BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

BERTOLT BRECHT AND HIS EPIC THEATRE

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German drama, once one of the leading contributors to the world of theatre, has produced very little since the end of World War II. Probably the greatest and the most influential dramatist of the wartime period is Bertolt Brecht. His plays are produced throughout the world. His style of writing and philosophy of theatre have helped greatly to set the pattern of the development of drama. Thanks to Brecht, theatre has become more than a form of entertainment. It is now gaining in importance as an educational and reformative media. Most dramatists now write to educate and inform their audience and have borrowed to some extent the style, and almost completely the philosophy of Bertolt Brecht. Yet he is one of the most difficult playwrights about which to write. His death was so recent (1956) that much of his writing is still being collected. Only portions of his works have been translated for non-German readers. Moreover, Brecht himself caused difficulties for his researchers by constantly revising his poetry and plays. He rewrote scenes and passages so often that it is confusing to discover which revision he actually wanted to communicate. To make matters worse, while Brecht was alive he revealed very little information as to what he
really felt. In discussing Brecht, Martin Esslin stated that often people would converse with Brecht and walk away, not really knowing what the man felt, so repeatedly did he jump from side to side of an issue. Yet scholars still strive to seek more knowledge about Bertolt Brecht. His plays continue to withstand the years of change since his death, and his philosophy of drama has come to life in theatres throughout the world, not only in his own works, but in the plays of other contemporary writers of today.

Born in 1898 in Augsburg, Germany, Bertolt Brecht's homeland was near the Black Forest region, where his father served as director of a paper mill. His mother was the daughter of a civil servant from the Black Forest. People respected both his parents greatly, and his family prospered financially. "Their was a mixed Catholic-Protestant marriage, and young Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht was christened in the Protestant faith of his mother."

He shortened his name later in life and adopted the spelling of Bertolt. He thought that the shorter spelling appeared harsher and more suited to the image he wanted to portray. He constantly rebelled against his earlier bourgeois background.

Brecht attended the Augsburg Realgymnasium for nine years. While attending school he published various articles and poems

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under the pen name of "Berthold Eugen" and got into trouble with teachers because of his pacifist views. In 1916 he left school and moved to Munich, where he began studying medicine and science at the university. During World War I he became a medical orderly in a military hospital. This experience influenced his later literary career greatly. His memory of the many atrocities of war vividly affected his sensitive personality, and found expression in much of his pacifist poetry.²

After the war ended Brecht returned to Munich to complete his studies. While in Munich he became involved in the literary world of the city. He began to frequent small bars and sing his poetical lyrics to the accompaniment of his guitar. Another development arose at this time which advanced his career in the drama:

He had begun writing dramatic criticism for the Augsburg Tageszeitung in 1918, and for the left-wing Augsburg Volkswille in 1919. With his mother's death in 1920, his ties with Augsburg—certainly with his family—were practically severed. He removed to Munich, where he settled in the Akademiestrasse 15.³

He continued to write poetry and plays throughout these years and received the Kleist Prize in 1922 as the best young dramatic talent.

In 1924 Brecht left Munich to go to Berlin where he became the Dramaturg of the Deutsches Theatre:


³Ibid., p. 64.
Brecht had finally entered the world of the stage, in the capacity in which most young dramatists in the German-speaking theatre begin to make their living: as a 'Dramaturg'. This post, non-existent in the Anglo-Saxon theatre, combines the position of a resident playwright and play-adapter with those of a reader, literary advisor of the management, editor of the program brochure, and public relations officer.¹

By this time Brecht had completed several plays. Baal was finished in 1919 and had its first appearance in 1923. After coming to Berlin he released his next great play, Mann ist Mann, which appeared in 1926. One of his best known plays, Die Dreigroschenoper, opened in August of 1928. "In his immediate personal life an important change had taken place. On November 21, 1927, Marianne Zoff and Brecht were divorced. The following year he married Helene Weigel, whom he had met when she appeared in one of Bronnen's plays sometime before."⁵

At this time in Berlin, Hitler was gaining more and more power. Brecht was not popular with Hitler because of the extreme pacifism he expressed in his writings. It became evident that Brecht would have to leave Berlin in the event of Hitler gaining complete control. Yet Brecht continued to do all he could to work against Hitler and the Nazi power:

In the spring of 1933 a group of prominent anti-Nazi writers held a kind of council of war at Sanary-sur-Mer to discuss their plight. There were Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Feuchtwanger, Arnold Zweig, Thomas Mann's son Klaus, Ernst Toller, and Brecht. It was the first of

⁵Ewen, Bertolt Brecht; His Life, His Art, and His Times, p. 159.
innumerable similar gatherings, all devoted to the earnest and searching examination of the problem of what writers could do to help bring about the downfall of Hitler. To keep their self-respect and their sanity they had to believe that their efforts mattered a great deal. In fact, they mattered little. 6

However it soon became necessary for Brecht and his family to leave Germany. "On the day after the Reichstag fire Brecht fled to Vienna, accompanied by his wife and his little son, Stefan."7 His daughter was left behind. But when the Nazis came close to discovering her, she was smuggled out of the country to rejoin her family.

Brecht's next move was to Denmark and from there to Sweden. In Denmark he began work on Leben des Galilei. It was finished in a few weeks. The next summer (1939) he moved to Sweden. While there he began work on Der Gute Mensch von Setzuan, but did not finish the play until he and his family were settled in Finland in 1940. It was easier there to get an American visa, and Brecht soon set about obtaining visas for himself and his family. Brecht received immigration visas on May 3, 1941.8 Brecht arrived in September 1941 in San Pedro, California where he joined a group of Central European writers who were also sitting out the war in exile. But like most other writers in exile, Brecht experienced difficulties in finding a public for his writings. While in America he tried

6Esslin, Brecht: The Man and His Work, pp. 64-65.
7Ibid., p. 64.
8Ibid., p. 72.
to create an English version of Galileo, with little success. He found minimum happiness in America. The country which had inspired much of his earlier writings became a land with almost no promise of creative satisfaction. Even the natural surroundings in California failed to motivate him. "...Brecht, whose earlier poetry was full of ecstatic praise of the beauties of nature, had come to fear them as a temptation that might lure him away from his duties as a social critic." 

The war in Europe finally ended. But Brecht did not immediately return to Europe. He was not optimistic about the situation in post-war Germany and decided to wait for it to improve. Then the situation in America began to change:

The particular committee before which Brecht was cited was established in 1938, under Representative Martin Dies of Texas. Its example was to be followed by other committees, lesser and greater. ... Subsiding momentarily during the great coalition of World War II, they assumed more formidable and terrifying forms with the emergence of the 'Cold War' and the evocation of the 'Iron Curtain', to reach their apogees in the witch-hunts under the direction of Senator Joseph J. McCarthy in the early 1950's.

The immediate objective of these hearings of 1947 was 'subversion' in Hollywood.

In this instance some of the most distinguished and talented members of the film colony were called, questioned, exposed to the light of a publicity which could not but react unfavorably on their careers should they fail to 'cooperate'.

Among those caught in the dragnet was Bertolt Brecht, who appeared before the Committee on October 30. 

Brecht was to be questioned concerning his membership in the

9Ibid., p. 75.

10Ewen, Bertolt Brecht; His Life, His Art, and His Times, pp. 416-417.
Communist party, the doctrine of which he had accepted years before. He was also to answer to charges of communist ideas present in some of his writings. On Thursday, October 30, 1947, he appeared before the Committee on Un-American Activities under the chairmanship of Representative J. Parnell Thomas.

Yet none of the committee members had any knowledge of German. Their information was drawn completely from translations of Brecht's work. When Brecht discovered this during the course of the hearing, he used his satirical sense of humor and quick wit to convince the committee that, not only were the translations misleading, but that he had no political leanings to the communist party. The committee dismissed Brecht from the hearings and thanked him for being such a cooperative witness. Shortly afterwards Brecht returned to Europe where he settled first in Zurich:

And so, having traveled right around the world in the course of his exile, Brecht was back in Europe.... At first he went to Switzerland. Zurich was undoubtedly the most favorable vantage point for such a reconnaissance—on the very borders of Germany with easy access not only to West Germany but also to the Soviet zone and within easy reach of Austria. Moreover, it had sufficient German-speaking theatres to give Brecht a chance to work, at least for a while. 11

