Chapter One

1920–1922

America Represents Cruel Progress: “In the Jungle” and Its Sources

In 1920 Brecht jotted down the germ of an idea for what became In the Jungle (1922) and later In the Jungle of the Cities (1924–27): “Show a man young and strong (American) who falls into an affair and is derailed as a side character!” (“Einen Mann zeigen, der jung und stark [amerikanisch] in eine Affäre hineingerät und als Nebenperson entgleist!”). But work on In the Jungle does not seem to have begun in earnest until September 1921, which is also the month in which “Bargan Lets It Be” was published, a short story with a similar plot. In that month he wrote, “I’m sort of pondering about a thing called ‘Freedom’ or ‘The Enemies’” (“Ich grebe wohl da so etwas herum in eine Sache, die ‘Freiheit’ heißt oder ‘Die Feindseligen’”). And on 11 September 1921 he wrote in a notebook the first mention of the theme of the big city that was to occupy him for so long:

As I considered what Kipling did for the nation that “civilizes” the world, I came to the epochal discovery that actually nobody had yet described the big city as a jungle. Where are its heroes, its colonizers, its victims? The hostility of the big city, its malicious, stony consistency, its Babylonian confusion of language, in short: its poetry, has not yet been created.

Als ich mir überlegte, was Kipling für die Nation machte, die die Welt “zivilisiert”, kam ich zu der epochalen Entdeckung, daß eigentlich noch kein Mensch die große Stadt als Dschungel beschrieben hat. Wo sind ihre Helden, ihre Kolonisatoren, ihre Opfer? Die Feindseligkeit der großen Stadt, ihre bösartige, steinerne Konsistenz, ihre babylonische Sprachverwirrung, kurz: ihre Poesie ist noch nicht geschaffen. (GW 18:14)
According to Gisela Bahr (editor of the early version), Brecht wrote very quickly in the first few weeks, but then work on the play came to a halt. Perhaps the idyllic setting in which he worked (the countryside around his parents’ home in Augsburg, complete with swans and chestnut trees \([GW 18:14]\)) seemed too unrelated to the themes of alienation, struggle, and the city that he was trying to write about. At any rate, he moved to Berlin in the beginning of November and quickly finished the play there that winter. At first he felt well received in Berlin; the popularity of the just-published “Bargan Lets It Be” helped him meet important literary people. But he was unable to earn any money in that particularly cold winter. By the end of January, he was so undernourished that he had to go to the Charité hospital.

The move to Berlin, and the difficulties Brecht experienced there for the first time, had a large influence on his development. His conception of the city as a jungle came out of his own very real experience: he learned something in Berlin that he was to emphasize throughout his writings, namely, the primacy of the struggle for existence or “first comes eating, then comes morality” (“erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral”). Having starved in a cold winter himself, he never felt the scorn that his idealistic do-gooders (personified by the Salvation Army in his plays) feel for poor people who “know nothing higher than the rim of a bowl” \((GW 2:677)\).

From that time Brecht identified the coldness of Berlin with the coldness of Chicago. Just before moving to Berlin, he wrote in a letter or his journal, “the great fear of cold Chicago!” (“die große Angst vor dem kalten Chicago!”). A letter he wrote from Munich to Arnolt Bronnen in Berlin is probably just one example of familiar use of the word Chicago to refer to Berlin among Brecht’s circle of friends: “be nice to cas and show him cold chicago . . . in short, initiate him with piss into the secrets of cold chicago” (“sei nett zu cas und zeige ihm das kalte chikago . . . kurz weihe ihn ein mit pisse in die geheimnisse des kalten chikago”).

Chicago became and remained the center of Brecht’s interest in America. Bronnen sheds some light on the Chicago mania and its autobiographical nature in his description of the writing of Jungle:

He called it Garga then. He called it the inexplicable wrestling match of two men in the giant city Chicago, and in fact the small-towner Brecht never really finished with the problem of the city of millions. But what
did the struggle of two men mean, which also kept appearing in Brecht's dramaturgical reflections and conversations? If Garga was Brecht—and he was—who was Shlink?

The play was written with breakneck speed, it was simply there, and Brecht only needed to write it down. What was this drama after? Bronnen said: “Bert, that's you, but you've come crawling through an underbrush of Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Villon, shreds of you, of them are hanging all mixed up together. What did you want to say?” Brecht said: “The last sentence.” It was: “The chaos is used up. It was the best time.”

But the chaos was still there. Chicago itself was still there. Maybe write a film, to get rid of this Chicago?

Er nannte es damals Garga. Er nannte es den unerklärlichen Ringkampf zweier Männer in der Riesenstadt Chikago, und in der Tat wurde der Kleinstädter Brecht mit dem Problem der Millionenstadt nie ganz fertig. Was aber bedeutete der Kampf zweier Männer, der auch in Brechts dramaturgischen Erwägungen und Gesprächen immer wieder auf­tauchte? Wenn Garga Brecht war—und er war es—: wer war Shlink?


Aber das Chaos war immer noch da. Selbst Chikago war noch da. Vielleicht einen Film schreiben, um dieses Chikago loszuwerden?

That Brecht identified so much with this play is important. He felt a simultaneous revulsion and attraction to Chicago/Berlin that the Germans call Haßliebe. It was precisely his difficult experience with the big city—the necessity to fight to stay alive—and simultaneously a sense of wonder and respect for technology and progress, that formed his symbolic picture of America when he first started writing about it.

In the edition he prepared for print (1927, In the Jungle of the Cities), Brecht removed the most personal passages, so it is harder for the reader of the standard version to realize what Chicago (or America) meant for him. In 1928, in program notes for the Heidelberg production, he continued to downgrade his own identification with America by explaining the use of Chicago as a kind of aesthetic trick. Although the note does not perfectly express Brecht's attitude at the time he wrote the first version of the play, it is a major
statement on his use of American settings for purposes of dramatic alienation:

ON JUNGLE

my preference for the american milieu does not come as was often supposed from a penchant for romanticism—this false conception arose from false productions that in turn arose because the theaters assuming I knew america very badly or not at all simply held to the aroma the aroma was in fact too seductive and I have taken pains to eliminate it i had chosen america not only for purely aesthetic reasons but from shall we say somewhat imprecisely but understandably political instinct the point for me was not to emphasize the freedom or offensiveness of certain actions—which could have happened if i had chosen germany as milieu—rather almost everything depended for me on making these actions utterly strange i.e. conspicuous . . . the device of a background (namely the american) that corresponded by nature with the freedom (or offensiveness) of my types so that [it] would not disturb and distract seemed to me the easiest way to steer attention toward the uniqueness of the actions of contemporary great human types in the german milieu these types would have become romantic that is ideals in the american they are realities practically speaking i would have been fully satisfied if the theaters had projected america on the backdrop with ordinary photographs

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meine vorliebe für das amerikanische milieu entspringt nicht wie oft gemeint wurde einem hang zur romantik—diese falsche vorstellung entstand durch falsche aufführungen die wieder dadurch entstanden daß die theater in der annahme ich kändte amerika sehr schlecht oder gar nicht sich einfach an das aroma hielten das aroma war tatsächlich zu verführerisch und ich habe mich bemüht es abzustellen ich hatte amerika nicht nur aus rein künstlerischen gründen gewählt sondern aus sagen wir etwas ungenau aber verständlich politischem instinkt es kam mir nicht darauf an die freiheit oder anstößigkeit gewisser handlungen zu betonen—was geschehen konnte wenn ich deutschland als milieu genommen hätte—sondern es lag mir beinahe alles daran diese handlungen ganz und gar fremd d.h. eben auffällig zu machen . . . durch einen hintergrund (eben den amerikanischen) der der freiheit (oder anstößigkeit) meiner typen von natur entsprach so daß sie [sic] nicht störend ablenkte glaubte ich das augenmerk am leichtesten auf die eigenartigkeit der handlungen zeitgemäßer großer menschentypen lenken zu können in deutschem milieu wären diese typen romantisch das heißt wunschbilder geworden in amerikanischem sind es realitäten praktisch gesprochen hätte es mir völlig ausgereicht wenn die theater amerika durch gewöhnliche fotografien auf den prospekt geworfen hätten
As we will see, Brecht's ideas both on America and on dramatic technique had changed considerably by 1928. We can be certain that in 1921–22 Chicago and America had strong personal—although ambivalent—meaning for him. In fact, for a while he seems to have wanted to include Chicago in the title of the play that became *In the Jungle*: there are five loose pages in the Brecht Archive with handwritten notes from 1921 and 1922 for a play to be called *Chicago* or *The Play of Cold Chicago* or *Cold Chicago*. And even at the end of 1925, he still considered Chicago a principal theme of the play: “That’s why you were for the play *Jungle*. . . . You were pleased that cold Chicago is so pleasant to look at” (“Deshalb waren Sie auch für das Stück ‘Dickicht’. . . . Sie waren erfreut, daß das kalte Chicago so angenehm anzusehen ist”) (GW 15:75).

