considered exemplary in many ways. Weber successfully demonstrated that a Brecht text can speak to American audiences without changing Brecht.

Weber also proved that in spite of what has been said on the subject, young American actors and acting students can learn to play Brecht well. John Wright convincingly portrayed Mr. Peachum as a middle-aged entrepreneur, while a youthful Macheath, played by Jonathan Nichols, seemed to have been inspired by the *film noir*. He certainly walked and dressed that way. Elizabeth Horn played Polly as woman who – although romantically inclined and deeply in love with MacHeath – has a firm grip on reality. When she sang her "Pirate Jenny Song," she not only convinced us but Mac's gang that under the "right" circumstances she might be just as tough and ruthless as any of them. Kate Hogan gave an outstanding performance as Lucy. Her coloratura soprano and her talent for comedy

added much sparkle to the show. Whenever Polly and Lucy locked wits in their battle over MacHeath – for example, in the “Jealousy Duet” – they drew spontaneous applause from the audience. Another impressive performance was that of Jenny and Mac as they fondly recall their life together in the “Ballad on Immoral Earnings.” This scene reminded me of Rudolf Forster and Lotte Lenya acting those parts in the 1931 movie. The same was true for the “Hanging” scene. MacHeath being lifted on an elevated platform with the noose around his neck made me think of a photo of that episode in the original production. The technique of intermingling elements from the original performance with modern elements was another example of “collage,” the principle Weber used in this show.

In spite of the many innovations Weber succeeded in producing a very “Brechtian” *Threepenny Opera*, proving that you can indeed update a Brechtian text without changing Brecht. The success of the production was echoed by local newspapers that gave it rave reviews.

## NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Carl Weber*

When Brecht and Weill adapted John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in 1928, they decided to place their story not in the period of the original, which had its premiere in 1728, but in the Victorian London of, say, the 1870s, an environment whose culture and morals were distanced by half a century from their own time while being still close enough to linger in their contemporary audience's memory. They selected a period when middle-class life was dominated by traditional Christian values though public and private activities in the colonialist Empire had become, more or less, a mockery of Christian morals. Those values had become commodities in a society that thrived on mass consumption. Brecht observed that in the Germany of the “golden twenties,” too, lofty ideals were employed to mask

an increasingly ugly reality.

In 1955, Brecht discussed with Giorgio Strehler a staging of *The Threepenny Opera* that the great Italian director was planning, and he suggested placing the action shortly before World War I. Again he was aiming for a period far enough in the past yet still not too remote from the performance's time. In its own way, our production follows the pattern established by Brecht. We chose the London shortly after World War II, in the late forties and early fifties, when people tried desperately to rebuild the traditions and values the war had threatened to destroy while an economy of shortages and a crumbling class society kept clashing with those cherished values. Again, the distance might sharpen our focus on this story told by beggars,” whereas many of the events and celebrities of the time are still vivid in our memory, or even with us. (In the US, the late forties and fifties with their prosperous postwar economy are claimed to have been a decade of sound morals and a wholesome society. But were they?)

Let me point out, however, that our production doesn't strive for a “realistic” or historically “correct” presentation of postwar England. Gay's “opera” was satire disguised as a fairy tale; Brecht and Weill's play about the legendary Mac the Knife pushed the story and its protagonists even further into a realm of fairy tale and popular lore. And so, in the “London” we quote on our stage we are toying with historical detail and cultural icons from the thirties to the fifties, as does the staging in its use of popular clichés that have become ingrained in our memory of the twentieth century.

Brecht once remarked about *The Threepenny Opera* that its hero is a gangster who sees himself as a solid middle-class citizen: Crime is business as usual, even when its methods may be somewhat ruthless. Today, this is probably old news. Yet, the way Brecht and Weill utilized the rich means of performance to comment on a society where high-minded morality served as facade for “business as usual,” may still entertain us as well as tell us a thing or two about the world we live in today.

*(Reprint from the program of the Stanford production)*

## A NEW SCORE

Stephen Hinton

The piano-conductor's full score and the band parts extracted from it for this production are being used for the first time. The score itself will appear in print later this year as part of a new collected edition of Weill's music, the *Kurt Weill Edition*. Most of the volumes of the *Edition* are devoted, as was most of Weill's composing career, to works for the musical theater; and in nearly all such cases, the *Edition* will be publishing the full scores for the first time. In the case of *The Threepenny Opera*, Weill's most popular creation by far, the music and text have been transmitted separately in various formats, including as song sheets of individual hit tunes such as "Mac the Knife." Never before, however, have music, lyrics and spoken dialogue appeared together as a single unit. They are doing so now in the first volume of the collected edition, prepared by the author of this note in collaboration with the managing editor of the *Kurt Weill Edition*, Edward Harsh. This concludes over a decade of research in which I have studied Weill's oeuvre from a number of perspectives, having been responsible either as author or editor for a variety of publications besides the already mentioned volume. Those publications include a handbook on *The Threepenny Opera* (for the series *Cambridge Opera Handbooks*) as well as a facsimile edition of Weill's holograph score (and a supplement to the main part of the *Kurt Weill Edition*), the entries on Weill and his compositions for the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, a German-language edition of Weill's collected writings, soon to appear in an expanded second edition and to be followed shortly thereafter by a companion English edition.

What are the principles governing the presentation in print of a musical theater piece such as this? The first and by no means trivial or obvious principle, which ultimately informs the entire edition, not just this volume, is that the work can be transmitted as a score with a matching libretto or book, as Weill intended. *The Threepenny Opera* may be Weill's first stage work to be published without an opus number, even though the composer initially identified his "Musik zu *The Beggar's Opera*" separately as "op. 25" on the cover of the

autograph piano vocal score. The ultimate absence of the opus number in the published piano-vocal score accurately reflects a shift in Weill's philosophy of musical production, namely a partial retreat from the Romantic reification of the musical work as a fixed and timeless "opus." Even so, describing the score as "music to" may reflect two other things as well: the generic uncertainty surrounding the piece (it is as much anti-opera as it is opera) and an overly modest estimation of the music's contribution, which turned out to be both substantial and decisive. (The reinstatement in the Stanford production of the original instrumental entr'actes makes that contribution even more substantial than usual.) Nonetheless the practice of fixing the work in notation as clearly and efficiently as possible, notwithstanding the labile nature of theatrical practice, remained. It is a practice that Weill never forsook throughout his career, even if the exigencies of musical life obviated the publication of the stage works as full scores or, in some cases, even as complete vocal scores. In addition to active collaboration on memorable productions over a career spanning some thirty years and covering two continents, Weill left a legacy of performance materials for works capable of transcending their original theatrical incarnation -- a legacy that the *Kurt Weill Edition* is committed to preserving.

The second principle derives from the fact, in which Weill readily colluded, that performance practice necessarily affected and even undermined the singularity of the score. Any edition needs to reflect this aspect of practice as best it can. In the case of *The Threepenny Opera*, the relationship between the written sources and the actual first production is complicated in the extreme. The work, more or less fixed as text, gives rise to multiple individual performances, just as any individual performance is one of a multitude of differing realizations. While the score is bound (in a twofold sense!) to present a single version of the piece, closely reflecting the authors' combined intentions from the identified target period (a period roughly corresponding to the run of the first production), the printed edition as a whole also documents in various ways the mutability of the work in production. The edition does not so much legislate any single version or every detail of performance practice (how could it,

even if it wanted to?), so much as define the publishable parameters within which performance of the work, as conceived by the authors, can take place.

The edition is thus both historical and critical. It is historical in that it presents the work as conceived and performed in a historically delimited period and in particular historical circumstances, while reflecting through commentary and appendices some of the inevitable mutations the work went through as theatrical reality in performance. Obviously there are both practical and philosophical limitations imposed on how far any publication can or should go in this endeavor. The abiding principle is nonetheless the first one mentioned: that the work is transmittable as text.

The edition is critical in that it utilizes critically all available sources, not just textual ones, while also inviting and expecting critical judgment from the user. (A critical edition will lose much of its purpose if it is not used critically.) This edition is committed to conveying the history of the work as text, while being intended for use in critically informed performances. Its claims to being definitive do not extend to the expectation that henceforth all productions should be the same. Neither does it legislate a single version of the work, which anyway has never existed as such. Nor does it record any single performance of the work (or in the unlikely event that it either could or even does, that would be merely fortuitous). Besides, there is enough flexibility built into the text -- not least because of Weill's "ad lib." passages for the instrumentalists, but also because of the possibility of reinstating cut numbers -- that no two productions are likely to be exactly the same.

The actual version transmitted in the main body of the edition (the singular, that is, to which the editor has necessarily had to commit himself) is, in broad outline, the one intended jointly by Weill and Brecht in their 1928 published libretto. That does not mean that all other pertinent materials departing from this particular version have been suppressed or dismissed as irrelevant. On the contrary: in all other matters the details of the edition have been determined by critical use of all available sources, which are numerous, including the surviving manuscript band parts from the original 1928

production. Appendices serve the express purpose of presenting important materials not accommodated by the 1928 libretto or by Weill's score materials. Among the more notable absences from the main body of the edition, but included in the appendices, is the "Ballad of the Prisoner of Sexuality." Its first publication occurred in 1929 in a "Song-Album" of miscellaneous vocal pieces by Weill, where it is described as being "originally from *The Threepenny Opera*." Its suppression, as with "Lucy's Aria," had to do with the performer in the Berlin production. It wasn't that the actress playing Mrs. Peachum (Rosa Valetti) was technically incapable of singing her ballad, however, as was the case with Lucy and her aria. She simply refused to, on moral grounds, because of the text. The work subsequently evolved without it, and following Weill's explicit instructions, his publishers left it out of the first edition of the published piano-vocal score. Nor was the number included in the published libretto. It does, however, seem to have been reinstated for a production in Vienna in 1929, with a less prudish Mrs. Peachum. Reporting to his publishers on his discussions with the director of that production, Weill said that several numbers not performed in Berlin were being done, including "even one not in the music," from which it must be inferred that he meant the sexuality ballad. Should the number therefore be reinstated in the edition? In a sense it already has been, thanks to its inclusion in the appendix. Productions are free to use it, should they so wish, just as Weill did in 1929, both in Vienna and in his "Song-Album," and as we are doing at Stanford. However, to place it in the main body of the text would be to distort the predominant, "historical" form in which the work existed during its first run. Its position in the appendix nicely reflects its original status as text: existent but scarcely used, available (to those in the know) but not prescribed.

*(Reprint from the program of the Stanford production)*

## THE THREEPENNY OPERA in Delaware

Charles H. Helmetag

On March 2, 1999 the Professional Theatre and Training Program of the University of Delaware presented Heinz-Uwe Haus's production of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Hartshorn Theatre in Newark, Delaware. The set seemed even more sparse than other Brecht productions Haus has staged in this venue. The Hartshorn Theater resembles a converted warehouse with the audience seats on bleachers facing a bare brick wall. According to Haus: "Was wirklich ungewöhnlich und provokant war, ist der Raum, den wir speziell geschaffen haben, um Spannungen herzustellen. Die gegebene Architektur ist theatralischer als alle pseudobühnenbildnerischen Versuche, ein 'Theater' vorzugeben."

William Browning's set consisted of little more than a raised, finished hexagonal platform (6x6 feet, 4 feet tall), which alternately became Peachum's office, Macheath's jail cell and a scaffold for the gallows. The platform was placed center-stage for Peachum's establishment and the jail, stage right next to a permanent floor-to-ceiling ladder for the gallows. Appropriate lighting created separate spaces stage left for the Love Song and stage right for the brothel.

The stark rear and side walls were intermittently draped with black cloths which the Ballad Singer and others ripped down to reveal painted panels designed by artist Glyn Hughes. Hughes has worked with Haus numerous times in Germany, Cyprus and Greece. His paintings for *The Threepenny Opera* recalled the drawings of Georg Grosz and Otto Dix and thus immediately evoked the spirit of Berlin in the 1920s. There was a separate panel for each of the stanzas of the Ballad of Mac the Knife and one for each of the other songs in the play. Many were erotic images.

This application of imagery, as Hughes pointed out, extended the story line of the play and attained considerable dramatic power. The paintings illustrated but sometimes also contradicted the lyrics of the song, just as Brecht's songs frequently stand in contradictory relationship to the action of the play.

During the Ballad of Immoral Earnings, instead of Venus rising from the ocean on a sea shell, the painting showed the pimp Macheath in a classical pose, nude, surrounded by broken, antique female figurines. The panel for the Third Threepenny Finale, which was hung on the opposite side of the stage from the gallows, was an image of strangulation in contrast to Macheath's escape from execution.

Certain aspects of the production were reminiscent of Haus's staging of *Oedipus Rex* at Villanova University in 1994. At the beginning of the play, the entire cast chanted the first stanza of the Ballad of Mac the Knife, just as the chorus in *Oedipus* had chanted the choral odes. For *Oedipus*, members of the chorus sometimes took a seat on benches in front of the first row of audience seats, thus blurring the line between audience and actors and making the audience a part of the action. With the *Threepenny Opera*, carpenter's horses placed in front of the first row of audience seats had the opposite effect: the horses formed an artificial boundary between the audience and the world of the play Mac the Knife, thus stressing the artificiality of the theatrical world (for example, when actors would step in front of the horses to address the audience) and offering the staged world as an object for the audience's consideration and evaluation.

