If the later Brecht has suffered from the controversy provoked by his critical pronouncements on epic theater, so that there is no dearth of chatter about his failure to make practice conform to theory, the early Brecht has in a way been just as unfortunate. For the Communists, the early Brecht, no matter how talented, must remain untutored on the issues that count, or on the single issue that counts, namely, the dialectics of the class struggle; Brecht himself would look back on his first works as ideologically faulty. But for non-Communists as well, the early Brecht has proved uncongenial, has, in fact, been taken more than once for a superficial nihilist who is always singing the same tune, and a most unoriginal tune at that. Frequently the latter view goes hand in hand with the idea that Brecht developed his theories to rationalize serious artistic shortcomings.

Whatever the merits of these depreciations, the early Brecht is more easily disparaged than defined with precision. Thus, his first play, *Baal*, is to an extent expressionistic, but one would certainly hesitate to leave it at that; what other play so described was written as a specific protest against the superficiality of an unmistakably expressionist work? It is significant that the composition of *Baal* was prompted by the desire to debunk, by that same passion for getting down to fundamentals which would inspire so much of Brecht’s later work. And it is significant, also, that the writer whose influence Brecht took it upon himself to counteract won fame and fortune under the same Reich that turned Brecht into a refugee.

Hanns Johst’s *The Lonely One* chronicles some crises in the life of Christian Dietrich Grabbe and suggests, at first glance, a tough-minded dramatic biography of that brilliant figure. But though the play contains some acidulous observations about the inability of Philistines to understand why every genius does not enjoy as full and rich a life as Goethe did, it sheds no light on any of the complexities implied by the artist’s isolated position in a bourgeois society. In fact, one realizes soon enough that Johst is utterly incapable of saying anything new on this subject, if only because he himself is far more a product of that society than he would like to admit. A writer who inserted into another of his plays a remark on the offensiveness of *Kultur* which was reputedly composed by Hermann Goering, Johst lays bare what is amiss with his own sensibility by the sticky manner in which *The Lonely One* concludes—it is portentously noted
that Grabbe’s remains are those of a German poet. The curtain falls to chords from Beethoven.

Brecht also gives us his major character in an artist at odds with his milieu, one who, in typically expressionistic fashion, conveys his creator’s strongest feelings. But Baal has as little in common with The Lonely One as with most of the strident theater connected with expressionism. Brecht’s hero is not a declamer of the type so commonplace in the dramas of writers like Kaiser and Hasenclever; he is an asocial cynic whom one could never imagine vocalizing moral outrage. Through him Brecht reveals an antipathy to middle-class attitudes which German drama had not sounded since the emergence of poetic nihilism in the early nineteenth century. Brecht suggests his kinship with that tradition when he asserts that the aim of life is to eat, drink, fornicate, and excrete; he is in that tradition also when he employs as spokesmen for his own views those subbourgeois types for whom society has least use. Philosophizing drifters made themselves felt in Büchner’s drama and they dominate what is perhaps the most brazenly nihilistic scene of Baal. The God of Nothingness has finally been enthroned, and he is exalted by worshipers who cannot wait to be transformed into corpses, to enjoy the redemption of being forever insensible like stone. Can it be anything but paradise when one has ceased to care that all of nature is caught up in an unrelenting process of decomposition. The dead are in no need of weather reports; they even sleep through hurricanes. Brecht reinforces the depressing effect of such perceptions with appropriately crude behavior. One wretch reaches out for some erotic satisfaction and is informed by the object of his desire that his mouth smells foul, whereupon he retorts that syphilitics cannot be complainers and puts her on his lap. The charnel-house atmosphere intensifies until even Baal, who is far from squeamish, finds this celebration of the death wish intolerable, describing it as an orgy of putrefaction in which worms are eulogizing worms. In Baal such imagery is matter of course; here God is extolled in blatantly scatological terms and the Bible used as source for obscene metaphor. Baal, like Grabbe’s first play, Duke Theodore of Gothland, exemplifies perfectly the current psychoanalytic theory on the deeper motivations of nihilism.

Baal is composed of twenty-one scenes that appear to move in no particular direction and generate little suspenseful plot. It is as if Brecht had made up his mind to stretch the principle of episodic reinforcement as far as possible—short of a wholly deliquescent lyri-
cism—so that he was able to transfer appreciable segments of poetry from his first play to his first collection of poetry without any need to establish context. One is far less conscious of what is happening and who it is happening to in Baal than of a certain haunting quality, but at the same time Brecht has already made an effort to keep his poetry from becoming nothing more than powerfully evocative. Almost every mood is made to clash with its antitype, and before long one expects passionate moments to usher in cynical recognitions. The fact that ecstasy should introduce disgust is only natural for the protagonist of Baal, who finds it as onerous to maintain a specific state of mind as he finds it easy to demolish a human relationship. His erotic life could well be characterized as manic-depressive, allowing him when properly inspired to rhapsodize on love in the following fashion:

And love is like letting your hand bathe in pond water, the seaweed settling between your fingers; like the affliction which makes a tree moan in song while mounted by the wild wind; like drowning oneself in sucked-up wine on a hot day, and her body goes through you like cool wine, drenching every fold of your skin; her joints are smooth like wind-swept plants, and the force of your thrust meets no resistance, and her body turns and turns upon you like cool gravel.

But this is only a temporary emotion. A few moments earlier, Baal had been cold as ice on the same subject, explaining to a young man named Johannes, who is as innocent as Baal is not, that after one has slept with a woman, she may become "a heap of flesh without a face." Pregnancy is an animalistic horror: "And they give birth with monstrous screams, as if being delivered of a new cosmos; but produce only a small fruit. In anguish they spit out what they once absorbed lustfully." This is not mere rhetoric: Baal's powerful aggressions come out nowhere so conspicuously as in his relationship with the opposite sex. Johanna Reiher, Johannes' girl friend, turns out to be one of his victims. After intercourse she asks Baal if he still loves her. Baal's answer: "I am completely fed up." His brutish streak impels him to rape one helpless victim, murder another, and invite two women to bed at the same time. He floats through life in a narcissistic stupor, bothered only faintly by the corpses that litter his voyage, subservient always to the command of his latest impulse. An

1 Brecht, Siücke, I (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961), 34.
outrageous personification of all that the rest of humanity consigns to fantasy, he nonetheless provokes something more than simple revulsion. A measure of our respect goes out to him, if only because he does no obeisance to that world of engrafted social hypocrisies by whose standards he cannot be too strongly condemned. He may be more destructive than his fellow man, but his fellow man is such a small-minded self-deceiver and fear-ridden hypocrite that Baal’s unabashed instinctualism has about it something refreshing. Like his mythological namesake, he is ravenous for life of every form, has no compunctions about constantly refilling his cup at the expense of others, finds it perfectly natural to identify himself in cold subhuman terms: “My soul, brother, is the moaning of cornfields rolling in the wind and the sparkle in the eyes of two insects anxious to gobble each other up.” In an arena of lethal competition Christian sentiment will not help, and Baal says so with every gesture. For him the world abounds in urine, mud, vomit, dung, and bile; why not enjoy the stench?

“That was circus! The beast must be lured out! In the sun with the beasts!” We are deliberately reminded by Brecht that if he shared Büchner’s and Grabbe’s Weltanschauung, his sensibility was equally indebted, if not more so, to Wedekind. Circus is a perfect metaphor for the human condition and that condition is best summed up in the sphere of sexuality. For all the differences between them, Brecht’s Baal and Wedekind’s Lulu are cut from the same cloth, personifying concentrations of primeval drive which modern society by its nature cannot allow itself to accommodate. Carrying this parallel further, one notices that though Wedekind attributed to Lulu an authenticity shared by none of her companions, he made no effort to glamorize the seamier aspects of a life dedicated to the morality of the senses; his ambivalence to that morality proved a rich source of aesthetic tension. Brecht, as well, cannot be accused of letting id worship blind him to what is cancerous about the sensualistic existence. Baal, like the Lulu plays, is vitalized by the very force that is tragically dissipated before our eyes.

If Baal recalls Lulu by virtue of his commitment to instinct, he recalls Woyzeck by his outsider’s position in a bourgeois society. From the very start of Brecht’s play it is as obvious as from the start of Büchner’s that the protagonist interacts with that society on the barest functional level. Baal’s curt responses to the blandishments of those who would extend him cash for the rights to his poetry parallel
Woyzeck’s mechanical responses to the Captain philosophizing in the barber’s chair. Both characters prove unresponsive in the company of those wishing to converse with them on a level that takes for granted a mutuality of middle-class interests, though Baal’s attitude in his respect implies far more defiance than that of the harried soldier-barber-guinea pig. Put another way, both characters live principally in the hothouse of their own emotional systems, which strike more stable citizens as nothing less than very weird indeed. Eventually their psychic intensities lead them to irrevocable breaks with the society that has not begun to comprehend them, but judges them quickly for crimes that are quite similar—both slash their lovers to death. In Baal’s case, the victim is a member of his own sex, and in this connection it might be noted that in three of Brecht’s early works a homosexual relationship dominates the action and ends in violence.

Büchner’s concern that, above all, drama be alive led him to evolve a prose containing linguistic elements for which neoclassical drama had no place. This prose was as evocative as it was down to earth; it was plastic enough to take in complex subjective experience as well as states of mind expressible in the most vulgar epithets; it availed itself of imagery that was often shockingly concrete and direct, and at times salaciously outspoken. This prose, for all its lowness, was charged with poetic force; it could be true to the idiom of the gutter without doing violence to the sensibilities of the poet. Exactly the same can be said for Brecht’s prose; it too encompasses the lyrical and the scurrilous, blatantly coarse vulgarisms and exquisitely delicate impressions, the mean and the beautiful. In Brecht’s world, as in Büchner’s, corpses that “stink” rot under skies that are strangely beautiful. Eric Bentley’s comment that Baal revolves around a “state of being” sums up in a phrase that area of style and content which links Brecht’s play and Woyzeck most closely. Almost any scene selected at random from either play would illustrate this. Brecht, like Büchner, conveys misery, joy, waste, and isolation, life purposelessly unwinding in spasmodic fits of pleasure and pain, aggression and passivity alternating as impersonally as the creative and degenerative cycles of nature. The vision of life in Baal as well as Woyzeck derives from the intense pressure of personal feeling against the ceaseless continuities of a world in which neither man nor God is merciful. In a manner of speaking, Baal is a sadistic inversion of Woyzeck, relishing the very malevolence built into the nature of things that keeps Woyzeck on the rack.
Brecht’s technique of synopsizing by song what may not otherwise achieve full clarity of definition commences with his first play. These lyrical interspersions hardly strike one as choral intermissions to relax by; they reinforce what is scandalous in the text by being every bit as scandalous; their deliberately offensive content is served up in a style of spirited mockery that would later prove irresistible to theatergoers who could not care less about Brecht’s deeper social motivations. As early as this it is clear that the most positive thing about Brecht’s way of looking at life is the vitality that shines through his despair. The opening ballad takes full cognizance of the truth that the world is steeped in death, but this hardly stops Baal, who is wily enough to feed on the vultures that mistake him for carrion. Brecht celebrates the magnificence of a life force which thrives in the very shadow of Thanatos. Another song glorifies the one place where man’s spiritual and physical needs can be accorded proper importance—the toilet. But not all of Baal’s songs are designed for raffish effect: “Death in the Forest” describes the agonies of someone so afraid to die he disgusts his closest friends; it will make no one laugh.

