

BRECHT: THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEXTUAL APPLICATION
IN SELECTED WORKS OF BERTOLT BRECHT

A study by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

McMaster University

November 1965

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MASTER OF ARTS
(German)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Concept of Alienation: Theoretical Development and
Textual Application in
selected writings of Bertolt
Brecht.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: 108

SCOPE AND CONTENT: This study presents an examination of the theory
of alienation which is found in the dramatic
work of Bertolt Brecht, the German writer and
producer. An historical survey is followed by
an attempt to describe the presence of the same
phenomenon in the text of two plays by Brecht,
Mutter Courage and Der kaukasische Kreidekreis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank Dr. J. Prager and Dr. R. L. van Dusen for their valuable suggestions as readers of this thesis. To Mr. J. B. Lawson, who supervised the study, I should like to express my particular gratitude for his help and cooperation throughout the year.

I should also like to thank Dr. Karl Denner for his assistance and advice during the year spent at McMaster University.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will attempt a historical examination of Brecht's theory of the theatre in so far as the theory concerns the principle of alienation.¹ The survey will begin with the more recent writings of Bertolt Brecht and will trace observations and attitudes which have reference to the concept and technique of estrangement.¹

The selection from the theoretical observations which is considered has been arranged in five main periods of time; the writer of this thesis considers that these periods reflect important landmarks in Brecht's attitude towards the theatre and development as a writer. The first period to be considered is, in Brecht's writings, chronologically the last period; it presents the reader with a formulation of the theory written after the conclusion of all Brecht's major plays and after an experience of the theatre which, though interrupted by the events of the Second World War, had been long and fruitful. The second period covers the years around 1940; this year preceded Brecht's arrival in the United States and his completion of the plays Mutter Courage and Der gute Mensch von Sezuan. The third period dates from the year 1936. In the years prior to the composition of this third group within the selection, Brecht had written die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe and Die Mutter, the latter of which was just produced in 1932. This third series of observations and essays is notable in that it contains the first uses of the terms "Verfremdung" and "Verfremdungseffekt". Dating from 1931, the comments to the productions of Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahoganny, die Dreigroschenoper and Mann ist Mann are considered as a fourth group; these

¹Throughout the thesis, the meaning of the German word "Verfremdung" has been expressed by the use of the English terms "alienation" and "estrangement".

notes, written after what may be regarded as Brecht's final conversion to Communism, reflect his attitude towards the theatre when he was engaged in composing and directing the essentially didactic "Lehrstücke". The fifth group of writings is included here in one chapter despite the fact that the selection is chronologically less homogeneous than its predecessors; it describes relevant aspects of Brecht's thoughts on the theatre during the twenties and even earlier.

This examination of that material in the theoretical writings which has direct reference to alienation should throw light upon the practical application of the theory. The more technical characteristics have been dealt with at some length by several writers, notably Walter Hinck, Carl Niessen, Ernst Schumacher and John Willett.¹ Other writers, for example Reinhold Grimm, have given serious thought to Brecht's application of the estrangement principle within the structure of the plays. The thesis refers the reader for fuller details to the quoted works.

The survey of the development of the alienation theory will, it is hoped, have established the nature of those basic features which distinguish Brechtian theatre. The thesis then attempts to show how elements of this same theory are present in the language of the plays, notably in Mutter Courage and in Der kaukasische Kreidekreis.

¹See the bibliography for details of publications.

PREFACE

1953

Notaten zum "Katzgraben"

In 1951 Erwin Strittmatter wrote a comedy, Katzgraben, which though intended originally for the amateur stage was prepared for professional production by Bert Brecht, Strittmatter himself and a team from the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht's comments upon the preparatory work were never published in full but the volume Schriften zum Theater closes with a short extract from these observations. In the form of a Socratic dialogue the author confesses in a somewhat sardonic manner that he himself is to blame for the many interpretations of his dramatic theory. His desire had always been to create a theatre which would not interpret but would seek rather to change the world. Brecht claims that he so overstressed the changes and techniques which he considered necessary that many readers of his theoretical writings about the theatre failed to realise that, as Brecht says: "eine Unmasse von alten Regeln blieb „natürlich" unverändert".¹ Much of the traditional theatre was not to be jettisoned though no great amount of attention had been drawn to the fact that it was to be retained. Brecht's audience would see the theatre as he describes it: "Mit Phantasie, Humor und Sinn".² Only upon an analysis of the effect would it become apparent that the production contained something new, the true nature of which could subsequently be explained by recourse to the theoretical writings. Brecht's amused attitude towards these circumstances is best seen in the final paragraph:

Ich glaube, die Kalamität begann dadurch, dass meine Stücke richtig ausgeführt werden mussten, damit sie wirken, und so musste ich für eine nichtaristotelische

¹Bertolt Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957) p. 286.

²ibid

Dramatik--oh Kummer!--ein episches Theater--oh
Elend!--beschreiben.¹

Misconceptions might easily arise if the theoretical writings are read without any recourse to more practical sources. However, a study of the "Modellbücher" or of the volume Theaterarbeit ought soon to effect a remedy. These publications contain detailed descriptions of production methods and techniques which to a reader, expecting a blue print of a theatrical revolution, would be disappointing. They are so full of character analysis, demonstration of psychological motivation, blocking and movement plans, stage and costume design and acting technique that they might be attributed rather to the Stanislavsky School than the popular conception of Brechtian theatre. That much common ground exists between Brecht's epic theatre and the theatre of illusion is further evidenced by Mr. Samuel Wanamaker's description of Helene Weigel's acting in the part of Mutter Courage as : "indistinguishable from a superb Stanislavsky trained actress".² Brecht himself acknowledged that much could be learned by the actor who studies Stanislavsky's methods.³

To achieve any insight into Brecht's conception of the theatre and in particular of his use of the so-called "Verfremdungseffekt", it will be necessary to examine both theory and practice in some detail before any judgement as to its scope and effect can be ventured.

¹ibid

²S. Wanamaker, "The Brechtian Revolution", International Theatre Annual, No. 1 (London: Calder, 1956) p. 125.

³Theaterarbeit 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles, ed. H. Weigel (Dresden: VVW Dresdener Verlag, 1952) p. 413.

CHAPTER ONE

1948

Kleines Organon für das Theater

The most comprehensive theoretical description by Brecht of his theatrical style is to be found in his Kleines Organon für das Theater which was first published in 1948. The study opens with an outline of the motives and aims in the author's mind when working upon a theatrical production; this outline is of interest if it can be accepted that the content and intention of a literary work are of considerable importance in the ultimate form of the work.

In the Kleines Organon much is made of the stress laid on pure entertainment, for the definition given of the theatre is one which underlines the necessity of entertainment value: "Theater besteht darin, dass lebende Abbildungen von überlieferten oder erdachten Geschehnissen zwischen Menschen hergestellt werden und zwar zur Unterhaltung"¹

and again: "es (das Theater - A.R.) benötigt keinen anderen Ausweis als den Spass; diesen freilich unbedingt".² This attitude does indeed seem to stand in some contrast to the earlier opinions which prompted the very didactic "Lehrstücke" of the late twenties and early thirties. A great deal depends, however, upon what Brecht intended by the words "Unterhaltung" and "Spas". Considerable light is thrown on his intentions and the didactic element is accredited with its true importance later in the survey. Brecht might seem to be deliberately aiming at causing some confusion, at prompting his reader to adopt a critical attitude by the seemingly ambiguous stand which he maintains in the sections three and twenty-three. In the first mentioned of these sections we read, when Brecht refers to the theatre: "Nicht einmal zu

¹Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 130

²ibid, p. 131

lehren sollte ihm zugemutet werden, jedenfalls nichts Nützlicheres, als wie man sich genussvoll bewegt, in körperlicher oder geistiger Hinsicht".¹ And yet there are in the twenty-third section such phrases as "nützlich unterhalten", "wirkungsvolle Abbilder", and "in der Wirklichkeit engagieren". It is the pedantic against which Brecht is warning his readers, not the educative. He still retains, then, even if in a more modified form, his earlier convictions about the nature of a revolutionary theatre. We are to have a theatre, dedicated to change and seeing as its primary function the demonstration of the possibility of a changeable society. A theatre fulfilling such pre-conditions will be not only revolutionary but also epic. It may at first be difficult both for the audience to appreciate the new form of entertainment and for the new entertainers to appreciate what their audience needs and in what manner the material ought to be presented. A transition period of compromise and uncertainty would appear to be inevitable and expected. But the epic theatre must be a theatre committed to change, catering largely for a working class audience and possessing strong didactic elements which in themselves provide the basis for entertainment. Brecht writes:

Sie (the spectators - A.R.) seien unterhalten mit der Weisheit, welche von der Lösung der Probleme kommt, mit dem Zorn, in den das Mitleid mit den Unterdrückten nützlich sich verwandeln kann, mit dem Respekt vor der Respektierung des Menschlichen, das heisst Menschenfreundlichen, kurz mit all dem, was die Produzierenden ergötzt.²

In the Kleines Organon Brecht describes the basic motives which

¹ ibid, p. 131

² ibid, p. 141

lie behind his theatrical thinking. Perhaps he is unwise to interpolate into the essay too much which gives us a one-sided view of contemporary theatre; his description of the theatre audience with vacuous minds and gaping mouths possibly underestimates both the audiences which he is describing and his readers. Despite this lack of reverence, the impression conveyed is one which carries weight and conviction. The conventional theatre, we read, fails the modern age in that it does not show that the structure of society, as seen on the stage, can be affected by the influence of that society which the audience represents. To create conditions which will enable the stage to demonstrate the possibility of change it is necessary to create a theatre along the following lines:

Wir brauchen ein Theater, das nicht nur Empfindungen, Einblicke und Impulse ermöglicht, die das jeweilige historische Feld der menschlichen Beziehungen erlaubt, auf dem die Handlungen jeweils stattfinden, sondern das Gedanken und Gefühle verwendet und erzeugt, die bei der Veränderung des Feldes selbst eine Rolle spielt.¹

At this juncture it must be observed that the above quotation represents a concept which, though essential to an understanding of Brecht's drama, is often denied. Feelings are not to be excluded; the theatre is not to be "cold". Excessive, exaggerated feelings are, however, to be avoided and a conscious acting style is to be developed. It is a style which, as Brecht observes:

. . . . den beobachtenden Geist frei und beweglich erhält. Er muss sozusagen laufend fiktive Montagen an unserem Bau vornehmen können, indem er die gesellschaftlichen Triebkräfte in Gedanken abschaltet oder durch andere ersetzt, durch welches Verfahren ein aktuelles Verhalten etwas ‚Unnatürliches‘ bekommt, wodurch die

¹ ibid, p. 147

aktualen Triebkräfte ihrerseits ihre Natürlichkeit einbussen und handelbar werden.¹

This loss of the appearance of "Natürlichkeit" lies at the root of what Brecht had been attempting to develop both in Berlin and in exile between the two World Wars, namely the "Verfremdungseffekt". The impression that is gained from Brecht's remarks at this juncture about the technique of alienation suggests a somewhat limited use; its application should be limited to the attitudes and procedures that the audience uncritically takes for granted, and does not re-examine and evaluate in the light of its own age. Brecht points this out in the forty-third section of the Kleines Organon where he writes: "Die neuen Verfremdungen sollten nur den gesellschaftlich beeinflussbaren Vorgängen den Stempel des Vertrauten wegnehmen, der sie heute vor dem Eingriff bewahrt".² (my underline - A.R.) How the theory is to be applied in detail is described in the subsequent sections, that is from section forty-seven onwards.

Brecht starts his detailed treatment with an examination of the role of the actor who must put to one side everything that he has ever learned which might help him to induce the audience into a condition of empathy with the characters on the stage.³ This does indeed seem definite. Further reading, however, leads us to conclude that Brecht's stand is not as adamant as might be supposed. There is an admonition to the actor that he may not, as Brecht says: "zur restlosen Verwandlung

¹ibid, p. 149

²ibid, p. 151

³ibid, p. 153

in die Figur kommen".¹ The actor's total immersion in the part and subsequent loss of a critical, demonstrative point of view corresponds to the audience's empathy with the character. It is important to note that in later descriptions of the two characteristics the attributive "restlos" is often used. The assumption may then be made that a certain amount of audience and actor identification with the role can be allowed, indeed can hardly be avoided, but that it can never be tolerated where it might lead to a blurring of the critical faculties. Brecht's antipathy towards the unfortunately all too prevalent, histrionic style of play acting can be found in the general advice offered to the actor which suggests a relaxed attitude both facially and vocally; the priest-like singsong and trance inducing cadences are particular sources of his disapproval. The actor, in Brecht's opinion, should never attempt to convince the audience of the reality of the events on the stage:

Wie der Schauspieler sein Publikum nicht zu tauschen hat, dass nicht er, sondern die erdichtete Figur auf der Bühne stehe, so hat er es auch nicht zu tauschen, dass, was auf der Bühne vorgeht, nicht einstudiert sei, sondern zum erstenmal und einmalig geschehe.²

This represents not only a stress on the technique but also a means of pointing out both the distance between the actor and his part, and the demonstrative element in the presentation. The aim is the possession by the actor of a critical attitude which will create a thought provoking rather than a thought controlling role. The actor is then advised to demonstrate his part and retain his own personality as an actor, but he is certainly not urged to omit from his role feeling and passion:

¹ibid

²ibid, p. 155

Er hat seine Figur lediglich zu zeigen oder, besser gesagt, nicht nur lediglich zu erleben; dies bedeutet nicht, dass er, wenn er leidenschaftliche Leute gestaltet, selber kalt sein muss. Nur sollten seine eigenen Gefühle nicht grundsätzlich die seiner Figur sein, damit auch die seines Publikums nicht grundsätzlich die der Figur werden. Das Publikum muss da völlige Freiheit haben.¹

From his discussion of the actor's part in the alienation effect Brecht moves, by way of a brief treatment of the "gestus" to the fable which is described, in Aristotle's words, as the "heart of the theatrical production" and which represents the total narrative content of the piece. The sequence of events in a Brechtian play conveys the impression of a series of tableaux, a factor which suppresses undesirable emotional excitement and involvement. The same effect also increases the awareness of the spectator that he is in a theatre watching a stage performance rather than a piece of human life. The individual sequences are not to have a smooth run; the joints are to be visible: "Die Geschehnisse dürfen sich nicht unbemerktlich folgen, sondern man muss mit dem Urteil dazwischenkommen können".² The best way of achieving such an effect is seen in the use of titles which precede the scene either in placard or in poster form, or are transmitted verbally by a narrator. These titles too have an aim in themselves:

Die Titel sollten die gesellschaftliche Pointe erhalten, zugleich aber etwas über die wünschenswerte Art der Darstellung aussagen, das heißt je nachdem den Ton der Titel einer Chronik oder einer Ballade oder einer Zeitung oder einer Sittenschilderung nachahmen.³

There is here a deliberate attempt to compel the spectator to

¹ibid, p. 152

²ibid, p. 166

³ibid

realise that he is in a theatre watching a play, and further that this play has not only an entertainment value but also a didactic, social content.

It has been suggested by Helge Hultberg that the alienation effect negates any aesthetic quality. She writes quite flatly that:

Verfremdung ist also ein eminent un^{..}künstlerisches Prinzip, da es zur Folge hat, das jedes Detail als ein Zeichen aufgefasst wird, das an^{..}stelle der Wirklichkeit steht, nicht als ein künstlerisches Symbol, das in eine Ganzheit eingeht.¹

The aesthetic quality of any object can hardly be objectively defined and can provide material for endless discussion. That Brecht did intend his plays to have aesthetic qualities can be inferred from the Kleines Organon. In the sixty-fifth section the fable had been equated with "die Gesamtkomposition aller gestischen Vorgänge". In the following section the spectator's critical scrutiny, the play's aesthetic qualities and the association of "Fabel" with "Gestus" are brought together when Brecht writes:

Bei der Gruppierung der Figuren auf der Bühn^{..}e und der Bewegung der Gruppen muss die erforderliche Schönheit hauptsächlich durch die Eleganz gewonnen werden, mit der das gestische Material vorgeführt und dem Einblick des Publikums ausgesetzt wird.²

The use of alienation and the practice of the epic theatre does not preclude a considerable interest in the aesthetic.

The actor must bear a considerable burden in the application of the alienation techniques. If any degree of success is to be obtained,

¹H. Hultberg, Die ästhetischen Anschauungen Bertolt Brechts, (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962) p. 143.

²Brecht, Schriften zum Theater p. 166

the entire organisation of the theatre must be brought into play; the set designers and builders, the mask-makers, the wardrobe mistress, the musicians, and the choreographers, all have their important part.

In the seventy-first paragraph the role of music is discussed. The subject had received full treatment in earlier theoretical works and Brecht contents himself with the observation that music enjoys the dual functions of both maintaining and underlining the critical attitude and also of providing variety in the form of the entertainment. The music of Hans Eisler for Galilei and Der kaukasische Kreidekreis is cited as evidence that music in a play may fulfil the two functions:

So kann sich die Musik auf viele Arten und durchaus selbstständig etablieren und in ihrer Weise zu den Themen Stellung nehmen, jedoch kann sie auch lediglich für die Abwechslung in der Unterhaltung sorgen.¹

The manner in which the music is to secure for itself an independent existence constitutes a strong element of the theatre of estrangement. There must be no attempt made to persuade the spectator that a song is a natural phenomenon. The songs are in fact referred to as musical addresses to the public and are to be accompanied by lighting changes, titles on screens and other visual stage effects.

Just as Eisler was cited with regard to the music, reference to the stage design prompts immediate mention of Caspar Neher who collaborated for so long with Brecht. In stage design no illusionary effects suggesting reality are called for: "Da genügen Andeutungen, jedoch müssen sie mehr geschichtlich oder gesellschaftlich Interessantes aussagen, als die

¹ibid, p. 170

aktuale Umgebung tut".¹ Brecht gives us some idea of his intentions when he refers us to the Moscow Jewish Theatre's use of a set for King Lear which evoked memories of a mediaeval tabernacle, to Neher's use in the Galilei setting of projections of maps, documents and objects d'art of the Renaissance, and to Piscator's set designer Heartfield who used revolving flags which described changes in the political situation unknown to the figures on the stage.

In dealing with choreography and mime Brecht points out that Art, when reflecting life, makes use of mirrors of a particular kind. Art, using these mirrors, does not become unrealistic by altering the proportions but rather, as Brecht says: "wenn sie diese (the proportions - A.R.) so ändert, dass das Publikum, die Abbildungen praktisch für Einblicke und Impulse verwendend, in der Wirklichkeit scheitern würde".² We may conclude that Brecht is proposing a stylized form of acting; too often, however, this idea brings to our mind an image of exaggerated, affected movement. Brecht is not advocating this, but sees in a stylized, artistic approach to choreography and mime both another means of reminding the spectator that he is in a theatre and also of re-enforcing the content of the play. He writes: "Schon die Eleganz einer Bewegung und die Anmut einer Aufstellung verfremdet, und die pantomimische Erfindung hilft sehr der Fabel".³

¹ibid

²ibid, p. 171

³ibid

CHAPTER TWO

1940

Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst

Anmerkungen zum Volksstück

The aim of the innovations which Brecht is recommending was expressed in terms similar to the description already seen in the Kleines Organon: "Der Zweck dieser Technik des Verfremdungseffekts war es, dem Zuschauer eine untersuchende, kritische Haltung gegenüber dem darzustellenden Vorgang zu leihen."¹ Two means are suggested to the reader by which the audience's inclination towards allowing itself to be swept into a world of make-believe may be countered. Both are described in a note to the essay and represent a constant characteristic of Brechtian production methods. The first mentioned described the necessity of illuminating the stage as brightly as possible. This is of considerable interest and importance; a very different impression could be gained if the photographs in the "Modellbücher" and the volume Theaterarbeit are accepted at first glance. The photographic apparatus and the maximum lighting strength of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm combine to give a misleading impression of a gloomy and underlit stage.² The second recommended effect is also a matter concerning lighting for Brecht advises that the sources of stage-light should be visible to the spectator. The obvious reason for this approach is that such procedures would hinder, if not prevent, any illusion of reality and further underline the element of demonstration which the theatre is ideally to adopt.

