Chapter Five

1929–1931
The World Economic Crisis and Brecht’s Commitment: “St. Joan of the Stockyards”

What happened in 1929 was, of course, the world economic crisis. The concentric circles of ruin spreading out from Wall Street throughout the world (just like the image of the wheat exchange’s influence in The Pit) meant for Europeans the end of the American Dream. It shattered Brecht’s world-view particularly because for him America had always been the symbol of strength and life; its system was perhaps unjust; but it was strong; next to decadent Europe America was raw, healthy, and productive.

But Brecht had been studying Marx’s analysis of capitalism intensely for three years; the crash must have been an overwhelming confirmation of the implications of the theories and formulas he had been learning so thoroughly. Capitalism was doomed!

As for so many Americans, the depression was the most important historic event in shaping Brecht’s thoughts. Surprisingly, there are in Brecht’s work almost no mentions of Hitler and fascism before 1932; although we know from biographical accounts that he was affected by the increasing terror in Berlin, events in America seem to have been more important to him. Or at least to his writing. We can only know what he thought from what he wrote down, but it is clear that the mythology he pasted together around America served as the set of symbols or the model into which he projected his thoughts about his own society. Thus he would feel events in Berlin deeply but analyze them in terms of the American model. But at the same time his interest in, and knowledge of, America did cause him to follow events there closely, so that he felt immediately touched by
the stock market crash, and accorded it more significance in his writings than Hitler’s rise.

For at the same time that the crash confirmed Brecht’s Marxism, it also destroyed what remnants of illusion he had left about the mythology of virile America. He was still able to use the symbols of that mythology in one of his most brilliant plays, *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, but the myths all turned ironic overnight.

"*Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York*"

The transformation of the American dream into the American nightmare and the turning upside-down of all the myths are the subjects of the major poem "*Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York*,” a direct response to the stock market crash. We will look at the poem in detail, because Brecht is nowhere more explicit about his attitudes toward America. He is also explicit that this is a turning point in his life, at least as important as the other turning point described in the poem about trying to write *Fleischhacker*.

The first half of "*Vanished Glory*" is a summing-up of Brecht’s own previous positions on America. He speaks not in the first person singular but rather at first completely impersonally, and then in the first person plural. This is his own story, but it is also the story of his generation, and of Europeans in general. The crash on Wall Street has returned them to a feeling of identification with their own countries after a decade of trying to identify with the splendor of the new world:

> Today, when word has gotten around
> That these people are bankrupt
> We see on the other continents (which however are also bankrupt)
> Many things differently, as it seems to us, more clearly.

> Heute, wo es sich herumgesprochen hat
> Daß diese Leute bankrott sind
> Sehen wir auf den anderen Kontinenten (die zwar auch bankrott sind)
> Allerhand anders, wie es uns vorkommt, schärfer.

The two-part structure of the poem demonstrates this new vision: the images of former glory in the first half are repeated in the second half, but all of them are seen from a new perspective:

What about the skyscrapers?
We regard them more coolly.

. . . . . . . . . . .
So high up filled with poverty?
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Was ist das mit den Hochhäusern?
Wir betrachten sie kühler.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... 
So hoch hinauf voller Armut?

The poem contrasts confidence and conspicuous consumption during the decade of economic expansion after the war (which was also Brecht’s first decade of dramatic production) with sudden revelation of the unsound structural base. Flamboyant waste turns out to have been overproduction of commodities, which are produced not to fill human needs but to gather profit.

We have already seen the trick of turning all the supposed pleasures and riches into their opposite, in Mahagonny. Eating, boxing, loving, drinking, and being free (anarchy) can all be fatal, if they are indulged in to excess—and the entire first half of “Vanished Glory” is about excesses. The excesses climax in the eleventh section, where the poet dissolves in superlatives.

But not only this dialectic comes from earlier works like Mahagonny. The images are, in fact, a compilation of the kinds of images and human types that filled Brecht’s own plays, poems, and stories until 1929.

The third section talks of the United States as a country that assimilates all races beyond recognition; this recalls the poor French family and Shlink in Jungle, and all the literature we know Brecht read about immigrant Americans.

“The voices of their women from the gramophone records” in the fourth section refers to Brecht’s early love of American records, with the single weak voice struggling against a whole orchestra (which Hauptmann said reminded them of the individual’s struggle against society). The “evening waters of Miami” are here too, echoing Decline and Fall of the Paradise City.

In the seventh section Brecht writes, with what appears to be admiration, “Poverty was considered a disgrace there” (“Armut galt dort für schimpflich”). That was certainly the case in Jungle, Fleischhacker, Threepenny Opera, Mahagonny, and it reminds us of Brecht’s early note about his generation’s interest in America, “Shortly after the Great War” (“Kurz nach dem Grossen Krieg”), quoted above, pages 6-7. (“Vanished Glory” begins by asking if anyone remembers New York’s fame “In the decade after the Great War” [“In dem Jahrzehnt nach dem großen Krieg”]).
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Americans considered it a sign of pride to be hard and cruel, as Brecht describes it in section 6: they openly, in front of the whole world, got everything they could from their workers and then shot them

. . . and threw their worn-out bones and
Used-up muscles on the streets with
Good-natured laughter.

. . . und warfen ihre abgebrauchten Knochen und
Vernutzten Muskeln auf die Straßen mit
Gutmütigem Lachen.

But, he immediately points out, the Americans reported that same raw determination among striking workers with “sporting recognition” (“sportlicher Anerkennung”); and the longest section in the poem begins by describing boxers in the terms Brecht had used for his friend Samson-Körner. We know the importance sport had had for Brecht. Yet after 1929 he rarely if ever mentioned it. It is Schuhmann’s opinion that “Vanished Glory” is in part a rejection of Brecht’s earlier admiration for Samson-Körner, and of the whole concept the boxer embodied: the matter-of-fact, physically expressive but unsentimental man. It is true that Brecht rejected the tough sporting type; but the qualities of matter-of-factness and unsentimentality remained important to him, gesture was still very important in acting, and even toughness is sometimes demanded in a situation like that in The Measure Taken or St. Joan. Brecht did not decide that these qualities were per se bad, just as tall buildings and fast cars were not bad: it was their social origins and the uses to which they are put that could make them bad. Boxing had become a trivial pastime and exploiting workers an evil one.

The boxers, of course, also remind us of Mahagonny, not just the boxing scene but the whole atmosphere created by men wearing suits “With cotton padding in the shoulders, which made the men so broad / That three of them filled the whole sidewalk” ("Mit den Wattewülsten an den Schultern, welche die Männer so breit machen / Daß drei von ihnen den ganzen Gehsteig beanspruchen"). In the 1931 production of A Man's a Man, too, the soldiers wore padded suits, and Peter Lorre suggested the interpolation of a scene where Galy Gay demonstrates how wrestlers deport themselves. Braking his movements and putting his hands in his pockets slowly were mannerisms Brecht had admired in Samson-Körner.
Cramming the mouth full of Beechnut chewing gum (also in section 8) may be an allusion to an unpublished song for Mahagonny called “The Chewing-Gum Song,” which is sung by two men and two women standing by Beechnut posters and chewing in time to the music. It is a song about the hardest, handsomest, meanest, and in fact only man in Mahagonny, whose “whole philosophy was that he chewed gum” (“ganze philosophie war daß er kaugummi kaute”) (BBA 460, 60).

In short, the entire imagery and diction of “Vanished Glory” are a kind of recapitulation of Brecht’s American phase. We know that America served him as an allegorical model, that Chicago represents Berlin; and in the eighth section the poet confesses that he himself admired and imitated the American mannerisms. There are few Ach’s in Brecht’s poetry; this poem contains two. “Ah, the voices of their women” (“Ach, diese Stimmen ihrer Frauen”) in section 4 is a parody (he is speaking ironically of his past) of stupefied admiration; it is how he used to feel. But the tone in section 8 is completely different: first the frenzied exclamation, “What glory! What a century!” (“Welch ein Ruhm! Welch ein Jahrhundert!”) and then a new voice, subdued, thoughtful, perhaps after a long pause: “Ah, we too demanded those impressive suits” (“Ach, auch wir verlangten solche breitspurigen Anzüge”). This Ach is spoken in the present. It says: don’t blame it all on the Americans, we caught the fever too. And: this is a confession. And perhaps also: those were golden days when our pleasures were so simple. At the beginning of the poem he suggested America had been “our childhood friend, known to everyone, unmistakable!” (“unser jedermann bekannter, unverwechselbarer Jugendfreund!”), and now he describes the influence of that friend. We are reminded too of the early poem in which Brecht declared:

And the best thing about America is:
That we understand it.

Und das Beste an Amerika ist:
Daß wir es verstehen.

(\textit{GW} 8:286)

But this explicit statement of fascination with America is a description of a time long past. “Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York” eradicates that early statement and many others with its first three lethal lines:

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Who still remembers
The glory of the giant city New York
In the decade after the great war?

Wer erinnert sich wohl noch
An den Ruhm der Riesenstadt New York
In dem Jahrzehnt nach dem großen Krieg?

Six years earlier Brecht had written a similar sentence:

Almost every one of us remembers the fall of the Roman cities Herculanum, Pompeii and Stabiae, which took place 2000 years ago.