The fact that Brecht’s first play was, for all its departures from conventional realism, a more truthful look at life than the run of expressionist drama, that it struck a note of directness and irony which separated it immediately from prevailing stylistic practice, is certainly germane to a study of its literary antecedents, if only because Brecht repeats a significant cultural pattern that goes back to Lenz’s theatrical innovations in the late eighteenth century. Every writer of the Lenz-Brecht tradition is in protest against his contemporaries’ approach to dramatic art; none can ally himself with an established movement except in minor details. Lenz’s two major plays may embody certain social emphases thanks to the example of the French bourgeois play and may share certain stylistic traits with Sturm und Drang episodic theater, but his work is, for its time, sui generis. Similarly, Grabbe and Büchner are not without connections to the German romantics, but they can be grouped with writers like Tieck and Brentano only in very broad cultural terms. How these episodic realists felt about the inadequacies of romanticism is probably very close to the way Wedekind felt about the superficialities of naturalism. As for Kraus, he saw no possibility at all of European theater’s accommodating the kind of raw truths with which he stuffed The Last Days of Mankind. Similarly, Brecht’s Baal may have been a Gegenstück against a particular play, but it was even more directed against the sickly
evasions he felt to be characteristic of almost all that went by the name of modern theater. He was as ill-disposed to photographic realism as he was to the lack of concreteness typical of most expressionist drama.

He was far more responsive to the kind of realism that blended precise observation of actualities with a variety of lyrical and satiric techniques. This is obvious enough on the basis of comparative literary analysis, but even the casual reader could pick it up from Brecht's critical pieces, which leave little doubt as to the dramatists he respected. Thus, his view of German classical theater is conventional enough when it includes Goethe, less so when it includes only the young Schiller, and much less so when it includes also Lenz and Büchner. The latter's Woyzeck he described in eulogistic terms, and Brecht rarely eulogized. It was a performance of Woyzeck that proved decisive also for Brecht, the theoretician, provoking him to reformulate his ideas on the most effective kind of theatrical presentation and acting style. While his admiration for Büchner has become a commonly noted fact, his relationship to Grabbe receives cursory mention at the most; one hopes that the situation will change as it becomes more widely known that Grabbe in many ways anticipated Büchner. At any rate, it deserves notice that in 1922 Brecht undertook as a project for Reinhardt a new version of Grabbe's Hannibal. He never finished it. But it makes an impression that Brecht worked on the one Grabbe play that can truly be said to revolve around a Brechtian motif, concerned as Hannibal is with a society so immersed in the pursuit of money that it winds up utterly destroyed. As for Wedekind and Kraus,* Brecht never concealed his admiration for the former as a man and for the latter as a master chronicler of World War I. Much of Brecht's Fear and Misery of the Third Reich would be modeled on Kraus's epic play.

One need go no further than Baal to find out how Brecht felt about the driving forces of bourgeois life. The businessman Mech, anxious to obtain the rights to Baal's poetry, is presented as a smug bargainer well versed in the art of manipulation, and he reveals with a phrase that he conceives of those who cross his path as animals to be pushed aside. But by and large, Brecht's assault on middle-class values is made in his first play in generalized poetic terms, as he concentrates on giving eloquent expression to those unconventional

* It recently became known that Kraus contributed a few lines to The Threepenny Opera.
states of mind which the Bürger identifies with eccentricity, if not sheer madness. Drums in the Night (1919), Brecht’s second play, is a far more specific indictment, a step toward the Brecht who would direct most of his attention to the subject of economic injustice. It is a play that did much for Brecht’s reputation among the intelligentsia of the Weimar Republic and won him a major literary prize. The protagonist of the play is an ex-soldier named Kragler who resists every temptation to actively fight a society for which he has very little use and which has even less use for him. Kragler will not move a muscle for any cause promising a better tomorrow because World War I has taught him that all idealistic slogans are false advertisements. Things being what they are, it makes more sense to join the general pursuit of money and comfort than the quest for a new society. Those who enter upon the latter course can expect to have their flesh rot in some gutter.

The embittered returnee is asked what he did in the war. He replies that he lay in filth and stank, and he wonders what his questioner was doing while he lay in filth and stank. He soon realizes he could as well talk to himself; he remains in the commercial world of postwar Germany the same anonymous quantity he was for so long on a remote, corpse-littered field. The gun-carriage manufacturer, Balicke, comes right to the point: “This is no opera. This is Realpolitik. There’s not enough of that in Germany. It is really quite simple. Have you the means to support a wife? Or have you webs between your fingers?” And Frau Balicke can lecture Kragler as Woyzeck was lectured by his self-appointed counselors of morality: “Herr Kragler! Our Kaiser has said: learn to suffer without complaining!” When Brecht is not focusing on such blatant hypocrisies, he depicts the social upheaval of the Spartakus Revolt through the jerky dialogue of bystanders who remain imprisoned in the sphere of their own preoccupations. All of this to reinforce the logic of noninvolvement, to substantiate the violent rejection of soft thinking that prompted Brecht to place placards among the audience reminding them of their narcissistic romanticism, their desire to use theater for purely escapist purposes.²

²Brecht’s attempts in Drums in the Night to reinforce the significance of content by stage techniques which negate the illusion of theatrical performance recall to us the fact that he was greatly indebted to the twin movements of Dadaism and the “Tribunal” theater of Erwin Piscator. The Dadaists relished theater in which every opportunity to nullify illusionistic mood was heartily exploited, though their intentions were by and large to thumb their
Those who wish to demonstrate that the early Brecht does not really change from play to play, point to the fact that Kragler conforms to the type of protagonist who dominates Baal and has the last word of In the Swamp. That is to say, Kragler is an asocial cynic who trusts his instincts far more than the appeal to any outside authority; in preferring a warm bed to a revolutionary battlefield, he adds another link to a consistent chain of nihilism to be broken by Brecht only upon his conversion to Communist doctrine. But to view Drums in the Night this way is to overlook that while it does end on a note of withdrawal, it conveys a more complex attitude all the way through. Brecht is not in this play the nihilist who communicates such an intensely subjective outlook that the final impression is of some strange, private world into which reality intrudes by accident. He is extremely conscious of the texture of postwar German life, especially of the degree to which that texture is reducible to economic competition; and he is conscious of the implications which that competition holds for any sort of individualistic philosophy. When Kragler departs from the scene, he does so in a manner which leaves the audience pondering not the resignation to a rotten world of another disillusioned idealist, but the grossly inequitable nature of that world—and the possibility of doing anything about it. Paradoxically, the later Brecht would want to suggest with his work that such a world could be changed, but he suggested all too often the very opposite. Drums in the Night says explicitly that the world is not worth lifting a finger for, but it communicates nonetheless an attitude of deep involvement. The quality of the cynicism is as ferocious as it is because it conceals a simple humanitarianism which Brecht exposes only for moments. One such moment is a waiter's explanation of why he lets himself get involved in the troubles of people like Kragler: "One can't be petty when a man needs help." The impulse to be good, such an intrinsic motive of the later Brecht's work, is already present; and

noses at the dictates of tradition and convention. Piscator, on the other hand, after a brief period of Dadaistic allegiance, went on to direct and stage dramas in which political consciousness was wedded to highly documentary modes of production. Though Brecht, the poet, owed little to Piscator, Brecht, the theatrical innovator, owed a great deal to him. A recent attempt on Piscator's part to demolish the very common notion that Brecht deserves exclusive identification with the label "epic theater" was made in his introduction to Rolf Hochhuth's Der Stellvertreter (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1963), pp. 9–10.
if we are to call the Brecht of *Drums in the Night* a nihilistic writer, it will have to be with the same reservations we attach to such a characterization of Büchner.

Alienation is a pervasive mood in the early Brecht's work, whether it is self-imposed by autistic perception (*Baal*) or imposed from without by an impossibly unfair society (*Kragler*). But alienation is nowhere stressed so thematically as in the one Brecht play that is loaded with obscurities to the point where it invites cryptography rather than criticism. *In the Swamp of the Cities* (1924) consists of eleven episodes that are even more loosely woven together than many a far less impressive expressionist play; and arbitrariness of scenic continuity is matched by incomprehensibility of action. More than ever, one feels privy to the elaborations of some bizarre Brecht fantasy, and, as usual, the fantasy bespeaks volcanic inner conflict. The homosexual element so recurrent in Brecht's early work is present here as well, though one is far less conscious of it because of Brecht's attempt to give everything a deeper metaphorical significance. For this reason all clarifications of the play come down to exercises of selective interpretation unless one is content with giving that bare outline about which there can be no argument.

Such an outline must note that an exotic Malayan named Shlink literally immolates himself for the sake of breaking down those barriers which stand in the way of human contact. Not only does he fail to make any dent in those barriers; he winds up a senseless corpse for his efforts; the man he hoped to reach, called Garga, steps blithely across Shlink's remains and finds the memory of those events which spelled disaster for the Malayan quite pleasant. And the implication of the play is that he should; for if the world subsists on conflict rather than contact, then the world belongs to winners only. One either survives or falls by the wayside. And that is all there is to the art of living.

The body of the play serves as prelude to this hard realization. Again and again, Shlink offers up pieces of his ego in the hope that he can obtain some human warmth in return. And again and again, he finds himself more deeply imprisoned within his own self. This aspect of *In the Swamp* is given poetic intensity of a kind that is bound to recall Büchner's lamentations on man's inability to achieve genuine contact with anything outside of his own instinctual promptings. In *Danton's Death* it was asserted that humans are equipped with skins so thick that when hands reach out for reassurance, they
meet only cold leather—"we are very lonely." Brecht's terminology is not much different when he has Shlink say that skin thickens far more impermeably than leather. Too fragile for survival if they hold on to their sensitivities, men shield themselves with integuments through which no warmth can flow, so that if a ship were stuffed with human bodies, it would freeze from impacted loneliness.

Brecht strove to characterize *In the Swamp* as a play so laden with the blows of direct conflict that it could be enjoyed simply for the techniques employed in delivering those blows. But rather than quintessential struggle, Brecht gives us quintessential absence of struggle, or, to extend his metaphor, shadowboxing; for Shlink and Garga both come to realize that their opponent is imaginary. Struggle in the modern world is simply a writhing of the self within the self. Again Büchner comes to mind, for one of the sad regrets of *Danton's Death* is that those who are about to die cannot even go down fighting, cannot enjoy the release of throwing all their primitive equipment of teeth and nails into a fierce final encounter; what man calls conflict is a melodramatized version of something far more deadly—the monotonous elaboration of a monstrous mechanism built into the very nature of things.