The bare brick walls formed a perfect backdrop for the crowd scenes and the stable (wedding) scene. The crooks carried furniture into the cavernous stable; when Macheath complained about the lack of a table, they quickly assembled one out of the carpenter's horses and long boards that were lying around. In the Cannon Song they marched around the stable with raised fists emulating Macheath and Brown, conjuring images of the *Schrei* of Expressionism and of the warring political ideologies in the Berlin of the 1920s while the song itself glorified the collaboration of commerce and military force in nineteenth-century colonialism.

Although almost every one of them had his own personality, as a group the members of Macheath's mob behaved like automatons, wishing the bride well with the same cliched greeting while reporting their accomplishments sotto voce to Macheath, singing and moving in unison with

extremely stylized movements. I was reminded of Expressionist stagings of Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller. Here Macheath and his band represented bourgeois capitalist business enterprise, the workers exploited, even physically abused (although staged as slapstick) by their boss, who later trained his spouse to take over the business. The scene conveyed that Macheath's crime "family" is a reflection of the capitalist business world.

The program acknowledged Elisabeth Hauptmann as author of the original German translation of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, which celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in London in 1928. Brecht was struck by Gay's equating thieves with middle-class businessmen and vice versa and his anticipating Brecht's own epic theater by insetting songs into the play in such a way as to interrupt and comment upon the action. Brecht set about adapting Hauptmann's translation, adding and deleting scenes and asked Kurt Weill, with whom he had collaborated on *Das kleine Mahagonny*, to write new music. As Lotte Lenya, Weill's widow, later recalled, Brecht wanted music "as racy and biting, powerful and modern as Brecht's own language ... with as wide and daring a range of reference."

Haus used the translation of John Willett and Ralph Manheim. For the songs, however, he used the theatrically more effective Marc Blitzstein translation. All the actors spoke Cockney English, except in the three Threepenny Finales and the Ballad in which Macheath begs all men for forgiveness. Here the cockney accents of Victorian London were replaced by contemporary American English.

Physicalized acting is a trademark of Haus's productions. Thus, in *The Threepenny Opera* the crooks didn't just put their hands up when Macheath introduced them to the police chief Tiger Brown; they faced the wall and spread their arms and legs as if they expected to be frisked or handcuffed. Later at Peachum's, when all but one of the beggars hid from Brown, the woman with the sign "Victim of Military Injustice" turned her sign against the wall and leaned against it to conceal it from Brown until he forced her to come forward and turn around, revealing the motto.

Not coincidentally, the actors who were the most impressive -- John Pasha as Peachum, Colleen

Madden as Mrs. Peachum and Rene Thornton as Tiger Brown -- were among those who employed this style most successfully. Madden utilized almost every inch of the stage, even sliding down a banister on an entrance stairway. Pasha's stepping out of character to address the audience as actor before the finale also stood out. Along with Cheyenne Casebier as Lucy Brown and Elizabeth Maher as Polly, they also seemed to have the best singing voices. Casebier wore a scarf as she stood in a spotlight singing the Barbara Song; as she walked to Macheath's jail cell in the next scene, she removed the scarf and stuffed it in her skirt: Presto! She was pregnant with Macheath's child. In the Pirate Jenny Song Maher evolved from a demure bride into a strong, earthy woman capable of taking over Macheath's business and continuing his ruthless regime. Brecht insisted upon the strict separation of the musical numbers from the rest of the play. He said that actors should change their position before beginning a song and clearly indicate that they were stepping out of the action. This would suggest to the audience that they might be expressing different opinions from those held by the characters being portrayed, perhaps even expressing the playwright's opinions. Haus's actors made use of wooden carpenter's horses downstage near the first row of the audience, stepping in front of them, even straddling them to underscore the separation of speech (to advance the plot) and song (to comment upon and contradict the action). Brecht also spoke of the actors "displaying gestures" while singing. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum began the "No They Can't" Song dancing together and he continued dancing alone upstage -- with a kick that made one think of Charlie Chaplin's tramp -- during her solo stanza. At other times the two moved together as if dancing even when there was no music. In other scenes as well, the musical numbers were imaginatively staged with characteristic "gestic" groupings of epic theater and exaggerated movements reminiscent of German Expressionism

Ren Thornton and Catrine Montbertrand appeared in Haus's staging of Brecht's *Arturo Ui* last year, Thornton as Roma, Montbertrand as Ui. Both actors have mastered Haus's technique of illustrating the conflicts in human behavior. In his fervent delivery and physicality, Thornton portrayed

the police chief as "a twofold personality: his private and official natures differ completely" (Brecht). At the end of the play, he returned dressed in burgundy-colored Baroque regalia as the queen's messenger and danced a classically strange solo on a golden hobbyhorse.

Montbertrand as Jenny alternated between singing and speaking the lines of her songs, a style which Brecht characterized as "ein Gegen-die-Musik-Sprechen." Montbertrand, who played the title role in Haus's Delaware production of *Arturo Ui*, had the hairstyle and, in general, the look and movements of Lotte Lenya in the 1931 Pabst film or the prostitutes in paintings by Schiele and Balluschek. The *gestus* of the Ballad of Immoral Earnings recalled Luis Bravo's Forever tango. The Ballad of Sexual Obsession, usually a solo sung by Mrs. Peachum, was staged as a duet with Jenny completing Mrs. Peachum's sentences and answering questions posed by her, for example: (Mrs. Peachum) "What gets him down? What gets 'em all down?" (Jenny) "Women." This number was a highlight of the production. Most American productions emphasize the "charisma" of the gangster Macheath. The current staging follows Brecht's view: "He impresses women less as a handsome man than as a well situated one." Hayden Adam showed the character as a stocky man of about forty, with a paunch but not lacking dignity, a used car salesman or town council member with habits and without humor or charm. He sees his marriage as an insurance policy for his business. He is truly a bourgeois phenomenon, as Brecht unmasked the conventional fascination with this type of crook.

In this production a ten-piece musical ensemble lent excellent support; the saxophone player even appeared at times in the audience or on the stage. The songs were complemented by Haus's imaginative staging, Glyn Hughes's striking paintings, Andrea Barrier's period costumes, Bill Browning's set design and the energy and inventiveness of the cast. This *Threepenny Opera* was a joyous exploration of Brecht the playwright and theater theoretician, the music of Kurt Weill and the Germany of the 1920s by a group of talented young actors under the direction of a master interpreter of Brecht.

## DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER

### Deutsches Theater, Berlin

In der Regie von Alexander Lang, Im Bühnenbild und Kostümen von Volker Pfüller spielen u.a.

Jörg Gudzuhn Macheath, Johanna Schall Polly

Horst Hiemer/Michael Walk Herr Peachum und Gudrun Ritter Frau Peachum.

Es spielt das Orchester VIELHARMONIE unter der Leitung von Frank Raschke

Herr Peachum ist Geschäftsmann. Sein Geschäft ist es, das menschliche Mitleid zu erwecken. Und selbiges befällt ihn in bezug auf die eigene Person. Schwer. Denn die eigene Tochter ist auch Eigentum und hat sich scheinbar verheiratet und damit den Besitzer gewechselt. Der ist ein respektabler Einbrecher und versierter Straßenräuber.

Komm, Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast! Ruft die liebende Mutter. Es ist Mackie Messer, den man den größten Verbrecher London's nennt!

Aber ein Herr Peachum gibt sich nicht so leicht geschlagen. Korruption, Bestechung, Spitzelei und Mord als Kavaliersdelikt – das ist vertraut wie 1928, als das in Berlin das erste Mal festgestellt wurde: Nur WER IM WOHLSTAND LEBT, LEBT AN-GENEHM.

Aber die anderen, die Knete haben, Konnektions und Kontenance selbst in den brenzligsten Lagen, sie sind extrem gut drauf. Sie tummeln sich weder auf Londons Boulevards noch auf Berliner Straßen. Sie geben eine Nummern-Revue, sie machen sich einen Jux. Was heißt einen?!... Vielleicht war in dieser Operette doch nie soviel Sprengstoff, wie die meisten Exegeten und Interpreten meinten und meinen.

Alexander Langs *Dreigroschenoper* spielt jedenfalls dort, wo sie heute hingehört – in einem realitätsfernen tucholskyschen "Indianien."

(C. Bernd Sucher, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*)

## THE THREEPENNY OPERA

### Secrets of its Success

Martin Esslin

*The Beggar's Opera — Dreigroschenoper — Threepenny Opera* is without doubt one of the most successful works in the history of theatrical performance. Its first production at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1728 became what was then the longest-ever run of a play on the London stage — 62 performances. At its major revival by Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in London in the 1920s it ran for almost 1500 performances — in its modernised Berlin version by Brecht and Weill as *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928 it became the hitherto longest run in the history of the Berlin theatre; and in its New York version of the 1950s at the Theatre de Lys off-Broadway it ran and ran and ran.

What is the secret of this evergreen appeal of what seems at first sight a slight creation — a mere parodic joke about pompous operatic sentimentality at its inception, a piece of cabaret political satire, an occasional piece that both Brecht and Weill regarded as a minor sideline to their more serious endeavors, a mere potboiler?

Perhaps a brief, somewhat anecdotal, account of the genesis of this work that, never taken particularly seriously by its own authors but undoubtedly of major importance in the history of popular theatre, might lead us towards an understanding of the reasons for its immediate impact and enduring vitality through more than two and a half centuries.

Indeed, it may precisely be the casual nature of its origin that at least to some extent contains the answer to that question. The randomly fired arrow, as the Zen philosophy has it, might most surely hit its target, or as Lao Tzu suggests in the Tao-te-king, when two armies are locked in battle, the one that is less eager to win will in fact emerge as the victor.

Casual the genesis of the play may have been, yet though it may have been just a by-product of more ambitious enterprises, it came from a most high-powered environment. Some of the greatest names of eighteenth century English — and indeed world — literature fathered the original idea for it — Jonathan Swift, the great satirist, and Alexander Pope the leading poet of the Augustan age. Swift

and Pope were the presiding influences in a coterie of Tory intellectuals who indulged in the pastime of collectively producing an ongoing satirical work *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* which ridiculed all the shallow and fashionable fads of the time. Next to Swift and Pope the leading members of this Scriblerus club were Dr John Arbuthnot, mathematician, physician and poet, and the modest poet John Gay, author of, among others, such "city pastoral poems" as: *Trivia or Walking the Streets of London*, published in 1716.

It was shortly after that, in the context of searching for subjects for Scriblerian satire, that Swift wrote to Pope about the further possibilities of such mock-pastoral poems: "...if our friend Gay could fancy it ... I believe the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted; and that a porter, footman or chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate Pastoral among the whores and thieves there..." Pope passed the idea on to Gay. And over the next decade the seed planted by Swift and Pope germinated in Gay's mind. Gradually the idea of a parody of a pastoral poem where the idyllic setting of the happy groves inhabited by love-lorn shepherds might be replaced by the sordid environment of London's notorious Newgate Prison, and the gamboling swains and maidens by hardened thieves and whores, developed in his mind under the impact of the enormous vogue of opera that was sweeping the town in the 1720s, into a that of a mock-pastoral opera.

The great German composer George Frederick Handel, now triumphantly having conquered England, ruled the roost of the theatrical scene. Gay himself had experience of the genre of this kind of classical pastoral, he had written the libretto for Handel's opera *Acis and Galatea* about the nymph pursued by the monster Polyphemus. But the Scriblerus club had also more directly political objectives -- they saw the Hanoverian king's chief minister Sir Robert Walpole as a breeder of corruption. Gay could point up a parallel between the head of the government and the notorious Jonathan Wild, who was both the godfather of the underworld and the main police-informer. He financed thieves and shared their spoils, but when they became less productive, denounced them to the authorities and pocketed the rewards. He became

the model for Gay's character of Peachum, the king of the beggars and narks, whose motto was : "When they are no longer of use, Impeach them!" "Peach'em!" It is Peachum's opening aria of the play that sets the tone:

Through all the employments of life  
Each neighbor abuses his brother;  
Whore and Rogue they call Husband and Wife  
All profession be-vogue one another.

The priest calls the lawyer a cheat,  
The lawyer be-knaves the divine.  
And the statesman because he's so great,  
Thinks his trade as honest as mine.

This is sung to the tune of an old ballad ("An old woman clothed in gray"). For on another level of satire the play is a "ballad opera," where the high artifice of grand opera's coloratura arias, is replaced by the tunes of old pop-songs, folk ballads. Gay and the arranger of the music John Christopher Pepusch, like Handel, a naturalised German, had created a new genre, the ballad opera, a musical theatre based on pop-tunes, which ultimately developed into operetta and today's musical.

The leading London theatre, Drury Lane, rejected the piece, so it got its first performance in January 1728 at the less prestigious theatre at Lincoln's Inn's Fields, run by John Rich.