(BBA 214, 23)

There he stated his intention to write a history of Miami so that after its destruction it should not be forgotten, and he proceeded to describe the structure of Miami, making clear where the irrationality lay that would lead to its destruction (symbolized by him at that time by the Flood). The story of the vanished glory of New York is very similar. It is interesting that by using the cadences of the introduction to the Miami story, Brecht can create the impression that New York existed about 2,000 years ago and is known only through archaeology. That stylistic device is important because what Brecht is really saying in this poem is that for him and his generation the depression divided history into two periods. The postwar decade of enthusiasm is ancient history; 1929 is the end of an epoch in Brecht’s life. And so there is a tremendous distance, the images are pulled up out of another eon—although they were actually still current and believable immediately before the poem was written.

The perversion of social relations into their opposites is introduced through a mere rumor (“For one day a rumor of strange collapses ran through the world” (“Denn eines Tages durchlief die Welt das Gerücht seltsamer Zusammenbrüche”). The myths of American capitalism depended on confidence for their success. The moment doubt began to infect people—Americans and Europeans—the system began to fall apart. That is a fairly accurate representation of stock market psychology, but also of Europeans’ quick loss of admiration for America: suddenly now they could
throw off their inferiority complexes. Why, America’s superiority had been all bluff! The last lines of the poem are:

What a discovery:
That their system of living together showed
The same lamentable flaw as that of
More modest people!

Welch eine Entdeckung:
Daß ihr System des Gemeinlebens denselben
Jämmerlichen Fehler aufwies wie das
Bescheidenerer Leute!

Although the turning point is indicated by nothing more than a rumor, the language used in reaction to the discovery of a new perspective is violent and vituperative. Brecht is not merely disillusioned, he is angry. The second half, a dialectical tour de force, uses exactly the same examples of America’s culture as the first half, but it reveals now the hollowness, decadence, and bankruptcy at the core, often quite rudely:

Records are still sold, admittedly few
But what are these silly women [goats] telling us, really, who never
Learned to sing? What
Is the point of these songs? What have they
Really been singing to us all these years?

Noch werden Schallplatten verkauft, freilich wenige
Doch was erzählen uns diese Ziegen eigentlich, die nicht
Singen gelernt haben? Was
Ist der Sinn dieser Gesänge? Was haben sie uns
Eigentlich vorgesungen all diese Jahre lang?

But—and this is central to an understanding of Brecht’s entire concept of America—if we reread the first half after knowing the second half, we begin to wonder just how positive those images at the beginning really were. And we realize that many of them are quite horrible, that they are only made to seem positive by the tone. The tone forces acceptance of the assumption that if America does something that seems cruel, it is because she cannot be bothered by weakness, she has a great destiny to fulfill. “They erected their gigantic edifices with incomparable waste / Of the best human material” (“Ihre riesigen Bauwerke führten sie auf mit unvergleichlicher Verschwendung / Besten Menschenmaterials”). It can be seen as either glorious or inhuman that the Americans wasted...
human beings. Brecht, we discover, simply reports what he saw the Americans doing. In the second half he reports the same activities but adds a value judgment.

He is shocked not only by the crash but also by his own earlier amoral stance. That is why the economic crisis marks the great hiatus in his life: never again will he be an uncommitted writer. He had been moving in that direction already during the years he was studying Marx, but only after the crash on Wall Street was he able to free himself completely of the earlier admiration for pitiless virility, to put all his energy at the service of the oppressed, and to promote the cause of socialism.

The first half of the poem begins to sound very ambiguous on second reading. "Poverty was considered a disgrace there" ("Armut galt dort für schimpflich"). Does that mean there were no poor, or they were cursed and rejected? "Truly, their whole system of living together was incomparable" ("Wahrlich, ihr ganzes System des Gemeinlebens war unvergleichlich"). Incomparably good or bad, kind or cruel, progressive or irrational? It took the reading of Marx, as Brecht himself said, before he understood his own plays: not that he had written Marxist plays, but that they would serve as excellent data for Marxian analysis because he had recorded exactly what he saw.

The striking structure of this poem is an accurate representation of the form taken by Brecht's own changing attitude toward America. We have been able to say both that this attitude changed and that it did not, because he kept the same images and impressions but changed his assessment of their virtue. He always associated America with opulent waste, contrast of rich and poor, sport, virility, gambling, jazz, skyscrapers, automobiles, toughness and unsentimentality, get-rich-quick schemes and swindles, gangsters, and anarchy. But at first he saw some positive value in these qualities, namely, progress. In the early twenties everything that was new came out of the States. But by 1929 Brecht was convinced that socialism was the system of the future, representing progress, experiment, and newness, so America lost its one justification. We have observed that dialectic in the relation of Flight over the Ocean to The Baden Learning Play: technical progress is not real progress if it does not help mankind. There had been signs in Brecht's poetry of the previous few years that a new concept of what "the new world"
could mean was replacing America: as early as 1926 “Coals for Mike” and “Eight Thousand Poor People Come Up to the City,” in 1927, “Ballad of the Steel Helmet” and “Three Hundred Murdered Coolies Report to an International,” and in 1929 a very clear statement on a new way of thinking, “The Rug Weavers of Kuyan-Bulak Honor Lenin.” America had already begun to lose the excuse of newness, and when the crash happened it became one big ghost town for Brecht.

The fatalistic prophecy of destruction of the cities in “Of Poor B.B.” (1922) is fulfilled in “Vanished Glory,” complete with the same imagery of useless skyscrapers. But in the earlier poem, Brecht identified himself with the dying culture; now he is observing its death and liberating himself from its influence. The difference between the resigned tone in “Of Poor B.B.” and the fighting, angry tone in “Vanished Glory” tells a whole story in itself. In 1922 Brecht could only hope he would not let his cigar go out in the earthquakes to come; in 1930 he knows what he is going to fight for and so has a transcendent, not nihilistic, reason to say earthquakes be damned. But there are no natural catastrophes in this poem. After 1929, causation in Brecht’s work is secular; it is in fact economic, and traceable to particular men. The Wall Street crash was caused by the irrationality of a system built by men and serving particular men, and by the time of the depression Brecht wanted to use no more literary devices that might obscure that crucial recognition.

The stock market crash inspired other expressions of anger too, but none is quite so bitterly ironic and direct in its portrayal of disillusion as “Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York.” In the same year, for instance, Brecht planned a comedy to be called Barnum, about “the destruction of New York” (BBA 424, 70). In 1931 he wrote a poem about New York, “Places to Sleep,” which describes (and evaluates as reformist) an act of charity: he has heard, Brecht says, that on the corner of Twenty-Sixth Street and Broadway every evening a man stands and finds a night’s lodging for the homeless by asking passersby for help. It is winter in the poem—“the snow that was meant for the homeless falls on the street”—and Brecht probably related it to that terrible depression winter in Berlin: in January 1931 there were almost five million unemployed in Germany. But the episode comes from chapter 45 of Dreiser’s 1900 novel Sister Carrie. (Brecht’s “I hear” [“Ich höre”] usually
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means “I have read.”) The poem seems to be the only direct influence the book had on Brecht, but it indicates that he was still reading American social novels in spite of the disenchantment he expressed in “Vanished Glory.”

For of course America was still a very important symbol; it now provided the allegorical structure on which to build a thorough analysis of capitalism’s cycles. The intention to write a major play exposing the mechanisms of capitalism had by no means left Brecht when he abandoned Fleischhacker to read Marx in 1926; on the contrary, his years of study were preparation for that major play on capitalism that he wanted to write.

In fact, Brecht kept coming back to Fleischhacker for years. We know from bound and dated notebooks that he wrote twelve pages for it in 1927 and one-page notes in 1928 and 1929. According to Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht also intended to complete it while he was in exile in the United States, combining it with The Bread Store and calling the new play The Bread King of Chicago. She said he never got to it because he had to do writing that would be more immediately profitable.

In fact, Brecht did work with Ferdinand Reyher in 1941 on a screen treatment of Joe Fleischhacker oder ein Brotkönig lernt backen (Joe Fleischhacker, or A Bread King Learns to Bake), called in English The King's Bread. A four-page synopsis is registered with the Screen Writers Guild; there are also a fifteen-page English version (presumably written down by Reyher) and seven pages of notes by Brecht in German. The plot, which Brecht claims to have developed in a couple of hours’ conversation with Reyher after telling the latter of the abandoned Joe Fleischhacker play, begins with the same poor farmer family penniless in Chicago; but this time the wife bakes a loaf of bread for the bread king Fleischhacker, who controls all the bakeries in Chicago. In a reversal of the St. Joan scene, she is fooled into giving the bread to someone else. But later Fleischhacker tastes it, loves it, and secretly sets her up in business so he can buy her bread. (He eats the bread in her back room with her, incognito, and complains about the rich Fleischhacker.) When he goes on vacation, the family adulterates the bread to be able to stay in business without his support; and when he returns, he is furious to find they have become competitors. He smashes them; but when his own chemists cannot duplicate her recipe for him, he sets the wife up

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in business again and returns to eating her bread in the back room.\textsuperscript{8}

The whimsical story seems not to have the bitterness and cruelty of any of the earlier works it is based on: \textit{Joe Fleischhacker}, \textit{The Bread Store}, and \textit{St. Joan}. Nevertheless it did not sell. And it is hardly a solution to the old problems Brecht had with the Fleischhacker material in 1926, since it does not deal with the commodity market. Its theme of temporary class reconciliation, based on the greater skill of the worker but the power of the capitalist, sounds almost like an echo of \textit{Mr. Puntilla and His Servant Matti}, which Brecht had finished a year earlier. But it is certainly interesting that this material still haunted Brecht fifteen years after he gave it up to read Marx.