This last mentioned element of demonstration is again stressed, as it was to be later in the Kleines Organon, as a prime characteristic

¹ibid

²Brecht, Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder. Text, Aufführung, Anmerkungen. (Berlin: Henschel, 1958. Modellbücher des Berliner Ensembles, 3) p. 6.

that the actor was to assume. As an example of how not to approach acting, the modus operandi of two adherents of the Stanislavsky School are quoted and compared to a course in sorcery. Here Brecht's sarcastic humour comes to the fore as he makes clear his concern for the truth and the rationally drawn conclusion:

Man fragt sich, ob eine Technik, welche einen befähigt, das Publikum da "Ratten sehen" zu machen, wo es keine gibt, wirklich so geeignet sein kann, die Wahrheit zu verbreiten? Ohne alle Schauspielkunst, mit genug Alkohol kann man beinahe jeden dazu bringen, überall wenn nicht Ratten so doch weisse Mäuse zu sehen.¹

Brecht's actors are enjoined to address themselves at times directly to the public; this is in itself an adjunct of acting as demonstration. The theatre of Naturalism had encouraged the attitude that the stage was real life with a fourth wall missing, that the audience did not exist. Actors who address themselves directly to the audience sharpen the audience's awareness of itself as an audience, thereby lessening identification with the proceedings on the stage.

In the Kleines Organon Brecht had written of the desirability of allowing the spectator to be perpetually aware that "ein Gegenexperiment" is possible. This is apparent in the earlier essay when he outlines the technique described as the "Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern". What the actor does not do must be contained and demonstrated in that which he does do. Brecht expresses this in the following words: "das heisst er spielt so, dass man die Alternative möglich deutlich sieht, so, dass sein Spiel noch die anderen Möglichkeiten ahnen lässt, nur eine der möglichen Varianten darstellt."²

¹Brecht, Versuche, pt. 11, p. 98

²ibid, p. 93

We have already seen in the Kleines Organon much of the theoretical basis for Brecht's development of an acting style more suitable to his intentions and plays. The essay Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst gives us a more detailed insight into the manner in which Brecht would like to approach his rehearsals.

If in the Kleines Organon and later in his comments to Mutter Courage there appears to be some little allowance for the audience's and the actor's tendency towards empathy, in this earlier essay it is specifically permissible in rehearsal¹; an emotional awareness even in the epic theatre is expected.² The essay, in dealing further with the actor's role in the creation of estrangement, throws interesting light on practical rehearsal methods. More readings at the table are suggested than are current in the conventional theatre and the deliberate committing to memory of first impressions is advocated. The interchange of roles during rehearsals is again put forward so that the actor may see his role played and demonstrated. The technique which is desired of the actor is compared to the manner in which many producers will demonstrate to the actor the effect which they require; by underlining the technical aspect in their efforts, they help the actor to achieve the correct result. But of greater interest are the three very definite methods which are suggested for achieving alienation. They are firstly narration of the part in the third person, secondly transference into the past tense and thirdly the inclusion in the actor's words of stage direction and commentary. These three "tricks

¹ibid, p. 92

²ibid, p. 96

of the alienation trade" are to be used at rehearsal; the resulting alienation will be transformed, in general, to the production.¹

That Brecht lays considerable weight on the artistic values of his theatre becomes evident when he speaks of the diction that he wishes to hear adopted. Diction, we read, can supply variation and thereby influence the attentiveness of the audience. He draws a comparison with the witnesses at a trial who, he claims, vary the stress according to the importance which is to be laid upon their words. After inveighing against the forced monologues and asides of the old theatre he concludes that artistic elegance of speech and movement is possible and that elegance and beauty in themselves are means of attaining a degree of alienation. In respect to both gesture and diction it is possible to imagine a factor of stylized exaggeration creeping in, for Brecht within twenty lines points out that the convictions of the witnesses, and by implication, of the actors, must be brought to what Brecht describes as a: "besonderer artistischen Wirkung."² Brecht further points out that alienation can be achieved by what he calls: "besondere Eleganz, Kraft und Anmut der Geste."³ A line of distinction would be hard to draw but these opinions are more akin to the stress laid in Kleines Organon on not concealing the results of rehearsal, practice and technique; the actor must present the event according to the following instructions:

er verbirgt nicht, dass er ihn [den Vorgang - A.R.] einstudiert hat, so wenig der Akrobat sein Training verbirgt,

¹cf. example quoted in appendix

²Versuche, 11, p. 94

³ibid

und er unterstreicht, dass dies seine, des Schauspielers, Aussage, Meinung, Version des Vorgangs ist.¹

Much, then, that is to be found in this essay of 1940 can also be found in the Kleines Organon which was written eight years later; these eight years were a period during which Brecht's contact with the theatre, and in particular the German-speaking theatre, was necessarily limited by his exile. The most detailed, recorded work on a production was his cooperation with Charles Laughton who had undertaken the role of Galileo. Laughton seems to have been infused with some of Brecht's reforming zeal for he surrounded the theatre with lorries laden with blocks of ice and had the ventilators running at full power so that, in a cooler environment, the audience might be more disposed to think.

Further strong links can be seen between the two studies. Kleines Organon lays stress on the historical perspective. The actor, in this particular incident a woman, must perform the part as if to make it clear that at the beginning the outcome is already known. Her acting must also give expression to a definite point of view. Brecht describes it as: "das, was von ihren Äusserungen für diesen Zeitpunkt wichtig war, denn wichtig ist da, was wichtig wurde."² It is a similar idea which receives attention in the Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst under the more scientific term of "Historisierung". The important point is brought out that human behaviour is subject to what the author describes as: "Kritik vom Standpunkt der jeweilig darauffolgenden

¹ ibid, p. 95

² Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 156.

Epoche aus"¹ and that a critical attitude towards the actions of previous generations is engendered by an awareness of the process of evolution.

The use of titles before scenes together with the projection of song titles and documentation is described in both essays. The technique of alienating, of making the audience reassess that which seems natural and usual is referred to in both texts; in Kleines Organon the conclusion is drawn that the same principle may be applied in order to make what seems unusual appear customary, for Brecht writes: "Schon die Frage, ob er [der einmalige und besondere Vorgang] oder was von ihm tatsächlich zur Sitte werden sollte, verfremdet den Vorgang."²

What Brecht fails to point out is to what extent the language of the text plays an important part in the task of alienation. Throughout his theoretical writings there appears to be little analysis of the role of the writer, a role which might seem to be the most important factor of those open to discussion.

In Kleines Organon we read that Brecht considered the political engagement of the actor to be essential. The earlier essay defines the attitude required of the actor as "ein gesellschaftskritischer Standpunkt".³ There is no specific mention of the political activity chosen and exercised outside of the theatre which we find in the later essay⁴ and which is so reminiscent of Piscator's demands of the actors in his political theatre. The relevance of this to the effect of

¹Brecht, Versuche, pt. 11, p. 96.

²Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 167.

³Brecht, Versuche, pt. 11, p. 95.

⁴Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 158.

estrangement is seen in reaction of the spectator confronted by an actor whose style stresses the social and political traits of the events and characters. The reaction, it is claimed, takes the form of a colloquium between actor and spectator which, in itself, distances both sides from the play, and encourages them to adopt a critical and rational appraisal of the situation.

The major difference between the two essays lies not in the scope of their content but in the stress which is laid on the extent of the application of the alienation technique. The Kleines Organon seems to be more conservative, more restricted in its aims whilst the earlier essay would seem to urge a more general application of the methods of estrangement. Compare, for example, a statement from the Kleines Organon of 1948: "Die neuen Verfremdungen sollten nur den gesellschaftlich beeinflussbaren Vorgängen den Stempel des Vertrauten wegnehmen, der sie heute vor dem Eingriff bewahrt"¹ with the broader outlook of the Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst of 1940: "Es ist der Zweck des V-Effekts, den allen Vorgängen unterliegenden gesellschaftlichen Gestus zu verfremden."² The latter of these two quotations invites comparison with both the extract from the Kleines Organon and a passage from the notes to die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe in its Copenhagen production of November, 1936 where the emphasis is laid upon only a selective use of the alienation effect. Brecht wrote in 1936:

Bestimmte Vorgänge des Stückes sollten--durch Inschriften, Geräusch- oder Musikkulissen und die Spielweise der

¹ ibid, p. 151

² Brecht, Versuche, pt. 11, p. 95

Schauspieler--als in sich geschlossene Szenen
aus dem Bezirk des Alltäglichen, Selbstverständlichen,
Erwarteten gehoben [verfremdet] werden.¹

Already, then, in 1936 there is evidence to suggest that the statements made in 1948 and 1953 about the extent of the use to which the alienation effect may be put are neither unique nor new. It may well be that there was a shift of position. More likely is it that the comments on the plays and the theoretical writings do not represent final and absolute opinions but are subject to the same mutability which their author considered to govern human behaviour and society.

The essay Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst contains a wealth of practical detail which makes clearer the manner in which Brecht thought his theatre of demonstration, using alienation as a principle technique, might be furthered. The same year, 1940, saw the publication of a small set of theoretical observations, entitled Anmerkungen zum Volksstück; make but little mention of the didactic, non-aristotelian, politically committed theatre which we have seen already and will find when we refer later to the earlier period of Brecht's writing. Helge Hultberg, however, certainly overstresses matters when she describes the shift of emphasis from the didactic qualities of the earlier period to the more artistic qualities of the later as, in her words: "eine totale Aufgabe des Hauptgedankens in Brechts Theorien."² In the course of the essay Brecht several times makes use of the term "episch"; he suggests that in comparison with the works of Auden and Isherwood the new style of theatre would demand less symbolism and allegory but more objectivity.

¹Brecht, Stücke, vol. VI Anmerkungen die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (Berlin and Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1957), p. 221.

²Hultberg, p. 164

He is certainly referring to social, political and educative criteria when he defines "das entmenschte soziale Milieu"¹ as the sphere of serious drama and when at the conclusion of his observations he says: "Es ist an der Zeit, ihr das hohe Ziel zu stecken, zu dem ihre Benennung diese Gattung [das Volkstück - A.R.] eigentlich von vornherein verpflichtet."² Brecht is preparing an eloquent plea for a new approach to the theatre which as "eine völlig neue Kunst"³ will break away from the two prevalent, basic styles of theatrical production--"der erhobene und der naturalistische".⁴ As if to remind his reader of the theatre's instructional obligations Brecht, after proposing a combination of the artistic and the natural style of acting, makes his suggestions historically more explicit; the producer must try, as Brecht observes: "den Pantula in einem Stil aufzuführen, der Elemente der alten commedia dell'arte und Elemente des realistischen Sittenstücks enthält."⁵ The reasons for trying to determine a new theatrical style and their causal connection with the alienation effect are found succinctly contained in a contrasting of two sets of adjectives used in the essay. The adjectives concerned are "naiv", "poetisch" and "wirklichkeitsnah" which are respectively contrasted as being more desirable qualities than "primitiv", "romantisch" and "tagespolitisch". The latter three evoke memories of chronologically later references to audiences

¹Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 120.

²ibid., p. 123.

³ibid.

⁴ibid., p. 117.

⁵ibid., p. 123.

uncritically accepting whatever the theatre of illusion puts before them. The former attributives tend to lead the reader to think of a theatre which is transparent and guileless in method, artistic in approach and politically engaged in nature.

Contained in the essay are several examples of the technique of alienation. The term "Verfremdung" is not used as such, but from a knowledge of Kleines Organon and Neue Technik einer Schauspielkunst the applicability of "chorische Elemente" and "erlesene Lyrik" as means of alienation is obvious. The problem of the loose, episodic structure of the Brechtian play is related in its origin to the "lose miteinander verknüpfte Sketche"¹ of the literary revue when Brecht writes: "Das neue Volksstück könnte die Folge verhältnismässig selbstständiger Begebnisse der literarischen Revue entnehmen, müsste jedoch mehr epische Substanz bieten und realistischer sein."² That the concept of alienation was present in the writer's mind seems further suggested by the use of contrast when he introduced the aesthetic into the essay. Brecht writes:

Faktum ist, dass der Schauspieler, wenn er Grobheit, Gemeinheit und Hässlichkeit darzustellen hat, ob nun bei Fischweibern oder Königinnen, keineswegs ohne Feinheit, Billigkeitssinn und Gefühl für das Schöne auskommen kann³

and: Die Kunst vermag das Hässliche des Hässlichen in schöner Weise, das Unedle des Unedlen in edler Weise darzustellen, denn die Künstler können ja auch das Ungrazioser in grazioser, das Schwache in kraftvoller Weise darstellen.⁴

¹ ibid., p. 116.

² ibid., p. 117.

³ ibid., p. 119.

⁴ ibid., p. 120.

By becoming aware of the existence of the two extremes the audience would ostensibly achieve that which Brecht refers to earlier as the "Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern"; they would therefore understand that only one possible variation is being presented and that other possibilities are conceivable. This realization that an alternative is possible is, as we have seen, an important factor of alienation.

Brecht presents then in the Anmerkungen zum Volksstück what is only a brief outline of his new theatre, of the new art form in which, we can be sure, his theory of estrangement was intended to play a considerable role. The conviction of the necessity of the new form was as strong in 1940 as it ever was to be. Brecht wrote:

Sie [die neue Kunst - A.R.] ist nötig für unser
 ganzes Repertoire, ganz unentbehrbar für die
 Darstellung der grossen Meisterwerke vergangener
 Epochen und muss ausgebildet werden, damit neue
 Werke entstehen können.¹

Even from such a brief outline, however, and from the contemporary Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst it is possible to conclude that from 1940 onwards the dramatic theory of the epic theatre was to undergo no radical changes and that the nature of the alienation effect itself was to remain unaltered.

¹ibid

CHAPTER THREE

1936

Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater

Anmerkungen zu "die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe"

Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst

The term "Verfremdung" can be traced back to the year 1936 and occurs in three works of the period 1936-1937; namely, in the essay Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater, in the notes to the play die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe and in the essay Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst, which, though not published in German until 1949, appeared in English in Life and Letters Today in the winter of 1936.

Brecht seems to have adopted the word itself but not the concept and the original's exact meaning from the Russian writer Shklovsky's use of "ostrannenie".¹ Opinions differ as to the exact nature and implications of Brecht's adoption of the term, but the conclusion must be that he had found a word which suitably described a theory for the theatre which had been developing in his mind for some years. There can be no doubt, however, that his concept of alienation is to be found much earlier than 1936. Prior to that year, we shall be able to find basically the same theory expressed in somewhat different terms.

The essay Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst was prompted by Brecht's visit to Moscow where he saw Mei Lan Fang, a Chinese actor who took the stage alone and without make-up, special lighting or properties. The essay insists upon the independent development in Germany of the epic acting style and denies any foreign influence. There is considerable praise for the Chinese Theatre but the praise is mingled with criticism for Brecht found the Chinese presentation to be "ungemein präziös", too systematized in its

¹Shklovsky, On the Theory of Prose, (Moscow: 1925) passim

presentation of human passions and too rigid and incorrect in its conception of society. The great difference was seen in the fact that Brechtian theatre realised its role in the further development of mankind and would consequently be able to use the alienation technique to greater effect than did the Chinese. Social and political commitment are, therefore, a necessity, for, as Brecht says: "Tatsächlich können nur diejenigen ein Technikum wie den V. Effekt der Chinesischen Schauspielkunst mit Gewinn studieren, die ein solches Technikum für ganz bestimmte, gesellschaftliche Zwecke benötigen".¹

The technical observations contained in the essay are sparse and restrict themselves to brief mention of the actor's role, music, chorus, songs, projection and film; the last mentioned of which was used very infrequently by Brecht. There is, however, a strikingly frequent use of the terms "historisch" and "historisieren"; Brecht writes of "historischer Ausspruch", "historischer Charakter", "das historisierende Theater", "der historische Bericht" and "das Historische eines bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Zustandes". A similar usage is to be found in Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst and in Kleines Organon; the essay of 1936 contrasts the conventional theatre where, as Brecht claims: "Die Darstellung des Menschen hält sich an das sogenannte Ewig-Menschliche"² and where, he continues: "Es ändern sich einige Umstände, es verwandeln sich die Milieus, aber der Mensch ändert sich nicht"³ with the Brechtian

¹Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 84.

²ibid, p. 85.

³ibid.

theatre where, as the author says:

Bei der Aufstellung neuer künstlerischer Prinzipien ..
und der Erarbeitung neuer Methoden der Darstellung müssen
wir ausgehen von den gebieterischen Aufgaben einer Zeit
des Epochenwechsels, Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer
Neuformierung der Gesellschaft taucht auf.¹

The incidents on the stage are to be portrayed in such a manner that their historical perspective and importance are appreciated, that the possibilities of human change and progress are realised. To do this, the theatre must make use of technique of estrangement.

This essay offers little detailed illumination of the theatrical technique of the alienation effect and is vague about the extent of its application. Other possible approaches are hinted at but not elaborated upon when Brecht points out that: "Ein neues Theater wird unter anderen Effekten für seine Gesellschaftskritik und seinen historischen Bericht über vollzogene Umstellungen den V. Effekt nötig haben".² There is none of the detail of the later essays, Kleines Organon and Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst. Elements common to the later works are "das Pfäffische" or the rhetorical character of stage diction which constricts the theatre of Brecht's time, the brief remarks about technique, the necessity of avoiding trance-like acceptance of a play's content by the audience and the abhorrence at the conventional theatre's lack of commitment. The greater stress is laid upon the role of the actor; he must not only avoid identification of himself with his part, but must also, by his technique, prevent the audience from identifying

¹ ibid, p. 89.

² ibid, my underlining - A.R.

itself with the character portrayed. These ideas have already been seen in the Kleines Organon and in the Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst; they differ in no way from their chronologically later presentations. It is, however, interesting to note again that the use of the alienation technique does not rule out entirely the emotions and that the artistic as an element receives considerable attention. Brecht's assertions here, with regard to the emotions, are a little different to his later ones. In the "Modellbuch" to Mutter Courage, for example, a certain degree of emotional effect at the death of Katrin is admitted to be unavoidable. Assurance is, however, given that the earlier scenes employ alienation to such an effect that the empathy possible in that scene is well balanced by the critical faculties developed earlier in the play.¹ The essay Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst allows even greater play of the emotions, for the alienation effect itself is to appear, as Brecht says: "nicht in der Form von keinen Emotionen, sondern in der Form von Emotionen, die sich mit denen der dargestellten Person nicht zu decken brauchen".² The question arises, in the reader's mind, whether the emotions can play any part in an analysis and conclusion which is to be rational and critical. The emotions to which Brecht is here referring probably are the result of a rational appreciation of the situation rather than a factor which conditions the audience's attitude towards the problem.

We find Brecht again making every allowance to give the artistic

¹Brecht, Mutter Courage, Modellbuch, p. 49.

²Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 81.

its place in his work. There are, as has been noted, several reasons why the Chinese Theatre should not be slavishly imitated but Brecht's praise of its naturalness, grace and artistry should be evidence enough of his aesthetic principles in advocating the adoption of elements of this "kunstvoller Schilderung", of this "künstlicher und kunstvoller Akt der Selbstentfremdung".¹

The year 1936 saw also the publication of Brecht's notes to the play Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe which were written presumably in November of that year when the play received its premier in Copenhagen. These observations are of a more practical nature than the essay last under consideration. The impression of Brecht as the author of some pretentious innovations can hardly be avoided when the notes point out that in the Copenhagen theatre it was permissible both to smoke and eat. Smoking as an aid to clearer reasoning, self-awareness and a more critical attitude had been prominent early in Brecht's views about the nature of the theatre. (It is probably fortunate that fire regulations and audience reaction have made these aspects of the alienation technique untenable.)