An immediate success, it was said that it made Rich gay and Gay rich. And it made the government furious. When Gay tried to follow up its success with a sequel — *Polly* (in which the heroine follows her lover, who has been transported to the Americas) it was banned by Walpole — and the consequence was the introduction of stage censorship, which lasted in Britain till 1968.

*The Beggar's Opera* became an evergreen success. The story of the gallant highwayman MacHeath (so called because Hampstead Heath on the northern approaches to London was the favorite spot for ambushing travellers and stage-coaches) and his lovers Polly and Lucy and his stable of whores, was frequently revived throughout the eighteenth century, less so in the more puritanical Victorian age.

After the First World War, in the 1920s, that age of a renewed, somewhat feverish joie de vivre,

*The Beggar's Opera* was re-discovered by the highly talented London actor and impresario Nigel Playfair, who staged a successful revival at his own theatre, the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1920 and again in 1925. This, with brilliantly colorful sets and costumes by Lovat Fraser, proved a sensational hit and ran for almost 1500 performances. The news of it reached Brecht's secretary, collaborator and lover, Elisabeth Hauptmann, who got hold of a script, realized its potential for Brecht, and began to translate it.

And now, we are now exactly two-hundred years after the opening of Gay's play — 1928. And we are in Berlin. A young man, Ernst Josef Aufricht by name, who has been an actor, has inherited 100,000 Marks, a considerable sum for those years. With this money he has decided to become a theatrical producer and has acquired the lease of an old theatre with a considerable history, but now standing empty, the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm — That is: "theatre on the shipbuilders' quai." And he is looking for a play with which to open the house. It must be a new play, progressive in tendency — he is left-inclined — and somehow different. He approaches agents, playwrights, but without success. In his memoirs he tells us:

"I'll have to commit suicide, if I don't find anything. Now all that's left is to try the artists' hang-outs, the bars, Schwanneke's or Schlichter's. So we (Aufricht and his dramaturg Heinrich Fischer) went to Schlichter's in Lutherstrasse. On the walls hang pictures by the owner, the painter Schlichter, for sale. In the second room, there sat a man. It was Brecht. I did not know him personally, but I knew his experimental work, and I liked his poems. His long face had the ascetic expression of a monk, sometimes the slyness of a ne'er-do-well.... We sat down at his table and put our question. He started to tell us a plot on which he was working at the moment. But he must have noticed that we weren't interested, because we were already asking for the check. "But I also have something I have started as a sideline. You could see six out of a total of seven scenes. It's an adaptation of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. I have given it the title *Gesindel* — *Riff-raff* — it deals with a corruption scandal, the gangster is a friend of the police-chief...."

This story smelled of theatre. We agreed that

we'd fetch the manuscript next morning from the Spichernstrasse, where Brecht had his lodgings.

Heinrich Fischer, Aufricht's dramaturg, at that time 36 years old, is my personal link to this story. He was for many years my colleague and friend in the German department of the BBC during the war. And he has often told me how actively he, as dramaturg, contributed to the process of the collective creation of the piece. For example: it was Heinrich Fischer who drew Brecht's attention to the ballads of the great French medieval vagrant poet Francois Villon which had appeared in a very good new German translation. Brecht incorporated some of these, notably the brothel ballad, and MacHeath's plea for forgiveness on the gallows, in his text.

Aufricht read the script — as much of it as already existed — liked it and decided to open his theatre with the play. But he was taken aback when he heard that there was also a musician involved, Kurt Weill. That frightened him — he knew Weill as an ultra-modern a-tonal composer. So he arranged — as a precaution to have someone adapt Pepusch's original 18th century music.

All this happened at the end of March and the beginning of April 1928. Aufricht had decided to open his theatre on 31 August — the traditional beginning of the fall and winter season. Rehearsals were scheduled to start on 1 August. But of course the text was by no means as ready as Brecht had pretended. And Weill had not even started on the piece. So Brecht and Weill decided to go into retreat, somewhere quiet, where they would not be disturbed — the south of France. Brecht set out by car with Helene Weigel and their three-year old son Stefan, Weill and his wife Lotte Lenya by train. The Weills arrived on 5 May, the Brechts a few days later. And so at the village of St Cyr, near Le Lavandou, east of Toulon, they set to work. Lotte Lenya has described the scene:

"Brecht had taken a house on the seashore, we had a room in a small pension near-by. The two men worked like mad. Day and night they wrote, altered, cut, and wrote again. They only interrupted work for a few minutes to go down to the sea. I can still see Brecht as he waded through the water, his trousers turned up, his cap on his head, and his familiar Virginia cigar in his mouth." By mid-June they were back in Berlin. But even now the script

was by no means finished. In fact, it was in constant flux right to the moment of the opening.

Rehearsals started on 1 August. Aufricht was still worried about the music. One day Weill turned up and said he wanted to play his score for him, and shocked him by adding the demand that his wife had to be given the part of Jenny, one of the whores.

"I was taken aback by this," Aufricht reports in his autobiography, "I didn't know Lotte Lenya as an actress, had never heard of her. Nevertheless I said, all right, for she looked talented, moved well and I liked her looks. 'Weill is also going to compose a song for me,' she said, by the door. Rather cheeky, I thought, and -- that little man Weill doesn't really deserve so attractive a wife. And then that little, be-spectacled man with his soft, metallic voice .... started to play and sing. I think we were all disconcerted at first, but after a while Vambery, my second dramaturg, whispered in my ear: 'this music is as much a basis for success as the play itself'."

The rehearsal period turned into a nightmare. In Lotte Lenya's words: "I don't think that any play in the history of theatre experienced such a chain of catastrophes so near the first night." The female lead, Carola Neher, who was to play Polly, was married to the well-known poet Klabund (famous translator of Chinese poetry, including the old Chinese play the *Chalk Circle*, which Brecht later adapted), he was suffering from consumption in Switzerland and was dying. Carola Neher had to go and join him. Four days before the opening a new Polly had to be found. A young unknown Roma Bahn took it on. The leading man, the operetta star Harald Paulsen, a very vain and handsome figure, insisted on playing MacHeath in an elegant drawing- room suit with a most flamboyant blue silk scarf designed to match his blue eyes. When the director, Erich Engel, objected to this as being over-pretty and sweet, Paulsen started to shout in such a wild tantrum that one had to fear for his voice. Brecht had an idea: "Let's keep him so dandified, camp and charming. We'll introduce him with a ballad about all his horrible misdeeds. It will make him look even more sinister with his kitschy shawl. That is how, at the very last moment, Brecht added the "Ballad of Mac the Knife" as an afterthought.

Brecht's wife, Helene Weigel, was to play the madam in the brothel scene. She wanted to play the

part as a legless paraplegic in a wheel-chair. But she developed an appendix infection, and her doctor would not allow her to go on. So that whole role was cut at the last moment. And still the play was too long, new drastic cuts had to be made.

Even the title was not yet fixed. It was Lion Feuchtwanger, the well-known novelist and Brecht's patron in Munich, who happened to look in and came up with the idea to call the piece *The Threepenny Opera*. Caspar Neher, Brecht's school-fellow, the designer (no relation of Carola Neher), painted the words of the title with black paint on the half-curtain of rough sack-cloth which had been found at the last moment to replace a velvet one which had turned out too kitschily pretty. Another famous personality who attended the rehearsals was Karl Kraus, the great Viennese satirist, probably the only twentieth-century writer who could be regarded as an equivalent to the play's only begetter, Jonathan Swift. He was a close friend of Heinrich Fischer, Aufrecht's dramaturg — (when he died, he left Fischer the copyright of his works) -- and had been invited by him to watch the rehearsals. Kraus thought that Polly's and Lucy's jealousy-duet was too short, so he wrote a second verse, which Brecht gratefully accepted and incorporated in the text.

There were rows right up to the moment when the curtain was to rise. Weill was in hysterics because his wife's name had been omitted from the cast-list in the program. There was a major technical problem with the horse that was to carry the messenger with MacHeath's pardon in the last scene. Some of the leading actors were so convinced the production would close immediately, that they had already signed new contracts with other theatres. After the last rehearsal, Brecht shouted, "I'll never set foot into this theatre again." Weill and Neher added : "and neither shall I!"

But, Aufrecht reports, as good troopers they all turned up punctually at seven thirty. And then the moment of truth arrived. Let Aufrecht take up the story:

"I activated the bell, the sign to start. The overture took the form of a fugue. The public was dumbfounded. The curtain rose: members of the cast stood around a hurdy-gurdy and Kurt Geron, the actor, dressed as the hurdy-gurdy man, started to turn the handle and to sing about the shark and his

teeth, but no sound came from the instrument. It hadn't been turned on. At last, on the second verse, the band took up the melody. What a relief!" The public sat silent through the first scenes. Aufrecht goes on:

"I noticed how Fischer's knees, in the seat next to me, trembled. The wedding scene started. Nobody laughed at the places that were supposed to be funny. The audience was frozen. Then suddenly, after the cannon song, the breakthrough came. The auditorium didn't just slowly thaw. It suddenly reached boiling point. Clapping, shouting, trampling with their feet, people demanded an encore. I had forbidden all encores, as being too vulgar for a serious theatre. But now, as they did not allow the actors to go on, and they helplessly looked at me in my box, I agreed to a "da capo." From that moment every sentence, every note of music was a success."

The next morning brought the reviews: the arch conservative *Kreuz-Zeitung* called the play an example of literary necrophilia." The communist *Rote Fahne* deplored its lack of Marxist relevance: "If you feel weak," it wrote, "you lean upon stronger stuff; if you confront the present with more or less complete lack of understanding, you flee into the past, if you don't know how to represent the revolutionary movement of the working class, you try to dabble in the aimless and sullen moods of the *Lumpenproletariat*."

The other reviews were mildly positive: Brecht's most faithful supporter among the Berlin critics, Herbert Ihering wrote: "it is a triumph of the open form. What Brecht as adaptor, Weill as composer have achieved with this slight sideline of a work is to have gone beyond the pattern of revue to a blending of elements of vaudeville into a new and vital form of theatrical expression." But the audiences loved it. For the first time in his life Brecht had a real financial success. He had shrewdly prepared it. The contract with Felix Bloch Erben, the publishers, gave Elisabeth Hauptmann, the translator of the original, 12 percent, Weill 26, and Brecht a full 62 percent of the royalties. In the long run, when the vast bulk of the royalties was due to the sale of recordings of the songs, this turned out to have been a great injustice to Weill. Lotte Lenya was fuming about it to me forty years later.

And other scandals and controversy followed: Alfred Kerr, the most influential of the Berlin critics discovered that Brecht had used an existing translation of Villon's ballads for some of the songs (to which Heinrich Fischer had drawn his attention) and denounced him as a thief and plagiarist, challenging him to explain himself. Brecht replied in his usual, casual manner, that he explained it by his "usual laxity in matters of literary property." And Karl Kraus, Kerr's long-standing arch-enemy, came to Brecht's defense. By changing as little as a comma or a single syllable in the original text, Brecht had turned plain verse into brilliant poetry and proved his genius.

The first night had been witnessed by the great Russian director Alexander Tairov, who acquired the rights and staged the play in Moscow just before the heavy hand of Stalinist socialist realism fell on all avant-garde theatre in the Soviet Union. All over Europe *The Threepenny Opera* was translated and staged. Within a year of the first night it had reached 4000 performances in 120 theatres, and in Central Europe alone the play was translated within the first five years into no fewer than 18 languages.

A film company acquired the rights. G.W. Pabst was to direct the film version. By this time Brecht had woken up to the fact that he had produced a work with much greater political potential than he had originally envisaged. So he produced a screenplay that was infinitely more Marxist, with Polly setting up as a banker and MacHeath turning into a major capitalist at the end. Disputes with the production company broke out, Brecht's screenplay was re-adapted by another writer, Brecht sued and was awarded a very large sum in compensation for non-use of his script. But the film was made according to the new screenplay, with Carola Neher, who had missed the part in the opening production, as Polly (by now she was Brecht's lover, probably the greatest love of his life, in spite of the fact that Brecht had at last got married to Weigel in April 1929. After Hitler came to power Neher, a dedicated communist, emigrated to the Soviet Union only to perish miserably in the great Stalin purges).

At that time — 1930 — before synchronization came into use, films were often shot simultaneously in two versions. *The Threepenny Opera* film was

done in German and French. In the French version another great name of theatrical history became associated with the *Threepenny Opera* — Antonin Artaud spent several weeks in Berlin playing in the French takes the part of the young man who is applying to Peachum to be employed as one of his beggars and is getting fitted out.

As I mentioned before: it may well have been the very lack of any intention to create a lasting masterpiece that contributed to success of *The Threepenny Opera*. The work grew as it was constructed, it absorbed the suggestions and contributions of a number of by-standers and, as it did, so it distilled essential aspects of the *Zeitgeist*, the general atmosphere of its epoch and location. *The Threepenny Opera* expresses, as no other work of the time, the Berlin of the brief window of relative well-being when Weimar Germany flourished — between the horrors of mega-inflation which came to an end around 1925 and the great depression which started around 1930.

The very fact that from its inception two-hundred years earlier it had been a parody, a satire, gave it that ironic ambivalence that made it equally acceptable to the left-wing avant-garde of the time — Brecht was at that very moment in the process of absorbing the dialectical thought-processes of Marxism — and to the affluent profiteers of that brief spell of prosperity who sat in the auditorium of the theatre on the Schiffbauerdamm.