Two other film scenarios that Brecht wrote in the United States betray his preoccupation with the Fleischhacker theme then: \textit{All Our Yesterdays},\textsuperscript{9} also written in English with Reyher, is a modernization of \textit{Macbeth} with a butcher named John Machacek as protagonist. It has the subtitle \textit{Lady Macbeth of the Yards}. In Brecht's English Machacek is not a "butcher" but a "steercutter"—clearly derived from "Fleischhacker." And \textit{The Hamlet of the Wheat Exchange}\textsuperscript{10} is the beginning of a retelling of the story of Jay Fleischhacker as a "tragedy of hesitation" like \textit{Hamlet}. Most of the few pages of this fragment explain the economics of cornering the Chicago wheat market, emphasizing the "Homeric proportions" of the struggles there.

There is yet another, longer film scenario that betrays Brecht's continuing fascination with the economics of wheat while in America. Written in English (probably not only by Brecht, though the English is rather quaint), \textit{The Goddess of Victory}\textsuperscript{11} claims that a close study of the story of Joseph (Genesis 37 ff.) shows it is mainly about the negotiations between Israeli and Egyptian wheat dealers, and that Joseph is able to force higher moral standards by being a better businessman. This lesson is then transplanted to negotiations between American and Italian wheat dealers at the end of World War II, with a clever Italian named Giuseppe escaping a trial for collaboration by trading Italian art to the Americans for wheat to feed hungry Italy. (His American captor is an art lover and partner in a New York wheat firm, "Phare and Potty"—Pharaoh and Potiphar.) Apparently, Brecht had wheat so much on his mind that he could interpret almost anything in its light.
But what happened to Fleischhacker in 1929 was that Brecht wrote St. Joan of the Stockyards instead. The original version of St. Joan was in fact much closer than the published version to Fleischhacker and The Pit: it was set at about 1900, and had Mauler as an old-style capitalist who really controlled the city of Chicago. He was the master of his own fate, and he, not the “letters from New York,” was the ultimate cause of much in the play.

There is no indication of the exact time at which Brecht started writing St. Joan; it would be meaningless anyway since it is an adaptation of so much of his early work. The program notes to the Berliner Ensemble production of 1968 imply that he wrote the first version before the stock market crash in October 1929, and then changed the setting to a contemporary one when the crash occurred. It is also possible that he began the early version after the crisis on Wall Street and changed it when the height of the crisis hit Berlin in 1931. (In Gesammelte Werke the dates Brecht worked on the play are given as 1929–31 [GW 2:4*].)

Commitment

However, it is not necessary to assume that Brecht waited for either of those dates. Economic and political chaos and polarization of right and left were occurring so fast in Germany at the end of the twenties that he was in the process of committing himself to active participation before the shock of the crisis. After the Tenth Party Congress in the Soviet Union in 1925, which presented Lenin’s plans for a cultural offensive for the masses, and especially after the Eleventh Party Congress in 1927, many writers were attracted to the idea of art for the workers, and Brecht too wrote a few poems for the Communist satirical journal Der Knüppel (The Nightstick) starting in 1926. But otherwise he seems to have held rather aloof from active engagement in struggle while he was studying capitalism. We must remember that reading Marx on economics is not at all the same thing as endorsing the Communist Party, let alone working with it. We must also remember, as Klaus-Detlef Müller points out, that

in the twenties there were extraordinarily divergent tendencies in the interpretation of Marx, and that the communism to which Brecht would have turned just did not exist.

es in den zwanziger Jahren außerordentlich divergierende Tendenzen
Brecht started out learning his communism from Fritz Sternberg, who was a left liberal, then from Karl Korsch, with whom he also later disagreed; he had frequent differences about details—almost always matters of cultural policy—with the KPD, the Soviet Union, and later the SED, but that does not mean that he ever failed essentially to support the Party. It is true that he never joined it; that could well have been because he was not willing to be as exemplary and to do as much bureaucratic work as Party membership entails. Käthe Rüliske reports that in conversation he used to call himself a "Bolshevik without a party" ("parteiloser Bolschewik").

Since very few of the notes and fragments Brecht left can be dated, and since his commitment to working-class art and socialism, his return to economic themes, and his newly defined attitude toward America are all crystallized not only simultaneously but also interdependently during the years of the depression, it would be foolish and false to try to pin down particular stages in his thinking to particular months. Brecht was so strongly attracted to dialectical thought partly because his own thought was always in the process of becoming.

What we can say is that certain events confirmed and finalized directions in which Brecht's thought was already tentatively moving, so that we can definitely pinpoint *latter* limits after which he could not return to old attitudes. Although he had already begun some literary activity for workers and students, it was not until the depression that Brecht definitively and consciously became a communist—a "Bolschewik".

It is from the second event that his total commitment to the revolution *as an artist* dates. Already in 1927 he had insisted on judging literature for its use value; but that was still a formal criterion, since it did not stipulate who (what class) should use it. After 1929 literature had to be useful *to the revolution*. As we have observed, that usefulness took several forms during the course of Brecht's life, depending on his historical situation: first, exposure of capitalism and instruction in means of class struggle; second, organization of resistance to Nazism; and third (and most subtle and difficult), the attempt to inculcate values of the new socialist person. But 1929 was the point of no return, after which he could not write
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apolitical works. As we have seen, Brecht complained often about living in a historical period that forced him to write only on political matters. Having decided to become a conscious agent of history, he had to help remove the need for struggle in society before he could write poetry that was not distorted by struggle: "Capitalism has forced us into the struggle" ("Der Kapitalismus hat uns zum Kampf gezwungen"). During the many years of deliberately limiting his style and subject matter, Brecht did not dream that in his own lifetime he would live under a socialist regime in Germany, and may well have expected his literary struggle against capitalism to be permanent. Nevertheless, he recognized that poetry did have valuable functions besides negative propaganda. In 1940 he was ready to accept as valid any literature that could enrich the capacity to experience and to communicate—provided, still, that this would be a socializing, not an isolating, effect. That is the germ of the third phase of Brecht's political aesthetics. For after all, the purpose of overthrowing capitalism was to provide the opportunity for people to develop to their furthest potential, in cooperation rather than in competition with each other.

But in the years of the depression, there was no time for the cultivation of primarily aesthetic sensibility. Germany, very dependent on U.S. financial conditions because of all the short-term loans used to rebuild after the war, suffered a depression far worse than that in the United States. Six million workers, half the work force, were unemployed in 1932. And the misery began in the winter of 1928–29. That winter was a terrible one in Germany, with 2.5 million unemployed. The fascists were gaining popularity frighteningly quickly. It was clear that the country was heading for crisis, and it was time to act, not study. It was then that Brecht started writing his Lehrstücke, renouncing the commercial stage.

Sternberg places Brecht's turning to the Party around the spring of 1929, after the May Day demonstration in which Brecht watched the police shoot twenty demonstrators. The importance of that winter and the May Day incident is corroborated by the fact that Brecht began work on The Bread Store, a play specifically about unemployment in Berlin, in May 1929. The main theme of The Bread Store is the devastating effect of the American depression in Germany, but it is clear from a dated notebook that Brecht did some work on it before the stock market crash of October–November 1929.
Significantly, all Brecht's work on the depression except the more abstract "Vanished Glory" is set in winter; the snow of New York in "Places to Sleep," the snow of Chicago in *St. Joan*, and the cold of Berlin in *The Bread Store*, all threaten to kill the homeless, jobless poor; it is during the winter that it becomes most apparent that the capitalist system does not even provide its workers with the means to stay alive. The cold and desperate winters of the depression in Berlin must have impressed Brecht very deeply—as well as reminding him of the strong emphasis on the cold in all those early books he read about Chicago.

People were freezing and starving to death around him. The strongest capitalist country was collapsing. The historical necessity of socialism was demonstrated conclusively. And Brecht ended his semi-withdrawal. This is clear simply from a look at the dates of his dramatic work. From 1926 to 1928 nothing was finished except a revision of *A Man's a Man* and *The Threepenny Opera*, which was written in a few weeks. In 1929 *Mahagonny, Flight over the Ocean*, and the *Baden Learning Play* were finished (though none of them are strenuous works and the last two are very short); but in 1930–31, Brecht finished *The Measure Taken, St. Joan, The Exception and the Rule, The Mother*—all major revolutionary works. But the number of plays, impressive though it is, is less important than their content and their intended audience. Their content was class struggle, and they were directed at the left, the workers, and sometimes students.

In short, the historical necessity for action in 1929 forced Brecht to step into the arena and start fighting. He fought by teaching the oppressed class how to fight. That is very clearly what his two most militant and party-oriented plays, *The Mother* and *The Measure Taken*, are for and about. But it is also what *The Bread Store* and *St. Joan* are about, though the latter plays are more complex. Those are, not coincidentally, four of his best plays. But even *The Exception and the Rule, The Baden Learning Play*, and *The Roundheads and the Peakheads* are about the tactics of fighting off oppression. All these plays deal with wrong tactics; some present right tactics as well.

Brecht's chief attack was against reformism in all its manifestations. Unemployment and necessity for revolution can be topics for a concerned but uninvolved writer; tactics of revolution can only be the topic of an active fighter. If in fact the young
comrade in \textit{The Measure Taken} is in the wrong, then his crime is voluntarism and reformism: although a sincere revolutionary, he learns too late the danger of working only for short-term relief. The coolie in \textit{The Exception and the Rule} does not learn that it is dangerous to treat the class enemy with kindness; but the audience (and the players) learn it.

