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Brecht

Collected Plays: Two

Man equals Man • The Elephant Calf
The Threepenny Opera
The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny
The Seven Deadly Sins

Edited and introduced by
John Willett and Ralph Manheim

BLOOMSBURY

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Set in British India, *Man equals Man* deals with the forcible transformation of a civilian docker, Galy Gay, into a perfect soldier. Using Kiplingesque vocabulary and imagery, Brecht explores the notion of personality as something adjustable: Galy Gay is 'dismantled like a car' and re-assembled as a different person. Also included is *The Elephant Calf*, 'an interlude for the foyer', originally an integral part of the main play.

The Threepenny Opera, immortalised by its songs to Kurt Weill's music, was Brecht's first commercial success; based on John Gay's 18th-century *Beggar's Opera* but set in a mock-Victorian Soho, it makes Macheath into a gentleman crook, an incarnation of the bourgeois values Brecht so distrusted.

The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny stems from the same period of creative collaboration between Brecht and Weill. Mahagonny is a fictional boom town born of Brecht's love-hate with the mythology of America – a 'net-city' founded to catch all comers.

Brecht's supremely ironic ballet libretto, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, is the story of two sisters who, in seven years, traverse seven cities, and are tempted in each by one of the seven deadly sins.

The volume, edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, includes Brecht's own notes and relevant texts as well as an extensive introduction and commentary.

Bertolt Brecht was born in Augsburg on 10 February 1898 and died in Berlin on 14 August 1956. He grew to maturity as a playwright in the frenetic years of the twenties and early thirties, with such plays as *Man equals Man*, *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Mother*. He left Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933, eventually reaching the United States in 1941, where he remained until 1947. It was during this period of exile that such masterpieces as *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* were written. Shortly after his return to Europe in 1947 he founded the Berliner Ensemble, and from then until his death was mainly occupied in producing his own plays.

Other Bertolt Brecht publications by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

Brecht Collected Plays: One
(Baal, Drums in the Night, In the Jungle of Cities, The Life of Edward II of England, A Respectable Wedding, The Beggar or the Dead Dog, Driving Out a Devil, Lux in Tenebris, The Catch)

Brecht Collected Plays: Two
(Man Equals Man, The Elephant Calf, The Threepenny Opera, The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, The Seven Deadly Sins)

Brecht Collected Plays: Three
(Lindbergh's Flight, The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent, He Said Yes/He Said No, The Decision, The Mother, The Exception and the Rule, The Horations and the Curiatians, St Joan of the Stockyards)

Brecht Collected Plays: Four
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Bertolt Brecht

Collected Plays: Two

Man Equals Man
translated by Gerhard Nellhaus
Original work entitled:
Mann ist Mann

The Elephant Calf
translated by John Willet
Original work entitled:
Das Elefantenkalb

The Threepenny Opera
translated by Ralph Manheim and John Willet
Original work entitled:
Die Dreigroschenoper

The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny
translated by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman
Original work entitled:
Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny

The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie
translated by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman
Original work entitled:
Die Sieben Todsünden der Kleinbürger

Edited and introduced by
John Willett and Ralph Manheim

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By Brecht's own account, he 'rewrote *Man equals Man* ten times'. Nearly all his plays were copiously revised, while there are two or three great unfinished works which he tussled with for years, leaving a mountain of paper for his interpreters to sort out as best they can. But of the completed plays only *Galileo* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* preoccupied him to anything like the same extent as this quite early piece. He wrote it over a period during which he was evolving rapidly, as was the whole German theatre of the time and (for better or worse) the Weimar Republic under which that theatre so flourished. And so, for all its surface flippancies, it may well be of lasting importance for the understanding of Brecht and his age. It is at once a vital piece of theatre and something like an archaeological site.

He started planning it when he was still a twenty-year-old student oscillating between Augsburg and Munich around the time of the end of the First World War. Two years later his early diaries show that he was writing the odd scene, very much in the spirit of his Augsburg poems:

> Galgei was a solid citizen
> His head was rather thick.
> Some villains told him that he was
> The butter merchant Pick.
>
> They were such wicked people
> To play this dirty trick.
> Reluctantly he in the end
> Became the wicked Pick.
>
> How could he prove he wasn't?
> God left him high and dry.
> His catechism hadn't told
> Him he was named Galgei.

The name might come in church lists
Or on his tomb perhaps?
The name Galgei however
Could be some other chap's.

Citizen Joseph Galgei
Born April '83
Devout and neat and honest
As God likes men to be.

So his original concept of a worthy Augsburg citizen persuaded to lose his own identity in favour of that of a missing butter merchant had something of the quality of his one-act farces at that time: of *Lux in Tenebris* and the other Bavarian sketches which he is thought to have written under the impact of the great Munich clown Karl Valentin. But before he had got very far with it *Drums in the Night* took priority, followed by *In the Jungle of Cities* which he started in the autumn of 1921, around the time of his first long visit to Berlin.

The Augsburg *Galgei* play, then, went into cold storage throughout the period of his first Munich successes. This was a time during which the German Expressionist theatre was expiring, along with the Expressionist element in Brecht's own writing. When finally he moved to Berlin for good in the late summer of 1924 his work already had a much more urban, industrialised flavour to it – the transitional poem 'Of Poor BB' being crucial here – but *Galgei* was still high on the list of the tasks he had set himself. So too were a 'Mahagonny opera' and a vast plan for an urban trilogy of which *In the Jungle* would be the first section. The trilogy ran into difficulties, partly because the second play proved unexpectedly hard to write, but partly too, no doubt, because the production of *In the Jungle* with which the Deutsches Theater, Berlin, introduced its new dramaturg that October was not a success. At the same time his publisher was pressing him to complete his first book of poems, the *Devotions*, which he had promised them at least two years earlier, and to that end supplied him with an assistant called Elisabeth Hauptmann. It seems to have been her arrival, combined with the lack of any serious work to do at the Deutsches Theater, that decided the way in which he now set about *Galgei*, renaming it *Galy Gay oder Mann = Mann*.

In its second stage, then, *Man equals Man*, as we have called it, emerged not only as the first real product of Brecht's Berlin period but also as the first work of what became known as the 'Brecht collective' – that shifting group of friends and collaborators on whom he henceforward depended. As such it mirrored the artistic climate of the middle

1920s, with their attitude of 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (or New Matter-of-Factness), their stressing of the collectivity and downplaying of the individual, and their new cult of Anglo-Saxon imagery and sport. Together the 'collective' would go to fights, not only absorbing their terminology and ethos (which permeates much of *Man equals Man*) but also drawing those conclusions for the theatre as a whole which Brecht set down in his theoretical essay 'Emphasis on Sport' and tried to realise by means of the harsh lighting, the boxing-ring stage and other anti-illusionistic devices that henceforward appeared in his own productions. Nothing could be less like the passionate, intensely egocentric gloom of so many Expressionist plays.

But there was another, perhaps even more important new element involved in Brecht's changed approach to the *Galgei* project. This lay most obviously in the shedding of the original Bavarian background and the shifting of the basic theme of human identity to a new setting in British India, something that German audiences even today must find utterly exotic. The precedent here was of course the Chicago background adopted for *In the Jungle*; and the inspiration quite clearly came from Kipling, who had already played a rather more marginal part in the mishmash of literary influences that went to make up the earlier play. Thus the three soldiers who transform Galy Gay into their fourth man recall the classic 'soldiers three'; the temple episode seems to echo the short story 'Krishna Mulvaney'; the song 'Johnny' is the old Boer War song 'Pack your kit and trek' which Kipling cites in 'Song of the Banjo'. And Brecht's own songs too – both the Man equals Man song of the early versions and the Widow Begbick song – are redolent of Kipling (as our translation tries to bring out). This affinity was already there before Brecht's move to Berlin, though at that point he had read Kipling only in German translation. But Hauptmann had studied English and acquired a real feeling for the language, and with her arrival the Kipling ties became more authentic. Nothing perhaps is more amazing to the English reader today than the quality of the soldiers' language. And it is instructive to see how it accords with the echoes from Hašek's novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, whose German translation had just appeared.

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At the end of 1925 Brecht had the finished typescript bound up in red leather and gave it to 'Bess Hauptmann'. 'It was a troublesome play,' said his covering note,

and even piecing together the manuscript from 20 lb of paper was

> heavy work; it took me 2 days, ½ bottle of brandy, 4 bottles of soda water, 8–10 cigars and a lot of patience, and it was the only part I did on my own.

Up to that moment it seems that there had been no definite prospect of a production, and the result was an enormously unwieldy play, in which the whole of *The Elephant Calf*, virtually as we now have it, formed the penultimate scene. Then in the course of 1926 two provincial theatres decided to stage it, and in the spring Brecht and Hauptmann reworked it yet again ('for the seventh time, I think,' said her diary for 30 April, 'and some scenes even more than that'). This, as far as can be seen, is the text actually performed at the double première, which took place at Darmstadt and Düsseldorf on 25 September 1926. By then Brecht had been without regular employment for a year, while Hauptmann had gone on working for him for nothing after the previous publisher's commission had run out.

