

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

3



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 3

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

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835 Penobscot Building
Detroit, MI 48226-4094

ISBN 0-8103-7959-7
ISSN 1056-4349

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in the United Kingdom
by Gale Research International Limited
(An affiliated company of Gale Research Inc.)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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Preface

Drama Criticism (DC) is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring popular appeal. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint students with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *Drama Criticism* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Each volume of *DC* presents:

- 10-12 author entries
- authors and works representing a wide range of nationalities and time periods
- a diversity of viewpoints and critical opinions.

Organization of an Author Entry

Each author entry consists of some or all of the following elements, depending on the scope and complexity of the criticism:

- The **author heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- A **portrait** of the author is included when available. Most entries also feature illustrations of people, places, and events pertinent to a study of the playwright and his or her works. When appropriate, photographs of the plays in performance are also presented.
- The **biographical and critical introduction** contains background information that familiarizes the reader with the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her works.
- The list of **principal works** is divided into two sections, each of which is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The first section of the principal works list contains the author's

dramatic pieces. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.

- Whenever available, **author commentary** is provided. This section consists of essays or interviews in which the dramatist discusses his or her own work or the art of playwriting in general.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism of individual plays** offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premiere of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety.
- As an additional aid to students, the critical essays and excerpts are prefaced by **explanatory annotations**. These notes provide several types of useful information, including the critic's reputation and approach to literary studies as well as the scope and significance of the criticism that follows.
- A complete **bibliographic citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, follows each piece of criticism.
- The **further reading** list at the end of each entry comprises additional studies of the dramatist. It is divided into sections that will help students quickly locate the specific information they need.

Other Features

- A **cumulative author index** lists all the authors who have appeared in *DC*, and Gale's other Literature Criticism Series, as well as cross-references to related titles published by Gale, including *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. A complete listing of the series included appears at the beginning of the index.
- A **cumulative nationality index** includes each author featured in *DC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *DC* volume in which the author appears.
- A **cumulative title index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's name and the corresponding volume and page number(s) where commentary on the work may be located. Translations and variant titles are cross-referenced to the title of the play in its original language so that all references to the work are combined in one listing.

A Note to the Reader

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literature Criticism Series may use the following general formats to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to materials reprinted from books.

¹Susan Sontag, "Going to the Theater, Etc.," *Partisan Review* XXXI, No. 3 (Summer 1964), 389-94; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 17-20.

²Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (Chatto & Windus, 1962); excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 237-247.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes of *DC*, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Bertolt Brecht	1
Author Commentary	3
Overviews and General Studies	9
<i>Galileo</i>	38
<i>Mother Courage</i>	60
<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	75
Pedro Calderón de la Barca	87
Overviews and General Studies	89
<i>The Constant Prince</i>	110
<i>Life Is A Dream</i>	117
<i>The Devotion of the Cross</i>	127
<i>The Doctor of His Honor</i>	136
John Dryden	144
Author Commentary	146
Overviews and General Studies	151
<i>All for Love</i>	193
Athol Fugard	220
Author Commentary	222
Overviews and General Studies	227
<i>The Blood Knot</i>	239
<i>The Island and Sizwe Bansi Is Dead</i>	246
<i>"Master Harold" . . . and the boys</i>	256
Langston Hughes	265
Overviews and General Studies	268
<i>Mule Bone</i>	278
<i>Mulatto</i>	280
<i>Soul Gone Home</i>	285
<i>Black Nativity</i>	287
<i>Tambourines to Glory</i>	290

Thomas Kyd	293
<i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	296
Menander	339
Overviews and General Studies	341
<i>The Girl from Samos</i>	368
<i>The Dour Man</i>	380
Joe Orton	389
Author Commentary	390
Overviews and General Studies	392
<i>Entertaining Mr. Sloan</i>	403
<i>Loot</i>	410
<i>What the Butler Saw</i>	419
Jean-Paul Sartre	429
Author Commentary	431
Overviews and General Studies	435
<i>No Exit</i>	456
Ntozake Shange	467
Author Commentary	469
Overviews and General Studies	473
<i>For Colored Girls . . .</i>	479
<i>Spell #7</i>	490

Bertolt Brecht

1898-1956

INTRODUCTION

Full name Eugen Bertolt Friedrich Brecht; also wrote under the pseudonym Bertold Eugen.