\textit{"The Bread Store"}

The strongest lessons about reformism are in the two plays about the depression. \textit{The Bread Store}, showing the effects of New York's crisis on the little people of Germany, also shows the wrong ways of fighting back; that is the educational purpose of the play. Brecht wrote of it: “The play was conceived in the grand style and was supposed above all to make visible a certain attitude during the economic crisis of those years” (“Das Stück war in großem Stil gedacht und sollte vor allem eine gewisse Haltung während der Wirtschaftskrise jener Jahre sichtbar machen”).\textsuperscript{21} Schumacher lists the \textit{Haltungen}—attitudes and actions—that the play shows to have been wrong: Widow Queck submits to all demands as to inexorable fate; the unemployed fight for a temporary part-time job instead of for state power; solidarity among the victims of exploitation is too fragile (when Widow Queck and her children are evicted, for instance); religious reformism treats only symptoms and thus helps the owners; all are fighting all; it is a senseless fight on an unorganized basis.\textsuperscript{22} There is no process of learning; no one in the play recognizes the mistakes and draws conclusions from the recognition.

In \textit{St. Joan}, on the other hand, such a learning process is the main plot movement in the play. That prompted Brecht in 1941 to consider the possibility of encouraging an audience to identify with Joan:

\begin{quote}
In a contemporary performance of, say, \textit{St. Joan}, it can be advantageous occasionally to induce empathy with Joan (from today's standpoint), since this figure does go through a process of recognition, so that the empathizing audience can take in the main parts very well from that point of view.
\end{quote}

Bei einer heutigen Aufführung etwa der \textit{Heiligen Johanna der Schlachtöhfe} kann es vorteilhaft sein, mitunter eine Einfühlung in die Johanna herbeizuführen (vom heutigen Standpunkt aus), da diese Figur ja einen Erkenntnisprozeß durchmacht, so daß der einführende
That would apply even more strongly to *The Mother*. But it does not apply at all to *The Bread Store*, where getting the point of the play depends on maintaining a critical attitude toward all the characters. In fact, *The Bread Store* is one of the best examples of the Brechtian anti-Aristotelian technique. In 1939, considering how to improve *Galileo*, Brecht wrote:

> First the Fatzer fragment and the Bread Store fragment would have to be studied. These two fragments are the highest standard technically.

*Fatzer* and *The Bread Store* are technically of the highest standard because of their consistent use of the techniques of epic theater: since the behavior of all characters in those plays is to be criticized, emotional identification is encouraged with none of them. Furthermore, various techniques are employed to present a “situation with the character of a model,” a paradigm rather than a naturalistic slice of life. This is the essence of Brecht’s idea of the difference between naturalism and realism. Naturalism portrays visible phenomena (i.e., *appearances*) without explaining them or suggesting how they might be changed; realism uses techniques of abstraction, stylization, nondramatic intrusion, comment, literary parody, and so on, to reveal *reality*: the laws of society that produce the phenomena.

*The Bread Store* and *St. Joan*, both written during and about the economic crisis, and both showing false ways of dealing with the crisis, are also Brecht’s two best examples of writing a plot based on the laws of economic development. They use not only similar themes and some identical passages but also similar techniques. But *The Bread Store* is more limited in scope than *St. Joan*, which covers an extraordinarily large and complex series of interdependent topics. In a sense, although they were written simultaneously, *The Bread Store* prepares the way thematically for *St. Joan*.

*St. Joan’s* development of *The Bread Store’s* themes is evident in four areas of the plot: the use of the Salvation Army, the formal climaxes in economic battles, the belief of some characters that
economic laws are incomprehensible, and the kinds of actions taken by the workers.

First: in *The Bread Store*, the Salvation Army helps the rich, not the poor—but its ideological role is not as clear as in *St. Joan*.

Second: there is a "bread battle" ("Brotenschlacht") in *The Bread Store*, probably based on the "wheat battle" ("Waizenschlacht") that Brecht had planned for *Fleischhacker* (BBA 678, 9), and there is a "stock market battle" ("Börsenschlacht") in *St. Joan*, based on the dramatic battle in the wheat exchange at the end of *The Pit* (very likely the *Fleischhacker* battle would also have taken place in the wheat exchange). In both *The Bread Store* and *St. Joan*, the battle is portrayed stylistically as the modern version of the battles in classic literature: in *The Bread Store* the Homeric style is parodied to produce a mock epic, reinforcing the point that this particular fight is trivial and not worth dying for; in *St. Joan* the battle is recounted in classic tragic diction by a messenger, as in a Greek tragedy. Like *Fleischhacker*, both these plays are written "in the grand style" ("in großem Stil"); *St. Joan* especially is famous for its parody to the point of blasphemy of the classical traditions. The technique is both further developed and more obvious in *St. Joan* than in *The Bread Store*; the economic function of the battle is also clearer in *St. Joan*.

Third: *St. Joan* provides the answers to the questions about the capitalist system that are raised in *The Bread Store*. In the prologue to *The Bread Store*, the unemployed complain:

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Unfortunately over eating and working
Stand immovably the laws
Unknown.

Leider über Essen und Arbeit
Stehen unverrückbar Gesetze
Unbekannte
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(*GW 7:2913*)

The packers in *St. Joan* use the same words:

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Against crises everyone is helpless!
Immovably over us
Stand the laws of economics, unknown

Gegen Krisen kann keiner was!
Unverrückbar über uns
Stehen die Gesetze der Wirtschaft, unbekannte
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(*GW 2:704*)
1929–1931. World Economic Crisis

and later the small speculators cry:

Alas! Eternally opaque
Are the eternal laws
Of human economics!

Wehe! Ewig undurchsichtig
Sind die ewigen Gesetze
Der menschlichen Wirtschaft!

(GW 2:735)

In both plays those laments continue with imagery of natural catastrophe. But we know that by then Brecht realized economic catastrophes were made by men, and seemed like hurricanes only to those who had been purposely misled. The play *St. Joan of the Stockyards* shows that economic disaster is not a natural disaster; it shows who is responsible and why, and it shows how those who are responsible maintain the myth that crises are natural, unavoidable, and above all incomprehensible. The ideology imposed on the workers is shown in the repetition of an image: in her first sermon Johanna claims to the workers: “Misfortune comes like rain, that no one maketh but that comes anyway” (“Das Unglück kommt wie der Regen, den niemand machet und der doch kommt”) (GW 2:674). After Johanna has started seeking individual responsibility, her boss, Snyder, tries to make a deal with the packers (the ruling class in the play) whereby for the price of their rent the “Black Straw Hats” (“schwarze Strohhüte”) will combat the “Bolshevik” tendencies among the workers:

For word has gotten around that misfortune doesn’t come about like rain but is made by a few people who get an advantage from it. But we Black Straw Hats want to say to them that misfortune comes like the rain, no one knows from where, and that suffering is their lot and a reward beckons them for it.

**THE THREE PACKING BOSSES**

**Why talk of reward?**

**SNYDER**

The reward we’re speaking of is paid after death. . . . We also want to promise them that the rich will be punished, after they are dead to be precise. . . . And all that for only eight hundred dollars a month!

Denn es hat sich herumgesprochen, daß das Unglück nicht entsteht wie der Regen, sondern von etlichen gemacht wird, welche ihren Vorteil davon haben. Wir Schwarzen Strohhüte aber wollen ihnen sagen, daß das Unglück wie der Regen kommt, niemand weiß woher, und daß das Leiden ihnen bestimmt ist und ein Lohn dafür winkt.

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DIE DREI PACKHERREN
Wozu von Lohn reden?

SNYDER
Der Lohn, von dem wir reden, wird nach dem Tode bezahlt. . . . Wir wollen ihnen auch versprechen, daß die Reichen bestraft werden, und zwar wenn sie gestorben sind. . . . Und das alles für nur achthundert Dollar im Monat! (GW 2:720)

That is how ideology is made; that is the function of religion in the service of capitalism; that is why the unemployed in *The Bread Store* and the packers and small speculators in *St. Joan* are fatalistic: they are taught to be.

Finally: knowing where responsibility actually lies, the workers in *St. Joan* are able to carry out concerted acts against the right target, as the unemployed in *The Bread Store* are not—or they would be able to if not for Joan's ignorance, which she too overcomes at the end.

All four areas in which *St. Joan* is the completion of *The Bread Store* (the role of religion, the heroic and classic style, the comprehension of economic laws, and effective action on the basis of comprehension) are aspects of ideology. But *St. Joan* shows that ideology is produced by economic interest. To explain the ideology, then, Brecht believed it was necessary to explain the economic relations. And that is what the play does: it is a dramatization of *Capital*.

"St. Joan of the Stockyards"

Here finally Brecht's years of study take clear dramatic form; here finally he finishes a play incorporating his old interest in the stock market and the results of his reading on political economy. *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, the first major play since *A Man's a Man*, is in every sense the culmination of Brecht's early work. The plays following *St. Joan* take up new themes and new styles; many are directed against fascism, and none are as purely socialist as *St. Joan* and *The Mother* (written in 1931, the year *St. Joan* was finished). Those two plays represent the zenith of Brecht's early creativity; not only because they are the last before exile, and not only because of their literary and ideological excellence, but also because *St. Joan* gathers up all the motifs Brecht had worked on and left in fragmentary form since 1924 and fits them into a coherent whole—while *The Mother* accepts those hard-won insights as given and goes
on to show the next step: how to organize the struggle at which Joan (and the unemployed in The Bread Store) failed.