The Düsseldorf production fell flat, but Darmstadt (which is only some seventeen miles from Frankfurt) was another matter. Here the director of the former court theatre was Ernst Legal, a man who like his successor Carl Ebert was soon to move to a key position in Berlin; and he brought in two of Brecht's associates – the director Jacob Geis and the designer Caspar Neher – to take charge of the production, himself acting the part of Galy Gay. Visually it was most original: paper-thin, elegant, brilliantly lit with whites and khakis predominating; this was also the first time that Brecht's characteristic half-height curtain was used. Jazz music was played by Widow Begbick's three (subsequently eliminated) daughters. The Widow spoke her new Interlude speech with its key line 'Tonight you are going to see a man reassembled like a car.' Geis himself wrote in the Berlin theatre magazine *Die Szene* of his guiding aim

> to show the play's underlying sense by making the surface meaning as clear as possible. In other words, no implications, secrets, ambiguities, half-light; but facts, brilliant illumination, light into every corner, absence of feeling, no humour-with-a-catch-in-the-throat. The theatre considered as craft rather than art; avoidance of private affairs. These should make a secondary appearance, emerge as self-evident.

Though Geis advised them to get hold of this play the Berlin theatres were slow to take up the challenge. However, Alfred Braun's still quite new drama department at Radio Berlin was more enterprising, and in March 1927 it broadcast a radio adaptation specially made

by Brecht. Introduced by a critical notice in *Der deutsche Rundfunk* (roughly equivalent to *The Listener*) which presented the play 'as the most powerful and original stage play of our time', this was linked by anonymous announcements which, again according to the same critic, were not merely

> a rehash of the stage directions in the book, but short sentences foretelling how the plot will develop, and reflecting something of the fairground barker's technique or the film titles of earlier times. Being written by a poet, these announcements give the whole evening a new form and one congenial to the radio medium.

The critic was Kurt Weill, whose first contact with Brecht and his work this seems to have been. The Galy Gay was again Legal, the Begbick Helen Weigel, taking her first step on the road that led to her Mother Courage some twenty years later. The music was by Edmund Meisel, Piscator's regular composer. The speech which Brecht wrote to introduce the broadcast (see pp. 263–4) reappeared almost unchanged as his contribution to the first programme of Piscator's 1927–28 season, for which he was now acting as one of a 'collective' of dramaturgs. It shows him reconsidering the play in a new context of rapid technological advance, which seemed to demand just that malleability and relativity of human identity that its protagonist – for entirely different reasons – displays.

The published text of the play, which appeared the same year, reads like a shortened and somewhat subdued version of the 1924–25 script, with *The Elephant Calf* separated off as an appendix with the very Pirandellesque subtitle *or the Demonstrability of Any Conceivable Assertion*. The direction saying that this should be performed in the foyer only came later, nor does it ever seem to have been followed in Brecht's lifetime. This version also gives a melody and a piano accompaniment for the Man equals Man song (derived allegedly by Brecht and Hauptmann from *Madame Butterfly*), which subsequently disappeared from the play. Though it might have been expected that Piscator, who frequently complained about the dearth of plays for his new company, would give it its Berlin première, there is no sign that he even considered this; nor did he ever himself direct a Brecht work before 1945. On the contrary, it was Piscator's rivals and former employers at the Volksbühne who next staged it, in January 1928, using Neher once again as the designer, directed by another kindred spirit, Erich Engel. Heinrich George was the Galy Gay, with Weigel as a shingled, raucous-voiced Begbick in riding breeches and boots. It looks as though the text this time was severely shortened, cutting out

scenes 5 and 7 and rolling 4, 6 and 8 together to make one long canteen scene; the play ended with scene 9.

The aim seems to have been to make this production more sharply anti-militarist, but it clearly did not satisfy Brecht. At the beginning of 1930, however, Leopold Jessner resigned as director of the Berlin Staatstheater – partly on account of the failure of a boxing play by Brecht's American friend Reyher, which Hauptmann had translated – and was succeeded by Legal, who must have had good memories of *Man equals Man* since he was quite willing to see it staged again. The surprising thing now was that in this time of economic cuts and incipient cultural conservatism he let it be directed by Brecht himself, whose long-standing ambition to direct his own plays had generally been thwarted so far. The result was that generally unpopular but highly original production of February 1931 which was seen by the visiting Soviet playwright Sergei Tretiakoff and 'produced a tremendous impression on him', second only (he said) to that made by Meyerhold's 1922 production of *Le Cocu magnifique*.

> Giant soldiers armed to the teeth and wearing jackets caked with lime, blood and excrement stalk about the stage, holding on to wires to keep from falling off the stilts inside their trouser legs.

As indeed we see from the many surviving photographs, though in fact only two of the three monsters were on stilts (the other being grotesquely padded out) while the wires appear to be those of the half-curtain in what was perhaps the lightest and subtlest of all Caspar Neher's sets. Dwarfed by the soldiery, who already seem a long way from Kipling, are the small figures of Weigel, as a rather more mature and less masculine Begbick, and the round-eyed Peter Lorre, the relatively obscure but greatly gifted young actor who played Galy Gay. Brecht made him an 'Irishman', and evidently did not follow Neher's drawings, where he has a red-brown skin.

So far as the text went two things distinguished Brecht's interpretation at this time. First of all, he made Lorre deliver his speeches in a broken, jerky manner, so as to emphasise the fact that they were a stringing-together of contradictory passages, each with its own specific attitude or 'gest'. (His answer to the critics who took exception to this will be found on pp. 268–71.) Secondly he yet again rewrote the play, this time with the advice of Dudow and Bernhard Reich, basing himself on the stage script of 1930 and greatly reducing its more frivolous aspects. Thus Begbick's daughters went out, as did the Man equals Man and Drinking Truck songs with their Kipling echoes; Bloody Five too became Germanised as the much less farcical-

sounding Blutiger Fünfer. For the production (though not for the version subsequently published) Begbick's Interlude speech was shifted to make a prologue. Her 'Song of the Flow of Things' made its first appearance, closely recalling the 'Reader for Those Who Live in Cities' poems which Brecht had written in 1926–27; so too did most of the passages of spoken verse. This time Kurt Weill wrote the music, which included a 'Nachtmusik' and a 'Schlacht-' (or Battle-) 'musik'. Unfortunately it disappeared after Hitler's advent to power two years later, and has never since been found.

In 1938 the play was again published as part of the exiled Malik-Verlag's edition of Brecht's work, using a text evidently close to that of Brecht's production. It was never staged during the Nazi era, though there is an English version of scene 1 in Brecht's handwriting dating from his years in California which suggests that he may have thought of doing something with it there (this has been used, almost unamended, in our version since it sounds so like his authentic voice). Nor was it one of the plays which Brecht worked on with the Berliner Ensemble, so that it is difficult to tell how his final version might have turned out. What we now have in his German Collected Works (the basis for our edition) is the 1938 version as rather hurriedly amended when his German publishers began republishing the plays in the 1950s not long after his return to East Berlin. To this he once again appended *The Elephant Calf*, which had not been published at all in 1938. But none of this was tried out by him in the theatre, as he always wished before accepting a text as final.

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The whole tangled story is of course grist to the slow mills of what some term *Brechtforschung* and others, less flatteringly, 'the Brecht industry'; for students and scholars can spend happy hours trying to decide what Brecht really meant and at what point he meant it. The reader too can get considerable enjoyment from simply taking the end product as it comes, appendix and all; and if this is not enough there is some fairly amazing material in the notes. But for anybody wishing actually to perform the play the problem is not so easy. Here the interpreters have differed widely, perhaps because so few have distinguished between the different layers making up the text as we now have it; thus it is not uncommon to find passages added in 1931 being taken virtually as the starting-point of the whole affair. Roughly speaking there seem to be three main approaches. One is to treat this play as the first true example of the 'epic theatre' advocated in Brecht's theoretical writings of the 1920s, and therefore as a significant piece of

formal theatrical innovation. Another is to regard it as something of a confession: a denial of the importance of individual personality and specifically of Brecht's own, culminating in the episode where the sergeant castrates himself in a bloody parody of Lenz's *The Tutor*, an eighteenth-century play which Brecht was to adapt and stage much later. Finally there is the devoutly Marxist–Leninist view, according to which Galy Gay is a symbolic victim of capitalism, whom the British can turn into cannon-fodder because his job has infected him with petty-bourgeois values. He ends by being caught up in what Ernst Schumacher calls

> a piece of grisly colonial reality. The atrocities committed by colonial armies in Vietnam, Korea and other oppressed lands are still awaiting portrayal; or are they too great for any writer's imagination?

Far be it from us to tell potential directors which of the possible lines they should choose. For the play has not really got one; it is more a tangle of threads, each starting at a different point in the playwright's own evolution and each leading in a different direction. But there are certain things which should not be ignored. To start with, this is a play which is easily taken too solemnly (which is not the same thing as seriously), though the temptation is perhaps less in this country, where the irony and humour involved in Kipling's approach to British India are not always overlooked. Nor is there anything very new about its structure compared with the episodic form of Brecht's own earlier plays, or the use of acrobatic and music-hall methods by Eisenstein and others around 1922–23. The nature of its concern with 'personality' too can be misunderstood, for on the one hand the 1920s were a time of collective undertakings, even in the arts, where the ego had necessarily to make concessions, while on the other Brecht's specific *bête noire* – the notion of the *Charakterkopf* whose very features single him out as 'a personality' – probably goes back to some youthful irritation. Certainly it long antedated his first reading of Karl Marx, though the notion of the man who doesn't live but 'is lived' does indeed stem from his private, quasi-dialectical vision of the world as continually in flux. Why should identity itself not be part of that flux too?