We have some conception already of the phenomenon of Americanism in postwar Germany. And we know that throughout the twenties Brecht was fascinated and horrified by the great cities; he planned a whole series of works on the “Human Migration to the Big Cities.” But we find no clue in his autobiographical statements as to why he consistently chose Chicago, rather than, say, New York or San Francisco, to represent both America and the cities.

The reason is simply that the sources for his ideas both on America and on the city are themselves all set in Chicago; they use Chicago as the extreme and therefore the typical, archetypical case of urbanization and the American social and economic system. We will look at these books thoroughly, because they provided most of Brecht’s imagery of America; then we will return to *In the Jungle*, to see how Brecht used his sources.

*Sinclair, “The Jungle”*

The first American book that we know Brecht read, Upton Sinclair’s *Jungle*, may have determined his fixation on Chicago, his city imagery, and his picture of America for the rest of his life, regardless of future reading. It is a giant in the “Chicago genre”; it made an impression in both the United States and Germany out of all proportion to its literary value. In the United States it was the direct cause of federal legislation (the pure food laws); in Germany it was translated and published within the same year that it had appeared in the United States, 1906, and (to give an example of its effect) before he ever met Brecht, Paul Dessau had tried to turn it into an opera.
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On 15 April, 1920 Brecht wrote a review of Schiller's *Don Carlos* for the newspaper *Volkswillen* in Augsburg. It is one of the first examples we know of Brecht's materialism, to be formulated in 1928 (in *The Threepenny Opera*) as "first comes eating, then comes morality." That idea, though certainly not new with Brecht (Büchner had already explored it unforgottably in the very "epic" *Woyzeck*, for instance), is very closely tied up with the development of Brecht's ideas on America.

He begins the review by saying God knows he has always loved *Don Carlos*:

But recently I've been reading in Sinclair's *Jungle* the story of a worker who is starved to death in the slaughterhouses of Chicago. It's a matter of simple hunger, cold, illness, which will do a man in as surely as if they were appointed by God. Once this man has a modest vision of freedom, then he is beaten down with rubber nightsticks. His freedom hasn't the slightest thing to do with Carlos's freedom, I know that: but I can't take Carlos's oppression really seriously any more. . . . So go see *Don Carlos* . . . (But when you get a chance read Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* too.)

Brecht must have taken his own advice and reread *The Jungle* occasionally, because its influence is much clearer in *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1929–30) than in the early plays. But it certainly determined his picture of America from the beginning. It also had some influence on his political and his aesthetic ideas, as is plain from the *Don Carlos* review. There are insights here that lay dormant through the whole first period of his work, until he was twenty-eight years old and writing on economic themes, using drama for the purpose of unmasking the processes that lie behind suffering and man's inability to attain freedom. Beginning shortly before 1926 but particularly in *St. Joan*, Brecht was concerned to show that simple hunger, cold, and sickness do not in fact come from God but are
caused by human beings as agents of a human system. As he puts it in this early review, the worker in Chicago's stockyards does not starve but is starved—by someone. And: having read a novel treating these problems, Brecht cannot take the old drama seriously. He also returned to this aesthetic problem in 1926. To be sure, at age twenty-two he was already cursing loudly at the old drama and especially the old way of producing drama (theater); but it was not until about 1926 that he thought of transforming drama so that it could have the function of the novel (called in German "epic," or narrative).

The fact that the principal ideas of Brecht's later development were present in embryo after an early reading of *The Jungle* shows the importance of the book for him, and the fact that he went back to those ideas specifically when writing his best and longest America play, *St. Joan*, shows that he probably associated the book strongly with his conception of America. And well he might, for it is a powerful and memorable indictment of the American system. That is not necessarily to say that it is a well-written book, but it is an important book, important for its documentary value, as Brecht would say. Brecht used works of literature just as he would use history or reference books: as sources of information. It was always the sociological data, seldom the style or tone, that Brecht took from his sources on America. They are all in the naturalistic and muckraking tradition, completely devoid of humor; but even when using the most lurid elements of the source or when without reservation criticizing conditions under capitalism, Brecht wrote with irony and humor—though the irony was often bitter and the humor black. He was irritated almost as much by illogic as by injustice and used a dialectical, superficially humorous, *reductio ad absurdum* kind of logic to demonstrate that a situation was wrong (in both the logical and the moral sense). Throughout his works he wanted to promote thought. At no time did he use the naturalist style.

The effect of Sinclair's technique is to produce not primarily thought but horror and nausea. It is a masochistic act to read *The Jungle*: the optimism felt at the beginning by the new immigrants to Chicago's stockyards sinks and sinks into drudgery, then squalor, then degradation, and farther down to misery, then desperation, and yet farther and even farther down. Every disaster is dwelled on in loving detail, every wound salted and probed. Sinclair is
determined to make the reader *suffer*, experience some of the hopelessness of a working man in Chicago. The book is a tour de force in empathetic technique, with an almost pornographic effect on the reader, who finds himself skimming ahead eager to find what worse catastrophes can occur, hardly interested in the “clean” passages. The reader’s reaction is similar to the reaction of helpless Jurgis in jail hearing from one of the children about conditions at home:

"Ona is very sick," Stanislovas said; “and we are almost starving. . . . She won’t eat anything, and she cries all the time. She won’t tell what is the matter and she won’t go to work at all. . . . And then Marija . . . she’s cut her hand!” said the boy. “She’s cut it bad, this time, worse than before. She can’t work and it’s all turning green, and the company doctor says she may—she may have to have it cut off. And Marija cries all the time—her money is nearly gone, too, and we can’t pay the rent and the interest on the house; and we have no coal and nothing more to eat, and the man at the store, he says—"

The little fellow stopped again, beginning to whimper. “Go on!” the other panted in frenzy—"Go on!"13

The impact of this short passage is representative of almost the whole book. After three hundred pages of being forced to feel the situation in his heartstrings and his stomach, the reader cannot make the sudden transition to using his head in the last few pages; the arguments for socialism at the end are simply anticlimactic, tacked on rather than organic. They certainly do not seem to have made any impression on Brecht. Much later (1938?), he attributed Sinclair’s inability to show the positive side (i.e., the socialist alternative) to his naturalistic technique, which

does not permit showing the new humaneness of the class-conscious worker of our age. Upton Sinclair’s technique is not too new but too old for such tasks. That is not too little Balzac, but too much Balzac.

gestattet nicht, die neue Menschlichkeit des klassenbewußten Proletariers unserer Zeit zu gestalten. Upton Sinclairs Technik ist nicht zu neu, sondern zu alt für solche Aufgaben. Das ist nicht zuwenig Balzac, sondern zuviel Balzac. (*GW* 19:316)

Of course, not all naturalism is as depressing as Sinclair’s, and Brecht’s confrontation with naturalism occupied his whole life; it cannot be summarized as briefly as this. Nevertheless, his fundamental objections to it were apparent from the beginning:
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stylistically, it was too florid, and ideologically it encouraged fatalism. The positive contribution is, of course, the respect naturalists give to working and poor people as subject matter. Brecht adopted the subjects but transformed the style into one that encouraged activity, optimism, and critical thinking.\(^{14}\)

In 1920 Brecht was not so interested in the class-consciousness of the working class and would not have criticized *The Jungle* in those terms; in fact, he only praised it. But the book nevertheless failed to interest him in the socialist solution to the situation presented; he seems not to have expressed any interest in socialism until about 1926.

What did interest him in *The Jungle* was the picture presented of a poor immigrant family moving to the New World—and to the city—and having their dreams destroyed. Brecht cared at that time about the life-and-death struggle itself, not its solution, and he cared about Chicago (\(=\) America \(=\) city) as the setting for the struggle. The picture of Chicago that impressed Brecht so much in *The Jungle* is above all the stockyards, with their utter disdain for any sanctity of life. The meat kings are as ready to kill men as animals. (This is later rendered by Brecht in the figure of Mauler, who in *St. Joan* cannot bear to see cattle killed but orders strikers shot.)

But Jurgis, the young immigrant and focus of the story, is impressed at first not by the inhumanity but by the efficiency of the stockyards. (Such a response is also representative of the reaction by Europeans to the United States in the twenties.) Never before had anyone seen such a concentration of life-energy producing such miracles and monstrosities.

Brecht too was impressed by the mere dimensions of progress in America and in the cities: “the new age had come greater than any previous one” (“die neue zeit war gekommen größer als jede vorhergehende”) (BBA 460, 63). And in 1931, in another significant short sketch, he confirmed that the interest of the postwar generation of dramatists was

the material grandeur of the age, its huge technological accomplishments, the mighty deeds of the big money people. . . . The world as it is should be demonstrated and recognized, its own mercilessness shown mercilessly to be its greatness: its God should be “the God of things as they are.”

die materiellen Größe der Zeit, ihre technische Riesenleistungen, die

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That is exactly the same kind of fatalistic admiration that Sinclair’s Jurgis feels on being shown the stockyards:

To Jurgis it seemed almost profanity to speak about the place as did Jokubus, sceptically; it was a thing as tremendous as the universe—the laws and ways of its working no more than the universe to be questioned or understood. . . . To be given a place in it and a share in its wonderful activities was a blessing to be grateful for, as one was grateful for the sunshine and the rain. (P. 45)

It is the American dream, the dream that young men can by their own efforts reach superhuman heights, always upward, never failing, in a system too marvelous to be understood or questioned. Jurgis, himself young and very strong, is fully in favor of a situation where the strongest survive.