Zurich was, at this time, also one of the leading cultural areas of Europe. Here Brecht returned shortly to singing his lyrics in small bars and cafes. However, his thoughts turned

11 Esslin, Brecht: The Man and His Work, p. 84.
once again to Germany. He soon got the chance to work in the Soviet Zone of Berlin, and he traveled there in October 1948:

Brecht had been invited to East Berlin to produce Mother Courage at the Deutsches Theater, where Reinhardt had once watched the rehearsals of Drums in the Night. Erich Engel, who had produced In the Jungle in Berlin back in 1924, was to be his coproducer. Helene Weigel was to play Mother Courage. After long rehearsals the play opened on January 11, 1949. It was a brilliant performance and one of Brecht's greatest triumphs as director and author. This, if not formally, was in fact the birth of the Berliner Ensemble. 12

Brecht remained in East Berlin. But he did not lose sight of the advantages remaining to him in the Western world. The East Berlin authorities allowed him to retain his Swiss bank account. He sold his publishing rights to a West German publishing company. He also applied for Austrian citizenship, aided by the fact that his wife was an Austrian citizen. His application was granted in April of 1950. His Austrian passport gave Brecht the opportunity to travel throughout Western Europe. He could thus encourage the production of his plays in other countries, and so he retained his Austrian passport for the rest of his life.

Brecht worked on with the Berliner Ensemble where he had the opportunity to direct and produce his own plays as he wanted them performed. He revised his work continually during this time. Accurate notes and records were kept on each

12 Ibid., p. 89.
rehearsal for his followers, who desired to carry on in his tradition. After five years of work, Brecht fell seriously ill, and from that time on his endeavors were influenced by forebodings of death.

On August 10 Brecht attended a rehearsal at the theatre. He felt very tired afterwards, and his condition gradually deteriorated. During the night from the 13th to the 14th of August it became critical. He died of coronary thrombosis at a quarter-to-midnight on August 14, 1956.\(^\text{13}\)

Though the last twenty years of Brecht's life were filled with problems and uncertainty, they were also some of his most productive years. During this time his plays turned from political propaganda and became, instead, writings which displayed a considerably matured and developed talent. From 1937-38 he wrote Leben des Galilei. He followed this piece with The Trial of Lucullus (1938), Der Gute Mensch von Setzuan (1938-40), and Mutter Courage (1938-39). During this period he also established much of the theory of his renowned "epic theatre", which I will discuss in greater detail later.

"Brecht himself directed Edward II, which was first performed in March 1924. In many ways this was the debut of Brecht's 'epic theatre', a production na"ively sophisticated yet highly stylized.\(^\text{14}\) Thus he began a dramatic movement which continues to influence many writers of the contemporary

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 104.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 17.
stage. Yet this theory is difficult to explain because it involves so many aspects, not only of theatre specifically, but of all the influences contained in Brecht's life.

Brecht was influenced early in his career by working with the dramatist Erwin Piscator. This man utilized heretofore unused methods to communicate his message to the audience. He began to expose his audience to the use of background photographs relating his subject matter to current events, which gave Brecht ideas in further developing this aspect of theatre. "But while Piscator attached little importance to purely literary values, Brecht laid great stress on the poetic aspects of such a drama."15 He always acknowledged his great debt, the evidence of which can be seen in many of his works, to many old theatrical conventions and traditions. He makes use of the chorus of Greek tragedy, the techniques of small town clowns and fairground entertainers, the Austrian and Bavarian folk plays, as well as the Elizabethan, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian theatres.16

Brecht is even more influential in his writings on dramatic theory. "Terms like 'epic theatre', 'non-Aristotelian drama', 'Verfremdungseffekt', and other catch phrases from Brecht's theoretical writings have become more widely known than any of his creative work."17 The problem then, becomes:

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15 Ibid., p. 27.
16 Ibid., p. 127.
17 Ibid., p. 126.
one of trying to define Brecht's theories. This has been
the task of many followers and students of Brecht. For "epic
theatre" is not a single body of doctrine that can be
concisely defined with concrete examples. It is a theory that
changed and developed throughout Brecht's life, and finally
mellowed in accordance with the changes in his styles of
writing and stage production:

Brecht was a rebel. The Brechtian theatre can be
understood only in the light of what he rebelled against:
the theatre as he found it in Germany around 1920 and
as it still remains in many parts of the world to this
day—a theatre in which bombastic productions of the classics
alternate with empty photographic replicas of everyday life,
whether in melodrama or drawing-room comedy; a theatre
that oscillates between emotional uplift and after-dinner
entertainment.\(^\text{18}\)

Brecht found a theatre which dwelt on emotional and naturalistic
dramas. Audiences did not pick up on the themes in drama
of why something happened, or what could have been done to
prevent the situation. They picked up instead on character
types, the emotions the characters felt, and the
relationships between characters. Brecht wanted to take the
drama one step further. He wanted to make his audience think.
He used the alienation, or Verfremdungseffekt, to take the
theatre away from the illusion of eavesdropping on real events
and turn it instead to abstractions. "The whole theory of

\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 127-128.
his 'epic theatre' is based on the rejection of empathy and of the emotional involvement of the audience with the characters on the stage."19 He wanted to put a distance between his play and audience. One way of doing this was by setting his plays in the past. Goethe and Schiller once stated that the difference between dramatic and epic poetry was that epic poetry was always historical.20 Brecht carried this idea to the theatre. He did away with the theatre which sought to entertain. He took away any possible event which would create an emotional response. He removed the audience's identification with the characters. He gave the audience the time and the detachment (Verfremdungseffekt) to sit back and think. In choosing with what he would replace these things:

Brecht's answer is clear: the theatre must do its best to destroy in the bud any illusion of reality, which will continuously, and mischievously, tend to arise.

It must at all times be made apparent to the spectators that they are not witnessing real events happening before their very eyes at this very moment, but that they are sitting in a theatre, listening to an account of things that have happened in the past at a certain time in a certain place. They are to sit back, relax, and reflect on the lessons to be learned from those events of long ago.... Hence the term epic theatre. While the theatre of illusion is trying to re-create a spurious present by pretending that the events of the play are actually taking place at the time of each performance, the 'epic' theatre is strictly historical; it constantly reminds the audience that they are merely getting a report of past events.21

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19 Ibid., p. 22.
20 Ibid., p. 129.
21 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
Brecht creates a theatre of contemplation and detachment. His theatre is one of critical thoughtfulness. It corresponds to Goethe's and Schiller's descriptions of epic poetry, hence the name, epic theatre.

This type of theatre took a period of time to develop, however. Brecht experimented over the years with a variety of forms of drama. He tried plays with a definite Expressionist trend, with loose construction and character-types who spoke in highly poetic language. On the other extreme he worked closely with Erwin Piscator in trying to turn the theatre into a forum for discussion of current affairs. But "He [Brecht], too, was convinced that the theatre must become a tool of social engineering, a laboratory of social change."22

Brecht used the theatre to express his views and opinions. He wanted change to come about as a result of his plays. He wrote about his world, being careful to separate the world of his plays from that of his audience by placing it in the past:

Brecht was more deeply involved in the conflicts of his age than most of his contemporaries. His experiences concentrate and distill its basic issues: the reaction of the generation of the First World War to the collapse of their entire civilization; the dilemmas facing a sensitive and passionate personality in an age of declining faith; the dangers that beset an artist whose indignation about the social evils of his society drives him into the arms of totalitarian forces; the theoretical and practical difficulties encountered by a writer of genius in a rigidly authoritarian society; the choice between lavishly subsidized but severely restricted working conditions in a Communist state and the limitations imposed on the artist by a free, but commercial, society.23

22 Ibid., p. 129.
23 Ibid., pp. XVI-XVII.
Brecht took questions which arose in his world. He removed them to another time and place. Then he exposed his audiences to these situations. Having been properly alienated, they could think about what was on the stage before them.

The plays of Brecht's epic theatre are not logically built, well-made dramas. They have no need to create suspense. Instead of one dynamic climax, the story is told in a number of separate episodes or scenes, each of which is complete in itself. The play's effect is built up through juxtaposition and "montage" of contrasting episodes.