A controversial innovator of modern theatrical techniques, Brecht is regarded as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. Brecht was an advocate of Marxism and sought to arouse the social conscience of his audience by addressing political and humanistic concerns in his plays. Intending to motivate spectators to action by disturbing them intellectually, Brecht introduced his concepts of “epic theater” and “alienation effects”—the best known features of his dramatic theory—in stagings of his plays. Epic drama, which Brecht also designated “Theater for Learning,” interrupts the narrative with dance, soliloquies, songs, subtitles, and choral readings, among other conventions, to reduce tension in the play and undermine its sense of reality; alienation effects—for example, an actor commenting on the play itself during performance—seek to create viewer detachment and promote objective questioning of the subject matter. The resulting estrangement, according to Brecht’s theory, will make the drama appeal “less to the feeling than to the spectator’s reason,” causing a theatergoer to view critically the ideas and situations presented in the play.

Brecht was born in the Bavarian town of Augsburg, where his family lived the middle-class existence he would later reject in favor of the Marxist ideal of a proletarian society. He began studying medicine at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, and when World War I broke out he served in a military hospital; his exposure to human suffering there solidified his lifelong commitment to pacifism. Brecht joined Germany’s Independent Social Democratic party in 1919 and completely abandoned his studies at the University in 1921, when he began writing drama criticism for a Socialist periodical. *Baal*, the earliest written of Brecht’s plays, was published the following year, and shortly thereafter his *Trommeln in der Nacht* (*Drums in the Night*) became the first of his works to be staged. In 1924 the dramatist moved to Berlin, where he became acquainted with such noted producer/directors as Max Reinhardt, Leopold Jessner, and Erwin Piscator. Brecht became *Dramaturg* (playreader and adapter) at the Deutsches Theater and for the next several years staged productions of his own works—including his *Im Dickicht der Städte: Der Kampf zweier Männer in der Reisenstadt Chicago* (*In the Jungle of Cities*) and *Mann ist Mann* (*A Man’s a Man*)—while also studying Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. Brecht began collaborating with composer Kurt Weill, and by the end of the decade, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*)—Brecht’s Marxist adaptation of John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* featuring an acclaimed score



by Weill—had earned both men widespread popular recognition.

In the early 1930s Brecht completed a series of *Lehrstücke*, or didactic plays; largely vehicles for his Marxist views, these writings prompted his self-imposed exile from fascist Germany in 1933. The dramatist resided temporarily in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland before settling in the United States in 1941, where he lived for the remainder of the Second World War. While in exile Brecht completed what are considered his finest plays: *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and Her Children*), *Leben des Galileo* (*Galileo*), and *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*). He returned to Europe in 1947, settling in Zurich, Switzerland, before accepting a Communist Party offer of a theater and acting company of his own in East Berlin. He spent the last years of his life working with this company, known as the Berliner Ensemble, implementing the production theories that he elucidated in essays and treatises composed during this time—most notably his *Kleines Organon für das Theatre* (*Little Organum for the Theatre*). Brecht died in 1956.

Critics suggest that the innovative production techniques for which Brecht is so well known were most effectively

employed in his later works. Although a strong proponent of didacticism, or instruction, as the primary purpose of drama, Brecht demonstrated in his later plays an increasing awareness of drama's need to entertain in order to convey ideas effectively. Critics note that Brecht's mature works correspondingly stress the human dilemma in social or political conflicts rather than the conflicts themselves, highlighting the dramatist's widening sympathy for the plight of humanity. While Brecht continued to employ alienation effects in the speech and actions of his players, his characterizations became more complex and human. For instance, *Mother Courage*, subtitled "A Chronicle of the Thirty Years' War," does not present the story of major historical figures or battles, but rather the experiences of a poor canteen woman who loses everything in her attempt to exploit the war for profit. Through his depiction of *Mother Courage*, Brecht condemns commerce, especially capitalism, as the root of war. However, his multifaceted portrayal of his heroine, with whom many have sympathized, has resulted in interpretations of the play as a tragedy depicting the destruction of virtue in a corrupt world, and not a political statement, as Brecht had intended, warning that "if you sup with the devil, you need a long spoon."