Is it a coincidence that the explosive turning point of the first night came after the song of the ex-soldiers who remember the great times they had in the war. The song is a satire, it obviously aims to describe the brutality of imperialist war. But did not the sentimental depiction of the comradeship of the boys who sat on the guns, and, when they encountered a new race, white or black, made beefsteak tartar, mince-meat, of them, also express the deepest desires of sections of the audience? How many of the men who got up and demanded an encore on that night in August 1928, would only a few years later vote for a party that boasted in its election manifesto that it would indeed make mince-meat of alien races?

And if the song about the advantages of living in affluence rather than as a starving intellectual

was meant to depict the mindlessness of a stupid consumerist bourgeoisie, clearly a very large proportion of the audience would have wholeheartedly subscribed to those sentiments. The brothel ballad clearly condemns the horrors of prostitution in a capitalist society, but how many of the men in the audience who lived in a town teeming with the establishments so brilliantly depicted by the drawings of Brecht's friend George Grosz, had enjoyed a situation in which, when they paid up, the pimp told them, "if you want her again, please, come again, you're welcome!" and that to nostalgically sentimental music?

And the two great finales which show the world as seen by the ideology of man-eats-man—capitalism — The world is poor and man is bad — and again — Mankind lives by misdeeds alone, meant clearly to show the wickedness and folly of such a view as against the socialist, Rousseauist conviction that humanity is basically good and only perverted by wicked institutions — how many of the middle-class audience of the first-night would have enthusiastically agreed with those sentiments and simply concluded that in such a world one just had to pursue one's own advantage as ruthlessly as possible.

These misunderstandings of the bitter satirical irony of the sentiments expressed in such songs certainly contributed a great deal to the initial success of the *Threepenny Opera*. But the piece also profited, I believe, from other ambivalences at a much deeper level: the depiction of the a-moral milieu, a world of whores, thieves, and corrupt officials, just a satirical flip-side picture of the opposite of a decent moral society — as surely the author of the original *Beggar's Opera* intended it, or did it not contain at least some of the anti-bourgeois tendencies of a dedicated rebel against stuffy respectability like Brecht himself? If Brecht spoke of his own laxity in matters of literary property, to what extent did he see himself as at least to some extent a re-incarnation of Mac the Knife? And MacHeath's polygamous life-style certainly chimed in with Brecht's ideology and practice.

During his stay at St Cyr, where he was working on the text of *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht suffered from lack of access to his favorite detective fiction and was compelled to fall back on

reading the *Confessions of St Augustine*. He noted in his diary: "He ( i.e. Augustine), put great store on chastity. As to that, I think, by the way, that we have a very deficient and gross idea of the profits to be derived from it."

And underneath he listed some of his own principles of conduct:

"Not for sociability	but for men's talk
Not for love	but for lust
Not for good eating	but for quenching one's hunger
Not for play	but for work
Not for leisure	but for laziness
Not for girls	but for women"

So at least to a certain extent the underworld of the play represented not just a negative satirical flip-side, but embodied some of the positive sides of an anti-bourgeois attitude. And that certainly strengthened the power of the poetry behind the sexual side of MacHeath's story. And what is more: to a newspaper questionnaire asking writers to name the books that had most influenced them at that time, Brecht replied: "You'll laugh — the Bible." Not only is the text of *The Threepenny Opera* rich in biblical phraseology, as in the opening lines of Peachum's : "Wake up you rotten Christian" or in the quotations from the Song of Solomon in the love-duet ... the plot itself is a parody of the gospel. After all MacHeath is betrayed to the authorities by a traitor's kiss. In the third verse of the "Ballad of Sexual Enslavement," it is expressly stated that Jenny received her "Judas-Lohn" — her Judas' wages. And the miraculous redemption of MacHeath under the gallows is clearly a parody of the resurrection. Mac the Knife is an ironic avatar of Christ himself. Here too it is obvious that Brecht was making fun of Christianity, but the emotional power of such parody clearly also must be nourished by the subconscious investment of deep religious feelings in early childhood.

*The Threepenny Opera* thus, it seems to me, derived much of its power at the time of its creation — and ever since — from the peculiar advantage of all parody — that the very savagery of the attack on what is being parodied contains and pre-supposes a deep hidden involvement with that very subject matter, that the parody depends on the strength of the author's concern, even hidden

admiration, with what is being parodied. After all, he takes the trouble to imitate it — and imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

This ambivalence is a powerful root of the success of *The Threepenny Opera*. The sentimental melodies of the love songs or the brothel ballad can be enjoyed as brilliantly popular, even kitsch melodies, while at the same time, they allow the more sophisticated among the listeners to laugh at the brilliance with which such kitsch is being parodied and ridiculed. Whichever way the piece is enjoyed, it gets the best of both worlds: the outrageous a-moral behavior of the characters can give rise to the pleasure of indignation at such baseness and fill the spectator with delicious feelings of moral superiority, while, at the same time, giving him the thrills of the voyeur of sexually explicit or brutally violent material.

If such were the sources of the success of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928, to what extent are they still valid today, seventy years later? Clearly what at that time was regarded as outrageous or obscene has lost a great deal of its ability to shock. Much of the bourgeois double-standard morality it attacks has since been eroded, at least in urban milieus like Berlin, London, New York or San Francisco. The political situation, which here -- in contrast to most other works by Brecht -- is still implied rather than explicit has also fundamentally changed.

What remains for our time? I think: the compassion with which the life of people in the lowest reaches of society is treated, the humor with which the play laughs about itself, and above all: the poetry and the music.

Brecht's lyrics — at least in the original, no translation can quite capture their concision and power — are truly immortal. And Weill's achievement lies in transporting that poetic power into the area that lies beyond language -- music.

It was, from the very beginning the power of Brecht's poetry that had brought Brecht and Weill together. Weill had, by the mid 1920s achieved considerable success both in the concert hall, as a leading modernist — he had been a pupil of Ferruccio Busoni who pursued tonal innovations parallel to those of Schoenberg — and in the theatre, notably with operas based on the works of the leading expressionist playwright Georg Kaiser. The

composer Paul Hindemith, one of the artistic directors of the Festival of Chamber Music at Baden-Baden wanted to commission Weill to write a short opera for the 1927 festival. Weill had no libretto, but he had been deeply impressed by Brecht's first collection of poetry, the *Hauspostille (Domestic Breviary)*, which had recently been published. He approached Brecht for permission to use a sequence of five poems about a mythical wild west city, *Mahagonny*, as a basis for a composition. And so they had collaborated on the *Mahagonny Songspiel*, which later became a full-scale opera -- in 1930.

And, indeed, Weill's music, which surely today carries most of *The Threepenny Opera*'s lasting appeal, owes its effectiveness to a very large extent to Brecht's poetry. Brecht used language on the stage in a way he described as *gestural*. The language had, as it were, to force the actor into the right attitude, the right expressiveness, beyond mere gesture, an epitome of the total essence of the scene — what he called *Gestus*. And Weill developed this idea into a theory of *gestural* music. He wrote: "Music lacks the capacity to describe psychology or character. Instead music has an ability which is decisive for the presentation of human beings on the stage — it can reproduce the gesturality which can clarify what is going on on the stage, it can even create a kind of basic *gestus* by which it prescribes a certain attitude to the actor which excludes any chance of a misunderstanding about the action in question. It can, in the optimal case, so fix this *gestus* that a wrong representation of that action becomes impossible .... The music has the ability of so determining the basic gesturality of an event that any wrong interpretation can be avoided... ."

In that sense Weill's music embodies the spirit of Brecht's poetry and carries it across the frontiers of language. It is this, I think, which makes for the continued attraction and power of *The Threepenny Opera* today. Almost casually, quite unforced, Brecht and Weill created a work that combines lightness of touch, lack of pretentiousness, multifaceted ironies and ambivalences with complex multilayered meaning.

A good deal of Brecht's poetry is lost in translation — but Weill's music captures the

essence of the power of its *gestus*. Moreover, the fact that an 18<sup>th</sup> century idea proved powerful in 1928 — shows its ability to transcend time in the present production which Carl Weber has set in England at the time of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, in 1953.

Italo Calvino once defined a classic as a work that “has never finished what it has to say.” In that sense the *Threepenny Opera*, it seems to me, is a true classic.

(Public Lecture presented in Stanford, in February 1999)

**THE BRECHT-AUDEN  
DUCHESS OF MALFI:  
A World Premiere in Los Angeles**  
Dorothea Kehler

Within two years of fleeing Europe for Los Angeles, Brecht became involved in an ill-starred project, “the most obscure collaboration of his American exile,” writes James K. Lyon (141). Brecht collaborated first with H. R. Hays, an American poet and one of his translators, then, on Brecht’s invitation, with Auden, who replaced Hays. Brecht had originally intended to adapt Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness* for the German actress Elisabeth Bergner, like him an emigré to the United States. But before tackling the Heywood play, Brecht decided, in its place, to revise John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* for Bergner. This project occupied him on and off from 1943 to 1946, generating three complete copyrighted adaptations as well as five complete or near-complete texts presently in the Brecht Archive, Berlin. Surprisingly, none of these works was ever staged.<sup>1</sup> Following the 1945 London triumph of the original Webster *Duchess* directed by George Rylands and starring Peggy Ashcroft and John Gielgud, the adaptation was abandoned, and a near-facsimile of the Rylands production was brought to New York, where it did poorly; Brecht and Auden remained among the credits (presumably to capitalize on name recognition), until Brecht, who

had considered suing for breach of contract, had his name withdrawn.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the version director Denise Gillman produced for the Theatre of Note and her year-old Pilgrimage Theatre in the former’s modest Los Angeles venue was a world premiere. For the July 26 through September 5, 1998 run, Gillman chose the latest (1946) and most “Brechtian” text, not one of the known eight versions but a conflation reconstructed by A. R. Braunmuller of UCLA—a text available only in the Random House volume 7 edition of what is otherwise a Pantheon imprint of Brecht’s *Collected Plays*. As primary reviser, Brecht had hoped for productions modeled after blockbuster Broadway musicals, a genre he thought replete with surrealist alienation effects.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the adaptation was staged as theatre-in-the-round, played by nine actors in a brick-walled space surrounded by some fifty seats, the only prop being an all-purpose black box. The success of the production despite minimal staging was a tribute to Director Gillman, who capitalized on the distinctively Brechtian slant of the adaptation: the prominence of social class as a determinant of action.

From the start the play engrossed an audience that, like most of the actors, seemed on average to be thirty-something. Gillman established a disquieting, sinister mood for the prologue, plunging the house into a darkness made audible by the sounds of wind and whispering—perhaps evoked by the lines “A visor and a mask are whispering rooms / That were never built for goodness” (Brecht 346-47).<sup>4</sup> An explosion of light revealed an athletic, shaven-skulled Ferdinand in black Elizabethan costume, passionately confessing to the Friar his incestuous love for his sister, hoping against all reason for permission to act on his desire. The prologue, quite close in its language to act one, scene one, of John Ford’s *Tis a Pity She’s a Whore*, is changed somewhat to accommodate both Brecht’s streamlining of Webster and his increased development of Ferdinand’s woes. Frustrated by the Friar’s refusal, Ferdinand leaves to take command of troops in Cyprus, an echo of *Othello*, recalling another tortured love. By making Ferdinand’s chief motive explicit, Brecht forgoes ambiguity, preferring to underscore the decadence of the upper classes.

He thus jolts his audience into immediate involvement.

Act one, scene one, of the Brecht-Auden text approaches Webster's opening scene with minor alterations — for example, Delio becomes Antonio's cousin rather than his friend, and it is he, not Antonio, who has just returned from France. But as in Webster, Bosola is scorned by the Cardinal, Antonio describes the Duchess and briefly her brothers to Delio, an arrogant Ferdinand hires Bosola as his spy, and the brothers warn the Duchess against remarriage. Julia being eliminated from the new text, the Duchess loses a foil and the Cardinal his mistress, but Brecht's added line "If you think my palace is a cloister you are deceived," (342) creates the same moral blemish. Most of Webster's speeches are retained unchanged, though some are simplified, updated, relocated, or omitted.

Webster's

wish me good speed  
For I am going into a wilderness,  
Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clew  
To be my guide (1.1.358-60)

is, arguably, improved by Brecht-Auden's truncation, ending with "wilderness" (347). New lines of poetry are written in a looser blank verse which opts for immediate lucidity in the interests of accessibility. Most lines are serviceable, though a few falter, e.g., "Dear Antonio, I've dragged you into this . . ." (388). Added passages often provide new information, as when Ferdinand rejects Castruchio's counsel against going into battle: "This war too nearly touches mine honor. Since the old Duke of Malfi fell, I have sworn to defend my sister Duchess in his stead. While I live she need fear no foe" (341). This speech reveals that the Duchess had been married to an elderly husband and that Ferdinand regards fighting for his sister as the act of a surrogate husband.