The notes do show us once more the basic principles on which estrangement is to be developed. There is to be "ein Verzicht auf Illusionswirkungen"² which is to be achieved by the theatre's not concealing its long-standing association with the material: "Die Vorbereitungen, die getroffen waren, das Gleichnis zur Wirkung zu

¹ ibid., p. 77

² Brecht, Stücke, vol. VI, p. 213.

bringen, mussten eingesehen werden können".¹ The purpose of this manner of presentation is described with a word which is new to the reader. Brecht says: "Das Spiel musste es dem Zuschauer ermöglichen und naheliegen, zu abstrahieren"²; by this we must understand the adoption of an objective attitude and a consequent conclusion of opinion. The role of the actor is examined and Brecht maintains that the character must be built up and motivated from a background which is both historical and social. The actor is further instructed that, to achieve the estrangement of the audience, he will have to act on behalf of the writer and point certain explanatory remarks directly at the audience.³ By doing so he will be able to establish his identity both as an actor and as a character; he will then stand between the audience and the events.

There has been, in the theoretical works so far examined, considerable indication that the author has no intention of forsaking the use of the emotions as a tool of the drama. The refusal to allow empathy, which is a causal factor for the need for estrangement, is not to be equated with a refusal to allow proper and just emotions to have their play. A performance which employs the methods of the epic theatre, that is, of alienation, must in Brecht's words: "den Emotionen des Zuschauers kritisch gegenüberstehen, genau wie seinen Vorstellungen".⁴ The theatre does not have to eliminate emotions, to be a "cold" theatre, but it must reduce the importance of the emotions as far as they affect the solution of the problems with which the theatre faces its audience.

¹ibid.

²ibid.

³ibid., p. 216.

⁴ibid., p. 221.

The section "Bühnenbau und Maske" gives us further evidence of the use of the alienation technique as far as the set is concerned. The backcloth consisted of four ivory coloured screens; lighting was visible; the two pianos were open so that the mechanism could be seen and illuminated when in actual use. Changes of set were made behind a half curtain which both allowed the audience some insight into the activities of stage management, and yet did not prevent curtain scenes.

The notes to the production in Copenhagen contain a description of the use of noise effects which were not treated in any of the later writings already examined. They are subjected to the same theoretical principles which govern the scenic and acting techniques. Brecht warns against using gramophone records to further the illusion of reality and cites Piscator's production of Rasputin as an example of the correct use of recorded sound. In that production, the voice of Lenin was heard; the effect was the same as that obtained by the use of titles and productions, in that the spectator's conception of reality was broken and he was distanced from the events on the stage. The technical means of producing the noises were also to be on show, as were those of the lighting and stage mechanisms. The practical theatreman, however, is obviously prepared to sacrifice some of his ideals if they tend to produce an adverse effect; for Brecht says: "wenn jedoch eine solche Massnahme das Publikum allzusehr schockieren würde, oder zu grösses Amusement erregte, unterliesse man sie lieber".¹

The question of the relationship between the didactic and the

¹ibid, p. 233.

entertainment values to be ascribed to the theatre had before 1936 been of considerable importance to Brecht. It was due to the pertinence of such considerations that he had written the experimental "Lehrstücke" of the early thirties. With the same problem in mind, the essay Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater was written in 1936. In this essay, the development of the epic style is traced in a vague manner and its purest phase related to the Berlin Theatre.

In a description of the nature of the new theatre, Brecht indicates that the environment can play an independent role which is to be realised in a number of ways. The principle factor was that the stage began to assume the role of the narrator.¹ The narrative character of the stage is to be achieved by the development of three main factors. The first was, in effect, the denial of the absence of the fourth wall by the presence of a narrator. The second factor was that the background to the stage should adopt an attitude; this adoption of an attitude would be achieved by the use of titles and projections.² The analysis here of the nature and reasons for their use is clear and concise:

...der Hintergrund nahm Stellung zu den Vorgängen auf der Bühne, indem er auf grossen Tafeln gleichzeitige, andere Vorgänge und andere Orten in die Erinnerung rief, Aussprüche von Personen durch projizierte Dokumente belegte oder widerlegte, zu abstrakten Gesprächen sinnlich fassbare, konkrete Zahlen lieferte, zu plastischen aber in ihrem Sinn undeutlichen Vorgängen Zahlen und Sätze zur Verfügung stellte...³

¹Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 63.

²ibid.

³ibid., p. 62.

Thirdly, the actor himself played the part in such a way that he created a distance between himself and the character he was portraying; it was this distance which gave him, and his audience, a critical frame of mind. All of the above are subsequently described as a part of the process of "Entfremdung". This term is identical in its meaning in the context to the term "Verfremdung" and it is the first use of the word that illustrates the theory so concisely which occurs in the writings about the theatre. The ultimate purpose of the process was to achieve an understanding of the events portrayed on the stage, an understanding of the laws of cause and effect.

Four years before Brecht wrote the previously examined essay Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst he points out the necessity for the actor's being able to demonstrate his character's actions in such a manner that the audience also becomes aware of that which is not happening. This is the possibility of the counter experiment of the "Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern". In the essay Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater we find an earlier version of the same concept which is drawn by contrasting the reactions of an imaginary spectator in the dramatic, conventional theatre with those of an imaginary spectator in the epic or Brechtian Theatre:

Der Zuschauer des dramatischen Theaters sagt:

Ja, das habe ich auch schon gefühlt.--So bin ich.--Das ist nur natürlich.--Das wird immer so sein. Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es keinen Ausweg für ihn gibt.--Das ist grosse Kunst: da ist alles selbstverständlich. Ich weine mit den Weinenden, ich lache mit den Lachenden.¹

¹ibid, p. 63.

Der Zuschauer des epischen Theaters sagt:

Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. So darf man es nicht machen.--Das ist höchst auffällig, fast nicht zu glauben.--Das muss aufhören. Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es doch einen Ausweg für ihn gäbe.--Das ist grosse Kunst: da ist nichts selbstverständlich. Ich lache über den Weinenden, ich weine über den Lachenden.¹

In these two contrasting points of view can be seen the attitude of mind which Brecht hoped to bring into being by his theatre. It is an attitude critically distanced from the events on the stage but even more important, an attitude that is prepared to take action to redress the state of affairs with which it finds itself so dissatisfied.

The essay offers us some further insight into Brecht's opinions concerning the applicability of his epic theatre at this stage of its development. He disclaims its stylistic originality and stresses that it is bound to certain characteristics of the time. Brecht does not at this moment believe that his theories represent a universal panacea.² Later he wrote of a more catholic application, extending to the whole theatrical repertoire and declaring it to be a necessary factor for the development of the theatre.

The historical events of Germany in the 1930's were unfavourable to the development of a theatre, committed along the lines which Brecht advocates and the essay closes on a note of considerable despair. The epic theatre, it is suggested, may not survive and may come to grief like its predecessors, the Mediaeval Theatre, the Classical Spanish Theatre and the Jesuit Theatre, unless an audience is at hand which is

¹ibid, p. 64.

²ibid, p. 72.

prepared to accept and appreciate it. At the time of the essay's conception, the political situation outlawed such a theatre. The implications seem inescapable that under more favourable circumstances the theatre, freed of its worries about basic existence, will have as one of its main tasks the shaping of an audience able to appreciate it.

The last three works under discussion used the linguistic terms applied to describe estrangement; namely, "Verfremdung" and "Entfremdung". The observation and notes to the play, Die Mutter, were written in 1932 and expanded in 1935 as a result of the New York production of the play. Although written before the previously mentioned terms were adopted, the essay, Die mittelbare Wirkung des epischen Theaters, which contains these notes, is expressed in language which is very much the same as the three works from the year 1936.

The principal concern appears to be the detachment of the spectator from the events on the stage. To facilitate this, the actor must do everything he can, as Brecht says: "sich als zwischen Beschauer und Vorgang stehend bemerkbar zu machen".¹ This "Sich bemerkbar Machen" can be compared to the "Sich selber Zusehen" that was described in the essay, Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst. The former phrase activates the audience's awareness of the actor as an actor, the latter the actor's awareness of himself as an actor. Both increase the likelihood of the acting adopting the nature of a demonstration.

Die Mutter is a predominantly political, didactic play, the notes to which stress the political obligations of the actors and of the

¹ibid., p. 42.

production. Brecht writes:

Bemüht, ihren Zuschauer ein ganz bestimmtes, praktisches, die Änderung der Welt bezweckendes Verhalten zu lehren, muss sie [die antimetaphysische, materialistische, nicht aristotelische Dramatik - A.R.] ihm schon in Theater eine grundsätzlich andere Haltung verleihen, als er gewohnt ist.¹

It is the revolutionary nature of the underlying philosophy which leads Brecht to undertake the "disillusioning" effect of giving to certain events an historical importance which would not be otherwise apparent. Several sequences in the first scene of "Die Mutter" are pointed out as examples and must be played, in the words of the author: "ohne Pathetisierung ebenso bedeutungsvoll und auffällig wie irgendwelche bekannten, historischen Vorgänge".² The culminative effect will depend largely upon the actors and the material provided for them to demonstrate. The sequences deal with Pelagea Wlassowa's reaction to her son's new political friends and the revolutionary activities which they are undertaking. The reaction takes the form of a conflict between the mother and revolutionaries who, in her eyes, represent a threat to her son's safety. Such a conflict could be reduced to the level of mere domestic strife but it was the author's intention that it should present a means whereby political and social awareness might be inspired.

In the last reviewed essay, Anmerkungen zu „Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe“, the use of stage sounds as means of alienation had been discussed; the main function was to deter empathy and illusion, thereby

¹ibid, p. 37.

²ibid, p. 42.

fostering the critical attitude towards the content. In the notes to Die Mutter, the uses of projections and chorus are considered from the same point of view from which Brecht had discussed the manner in which sound was to be used. Brecht points out that projections of scene titles¹ are not intended to fill out gaps in the audience's factual knowledge nor function as direct aids to the spectator's decision. Rather, they are to be looked upon as "organische Teile des Kunstwerkes"; their primary function is to be one of alienation--though the term "Verfremdung" is not yet in use: "Sie vereiteln seine totale Einfühlung, unterbrechen sein mechanisches Mitgehen".² The use of the chorus is described in a similar manner. Brecht, in his notes, provides for the possibility of placing in the audience choruses either to read documents and quotations, to sing songs or to recite the texts which Brecht provides as optional supplementary material.³ These choruses invite the spectator to form his own opinion but they do also demonstrate to him the correct opinion. This last function underlines strongly the play's didactic nature, in pursuit of which the alienation effect was considered, by Brecht, to be extremely effective.

Brecht deals with one further aspect of stressing the fact that an audience is in a theatre and must put its critical faculties to use. The production is advised to adopt a degree of simplification--Brecht refers to it as "die Frage der Vereinfachung"--to facilitate the

¹for examples see Schriften zum Theater, p. 38ff.

²Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 37.

³for examples see Schriften zum Theater, p. 47.

demonstration of the characters' behaviour; the intention is to make clearer the political implications of the action. The simplification in question may take the form of an exposition directed at the audience:

Auf dem epischen Theater ist es durchaus möglich, dass eine Figur sich in aller kürzester Zeit exponiert, indem er zum Beispiel einfach berichtet: Ich bin der Lehrer dieses Dorfes; meine Arbeit ist sehr schwer, da ich zu viel Schüler habe usw. Aber was möglich ist, muss doch erst möglich gemacht werden. Hier ist Kunst nötig. Sprechweise und Gestus müssen hier sorgfältig gewählt und gross geformt werden.¹

This is more than the direct addressing of the audience. There is stress here on the deliberate selection of facts to be dealt with in the short exposition, and on the art which will be necessary to convey the selection to the audience. Alienation is again presented as being not inartistic.

The reasons for the adoption of the alienation technique are examined here from the political point of view and the effect itself receives practical attention. The essay, or notes, concerning Die Mutter is of particular interest in that, unlike most of the essays and collections of notes so far considered, it makes specific reference to the fact that the conventional theatre is not wholly to be abandoned; it is echoed twenty years later when Brecht writes about the Strittmatter comedy, Katzgraben. He observes in the earlier essay:

Dieser Stücktypus [i.e. New York production of Die Mutter -A.R.] nicht aristotelischer Dramatik verwertet einerseits die Technik des vollentwickelten, burgerlichen Theaters, andererseits die der kleinen proletarischen Spieltruppen, welche nach der Revolution in Deutschland für ihre proletarischen Zwecke einen eigentümlichen und neuartigen Stil ausarbeiteten.²

¹ ibid., p. 53.

² ibid., p. 50.

The alienation effect, then, is to be a constituent factor of a synthesis of various styles--and from that statement we may look forward to the later advice given regarding the production of Pantula. In the later essay, Brecht was to suggest a style contain, as he says: "Elemente der alten commedia dell'arte und Elemente des realistischen Sittenstücks."¹ Even at the time at which Die Mutter was being first produced, namely 1932, there appears to be evidence to conclude that Brecht's new dramatic theory was not entirely destructive of older values.

¹ibid, p. 123.

CHAPTER FOUR

1931

Anmerkungen zu "Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahogany"

Anmerkungen zur "Dreigroschenoper"

Anmerkungen zu "Mann ist Mann"

The second year of the thirties saw three important publications which shed some light on the particular theme which we are trying to trace. The three publications are notes and observations to the productions of the Dreigroschenoper, Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahoganny and Mann ist Mann. Particularly at this stage in Brecht's work it is not really possible to separate theoretical observations from the description of concrete, practical stage experience. The manner in which the stage theory is presented is essentially a threefold one in that it is comprised of essays, poems and notes to particular productions. The three collections of notes and short essays at the moment before us were written just after Brecht's conclusive conversion to Communism; it can, therefore, be no surprise to find the sociological and political motivation of the theatre stressed. The "pädagogische Zweck" of the pre 1929 era has been replaced by the conviction that the theatre must present the possibility of a new form of society to its audiences and press for their active support and participation in the creation of that new society. Brecht had experimented with the predominantly pedagogic "Lehrstück". Many of the lessons drawn from this experimentation are used to frame his concept of the theatre which will contain both the amusement factor, accredited to Mahoganny, and the later ideas of that pleasure which emanates from the realisation of the truth, from learning and from a "lustvolles Lernen, fröhliches und kämpferisches Lernen".¹ Brecht, in 1936, made much clearer his faith in the excitement and pleasure that can be found in learning. He does this in such

¹ibid, p. 66.

a way that it acted as a useful counterbalance to the dry pedagogy that the earlier statements would lead the reader to deduce, were he not to be conscious of the train of connection that exists between the three following ideas. Firstly, the statement of 1931: "Mahogany ist ein Spass".¹ Secondly, the later statement of 1936 from Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater: "Das Theater bleibt Theater, auch wenn es Lehrtheater ist, und soweit es gutes Theater ist, ist es amüsant".² The third idea is the definition of "Spas" that has already been made during the examination of Kleines Organon.

But to make effective this conviction in the educative role of the theatre, a new approach is outlined. In the notes to the Mahogany production there is the well-known scheme³ for shifts of accent which are desirable if a production is to be described as epic rather than dramatic, that is to say, conventional. The scheme leaves much to be desired; it contains what appear to be repetitions and the impression given of the conventional theatre can be challenged. Its importance rests, however, in the insight it gives into estrangement and its own relationship to what has already been under discussion. The alienation effect proves to be a practical means by which some of the proposed shifts in accent can be put into effect; the circle of connection is completed in that the proposals also represent the underlying outlook which gave rise to the idea and necessity of estrangement in the theatre that Brecht hoped to develop.

¹ibid, p. 17.

²ibid, p. 66.

³See Appendix, p. 85.

The mechanics of the outline are not discussed in any great detail in the Mahoganny essay. The various roles of music, text and set are delineated. The music must be "vermittelnd", "den Text auslegend", "den Text voraussetzend", "Stellung nehmend" and "das Verhalten gebend". There is one of the rare references to the play's actual written text which must not be sentimental nor moral but which should rather demonstrate sentimentality and morality. Included in the observations about the text there is mention of the importance of titles and the state of mind induced by the reading of them. The terms "verfremden" and "V. Effekt" are not yet in the author's possession, but the effect of their application is implied; for as Brecht writes: "Beim Lesen [of the projected titles - A.R.] gewinnt das Publikum wohl am ehesten die bequemste Haltung dem Werk gegenüber".¹ The same principle is seen in the discussion of the projections themselves which are designed that they again using the author's words: "nehmen Stellung zu den Vorgängen auf der Bühne".² The culminative effect should be that the spectator is forced into a critical frame of mind.

The two essays written in the same year, one to Mann ist Mann and the other to the Dreigroschenoper, make use of a term which we may compare closely to the word "Verfremdung". The idea is expressed in two phrases in the former essay where Brecht praises Peter Lorre's

¹ibid, p. 22.

²ibid.

obvious use of white make-up to denote fear. Brecht describes this use with the words: "er verhilft zumindest der Dramaturgie zu einiger "Auffälligkeit".¹ The second expression of the idea occurs when the efforts of the actor in the epic theatre are described. The purpose is, in Brecht's words: "bestimmte Vorgänge unter Menschen auffällig zu machen".² In the later essay, which relates to the Dreigroschenoper, the same attitude is presented in the context of the use of titles and the spectators' critical attitude of "Rauchend Beobachten". About the actor playing under such circumstances Brecht observes: "Der Schauspieler müsste jene Vorgänge, die durch die Titel schon angezeigt, also ihrer stöflichen Sensation schon beraubt sind, ganz anders auffällig machen".³

Many of the effects of Mann ist Mann remind the reader of Brecht's remarks very strongly of the techniques that have so far been discussed. Described are the uses of stilts, of enlarged hands, of padding and masks. Almost in the form of a narrator, the stage manager was used in one particular scene as a commentator on the proceedings, reading from a prepared text. There is also mention of projections and scene titles. Brecht describes them as "ungewöhnliche Mittel".⁴ The core of this particular essay takes the form of a defence of Peter Lorre's epic

¹Brecht, Stücke, vol. II, p. 324.

²ibid, p. 325.

³Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 31.

⁴Brecht, Stücke, vol. II, p. 316.

style of acting and line delivery. Lorre, it is admitted, had developed for the part of Galy Gay a monotonous tone which Brecht further describes as: "eine Art nicht auf klaren Sinn zu sprechen".¹ This style, nevertheless, transmitted the intentions of the author because it was, as Brecht observes: "ganz nach dem Gestischen aufgelöst".² The monotony was punctuated by the loud declaration of carefully selected phrases: "Die Sätze (Aussprüche) wurden also nicht dem Zuschauer nahebracht, sondern entfernt, der Zuschauer wurde nicht geführt, sondern seinen Entdeckungen überlassen".³ Lorre's acting is described variously as a "Gegen den Fluss spielen", as contrary to the "Spannungsverlangen" of the audience, as a style which demands from the audience a mood which corresponds to "dem vergleichenden Umblättern des Buchlesers". In these three references it is possible to trace three clear characteristics of the alienation effect. Firstly, the style of acting is a pointed, obvious one; this leads to the second characteristic; namely, a lessening of tension and deflation of obscuring emotion which in turn facilitates the third, a critical attitude towards the events which are being demonstrated on the stage.

The notes to the Dreigroschenoper provide us both with a short discussion of two points pertaining to the opera itself and with an analysis of the use of songs. Brecht precedes the description of the

¹ ibid, p. 320.

² ibid.