*In the Swamp* strikes many as the most nihilistic play Brecht wrote, for in no other work was he so intent upon exhibiting life as a purely animalistic experience without a shred of redeeming value. Even *Baal* seems positive in comparison. Life might be hellish, but if lived to the hilt, it is worth living. *In the Swamp* offers no such consolations. Here sex is an exquisite form of humiliation and perversion, essentially an exercise in *Realpolitik* applied to the most intimate area of human relationship; such sex invariably ends in impotence and prostitution. As for the possibility of transcending this cesspool by strength of character, if nothing else, that is exactly what Garga attempts, and he winds up doing the dirtiest work of the play. Our first glimpse of him shows a man who cannot be bought; our last, a man content to sell out his own family. One could go on and on accumulating nihilistic testimony from *In the Swamp*, so obsessively does Brecht recapitulate his basic idea that life has meaning only for those taken in by false idealisms, those Gargas who are fortunate enough never to meet their Shlink. Our first reaction is that this is the vision of an arrant nihilist, but, as usual, Brecht defies simple identification; above all, he impresses us here as being on the way to something else because he confronts so pitilessly what he already
is. Having made up his mind to remove the last trace of romantic emotion from the kind of nihilism displayed in *Baal*, he writes a play in which there are no idealistic escape routes whatever. Even wild nature cannot provide succor: the trees are draped with dung. *In the Swamp* reveals Brecht anxious to strip nihilism down to its pernicious essence, even if he was not then able to embrace any other attitude.

*LIFE OF EDWARD THE SECOND OF ENGLAND* (1924) was an adaptation of Marlowe's *Edward II* that Brecht wrote with Lion Feuchtwanger. The modern version is, as has been pointed out, coarser and more concise, much more sharply focused on emotional essentials. Whereas Marlowe's play is viewed as one in which he departed from the out-and-out nihilism of *Tambourlaine*, the German adaptation is as nihilistic on the plane of history as *In the Swamp* was in a more cosmic context. Marlowe's play raises various political and social issues and has provoked discussions on his maturing concept of kingship. Brecht's play is quite frankly an homage to the cynical truth that the wolf will feast on lamb when lamb is to be had. Animal imagery only serves to confirm what the action implies—that *Realpolitik* is the art of living by killing. Every major character lives by this insight. Mortimer says: "... and out of / Man comes naked beast. / As things now stand, someone must hang." The Archbishop declares that God is always on the side of the victors, and the man who betrays Edward II justifies his deed by explaining that one's own interests come first. When Edward declares that darkness is best of all, he is saying essentially what the Queen does after a burst of wholly unwarranted laughter. Her explanation: "I am laughing at the emptiness of the world."

Edward's refusal to part with his "whore" Gaveston plunges a whole nation into civil strife and serves to introduce Brecht's conception of history as "the nothingness of human affairs and deeds." Such explicit nihilism makes it strange that one critic should note that there is in the play no counterargument to violence for political ends; the counterargument is built into the very texture of the play itself, into speech after speech communicating the utter senselessness of all violence and, for that matter, all action. The whole point of Brecht's adaptation is that those who kill for political reasons and those who kill for the sake of killing are of a kind. This is Grabbe's view of history all over again, and as in Grabbe, the chaotic nature of the historical process is given vivid expression by having momentous events filtered through gutter sensibilities:
Eddie's mistress has a beard on her breast.
Plead for us, plead for us, plead for us!
Eddie fleeces his Gavy from morn to night.
Plead for us, plead for us, plead for us!

In concentrating on the painfully concrete way in which historical developments take their toll of human misery, and in suggesting that those in power are indifferent to the anguish they inflict in consequence of their irresponsible attitudes, Brecht anticipates motifs he will be concerned with in later work, just as he anticipates basic elements of technique that will be associated with his concept of epic theater. He is already minimizing suspense where others might be tempted to enhance it; he is already clarifying action by showing it from various angles. The episodic structure allows him to devote major scenes to cogent synopses of content and to reduce identification by shifting from one point of view to another. His concept of the scene as a body of action illustrating, in essence, a single defining action, is operative as well. It may not be inaccurate to see this adaptation as a kind of formal exercise on Brecht's part to determine the suitability of the episodic structure for the presentation of varieties of recognizable human experience and varieties characterized less by repetitions of highly emotional states of mind than by a tough-minded skepticism about anything and everything.

It is common knowledge that after his adoption of Communism Brecht's work was marked by a highly contradictory character. But it should be realized as well that from the start his work manifested tensions between polar attitudes; in fact, it is hard to conceive of a play so much the product of self-division as In the Swamp. The later Brecht could not resist disintegrating what he was ostensibly trying to prove; the early Brecht is just as ambivalent when he presents himself, on the one hand, as a confirmed nihilist, and, on the other, as someone who could not stand to be a nihilist a moment longer. Brecht escaped such a clash of irreconcilable attitudes only in those plays where he assiduously expunged whatever might cast doubt on the fixity of his commitment, namely, in his most mediocre work. As for his tendency to assume a far more elusive stance in better plays, this has been the focal point of Brechtian criticism in the Anglo-Saxon world and has naturally sparked controversy between those intent

3 Brecht, Stücke, I, 20.
on fathoming his basic motivation and those concerned, above all, to find him spinning a consistent thread of existential-social protest. For the former, the emphasis remains on the emotional dynamics projected by Brecht into characters who incarnate powerful unconscious strivings; the enigmatic Brecht is viewed as being torn between the anarchies of impulse and the compulsions of a superego thirsting for discipline at any price. For some Marxist critics this approach is too much in the nature of a diversion from the main point of Brecht's writing, his confrontation of the true nature of bourgeois life from the first play to the last and a confrontation every bit as intrinsic to Baal and In the Swamp as to plays in which the socio-economic context is loudly advertised. The crux of the issue here, of course, is related to that much-discussed question of yesterday—the validity of any ideological course of action in view of man's projective nature, his inability to formulate solutions except in the rationalized terms of his own inner conflicts. In Brecht's case that question takes on renewed topicality, so obvious is it from his plays that he sought in communism relief from the pressures of deeply personal psychic problems; and it is equally obvious he was never certain he had found the right cure. One might note that Marxist critics intent upon making Brecht's extremely complex personality a side issue, are acting completely in character. Their refusal to recognize how much the chaos depicted in Brecht's work stems from the chaos in the man himself has its roots in the same ideological conformity which prevented Brecht from understanding why Mother Courage was not received in the proper anticapitalistic spirit. The true believer dare not allow himself to know himself.

Brecht was not yet in that category when he wrote A Man's a Man (1926), but in the light of what that play contains, it could not have occasioned too much surprise when he finally turned Communist. He was already thinking along lines that converged with Marxist emphases, already satisfied bourgeois individualism would soon be obsolete. And as far as Brecht was concerned, when something is about to depart the stage of history, the astute will put out flags for what is coming—communism was surely attractive to Brecht not just because it promised to deliver a more humanitarian social existence but because, given the absurd contradictions of capitalism, its success was a certainty. As Bentley has noted, Brecht's triumphant return to East Germany after the war proved, if nothing else, that he had
guessed shrewdly about his relationship to the future of the party. That guessing was already going on when *A Man's a Man* came out, Brecht claiming to be showing today what would be the rule tomorrow, namely, the process whereby individuals are persuaded to become units of broad collective entities—and becoming such cogs without regrets.

Brecht works out his equation on an innocent named Galy Gay, who sets out one day in a very Kiplingesque India to purchase a fish but never comes home with it. The kind of person who cannot say no, in general, and doubly so when he sniffs a chance to make some money, he winds up replacing a member of the British Colonial Army, whose absence would otherwise prove highly embarrassing to the quartet of soldiers of which he constitutes one fourth at roll call. The crux of the play is the attempt of these soldiers to persuade Galy Gay into a full acceptance of the missing man's identity. They succeed brilliantly, abetted by Galy Gay's eagerness to net a profit. He agrees to claim ownership of a fake elephant in the expectation of selling it, but this proves quite a blunder: it exposes him to military trial as a crook and to a mock execution. Scared out of his wits, he is eager to avow that he is the same Jip whose name belongs in roll call with that of Jesse Mahoney, Polly Baker, and Uria Shelley. With the change of name comes a radical change in personality. The meek packer of Kilkoa turns into a military man who knows no fear.

Brecht referred to this as a happy ending, and those who find that he starts with sound assumptions could well agree. Premise number one is that the continuity of the ego is a fiction; premise number two, that all fictional constructs are to be abandoned the moment they impede one in the struggle to survive. For Brecht this is quite a transvaluation: he has stopped viewing the self as a dungeon from which no escape is possible; it has become more like an automobile part which one replaces as a matter of course when it ceases to do the job. Brecht underscores his contempt for the idealistic ethics of expressionist drama by building an entire play around such a functional concept of ego, concerned as the expressionists were with the importance of their protagonists' moral transfigurations. All too often the expressionist hero sought an exalted state of subjectivity: Galy Gay wants only to make a little money. No declamatory expressionist play was ever built around the brutification of a nonentity. Clearly, Brecht is at this stage intent upon banishing from his work whatever might
attentuate his view of life as a cold, hard exercise in materialism. He wishes to propound the same unsentimental rules for living that Wedekind never tired of preaching—rules based on the undeniable truth that reality is a flux which life can come to terms with only by virtue of its plasticity, its capacity to accommodate. The star performers in the circus of existence are those with limbs of rubber; tragic moments do not leave them crushed but merely endow them with an added appreciation of the absurdities with which they have to contend. Soon enough they are back on the trapeze, soaring cynically above those who have never learned morality is something to chat about over soup and to forget while making sure soup will always be on hand. One would hardly expect such an approach to ethics and life to enchant Communists searching for “anticapitalistic” elements in Brecht, and it is small wonder that Schumacher, a leading East German critic, after picking *A Man's a Man* clean for the smallest crumb of revolutionary sentiment, in the end calls the play unconcrete and undialectical; for he realizes quite well Brecht has written the perfect apologia for all totalitarianisms that promise satisfaction of basic needs.

That the malleable shall inherit the earth is a cynical message, and Brecht went out of his way to indicate that this was precisely his message. But as is so often the case later on, he proves disingenuous on the real nature of what he gives dramatic form, failing to mention that one will find in his play serious reservations about what seems to be advocated. Thus, while Brecht does sing a hymn here in favor of depersonalization, he is not without second thoughts on the manner of Galy Gay’s rebirth to a new resplendent self. Off stage, Brecht trivialized what brainwashing comes down to in personal terms, but on stage he depicts that process in all its harrowing concreteness: Galy Gay screams his anguish and loneliness while his tormentors wait for him to make the proper gesture of submissiveness. Brecht cannot help suggesting that to carve out a new identity is equivalent to butchering the old—and you cannot butcher an identity without torturing a man. Nor is this the only note of social conscience in *A Man's a Man*, Brecht revealing himself to be prophetically alert to what things have come to when identity is reduced to a mere matter of identification: “A man can be replaced at any time, but there is nothing holier than the possession of a pass.” The world is full of Galy Gays for whom the ultimate validation of reality is wholly financial:
A Soldier: Do you still have any doubts about the elephant?

Galy Gay: Since he is being purchased, I have no doubts at all.