• • •

Although the opera *Mahagonny* (to give it its short title) is often placed after *The Threepenny Opera* in chronological arrangements of Brecht's works, in fact it was started almost a year before Brecht began

work on the latter, and his general conception of it goes back earlier still. It was *Mahagonny* that inaugurated the collaboration with Kurt Weill, and unlike *The Threepenny Opera*, where Weill was brought in at a relatively advanced stage to set the songs, it was from the first a co-operative venture. *Mahagonny* was *durchkomponiert*, or set to music right through. Not only the song texts but the whole structure was jointly established in such a way as to offer prospects of a more radical kind of work, an 'epic opera' whose form, content and ethos would reflect the considerable area of agreement between two highly original minds.

Like Strauss and Hofmannsthal or Gilbert and Sullivan, Brecht and Weill were in their own way peculiarly fitted for the common task. When they met for the first time in March 1927 the poet was just twenty-nine, and his experience of performing his own songs, often to home-made tunes, had accustomed him to writing for singing; moreover he had been married to an opera singer, Marianne Zoff, for whom he thought of writing a libretto. Two years younger, the composer had since 1925 been a most productive writer, contributing regular articles to the new radio journal *Der deutsche Rundfunk* on music and a variety of other cultural topics. In 1924 he had met Georg Kaiser, the one Expressionist playwright respected by Brecht, and had thereafter collaborated with him on two operas; while around the same time he also worked with the poet Iwan Goll who had first proclaimed the death of that school. His marriage too had been to an actress: the youthful Lotte Lenya whose voice was to give its very timbre to so many of their songs.

Right away, according to Weill, his conversation with Brecht turned to 'opera's possibilities' and the notion of 'a paradise city' as a theme echoing (as we can now see) certain ideas which Brecht had had in his head for some time. For even before moving to Berlin in the autumn of 1924 he was using the private codename 'Mahagonny' for some of the crazier aspects of Bavaria (then in the aftermath of Hitler's failed coup), and following this he had written the first three 'Mahagonny Songs' with their vaguely Wild West imagery of *Poker-drinksalons* and the like; a 'Mahagonny opera' indeed was part of his mental luggage for the move. Though he did nothing to develop this further during the subsequent two and a half years, his new collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann had studied English and she wrote him the two English-language 'Mahagonny Songs' which have ever since figured among his poems. With her he had started working on two related projects: an opera to be called *Sodom und Gomorrah* or *The Man From Manhattan*, and a radio play called *Die Sintflut* (*The Flood*).

The opera project which the two men instantly began to discuss aimed accordingly to deal with the biblical theme of the Cities of the Plain; but in terms of the *Amerikanismus* prevalent in Germany after the stabilisation of 1923/24. Under the impact of the latter *The Flood* had already become known as *Collapse of Miami, the Paradise City*, for which Hauptmann had made a collection of newspaper cuttings dealing with hurricanes, and which clearly underlay the new scheme from the start. Though nothing is known of Weill's contribution at this initial stage it is already evident that if the outward trappings of the opera were to be modish and up-to-the-minute its message would be a Jeremiah-like warning derived from both men's knowledge of the Old Testament. A solemn moral was to be wrapped in an enjoyably flippant package.

Almost at once there was an interruption. Weill was already an established contributor to the new music festivals at Donaueschingen and Baden-Baden, and in the spring of 1927 he was commissioned to provide one of a batch of very short operas to be performed at the latter that summer. This struck him as a perfect pretext for what he termed 'a stylistic exercise' for the new project, so before either partner got down to work on the opera proper the so-called *Songspiel* or *Little Mahagonny* was prepared and performed. This consisted of the five 'Mahagonny Songs' from Brecht's first book of poems (including Hauptmann's Alabama and Benares Songs) followed by the unpublished 'Poem on a Dead Man' as a finale; and with Brecht's participation it was staged in a boxing ring in front of projections by his friend Caspar Neher. Lenya was one of the singers. The milieu was mock-American, the characters bearing such names as Jessie, Bessie, Charlie, Billy and so forth; and this was matched by Weill's use of the jazz idiom, which took one or two of Brecht's own tunes as a jumping-off point. The other works presented at the same time were by Milhaud, Hindemith and Ernst Toch, Hindemith being the festival's principal moving spirit. His contribution *Hin und Zurück*, in which music and action alike run backwards from a midway point, was based on a Berlin revue sketch.

The Little Mahagonny was a success, even though there seems to have been no question of performing it elsewhere. After the show, in Lenya's words,

> suddenly I felt a slap on the back, accompanied by a booming laugh: 'Is here no telephone?' It was Otto Klemperer. With that, the whole room was singing the Benares Song, and I knew that the battle was won.

This came at a moment when the 'New Objectivity' of the painters

(formally launched in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition of 1925) seemed to be merging in a wider movement of a down-to-earth, deliberately impersonal yet socially critical kind, of which *Amerikanismus* with its cult of jazz and sport formed part. Novel as their contribution was, Weill and Brecht were by no means alone in this, for Ernst Křenek's jazz opera *Jonny spielt auf* had already been performed at Leipzig at the beginning of 1927, and a whole new wave of *Zeitopern* or 'operas of the times' was to follow. Soon the critic Herbert Ihering was writing of Brecht as part of a modern musical-theatrical complex stretching from Chaplin and Piscator to the experiments of Klemperer, Hindemith and Weill: 'All that has hitherto been running along parallel or divergent paths is now joining up. . . . The age of isolation is over.'

After the summer holidays the three collaborators – for from now on Neher was a vital part of the team – got down to serious work on the opera libretto, which seems to have taken nearly a year. Their aim was to create an 'epic opera' of a new kind, in which a sequence of self-contained musical units would correspond to a 'step by step juxtaposition of situations' on the model (evidently) of *Man equals Man*. Projections like those used at Baden-Baden would add the third dimension to this scheme, which was based on Brecht's idea of an alternative to the integrated Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the new principle which he termed 'the separation of the elements'. What this amounted to in practice was a variety of montage, the major structural principle of the decade, and so far as Brecht's share was concerned he used his previous writings as the main source of raw material for it. On to the nucleus of 'Mahagonny Songs' used in the *Songspiel* therefore were grafted early poems like 'Tahiti' and 'Lucifer's Evening Song' dating from his youth in Augsburg as well as city poems dating from 1926–27 which reflect his first appalled reactions to Berlin. The hurricane advancing on Pensacola came, complete with its thousand victims and its diagrammatic arrow, from a report in the *Chicago Daily News* of 22 September 1926 which was among the *Collapse of Miami, the Paradise City* material. Leokadia (or Ladybird) Begbick is a self-evident importation from *Man equals Man*, Trinity Moses a quasi-Biblical guide through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Such was the mixture used to provide the required musical 'numbers'.

This work had to be fitted in between a succession of more or less demanding distractions. First of all came Brecht's new role as one of the team of dramaturgs for Piscator's Communist-inspired company at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, which staged four epoch-making

productions in the 1927–28 season. Here he found a highly original approach to the use of film, slide projections and other new technical devices, his work on the *Schweik* production in particular making a lifelong impression on him. Weill too wrote incidental music for one of the productions.

The particular plays which he was trying to write – notably *Joe P. Fleischhacker*, based on Frank Norris's novel *The Pit* about the Chicago wheat market, and *Decline of the Egoist Johann Fatzer* about soldiers deserting in the First World War – were neither performed there nor even completed. Indeed from *Man equals Man* in 1926 to *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* in 1931 he remained unable to finish the large-scale plays that preoccupied him most.

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The critical interruption came in March–April 1928, when Piscator had taken on a second theatre and was fast heading for bankruptcy. Some three months earlier a new management had been set up in Berlin, headed by a young actor called Ernst-Josef Aufricht, once a member of Berthold Viertel's much respected company 'Die Truppe'. Around Christmas he had been given 100,000 marks by his father with which to open his own Berlin theatre, and he used this to rent the medium-sized late nineteenth-century Theater am Schiffbauerdamm not far from Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater. He booked Erich Engel, then busy with Brecht's *Man equals Man* at the Volksbühne, to direct the opening production, if possible to coincide with his own twenty-eighth birthday on 31 August. All that remained was to find a play. This was not quite so simple, even after he had brought in a young friend of Karl Kraus's called Heinrich Fischer to help him and act as his deputy. Kraus, Wedekind, Toller, Feuchtwanger, Kaiser, even the much older Sudermann were in turn considered or actually approached, but to no effect. Then one of those happy accidents occurred which go to make theatre history: Fischer ran into Brecht in a café, introduced him to Aufricht and asked if he had anything that would answer their needs. Brecht's own work in progress – presumably *Fleischhacker* – would not do; it was already promised – presumably to Piscator – and Aufricht appears to have been bored by his account of it. But Brecht also mentioned a translation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* which his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann had begun making the previous November. This eighteenth-century satire had been an immense success in Nigel Playfair's revival at the Lyric, Hammersmith some five or six years earlier, and to the two entrepreneurs the idea 'smelt of theatre'. They read all that had so far been written, under the

provisional title *Gesindel*, or *Scum*, and decided that this was the play with which to open..