³ ibid, p. 326.

use of songs in the theatre with the suggestion that the spectator should read any play which is intended for production on the stage and which aims at changing the nature of the theatre. The reason given for this is simply mistrust of the theatre and its influence. Whether intended or not, however, this advice does offer us another possible means of estrangement between the spectator and the play and a way of sharpening the spectator's critical faculties. There can be no surprises as far as the plot is concerned if the play has been read. Having read the play, the spectator is more likely to think of the actor as a demonstrator of a part, and is less likely to consider the events on the stage as unique and real. Moreover, it is probable that the reader's preconceptions of the characters and the actors' interpretations of the parts will produce a response marked by distance and criticism. Brecht later demands that the actor should act in such a way that demonstrates his knowledge of the play's outcome. Our awareness of this later development may be persuading us to read too much into these earlier remarks about reading. But it would seem that alienation, if not expressly stated, is at least implied. The effect of reading is, in the same essay, extended to the reading of projected scene titles; this is described as inducive of "das komplexe Sehen" which benefits greatly from the introduction of "die Fussnote und das vergleichende Blättern".¹

More specific reference to estrangement can be seen in the treatment of the songs which intersperse Brecht's plays. They are not

¹Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, p. 31.

to be performed as though they are a natural sequence in the proceedings but rather as an interruption, a special event for which obvious preparations may be made. The musicians should be visible and the actor may indicate his pleasure at the melody, thus underlining his function as a singer of a song. Brecht makes here a suggestion regarding rehearsals which later is to assume considerable importance in the ultimate estrangement of the performance and its audience. The actor is urged to practise the songs, using certain figures of speech and idioms. There must be, as Brecht indicates: "landsläufige, profane Redensarten, die ähnliches ausdrücken, aber in der schnoddrige Sprache des Alltags".¹ Brecht considered that, by following such a course in rehearsal, the actor was prevented from identifying himself with the character in performance, thus increasing his own and the audience's critical faculty.

¹ibid., p. 32.

CHAPTER FIVE

1929 - 1920

Dialog über Schauspielkunst 1929

Ovation für Shaw 1926

Augsburger Theaterkritiken 1920

In February of 1929, Brecht published in the Berliner Börsen Courier an article entitled Dialog über Schauspielkunst, which provides us with an early, if incomplete, basis from which the later development of his theatrical theory was to proceed. The conclusions contained in this article were based on the experience gained from productions of Die Dreigroschenoper and Ödipus; the latter was produced by Jessner whom Brecht had persuaded to try the epic style.

In 1936 Brecht had described estrangement as the process of "auffällig machen", and seven years earlier the same idea is given expression when Brecht writes: "Das Auffällige ist doch ein Merkmal dieser neuen Schauspielkunst".¹ The essay contains much that we have already seen. The language is similar to that used in the three works last discussed. The theatre of the day is criticised for its falseness in that its actors work, as the article states: "Mit Zuhilfenahme der Suggestion. Sie versetzen sich selber und das Publikum in Trance".² This gives a performance, hall-marked by empathy, from which only feeling may arise and in which there is no possibility, Brecht adds, of learning anything.

The article goes on to present what is one of the earlier theoretical descriptions of what we can safely conclude to be the theory of estrangement. Brecht reminds his actor that he is to narrate the part, that he is acting for an audience in a scientific age; this is

¹Brecht, "Dialog über Schauspielkunst", Berliner Börsen Courier (February 2, 1929).

²ibid.

incidentally the first use of the term "scientific theatre" in the articles concerning the theatre. The actor is given the following advice:

Er sollte sein Wissen von den menschlichen Beziehungen Haltungen, Kräften zeigen, also im Wortsinne bewusst spielen. Die schauspielerische Darstellung wurde damit "spirituell zeremoniell und rituell".¹

Specific reference is made to Helene Weigel's acting in Ödipus; to her controlled, perhaps monotonous voice, to obviously conventional gestures which indicate mourning, to the use of white make-up to show anguish and fear. The audience is being reminded that the events on the stage have been rehearsed, are not unique and that acting technique is being used. The interest in this conscious style of acting is further stressed by Brecht's answer to the question of whether actors found it easy to adopt his suggestions. His reply was that they found it difficult; the ones who did comply to some degree with his demands invariably grew worse, from his point of view, as the first night approached and as they were reminded of the expectations of the conventional audience. Brecht's aim was the distance between actor and part that is found in rehearsals where the actors are holding themselves back and repressing identification with the part. Distance is also to be sought between actor and audience: "Nicht nahe kommen sollten sich Zuschauer und Schauspieler, sondern entfernen sollten sie sich voneinander".² The shock of seeing objects and people in a new light, out of their usual context, is a result of that distancing and the evocation of a critical attitude; Brecht describes it as follows:

¹ibid.

²ibid.

"Jeder sollte sich von sich selber entfernen. Sonst fällt der Schrecken weg, der zum Erkennen nötig ist".¹

Brecht takes the argument further by selecting a concrete example. He claims that, if he goes to see Richard III, he does not wish to be persuaded that he himself is Crouchback. He would rather see the phenomenon of Richard in all his strangeness and incomprehensibility²; only then would Brecht feel that he could gain some understanding of Richard and, by so doing, learn from the play.

In this essay or dialogue there are, then, references to self-conscious, self-critical acting and watching, to the treatment of the unusual with the use of stereotyped methods, to the treatment of the familiar with unusual means, and to the resultant critical distance. All become common concepts in the application of estrangement and it is possible to see, in works going back to 1920, Brecht using stage techniques which are reflected in the ideas put forward in this article.³

Three years prior to the publication of the Dialog über Schauspielkunst, Brecht wrote an article, also in the Berliner Börsen Courier, in which he lavished considerable praise on Bernard Shaw. It is possible in the article to see some practical remarks and observations from which Brecht's later theory of estrangement developed. The Dialog über Schauspielkunst is, apart from one or two illustrations, less concrete than its predecessor about Shaw. The form of the praise that is awarded

¹ibid.

²ibid.

³cf. Schumacher: Die Dramatischen Versuche Bertolt Brechts.

Shaw may be read as an indication of the trend that Brecht's thoughts about the theatre were taking.

Brecht finds obvious delight in the manner in which Shaw ridicules the shibboleths of the day. In expressing his pleasure, Brecht uses an adjective that we have met already in his later references to estrangement. Brecht writes: "dass wirklich wichtigen Erscheinungen gegenüber nur eine lässige (schnoddrige) Haltung richtig ist, da sie allein eine wirkliche Aufmerksamkeit und völlige Konzentration ermöglicht".¹ This maxim, applied on the stage, should cause a clash in the spectators' minds between what is expected and what is being presented. It is such a clash that would bring forth the "Entfernung" and the "Schrecken" that three years later, in 1929, Brecht was demanding as fundamental elements of the new style of theatre. Shaw held further appeal for Brecht because he avoided creating the accepted, typical type of hero who was a model of good conduct. Brecht, too, looked upon character, particularly the heroic character, as being difficult to penetrate and consisting of a lively, perhaps random, mixture of contradictory qualities. There was no reason, he maintained, why a money lender should not be courageous, wistful and tender-hearted, every reason why he should not conform to the general impression of cowardice, furtiveness and brutality. This attitude was still very much in Brecht's mind when he wrote the Kleines Organon, but his words of 1926 are of interest. He wrote then about Shaw's plays: "Wahrscheinlich verdanken alle seine Figuren ihre sämtlichen Züge

¹Brecht, "Ovation für Shaw", Berliner Börsen Courier (July 25, 1926).

Shaws Vergnügen, unsere Gewohnheitsassoziationen in Unordnung zu bringen".¹ Brecht saw in the outcome of the above attitude to the theatre a further close bond between himself and Shaw; both of them were, he claimed, making their appeal to the reason of the spectator. It was the intellect, and not the emotion, which was to provide the basis for the new theatre.

The essay, Ovation für Shaw was one of several printed in the Berliner Börsen Courier in and after 1926 which stressed the necessity of contact with the public and of enjoyment in the theatre.² These essays represent a first attempt at a theory of the drama. It is not, however, an attempt at a systematised theory, but rather a collection of articles stimulated by productions of plays, by criticisms and by other journalists of the theatre who were putting forward their points of view. The essay about Shaw is representative and illuminating in that it gives us a clear picture of the earliest theoretical writings which concern the technique of estrangement. Other references may be found that are of interest but they occur only in direct relation to a particular production or artist. This period, marked by the beginning of publication for the Berliner Börsen Courier in 1926, was preceded by Brecht's five-year silence in the field of literary criticism, and theory. We have to look as far back as 1921 and the so-called "Augsburger Theaterkritiken" before we again come across writings which give us some insight into the subject of alienation.

¹ibid.

²See also Brecht, "Mehr guten Sport", Berliner Börsen Courier (February 6, 1926) and Brecht, "An den Herrn im Parkett" Berliner Börsen Courier (December 25, 1925).

The twenty-six reviews which constitute the Augsburger Theaterkritiken reveal an attitude towards the theatre which is for the most part conventional. This becomes abundantly clear from even a short examination of the vocabulary with which Brecht describes facets of productions which had found his favour. One actress is described praisingly as having played her part with "schöner Innerlichkeit" and having shown "besonders stimmlich, sehr starke Momente".¹ Another was praised because she was "lieblich, unbewusst, kindlich" and criticised because, with her style of acting, the spectators realised that the actors were conscious of an audience and that no transparent, fourth wall separated stage from audience.² This last remark stands in sharp contrast to Brecht's later ideas. There are words such as "Spannung", "Intuition", "künstlerische Einfühlung" and "ergreifend" describing measures which deserve praise. They, too, are at variance with Brecht's later development.

There are, however, a few references that may justifiably be looked upon as pointing in the direction of the development which we have just traced. The first reveals a delight in "das Mimische und das Gestische" which, as we have seen, play not inconsiderable roles in the effectiveness of alienation. Praise for the use by actors of these two characteristics can be seen in the critiques Brecht wrote of Hofmannsthal's Jedermann and Shaw's Pygmalion. In the former of

¹Brecht, Reviews of the play Maskenschnitzer by Crommelynck in Volkswille, (Augsburg: April 27, 1920).

²Brecht, Review of the play Kabale und Liebe by Schiller in Volkswille, (Augsburg: September 29, 1920).

these two reviews, he describes the acting of Aicher in the following words:

Sein Organ, langweilig, spröde, viel zu routiniert, oft zu einem kramphaften Deklamation missbraucht--wird stark und ergreift, wo es aus der Körperlichkeit wächst, wo es breit und mächtig werden kann. Das Beste ist das Mimische, die bleiche, aufgeschwemmte Völlerphysiognomie an der Tafel usw.¹

Emphasis is laid upon correct use of the voice and of accompanying gesture. Much of this is not the Brecht whom we have come to know, but the seed for future development is there. Perhaps even more striking is the description of the acting of the leading lady in Shaw's Pygmalion about whom Brecht wrote: "Sie hätte und hat noch gute Momente im körperlichen Ausdruck, leichte und wie zufällige, körperliche Einfälle".² Use of the body is here directly connected with the concept of retaining the impressions gained at first rehearsals; it is a use of practised technique which preserves some of the novelty of first contact with the part.

Brecht offered, too, his observations about the writers of the time, notably Hauptmann, Toller, Kaiser, Rubiner, Goll and Wedekind. The impression made by Goll is of particular importance, for he advocated a realistic theatre, showing man as he truly is; he further suggested an approach through which the problem would be seen as though through a magnifying glass. The resultant shift in perspective and emphasis is reminiscent of Brecht's description of the theatre's

¹Brecht, Review of the play Jedermann by Hofmannsthal in Volkswille, (Augsburg: November 6, 1920).

²Brecht, Review of the play Pygmalion by Shaw in Volkswille (Augsburg: October 30, 1920).

utilisation of a system of mirrors. This impressed Brecht who, comparing Goll with Toller, wrote:

Wesentlicher für das Theater: Iwan Golls Possen. Die Emanzipation der Regie. Spukhaft deutliche Einfälle. Zeitung, Bänkelsängerlyrik, Photographie: höchst lebendige Maschinerie, Plakat: Der expressionistische Courteline. Es ist Gutes drinnen, Kindhaftes. Es steckt mehr Menschlichkeit drin als bei Toller.¹

Brecht thus showed that his mind at this time was certainly receptive to ideas and methods which were later to find development within his concept of the epic theatre.

The above mention of "Bänkelsängerlyrik" prompts reference to Brecht's admiration and praise for the style of two exponents of the ballad type of singing, Franz Wedekind and Karl Valentin. Wedekind died on the ninth of March, 1918 and is remembered for his dramas and also for his excellence as a cabaret singer and actor in his own plays. Three days after his death, Brecht wrote an obituary for Wedekind in the Augsburger Neueste Nachrichten in which he praised Wedekind's technique in singing and accompanying himself on the guitar. He wrote: "mit spröder Stimme, etwas monoton und sehr ungeschult: Nie hatte mich ein Sänger so begeistert und erschüttert".² The above quotation is reminiscent of the qualities which Peter Lorre developed during the production of Mann ist Mann and which brought forth such strong defence and praise from Brecht.

The young critic's attitude towards Karl Valentin, the Munich

¹Brecht, "Dramatisches Papier und anderes" in Volkswille (Augsburg: December 14, 1920).

²Brecht, "Franz Wedekind" in Augsburger Neueste Nachrichten (Augsburg: March 12, 1918).

cabaret artist also offers some glimpse of the way in which Brecht was later to develop. Valentin was, Brecht wrote:

von einer ganz trockenen, innerlichen Komik, bei der man rauchen und trinken kann. Hier wird die Unzulänglichkeit aller Dinge gezeigt, einschliesslich uns selber. Wenn dieser Mensch, einer der eindringlichsten Figuren der Zeit, den Einfältigen die Zusammenhänge zwischen Gelassenheit, Dummheit und Lebensgenuss leibhaftig vor Augen führt, lachen die Gaule und merken es tief innen.¹

The cabaret artist, then, points the way towards the revolt against the theatre of illusion with his dry, controlled style which, by allowing the spectators to eat and drink, ensures that its audience is aware of itself as an audience. There is an intellectual force of demonstration at work which has, in its own ironic manner, a revolution in mind. The pertinence of Valentin's style and humour to the future development of alienation as a theatrical technique is more strikingly described by a writer other than Brecht himself. In 1929, Eugen Gürster wrote an article about Valentin in which he said:

Das uns so vertraute Beziehungssystem dieser äusseren Welt ist für Karl Valentin nirgends dicht genug, um nicht einem Zweifel Raum zu geben, ob nicht vielleicht doch andere Verbindungen zwischen den Dingen möglich sind als die, die uns gelaufig geworden sind.²

The famous cabaret figure was then able to offer to Brecht a technique which achieved much the same end as did the plays of Bernard Shaw in that they disturbed the normal interrelationship of associations.

From the opinions expressed towards both theatre and actors, it is possible to discern, amidst more conventional attitudes, opinions

¹Programme for the premier of Trommeln in der Nacht by Brecht, published by Munchener Kammerspiele: September 30, 1922.

²Eugen Gürster, "Der Stehgreifspieler Karl Valentin", Der Scheinwerfer, (Essen: December, 1929).

which will ultimately develop along the lines which we have traced back. Even as early as 1920, there are indications of the course which Brecht's political and social thought were taking. In his review of Don Carlos at the Augsburg theatre Brecht compares the situation in that play with the novel The Jungle by Upton Sinclair. The latter work was published in 1906 and was a considerable indictment of the capitalist system. Brecht concludes his comparison of the novel with the observation: "ich kann Carlos' Knechtschaft nicht mehr recht ernst nehmen".¹ Further evidence of a growing interest in the active participation of the working class in the theatre can be seen in the review of Hauptmann's Rose Bernd. He advises the workers to see the play and, more important, identifies himself with the working class and advocates a theatre which represents its interests:

Das ist ungefähr der Inhalt, er geht nicht über
Bühnenkaiser, Prinzessinnen singen nicht darin, es kommt
kein Lohengrin zu dieser Beschimpften, aber wir müssen
hineingehen, es ist unsere Sache, die in dem Stück verhandelt
wird, unser Elend, das gezeigt wird. Es ist ein
revolutionäres Stück.²

Such political and social thoughts helped to persuade Brecht that a new form of theatre was needed. This new theatre ultimately derives its character from a synthesis between this politically and socially inspired thinking and the reaction against the Naturalist theatre, predominant at that time on the stages of Germany.

¹Brecht, Review of the play Don Carlos by Schiller in Volkswille, (Augsburg: April 15, 1920).

CHAPTER SIX

Textual Alienation

We have examined in detail the development of the theatrical theory of the alienation effect, and in so doing have gained some impression of its nature as far as the stage is concerned. But no full appreciation can be won from a mere study of the theory or its application on the stage. One of the values of such a study is, however, that it makes the reader of the play, or the spectator, more conscious of the extent to which the theory of estrangement can be found reflected in the text itself. Brecht wrote very little about the textual side of his work, but this fact must not be interpreted as a denial of the text's importance nor of the part it plays in creating a critical attitude that seeks to reassess the nature of the phenomena with which society is faced.

Two plays, Mutter Courage and Der kaukasische Kreidekreis, both written in Brecht's maturity, provide good, but in Brecht's work by no means unique, material for an examination of estrangement as it may be seen in the text of a play. If the definitions of estrangement that we have so far met are borne in mind it is perhaps feasible to maintain that Brecht's work shows four main facets which seek to effect alienation in the textual sense. The first is the juxtaposition in the text of contradictory aspects of a character. The second is the reversal of accepted values, the attempt to demonstrate a problem in a new perspective. The third is the deliberate use of language as a tool which questions conventional usage, checks irrational assumption and reminds the reader or hearer of a reality which lies beyond everyday appearance. The fourth is the intrusion, into the material, of lessons which demonstrate historical parallels in an obvious manner. It will be necessary to examine the four facets in greater detail.

The juxtaposition of contradictory aspects of a character has made itself felt as a necessary element in the theory. We find it applied in a marked form to the character of Mother Courage herself. Anna Fierling is a rough but warm-hearted person whose aim in life is to guide her children and her wagon through the war that is waging. She shows considerable generosity and open-heartedness with the means which are at her disposal. And yet she makes her living from the very war which is to rob her of her three children. Her fatal avarice, the compulsion of the profit motive, is not in Brecht's eyes incompatible with the strong affection she feels, and sometimes disguises, for her children. Few people can ever take their thoughts to a logical conclusion. Mother Courage is not one of those who can. In the first scene she tries to sell the tools of warfare to her interrogators, tries to turn war to economic advantage, but on the sergeant-major's interest in her boys as potential soldiers replies with force: "Nicht zu machen, Feldwebel. Meine Kinder sind nicht für das Kriegshandwerk".¹ Ironically, it is this desire to make profit from war which causes her to be tricked by the sergeant-major's red herring. The sale of a buckle distracts her attention from the recruiting officer, enables him to enlist Eilif and ultimately sends Eilif to his death. Similarly, her long drawn-out financial haggling through Yvette costs her second son, Schweizerkas, his life. Finally, at the time of the death of her daughter Kattrin, Mother Courage is condemned by the old peasant woman with the words:

¹Brecht, Stücke, vol. VII, p. 71.

"wenns nicht in die Stadt gegangen wären, Ihren Schnitt zu machen, wärs vielleicht nicht passiert".¹ It is possible to draw comparisons with similar traits in other plays. Mackie Messer, for example, is the gangster who operates like a middle-class businessman, complete with account books and spats. Puntilla has two different sides to his character, the nature of which is determined by the state of his sobriety. Azdak is a ruffian, but ~~who~~ is also a judge. Shen Te in Der gute Mensch von Sezuan becomes a masculine counterpart when the situation demands a hard approach.

These contradictory characteristics force the reader into the critical approach that Brecht desired. We are not free to condemn or praise Mother Courage, but rather led to evaluate from a distance the pros and cons of her character and be persuaded by the tragedy of her example into reassessing our own conceptions about human behaviour and the effect of the environment upon the individual.