For those concerned with the psychodramatic aspects of Brecht’s work, Galy Gay deserves attention. A mixture of venality, charm, opportunism, naïveté, and a tendency to let himself be victimized, this character seems to embody a good share of the traits commentators invariably refer to in characterizing Brecht’s work as one long confession of psychic conflict. Without becoming too immersed in psychological analysis, one can still point out that Brecht does with Galy Gay what he would later do with Mother Courage, creating a character who is on the one hand the quintessence of the kind of money-obsessed personality Brecht despised and at the same time a device through which he expresses his own emotional state. Blindfolded for what he believes to be his execution, Galy Gay becomes just such a device, and it is Brecht on Brecht we begin to hear: “Listen to me! I confess that I don’t know what has happened to me. Believe me and don’t laugh, I am someone who doesn’t know who he is.” In Brecht’s work, the temptation to caricature will always yield at significant junctures to the temptation to articulate existential despair—even after Brecht had ostensibly made up his mind that thanks to communism, the concept of tragedy was as outmoded as the concept of individualism.

A Man’s a Man deals not only with a character who has his identity cut away but also with a character who attempts to regain what he feels is his true identity by shooting his sex away. Bloody Five, a pathologically aggressive sergeant whose name commemorates his use of five defenseless victims as target practice, is as unable as Läuffer was to subordinate his sex life to his career, with the result that he arrives at Läuffer’s radical solution. Brecht may well have intended Bloody Five’s fate to underscore how much better it is to be a Galy Gay than the jealous guardian of a name, but his emasculation hardly leaves that impression. It merely makes us realize that man must cope with a far more complex set of forces than are encompassed by Marxist doctrine, and Brecht will be forcing that realization upon us in The Threepenny Opera and most of his important work thereafter; much as he may have wanted to make of sexual activity an area of human behavior defined by socio-economic criteria, he merely succeeded in restating an insight running through almost the entire Lenz-Brecht tradition—that instinct is an autonomous force which can
be explained only in terms of its own momentum. Man is driven by forces he does not begin to understand, and he does not begin to understand either how thin-crusted is the earth upon which he strikes his postures. In making this clear, Brecht employs imagery that takes us right back to Büchner's dangerous puddles.

On a formal level, *A Man's a Man* is an episodic illustration by parable in which Brecht is already utilizing much that will become staple in his later epic theater. Actors step out of character to underline the illustrative nature of the proceedings; moody lyrics make us conscious of universal truths to which all the sound and fury of the moment will have to conform; commentary focuses on the illustration pattern's critical implications; and each scene, though it provides a building block to an interlocking pattern, contributes its share of self-explanatory tragicomic observations on such matters as military values, the importance of personality, the power of money, etc. As he will later on, Brecht loads his scenes with broad social satire, deflating left and right what he smells as fake. A typical thrust is that colonial soldiers drink as heavily as they do to satisfy a consuming thirst for law and order.

The Brecht who will mix comic and tragic effects in order to demonstrate that what seems comic is laden with tragic implications, is already present in *A Man's a Man*. So is the Brecht who will teach by grotesque example that man is his own worst enemy. *A Man's a Man* has all the ambivalence of the plays which we identify most fully with Brecht's concept of epic theater, suggesting on the one hand a cynic who observes the human menagerie with a detached hopeless smile, on the other, a humanitarian who cannot shirk his emotional involvement. It even suggests that most glaring paradox about the later Brecht—his failure to confront the tragic implications of his deepest convictions. Communist critics may not find *A Man's a Man* wholly to their liking, but they can find enough in it to make out a case for it as an arraignment of capitalism. It is just as easy to see it as an arraignment of men in general—precisely the summary Brecht's major plays demand.

In posing problems for those who would like to attach to him a single overriding attitude, Brecht recalls forerunners like Lenz and Büchner whose cynical perceptions and pessimistic outlook combined oddly with an anguished social conscience. Writers of this type are easy to dismiss as cynical nihilists by quoting lines from their works that could not be more cynical without probing the complex motivation behind those lines. In *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), cynical nihilism
seems to be the message when it is bluntly stated that morality is only possible on a full belly and that one man’s full belly means someone else has been fed on; that no matter what values men say they live by, they live hypocritically; that most men cannot possibly be cunning or evil enough to make a go of things; that even outstanding men are not immune to pure instinct; and, to top it all off, that the worst fools are those who sacrifice personal comfort to make a better world.

But it is wholly cynical to stress that one should not preach morality to those without the means to practice it; that whether we like it or not, our first concern is to have enough to eat; that mankind fails to react to the genuine need of the unfortunate but is quickly enough energized into action by melodramatized misery. The cynical comments in *The Threepenny Opera* do carry a ring of conviction because Brecht finds in the world more than enough to be cynical about; but the cynical tone should not fool us—no mere cynic could write as eloquently as Brecht on the need to be cynical. *The Threepenny Opera* was Brecht trying to confront his audience with the real nature of their world, to get people to realize how much evil is perpetually being taken for granted. Brecht seems to have felt at the time that he could do this no better than by striking brazen antiromantic and anti-idealistic attitudes, by exhibiting modern society as a place where one must, above all, possess sharp teeth if one is not to be plowed under. In this he succeeded far too well, and when one thinks back to *The Threepenny Opera*, one recalls most of all such bits as the whorish laughter shattering the quiet in which a killer like Macheath disposes of another victim, or the venalities which prepare Macheath’s betrayal by his dear friend Tiger Brown, or Peachum conducting a lesson in how to look properly maimed for maximum sympathy and minimum revulsion, and so on; one remembers, in short, a society in which injustice is so pervasive that the possibility of a better tomorrow simply does not enter into the picture. While this may have shown Brecht in the grip of a darker vision than he cared to admit, it does not reveal him as the sort of facile cynic that writers like Koestler have tried to make him out to be by focusing on a catchy line taken out of context.

On the other hand, those who accord Brecht the status of a master ironist who resembles Swift in his ability to convince the literal-minded that he is an exponent of the very attitudes he is exposing, should realize they are extending a compliment whose implications are far
less flattering. An ironist cannot suddenly reverse his angle of attack in the middle of a work and expect that his audience will make a clear-cut distinction between what is steeped in negation and what is offered in the spirit of constructive social criticism. Brecht wished, among other things, to make *The Threepenny Opera* a piece of forceful anticapitalistic satire; he wanted his audience to share his view that the banker is as much a criminal as the gangster, the public official as much a prostitute as the street-walker, the business world as much a jungle as the most violent section of a slum. But these observations, reflecting Brecht’s initial study of Marxism during this period, do not detach themselves from criticisms of a more generalized nature such as fill the body of the play. Rather, they reinforce a predominantly negative tone that can be described as racy and cynical, raffish and knowing, bawdy and mocking, much the same tone in which Grabbe’s barkers suggested the world to be a zoo and man quite apish, and in which Büchner’s exhibitors mocked man’s pretensions to be anything but a member of the animal kingdom. It is as well the tone of Wedekind inviting his audience to receive his plays as zoological studies. In *The Threepenny Opera* we are dealing once more with fauna and we know it from the very start:

And the shark possesses teeth
And he wears them on his face.

Much worse than the shark is man, who can slice up his victim while looking most harmless. The point of Brecht’s ballad opera is that man is the only animal whose gift for hypocrisy matches his genius for exploitation—he is bound to taint whatever he touches. Given such eloquent misanthropy, what is the logic of punctuating satire with touches of straight Marxism; or of making characters embody what is incurably wrong with human nature, on the one hand, while endowing them as well with attitudes implicit in the psychology of capitalists. Brecht’s equation between the business of crime and the crime of business strikes us as mathematical proof not of the need to change the nature of the conditions under which business is conducted but of the more depressing axiom that society must forever be no better than its members. Determined as Brecht is to make clear that there are no idealistic alternatives, he succeeds only in convincing
us that there are no alternatives whatever to the terrible realities that so obsess him. *The Threepenny Opera* concludes by reminding us that we inhabit a dark, cold universe in which the most common sound is a cry of misery.

Brecht's inconsistencies in *The Threepenny Opera* are invariably cited by those who assert he attempted to achieve by theatrical technique what he could not convey by the written word. It is not a criticism one can dismiss, especially since certain elements of style changed very little in the course of his career. He could never resist putting into the mouths of his most pathetic characters apt observations of the kind which are appreciated for themselves, no matter who gives them utterance. Characterization would always carry a substantial load of programmatic commentary, with the result that one begins to find it natural for characters to resonate every once in a while with their master's voice. And quite understandably, one would hardly be able to view such characters simply as examples of what was wrong with the same world they dissect so cunningly. Brecht tried to salvage the illustrative value of such characters by emphasizing that they had to read their lines in a certain way, or move about the stage in a certain way, or define their purpose by acting in a manner wholly at variance with the insights they articulate. But it never worked, at least not for Western audiences—Brecht, the director, is no match for Brecht, the poet. When he makes of characters like Peachum or Macheath sources of irrefutable perceptions, he gives to content a significance that cannot be neutralized by style of presentation.

Least ambiguous are the works Brecht produced immediately after *The Threepenny Opera*. Apparently stung by the impression he had made on a leading critic that he was unconvinced as well as unconvincing on the issues he blended with his entertainment, Brecht makes absolutely certain in *The Rise and Fall of the City Mahagonny* (1929) that no one can carp about the precision of his message. For all its exotic locale, *Mahagonny* takes place in the world of modern capitalism as Brecht saw it; that world, says Brecht, elevates individual appetite to religious heights, enshrining as its holiest commandment "Thou shalt never be without money." Hedonistic experience—and here Brecht clearly has in mind his own glorification of instinct in the early twenties—is the sole resource of those trying to function by the rules of a profit-oriented society while clinging to the idea that they are free men. But in a world where cash decides, the rush for diversions serves merely to underscore that all is emptiness. No amount
of sport, sex, or drink will give moneyed sensation-seekers what they really need and what can be obtained only in a system that does not define personal value in commodity terms. In essence a flow of verse set to music, *Mahagonny* is constantly reiterating such an apocalyptic view of the capitalistic ethos. Brecht goes so far as to show a character executed for lack of money, continuing to equate what is matter of fact under capitalism with ultimate horrors. As in *The Threepenny Opera*, he indictsthe way things are by seeming to relish their rottenness. Thus he puts on stage boards in which liberty is advocated only for those who are rich, bravery extolled as an attitude by which one adds to the misery of those who cannot fight back, and filth bluntly equated with greatness. Whatever one may feel about the ideological aspects of Brecht's vision in *Mahagonny*, one cannot deny that the vision itself is remarkably powerful; and if future students are bound to turn to *The Measures Taken* to understand the workings of the totalitarian Communist mind, one can expect them to be equally fascinated with *Mahagonny* for revealing why a middle-class intellectual is attracted to Communism in the first place.

*Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1930) is an episodic play in which Brecht reveals much the same feeling about Schiller and the high style conveyed in *Danton's Death*. Like Büchner in the Simon scenes, Brecht parodies elevated rhetoric by placing it at the disposal of vulgar thought and by associating it with stark realities to which high-flown poetry has scant relevance. These realities comprise the education of a missionary Christian social worker named Joan Dark who begins with the idea that the world will in time be a better place in which to live—but first, people must change themselves; in the end Joan is confirmed in the belief that nothing is more evil than to attach such importance to personal development. Joan comes to feel that any action which does not have consequences for society as a whole is not worth performing, but that any action which does is commendable, even if that action is violent and, by Christian standards, unpardonable. In fact, so wrong is nonviolence as a basic social attitude that war to the death must be declared on any philosophy which blocks recourse to the gun or club promoting revolutionary change. Believers in a God who might save man the task of hacking his way to something better should have their heads pounded on the pavement till they croak. Joan says all this as she is about to die. But her message gets through least of all to the villain-capitalists Brecht has placed at her bedside: the meat kings of Chicago drown out her attack on all tran-
scentental thinking with noisy idealistic lyricism. The verse patterns of German classicism echo grotesquely not only against Joan's final remarks to the effect that force responds to nothing but force, and people can be helped only by people, but against loud-speaker announcements on the state of a world in which coffee harvests are poured into the sea and banks closed one after another by governments—a world Brecht views to be wholly at the mercy of monopoly capitalism.

In *Saint Joan* Brecht employs the open form to illustrate the fallacy of identifying the forces which keep that capitalism going with reasonable humanity. His intention is to shock the audience into the same ruthless attitude to which the dying Joan commits herself. The eleven episodes are designed to make increasingly untenable any faith in nonviolent progress. It comes down to the ever-growing capacity of Joan to think the unthinkable, to conceive of human beings who will only stop exploiting and killing when they cease to breathe. Thus, in scene 1 Joan preaches idealism while ladling out soup; in scene 2 she determines to add knowledge of what is really going on to her idealistic convictions; by scene 4 she has become acutely conscious of the material nature of spiritual poverty, but the learning process has still not consumed her basic conviction that no man is a total villain; even in scene 9 she clings to that conviction—it leaves her only in the end.

The play is not remotely realistic; its characters are obvious personifications of attitudes, its dialogues and monologues are the antithesis of ordinary speech, and its plot is so obviously schematic and tendentious that we are constantly aware of the dramatist as speech-writer. While it can be performed effectively, and was, indeed, so performed on the German radio with actors Fritz Kortner and Peter Lorre, among others, it is a far cry from the disturbing plays Brecht was still to write, those plays in which he would sound chords whose full tonalities he could never explain away with Marxist dogma. *Saint Joan*, for all its serio-comic brilliance and linguistic versatility, is a play in which the cynical intonations move in a single direction; any reservations one might have about the crusade against capitalism are vitiated by the device of having nasty capitalists express such reservations to Joan, who is always quick to show they have no basis in reality. The later Brecht would never be so cut and dried.

Brecht's *Lehrstücke* have been called "miniature epic dramas," but they are epic only in the sense that episodes are employed illustratively.
They have none of the richness of characterization and background detail of the work by which Brecht is known. They are single-mindedly didactic to the point of abstraction, and to describe them by the same phrase used to identify plays like *Galileo* and *Mother Courage* does not make sense. If epic theater is not to become too vague a classification, it should not be employed to refer to plays whose tone and feeling set them sharply apart.

But what *The Measures Taken* tells us about Brecht at the beginning of the thirties cannot be overlooked. Like Büchner, who was haunted by the realization that only killing could usher in a different social order, Brecht stresses in *The Measures Taken* that the road to a better world must be paved by executioners. To be thrown on the corpse heap of history are not just those who stand in the way of progress by their reactionary convictions but even those whose basic decency cannot be called into question. In *The Measures Taken* Brecht is ideologically explicit about the value of individual personality in a way he was not in *A Man’s a Man*—humanitarian feeling should never outweigh the larger considerations at work; those whose task it is to wipe out innocents, whose only crime is that they cannot extinguish their capacity to feel, are acting with logic. Individualism and idealism are inexcusably regressive postures in a world where all value is collective. If Brecht heretofore opposed idealistic value systems with a forthright cynical materialism, he now opposes them with a materialism interpenetrated by religiofied Marxism.

The rejection of liberalism in *The Measures Taken* is on view in other pieces written by Brecht at this time in a highly didactic style, but nowhere else is it given such stark formulation. And here one might add that if Brecht showed himself in a key play to be very much aware of what his concept of paradise came down to in concrete terms, he is bound to recall a similar moment of truth in the work of the one modern dramatist about whose greatness as a living presence Brecht had no second thoughts. Could one not say that *The Measures*...
*Taken* occupies in Brecht's work a position parallel to that of *Death and Devil* in Wedekind's drama? In both cases the intention was to set forth unambiguously what might tend to lose clarity in a play of more complex texture; in both cases the dramatist confronts in concrete terms his belief that there is a solution to the world's ills; and in both cases the results are surprisingly negative. In *Death and Devil* Wedekind showed himself to be tragically aware that there was no basis for his dream of a world liberated by erotic radicalism. The fate of sexual reformers like himself is to be eulogized by weak-kneed candidates for spinsterhood. In a play which should logically have vindicated a faith, Wedekind offers a confession of despair. In *The Measures Taken* Brecht, too, disappoints those who expect of him bold affirmations. Like Wedekind, he cannot hide from himself that death and dehumanization are organic to his vision, that the true landscape of his ideals is barren of the very things for which he is fighting in the first place. It cannot be accidental that Brecht and Wedekind give us leading characters who are obvious projections of their creators and that these characters in the end are mercilessly destroyed—all of which may go to show that nihilistic pessimism is least of all an ephemeral attitude and has a way of reasserting itself long after it has supposedly been overcome.

*The Exception and the Rule* (1930), in which a merchant kills his coolie because he thinks the latter is about to kill him, when in reality the coolie wishes only to do him a kindness, is another play in which Brecht wants to show that the world is too evil to respond to halfway measures. One wonders if that is all it shows. On the one hand, Brecht demonstrates again a world in which those who act on impulse are destroyed; on the other, he shows that those who do the destroying are as much shackled by self-defeating contradictions as their victims. The exploiter, in order to secure his parasitic position, must constantly add to his demands on the exploited. Reason tells him he deserves to be loathed in return, and this awareness brings paroxysms of anxiety—with the result that the exploiter is a kind of split personality, swerving between joy at the superiority of his position and despair at ever being secure enough not to have to armor himself against any genuine human warmth. His survival instincts dictate that for every stirring of good fellowship he must become that much more inhuman, since kindness is bound to be interpreted as weakness. As for the exploited, they are in an equally stereotyped situation. They cannot ever hope to transcend the status to which
their masters have assigned them: cast in the role of villains, they must play that role to the hilt every moment of their lives, for to express any unpredictable emotion can be suicidal. They survive, in short, by hardening themselves to the point where they will appear to be just what they are expected to be—and they are expected to be maelstroms of murderous hostility. Quite plainly the one thing that Brecht's world will not allow is the manifestation of humane impulse. Evil is bound to perpetuate itself because all avenues for the expression of anything better have been sealed off. Exploiter and victim appear frozen into attitudes that cannot be altered; the coolie will always cringe, the merchant will always stand above him, whip in hand. It should be clear why one can easily make of The Exception and the Rule another key play of Brechtian ambiguity; for some, Brecht is, of course, saying again, "That's capitalism"; for others, his image of the coolie crucified for a humane gesture, after being treated all his life like a pack animal, carries more tragic overtones.

Of the plays Brecht wrote to indict Hitler's Germany and to illuminate the forces that made Germany ripe for Nazism, Fear and Misery of the Third Reich (1938) is most memorable. It is a cumulative indictment by episodes and is bound to remind us forcibly of The Last Days of Mankind. Each scene of Brecht's play shows Germany as the land of Richter and Henker which Kraus asserted it to be. Like Kraus, Brecht displays the types for whom things never go better than when they go worst for men of decency; and like Kraus, he exposes moral cretinism while making vivid the tragic side of rule by force. It might not be at all unreasonable to look upon Brecht's play as a continuation of the social and cultural history dramatized by Kraus; for its dialogue this play also depends on the way individuals really talk; once more the surest guide to a moral atmosphere is the spoken word.

Brecht gives us close to thirty unconnected episodes, and each episode illustrates what a pervasive fact of life the Hitler regime was for the Germans. Religiously, economically, and socially the Nazi virus spreads through the moral fabric of a nation. Toughs of the SA have the power to play God in 1933; and by 1934, judges are prepared to modify their legal outlook now that they know which way the wind is blowing; nuclear physicists make sure that they will not be accused of practicing "Jewish" science; a doctor and his wife realize they are racially incompatible inasmuch as she is of Jewish descent; parents live in dread of the day their children will report them to
the authorities; again and again, Brecht shows us a world in which one is mortally afraid to say anything but "Heil Hitler."

Brecht, like Kraus, teaches by grotesque example. What could be more grotesque than for bakers to be sent to concentration camps because they mixed bran in their dough or because, at another time, they failed to adulterate bread according to Nazi recipe? Grotesque in a much more visceral sense is the sight of an old woman vomiting in terror while screaming "Heil Hitler." And grotesque also is the panicky attempt of a judge to make sure that his mental processes are in tune with the times. In showing how Germans perspired to look like sheep that the Nazi power structure would not slaughter, Brecht exploits the incongruity between the way Goebbels wished to picture Germany and the way things actually were. Here again he works very much like Kraus.

*The Private Life of the Master Race*, Eric Bentley's acting version in English, utilizes songs and commentary that make the indictment of the Third Reich even more explicit:

And soon all Europe saw a bloody plaster
Smeared on our tanks from Seine to Volga strand
Because our **Führer** had re-cast us as a Master-Race through the continent with iron hand.5

* * * *

Thus neighbor betrayed neighbor.
Thus the common folk devoured each other
And enmity grew in the houses and in the precincts. . . .6

In this acting version, a narrative Voice bridges episodes whose content works out in concrete detail the Voice's generalized reportage. Soldiers sing to the tune of the Horst Wessel Song verses that sum up the real nature of totalitarianism. A Woman's Voice sings the following song after a scene in which Jewish authorship of the Sermon on the Mount makes Christian sentiments suspect:

I gave you the fine boots, my son;
Your brown shirt came from me;

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But had I known what to-day I know,
I'd have hanged myself from a tree.\(^\text{7}\)

Brecht's play is, as Bentley has pointed out, quite naturalistic in more ways than one, but "not naturalism." Aside from trying to effect distance between audience and performance, Brecht cuts across aesthetic categories by virtue of a combination of colloquial texture with heavily satiric treatment. Like Kraus's, Brecht's characters could not speak more authentically, and they could not, with some exceptions, come through as greater stereotypes. In driving home by panoramic illustration the diseased moral climate of a culture, Brecht and Kraus both imply that only a melodramatic conception of character, one which does not shy away from the heavy, black lines of the cartoon, can do justice to the real nature of men. In this sense each is worlds away from the view that only the complex and prosaic are realistic; in their plays, life is often so laughably simple that one wants to do anything but laugh. For them, villains are villains, not people to understand.

