Chapter Two

1924–1926

America as Business:
"Joe Fleischhacker" and
Other Fragments

In the years 1924–26 Brecht only completed one original play, A Man's a Man, which is set in India, not the United States (though they are not unconnected in Brecht's mind). But for anyone interested in Brecht's ideas of America, these years could merit a small book in themselves. We will limit ourselves to a book-length chapter, divided somewhat artificially, for the sake of ordering this complex material, into two parts. In the first part we examine the many sources, mostly literary, that contributed during this time to Brecht's growing consciousness of the contradictory nature of U.S. society; in the second part we will look at the poems and fragments of plays that he wrote based on this material.

A. SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

Between the writing of In the Jungle and the work on the next plays set in America (unpublished fragments from 1924 to 1926), Brecht consolidated his success on the stage, moved permanently to Berlin as the fascists became too oppressive in Munich, began his first team writing (with Lion Feuchtwanger), and began his friendships with the actress Helene Weigel, the boxer Samson-Körner, and his secretary and collaborator throughout his life, Elisabeth Hauptmann. She was a teacher of English literature, and introduced him to much of what he knew of England and America.

He also made the first significant change in his style, the change from the lyricism of Jungle to the sober and ironic prose of A Man's a Man. Simultaneously with the change in writing style, he began
using “epic” staging techniques associated with Erwin Piscator’s experimental proletarian theater.

There is no doubt that Piscator was the principal influence on Brecht’s staging technique, though not on his literary technique. Plays produced by Piscator were always exclusively intended as agitprop theater and often had small literary merit; Brecht’s work was always more subtle and literary—though Piscator planned to produce at least one of the plays (Wheat) that Brecht never finished. Brecht, looking back at the twenties, later calls Piscator “without a doubt one of the most significant theater people of all times” (“zweifellos einer der bedeutendsten Theaterleute aller Zeiten”) (GW 15:237), and “the great master builder of the epic theater” (“der große Baumeister des epischen Theaters”) (GW 15:316); he praises Piscator’s innovative daring, saying:

Piscator’s experiments burst nearly all conventions. They intervened to bring changes in the dramatist’s work methods, the actor’s style of representation, and the designer’s sets. They aimed at a completely new social function for the whole theater.

And Piscator himself relates that Brecht wrote him a letter from exile in the United States suggesting collaboration on a project, because, as Brecht said, major political, anti-emotional theater was unimaginable without Piscator; his words were: “I’d like to say here that in my entire career no one has been as valuable for my artistic development as you” (“Ich möchte Dir hiermit sagen, daß mir kein Mensch in der ganzen Zeit meiner Tätigkeit so wertvoll war in der künstlerischen Entwicklung wie Du”).

Paquet, “Flags”

Leo Lania, whose book Welt im Umbruch (World in Transition) is a valuable “biography of a generation” (as its subtitle says), and who himself wrote for Piscator, recalls that “a new dramatic period, a new style of theater, a new literary direction” (“eine neue dramatische Periode, ein neuer Theaterstil, eine neue literarische Richtung”) began with Piscator’s production of the play Flags.
(Fahnen) by Alfons Paquet in 1924, in the Volksbühne. Flags is an extremely important production in the history of the theater. It was the first play produced by Piscator in the “Piscator style”; it was also the first play to be called “epic theater,” which is now identified more with Brecht than with Piscator and which has changed the complexion of twentieth-century world theater. Lania describes the play and the production as follows:

Flags was set in the eighties and dealt with the Chicago anarchists’ trial. In a loose succession of scenes Paquet portrayed the rebellion of the workers, the crushing of the strike, the trial against the strike leaders, and their conviction.

A revolutionary drama of workers’ life, such as the period of naturalism had already produced in great numbers. But what differentiated this play fundamentally from other drama with similar content was that Paquet wanted to give neither a naturalistic milieu depiction nor a psychological study of different types of workers: without resorting to any kind of poetic creations he let the naked facts speak for themselves. The play had no individual heroes, and no central theoretical problem—it was a dramatized newspaper article.

The production had taken this basic idea of the author’s as a leitmotiv. Slides introduced the drama: they showed the photographs of the historical personages. As in the movies, titles between the scenes delivered the mediating text. On both sides of the stage, right and left, stood tablets [screens]; at the decisive points in the plot texts would be projected on these that drew the moral from what was happening. Thus was this “dramatic narrative” intended to appeal not to the emotions but to the understanding of the audience.


Ein revolutionäres Drama aus dem Arbeiterleben, wie solche die Periode des Naturalismus schon in großer Zahl hervorgebracht hatte. Aber was dieses Stück von jenen Dramen ähnlichen Inhalts grundlegend unterschied, war, daß Paquet weder eine naturalistische Milieuschilderung geben wollte noch eine psychologische Studie der verschiedenen Arbeiterarten, sondern daß er, auf jede dichterische Gestaltung verzichtend, nur die nackten Tatsachen für sich sprechen ließ. Das Stück hatte keine individuellen Helden, auch kein zentrales geistiges Problem—es war ein dramatisierter Zeitungsbericht.

und links von der Bühne, standen Tafeln; auf diesen wurde an den entscheidenden Stellen der Handlung ein Text projiziert, der die Lehren aus dem Geschehen zog. So sollte diese "dramatische Erzählung" nicht an das Gefühl, sondern an den Verstand der Zuschauer appellieren.  

It is these technical innovations in staging that Brecht always mentions in connection with Piscator: use of film, conveyor belts, elevators, new music and scenery. He never specifically mentions Piscator as an influence on his politics, and Brecht's own theories of the social aspect of "epic" theater come from a later date than his adoption of the technical means from Piscator.

The word *epic* in German refers not only to Homer and to Hollywood extravaganzas, as it does in English, but to all narrative literature, in distinction to drama and lyric. Brecht sometimes says "narrative" ("erzählend") instead of "epic" ("episch"). The subtitle of the printed version of *Flags* (1923) is "a dramatic novel" ("ein dramatischer Roman"); the subtitle of the theater production was "an epic drama" ("ein episches Drama"). Both Piscator and Brecht may have got their use of the term from Paquet; *Flags* was the first epic drama that called itself epic. What makes it "epic," is, first, the staging techniques, which allow the kind of commentary on the action that is normally possible for novelists but not dramatists; second, the open form, the "loose succession of scenes" ("lose Szenenreihe") or "dramatized newspaper article" ("dramatisierter Zeitungsbericht"), as Lania calls it; and third, the attempt to expose the social and economic causes of the events shown. "Thus *Flags* represented in a certain sense the first Marxist drama, and that production the first attempt to grasp these materialist forces and make them tangible" ("So stellte 'Fahnen' in gewissem Sinne das erste marxistische Drama dar und jene Inszenierung den ersten Versuch, diese materialistischen Triebkräfte zu erfassen und fühlbar zu machen"). So Piscator on his discovery of epic theater.

To a certain extent Brecht had already used the first two techniques in his earliest plays: in songs and open form in *Baal*, and in the newspaper report preceding *Jungle*. In 1926 (about the time that Brecht first started using the term *epic* himself), he claimed his own *Baal* was one of the first examples of epic theater (GW 15:133). But it was not until *A Man's a Man*, completed in 1926, that he consistently used the distancing effect of cool and carefully controlled language, and the actors' stepping out of their roles in order
to comment on the play. In this play too there are special staging
techniques and deliberate avoidance of naturalism (in both lan­
guage and staging). There is also some attempt at showing economic
causes behind the action, as in the little vignette where one soldier
asks, “Do they know yet who the war is against?” (“Weiβ man
schon, gegen wen der Krieg geht?”) and the other answers, “If they
need cotton, it’s Tibet, and if they need wool, it’s Pamir” (“Wenn sie
Baumwolle brauchen, dann ist es Tibet, und wenn sie Schafwolle
brauchen, dann ist es Pamir”) \((GW 1:348)\). But this imperialist
nature of the war is not emphasized; it is hard to judge what the
political direction of the play is. The fact is, Brecht started using the
techniques of the epic theater before he knew exactly to what end he
needed them. That is the case also with his intention to appeal more
to the intellect than to the emotions. As early as 1922 Brecht wrote,
“I hope I have avoided in \textit{Baal} and \textit{Jungle} a great mistake of other
art: its effort to carry the audience away” (“Einen grossen Fehler
sonstiger Kunst hoffe ich im ‘Baal’ und ‘Dickicht’ vermieden zu
haben: ihre Bemühung, mitzureißen”) \((GW 15:62)\). But this is in
rebellion against the sentimental art of the “bourgeoisie”; it remains
a \textit{formal} principle, not a means to communicate any particular idea.
Brecht’s early plays were in rebellion more against the theater than
against society.

The early attempts at an “epic” drama in Piscator’s theater were
not as sophisticated as what Brecht came to call his epic drama.
They were closer to the later German “documentary theater” of the
sixties: usually without fictionalized plot, presenting a panorama of
history rather than concentrating on a few characters, and using for
text the actual words of the historical characters. The newspaper-
like style of the plays (Lania calls it \textit{Reportage} and says it came from
the influence of the American novel, e.g., Sinclair Lewis and Dos
Passos\(^7\)) makes for rather dull reading; Brecht was always much
more interested in language and used the mock newspaper reports,
which he himself prepared, only to clarify the plot to himself.
Furthermore, it is probably true, as Ernst Schumacher says,\(^8\) that
the dramatists for Piscator’s “epic” theater were not really penetrat­
ing below the surface of events to social causes and economic
processes, but were only using realistic journalism to reproduce the
thing in itself, in a new kind of naturalism.

Nevertheless, Piscator had a very strong influence on Brecht.

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BRECHT'S AMERICA

Brecht cannot help but have seen *Flags*; he even had a copy of the book edition from 1923 in his library.

And *Flags* too is about Chicago—specifically about the Haymarket Massacre in 1886. Here Chicago is again presented as a city torn by class war; this time it is literally a war, a workers' uprising and brutal repression by the state. The atmosphere is very similar to that in Brecht's *Drums in the Night*; but Paquet is unequivocally on the side of the workers in revolt. Again Chicago (and in fact America) is peopled by working-class immigrants. Special emphasis is put on the Germans, who were historically the principal anarchists involved. They, and all the workers, are disappointed by America.

We thought: a little piece of land, a quiet life in America. And now here we sit.

The worker has no homeland. He has to create one. My homeland is called the International.

Bah, the American apples taste like rainwater. . . . What use are flowers that have no scent. Have you noticed that nothing in this land gives real pleasure?

Wir dachten uns: ein Stückchen Land, ein ruhiges Leben in Amerika. Da sitzen wir nun.\(^9\)

Der Proletarier hat keine Heimat. Der muß sie sich erst schaffen. Meine Heimat heißt die Internationale.\(^10\)

Bah, die amerikanischen Äpfel schmecken wie Regenwasser. . . . Was nützen ihm Blumen, die keinen Duft haben. Hast du schon bemerkt, daß nichts in diesem Land einem wirkliche Freude macht?\(^11\)

In fact Paquet's America is unmitigatedly evil—excepting of course those who fight against it. A worker sums up America in an aphorism: "This is a rich country that shoots its workers dead in thanks" ("Dies hier ist ein reiches Land, das seine Arbeiter totschießt zum Dank").\(^12\) The police and courts are absolutely corrupt, interested not in human life but in making Chicago look like a peaceful, prosperous city for the World's Fair. This is all the class analysis that is provided in the play; as Schumacher says, it does not really attempt a serious portrayal of the mechanisms behind the action.

That is what is most "un-Brechtian" about it; its argument is based on emotional identification with the workers, even to the point of involvement in their private lives. The revolt is led by
anarchists, without planning or analysis, and Paquet's own attitude toward the revolt he portrays is also unanalytical. It is: romantic. The style of the play is naïve; although it presents a pageant rather than only individuals, it still uses empathy; and its language has no stylization, no distancing from the naturalistic. There are a good many English words in the German text (mark you, citizens, look here, shopkeepers, stairbuilder, etc.), but Paquet has not got Brecht's ear for special associations with words and for slang: these Anglicisms seem gratuitous, stuck in like the many place-names just for a bit of local color. They have perfectly good German equivalents.

And so Brecht was probably not very impressed by the play as literature, only by its staging. But despite its weaknesses the play seems to have impressed people as theater, and it probably helped form Brecht's image of Chicago, pushing him now to identify as class struggle the brutal struggle he had already recognized there. Chicago was still very much with Brecht, now with the addition of the cry of one of Paquet's anarchists in his ears:

Nothing is as interesting as Chicago. The explosion must come. Our movement was not arbitrary. Only premature. There will be wars. People will be blown up wholesale.

Nichts ist so interessant wie Chikago. Der Krach muß kommen. Unsere Bewegung war nicht willkürlich. Nur verfrüht. Es wird Kriege geben. Leute werden massenhaft in die Luft fliegen.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Tarbell, "The Life of Elbert H. Gary"}

Another book in the library Brecht left when he died is the fascinating \textit{Life of Elbert H. Gary: The Story of Steel}, by Ida Tarbell.\textsuperscript{14} Of course, the fact that the book was published in 1925 does not necessarily mean that Brecht read it then. His knowledge of English was slight at that time; usually Elisabeth Hauptmann did his English reading for him, as Bernhard Reich tells us:

She knew English and provided him with materials: clippings from English and American newspapers and magazines. She had plenty to do, because Brecht's appetite for things American was enormous.

Sie konnte Englisch und versorgte ihn mit Materialien: Ausschnitte aus englischen und amerikanischen Zeitungen und Zeitschriften. Sie hatte alle Hände voll zu tun, denn Brechts Appetit nach Amerikanischem war ungeheuer.\textsuperscript{15}
It is also possible that there are books in his library that he never read at all, but this is not likely to be the case with the few older books he kept from the twenties. At any rate something turned his interest around at that time (1924–25) to economic relations, especially in America. Tarbell’s book was likely a factor, either through his own reading or through Hauptmann’s.

_The Life of Gary_ reads like a historical novel: it has a plot and a central conflict (will honest Judge Gary be able to retain his Methodist virtues and still do well in business?), and big names in government and finance (notably J. P. Morgan and Teddy Roosevelt) are reduced to likeable folks with definable personalities, yet they are heroes just the same. These are the people who set up the first billion-dollar corporation in history; everything they do shakes the nation and the world. If he read the book when it was published, Brecht was undoubtedly impressed by the bigness of it all; he writes later that one of the main themes of the time was “the construction of a mammoth industry” (“der Aufbau einer Mammutindustrie”) (GW 15:236).

Although Ida Tarbell is known as a muckraker, there is nothing in this biography to indicate that she had any conception of class struggle. Tarbell reveals herself in this book as a liberal, not a socialist, critical of excesses but approving of progressive and “moral” capitalists like Gary. There are two prominent explicit ideological messages in the book and one implicit one. Implicit is the complete identification with management’s side. Again and again, the workers just do not understand that Gary is trying to keep their interests in mind, that he believes in “cooperation.” Gary seems to be the country’s first liberal businessman; he realizes at every turn that it is profitable to avoid conflict. Tarbell does nothing to suggest that no matter how many concessions Gary gives the workers, they remain class enemies.

The explicit ideological messages in the book are, first, the value of the pioneer spirit that made America great, combined with Methodist uprightness, and second, the great advantages for business of cooperating with government rather than fighting it. American business ethics are transformed by one man, who is determined to hang on to the Christian virtues even when making money—according to Tarbell’s book. In fact, of course, the founders of the great corporations gradually realized they would
be incomparably more powerful with government at their service, particularly in foreign investment. Gary may have been especially intelligent and farsighted; Tarbell depicts him as having to fight hard to get this concept through at board meetings.

The glorious pioneer heritage is extolled in the opening two paragraphs of the book, and a dichotomy described that informs many of Brecht's works on America. The pioneers who leave settlements to strike out into uncharted country are the same kind of people who later leave the country to build the great cities and great industries. This is a theme of book after book that Brecht now read on America, and it is the motion he used as the basis of his planned series "Human Migration to the Big Cities." It is the instinct for progress, basic to Brecht's idea of the American character.

Judge Gary the pioneer comes into business at an anarchic, brawling time when patents are stolen, corporate law is just beginning to be written, legal differences produce fistfights in the courtroom, large firms are beginning to consolidate, and individual men control their own destinies and those of their church, community, children, and business. (That is, all the people mentioned in this book are able to control their own destinies; the poor are only present as an occasional irritant.)

But we leave Judge Gary, still running U.S. Steel, with the age of competition behind us. The individual capitalist no longer controls the market; it is the age of the giant corporation, cooperating with the government and the other corporations in the same industry. Speculation has been superseded by planning; stability is the most important goal.

This is the process that is shown in St. Joan: at the end of the play Mauler ends his deadly competition and consolidates the meat industry without regard to the workers' interests but with the enthusiasm and cooperation of the other capitalists. Mauler receives from his former competitors the same kind of "trust" that makes it possible for Gary and J. P. Morgan to get many interests together to form the U.S. Steel Corporation:

Most important, no doubt, was faith in Mr. Morgan's power to make money for everybody who joined—and that was what they wanted. The best of them believed not only in the man, but the process of integration. They believed it inevitable, beyond the power of men to resist. 16

St. Joan also shows the ostensible moral concerns of the capitalist
and the harnessing of religion into the service of enlightened moneymaking, both unconscious themes of Tarbell's book; but St. Joan fails to show the tremendous cooptive potential of corporate liberalism, as practiced par excellence by Judge Gary in Tarbell's book.

It may have been more Tarbell's characterization of J. P. Morgan than that of Gary that influenced Brecht's creation of Mauler. Brecht's "Pierpont Mauler" is of course meant to sound like "Pierpont Morgan," only more brutal. There is a short scene in St. Joan where Mauler's partner and his competitor call him "Pierpy" to get his goat, after having punched him in the chest to prove his heart has feeling (GW 2:683). This little bit of psychological rivalry among the giants could have been inspired by a parenthesis in Tarbell's story: "(Judge Reed is very likely to remark that Mr. Morgan always winced when Carnegie called him 'Pierpont')." Carnegie too may have provided part of the character of Mauler, in particular the brilliant tiny vignette where "the meat king and philanthropist P. Mauler" goes to the dedication of the hospitals he founded, guarded by two detectives so he will not be attacked (GW 2:671). Tarbell writes of Carnegie, "He was a very rich man. When he died he wanted to leave behind him a reputation not of being the greatest iron master in America, but the greatest philanthropist." Norris, "The Pit"

Another book that we find in Brecht's library, Frank Norris's The Pit (published in English in Leipzig in 1903), ranks with or even above The Jungle in the influence it had on him. Bernhard Reich writes of the years 1924–25 in Berlin:

During this time Brecht read Walt Whitman and Frank Norris. Often Brecht mentioned Wheat by Norris with great thoughtfulness. He occupied himself intensely with economic materials.


At the same time as he was working on A Man's a Man, Brecht was planning the second and third plays in his projected series "Human Migration to the Big Cities"; the first was retroactively declared to be In the Jungle, then were to come Fatzer (The Decline and Fall
of the Egoist Johann Fatzer, a fragment actually written between 1927 and 1930 in Lehrstück style) and John Schlachthacker, as Reich remembers it. That fragment, renamed Joe Fleischhacker, was begun in 1924 and written mainly in 1926. It is based primarily on The Pit.

Norris's novel is (by now we expect it) set in Chicago. Like the biography of Judge Gary, it centers its attention on the great capitalists—this time the speculators of the wheat exchange at the turn of the century—not on the repercussions these men's acts have for the masses. However, Norris does occasionally mention the victims, and by implication they are always there, accusing. When he describes the Board of Trade as a generator that sends ever widening circles of influence throughout the country and the world, it is the "little man" who in the end pays.