Galileo, another chronicle play, recounts the life of the seventeenth-century scientist who, under threat of physical torture by Catholic church authorities, recanted his confirmation of Copernicus's findings regarding the earth's orbit around the sun. In the first version of the play, written in 1938, Galileo's retraction is presented as a heroic ploy to avoid persecution and thus surreptitiously complete the writing of his *Discorsi*, a work which featured the results of his experiments and meditations on physics. A later version of Brecht's play, written in English with the actor Charles Laughton around the time of the bombing of Hiroshima, explicitly portrays the scientist as a sensuous individual with a voracious appetite for intellectual and physical gratification. When Galileo disavows his scientific discoveries in this rendition, the act is presented as one of cowardice; he furtively completes the manuscript of his *Discorsi*, not to serve humankind, but to indulge an insatiable intellectual need. Most critics agree that this later version of *Galileo* was intended to caution scientists against alienating themselves from society, and to remind them of their responsibility for the future of humanity. However, Brecht's depiction of Galileo, considered one of the most complex characterizations in modern theater, has led many critics to sympathize with the scientist's plight. As Eric Bentley has written: "What makes this Galileo a fascinating figure is that his goodness and badness, strength and weakness, have the same source: a big appetite and a Wildean disposition to give way to it. His appetite for knowledge is of a piece with his appetite for food, and so the same quality can appear, in different circumstances, as magnificent or as mean."

The Caucasian Chalk Circle presents in the figure of Azdak what many commentators consider Brecht's finest character portrayal. A parable play based on the Chinese drama *The Circle of Chalk*, this work relates the story of an infant abandoned by his mother and rescued by a maid, who cares for the child through various wartime ordeals.

When the child's mother later returns to claim him, the case is brought before Azdak, who as a judge has accepted bribes and shown little regard for justice. He orders a circle drawn on the floor and places the child in the middle, announcing that he will award the boy to whomever wins the subsequent tug-of-war using the child rather than a rope. The maid, however, demonstrates a genuine fear of harming the child, moving Azdak to rule in her favor. The play, according to its prologue and epilogue, was intended to address a contemporary issue that had arisen between two Soviet communes over the ownership of a tract of land. Critics, however, have focused on Brecht's portrayal of Azdak. Ronald Gray has described Azdak as "the most fascinating character in the play, insulting and generous, preposterous and humble, ignorant and wise, blasphemous and pious." As such, Azdak embodies dialectical contrasts typical of the dramatist's mature works, which emphasize the problematic relationship of the individual to society. Presenting what critics regard as a characteristic Brechtian struggle between good and evil, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* demonstrates its author's optimistic Marxist faith in positive change through political action and in the "temptation of goodness" through which human nature transcends a corrupt world.

Robert Brustein has indicated the difficulty of assessing Brecht's achievement, noting that the dramatist was "an extremely divided artist, whose works, for all their ideological intentions, remain peculiarly enticing and elusive." Critics continue to analyze the relationship between Brecht's artistry and his declared didactic aims. Many commentators contend that the vivid characterizations of the later plays detract from the dramatist's innovative efforts to "alienate" the audience; others maintain that Brecht's increasingly complex character portrayals are consistent with his progressive concern for what Bentley has termed "the dialectics of living." Accordingly, if Brecht's early work was designed to shock and instruct, his mature plays offer a rich and varied view of existence wherein, as Bentley suggests, his primary aim was neither to entertain nor to teach but to awaken.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

PLAYS

Baal 1922

[*Baal*, 1964]

Trommeln in der Nacht 1922

[*Drums in the Night*, 1966]

Im Dickicht der Städte: Der Kampf zweier Männer in der Riesenstadt Chicago 1923

[*In the Jungle of Cities*, 1957]

Mann ist Mann: Die Verwandlung des Packers Galy Gay in den Militärbaracken von Kilkoa im Jahre 1925, Lustspiel 1926

[*A Man's a Man*, 1957]

- Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny: Oper in drei Akten* 1927
 [The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, 1959]
Die Dreigroschenoper 1928 [adapter, with Kurt Weill; from the play *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay]
 [The Threepenny Opera, 1949]
Die Maßnahme: Lehrstück 1930
 [The Measures Taken, 1956]
Die Mutter 1931
 [The Mother, 1956]
Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe 1932
 [St. Joan of the Stockyards, 1956]
Furcht und Elend des dritten Reiches 1938
 [Fear and Misery in the Third Reich, 1942]
Leben des Galilei 1938
 [Galileo, 1947]
Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder: Eine Chronik aus dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg 1941
 [Mother Courage and Her Children, 1949]
Der gute Mensch von Sezuan 1943
 [The Good Woman of Sezuan, 1948]
Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti: Nach Erzählungen der Hella Wuolijoki 1948
 [Mr. Puntila and his Hired Man Matti, 1954]
Der kaukasische Kreidekreis 1948
 [The Caucasian Chalk Circle, 1948]