There is a special method of acting for Brechtian theory. No longer does the actor seek to become the character, as in the Stanislavski method. In Brechtian theatre the actor is only impersonating the character. He is narrating the actions of another person at a definite time in the past. This attitude in itself establishes a distance not only between actor and character, but between actor and audience. It is this distance that Brecht strives for:

The writer's task is to assemble his material as objectively as possible and without preconceived notions of the likely outcome, so that the audience can rationally respond like a jury and make up its mind without taking sides. To make this possible, the actor (witness) must restrict himself to the task of demonstration and never lose himself entirely. 24

Thus the viewers see not the characters, but the story in

which the characters are involved. When the audience loses concern for the men and begins to question the situation, Brecht's purpose is achieved. Brecht wanted to banish trance, illusion, and magical effects from the theatre. He sought to replace them with lucidity, rationality, and elegance. 25

Brecht found yet another purpose for his epic theatre:

Brecht claimed that the 'epic' theatre alone could present the complexity of the human condition in an age in which the life of individuals could no longer be understood in isolation from the powerful trend of social, economical, and historical forces affecting the lives of millions. 26

The field of science was making life more and more complex every day. It was causing problems in the areas of morals and ethics. Life was becoming so complex that to understand it, man had to put a distance between himself and problems. He had to adopt an adult and scientific attitude toward life. Brecht viewed epic theatre as the theatre of the scientific age:

Urbanization, as Brecht saw it, is one of the undeniable new features of the modern world; science is the other and even more important one, because it is gradually usurping man's whole mode of thinking, acting, and reacting. The task of the playwright is, therefore, to bring the theatre, which in Brecht's opinion has remained stagnant since 1830, up to par with modern consciousness. 27

Brecht saw the epic theatre as being aimed at awakening the

26 Ibid., p. 133.
27 Hill, Bertolt Brecht, p. 150.
spectator's critical faculty. He believed the theatre would serve as an instrument of social change, or a birthplace for revolutionary enlightenment. The theatre was, to Brecht, the Marxist theatre par excellence.\textsuperscript{28} It was a theatre which was well-fitted for parody, caricature, and denunciation. It was a negative theatre, lacking positive heroes, and crushing and defeating the good characters, presenting the world as Brecht saw it:

In 1934, during the early years of the Nazi scourge, Brecht wrote a pamphlet entitled Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth, concerning the courage that such writing required, the discernment needed to recognize the truth, the art of turning it into a weapon, the judgement and the cleverness to seek out its likeliest propagators, the means of likeliest propagation.\textsuperscript{29}

Brecht used the truth to enable his concept of drama to do what he sought. He did not want to interpret the world as it was. He wanted to change it to what it could be.

Brecht's first play, Baal, evidenced the beginnings of Brecht's ideas. It was not well developed, but began to diverge from the norm of drama of the period. Baal characterizes Brecht's pessimism, his view of the desperation of the world. He is the epitomy of the constant searching and loneliness of mankind:

If, as I believe, a good play amounts finally to a particular vision of life seen as a whole, then this

\textsuperscript{28}Esslin, Brecht: The Man and His Work, p. 149.

play is a vision of life as an inferno, and the occasional faint gleam of beauty only makes the ugliness look more intensely black. Baal will let no one persuade him he has lost all chance of pleasure. But self is something he lost so long ago, its discovery is never on the cards. One might better put it that he never had a self. 30

Baal wanders about, reciting and singing his poetry in small bars, much like Brecht himself. He searches for love and yet destroys it each time he finds it. Rather than the inspired visionary, the poet Baal portrays the materialism and evil of the surrounding world. Baal's journey through life exemplifies Brecht's view of life. Baal is always alone, no matter who he is with. He is dragged farther and farther into the evil of the world. Yet no one can bring him back to a good human being because man is always alone. In the end, Baal's death is as his life. He dies alone, and no one feels his loss. Death is not a change, but rather a continuation of the meaninglessness of life:

Man, here, is alienated from the others and from himself, to the degree that both others and self may be said to non-exist, to be nothing. This idea—better, this sentiment, this lacerating conviction—gives a new poignancy to the old 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. If death, on the one hand, is an ironic ending to pleasure and beauty, it is, on the other, a direct, unironic continuation of the universal nothingness, the omnipresent death-in-life. 31

Baal then, goes beyond the existentialist view of man and


31 Ibid., p. 11.
leaves him with the absolute nothingness of life. Death can provide no release, but offers the eternal degradation and hell found in life. This absolute despair portrayed can probably be attributed to the period of Brecht's life in which this play was written. When begun in 1919, Brecht's impressions of war and destruction were fresh. World War I was barely over, and the atrocities seen led Brecht to his outlook of dismay toward the society of man.