Endlessly, ceaselessly the Pit, enormous, thundering, sucked in and spewed out, sending the swirl of its mighty central eddy far out through the city's channels. . . . And men upon the streets of New York felt the mysterious tugging of its undertow engage their feet, embrace their bodies, overwhelm them, and carry them bewildered and unresisting back and downwards to the Pit itself.

Nor was the Pit's centrifugal power any less. . . . Because of an unexpected caprice in the swirling of the inner current, some far-distant channel suddenly dried, and the pinch of famine made itself felt among the vine dressers of Northern Italy, the coal miners of Western Prussia. 2

For those who have the means, the appeal of gambling proves irresistible, although they sacrifice their friends, love, health, and even life; for those without means, the effect of the capitalists' gambling is disastrous.

The Pit is simultaneously the story of a beautiful but conceited and self-centered girl from small-town Massachusetts—who marries the rich wheat operator Curtis Jadwin in Chicago and then all but loses him to the fascination of speculation—and the story of Jadwin's speculations themselves, ending in his great corner and subsequent ruin—which is what leads him back to Laura and leads her in turn to learn unselfishness. But Brecht was not very interested in the story of the spoiled rich girl who is loved to distraction by three men. What moved Brecht so much was nothing but the economic plot, the drama of the wheat exchange; and that is also where Norris really excels. There could hardly be more dramatic
suspenose than in his tale of the mundane events in the Board of Trade. And not only are they fascinating like a game or a sporting match, they are also of the most extreme importance for the fate of millions of human beings.

Jadwin, true to the type, comes from a farm in Michigan and has moved to the city, Chicago, where he made his early fortune in real estate. He is portrayed as a strong, large, and good man: he passes the plate in church; he is kindness and generosity itself to Laura and all his friends; he has a huge Sunday School for poor children (of which he is very proud because it is run on such fine business principles as consolidation and streamlining). Jadwin is downright sentimental. And everyone thinks of him as a kind man; it never occurs to himself or Laura to hold him responsible for the reverberations throughout the world that his speculation and crash cause: banks closing, tight money, people losing all their savings overnight.

Jadwin's friend Cressler (who represents Norris's views) explains the evils of speculation to Laura:

Those fellows in the Pit don't own the wheat; never even see it. Wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. They don't care in the least about the grain. But there are thousands upon thousands of farmers out here in Iowa and Kansas or Dakota who do, and hundreds of thousands of poor devils in Europe who care even more than the farmer. . . . It's life or death for either of them. And right between these two comes the Chicago speculator, who raises or lowers the price out of all reason, for the benefit of his pocket. . . . Think of it, the food of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people just at the mercy of a few men down there on the Board of Trade. They make the price. (Pp. 121–22)

It is quite an ingenious, though gratuitous, system. Using statistics on supply and demand and weather, plus their sixth sense, the speculators bet on what the price of wheat will be in the coming harvest, and through their bets they influence the price: the more people buy in expectation of higher prices, the higher the prices rise. This is suggested but incompletely explained in Cressler's speech to Laura; likewise the function of a commodity exchange is never explained. It does not have the function of a stock exchange, which is to provide starting capital for enterprises and to share profits and ownership. Whether commodity exchanges have any truly necessary function at all is doubtful. Hence they are incomprehensible to anyone who is looking for a rational basis in the economy.
And it is this incomprehensibility that drove Brecht, who had very little precise knowledge of economics, to search farther and farther for explanations of how the wheat market worked. No one could explain to his satisfaction, because it simply did not make sense.

Jadwin is tempted by an apparent sure deal his broker suggests to him. But once in, he feels the desire to prove how good he is. "Oh, it's not the money," he says, "... it's the fun of the thing; the excitement—" (p. 220). His broker has a secret connection in Paris who has tipped them off by coded cablegram that the French Chamber of Deputies will pass a bill for heavy import duties on foreign grains. (Compare in St. Joan Mauler's letters from New York about the probability that tariffs will be lowered in the South.)

The broker cajoles Jadwin:

Now here's the chance to make a really fine Bear deal. Why, as soon as this news gets on the floor there, the price will bust right down, and down, and down. (P. 80)

I'll sell short for you at the best figures we can get, and you can cover on the slump any time between now and the end of May. (P. 81)

It is easy to see how this unfamiliar language, which the speculators take for granted, would have fascinated Brecht, who always wanted to understand and demonstrate how everything worked. And it is not simple; why does the expectation of higher prices for wheat sold abroad make the Chicago price sink?

The deal is successful, and Jadwin becomes a big-time Bear; there are hard times throughout the land. But come winter his sixth sense tells him things will change: business is picking up, stocks are booming in New York, and reports predict a very small crop. He talks the broker this time into secretly turning Bull, and starts buying. From now on the whole show is masterminded by Jadwin, the "unknown Bear." (All of this is familiar to any reader of St. Joan.)

Suddenly he discovers that 80 million of the 100 million bushels of wheat that will be harvested in May will be bought by Europe, and some speculators have already sold short and will not be able to deliver because there is no wheat to be had. This means—he and his broker are overwhelmed as they realize it—that he can corner the market.

Which is what he does for the rest of the book. He secretly buys up 40 million bushels, so that other investors will have to buy from him
at a high price to deliver to him at the former low price. Drunk with
the power of shooting the moon, Jadwin cannot let go. Having
driven the price up to a dollar, he decides to buy up July shorts, and
force two dollars. He becomes nervous, physically exhausted; he
never sees his wife, and he is furious at advice. He never makes the
two dollars. On the day of crisis, the Pit senses an unprecedentedly
large crop coming because of the high price, and it starts to take
courage to oppose him. As his broker warns him, he is fighting
against the earth itself. This is Norris's grand moment; the author
cuts in and explains what has happened:

It was the wheat, the wheat! . . . Almighty, blood-brother to the
earthquake, coeval with the volcano and the whirlwind, that gigantic
world-force, that colossal billow, Nourisher of the Nations, was swelling
and advancing. (P. 357)

For months, he had, by the might of his single arm, held it back; but now
it rose like the upbuilding of a colossal billow. It towered, towered, hung
poised for an instant, and then, with a thunder as of the grind and crash
of chaotic worlds, broke upon him, burst through the Pit and raced past
him, on and on to the eastward and to the hungry nations. (Pp. 375-76)

Here natural forces overwhelm man as they threaten to do in The
Wheel; but they are not man's enemy. Rather they are, if he would
only see it, his friend and guide: he must learn not to interfere with
them, and not to set up artificial barriers in the way of natural
(logical, simple) production and distribution. The wheat is the life
force itself, and will have its way. Norris's social criticism is clothed
in the ethics of non-interference with nature, his brand of
naturalism.

Strangely, though, he speaks of the great city with similar
imagery. It is dirty and squalid to be sure, but it is alive. Again like
Jensen, Norris writes in rhapsodic prose of the trains roaring and
screeching in and out of Chicago as the lifeblood of the city, and the
carriages and markets and streets are pure activity—expression of
life—and power. Norris renders once more the American dream of
infinite confidence and will to progress, of a country without history
that knows it will make its history in the future. He chose Chicago as
the embodiment of the dream because Chicago was to Americans
what America was to Europeans; Brecht, realizing this, again and
again used Chicago as the most extreme case of what he meant by
Americanism. His picture coincides with Norris's as far as the
latter's goes: Chicago is healthy, brutal, arrogant. But Brecht knew of more; he knew of the symptoms of despair that appear in the great cities: prostitution, drinking, violence. He knew that barbarism and decadence coexisted. For a naturalist, Norris writes of remarkably clean-living people; Brecht, who rejected naturalism because it presented the human condition as unchangeable (*GW* 15:207, 173), was nevertheless interested in the outcasts and victims of society, as symbols, as clues to the workings of society.

The poems and fragments of plays Brecht wrote during this period show that he was partly caught up by the image of the city as an irresistible force himself. But for him it was also a very human institution, and the suffering that took place in it was not impersonal but caused by people. That is why the account of men's activities on the wheat exchange, and their far-reaching implications, was what fascinated Brecht in *The Pit*. We know that he found the book extremely important, because the economic processes both in *St. Joan* and in *Joe Fleischhacker* are copied right from Curtis Jadwin's corner.

*White, "The Book of Daniel Drew"*

We find an even closer example of copying market manipulation—this time the stock market—in Brecht's fragmentary script in the Archive for a play to be called *Dan Drew*. There are frequent references to page numbers in "the book" ("das Buch") in Brecht's manuscript, and notes to himself like "best the scene on page 198 199" ("am besten die scene von seite 198 199"); "JIM TELLS THE STORY 219" ("JIM ERZAHLT DIE GESCHICHTE 219"); and "(exactly the conversation on page 195)" ("[genau das gespräch von seite 195"] (BBA 194, 21, 30, and 18). Nowhere does Brecht give a clue what book he means. Luckily, although she was not sure of the author or title, Helene Weigel was able to remember the translator (Hanns Heinz Ewers) of the biography of Drew that Brecht used (and that she and Brecht found it delightful and gave it to all their friends), and so it was possible to track down *The Book of Daniel Drew*, by Bouck White.²²

It is a strange book, ostensibly an autobiography written by Drew as old man, but actually a biography written by White in the first person. White claims to have based it on papers of Drew's that may have been intended as notes toward a book, but how much is Drew
and how much is White, or whether the whole thing is made up by White, is impossible to tell. In any case, White has done a remarkable job of maintaining Drew's point of view throughout: the picture that emerges is of a drastically uncultured, unprincipled, ambitious, and ostentatious swindler, the kind of man who today would be a stereotyped Texan, but who a century ago was only one of many similar men who controlled the country's wealth. Drew was by no means the biggest swindler, but he was one of the more colorful; and few had such imaginative biographies written about them, revealing with such psychological clarity their devastatingly simple philosophy. At any rate, this was the book that came into Brecht's hands at the end of 1925, and so it is the one he used. Apparently it made such an impression on him that he simply sat down and decided to turn it into a play.

Adapting this book by White is another example of Brecht's rebellion against the bourgeois tradition of legitimate literature. It is not a book of great literary value but rather another "document," a study in psychology and economics. The urge to dramatize the life of this illiterate cattle-driver-turned-unscrupulous-speculator came at the same time and was as "unliterary" as the urge to tell the life of the boxer Samson-Körner. Brecht found the spirit of sport and suspense in the great stock deals intensely dramatic. (In production the stock market scenes in *St. Joan* can be the most effective part of the play. But in *Dan Drew* the stock market scenes, plus the kibbitzing and plotting of which they are the climax, make up the whole play; in the far more complex *St. Joan*, they are contrasted to the workers' poverty and the strike.)

White portrays not only Drew's almost sadistic lack of conscience and his rough and illiterate beginnings as a cattle driver, he also emphasizes Drew's quaint piousness. In the sport of making money, Drew unflinchingly lies, steals, bribes, betrays his friends—and then he goes to church immediately afterward and prays and condemns exactly those sins in others, and is certain he is one of the more moral persons on earth. He even donates money for a theological seminary to perpetuate his name as a religious man. It is almost eerie that he himself never sees the slightest conflict between his religion and his secular life; this is, of course, a comment by White on the church as well as on Drew's somehow naïve capacity for duplicity. (It is strange that Brecht did not take up the theme in *Dan Drew*. All the
In all Brecht's reading on America, Drew comes closest to being like Lorimer's John Graham: somehow appealing, homespun, and humorous despite his ruthless use of capitalism and his self-righteousness. But he also sounds a little like Tarbell's Gary and Norris's Jadwin. A cumulative impression of these rich Americans and their country is forming for Brecht. Chicago as brutal repressor of workers' revolt and center of speculation, America as imperialist, America as corporate capitalist, home of the robber barons: these are the very negative impressions Brecht was collecting after writing his first American play. Yet he was still paradoxically charmed by the Americans, to the extent that he was infuriated by some remarks by Bernard Shaw claiming, on the evidence of the monkey trial in Dayton, that Europeans are more civilized than Americans.

The epithets Brecht uses to praise Americans in this outburst are perhaps left-handed compliments, but he clearly intends to say that it is an advantage not to be civilized to the point of apathy as Europeans are. Except for that possible valid point, Brecht's position is quite untenable, and it is interesting only as it reveals his confused state of mind at the time. He is really bending over backward to praise Americans for their bigotry and stupidity in the matter of evolution versus fundamentalism.

I consider it in any case a great moment for the history of ideas when a busy people like the Americans, through a healthy i.e. strong reaction, makes a meeting with new theories into a real adventure.

Ich halte es in jedem Falle für einen großen Moment der Geistesgeschichte, wenn ein ausreichend beschäftigtes Volk wie das amerikanische durch eine gesunde, das heißt heftige Reaktion das Zusammentreffen mit neuen Theorien zu einem wirklichen Abenteuer gestaltet. (GW 18:26)

He goes on to call the American people “this extraordinarily unbiased people, totally unspoiled by history” (“dies erstaunlich vorurteilslose und von der Geschichte gänzlich unverbildete Volk”). This description is consistently repeated in 1928-30 when he twice again mentions the monkey trial. Once he calls the Americans “a somewhat more healthy people” (“ein etwas gesünderes Volk”) (GW 15:200); and once he writes that the monkey trial must be considered an important stage in the progress toward Bolshevism,
because in it a people showed a strong, healthy reaction to an idea and at the same time a na"ive trust in the courts. That a people would let a conflict between religion and science be decided by a criminal court is a clear victory of Bolshevist atheism.

weil in ihm ein Volk eine starke, gesunde Reaktion auf eine Idee zeigte und sogleich das naive Vertrauen auf seine Gerichtsh"o"fe. Daß ein Volk einen Streitfall zwischen Religion und Wissenschaft durch einen Kriminalgerichtshof entscheiden l"aßt, ist ein klarer Erfolg des bolschewistischen Atheismus. (GW 15:160)

This is the same ironic idea in a new political context: here it is clear that Brecht is pleading for common sense, for beliefs determined on the basis of discussion (he delighted in the dialectical dramatic form of a trial) and not just by acceptance. That is not exactly what he said in the early reaction to Shaw. There it was a simple defense of Americanism. In fact, he quite overreacted; the article by Shaw has very little to say about Americans. Shaw is interested in showing that the Bible is full of contradictions and that fundamentalism is a bunch of impractical nonsense. Actually Brecht shared Shaw's opinion on religion; all that can have angered him is Shaw's sarcasm directed at America, which is, granted, heavy-handed:

It doesn't happen often that a single state can make an entire continent ridiculous, or that a single man can cause Europe to question whether America was really ever civilized at all. But Tennessee and Mr. Bryan have made it an event. To us on this side of the Atlantic American civilization was of course always suspicious. The lawbooks of the federated states are museums of childish, temperamental lawmaking, and are defended by traveling Americans with the argument that not even in a dream did anyone ever think of actually applying these childish laws.

But Brecht's angry reaction and overeager defense of the American people are characteristic of this period. He was, simply, ideologically confused. The comment on Shaw goes on to state a position of complete agnosticism on beliefs:

If I were asked what I would prefer: the terrorism of those who don't want to know something or the terrorism of those who claim to know it better, I would prefer the former without hesitation and in every instance.

Wenn ich gefragt würde, was ich vorziehen würde: den Terror derer, die
etwas nicht wissen wollen, oder den Terror derer, die etwas besser wissen wollen, dann gäbe ich den ersteren unbedenklich und in jedem Falle den Vorzug. (GW 18:27)

The position is suspicion of anyone who is too positive about his ideas; it is still the (as Brecht himself calls it [GW 20:46]) nihilism of his earliest plays, which have a background of social problems but take no position. They tend, on the contrary, to praise the morality of survival of the individual, i.e., pragmatic amorality. In 1919 Brecht had written that he was against “teachers,” people who enjoy knowing better, including “the petty revolutionaries, those that abolish the Kaiser and introduce communism, and conservatives who fight them. . . . The absolute pacifist and the absolute militarist, they are the same fools” (“die kleinen Revolutionäre, diejenigen, die den Kaiser abschaffen und den Kommunismus einführen, und Konservativen, die sie bekämpfen. . . . Der absolute Pazifist und der absolute Militarist, das sind die gleichen Narren”) (GW 20:7). Six years later this relativistic position had not changed. But it was getting more untenable. He was being forced into absurdities, ironies where he himself probably did not know what he really meant, cynical laughter with a touch of desperation. In the fragment on Shaw he even proceeds to say, “It is progress that makes me throw up” (“Es ist der Fortschritt, der mich so anakotzt”) (GW 18:27), and to praise conservatism—positions that hardly sit well with almost everything else he had written.

In criticizing Shaw, and in comments written on A Man's a Man at this time and other political statements, Brecht seems to be trying to imitate Shaw's own technique: the statement of outrageous positions in a tone that leaves the reader guessing whether the intent is ironic or earnest. What is one to make, for instance, of this sentence written around 1926? “The trouble with great men (for they are an evil) consists in the fact that there are too few of them. There ought to be a mass of them, let's say: a proletariat” (“Das Übel der großen Männer (denn sie sind ein Übel) besteht darin, daß es zu wenige gibt. Es müßte eine Masse davon geben, sagen wir: ein Proletariat”) (GW 20:16). The other earliest notes collected in the volume Writings on Politics and Society are similarly so saturated in irony that it is impossible to conclude any political direction from them. Brecht was being careful, overcareful, not committing himself to any position, playing the invincible role of skeptic and cynic.
The year 1926 is the crucial one in Brecht's development. It marks the greatest change not only in his attitude to America but also in his politics and his dramatic theory. In all three of these fields, he became conscious: former instincts and inchoate contradictory attitudes began to crystallize, come under sharp intellectual scrutiny, and resolve themselves into a set of well-defined and interrelated ideas that would remain with him for the rest of his life. The confusion in his thinking had to be resolved. It was being pushed partly by his inability to finish writing any of his dramatic projects, and partly by his reading about America (which in 1926 continued to challenge his "nihilist" stance). As we have seen, he was steering toward a crippling dilemma in his philosophy: on the one hand a glorification of progress and the machine age, on the other a foreboding of annihilation and feeling of futility, arising from his cynicism. At the same time his fascination with cities and America reached a peak, and expanded into the area of economics. We will finish our examination of Brecht's reading about America by looking specifically at the books he read in the year 1926, to get some idea where the intensified interest in economics came from. Then in Part B we will look at the crisis to which this interest took him in the unfinished plays of 1926, and then at the effects of this crisis on his picture of America, his politics, and his dramatic theory.

Harris, "My Life and Loves"

We cannot know in what order Brecht read the books listed below, but he read them all in 1926, or very shortly before. We will begin arbitrarily with Frank Harris's *My Life and Loves*, printed in Berlin in 1926 under the title *Mein Leben* (*My Life*). Brecht wrote a short review (GW 18:48–49) praising the book for its "documentary value," a term he was to use often. The review claims that Harris is a great liar, but that his book is very useful because it shows us the system of values of a type of man; in other words, the picture Harris gives of himself is Harris's conception of the ideal of the age. He supposes himself the self-made man, the young European boy who runs away to America and becomes a success. A success at everything—intellectual abilities, women, and money are all his in unbelievable quantities.

The book contains interesting documentary material on America too; it is the very embodiment of the American dream come true.
Harris makes good first as a young boy in New York shining shoes, constructing bridges, and fornicating; then as a hotel boy in Chicago; then as a cattle rustler; then as a friend of famous people; finally as an intellectual (that is, he could memorize phenomenally, which he believed made him an intellectual). He sympathizes with the Marxism of the professor who “discovers” him, but his political philosophy consists of asserting rather stridently that socialism and individualism can somehow be combined.

