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Bertolt Brecht

Threepenny Novel

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ALTONA, MEN WITHOUT SHADOWS, THE FLIES

Jean-Paul Sartre

Born in Paris in 1905, Jean-Paul Sartre studied philosophy and took up teaching. After service in the Resistance he became a writer and edits *Les Temps Modernes*. His philosophical books – notably *L'Être et le néant* (1943) – have caused him to be regarded as the founder of existentialism, an attitude which is concerned with the absurdity of so many people's lives and the possibilities of human freedom. His novels, such as *The Age of Reason* (available in Penguins), tend to stress the meaningless aspect of modern life.

His plays, on the other hand, deal more with human freedom. *The Flies* (1942) presents Sartre's interpretation of the Greek legend of Orestes, who killed his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, in order to avenge Agamemnon, his father, and set Argos free. *Men Without Shadows* (1946) is a brutal study of the effects of torture on captured members of the Maquis. *Altona* (1959; previously published as *Loser Wins*) comments on the acquisitive aspects of capitalism as seen in a family of rich German industrialists.

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSIC

1515

THREEPENNY NOVEL

BERTOLT BRECHT

Bertolt Brecht was, and still is, one of the most controversial figures in modern European theatre. He was born in Augsburg, the son of a manufacturer, in 1898, and studied natural science and philosophy in Munich and Berlin. His first play *Baal* was written in 1918, and he wrote thirty-nine others before his death. The best known are *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *The Life of Galileo* (1939), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1941), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945). A great many of Brecht's plays were, like Shakespeare's, adaptations, but in his hands they became completely fresh works.

When the Nazis came to power, Brecht lived successively in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the U.S.A. In 1948 he accepted an offer from the East German government to return to Berlin where, with his wife, he founded the famous Berliner Ensemble in 1949. He died in 1956.

BERTOLT BRECHT

THREEPENNY NOVEL

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THE SURVIVOR

THE SURVIVOR

And he took what they gave him, for sore was his need
Then he spoke (for he lacked not wit):
'Why give ye me lodging? Why give ye me bread?
Alas! How must I pay for it?'

(From THE DOWNFALL OF LORD AIGHN,
an old Irish ballad)

A SOLDIER by the name of George Fewkoombey was shot in the leg in the Boer War, so that the lower half of his leg had to be amputated in a hospital in Cape Town. When he came back to London, he received £75, in return for which he signed a paper stating that he had no more claims on the State. The £75 he invested in a small ale-house in Newgate, which, as he could see from the books (small, beer-stained notebooks written in pencil), made a comfortable profit of £2 a week.

When he had moved into the tiny back room and had sold beer with the help of an old woman for a few weeks, he knew that the loss of his leg had not been particularly worth while; the takings had remained considerably under £2, although the soldier was always a model of politeness towards his customers. He learned that there had recently been some building going on in those parts and that the builders had been good customers at the ale-house. But now the building was finished and all the custom was gone. As people said to him, he could easily have seen from the books that business had been brisker on weekdays than on holidays, which is contrary to the expectations of all experienced public-house keepers; but then the man had always been the customer at such places and never the owner. He was able to keep going for just four months. It might have been longer, only he wasted so much time looking for the previous owner. And then he found himself penniless on the streets.

For a time he found shelter with a soldier's wife, to whose children he told stories of the war while she looked after her little shop. Then her husband wrote to her that he was coming home on leave and she told the soldier, with whom in the mean-

time, as does happen in these small houses, she had been sleeping, that he must leave as quickly as possible. He waited a few more days, then had to go. He visited her once or twice after her husband had returned home and was given something to eat. But he sank lower and lower until he finally joined the endless line of wretches whom hunger drives day and night through the streets of the greatest city in the world.

One morning he stood on one of the Thames bridges. For two days he had had nothing proper to eat, for the people in public houses whom he had approached in his uniform had given him drinks but no food. Without the uniform they wouldn't even have given him drinks, and that was why he had put it on.