In drawing main characters as compositions of contradictory qualities, Brecht is attacking the conventional concept of the heroic character. We have already seen that this is an attitude towards character that he shared with Shaw. The attack upon conventional assumptions is made on a wider front than character formation. Like Shaw, he demonstrates a new perspective on values and reverses accepted judgements by forcing his audience into contact with a hitherto unknown approach to the phenomenon which he wishes to question. The means employed to achieve this end do not rest upon logical argument, but on

¹ibid, p. 203.

the proximity to each other of ideas, represented by words which seem to be mutually exclusive of each other. The exponents of war are not seen as reluctant defenders of the democratic or religious ideal but as soldiers who enjoy war and to whom it is both a means of and reason for existence. The professional soldier, as seen in the sergeant-major, the recruiting officer and the captain interpret as positive, values which to the rest of society should appear as negative. The civilian population tends to welcome peace as the preferable state of affairs, but not the sergeant-major who says: "Frieden, das ist nur Schlamperei, erst der Krieg schafft Ordnung Nur wo Krieg ist, gibts ordentliche Listen und Registraturen weil man eben weiss: Ohne Ordnung kein Krieg".¹ We are forced, then, to see war and peace in a different perspective, compelled to realise that to some people peace is undesirable. The foolishness of praising war on account of its efficient lists and ordinances is manifest, but the absurdity reaches a climax when the army chaplain advises Mother Courage that war will go on for ever. Talking of war, he says:

Es kann natürlich zu einer kleinen Pause kommen. Der Krieg kann sich verschlaufen müssen, ja er kann sogar sozusagen verunglücken. Davor ist er nicht gesichert, es gibt ja nix Vollkommenes allhier auf Erden. Einen vollkommenen Krieg, wo man sagen konnt: an dem ist nix mehr auszusetzen, wirts vielleicht nie geben. Plötzlich kann er ins Stocken kommen, an was Unvorhergesehenem, an alles kann kein Mensch denken%. Vielleicht ein Übersehen und das Schlamassel ist da. Und dann kann man den Krieg wieder aus dem Dreck ziehen! Aber die Kaiser und die Könige und der Papst wird ihm zu Hilfe kommen in seiner Not. So hat er im ganzen nix Ernstliches zu fürchten, und ein langes Leben liegt vor ihm.²

¹ibid., p. 64.

²ibid., p. 146.

The absurdity and the effect lie in that these are the words of a cleric, in that war is described almost in the form of a helpless child or petty business which cannot hope to avoid difficulties and further in that words are used which would normally never be applied to war; for example, "verunglücken", "vollkommen", "ins Stocken kommen" and "aus dem Dreck ziehen". It is the absurdity of the selection of vocabulary which aims at the realization of the futility of war; the phenomenon of war loses much of its awe-inspiring, mystic quality, and its, invariable presence seems less necessary.

There is a resultant confusion in the minds of the characters about war and moral values. The chaplain considers his gift for speech to be a god-given talent and says to Mother Courage: "Sie haben mich nicht predigen hören. Ich kann ein Regiment nur mit einer Ansprach so in Stimmung versetzen, dass es den Feind wie eine Hammelherd ansieht".¹ There is no direct suggestion of the incongruity of the concepts "predigen" and "den Feind wie eine Hammelherd ansehen" but the propaganda aspect of the chaplain's behaviour is more than strongly suggested. Perhaps we can define such a technique as the linguistic "Fixieren des Nicht--Sondern". The description of the chaplain's abilities immediately reminds the reader, or hearer, of that which the chaplain does not do but ought to do, namely preach the gospel of peace. This is basically an illustration of the confusion of right with wrong and the difficulty of an absolute definition of either. The arbitrary distinction between the two is further underlined when Eilif loses his life for committing an action in peace, the like of which in war had previously won him

¹ ibid, p.152.

honour and favour.

War is, then, held up to critical view by a reversal of the perspective in which society usually sees it. The same method of estrangement is applied to organised religion, in this case Christianity, largely through the attitude adopted towards the Thirty Years War and the reactions of various characters to matters of faith. The concept of a religious war is set side by side with the terminology of plunder, pillage and privation which characterize any war to those who must live through it. This comes particularly clearly to the fore in the conversation during the third scene between Mother Courage, the cook and the chaplain:

Der Feldprediger: In dem Krieg fallen, ist eine Gnade und keine Unangelegenheit, warum? Es ist ein Glaubenskrieg. Kein gewöhnlicher, sondern ein besonderer, wo für den Glauben geführt wird, und also Gott wohlgefällig.

Der Koch: Das ist richtig. In einer Weise ist es ein Krieg, indem dass gebrandschatzt, gestochen und geplündert wird, bissel schänden nicht zu vergessen, aber unterschieden von alle andern Kriege dadurch, dass es ein Glaubenskrieg ist, das ist klar. Aber er macht auch Durst, das müssen Sie zugeben.¹

The flippancy of the language and the ironic break to the more favoured subject of drink affect our attitude towards the religious motives which prompt the leaders and armies concerned in the war. Later in the same scene, Mother Courage deals another disillusioning side-swipe at religion when talking to the chaplain:

Der Feldprediger: Wir sind eben jetzt in Gottes Hand.

¹ibid, p. 100.

Mother Courage: Ich glaube nicht, dass wir schon so verloren sind, aber schlafen tu ich doch nicht nachts.¹

This sequence is in fact full of such textual alienation effects. The Catholic army is seen as something other than a band of Christian soldiers marching on to war by that essential piece of impedimenta, Yvette, whose reaction to its arrival is described as follows:

Yvette kommt, sich pudern: Was sagen Sie, die Katholischen kommen? Wo ist mein Hut? Wer hat auf ihm herumgetrampelt? So kann ich doch nicht herumlaufen, wenn die Katholischen kommen. Was denken die von mir? Spiegel habe ich auch nicht. Zum Feldprediger: Wie schau ich aus? Ist es zu viel Puder?²

The Lutheran side is also seen from an essentially non-heroic point of view which reveals the casuistry of some of its number. In the scene with the hero Eilif, the captain's biblical turn of phrase is conditioned by his reference to the golden bangle which he intends to award Eilif from the plunder; it is a gift which will cost him nothing. The captain, too, is unable to comprehend the reaction of the natives to his mission of salvation. He says to Eilif:

Nun, mein Sohn, herein mit dir zu deinem Feldhauptmann und setz dich zu meiner Rechten. Denn du hast eine Heldentat vollbracht, als frommer Reiter und für Gott getan, was du getan hast in einem Glaubenskrieg, das rechne ich dir besonders hoch an, mit einer goldenen Armspang, sobald ich die Stadt hab. Wir sind gekommen ihnen ihre Seelen zu retten, und was tun sie, als unverschämte und verdreckte Saubauern? Uns ihr Vieh wegzutreiben.³

Mother Courage herself passes sage, if novel, comment on the situation. Speaking more with the voice of reason, she gives expression in particular to the attitude of the mother when she observes that a general

¹ ibid, p. 109.

² ibid, p. 106.

³ ibid, p. 84.

must be a bad one who needs brave soldiers. She goes on: "In einem guten Land brauchts kein Tugenden, alle können ganz gewöhnlich sein, mittelgescheit und meinetwegen Feiglinge".¹ By doubting the necessity for bravery, Brecht is also doubting its absolute quality and equating it more with misguided zeal. And yet the main character in the play bears the name, Mother Courage; the sergeant-major, asking her why she is so called, receives a reply which puts the compulsion of economic necessity forward as a cause of bravery: "Courage heiss ich, weil ich den Ruin gefürchtet hab, Feldwebel, und bin durch das Geschützfeuer von Riga gefahrn mit fünfzig Brotlaib im Wagen. Sie waren schon angeschimmelt, es war höchste Zeit, ich hab kein Wahl gehabt".²

Honour is also assailed and put into a fresh perspective; it is held up to our critical attention by the exhibition of sophistry shown by the recruiting officer. He describes his treating of potential recruits, how he gets them drunk and in a mood for signing. But his tricks and deceits are not working well of late, for his victims elude him at the last moment, presumably having enjoyed his entertainment. He complains to the sergeant-major: "Da gibts kein Manneswort, kein Treu und Glauben, kein Ehrgefühl. Ich hab hier mein Vertrauen in die Menschheit verloren, Feldwebel".³

The above are only a few illustrations of the techniques which are at work. Absurdity of language and incongruity of ideas are used by Brecht to bring about a shift in perspective which puts War, Peace, God,

¹ibid, p. 90.

²ibid, p. 129.

³ibid, p. 63.

Religion, Bravery and Honour into a fresh light. It is a light which causes us to stop, and query our own assumptions. The play, nevertheless, carries on and we may not have much time to come to adequate conclusions. The essential results are, however, that our preconceptions are questioned in such a manner that we are made aware of the questioning. We are not allowed to forget for long that we are in a theatre.

The manner used to make the audience question its beliefs is often essentially a linguistic one, in fact, the third method or facet indicated at the opening of this chapter. This is the more common and certainly the more intricate means of textual alienation; it employs many distinct stylistic usages to attain its effect. Examples of the techniques employed should suffice to persuade the reader of the extreme importance of this aspect to the study of estrangement.

By the use of etymologically incongruous combinations and phrases, Brecht is able to surprise the reader into a questioning attitude towards the implications behind the phrases; helped by this critical frame of mind, the reader may be able to come to rational conclusions. We meet the following type of phrase: "Anna Fierling kommt ein Sohn abhanden"¹; "Ich kann grad ein Stossgebet zurückhalten"²; "Sagen Sie mir nicht, dass Friede ausgebrochen ist"³. "Abhanden" would be more appropriate if used in reference to a material possession rather than to a person; it would be more appropriate to utter, murmur, or whisper a short prayer, rather than to repress one because of the

¹ibid.

²ibid., p. 111.

³ibid., p. 161.

bad effect that it might have; peace does not usually break out and consequently the mind immediately turns to thoughts of war or the losses inflicted by peace on some sections of the community. The unusual turn of phrase in itself causes estrangement from the meaning of the original and from the character speaking the lines. We are reminded of Mother Courage's overriding attraction towards profit, of a faith which is forgotten by one of its ministers, should it be necessary and we are reminded of the gains to be had from war. Brecht would hope such disharmony might bring about a critical and fruitful re-examination of the situations described.

Quotations and figures of speech receive their full share of the treatment of estrangement. Brecht makes use of them in four different ways. Firstly, Brecht will deliberately misquote a well-known illustration. Upon the approach of the Catholic army, for example, Mother Courage does her best to make her daughter appear even more unattractive and concludes her efforts with the words: "Sein Licht muss man unter den Scheffel stellen, heisst es".¹ This is a direct negation of the original in Matthew and the listener is at least caused to wonder at the accuracy of the citation. Secondly, an absurd use of an idiom secures a similar end; for example, the phrase: "den Krieg aus dem Dreck ziehen".² This phrase has already been examined in the context of a passage seeking to put war into a fresh perspective but the linguistic oddness of it consists in the substitution of war

¹ibid, p. 107.

²ibid, p. 146.

for some more suited object such as a cart or wagon. Brecht, thirdly, finds his way of adding his own qualifying, anti-illusionary comments to well-known figures of speech. When Mother Courage is talking to her daughter in the second scene Brecht is able, by adding Mother Courage's own remarks, to doubt the validity of the original phrase and thereby invite his readers to come to their own conclusion. Mother Courage says: "Die Liebe ist eine Himmelsmacht, ich warne dich".¹ The reader is set upon his guard against the powers of heaven; it would be more conventional to have the powers of hell pointed out. The same technique, but in double form, is applied in: "Er sagt, er möcht den Boden küssen, über den deine Füß gehen, hast du sie gewaschen gestern" ² The original statement is set in reported speech which in itself makes its validity uncertain; the wisdom of the action is further questioned by the suggestion that Katrin does not wash her feet too often. Fourthly, idioms and quotations are found used in situations where the connection between phrase and situation can only be described as grotesque. The chaplain is called upon to express his opinion of the maxim "Not kennt kein Gebot". His reply is: "Strenggenommen, in der Bibel steht der Satz nicht, aber unser Herr hat aus fünf Bröten fünfhundert herzaubern können, da war eben keine Not und da konnt er auch verlangen, dass man seinen Nächsten liebt, denn man war satt. Heutzutage ist das anders".³ A further example of this treatment is seen in the captain's lavish praise

¹ibid, p. 98.

²ibid.

³ibid, p. 87.

of Bilif who had, by trickery, killed some peasants and stolen their cattle to provide food for the troops. The captain replies: "Heissts nicht in der Schrift: was du dem geringsten von meinen Brüdern getan hast, hast du mir getan? Und was hast du ihnen getan? Eine gute Mahlzeit von Ochsenfleisch hast du ihnen verschafft".¹ These last two illustrations represent complete travesties of the original meaning of the scriptures. It is in realizing that these are travesties that the reader will perhaps become aware of the hypocrisy and emptiness of much of human behaviour. This new awareness would be the consequence of an estrangement, a "distancing" from the original meanings of the phrases.

Metaphors are also treated in such a way that the reader is constantly being thrown back upon their literal meaning or being reminded that their usage is figurative. The following sequence between the sergeant-major and Mother Courage illustrates this attitude towards metaphor:

Feldwebel: Willst du mich auf den Arm nehmen? Ich werde dir deine Frechheit austreiben. Du weisst, dass du eine Lizenz haben musst.

Mutter Courage: Reden Sie anständig mit mir und erzählen Sie nicht meinen halbwüchsigen Kindern, dass ich Sie auf den Arm nehmen will, das² gehört sich nicht, ich hab mix mit Ihnen.

Another example, but one which contains strong political undertones, is found in the discussion between Mother Courage, the chaplain and the cook in the third scene when the subject of conversation is the Swedish King:

¹ibid, p. 88.

²ibid, p. 67.

Der Feldwebel: Schliesslich essen Sie sein Brot.

Der Koch: Ich esse nicht sein Brot, sondern ich backs ihm.¹

Brecht here is not only pointing out the hollowness of the phrase, the usual meaning of which is to live off a person without contributing anything in return but he also points towards the social situation of the day in which the cook allegedly goes hungry while he cooks for his master; in other words, the exploitation of labour by the owners of the means of production.

As a means towards further textual alienation Brecht also employs the skillful use of expressing non-sequiturs by the juxtaposition of differing or irrelevant concepts. For example, the recruiting officer says to Eilif: "es ist gegen uns gesagt worden, dass es fromm zugeht im schwedischen Lager, aber das ist üble Nachred, damit man uns schadet".² Similarly the quartermaster when asked why he refuses to sell his ammunition directly to another quartermaster rather than do it through Mother Courage, replies: "weil ich ihm nicht trau, wir sind befreundet".³ "Frömmigkeit" is not usually looked upon as being good cause for "üble Nachrede" nor is mistrust conventionally caused by friendship. The ultimate effect of these linguistic somersaults is that the reader or hearer is jarred: language is being used as a tool aimed at dislodging him from his uncritical attitude of mind. The author as well as the actor is then stepping between the character and the audience.

¹ibid, p. 103.

²ibid, p. 75.

³ibid, p. 94.

Very close to this last usage is Brecht's tendency to put together attributives and descriptions the meanings of which are not compatible, at least superficially. The chaplain after an argument with the cook confesses: "Seit ich verlumpt bin, bin ich ein besserer Mensch geworden. Ich könnte ihnen nicht mehr predigen".¹ Normally we would not equate "verlumpt" with "besser", but the chaplain has achieved in some ways the state of estrangement from his own personality and is able to view himself critically and rationally. From this new viewpoint he finds himself unable to continue his preaching which as we have seen depended on the creation of illusion. Consequently, despite his material position, he finds himself a better man; the paradox of the situation lies in his being unable to preach despite his being a better man.

At times, Brecht uses forms of elevated language the artificiality of which strikes the reader and underlines either the falseness of a particular kind of emotion or sets both actor and audience at a distance from the events on the stage. Mother Courage in an attempt to deceive both her children, the sergeant-major and the recruiting officer about their futures gives by trickery a cross indicating death to her son, Elif. Her assumed grief reminds us of the excesses of a Gryphius play for she cries: "Oh, ich unglückliche Mutter, ich schmerzreiche Gebärerin. Er stirbt? Im Lenz des Lebens muss er dahin".² The impression caused by this evocative use of language is immediately broken and we are reminded of the histrionic nature of what is before

¹ibid, p. 169.

²ibid, p. 76.

us by the more mundane turn of phrase "Wenn er ein Soldat wird, muss er ins Gras beißen, das ist klar".¹ The eleventh scene presents us with a comparable effect in the prayer of the old peasant woman for the city and its inhabitants who are about to be attacked. The prayer itself is an almost comic mixture of the speech of a Swabian peasant and the accepted conventions of extemporary prayer. There is the understandable peasant concentration on the farm land and stock which are as much in evidence in the prayer as in daily life. This realistic touch contrasts vividly with the biblical phrases, remembered from an orthodox religious background, such as: "und der Feind ist vor den Mauern mit grosser Macht".² The importance of the prayer from the point of view of action is its interruption by what to the old woman is merely family talk. She includes in her prayer her brother's children and makes the aside to Kattrin that one is under two, the oldest seven. This is, of course, the final impetus that drove Kattrin to her heroic deed and death: the love for little children that she has shown earlier in the play: As a factor of such importance, Brecht makes it stand out by presenting it as a naïve aside in the middle of a prayer which itself attracts attention by the conflict of its styles. The psychological motivation is then made obvious to the audience and we are reminded of the weight laid in the early development of the theory on the characteristic of "Auffälligkeit".

¹ibid.

²ibid., p. 195.

There is one favoured linguistic technique by which Brecht reminds his audience of the demonstrative nature of the events on the stage; this is the use of proverbs. It finds some expression in Mutter Courage but is used only briefly. A fuller treatment is afforded this characteristic in Der kaukasische Kreidekreis. Brecht uses proverbs and quotations to enable his actors to speak in what is virtually the third person, taking shelter behind an authority other than themselves. It is a means of expression which is colourful, unreal but yet strangely effective. The sequences in Der kaukasische Kreidekreis in which proverbs are used, are notably the scenes between Simon and Grusche and the clash in the courtroom between Azdak and Simon. The proverbs used are of Russian origin and their foreignness would strengthen the effect they have.

The scenes between Grusche and Simon are written in a very detached manner; the detachment is achieved by the use of the third person, by excessive formality as an expression of shyness and reserve, and by the interspersion of metaphor and proverb. For example, the scene in which Simon is proposing to Grusche:

Simon: Da Eile ist, sollten wir uns nicht streiten, denn für ein gutes Streiten ist Zeit nötig. Ist die Frage erlaubt, ob das Fraulein noch Eltern hat?

Grusche: Nein, nur den Bruder.

Simon: Da die Zeit kurz ist--die zweite Frage wäre: ist das Fraulein gesund wie der Fisch im Wasser?

Grusche: Vielleicht ein Reißen in der rechten Schulter mitunter, aber sonst kräftig für jede Arbeit, es hat sich noch niemand beschwert.

Simon: Das ist bekannt. Wenn es sich am Ostersonntag darum handelt, wer holt trotzdem die Gans, dann ist es sie. Frage drei: ist das Fraulein ungeduldig veranlagt? Will es Kirschen im Winter?

Grusche: Ungeduldig nicht, aber wenn in den Krieg gegangen wird ohne Sinn und keine Nachricht kommt, ist es schlimm.

Simon: Eine Nachricht wird kommen. Aus dem Palast wird wieder nach Grusche gerufen. Zum Schluss die Hauptfrage

Grusche: Simon Chachava, weil ich in den dritten Hof muss und grosse Eile ist, ist die Antwort schon „Ja“.

Simon: sehr verlegen. Man sagt: „Eile heisst der Wind, der das Baugerüst umweht“. Aber man sagt auch: „Die Reichen haben keine Eile“. Ich bin aus¹

There is a similar scene when Simon eventually returns from the war.

Simon: förmlich: Gott zum Gruss und Gesundheit dem Fraulein.

Grusche: steht fröhlich auf und verbeugt sich tief: Gott zum Gruss dem Herrn Soldaten. Und gottlob, dass er gesund zurück ist.

Simon: Sie haben bessere Fische gefunden als mich, so haben sie mich nicht gegessen, sagte der Schellfisch.

Grusche: Tapferkeit, sagte der Küchenjunge; Glück, sagte der Held.