OTHER MAJOR WORKS

- Die Hauspostille* (poetry) 1927
 [A Manual of Piety, 1966]
Dreigroschenroman (novel) 1934
 [A Penny for the Poor, 1937; also published as *Threepenny Novel*, 1956]
Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit (essays) 1934
 [Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties, 1948]
Selected Poems (poetry) 1947
Kalendergeschichten (short stories and poetry) 1948
 [Tales from the Calendar, 1961]
Kleines Organon für das Theatre (treatise) 1949
 [A Little Organum for the Theatre, 1951]

AUTHOR COMMENTARY

Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Learning? (1936)

[In the following essay, written around 1936, Brecht offers a definition and analysis of epic theatre.]

When anyone spoke of modern theatre a few years ago, he mentioned the Moscow, the New York, or the Berlin theatre. He may also have spoken of a particular production of Jouvett's in Paris, of Cochran's in London, or the Habima performance of *The Dybbuk*, which, in fact, belonged to Russian theatre, since it was directed by Vakhtangov; but, by and large, there were only three capitals as far as modern theatre was concerned.

The Russian, the American, and the German theatres were very different from one another, but they were alike in being modern, i.e., in introducing technical and artistic innovations. In a certain sense they even developed stylistic similarities, probably because technique is international (not only the technique directly required for the stage, but also that which exerts an influence on it, the film, for example) and because the cities in question were great progressive cities in great industrial countries. Most recently, the Berlin theatre seemed to have taken the lead among the most advanced capitalist countries. For a time, what was common to modern theatre found there its strongest and, for the moment, its most mature expression.

The last phase of the Berlin theatre, which as I said only revealed in its purest form the direction in which modern theatre was developing, was the so-called epic theatre. What was known as the "*Zeitstück*"—the play dealing with current problems—or the Piscator theatre, or the didactic play, all belong to epic theatre.

EPIC THEATRE

The expression "epic theatre" seemed self-contradictory to many people, since according to the teachings of Aristotle the epic and the dramatic forms of presenting a story were considered basically different from one another. The difference between the two forms was by no means merely seen in the fact that one was performed by living people while the other made use of a book—epic works like those of Homer and the Minnesingers of the Middle Ages were likewise theatrical performances, and dramas like Goethe's *Faust* or Byron's *Manfred* admittedly achieved their greatest effect as books. Aristotle's teachings themselves distinguished the dramatic from the epic form as a difference in construction, whose laws were dealt with under two different branches of aesthetics. This construction depended on the different way in which the works were presented to the public, either on the stage or through a book, but nevertheless, apart from that, "the dramatic" could also be found in the epic works and "the epic" in dramatic works. The bourgeois novel in the last century considerably developed "the dramatic," which meant the strong centralization of plot and an organic interdependence of the separate parts. "The dramatic" is characterized by a certain passion in the tone of the exposition and a working out of the collision of forces. The epic writer, Döblin, gave an excellent characterization when he said that the epic, in contrast to the dramatic, could practically be cut up with a scissors into single pieces, each of which could stand alone.

I do not intend to discuss here in what way the contrasts between the epic and the dramatic, long regarded as irreconcilable, lost their rigidity; let it suffice to point out that technical achievements alone enabled the stage to incorporate narrative elements into dramatic presentations. The potentialities of projection, the film, the greater facility in changing sets through machinery, completed the equipment of the stage and did so at a moment when the most important human events could no longer be so simply portrayed as through personification of the moving forces or through subordinating the characters to invisible, meta-physical powers.

To make the events understandable, the environment of human activity had to be given great and "significant" value.

Of course this environment had been shown in plays before, not, however, as an independent element but only from the viewpoint of the main figure of the drama. It rose out of the hero's reaction to it. It was seen as a storm may be "seen" if you observe on the sea a ship spreading its sails and the sails bellying. But in the epic theatre it was now to appear as an independent element.

The stage began to narrate. The narrator no longer vanished with the fourth wall. Not only did the background make its own comment on stage happenings through large screens which evoked other events occurring at the same time in other places, documenting or contradicting statements by characters through phrases projected onto a screen, lending tangible, concrete statistics to abstract discussions, providing facts and figures for happenings which were plastic but unclear in their meaning; the actors no longer threw themselves completely into their roles but maintained a certain distance from the character performed by them, even distinctly inviting criticism.