Harris criticizes America’s Puritan morals, lack of (sexual) liberty, and low cultural level, describes the horror of a lynching during the Chicago fire, and protests vigorously against the torture of conscientious objectors in World War I; but he also speaks of America with extreme affection, feeling it really is the land of opportunity (as most people who manage to make their fortune there feel). He has clearly racist prejudices, especially in relation to the Negro women he “loves” (uses), and his ideas on preventing pregnancy are terrifying. He is a strange and conceited specimen.

When in the early 1880s he met Marx, he was impressed by Marx’s “deep human pity and sympathy . . . the heart better than the head—and wiser.” Capital (volume two) was also a great book—“No one who ignores it should be listened to on social questions”—but Marx himself, Harris says from a fully self-confident equal level, in conversations shut himself off from “hearing anything against his pet theory, one-sided though it was.”

Harris went to Berlin in 1918 to publish the autobiography because he could not find anyone to do it in the prudish United States. While there he met George Grosz. Harris’s descriptions of America probably interested Brecht; but they fall into the pattern to which he was by then quite accustomed, and he would hardly have taken them as gospel. They can not be classified as ideas; they are simply the reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices: “It is a genuine document, although it is the best that an enormous liar could produce” (“Es ist ein wirkliches Dokument, obwohl es das Beste ist, was ein ungeheuerer Lügner zustande bringen konnte”) (GW 18:48).

Mendelsohn, “America: An Architect’s Picture Book”

Another kind of document that Brecht used as source material was photographs of America. He mentions skyscrapers often, and it
is easy to see why: he actually collected postcard pictures of the largest buildings in Chicago, to have a visual symbol of what the huge growth looked like. Not only did this visual aid help him steep himself in the right atmosphere; it also found its way into his work as concrete detail, almost in the style of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. These postcards (from 1925) can be found among the materials for *Joe Fleischhacker* along with many newspaper clippings about wheat and the stock market.

There are many other instances of Brecht's use of photographic sources. In a note about the growth of cities, for instance, he mentions explicitly a photograph that loosed a train of thought:

> Ich habe eine Photographie vom Eingang des Broadway in New York gesehen (das Tor dieser Zementschlucht, über dem “Danger!” steht) und mir Mühe gegeben, herauszubringen, was man, wenn ihre Zeit um ist, über die Circese dieser Städte wird sagen können. (*GW* 15:76)

He answers that it will not be the events one thinks of “while looking at such imposing photos” (“bei der Betrachtung solch imposanter Fotos”) that will last, but the things that were fun: Chaplin's films, jazz.

What could be the “imposing photo” that inspired this strange and grotesque vision of an entrance to Broadway like the entrance to hell? We can answer this question definitively: it is a picture in Erich Mendelsohn's photographic essay *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architeken* (*America: An Architect's Picture Book*).  

A full-page photograph on page 30 of this large-format book shows a close-up of the previous photograph of one end of Broadway. In the back is a tall sunlit building with thirty-three floors and regular rows of closely set windows; Mendelsohn comments on the technical achievement but the inhumanity of squeezing an average of 5,000 to 15,000 people into one building. The foreground buildings are in the shadow, dark and forbidding, and seem to march into a long line of their type. People and cars are heading into the dark narrow street; it is easy to imagine them being swallowed by an ominous fate once they are inside. A fourteen-story building on the right side is under construction; there is a cement or wooden bridge built out in front of it covering the sidewalk, to
protect pedestrians walking beneath the construction. In the closeup the tunnel for pedestrians looks as though it filled the whole street—like a more practical, American version of the gate to a European city—and above the passageway is a large sign (referring to the construction, not the road ahead) reading: DANGER.

Either Brecht misinterpreted the picture, or he had an excellent eye for ironic detail. In either case, his use of this picture is revealing: it shows in miniature how he adapted information about America to his own use, how something he considered a characteristic detail could be the stimulus for a whole train of thought. This is why we see him using the same concrete details again and again: they have very specific symbolic meaning for him.

A glance through the book by Mendelsohn is enlightening; it must have made a strong impression on Brecht. Divided into sections on "The Typically American," "The Heightened Civilization," "The World Center—The Money Center," "The Gigantic," "The Grotesque" ("Das typisch Amerikanische," "Die gesteigerte Zivilisation," "Das Weltzentrum—das Gelzentrum," "Das Gigantische," "Das Groteske"), it contains visual examples of much that Brecht associated with America. He read it in 1926, the year it was printed, and declared it one of the best books of the year, praising its "outstanding photos, all of which one could really hang separately on the wall, and which give the (certainly misleading) impression that the big cities are habitable" ("ausgezeichnete Photos, die man eigentlich fast alle einzeln an die Wand heften kann und die den [bestimmt trügerischen] Anschein erwecken, als seien die großen Städte bewohnbar") (GW 18:51–52). The camera has an eye for the essential design and manages to catch a gesture, as Brecht might call it, in each building. Studying the pictures in the book today, an American can reconstruct some of the effect this country must have had on Europeans in the twenties.

Mendelsohn's book contains not only pictures but also short, large-print, pithy, almost expressionist comments on each of them. Some of these leave an almost visual imprint on the mind, as strong as that of the pictures. The introduction sounds familiar to the reader of those works by Brecht that equate America with a new age, cruel but grand:

Altered, heightened dimensions of life energy, of spatial relations and of traffic.

Driven upwards by unforeseen accumulation of money, pumped up
BRECHT'S AMERICA

in an unprecedented short time from immigrants' port to business center of the world. A conglomeration of fairy-tale wealth and armies of the needy. . . .

For what is forbidden, what allowed, where dimension allows itself every liberty and knows no respect for the traditional scale of comprehension. . . .

America is today still so deep in the period of exploitation, the primitive function of daily necessity, that it has no time for thoughts about itself, about the purpose of its living lifelessness. . . .

Seeing America today is therefore being thrilled with perspectives. Here we recognize for the first time the whole monstrousness of negative civilization, but at the same time in this chaos we see the first reference points of a new age. . . . Whirlwinds are only harbingers. . . .

This land gives everything: the worst refuse from Europe, civilization's abortions, but also hopes of a new world.

Veränderte, gesteigerte Dimensionen der Lebensenergie, der Raumverhältnisse und des Verkehrs. . . .

Hochgetrieben von unvorhergesehener Geldhäufung, aufgepumpt in beispiellos kurzer Zeit vom Einwandererhafen zum Geschäftszentrum der Welt. Ein Konglomerat von Märchenhaftem Reichtum und Notarmeen. . . .

Denn was ist verboten, was erlaubt, wo die Dimension sich selbst jede Freiheit genehmigt und vor überkommener Begriffsweite keinen Respekt kennt. . . .

Amerika steckt heute noch so tief in der Periode der Ausbeutung, der primitiven Funktion des täglichen Bedürfnisses, daß es für Gedanken über sich selbst, über den Sinn seiner lebendigen Leblosigkeit keine Zeit hat. . . .

Amerika heute zu sehen, ist deshalb ein perspektivischer Rausch. Erst hier erkennen wir die ganze Ungeheuerlichkeit der verneinenden Zivilisation, aber gleichzeitig in diesem Schwimmbrei schon die ersten Fixpunkte einer neuen Zeit. . . . Wirbelwinde sind nur Vorbote. . . .

Dieses Land gibt alles: Schlechteste Ablagerungen Europas, Zivilisations-Ausgeburten, aber auch Hoffnungen einer neuen Welt. (Pp. viix)

There is the same simultaneity of two visions of America here as in Brecht: it is a terrible place, but what a potential! For Mendelsohn, America is an organic, energy-driven chaos that has yet to be understood and controlled; a picture of 43d Street in New York bears the caption, "Impossible to imagine the spirit that will someday organize it" ("Unmöglich, den Geist sich vorzustellen, der das einmal ordnen soll") (p. 55). The language Mendelsohn uses to
try to describe the visions is full of crackling and roaring sounds, images of speed and force and noise: New York’s skyline is to him “Fast entrance, turns, curves, space cataract, space battle, infinite triumphal delirium” (“Schnelle Einfahrt, Wendungen, Kurven, Raumkatarakt, Raumschlacht, unendlicher Seigesrausch”) (p. 21).

A picture of the el in Chicago is accompanied by a description of the noise it makes right in the middle of the city: “The European goes blind from the noise, but the American has adjusted his nerves and hears nothing any more” (“Der Europäer wird blind vor Lärm, aber der Amerikaner hat seine Nerven angepaßt und hört nichts mehr”) (p. 16). Americans have, through adaptation to inhuman conditions, really become a new race of tough and practical people. These are the people that we see in Dan Drew and Joe Fleischhacker (Brecht’s main projects of that year), single-mindedly pursuing their absolutely worldly goals.

Mendelsohn has pictures of Wall Street too: “Stock exchange, the bourse, and Equitable Trust. On the far side of Broadway, Trinity Church—money and God” (“Stock exchange, die Börse, und Equitable Trust. Jenseits des Broadway Trinity-Church—Geld und Gott”) (p. 23). This juxtaposition is not infrequently used by Brecht. But for all his talk of capitalism, there is a tone of admiration discernible in Mendelsohn’s text beyond which Brecht had already gone. Mendelsohn’s attitude is: America is brutal, but it is so marvelous. Brecht’s is: America may be marvelous, but it is so brutal. In Brecht’s recommendation of the book there is also a certain tone of superiority looking down at Mendelsohn’s naïveté.

Perhaps Mendelsohn’s most striking picture, which he repeats from various angles, is the one of a complex of massive grain elevators and silos made of concrete. This, too, is Chicago, and the accompanying text describes the special trains and ships that bring grain to the central city from Canada, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana: all the midwestern states provide the city. Chicago is the collection point for the country’s agriculture, just as in The Pit food crises radiate outward from Chicago to the world. The functional beauty of the silos (not an American invention but uniquely imposing in these pictures) represents what is best in America: matter-of-factness, getting down to business on a gigantic scale. This was another visual help to Brecht, who was working on a play about the grain market in Chicago.
Mendelsohn's principal message on city architecture is the lesson of the silo picture: honesty about function is beautiful. He complains that useless decoration (baroque frills, Roman columns) on the American skyscrapers reveals the fear in America's people that they have no culture. Their great achievements come when they dare to look into the technical future with confidence: "technical beauty, the new romanticism" ("technische Schönheit, die neue Romantik") (p. 74). The imagination is most stimulated by powerful expressions of purpose. America is most attractive when it admits its brutality rather than copying European decadence. There are two possible paths for architectural development:

Either one swears by the eternal validity of historical forms or one refuses to be intimidated by history's judgment and tries to find, out of purposes and materials, the suitable formal expression for our time.

Entweder, man schwört auf die Immergültigkeit der historischen Formen, oder, man lehnt den Angstblick auf die Historie ab und versucht, aus Zweck und Material den unserer Zeit entsprechenden Formausdruck zu finden. (P. 63)

This is remarkably similar to what Brecht believed and practiced in his drama and theater. Expressionism (he calls it sarcastically "Oh-humanity dramatics" ("Oh-Mensch-Dramatik" [GW 17:945])) and glorification of the individual soul were in Brecht's opinion no longer contemporary, nor was naturalism, which was too defeatist. The dramatist of the new age must embrace the technical achievements and understand their implications, use every possible new technique on the stage, make his drama relevant to the innovations that the audience knows in its everyday world. The new drama must break down the bourgeois idea of art as decoration and preservation of what is old, and replace the old conception with a new one of an art that is relevant to the present and the future.

Thus the occasional similarity between Brecht's technique and Neue Sachlichkeit, a style that Europeans claim originated in America (but more likely it originated in their own admiration of America's supposed Sachlichkeit—matter-of-factness).29 That style, which was a pendulum reaction of postwar German artists against expressionism, tried to make poetry out of the objects of everyday contemporary life; technology played an especially large role precisely because it had previously been scorned as unpoetic. Brecht
never seemed to fall into the temptation of writing exclusively about inanimate objects, but rather with his effortless eclectic genius adopted the most useful quality of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and sprinkled it generously through his writing, as in his brilliant use of concrete detail and his determination as a director that actors have respect for the technique of how things are done. Concretization was from the beginning terribly important to Brecht, but not an end in itself. Its function is well illustrated by Bernhard Reich’s reminiscence of Brecht’s direction of *Edward II* in 1924:

> When for a certain epoch the sentence “It is Thursday” was spoken, he nodded at me, proud of far-reaching concretization of time. Seeking concretization, he later came to his concept of the historic and poetic—a day becomes a particular day by means of the important event, rich in consequences, that occurs on it.

Als bei einer Epoche der Satz “*Es ist Donnerstag*” gesprochen wurde, nickte er mir zu, stolz auf weitgehende Konkretisierung der Zeit. Die Konkretisierung erstrebend, kam er später zu seinem Begriff des Historischen und Poetischen—ein Tag wird zu einem bestimmten Tag durch das wichtige und folgenreiche Ereignis, das an ihm geschieht.

So, similarly, the many skyscrapers, radio antennas (radio was the exciting new way to communicate with the New World), Virginia cigars, and bottles of whisky that appear in Brecht’s drama and poetry during the period of about 1926 are not fetishes but concrete signs of the new age he is talking about; they are both its cause and its manifestation. Brecht’s plays are about human beings. But these concrete technological details anchor the human beings in reality (i.e., a particular stage of social development); they make people’s problems very real, not imagined (romantic). The technique of concretization is a cornerstone of Brecht’s style: again and again he uses a single concrete detail to incorporate the whole idea or setting he wants to express.

It is this same courage to be thoroughly modern—the refusal to look back—that Mendelsohn praises in the best American architecture. He insists that the only honest approach to building is the attempt to find formal expression in the purposes and materials of our time. Both Brecht and Mendelsohn were strongly influenced by the rapid progress and optimism of America in the twenties, and so they embraced progress, determined always to look forward. Brecht was almost obsessed with newness, and he identified with the pio-
neer spirit. However, he was also able to understand the settler spirit (as described by Tarbell), as well as the economic duress that industrialization and urbanization created for the less competitive and the lower classes. The dream of Tahiti and of the Old Country or the savannah in *Jungle* is an early expression of this understanding; in *Joe Fleischhacker* the ruin and degradation of a family that moves from the savannah to Chicago is still more explicit.

**Anderson, “Poor White”**

One source of this increased understanding was Sherwood Anderson’s *Poor White*, which Brecht also read in 1926. From this novel he learned about the anguish of Americans who look back at the simple, country days with nostalgia. This is not a position Brecht himself could ever take, but the dream of the free and simple past before urbanization and industrialization haunts many of his characters in the American plays.

Elisabeth Hauptmann notes on 8 June 1926:

> About Easter Brecht had discovered a new lending library. *Poor White* by Sherwood Anderson made a strong impression on him; he wrote the poem “Coals for Mike” after it.

> Um Ostern herum hatte Brecht eine neue Leihbibliothek entdeckt. “Der arme Weiße” von Sherwood Anderson macht einen großen Eindruck auf ihn; er schreibt danach das Gedicht *Kohlen für Mike.*

(For a discussion of that poem, see below, p. 93.)

Among the drafts for *Fleischhacker* is another hint that *Poor White* made a strong impression on Brecht: he has copied out a description of how cattle are transported from the Far West to Chicago, the “giant city of the prairie” (“Reisenstadt der Prarie”), and brought to the slaughterhouses. At the end of the passage he writes the source: “POOR WHITE by ANDERSON” (“DER ARME WEISSE von ANDERSON”) (BBA 524, 60). It is not clear how Brecht intended to use the quotation.

Also mentioned in the *Fleischhacker* notes is Jack London. His name follows what is presumably a quotation from one of his works: “the heart of this man, to whom the seasons are just specks and whose dreams end barbarically,” (“das herz dieses mannes, dem die jahreszeiten flecken sind und dessen träume barbarisch enden”) (BBA 524, 48). Undoubtedly London’s novels helped form Brecht’s concept of adventure and tough, heroic men in America. That
London was a socialist probably had less effect; as we have seen, Sinclair's and Piscator's early socialist arguments fell on rather deaf ears.

But the influence of *Poor White* is clear. Anderson makes explicit what Brecht had already suspected about the stage of history characterized by men moving to the cities. That theme was the historical background to earlier books Brecht read, but here the causes and effects of industrialization and urbanization are the central topic of the whole book. *Poor White* is probably the source that really solidified Brecht's concentration on "Human Migration to the Big Cities," the rubric under which he intended his studies around 1926 to appear.

The plot of *Poor White* is summed up in a short passage where Anderson describes the quiet towns of farmers and craftsmen, and then writes about the sense of something new coming:

A sense of quiet growth awoke in sleeping minds. It was time for art and beauty to awake in the land.

Instead, the giant, industry, awoke.  

The book begins as the story of Hugh McVey, a poor white from Missouri who is trapped in the contradiction between the southern laziness he inherits from his father and the ambitiousness of his foster-mother. To please her and to overcome his fear of his own passive nature, he constantly pushes himself, but remaining shy and lonely he centers his attention on mechanical things. When he moves north and east to Bidwell, Ohio, he becomes an inventor. The town itself now becomes the subject of the story: how it develops into an industrial city, the ambition of some of its citizens to push into the future, the tragedy of men who try to hang on to the past, and occasional diatribes by the author against the similar transformation of the whole country. Eventually Hugh becomes aware that his inventions are hurting people. He is thoughtful about this dilemma, but there is obviously nothing he can do, just as there is no way to hold up the whole industrial revolution. There are strikes against mechanization and there are a few speeches by socialists, but the majority of men have been infected with the cruel fever of progress. Anderson utterly condemns blind progress, showing only its bad effects; but his book is a sad and resigned polemic, not one offering a fighting solution. He sees no way to slow down history.

Brecht's attitude was very different, but this book was a
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contribution to some of the criticism that runs through his urban works. Anderson's social criticism is a sad cry of despair at the tremendous loss of beauty and sensitivity; the whole book is subdued and plaintive, the author's position defeated from the beginning. There is no attempt to see what can be made of the new age, how to transform the new forces of production (for that is what he is portraying) into means to a more human life for all rather than a more lucrative life for some. In short, Anderson only looks back with a sigh, not forward with determination. Brecht never allows a backward glance: dreams of escape to exotic and primitive landscapes or of return to the old family homestead are never more than dreams. He sharpens the contradictions in the present reality of his plays to the point that they cannot be accepted with a resigned sigh: they cry for resolution. Progress is glorified as bringer of the grand new age, but misery and desire to escape are likewise emphasized.

There is a poem spoken by the boy Calvin Mitchell from the electric chair, in Joe Fleischhacker (see below, pp. 91–92), that is a translation from the negative to the positive of Anderson's bitterness in the following sentence:

In making way for the newer, broader brotherhood into which men are some day to emerge, in extending the invisible roofs of the towns and cities to cover the world, men cut and crushed their way through the bodies of men.34

The boy in the electric chair in San Francisco uses the same images but in fanatical praise. And at the same time the misery accompanying the great transformation is made far more acute and desperate than in Anderson's book. Brecht shows not ugly architecture but people dying. Anderson shows the far-reaching effects of the industrial revolution on people's souls; Brecht shows the effects on their way existence.