Brecht wrote plays in the thirties about whose message there is no vagueness, plays in which his dictating intent was to ascribe all that is wrong with reality to conspiratorial capitalism. No critic without doctrinal preoccupations has found any reason for listing such work among Brecht's best, and many critics feel it is Brecht at his least incisive when he chronicles the rise of Hitlerism as if it were simply another capitalistic subterfuge or when he suggests the same about Hitler's violent anti-Semitism. The Roundheads and the Peakheads and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, even if the latter play does contain extremely biting satire, are referred to here. Guided by what Brecht said, the brilliant antiwar play he wrote the year Hitler moved into Poland should be no harder to detect as a slap at capitalism than, say, Arturo Ui. But it is common knowledge that Mother Courage and Her Children has rarely been perceived in that way; this fact forced Brecht into arguing that audiences are by nature inclined to attach far more importance to a play's emotional sequences than to less dramatic representations of what is truthful. Hence, Brecht counseled future actors of Mother Courage to adopt a cool, detached acting style; above all, they were to resist the temptation to sentimentalize or idealize.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., p. 81.
The more one reads Brecht on *Mother Courage* in letters and essays designed to explain his reasons for writing the play, the more one sees him engaged in the same kind of dubious tactic observable in his publicizing of *A Man's a Man*. In both cases he tries to convey the impression that the nature of the leading character and what happens to him or her are bound to reflect an entirely antitragic position—in a manner of speaking, Galy Gay supposedly proves it pays to be collective while Mother Courage proves it does not pay to be capitalists. And if Brecht were asked to supply evidence for both theses, he certainly could do so, especially for the latter. Thus, Mother Courage is the quintessence of capitalist greed when she balks at having bandages made from her stock of shirts, even though blood is spilling while she is balking; and she does not present a prettier picture when she groans at what peace will do to her business, or when she haggles so long that her son must pay with his life for her mercantile nature. But easy as it may be to quote excerpts that indicate Mother Courage to be vulturous, it is no less easy to piece together a portrait worthy of admiration. Mother Courage earns respect as the voice of experience when she advises a soldier that he lives in a world where moral outrage is a posture few can afford for more than moments; she is the voice of healthy skepticism when she replies to a member of the military establishment, who says soldiers need discipline, that they need *Wurst* far more; and she is the voice of sanity and pacifism when she stresses again and again that wars succeed in producing, above all, corpses. In short, Brecht went to such lengths to associate Mother Courage with skeptical wisdom that she was bound not to be recognized as capitalism incarnate.

Nor does it help to say that action speaks louder than words and that one can have no illusions about Mother Courage in view of what she does to her children; for while it is true that she is invariably haggling while they are being killed, it does not follow that they die *because* she haggles—an impression left by many discussions of the play. Mother Courage's sons and daughter do not die to illustrate the pernicious nature of their parent's life style but because they simply have not mastered the art of survival, which begins with the rule that one must not take too seriously the claims made for the virtuous life. Eilif, who discovers that the valorous deeds of war are evaluated by other criteria the moment wars conclude, perishes to prove that the brave are soon six feet under and that courage and stupidity often go hand in hand; Swiss Cheese, who will not betray his trust as
caretaker of the regimental cashbox and is therefore riddled with bullets, makes a similar point about the value of dutiful honesty; and Kattrin gives up her life to save others in a world where such immolations are not going to change things. In the one case where the death of a child can be used to call Mother Courage’s maternal instincts into question, a defense of her actions is by no means precluded: she engages in the haggling which accompanies the death of Swiss Cheese, not out of indifference to her son’s predicament, but because she is foolish enough to think she has time to save him without going completely bankrupt.

To make a long story short, Mother Courage is simply Mother Courage, a character whose contradictory traits insist on being taken on their own terms rather than judged in the light of extraneous issues, and a character whom one is bound to sympathize with, given the impossible world she inhabits. In depicting that world Brecht proved again that the episodic structure is made to order for the pessimistic vision. Dealing with the Thirty Years’ War, Mother Courage covers a dozen years of that conflict, which Brecht said he wished to present in all its concreteness. Like Grabbe, his aim is to show how much war consists of agonies quickly forgotten by those lucky enough not to be among the sufferers, but unlike Grabbe, he despises nothing more than a glorious valuation of war’s overriding purpose. His eye remains always on the sad fact that the high and mighty use those below as their swords, and so, while we do not get in Mother Courage a single battle scene such as has always been conventional in epic historical drama, we do get battles of a different kind—between those representatives of the military establishment whose contribution it is to assemble cannon fodder, and people, like Mother Courage, who must fight tooth and nail to save their kin from being thrown into the carnage.

Brecht is no more romantic about war when he informs us that General Tilly’s victory at Leipzig cost Mother Courage four shirts, when he has a soldier complain that the worst thing in war is to arrive too late for plunder, or when Mother Courage takes inventory while funeral rites are being conducted for General Tilly, whose death she attributes to his having stumbled into battle because of a fog. The play is full of such antiheroic mockery, and it is full of detail on the texture of life in those areas where the war is an immediate fact. When directing Mother Courage, Brecht made the stage look increasingly bleak as the play moved along; even Mother Courage’s
wagon was by its deterioration to attest to a destructive course of events which by 1634 had depopulated Germany to the point where wolves prowled empty streets.

This piece of historical fact introduces us to scene 9 of Mother Courage, and it is soon made quite evident that even the protagonist of the play has ceased to enjoy her work. She has lost both her sons—though she does not know about Eilif—and business is bad. Reduced to begging, she is very much tempted to accept a proposal from the cook accompanying her to open an inn with him. But as with almost everything else in Mother Courage, there are strings attached: the cook wants Katrin to be left behind; she would make the whole thing a losing proposition. At this point, one cannot imagine Mother Courage’s situation in more depressing terms, and Brecht increases the pathos by having Mother Courage and the cook sing The Song of the Wise and Good, whose lyrics recommend the kind of hardheartedness that would allow Mother Courage to start a new life at the expense of Katrin. But it is a measure of the degree to which Brecht did not want his leading character to personify the cold, grasping opportunism that this world seems to require that the scene concludes on a very happy note, mother and daughter harnessing themselves to the wagon and going off together without the cook.

Such a scene has a strong impact; thus it is surprising that when Brecht acknowledged the presence of emotional intensities in Mother Courage he restricted himself to the scene where Katrin was killed, implying that such an invitation to empathy was highly exceptional. But throughout the play Brecht has recourse to effects of the kind that are ordinarily associated with Aristotelian dramaturgy; in fact, his theorizing on theater began to make room for such effects—in an aesthetic turnabout he asserted that the Aristotelian structure could be employed to communicate the same truthful representation of the world that he had once identified exclusively with the episodic structure. It is a radical revaluation but should not blur the important point that Mother Courage is a superb play primarily because Brecht brilliantly exploited the freedom to diversify content and emphasis that is afforded by the episodic mode of development. Some scenes are segments of concentrated cynicism, the plot receding while another Brechtian point is made about the nature of a world steeped in unfairness (scene 4); other scenes are feverishly suspenseful in a manner that has led one critic to note that Brecht was not above using Hollywood technique (scenes 3 and 11); still others consist of no more
than a song and the brief picture of Mother Courage plodding by with her wagon (scenes 7 and 10). There are also episodes dominated by sheer conflict as Mother Courage stands up to the brutes in uniform determined to separate her from money, merchandise—or family. Conflict of a more primitive type is hardly more conceivable than when Mother Courage stops fighting verbally and pulls out a knife to protect her brood.

The episodic structure also allows Brecht to combine a variety of thematic strands which reinforce the same basic point—that war is nothing but a death mechanism from whose operations no one is exempt. More than one critic has noticed that the audience is prepared for the abundance of death in *Mother Courage* by the action of the first scene, in which Mother Courage can come up with nothing but black crosses when she draws lots to predict the future. As the play develops, death begins to gobble up not only the protagonist's children but thousands of others encompassed in narrative introductions and in dialogue comments. The leading players may enjoy some moments of glory—in scene 5 General Tilly is victorious—but glory proves quite ephemeral—in scene 6 General Tilly is killed. After this, Mother Courage's wagon gets barer and shabbier as the war grows increasingly bloody. War knows no respect for status: in the same scene that the Protestant King falls in the battle of Luetzen, Eilif is executed; and he is executed for having executed others. Brecht suggests that such horrors will be with us till the end of time by having a character sing that the purpose of sex is to insure the continuation of war.

The only bright spot on this landscape would seem to be Kattrin. True, she is killed, but at least she is not first dehumanized, and Brecht dramatizes the importance of her sacrificing herself for others by noting that the stones begin to speak. It should be noted, however, that most of the speaking in the Kattrin scene gives us the same Brechtian world. The peasants who witness Kattrin's act of courage in trying to alert a sleeping town to an imminent invasion despise her for it: they are worried, above all, about their cattle. Kattrin's heroism takes place in the context of a world where those who implore God for justice seek it only for themselves; and the moment it is realized Kattrin may be endangering their own lives, the peasants are anxious to remove her from the rooftop, where she dies banging her drum. If anything, the scene shows once again that goodness is the rare exception in a world ruled by self-seeking natures. For the peasants, Kattrin is no heroine, just a silly cripple.
Kattrin's death comes immediately before the final scene, by which Brecht intended to make clear once and for all that Mother Courage will never learn from experience. But one is least inclined at this point to dismiss Mother Courage as an unteachable harridan. She returns to her old pursuits because it is the one way she can avoid a life among wolves and bandits. As a matter of fact, she is persuaded to attach herself to a regiment of departing soldiers by an old peasant who suggests it is her last chance. She is no more villainous in wanting to continue functioning than any Wedekind character who knows there is not much to live for but will not yield to despair. As Mother Courage tears herself away from Kattrin's corpse and cries out to the passing soldiers to take her along, she makes us realize that man's capacity for self-slaughter is complemented by his hunger for survival, no matter what the circumstances. As so often, Brecht has something more generalized to say about life than his own pronouncements suggest.

As a concluding note, it bears mentioning that Mother Courage, as a title, is as ironic as was Lenz's subtitle of The Tutor: Advantages of a Private Education. Brecht could, for that matter, just as easily have called his drama Anna Fierling, so much is his antiwar play dominated by its titled character, recalling episodic plays like Woyzeck and Hannibal in which the nature of a particular society was refracted in the problems of a single personality. And this suggests something that seems to have gone largely unnoticed: that epic theater—upon whose techniques European critics have lavished so much technical analysis—is simply character-oriented episodic theater of the type that got started with Lenz. Thanks to the influence of Diderot, Lenz did his best to show character under the sway of social and economic determinants. Büchner and Brecht work very much the same way: we are as aware of Mother Courage's trying to sustain herself economically as we are of Woyzeck's and Läufer's trying to keep their heads above water. Too many people are under the impression that Brecht's concern with how his characters make a living is traceable exclusively to his reading of Marx; as a matter of fact, it is equally traceable to his reading of Lenz, Büchner, and Grabbe. The latter's Hannibal is the closest thing to Mother Courage in the drama of the nineteenth century.