Simon: Und wie steht es hier? War der Winter erträglich, der Nachbar rücksichtsvoll?²

The nature of both scenes could easily create waves of emotion, more easily typified by reference to popular song hits composed for departing troop ships. The emotional content of these scenes is kept within bounds by the language and the restraint of the characters. The scenes do, however, have considerable impact which stems largely from the awareness that emotion is not being exposed to the public gaze. This is, perhaps, not what the audience may be accustomed to, and the very

¹Brecht, Stücke, vol. X, pp. 162-163.

²ibid, p. 231.

unusualness of the approach causes us to criticise the conventional emotional slickness of which these scenes are the antithesis. An antipathy to excessive emotional demonstration has long been a characteristic of the alienation effect, for such excess denies rational judgement. As early as 1919, Brecht had ridiculed such an approach when he described the outcome of an office romance with the words: "die unglückliche Mutter zieht unter Harmoniumbegleitung, sich selbst opfernd ins Freudenhaus, wobei man das Harmonium vor dem gerührten Schluchzen im Zuschauerraum Gott sei Dank kaum hört".¹ In Der kaukasische Kreidekreis, the audience will realise that a deliberate brake is being applied; this knowledge will prevent the audience from believing that it is watching a scene from real life and remind it that the stage is peopled with actors.

Perhaps the most concentrated use of proverbs occurs in the clash between Azdak and Simon who has been increasingly infuriated by the readiness with which the new judge asks for and accepts bribes. Azdak takes Simon to task and points out that particularly the poor never feel it necessary to pay for justice which is just as marketable as any other commodity. The duel then continues:

Simon laut: Als sie das Ross beschlagen kamen, streckte der Rosskafer die Beine hin, heisst es.

Azdak nimmt die Herausforderung eifrig auf: Besser ein Schatz aus der Jauchegrube als ein Stein aus dem Bergquell.

Simon: Ein schöner Tag, wollen wir nicht fischen gehen, sagte der Angler zum Wurm.

Azdak: Ich bin mein eigener Herr, sagte der Knecht und schnitt sich den Fuss ab.

¹Brecht, "Aus dem Theaterleben" in Volkswille, (Augsburg: November 7, 1919).

Simon: Ich liebe euch wie ein Vater, sagte der Zar zu den Bauern und liess dem Zarewitsch den Kopf abhauen.

Azdak: Der ärgste Feind des Narren ist er selber.

Simon: Aber der Furz hat keine Nase.¹

Such a sequence of unbroken proverbs may be looked upon as a means by which the continuity of the play is broken, the audience's involvement disturbed and a reminder made that an imitation of life is being watched. The implication of an authority, outside and higher than their own, puts the actors more firmly between the characters they create and the audience; it is a position which Brecht has so often demanded.

The fourth and last main facet of textual alienation concerns the introduction into the text of passages which from the point of view of content and expression remind the reader or hearer of parallel situations either in history or contemporary affairs. The chaplain and the cook, for example, discuss the politics of the day with particular reference to the Swedish King. The cook says:

die Freiheit, wo er hat einführen wollen in Deutschland, hat sich der König genug kosten lassen, indem er die Salzsteuer eingeführt hat in Schweden, was die armen Leut, wie gesagt, was gekostet hat, und dann hat er die Deutschen noch einsperren und vierteilen lassen müssen, weil sie an ihrer Knechtschaft gegenüber dem Kaiser festgehalten haben. Freilich, wenn einer nicht hat frei werden wollen, hat der Kaiser keinen Spass gekannt. Zuerst hat er nur Polen schützen wollen vor böse Menschen, besonders dem Kaiser, aber dann ist mitn Essen der Appetit gekommen, und er hat ganz Deutschland geschützt. Es hat sich nicht schlecht widersetzt. So hat der gute König nix wie Ärger gehabt von seiner Gute und Auslagen, und die hat er natürlich durch Steuern reinbringen lassen müssen, was böses Blut erzeugt hat, aber er hat sichs nicht verdriessen lassen. Er hat eins für sich gehabt, da war

¹Brecht, Stücke, vol. X, p. 291.

Gottes Wort, das war noch gut. Denn sonst hätt's noch geheissen, er tuts für sich und weil er Gewinnst haben will. So hat er immer ein gutes Gewissen gehabt, das war ihm die Hauptsach.¹

The audience cannot help but be reminded of the territorial ambitions and expansions of Germany prior to the 1939 war, of the foreign policies of world powers since the last war and the devious means sought to justify such actions. Historical lessons are being illustrated, the conclusions are left to the audience. A social parallel is offered in the words of Mother Courage to the young soldier who feels that he has been cheated out of a justifiable reward. The soldier is commanded to sit by the clerk and, despite a show of belligerence, does so.

Mother Courage remarks:

Er sitzt schon. Sehen Sie was hab ich gesagt. Sie sitzen schon. Ja, die kennen sich aus in uns und wissen, wie sie es machen müssen. Hinsetzen! und schon sitzen wir. Und im Sitzen gibts kein Aufruhr. Stehen Sie lieber nicht wieder auf, so wie Sie vorhin gestanden haben, stehen Sie jetzt nicht wieder. Vor mir müssen Sie sich nicht genieren, ich bin nicht besser, was nicht gar. Uns haben Sie allen unsere Schneid abgekauft. Warum, wenn ich aufmuck, mochts das Geschäft schadigen.²

The use of the vague, general "they" reflects the abuse of the weak by the strong, of the troops by the officers, of the workers by the employers, of the people by the state. The audience should appreciate the parallel and in so doing should become conscious of two problems, the one on the stage and the more actual one which affects the audience itself. The awareness of the two problems distances the spectator from the one on the stage and by offering comparisons puts him into a more

¹Brecht: Stücke, vol. VII, p. 103.

²ibid., p. 134.

critical position towards both. A third example can be cited to illustrate how the usage can be employed to reduce emotional involvement, or empathy with the characters. Mother Courage is forced by circumstances to deny her relationship to her son Schweizerkas, who is about to be executed. A large part of any Christian educated audience would be reminded by the scene of the denial of Jesus Christ by Peter. The fact that the mind is made conscious of the parallel prevents it from becoming totally absorbed in the stage events, for they adopt something of the nature of a parable. The denial of total absorption prevents any extreme degree of emotional identification with the characters.

The use of the concept of alienation would, from the above, appear not to be confined to the practical effects possible upon the stage, nor to the dramatic structure of the play. The presence of estrangement can also be seen as a literary device in the written word of the plays.

CONCLUSION

The estrangement principle, as described in the theoretical writings, does not in the writer's opinion develop by means of a smooth step-by-step progression from a basic idea to a finally realizable plan. The fundamental attitude is present in the early days; the path from these early Augsburg days to the final period of the Kleines Organon is perhaps better described as one in which Brecht, with shifting emphasis, offers observation and practical help, based on his own experience, to those who are engaged in the theatre.

In the last few years of his life, there is some evidence that Brecht was himself dissatisfied with the nomenclature of his theatre. He wrote in an essay, Die Dialektik auf dem Theater that the term epic was unsatisfactory though no better one could be offered at that time. The dissatisfaction appears to extend itself mainly to the phrase "epic theatre"; the theoretical basis of his theatre is not to be revised. He wrote about the term epic: "Episches Theater ist für diese Darbietungen wohl die Voraussetzung, jedoch erschliesst es allein noch nicht die Produktivität und Änderbarkeit der Gesellschaft, aus welchen Quellen sie das Hauptvergnügen schöpfen müssen".¹ The willingness to consider new terminology is at least evidence of Brecht's readiness to look upon his work as subject to those rules of change and improvement which he considered ought to govern the condition of society.

The impression is often expressed that Brecht, by merely pointing out the flaws in a given situation, expected his audience to arrive at the conclusion he desired. The writer of this thesis would

¹Brecht, "Die Dialektik auf dem Theater", Versuche 15. (Berlin - Suhrkamp 1957), p. 79.

suggest that, particularly in the later plays, a strong indication towards the correct answer is supplied by the ironic, deflatory techniques that Brecht so often uses. The earlier plays, for example Die Mutter, contain a far less sophisticated political thesis than the later ones. The examination of the text of Mutter Courage will, it is hoped, have shown how subtly Brecht derides those phenomena of which he disapproves. By prompting his audience, Brecht goes some way towards leading them to the attitude he desires them to adopt.

The efficiency of alienation techniques would appear ultimately to depend on two factors, determined by the character of the audience. The first is the danger that the audience will accustom itself to the new approach to the theatre; the consequence might be that the audience would exclude from its mind as unwelcome interruptions, the very means by which Brecht hopes to realize his intentions. The question must, in other words, be raised as to whether the degree of effectiveness of the estrangement principle will wane as the audience becomes familiar with that technique. The second factor concerns in a different way the receptivity of the audience. A study of the text of Mutter Courage and Der kaukasische Kreidekreis has found evidence which points to the presence within the text of conscious efforts to alienate the audience. With its use of prologue, epilogue, chorus, song, trial scenes, play within play and the narrator, the dramatic structure combines with stage presentation and text to make alienation the fundamental characteristic of a Brechtian play. The audience is immediately aware of the stage technicalities but we may justifiably ask ourselves whether an average audience will be able to appreciate the intricacies of

speech and structure in the way which Brecht intended. Doubtless, to heighten the appreciation on an intellectual level, Brecht urged that his plays should be not only seen, but also read. Fortunately, it is possible to put forward the same doubts with regard to other playwrights. Without a sound knowledge of the text, few people can grasp the grandeur and implication of Shakespeare's language, or the biting wit of Shaw, or the social criticism of W. S. Gilbert. Time, and not the writer of this thesis, can alone provide the answer to these doubts.

A section of the volume Theaterarbeit has often been cited as evidence of an increasing disenchantment, on Brecht's part, with his own theories and a growing resignation towards the impracticability of their application. Actors at the Berliner Ensemble, when faced with the question: "ob beim Berliner Ensemble eine besondere Spielweise festzustellen sei"¹, showed considerable uncertainty, the cause of which was presumed to be the lack of stress laid during the rehearsals upon the theoretical writings. Brecht's own attitude was cited: "Es werden bei bestimmten Stücken zwar einige praktische Hinweise aus diesen Arbeiten [the theoretical writings - A.R.] berücksichtigt, jedoch erlaubt nach Brechts Ansicht der derzeitige Stand des Theaters ihre volle Auswertung nicht".² The volume containing the results of this enquiry was published between 1951 and 1952; presumably, therefore, the time referred to by the actors must have been within two years of Brecht's return to Berlin. The conditions of that period can hardly

¹Theaterarbeit, p. 412.

²ibid.

be looked upon as normal and the remarks must be viewed strictly within the context of the time. That the Ensemble has continued to work along the lines put forward by Brecht in his theorising seems justified by reference to the opinions of critics who have reviewed recent productions of the Ensemble and have visited the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm.¹

This thesis has made no attempt to evaluate Brecht's work nor to ascribe to him a place in world literature. Countless literary and dramatic critics have already made such attempts and the factors governing any judgement are, particularly in Brecht's case, too subjective to allow unbiased conclusions. Making reference, however, to the previously mentioned descriptions of the dramatic structure and stage technique, the thesis would conclude that the principle of alienation, as here examined in its historical development and linguistic application, constitutes a basic tenet of Brecht's writing.

¹Included in the appendix are several reviews of the recent Berliner Ensemble productions in London. They are taken from reputable newspapers and periodicals. They allow an interesting insight into current productions and supply evidence of the close relationship between Brecht's theory and his practice. In addition to the current reviews, some of the opinions of Kenneth Tynan are reprinted here as they appeared in the Penguin paperback, "Tynan on the Theatre".

APPENDIX

The concluding scene of Der Hofmeister reads:¹

Lise: O ja, ich bin herzlich wohl mit ihm zufrieden, Herr Schulmeister!

Läufer: Ich Unglücklicher!

Lise: Glauben Sie mir, lieber Herr Pate,--ich lass nicht ab von ihm.

Wenzeslaus: So--dass doch--Lise, du verstehst das Ding nicht--Lise, es lässt sich dir so nicht sagen, aber du kannst ihn nicht heiraten, das ist unmöglich.

Lise: Wie kanns unmöglich sein, Herr Pate. Sie haben mir immer gesagt, dass ich einmal einen geistlichen Herrn bekommen konnte.

Wenzeslaus: Aber dass dich der Kuckuck, er kann ja nicht--Gott verzeih mir meine Sunde, so lass dir doch sagen.

Läufer: Vielleicht fordert sie das nicht--Lise, ich kann bei dir nicht schlafen.

Lise: So kann Er doch wachen bei mir, wenn wir nur den Tag über beisammen sind und uns so anlachen, und uns einstweilen die Hände küssen--denn bei Gott! ich hab Ihn gern. Gott weiss es, ich hab Ihn gern.

Läufer: Sehn Sie, Herr Wenzeslaus! Sie verlangt nur Liebe von mir. Und ists denn notwendig zum Glück der Ehe, dass man tierische Triebe stillt?

Wenzeslaus: Ei was--seid fruchtbar und mehret euch, steht in Gottes Wort. Wo Eh ist, müssen auch Kinder sein.

Lise: Nein, Herr Pate, ich schwörs Ihm, in meinem Leben möcht ich keine Kinder haben. Der Pate hat Enten und Hühner genug, die ich alle Tage füttern muss: wenn ich noch Kinder obendrein füttern musste!

Läufer küsst sie: Göttliche Lise.

Wenzeslaus: reisst sie auseinander: Ei, was denn! Was denn? Vor meinen Augen?--So kriecht denn zusammen; meinerwegen, weil doch Heiraten besser ist als Brunst leiden.--Aber mit uns, Herr Mandel, ist es aus; alle grossen Hoffnungen, die ich mir von Ihm gemacht habe, von einem Vorbild unerhört!--Erwartungen, die mir sein Heldenmut einflosste--Gutiger Himmel! für mich ist Er wieder mal was Halbes!

¹cf. p.16 of the thesis.

Ab.

Läufer: Und ich bins gewiss, die Herren zu Insterburg werden mir, so wie ich vor ihnen stehe, eine gute Stell verschaffen, so dass ich mein Eheweib ernähren kann.¹

Compare this with a text used by the actors during rehearsals:

Lise: Lise trat hierauf mit einem Gughupf hervor und versicherte ihrem Paten, sie sei herzlich mit Herrn Mandel zufrieden.

Läufer: „Ich Unglücklicher!“ murmelte Läufer, jedoch ohne tiefere Erregung zu verraten, und wandte sich ab.

Lise: Sie aber sagte, ihr Herr Vormund solle ihr glauben, sie lasse einmal nicht ab von Läufer.

Wenzeslaus: Wenzeslaus versuchte, einigermaßen verlegen, seinem Mundel klarzumachen, sie verstehe das alles nicht, es liesse sich ihr nicht so sagen, aber sie könne ihn nicht heiraten, das sei unmöglich.

Lise: Lise fragte unschuldig, warum es unmöglich sein solle. Sie sah nicht ein, wie das unmöglich sein könne, wenn sie wolle oder wenn der Herr Mandel es wolle und ihr Herr Vormund es auch wolle. Ihr Vormund hätte ihr ja immer gesagt, dass sie einmal einen geistlichen Herrn bekommen könne.

Wenzeslaus: Der Kuckuck solle sie holen, rief Wenzeslaus, verzweifelt um eine fleckenlose Erklärung ringend, der Herr Mandel könne ja nicht.--Mit gerungenen Händen bat der Schulmeister Gott, er solle ihm seine Sunde verzeihen, und Lise, sie solle es sich doch sagen lassen.

Läufer: Läufer, der den Vorgängen aufmerksam gefolgt war, liess die Hoffnung erkennen, dass sie „das“ vielleicht gar nicht von ihm fordere. Dann stand er auf und sagt Lise, er könne nicht bei ihr schlafen.

Lise: So könne er doch wachen bei ihr, erwiderte Lise heiter. Es genüge ihr, fuhr sie fort, wenn sie nur bei Tage beisammen seien und sich anlachten und einstweilen die Hände kussten. Sie versicherte bei Gott, dass sie ihn gern habe. Gott wisse es, sie habe den Herrn Mandel gern.

¹Brecht: Versuche, pt. II, p. 54.

Läufer: Läufer bat Herrn Wenzeslaus eindringlich um Einsicht. Wie er sahe, verlange sie ja nur Liebe von ihm. Sei es denn notwendig zum Glück der Ehe, dass man tierische Triebe stille?

Wenzeslaus: Wenzeslaus protestierte empört. „Seid fruchtbar und mehret euch!“ stünde in Gottes Wort. Wo Ehe sei, erklärte er kategorisch, müssten auch Kinder sein.

Lise: Lise schwor ihrem Vormund, es sei nicht so. Sie wolle in ihrem Leben keine Kinder haben. Damit wäre ihr schlecht gedient, wenn sie noch Kinder dazu bekame. Der Herr Vormund habe Enten und Hühner genug, die sie alle Tage füttern müsse: wenn sie da noch Kinder obendrein füttern müsse!

Läufer: „Göttliche Lise“, rief Läufer, ging zu ihr und küsste sie.

Wenzeslaus: Der Schulmeister gab erschöpft nach. Seinetwegen könnten sie zusammenkriechen, weil doch Heiraten besser sei als Brunst leiden.--Aber zwischen Herrn Mandel und ihm, Wenzeslaus, sei es aus. Alle grossen Hoffnungen, die er sich von ihm als einem unerhorten pädagogischen Vorbild gemacht habe, seien zunichte geworden, fuhr er erbittert fort! Alle Erwartungen, die ihm Mandels Heldenmut eingeflösst habe, seien dahin. Für ihn, Wenzeslaus, sei Mandel „wieder mal was Halbes“.

Läufer: Läufer stand wieder auf und umarmte Lise. Die Herren zu Insterburg würden ihm nicht länger eine Stelle versagen, das sei er gewiss, sagte Läufer, indem er ein Stück Kuchen in den Mund schob; dann könne er sein Eheweib ernähren.¹

¹ibid, p. 71,72.

Dramatische Form des Theaters

handelnd

verwickelt den Zuschauer in eine
Bühnenaktion

verbraucht seine Aktivität

ermöglicht ihm Gefühle

Erlebnis

Der Zuschauer wird in etwas
hineinversetzt

Suggestion

Die Empfindungen werden konserviert

Der Zuschauer steht mitendrin,
mitemlebt

Der Mensch als bekannt vorausgesetzt

Der unveränderliche Mensch

Spannung auf den Ausgang

Eine Szene für die andere

Wachstum

Geschehen linear

evolutionäre Zwangsläufigkeit

Der Mensch als Fixum

Das Denken bestimmt das Sein

Gefühl

Epische Form des Theaters¹

erzählend

macht den Zuschauer zum Betrachter,
aber

weckt seine Aktivität

erzwingt von ihm Entscheidungen

Weltbild

er wird gegenübergesetzt

Argument

werden bis zu Erkenntnissen getrieben

Der Zuschauer steht gegenüber, studiert

Der Mensch ist Gegenstand der Unter-
suchungDer veränderliche und verändernde
Mensch

Spannung auf den Gang

Jede Szene für sich

Montage

in Kurven

Sprünge

Der Mensch als Prozess

Das gesellschaftliche Sein bestimmt
das DenkenRatio²¹cf. p. the thesis.²Brecht: Schriften zum Theater, p. 19,20.

TYNAN: Tynan on the Theatre p. 24Off.

When the house-lights went up at the end of The Caucasian Chalk Circle, the audience looked to me like a serried congress of tailor's dummies. I probably looked the same to them. By contrast with the blinding sincerity of the Berliner Ensemble, we all seemed unreal and stagey. Many of us must have felt cheated. Brecht's actors do not behave like Western actors; they neither bludgeon us with personality nor woo us with charm; they look shockingly like people - real potato-faced people such as one might meet in a bus-queue.