Concerning the quality of St. Joan, many of the critics who are not obliged to reject it for being “doctrinaire” consider it one of Brecht’s major accomplishments. Theodor Adorno calls it “the central conception of his dialectical theater.”

Frederic Ewen praises it at length, beginning with: “St. Joan of the Stockyards constitutes not only an intrepid tour de force, but it is probably one of Brecht’s most brilliant and successful dramatic efforts.” André Müller describes the play’s success at its premiere in Hamburg in 1959:

Half an hour after the end of the performance the room was still filled with an enthusiastically applauding audience. . . . In recent years there has hardly been a theater event in the Federal Republic that came close to this.

Ernst Bornemann, in his “Epitaph für Bertolt Brecht,” calls it “the noblest and most beautifully balanced play that Brecht ever wrote” (“das nobelste und am schönsten ausgewogene Stück, das Brecht je geschrieben hat”). And although he still regarded it as a fragment, Brecht himself counted St. Joan among his three favorite plays.

There are few plays in the history of drama that are more derivative and eclectic than St. Joan of the Stockyards, yet every line is unmistakably Brecht. He has succeeded in this work in exposing the major stylistic and ideological traditions of modern bourgeois Germany, by measuring them against his new Marxist insights. Rülicke-Weiler describes the effect of the clash between form and content (parody) as a technique of Verfremdung:

The verse forms of Shakespeare, Schiller and Goethe come to contradict the content; the inhumanity of a society is exposed through confrontation with a form that was created to express human content. It becomes evident that the vestments of the classic-humanist ideal do not fit the affairs of monopoly capitalism.

Die Versformen Shakespeares, Schillers und Goethes geraten in Widerspruch zum Inhalt, die Ummenschlichkeit einer Gesellschaft wird enthüllt durch die Konfrontierung mit einer Form, die geschaffen
Besides the classic poets, she could have mentioned the Bible, which permeates the style of the entire play. It was in 1928 that Brecht was asked what book influenced him most, and answered, "You will laugh: the Bible" ("Sie werden lachen: die Bibel") (GW 18:12*).

In 1929 Brecht asked whether a playwright could write about money in iambic forms (GW 15:197); in St. Joan he gives the answer: yes, but only in parody. In parodying the style of the classics, Brecht by no means meant to ridicule them—he had the strongest respect for them, especially Shakespeare—but rather to demonstrate the Marxist principle that the bourgeoisie was a progressive and creative force when it was the revolutionary class, but that its early ideology and art are hypocrisy when used by today's bourgeoisie to restrain progress and creativity (revolution). Faust's ambivalence was honest a century earlier; but when mouthed by Mauler, Brecht's twentieth-century Faustian man, it is duplicity. In the age of individualism, acts of charity were virtuous; in the age of mass struggle, Brecht's Salvation Army objectively serves the enemies of the individuals it feeds. Even martyrdom is perverted: the true martyrs in Brecht's scheme are not canonized by the ruling class; they are the Saccos, Vanzettis, Luxemburgs and Liebknechts, whose deaths anger and instruct the people. Joan's tragedy is that she is unable to pass on what she learned to anyone who should hear it; her sacrifice is futile because its meaning is perverted by her enemies, and that is possible because she always acts as an individual.

In short, St. Joan is a play about how ideology is used to obscure reality. Simultaneously, its effect on the audience is to teach them how to see through the ideology to the reality; as such it is a Lehrstück par excellence. The ideology is: Mauler's "humane nature" ("menschliche Natur") and philanthropy, the Salvation Army's promise of reward and punishment in heaven for those who accept the status quo on earth, Joan's individualism and reformism and her disapproval of violence, and of course the pact between the capitalists and the church. The reality is: Mauler's "letters from New York," the need for revolutionary violence and solidarity, and the workings of the capitalist system.
The last theme is brilliantly demonstrated by the very structure of the play. The audience can see that each one of Mauler's apparent concessions to the poor is actually motivated by advice from the inner workings of the system (Wall Street). Each phase of the action is introduced by a letter predicting and advising on the coming stage of capitalist development. The play is divided into five sections representing five stages: (1) the end of prosperity; (2) overproduction; (3) crisis; (4) stagnation; and finally (5) the tendency toward monopoly as a (temporary) solution. Joan merely provides Mauler with the ideological excuses he needs so he will look as though he is not acting only in his own interest. But his every apparent good and spontaneous act is premeditated on the basis of better knowledge of the system. If there is any doubt on that point, a passage in a draft that Brecht did not publish (probably because he thought it unnecessarily obvious) should clear it up:

SLIFT:
helping people mauler you must be ill
MAULER:
don't say that i have a letter here
from my dear friends in newyork

SLIFT:
leuten helfen mauler du mußt krank sein
MAULER:
sag das nicht ich hab da einen brief
von meinen lieben freunden aus newjork

(BBA 118, 74)

A detailed and excellent description of the economic plot (i.e., the Marxist analysis of the phases of capitalism), and of the ideological superstructure that Mauler imposes to mislead Joan and that Brecht tears away to teach his audience, is contained in an article by Kathe Rülicke.\textsuperscript{31} It would be redundant to repeat her definitive analysis here, except to point out the genius of the play's structure and the audacity of the attempt to dramatize \textit{Capital}.

It is an attempt that necessarily requires simplification, as well as stylization, of reality into what Brecht would call realism (which shows how to change reality) as opposed to naturalism (which portrays reality as inevitable). The simplification and stylization are aided by the use of the American setting. Rülicke-Weiler again:

Dramatic alienation by means of a milieu largely unknown in Germany,
in which details could be treated on a large scale or left out, made it easier for Brecht to bring out the economic processes clearly and to make evident the fact that these processes (which, erupting inexplicably and seemingly overnight, determined the events in Germany as well) follow certain laws.

Die Verfremdung durch ein in Deutschland weitgehend unbekanntes Milieu, in dem Details großzügig behandelt oder weggelassen werden konnten, erleichterte es Brecht, die ökonomischen Vorgänge klar herauszuarbeiten und die Gesetzmäßigkeiten der Vorgänge deutlich zu machen, die—scheinbar über Nacht und unerklärbar hereingebrochen—die Ereignisse auch in Deutschland bestimmt.

That is not so very different from Brecht's early rationale for using America as the setting for *In the Jungle* (see above, p. 15).

The theory of *Verfremdung* by means of setting remained remarkably the same, and continued to do so through Brecht's late works, which are set in Sichuan, the Caucasus, ancient Rome, Renaissance Italy, the Thirty Years' War—only once in contemporary Germany and once (*Ui*) in America. The purpose is to be able to concentrate on the paradigmatic aspects (*Modellcharakter*) of the plot and not be distracted by incidental exceptions and variations with which the audience would be familiar in its own country. (Perhaps *Ui* failed to arouse interest in the United States because Americans expected to see themselves mirrored in a play set in America.)

But although the dramaturgical reason for using America stayed the same, the image of America changed. And yet it did not change: it retained all the same outward characteristics. Only the focus was sharpened, so that a formerly illegible background appeared, creating a qualitatively different picture. The new focus, of course, was the result of Brecht's own clearer vision, sharpened by reading *Capital* as well as the books on America that we have discussed, attending classes and provoking countless discussions on Marxism, experiencing and understanding the depression, and committing himself to active struggle on the side of the working class, socialism, and the Communist Party.

Thus, in *St. Joan* Brecht is still using a background that corresponds to the character types in his play, in order that the audience not think them romantic or exceptional; but it is no longer "freedom" ("Freiheit") and "offensiveness" ("Anstößigkeit") that characterize the types and he would not call them "great human
types" ("große Menschentypen") without some qualification. There are now moral judgments attached to the characters; in fact, they are no longer interesting as individuals but as the embodiment of moral categories and representatives of specific forces in society. The scheme for the setting of *In the Jungle* no longer fits for *St. Joan* because the latter is not a play about the characters, who are just given a fitting background; to return to the analogy, the background is now in such clear focus that it has become the foreground, and the focus on individual figures is less clear. (Thus Western critics find Mauler too simplified, and Schumacher finds the workers too undifferentiated.)

The background that has become foreground is simultaneously the capitalist system and America. More than any of Brecht's other plays, *St. Joan* is a play about America—not just set in America. The setting has none of the mythical qualities and geographical absurdities of *Mahagonny* or *In the Jungle*; it is very concrete and very real, adopted carefully and as accurately as necessary from the many sources Brecht read on the United States, Chicago, and finance. Chicago does still correspond to Berlin, but not as a metaphor or allegory: now Chicago is the cause of Berlin. For not only was the capitalist-democratic Weimar Republic a direct product of American postwar investment and influence, the entire capitalist world suffered an economic crisis as a result of the American stock market crash. The German depression was worse than the American because of the German economy's extreme dependence on American capital.

Thus *The Bread Store*, which demonstrates the effects of the depression, is set in Berlin, but often mentions New York as the origin of the crisis. In that play Falladah Heep of the Salvation Army asks Washington Myers the *Gretchenfrage* (the question Gretchen puts to Faust), how he feels about God, and he answers:

> yes, miss heep, positive, completely positive. but, he naturally has very little influence in new york. it's always said that he has a crowd of rich friends, mr. ford and mr. rockefeller, but unfortunately his friends very often seem to leave him in the lurch.