Yet, of course, Poor White is a very important book for its "documentary value." Perhaps Brecht's interest in it will encourage more Americans to take Anderson more seriously, for he captures the fear and excitement of the age of growth that left small people feeling lost, almost as well as Thomas Wolfe. Poor White reproduces the feeling of a great change; it shows how the mood of an age penetrated into the lives of all the people living in that age:
Overnight, towns grew into cities. A madness took hold of the minds of the people. Villages... became small cities within a few weeks.\textsuperscript{35}

A vast energy seemed to come out of the breast of earth and infect the people. Thousands of the most energetic men of the Middle States wore themselves out in forming companies, and when the companies failed, immediately forming others... It was a time of hideous architecture, a time when thought and learning paused. Without music, without poetry, without beauty in their lives and impulses, a whole people, full of the native energy and strength of lives lived in a new land, rushed pell-mell into a new age.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Myers, "History of the Great American Fortunes"}

It may have been the many descriptions in Poor White of the new ruling class—the Rockefellers, Morgan, Frick, Gould, Carnegie, and Vanderbilt,\textsuperscript{37} who became powerful purely through financial speculation—that prompted Brecht in the same year to read Gustavus Myers's brilliant historical study \textit{History of the Great American Fortunes}.\textsuperscript{38} This amazing book, 700 pages long, was available in translation in Germany from 1916. It was written just after the turn of the century, at the same time as the early muckracking works of Sinclair and Lincoln Steffens, but it is not a fictionalized account of a microcosm of social injustice, nor is it a biography; it is a vast study of the growth of wealth in the United States from colonial times to the twentieth century, an extraordinarily carefully researched and documented work. It is perhaps the first significant example of what is today called "power structure research," that is, research on the connections between financial interests and government policy, with the aim of exposing class bias. The book is simply an exposition of facts, written to be sure in polemical style, but there is never any doubt that the occasional comment is justified by the documentation. And furthermore, Myers's information, interpretation, and style of presentation are so fascinating that this long book on economics reads, as Brecht says, like a mystery story. And Brecht loved mystery stories.

That is another clue to Brecht's interest in economics: it is well known that he was a fanatic reader of mysteries (\textit{Kriminalromane}). This was confirmed by his wife, who said that he read masses of them throughout his life, and by some of his own comments on literature.\textsuperscript{39} The intellectual exercise involved in finding the key facts to solve a murder mystery is similar to the investigation of the
underlying economic causes of readily visible phenomena. Sinclair, Jensen, Paquet, Anderson, all wrote descriptions of the social types and relations of this new age, but Brecht with his mystery-story attitude wanted to know what forces really lay behind the developments that those authors usually presented as pure phenomena. This is not to say that Brecht’s interest in murder mysteries was the cause of his interest in economics but that they both sprang from the same analytic mind.

Brecht writes in 1926 “For lovers of criminalistic reading, Myers’ History of the Great American Fortunes is a feast” (“Für Liebhaber kriminalistischer Lektüre ist Myers ‘Geschichte der großen amerikanischen Vermögen’ ein Fressen”)—and not just because the money magnates were criminals. He continues: “It’s well known that matters having to do with money are taboo in polite society and its literature. I assume it’s because there is so much spirit in them (in the money matters)” (“Bekanntlich sind Angelegenheiten, die mit Geld zusammenhängen, in der guten Gesellschaft und ihrer Literatur verpönt. Ich nehme an, weil so viel Geist drin steckt [in den Geldangelegenheiten]”) (GW 18:52). The implication is that literature should concern itself with financial affairs, and Brecht’s literature will. The interest in economics was also partly the climax of his concentration on unliterary sources, many of which originated in Americanism.Originally the cult of sport, cigar-smoking, and workers’ clothing was an act of rebellion against the literary establishment; now the continued rebellion against the irrelevance of literature led to first a faddish, then a serious, interest in the economic base of society. And once Brecht had read Myers, there could be no turning back from the knowledge gained there: on the one hand, cold facts and analysis about the financial giants whom Anderson just mentions as shadowy background figures, and on the other, a perspective that makes sense out of history. It might well have been after reading Myers that Brecht noted down, “The American histories alone yield a minimum of eight plays” (“Die amerikanischen Historien allein ergeben im Minimum acht Stücke”) (GW 15:70).

It would be impossible to summarize Myers’s book or to quote enough from it to make evident the influence it had on Brecht. There is a detailed account of each of the capitalists Brecht writes about in Dan Drew—Vanderbilt, Drew, Fisk, Gould—as well as more than
one hundred pages on J. P. Morgan, model for Mauler in *St. Joan*. The stock market swindles of the Erie Railroad crew receive about twenty pages. It is not possible to know to what extent Myers influenced Brecht's fragment *Dan Drew*, which is otherwise an adaptation of just one book. But there is one detail not mentioned in the source, which is probably taken from Myers: the name of Fisk's mistress, Josie Mansfield. Myers reports that Fisk bribed a judge to hold court in Josie Mansfield's apartment. \(^{41}\) This must have caught Brecht's attention: he gives “josy mansfield” a lament to speak on the lot of a poor girl who comes to New York to make money, becomes a prostitute, and grows old there (BBA 194, 59).

There are two principal lessons that Brecht will have learned (at least in part) from Myers. First is the approach to the study of social relations which says that understanding history requires understanding the mechanism of finance. The other is an absolutely consistent class perspective, made far more explicit in Myers’s book than in any of the fictional works Brecht had been reading about America. The American “Revolution” and the Constitution are presented as vehicles of class rule for the propertied, and the law and the courts as well as governors and administrators, with very few exceptions, are either simply bought by the magnates or serve the ruling class out of conviction or their own class interest. And as in *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, religion too is a means of keeping the poor from revolting.

Myers's intention is not to lash out at individual criminals or to express or create shock at frauds; in his preface he differentiates himself not only from the admirers of wealth but also from the sensationalist muckrakers. He himself wishes to show that

> while it is true that the methods employed by these very rich men have been, and are, fraudulent, it is also true that they are but the more conspicuous types of a whole class which, in varying degrees, has used precisely the same methods.\(^{42}\)

He complains of the sensationalists:

> They give no explanation of the fundamental laws and movements of the present system, which have resulted in these vast fortunes; nor is there the least glimmering of a scientific interpretation of a succession of states and tendencies from which these men of great wealth have emerged. With an entire absence of comprehension, they portray our multimillionaires as a phenomenal group whose sudden rise to their
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sinister and overshadowing position is a matter of wonder and surprise. They do not seem to realise for a moment—what is clear to every real student of economics—that the great fortunes are the natural, logical outcome of a system based upon factors the inevitable result of which is the utter despoilment of the many for the benefit of a few.43

The reason for quoting this introductory passage at length is that Brecht in Dan Drew did not really follow its warning. (He started work on Drew before reading Myers; conceivably Myers's argument convinced him to stop.) Brecht too presents the great finance kings as "a matter of wonder and surprise"; though he undoubtedly took to writing about the stock market in an attempt to expose class rule, what he produced on paper is still rather awed by the grandeur of it all. And there is no sign whatsoever of the effect the Drews and Vanderbilts have on the lower classes; the only characters in Dan Drew are the members of the Erie ring, plus one woman. One of Myers's virtues is that from time to time he interjects into his narrative of the great fortunes an analysis of working class conditions at the same point in history, showing, for instance, that most laws were passed to protect the rich from the poor and describing concretely the living conditions of the workers. That Brecht does nothing of the kind in Dan Drew is a sign that he based it almost exclusively on the pseudo-autobiography of Drew.

His simplification of financial politics in Dan Drew is some justification of the criticism by Martin Esslin:

The writings of Lincoln Steffens and other muckraking American authors, Upton Sinclair's Jungle and accounts of the destruction of coffee and wheat to raise prices contributed to the somewhat crude idea he had formed of the great buccaneers of capitalism like Dan Drew and Commodore Vanderbilt.44

We know that Brecht had read enough other materials to have a pretty sophisticated idea of how these men worked; it was not Brecht's idea but his presentation that was crude, and he probably realized that himself. But the crudeness that Brecht would have found wrong is rather a different kind from what is meant by Esslin, much of whose book attempts to show that Brecht was a sentimentalist rather than a communist. Esslin thinks Brecht is selling capitalism short, whereas Brecht would criticize himself with obscuring its bad effects by sensationalizing it.

But more important for us is the long-range effect Brecht's
attempt at adapting the story of Daniel Drew had on his conception of America. Bouck White’s book is one in a series of works Brecht read at this time that all together produced a very convincing case that America is both ruled and ruined by the men who control its wealth. The Pit, the story of the corruption of Chicago’s *nouveau riche* wheat dealers, who will let the world starve for the fun of the speculation game; The Book of Dan Drew, the minute study of the workings of one speculator’s mind and of his techniques in the market and their effects; Poor White, a wistful look back at what is crushed and forgotten when the cities grow up; and finally the History of the Great American Fortunes, which put into a class context all the stories of individual exploitation and presented them as the rule and not the exception: all these books about America made it impossible to accept the old myth of greatness and democracy any more. After reading them, Brecht could only use the myth to show how it has perverted human values, as in Mahagonny. If people like Dan Drew and Curtis Jadwin are typical of the American system, as Myers claims, then this system must be changed. That is the lesson of St. Joan of the Stockyards.

B. POEMS AND FRAGMENTS

*Brecht’s Creative Crisis*

But Brecht did not arrive at these conclusions merely through reading. Brecht was a writer, and it was when he reached a crisis in his writing, when he was unable to go any further on the projects that he had started, that he was forced to think through his attitudes and find exact answers to questions raised by the plays he was trying to write. Obviously, reading a book and accepting what it says passively is very different from trying to write a play whose aim is to make as clear as possible the message of that book: to write he really had to understand. But more than that, writing was his occupation, his only means of being productive. If he was unable to write, he could not do anything; and if something was preventing him from writing, he could not circumvent it and do something else; he had to solve the problem.

The only significant work Brecht finished during this period (1923-26) was *A Man’s a Man*, which he had started working on, under the title Galgei, as early as 1920-21.⁴⁵ It was essentially completed, according to Ihering, in 1924.⁴⁶ The next two years saw
many revisions, but they were minor, formal changes. He finished *A Man's a Man* in a period of ideological uncertainty, and he remained for some time thereafter confused about its meaning. There are many different drafts of prefaces to the play, and they all take different positions. (See below, pp. 172–74.)

Few of Brecht's poems were written in these years either; until 1922 and starting again about 1929, he was prolific in poetry. About five or six stories were published during 1923–25, then a flurry of them in 1926, then nothing till the thirties. Everything else seems to have remained unfinished. Nothing came of most of the plays Elizabeth Hauptmann noted Brecht was working on in 1926. She lists *Inflation* (*Whores*); *Charles the Bold, Parody of Americanism*; *Robinsonisms in the City*; *Joe Meatcutter in Chicago* (*Wheat*); *Dan Drew (The Erie Railroad)—* (*Inflation [Mentscher]; Karl der Kühne, Parodie auf den Amerikanismus; Robinsonade in der Stadt; Joe Fleischhacker in Chicago [Weizen]; Dan Drew [Die Erie-Bahn]*)— and there were more projects around that time, plans and sketches that hardly anyone knows about. They all remained fragments. *Dan Drew* and *Joe Fleischhacker* are the only ones of these that were worked out in any detail; of the rest, some are only four or five pages of notes in the Archive, and of others there is no trace at all. In all there are about twenty ideas and sketches for plays preserved in the Archive from the approximate period 1924–26, and about as many again from 1927 to 1929. (As we will see, 1924–26 was an involuntary and 1927–29 a voluntary dry period.)

Brecht wrote a note at the end of July 1925 that shows how disoriented he was:

I vacillate a lot about pledging myself to literature. Till now I have done everything with the left hand. I wrote when something occurred to me or when I got too bored.


He lists the reasons for writing all his works: *Baal* as satire of a popular (expressionist) play, *Drums* to make money, ballads for evenings in Augsburg, sonnets out of boredom, and so on. "Were I to decide to try to make it with literature, I would have to turn a game into work, and excesses into a vice" ("Würde ich mich
entscheiden, es mit der Literatur zu versuchen, so müßte ich aus dem Spiel Arbeit machen, aus den Exzessen ein Laster") (GW 15:69). Again, there is a mixture of truth and irony here; Drums certainly had more artistic purpose than just making money, and the testimony of Brecht's contemporaries as well as his own obvious delight at playing with language leave no doubt that writing was enjoyable for him. What he is expressing here goes deeper; he is asking whether he wants to think of himself above all as a writer; whether literature is important enough so he could devote his life to it. The feeling of uselessness, of dilettantism that he reveals here was the almost inevitable result of the amoral position he carefully cultivated and maintained from 1918 to 1926. With this position he was bound to ask sooner or later, Sure, writing is fun, but what is it for?

The problem was not a lack of ideas or material; he has plenty to write about for forty plays, he says. As he goes on to talk about what his subject matter will be, his tone changes from the discouragement of the cynic to the enthusiasm of the creative scientist fiddling with his formulas again. He is eager to make studies on all the important topics of the day—but he does not really know what to say about them:

As for material, I have enough. . . . For a heroic landscape I have the city, for a point of view relativity, for a situation the human migration to the big cities at the beginning of the third millenium, for content the appetites (too big or too little), for training of the audience the social battle of the giants. (The American histories alone yield a minimum of eight plays, the World War just as many. . . .)

Was den Stoff betrifft, so habe ich genug. . . . Als heroische Landschaft habe ich die Stadt, als Gesichtspunkt die Relativität, als Situation den Einzug der Menschheit in die großen Städte zu Beginn des dritten Jahrtausends, als Inhalt die Appetite (zu groß oder zu klein), als Training des Publikums die sozialen Riesenkämpfe. (Die amerikanischen Historien allein ergeben im Minimum acht Stücke, der Weltkrieg ebensoviel. . . .) (GW 15:70)

By this time he was quite certain that the important content for literature was not individual emotions and the struggle to remain an individual but the giant social struggles. The themes he mentions are nearly all related to the city-Americanism-progress complex. Those themes had formed the background for Jungle, but by some time in
1924 (which is when Brecht read *The Pit*) they gained paramount importance.

*Brecht’s Poetry*

The change in emphasis is particularly evident in Brecht’s poems. To understand the change we will look very briefly at his earlier poems, then examine the America and city poems of 1925–26 more closely.

The poems are a more accurate record than the plays of what was occupying Brecht at any particular moment, partly because they are often much easier to date (he usually wrote and rewrote the plays over a period of years), and partly because he expressed himself more immediately in them (“My poetry has a more private character”—“Meine Lyrik hat mehr privaten Charakter”\(^{51}\) [1926]). On this second point, though, we should be careful: many poems, especially the early ones, are in the mode of the dramatic monologue, spoken not by Brecht but by typical *Erscheinungen* or manifestations of the age. But precisely this technique shows us what subjects Brecht thought were currently important, though it may not show us what he thought about them.

Brecht’s very earliest poems, published under the name Bertold Eugen, are mostly embarrassingly patriotic war poetry.\(^{52}\) When he begins publishing under his own name in 1916, his poems tend to be expressionistic or love poems with vague settings or none at all, though his talent for satire and lightly mocking nonsense about his friends is also evident from the start. War is a frequent topic; but although we know Brecht was a pacifist, there is no ideological position on war in the poems. They are mainly monologues showing how miserable it was: “Song of the Red Army Soldier” is an example. These early poems are by no means the normal sentimental and sophomoric attempts of youthful poets riding on the coattails of current popular expressionism; they are written in Brecht’s terse and very individual style almost from the beginning. What Feuchtwanger says about the language of Brecht’s first three plays applies also to his poems of that time: “Brecht’s German is the voice of the time, with its enormous matter-of-factness and sensuousness, its wild, fanatic precision” (“Brecht’s Deutsch ist die Stimme der Zeit, von einer enormen Sachlichkeit und Sinnenfälligkeit, von einer wilden, fanatischen Präzision”).\(^{53}\) The matter-of-factness is even
stronger in the poems than in the early plays; their self-control is emphasized by their strict strophic forms.

About 1920, the year his mother died, death became a morbid fascination for Brecht, together with the Baudelairean aesthetic of finding beauty in decay—except that in Brecht's case the opposite happens: he finds decay in beauty. The well-known examples of this vision, "Remembering Marie A." and "On the Drowned Girl," are both from 1920.

"Song of the Railroad Gang of Fort Donald," 1916, is Brecht's earliest published reference to America. It is also the beginning of a long fascination with heroism and natural catastrophes; Fort Donald in Ohio is the frontier, Lake Erie as dangerous and exotic as the Pacific Ocean. The idea of Fort Donald later becomes Alaska in *Mahagonny*—but *Mahagonny* is a satire. Is this? It is hard to believe that even at the age of eighteen Brecht could have written it with a completely straight face, and future use of similar themes reinforces the notion that his attitude toward the heroes of Fort Donald was at least partially ironic.

In 1921, at the time Tahiti became a motif in *Jungle*, Brecht wrote a poem called "Tahiti," a tongue-in-cheek nonsense poem about the same kind of adventurous spirit as that of the Fort Donald men, but ending in seasickness, drinking schnaps, and having a child by a seagull. The entire first verse is later adopted into *Mahagonny*, with Tahiti becoming Alaska; several of the *Mahagonny* songs were written in the early twenties and published in *Home Devotions*, Brecht's first collection of poems. The context into which he later put them in *Mahagonny* makes it clear that he himself did not accept the myth; rather, they are examples of the thoughts of human types in the new age.

During this early period there are few poems on political subjects; only one ("Song of the Red Army Soldier") is a reflection of the 1918 revolution, and several are on war and death. The character types and the moods of the times are represented but not the events.

Certainly the most significant early poem, not only because it is brilliantly written but also because it sums up the mood of the earliest works and simultaneously contains in embryo the themes that will follow, is "Of Poor B.B." (1922). No one but Brecht could have written this poem with its paradoxical mixture of painful honesty and self-protective irony, of bitterness and hopelessness
expressed with a sardonic smile and a determination not to be discouraged, of guilt and fear and loneliness immediately negated by cynicism. Many of the motifs of *Jungle* reappear in this key autobiographical statement—cold, people as animals, the move from country to city, survival, the good life, and especially nonchalance as a life style: Garga must not be affected by his family’s tragedy, B.B. must not let his cigar go out in the earthquakes to come. That is, of course, the attempt at an amoral position: do not try to get me involved.

As important in the poem as "B.B." is the city. It represents a new age, an age of no sentimentality. We know that we are only forerunners, Brecht says, but we do not delude ourselves into thinking that what comes after us will be particularly wonderful. We are not trying to build anything new, we are only trying to get the most we can out of this hard new age. The cities we have built are more stupendous than anything man has yet accomplished—but they will not last. In the long run nature will win. Brecht quotes this poem later in talking about what postwar dramatists saw as their task:

The important thing was to demonstrate the rationality of reality. . . . This drama . . . saw a great age and great personages and so prepared documents of them. And yet it saw everything in flux ("So we have built the long houses of the island Manhattan . . .").

Es galt, die Vernunftigkeit des Wirklichen nachzuweisen. . . . Diese Dramatik . . . sah eine große Zeit und große Gestalten und fertigte also Dokumente davon an. Dabei sah sie doch alles im Fluß ("So haben wir gebaut die langen Gehäuse des Eilands Manhattan . . ."). (*GW* 15:218)

The city is heroic partly for the very reason that it cannot last: the mad tempo, the high buildings and thin antennas that are thought to be indestructible, the alienation from any sense of purpose or human contact, all are symbols of both strength and frailty. But: "In the asphalt city I am at home. . . . and content in the end" ("In der Asphaltstadt bin ich daheim. . . . und zufrieden am End") (*GW* 8:261).

This poem is only a presentiment of how very at home Brecht was to be in the asphalt city in the next years. The poems from 1925–26 are almost all about the city. It was not just a fascination; it was an obsession. For at the same time that Brecht felt at home in the city,
he also felt oppressed by it. Many of the poems about the city are really about wanting to get away from the city. This is the escape motif that is so strong in *Jungle* and *Mahagonny* too. Human beings move into these cities and build breathtaking structures, and then keep building them until there is no psychic room for human beings any more and fear grips them and they want escape. But they cannot go back to the prairie or the Old Country; that is only regression. They must move forward; they must progress to some new goal that Brecht could not yet articulate. Brecht was not aware what direction his thought would take, but the contradictions in his writing implied that something had to change, a new age had to be founded because the age of asphalt and mammoth industry had become unbearable. Brecht did not see any future; he only saw the attraction and the repulsion of the city and the urge to get out, the urge to step out of history—which is impossible. At the end he foresaw only destruction and disaster, the constantly threatening hurricanes and earthquakes waiting for vengeance on man. And faced with eventual disaster, he found the only response an aggressive existential resignation.