While Pilgrimage's Ferdinand (André Marrero) and, for the most part, Bosola (Kiff Scholl), did fine work, the Duchess (Trace Turville), reminiscent of a young Emma Thompson, was the life of this production. With Ferdinand she is at first almost flirtatious, a sweet and saucy Ophelia, not much chastened by the warnings of her grimmer Laertes. As Ferdinand turns to leave, she removes her pearl necklace and presents it to him; the

farewell gift, Gillman's addition, will reappear later. Once Ferdinand is gone, the Duchess discards her dignity, betokened by her coronet and robe, and sends for Cariola (Judith Ann Levitt), some years older than her mistress — one thinks of Juliet's nurse — to call Antonio to her; the waiting woman, who had appeared and exited earlier, has only to turn around, for Gillman dealt cleverly with the limitations of her theatre by having various characters absent from the action for a scene or less face a wall until they are once again "onstage."

Act one, scene two, begins with the entrance of Antonio (Peter Konerko). The Duchess, looking very much the ingenue in a pale blue gown, bids Antonio inscribe her will. The Brecht-Auden text adds lines in which she asserts that her brothers had arranged her marriage to 'their' liking and that she no longer believes obedience to be a feminine virtue. Antonio seems overwhelmed by these pointed confidences. Visibly frightened, when the Duchess puts her wedding ring on his finger Antonio removes it, echoing Webster — Ambition, madam, is a great man's madness" (351). This prompts the Duchess to woo all the more ardently. To Antonio's question "But for your brothers?" the Duchess replies by discounting their continued opposition and simplifying their motives: "It's true, they had a hope / Had I continued widow to have gain'd / An infinite mass of treasure by my death" (352). Here Brecht transposes the rationalization Ferdinand voices in Webster after his sister's murder. By moving lines and changing pronouns, Brecht highlights an important theme of the adaptation: the avarice of the ruling class. Similarly, whereas Webster's Antonio excuses his passivity on the grounds that he would not have seemed to flatter, Brecht's Antonio raises class issues as he regrets that his tongue has "been too long used to servitude" (352). Keen social criticism early on centers the adaptation thematically.

Nevertheless, at her command, both the Duchess and Antonio kneel to make their vows. Still nervous, Antonio starts, almost dropping the ring when Cariola enters to witness the contract 'per verba de presenti'. Alone on stage after the couple exits to consummate the marriage, she sings the ominous lyric "Call for the robin red breast" from *The White Devil* to the plaintive accompaniment of a

recorder.<sup>5</sup> Unable to locate Benjamin Britten's score for the Rylands' Broadway production (Lyons 147; Shirley 48), Gillman commissioned this effective entr'acte music from her composer/producer, David Bickford.

The next scene opens with a shortened and modernized exchange between an old woman (actually, a versatile young actress, Sarah Phemister, who played half a dozen other minor roles as well as understudying the Duchess) and Bosola. Their dialogue prefaces his ploy to confirm his suspicion that the Duchess is pregnant. Brecht wisely deletes much of Bosola's misogynous (and incidentally antisemitic) tirade. Even so, the light touch, more fluff than poison, with which Scholl played this spy introduced as a "notorious murderer" (340) was unexpected. Though angry enough at the beginning and end of the play — and unnerving as he jokes his way through the murder of Cariola — overall Scholl's Bosola was not much more than an amusing smart aleck, deficient in the bitterness and bite of a Richard III or Iago. Scholl may have taken his cue from Brecht, who saw Bosola as merely "a librarian, a frustrated scholar,"<sup>6</sup> yet Bosola's actions would seem to call for a darker representation. Scholl played the "apricot scene" (the fruit brings on the Duchess' labor) for laughs and got them, but the scene was not convincing. Far more convincing was the fine moment when Antonio, a proud, loving, yet fearful father, first holds his infant son.

The Brecht-Auden text updates the play by restructuring Webster's five acts into three. In point of fact, Braunmuller credits Brecht with restructuring throughout the play (332). Act two, scene one, is entirely new. Set in Cyprus it opens to the offstage strains of a soldier's song: "I wrote my love a letter." The first stanza asserting that "the war will soon be over" (365) introduces a kindly Ferdinand. He banters with his page boy (Brecht designates a "Negro" page) whose complaints foreshadow his master's: the girl that the pageboy loves has been abused by a rival, paralleling Ferdinand's feelings about his sister's lover; and to the chagrin of the page, the girl doesn't even know he loves her, much as the Duchess is unaware of Ferdinand's feelings. Soon Bosola enters, lamenting the misfortunes that caused him to spend two years on his journey to Ferdinand. His self-consciously

cute response to Ferdinand's twice-iterated question, "how fares the duchess?" (366) reveals the malcontent's severe misreading of the Duke's character. Bosola replies, "Excellently. She hath a son" and offers the duke the boy's horoscope that Antonio had cast. As Ferdinand reads, the soldier is heard singing a second verse: "But when we left the city / A second war began . . ." (367). Ferdinand draws his sword, shouts at the page, "Uncase me, slave!" and, in a fury, prepares to throw the command on Delio and leave for Malfi—to assault his sister. Only when he learns that Delio is too severely wounded to take over, does he return to the battle, vowing vengeance, whether in a fortnight or a decade. Love, no less an equalizer than death, has declassed Ferdinand, who now sees himself as occupying the same position as his page, his class and racial superiority lost. Still benighted, Bosola voices Brechtian political sentiments as he wonders, "What's the matter with him? Why should she not bear a son? Her brother steals enough land for five sons. . . . Yet all this is but policy for a gentleman like him was never in such a sweat over less than a dukedom" (368). Bosola's naivety prepares for his gulling in Brecht's surprise ending.

Act two, scene two, of the Brecht adaptation, corresponding to Webster's act three, scene one, reunites Delio with his cousin Antonio, who confides that he is the father of the Duchess's children. Between this scene and the next a woman's voice is heard singing offstage, a directorial addition that sets the mood for the initially playful scene in which the Duchess teases Antonio, denying him her bed. Teasing in turn, Cariola and Antonio tiptoe away, unbeknownst to the Duchess, who continues speaking. Meanwhile Ferdinand comes up behind her and lightly caresses her hair. Still unaware of the substitution, she calls him "husband" (373). A Brechtian hallmark here is the change from Webster, in which, upon seeing Ferdinand, poniard in hand, she says, "Tis welcome: / For know, whether I am doom'd to live, or die, / I can do both like a prince" (3.2.69-71). In Brecht, she still believes she is addressing Antonio, and love supplants aristocratic pride:

In truth I fear nothing  
For I have tasted so much joy that now,  
Whether I am doomed to live or die,

I can do both. (373)

When Ferdinand reveals himself, he offers her the poniard as a suicide weapon and berates her. Gillman heightens the dramatic moment by having the Duchess slap her brother when he asks, "Dost thou know what reputation is?" (375). As he exits, vowing never to see her again, he returns her pearls, leaving his poniard behind. Antonio reenters, proposing that they secure the guard and then confront Ferdinand from a position of strength. But despite Brecht's heroic aggrandizement of Antonio, Brecht's Duchess, as in Webster, prefers her own scheme — to save Antonio by banishing him as a swindler; she will not allow him the status of principal in this contention between aristocrats. Trace Turville played the banishment scene so well that she risked reinforcing the subtextual intimations of the Duchess's talent for duplicity, having stolen her marriage and concealed it for years. Hopefully, spectators understood that thwarted by gender, truth-telling is a luxury the Duchess cannot afford. The scene ends as Bosola, who has won the confidence of the too credulous Duchess, plans to inform Ferdinand that she will be joining her husband in Ancona to seek sanctuary from the Cardinal. Echoing Webster, Bosola, no less gullible than the Duchess, cries, "I am certain to be raised" (381), jubilantly raising the black box. The gesture notwithstanding, one might have heard an ironic homonym — "razed."

Gillman placed the sole intermission here, after which the play resumed as it had begun, with the house in darkness and the sound of whispering. The sudden burst of light reveals Ferdinand shouting at the Cardinal, maddened by what his "intelligencer" (344) has written. Insisting that his sister die, Ferdinand weeps, apostrophizes her as a whore, and exits in a agonized, vengeful frenzy. Excising the cardinal's installation as a soldier, Brecht revises Webster's excommunication scene. Two grey-cloaked pilgrims, a woman and her husband, watch the spectacle with pleasure, commenting shrewdly on class issues. As monks anathemize the Duchess, the Cardinal, unseen, curses each part of her body in turn for her sin of lechery, ultimately confiscating her Duchy and goods in the name of the church. Brecht ends this theatrical spectacle with the woman asking her

husband, "What was it with such violence he took / From off her finger?" He answers, "Twas her wedding ring" (387). Here, to my mind, Brecht betters Webster, whose additional seven bland lines (3.4.38-44) dissipate the irony. Gillman's staging of this scene within the small empty space at her disposal was compelling. Monks, just visible in the darkness, their faces hidden, formed the perimeter of a square. Their chanting in unison served as background and choral refrain to the Cardinal's offstage curses.

Contrasted is the next scene in which birds warble as the exiled Duchess, Antonio, and their children sit forlornly on the ground. Shortly before Bosola's entrance, the Duchess apologizes to her husband; he exonerates her, blaming himself for accepting her stratagem when he should have fought — his pugnacity quite unlike Webster's passive steward. Seeing through the ambiguously worded promises in the letter Bosola brings from Ferdinand, Antonio goes off with the second oldest child, and the Duchess, arrested by Bosola, mesmerizes the audience with the fable of the salmon among dog-fish.

The last act begins with one of Brecht's excellent new scenes: the murder of the Cardinal, not by Bosola as in Webster, but by his brother. Guilt-ridden, the Cardinal is seated beside a monk to whom he speaks of hell, then takes the Bible and kisses the monk's hand. Ferdinand enters, angered to madness by the lascivious gossip attendant upon the Duchess' public excommunication, and demands that the ban be lifted and the Duchess's lands restored. Unmoved by his brother's offer to share her revenues, Ferdinand threatens the Cardinal: "Recant or die!" (395). At first the Cardinal rejects the dagger Ferdinand proffers, holding up his Bible instead. Then, realizing that Ferdinand is undeterred, he tries to defend himself against his brother's superior skill. The Cardinal dies, acknowledging his sin, whereupon Bosola and Ferdinand wordlessly drag his corpse offstage.

Revising the action, Brecht moves forward Webster's act five, scene three, the echo scene, and has Antonio accompanied by his younger son instead of by Delio (Kyle Christopherson), who plays both parts. Although Antonio was not the strongest of the Pilgrimage actors, and Christopherson's doubling

was initially confusing, the father's dogged persistence in the face of imminent death and his tender regard for his little boy were truly moving.

Brecht then returns to Webster's act four, scene one, in which Ferdinand sends Bosola to the Duchess with a "precious gift" (399). In a more realistic version of grand guignol, Brecht replaces Webster's wax hand and the wax figures of Antonio and their second son with their corpses, which tumble out of the black box when the Duchess turns the key Bosola has given her. Brecht gains further persuasiveness by omitting the madmen's histrionic masque, instead preparing the conclusion with a scene in which Ferdinand's pageboy relates his master's mad behavior to a physician, and Delio leaves to gather troops committed to freeing the Duchess on the doctor's testimony.

But the attempt comes too late, for in the next scene Brecht saves Webster's device of murder by means of a poisoned book. Whereas in Webster, the Cardinal rids himself of a tiresome mistress through his insistence that she swear her secrecy by kissing a book he has secretly poisoned, Brecht has Bosola offer to liberate the Duchess and return her lands at Ferdinand's behest if, kissing a prayer book, she swear never to remarry. With quiet dignity, weary of a life she endures only because of her two remaining children, the Duchess accedes. As warlike offstage sounds proclaim Delio's successful coup, a priest enters to lift the sentence of excommunication and to restore the Duchess' holdings. However, rather than the triumphant line Webster gives her — "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (4.2.142) — in response to Bosola's taunting, Brecht, no doubt suspicious of ruling-class hauteur, has Bosola announce, "You are Duchess of Malfi once more" (407) — a disappointing substitution. The Brecht-Auden text does provide a memorable exchange when, after learning that Ferdinand has killed the Cardinal for publicly disgracing her, she asks, "Bosola, is my brother mad?" He replies, "Only in what concerns you" (407).

Almost immediately thereafter the Duchess becomes lethargic, feeling the effects of the poison; her legs grow numb, and Cariola realizes, "Twas the book!" (409). At this juncture the Duchess, questioning the motives behind Ferdinand's violence, perceives that only by killing her could her

brother disclose his passion:<sup>7</sup> "O my poor brother! Cariola, there are sins / With deeper roots than hate" (409). Turville's portrayal of the Duchess, torn between amazement, horror, and compassion, was brilliant. The last emotion wins out; the Duchess attempts to stay alive by walking so that she can be reconciled with Ferdinand. (That Brecht has her attempt to die on her feet, in contrast to Webster's staging — toppling over after being strangled while kneeling — appears to have been motivated by Elisabeth Bergner's reluctance to die prone; Bergner was been panned for an inept prostrate demise not long before her involvement in the Brecht-Auden adaptation [Lyon 143]). Immediately after asking that her elder son be given his cough syrup and that her daughter say bedtime prayers, the Brecht-Auden Duchess adds, "And when I falter, do thou urge me on. Cry loudly / In my ear: His soul is lost because he loved you so!" (411) — a judgment that again likens Ferdinand to Othello, both men having "loved not wisely but too well." Turville died with gentle grace just before Bosola enters. He sends an assassin to kill the children while he strangles Cariola despite her pitiful efforts to buy time. Here, the ruthless efficiency of Scholl's Bosola, grimly witty even as he kills, creates the sense of horror.