But gradually the full meaning of the law of survival unfolds itself to him and his family. They discover that each of them has got his job through the misfortune of someone else; each is forced to kill or pack diseased meat (and even rats and human corpses); each is subject to serious injury and disease. The rest of the book shows the various members of the family gradually reduced to the state of animals, losing all their “human” values in the fight to survive.

The basic law of Chicago, of the city, and of the industrial system is presented by Sinclair as the law of the jungle: not only the survival of the fittest but also the inexorable perishing of all who become unfit. It is an inhuman law, forcing human beings to behave like beasts of prey. As Jurgis discovers, it is a system that only looks good as long as you have the resources, physical or financial, to stay on top. It is of course the “inhumanity” of capitalism that Sinclair attacks, and Darwinian competition fits well for him as a metaphor for capitalist competition. It is not just a metaphor; Sinclair wishes to say that under capitalism men are actually forced to relate to each other as beasts: each beast has his own family whose right to live he protects by fighting for whatever he can get at the cost of other families. This metaphor informs the whole book, as is obvious from the title.15

The idea of calling his Chicago play In the Jungle probably came
to Brecht in the fall of 1921, when he wrote the first scenes, including one called "Jungle" (literally, thicket) ("Dickicht") and one called "Wooden Structure in the Jungle" ("Holzbau im Dickicht"). That is also when he recorded the "epochal discovery that no one had yet described the big city as a jungle" (see above, p. 12); but even as he wrote that, he must have been reminded of Sinclair's *Jungle*, which he read a year and a half earlier. (It is unimportant that *The Jungle* was translated as *Der Sumpf* and that Brecht used the word *Dickicht* not *Dschungel* for the title. Their metaphoric meanings in German are similar.)

However Sinclair does not describe primarily the *city* as a jungle; it is the capitalist system he describes; the city is simply a setting that exhibits the faults of the system to an extreme. For Brecht, at this point and for several years to come, the focal point was the city itself. Therefore, he adopted the conditions of poverty in *The Jungle* for his play, but he did not show their origin. It is clear from the subject matter of Brecht's poems that his fascination with cities began around the time he wrote *Jungle* and moved to Berlin, and that it reached a climax about 1925–26. At the very beginning of his career, he had a certain romantic and almost animistic attachment to nature, evident in *Baal* and early poems; but this quickly gave way to the necessity of dealing with a more modern theme, the cruelty of the cities.

Although it is primary, the metaphor of the city as jungle is not the only impression of Chicago that Brecht gleaned from Sinclair: another very forceful impression was of the *coldness* of Chicago. As we have seen, Brecht used the expression "cold Chicago" to refer to Berlin. In *St. Joan*, Chicago's cold is a major factor in ruining the strike, and it also kills Joan, in scenes similar to Sinclair's unbearable description of Jurgis's family's miseries. The struggle that builds the plot of *In the Jungle* begins and ends with Garga's declaration that Chicago is cold: "The windows are closed, since Chicago is cold, if that amuses you" ("Die fenster sind geschlossen, da Chikago kalt ist, wenn es Ihnen Spaß macht") (p. 15); and "I will carry my raw flesh out into the sleet. Chicago is cold. I'm going into it" ("Ich werde mein rohes Fleisch in die Eisregen hinaustragen. Chikago ist kalt. Ich gehe hinein") (p. 100). And in the notebook that Brecht kept in the fall of 1921, he wrote, "The play is set in an unreal, cold Chicago" ("Das Stück spielt in einem unwirklichen, kalten Chikago").
It is not trivial to pinpoint the origins of Brecht’s association of coldness with Chicago: it was a strikingly important symbol for him, a large part of his Chicago picture and significant in his plays. Natural cold as a symbol, of course, represents human coldness, unfriendliness, inhumanity. This was certainly part of what Brecht meant when he called Berlin “cold Chicago”—he had a very hard time at first in Berlin finding contacts—and it is a connotation of Garga’s “Chicago is cold.” Unfriendliness, coldness, is a characteristic of cities in general for those who move there from the country or small towns, as Brecht and so many of his characters did, and so a city known for its cold temperature is an especially good model for The City.

At the same time, the cold also leads human beings to become more “bestial,” forces the instinct to struggle for survival nearer the surface; and so it serves to show the competition in the city (and, for Sinclair, in capitalism). Sinclair repeatedly describes the cold in terms of the natural struggle and the animalization of man:

The blizzard knocked many a man out. . . . When it was over, the soul of Jurgis was a song, for he had met the enemy and conquered, and felt himself the master of his fate. So it might be with some monarch of the forest that has vanquished his foes in fair fight, and then falls into some cowardly trap in the nighttime. (P. 116)

There came a spell of belated winter weather, with a raging gale, and the thermometer five degrees below zero at sundown and falling all night. Then Jurgis fought like a wild beast to get into the big Harrison Street police station. (P. 201)

Sinclair’s Chicago is not only a cold city and a jungle; it is also a corrupt city. Jurgis is introduced to all the inner connections of the politicians and the underworld, a subject that was later to fascinate Brecht and form the basis of Happy End and Arturo Ui, both also set in Chicago. Elections are won in The Jungle by elaborate manipulation of ignorant opinion, of which buying votes is only the most open form; Jurgis himself is hired to carry out this function, thereby betraying his class. He betrays his class again by working as a scab in the strike that is a significant model for the strike in St. Joan.

Also important for Brecht’s conception of America is the fact that Sinclair’s stockyards are peopled entirely by immigrants. Moving from Europe to America is a parallel to moving from the country to the city, which Brecht considered the central theme of his early
work. For Brecht, country = backwardness = Old World, and city = progress = America. The American dream is for Brecht the same as the dream of living hard and getting rich fast in the cities. In *Jungle*, Shlink is a Malayan (originally a Chinese) who has become rich in America but still feels inferior because of his race. And the Garga family is presented in the introductory program notes as being French immigrants, but in the text of the play they only mention that they are from the country. (This inconsistency demonstrates the similarity in symbolic meaning between a move from Europe to America and a move from country to city.) The mother was born in the southern states (p. 89); the family comes from the “Alleghani-Gebirgen” (mountains) (p. 99) and from the “Savannah” (p. 109); and Garga tells Marie, “We grew up in the flatlands” (“Wir sind im flachen Land aufgewachsen”) (p. 28), meaning they do not understand the ways of the city.

It is important not just for Brecht’s conception of America but also for the whole series he built around the “Human Migration to the Big Cities” that the American dream is reversed in *The Jungle*, transformed into the American nightmare. This gullible immigrant family from Lithuania falls for every gimmick; the glittering picture of America in Europe is traced back to public relations stunts performed by the kings of the meat industry to get cheap labor. There is not much left of the land of opportunity when Jurgis has seen it from the bottom; as Brecht later puts it in *Mahagonny*, “Here everything is allowed” (“Hier darfst du alles dürfen”) as long as you can pay for it, and if you cannot: you die.

Sinclair is quite specific about what is wrong with the American dream: “If we are the greatest nation the sun ever shone upon, it would seem to be mainly because we have been able to goad our wage-earners to this pitch of frenzy” (p. 198). Sinclair maintains in *The Jungle* that corruption and injustice are inherent in the American, or capitalist, system, and presents rebellion against the system in any form as legitimate, but only rebellion through trade union and Socialist Party organization as effective.

To all these political opinions Brecht returned later, but they did not really impress him in 1920. As we have seen, what excited him about America was not so much the opportunity to “make good” as its symbolization of the new beginning, the rebellion against the decadence of Europe or the decadence of the bourgeoisie—which
was Brecht’s own rebellion—the progress, the vitality. Brecht embraced jazz and boxing and cigars and casual American clothing and the anti-intellectual, pro-sport, and pro-entertainment attitude that was associated with the growth of the United States. America was confidence and rebirth. America was a slap in the face of the older generation.

Yet in *The Jungle*, America, or Chicago, is an unfriendly backdrop, a place of utmost cold and alienation. This is not a contradiction; Brecht believed that this energetic land was also a merciless one, an impression gleaned partly from *The Jungle*. And it is not an accident that he chose America as the setting for a struggle; he knew it was the land of competition. What did change was his ideological understanding of competition; that it exists he had always known.