Just how much Brecht had had to do with the script at this exploratory stage is uncertain, but he now took the lead and proposed that Weill should be brought in to write modern settings for the songs. Aufricht, by his own account, thereupon went privately to hear two of Weill's Kaiser operas, was appalled by their atonality and told his musical director Theo Mackeben to get hold of the traditional Pepusch arrangements in case Weill came up with something impossibly rebarbative. In mid-May the whole team were packed off to Le Lavandou in the south of France to complete the work: the Brechts, the Weills, Hauptmann, Engel. Here, and subsequently on the Ammersee in Bavaria, Brecht seems to have written some brand-new scenes (the stable wedding for instance, which bears no relation to Gay's original), and started adding his own songs, four of them piratically derived from a German version of Villon. On 1 August rehearsals started, with a duplicated script which, as our notes show, still contained a good deal of the original work, as well as songs by Gay himself and Rudyard Kipling which later disappeared. A succession of accidents, catastrophes and stopgaps then occurred. Carola Neher, who was to play Polly, arrived a fortnight late from her husband Klabund's deathbed, and abandoned her part; Roma Bahn was recruited and learned it in four days. Feuchtwanger suggested the new title; Karl Kraus added the second verse to the Jealousy Duet. Helene Weigel, cast as Mrs Coaxer the brothel Madame, developed appendicitis and the part was cut. The cabaret singer Rosa Valetti objected to the 'Song of Sexual Obsession' which she had to sing as Mrs Peachum, so this too went; Käte Kühl as Lucy could not manage the florid solo which Weill had written for another actress in scene 8, so this was eliminated and later the scene itself was cut; Weill's young wife Lotte Lenya was accidentally left off the printed programme; the play was found to be three-quarters of an hour too long, leading to massive cuts in Peachum's part and the dropping of the 'Solomon Song'; the finale was only written during the rehearsals; and late on the 'Ballad of Mac the Knife' was added as an inspired afterthought.

All accounts agree that the production's prospects seemed extremely bad, with only Weill's music and Caspar Neher's sets remaining unaffected by the mounting chaos. Even the costumes were simply those available, so Brecht was to say later (p. 323), while the Victorian setting was decided less by the needs of the story than by the shortage of time. The dress rehearsal must have been disastrous, the reactions of the first-night audience a confirmation of this, lasting

right into the second scene, even after the singing of 'Pirate Jenny' in the stable. But with the 'Cannon Song' the applause suddenly burst loose. Quite unexpectedly, inspiredly, improvisedly, management and collaborators found themselves with the greatest German hit of the 1920s on their hands.

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It struck Berlin during an interregnum, as it were: at a moment when Piscator had temporarily disappeared as an active force in the left-wing theatre and the various collective groups which succeeded him had not yet got off the ground. For Brecht and Weill there was now the composition of *Mahagonny* to be resumed – as well as a small Berlin Requiem which Weill had agreed to write for Radio Frankfurt on texts by Brecht, and which they sketched out in November and December 1928. Both men probably also had some involvement in the production of Feuchtwanger's second 'Anglo-Saxon Play' *Die Petroleuminseln* at the Staatstheater in the former month, for which Weill wrote the music and Neher once more provided sets. But the immediate effect of *The Threepenny Opera*'s success was to establish the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm as the leading left-wing theatre of the moment in Berlin. Retrospectively Brecht came to speak of it as 'his' theatre, and indeed to a great extent he does seem to have dominated its entire opening season. For with *The Threepenny Opera* temporarily transferred to another theatre (and Carola Neher at some point assuming her original role as Polly), he took over the direction of Marieluise Fleisser's anti-militarist Bavarian farce *Die Pioniere von Ingolstadt*, a sequel to the play which he had recommended to the Junge Bühne three years earlier. This opened on 31 March 1929 and featured an unknown actor whom Brecht had advised Aufricht to engage on a three-year contract – Peter Lorre – along with Kurt Gerron and Lenya, the Brown and Jenny from his own play. The farce itself was too outspoken for the police and the military, and had to be bowdlerised, but it none the less ran for two months and broke even; Aufricht later judged it the best of all the productions which he sponsored. Then *The Threepenny Opera* returned for the rest of the season, and the problem of the next play had to be faced.

Rather than concern himself with the *Mahagonny* project, Aufricht wanted another Brecht–Weill work on the same lines as before. It was scheduled once more for 31 August; Engel and Neher were again booked, and a number of the same actors already under contract. But the moment had passed, the first symptoms of the imminent economic crisis were beginning to make themselves felt, the veneer of political

tolerance was wearing thin. Brecht had a seismographic feeling for such changes, and he was already heading towards a much more didactic kind of theatre, in which he briefly also managed to involve Weill. As a result *Happy End*, the Chicago comedy which was supposed to follow up *The Threepenny Opera*'s success, never really stirred his interest or drew the same inspired ideas from him as had Gay's inherently much superior original. Superficially the prospects might have seemed the same as before, with Elisabeth Hauptmann providing the basic dialogue and Brecht writing a number of characteristic songs, some of them eliciting first-rate settings from Weill. But whereas in 1928 Brecht was willing to make many radical changes in the former, so that his stamp on the final play is unmistakable, only a year later this was no longer the case. At some point during the spring of 1929 he began writing his first *Lehrstücke* or didactic plays under the twofold influence of the Japanese Noh drama and Hindemith's concept of *Gemeinschaftsmusik* – the educational implications of making music in common. Two works for that summer's Baden-Baden festival resulted. Almost at the same time his hitherto uncommitted left-wing opinions crystallised as a consequence, it seems, of the Berlin May Day demonstration at which the police killed thirty-one people. From then on he was aligned with the German Communist Party, and in the autumn both *Happy End* and Piscator's theatre alike failed.

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Meantime, the full *Mahagonny* libretto had been completed by the middle of 1928, and the understanding between the two men, though never intimate, continued to be good. Brecht still assumed, as he had written in the Baden-Baden programme, that Weill's work was

> moving in the same direction as those artists in every field who foresee the collapse of 'society' art . . . It is already addressing an audience which goes to the theatre naïvely and for fun.

– while Weill for his part told the music magazine *Melos* that

> there is no ground whatsoever for the frequently voiced fear that any collaboration with literary figures of real stature must make the relationship between music and text into one of dependence, subordination or at best parity. The more powerful the writer, the greater his ability to adjust himself to the music . . .

The libretto once finished, Weill composed the music during the run of *The Threepenny Opera*, sending off both script and score to his

Viennese publishers Universal-Edition in April 1929. The latter had already warned him that the new work looked like being both controversial and financially hazardous to stage, and now they became even more alarmed at the sight of Brecht's text for the brothel scene (the original text, that is, as given on pp. 369–70). On being told by their director Alfred Hertzka that any established opera house would certainly reject it, Weill agreed after some argument to drop the most outrageous passage; marked the whole 'Mandalay' section, with its depiction of the Men queueing up, as an optional cut; and got Brecht to provide him with the poem of the cranes and the cloud, which he set in 3/8 time as a love duet. Shortly afterwards the two collaborators, who may well by now have come to feel that *Amerikanismus* had become rather hackneyed, agreed as far as possible to eliminate the exaggeratedly 'American' names and allusions in the text, and thereby to make it clear that 'the amusement town [or fun city] of Mahagonny . . . is international in the widest sense' and the satire applicable a good deal nearer home. The Weill–Neher 'prompt-book' accordingly carries a warning (p. 353) against creating any kind of 'Wild West and cowboy romanticism', while there is a prefatory note in the full score suggesting the use of German names for the original lumberjack quartet of Jim, Fatty, Billy and Jack or Jake. (This was not, however, in time to affect the piano score, whose first edition retains the American names.)

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In the cultural life of the Weimar Republic 1929 was a crucial year: and much of the subsequent history of this opera – and perhaps even of the whole Brecht–Weill collaboration – would have been different if the work had been completed twelve months sooner. For the whole climate in which it had been originally conceived now changed, further stages in the process being the death of Stresemann (whose foreign policy ever since 1923 had made quite amazingly few concessions to German nationalism) and the Wall Street crash of October which initiated the world economic crisis. Nationalsim now once more asserted itself, to the great advantage of the Nazis; the Communist left went over to a policy of aggressive confrontation, largely directed against the Socialists; while a period of economic retrenchment began which affected every aspect of life. So far as *Mahagonny* was concerned the effects were threefold. First of all the opera houses, compelled to economise, started to cut back on modern works, while Klemperer's Kroll-Oper on the Platz der Republik was actually closed down. Secondly there was a considerable wave of

feeling against 'decadent' modern art and music, which the crazier Nazis like Alfred Rosenberg interpreted racially as part-negroid (the jazz influence) and partly a destructive operation by the Jews. Finally Brecht's own attitude to politics and the theatre changed radically as he aligned himself with the Communist Party and began developing the new didactic form.