These city poems begin (if the chronology in the *Werke* is correct) with “Bidi’s Opinion of the Great Cities” (1925). We already know Bidi (Brecht’s nickname) from “Tahiti”; now he expresses himself on some of the themes in “Of Poor B.B.”: the wind will eat up the cities, unknown forces are slowly wiping out the Big Dipper, the big city, and the moon. The next poem, “Of the Crushing Weight of the Cities,” is a fantastic vision of the speed with which skyscrapers are built:

So short was the time
That between morning and evening
There was no noon
And on old familiar ground
Stood mountains of concrete.

So kurz war die Zeit
Daß zwischen Morgen und Abend
Kein Mittag war
Und schon standen auf altem, gewöhnetem Boden
Gebirge Beton.

(GW 8:130)

Then come poems on the speed of progress: society has advanced so
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fast that horses and old cars are already forgotten. Then there is
“Come With Me to Georgia”

Look at this town and see: it is old . . .
Come with me to Georgia
There we'll build a brand new town
And when the town is too full of stone
Then we just won't stay.

Sieh diese Stadt und sieh: sie ist alt . . .
Komm mit mir nach Georgia
Dort bauen wir halt eine neue Stadt
Und wenn diese Stadt zu viele Steine hat
Dann bleiben wir nicht mehr da.

(GW 8:135)

(Two more stanzas substitute “women” and “ideas” for “city.”)
Dissatisfaction is setting in, not just fear of speed and catastrophe at
the end but also the urge to flee—and flee again.

There is a “Mahagonny Song” here too (the other three were
written several years before). Mahagonny is not just a city. It is the
utopia of the philistine petty bourgeois or Spießbürger, as Arnolt
Bronnen tells us; in Brecht's symbology it is the nightmare of what
the cities can become for people who have no purpose but keeping
themselves occupied and spending their money, in short, people
who live exactly as he recommends, but without irony, without
having recognized the futility of it all. They are: the petty
bourgeoisie.

About 1926 Brecht wrote a series of poems that he later collected
under the name “From a Reader for City Dwellers.” Most of them
are very depressing dramatic monologues on how to survive in the
city, and at the same time they are portraits of the human waste
and degradation in the cities. They are not funny.

There are many more poems on cities from this period, but their
main themes are in the poems listed above. The two in which Brecht
expresses most strongly both the cruel heroism of the cities’ new age
and the terrible impatience, leading to ruin, that the dream of
progress produces are both from Joe Fleischhacker. It is important
to know that the first, “On the Human Migration to the Big Cities at
the Beginning of the Third Millenium,” is spoken from the electric
chair by the son of the poor Mitchell family, a man with the pioneer
spirit whom Brecht characterizes thus in the play: “a beaming hard
person goes like a knife through frisco eats his share of meat ruins

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his share of women and lands hard on the electric chair” ("ein strahlender harter mensch geht wie ein messer durch frisko ißt seinen teil fleisch ruiniert sein teil frauen und landet schlag hart auf dem elektrischen stuhl") (BBA 524, 14). For Calvin Mitchell individual lives are not important at all; important is the new age, the feeling of pride at having had even a glance at this progress that is so much larger than man and yet man-made. He is the embodiment of an enthusiasm so ruthless that it becomes a kind of idealism, a way of achieving meaning beyond one's own life. Brecht in his mood of futility must still have felt some perverse attraction to this brutal heroism.

This is the poem spoken by Calvin Mitchell, quoted in its entirety because the theme is central to Brecht's thought and because many formulations found here are repeated in later plays:

Many say the age is old  
But I have always known it is a new age  
I tell you: not by themselves  
Have houses grown for twenty years like mountains from ore  
Many move each year to the cities as if they expected something  
And on the laughing continents  
The word is getting around that the great dreaded ocean  
Is a little water.

I will die today, but I am convinced  
The big cities now await the third millenium  
It begins, it cannot be stopped, already today  
It only requires one citizen, and a single man  
Or woman is enough.

Of course many will die in the upheavals  
But what is it for one person to be crushed by a table  
If the cities are consolidating:  
This new age may only last four years  
It is the highest that will be given to humanity  
On all continents one sees people who are foreign  
The unhappy ones are no longer tolerated, for  
To be human is a great affair.  
Life will be considered too short.

Viele sagen, die Zeit sei alt  
Aber ich habe immer gewußt, es sei eine neue Zeit  
Ich sage euch: nicht von selber  
Wachsen seit zwanzig Jahren Häuser wie Gebirge aus Erz  
Viele ziehen mit jedem Jahr in die Städte, als erwarteten sie etwas  
Und auf den lachenden Kontinenten
Spricht es sich herum, das große gefürchtete Meer
Sei ein kleines Wasser.

Ich sterbe heut, aber ich habe die Überzeugung
Die großen Städte erwarten jetzt das dritte Jahrtausend
Es fängt an, es ist nicht aufzuhalten, heute schon
Braucht es nur einen Bürger, und ein einziger Mann
Oder Frau reicht aus.
Freilich sterben viele bei den Umwälzungen
Aber was ist es, wenn einer von einem Tisch erdrückt wird
Wenn die Städte sich zusammenschließen:
Diese neue Zeit dauert vielleicht nur vier Jahre
Sie ist die höchste, die der Menschheit geschenkt wird
Auf allen Kontinenten sieht man Menschen, die fremd sind
Die Unglücklichen sind nicht mehr geduldet, denn
Menschsein ist eine große Sache.
Das Leben wird für zu kurz gelten.

(GW 8:143–44)

But not everyone who lives in the new age is able to be satisfied by merely being alive (for a while) in that heady time. The whole Mitchel family has moved from place to place in America, like the speaker of “Come with Me to Georgia,” looking for more and more riches but finding less and less; finally they end up in Chicago starving, fighting each other with knives, and in the end freezing to death. They sing the song of modern dissatisfaction, “Song of a Family from the Savannah.” It is the other side of the first song.

And once we had money and prospects
Work for the week and Saturday evening free
And no place was good enough for us.

Und wir hatten einst Geld und Aussichten
Arbeit die Woche und frei am Samstag abend
Und an allen Orten war es uns zu schlecht.

(GW 8:145)

These two poems, then, express Brecht’s main interests in early 1926: the migration of humanity to the cities, the grandeur of a new age but also its cruelty, and a sense of futility and impending disaster. Added to this list was a newfound fascination with the stock market (and commodity market), which is expressed in the play fragments of 1924–26 but not in the poems. The city had now become the overriding image that collects all these themes into one complex, and as we have seen from Elisabeth Hauptmann’s list of
plans for 1926, the city was still identified completely with America. Another American poem Brecht wrote in 1926 is very different, though. “Coals for Mike,” the poem based on a passage in Poor White by Anderson, exists totally outside the world of the harsh cities. This poem is an interesting example of Brecht’s technique of adaptation: in the context of the novel the paragraph on Widow McCoy, whose husband’s old friends throw her coal from the passing train, is insignificant; it is a tiny little vignette, one of those distracting details that critics would say destroys the unity of the novel. But for Brecht it was a found poem that he hardly changed at all; he moved the words around a little and wrote it from his own point of view as the discoverer of the little story, ending it with:

This poem is dedicated to the friends
 Of the brakeman Mike McCoy
 (Died of too weak a lung
 On the coal trains of Ohio)
 For comradeship.

Dieses Gedicht ist gewidmet den Kameraden
 Des Bremsers Mike McCoy
 (Gestorben wegen zu schwacher Lunge
 Auf den Kohlenzügen Ohios)
 Für Kameradschaft.

(GW 9:670)

It is the comradeship or friendliness that made the short passage jump out at Brecht the reader; later he might have called it proletarian solidarity. Friendliness is an important theme for Brecht, which we will not have an opportunity to discuss, since the plays about America are mostly about hard people. But if we think ahead to Gruscha and Shen Te and “The Legend of the Origin of the Book Dao De Jing,” we realize that friendliness is one of the really positive values throughout Brecht’s work, of course in an understated manner, without sentimentality. It is the necessary human antidote to the poison of the cities and alienation. It is also an aspect of Brecht’s own personality that is mentioned strikingly often in reminiscences by people who knew him, which may come as a surprise to those who know only the severity of his plays.

Oddly, Brecht chose not to publish this poem with others from that period that we have looked at; he saved it for the Svendborg Poems, most of which were written in the thirties. There it is in the
section called “Chronicles,” which compares interestingly with the section of the same name in the *Home Devotions*. In the *Home Devotions* all the “Chronicles” are adventure stories, filled with the decay of exotic landscapes—Brecht’s early twenties attitude:

One should browse through the third lesson (Chronicles) in times of raw natural forces. In times of raw natural forces (cloudbursts, snowstorms, bankruptcies, etc.) one should turn to the adventures of bold men and women on foreign continents.

Die dritte Lektion (Chroniken) durchblättere man in den Zeiten der rohen Naturgewalten. In den Zeiten der rohen Naturgewalten (Regengüsse, Schneefälle, Bankrotte usw.) halte man sich an die Abenteuer kühner Männer und Frauen in fremden Erdteilen.\(^{59}\)

The “Chronicles” of the *Svendborg Poems* are also about bold men and women in foreign parts of the earth, but the tone is utterly different: calm, certain of the worth of human beings and what they are accomplishing, extremely simple in language, and unpretentiously proud. “Dao De Jing” is here, and the well-known “Questions of a Reading Worker,” and “Appropriation of the Great Metro by the Moscow Workers on April 27, 1935.” These are, in short, poems about the creation of a new person and new society, a person and society of which Brecht wholly approves, without his earlier irony. This was what he needed to pull him out of the sarcastic and nihilistic hole he had dug by 1926. “Coals for Mike” is proof that he already saw signs of a way out, but he did not know what to name them. Another sign was his reaction to a notice he read about a demonstration by unemployed and starving miners in Budapest. He made a poem about it, around the same time as “Coals for Mike,” and he felt that it too did not belong in *Home Devotions* with its poems about the city as jungle; he would like to save it for a different collection, “that deals with the new person” (“die sich mit dem neuen Menschen befaßt”).\(^{60}\)

But at that time Brecht probably could not have defined what he meant by the new person. He had always been sympathetic with the poor, and was beginning to see the necessity of their fighting for their rights; and at the same time he was writing about economic machinations of the rich, so with hindsight it is clear in which direction his thoughts had to move. But it was not perfectly clear to him at the time. As far as we can tell, the fragments of 1924–26 are
studies in the fascination of ruthless progress and big finance, but not clear indictments of them. The two later plays that absorb all this material, Mahagonny and St. Joan of the Stockyards, are very different in tone from the earlier fragments. But Brecht was not yet ready to write Mahagonny or St. Joan; as we work through the play fragments set in America, we will see that he was himself still partly caught up in the thrill of Calvin Mitchell’s “new age.”

We will look first at the two quasi-biblical fragments about building the cities, which relate to Mahagonny, and then at the two about big finance, which are later transformed into St. Joan.

"Man from Manhattan"

In 1924 Brecht worked on an opera about another kind of “new man,” a representative of an earlier contradictory age. (Later he might have analyzed the new man of the poems mentioned above as the beginnings of socialist man in a capitalist society, and the new man of these play fragments as the beginnings of capitalist, progress-minded, urban man in a feudal or frontier society.) In fact, from Drums in the Night on he had portrayed historical periods of great change and confrontation, and the human types who cause, and are affected by, the changes; that is a large part of his fascination with the urbanization theme. This opera fragment, which exists in two versions called Man from Manhattan and Sodom and Gomorrah, is explicitly about the human misery caused by the “fever” of progress. The “man” of the title is tempted by the rich growth of the cities as Curtis Jadwin (about whom Brecht read in the same year) is tempted by the wheat market. The opera has a simple theme as Brecht summarizes it:

The man is gripped by the fever of construction of the conquest of America and of the founding of cities so much that he can’t think of the suffering of one single honest man.

den mann erfaßt das fieber des aufbaus der eroberung amerikas und der gründung der städte so sehr daß er nicht an die leiden eines einzelnen ehrlichen mannes denken kann. (BBA 214, 76)

(In the Sodom and Gomorrah version it is a woman, with her story about the growth of America, that distracts the man.)

The situation is based on Schiller’s ballad “Die Bürgschaft” (“The Guarantee”) about which Brecht later wrote a satirical sonnet implying that morality is not as simple today as in Schiller’s time
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(GW 9:611). But Brecht has asked changed the ending. In Schiller's version the man who has another to substitute for him returns. Brecht asks: What happens if the person who was supposed to die fails to return? What sort of diversion could hold him up and make him forget his bond? What kind of punishment would he eventually suffer, if any?

The story is: a man steals a horse in the prairie in Ohio. When he is caught, he must be executed, but he begs for time to go visit his father. In Man from Manhattan the father is dying in “Frisko,” whereas in Sodom and Gomorrah he owes several railroad cars full of wheat to a “hard man.” The thief can only be let free if another man acts as his security. This the owner of the horse, John Brown, the man from Manhattan, promises to do; although he does not know the thief, he trusts him as a matter of faith. The chorus warns him:

John Brown do not do it.
Do you know him then?
The law must be fulfilled . . .

Tu es nicht John Brown.
Kennst du ihn denn?
Das Gesetz muß erfüllt werden . . .

But John Brown answers:

For he said it and I
believe what he said
For on this earth
Where a man can't keep his word
There is no place for John Brown . . .

Denn er sagt es und ich
glaube, was er sagt
Denn auf dieser Erde
Wo ein Mann nicht sein Wort hält
Ist kein Platz für John Brown . . .

(BBA 214, 70)

The thief agrees to return before the moon changes once, and he runs off. He meets a friend who tells him his father has died; but he misses his ship (!) to return to Ohio because the friend's sister (Anne Smith) has stayed to keep him company, and told him “to cheer him
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up the only story she knows namely the story of america but in
the telling three months go by” (“um ihn zu erheitern die einzige
geschichte die sie weiß nämlich die geschichte amerikas darüber
vergehen aber drei monate”) (BBA 454, 96). He has fully forgotten
John Brown, and gives evasive answers when people come and ask
him about a man in Manhattan and a man in Ohio. The third time he
even denies his substitute. The substitute, John Brown, is put to
death.

In a notebook Brecht jotted down these lines for the man to say:

i've been seized by the fever
of city building and of oil
my thoughts were prairies and the trains to illinois
i forgot over the wheat from dakota
my father and mother and a man in manhattan

mich hat erfaßt das fieber
des städtebaus und des öls
meine gedanken waren präriien und die züge nach illinois
ich vergaß über den weizen von dakota
meinen vater und die mutter und einen mann in manhattan

(BBA 461, 58)

Three pages later in the bound notebook he noted plans for “morti­
mer fleischhacker” and a “mahagonny-opera” on a page dated July
1924. The similarity in theme of the three planned projects is clear
from the few lines spoken (presumably) by the thief in Man from
Manhattan.

Both the themes and the details of the opera are closely related to
Brecht’s other American studies of 1924–26, and also to the previous
play In the Jungle. It is clearly part of the planned series on the
human migration to the big cities. The man (in the Manhattan
version) goes to “Frisko” and is seduced by it, like the son in
Fleischhacker; the son’s song, “On the Human Migration to the Big
Cities at the Beginning of the Third Millenium,” could just as well
have been included in Man from Manhattan. The electric chair
(man’s own retribution) appears in both Fleischhacker and Sodom
and Gomorrah, as well as in Mahagonny. The poem “Song of a Man
in San Francisco” (1927?) is also remarkably similar in theme as well
as setting. Trapped by the fascinating growth of the city, the speaker
of that poem denies his wife in the East, just as the man from Manhattan forgets the good man who offered himself as a bond for him. That poems ends:

Ten years go by quickly when houses are being built.
I've been here ten years and want
More. On paper
I have a wife in the East
Over the faraway land a roof
But here
There's something happening and fun and
The city's still growing.

Zehn Jahre vergehen rasch, wenn Häuser gebaut werden.
Ich bin zehn Jahre da und habe Lust
Nach mehr. Auf dem Papier
Habe ich eine Frau im Osten
Über dem fernen Boden ein Dach
Aber hier
Ist etwas los und Spaß, und
Die Stadt wächst noch.

(GW 8:306)

Also, possible influence of The Pit is evident in the mention of wheat and in the plot, which involves the ruination of one good man by another.

By far the most important part of Man from Manhattan is the brilliant long poem “anne smith tells the story of the conquest of america.” Both the cruelty and the fascination of America’s development find clearer and deeper expression here than anywhere else in Brecht’s work, for instance in the final lines:

the states that were there however had the names:
arkansas connecticut ohio
new york , new jersey and massachusetts
and today still
there are oil and men and it is said
it is the greatest race on earth
that lives now and they all
build houses and say
mine is longer and are there when there is oil
ride in iron trains to the ends of the world
grow wheat and sell it across the sea
and die no longer unknown but are
an eternal race in the earth's
greatest age

es hießen aber die staaten die es gab:
arkansas connecticut ohio
new jork new jersey und massachusetts
und heute noch
gibt es öl und männer und es heißt
es ist das größte geschlecht der erde
das jetzt lebt und alle
bauen häuser und sagen
meines ist länger und sind dabei wenn es öl gibt
fahren in eisernen zügen an die enden der Welt
bauen den waizen und verkaufen ihn überm meer
und sterben nicht mehr unbekannt sondern sind
eine ewige rasse in des erdballs
größter zeit

Anne Smith's poem also has a long section on the genocide against the Indians, which Brecht had already mentioned with anger in *Jungle*. She begins with the idyllic scene: grazing lands from Atlantic to Pacific, nothing but red men, bears, and buffalo. But:

one day a man with white skin came
he roared and spewed out chunks of iron
when he was hungry and he was always hungry

eines tages kam ein mann mit weißer haut
der krachte und spie eisenklötze
wenn er hunger hatte und er hatte immer hunger

Three hundred years long the red man died; but the white man split open the earth and brought forth oil, and the rivers produced gold

. . . and all around
the wooden huts grew out of rotting grass and
out of the wooden huts grew mountains of stone they were called cities into them went
the white people and said on the earth
a new age had broken out that is called: the iron . . .
and with music and shrieking the white people sat in the eternal prairies of stone . . .
... und ringsum
wuchsen aus faulendem gras die hölzernen hütten und
aus den hütten von holz gebirge aus stein die waren
städte geheißen drin ging
das weiße volk und sagte auf dem erdball
sei angebrochen eine neue zeit die gennant wird: die
eiserne . . .
und mit musik und geschrei saß das weiße volk
in den ewigen prärien aus stein . . .

(BBA 214, 75)

Here we have the picture of the heroic city of the new age built on
destruction of all that is natural. That is the setting of the play.

The plot outline of Sodom and Gomorrah concludes four years
later with the thief still living on his farm with wife and child; “he
smokes and instructs his son in the primer honesty courage
but there are strange signs in the land” (“er raucht und gibt dem sohn
unterricht in der fibel ehrlichkeit mut aber es gibt merkwür­
dige anzeichen im land”): the wheat does not grow and the woods
are yellow in April. But the man fails to notice the signs, and so God
must send a rain of fire “like over the corrupt sodom of old” (“wie
über das verderbte sodom von alters”) (BBA 424, 96). The family
perish in the fire, their voices growing weaker as they call to each
other, the man remembering his crime, the woman lamenting that
she did not know who he was.