At his death, Brecht left unedited his original notes on Galileo and they are not nearly as explicit on his creative intentions as those he appended to the play's final version. But they do indicate that
Brecht, in 1939, could not help brooding upon the aspirations that had once been identified with our century. Nothing, Brecht suggests in those notes, matches in excitement the conviction that one is participating in the dawn of a new age, and nothing more depressing is conceivable than for such a participant to realize in the end that he has been imagining things. Brecht goes on to imply that reactionary movements are bound to advertise themselves as having something new to offer, and the Nazis were making that clear by terming their re-enactment of old bestialities a "new order." After reflecting on those who were acting to pervert the very concept of newness, Brecht suggests he got the idea of doing a play on Galileo because he wished to evoke a time when the phrase "new age" did not yet have ironic connotations.

The first version of *Galileo* is thus essentially positive. Something new was crystallizing in the history of thought, and it was something one could accord wholehearted respect. As for the pioneer in question, he was deserving of applause even if appearances might suggest otherwise; Galileo’s public retraction of his scientific convictions is presented as a stratagem making it possible for him to extend his research into even more significant areas. In short, Brecht in the first version of *Galileo* was willing to go along with the generally held view that Galileo’s submission to the Church was only half the story, although Brecht cannot help adding that as Galileo’s reputation for intellectual courage expanded to legendary proportions among modern Europeans, the position of the living intellectual became increasingly precarious. After a while it was taken for granted that intellectuals were at best to be tolerated as mentally queer and unfit for work of importance. Perhaps Brecht’s going into the subject of how condescendingly intellectuals have long been treated in his native land by all classes helps to explain why he was attracted to so vigorous a conception of Galileo.

Such considerations became secondary in 1945. Brecht was living in Santa Monica at the time, and his notes indicate he was not at first deaf to the argument that employing the bomb was the only way to put a quick end to what promised to be a very costly war in the Pacific. But it was not long before his attitude changed to one of outright condemnation of all that the military use of atomic energy implied. He now began to resent it when scientists informed him that his portrayal of Galileo was just right, began to feel he had not done justice to his subject if *Galileo* did not make clear that no scientific advance takes place in a social vacuum, that the
discovery of a new truth is of far less importance than its subsequent application. Apropos of this, he recalls that the day it was announced the atom bomb had been dropped, he sensed among fellow Californians relief at the imminent conclusion of the war as well as great sadness and distrust. It was Brecht’s contention that all scientific break-throughs should meet with an equally ambivalent reaction.

*Galileo* was thus rewritten to serve as an indictment of amoral science, with the protagonist serving as his own judge and jury. The decisive changes are contained in the single scene where Galileo reveals himself to have written the *Discorsi* under cover. When a former pupil congratulates the old scientist on his achievement while apologizing for having joined those who slandered him as a traitor to progress, Galileo declares that his reputation is wholly in accord with the facts. He capitulated to established authority not because he was once again living by the philosophy that working scientists can do more for the human race than dead heroes, but simply out of fear—and to compound his ignominy, that fear was probably without foundation, since it is now his understanding that the pope was extremely reluctant to have him tortured and since he himself had already become a formidable figure at the time of his recantation. As Galileo’s *mea culpa* continues, he firmly refuses to allow his life to be evaluated on any grounds except those connected with his desertion of his anti-Ptolemaic position. He equates that desertion with a negation of all the social principles on which a new age might well have been erected, denouncing himself for emptying science of basic human considerations, for reducing it to a cold technology whose future development could well jeopardize all that makes a civilized life possible.

As speeches go, Galileo’s is quite eloquent, and we are bound to recall that Brecht’s work is full of such ringing self-appraisals. Galileo, like Joan Dark and the doomed comrade in *The Measures Taken*, comes to realize that at certain junctures of history there is no room for compromise. But whereas in Brecht’s earlier plays the schematic nature of dramatic treatment made it natural for a character to be subsumed by his function as spokesman for a particular point of view, in *Galileo* such a transition is far less acceptable. And this is because until the moment Galileo strikes out at himself he is presented as a character whose distinction is precisely that nothing can make him subordinate his lust for life to categorical imperatives. In fact, his scientific activities are simply another expression of the same basic drive for pleasure that makes Galileo a connoisseur of food and wine.
Wholly without illusions about what one must do in a profit-driven world to get by, he has nonetheless decided to function by the rules of just such a world rather than withdrawing for the sake of some abstract ideal. Above all, he wants to fill his belly, and those who use their brain without getting something concrete in return he holds beneath contempt.

Against such a portrait, the speech Brecht wrote to point up Galileo's villainy must of necessity strike us as extrinsic. One cannot build up a persuasive pattern of episodic detail and then expect to add climaxes unprepared for by such detail without confusing the issue. Actually, Brecht in *Galileo* is guilty of the same kind of dissociation observable in the first drama of the Lenz-Brecht tradition. *The Tutor* presented a series of episodes in which it was made evident that Läuffer would be self-destructive no matter what the circumstances; certainly he would not be transformed into a more admirable type by a realization of the ideals propounded by characters who served as Lenz's spokesmen. In *Galileo* the leading character is just as incongruous for the lesson Brecht has in mind, if only because we are fully convinced that Galileo's fear of torture and unabashed hedonistic life style is immune to reformation. Galileo may want to suggest in his final long speech that if he had to do it all over again he would be tempted to immolate himself for a more ethical conception of science; but there is really no reason to take him at his word. Characteristically enough, after Galileo says his piece he sits down to eat goose. And he makes no secret of the fact that he enjoys such eating.

*Galileo* then is a play in which we find much of the implicit pessimism running through most of Brecht's other work. But some would have us think that it contains also something positive, namely, the search for scientific truth. According to Margret Dietrich, this is the sole human activity upon which Brecht did not cast the shadow of his merciless cynicism. But while episodes in *Galileo* are built around such an affirmation of science as a pursuit, Brecht is not nearly so positive when he decries the fact that scientists are expected only to contribute knowledge and not to care at all whether their contribution will prove constructive in the long run. Brecht was acutely aware that in the seventeenth century, as well as in our own, the search for truth on the part of dedicated individuals was inevitably bound up with the interests of power-hungry institutions seeking to maintain themselves. As always, what Brecht passionately wants to affirm collides
with what he bitterly cannot help realizing. At any rate, if one cannot
go along with his comment that *Galileo* has nothing to do with tragedy,
one can at least credit him with making the Galileo story highly
thought-provoking; and Brecht indicated he desired to do just that
with his second version.

Sokel has noted that *Galileo* is relatively "cool" theater. Schumacher
and Mayer, on the other hand, seem hardly disposed to call the play
a good example of epic theater. How one stands on this point very
likely depends on where one lays the stress of Brecht's critical theories.
*Galileo* is far more documentary in texture than plays like *Mother
Courage*; inasmuch as it is in essence dramatized history, a measure
of coolness and objectivity is to be expected, and Brecht's theories
advocate such qualities. On the other hand, if *demonstration* is made
the key concept of epic theater, any thought of rendering history
factually is bound to be viewed as a regression to undialectical real-
ism—which brings us once again to the major criticism of Brecht's
final version of *Galileo*: it is an uneasy mixture of authenticity and
special pleading. For all its coolness, *Galileo* is to a degree suspenseful
because the life of the real Galileo warrants such treatment; individual
scenes do not achieve the kind of intellectual autonomy that modern
critics associate with the type of theater they call epic.

"I always tell myself: you are a virtuous person, a good person,
a good creature." The Captain compliments Woyzeck redundantly on
the latter's right to be called good but indicates no concern with
the economic implications of goodness. This is one way to begin dis-
cussing *The Good Woman of Sezuan* (1940), a play in which Brecht,
like Büchner, states emphatically that to be good is simply to be ex-
plorable, that virtue is weakness, and that we live in a world where
those who determine the semantics of goodness feel no obligation
to help make it part of the practical person's vocabulary.  

In *The Good Woman of Sezuan* Brecht asserts that no help for
this world will be forthcoming from any reservoirs of ethical idealism
conceivably present in human nature itself. As the world now stands,
it is bound to make those who are evil more so and to swell their

*Very relevant here is the following Büchnerian comment by Brecht: "We
spoke specifically in the name of the wronged and not in the name of morality.
One deals here with two different things, since those wronged are often
told on the basis of moral authority that they must be content with their
lot. For such moralists, people exist for morality and not morality for people."* Schriften zum Theater (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1957), pp. 71–72. That Brecht should say this in the same essay in which he pokes fun at Büchner's *bête noire*, Schiller, is more than coincidental.
ranks with disenchanted do-gooders. Brecht concerns himself mainly with the fate of the good; the only person in Sezuan who fits this description learns soon enough that kindness cripples, that to survive one must function wholly without sentiment. As the good woman Shen Te the protagonist is everyone's soft touch; as the no-nonsense man of action Shui Ta she keeps parasites at arm's length while improving her lot; as Shen Te she lives for others and finds she can do so only by surrendering her right to live any kind of decent life at all; as Shui Ta she lives for herself and finds she can do so only by stepping on others. Society offers only the choices of self-destructive goodness and self-protective egocentricity.

Brecht gives us scenes in which he demonstrates how difficult it is to be a Shen Te in a world made for Shui Tas, as well as scenes in which we can see for ourselves how swiftly Shui Tas resolve what proves insurmountable for Shen Tes. Beyond that, episodic continuity allows Brecht to follow through effectively on the point of departure for his play: the conviction of three gods that goodness is by no means ruled out in the world they have chosen to visit. At significant points of the action the utter irrelevance of any supernatural orientation to the hard facts of earthly economics is made apparent by showing the gods' efforts to rationalize away what it is beyond their capacity to influence. They persist in their glib simplifications while Shen Te sinks deeper and deeper into the vicissitudes of a life in which nothing is so impossible as to live and let live. Representing all forms of evasive idealism, the gods leave Sezuan as complacently as they arrive, refusing to recognize that life in no way validates their presumptuous expectations of human virtue.

Highly abstract and concrete at the same time, The Good Woman of Sezuan is a dramatic parable in which Brecht makes certain the illustrative function of character does not fade from view. The device of having changes of character symbolized by the putting on of a mask adds to our impression of the play as a living demonstration in which character is at all times to be related to economic circumstance. One experiences little action without its implied lesson. Brecht's conviction that true realism should not aim for mimesis but a clarification of underlying forces is borne out by The Good Woman of Sezuan, in which what Brecht takes to be the concrete nature of life is communicated all the more incisively by techniques that established realism excludes. What realistic play has focused as relentlessly as Brecht's on the economic contexts of everyday life? When one recalls a play
like *Les Corbeaux*, in which Becque has no more illusions about the power of money than Brecht, one begins to appreciate Brecht for provoking thought where a naturalistic dramatist merely stimulates our sense of self-righteousness. For while we are quite certain we are not the villains of *Les Corbeaux*, we can be equally as certain that all of us, in one way or another, wear the mask of Shui Ta.