Now he was again in the ordinary clothes which he had worn as landlord. For he was intending to beg, and he was ashamed. He was not ashamed of having had a bullet in the leg, nor of having bought a public house that didn't pay, but because he was reduced to asking complete strangers for money. In his opinion no one owed him anything.

Begging came hard to him. It is the profession for those who have learned nothing; only it seemed that even this business had to be learned. He spoke to several people one after another, but with a courageous expression on his face, and taking care not to stand in people's way so that they should not feel that they were being pestered. Also, he chose rather long sentences that were only completed when the person was a long way past; neither did he hold out his hand. And so, by the fifth time that he had humiliated himself, scarcely anyone had noticed that he was begging.

But someone had noticed it, for he suddenly heard a hoarse voice behind him say: 'Get out of here!' Because he felt so guilty, he did not even look round. He simply moved on, shoulders drooping. Only after a hundred yards did he dare turn his head, and then he saw two ragged beggars of the lowest sort standing beside one another and looking after him. They followed him, too, as he limped on.

It was not until he had crossed several streets that he saw that they were not following him any more.

On the next day, as he loitered around the neighbourhood of

the docks, now and again astonishing people of the lower classes by his attempts to speak to them, he was suddenly struck in the back. At the same time his attacker pushed something into his pocket. When he turned round he saw no one, but out of his pocket he drew a piece of card, much crumpled and exceedingly dirty. On it was printed the name of a firm: *J. J. Peachum, 7 Old Oak Street*; and underneath was written in smudged pencil: 'If you dont want no boanes broke come to the above address.' This was twice underlined.

Slowly it dawned on Fewkoombey that the attacks were connected with his begging. But he felt no special desire to visit Old Oak Street.

That afternoon, as he stood outside a public house, he was spoken to by a beggar whom he recognized as one of those of the previous day. He was quite a young man and did not look really bad. He grasped Fewkoombey by the sleeve and drew him away.

'You dirty swine,' he began in a friendly voice, 'show me your number!'

'What number?' asked the soldier.

Slouching along beside him, still friendly but never for a moment letting go of him, the young man explained in the language of his kind that this new profession was just as well organized as any other, perhaps even better; and that he, the soldier, was not in a wild, uncivilized corner of the globe but in a great city, the hub of the world. For the carrying on of his new trade he must have a number, a sort of permit which he could obtain – at a price – from a union with headquarters in Old Oak Street, to which union he must belong.

Fewkoombey listened without asking a single question. Then he answered, just as pleasantly – they were passing along a crowded street – that he was glad to hear they had a union, just like the bricklayers and hairdressers, but for his part he preferred to do just as he liked. He had had too many orders in his life rather than too few, as his wooden leg proved.

With that he held out his hand to his companion, who had been listening with the expression of one hearing an exceptionally interesting discourse by a clever speaker with whom, however, he cannot quite agree. The latter laughed and clapped

him on the back like an old friend and departed across the street. Fewkoombey did not like the sound of his laugh.

The next few days he fared even worse than before.

It appeared that in order to receive a fairly regular supply of alms, one had to remain sitting in one particular spot (and there were good spots and bad spots), and he was unable to do that. He was always driven away. He didn't know how the others managed. Somehow they all looked wretcheder than he. Their clothes were genuine rags through which one could see their bones. (Later he learned that in certain circles a suit of clothes without such flesh-revealing peepholes was regarded as equivalent to a shop-window which has paper pasted over it.) Also their physical appearance was more repulsive; they had more and direr infirmities. Many of them sat on the cold pavement without anything under them so that the passers-by could be really sure that the supplicant would get ill. Fewkoombey would gladly have sat on the cold ground if only he had been allowed to. Apparently however, this detestable and pitiable position was not permitted to everyone. Policemen and beggars continually disturbed him.

Because of what he had gone through, he caught a cold which settled on his chest, so that he had to walk round with shooting pains and a high fever.