Brecht made occasional use of biblical parody and language in
many of his plays, especially The Threepenny Opera, St. Joan, and
Galileo, but (except for his 1913 one-act drama The Bible) it is only
in these unpublished fragments that the Bible became the main
source for the entire play, and that he consistently imitated its style.
An unpublished plot summary of A Man's a Man, which is like a
writing-class exercise in Bible imitation, was probably also written
at this time:

then they all helped together and made a false elephant . . . and so the
man sold the elephant that was not his and false besides . . . and so they
took him away with them in the same night

da halfen sie alle zusammen und machten einen falschen elefan-
ten . . . also verkaufte der mann den elefanten der nicht sein war und
dazu unecht . . . also nahmen sie ihn mit sich fort in derselben nacht
(BBA 348, 68)
But Brecht's interest in the Bible was not only stylistic. In these two fragments on Sodom and Gomorrah and the next, on the Flood, he explores the content and significance of the Old Testament. Specifically, his concentration on the Bible coincides with his concentration on destruction by natural catastrophe (and vice versa). This concurrence of preoccupations suggests that his premonition of disaster as the final result of precipitous progress and alienation from nature might be, either actually or symbolically, fear of retribution by an angry god. The biblical (or Judeo-Christian) tradition is the conservative force competing against man’s urge for progress; it is the fear that holds us back from accepting the implications of our own breakthrough to a new age. Man can pretend to himself that he is free, but he knows the catastrophe will punish him for this _hybris_. Which means: he is afraid to be free and seeks restraining bonds and rules.

The similarity to the dramatic situation of _The Pit_ is striking. Curtis Jadwin, daring to challenge single-handedly all the traders on the wheat market, holding the fortunes of America’s farmers and Europe’s consumers in his hands, sacrificing his friends, his wife, even his health and reason to become the controller of the country’s finances, daring, that is, to ignore advice from traditional traders and to go further than ever man has gone, this hero is finally conquered by the wheat itself: by the forces of nature, which will not stand for such presumption.

Brecht frees himself of this remnant of Old Testament morality, too, by the time he is able to write full plays again. In _Mahagonny_ the theme of natural catastrophes as retribution is brilliantly reversed as a typhoon makes a circle around the latter-day Sodom; and in _St. Joan_ the analysis has become totally materialist: cold and misfortune are caused by the employers.

_"The Flood"_

It is in the radio play _The Flood_ (with versions called _Decline and Fall of the Giant City Miami_ and _Decline and Fall of the Paradise City Miami_ [1926]) that we see Brecht work out the theme of natural catastrophe most thoroughly. Accompanying the pages of _Miami_ in the Brecht Archive are many newspaper clippings from the _Chicago Daily News_, including one from 22 September 1926 that describes a huge hurricane that killed over a thousand people. With the article
there is a map showing the hurricane moving toward the town of Pensacola (Florida). This is obviously the source for the stage directions to the hurricane scene in *Mahagonny*:

> On the screens in the background only a geographical diagram is visible now, an arrow moving slowly toward Mahagonny, showing the path of the hurricane. . . . In Pensacola 11,000 dead. . . . The hurricane has gone around the city of Mahagonny and is continuing on its way.

> Auf den Tafeln des Hintergrundes sieht man nur noch eine geographische Zeichnung mit einem langsam auf Mahagonny zulaufenden Pfeil, der den Weg des Hurrikans anzeigt. . . . In Pensacola 11,000 Tote. . . . Der Hurrikan hat um die Stadt Mahagonny einen Bogen gemacht und setzt seinen Weg fort. (*GW* 2:530–31)

The rest of the source for that strange sequence in *Mahagonny* is likewise to be found among the materials to *Miami*; there are approximately twenty-five more pages of newspaper clippings about hurricanes. Those in German have technical details underlined, probably by Brecht; those in English, which all seem to be from the *Chicago Daily News*, have German translations, presumably prepared for Brecht by Elisabeth Hauptmann. Among the twelve pages of translations, the following can be found (the English is a retranslation):

> A part of Florida was spared by the hurricane. Inhabitants of a strip along the west coast, an elevation of 30 feet, which the storm bypassed [sic]. No one guessed the fate that had befallen Florida until the Sunday morning papers were missing and the storm on the east coast was given as the reason.

**THE PALACES OF THE RICH IN A HURRICANE**

**THE STORM REACHES THE WEST COAST** ["West coast" is strongly underlined by hand, and one of the destroyed cities is named "Hollywood!"]

Southern Florida's beauty is no more.

If anyone imagines that Miami or southern Florida has collapsed because of the catastrophe, he is fooling himself. The spirit and mood in the disaster area are remarkable. No complaints. Sorrow to be sure, but optimism and determination to put the city back in shape quickly.

The only help that Miami needs is money and more money for reconstruction.

> Ein Teil Floridas wurde vom Hurrikan verschont. Einwohner eines Streifens an der Westküste, eine Erhöhung von 30 Fuß, um die der
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Sturm herumging. Man ahnte nichts von dem Unglück das Florida betroffen hatte, bis die Zeitungen Sonntag früh ausblieben und man als Grund den Sturm an der Ostküste gab. (BBA 214, 27)

DIE PALÄSTE DER REICHEN IM HURRIKAN (BBA 214, 29)

DER STURM ERREICHT DIE WESTKÜSTE (BBA 214, 30)

Die Schönheit Südfloridas ist dahin.

Wenn sich jemand einbildet, daß Miami oder Südflorida zusammengebrochen ist durch das Unglück, so täuscht er sich. Der Geist und die Stimmung in dem Unglücksdistrikt sind bemerkenswert. Kein Klagen. Wohl Trauer, aber Optimismus und Entschlossenheit, die Stadt schnell wieder instand zu setzen.

Die einzige Hilfe, die Miami braucht, ist Geld und wieder Geld, um sich aufzubauen. (BBA 214, 32)

The details of Mahagonny’s hurricane are not all that Brecht adopts from Miami materials; the miraculous escape of one city, the forced optimism of promoters and the city’s need for “money and more money” are all elements of Mahagonny that come directly from Miami and its sources. It is obvious that Decline and Fall of the Paradise City Miami is a preliminary study for what becomes Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny. But it was definitely originally intended as a separate play, since the early (1927) version of Mahagonny contains no mention of hurricanes. The final Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny (1929) is in fact a fusion of The Flood/Miami and the Mahagonny Song-Play, with some gold rush mythology and miscellaneous old songs mixed in.

Exactly how Brecht intended to use the hurricane theme in The Flood/Miami itself is not clear; the plot synopsis (BBA 214, 23) does not get that far. It begins—in Brecht’s opaque ironic style of those years—by stating that it is proof of the energy of the Romans that we still remember the destruction of Pompeii and the other Roman cities; their disaster has horrified men for 2,000 years, and the horror has produced a feeling of solidarity. For completely different reasons, writes Brecht, he is going to try to give some permanence to the memory of the destruction of the City of Paradise, Miami, which happened in “our time.” It is scandalous that the San Francisco earthquake has already been forgotten. With that reference Brecht hints that he intends to write about a Miami that is destroyed by natural catastrophe.

The other extant paragraph of this plot summary betrays an
excellent knowledge of the real-estate swindles involved in building the city of Miami; where Brecht got this knowledge we do not know. He writes that, like Palm Beach, Miami was built, about ten years before his writing, in an unbelievably short time on Florida's swamps. A few farsighted people built a huge street through fertile but unfirm lowlands and started selling the plots on both sides for high prices. There were no inhabitants yet, but the ground was gradually drained and divided into cities and streets. In New York and other big cities, it was announced that the best land and best people in the world would be in Florida.

The affinity to Mahagonny is clear, as well as to the books Brecht had been reading about the growth of other American cities, and to his increasing conviction that economic motives underlie history.

The pages of The Flood, the other version of the same play, are written in verse. Brecht concentrates on the cities themselves as characters in the drama of destruction; here he suddenly portrays not the beginning of an age but its end. And yet he is writing about the same time and the same cities, and using the same phrases:

conversation of the rebuilt cities they are indestructible
in the years of the flood human types change "that is the greatest age humanity has experienced (the types get stronger bigger darker they laugh . . . )
in the final years epidemics of monstrous inventions proliferate flying people appear they achieve greater fame than people ever have they fall in the water laughter atheism increases

gespräch der wiedererbauten städte sie sind unzerstörbar

in den jahren der flut verändern sich die menschentypen "das ist die größte zeit die die menschheit erlebt hat (die typen werden stärker größer finsterer sie lachen . . . )

in den letzten jahren verbreiten sich seuchen von ungeheuren erfindungen flugmenschen treten auf sie gelangen zu größerem ruhm als je zuvor
There are two startling and important new developments here: the first is a clear expression of the reverse side of the myth of the new age and fast-growing cities: here the sense of disaster, which lurks in most of the works that on the surface praise the new age, becomes explicit and primary. Second, the disaster is identified with the Old Testament pestilence and God's revenge through natural catastrophe, again specifically with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ruined is the big city of Gomorrha
Since yesterday the big harbor Yokohama is just water
This morning the paradise city Miami disappeared
And now the powerful Sodom answers no more

Untergegangen ist die Großstadt Gomorrha
Seit gestern ist der große Hafen Jokohama nur mehr Wasser
Heute früh verschwand die Paradiesstadt Miami
Und nicht mehr antwortet jetzt das gewaltige Sodom

In this strange anachronistic mixture, Brecht yokes together his own symbology of American cities and biblical symbology, thereby altering and commenting on both of them. The Old Testament conception of sin is concretized into modern contexts ("concretization" in Brecht's terminology means showing the contemporary parallels), so that we may think of Sodom and Gomorrah as having been punished for the sins of exploitation and fraud, not just sins of the flesh. The Brechtian tradition of America—the greatest age ever, monstrous inventions, greater fame than ever, larger and stronger human types—receives a connotation of rushing toward the apocalypse that it has not had before. Technology, the development of a new type of man, confidence are here revealed to be not entirely positive. We know already, from the human alienation in *Jungle* and the nihilistic *carpe diem* theme in the poetry with urban or American contexts, that Brecht sensed a great deal of evil and danger in this marvelous new age, but the juxtaposition with the Old Testament makes the evil and danger explicit.
BRECHT'S AMERICA

What is more, the floods are heading toward the Old World too:

In the third month the nameless waters storm
The mainland of Europe and a great fear spreads

Im dritten Monat bestürmen die namenlosen Wasser
Das Festland Europa und eine große Furcht breitet sich aus.

(BBA 214, 18)

Here too the implication is obvious but important to Brecht's symbology: what happens in America is only an early sign of what will eventually happen in Europe as well; Europe is beginning to commit the same sins. America is the vanguard of the new age that will rejuvenate but also destroy the world.

The hurricanes and the Flood, together with the earthquakes that also appear in other parts of Brecht's work—but especially the hurricanes—have almost the function that the cold and snow have in Jensen's Wheel and the wheat has in Norris's Pit: nature is waiting to reclaim every bit of territory that man has conquered, and the higher the level of technology and subjugation of nature, the harder she will strike. Man's anguish, fear, and guilt that Brecht portrays here come close to the literary tradition of hybris. Having dared to challenge the gods of nature and explore further and further into the unknown and unnatural, possessing the insolence to proclaim that he is making a new age, and building boldly into the future without a backward glance at his origins, man lives with the anxiety that he is transgressing some eternal law; modern man feels as if he were sitting on the top of his tallest skyscraper with a thunderstorm approaching, realizing that he has forgotten to build a lightning rod. The cities are growing beyond the comprehension of the human beings who began to build them; some little detail absolutely necessary to survival will have been overlooked, and then lightning will strike. Such a detail could be: the ability to communicate with other human beings (Jungle), or the realization that nothing man-made is indestructible ("Of Poor B.B."), or some purpose in life other than making money at anyone's cost (Dan Drew and other plays to come).

Later, in Mahagonny, the detail that is forgotten in building up the city is that men cannot be restricted and still be happy. When the people of Mahagonny discover this "law of human happiness," in the night of terror, the hurricane makes an intentional detour
around their city. In *Mahagonny* the fear of punishment for _hybris_, of lurking natural catastrophe, is conquered by yet more _hybris_, by a tremendous bluff with which the Mahagonny people plunge into a world completely of their own making; they accept all the consequences of making all their own rules, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, cut off from all tradition. *Mahagonny*, which makes the principal use of the symbol of natural catastrophe, is also the play that overcomes that threat, which has occupied Brecht's imagination since the first American poem, "Song of the Railroad Gang of Fort Donald." But *Mahagonny* goes further. In it, men themselves provide the catastrophe. Existential anxieties about nature's retribution against progress were unfounded; man is free to do whatever he wants and to create any kind of a world he wants; religion is dead, there is no punishment, "anything is allowed." And what man then creates is hell on earth (as in the "Play of God in Mahagonny" ["Spiel von Gott in Mahagonny"]).

*Dan Drew*

The two other American fragments of this period are completely different. Gone are the biblical language and the vast and surreal accounts of divine and natural retribution; instead we have more realist, small-scale studies of manipulation of the stock and commodity markets. Similar is the continuing theme of the building of the cities, and with them monopoly capitalism.

In *Dan Drew*, which Brecht worked on in 1925 just before *The Flood*, we are really dealing not so much with Brecht's ideas as with his adoption and adaptation of Bouck White's ideas. Nearly all the small details of Brecht's fragment are present in White's book, even down to use of the word "spikkilieren" by Drew ("speckilate" in English), the meetings in Delmonico's, and the ending of the work with a newspaper article. We do not know whether Brecht was serious about putting this play on the stage or whether it was more of an exercise for him; but it allows us the opportunity to see unusually precisely what interested him in a source on America and capitalism. Especially important are the impressions of New York and finance that stay with Brecht, not just for *Dan Drew*. White's *Drew* shows the growth of the city of Manhattan from the time when it looked like a Currier and Ives print—when pigs and cattle roamed the streets and the Bowery was a worthless swamp—to the age of the
modern metropolis with streetcars, electronics, and mass media. Brecht catches the change in the last scene he wrote, Scene 8:

**WALL STREET TOTALLY TRANSFORMED**
(the buildings are large and built to last many centuries. it is no longer the work of individuals; now many unknowns are walking around, among them, unrecognized, the old daniel drew)

**DREW**
see, that is the stock exchange. there from nine to four they do business. before, one knew all that went in and out of there, now one would have to have a giant head. that car belongs to old astor. he was once a simple man.

**WALLSTRASSE GÄNZLICH VERÄNDERT**
(die gebäude sind groß und für viele jahrhunderte gebaut. es ist nicht mehr das werk einzelner, sondern es gehen viel unbekannte umher, unter ihnen unerkannt der alte daniel drew)

**DREW**
siehst du das ist die börse. dort macht man von neun uhr bis vier uhr geschäfte. früher kannte man alle die da ein und ausgingen, jetzt müßte man dazu einen riesenkopf haben. dort steht der wagen des alten astor. er war einmal ein einfacher mann.

(BBA 194, 39)

This is parallel to the change in the Midwest shown by *Poor White*, and *The Pit* is of course another contribution to the complex on the growth of cities that Brecht was working on. Because he finally had a source that concentrated on New York instead of Chicago, Brecht abandoned Chicago as setting for one unfinished play, but this brief vacation did not last long. The only other significant use of New York is as the source of the mysterious letters from the Providence of finance in *St. Joan of the Stockyards*. The work on *Dan Drew* probably contributed to that image of New York, though naturally Wall Street is known to everyone without reading whole books on it.

Also reflected later in *St. Joan* is the close relationship between speculator and broker—Mauler and Slift—and their need for secrecy. White’s Drew says:

A big operator’s business has to be done on the quiet. The relationship between a Wall Street operator and his broker is a close one. In order to manipulate the market, you must keep mum while you are doing it. The broker is the only one besides yourself who knows what you’re doing. He is in a position to give you away if he wants to. So I was glad to have a brokerage house that I could be confidential with.
The Book of Daniel Drew also explains at length the difference between a bear and a bull in stock market jargon. Brecht uses this terminology often in Fleischhacker. In White’s book the examples are Drew and Vanderbilt:

Another difference between the Commodore and me was that he was by make-up a Bullish fellow, whereas most of my life I have been on the Bear side of the market. . . . Even in the darkest hours of the Civil War, he had lots of faith in the future of the country. He seemed to think that in America 'most any kind of stock would go up and be valuable if he only waited long enough.\textsuperscript{64}

Brecht adapts this passage almost verbatim. He has Fisk say of Vanderbilt:

\begin{quote}
it is a strange man
he believes in america’s future even if he loses everything.
in the stock market he always says don't sell anything, everything you have will become valuable, in america

es ist ein komischer mann
er glaubt an amerikas zukunft und wenn er alles verliert.
er sagt auf der borse immer, nichts verkaufen, alles wird wertvoll was ihr habt, in amerika
\end{quote}

\hfill (BBA 194, 15)

Vanderbilt, according to White, was such an altruist, so convinced his fortune was tied up in his country’s fortune, that he gave the government a ship to help end the war. Drew rented ships to the government and was sorry when the war ended. As in Tarbell’s book on Gary, we have here the clash of the new and old types of businessman; Drew’s type is a dying strain. Bear tactics (preventing the economy from rising) were too upsetting to the economy as a whole, and in the long run unprofitable because unpredictable. It took a thick-skinned man to withstand the hatred that Drew’s destructive tactics would bring on him, and in White’s book Drew keeps insisting that he doesn’t give a damn what people think of him. This too finds an echo in Mauler.

Brecht reproduces in his Dan Drew a lecture that Vanderbuilt gives Drew:

\begin{quote}
VAND
you are a strange bird uncle.
you don’t believe in america and you’ve seen it grow for seventy years
\end{quote}
you are still a bear, and only want to gain from destruction.
it's better for you to quit.
the american way is lighter and freer than the way of other countries.
nothing
holds us down.
a strong fellow can show his strength here and fetch his price.
new york has grown enormous. it can no longer be bought up by three
men
and we individuals are small, because america grows.

VAND

sie sind ein wunderlicher kauz onkel.
sie glauben nicht an amerika und haben es siebzig jahre wachsen sehen
sie sind immer noch ein bär, und wollen nur bei der zerstörung verdienen.
es ist besser sie ziehen sich zurück.
amerikas art ist leichter und freier wie die art anderer länder. wir sind
nicht beschwert durch irgendetwas.
ein kräftiger kerl kann hier seine kraft zeigen und holt sich seinen preis.
new jork ist ungeheuer groß geworden. nicht mehr so von drei männern
aufzukaufen
und wir einzelne sind klein, weil amerika so wächst.

(BBA 194, 38)

Vanderbilt rides with America's future and gets rich with the coun-
try, whereas Drew cannot feel at home in the reconstruction period.
White's Drew complains:

Somehow or other I have never been able to feel at home in this new age.
The Country isn't what it used to be when I was in my prime, back in the
fifties. There's a change in the very religion, to-day.