Nothing permitted the audience any more to lose itself through simple identification, uncritically (and without any practical consequences), in the experiences of the characters on the stage. The presentation exposed the subject matter and the happenings to a process of alienation. Alienation was required to make things understood. When things are "self-evident," understanding is simply dispensed with.

The "natural" had to be given an element of the conspicuous. Only in this way could the laws of cause and effect become plain. Characters had to behave as they did behave, and, at the same time, they had to be capable of behaving otherwise.

These were great changes.

The spectator in the dramatic theatre says: Yes, I have felt that too.—That's how I am.—That is only natural.—That will always be so.—This person's suffering shocks me because he has no way out.—This is great art: everything in it is self-evident.—I weep with the weeping, I laugh with the laughing.

The spectator in the epic theatre says: I wouldn't have thought that.—People shouldn't do things like that.—That's extremely odd, almost unbelievable.—This has to stop.—This person's suffering shocks me, because there might be a way out for him.—This is great art: nothing in it is self-evident.—I laugh over the weeping, I weep over the laughing.

DIDACTIC THEATRE

The stage began to instruct.

Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat-packing industry became subjects for theatrical portrayal. Choruses informed the audience about facts it did not know. Films displayed events from all over the world. Projections provided statistical data. As the "background" came to the fore, the actions of the charac-

ters became exposed to criticism. Wrong and right actions were exhibited. People were shown who knew what they were doing, and other people were shown who did not know. The theatre became a matter for philosophers—for that sort of philosopher, to be sure, who wanted not only to explain the world but also to change it. For this reason, the theatre philosophized; for this reason, it instructed. And what became of entertainment? Were the audiences put back in school, treated as illiterates? Were they to pass examinations? Be given marks?

It is the general opinion that a very decided difference exists between learning and being entertained. The former may be useful, but only the latter is pleasant. Thus we have to defend the epic theatre against a suspicion that it must be an extremely unpleasant, a joyless, indeed a wearing business.

Well, we can actually only say that the contrast between learning and being entertained does not necessarily exist by nature, it has not always existed, and it need not always exist.

Undoubtedly, the kind of learning we did in school, in training for a profession or the like, is a laborious business. But consider under what circumstances and for what purpose it is done.

It is, in fact, a purchase. Knowledge is simply a commodity. It is acquired for the purpose of being resold. All those who have grown too old for school have to pursue knowledge secretly, so to speak, because anybody who admits he still has to study depreciates himself as one who knows too little. Apart from that, the utility of learning is very much limited by factors over which the student has no control. There is unemployment, against which no knowledge protects. There is the division of labor, which makes comprehensive knowledge unnecessary and impossible. Often, those who study make the effort only when they see that no other effort offers a possibility of getting ahead. There is not much knowledge that procures power, but there is much knowledge which is only procured through power.

Learning means something very different to different strata of society. There are strata of people who cannot conceive of any improvement in conditions; conditions seem good enough to them. Whatever may happen to petroleum, they make a profit out of it. And they feel, after all, that they are getting rather old. They can scarcely expect many more years of life. So why continue to learn? They have already spoken their last word! But there are also strata of people who have not yet "had their turn," who are discontented with the way things are, who have an immense practical interest in learning, who want orientation badly, who know they are lost without learning—these are the best and most ambitious learners. Such differences also exist among nations and peoples. Thus the lust for learning is dependent on various things; in short, there is such a thing as thrilling learning, joyous and militant learning.

If learning could not be delightful, then the theatre, by its very structure, would not be in a position to instruct.

Theatre remains theatre, even when it is didactic theatre, and insofar as it is good theatre, it will entertain.

THEATRE AND SCIENCE

But what has science to do with art? We know very well that science can be diverting, but not everything that diverts belongs to the theatre.