One evening he again met the young beggar, who immediately began to follow him. Two streets further on a second beggar joined the first. He began to run; they ran too.

He turned into a smaller alley in order to escape them. He already thought that he had succeeded when he suddenly saw them in front of him on a street corner, and before he could turn round they hit at him with their sticks. One of them even pushed him over on to the pavement and pulled at his wooden leg so that he fell backwards on his head. At this point, however, they let go of him and ran away; a policeman was coming round the corner.

Fewkoombey was already hoping that the policeman would help him up, when, from out of a passage between the houses just beside him, came a third beggar on a little truck, who pointed excitedly at the two men running away and tried to say something to the policeman in a guttural voice. When Few-

koombey, after being jerked up by the policeman and pushed off with a kick, tramped on, the beggar remained close beside him, propelling his iron trolley with both hands.

His legs seemed to be missing.

At the next street corner the legless one grasped Fewkoombey by the trousers. They were now in the dirtiest quarter of the slums; the alleys were no wider than the average man's height, and off one of them opened a low passage leading into a dark courtyard. 'In there!' commanded the cripple hoarsely. At the same time he drove forward with his truck against Fewkoombey's shinbone, and the soldier, being already weak with hunger, was forced into the tiny court, which was little more than three yards square. And before the astonished man could look round, the cripple, an elderly person with an enormous jawbone, climbed like a monkey out of his truck, suddenly became possessed of two healthy legs, and sprang on him.

He was a good head taller than Fewkoombey and had arms like an orang-outang.

'Take off your coat,' he growled, *'and show in an open, honest fight whether you're a worthier man than me to have a good, profitable pitch. "Make way for the fittest and damnation to the conquered" is my motto. In that way the whole of mankind is benefited; for the fittest rise to the top and possess the good things on earth. But don't try any dirty tricks, don't hit below the belt, and don't use knees. If the fight is to be decisive, it must be fought under Queensberry Rules!'*

The fight was short. Physically and spiritually broken, Fewkoombey slunk behind the old man.

Old Oak Street was not mentioned.

For a week the soldier remained under the rule of his new master. The latter installed him on a certain corner, once more in uniform; and in the evening, when he had paid in his earnings, the old man fed him.

His takings still remained at a very low level. He had to give it all to his employer, so never knew whether his few pennies paid for the herrings and cheap gin which formed his chief meal of the day. The old man, whose infirmities seemed so much worse than the soldier's but in reality did not exist at all, did immeasurably better trade.

After a time, the soldier came to the conviction that his master had only wanted the site on the bridge occupied for his own benefit. The main sources of profit were the people who came by the place every morning, or if they were going to work, every morning and evening. They only gave once and generally always walked on the same side of the road; but sometimes they changed over. One could never rely on them completely.

Fewkoombey felt that this situation was a step forward, but it was not yet the right one.

After a week had elapsed, the old man received attentions, apparently on his own behalf, from the secret society in Old Oak Street. One morning early, as they were leaving their sleeping-place in a boat-house, they were attacked by four or five beggars and carried along several streets until they reached a small, dirty shop whose sign said INSTRUMENTS.

Behind a worm-eaten counter stood two men. The one, who was small and dried up, with an unpleasant face, stood in shirt-sleeves, with a greasy hat perched on the back of his head, and his hands in his pockets, staring out of the shop-window at the dreary morning outside. He did not turn round and showed no sign of interest in the new arrivals. The other was fat and very red in the face and looked, if possible, even more unpleasant than the first.

'Good morning, Mr Smithy,' he said to the old man – scornfully, so it seemed – and went through an iron-covered door into a back room. The old man looked round uncertainly before he followed in the wake of the men who had fetched him. His face had grown grey.

Fewkoombey, apparently forgotten, remained standing in the shop. On the walls hung a few musical instruments, battered old trumpets, violins without any strings, some weather-beaten hurdy-gurdies. Business did not seem to be brisk, for the instruments were covered with a thick layer of dust.