Brecht's Drew:

. . . this city grows, but it is godless and i believe it will be
a hell. the ground is fertile for stone and suffering, that is
my opinion, truly

. . . diese stadt wächst, aber sie ist gottlos und ich glaube sie wird
eine höle. der boden ist fruchtbar für steine und elend, das ist
meine ansicht, wahrhaftig

(BBA 194, 37)

Drew must be eliminated because his tactics not only make the
railroad unsafe to travel on (Brecht makes much of his turning the
rotten rails around rather than replacing them, and of the many
accidents) but also because in the long run he prevents it becoming
as valuable an enterprise as it might be. He is the acme of the old type of capitalist, investing purely for the sport and the money he can make, not for the growth of the company he directs. White has his Drew present his attitude toward public responsibility always with a pout and an insulted tone; accidents are a bother because people accuse you of murder and make your life uncomfortable. There was a bad accident on the Erie because of rotten rails, "which enemies tried to lay at my door." Brecht combines this egocentric view of the railroad with the statements on the destructive nature of "bear" speculation, and has his Drew say,

\[
i \text{care more for my wallet than for the railroad that I don't ride on} \\
\text{meine tasche ist mir lieber wie die eisenbahn, auf der ich doch} \text{ni} \text{ch fahre}
\]

and

\[
\text{what is the Erie to me, I feel justified in getting} \\
\text{something out of it for myself, I think we'll turn the tracks around, then} \\
\text{they'll be new again} \\
\text{was geht mich die Erie an, ich füehle mich berechtigt etwas für mich} \\
\text{herauszuholen, ich denke wir drehen die schienen um, dann sind sie} \\
\text{wieder neu}
\]

(BBA 194, 8)

Even though the effect on "little people" is not shown, the effect of such maneuvers on the other stock operators and the railroad company was bad enough that they themselves had to get rid of Drew for the sake of stability. This too—the vulnerability of even the rich in capitalism—is recapitulated in \textit{St. Joan} and also in \textit{The Bread Store}. The capitalists themselves must find ways of protecting the interests of their own class. Brecht's \textit{Dan Drew} is a preliminary study of the development later shown in \textit{St. Joan}, from early individualistic and speculative capitalism to cooperative corporate capitalism—which is also the theme of Tarbell's \textit{Life of Gary}. \textit{Dan Drew} does not make the development very explicit. But it is the period of capitalism in which Brecht remained the most interested: the period of free competition, crisis, and early development of monopolies.

It is the period that allowed a rich man to be "self-made," like the "Self-Made Merchant" (\textit{Dollarkönig} in the German version) whose
letters Lorimer penned for the *Saturday Evening Post*. The perspective of Lorimer's John Graham is very much like that of White's Dan Drew; both men are vigorous, humorous, self-confident; both books are documents, as Morley puts it in describing Lorimer's book, of "the wheelings and dealings of big business as told from the inside, and presented with no social comment on the justice or injustice of the situation. . . . Lorimer makes of the older Graham a figure who, although he represents the power of the dollar, is nevertheless an appealing, hard-headed, and wonderfully entertaining mentor."

White doubtless intended his Dan Drew to be somewhat more distasteful; nevertheless, the tone is remarkably similar.

In *The Book of Daniel Drew*, Drew takes a crybaby attitude to being thrown out of the Erie; he considers it quite unjust that old creditors should still ask for money and investigators should still hold him responsible. Brecht did not get around to writing text for that part but he did leave a plot outline:

7. agreement vand + drew add fisk + gould drew must out
8. gould and fisk ruin dan drew
9. fisk dies tweed goes to jail gould isolated
10. end drew is wiped out lear newspaper notice

7. einigung vand + drew hinzu fisk + gould drew muß heraus
8. gould und fisk ruinieren dan drew
9. fisk stirbt tweed kommt ins gefängnis gould vereinsamt
10. schluß drew wird erledigt lear zeitungsnotiz

(BBA 194, 67)

It says as much about Brecht's reinterpretation of Shakespeare as about his interpretation of Daniel Drew. He apparently saw Lear as an old Wall Street magnate, who has caused too many disasters through his egotism, and at the end of his life sits about and pouts and plays sick when anyone tries to hang responsibility on him! And Drew as a tragic hero, ruined through not being able to see past his own nose, pitiable perhaps but shaking kingdoms with his moods and ultimately becoming so destructive of order that he must be eliminated. This perspective that allowed Brecht to see very worldly relations in terms of the classics of literature and vice versa was a permanent part of his talent, long after the work on *Dan Drew*; parodies of Shakespeare, Schiller, and Goethe in *St. Joan* and *Arturo Ui* (which are both about economic relations) are only two examples.
Brecht portrays Drew's selfishness and ruthlessness, but it proves impossible for him really to imitate the pouting and self-righteous tone of this extraordinarily powerful man who really is just a child. He also makes no attempt to include the country-style metaphors and proverbs that characterize Drew's speech. The result is that the very quality that makes Bouck White's book fascinating is missing in Brecht's version; Brecht reproduces the mechanics of the stock market but not the naively candid self-portrait of Drew. This is probably the principal reason why he gave the project up; the texture of the play he was creating was simply too thin. Since Elisabeth Hauptmann said he worked on *Drew* and *Fleischhacker* simultaneously, he may also have stopped working on *Drew* for the same reason he stopped *Fleischhacker*, namely, because the stock market did not make sense to him. And, as we mentioned before, Myers's criticism of using individualist sensationalism to replace class analysis may possibly have given him pause.

"Joe Fleischhacker"

Brecht put most of his energy in 1926 into *Joe Fleischhacker*, which shows both the machinations of market manipulators and their effect on the little people caught without means in the age of progress. *Fleischhacker* shows a clear conflict between the classes and also combines many themes of the fragments and poems of this period.

Based on the financial manipulations in *The Pit*, it is partly intended as another play in the series on the conflict between the new and the old, with catastrophe as the punishment for too daring acceptance of the new. However, that is a secondary theme in the fragmentary scenes Brecht put down on paper: it is evident in the song on the “Human Migration to the Big Cities,” which expresses one character’s total involvement in the new age, and in the notes on “NATURE AND BEHAVIOR OF A HURRICANE” (see below, page 121). The Mitchel family, before migrating to Chicago, has been hit by a big wind described in the scene “Hurricane over Texas” (“Orkan über Texas”). This family belongs to the long line of persons Brecht read and wrote about who come from the prairie to the city to make their fortune but end up in ruin instead. Their fate is not very different from that of the Garga family.

It is not clear from the notes Brecht completed what the connection between the Mitchel family and Joe Fleischhacker himself was
supposed to be. The Mitchels are apparently robbed and then
ruined in the war, but what Fleischhacker had to do with their ruin is
impossible to tell. The two plots seem to run parallel in alternate
scenes. Here is Brecht's outline of the plot:

1. Mitchell family's move to the metropolis Chicago
2. At their market J. Fleischhacker steps forward with a group of bulls
   who are buying up the grain
3. Robbery of the Mitchell family on the first day
4. Fleischhacker's betrayal aided by rain
5. Ruin of the Mitchell family in invasion
6. Lasting rain and incomprehensible fear confuses Fl, he secretly
   becomes a bull and comes into a corner
   radio strike
7. Death of the Mitchell family
8. Fleischhacker's great corner
9. Calvin Mitchell's speech and death
10. The wheat battle
11. End

—

(Note that in *The Bread Store* there is a "bread battle," doubtless
inspired by the "wheat battle" here.)

As in so many cases, Brecht combines two plays he has been
working on to make one. In deciding to dramatize *The Pit*, he must
have felt that Norris's abstract laments about the ruin of poor
farmer families through wheat speculation should be concretized in
one example, and he simply interlaced an old play he had abandoned with the Pit plot. There is only one page extant from this old play, called “A FAMILY FROM THE SAVANNAH: HISTORY IN ELEVEN SCENES”:

a farmer family    father mother son
2 daughters baby with car and furniture
on the road to san francisco
father
because of a bad harvest in the wheat district
caused by floods rain drought
lasting three years after 2 lost
trials against the northsouthern
we started out two weeks ago
in the southern dakota and are coming
six souls with furniture and 500 dollars
after [to?] the big cities of the eastern atlantic
to san francisco to try our luck

eine farmefamilie    vater mutter sohn
2 tüchter baby mit auto und hausrat
auf der straße nach san francisco
vater
wegen mißernt im waizendistrikt
verursacht durch hochwasser regen dürre
drei Jahre durch nach 2 verlorenen
prozessen gegen die nordsüdliche
sind wir vor vierzehn tagen aufgebrochen
im südlichen dakota und kommen
6 seelen hoch mit hausrat und 500 dollars
nach den großen städten des östlichen atlantik
nach san francisco unser glück zu versuchen

(BBA 524, 92)

This tiny fragment, written on very old paper, is clearly part of the series on migration to the great cities; but Brecht cannot have used Poor White as the model for the story of the family, because he read that book about Easter 1926 but started work on Fleischhacker in 1924. But it has similarities with The Octopus by Norris, the first volume of what would have been a trilogy on wheat, had Norris not died (in 1902) after completing the second volume, The Pit. In Germany the two books were published as a single work called Das Epos des Weizens (The Epic of Wheat); part one (1907) had the title Der Oktopus: Eine Geschichte aus Kalifornien (The Octopus: A
Story from California, and part two (1912), Die Getreidebörse: Eine Geschichte aus Chikago (The Grain Exchange: A Story from Chicago). Brecht's only reference to his source is the heading of a page of notes: "FL From Wheat" ("FL Aus 'Weizen' ") (BBA 524, 117). Weizen is the name of the whole trilogy in Germany, and Weizen was to be the name of Piscator's planned production of Brecht's play. Furthermore, Helene Weigel remembered Octopus as one of the early books Brecht read on America. So the usual assumption that The Pit was the only source is apparently wrong; Brecht probably read the first book, Octopus, first. However, it is clear that The Pit made a far stronger impression on him.

The Octopus is set entirely in California, and tells the story of the bitter fight of wheat ranchers against the railroads, which destroyed land and men and women. It is similar to The Pit (though more extravagantly written) in that the wheat itself—life, nature—is the real victor; nature's will is done through men, crushing (literally, in one scene) indifferently those who defy it. The book ends on a rapturous note of praise to the wheat and the eternal principle of life, but individual quiet farming families have been destroyed. Several details in the farmer family's history in Brecht's Family from the Savannah (later Joe Fleischhacker) can be found in Octopus. The terrible legal battle that builds the plot of Octopus is against the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, in Brecht the Northsouthern; and in Octopus, too, bad harvests are a problem.

Brecht's geography in this early fragment is nonchalant, to say the least; later when he incorporates this scene into Fleischhacker, he makes some corrections, but they are not much better. Now the family has left Lake Michigan and is moving with $7,000 cash to the great cities of the eastern continent, beginning with Chicago. It has taken them fourteen days to get from Lake Michigan to Chicago. Brecht of course did not care at all about such inaccuracies; he may have used them purposely to emphasize the mythical—or, better, allegorical—purpose of the American setting. But in the "Song of a Family from the Savannah" (GW 8:144-45), he does manage to combine the two routes: there they start in the savannah with wheat, move to San Francisco with a motor shop and jazz, move then to Massachusetts with an oil field (!) and a drill—and then to Chicago with nothing.
They are very confident on their way to the city: they come not only to try their luck but (in chorus):

- to place a penny and
- to cut out our piece of meat [flesh]
- and to show them how money is made where we come from
- this Chicago had better be on its guard
- that people of our breed don’t butcher it like cattle
- before evening comes
- and hang its hide up to dry

JM

the big cities they say are dangerous
but kind to enterprising people
FAMILY
we are such people

einen penny zu setzen und
unser stück fleisch herauszuschneiden
und ihnen zu zeigen wie man geld macht bei uns zuhause
dieses chicago soll auf seiner hut sein
damit nicht leute unseres schlages es ausnehmen wie ein rind
vor es abend wird
und hängen auf zum trocknen seine haut
JM
die großen städte heißt es sind gefährlich
aber günstig unternehmenden leuten
FAMILIE
solche leute sind wir

(BBA 524, 2)

This is the very blustering confidence that makes America symbol of the new age for Europeans; it is the sense of success and purpose that builds the great cities. But it is also suspiciously like the optimism with which a European family lands on American shores in *The Jungle*, and for the Mitchel family too the dream is short-lived. Brecht outlines the story of their ruin:

1. francis the son goes ahead to seek quarters
2. he earns
3. the family waiting for him loses everything they have in 5 minutes
   the milkman takes up their cause
   the milkman is a poor devil who takes nothing from them except what he needs to eat
   he takes everything he guides them for that and sells each piece of advice
the son francis a beaming hard person goes like a knife through san francisco eats his share of flesh ruins his share of women and lands hard and fast in the electric chair
one daughter leaves right away the other incomprehensibly indolent doesn't want to do anything and is sold by her family
the boy leaves the last three who at the end were mowing each other down with knives in the night between saturday and sunday that preceded the end of the november strike by the electric workers he wanders around through the whole icy night and in the morning he doesn't return to see about them
since they have certainly frozen to death i can't look at it it must be horrible and wouldn't help them any more

1 francis der sohn geht voraus quartier zu suchen
2 er verdient
3 die familie auf ihn wartend verliert all das ihre in 5 minuten der milchmann nimmt sich ihrer an
der milchmann ist ein armer teufel der nichts von ihnen nimmt außer dem was er zum essen braucht er nimmt sie ganz aus er führt sie dafür und verkauft jeden ratschlag
der sohn franzis ein strahlender harter mensch geht wie ein messer durch frisko ißt seinen teil fleisch ruiniert sein teil frauen und landet schlag hart auf dem elektrischen stuhl
eine tochter geht gleich weg die andere von rätselhafter indolenz will nichts tun und wird verkauft von ihrer familie
der knabe verläßt die letzten drei die die letzte zeit mit messern sich gegenseitig niedersichelten in der nacht von samstag auf sonntag die dem ende des novemberstreiks der elektrizitätsarbeiter voranging er wandert die ganze eisige nacht und kehrt am morgen nicht mehr um nach ihnen zu sehen
da sie ja doch bestimmt erfroren sind ich kanns nicht sehn sist sicher schrecklich auch nützt ihnen nicht mehr

(BBA 524, 14)

The son Francis (later Calvin) behaves very like the man in Man from Manhattan/ Sodom and Gomorrah who deserts a friend because he is fascinated by San Francisco, progress, money, and women; here he himself lands in the electric chair, and it is the family he betrayed that is hit by catastrophe. There are other echoes of works we already know: a strike of electricity workers on an icy night in Chicago sounds very much like The Wheel; the son
deserting the family because he cannot bear to see the terrible state they are in is like *The Jungle* and Brecht's *In the Jungle*. And in the fate of the indolent daughter there is a hint of what is to come in *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie* (1933), also set in America.

Brecht intends the story of the family to be sentimental, as we see from a very interesting note he made for himself about the tone of the play. Here we not only see him follow his suggestion (for *Jungle*) to indicate the locality by simply placing a picture on the wall; we also see him define consciously his own characteristic style. His precise use of words, his mixture of entertainment and matter-of-factness do not come completely effortlessly; he has to plan to write that way and be able to describe it. Note that the description fits the style of *Mahagonny* also:

gray colorless
things
fleischhacker flat as a pebble
in the back a photograph of chicago
all characters submitted to a hard verdict
every word unassailable as a coin
a physical money story in between sentimental family story from dime novel
the outline somewhat lumpy not too composed
spreading good spirits
cheap
with a lot in it flat
bible

grau farblos
sachen
fleischhacker platt wie ein kieselstein
hinten fotografie von chikago
alle figuren hartem urteil empfohlen
jedes wort unangreifbar wie ein geldstück
eine physikalische geldgeschichte dazwischen sentimentale
famiengeschichte aus groschenroman
etwas klotzig der aufriss nicht zu sehr komponiert
gute laune verbreitend
billig
mit viel drin flach
bibel

(BBA 524, 69)
From the point of view of the small people who have put all their faith in progress, America, and money and are then ruined, a financial disaster is like a natural catastrophe, subject to the laws of physics. One minute they are climbing upward and full of the optimism of the rich country, and in five minutes they have lost everything. Brecht has them believe that the laws of finance are too complicated for anyone to understand; that they are like natural laws, and subject to occasional unpredictable eruptions. This fatal ignorance, the acceptance of the myth of man's subjugation to inscrutable economic laws, is made poetry and made explicit in *St. Joan*:

Alas! Eternally impenetrable  
Are the eternal laws  
Of human economy!  
Without warning  
The volcano opens and lays waste the region!  

Wehe! Ewig undurchsichtig  
Sind die ewigen Gesetze  
Der menschlichen Wirtschaft!  
Ohne Warnung  
Öffnet sich der Vulkan und verwüstet die Gegend!  

(GW 2:735)

The joke in the later play is of course that it is no law of nature but Mauler that has caused the disappearance of all the cattle, and that joke is much of what *St. Joan* is about. The reason *Joe Fleischhacker* was never finished is precisely because Brecht did not understand the functioning of the market well enough to make such a clear statement; he wanted to write a play that explained economic laws and could not do it because they did not make sense to him. In an unpublished foreword to *Fleischhacker*, he writes exclusively about money; as a beginner in the study of economics, he simplifies economic relations to money relations, assuming money as a cause: "money is something very important this is generally recognized however only a few people admit it," ("das geld ist etwas sehr wichtiges dies wird allegemein anerkannt jedoch ist es nur wenigen leuten recht"); people are ashamed to say they did anything for the sake of money, he continues, and that's why everything that occurs around money is almost unknown and
in many cases that which is unknown about things because it has to do with money is much more significant than that which is known about them this causes a false impression to arise
darum sind alle dinge die sich um das geld herum abspielen wenig bekannt und von vielen dingen ist das was über sie unbekannt ist weil es mit geld zusammenhängt viel bezeichnender als das was über sie bekannt ist dadurch entsteht ein falscher eindruck

(1BBA 348, 63)

Although Brecht himself had, to a certain extent, a “false impression,” the danger he describes in not understanding money (i.e., economics) certainly applies to the Mitchel family. Because of their naïveté they never know what hit them; it is not only like a volcano (the image from the *St. Joan* passage) but also like a hurricane. This is why among the materials to *Fleischhacker* there are the notes on the

**NATURE AND BEHAVIOR OF A HURRICANE:**
1) certain signs announce it but one doesn’t know yet how it will move
2) from the beginning, it has a direction one sees it coming toward one
3) to the left and right the houses are still standing

**WESEN UND ART EINES HURRIKANS:**
1) gewisse anzeichen künden ihn an jedoch weiß man noch nicht wie er sich bewegen wird
2) vom beginn an hat er eine richtung man sieht ihn auf sich zukommen
3) links und rechts stehen die häuser noch (BBA 524, 126)

Bankruptcy, like a hurricane, seems to select its victims and bear down on them leaving others standing perfectly whole. For the Mitchells it is a complete surprise; speculators can see it coming—they know the signs that the market will move one way or another—but they too may be helpless to escape it.

Brecht uses the word *hurricane* specifically to apply to the catastrophe that destroys the Mitchels, in another memorandum to himself:

peculiarity of money catastrophes
the hurricane that the mitchel family comes into must be as sober and cold as possible . . . it is showing precisely this thin invisible destructive power of money that is so terrible insufficient information
ineptitude too little or too much ability to adjust stand in the place of devastating feelings impossibility of communication . . . the terrible precariousness of the giant cities that is the battlefield
eigenartigkeit von geldkatastrophen
der hurrikan in den die familie mitchel kommt muß so nüchtern und kalt wie möglich sein . . . es ist gerade diese dünne unsichtbare zerstörende macht des geldes zu zeigen die so furchtbar ist mangelnde information geringe eignung zuwenig oder zuviel anpassungsfähigkeit stehen anstelle von verheerenden gefühlen unmöglichkeit der verstän­digung . . . die entsetzliche unsicherheit der riesenstädte das ist das schlachtfeld (BBA 524, 21)

It is a battlefield he wishes to show, but the war that is fought there is without the emotions of a battle; it is the abstraction money that destroys, not human beings, and so there is no visible enemy to fight against. And destruction comes like a hurricane out of the clear blue sky; how can the abstraction money suddenly turn into a destructive force leaving dead, starving, and prostituted victims in its wake? How does the force of a hurricane arise out of still air?

It was to answer this question that Brecht wrote the play: not primarily to show the effect on the Mitchels of belief in the myth of getting rich, but to study the mechanisms of the commodity exchange. Most of the many pages of notes and few pages of finished text are on the subject of the wheat exchange, which Brecht felt was leading him to an understanding of the primum mobile of the subjects he had hitherto considered most important: social struggle, building up of industry, war.