Let me instance the peasant wedding in The Caucasian Chalk Circle, a scene more brilliantly directed than any other in London. A tiny cell of a room, ten by ten, is cumulatively jammed with about two dozen neighbours and a sottish monk. The chances for broad farce are obvious, but they are all rejected. Reality is preferred, reality of a memorable and sculptural ruggedness. I defy anyone to forget Brecht's stage pictures. No steps or rostra encumber the platform; the dominant colours are browns and greys; and against a high, encircling, off-white backcloth we see nothing but solid, selected objects - the twin gates in The Caucasian Chalk Circle or Mother Courage's covered wagon. The beauty of Brechtian settings is not of the dazzling kind that begs for applause. It is the more durable beauty of use.

The same applies to the actors. They look capable and practical, accustomed to living in the open air. Angelica Hurwicz is a lumpy girl with a face as round as an apple. Our theatre would cast her, if at all, as a fat comic maid. Brecht makes her his heroine, the servant who saves the governor's child when its mother flees from a palace rebellion. London would have cast a gallant little waif, pinched and pathetic: Miss Hurwicz, an energetic young woman too busy for pathos, expresses petulance where we expect her to 'register' terror, and shrugs where other actresses would more likely weep. She strengthens the situation by ignoring its implications: it is by what it omits that we recognize hers as a great performance.

As Eric Bentley said, 'Brecht does not believe in an inner reality, a higher reality, or a deeper reality, but simply in reality.' It is something for which we have lost the taste: raised on a diet of gin and goulash, we call Brecht ingenuous when he gives us bread and wine. He wrote morality plays and directed them as such, and if we of the West End and Broadway find them as tiresome as religion, we are in a shrinking minority. There is a world elsewhere. 'I was bored to death,' said a bright Chelsea girl after Mother Courage. 'Bored to life' would have been apter.

The famous 'alienation effect' was originally intended to counterbalance the extravagant rhetoric of German classical acting: to a debauched emotionalism, Brecht opposed a rigorous chastity.

Mother Courage cries out for rich and rowdy performances. Brecht has staged it in a style light, swift, and ironic. In the central part Helene Weigel is never allowed to become a bawdy and flamboyant old darling: her performance is casual and ascetic: we are to observe but not to embrace her. Twice, and agonizingly, she moves us: elsewhere, even in Paul Dessau's magnificent songs, we must never sympathize with Mother Courage. She has battered on the Thirty Years' War, and must suffer for her complicity by losing her daughter and both her sons. But the clearest illustration of the 'A-effect' comes in the national anthem, which the Berliner Ensemble have so arranged that it provokes, instead of patriotic ardour, laughter. The melody is backed by a trumpet obbligato so feeble and pompous that it suggests a boy bugler on a rapidly sinking ship. The orchestration is a criticism of the lyrics, and a double flavour results, the ironic flavour which is 'A-effect'.

Irony crops up throughout Trumpets and Drums, Brecht's expansion of Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer, advanced by a hundred years so as to coincide with the American Revolution. This involves propaganda, but it is propaganda as blithe and irrefutable as the remark made by an American wit on first seeing the playing-fields of Eton: 'Here,' he cried, 'is where the battle of Yorktown was lost!' Farquhar's text has been surveyed by cool new eyes, against the larger vista of England at war, and there is evidence that the director (Benno Besson) does not find enforced recruitment particularly hilarious.

Captain Plume is the kind of role in which, formerly, John Clements was wont to cut a charming dash. Dieter Knaup plays him realistically, as a sallow and calculating seducer. The costumes look as if people and not puppets had worn them, and the settings, shiny Hogarthian etchings suspended on wires, are amusing without being 'amusing'. And to show that Brecht can throw his bonnet over the windmill, we have Wolf Kaiser as Captain Brazen, who does just that, entering every time with a new hat which he whips off and flings irretrievably over the nearest rooftop.

Is it mere decadence that makes us want more of this, more attack, more abandon? I think not. Brecht's rejection of false emotions sometimes means that the baby is poured out with the bath-water: the tight-wire of tension slackens so much that the actors fall off, and instead of single-mindedness, we have half-heartedness. Yet as a corrective he is indispensable. It is possible to enter the Palace Theatre wearing the familiar British smile of so-unsophisticated-my-dear-and-after-all-we've-rather-had-Expressionism (what do such people think Expressionism was?) and it is possible to leave with the same faint smile intact. It is possible: but not pleasant to contemplate.

(1956)

TYNAN: p. 251.

I arrived at the theatre this year during a rehearsal, and one that was loaded with nostalgia. The Threepenny Opera, Brecht's first decisive success, was being prepared for revival on the same stage that had seen its premiere thirty-one years earlier, with the same director in charge - Erich Engel, now looking gaunt and unwell, despite the jaunty cock-sureness of his beret. As I entered, somebody was singing 'Mack the Knife' with the tinny, nasal vibrato that one remembers from the old Telefunken records. Engel and two young assistants interrupted from time to time, talking with the easy, probing frankness that comes of no haste, no pressure, no need to worry about publicity, deadlines, or out-of-town reviews. I noticed that Mr. Peachum, a part usually given to a rubicund butterball, was being played by Norbert Christian, a slim soft-eyed actor in his thirties. Brecht, I reflected, would have liked that; he always detested physical type-casting. In Brecht's theatre it is what people do, not what they feel or how they look, that counts. Action takes precedence over emotion, fact over fantasy. 'Die Wahrheit ist konkret' ('Truth is concrete') was Brecht's favourite maxim; for him there could be no such thing as abstract truth. Somebody once asked him what the purpose of a good play ought to be. He answered by describing a photograph he had seen in a magazine, a double-page spread of Tokyo after the earthquake. Amid the devastation, one building remained upright. The caption consisted of two words: 'Steel Stood'. That, said Brecht, was the purpose of drama - to teach us how to survive.

The rehearsal continued, the patient denuding process that would ultimately achieve the naked simplicity and directness on which the Ensemble prides itself. To encourage the players to look at themselves objectively, a large mirror had been placed in the footlights, and throughout the session photographers were taking pictures of everything that happened, providing a visual record that would afterwards be used to point out to the actors just where, and how they had gone wrong.

TYNAN: p. 259ff.

After the Master's death many people in the company, as well as outside it, wondered whether it could survive without his fiery presence. An interim answer was supplied by the Ensemble's triumphant East Berlin presentation, in January 1957, of The Life of Galileo - a production begun by Brecht and finished by Engel. I saw it again this summer, and the play still seems to me, as it did at the first night, an incomparable theatrical statement of the social responsibilities of the intellectual. At the outset it looks as if we were in for a straight fight between religious obscurantism and scientific discovery. The only progressive art, says Galileo, is 'the art of doubt', a remark that echoes Brecht's own dictum: 'Scepticism moves mountains.' But before long we arrive at the author's real purpose, which is to condemn Galileo for cowardice. Intimidated by the threat of torture, cajoled by the promise of a cosseted life, he abjectly recants, and emerges from the Inquisition chamber to be shunned by his pupils, one of whom shouts at him, 'Unhappy is the land that lacks a hero!' Brecht goes on to show how one such concession brings a hundred in its train; within months Galileo is backing the Church in social and political, as well as scientific and theological, affairs. The final tableau epitomizes the argument: in the foreground a choir polyphonously hymns the power of science, while in the background Galileo wolfs a fat roast goose. The play contains two scenes that exemplify, as sharply as anything Brecht ever wrote, his ability to make an intellectual position visible and tangible. In the first of them a provincial ballad singer hails Galileo's challenge to Rome. As he does so, a riotous procession, reminiscent of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, streams across the stage. Some of the marchers are clad in obscene masks, and coax a jangling music out of saucepans and brass bedsteads; others toss a straw effigy of a cardinal in a blanket; one, a child, is attired as the earth, with water squirting from its eyes at the loss of its position at the centre of the universe; another clumps in horrendously on twenty-foot stilts, surmounted by a gigantic facsimile, acclaimed on all sides, of Galileo's head. The second scene that sticks in my mind is the one in which the liberal Cardinal Barberini, newly installed as Pope, turns against Galileo. At first, skinny in his underwear, waiting to be robbed, Barberini refuses to countenance the Inquisitor's demand that the scientist be brought to trial, but as the robing proceeds and he is draped, encased, and almost buried in the ceremonial vestments of his office, the Pope grows more and more receptive to the Inquisitor's plea, to which, at last, he consents. It is instructive, by the way, to contrast Brecht's attitude towards Galileo with Arthur Koestler's in The Sleepwalkers - bearing in mind, of course, that Mr. Koestler's Marxism was once as deeply ingrained as Brecht's. According to the Koestler version, Galileo's pride brought about a disastrous and unnecessary breach between science and religion. Brecht, on the other hand, accuses Galileo of not having had enough pride (or self-respect) to make a breach that was healthy and necessary. Koestler wants to reconcile the physical with the metaphysical; Brecht strives to keep them apart. But, whatever one thinks of the argument, it is impossible

to deny the unassertive loveliness of Caspar Neher's decor for The Life of Galileo - three towering panelled walls of darkly glowing copper, enclosing an area into which informatively beautiful objects, such as Roman bas-reliefs and silver models of the Aristotelian universe, are occasionally lowered. The production proved that the spheres of the Ensemble would continue to revolve without the animating zeal of their great mover. Brecht thus demonstrated, posthumously, the truth of his own apophthegm that no man is indispensable, or, if he is, he is up to no good.

The Ensemble today consists of sixty-two actors, plus a staff of administrators, office workers, stagehands, musicians, designers, dressmakers, scene builders, electricians, ushers, waitresses, and cooks that brings the grand total of employees up to nearly three hundred. Its yearly subsidy, paid by the Ministry of Culture, amounts to more than three million marks. Rehearsals, in this happy set-up, may go on for anything between two and six months; when I was there in June, the cast of The Threepenny Opera was already wearing full costume and make-up, although the opening was not scheduled until October. It sometimes worries Helene Weigel that in all its ten years of operation the Ensemble has presented no more than twenty-five plays. She need not disturb herself unduly, because the main reason for the company's low output is, quite simply, its fame. Its productions are being reverently filmed for the East Berlin archives, it is constantly being invited to foreign countries (Hungary and Rumania this summer, Scandinavia in the fall, England and China next year), and it spends a lot of time polishing and recasting its existing repertoire.

This summer I attended two productions I had not seen before. One was Die Mutter, Brecht's expansion of the Gorky novel about an illiterate Russian mother who begins by urging her son to abandon his revolutionary activities and ends up, after he has been shot, a convinced supporter of the cause. The play is outright agitprop, a mosaic of Marxist exhortations, and the last scene shows the whole cast singing in praise of Communism while a film projector fills the backcloth with newsreel shots of Lenin, Khrushchev, Mao Tse-tung, and even - fleetingly - Stalin. It all sounds crudely hysterical until one sees the stealth and subtlety of the performance. There are no exaggerated Czarist villains, no exuberantly heroic proletarians; everyone acts with a detached calm that, if anything, reinforces the message. Weigel plays the mother as a quiet but relentless nagger. ('I picked out the nagging and decided to use it all through,' she told me later. 'I wanted to show that nagging could be constructive as well as nasty.') Looking like Nefertiti lined by years of labour over a hot stove, she permits herself one moment of pure lyricism. Her son, who has escaped from Siberia, appears without warning at a house where his mother is employed as housekeeper. Entering from the kitchen, she sees him and instinctively registers chiding disapproval; then, uncontrollably, she flies to his arms, as weightlessly as Ulanova's Juliet flies to Romeo, letting both legs swing round the boy's waist as he catches her. Throughout the evening one feels Brecht's passion for objects that have been durably used - a sofa,

a soup tureen, a hand-operated printing press. Once, in a poem, he said that his wife chose her props with the same loving precision as that with which a poet chooses his words. Weigel's props, he declared, were selected

...for age, purpose, and beauty
 By the eyes of the knowing,
 The hands of the bread-baking, net-weaving,
 Soup-cooking comprehender
 Of reality.

After this, one of the company's oldest productions, I went to see the newest - The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, described in the programme as 'ein Gangster-Spektakel von Bertolt Brecht'. Written in 1941, it is a jagged, raucous parody of Hitler's rise to power, told in terms of Chicago in the twenties, composed mostly in blank verse, and including several malicious revampings of scenes from Shakespeare and Goethe. Hitler-Ui is a small-time thug who, taking advantage of a falling market, blackmails the mayor of the city (Hindenburg) into allowing him to organize a really prosperous protection racket. When the mayor dies, Ui succeeds him. His plans to take over the suburb of Cicero (Austria) are disputed by some of the mob; he slaughters the dissidents with as merry a lack of compunction as Hitler showed in disposing of Ernst Roehm and his friends on the Night of the Long Knives. In the final scene Ui is the boss, high on a rostrum spiky with microphones, through which he shrieks an oration that is cacophonously reproduced, at intervals of roughly half a second, by loudspeakers all over the theatre. The whole play is performed in a style that is somewhere between Erich von Stroheim and the Keystone Cops. The Roehm murders are staged like the St. Valentine's Day massacre; a truck drives into a garage, its headlights blazing straight at the audience, and silhouetted gunmen mow down the victims. The entire cast wears the sort of distorted make-up that one associates with puppets; the revolve whizzes around; and squalling Dixieland jazz interlards the scenes. Macabre farce on this level of inventiveness was something I had never struck before in any theatre. Its quality was condensed in the performance of Ekkehard Schall as Ui - one of the most transfixing human experiments I have ever seen on a stage, and a perfect image of Brechtian acting. Schall, who is under thirty, plays Ui with a ginger moustache, a ginger forelock, a trench coat, and a hat with the brim completely turned down. He invests the part with all the deadpan gymnastic agility of the young Chaplin: clambering on to the back of a hotel armchair and toppling abruptly out of sight; biting his knuckles, and almost his whole fist, when momentarily frustrated; indulging, when left alone with women, in displays of ghastly skittishness; and learning, from a hired ham actor, that the golden rule of public speaking is to preserve one's chastity by shielding - as Hitler always did - the lower part of one's belly. Yet Schall can change gears without warning, swerving from pure knockabout to sudden glooms of fearful intensity; from Chaplin, one might say, to Brando; for the virtue of Brechtian training, as of Brechtian thinking, is that it

teaches the infinite flexibility of mankind. The play itself is rowdy and Chaplinesque. What the production - and Schall, above all - has added to it is a fever, a venom, and a fury that make laughter freeze, like cold sweat, on one's lips.

In me are contending
Delight at the apple trees in blossom
And horror at the house-painter's speeches.
But only the second
Drives me to my desk.

Thus Brecht; and this production makes one glad that he was so driven. Its directors - Peter Palitzsch and Manfred Wekwerth - are both, like Schall, young men who were shaped by his tuition. The tradition, I would hazard, is safe.

"Brecht restored by Berliner Ensemble" The Times

[London: 10 August 1965] p. 9, col. 1 and 2

It is nearly 10 years since the Berliner Ensemble played in this country and during that time the Brecht debate has continued to bowl along without reaching any conclusion. One thing seems clear; he is not an actor-proof dramatist, and wrong performance can make his work seem like plagiarism or pure hoax. And so far we have rarely found the knack of playing Brecht in English.

The current return visit of the Ensemble is doubly welcome: partly to justify the legend of the 1956 season, and partly to re-establish Brecht's basic claim to attention. Arturo Ui is not a consistently satisfactory play, but in the Ensemble production there is no doubt at all that it works splendidly in the theatre, whether or not one knows German.

As one of those who do not, I am hesitant about raising objections which may be answered in the text (of the four productions in the season, only The Threepenny Opera is available in translation). But it does seem that Brecht, in his determination to explain the rise of Hitler in Marxist terms, has misrepresented history and failed to convey the evil of the subject.

The play (written in 1941) is set in the American never-never land of his early plays, and traces the growth of the Nazis in terms of gang warfare--Arturo Ui (Hitler) being a mob leader who comes to political power with the aid of a cartel of wholesale cauliflower merchants (standing in for the Prussian land-owners). Goebbels, Roehm, and Goering all have opposite numbers among his henchmen, and the senile Hindenburg appears as the mayor under the ignominious name of Dogsborough (Brecht's English names suggest a Shakespearian nightmare). With this company, the play works through equivalents of the Reichstag Fire and the Night of the Long Knives, also relying on parallels from Richard III in the murder of Roehm and the wooing of Austria.

The production (by Manfred Wekwerth and Peter Palitzsch) takes place in a circus tent behind a gaily illuminated proscenium--old tricks, but they can never have worked better than they do here in an atmosphere pungent with cordite and ruthlessly jovial music interspersed with gunfire. The acting style in the supporting parts is broadly grotesque--each figure a caricature drawn with a decisive line.

Roehm (Günter Naumann) is a hulking bully in plus-fours whose elongated mouth opens into a bonhomous grin whenever he is about to kill. The other conspirators also adopt mask-like make-up--the Gilbertian, Goering, and the dapper Oriental Goebbels: together they make a formidable team when it comes to intimidating court witnesses, and acts of arson (like one marvellously brazen scene where they dispatch a procession of jerry-cans through a public meeting in full view of the victim).

At the centre of this inhuman society is the all-too-fallible Arturo himself.

The part is played by Ekkerhard Schall and it is a great piece of comic acting. It works from two centres--fantasies of power and personal insignificance--which are continually colliding with one another. In the early stages of the play Arturo is simply a shabby figure twisting his hat in his hands; with coaching from an old Shakespearian (which incidentally acts as a lethal satire on the inflated style of acting which Brecht loathed) he acquires a rhetorical technique. But right to the end--where in a speech on future conquest he inadvertently rips his shirt out of his trousers--it is his puny body that remains his main enemy.

"Shakespeare remodelled by Brecht" The Times
 [London: 11 August 1965] p. 5, col. 1 and 2

This long-meditated production finally reached the stage last September, some 15 years after Brecht made his first notes on the play. No spectator can hope to disentangle his work on it from that of his colleagues, but one would like to believe that if he had lived to see the project through, his ironic and contradictory spirit would have saved it from the rigidly perverse treatment that disfigures the finished product.

The interpretation is certainly Brechtien's, and can be summed up in the phrase he applied to Arturo Ui as an attempt to "destroy the usual disastrous respect we feel for great murderers". Coriolanus, in other words, is not the defender of Rome but a vicious parasite who instigates private wars for his own glory which bring famine and death on his own people.

No doubt a good play could be written from this point of view; but Shakespeare, with his respect for individual magnitude (even that of murderers) and abiding suspicion of the mob, did not write it. To wrench the drama into a Marxist pattern, its hero is presented as a near-psychotic and the line of the action is diverted to show Rome being saved not by Volturnia's prayers but by a plebeian uprising (a disingenuous programme note suggests that this is what Shakespeare really meant).

But if one finally quits the theatre in a state of indignant bardolatry, it must also be said that the first half of the production is richly exciting: far more so than Guthrie's version at Nottingham although its homosexual interpretation made better sense. What the directors (Manfred Wekwerth and Joachim Tenschert) show is a society governed by a military caste that is closer to Prussia than to Rome. The patricians flaunt their wounds like duelling scars--marks of male initiation; and Ekkehard Schall's Coriolanus is an unforgettable embodiment of the bullet-headed Junker--a loud-mouthed golden boy, his lips set in a fixed sneer, and his cat-like walk never far from violence. And when the violence does erupt, it outclasses anything seen in the Royal Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses. The idiom is carefully ritualized. But what comes through--in Coriolanus' voluptuous duel with Aufidius, and in the mass assaults on Corioli with scaling ladders, and soldiers moving under shields like a single monstrous crab--is more barbarous and terrifying than any representation of naturalistic combat.

In the second half of the production the grey men of the people take over. The only opportunity the production offers for fresh character to develop is thrown away by Helene Weigel whose Volturnia is a remote, gentle-voiced figure who hardly seems connected with the action. Miss Weigel moves exquisitely and creates an atmosphere of warm family charm in the first scenes; one can appreciate the desire to play the part against stereotype, but the result seems foreign even to the Ensemble's view of Shakespeare.