> ja, fraulein heep, positiv, durchaus positiv. nur, et hat natürlich sehr wenig einfluß in new york. man hört immer daß er eine menge reicher freunde hat, herrn ford und herrn rockefeller, aber seine freunde lassen ihn leider anscheinend sehr häufig aufsitzen. (BBA 1353, 24)
The song "Hosanna Rockefeller," written in 1924 but included among materials to *The Bread Store*, repeats those names as business partners with God. The chorus is:

Hosanna Rockefeller
Hosanna Henry Ford
Hosanna coal steel and oil
Hosanna God's word
Hosanna faith and profit
Hosanna law and murder.

Hosianna Rockefeller
Hosianna Henry Ford
Hosianna Kohle Stahl und Öl
Hosianna Gottes Wort
Hosianna Glaube und Profit
Hosianna Recht und Mord.

(BBA 1353, 78)

Brecht comments on the plot of *The Bread Store*: “Mrs. Q has bad luck because of New York” (“Frau Q hat Pech wegen New York”) and “He [Myers] rebels against New York, the law, and the army” (“Er [Myers] lehnt sich auf gegen New York, das Gesetz, und die Armee”). Finally, Herr Flamm, the richest man the unemployed have ever seen, explains to his tenant the baker that he must pay his rent or be evicted, because Flamm is at the mercy of the small banks, which are in the hands of the great banks, which are in crisis because the state is actually thinking of demanding taxes from industry, which has never happened in the memory of mankind,

because America, to which Europe is in debt up to its neck, is writhing in a horrible crisis, the reasons for which are a complete mystery to the greatest scholars of political economy.

weil Amerika, dem Europa bis an den Hals verschuldet ist, sich in einer entsetzlichen Krise windet, über deren Gründe sich die größten Gelehrten der Nationalökonomie absolut nicht klarwerden können. (GW 7:2923)

Whereas *The Bread Store* leaves everyone wallowing in futile actions or resignation because of ignorance of causes, *St. Joan* exposes those same causes. Since it intends to teach the cause as well as the effect of the crisis, it is set in the country that is itself the cause. Insofar as the mechanisms revealed in the play apply universally to capitalist countries and will be applied by the audience to Germany,
and insofar as Brecht uses the American setting as a vehicle for
simplification, it is, as usual, a means of Verfremdung. But insofar as
the background has become foreground so that statements and
value judgments are made about America itself, and the relation
between America and Germany is one of cause and effect rather than
analogies, the American setting is not a means of Verfremdung but is
necessary and natural. Distance in this play is achieved primarily
through the style (verse, parody, and unnatural diction and syntax)
and the elaborate, “scientific” structure, rather than through the
setting.

If America is then in part the subject of St. Joan, what is Brecht
saying about his subject?

That religion there is hypocritical. That a few men can ruin the
lives of millions. That violence is used to keep those men in power.
That this situation can be changed if it is understood, but that the
ruling class propogates ideologies that prevent understanding. In
short, that the United States is capitalist (and how that capitalism
works). The two concepts are fused: every detail is both a
characterization of America and a characterization of capitalism (at
first competitive capitalism, then monopoly capitalism).

Brecht has come a long way since In the Jungle. There he intuited
that the degradation caused by poverty and the isolation between
people were somehow native to America, the land of plenty, but he
was not certain that that was bad; it was the cost of progress, the new
age required strong men. Now, in St. Joan, he knows why people
fight each other as in a jungle, why they live in poverty in the land of
unlimited opportunity; and he knows that it is bad, that it was in fact
the cost of progress but that American capitalism itself was only a
stage in the progression. America no longer represents the new age;
it is now the dying culture, and the socialist countries are The New
that always fascinated Brecht so much. The classes of people who
seemed to him in Jungle and Fleischhacker to be dying as a sacrifice
to the cruel new age become and remain for Brecht the carriers of life
and progress into the just new age.

As in “Vanished Glory,” the details are the same, but the context
and the evaluation are utterly different.

The details about America even come from many of the same
sources as Brecht’s earlier plays, or they are further developments of
those plays (and fragments) themselves. Virtually every source we
have examined in the course of this study is reflected in *St. Joan*, and virtually every theme from the earlier works that are set in America (particularly the unfinished ones) is incorporated into this rich play. We will look first at the sources, then at Brecht's adaptation of his own work.

In *St. Joan* we have the fruits of the first work we know Brecht read on America, *The Jungle*. When we examined that novel's influence on *In the Jungle*, we could only determine that the general atmosphere of *The Jungle* must have informed Brecht's emphasis on poverty and his treatment of Chicago, prostitution, and coldness, as well as the concept of the city as Darwinian jungle. The influences on *St. Joan* are much more specific, so much so that we must assume Brecht reread the novel before or while working on *St. Joan*. Nowhere but from Sinclair could Brecht have got his information about the human ingredient in leaf lard; and that accident is explained to the widow in both works with the packers' lie that the man has gone off on a trip. We have here a clear example of Brecht's reaction to, and use of, his reading. The description of that accident caused more sensation than any other passage in the very influential novel. (Sinclair: "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach."36) But Brecht, with his command of the technique of dramatic alienation that eludes Sinclair, is able to prevent excessive interest in the gory detail and focus instead on the reaction to which poverty and bribery force the dead worker's widow.

There are other details that Brecht clearly adopted from *The Jungle*. One is the fascinating gravity method of slaughtering hogs, in which the hog's own weight is his undoing. Another is the presence of vast numbers of unemployed, which means that jobs are only available through other workers' misfortune. More general common themes are the evaluation of charity organizations, the strike, the cold, and of course the entire structure of the meat industry.

By now Brecht had also come to agree with Sinclair's conclusion, that socialism is the solution to the horrors of the meat industry. But that conclusion is not very convincing in Sinclair's book, partly because it is an afterthought and partly because the worst horrors described are excesses, which can easily be remedied (and were, partly as a result of Sinclair's book and with the blessing of the government and the larger industries) without altering the structure
of the system at all. On his first reading of *The Jungle*, Brecht was moved by the lot of the poor but uninterested in socialism; but in *St. Joan* he is far more revolutionary and more astute in his analysis than Sinclair. In *St. Joan* the need for a socialist revolution is an integral part of the conception of the whole play. It is not a protest play, i.e., an appeal to those presently in power; Brecht never wrote protest literature. It is a revolutionary play, an appeal to those not in power to take power.

None of the American works Brecht read are revolutionary; Gustavus Myers comes the closest, with his exposé of the immorality of every last link in the system, but his book is only the king of muckraking books: it suggests no alternative and no means of attacking the wrongs he lists, either individually or collectively. George Lorimer, Bouck White, Ida Tarbell, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, all provide fascinating studies of the minds of capitalists and the workings of capitalism, but there are no conclusions even implicit in their studies. Johannes V. Jensen affirms the order of the system over chaos, and Sherwood Anderson mourns what is past more than he envisions a way to a better future. The principal themes of the novels by the last two authors are themes that Brecht no longer takes up in writing *St. Joan*: destructive personal fascination (and homosexuality) and the “Human Migration to the Big Cities.” The absence of the second theme is particularly significant because it was the rubric under which he united all his previous American plays, from *Jungle* to *Mahagonny*. But in *St. Joan* there is never a mention of nostalgia for the plains, the savannahs, the countryside, Alaska, Tahiti—there is no comparison of industrial capitalism with feudalism or the early agrarian-frontier ethic. That concern is finished for Brecht. To repeat: newness is represented no longer by capitalism but by socialism; the important conflict is not between the old values and structures and those of the present, but between those of the present and the forces that are struggling to change them in the future.

Thus, ironically, although almost all the American literature Brecht read was social protest, in the play that reflects the sources most he only used them for their inside information on capitalism. He could as well have used the financial journals—and in fact he did. We know about his studies for *Fleischhacker*, including newspaper clippings, and the interview with the Viennese stockbroker. With the
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materials to *St. Joan* in the Brecht Archive, there is also a floor plan of the Chicago Board of Trade, printed in 1931 (BBA 894, 103–5). The floor areas for the different kinds of grain are indicated, and the accompanying text, underlined by Brecht, explains the techniques of trading, such as hand signals. The scenes of *St. Joan* set in the cattle exchange take account of the buying and selling techniques, at the same time rendering them grotesque with biblical language. In production of course the hand signals can be used, as Brecht undoubtedly intended.37

That plan of the Board of Trade also indicates that even in 1931 Brecht still thought of *St. Joan* as an adaptation of the relations of the wheat exchange to the beef trust; we have assumed that the reasons for the change were a rereading of *The Jungle* and the rich possibilities in the symbol of slaughtering meat (for instance, the Black Straw Hats compare today’s world to a slaughterhouse).