In the revised ending Ferdinand's death follows hard upon his entrance. Viewing his sister's corpse — "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young" (413) — Ferdinand alludes less obliquely than in Webster to his incestuous longings, then goads Bosola into an attack to which he makes no defense. As Ferdinand dies sane, acknowledging that his sister "is the cause on it" (414). Bosola belatedly realizes Ferdinand had sought death: "That was the purpose and thy cunning wit / That I should kill thee, and I did" (414). By observing the caesura after "kill thee" with a lengthy pause, Sholl conveyed surprise, not only that he could be so played upon but that Ferdinand was indeed gone.

More surprising for the audience was Bosola's confession in the final scene; although hating evil, he had done evil for love of Ferdinand. Unfortunately, this suggestive explanation, while an arresting parallel to Ferdinand's motives, was not consistent with the role either as written or acted.

But Scholl's Bosola was eloquent when, before being led off to be hanged, he speaks his haunting epitaph — “Mine is another voyage” (415).

Having escaped assassination, the eldest son of the Duchess and Antonio and the sole survivor of his line is brought forward as heir to Malfi. When a captain questions the boy's pedigree, Brecht's Delio champions the union of the aristocracy with the base-born:

if here should spring  
A new shoot from a hundred-years-old tree  
Whose trunk too long hath twined upon itself  
It were a hopeful portent. (416)

Delio also speaks the twenty-two line epilogue in tetrameter couplets, part Auden's, part Webster's from *The Devil's Law Case*. The “Ozymandias”-like threnody concludes with Webster's lyric reflection on the great, who seek “To leave a living name behind / And weave but nets to catch the wind” (417).

Braunmuller writes that “Nearly every aspect of Brecht's adaptation of John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* — the text, the collaborators' shares, the dates of composition and revision, even the spelling of the title itself — offers puzzles and confusions almost impossible of certain solution” (331).

Nevertheless, Braunmuller offers us the text he believes Brecht to have been most involved with, one to which Brecht added an introductory and final scene and much of act two, modified characterization and motives, and simplified the intrigue plot. The result is a fast-paced theatre piece in which incest, greed, and the abuse of power are underscored by their contextualization within the hierarchies of church and state. Although an untoward corollary of Brecht's minimizing the Duchess' class pride was the creation of a less independent heroine than Webster's, ultimately more patient Griselda than feminist, Turville evoked great sympathy for a character no less a victim of elitism than of patriarchalism and perversity. Certainly, the Los Angeles world premiere by Gillman's Pilgrimage Theatre and Theatre of Note was a notable marking of the centennial anniversary of Brecht's birth. Gillman's low-budget staging has demonstrated the exceptional energy of the much-neglected Brecht-Auden *Duchess*. One must hope that her production will inspire many more.

## Notes

1. See A. R. Braunmuller's Editorial Note, 7: 426-50, for a discussion of the variant texts. I am much indebted to his valuable work. Braunmuller has also edited a version of the Brecht-Hays *Duchess* for Methuen, [337]-443.
2. For this history of the adaptation, I have drawn upon John Willett's and Ralph Manheim's Introduction to their 1970 Eyre Methuen collection, esp. xviii-xx, and the Editorial Note, 424-48. Also see Lyon 141-50.
3. See Brecht's “How *The Duchess of Malfi* ought to be performed” reprinted from *Schriften zum Theater* 4, 196 (Random, 7: 422-23).
4. Because the Random House text lacks lineation, I use page references.
5. Actually, the song is not part of this version of the adaptation but of an earlier one. Braunmuller reprints the song in his Notes on Specific Scenes (Random 7: 433), which I take to be Gillman's source for this addition.
6. The phrase, quoted by Lyon 144, is Brecht's from a letter to Elisabeth Bergner. In Gillman's version, Bosola wants the reward of a pension (414), in two other versions, a “scholarship”! (see Braunmuller's *Notes on Specific Scenes* (Random 7: 448).
7. Brecht says as much in point 11 of his plot summary notes (rpt. and trans. by Braunmuller in Random 7: 422) and his critique of the Broadway production of a version little changed from Webster's text (Braunmuller 425, rpt. from *Schriften zum Theater* 4).

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## BRECHTIAN THEORY AND THEATER

### Techniques in Marlene Streeruwitz's *Bagnacavallo*

Britta Kallin

The author Marlene Streeruwitz is one of the two most important contemporary Austrian women playwrights, second only to Elfriede Jelinek.<sup>1</sup> In the last few years, Streeruwitz's work has received critical acclaim. Her theoretical approach on feminism and theater is clearly developed in a series of lectures held at the University of Tübingen which were published as *Sein. Und Schein. Und Erscheinen* (1997).<sup>2</sup> Analyzing one of her plays from a Brechtian perspective and looking at her theoretical approach on dramaturgy, I argue that Streeruwitz applies Brechtian theater techniques in her play *Bagnacavallo* in order to send a feminist message.<sup>3</sup>

Research on Brecht's heritage in German, Austrian and Swiss theater has most often focused on contemporary male playwrights and directors, many of whom deny Brecht's influence and distance themselves and their art from Brecht's political and aesthetic principles.<sup>4</sup> There are rather few examples in recent scholarship of analyses of Brecht's influence on female German-speaking dramatists and directors.<sup>5</sup> Feminist scholars such as Sara Lennox, Laureen Nussbaum, Sue-Ellen Case and others have been more concerned with the representation of women and homosexuality in Brecht's plays and with Brecht's treatment of his female co-workers.<sup>6</sup>

Many feminist authors of the second wave of feminism began writing plays in the 1970s and 1980s. Brecht's influence on their theater may be explained by the fact that his theater was still thought of as the most persuasive form of political theater that could lead to changes in society. As Olga Taxidou observes, "Gender analysis has always been a 'blind spot' within marxist (sic) theory and Brecht's work suffers from it" (382). The attention to class conflict in Brecht's theater was supposed to be replaced in feminist drama by the conflict between the sexes. Brecht's theater provides feminist playwrights with means for social critique and means revealing and examining ideologically

determined beliefs such as gender constructions.

Brecht did not develop one singular theory or dramatic model. The theoretical foundation and practical application in his plays show a wide variety of approaches to theater which are sometimes contradictory in nature.<sup>7</sup> Some of his ideas on Epic theater cannot even be found in an analysis of the written text of a play. Brecht introduced many of his theater techniques in rehearsals with actors and actresses as well as in the use of costumes, props and stage designs. However, several aspects of his theoretical framework can be located in the written version of Streeruwitz's *Bagnacavallo*.<sup>8</sup>

Brechtian techniques such as *Verfremdung*, *Gestus* as well as historicization are used effectively in this play. Some of these aspects are intertwined and cannot be clearly distinguished from one another. Streeruwitz's choice of *dramatis personae* shows one way in which she uses the Brechtian alienation effect. The playwright goes back to literary sources such as Shakespeare, Maeterlinck, Ibsen and Walt Disney from which she chooses the characters.

The title of the play refers to the name of a location, which is typical for Streeruwitz's plays. In this case it is a small town in the northern part of Italy famous for its frescoes, paintings and mosaics.<sup>9</sup> In the play, two families fight against each other in a civil war which leads to the apocalypse. Everything is destroyed and the world comes to an end. Only few humans survive, one of them works as a tourist guide for his new employers, the Marsians. They come down in groups to look at the Earth and decide whether it is worthwhile to reconstruct human life.

The protagonist's name is Romeo and the constellation of the two families who are enemies reflects the situation in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The families' names are DelNorth and DelSouth, symbolizing conflicts in the real world between North and South as well as West and East. This is an example of Streeruwitz using the Brechtian technique of historicization to draw parallels between a situation in history — even as a literary invention — and the current political situation. Brecht did something similar in *Mother Courage*, in which the situation during the Thirty Year War is used to reflect upon World War II.

In *Bagnacavallo*, Romeo is not the pleasant guy as in Shakespeare's play. He is a pimp who wants to play war with the latest weapon technology. He does not love but wants to have control over the female characters. In an interview, Streeruwitz answers the question whether *Bagnacavallo* can be called a "travesty of *Romeo and Juliet*":

Shakespeare is not of interest to me at all. What is interesting about Shakespeare is the interest the theater nowadays shows in him. Reactionary male clamor on all political levels in luxurious stage costume. That's why I take the individual figures and put them in a different context in order to show who Mr. Romeo really is: a guy who murmurs in the bedroom but who in reality is a warmonger like any other noblemen of his time. In *Bagnacavallo*, he simply gets a cellular phone and new weapons. (Streeruwitz, "Interview") Thus, Streeruwitz invites the audience to look at literary history from a woman's perspective.

The Brechtian *Gestus* is another element with which Streeruwitz works here. She employs the *Gestus* to reveal the power relations between the sexes. Romeo wants to marry Melisande, whose name and child-like character is taken from Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pélléas et Mélisande* (1891). He offers her a revolver as an engagement gift and teaches her how to use it. Teaching her how to kill, Romeo prepares her to take an active part in the ongoing war. In order to avoid participating in the war, Melisande refuses to follow Romeo's orders. She does not want to marry him and after suffering psychological trauma — because she was kidnapped and abused by Romeo's family — kills herself with the revolver.

Another female character is taken from Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. In Ibsen's version, Anitra, the Moroccan, dark skinned Bedouin, is the epitome of virginity and at the same time she personifies exotic eroticism. Anitra mistakenly thinks Peer Gynt is a prophet, and he makes her work for him and calls her his handmaid. Streeruwitz changes this object of male desire into a woman, who, as a foreigner, is the object of sex trade.<sup>10</sup> Anitra explains her situation: "No passport. No ID. No residence permit. Always a handmaid. Slave work...." (162). She falls victim to Romeo who uses

her as his prostitute. The fact that this character is taken from another literary source enables the audience to re-examine the presentation of female figures in examples of Western literature.

Another Brechtian technique comes into play when the spectator encounters the group of Marsian tourists who walk across the stage. The scene is a play-within-a-play: the actor of Romeo and the actress of Melisande are supposed to perform for the Marsian tourist group. The tourist guide Mr. Sellner gives them orders to act out parts of the history of humankind. Mr. Sellner addresses the actress of Melisande by her supposedly real name "Evelyn Klein" (178). In doing so, Streeruwitz uses a crucial element of Brecht's theory to release the spectator from imaginary and illusionary identifications. The audience becomes aware that the story on stage is not at all reality.

An interesting aspect of this play-within-a-play is the fact that some of the time levels overlap. The main story is that Romeo and Melisande are dead before the Marsians come down to Earth. The overlapping time aspect is used in such a way that the story does not follow a logical time sequence. In her essays on theater, Streeruwitz explains the usage of time in this play:

Synchronicity is possible. Passages of time can be newly structured. The time of the performance can be differentiated from real time . . . in *Bagnacavallo* by using time related techniques. The performance becomes more of a performance in its special structure. Any semblance with reality is nipped in the bud. The illusion of theater is exposed.<sup>11</sup>

(Streeruwitz, *Sein* 81)

The illusion of the play is reinforced by its structural representation. Streeruwitz adopts this structural element of Brecht's ideas on representation of time and modifies it.

In the same scene, the audience also encounters eighteen visual projections. Streeruwitz employs stage techniques such as pictures and slides which Brecht demanded for his Epic theater. These visuals disturb the flow of the story and, therefore, they do not allow the audience to believe the illusion on stage is true. The tourist guide Mr. Sellner tries to explain the essence of humanity to the Marsians:

SELLNER: Nine tenths of this time, humans

have lived as hunters and gatherers.

Projection:

He-Man or Schwarzenegger as Terminator. Then immediately Marilyn Monroe as naked pin-up girl.

SELLNER: The last bit was more civilized. But it was still the language of violence that ruled.

Projection:

Wedding picture of Barbie and Ken. (176)

By showing projections that are contradictory to the commentary, Streeruwitz ironizes and alienates the presentation of human history. In her theoretical essays, Streeruwitz argues that women perceive the world through a male gaze and the female gaze is almost non-existent. Streeruwitz criticizes the *Terminator*, in which the saga of the rescuing knight [in shining armor] is continued" because it reinvents a military image of the role of men in society (Streeruwitz, *Sein* 24).

Streeruwitz also uses slides to foreshadow the death of Melisande. One slide shows Melisande's dead body. Throughout the play there are flashbacks and flash-forwards that are used as tools from the Epic theater to distance the audience from the story. They provide a distance from the events on stage because they are set in a time after the period being shown. Streeruwitz breaks up scenes so that they do not follow a chronological order, which indicates the non-linear form of this play.