"A Macheath excluding Violence" The Times
 [London: 12 August 1965] p. 5, col. 1

Of all Brecht's work The Threepenny Opera has come closest to establishing itself in the bourgeois theatre. The 37 years since its original production have dulled its social impact and nowadays lines like "What is the robbing of a bank compared with the founding of a bank?" seem like harmless proverbs. And for postwar British audiences the legend of the Weimar Republic, a fantasy realm exclusively peopled with satanic cabaret singers and booted prostitutes, possesses the same romantic appeal that the myth of Edwardian Soho had for Brecht.

This production in the Berliner Ensemble season is five years old and it certainly knocks some of the gloss off the legend and reestablishes the work's priorities. It compares drably with the slicked-up Blitzstein version that appeared at the Royal Court 10 years ago. Nor does it go out of its way to evoke the famed cabaret style of the 20s, and anyone expecting whiplash singing of the Lotte Lenja variety may be disappointed by the sweet almost Viennese quality of the voices.

What Erich Engel's production does do is to insist on the parallel between the criminal underworld and middleclass society. Macheath and Peachum both appear as respectable businessmen: Peachum soberly kitting out his beggar clients with Hogarthian rags guaranteed to melt the stoniest hearts; and Macheath--a little flashy, perhaps, in electric blue suit and white spats--running his gang in the manner of a serious-minded company director.

Much of the comedy, in fact, comes from the incongruity of seeing so respectable a figure dropping in for a chat with the Wapping whores; he seems much more in his element when he brushes Polly from his lap and dons a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles to go through the firm's books. The towering and lugubrious Wolf Kaiser plays the part with an elegant agility that completely excludes violence. Peter Kalisch's Peachum, in contrast, is a grizzled stiff-jointed paterfamilias.

The disappointment of the production--unexpected from this company--is in its ensemble playing. Visually there is no complaint against the dilapidated whores with death's head faces, and Peachum's masked beggars trudging in mutilated procession across the stage. But in scene after scene they fall respectfully into place behind the principals and fail to provide a living background.

It is a quiet, thoughtful production that may disappoint audiences who expect the brilliant pantomime effects of Arturo Ui. It is advisable to read the text first.

But even without preparation there is the sheer joy of Weill's music and the sweet-and-sour lyricism of Christine Gloger's Polly.

"Two Faces in Brecht's Utopia" The Times
 [London: 13 August 1965] p. 11, col. 1 and 2

This is Brecht's last completed play and the closest he ever came to a straightforward essay in socialist realism--a counter-work written in answer to Nordahl Grieg's The Defeat so as to celebrate the heroic two-month stand of the Paris Commune against the unholy alliance of Thiers and Bismarck.

The virtues of the Paris proletariat are extolled; citizens toast the Red Flag and die for it at the barricades; statesmen, bankers, and fat war profiteers come in for agit-prop caricature. And yet how far from socialist realism the play really is. The east German authorities banned the play in Brecht's lifetime, and it is not surprising.

If there is a central character it is Mme. Cabet, a seamstress who emerges as queen bee of the Montmartre resistance; but in the first scenes--as a supplier of cockades to recruiting offices--she is directly descended from the parasitic Mother Courage as one who makes a living from the war; the difference between her and the profiteer is simply one of degree.

The same discrepancy between human and ideological intention runs through the whole play. The Commune forces revolt in the name of justice and peace; they leave the Bank of France untouched and fail to answer violence with violence; and as a result they are wiped out. There are, thus, two contradictory ways of looking at the action; either as a portrait of a socialist Utopia, or as a grim demonstration of the wrong way to run a revolution. Brecht leaves the question open: this is not a defect in the play, but it certainly undermines it as a didactic work.

As it appears in this production (by Manfred Wekwerth and Joachim Tenschert), the play's main achievements are in reconstructing the fierce policy debates of the Commune's leaders, and in painting a convincing picture of a happy people. Paradise of any kind is a stumbling-block to all but the boldest imagination, but Brecht manages to charge the ensemble street scenes with a gaiety and human warmth that is worlds removed from the usual stuffy propriety of Communist virtue.

The drab little street with its grimy corner cafe is decked out with Chinese lanterns and talk goes on in the midst of dancing and eating, and jealous fights between the girls. This is not empty romanticism: it is rooted in life and appears in a different context where one of the rebel women tries to save a gun from falling into Government hands by throwing herself under its wheels--a climax that is cheerfully interrupted by Mme. Cabet, whereupon the soldiers go back to munching bread. This thread of detailed everyday realism runs throughout the production.

This is the most thoroughgoing ensemble production in the company's London repertoire (Schall and Weigel both taking tiny parts); it may not be to everyone's taste, but its final image--of men behind a wall holding up a banner inscribed "We're just like you"--invites something more generous than an iron curtain response.

RONALD BRYDEN: The NewStatesman

[London: 13 August 1965] p. 229

It would be nice to think that the Berliner Ensemble, having split the British theatre into armed camps with their first visit nine years ago, set brother against brother and Sunday against posh Sunday, might end the Brecht war with their second. On Monday night at the Old Vic, the antis seemed less vociferous than usual, subdued perhaps by reflection that, while they argued with such belligerent confidence, there'd been these three major Brecht works yet to be seen in Britain, let alone translated. Few of us there felt sure enough of our German to pass judgment on Arturo Ui as a play. Meanwhile the bookshops confronted us with John Willett's new translation of The Messingkauf Dialogues,* displaying the quotation: 'It's not the play but the performance that is the real purpose of all one's efforts.' And the performance was superb.

I've previously deplored the mutilations Brecht inflicted on his own work in preparing them for the Ensemble stage, and the Dialogues are crammed with ammunition for anyone who wants to argue that Brecht the dramatic theorist is a tiny, cranky figure who should never be allowed to get his hooks on the output of Brecht the playwright. All the same, the fact remains that a written play is but a sack which needs to be filled before it will stand up, and Arturo Ui is the first Brecht production we've seen since the Ensemble's last visit which came anywhere near full verticality. It's been stuffed to bursting with vitality, invention and sheer raucous theatricality. It's also got in the title role one of the finest comic performances, by Ekkerhard Schall, I ever hope to see.

You can argue against the political poster as an art-form until you've seen those magnificent Chinese hoardings urging the population to even greater leaps forward. Ui is their dramatic equivalent: a moderately banal political conceit coloured and drawn with such power you have to invoke Goya, Daumier and Grosz. Had Brecht set out to dramatise realistically Hitler's rise to power, he undoubtedly would have fallen short of his subject. By cartooning the dictator and his henchmen as petty Chicago mobsters he's able to keep them in ironic perspective while letting the terror of actual events flicker through his allegory. Ui burns down a Chicago warehouse; at a ludicrous trial, guilt is pinned on an unemployed mental defective. At a night ambush in a garage, he massacres his friend Roma and his followers with tommy-guns. Over the coffin of its murdered mayor, he woos and takes over the citizens of neighbouring Cicero. As each scene ends, projected legends force home the parallels - the Reichstag fire, Roehm's murder, the Anschluss. At the end, as Ui screams from a giant podium his intention to take over Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Los Angeles, New York, the identification is complete.

*Methuen. 16s.

It's played at breakneck farce speed within a framework of flashing circus lights and brassy march-music, with a wealth of straight-forward slapstick to keep the action moving and implication disciplined. But control of the image is centred in Schall's performance, at once a viciously funny parody of Hitler's own mannerisms and an independent comic creation. His Ui is a sallow, bottle-shouldered craven, pink-eyed and hang-dog as a mangy bull-terrier, nervously fingering his hat shapeless while his voice slides from a naive stammer, through inane giggles, to a paranoid shriek. He clowns with superb physical grace, tumbling rubberily backward when scared, rocketing himself over the back of an armchair with a bellow of his own voice. Almost, you suspect him of reading Miss Spurgeon on Macbeth: this is a tyrant so awkward in any social role that only the largest will cover his uneasiness. It remains to be seen whether the rest of this week's Ensemble showing can settle the Brecht argument once and for all, but one bagful's enough to demonstrate much of what's been missing from his English productions: to produce an equivalent of Schall's performance, you'd need an actor who combined the animal power of Finney with the comic elegance and timing of Alec McCowen.

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PENELOPE GILLIATT: The Observer

London: 15 August 1965

It has been an astounding week. The Berliner Ensemble at the National Theatre has held a largely non-German-speaking audience agog. This is the way Brecht wanted the theatre to be: skimming, speculative, beautiful, fun.

I realise that every received idea about him in England teaches the opposite. His plays are expected to be heavy because he was German, shut-minded because he was a Marxist, visually like wartime utility china because of his emphasis on use in design, and no fun at all. I can only say: Go to the Old Vic fast. The work of this stunning company has an energy and sense of play that hardly anyone but Joan Littlewood in England dreams of.

The week began with Brecht's Arturo Ui, and it was like watching a bunch of tumblers or men on a trampoline. Physically the actors are phenomenal. Even their moments of relaxation have a fierce life. The substance of the play is an acrobatic feat in itself: it is a farce about the rise of Nazism, mockingly mirrored in the career of an unimpressive American gangster, who blackmails a mayor called Dogsborough (Hindenburg) into allowing him to organise a protection racket and move in on a town that symbolises Austria.

The scenes are played and set inside a circus big-top, and the ringleaders are presented by a huckster. Goering is a cleft-chinned jokester in a white suit who collects the hats of his victims; after a murder he is inclined to open his jaws on a mirthless, cavernous howl. Like all the cast, he is brilliantly made up, with a cheesy green skin that makes his mouth look shrimp-pink. The betrayed Roehm, assassinated in a St. Valentine's Day massacre with car headlamps glaring straight at the audience, wears plusfours, black lipstick and a magenta scar. Goebbels (Hilmar Thate) looks like an Oriental monkey, with damson-stained lips and an Adam's apple that lurches at religious music.

The physical images of Thate's performance are distinct and unforgettable. In one scene, plotting with Hitler-Ui in a hotel room mined with treacheries, he sits on a very low stool at a very high table drumming excitedly at a blötter under his chin, and then races Goering for Hitler's handshake, bouncing along on his stool like a satanic toddler. In another he sings a song astride the barrier of the circle, leaning perilously over the stalls with one leg jabbed into the gilt like a grappling hook.

Ekkehard Schall's performance as Ui starts from a paradox that is pure Brecht. To define a man incapable of shame, it first records that he is bashful. Ui clearly longs to be an actor, but he is locked in a rictus of stage fright. Whenever he is near a window he goes to it instinctively, like a model-girl to a mirror, and prepares to harangue the street; but his gestures fall foul of one

another, the left arm ambushes the right, and his feet hang down from his abject macintosh like the feet of a dummy in a shooting gallery. When he is yelling he will suddenly gag, or change dynamic level uncontrollably, as he does in a deafening diatribe where the recurring word "faith" is each time spoken on a soft indrawn gulp. His neck is scored with two black lines of make-up, the tendons of tantrum, like a frantic pullet, and after a stint with an actor hired to teach him Shakespearean delivery, he acquires a Hitlerian clasp of the hands that one suddenly sees to be the primordial gesture of male modesty, as used by the naked Popeye.

The next night Herr Schall played Coriolanus just as anti-heroically. Usually the violence of the character has a moral inflexion: Coriolanus employs force as though he feels that any argument but a physical one is a hypocrisy, admiring the persuasion of a blade in a man's guts much as others respect candour. But in this production the violence has no moral content because it is the expression of a pre-moral and barbarous infant. The victor of Corioli is a plump narcissist who smiles as he kills and has a frightening capacity to cut out when people are urgently communicating with him. When Menenius pleads or Aufidius curses, he looks away and goes deaf.

There is a hint of erotic excitement in his feeling for Aufidius, but this passes, like his feeling for his mother. At the beginning he watches her, embracing his wife with his wrists turned fastidiously back because Volumnia is looking, but by the end "he no more remembers his mother than an eight-year-old horse."

In Brecht's version, Coriolanus changes his mind about marching on his native Rome not because of maternal pleas, but because she tells him that there is a sizable plebeian uprising to surmount, which is rather disingenuously supposed by Brecht to be enough to instil in him the realisation that heroic leaders are dispensable. I suppose, though, that Brecht's reason is no more insufficient than Shakespeare's. If either had to be accepted as the single motive for Coriolanus's switch of heart, without the density of other motives collected behind it, there wouldn't be much to choose for hollowness between them.

When Shakespeare is translated and his tongue has been cut out, the chief thing left to be defended is his complexity. Without German I can't be sure, but the dramatist in Brecht doesn't seem to have been guilty of giving in to the aphorist here. In fact it seems clear from the delicate expansions of business in Brecht's version that it was Shakespeare's characteristically complex series of mirrors--everyone seen through everyone else's eyes--that he most admired. One of the tensions in Brecht is the fact that, though he had the polemicist's instinct to frame simplifications, he also had the playwright's instinct to prove them infinitely disputable. It was like the tug between his cool theories and his violent feelings, and between his plain man's sympathies and his very august wit.

The production by Manfred Wekwerth and Joachim Tenschert is the best "Coriolanus" we are ever likely to see. Karl von Appen's designs are incomparable beautiful: all pale chalky greys and the browns of hide and wood, scorchingly lit, with one stupendous red leather cloak that is dropped and left when Coriolanus is banished. The iron-work is exquisite--slender, stately chairs, for instance, and an avenue of poles that two men decorate with the helmets of the vanquished, reaching up with staves like Victorian lamplighters. The Ensemble must have its own smithy.

And each Shakespearean costume looks as though it has belonged to that particular character for a long time--all but one. It was a very Brechtian trick to make Coriolanus play his discomfited electioneering scene in a toga a foot too long for him. The revolve shifts from one camera angle to another for the vote-catching scene in a way that is almost an image of Shakespeare's way of writing verse; and in the battle it does the same, swivelled round from a face that shows a chalky Roman arch to a face that is a log stockade like the one in Kurosawa's film of "Macbeth".

The battle scenes are spectacular: leathery soldiers fight with the ritualism of the Kabuki, with a choric bark coming over the speakers in which the human voice is massed and notated almost as Schoenberg did it in "Moses and Aaron." The movements are very stylised, curiously both ferocious and dispassionate; one of the generals suddenly leaps on to the crooked arm of the other and hangs there, like a basket. And what an ending for Coriolanus. His death is inglorious: he is hacked down in mid-chuckle by a ring of soldiers with their arms round each other like a rigger scrum.

The appeal of "Coriolanus" to Brecht must have been enormous. Shakespeare understood in it as much about the power vacuum as any dramatist after Marx, and he was characteristically absorbed by Brecht's own life-long fascination with historical impulses that mistake the tide. It is part of the structure of "Coriolanus" that each of the forces in it acts without being aware that it is also being acted upon, and this must have appealed to Brecht very powerfully.

It is also the narrative point of the Ensemble's production of his Days of the Commune, a warm chronicle of a group of Parisians in the winter of 1871, when the workers rose against Thier and his ally Bismark, hung out briefly in the cold, nourished only by their historic excitement, and collapsed largely because they still insensibly obeyed the laws of the society they opposed. "We have resolved in future to fear / Bad life more than death": the revolutionary song, set by Hans Eisler, has Brecht's blackest voice. Unlike most of us, he had the courage to find nothing better than anything. The acting is the best Stanislavskian acting west of the Moscow Arts: so much for the crass myth that the Berliner Ensemble has a rigid style.

HAROLD HOBSON: The Sunday Times (Review)

[London: 15 August 1965] p. 31, col. 1,2,3

Of the four productions which the Berliner Ensemble is presenting at the National Theatre, only one--The Threepenny Opera--can be said with any plausibility to have been in existence at the time of the Company's previous visit to London a decade ago. The Ensemble is thus not merely a creation: it is still creative. Brecht himself discussed Coriolanus and The Days of the Commune, but The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui seems to be, in its direction by Manfred Wekwerth and Peter Palitzsch (two of Brecht's most faithful disciples), more or less independent of the Master. These productions therefore cannot claim to have received Brecht's formal imprimatur. What they can claim is that they reveal Brecht as a dramatist who, apart from the productions of the Berliner Ensemble, has never been seen in this country. We have been given Infant Brecht; the Berliner Ensemble is Brecht for grown-ups.

The public has this week instantly recognised the superiority of these four productions to anything that has been offered us of Brecht in English. The reasons for this superiority seem twofold. The first is that the Berliner Ensemble plays in German; it speaks the actual words that Brecht wrote. One does not need to know German in order to be painfully aware that the English translations of his work which have been presented in London simply will not do. At their best they are flat, halting and childish; and at their worst they aim at a sham forcefulness which they embarrassingly attain.

But more important still is the production. The zest and precision of the Berlin company are remarkable. The sleazy dance of Mack the Knife with Jenny the whore in "The Threepenny Opera" (Wolf Kaiser and Felicitas Ritsch) is as accurate in its sliding slowness as the acrobatics of Ekkehard Schall when, in "Arturo Ui," the ridiculous Hitler rehearses a speech on a sofa that will not stay still. But this life and this exactness are not the essence of the matter; the point is that Mr. Wekwerth and Mr. Palitzsch direct them to the right uses.

English directors seem to misunderstand Brecht. Because he is a progressive writer, they assume that the reactionary characters in his plays must be absurd. They make them absurd, and stop at that. They create no sense of power or of conflict. Behind the joke the threat is missing.

In the Berliner Ensemble's "Arturo Ui," the joke is huge. The Charlie Chaplin figure presented by Mr. Schall: the bowler hat which his clumsy foot kicks away from him when he tries to pick it up: the Hitler salute which he invents by accident when imitating a ranting provincial actor reciting "Friends, Romans, countrymen": these things are very funny. But around and impregnating the hugeness of the joke is the reality of the menace. This is the imminent sense of the society

which gives to the buffoon Ui his terrible power. All the things that make Ui formidable are outside him: but in this production they are most certainly there. They leap out in the angry, mocking explosions of Hans-Dieter Hosalla's music, or in the shout of the newspaper seller, or in the shot that kills Roma whilst Ui is waving his arm at him in a gesture of imbecile good-fellowship. The statement that Ui is a clown is made by Mr. Schall's superb performance. The other and complementary statement--that the clown is lethal--is left to be made by the production. Most sensationally does it discharge its function.

There is the same feeling of a power not ourselves which makes for wickedness in the most brilliant scenes in "Coriolanus." These are the battle sequences devised by Ruth Gerghaus. The scaling ladders placed against the fortress walls of Corioli, the climbing and falling soldiers are extremely exciting; but what is unique is the single combat between Coriolanus (Mr. Schall again: young, aggressive, astonishingly transformed from the cringing Ui) and his enemy Tullus Aufidius. Once more the music (by Paul Dessau this time) is of vital importance; its snarling enunciation of the name Aufidius is terrifying. Ekkehard Schall and Hilmar Thate prowl round the edges of the stage as if in a dream: warily watching each other as they tread out their all-powerful and luxurious ritual.

Except in these scenes "Coriolanus" is less satisfactory than the wholly admirable "Arturo Ui." Brecht makes Coriolanus abandon the attack on Rome simply because the Roman people decide to resist him. It might be better for the world if armies gave up fighting when they found that other armies were ready to oppose them. But there is absolutely nothing in Coriolanus that suggests he had so much common sense. This feeble ending to the play must be ascribed to the optimism that was a strong feature of Brecht's dramatic outlook, an optimism which in this season's programme fails only in "The Last Days of the Commune." There is much that is heroic here, and the burning of the city is a magnificent climax. Mr. Thate's singing and Mr. Schall's declamation stir the blood: but the finish is without hope.

For entertainment (a quality to which Brecht attached increasing importance) I suppose that "The Threepenny Opera" is just a little in front of the hilarious and alarming "Arturo Ui." Kurt Weill's rasping, cynical, fairground music remains a powerful asset; it is excellently sung by Miss Ritsch, Christine Gloger, Annemone Haase, and the large and exceptionally good-humoured and elegant Mr. Kaiser. Here again one gets that sense of the enveloping that potent world that governs individual fate. This time it is a negative power: to be seen in the inert, lifeless attitude of the whores in the brothel and in the hideous inactivity in the procession of crippled beggars. In "Arturo Ui" the social organisation is active, here permissive: equally determinant in both.

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