**Jensen, “The Wheel”**

But there are two kinds of struggle in *Jungle*: the struggle of the poor Garga family to stay alive, and the “metaphysical” struggle between Shlink and Garga. This latter struggle, which builds the basic plot of the play, has little to do with class struggle or a social Darwinist society; for Shlink it is the means to overcome alienation and make contact with another man, and for Garga it is the means to assert his freedom and individuality. Chicago would not seem to be a necessary setting for such a story, but it was the obvious choice for Brecht, because it is the setting of the book that served as an immediate model for that struggle. The material struggle of the Gargas is based partly on *The Jungle*; the metaphysical struggle of Shlink and George Garga is based largely on *The Wheel* (*Hjulet*), by the Danish novelist Johannes V. Jensen. It was translated into German under the title *Das Rad* and printed in Berlin in 1908. Brecht himself mentions *The Wheel* as an influence on *In the Jungle* in the 1954 essay “On Looking through My Early Plays.” He calls it not a source but an impression (*Eindruck*) (*GW* 17:949). Clearly *The Wheel* is a source for the plot (the struggle) of *In the Jungle*, as Gisela Bahr notes: “What Brecht found in Jensen’s novel, and reproduced in the plot framework as well as in some individual psychological characteristics, was the model of a private struggle between two men” (“Was Brecht in Jensens Roman vorfand und im Gerüst des Handlungsverlaufs wie auch in manchen psy-
chologischen Einzelzügen nachgebildet hat, war das Modell eines privaten Kampfes zweier Männer"). 19 Yet Brecht in referring to The Wheel as a source does not mention that aspect of it; he calls it just “J. Jensens Chikagoroman” (GW 17:949). And it is a “Chicago novel” to an even greater extent than The Jungle; here the city of Chicago itself is virtually anthropomorphized. Chicago is a character—a living presence—in the story.

Brecht used Jensen’s Chicago not only as a setting for his text but also as a stage setting for the original production of In the Jungle in Munich, May 1923. His early friend H. O. Münsterer recalls the scene:

The performance began splendidly, but for the Residenztheater audience, shockingly; Cas Neher’s scenery, built on the revolving stage, rotated under the street noises of the metropolis waking up on the open stage, and after some hesitation stood still as if by chance at Maynes’s lending library. Jensen’s Wheel, which had very substantially inspired the writing of the play, is also known to begin with the Git-up calls of the Chicago wagon drivers.

Die Aufführung begann großartig, aber für das Publikum des Residenztheaters schockierend; die auf der Drehbühne aufgebauten Schauplätze Cas Nehers kreisten unter dem Straßenlärm der erwachenden Großstadt bei offener Bühne und standen nach einigem Tasten wie zufällig bei Maynes Leihbibliothek still. Auch Jensens Rad, das sehr wesentlich zur Entstehung des Stückes angeregt hatte, wird bekanntlich durch die Git-up-Rufe der Chikagoer Lastkarrenführer eingeleitet. 20

Münsterer’s description makes clear that the production treated the city of Chicago as a significant entity in the play.

There are many similarities between Sinclair’s and Jensen’s Chicago, and there is one great difference: Jensen loves the city unequivocally. He is a passionate dreamer of the American dream, as is the young poet in the book, Lee.

Chicago is the city that embodies for Jensen the typically American pulsing of life. It is business; action; huge machines; progress. Although man-made, it is so huge that it is out of the control of human beings; behind the perfectly functioning machinery of the city lurks the danger of loss of control, of regression to the primitive. The city is strong and wonderful and kind; its breakdown is chaos. Technology is mysterious but marvelous: it protects man from the primeval.

26
The book opens with pages of description in purple periods; Jensen’s as well as Lee’s stylistic purpose is to sing the praises of industrial society in the rapturous idiom previously reserved for novels of love and nature or for romantic poems. The flowery style probably amused Brecht. (But he apparently liked Jensen’s book just the same; Helene Weigel said he also read the same author’s *Madame D’Ora.* ) Since the book has not been translated into English and is largely unavailable even in German, I will translate a few long passages from the version that Brecht read, to give an idea of its style.

One example from the opening pages is enough to demonstrate the euphuistic style of the whole book, and it demonstrates Jensen’s conception of Chicago as well:

In the deep gorge between Michigan Avenue and the water the trains of the Illinois Central ran in and out, hundreds of long, heavily laden trains from all regions of America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, from the polar regions to the gardens of Florida, a rolling of thousands of wheels, a tone deep and dark and acrid like the air that was saturated with soot and rested heavily over everything. The black ravine was alive with trains, with endless rows of freight cars pushing in crowded confusion, with smoking locomotives; it lay like an endlessly milling pit between the yellow fog walls of Lake Michigan and the copper-red fiery air of the city, which rose like a funeral pyre of stone and metal with its long white cliff banks of towered houses, and which mixed its red vapors and its piercing sulfur smoke with the raw fog of the winter night. Here in this mighty hell thundered the mill that grinds America together and sets its tone, here sang *Grotto,* the old destroyer and lifegiver, here grumbled the *Wheel.*

The wheel is Jensen’s symbol of the civilization of Chicago, of progress or technology, and above all of order:

It was the pulse of the living machines, that are nourished from the coal fires underneath, it was the beat in the heart of the light which sends artificial day through copper arteries under the ice-cold tiles of the street into the main body of the city. Oho, it was the *Wheel* that never rests! It was the Wheel that upheld the possibility of life and the day, here in this rock vein of a city in the middle of the prairie, where only three, four generations ago the redskin struggled on snowshoes in the buffalo’s trail across the desolate snow-desert. (P. 13)

Here is the vision of the grandeur of the city that gripped Brecht, too, though Brecht would never have used such rhetoric to describe it. This admiration for progress he did not simply take from Jensen;
his whole generation shared it. It was the generation of *Neue
Sachlichkeit*, of glorification of the non-poetic, technical elements
of modern civilization. But Brecht also recognized the danger and
inhumanity in the modern cities; for Jensen the danger lies only in
the possibility that primitive passions and primitive natural
conditions may reconquer civilization.

It is that threatened catastrophe of disorder and irrationality that
makes a general strike in Chicago so dangerous. Lee's heroic act is to
save the city by killing the strike's demagogic leader, Evanston alias
Cancer (who is also the man who has him under the spell that
becomes a struggle to the death).

The danger to Chicago is expressed in terms of encroachment of
cold. In the scheme of the book, Cancer is the destructive force that
tries to end human and technological control of Chicago and turn it
over to the natural cold:

> Telegraph and telephone will be suspended! The *press* will stop! Cancer
wants to cordon Chicago off. Chicago is to be isolated from all four
world regions, until silence returns, the silence that prepares God's
coming!

> Cancer wants to give Chicago to the poor!

> Before midnight God will be in Chicago! (P. 237)

Lee has a vision of what it would be like were Cancer's strike to
succeed and all the wheels running Chicago to grind to a halt. The
vision is a nightmare of the power of cold and natural forces:

> Ice blooms out of the sidewalks and out of the doors of abandoned
houses, the entire city turns to stone. Winter marches into Chicago, the
north wind in its full biting majesty, and sets up in the streets a fortress of
steeply combed snowdrifts, towers the snow up on Masonic Temple,
transforms parks and districts into wilderness, fills the Illinois Central
gorge, buries all train stations. (P. 239)

and so on—a single periodic sentence designed to create terror of
snow and cold.

Lee ends his vision by deciding it must not be allowed to happen.
He goes walking by Lake Michigan and there are almost two pages
of description of the cracking of the ice in the cold. "And that
awakened monstrous images of something in nature that has been
subdued and that can rise up again. It was a raw and wild winter
night, like a night in the beginning of all existence" (p. 242). In this
situation Lee is suddenly overwhelmed by the insight that the high
grade of civilization reached by the city is caused by Chicago’s need to overcome unusually strong natural forces: “From that followed inviolable property rights, the rights of a creator, which he felt himself called upon to maintain and defend” (p. 243).

Brecht’s references in Dickicht to trains going to Illinois and to both coasts may well be an echo of the heroic setting in the opening pages of The Wheel. Brecht did not care in the slightest whether his geographical bearings were correct, but he wanted the atmosphere of mighty activity and progress that Jensen creates, and he wanted place-names. The geography of the American railroads is confused in Dickicht: in the scene “In the Quarry” (“Im Steinbruch”), we hear the “Pacific trains” (“Pazifikzüge”) in the background; Garga asks, “What’s the noise?” (“Was ist der Lärm?”); and although they are in Chicago, the other answers, “The trains to Illinois” (“Die Züge nach Illinois”). Later when he hears a train above, he says, “That’s the Pacific. New York!” (“Das ist der Pazifik. New York!”) (p. 23).

Throughout the works that are set in America, especially in Mahagonny, Brecht is blithely unconcerned about correctness of detail—and yet he uses many very concrete details. This apparent contradiction comes from the fact that actually the setting in all of his plays has somewhat the character of an allegory; he is not interested in painting a portrait of America but in using the conception people already have of America to reinforce the points he is making in the play. The sprinkling of place-names through the play serves the same purpose as projecting pictures of these places on a screen, as he suggests in “my preference for the American milieu” (see above, p. 15). It does not matter where they are, as long as the audience recognizes them as being America.

This is the early dramaturgical function of America: simple dramatic alienation, carrying the action into a strange milieu so it will not be judged with traditional or local criteria. But there is an ideological function beginning right with the first American play, In the Jungle, and growing in importance later on, of which Brecht himself was not fully aware at first. One way of getting at America’s ideological role for him is to notice the way he reacted to Jensen’s ideology in The Wheel. The Wheel is an example of a book from which Brecht took some concrete details and atmosphere that he found valuable, but we can easily see that he totally rejected the ideas. The book is startlingly racist, misogynistic, and anti-working
class. Each of these subjects—race, women, and class—gets a treatment in *Jungle* that is not necessary just to show the struggle between Shlink and Garga; perhaps Brecht was moved to include them because of his reaction against Jensen.