With Brecht apparently losing interest once the opera had gone off to the publishers, it was left to Weill to arrange its production. This might possibly have been undertaken by Piscator, who in March had listed it among the forty works under consideration by his company; but that company died in October. Aufricht too, the impresario of *The Threepenny Opera*, was so angry with Brecht over *Happy End* that it was two years before he would consider another work by him. Thus the choice would probably have been limited to the opera houses even if Universal-Edition had not in any case seen them as the natural and preferred outlet. Here the obvious candidate would of course have been the Kroll-Oper with its truly remarkable record of modern productions, for Klemperer knew both collaborators and had a high regard for Weill's music. But such negotiations as took place with the Kroll must have been prior to the opera's completion. For in July the Prussian government's public accounts committee proposed to abolish the Kroll-Oper altogether, and from that point the latter was doomed.

In the end the choice fell on the Leipzig Opera, where two previous Weill premières had been staged (likewise Křenek's *Jonny spielt auf*), with a second production to follow at Kassel a few days later. These took place in March 1930, by which time the cultural reaction was well under way, with a Nazi, Wilhelm Frick, actually heading the responsible ministry in nearby Thuringia. Though the Kassel production went calmly enough (after some modifications in the last scene to make its slogans seem less 'communistic') the première proper was interrupted by demonstrators, and from then on the opera became a prime target for such people. Accordingly (to quote David Drew), 'the few music-directors who wished to stage it were anxious to do so only with "closed performances" '.

Fortunately Berlin was different, and right up to the Nazi takeover in 1933 left-wing plays and productions continued to be staged; thus Brecht's own extremely radical re-staging of *Man equals Man* could be seen at the Prussian State Theatre in February 1931 (though it only ran for a few performances). It was Aufricht, then, who came to the rescue of *Mahagonny* by deciding to put it on at the specially rented Theater am Kurfürstendamm at the end of that year, and to do so in a predominantly theatrical rather than an orthodoxly operatic

production. Actors were engaged rather than singers, with the fortunate result that Weill had to write a new setting for Jenny's Arietta in scene 5 to allow for Lenya's vocal limitations (it is now the accepted one). Brecht and Neher were nominated as directors, while the conductor was Schönberg's brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky, previously Klemperer's number two at the Kroll. Many cuts were made, including the crane duet, the Benares Song, 'God in Mahagonny' and the chorus 'Lasst euch nicht verführen'; the whole scale was reduced and shortened; the orchestra was cut down. To Theodor Adorno, though he had come to think an opera house the proper place for this work, it was the tightest, clearest and musically strongest performance yet, while Lenya too has written of it as something quite unforgettable. This in spite of the fact that Brecht and Weill were on bad terms throughout: so much so indeed that Aufricht underwrote the almost simultaneous première of the former's didactic play *The Mother* in order to distract him from the rehearsals, leaving the more amicable Neher in charge.

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Though there was no irreparable quarrel between the two men, there was from mid-1930 onwards a growing divergence which discouraged any further work of the originality of *Mahagonny*, as well as some specific disagreement about *Mahagonny* itself. In his edition of the writings of Kurt Weill David Drew has attributed this to what he terms 'the time-honoured rivalry of words and music', suggesting in particular that Brecht was riled by the one-sidedly 'musical' slant of the programme note to the Leipzig première. Whether or not this was the cause, he left the compilation of the 'prompt-book' entirely to his two partners, even though Universal-Edition had announced that he too would take part in it; and he also acted quite unilaterally where the publication of the text was concerned. This seems to have taken place some time in the winter of 1930–31 (the relevant number of his *Versuche* being actually dated 1930), and it showed a number of variations from the version composed by Weill. Among these was the changing of the German name Johann previously proposed for the hero Jimmy, so as to turn the four lumberjacks into Paul, Heinrich, Jakob and Josef.

More significantly perhaps, the 'Notes on the Opera' which Brecht wrote for this publication in August 1930 not only differ from Weill's views but indicate a considerable disappointment with the way in which *Mahagonny* had turned out. Meant as an epic opera of a new kind, it had finished up as a 'culinary' one, so Brecht felt: that is to say

it resembled the conventional opera whose ingredients, instead of being kept separate, are cooked together for the benefit of an audience of musical gastronomes. In fact this was not a criticism of the work itself so much as of its presentation, which had been left in the first place to the established opera houses. For what Brecht was concerned with, and had doubtless imagined Weill to be concerned with too, was not just the writing of 'an opera' but the transformation of the audience and of the whole theatrical and operatic 'apparatus': that Establishment, in fact, which he now realised to be socially and economically based. The trouble, then, was not so much a basic incompatibility between the two men – for after all they spent their summer holidays together at Le Lavandou in 1931 and supported each other in the *Threepenny Opera* film lawsuit that autumn – as a sense on Brecht's part that Weill, once so full of promise for him, had let him down.

And there was indeed some inconsistency between the collaborators' original concept of the staging and the actual results. Thus the provisions of the 'prompt-book' (whose foreword by Weill appeared two months before the Leipzig première) suggest that the set must be made 'so simple as to be equally well transferable from the theatre to any old platform', with neither emotion, stylisation nor any kind of irony or caricature being added to the bald, almost concert-like delivery of the material with its carefully built-in gests. This extreme economy of approach, reflecting possibly the lessons of the first *Lehrstücke* as well as the experience of the *Songspiel* of 1927, was intended to make very clear the montage structure of the work. At the same time it rested on a systematic concept of 'gestic' writing, acting and composition which was actually formulated in the first place by Weill. Indeed his essay 'On the Gestic Nature of Music', which first appeared in *Die Musik* as early as March 1929 – some two years before Brecht started writing of 'the gest' – plainly reflects the work on *Mahagonny*. This principle of identifying the successive attitudes expressed in a work or a scene or a song, and then communicating them individually in all the separate media involved, underlay the whole Weill–Brecht–Neher collaboration. Each point had to be distinctly made from their three different directions in such a way that the audience could follow the cumulative argument without abandoning what Weill termed 'the calm posture of a thinking being'.

Nothing in the available contemporary accounts suggests that these demands ever came near to being fulfilled, not even in the Aufricht production of 1931. And so Brecht may well have blamed Weill for his willingness to listen to the powerful chiefs of Universal-Edition who

had done so much to establish the modern repertoire at the Kroll-Oper and elsewhere, instead of seeking that new audience which goes to the theatre 'naïvely'. He could equally well, for that matter, have blamed himself, for once the libretto was off his hands he seems to have left Weill, and in a lesser degree Neher, to settle the question of where and how it was to be staged. Whatever the reason, the salient fact is that from then on he apparently lost all interest in what, after all, remains a powerful, funny, unusually concise and often quite beautiful text. Simply to read, it is one of his finest works. Yet after the 1931 production he virtually ignored it, never (for instance) once mentioning it in the *Journals* that set out his achievements, reflections and preoccupations between 1938 and the end of his life. Certainly he did not view it with anything like the affection which he felt for *The Threepenny Opera*, though the latter was a far less original piece of writing.

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The great difference between *The Threepenny Opera* and either *Mahagonny* or *Happy End* was its enormous success, which kept it running in different parts of Germany until the Nazis took over and in other countries longer still. This did not immediately tempt Brecht to tinker with the text of the play (as he continued to do with *Man equals Man*), but when Warner Brothers and Tobis, acting through producers called Nero-Film, contracted in May 1930 to make a film version he started looking at it with changed – and changing – eyes. Though sound film was then in its infancy, the prospects seemed good: G. W. Pabst was to be the director, Lania (of Piscator's old collective) to write the script; Carola Neher would play Polly, Lenya Jenny; while Brecht and Weill were given a say respectively in the script and the music. Two parallel versions would be made, one German and one French. That summer, accordingly, Brecht wrote Lania the treatment called 'Die Beule', 'The Bruise', which in effect ignores all that had remained of *The Beggar's Opera* and uses the characters and the Victorian London setting to point a radically changed moral. Everything now is on a larger scale – the gang is 120 strong, Peachum heads a Begging Trust – and a higher social level, with peers, a general and a magistrate at Macheath's wedding in the ducal manège. The gang and the beggars this time are engaged in a war whose symbol is the bruise inflicted by the former on a beggar called Sam. Peachum accordingly uses the beggars to disfigure the smartly repainted slum streets through which the Queen is to pass; he interviews Brown with seven lawyers behind him, and secures Macheath's arrest after a bucolic picnic and a

chase in which a car full of policemen pursues a car full of whores. There is no escape and no second arrest. Under Polly's direction the gang has simply taken over the National Deposit Bank and converted itself into a group of solemn financiers. Both they and Mrs Peachum now become uneasy about the dangers of unleashing the poor; while Brown has a terrible dream, in which thousands of poor people emerge from under one of the Thames bridges as a great flood, sweeping through the streets and public buildings. So the 'mounted Messengers' this time are the bankers who arrive to bail Macheath out; and rather than disappoint the crowds Peachum hands over Sam to be hanged instead. The social façades are maintained as Macheath joins the reunited bourgeoisie awaiting the arrival of their Queen.