I have often been told when I pointed out the inestimable services that modern science, properly utilized, can render to art, especially to the theatre, that art and science were two valuable but completely different fields of human activity. This is a dreadful platitude, of course, and the best thing to do is admit at once that it is quite right, like most platitudes. Art and science operate in very different ways—agreed. Still, I must admit—bad as this may sound—that I cannot manage as an artist without making use of certain sciences. This may make many people seriously doubt my artistic ability. They are accustomed to regarding poets as unique, almost unnatural beings who, with truly godlike infallibility, perceive things that others can only perceive through the greatest efforts and hard work. Naturally, it is unpleasant to have to admit not being one of those so endowed. But it must be admitted. It must also be denied that these admitted scientific efforts have anything to do with some pardonable avocation indulged in the evening after work is done. Everyone knows that Goethe also went in for natural science, Schiller for history, presumably—this is the charitable assumption—as a sort of hobby. I would not simply accuse these two of having needed the science for their poetic labors, nor would I use them to excuse myself, but I must say I need the sciences. And I must even admit that I regard suspiciously all sorts of people who I know do not keep abreast of science, who, in other words, sing as the birds sing, or as they imagine the birds sing. This does not mean that I would reject a nice poem about the taste of a flounder or the pleasure of a boating party just because the author had not studied gastronomy or navigation. But I think that unless every resource is employed toward understanding the great, complicated events in the world of man, they cannot be seen adequately for what they are.

Let us assume that we want to portray great passions or events which influence the fates of peoples. Such a passion today might be the drive for power. Supposing that a poet “felt” this drive and wanted to show someone striving for power—how could he absorb into his own experience the extremely complicated mechanism within which the struggle for power today takes place? If his hero is a political man, what are the workings of politics; if he is a business man, what are the workings of business? And then there are poets who are much less passionately interested in any individual’s drive for power than in business affairs and politics as such! How are they to acquire the necessary knowledge? They will scarcely find out enough by going around and keeping their eyes open, although that is at least better than rolling their eyes in a fine frenzy! The establishment of a newspaper like *Der Völkische Beobachter* or a business like Standard Oil is a rather complicated matter, and these things are not simply absorbed through the pores. Psychology is an important field for the dramatist. It is supposed that while an ordinary person may not

be in a position to discover, without special instruction, what makes a man commit murder, certainly a writer ought to have the “inner resources” to be able to give a picture of a murderer’s mental state. The assumption is that you only need look into yourself in such a case; after all, there is such a thing as imagination. . . . For a number of reasons I can no longer abandon myself in this amiable hope of managing so comfortably. I cannot find in myself alone all the motives which, as we learn from newspapers and scientific reports, are discovered in human beings. No more than any judge passing sentence am I able to imagine adequately, unaided, the mental state of a murderer. Modern psychology, from psychoanalysis to behaviorism, provides me with insights which help me to form a quite different judgment of the case, especially when I take into consideration the findings of sociology, and do not ignore economics or history. You may say: this is getting complicated. I must answer, it *is* complicated. Perhaps I can talk you into agreeing with me that a lot of literature is extremely primitive; yet you will ask in grave concern: Wouldn’t such an evening in the theatre be a pretty alarming business? The answer to that is: No.

Whatever knowledge may be contained in a literary work, it must be completely converted into literature. In its transmuted form, it gives the same type of satisfaction as any literary work. And although it does not provide that satisfaction found in science as such, a certain inclination to penetrate more deeply into the nature of things, a desire to make the world controllable, are necessary to ensure enjoyment of literary works generated by this era of great discoveries and inventions.

IS THE EPIC THEATRE PERHAPS A “MORAL INSTITUTION”?

According to Friedrich Schiller, the theatre should be a moral institution. When Schiller posed this demand, it scarcely occurred to him that by moralizing from the stage he might drive the audience out of the theatre. In his day the audience had no objection to moralizing. Only later on did Friedrich Nietzsche abuse him as the moral trumpeter of Säckingen. To Nietzsche a concern with morality seemed a dismal affair; to Schiller it seemed completely gratifying. He knew of nothing more entertaining and satisfying than to propagate ideals. The bourgeoisie was just establishing the concept of the nation. To furnish your house, show off your new hat, present your bills for payment is highly gratifying. But to speak of the decay of your house, to have to sell your old hat, and pay the bills yourself is a truly dismal affair, and that was how Friedrich Nietzsche saw it a century later. He had nothing good to say of morality, nor, consequently, of the other Friedrich.