The use of masks is also employed by Streeruwitz as a feminist trope in Brechtian theater. Brecht wrote: "The classical and medieval theatre alienated its characters by making them wear human or animal masks" (Willett 192). Another female character, Genofeva, is transformed into the Virgin Mary in one scene.<sup>12</sup> The message of her conversation with Melisande stands in contrast to what one would expect the Holy Mother to say:

You have to forget the fear. Melisande. My child. We are women. Women are foreigners. Those who are foreign have to expect the worst. Be certain that the worst will happen to you. And give up the fear. And hope. (180)

Streeruwitz criticizes the few roles to which women have been assigned in society. They are often construed as the Other, comparable to an outsider or foreigner. Compared to the abused and exploited foreigner Anitra, however, their situation is much

better. By putting Genofeva in the mask and costume of the Virgin Mary, the character is changed from its normal representation to another person that does not seem to be in line with her old character. By use of a different costume, the distance between actress-character and her social role in the play are highlighted.

Streeruwitz's incorporation of poems and songs also echoes Brecht's Epic theater: actors recite poems and aphorisms, and they sing different words to commonly known tunes, allowing them to temporarily detach themselves from the role they represent. An example are the Siamese twins Tick and Trick, two characters taken from Walt Disney, who recite poetry in the form of a choir. These two characters represent warmongers without scruples who profit from war by taking away belongings of the dead.

The adaptation of Brechtian techniques and theory can be an effective tool for feminist playwrights. In *Bagnacavallo*, Marlene Streeruwitz employs a number of Brechtian elements such as the A-effect by using masks, projections, poems, songs, stepping out of the character, non-linear time sequences, characters from other literary sources as well as historicization and gestural techniques as means to expose inadequacies between the sexes and between the powerful insiders like Romeo, the nobleman, and less powerful outsiders such as the woman and foreigner Anitra.<sup>13</sup> The play challenges dominant power structures in contemporary society, partly by use of the Brechtian concept of theater as a political tool. Streeruwitz uses Brechtian approaches in a different yet pertinent theater of protest.

## Notes

1. Since the early 1990s Streeruwitz has written numerous plays, most of which have been staged and/or published, such as *Kaiserkamm*, *Und Kirchenwirt* (1990), *Waikiki Beach* (1992), *Sloane Square* (1992), *New York. New York* (1993), *Elysian Park* (1993), *Ocean Drive* (1993), *Tolmezzo* (1994), *Bagnacavallo* (1995), *Dentro* (1995) and *Brahmsplatz* (1995).
2. Most recently, Streeruwitz has turned to writing prose. Her two novels are *Verführungen* (1995) and *Lisa's Liebe* (sic) (1997).
3. *Bagnacavallo* was written in 1993 and staged for the first time on 17 October 1995 at the Schauspiel Köln. See

Streeruwitz, "... und nicht zu sagen ist" 225.

4. For a discussion of Brecht's influence on post-Wall German male playwrights, see Haus 90-97.

5. Compared to feminist critics who work on British and American literature, feminists in German studies have not as yet analyzed Brechtian elements in women's theater. Janelle Reinelt has given an analysis of Brecht's impact on British women's drama in her article "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama" (1990). For the American stage, Elin Diamond in "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism" (1988) and Karen Laughlin in her article "Brechtian Theory and American Feminist Theatre" (1990) have pointed out that even though Brecht created "conventionally gendered plays and too many saintly mothers," feminist playwrights use certain Brechtian techniques in order to create a viable position for the female spectator and to represent the female body as something that will not be fetishized (Diamond 83). Sue-Ellen Case mentions the absence of research on German women playwrights by Anglo-American feminist scholars, see Case, *Home/Land* 19.

6. See Lennox, "Women in Brecht," Case, "Brecht and Women" and Nussbaum. Renate Möhrmann has conducted a study on Brecht's influence on contemporary German women's film, see Möhrmann.

7. See Lennox, "Brecht, Feminism" 16.

8. For reviews of the performance in Cologne, see "Untergangsrevue", Hammerthaler and Wille 36.

9. Streeruwitz describes how she traveled with her two daughters to *Bagnacavallo* in September 1994. See *Sein. Und Schein. Und Erscheinen* 56.

10. The reviews of the performance were mixed, see Wille 35. One critic maintains that Streeruwitz produces stereotypical characters: good women and bad men, see Berger.

11. Streeruwitz demands that drama has to break away from realism. See "Passion. Devoir" 31.

12. In Maeterlinck's *Pélléas et Mélisande*, Genofeva is Melisande's mother-in-law. In *Bagnacavallo*, the presentation of Genofeva as the Holy Mother allegorizes the scene in which Margarete sees the Virgin Mary in Goethe's *Faust I*.

13. I am not claiming that Streeruwitz only employs techniques that are in accordance with Brechtian ideas. She also goes against Brechtian principles. For example, *Bagnacavallo* does not include a prologue or epilogue; there are no titles for the scenes; the audience is not directly addressed by any actor; etc. Nevertheless, many of her theatrical approaches are closely related to those of Brecht. At one point, Streeruwitz explicitly states that she does not want the audience to identify with her characters, see Meyerhoff 17.

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## WHERE'S WEIGEL?

Niko Lande

I never knew how much one class period could inspire me until I took a course on Bertolt Brecht. However, Brecht was not the source of inspiration for this paper. A student presentation called "Women in Brecht's life," called my attention to one woman in particular. My curiosity was piqued by Helene Weigel. The student presentation demonstrated to me that Helene Weigel was a woman who appeared to be strangely tolerant of her husband's infidelities.

Before the Brecht course, I had never heard of the actress Helene Weigel during my time as an undergraduate student studying German language and culture. I used Brecht as a tool to research Helene Weigel. The information on Weigel within the books on Brecht was informative yet limited. The lack of information was a challenge which resulted in my search on "Who's Weigel?" However, I realized the perception of who Helene

Weigel was was connected to where Weigel appears and does not appear in literature. My search for Weigel was turned into one highly reminiscent of the cartoon "Where's Waldo?"<sup>1</sup> The parallel between Waldo and Weigel is not meant to trivialize the issue of Weigel, but to help readers understand the concept behind this topic. It was difficult to discern Helene Weigel in the Brechtian backgrounds that seemed to have camouflaged a large part of her presence and identity.

After searching the University of Oregon library, I realized there were no writings in this library's collection on the actress Helene Weigel. Ironically, the only item that I found was *Helene Weigel liest Bertolt Brecht*.<sup>2</sup> This phonodisc was the only item with Helene Weigel in a subject, title and author search. This experience helped me to understand the subversion of Helene Weigel's person in lieu of Brecht's fame and status as a genius writer. While Brecht occupies shelves upon shelves of literature, Weigel silently waits in a dusty album cover to be discovered so she can read her husband's literature out loud.

Within the pages of many books on Brecht, Helene Weigel's presence appears as a surrealistic mother-figure instead of a woman with ambition and drive. For example, in Bernard Fenn's *Characterisation of Women in the Plays of Bertolt Brecht*, the idea that Weigel is a muse-like mother figure is presented. Fenn states, "all the great mother figures of Brecht's plays took shape after his contact with Helene Weigel."<sup>3</sup> This statement may be an accurate interpretation about Weigel as a source of inspiration for Brecht, however, Weigel was more than just a mother.

The mother figure representation of Weigel is further extended to an asexual mother figure in *Ich kommandiere mein Herz*. Pietzcker states, "Helene Weigel hatte bald den Part der asexuellen wärmenden und nährenden Mutter zu übernehmen..."<sup>4</sup> This one-dimensional representation of Weigel as a mother figure is perhaps a premature evaluation of the Weigel-Brecht relationship. The author examines no letters or opinions that Weigel may have had to describe her relationship with Brecht. In my opinion, a conclusion that is drawn about a relationship without examining both parties involved can result

in a highly inaccurate representation.

Weigel is not only presented as a one-dimensional mother figure in many books on Brecht, but at times she has been completely ignored when Brecht has been evaluated. For example in *Brecht: Frauen und Politik*, the introduction addresses the fact that Helene Weigel was not included in the evaluation of Brecht's involvement with women in this manner.<sup>5</sup> Although the editors support the idea that more work should be done on Helene Weigel, they claim that none of the work submitted on Weigel fitted the subject matter of the book.<sup>6</sup>

However, the exclusion of Helene Weigel in a book such as this seems rather ludicrous and inexcusable considering the length and depth of the relationship that Brecht and Weigel shared for 27 years.<sup>7</sup> The exclusion of Helene Weigel as an influential presence on Brecht was not limited to this one book.

Another book, *Brecht: As They Knew Him*, provides yet another example of blatant exclusion of Weigel's presence and opinions.<sup>8</sup> It seems rather shocking that mistresses Elisabeth Hauptmann and Ruth Berlau were included to comment on their experiences working with Brecht while Weigel was not even mentioned. Although Weigel may not have been a writer, her comments and thoughts would be seemingly just as valid as those of Hauptmann and Berlau.

For example, in the book *Die Weigel*, Weigel talks briefly about her work with the Berliner Ensemble and Brecht.<sup>9</sup> Helene Weigel states that Brecht gave her the power over the Berliner Ensemble because he knew that she had an "Organisationstalent."<sup>10</sup> Helene Weigel's absence in *Brecht: As They Knew Him*, inaccurately may suggest that Weigel was not an influential colleague and perhaps had no significant remarks to make on Brecht and his work. In contrast to *Brecht: Frauen und Politik*, this book provides no excuses for the lack of information on Helene Weigel.

Weigel was a multi-faceted figure whose interests appear to have superseded the simplified version of a mother-role to Brecht. Weigel was not only the manager of the Berliner Ensemble, but worked as a colleague with Brecht in plays such as *Die Mutter*.<sup>11</sup>

Weigel's accomplishments extended from

behind the scenes to on the stage. In *Helene Weigel zu ehren*, a section in the back of the book is titled "Die Rollen Der Weigel im Spiegel der Kritik."<sup>12</sup> This section lists a variety of reviews from Weigel's many performances. According to Karin Michaelis, after Weigel's first audition at the Wiener Volksbühne in 1918, the director told Weigel that she didn't need any acting lessons, and later that day he remarked that Weigel was "Eines der größten dramatischen Genies, die jemals geboren wurden."<sup>13</sup> Another book, *Die Schauspielerin Helene Weigel*, supports the assertion made by her first director. In an excerpt "aus der dritten Nacht des *Messingkaufs*," the author states that Weigel's ingenious art of acting was not only making the audience cry when she cried and laugh when she laughed, but her style focused on making the audience cry when she laughed and laugh when she cried.<sup>14</sup>

The performances by the actress, Helene Weigel, have been praised over and over again by critics.<sup>15</sup> In yet another review, a critic calls Weigel's art of performing "wahrscheinlich die ursprünglichste und reichste Schauspielkraft, die wir überhaupt haben."<sup>16</sup> The reviews of Weigel's acting career may have been great, but she was not supported by her parents when she told them of her idea to act. In the biographical time line in the back of the book, *Die Schauspielerin Helene Weigel*, it is stated that after Weigel vocalized her desire to pursue acting, there was a "Widerstand im Elternhaus."<sup>17</sup> Despite this conflict with Weigel's parents, Weigel appears to have been self-confident and ambitious when it came to her passion and ability to act. In Tenschert's *Die Weigel*, Weigel states, "Es war eigentlich so ein Platzen von Talent und Kraft, eine Art Wahrhaftigkeit, die damals ohne Zweifel durchbrach."<sup>18</sup>

The confidence and strength of Helene Weigel fills the books on Weigel and her acting. A definite strong presence shines through page after page of pictures of Weigel on and off stage.<sup>19</sup> The pictures of Weigel depict a definite ability to express emotion through her face and body movements.

However, even when movement is shown and expression is seen in the pictures, there is a feeling of insufficiency that persists. Weigel's motion and voice is frozen, which limits the ability to

experience Weigel's art. Although the pictures preserve a part of Weigel's art form, the words are silenced and screams on stage are depicted without sound. This voiceless presence persists throughout almost all of the literature on Helene Weigel.

Most of the books on Weigel resemble photo albums, but the pictures of Helene Weigel are alternated with Brecht's poetry on Weigel. In all but one of the books on Weigel, she is neither quoted nor interviewed. Perhaps the cliché "a picture is worth a thousand words" can be applied to show the paradox in this situation. The subject of these books is Helene Weigel — the pictures in the books are of Weigel yet the words are of her husband, Bertolt Brecht, which are used to define more fully Weigel's character.

In *Die Weigel*, Tenschert also uses Brecht's poetry, but further expands Weigel's identity beyond the mother figure by using a few scattered quotes and discussions with Weigel on her acting career.<sup>20</sup> *Die Weigel* presented the most information that stemmed from Weigel speaking of herself and her acting career. The sum of this information amounted to a meager 8 pages. Many of the pages were not full and were printed in large font, but the actual words of Weigel were a ray of sunshine for a student who yearned for direct information about Weigel's identity.

Of the four books found on Helene Weigel, one was different in content and form than the other picture-oriented representations of Weigel. The book *Helene Weigel zum 70. Geburtstag*, contains letters to Helene Weigel from friends and colleagues.<sup>21</sup> The letters are personal and informative and speak of the effect that Helene Weigel had on those who knew her.