This scheme, on which Neher and the Bulgarian director Slatan Dudow also collaborated, was plainly unwelcome to the producers, and the fact that Brecht only met the agreed August deadline by communicating it to Lania orally did not improve matters. Though Lania needed him to continue working the Nero firm chose to dismiss Brecht at this stage, and brought in the Communist film critic Béla Balázs to help complete the script. A lawsuit followed, which Brecht lost, and thereafter he had no words too bad for Pabst's film, which meanwhile went obstinately ahead, to be shown in Berlin on 19 February 1931. Though the long theoretical essay which Brecht thereafter wrote on the 'Threepenny Lawsuit', as he termed it, is an illuminating work, not least for its links with the ideas of his new friend Walter Benjamin, the modern reader should not allow its downright condemnation to put him off the film. For in fact not only did the latter capture aspects of the original (for instance Carola Neher's interpretation of Polly) that necessarily elude any modern production, but it also incorporates a surprising proportion of Brecht's changes to the story. These, however, continued to itch Brecht, so that while leaving the play itself as it had been in the 1928 production (with all its last-minute decisions and improvisations) he was soon planning its further development in *The Threepenny Novel*, his one substantial work of fiction, which he was to hand in to its Dutch publisher some months after leaving Germany in 1933. Engel, when he came again to direct the play at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm for the Berliner Ensemble in 1960, after Brecht's death, wondered at first if he could not incorporate some of the ideas from 'The Bruise' and the novel, but soon decided that they were too divergent from the play. Brecht for his part wrote some topical versions of the songs (p. 305 ff.) for other directors in the immediate post-war years, but it is not clear if and when they were used, and certainly he never made

them a permanent part of the text; indeed they hardly merit it. All the same, his discussions in connection with Giorgio Strehler's Milan production in the last year of his life (pp. 320–5) show that he regarded *The Threepenny Opera* as no inviolable museum piece. For he envisaged a new framework, and welcomed Strehler's updating of the story to the era of the Keystone Kops.

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Like *Man equals Man*, *The Threepenny Opera* presents a problem to earnest-minded interpreters, since it is hard to reconcile its flippancies with Brecht's status as a Communist playwright, while its repeated successes in the commercial theatres of bourgeois society – from Berlin of the 1920s to New York of the 1970s – take some explaining away. The trouble here is not only that when Brecht actually wrote his share of this play he was only beginning to explore Marxism and had barely begun to relate to the class struggle (as the leading Communist Party critic Alfred Kemény pointed out), but that the issue was subsequently confused by Brecht's writing all his own notes and interpretations *after* adopting a more committed position in 1929. His remarks moreover are too easily taken out of context and at their face value: his insistence, for instance, that the play is a critique of bourgeois society and not merely of the *Lumpenproletariat* was only a retort – quite unsubstantiated – to that ill-disposed critic in the party's daily *Die Rote Fahne* who had accused him of the contrary, referred to him as 'the Bohemian Bert Brecht' and dismissed the whole work as a money-spinner containing 'Not a vestige of modern social or political satire'. Just like Piscator's productions of the previous season *The Threepenny Opera* undoubtedly appealed to the fashionable Berlin public and subsequently to the middle classes throughout Germany, and if it gave them an increasingly cynical view of their own institutions it does not seem to have prompted either them or any other section of society to try to change these for the better. The fact was simply that 'one has to have seen it', as the elegant and cosmopolitan Count Kessler noted in his diary after doing so with a party that included an ambassador and a director of the Dresdner Bank.

Brecht himself had far too much affection for this work to admit the ineffectiveness of its message, even after he had tacitly confirmed such accusations by going over to austerer, explicitly didactic forms. Even years later he could still view it through something of a pink cloud, as indicated by his wishful replies to Giorgio Strehler on p. 322. Yet the most favourable criticisms at the time were concerned less with its attack on 'bourgeois morality' and capitalist property rights as being

based on theft than with its establishment of a highly original new theatrical genre. Thus Herbert Ihering, who from the first had been Brecht's leading supporter among the Berlin critics, while welcoming this 'new form, open to every possibility, every kind of content', pointed out that 'this content, however, has still to come'. Part of the common over-estimation of the play's social purpose and impact is due most probably to the intense dislike felt for it by the German nationalist reaction which began gaining ground within a year of the première and was soon to bring the Nazis their first great electoral successes. It was a time of growing polarisation in German political and cultural life, and if the Berlin theatre continued to move leftwards, dragging part of the cinema with it, there was now much less hesitation on the part of the authorities and the great middlebrow public to voice their dislike of anything 'alien' and 'decadent' in the arts. Not only was Weill a leading target for such campaigns, largely on racialist grounds, but the brothel scene and the cynicism of the songs were certainly enough to qualify Brecht too, whether or not he represented any kind of serious threat. A great wave of irrational feeling was building up, and in so far as it was directed against *The Threepenny Opera* its political aspects were quite deceptive. Thus that shrewd observer Kurt Tucholsky could write in spring 1930 that the battle was a sham one because the work itself was unrealistic. 'This writer can be compared to a man cooking soup on a burning house. It isn't he who caused the fire.'

Yet if its political significance is often overrated today *The Threepenny Opera* remains revolutionary in a less obvious but equally disturbing sense. For, like *The Little Mahagonny* before it, it struck almost instinctively at the whole hierarchical order of the arts, with opera on its Wagnerian pinnacle at the top, and reshuffled highbrow and lowbrow elements to form a new kind of musical theatre which would upset every accepted notion of what was socially and culturally proper. This was what the best critics immediately recognised, Ihering writing that the success of *The Threepenny Opera* was of immense importance:

> A theatre that is not smart, not geared to 'society', has broken through to the audience.

Far more so the musicians; thus Klemperer included the wind suite from the music in his concerts and is reported to have seen the 1928 production ten times, while Heinrich Strobel compared it with *The Soldier's Tale* as 'showing the way' and Theodor Adorno judged it the most important event since Berg's *Wozzeck*. In many ways the change

of values which it implied has proved harder for later societies to assimilate than have the somewhat random gibes at business, religious hypocrisy, individual charity, romantic marriage and the judicial system which make up the political content of the text. Particularly when seen in conjunction with Brecht's and Walter Benjamin's current thinking about the 'apparatus' of the arts, it suggested a complete cultural and sociological re-evaluation which would alter all the existing categories, starting with those of opera and operetta (for it was neither), as well as the corresponding techniques of acting, singing and so forth. Today, though certainly poverty, slums, corrupt business practices and biassed justice continue to exist in our most prosperous societies, we no longer feel that *The Threepenny Opera* has anything all that acute to say about them. But the implications of the new form for singers, musicians, voice teachers and above all for institutionalised opera are still far from fully digested. And because Brecht and his friends did not yet manage to capture the 'apparatus' of which they spoke this held good for Communist as well as for capitalist society.

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If the problem with *The Threepenny Opera* is that its interpreters tend to take the social criticisms too seriously, those of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* may fail to take its content seriously enough. This is partly due to the fact that the translation by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, for all its verbal felicities, needs to be treated with some reservation. A few minor misunderstandings have been corrected, but they also made a dubious decision to return to a modified form of the original 'American' names as found in the piano score which they used. For while it is true that an American audience hearing them for the first time might find that they help make the text more relevant to its own society, to everybody who knows that the work emanated from the Berlin of the 1920s – i.e., for almost anyone directing or conducting it – they conjure up just that modish *Amerikanismus* which Brecht and Weill wanted to discard. Of course the collaborators themselves had somewhat undermined this good intention by their deliberate return to the 'American' milieu in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which the New York revival of 1958 further emphasised by consciously setting it in the 1920s. But there remains a considerable risk that if *Mahagonny* is staged in English in this spirit it will become dated, historical, fashionably nostalgic and that much easier for us to stomach.

The Seven Deadly Sins was a comparatively slight work that was

written in exile in May 1933, some three months after Hitler came to power. It was commissioned by a short-lived Paris-based company called Les Ballets 1933 backed by the surrealist picture collector Edward James, with his Viennese wife Tilly Losch as its principal dancer; their choreographer was George Balanchine. Fairly clearly the commission was prompted by the success of Weill's concert there the previous December, when *Der Jasager* and a very trimmed-down version of *Mahagonny*, with Lenya among the singers, were included in a series called 'Concerts de la Sérénade'. So Brecht joined Weill in Paris that spring and supplied a libretto which was essentially a cycle of songs for Lenya in the old pseudo-American vein. As performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, with Lenya and Losch as the two Annas, this fell comparatively flat – Serge Lifar calling it 'de la pourriture de ballet' – though it made a great impression on Constant Lambert, who conducted the subsequent performance at the Savoy Theatre in London. To Brecht himself however this excursion into the past seems to have been of little interest, for he subsequently paid no attention to his script and made no attempt to get it published. He made just one amendment: the addition of the words 'of the petty bourgeoisie' to the title; the German phrase being *des Kleinbürgers*, the same words as he added to the title of the early one-act play *The Wedding*.

To return to *Mahagonny*, the unpleasant truth is that this work's message, unlike that of *The Threepenny Opera*, remains as valid as ever in a society like our own. For we too live in a consumer civilisation: one that has been intensified, refurbished and in many ways enriched, but remains every bit as money-conscious as that of Brecht's Suckerville, the 'city of nets'. We too have our idealists who feel that once 'Don'ts are not permitted here' the Golden Age will return and all social and economic problems fade into the background. We too are just as loud in our protests against just as muddled a list of things. And so the message must come direct to us, not altered through a blue and angelic 'period' haze.