But the wheat exchange is not so easy to understand. The financial action in The Pit is fascinating drama and made a strong impression on Brecht, but it by no means makes the functioning of the wheat exchange completely clear. It leaves the neophyte with small questions like: what does it mean to sell short? how does one “cover” one’s sales? how do bears and bulls operate? where is all the wheat the speculators buy?—and with vaguer large questions like: why does it work this way? how can men who never even see the wheat control it? And so there are pages of notes to Fleischhacker on which Brecht copied down definitions and quotations from Norris’s book. On the page with the heading “FL From Wheat” (“FL Aus ‘Weizen’ ”) we find
1924–1926. America as Business

Corner—buy up the entire supply
Lambs = small businessmen.
Bears, who tore the bulls down with their teeth.
Scalper = someone who sells below price.
Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska (one single immense wheatfield)

Corner—das ganze Angebot aufkaufen
Lämmer = kleine Geschäftsleute.
Bären, die mit ihren Gebissen die Bullen niederrissen.
Skalper = jemand der unter Preis verkauft
Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska (ein einziges ungeheurees Weizenfeld)

(BBA 524, 117)

which is information taken directly from The Pit (probably by Hauptmann: it is typed with capitals, unlike Brecht’s usual practice).

The following passage is clearly one of the sources:

the Bears strong of grip, tenacious of jaw, capable of pulling down the strongest Bull . . . the “outsiders,” the “public”—the Lambs . . . whom Bear and Bull did not so much as condescend to notice, but who, in their mutual struggle of horn and claw, they crushed to death by the mere rolling of their bodies. (The Pit, p. 75)

Another source is Norris’s list of the states sending in reports of bad crops expected: Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, ending with:

But more especially Jadwin watched Nebraska, that state which is one single vast wheat field. How would Nebraska do, Nebraska which alone might feed an entire nation? (P. 183)

In a clarification for himself of part of the plot, Brecht also quotes directly from Norris the phrases in quotation marks:

When the whole bear clique wants to make cover purchases, suddenly there’s no more wheat to be had. “Someone owns a gigantic pile of wheat that’s not coming to the market, Chicago’s visible supply is cornered.” J wants to stop this huge increase in wheat farming by reports in the newspapers he has bought. . . . must now buy and buy: “the wheat has cornered me.” the moment he stops buying the price must go down.

Als die gesamte Bärenklique dann Deckungskäufe machen will ist auf einmal kein Weizen mehr zu haben. “Jemand besitzt einen riesigen haufen weizen der nicht auf den markt kommt, die sichtbare versorgung chicagos ist gecornert”. . . . Diese ungeheure zunahme des weizenbaus will J stoppen durch berichte in den von ihm aufgekaufenen zeitun-
The sources of the above quotations are in Norris's description of Curtis Jadwin's corner. The bear clique tries to sell, bringing the price down, and then buy again, having made a cash profit. But: "The instant they tried to cover there was no wheat for sale" (p. 312). The leader of the group, Crookes, muses:

Somebody has a great big line of wheat that is not on the market at all. Somebody has got all the wheat there is. I guess I know his name. I guess the visible supply of May wheat in the Chicago market is cornered. (P. 313)

Jadwin (whose friends call him "J.," like Brecht's occasional Jae Fleischhacker)\(^69\) has engineered a corner; his problem now is that with the price so artificially high he has to do something to prevent farmers from planting unprecedentedly large crops; in fact, it is the new crop that finally ruins him because he is trapped into having to buy it all up to maintain his corner. He remarks often to his wife and his broker that he has not cornered the wheat, it has cornered him.\(^70\)

Brecht spent the most time figuring out how a corner works: in three different sets of notes he tries to think of all the aspects of such a deal. So, for instance:

Difficulties of a corner
What enemies does F1 make?
What friends " " " ?
Where must he get involved?
Relation to bank, railroad, farm, press . . .

*Whom does he ruin?*

Schwierigkeiten eines Corners
Welche Feinde macht sich F1?
Welche Freunde " " " ?
Wo muß er sich hereinmischen?
Verhältnis zur Bank, Eisenbahn, Farm, Presse . . .

*Wen ruiniert er?* (BBA 524, 84)

Another similar list of considerations (also typed and perhaps compiled by an assistant) is more extensive:

- Bringing about a corner is very difficult.
- 1. getting warehouses,
- 2. getting the money
3. getting the means of transportation
4. paying the rent
5. paying the interest
6. thwarting the intrigues of the railroads
7. bribing the meddling press

Den Corner zustande zu bringen ist sehr schwer. 1. Lagerhäuser zu bekommen,
2. das Geld zu bekommen
3. die Transportmittel zu bekommen
4. die Miete zu zahlen
5. die Zinsen zu zahlen
6. die Intriguen der Eisenbahnen zu vereiteln
7. die sich einmischende Presse zu bestechen

(BBA 524, 113)

In *The Pit* Jadwin and his broker discuss similar problems in securing a corner: paying storage, bribing warehouse people, buying up newspapers, bargaining with railroads—and of course keeping the whole thing secret and keeping up to date on every hint of new developments in supply and demand.71 (Both Fleischhacker and Mauler in *St. Joan* bribe and use the newspapers.)

There are also more subtle echoes of *The Pit*, in the characterizations. Brecht invents two little epithets, presumably for his own characters, that describe succinctly what happens to Curtis and Laura Jadwin:

of a lonely man
he ate alone
or
he slept together and ate alone

of a woman
she has many pasts and no future

von einem einsamen
er aß allein
oder
er schlief zu zweit und aß allein
von einer frau
sie hat viele vergangenheiten und keine zukunft

(BBA 524, 32)

Fleischhacker himself is characterized by the same strange pride (*hybris*)? that grasps Jadwin when he finds himself in control of the market:
BRECHT'S AMERICA

Fl. No one knows how much wheat there is in the world. . . . Not considering whether it's possible, I will now, whether it is possible or not, simply do as good a job of buying that wheat as I am a good man.

Fl. Niemand weiß, wieviel Getreide auf der Welt ist. . . . Betrachtend nicht obs möglich ist, will ich jetzt, obs möglich ist oder nicht, einfach so gut einkaufen solches Getreide als ich ein guter Mann bin. (BBA 524, 10)

In the same passage Brecht compares the speculator in wheat to a poker player who never looks at his own cards but only watches the faces of the other players; it is an apt image and shows that Brecht already grasped an essential of speculation in commodities: there is never any contact with the commodity itself; the speculator deals purely in abstractions.

Fleischhacker demonstrates the same boldness when he transfers from being a bull to being a bear, deserting his partner and joining a new clique. Jadwin makes a similar move but without the same style; Fleischhacker's cold-bloodedness is reminiscent of Shlink's firing a trusted old employee for the sake of a new fascination (Shlink's fascination is the struggle against a man, Fleischhacker's is the struggle for money):

joe
because now the frosted-glass face of this chicago
is turned toward me jaefleischhacker
i obey the wish of monstrous chicago
to change at such a height
to increase in virtue and
to test before i climb higher how
healthy i am and so
GOES OVER TO MILK
today i will chop you my right hand
still fairly useful once indispensible
you dirty hand from murky times off
shaw
's more than we expected jae
brown
's good
table
's dangerously good

joe

weil jetzt das milchglasige gesicht dieses chikago
auf mich jaefleischhacker gerichtet ist
gehorch ich dem wunsch des ungeheuren chikago

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In this, the first scene in the Fleischhacker plot (scene two of the play), Chicago again plays the role of a living character; Fleischhacker imagines it is the city itself that gives him his strength and challenges him to push his profits further and further. The city of Chicago (like other cities and like America) is organized on the principle of a social-Darwinist struggle for money; that is the very essence of its existence, and Joe is simply fulfilling its laws. He is to become the executor of the city's will. He speaks of an obligation to the city to be virtuous and to prove himself in the same terms as an obligation to God.

Another version of the same scene is set surprisingly not in the Weizenbörse—Board of Trade—but in an office near the Chicago stockyards. Here, instead of obeying the wish of Chicago, Joe says he will shake off "the stockyards' brutal blow from behind" ("des schlachthofs rohen nackenschlag") (BBA 524, 42). There is no mention of wheat, and the names of the other characters are unfamiliar. The stockyard scene is titled "scene i," which could mean Brecht wrote it before deciding to combine the Fleischhacker story with the Mitchel family story. Or it could be a later adaptation of the Fleischhacker theme to the meat industry, the embryo of St. Joan of the Stockyards. Fleischhacker's name suggests, however, that Brecht's original conception of the play might have dealt with meat, not wheat (perhaps based on the Lorimer book), but every reference we know of says it was to be a play about the Chicago wheat market; often it is called Weizen. So it is impossible to tell when the thought occurred to Brecht to write a play about the
capitalist relations of the meat industry; but it is clear that *St. Joan* became the home of the theme of commodity speculation that never was completed in *Joe Fleischhacker*.

The actual financial speculations and mechanisms are very similar in the two plays. That is evident from a page in the *Fleischhacker* materials (BBA 524, 24) on which Brecht figures out the arithmetic of Joe's transactions. Most but not all of that scenario is from *The Pit*; the rain, for instance, is not. For all his rhapsody over the forces of nature, Norris mentions very little about the factors that control the supply of wheat (which is the principal information causing fluctuations in market price; speculators slavishly follow statistics on expected crop size).

But Norris was not Brecht's only source of information. He had contemporary history as inspiration and teacher too. In 1925 one of history's most infamous wheat corners was engineered by the Barnes pool in Chicago. In that year the wheat exchange was twice as old as when Norris wrote about it (it was founded in Chicago in 1877), but its methods had not changed at all. During the two months the Barnes group controlled the market, daily wheat sales in Chicago sometimes reached $380 million, or several times the daily volume of sales on the New York Stock Exchange. The Chicago wheat exchange is in fact even in normal times the largest exchange in the world, both in price variation and in sales volume. Considering that it is also an artificial and unnecessary injection of speculation into the normal mechanism of production and consumption (wheat prices are determined by the gambling of persons with no practical connection whatever to wheat) and that this speculation directly affects farmers and consumers through the whole world, it is easy to see why Brecht chose wheat as the vehicle for his study of the inmost workings of finance and capitalism.

The worldwide consequences of activities in the Chicago Board of Trade were particularly evident during the Barnes corner; American and European newspapers were full of the news of the deal, which was reported with the suspense of a national sports match. There are pages and pages of clippings with the materials to *Fleischhacker*. They date from 1925 to 1929; most of them however are from 1926–27. This is an important indication of the period in which Brecht worked on *Fleischhacker* and related subjects. Brecht intended *Fleischhacker* to be set closer to Norris's time—the title of
one page of text is “THE GREAT WHEAT CRISIS IN THE CHICAGO BOARD OF TRADE IN THE YEAR 1908” (“DIE GROSSE WAIZENKRISSE AN DER CHIKAGOER WAIZENBÖRSE IM JAHRE 1908”) (BBA 524, 44)—but he was dissatisfied with the information in *The Pit* and went on an extensive search for deeper explanations from contemporary sources. (The turn of the century was also the original setting for *St. Joan.*)

One of the earliest clippings, with underlining by Brecht or an assistant, is from the *Neues Wiener Journal* (New Viennese Journal) of 10 March 1925. Brecht studied it carefully, and incorporated it. This article identifies the Barnes group as cause of the boom in wheat, describes the very complex maneuvering of the group and its crash because of the tactics of the bears, who forced Barnes to bring out all his supply of wheat. When all this wheat was dumped on the market, a panic and lowering of prices resulted at once. To try to keep the price up, the bull group spread reports that Russia had bought approximately 300,000 tons of wheat from American sources, and that because of drought India would have a 30 percent smaller crop than expected. Brecht adapted this article about rumors right away, when he was still calling Joe Fleischhacker “Jae”:

Jae says to the 4 bulls: you must buy wheat. There were 4 good years, this year will be a bad one. You know there is a drought through the whole world. Grain will be very scarce. You must buy grain, and it will reach a high price.

Jae sagt zu den 4 Bullen: ihr müßt Getreide kaufen. Es waren 4 gute Jahre, dieses Jahr wird ein schlechtes sein. Ihr wisst, es ist eine Dürre in der ganzen Welt. Das Getreide wird sehr rar sein. Ihr müßt Getreide kaufen, und es wird einen hohen Preis erzielen. (BBA 678, 10)

These are the four bulls whom Fleischhacker betrays, having already betrayed his partner to join them. Brecht sketches the second betrayal on the same page, and then goes on to the overabundant rain; perhaps that was a factor in 1925.

Brecht also intends to have Fleischhacker’s corner fail, like those of both the Barnes group and Curtis Jadwin; at the end of the page of reckoning how many bushels Joe buys to make his corner, Brecht adds the next step in the plot: that Joe has not included everything in his plans, and unexpected wheat is suddenly thrown on the market. This is a simplification of the situation both in *The Pit* and in 1925.
when it was the plotting of a whole group of bears that broke the big
bull. Perhaps an unexpected supply of wheat was the real cause of
the break in 1908. It is of course in the background in *The Pit*:
nature’s forces cannot be held back; wheat will grow, and “the pit”
senses this seismically and takes courage to fight the bull.

But Brecht then jilts his sources and saves Fleischhacker by
introducing rumors of war. The market recovers, and Joe’s wheat is
a gold mine. Brecht does this probably in order to make a comedy
(for Joe) out of the play, preventing sympathy for the speculator, as
well as to exploit the irony that war is healthy for the economy.
Brecht found hints about the effect of war and war rumors on the
market in White’s *Dan Drew* as well as in *The Pit*.

There are many more clippings and other contemporary sources
among the materials to *Fleischhacker*. A summary of the entire year
of 1925 is given in a yearly report of the National City Bank, and in a
four-page article from a Berlin paper. A few clippings are about
finance or the stock market in general, such as one from 4 March
1926 with the large headline “A Billion Dollars Speculated Away!”
(“Eine Milliarde Dollars verspekuliert!”) describing excitement in
the New York Stock Exchange: “Scenes of madness . . . Before
closing the stock exchange was literally like a madhouse . . .
Clothes were torn” (“Wahnsinnsszenen . . . Vor dem Schluß
gleich die Börse buchstäblich einem Tollhause . . . Kleider wurden
zerrissen”). But almost all of the many newspaper articles are
about the narrower subject of the wheat market, in both Chicago
and Europe.

And still that was not precise enough for Brecht; he demanded
better and better information. There are pages of notes to
*Fleischhacker* preserved that consist of nothing but numbers—
attempts at figuring out the exact arithmetic of the exchange.

Elisabeth Hauptmann remembered that Brecht read articles by
Richard Lewinsohn, alias Morus, in preparation for *Fleischhacker*.
Lewinsohn was an excellent columnist on economic matters and a
specialist on the stock exchange for the *Vossische Zeitung*, Berlin;
under the name Morus he wrote articles for *Die Weltbühne*, a
magazine of the left.

Brecht (and Hauptmann) even traveled from Berlin to Vienna to
ask a broker there questions about how the wheat market works.
Perhaps the very short memorandum on “benefits of the grain exchange” (“niitzen der getreideborse”) stems from this interview:

assumption of the risk the world's grain is divided up the fixed price covers real grain the price stands between harvests

übernahme des risikos das weltgetreide wird eingeteilt der fixierte preis erfaßt wirklich getreide der preis steht zwischen den ernten (BBA 524, 21)

But these few “benefits” of the grain exchange are not necessary, and to Brecht they hardly seemed enough to justify the arbitrariness with which absolutely unproductive capitalists, interjected without real function as middlemen between the producers and wholesale buyers of most raw materials and staples, could control the lives and deaths of millions of people throughout the world.

Brecht had read many times already that this was what capitalism was about; he had read Sinclair and Lorimer and Myers and White and Norris and Jensen on American society, and he had admired Piscator’s proletarian theater and had lived through the October Revolution and the Munich soviet, and he himself had rebelled from the beginning against hypocritical bourgeois values. But through none of this had he felt a need to analyze and judge the political and economic system that he lived under and that ruled the country he considered the wave of the future; he wrote plays and poems and theater criticism that assumed a critical attitude toward society, but they were reflections of that society, “documents,” not analysis and far less prescriptions for change.

About 1924, feeling that the urge to make money is a more basic social force than the theater usually admits, he elected to begin writing plays on economic motives; these he set in America because there people were, bless them, honest: it was the one place where everyone admitted his real motives, and so the simplification necessary to make a dramatic point was credible against that background. America was also the country where the transformation from a rural, tribal, or feudal sort of society to an urban and technological society was evident on an accelerated and grand scale; it was the perfect setting for the study of sociological changes in the transition to a new age, a transition that was also taking place in Europe,
though more slowly. *Joe Fleischhacker* started out to be another in the series of studies of the migration to the cities. *In the Jungle* was the first; it examined the struggle for survival and its result, loneliness. And *Fleischhacker* was to study the struggle for survival and its cause, the economics of the city.

But the study dragged on and on. More and more materials were collected for it, but apparently the more Brecht read and asked, the less it all made sense. He pieced together a plot, worked out the very mathematics of the trading, but could not understand the logic of the system. The more he read, the less possible it was for him to write the play, nor could he finish any other projects he had been working on—which were all on similar themes—as long as he could not make clear the rationale behind the market.

Looking back about ten years later, Brecht wrote a poem on the subject of trying to understand the wheat exchange; the poem shows that the experience was a crisis in all aspects of his life.

When I years ago while studying how Chicago’s wheat exchange works
Suddenly understood how they controlled the world’s grain there
And yet didn’t understand it and lowered the book
I knew right away: you have
Come upon a bad business.

There was no feeling of bitterness in me, and the injustice
Didn’t frighten me then, only the thought
They can’t do that, the way they’re doing it! filled me completely.
These men, I saw, lived from the harm
That they caused, not from their usefulness.
This was a situation, I saw, that could be maintained
Only through crime, because it was bad for the majority.
And thus must each
Triumph of reason, invention or discovery
Lead only to yet greater misery.
These and similar thoughts came to me in that moment
Far from anger or grief as I lowered the book
With the description of the wheat market and Chicago’s Board of Trade.
Much work and unrest
 Awaited me.

Als ich vor Jahren bei dem Studium der Vorgänge auf der Weizenbörse Chikagos
Plötzlich begriff, wie sie dort das Getreide der Welt verwalteten
Und es zugleich auch nicht begriff und das Buch senkte
Wüßte ich gleich: du bist
In eine böse Sache geraten.

Kein Gefühl der Erbitterung war in mir, und nicht das Unrecht
Schreckte mich da, nur der Gedanke
So geht das nicht, wie die's machen! erfüllte mich gänzlich.
Diese, sah ich, lebten vom Schaden
Den sie zufügten, anstatt vom Nutzen.
Dies war ein Zustand, sah ich, der nur durch Verbrechen
Aufrecht zu halten war, weil zu schlecht für die meisten.
So muß auch jede
Leistung der Vernunft, Erfindung oder Entdeckung
Nur zu noch größerem Elend führen.
Solches und Ähnliches dacht ich in diesem Augenblick
Fern von Zorn oder Jammer, als ich das Buch senkte
Mit der Beschreibung des Weizenmarkts und der Börse Chikagos.
Viel Mühe und Unrast
Erwarteten mich.

(GW 9:567–68)

The crisis reached its climax. Brecht stopped writing. It was no use until he understood. After the premiere of *A Man's a Man* (25 September 1926) he asked for advice on which works to read about political economy, socialism, and Marxism, and bought them; he took a vacation and wrote in a letter: “I’m stuck eight shoes deep in *Capital*. I’ve got to know that now exactly” (“Ich stecke acht Schuh tief im ‘Kapital’. Ich muß das jetzt genau wissen”).

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