The young hero of the book, Lee, wants to convince his millionaire capitalist friend, H. A. Gronau, that America is the great melting pot, the home for all free men. Lee as the Promethean, creative genius envisions himself (presumably through his poetry) making “out of America a home also for the Germans!” (“aus Amerika eine Heimat auch für die Deutschen!”) (p. 63). He has a special affinity for the Germans because they help him give America the tradition, the history as promised land, that he wants to create for it: “I want to found an Aryan center here in America—this is after all the discovered land! The wheel of freedom is here, giving energy to as many as want to join it. Here is also the mill hole around which the freed peoples of the world swing” (p. 64). This is something more than the standard American dream. This is exaltation of it and synthesis of it with European traditions into a racist mythology; this is the beginnings of an Aryan Reich on American soil. These immigrants are not at all the same as those in Sinclair's Chicago novel; here they are the master race (and Gronau is a millionaire to boot). “England and Australia, Scandinavia, Germany and Holland and America, they all constitute one empire . . . they are all America . . . everywhere where there are descendants of the old nordic nomadic tribes, America is there, because the land of which the ancients dreamed is America” (p. 25).

This is not the only disturbing aspect of Jensen's ideology of race. There is the explicit racism of Evanston against the Chinese, which may have influenced Brecht’s portrayal of Shlink (originally Chinese):

> I had the urge to present myself as the foreign white god from faraway to these four hundred million yellow people, who hate each other to the point of bloodshed . . . . The Chinese doesn't know yearning. He has the other venereal diseases, but yearning is reserved for the white man, especially the Northlander. (P. 194)

There is no sign that Jensen himself rejects such prejudices expressed by his characters; on the contrary, he probably shares them, since Lee, the protagonist (whom he intends to make sympathetic), himself shares them. On the other hand, it is amply
clear that Brecht uses the repeated references to race in *Jungle* for characterization, i.e., to expose racism in his characters. In 1928 he writes that it would have been enough to signify Shlink's race on stage with simple yellow paint, and then just to let him behave like an Asian, "that is like a European" ("nämlich wie ein Europäer") (*GW* 17:972).

Any possible doubts about Brecht's attitude toward racial prejudice disappear with the lynching scene. First Garga tells Shlink that there were lynchings that day: "Negroes like dirty laundry on clotheslines" ("Neger wie schmutzige Wäsche an Stricken") (p. 88). Then he has the idea of turning all the men in the bar (who have animal names) against Shlink so he will be lynched. It is ridiculously easy to do; he simply tells them the old story that yellow-skinned men are sleeping with their daughters. He uses all the old clichés that were used to turn white men against black men for a lynching in the American South. Brecht knows exactly the right lines; he may have had a specific source on racism in the United States that we do not know about.

Jensen's attitude toward other races is bad enough, but his attitude toward women is unequivocally reactionary:

Nature's gender is female, woman is existence itself, and Cancer was man of the masses and traditional type enough to be a woman's equivalent, he had remained just far enough behind in evolution, he was just weak enough in nerve and irresponsible enough a liar so that he, although of the male gender, could stand on a niveau with nature and with woman. Even his fanatic misogyny was only the force with which the female pole of his being removed him from his own, it was one more piece of wenchlike behavior. . . . He was, like woman, a born criminal—but he lacked woman's fertility. (Pp. 295, 296)

The theme of objectification of women plays an important part in Brecht's play, too, but with a very different value attached to it. Unlike his later plays, which treat women as strong, independent, and equal to men, Brecht's early works, including *Jungle*, present women as objects, which is the role literature has traditionally assigned to them. Most women in the early plays are whores; *Mahagonny* and *The Threepenny Opera* are of course replete with them. But Brecht shows he is conscious that society forces women into a role where their only function is to give pleasure to men, regardless of what their wishes may be.

Both Garga's mother, Maë, and his sister, Marie, are strong
characters who understand what is going on. But Maë disappears after an insult from her husband (she rejects objectification), and Marie is forced to become a whore. It is one of Shlink’s tactics in the fight to try to get at Garga’s emotions by making Marie suffer; Garga refuses to be upset and uses her in turn against Shlink. They both use her emotions like pieces in a game. Schlink says, “I burden you with the fate of your sister. You have opened her eyes to the fact that for all eternity she will remain an object among [under] men!” (“Ich belade Sie mit dem Schicksal ihrer Schwester. Sie haben ihr die Augen geöffnet darüber, daß sie in alle Ewigkeit ein Objekt bleibt unter den Männern!” (p. 56). Brecht understood the reification of women very clearly.

Both Shlink and Garga would like to love Marie, but they subordinate kindness to her to the tactics of their fight; neither can allow himself a moment of emotion in this completely psychological battle. Marie sees more clearly than Garga himself that each time he appears to be winning he is actually losing, because he has degraded himself, allowed himself to become a little more inhuman. It is a terrible side-effect of the ruthlessness of the struggle that she must be sacrificed. In an unusually emotional scene, when Garga has come out of prison and she has told him what she has become, someone in the bar calls “Coquettes!” (“Kokotten!”) at her and “Vice is women’s perfume” (“Das Laster ist das Parfüm der Damen”). She answers, with tears running down her cheeks,

We coquettes! Powder over the face, you can’t see the eyes that used to be blue. Stink of plague between our legs! The men who do business with scoundrels make love with us. We sell our sleep, we live from mistreatment, the orphans of our dear lady!

Wir Kokotten! Puder über dem Gesicht, man sieht die Augen nicht, die blau waren. Pestgestank zwischen den Beinen! Die Männer, die mit Schuften Geschäfte machen, lieben mit uns. Wir verkaufen unseren Schlaf, wir leben von Mißhandlung, die Waisen unserer lieben Frau! (P. 82)

Here Brecht is seeing through the tortured eyes of the ruined woman; he is seeing woman as a subject that has been made an object by men, not as a creature born only to be an object.

But at least Marie gains financial independence, by demanding payment for her degradation. The role of whore in Brecht’s plays is an ambiguous one: whores are victims of male society, but they are
also tough and independent, like the Jennys in both *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*. Interestingly, the whore seems to have been associated in Brecht’s mind with the American or Anglo-Saxon milieu.

There is one aspect of Jensen’s ideology that must have angered Brecht even more than his racism and misogyny; that is his treatment of the strike. It is clear that he has no conception whatever of the workers’ side of it. He does not know the term “general strike.” The strike is utter chaos; he describes it like a war, with shooting and rioting; for him it is the breakdown of order; it is total disaster. The honest workingmen are kept at it against their own interest by Evanston’s demagogy: they have no ability to think for themselves. Jensen speaks of the strike as a “destroying power,” a “mishap,” a “catastrophe.” In other words, the mass is as terrifying and dangerous to him as nature, and just as irrational. It never occurs to him that perhaps the strikers should have won; the proper solution is to break the strike and end the chaos.

And in the end Lee himself becomes a capitalist. Although this shift away from his sloppy romanticism must have pleased Brecht, he cannot have been so pleased by the capitalist-aristocratic prejudice of the whole book. He was not a socialist then, but he knew what poverty was like, he knew he hated the bourgeoisie; he had, after all, read another novel about Chicago that made it quite clear why the poor (like the Garga family) suffered. He did not know what he was for, but he certainly knew what he was against. A quick look through the early theater criticism and early political notes shows that he was against the bourgeoisie, the establishment, the rich, the older generation, the nineteenth century, and everything that was old.

In “On Rhymeless Poetry with Irregular Rhythms” (1939), he talks about his style in his early work:

One must consider the times when I wrote. The World War had just ended. It had not solved the enormous social tensions that had caused it. My political knowledge was shamefully small then; nevertheless I was aware of great inconsistencies in human social life, and I didn’t consider it my task to neutralize in the form all the disharmonies and interferences which I felt so strongly. I caught them up more or less naïvely into the actions of my plays and the verses of my poems. And that long before I recognized their actual character and their causes. It was a matter, as one can see from the texts, not only of a “swimming
against the current” in the form, a protest against the smoothness and harmony of conventional verse, but already of an attempt to show incidents between people as contradictory, raging with struggle, violent.

Man muß die Zeit bedenken, in der ich schrieb. Der Weltkrieg war eben vorüber. Er hatte die ungeheuren sozialen Spannungen, die ihn verursacht hatten, nicht gelöst.