Too, this play exhibits a move towards Brecht's future dramatic theory. It is separated from the audience's everyday world and written in short scenes. But the ideas are not fully developed and can be understood far better in the light of Brecht's later ideas. The style of Baal has not progressed into Brecht's later examples of parables and satirical humor, but remains at a rather base grade of action.

Brecht's development can be seen in Mann ist Mann. He begins here to display well-developed and concrete ideas. Evidence is seen of the quick wit and humor, so established in Brecht's later works. The action is further removed and the Verfremdungseffekt on the audience is heightened. This is Brecht's first experiment with parable plays. It is the first time he expresses the duality of good and evil in his characters, and it is the first time Brecht speaks directly to his audience in his own name.32

32Ewen, Bertolt Brecht; His Life, His Art, and His Times, p. 36.
The themes evident in this play show Brecht's development also. He displays the conflict between strong and weak men. The weak character of Galy Gay develops in the action into a man who denies himself the power-draining emotional outlets. He makes himself stronger in an evil sense to survive and overcome strong characters who possess emotional releases. This duality in man's nature becomes one of Brecht's major observations in later works. The outcome of this inherent struggle in man is a rather ironic reconciliation of man to the very source of his destruction:

The protagonist, Galy Gay, brought by the cruel society he lives in to doubt if he has a real identity, accepts a false identity—an identification with precisely the cruelty that is being exerted upon him, with precisely the power that is overpowering him.33

Brecht leaves us with a somewhat unexpected view of mankind and resolution of life. But Brecht's real efforts to change mankind's state rather than resolve it were not further developed until his later works, when the evolution of science caused yet another gulf between man and his condition.

One of his best examples of epic theatre, a good example of the effects of scientism, and a good study of one of Brecht's characters is his Leben des Galilei. Yet none of his plays is as difficult for an interpreter or translator as

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33Brecht, Baal, A Man's a Man, and The Elephant Calf, p. 109.
to make understandable to American readers. Probably the best way to comprehend and appreciate Galileo is to look at Brecht's probable intentions. Readers must not judge upon Brecht's historical accuracy. They must look at the themes and ideas Brecht strove for. One of the major themes present in the play is the increasing separation of ever more complex science from ordinary man:

Just as the splitting of the atom by Otto Hahn in 1938 sharpened but did not precede Brecht's notion of the moral responsibility of science, so the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima (1945), while he worked on the English translation, was the only visible and terrifying confirmation of that 'serious schism between science and human society' which the playwright had already foreseen.34

Brecht began thinking about the character of Galileo in 1933. He did not write the play, however, until 1938. Once he started it, he completed it within a few weeks. He had checked upon the accuracy of his astronomical and physical descriptions. He made use of Galileo's journals. Beyond that, the play was not to be taken as historical truth, but as a statement of the world of man and its relationship to science.

After coming to America, Brecht began working on an English version with an actor by the name of Charles Laughton. During the writing of this new version, the character of

Galileo changed from a cunning hero who recants to safeguard his scientific discoveries, into a coward who betrays the truth and fails to set a moral standard for future scientists. Much of the change in character was due to the influence on Brecht of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima.

However, Galileo failed to capture American audiences. They were unprepared for the new style of dramatic conventions. They expected the usual drama of suspense and emotional intensity. But Galileo is one of Brecht's best developed pieces of epic theatre. There is no center of gravity to the play. There is no dramatic progression. Galileo is a character who is constantly changing. He is always hesitating and questioning himself. The play is written in the style of epic theatre:

There are recited verses and projections before and, at times, at the end of scenes; there are many passages which seem to be directed to the audience as commentaries and are not needed for the dialogue onstage; there is a whole scene interrupting the action and only serving as an alienating device for enabling the audience to gauge Galileo's standing with the common people; and there is, finally, his unhistorical self-accusation, which establishes 'the planetary connection' of the play's message. In short, the final Leben des Galilei qualifies as an anti-illusionary drama for 'the children of the scientific age'.