Many people also attacked the epic theatre, claiming it was too moralistic. Yet moral utterances were secondary in the epic theatre. Its intention was less to moralize than to study. And it did study, but then came the rub: the moral of the story. Naturally, we cannot claim that we began making studies just because studying was so much fun and not for any concrete reason, or that the results of our studies then took us completely by surprise. Undoubtedly there were painful discrepancies in the world around us, conditions that were hard to bear, conditions of a kind

hard to bear not only for moral reasons. Hunger, cold, and hardship are not only burdensome for moral reasons. And the purpose of our investigation was not merely to arouse moral misgivings about certain conditions (although such misgivings might easily be felt, if not by every member of the audience; such misgivings, for example, were seldom felt by those who profited by the conditions in question). The purpose of our investigation was to reveal the means by which those onerous conditions could be done away with. We were not speaking on behalf of morality but on behalf of the wronged. These are really two different things, for moral allusions are often used in telling the wronged that they must put up with their situation. For such moralists, people exist for morality, not morality for people.

Nevertheless it can be deduced from these remarks to what extent and in what sense the epic theater is a moral institution.

CAN EPIC THEATRE BE PERFORMED ANYWHERE?

From the standpoint of style, the epic theatre is nothing especially new. In its character of show, of demonstration, and its emphasis on the artistic, it is related to the ancient Asian theatre. The medieval mystery play, and also the classical Spanish and Jesuit theatres, showed an instructive tendency.

Those theatre forms corresponded to certain tendencies of their time and disappeared with them. The modern epic theatre is also linked to definite tendencies. It can by no means be performed anywhere. Few of the great nations today are inclined to discuss their problems in the theatre. London, Paris, Tokyo, and Rome maintain their theatres for quite different purposes. Only in a few places, and not for long, have circumstances been favorable to an epic, instructive theatre. In Berlin, fascism put a violent stop to the development of such a theatre.

Besides a certain technical standard, it presupposes a powerful social movement which has an interest in the free discussion of vital problems, the better to solve them, and which can defend this interest against all opposing tendencies.

The epic theatre is the broadest and most far-reaching experiment in great modern theatre, and it has to overcome all the enormous difficulties that all vital forces in the area of politics, philosophy, science, and art have to overcome. (pp. 149-57)

Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Learning?" translated by Edith Anderson, in The Creative Vision: Modern European Writers on Their Art, edited by Haskell M. Block and Herman Salinger, Grove Press, Inc., 1960, pp. 149-57.

Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect (1933-47)

[In the following essay, written sometime in the period 1933-47, Brecht defines the alienation effect and describes methods used to achieve it.]

What follows represents an attempt to describe a technique of acting which was applied in certain theatres with a view to taking the incidents portrayed and alienating them from the spectator. The aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident. The means were artistic.

The first condition for the A-effect's application to this end is that stage and auditorium must be purged of everything 'magical' and that no 'hypnotic tensions' should be set up. This ruled out any attempt to make the stage convey the flavour of a particular place (a room at evening, a road in the autumn), or to create atmosphere by relaxing the tempo of the conversation. The audience was not 'worked up' by a display of temperament or 'swept away' by acting with tautened muscles; in short, no attempt was made to put it in a trance and give it the illusion of watching an ordinary unrehearsed event. As will be seen presently, the audience's tendency to plunge into such illusions has to be checked by specific artistic means.

The first condition for the achievement of the A-effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite gest of showing. It is of course necessary to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage action is taking place in reality and without an audience. That being so, it is possible for the actor in principle to address the audience direct.

It is well known that contact between audience and stage is normally made on the basis of empathy. Conventional actors devote their efforts so exclusively to bringing about this psychological operation that they may be said to see it as the principal aim of their art. Our introductory remarks will already have made it clear that the technique which produces an A-effect is the exact opposite of that which aims at empathy. The actor applying it is bound not to try to bring about the empathy operation.

Yet in his efforts to reproduce particular characters and show their behaviour he need not renounce the means of empathy entirely. He uses these means just as any normal person with no particular acting talent would use them if he wanted to portray someone else, i.e. show how he behaves. This showing of other people's behaviour happens time and again in ordinary life (witnesses of an accident demonstrating to newcomers how the victim behaved, a facetious person imitating a friend's walk, etc.), without those involved making the least effort to subject their spectators to an illusion. At the same time they do feel their way into their characters' skins with a view to acquiring their characteristics.

As has already been said, the actor too will make use of this psychological operation. But whereas the usual practice in acting is to execute it during the actual performance, in the hope of stimulating the spectator into a similar operation, he will achieve it only at an earlier stage, at some time during rehearsals.

To safeguard against an unduly 'impulsive', frictionless and uncritical creation of characters and incidents, more reading rehearsals can be held than usual. The actor