The important thing, then, in staging this work is to forget all about the Berlin Cabarets on the one hand and the marching storm-troopers on the other, and treat it as simply and directly as its original conception. For Mahagonny is localised neither in Weimar Germany nor in a pseudo-America but in any society which lives in great cities and becomes obsessed with pleasure and the problem of how to pay for it. Its teaching is far closer to that of the great Bible-thumping revivalists than to the idiosyncratic attitudes of Mr Norris and Herr Issyvoo on which our present picture of pre-Hitler Berlin is so largely based; its choruses do not recall the husky voice of Marlene Dietrich so

much as the *Dies Irae*. Its warnings therefore are likely to be relevant as long as such societies depend on commercialised distractions, vices and entertainments, where even their permissiveness remains subsidiary to the rule that everything must be paid for. The point is summed up in one of the inter-scene inscriptions which Auden and Kallman for some reason failed to translate: 'SO GREAT IS THE REGARD FOR MONEY IN OUR TIME.' Only when this no longer applies will *Mahagonny* be truly a 'period' work. To present it as such today is an evasion.

THE EDITORS

This introduction is based on the three separate introductions to those plays in the Methuen hardback edition of the Collected Plays. Among further developments worth noting are some that concern the rôle of Brecht's collaborators Kurt Weill and Caspar Neher. Basing itself on the bowdlerised version of the original *Threepenny Opera* libretto which Weill's publishers issued in the autumn of 1928, the Kurt Weill Foundation has more than once tried to insist on the exclusion from English-language productions of lines 10–17 on p. 166 (starting 'You see before you') in Macheath's last speech on the gallows, on the grounds that they were a slightly later addition by Brecht. They are however part of the spoken dialogue to a 'play with music'; there is no musical pretext for excising them; we have no evidence that Weill himself ever argued for their removal; and their alleged 'Marxism' is hardly the business of a US-based charitable foundation.

Neher's designs shown by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1986 indicate that the projection screens right and left of the stage for the same play were not meant for titles and inscriptions as seen in photographs of the original production, but for coloured drawings with handwritten comments and quotations. For the 1931 production of *Man equals Man* Neher drew giant soldiers – hence perhaps Brecht's notion of putting two of them on stilts – and once or twice gave Galy Gay a brown skin. This suggests the possibility of making him an Indian rather than the 'Irishman' of our text.

JOHN WILLETT, 1994

Chronology

1898 10 February: Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht born in Augsburg.

1917 Autumn: Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Brecht to Munich university.

1918 Work on his first play, *Baal*. In Augsburg Brecht is called up as medical orderly till end of year. Elected to Soldiers' Council as Independent Socialist (USPD) following Armistice.

1919 Brecht writing second play *Drums in the Night*. In January Spartacist Rising in Berlin. Rosa Luxemburg murdered. April–May: Bavarian Soviet. Summer: Weimer Republic constituted. Birth of Brecht's illegitimate son Frank Banholzer.

1920 May: death of Brecht's mother in Augsburg.

1921 Brecht leaves university without a degree. Reads Rimbaud.

1922 A turning point in the arts. End of utopian Expressionism; new concern with technology. Brecht's first visit to Berlin, seeing theatres, actors, publishers and cabaret. He writes 'Of Poor BB' on the return journey. Autumn: becomes a dramaturg in Munich. Première of *Drums in the Night*, a prize-winning national success. Marries Marianne Zoff, an opera singer.

1923 Galloping German inflation stabilised by November currency reform. In Munich Hitler's new National Socialist party stages unsuccessful 'beer-cellar putsch'.

1924 'Neue Sachlichkeit' exhibition at Mannheim gives its name to the new sobriety in the arts. Brecht to Berlin as assistant in Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater.

1925 Field-Marshal von Hindenburg becomes President. Elisabeth Hauptmann starts working with Brecht. Two seminal films: Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* and Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*. Brecht writes birthday tribute to Bernard Shaw.

1926 Priemière of *Man equals Man* in Darmstadt. Now a freelance; starts reading Marx. His first book of poems, the *Devotions*, includes the 'Legend of the Dead Soldier'.

1927 After reviewing the poems and a broadcast of *Man equals Man*, Kurt Weill approaches Brecht for a libretto. Result is the text

of *Mahagonny*, whose 'Songspiel' version is performed in a boxing-ring at Hindemith's Baden-Baden music festival in July. In Berlin he helps adapt *The Good Soldier Schweik* for Piscator's high-tech theatre.

1928 August 31: première of *The Threepenny Opera* by Brecht and Weill, based on Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.

1929 Start of Stalin's policy of 'socialism in one country'. Divorced from Marianne, Brecht now marries the actress Helene Weigel. May 1: Berlin police break up banned KPD demonstration, witnessed by Brecht. Summer: Brecht writes two didactic music-theatre pieces with Weill and Hindemith, and neglects *The Threepenny Opera*'s successor *Happy End*, which is a flop. From now on he stands by the KPD. Autumn: Wall Street crash initiates world economic crisis. Cuts in German arts budgets combine with renewed nationalism to create cultural backlash.

1930 Nazi election successes; end of parliamentary government. Unemployed 3 million in first quarter, about 5 million at end of the year. March: première of the full-scale *Mahagonny* opera in Leipzig Opera House.

1931 German crisis intensifies. Aggressive KPD arts policy: agitprop theatre, marching songs, political photomontage. In Moscow the Comintern forms international associations of revolutionary artists, writers, musicians and theatre people.

1932 Première of Brecht's agitational play *The Mother* (after Gorky) with Eisler's music. *Kuhle Wampe*, his militant film with Eisler, is held up by the censors. He meets Sergei Tretiakov at the film's première in Moscow. Summer: the Nationalist Von Papen is made Chancellor. He denounces 'cultural bolshevism', and deposes the SPD-led Prussian administration.

1933 January 30: Hitler becomes Chancellor with Papen as his deputy. The Prussian Academy is purged; Goering becomes Prussian premier. A month later the Reichstag is burnt down, the KPD outlawed. The Brechts instantly leave via Prague; at first homeless. Eisler is in Vienna, Weill in Paris, where he agrees to compose a ballet with song texts by Brecht: *The Seven Deadly Sins*, premièred there in June. In Germany Nazi students burn books; all parties and trade unions banned; first measures against the Jews. Summer: Brecht in Paris works on anti-Nazi publications. With the advance on his *Threepenny Novel*, he buys a house on Fyn island, Denmark, overlooking the Svendborg Sound, where the family will spend the next six years. Margarete Steffin, a young Berlin Communist, goes with

them. Autumn: he meets the Danish Communist actress Ruth Berlau, a doctor's wife.

1934 Spring: suppression of Socialist rising in Austria. Eisler stays with Brecht to work on *Round Heads and Pointed Heads* songs. Summer: Brecht misses the first Congress of Soviet Writers, chaired by Zhdanov along the twin lines of Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. October: in London with Eisler.

1935 Italy invades Ethiopia. Hitler enacts the Nuremberg Laws against the Jews. March–May: Brecht to Moscow for international theatre conference. Meets Kun and Knorin of Comintern Executive. Eisler becomes president of the International Music Bureau. At the 7th Comintern Congress Dimitrov calls for all antifascist parties to unite in Popular Fronts against Hitler and Mussolini. Autumn: Brecht with Eisler to New York for Theatre Union production of *The Mother*.

1936 Soviet purges lead to arrests of many Germans in USSR, most of them Communists; among them Carola Neher and Ernst Ottwalt, friends of the Brechts. International cultural associations closed down. Official campaign against 'Formalism' in the arts. Mikhail Koltsov, the Soviet journalist, founds *Das Wort* as a literary magazine for the German emigration, with Brecht as one of the editors. Popular Front government in Spain resisted by Franco and other generals, with the support of the Catholic hierarchy. The Spanish Civil War becomes a great international cause.

1937 Summer: in Munich, opening of Hitler's House of German Art. Formally, the officially approved art is closely akin to Russian 'Socialist Realism'. In Russia Tretiakov is arrested as a Japanese spy, interned in Siberia and later shot. October: Brecht's Spanish war play *Señora Carrar's Rifles*, with Weigel in the title part, is performed in Paris, and taken up by antifascist and amateur groups in many countries.

1938 January: in Moscow Meyerhold's avant-garde theatre is abolished. March: Hitler takes over Austria without resistance. It becomes part of Germany. May 21: première of scenes from Brecht's *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* in a Paris hall. Autumn: Munich Agreement, by which Britain, France and Italy force Czechoslovakia to accept Hitler's demands. In Denmark Brecht writes the first version of *Galileo*. In Moscow Koltsov disappears into arrest after returning from Spain.

1939 March: Hitler takes over Prague and the rest of the Czech territories. Madrid surrenders to Franco; end of the Civil War. Eisler has emigrated to New York. April: the Brechts leave Denmark for Stockholm. Steffin follows. May: Brecht's *Svendborg Poems* published. His father dies in Germany. Denmark accepts Hitler's offer of a Non-Aggression Pact. August 23: Ribbentrop and Molotov agree Nazi-Soviet Pact. September 1: Hitler attacks Poland and unleashes Second World War. Stalin occupies Eastern Poland, completing its defeat in less than three weeks. All quiet in the West. Autumn: Brecht writes *Mother Courage* and the radio play *Lucullus* in little over a month. November: Stalin attacks Finland.