Mein politisches Wissen war damals beschämend gering; jedoch war ich mir großer Unstimmigkeiten im gesellschaftlichen Leben der Menschen bewußt, und ich hielt es nicht für meine Aufgabe, all die Disharmonien und Interferenzen, die ich stark empfand, formal zu neutralisieren. Ich fing sie mehr oder weniger naiv in die Vorgänge meiner Dramen und in die Verse meiner Gedichte ein. Und das, lange bevor ich ihren eigentlichen Charakter und ihre Ursachen erkannte. Es handelte sich, wie man aus den Texten sehen kann, nicht nur um ein “Gegen-den-Strom-Schwimmen” in formaler Hinsicht, einen Protest gegen die Glätte und Harmonie des konventionellen Verses, sondern immer doch schon um den Versuch, die Vorgänge zwischen den Menschen als widersprüchvolle, kampfdurchtobte, gewalttätige zu zeigen. (GW 19:397)

Brecht did not understand the causes, but he knew that there was disharmony. His plays show human events as violent and characterized by struggle. An attempt at harmonious solution by a writer like Jensen simply would not do; there was no harmony, the social tensions that caused the war were still there. For Jensen the conclusion of the struggle has to be to end it and restore order. For Brecht there was no question of restoring order; the nature of contemporary life was struggle.

This could be one reason for his choosing to portray a “struggle per se” (“Kampf an sich”), a fight abstracted from any motivation or context. Realizing that conflict was characteristic of the times but instinctively condemning the values in Jensen’s work, he simply avoided values and contexts in Jungle. This supposition is supported by a note from 1929, where he says the motivation “our fathers” (the older generation, the bourgeoisie, the nineteenth century) understood is an impossible explanation for today’s actions and characters; therefore:

We helped ourselves (provisionally) by not investigating the motives at all (example: In the Jungle of Cities, East Pole Train), in order at least not to give the wrong ones, and presented the plots as mere phenomena.

Wir haben uns (provisorisch) damit geholfen, die Motive überhaupt nicht zu untersuchen (Beispiel: “Im Dickicht der Städte”, “Ostpolzug”).
um wenigstens nicht falsche anzugeben, und haben die Handlungen als bloße Phänomene dargestellt. (GW 15:197)

And it is in fact only the plot and background, and not the motivation, that Brecht adopted from *The Wheel*. The plot of *Jungle* is a series of phenomena that cannot be explained by traditional values, performed by strange new men with unfamiliar motivations.

*Other Sources*

There is, however, one aspect of *The Wheel* (besides the setting, the coldness of Chicago) that Brecht clearly and uncritically adopts: the identification of both Lee and Garga with poets. Lee is not only mad over Whitman; he is also a poet himself, in the Byronic tradition of what a poet is supposed to be like: sensitive, excitable, wildly creative, impressionable. Lee is not Whitman, but perhaps he is what he himself—or Jensen—thinks Whitman was. Urged to read his poetry, he fears to bare his innermost self and reads Whitman instead—but with such an evangelical fervor that he might as well be reading his own work.

The way Garga reads Rimbaud is too similar a phenomenon not to have been consciously based on *The Wheel*. His Rimbaud quotations also express himself, or the exotic creature he would like to be: the Tahiti side of himself. He recites Rimbaud when he needs to believe that he is strong:

> I will go, and I will come back with limbs of iron, dark skin, rage in my eye. From my face one will think I come from a strong race.

> I am an animal, a Negro, but I may have been saved. You are false Negroes.

> I don’t understand laws, have no morality, am a raw man.

> Ich werde hingehen, und ich werde zurückkommen mit eisernen Gliedern, dunkler Haut, die Wut im Auge. Meinem Gesicht nach wird man glauben, daß ich von starker Rasse bin. (P. 99)

> Ich bin ein Tier, ein Neger, aber vielleicht bin ich gerettet. Ihr seid falsche Neger. (P. 21)

> Ich verstehe die Gesetze nicht, habe keine Moral, bin ein roher Mensch. (P. 21)

This is Baal again, or a trapped man trying to be as free as Baal. It is the vision of the natural man, repeated by Brecht in *Mahagonny*:
Garga dreams of taking his mother with him to the South ("I can fell trees" ["Ich kann Bäume fallen"] [p. 37]) as Paul Ackerman dreams of returning to Alaska, where life was not alienated. But they are both trapped where they are, in the land and age of commercial relations.

The passages Brecht used from Une saison en enfer (A Season in Hell) are in fact about traveling, about whether to leave Europe or not; they are in their theme as well as their passion appropriate to Brecht's purpose. He had been reading Rimbaud (he names "Summer in Hell" ["Sommer in der Hölle"] as an "impression" along with The Wheel [GW 17:949]); and he was particularly interested in somehow using Rimbaud's style: "After that I occupied myself for a play (In the Jungle of the Cities) with the exalted prose of Arthur Rimbaud (in his A Season in Hell)" ("Danach beschäftigte ich mich für ein Theaterstück ['Im Dickicht der Städte'] mit der gehobenen Prosa Arthur Rimbauds [in seinem 'Sommer in der Hölle']") (GW 19:396). In fact, in the style of Jungle, Brecht succeeded to a large extent in achieving a compactness similar to Rimbaud's: apparent non sequiturs burst with meanings that one cannot quite paraphrase (like trying to outguess a déjà vu: it can only be grasped when the next image appears). Perhaps even more than Rimbaud, Brecht wrote compact sentences that are masterpieces of the technique of inevitability; this is what gives them their misleading simplicity and makes them almost impossible to translate without making him seem simpleminded. The technique of choosing only the perfect and necessary words may have come from his study of Rimbaud. At any rate, he wanted to base Garga on him: "George Garga is like A. Rimbaud visually. He is essentially a German translation from the French into the American" ("George Garga gleicht A. Rimbaud im Aussehen. Er ist im Wesentlichen eine deutsche Übersetzung aus dem Französischen ins Amerikanische"). And of course the homosexual relationship in Jungle, like that in Baal, is partly based on Rimbaud and Verlaine.

It is important to know about Brecht's interest in Rimbaud, because otherwise we could not understand why he did not simply use Whitman as the poet model. Both Bernhard Reich and Elisabeth Hauptmann testify that Brecht read and appreciated Whitman while in Berlin; Reich specifies about 1924-25. We do not know whether Brecht's reading of The Wheel was his first acquaintance with Whitman, but it is not an insignificant one: there
are pages and pages of *Leaves of Grass* printed in the novel in German translation, all of which Lee reads out loud to the bored Gronau family.

We have no direct evidence of the impression the lines quoted in *The Wheel* made on Brecht, because he himself hardly mentions Whitman until very late: once in 1954, once in 1956.25 The volume of *Auf der Brooklyn Fähre (Crossing Brooklyn Ferry)* in his library was printed in 1949. But there is no mistaking the impression of America that Whitman intends to convey. The lines in *The Wheel* are unequivocal praise. This is the America one would like to believe in, bursting with life and creative energy. This is the America of the pioneers; it is the America that Alaska represents in *Mahagonny*; it is the grand vision of a gigantic land and a heroic people. It is the antidote to Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, and it is the America Brecht praised in his early poems and for which he longed in stuffy Europe.

These are some of the passages of Whitman’s praise for America that Brecht read in Jensen’s translation:

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born . . .
Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas, . . . or a miner in California,
Or rude in my home in Dakota’s woods, . . . aware of mighty Niagara,
. . . Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.
. . . This then is life.

Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
For you a programme of chants.
Chants of the prairies,
Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican sea,
Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota,
Chants going forth from the centre from Kansas, and thence equi-
distant,
Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all.
Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own off-spring,
Surround them East and West, for they would surround you.26

John Willett says that Whitman had very little influence on Brecht, that “nothing could be more foreign to Brecht than Whitman’s egotism and rather hollow rhetoric.”27 But for Brecht,
BRECHT'S AMERICA

Sinclair’s and Whitman’s pictures could both be right: we will see him learning about the system that spoils what could be a great country. Brecht used literary sources for their informational value; Whitman’s poetry certainly provided Brecht with an important conception of America, the positive statement of the American dream, full of adventure, robustness, and optimism.

It is essentially the same picture as that presented by Jack London’s and Bret Harte’s stories of the West, both of which Brecht also read, though it is not clear exactly when. London is quoted in Brecht’s notes for Joe Fleischhacker (1924–26), and there are three volumes of Bret Harte’s Kalifornische Erzählungen (California Tales, published in Leipzig, no date), with Elisabeth Hauptmann’s name in them, in Brecht’s library.28 The Wild West, outlaw, and gold rush themes are clear in Mahagonny, but perhaps Brecht read London and Bret Harte even before writing his first American poem, “The Song of the Railroad Gang of Fort Donald” in 1916.29

There is also no way of knowing exactly when Brecht read Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters (Spoon River Anthology). Helene Weigel remembered only that they were among the American books Brecht read early. Their influence, if any, was of a general nature, like Whitman’s; it is impossible to point to any specific passages or plays that derive from them.

There are two other books in Brecht’s library that may have contributed to his picture of America while he was writing In the Jungle, though there is no direct influence visible. They are both plays by Upton Sinclair that were published by Malik in Berlin in 1921, and one of them, Prinz Hagen (Prince Hagen), was performed in Piscator’s Proletarisches Theater in Berlin in 1920–21.30 It is a fantasy, set partly in the high society and high finance world of New York, which Richard Wagner’s Prince Hagen plans to control through total monopoly. This is possible because of his almost limitless stores of gold from Nibelheim; only death stops him. The play is a clever and biting attack on American capitalism. The ironic position that “morality” takes is particularly close to Brecht’s own sensibility. Hagen is thrilled with the discovery of this principle for preventing revolution. He exclaims to his horrified and very Christian tutor:

And the number of those creatures is a thousand to your one, and the best that is might be theirs if they would take it; but there is Morality!
And the poorest of them would starve and die in his tracks before he would touch a bit of bread that was not his own, and he struts about and boasts of it, and calls it his "virtue!" And so the rich man may have what he will, in perfect peace and indifference! By heaven, if that is not a wondrous achievement, I, at least, have never seen one in my life.  