But although the setting in the stockyards is taken from *The Jungle*, the financial dealings are still basically those described by Norris in *The Pit*, assimilated into *St. Joan* by way of *Fleischhacker*. The most significant difference between Curtis Jadwin’s story and Brecht’s version in both *Fleischhacker* and *St. Joan* is that Jadwin loses and that is the end of it; he goes off with his wife a happy man, relieved of the burden of wealth, and the reader forgets the market in this conciliatory happy ending. Brecht allows no such escape, and he does not exonerate his capitalists because they are loving husbands. Both Fleischhacker and Mauler rise up to the top again after apparent bankruptcy, Fleischhacker because war breaks out and his wheat becomes a gold mine (BBA 524, 90), Mauler through the conscious use of monopoly capitalism’s tactics for pulling out of a crisis: mergers and destruction of the excess product, plus cutbacks in production to raise prices, and cutbacks in wages and employment. In both cases the capitalist system is saved by becoming more brutal. In *The Pit* the future course of the system is not indicated at all; in *Fleischhacker* too there is no indication what will happen after the war. But in *St. Joan* Mauler’s solution clearly can only be temporary, because capitalist economics have been shown to be cyclical. The seeds of the next, larger crisis are already apparent in the larger numbers of unemployed and the lower salaries paid to the workers: these two groups are supposed to be the market for the meat that now has a higher price. Brecht is not just
registering moral outrage that the workers suffer most from the solution to a crisis; he is also showing that the solution cannot work permanently.

Although Mauler’s financial dealings are adopted mainly from The Pit, his character has several other sources as well. There are two non-American sources, Faust (Brecht: St. Joan “is supposed to show the current stage of development of the Faustian person ["soll die heutige Entwicklungsstufe des faustischen Menschen zeigen"] [GW 2:4*]) and Shaw’s Underhill in Major Barbara. The Faust theme, parodied especially at the end of the play (“Human, there are two souls living / In your breast!” [Mensch, es wohnen dir zwei Seelen / In der Brust!”]) may have occurred to Brecht when he read Capital. In volume 1, chapter 24, shortly before his famous “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!” Marx uses the Faust theme to describe the capitalist: “Two souls alas do dwell within his breast; / The one is ever parting from the other.” He is referring not to an earthly and a heavenly, or selfish and generous, soul, but to the contradiction between consumption (avarice) and accumulation (abstinence). Major Barbara was mainly a negative influence on the story of Johanna, since Brecht is protesting Shaw’s extremely un-Marxist conclusion that only the rich can help the poor. (I suspect that St. Joan also embodies a similar reaction by Brecht against the class reconciliation in Fritz Lang’s great 1926 film Metropolis: the capitalist, the strike, the saintly woman are all there, but with a very different, naïve message.) Brecht’s attitude toward Shaw fluctuated; at the end of the twenties it was ambivalent. From both internal and external evidence, Shaw’s Saint Joan seems not to have been a model; Schiller’s, on the other hand, was.

But Mauler as capitalist is more directly a conglomerate of the capitalists in all the American books Brecht read. In him we find elements of Dan Drew, the ruthless spectator and swindler, and naïve and hypocritical churchman and philanthropist; of Lorimer’s John Graham, the kindly meat-packing king who gives homespun advice to his son Pierrepont; of Tarbell’s Gary—the “good” capitalist who cooperated with government and originated mergers—and J. P. Morgan, who contributes Pierpont Mauler’s name; of all the great merciless financiers in Myers’s compendium; and of Dreiser's Cowperwood, who is essentially the same type as
Norris's Jadwin. Brecht's first version of *St. Joan* is set at the turn of the century, in the period of old-style tycoons described by most of the American books we know Brecht read. Angered by the pieties expressed by so many of these powerful exploiters, Brecht has Joan learn that goodness of character in the class enemy is irrelevant, that it even helps make him more powerful.

We also see the influence of many of Brecht's readings about Chicago in his use of the cold and snow. We have already noted that Chicago's cold is extraordinarily emphasized in books like *The Jungle*, *The Wheel*, and *The Pit*, and that Brecht reflected that emphasis in *Jungle* and in talk of "cold Chicago" ("das kalte Chikago"), meaning Berlin. In *The Bread Store* and *St. Joan* he learns how to make cold and snow socially relevant, not just part of the American "aroma." Brecht himself noted in 1942:

"Nature" is reflected curiously in my works. . . . In *Drums* and *Jungle* the battlefield is the city. . . . In *St. Joan* [the landscape] is battlefield again (the snowfall is a social phenomenon). *Mother* has no landscape . . . *Courage* renders landscape like *St. Joan*. . . . Human relationships of a direct sort are depicted only in the *Mother*.

This important statement says in effect that all the "landscapes" or settings Brecht has used have been creators of alienation; their role has been to show that capitalist society prevents meaningful relations between men. He probably realized that with hindsight when looking at the earliest plays, but in *St. Joan* (and *The Bread Store*) it is deliberate. There even the weather becomes a social phenomenon. Nature no longer has the symbolic, *deus ex machina* character it had in *Mahagonny*; rather it is a day-to-day danger the workers have to cope with. And responsibility for the weather (i.e., for the suffering it causes) lies with the rich.

Herr Flamm, the richest man in *The Bread Store*, enjoys the winter crispness that is killing the homeless and unemployed:

At last, a real, lovely winter again! With snow and ice! You actually
never feel fresher than in winter, at noon you bring a real appetite home with you.

Endlich wieder einmal ein richtiger, schöner Winter! Mit Schnee und Eis! Man fühlt sich eigentlich nie frischer als im Winter, man bringt mittags einen richtigen Hunger mit nach Hause. (GW 7:2922)

If they could choose whether to be in a heated house or in the fresh air, winter would be something completely different to the unemployed. The winter as they know it is created by the capitalists.

In a discussion of the poem “Places to Sleep,” Erck and Gräf explore the snow metaphor and point out that for Brecht the cold of winter is synonymous with the depression:

What determines whether the influence of natural forces on the life of working people is harmful or useful is the social situation. That is why the winter snow is identified with the elementary force of the crisis.

Bestimmend für den schädlichen oder nützlichen Einfluß der Naturgewalten auf das Leben der Werktätigen sind die gesellschaftlichen Zustände. Deshalb wird der Schnee des Winters mit der elementaren Gewalt der Krise identifiziert.42

They note that snow is mentioned twenty times in St. Joan, and that in this as well as other works by Brecht snow has a meaning completely different from its traditional poetic associations. The key to the significance of snow for Brecht, they say, is in an autobiographical poem from 1935 called “The Playwright’s Song”:

I see snowfalls appear there
I see earthquakes coming forward there
I see mountains standing there in the way
And I see rivers stepping over their banks.
But the snowfalls have hats on
The earthquakes have money in their breast pocket
The mountains have climbed out of vehicles
And the bursting rivers command over police.
This I expose.

Ich sehe da auftreten Schneefälle
Ich sehe da nach vorn kommen Erdbeben
Ich sehe da Berge stehen mitten im Wege
Und Flüsse sehe ich über die Ufer treten.
Aber die Schneefälle haben Hüte auf
Die Erdbeben haben Geld in der Brusttasche
Die Berge sind aus Fahrzeugen gestiegen
This poem explains the development of Brecht’s treatment of natural catastrophe; first it was a symbol of divine punishment, but the depression made him see it as individual responsibility. The snowstorms wearing hats are his own metaphor for what he has learned. (Compare, however, the poem on p. 219; snowstorms are not only cold, we know that.)

What Brecht has learned is also what Joan learns: that whoever says “Misfortune comes like the rain, that no one maketh but that comes anyway” (“Das Unglück kommt wie der Regen, den niemand machet und der doch kommt”) is lying; that there are persons who deliberately inflict misfortune; that it is not just “fate.” Brecht emphasizes that this is the most elementary lesson the oppressed must learn, so that they know they can change their situation by fighting their enemies. The necessity of naming the enemy is a lesson he repeated often, starting from the time of *St. Joan*. The song “In Praise of the Revolutionary,” from *The Mother*, is an example: “And where oppression rules and the talk is of fate / He will name names” (“Und wo Unterdrückung herrscht und von Schicksal die Rede ist / Wird er die Namen nennen”) (*GW* 2:859).

In *Refugee Conversations* (1940–41) Ziffel observes how the workers are misled by reading the social-democratic papers:

*Sie hören immerfort, daß sie vom Kapital beherrscht werden, so übersehn sie die Kapitalisten. Sie hören, die Zustände sind schlecht, das lenkt von den schlechten Menschen ab. (GW 14:1502)*

And by a picture of a Berlin woman standing next to her bombed-out house, Brecht writes in the *War Primer* (published 1955):

*Look no longer, woman: you'll not find them now!  
But providence, woman, shouldn’t get the blame!  
The dark powers, woman, that oppress you there  
They have a face and address and a name.*

*SUCH NIEHT MEHR, FRAU: DU WIRST SIE NICHT MEHR FINDEN!  
DOCH AUCH DAS SCHICKSAL, FRAU, BESCHULDIGE NICHT!*
Die dunklen Mächte, Frau, die dich da schinden  
Sie haben Name, Anschrift und Gesicht.  

*(GW 10:1038)*

In *St. Joan* this theme takes the particular form of criticizing capitalism’s use of religion to distract from the guilty individuals and guilty class. Because of its focus on the poor, the Salvation Army is an excellent vehicle for that criticism, which is probably why it so fascinated Brecht. The Salvation Army makes a brief appearance in *The Bread Store*, too, where it plays the same role as in *St. Joan*: it aids the rich and confuses the poor. In notes to *The Bread Store* Brecht complains about the uselessness of the Salvation Army’s idealism (only in *St. Joan* does he have the “Army” *consciously* collaborate with the capitalists): “Salvation Army: its function: it drags everyone into the swamp with its idealism” (“Heilsarmee: ihre funktion: sie bringt alle in den sumpf mit ihrem idealismus”) (BBA 1353, 21). Another note on the same subject shows that the story of Joan was probably originally conceived for *The Bread Store*:

**Act 1**

Show the uselessness of religion. Not attack on the Salvation Army! Salvation Army has an interest only in itself, its own advancement, it is not interested in people. Wants donors, big earners, not unemployed. Girl is thrown out because she cares too much about people.