1940 Spring: Hitler invades Norway and Denmark. In May his armies enter France through the Low Countries, taking Paris in mid-June. The Brechts hurriedly leave for Finland, taking Steffin with them. They aim to travel on to the US, where Brecht has been offered a teaching job in New York at the New School. July: the Finnish writer Hella Wuolijoki invites them to her country estate, which becomes the setting for *Puntila*, the comedy she and Brecht write there.

1941 April: première of *Mother Courage* in Zurich. May: he gets US visas for the family and a tourist visa for Steffin. On 15th they leave with Berlau for Moscow to take the Trans-Siberian railway. In Vladivostok they catch a Swedish ship for Los Angeles, leaving just nine days before Hitler, in alliance with Finland, invades Russia. June: Steffin dies of tuberculosis in a Moscow sanatorium, where they have had to leave her. July; once in Los Angeles, the Brechts decide to stay there in the hope of film work. December: Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brings the US into the war. The Brechts become 'enemy aliens'.

1942 Spring: Eisler arrives from New York. He and Brecht work on Fritz Lang's film *Hangmen Also Die*. Brecht and Feuchtwanger write *The Visions of Simone Machard*; sell rights to MGM. Ruth Berlau takes a job in New York. August: the Brechts rent a pleasant house and garden in Santa Monica. Autumn: Germans defeated at Stalingrad and El Alamein. Turning point of World War 2.

1943 Spring: Brecht goes to New York for three months – first visit since 1935 – where he stays with Berlau till May and plans a wartime *Schweik* play with Kurt Weill. In Zurich the Schau-

spielhaus gives world premières of *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *Galileo*. November: his first son Frank is killed on the Russian front.

1944 British and Americans land in Normandy (June); Germans driven out of France by end of the year. Heavy bombing of Berlin, Hamburg and other German cities. Brecht works on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and with H. R. Hays on *The Duchess of Malfi*. His son by Ruth Berlau, born prematurely in Los Angeles, lives only a few days. Start of collaboration with Charles Laughton on English version of *Galileo*.

1945 Spring: Russians enter Vienna and Berlin. German surrender; suicide of Hitler; Allied military occupation of Germany and Austria, each divided into four Zones. Roosevelt dies; succeeded by Truman; Churchill loses elections to Attlee. June: *Private Life of the Master Race* (wartime adaptation of *Fear and Misery* scenes) staged in New York. August: US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrenders. Brecht and Laughton start discussing production of *Galileo*.

1946 Ruth Berlau taken to hospital after a violent breakdown in New York. Work with Auden on *Duchess of Malfi*, which is finally staged there in mid-October – not well received. The Brechts have decided to return to Germany. Summer: A. A. Zhdanov reaffirms Stalinist art policies: Formalism bad, Socialist Realism good. Eisler's brother Gerhart summoned to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee. November: the Republicans win a majority in the House. Cold War impending.

1947 FBI file on Brecht reopened in May. Rehearsals begin for Los Angeles production of *Galileo*, with Laughton in the title part and music by Eisler; opens July 31. Brecht's HUAC hearing October 30; a day later he leaves the US for Zurich.

1948 In Zurich renewed collaboration with Caspar Neher. Production of *Antigone* in Chur, with Weigel. Berlau arrives from US. Summer: *Puntila* world première at Zurich Schauspielhaus. Brecht completes his chief theoretical work, the *Short Organum*. Travel plans hampered because he is not allowed to enter US Zone (which includes Augsburg and Munich). Russians block all land access to Berlin. October: the Brechts to Berlin via Prague, to establish contacts and prepare production of *Mother Courage*.

1949 January: success of *Mother Courage* leads to establishment of the Berliner Ensemble. Collapse of Berlin blockade in May

followed by establishment of West and East German states. Eisler, Dessau and Elisabeth Hauptmann arrive from US and join the Ensemble.

1950 Brecht gets Austrian nationality in connection with plan to involve him in Salzburg Festival. Long drawn-out scheme for *Mother Courage* film. Spring: he and Neher direct Lenz's *The Tutor* with the Ensemble. Autumn: he directs *Mother Courage* in Munich; at the end of the year *The Mother* with Weigel, Ernst Busch and the Ensemble.

1951 Selection of *A Hundred Poems* is published in East Berlin. Brecht beats off Stalinist campaign to stop production of Dessau's opera version of *Lucullus*.

1952 Summer: at Buckow, east of Berlin, Brecht starts planning a production of *Coriolanus* and discusses Eisler's project for a *Faust* opera.

1953 Spring: Stalin dies, aged 73. A 'Stanislavsky conference' in the East German Academy, to promote Socialist Realism in the theatre, is followed by meetings to discredit Eisler's libretto for the *Faust* opera. June: quickly suppressed rising against the East German government in Berlin and elsewhere. Brecht at Buckow notes that 'the whole of existence has been alienated' for him by this. Khrushchev becomes Stalin's successor.

1954 January: Brecht becomes an adviser to the new East German Ministry of Culture. March: the Ensemble at last gets its own theatre on the Schiffbauerdamm. July: its production of *Mother Courage* staged in Paris. December: Brecht awarded a Stalin Peace Prize by the USSR.

1955 August: Shooting at last begins on *Mother Courage* film, but is broken off after ten days and the project abandoned. Brecht in poor health.

1956 Khrushchev denounces Stalin's dictatorial methods and abuses of power to the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow. A copy of his speech reaches Brecht. May: Brecht in the Charité hospital to shake off influenza. August 14: he dies in the Charité of a heart infarct.

1957 *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *The Visions of Simone Machard* and *Schweyk in the Second World War* produced for the first time in Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Warsaw respectively.

Man equals Man

The transformation of the porter Galy Gay in the military cantonment of Kilkoa during the year nineteen hundred and twenty five

Collaborators: E. BURRI, S. DUDOW, E. HAUPTMANN, C. NEHER, B. REICH

Translators: GERHARD NELLHAUS and (for scene 1) BERTOLT BRECHT

Characters

URIAH SHELLEY
JESSE MAHONEY
POLLY BAKER
JERAIAH JIP
} *four privates in a machine-gun section of the British Army in India*

CHARLES FAIRCHILD, *known as Bloody Five, a Sergeant*
GALY GAY, *an Irish porter*
GALY GAY'S WIFE
MR WANG, *bonze of a Tibetan pagoda*
MAH SING, *his sacristan*
LEOKADIA BEGBICK, *canteen proprietress*
Soldiers

I

Kilkoa

Galy Gay and Galy Gay's wife

GALY GAY *sits one morning upon his chair and tells his wife*: Dear wife, I have decided in accordance with our income to buy a fish today. That would be within the means of a porter who drinks not at all, smokes very little and has almost no vices. Do you think I should buy a big fish or do you require a small one?

WIFE: A small one.

GALY GAY: Of what kind should the fish be that you require?

WIFE: I would say a good flounder. But please look out for the fishwives: they are lustful and always chasing men, and you have a soft nature, Galy Gay.

GALY GAY: That is true but I hope they would not bother with a penniless porter from the harbour.

WIFE: You are like an elephant which is the unwieldiest beast in the animal kingdom, but he runs like a freight train once he gets started. And then there are those soldiers who are the worst people in the world and who are said to be swarming at the station like bees. They are sure to be hanging around in numbers at the market place and you must be thankful if they don't break in and murder people. What's more they are dangerous for a man on his own because they always go around in fours.

GALY GAY: They would not want to harm a simple porter from the harbour.

WIFE: One can never tell.

GALY GAY: Then put the water on for the fish, for I am beginning to get an appetite and I guess I shall be back in ten minutes.

2

Street outside the Pagoda of the Yellow God

Four soldiers stop outside the pagoda. Military marches are heard as troops move into the town.

JESSE: Party, halt! Kilkoa! This here is Her Majesty's town of Kilkoa where they are concentrating the army for a long-predicted war. Here we are, along with a hundred thousand other soldiers, all of us thirsting to restore order on the northern frontier.

JIP: That demands beer. *He collapses.*

POLLY: Just as the powerful tanks of our Queen must be filled with petrol if we are to see them rolling over the damned roads of this oversized Eldorado so can the soldier only function if he drinks beer.

JIP: How much beer have we left?

POLLY: There are four of us. We still have fifteen bottles. So we must get hold of another twenty-five bottles.

JESSE: That demands money.

URIAH: Some people object to soldiers, but just one pagoda like this contains more copper than a strong regiment needs to march from Calcutta to London.

POLLY: Our friend Uriah's suggestion with respect to a pagoda which, though rickety and covered with flyshit, may well be bursting with copper surely merits our sympathetic attention.

JIP: All I know, Polly, is I've got to have more to drink.

URIAH: Calm down, sweetheart. This Asia has a hole for us to crawl through.

JIP: Uriah, Uriah, my mother always used to say: Do what you like, my darlingest Jeraiah, but remember pitch always sticks. And this place stinks of pitch.

JESSE: The door isn't properly shut. Watch out, Uriah, you bet there's some devilry behind it.