This is the kind of dialectical twist Brecht gives not only to the role of the Salvation Army but also to the function of "goodness" under capitalism in nearly every play (most obviously St. Joan of the Stockyards and The Good Person of Sichuan).

But Sinclair's Die Maschine (The Machine) is a terrible play, both artistically and ideologically. It is concerned with trying to get one capitalist to stop being a capitalist, and with keeping his daughter's conscience clean. The streetcar king Jim Hegan (= Hagen?), although he loves his daughter, is unable to give in to her pleas that he stop dealing with corrupt politics (Tammany Hall) and the white slave trade; but the play ends happily because the man who told the daughter about her father's sins—called a socialist by Sinclair but actually only a muckraker—declares his love for her and the curtain goes down on their embrace. The play is full of the oversimplifications and reformism that Brecht avoids, but it may have been one stimulus for St. Joan: here too the heroine goes to the poor to do unspecified "good works," and insists on finding out the whole truth about exploitation once she has stumbled on a hint of it.

One other work about Chicago that Brecht read at this time seems also to have had a stronger influence on St. Joan. In "On Looking through My Early Plays," where he lists Rimbaud and Jensen as sources of "impressions" ("Eindrücke"), he mentions also a collection of letters whose title he has forgotten; they had, he says, a cold and final tone, almost the tone of a will. In a 15 September 1920 diary entry, he mentions a certain Lorimer next to Synge as a source for his studies on using the verb, and in notes on Galgei (an early version of A Man's a Man), he includes two short quotations from Lorimer. We are indebted to Michael Morley for the literary sleuthing that put these three hints together and resulted in the discovery of George Horace Lorimer's Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son, translated into German by O. Oppen in 1905 under the title Briefe eines Dollarkönigs an seinen Sohn. All the following information is from Morley's useful article.

Lorimer was the man who made the Saturday Evening Post a
success; he became its editor in 1899 and almost tripled its circulation in the next five years. He did this primarily by writing a series of letters that he submitted pseudonymously to the literary editor; in 1902 they were printed as a book that became a best-seller. The letters purported to be advice by the owner of a Chicago meat-packing plant, John Graham, “known at the stock market by the nickname ‘The Old Pig Graham’” (“an der Börse unter dem Spitznamen ‘Der Alte-Schweine-Graham’ bekannt”), to his son Pierrepont “called in intimate circles ‘piglet’” (“in intimem Kreise ‘Ferkelchen’ genannt”), on how to get rich and other moral matters. The style is vigorous, humorous, and hardheaded, as is Brecht’s in *Jungle*. The “impressions” that Brecht gained from these letters were, then, partly about the city of Chicago and the nature of capitalism, and partly stylistic. As with *The Jungle*, he did not use the subject matter until much later, but then quite explicitly.

Of the books Brecht read on America before or during his work on *In the Jungle*, *The Jungle* and *The Wheel* had the strongest influence on the play. It is obvious, then, why Brecht chose Chicago for the setting, and what kind of an image he had of that city. Both novels are set in Chicago, and they both portray it as a city of the American dream, yet also as a city of cold, struggle, and cruelty. They both have labor struggles as central themes, but the authors stand on different sides of the barricades. (Lorimer’s book too covers similar themes, but it is much more sanguine about the possibility of success in America.) Both novels portray America as a country of immigrants, but with different conclusions about how well off the immigrants are there.

Let us now look at the play itself to see what Brecht did with the impressions of Chicago and America he had gathered.

*“In the Jungle” and “In the Jungle of the Cities”*

Although *In the Jungle* was written at the height of Brecht’s and his friends’ cult of Americanism, there is no suggestion that America is a promised land, or a land of unlimited opportunity. It is not a fresh and hopeful beginning to which decadent Europeans can flee; in fact, Garga wants to flee from America to Tahiti. Brecht seems to have taken his literary use of America from his literary models and not from the popular conceptions that were current.

Later, in *Mahagonny*, he wrote a satire on what his generation
promised itself in America; and in "Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York," he wrote a devastating reminiscence of the short-lived American dream. He could only be so bitter about the dream if it had visited some of his own youthful nights, and he admits quite openly that it did.

But he was not dreaming when he wrote his plays: in the case of *Jungle* he was very wide awake and consciously using the conception of America and Chicago that he found in those works that also served as models for other aspects of the play. The Garga family's poverty, the young women who are driven to prostitution, George Garga's urge for freedom and escape from responsibility for a family, and the subsequent destruction of the family are all elements from *The Jungle*. There they happen in a Chicago that is cold and inhumanly cruel, and makes "beasts" out of human beings. *In the Jungle* paints Chicago as the same cruel jungle. And the dynamics of the battle between Shlink and Garga, Shlink's love for Garga, Shlink's losing because he is the one who *needs* the other, Garga's inability to extricate himself, his idealism, his disgust at Shlink's physical presence and age, the subtleties of the battle that make apparent victories into defeats, the final victory only through murder, and the subsequent flight of the victor from Chicago—all these are from *The Wheel*. There they happen in a Chicago that is the symbol of progress, a city of machines that have gone beyond man's level, but with primeval cold and hungering masses waiting to creep through any weak spot and turn order into chaos: a Chicago whose civilization must protect itself against barbarism and nature. This Chicago is not so explicitly evident in *Jungle* but it is there, in the manipulable passions of the mob that wants to lynch Shlink, in the conception of the American city as a higher form of human organization than the "savannah" or the Old Country, in the omnipresent cold.

Brecht maintains the dominant imagery of the jungle throughout the play. Shlink and Garga retreat into the thicket to fight out their duel like two bucks disappearing for days and fighting to the death. But they are also surrounded by animals fighting each other: the Baboon, the Bear, the Ape, the Worm are the names of some of the characters. A howling is heard throughout the scene where Garga incites the lynchers. Marie cries, "Oh you animals!" ("O ihr Tiere!") at them on discovering that he is dead. Garga experiences the forest
as origin of the first men, who are “hairy, with ape’s teeth, good animals that knew how to live” (“haarig, mit Affengebissen, gute Tiere, die zu leben wußten”) (p. 93). Again and again animal imagery is used to describe people: animals, dogs, vultures, bestialization, elephant, vermin, game, pig, scarab, beast, crocodile skin, animal corpses, lamb, quail, alligators, hedgehog, crabs, beast of prey, flies, menagerie. (Tiere, Hunde, Geier, Vertierung, Elefant, Viecher, Wild, Schwein, Skarabäus, Bestie, Krokodilshaut, Tierleichen, Lamm, Wachtel, Alligatore, Igel, Krebs, Raubtiere, Fliegen, Menagerie.) Brecht makes use of animal imagery in other plays, such as Drums in the Night and Edward, but in Jungle it is more than imagery. The conception implied in Sinclair’s title, but only mentioned a few times in his book, is transformed by Brecht into a conceit that informs the entire play.

The animalization of human beings is not only a consistent metaphor throughout the play; it also contains the play’s message. In the fight for survival, it is not possible to make real contact with other human beings; Shlink tries and perishes, Garga refuses to try and survives. Hence the emphasis in the play on love (and its impossibility) and on loneliness (and the impossibility of overcoming it). Language cannot reach far enough to reach to other men. Shlink:

Yes, you wanted the end, but I the struggle, Garga.
And never, George Garga, will there be an end to this fight, never an understanding.
The infinite loneliness of man makes being enemies an unobtainable goal.

Ja, Sie wollten das Ende, aber ich den Kampf, Garga. (P. 97)
Und niemals, George Garga, wird ein Ausgang dieses Kampfes sein, niemals eine Verständigung. (P. 99)
Die unendliche Einsamkeit des Menschen macht eine Feindschaft zum unerreichbaren Ziel. (P. 92)

Garga:

In the jungle each one is alone.
Why are there no words?
Language is not adequate for communication.

In dem Dschungel ist jeder allein. (P. 66)
Warum gibt es keine Worte? (P. 20)
Die Sprache reicht zur Verständigung nicht aus. (P. 92)
Brecht:

With *Jungle* I wanted to improve *The Robbers* [Schiller] (and prove that struggle is impossible because of the inadequacy of language).

Mit "Dickicht" wollte ich die "Räuber" verbessern (und beweisen, daß Kampf unmöglich sei wegen der Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache). (GW 15:69)

The one advance human beings have made over their animal state, language, is not enough to overcome the alienation from each other that results from no longer being in the natural state. They are forced back into the condition of beasts—and yet they are no longer capable of being satisfied by the simple physical life of the beasts.