In one of the letters to Weigel, friend Juri Ljubimow inadvertently acknowledges the subversion of Weigel due to Brecht's fame. Ljubimow states, "Ihr Leben und Ihre Kunst sind für immer untrennbar verbunden mit dem unsterblichen schöpferischen Erbe Brechts als Dichter, Dramatiker, Kunsttheoretiker, als einer der größten Revolutionäre des Theaters."<sup>22</sup> I don't think the author intentionally attempted to recognize the injustice behind this statement.

The realization that Weigel will not be recognized for her own talent, but through her

connection with Brecht appears to have not been scrutinized by this author. Supported by a sexist assumption that women are to gain ultimate satisfaction from supporting and caring for family, the author perhaps saw the Brechtian connection as an opportunity for Weigel rather than an injustice. Although Weigel has been positioned as a genius with her acting abilities, why has she not been elevated to the status that Brecht has been over the years. In fact, Vera Tenschert states that after years of photography with Weigel she created the book *Die Weigel* in response to Weigel's request.<sup>23</sup> Weigel said to Tenschert, "Später einmal wirst Du ein Buch machen. Sicher wirst Du eins machen. Wenn dem so ist, dann bitte ich Dich wirklich: Mach ein menschliches Buch von mir."<sup>24</sup>

I don't believe that Bertolt Brecht would have ever had to ask for a book to be written on him. However, Brecht has been recognized as a brilliant writer and Weigel has been faintly recognized as a brilliant actress. Brecht's art form and character have been explored; Weigel's art form and character have not been explored in depth. Even though Tenschert has produced her visual representation of Weigel as a human within the realm of photography, Weigel has yet to be explored with words. Some may state that her art is of a different form than Brecht's and that is why Weigel remains a character that is lacking in representation. I don't accept this excuse. Long before this class, I had heard of the actress Marlene Dietrich and saw her perform in the film *Der blaue Engel*.<sup>25</sup>

Why then has there been such little work done on Weigel? Who are more readily called geniuses within Germany's culture? I admit that when I think of German geniuses I think of Einstein, Brecht and Goethe among other men. Why is it that within society the term genius is limited to one gender? Why does Helene Weigel appear only as a character within the life of the male genius Bertolt Brecht? Is this a result of socially constructed ideas of women as mothers and wives and men as workers and thinkers?

I think questioning the social structure is important in recognizing the predetermined fate of past female geniuses such as Helene Weigel. Helene Weigel may be just one of many female geniuses sitting in the dusty back shelves of our

libraries and consciences waiting to be discovered and brought into the classrooms of educators.

The material on Weigel is aged and the corners of the pages are yellowing. The material on Weigel is already 30 years old or older and will continue to deteriorate with the passage of time. Without further research, Weigel will continue to be a silent character pushed into the corners of Brechtian landscapes. More research could be done on the social constructions that may have resulted in the scarce materials on Helene Weigel. Or perhaps, Weigel could be compared with other well-known actresses such as Marlene Dietrich. One could also pursue the relationship between Weigel and Brecht from Weigel's perspective (i.e. with her letters to Brecht).

The lack of materials on women, such as Weigel, does not mean that they should simply be ignored. Due to a lack of material resources on Helene Weigel, this paper is ending prematurely. However, I have not given up on the search of "Where's Weigel?" and who she is. Weigel is a subject ripe for exploration and she has been blatantly denied a place amongst the declared geniuses in the world of literature.

Fans of Bertolt Brecht celebrated his 100th birthday this year. Helene Weigel's 100th birthday will be in two years. I wonder if this individual will be celebrated with articles, classes and dinners in a similar manner to Brecht. Or will we allow the day to pass as any other?

#### Notes

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23 Tenschert no pp.

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25 *Der blaue Engel*, dir. Josef Von Sternberg, with Marlene Dietrich, Emil Jannings, UFA-Paramount, 1986.

(The author and readers of this article will be pleased to hear that several projects are being completed for Helene Weigel's centenary in May 2000. The next *Brecht Yearbook* (vol 25), under the guest editorship of Dr. Judith Wilke (Frankfurt am Main), will be a special focus issue on Weigel; biographical studies are forthcoming by Carola Stern and Sabine Kebir; a volume of correspondence is being prepared by Stephan Mahlke; and Werner Hecht is compiling a volume of photos and background material for Suhrkamp Verlag. Finally, the Akademie der Künste in Berlin is planning a special exhibit, to open in May 2000)

## A PECULIAR CONFERENCE

by R. G. Davis

A curious thing happened to me this summer. I was invited to a conference on Samuel Beckett. I didn't give a paper, but other friends of mine were giving papers, so I thought to attend and visit with them. They gathered in Illinois in one of those smaller tourist towns with sun and a University, since the El Niño effect in the midwest made things

greener in the summer and more pleasant.

The conference was held on the University's smaller campus area and attended by about 150 people. The conference was managed by a member of the theatre department who had written a paper on French theatre and Beckett in Europe. The Chair of the theatre department opened the conference with a welcoming speech and then introduced his former professor and now friend, a Brechtian. This was a surprise, since I couldn't imagine why they would pick a Brecht aficionado to speak at a Beckett conference, but it was later explained he was the mentor of the Chair, and after all the conference was funded by the theatre department.

The speech about Beckett was both amazing and astounding. The keynote speaker opened with a volley across the bow: "Beckett had never been in the underground in France and his wife and mistresses wrote all the plays." The keynote then proceeded to recount all the Beckett plays that Alan Schneider had directed in the US and the numbers of productions that followed. His technical details were all confused, he never mentioned the late plays or the Mime plays since he hadn't seen them, nor read them. He told us that Beckett had left Ireland afraid of the radical nature of the Irish rebellion, and had a double passport — one from France, another from Great Britain — so as to protect his income and avoid taxes, which turned out to be considerable.

Beckett's first production in France, by Roger Blin, boosted his career. The speaker told us it was Blin who had rewritten the play in French so that it was a success, thus improving a simple minded a-political script about alienation. Blin played the main role himself and gave real fervor to a rather bland text. The keynote speaker continued on, demonstrating with technical details the fact that Beckett couldn't have done as well without his confreres; his novels were the better part of his writing, he was after all a novelist not a playwright. His plays were made dynamic by his wife and mistresses. He had a number of the latter, whom he exploited, while subsequent directors also rewrote sections of his plays which added to his glory.

Beckett's poetry, the speaker told us, was minor but his novels were the better part of his talent. He walked alone most of the time in Paris on account of his body stench, which became a major

factor for the speaker. Apparently the odor was so intense that people avoided him, and to cover for this peculiarity he developed a reclusive life style, which should be interpreted as evidence of his disdain for human beings. His anti-social attitude was also demonstrated by his inability to take any side in the Algerian Revolution. He apparently wrote a letter in support of the fascist French interrogation techniques used in Algeria and never spoke out for the suffering masses in Algeria whose mothers had supported, and expected Beckett to follow suit. Beckett was depicted as a coward who hid behind his French and Irish passports. His translations were evidently in peculiar French because he didn't have a command of the language and his wife and his French mistresses did most of the linguistic re-writes, which he later took credit for.

Beckett had tried to make movies and become a commercial success by joining with Buster Keaton, but Keaton, the greater performer and artist, only tolerated a silly script and insightful direction by Alan Schneider, who was known in the US as one of the most sensitive artists of his time. Schneider thus gave Beckett undeserved status in the art world. Alan Schneider, the keynote stated, did for Beckett what Eric Bentley did for Brecht.

Schneider, who directed 150 plays in his prime, did Beckett as a side light, although he obtained the right to produce the first production of any new Beckett play in the US and thereby show how it should be done. It was Alan Schneider who made Beckett popular in the US. It was fortunate that Schneider was in charge, even though some thought he was a pedestrian joke. His signal anti-intellectualism was evidenced in the wearing of a baseball cap when he directed to show his antipathy to French elitism. Despite these cavils, Schneider was able to turn the novelist into a box office success.

It was Beckett's sexual habits that were made ugly by the speaker, too nasty for me to describe here, but they were bizarre. Only Schneider and others in the US kept Beckett from falling through the cracks.

The keynoter ended his account with: "Beckett's politics were despicable and cowardly, but he was a great artist."

The assembled Beckettiens didn't respond. One or two scholars complained about inaccuracies in the keynote speaker's address, and one heckler houted a few inaudible complaints, but in the main, hardly anyone noted that the keynote speaker had defamed and misrepresented Beckett, jumbling dates and even accusing Beckett of not responding to the Hungarian Revolution, even though Beckett at the time was in a hospital dying of cirrhosis of the liver. Later in private, others mumbled their objections, but in general the assembled were polite. The keynote speaker continued at other sessions to explain how limited Beckett was in his abilities and how only as a novelist had he shown any talent.

The most curious thing at this conference on Beckett's "Birth and Life" happened at the near end of the sessions. A French women had made a film showing how sexually crazed Beckett was in France. She represented him as a libertine and a sensate pervert like Jean Genet. The female film maker explained that the postmodern philosophers in France had taken down all the icons of French and Irish culture, and although Beckett was for her an icon of her youth and an example of a leading figure in the arts (quite at odds with the keynote speaker's description of inept Beckett), she made a film deposing the 'God figure,' exposing all of his commercial interests and anti-social behavior. She noted his support for the right-wing Pétain and De Gaulle factions in France and his fear of radical activity in Ireland. She had been hindered in her noteworthy approach to the films subject, by the last wife of Beckett, Suzanne, who was now suing her for false assertions and for use of Beckett's works in her film.

The attending Beckett scholars once again responded timidly, stating that the film might be one-sided in its approach to the great author Beckett, who they all conceded was a major playwright, novelist, director and even a poet. They spoke in French so as to make themselves clear. Someone in the back, a non-academic scholar, got up and called the filmmaker an asshole or some such nasty statement and said she should get together with the Keynote speaker and shoot themselves. "A double suicide would do well to serve the community," the person in the back said.

I was shocked, both at the last response which

was totally out of order, as well as the presentation of this film. More important, I had not believed that such things could be organized by the conveners of a conference on Samuel Beckett. After all, the conference was filled with people who understood Beckett better than the keynote speaker or the film maker, but they were sandwiched between these two figures who appeared at the opening and at the end. Apparently the conveners expected a stimulating debate about both presentations. However, after all the papers were dutifully presented and the scheduled events took place, there was no time for a critical public discussion.

When I returned home, I called an Iranian friend who was acquainted with an ex-CIA operative. My friend said he would discuss this peculiar event with his CIA contact. A few days later he told me: "It was all planned and paid for, they have been working on this character Beckett so as to undermine his influence in the intellectual community by emphasizing his personal cowardly French living habits. They had targeted Beckett, because they thought his stature was likely to lead the US youth into an anti-establishment critique and also had supported the publishing of a Grove Press book claiming all sorts of outlandish things about Beckett's habits. The CIA also supported articles, speeches and films on anti-Beckett themes."

I proceeded to secret my Beckett books in the basement of my house and buried the hottest ones in my garden.

*(R.G. Davis, a prominent Beckettian who used to direct Beckett plays at the San Francisco Mime Troupe, regularly enters from stage left to remind the flock who Beckett is, and could be.)*

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## LITERATURSOMMER IN BUCKOW

Vom 12. Juni – 11. Juli 1999

### Programm

12.6.: Ruth Berlau und Bertolt Brecht oder Liebe als Produktion .(Lesung)

13.6.: Wenn Du stolperst, Schwester ich halt Dich. Lieder, Szenen und Plaudereien durch fünf Jahrhunderte und ebensoviele Länder. Mit **Gina Pietsch** und **Dietmar Ungerank**.

19.6.: "Wie man einen Vogel malt." Gedichte und Texte von Brecht. (Lesung)

20.6.: "In der Frühe sind die Tannen kupfern." (Lesung)

25.6.: "Esche zu Esche." **Eberhard Esche** liest.

26.6.: "Hinter die Kulissen geschaut." **Kurt Schwaen** und **Helmut Baierl** plaudern über ihre Zeit am BE und **Barbara Kellerbauer** singt. Ausstellung von **Emil Stumpf**: Gezeichnete Brecht-Porträts.

27.6.: "...in Hamburg lebten zwei Ameisen..." Deutschlandbetrachtungen. Texte von Goethe, Heine, Kästner, Brecht, Tucholsky, Nietzsche vorgetragen von Scarlett O und der Folkgruppe "Wacholder."

3.7.: "Pah, als ob die Liebe etwas mit dem Verstand zu tun hätte." Goethe und die Frauen. Gesang: **Gerlinde Kempendorff** / Saxophon: **Ulrich Kempendorff**.

4.7.: **Dieter Mann**. Lesung: "Mein Name sei Gänseklein." Literarische Gegendarstellungen und Parodien.

9.7. "Liedhaber." Chansonnachmittag mit **Ko J. Kokott** von der Gruppe "Wacholder."

10.7.: **Käthe Reichel**. Szenische Lesung: Büchner: "Der Hessische Landbote."

11.7.: Literaturfest mit Jazz und Autoren der neuen Generation – **Sibylle Lewitscharow**, **Steffen Jacobs** und **Julia Franck** lesen eigene Texte und Gedichte.

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