When we have finished *The Good Women of Sezuan*, we have much the same feeling that is evoked by Lenz’s episodic illustrations. We have witnessed a number of scenes in which a naive young person is taught by bitter experience that the competitive nature of modern society makes of ingenuousness the most dangerous fault of all. Läufer, Marie Wesener, and Shen Te all learn that to be spontaneous and trusting is to invite disaster, and never more so than in that area of human experience where one has no wish to be anything but spontaneous and trusting—love. All three capsize on their inability to depersonalize the erotic—in their sexual lives they make the big mistake of simply letting go. While Lenz envisioned specific remedies within society for the amelioration of those conditions that defeated his characters, Brecht suggests in his Epilogue a mixture of passionate social conscience and desperate resignation: “There must be a good one—must, must, must!” Brecht verbalizes what Lenz is always implying silently—that there are no easy answers, if there are any answers at all.

*Mr. Puntila and His Hired Man Matti* (1941) is a play in which Brecht uses the episodic structure to make another pessimistic comment on the possibility of men ever treating one another humanely. Consisting of twelve scenes, *Puntila* stresses the episodic nature of life itself: it shows human personality to be, in essence, a flow of moods; as in *A Man’s a Man*, no ideal continuity splices these states of mind into a pattern that would reassure us of man’s intrinsic sanity. Episodic organization is shown to be suitable not only for the dramatization of dissociated history but for underscoring how devoid of meaningful continuity human emotional life can be. Even though Brecht includes in *Puntila* enough action and dialogue to make a case for the view

9 In *Puntila*, dialogue is largely monologue, as Franz H. Crumbach has noticed in his analysis of the play’s dramaturgy. Brecht, like Büchner and Wedekind, reinforces a sense of human isolation by conversational exchanges which are usually quite undramatic, with the result that the dialogue says in one way what the reality of the master-servant relationship says in another—that everyone is tied to his own concerns so inextricably that there is no room for genuine human contact.
that he is showing only the psychology of exploiters to be so fragmented, he is no more successful here than in *Mother Courage* in keeping a tendentious play within the bounds of its message.

When drunk, the Finnish landowner Puntila bubbles over with human warmth; when sober, he can treat human beings at best as objects. What he promises in bursts of intoxicated generosity he retracts the moment he is again sober. He is simply not recognizable from scene to scene, so fundamentally is his nature altered by liquor. The only man who is not taken in by his spells of good feeling is his servant Matti, who finally acts out the gesture of revolt which Brecht would like us to generalize into a rejection of capitalism, no matter how progressive. Matti knows from bitter experience that the more human his master appears when drunk, the more impossible he will be upon recovery of his senses. So Matti leaves his master's house, and he explicates his departure with a poem on the need for each man to be his own master. But the play still strikes us as essentially tragic, indicating, as it does, that man's relationship to man can be decent only at rare moments, that the world will inevitably harden everyone into the petty protector of his own narrow interests. Once again Brecht has invested the character who is bad with so much vitality and color that we cannot help seeking the clue to his play in the contradictions of that character. One is inclined to remember most clearly a common phrase from Matti's poem of rejection: "Nothing helps. . . ."

Brecht's hatred of parasites and exploiters, his conviction that small people always pay for those on top, sympathy for victims who must remain forever unnoticed in their misery, goodness as a deadly temptation, the prohibitive cost of all that makes life worth holding on to—these and just about every other perennial Brechtian motif can be found in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945); but they are worked into a story whose development by climaxes and tidy ending one is not disposed to call Brechtian. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Brecht comes close to writing the kind of escapist theater against which he had once inveighed, theater that serves to entertain and reassure rather than so disturb the audience that it is compelled to make decisive reformulations of attitude.

The fact that the later Brecht was much more sympathetic to drama along Aristotelian lines, and apparently far less concerned with teaching lessons in dramatic form, is germane to the reason he began in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to dispense with stylistic elements asso-
ciated with the Lenz-Brecht tradition. Though influenced by Shakespearean dramaturgy every bit as much as by any work covered in this study, The Caucasian Chalk Circle does not reflect a radical fusion of Shakespearean form with modern content. If anything, Shakespeare here proves to be too obviously the model being imitated. Robert Brustein has remarked that the play "is not only permeated with the mood and atmosphere of Shakespearean comedy, but also with some of its dramatic conventions"; and Brustein goes on to note that, among other borrowings, there is "the main plot" which "turns on suspense, misunderstanding, and intrigue." Recourse to Shakespearean modes of humor is complemented by boisterous comedy, whose emphasis on the quick laugh has prompted the observation that Brecht never got out of the cabaret. As for content, The Caucasian Chalk Circle is the one play in which goodness is not without compensation, and in which the rewarder of that goodness is plainly a wish-fulfilling projection of Brecht himself; Azdak, the memorably whimsical Samaritan of those whose difficulties can only be exacerbated by conventional law, allows his creator to give vent to his usual all-inclusive cynicism without in any way questioning the essential benevolence of that cynicism. Thus Azdak, like Brecht, sees through the contradictions of fashionable moralities thanks to a concrete grasp on life that yields to no system of abstractions. But biographical relevancies do not suggest themselves when Azdak turns out to be an unequivocal force for good. In a manner of speaking, Azdak is Mother Courage and Galileo without tragic qualifiers, this being one instance in which he who does the Brechtian deflating is not, in return, shown in need of the same unmasking. It is as if Brecht grew bored with demonstrating life as something to be lived only at the price of one's illusions, if not one's life. For once, his cynicism and skepticism, his hopelessness and hostility, do not determine the character of our final response. Not that this should be taken to imply that the response itself is powerful enough to merit the analysis bestowed on ambivalent reactions that are evoked by Brecht's best tragicomic work; actually, the nature of that response is not such as to explain why there are those who view The Caucasian Chalk Circle as among Brecht's masterpieces.

It was noted earlier that Brecht's episodic theater is built around a core of vivid characterization in a way reminiscent of Lenz, who insisted that Shakespeare's capacity to endow his figures with pulsing blood was his most distinguished aesthetic trait. Brecht was not unaware of Lenz. He payed tribute to him in a poem, Concerning the
Bourgeois Tragedy, 'The Tutor' by Lenz, describing Lenz's play as Figaro on the other side of the Rhine, and noting that what came through as comedy in France proved tragic in Germany because of the impotence of the German lower classes. Brecht went on to write an adaptation of The Tutor in 1950. He retained most of what Lenz put into his play: the Major and his wife are as greedy and status conscious as ever; they are still out to get labor at the lowest possible price; and they are still unaware that the tutor is a human being with human needs rather than a polished robot. In his treatment of Läuffer's relationship to his masters, Brecht adds concrete details not found in the original. Thus, we are made conscious of the knife the tutor uses to convert himself into an asexual creature; and Läuffer's desire to escape the stifling atmosphere of the aristocratic environment in which he is not allowed the minimal pleasures of normal social intercourse is focused on his attempt to get a horse from the Major. Naturally, such horses are not available for tutors. The end result is that Läuffer proceeds to take his place in a society that prefers the puppet to the man:

Only after maiming and castration
Do his masters condescend to recognize his station.
Broken in his backbone. And now he'll be an expert
In making spinelessness the major aim of education.39

For Brecht, Läuffer is the archetypal German intellectual, who is quite prepared to remodel himself in the image most reassuring to his superiors. How ironic that this same judgment is rendered by present-day German intellectuals on Brecht himself.

For Lenz, Shakespeare had charted the path modern drama should take. Brecht, too, considered Shakespeare a giant, going so far as to call him "a great realist," and crediting him with sophistications all too often missing in modern bourgeois drama. When adapting Coriolanus, Brecht was quick to point out that modern depictions of proletariat psychology suffer in comparison with Shakespeare's. It was Brecht's opinion, also, that even when Shakespeare wrote perfunctorily he wrote extremely well. But Brecht was by no means as enthusiastic about the content of Shakespeare's work as he was about

39 Brecht, Stücke, XI, 213. See also Brecht's essay on his adaptation, "Über das Poetische und Artistische," pp. 274-87, in Schriften zum Theater, VI.
its episodic form. The content he found revoltingly archaic; and he foresaw the day when plays like *King Lear* would be looked upon as examples of sadistic entertainment—for what civilized person would have the heart to watch a tragic hero being slowly cut to pieces? Shakespeare's depiction of a world in which human beings are isolated from one another by inexorable forces that defy comprehension makes him the contemporary writer par excellence for a great many readers: for Brecht, it simply makes him outdated.

Here a paradox emerges. Lenz extolled Shakespeare as the playwright-thinker who had modernized the episodic structure by infusing it with a naturalistic view of life. Conversely, Lenz belittled classical drama because the Greeks conceived of life as ruled by supernatural fate. Brecht, in contrast, defines his sense of what is modern by using Shakespeare as a negative example. He finds Shakespeare to be, in his own way, as obsessed with fatalistic action as were the Greeks of Lenz's finding. This might lead us to assume that neither Lenz nor Brecht would be responsible for plays in which human beings are pictures enmeshed in situations that underscore how little freedom of action life on this earth affords. But, as we have seen, they wrote just such plays.

We have been talking of a Lenz-Brecht tradition, and the fact that the dramatists in question do constitute a tradition is borne out by resemblances noted throughout this study. One can mention here that they share not only the basics of an attitude toward existence but a specific way of fashioning a play to convey that attitude in the most persuasive manner. They all de-emphasize Aristotelian plot in order to demonstrate episodically that man is wholly at the mercy of forces that reassert themselves with monotonous inevitability. For Lenz, these forces are social, for Grabbe and Büchner they defy definition, for Wedekind they are sexual, for Kraus, immoral, and for Brecht, economic. In the plays of these dramatists there is as much thematic similarity as one could hope to find in any group of writers linked by kinships of sensibility and temperament. Invariably they show us a world in which only hypocrites and exploiters are at home, a world that is a veritable hell for anyone with reverence for life or truth.

They are so fiercely hostile to the way things are that they do not hesitate to break through the restrictive criteria of a prosaic realism. They stage grotesquery after grotesquery and do not shy away from car-
icatural portrayals. They are not content to dramatize—they wish to teach; and commentary, both in prose and poetry, pervades their work. They have the satirist's passion for irony and the poet's conviction that the rhythms and intonations of verse are best suited to convey irony in the most concise and effective manner. Their approach to dialogue could well be termed novelistic, for they wish at all times to relate the spoken word to the texture of a specific society, to make of the manner in which characters speak an eloquent indictment of all that a society stands for.

They share the same essential inner conflict. On the one hand, they are impatiently cynical, out to convince us that the world is simply verminous; on the other, they rage prophetically against injustice and pettiness. From Lenz to Brecht we meet a strange breed of writers whom one can justifiably call idealistic cynics, men far too skeptical to believe that evil men can ever be anything but evil, but, nonetheless, so disturbed by this evil that they can hardly keep their violent feelings in check. As it is, their plays would delight any researcher of the art of drama as an outlet for aggressions. In their plays, men are castrated, beheaded, cremated alive, strangled, brainwashed, shot, etc. And while this is happening, the rest of the world spins blithely by, having its own good time. Though all the dramatists of the Lenz-Brecht tradition communicate eloquently in play after play their revulsion at such a world, one cannot help feeling that in their deepest selves they realize their way of responding to reality is a futile emotional indulgence. A world so bad cannot possibly get better. "Nothing helps . . ." could well serve as the theme of the Lenz-Brecht tradition.