Shlink:

I have observed animals. They seemed innocent. Love, warmth from close bodies, the one mercy for them in the darkness. The uniting of the organs is the only unity; it doesn't bridge in a human lifetime the separation of their languages.

Ich habe Tiere betrachtet. Sie schienen unschuldig. Die Liebe, Wärme aus Körpernähe, ihre einzige Gnade in der Finsternis. Die Vereinigung der Organe ist die einzige, sie überbrückt nicht in einem Menschenleben die Entziehung ihrer Sprachen. (P. 92)

Garga:

The forest! Humanity comes from here, doesn't it? Hairy, with ape's teeth, good animals that knew how to live. They simply tore each other to pieces, and everything was so easy. . . . and the one that bled to death among the roots, that was the loser, and the one that had trampled down the most woods was the victor!

Der Wald! Von hier kommt die Menschheit, nicht? Haarig, mit Affengebissen, gute Tiere, die zu leben wüßten. Sie zerfleischten sich einfach, und alles war so leicht. . . . und der verblutete zwischen den Wurzeln, das war der Besiegte, und der am meisten niedergetrampelt hatte vom Gehölz, war der Sieger! (P. 93)

Nothing is as simple for human beings as for animals, neither in love nor in battle, because they are cursed with the words for thinking, feeling, and loneliness. All their attempts to raise themselves above the level of the animals only throw them lower. Marie cries, "How they debase us, love and hate!" ("Wie niedrig es macht, die Liebe und der Haß!") (p. 85). And all there is to do after all is to survive. Garga concludes: "But it is not important before God to be the stronger, only the survivor" ("Aber es ist nicht wichtig, vor Gott der
Stärkere zu sein, sondern der Lebendige") (p. 100). He must not allow himself to be affected by the destruction of his family or by the murder of his wife, or he will lose. That he loses anyway, by losing his humanity in order to survive, only means that this is an absolutely pessimistic play. You can only win by losing. You are reduced to being an animal, but you cannot enjoy the pleasures of animals.

And yet Garga (or Brecht) regrets the ending of the fight. Brecht told Bronnen the meaning of the play was in words "The chaos is used up. It was the best time" ("Das Chaos ist aufgebraucht. Es war die beste Zeit"). Despite all the destruction, there was a kind of hope in the struggle, a hope that something would be born out of it; it was creative in setting all its own rules, ignoring morality. It was a relationship. Life after the fight could only become duller.

Undoubtedly Brecht’s remark to Bronnen applied to his or their own life too; this was in fact the last play Brecht wrote in the metaphoric and emotional language that he got from the expressionists and Rimbaud. After this he moved from Jungle’s disconnected fragments of free association to crystal clarity in language; the dialectic of ideas, which must be expressed as clearly as possible, became more important for him than playing with dazzling but subjective images.

And so the version of Jungle that he put together for print in 1927 has a very different atmosphere: the passions, the love affairs, the personal references are largely gone, and the diction is tight, strict, utterly compact. It is to this revised version that Brecht prefixed the famous admonition to the reader or audience:

Don’t worry about the motives of this struggle, but be concerned with the human stakes, judge impartially the fighting form of the opponents and direct your interest to the finish.

Zerbrechen Sie sich nicht den Kopf über die Motive dieses Kampfes, sondern beteiligen Sie sich an den menschlichen Einsätzen, beurteilen Sie unparteiisch die Kampfform der Gegner und lenken Sie Ihr Interesse auf das Finish. (GW 1:126)

In other words, avoid getting emotionally involved in the fighters’ lives, stay coolly detached from their persons and feelings as you would at a sporting match, and use your head to analyze their moves—just as they themselves are doing. This cool, rational approach is consistently reflected by the style of the late version. It
is, in a word, non-chaotic. Herbert Ihering, from the beginning Brecht’s most faithful supporter among the critics, mourned the passing of the old chaotic style when he read the printed version in 1927:

Now he has brought the *Jungle* over from the tropical climate of the first, atmospheric versions into the cooler air of an objective fight. . . . The new *Jungle*, the *Jungle of the Cities*, has lost some color and atmosphere. It has won some clarity and concentration. . . . Brecht has used up the chaos. It was his best time, because it provided the pregnant ground for his development.


“Chaos”—fascination with the exotic, sinking deep into every vice, rebelling against the stagnation of German society by embracing anarchic and cruel but very alive societies—some time after finishing *Jungle* Brecht did not need it any more. But certainly it was the “best” time of his life; he would never be so free again, because he would never be so completely in rebellion. Of course, as Bronnen hints, “chaos” did continue for a while; the next plays continued to be bitter and apocalyptic visions without a hint of a way out. But the lush, wild language disappeared. It was necessary for a while, and it was beautiful. It is easy to see how Brecht could feel nostalgia for the wild creativity of his youth.

Early articles by Ihering are a valuable contemporary interpretation of the stylistic characteristics of Brecht’s “chaotic” rebellion:

Brecht experiences chaos and decay bodily. Hence the matchless power of the imagery in his language. . . . It leaves out connecting links and tears perspectives open. It has a brutal sensuality and a melancholy tenderness. There is coarseness in it as well as unfathomable sadness; fierce humor as well as plaintive poetry.

And Ihering’s interpretation of the need for this anarchic language is important because it shows the dialectic between the old and the new that produced a Brecht, and that was symbolized for much of Europe by America.

People cursed the coming generation and failed to sense that it had to fight harder than any other in 100 years . . . for experience itself. . . . Energies were so exhausted that apocalyptic events were accepted like everyday annoyances.

Man beschimpfte die aufsteigende Generation und fühlte nicht, daß sie schwerer als irgendeine seit hundert Jahren zu kämpfen hatte . . . um das Erlebnis selbst. . . . Die Energien waren so aufgebraucht, daß man apokalyptische Ereignisse wie Unannehmlichkeiten des Alltags nahm. (1922)\textsuperscript{42}

In 1924 Ihering continued that analysis in a review of \textit{Jungle}:

War and revolution struck a humanity that was so mechanized by civilization that it could no longer experience elemental events in an elemental way. Drama couldn’t begin again where it had broken off. It couldn’t deny Americanism, couldn’t rub it out. What was necessary, though, was not to see it as a refinement, not as a stage of development, in other words not to refer it back to history again, but to feel it as a new, primitive beginning. The final technical precision of the age could only be artistically productive if it was possible to experience it as barbarism. As prehistory that would be productive for a new spiritual beginning.

Ihering believed that European humanity had forgotten how to be primitive; it was alienated to the point of complete apathy; it needed to be rejuvenated. Drama was trapped in the same dilemma: the more it tried to be an experience, to awaken feeling, the more it would fade into the background of experiences that an exhausted society was trying to forget.
This is where America came in. America represented the extreme of civilization, of overmechanized experience that one wants to escape, but it was simultaneously utterly primitive; the two are brought together in the word *barbarous*. Hence it was a new beginning, the chance to feel the elemental emotions again—love, hate, fear. This has always been the function of "escape" entertainment in a decadent society: the experience of vicarious emotion. But for Brecht the myth of America meant more. Since he was a creative talent and not just in search of experience, America was only a beginning for him. He saw the mammoth technical development achieved there not only as the furthest extension of Europe's own tendency toward progress but as a qualitatively new stage, the beginning of a new era. Although the Americans had carried civilization even further than the Europeans, they had done it with such confidence, naïveté, and ruthlessness that they were now in the early, barbarous stage of a new culture. The brilliant incarnation of this paradox is the city Chicago as jungle; the most unnatural city becomes a new kind of nature.

For Brecht the dawning of a new age (a theme treated again thoroughly in *Galileo*) is grounds for hope because new experiments can be made, human nature can be changed, new social orders can be attempted. This is where the next stage in Brecht's development actually took him. But right now the positive feeling only came from the newness itself, from the consciousness that history lay ahead, not behind, from the feeling of being young and having a young world to experiment with, rather than being old before one's time in a world afraid to try any more experiments.

This is what Ihering says was the meaning of America for Brecht's development. It is a valuable insight. But we must not forget that neither Brecht nor Ihering thought America was *nice*; on the contrary, it was harsh and cruel. It is the very nature of Chicago that causes the devastating loneliness of man, that makes human language inadequate, that turns men into beasts.

These things can happen in Brecht's plays with the absoluteness they do because of the ruthlessness of his America: in America (Germans supposed) everything is absolute, the great city is the beginning of the new age where stakes are high and passions are laid bare and the most merciless man wins. At the beginning of an age you make your own rules. As we have seen, Brecht always portrayed
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Chicago and America as unjust and cruel, even as early as in *Jungle*. But in the beginning there was nevertheless a promise of future in the celebration of the tough new age. Brecht was conscious of social injustice in *Jungle*; he was even critical of racism, poverty, and the use of women as objects. But the negative picture of America is only the background of the play. Fundamental is the gruesome strength of a new kind of man who can sacrifice everything to a metaphysical fascination. The very destruction in *Jungle* is glorious in its uncompromising boldness.

But looking back, Brecht was ashamed of that attitude toward America. To find out what caused him to change his mind, we must again look at his literary sources, and at his next works on America.