1. Akt


Mädchen fliegt raus, weil es sich zu sehr um Leute kümmert.  

*(BBA 1353, 2)*

Also in notes to *The Bread Store*, Brecht compares schematically the characteristics of the Salvation Army and the Communist party. This list demonstrating the Salvation Army’s reformism is especially applicable to *St. Joan*, where the Communists are actually present on stage to show the alternative to reformism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the c p</th>
<th>the salvation army</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at first helps no one</td>
<td>helps the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leads the individual</td>
<td>separates him from the mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the mass</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

259
BRECHT'S AMERICA

considers force a resource  
thinking materially  
succeeds because of the  
bad situation  
has an interest

combats force  
thinking ideally  
in spite of the bad s.

is for id. reasons uninterested  
in changing the s.

die kp  
hilft zunächst niemand  
führt den einzelnen zur  
masse  
hat als hilfsmittel  
die gewalt  
materiell denkend  
hat erfolg durch die  
schlechte lage  
ist interessiert

die heilsarmee  
hilft dem einzelnen  
trennt ihn von der  
masse  
bekämpft die gewalt  
ideell denkend  
trotz der  
schlechten l.  
ist aus id. gründen an der  
änderung der  
l. uninteressiert

(BBA 1353, 87)

The first two points are also a major concern of the Lehrstücke, especially The Measure Taken.

The reasons why capitalism needs the ideological figleaf provided by the Salvation Army, and the exact techniques used, are clear only in St. Joan. But both St. Joan and The Bread Store represent a strong qualitative difference from Happy End, although Happy End is the only source Brecht names for St. Joan in his introductory note (GW 2:4*). That note indicates only that part of the story of Hallelujah-Lilian and the Salvation Army has been adopted; the context and ideology of Brecht’s play are completely different from Hauptmann’s. When we discussed Happy End, we quoted Bernhard Reich’s advice to Brecht on how to make the Salvation Army theme more relevant: by allowing the “Army” to convert capitalists instead of petty gangsters. Brecht took this advice by wedding Happy End and Joe Fleischhacker, two very different plays.

St. Joan is, of course, a great deal more than the marriage of those two plays, especially stylistically, but they provide the primary themes and two of the three interwoven plots: the plot concerning Joan and her relations with the Salvation Army, and the plot concerning Mauler and his machinations on the commodity exchange. The third plot, which is partly new and partly a develop-
ment of themes from *The Bread Store*, concerns the actions of the workers. They present the real opposition to Mauler, which Joan only thinks she presents, and they replace the equally non-antagonistic Mitchel family in *Fleischhacker*. Like the comparison of Joan with Hallelujah-Lilian, a comparison of the workers in *St. Joan* with the Mitchel family shows how far Brecht had come. The Mitchels are basically like the Gargas in *Jungle*: poor, ambitious, and full of dreams of individual escape, they are trapped by the American urban system and by their very dreams; and they simply go down, without fighting back, except for the sons—George Garga and Calvin Mitchel—who retain the illusion that they have somehow escaped. The overwhelming mood of *In the Jungle* is isolation, and that carries over into *Fleischhacker*. The Mitchel family succumbs because of false consciousness—it does not realize that it belongs to the victims rather than the beneficiaries of capitalism (or Chicago)—and because it is completely isolated, believing it can escape poverty alone, through sheer force of individual, American will.

Something of that isolation or individualism remains in Joan. But the workers in *St. Joan* understand—up to a point—that their strength lies in acting together; they are hardly portrayed as individuals. They are, dramatically, real antagonists to Mauler, not just victims.

The story of a speculator who corners the commodity market, then fails, from *Joe Fleischhacker*; the story of a Salvation Army girl who is expelled for taking the job too seriously, from *Happy End*; and the story of an attempted general strike, from Brecht's new experience and conviction—these are the three concurrent plots of the play and their sources. But *St. Joan* also incorporates themes from Brecht's other earlier works. It is the only play he was able to finish on all the economic themes that interested him from 1924, and it represents both his mastery of the theory of capitalism and, apparently, his liberation from the need to write about it. But concerns of the less directly economic plays are also incorporated into *St. Joan*. The possibility of "rebuilding" people is shown by the bribery of Frau Luckerniddle, wife of the man who fell in the vat of lard, as well as in *A Man's a Man*. The problem of reformism, from the *Lehrstücke* and many other works of this period (such as "Places to Sleep"), is a central theme of *St. Joan*. *St. Joan* and *The Mother*
are certainly also didactic plays, but Brecht does not call them *Lehrstücke* because their form is completely different, and they are meant to teach the audience, not only the actors.

The conscious adoption of *Lehrstück* themes in *St. Joan* is indicated by the use of some lines in both it and *The Exception and the Rule* (1929–30), such as, "Something like that won't raise itself any higher than the edge of a bowl" ("So was hebt sich nicht höher als bis zu einer Schüssel Rand") and the prologue to the latter play, which uses words of the Black Straw Hats' song:

In such an age of bloody confusion  
Organized disorder, well planned arbitrariness  
Dehumanized humanity.

In solcher Zeit blutiger Verwirrung  
Verordneter Unordnung, planmäßiger Willkür  
Entmenschchter Menschheit.⁴⁴

Also treated in the *Lehrstücke*, and closely related to the problem of reformism, is the problem of individualism. For Joan and for Brecht, that problem arises because they both want to take on the cause of the working class without having been brought up with its oppression or, therefore, its solidarity. With Joan, Brecht shows how middle-class reformers tend to get involved in doubts—most often about the question of violence—and follow the dictates of their (irrational) conscience at precisely the crucial moment when they are being depended upon. But that conscience itself has been formed by their middle-class upbringing. If they really want to work with the working class, they must learn to have more trust in collective decisions than in individual ones. That is what Joan's failure to deliver the letter is about: first, she is afraid there is something about violence in it; second, since she does not have the same background as the workers and does not know what it is like to have nothing to lose, she cannot stand the cold.

These are likely the hesitations that Brecht too had to overcome and against which he struggled. Since *St. Joan of the Stockyards* is a revolutionary play, it is more involved with the author's view of his own life than social criticism, or protest literature, which merely records the faults of society without demanding a course of action from the readers, audience, or author himself. It is the play that represents Brecht's final break with the familiar bourgeois world.
That break begins for Joan when she cannot understand why the unemployed workers leave her sermon for a possible job. She tells the Black Straw Hats, “But then I want to know who is to blame for all this” (“Dann will ich aber wissen, wer an all dem schuld ist”). They try to dissuade her, but she is determined to investigate although it jeopardizes her job, and she declares, “I want to know it” (“Ich will's wissen”) (GW 2:679). The break begins for Brecht when he cannot understand how the wheat exchange works. He sends a letter to Elisabeth Hauptmann announcing that he is reading Capital (even though his need to know will jeopardize his writing for three years), and declaring, “I've got to know that now exactly” (“Ich muß das jetzt genau wissen”). The break is completed for Joan in her final speech of the play, and symbolically for Brecht in the writing of that speech.

That Brecht did successfully learn to feel at home in the working class is clear from the complete identification with the workers in The Mother and subsequent plays. It is partly because he tailored his language to workers that his style achieved its profound simplicity.

Future themes are also prefigured in St. Joan. The most important one is the concept of the impossibility of doing good instinctively in an evil society, which finds expression not only in the Salvation Army but also in the dramatic device of the split character. Mauler’s two Faustian souls become the two Annas in The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie and Shen Te and Shui Ta in The Good Person of Sichuan, as well as Puntila and other morally if not physically split characters.

St. Joan is not only the culmination of Brecht's early work but also the kernel of much of his future development. In particular, it expresses the political position that he retained firmly through the rest of his life: he deepened his emphasis on humanism later, but he never wavered in his commitment to communism.

We can see from Brecht's poems that the commitment became all-pervasive. By 1931 the majority were political, a change from his statement of 1926 that his poetry had “a more private character.”

His theoretical writings on drama from the thirties are also full of political concepts; or, more correctly, Brecht now fit his dramaturgy into a political and economic framework. This is the time when he started speaking of “dialectical” drama instead of “epic” drama. The
important fragment "Dialectical Dramatics," written in 1931, is only one example of the totality of Brecht's Marxism. It is subtitled "Basic Idea: Application of the Dialectic Leads to Revolutionary Marxism" ("Grundgedanke: Anwendung der Dialektik führt zu revolutionärem Marxismus") (GW 15:211); and in speaking of the theater, it uses Marxist concepts like "commodity," "means of production," "the viewer as mass," "class character" ("Ware," "Produktionsmittel," "der Zuschauer als Masse," "Klassencharakter") and, of course, the broader categories of dialectics and economics. In attempting to explain the social role of theater in this essay, Brecht gets so involved in Marxist terminology that he has to explain parenthetically, "an understanding of revolutionary economics is indispensable here" ("ein Verständnis der revolutionären Ökonomie ist hier unerlässlich") (GW 15:223).

But the piece written in 1931 is not a brief outburst. Precisely the same terminology fills Brecht's writings on the theater from his last years; his emphasis shifts only from unmasking and destroying capitalism to building socialism.