Fewkoombey was to learn that these seven or eight antiques played no part in the business whose service he had just entered. Even the narrow, two-windowed front of the house gave a very incomplete idea of the extent of its rambling interior. Even the counter with its rickety cash-drawer revealed nothing.

In the house, which was actually three houses in one and

enclosed two back-yards, were a workshop with a half a dozen girls sewing in it and a shoemaking establishment occupied by the same number of expert workmen. And, most important of all, somewhere in the building was a records room which contained at least 6,000 names belonging to all those who had the honour to be associated with the firm.

The soldier had no idea how this unique and disreputable business functioned; he took a whole week to learn that. But he was too desperate not to realize that it was a piece of good fortune to be allowed to come here and join such a mighty and secret organization.

Mr Smithy, Fewkoombey's first employer, did not appear again that morning, and Fewkoombey saw him at the most only two or three times more – and then from a distance.

After a time, the fat man opened the iron door slightly and called into the shop:

'He's got a real wooden leg.'

The small man, who nevertheless seemed to be the chief, walked across to Fewkoombey and with a rapid movement lifted up his trousers to see his wooden leg. Then, hands in pockets, he went back to the window, looked out, and said softly:

'What can you do?'

'Nothing,' said the soldier, just as softly. 'I beg.'

'That's what everyone would like to do,' said the small man scornfully, never even looking around. *'You've got a wooden leg. And because you've got a wooden leg, you want to beg? But you lost your leg in the service of your country? So much the worse. That can happen to anyone. (Unless he's in the War Office.) When a person loses his leg he's thrown upon the mercy of others? Of course he is! But it's equally certain that people don't like giving away money. Wars – they're exceptional cases. If an earthquake happens, no one can help that. As if everyone doesn't know the profit that is made out of the patriotism of patriots. At first they all enlist voluntarily, and then, when their legs are shot away, they won't accept the situation. Quite apart from those innumerable cases, such as where the driver of a brewer's dray loses a leg in the course of his duties and then coins money out of the Battle of Something-or-other. And there's one*

thing more, the chief thing: why is it so profitable to go to war for one's country, why are these brave men so loaded with honour and glory? – simply because there's a chance of losing a leg? If there wasn't this small risk – well, this big risk if you like – why should they have the heartfelt gratitude of the nation? Actually you are an anti-war demonstrator. No, there's no use denying it. When you stand about, making no effort to hide your stump, you're saying to everyone: Look what a terrible thing war is; it takes off a man's leg! You should be ashamed of yourself. Wars are as necessary as they are terrible. Do you want everything taken away from us? Do you want to see Great Britain full of foreigners? Would you like to live in the midst of enemies? In short, you ought not to hawk your misery around. You haven't the talent for that. . . .'

When he had finished speaking, he went, without looking at the soldier, through the iron door into his office. But the fat man came out and took Fewkoombey, because of his leg, he said, through one back-yard into a second yard, where he put him in charge of a dog-kennel.

As a result of this, the soldier walked round and round the yard every morning and evening, exercising and looking after the blind men's dogs. There were quite a number of these dogs; they were not selected for their ability to lead blind men (there were less than five such unfortunates in the place), but for other points, namely whether they would arouse enough pity from passers-by, i.e. look cheap enough, which, indeed, partly depended on their feeding. They all looked very cheap.

If Fewkoombey had been asked by a welfare worker what his profession was, he would have found difficulty in answering; quite apart from his fears of falling foul of the police. He could hardly have called himself a beggar. He was an employee in a concern that sold the accessories for street-begging.

No more attempts were made to make an even tolerably competent beggar out of him. The experts here had recognized at first glance that he would never be a success. He had had luck. He possessed none of the qualifications which make a beggar, but he had one thing which not everyone here could boast of – a wooden leg; and that was sufficient to secure him a job.

Now and again he was called into the shop and had to show