This final copy is considered to be the one presented by the Berlin Ensemble shortly before Brecht's death. Therefore, the most common English version, that by Laughton, can no

longer serve for an objective evaluation of the play. It continues to be one of the most important of Brecht's plays, however. Galileo is one of the most convincingly three-dimensional and complex characters of Brecht's creation. In Galileo, we see the heart of Brechtian tragedy. "Man knows that his curiosity is accursed. And yet this demoniacal instinct for truth is so essential to him that he must obey it, even if he may die because of it."36 Yet this search for truth applied also to Brecht's world. Galileo's plight seems much the same as people in Brecht's world seeking to spread the truth despite secret police and the Gestapo. Not only does Galileo represent Brecht's world, but as science continues to hold control over the modern world, Galileo's search for a new morality of the scientist leads to still greater appreciation of the play in today's generation.

Another of Brecht's plays which remains relevant in today's world, and which was developed in the style of Brecht's epic theatre is Der Gute Mensch von Setzuan (The Good Woman of Setzuan). This play was written as a parable, one of the most suitable forms for epic theatre. Brecht began the play in Copenhagen while Hitler was dissolving Czechoslovakia. He continued writing in Sweden as World War II was beginning. He finished in 1941 when he and his family were living in Finland. The world premiere was held in Zurich in 1943.37


37 Hill, Bertolt Brecht, pp. 121-122.
In The Good Woman of Setzuan Brecht deals with the same problem which presents itself in his earlier works. He asks how man can be good and yet live in today's world:

Brecht does not offer a solution in his play, which is supposed to be a parable of life as most of us know it and in which a truly good person cannot survive; but the answer the audience is expected to give to the urgent questions posed in the epilogue is obvious: The world can and must be changed. As a Marxist, Brecht wished to take away the opium from the people, so that they could become strong and help themselves. 38

Brecht believed that simple goodness was the natural state of man. He felt that it was only the mechanics of capitalist society which restricted and perverted this goodness. Brecht suggests, therefore, that man should strive for a society of the future in which simple goodness will be possible. "Galileo's verdict, 'Unhappy is the land that needs a hero', can also be applied to Shen Te: Unhappy is the land that needs goodness as a virtue; that is, in excess." 39 Therefore, Shui Ta represents the paradoxical fact of our society: that to be good, man must also be bad.

The Good Woman of Setzuan is written in three levels. First is the dramatic level. In this we follow the encounters and involvements of Shen Te/Shui Ta (the good woman/the good woman disguised as her evil uncle) with the other people of Setzuan. The second level is the philosophical level, which deals with the relationship existing between the water-seller

38 Ibid., p. 124.
39 Ibid., pp. 124-125.
Wang, and the three gods. The third level is not visible in
the script. It consists of the reactions of the audience.
The playwright often solicits their responses through direct
appeals and questions. The audience serves as the judge in
the final trial scene. They are compelled to form an opinion.
They are left to find a solution in the final epilogue. They
must find one themselves because the playwright does not supply
any.

A multidimensional structure with shifts in
perspectives, breaks in illusionary audience identification,
suspension of time and action, has been created in order
to make the parabolic presentation, which is simplistic
almost by definition, appealing and challenging to the
more intellectual audiences of the modern theater.

Brecht presents a character who is forced to make a
deliberate choice for survival in a capitalistic society.
However, Brecht presents the case of a good person who cannot
really be good in our present world in a universal and poetic
manner. As a result, the play carries a message to almost
any audience, irrespective of the idealogical platform of the
individual spectator.

Just twenty years have passed since Brecht's death. The
soviet state of East Berlin and East Germany still exists.
A few more countries have changed to the soviet political
structure. America continues in her capitalistic state.
A schism between scientific and humanistic society still
remains, as does an ethical and moral problem arising from
science. And it is yet difficult for a good person to

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 126.}\]
survive in today's world. It would seem almost as though Brecht's messages have made little impression on the world he left behind. Yet a look at some of the German-speaking dramatists today such as Frisch, Weiss, and Hochhuth, and the experiments they are making in theatre show that Brecht's theories have, indeed, made their place in the world. The short, narrative scenes and the educational and reforming goals of epic theatre still remain. The theory has grown with the addition of new followers and new developments. It is now an integral part of modern drama and a useful tool in using drama as part of the educational media of today.
SOURCES CONSULTED


