

Bertolt Brecht



Journals
1934–1955

Bertolt Brecht: Plays, Poetry and Prose

Edited by JOHN WILLETT

and RALPH MANHEIM

Journals 1934–1955

Brecht's Plays, Poetry and Prose
annotated and edited in hardback and paperback
by John Willett and Ralph Manheim

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* *in preparation*

Bertolt Brecht Journals

Translated by Hugh Rorrison
Edited by John Willett

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Brecht Between Two World Systems

Aside from a recently discovered handwritten diary of 1913 (when he was an adolescent), Brecht left two coherent diaries or journals: one for the years 1920 to 1922, which appeared in the Methuen edition in 1979, and the other the present 'work journal' or 'Arbeitsjournal' as it became called, which starts in the summer of 1938 and runs (or in the end hops) until about a year before his death in August 1956. Besides these two contrasting documents there are also a lot of miscellaneous jottings or notes of which a small number were included in the German edition of the first diary and more are expected to see the light in the new thirty-volume 'Berlin and Frankfurt' collected works which began appearing in 1988.

The first adult diary was handwritten and bound in four parts. It is self-aware, self-exploratory, often wildly romantic and exotic, full of poetic and theatrical ideas and insights. It seems to have been written for fun, for the pleasures of language, with little attention to eventual publishers or ordinary readers. Its later and larger successor is much less spontaneous. This is typewritten, recognisably by Brecht himself throughout – no evidence of his collaborators – on loosely filled pages and without capital letters except for the use of small capitals for titles and sometimes for proper names. 'In the last few days', he notes in the winter of 1941/2, when still feeling somewhat lost in the United States,

i have skimmed superficially right through this journal. naturally it is quite distorted, for fear of unwelcome readers, and i will have difficulty following its guidelines one day. it stays within certain bounds, precisely because bounds are there to be exceeded.

Who were those unwelcome readers, we may wonder? The police, the Nazi invaders of Denmark, the watchdogs of the Communist Party, his household, the women closest to him? About these last he says very little – much less than in the earlier diary – and maybe he meant to control his utterances about politics too, and even about other things, though such matters as his thoughts about Soviet policy and propaganda in 1939/40 burst out none the less. But the possibility of eventual publication, for better or worse, was surely in his mind.

It was not Brecht who used the term 'work journal', and although it certainly contains important reflections about his work, its problems and its progress, there are surprising aspects of his writing about which the journal says very little. About *Mother Courage*, for instance, he says nothing about the original planning and completion in 1939; *Lucullus* too is barely discussed in its first (radio) version; his intentions with *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* remain unclear; he never mentions that great poem 'To those born later'; and he seems quite to have lost interest in *The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads* after its Danish première. He does however tell us a lot about his fellow exiles, gives vivid glimpses of his own family, comments sharply on Californian life and landscape, keeps an eye on the Second World War and looks around him with his own special mixture of interest and detachment. Repeatedly he says the unexpected thing. Much of this is like a montage, as he cuts from one subject to another, and the scrapbook effect is added to by the insertion of photographs – public or personal – and newspaper cuttings from different sources. There are gaps, sometimes conscious; sometimes perhaps because he is away from his own desk; they become more noticeable as the journal goes on. The year 1946, for instance, is an almost complete blank, and for the last three years or so of his life the material is sparse.

So our editorial notes set out in the first place to comment on what he says, often about little-known individuals and works and sometimes obscure subjects. This has been done separately from the journal proper, not so much in order to preserve its flow as the opposite: i.e. to convey its montage structure, its particular jerky dynamic, not unlike the 'epic' construction of the plays. Generally speaking the pictures and cuttings are as chosen and positioned by him, sometimes with a brief explanatory caption, though he took so many of them from English-language publications that little captioning is needed. We have included some longer notes for the interested reader which set out to resume Brecht's life and concerns during the gaps. And we start the book with a short run-up to the summer of 1938 in the shape of a few self-introductory statements which have not previously been published in this edition. In his maturity he was not generally so introspective.

Now what made him start this journal in 1938? What was happening in his life and writing, and indeed in the world, to impel him? In February he was forty; he was an exile from Germany who had been living quietly in a thatched cottage on a Danish island for four years, stripped of his citizenship and cut off from all the former outlets for his work. In March the Nazis took over Austria, his wife's country; her family were Jewish. In France the Popular Front was already in decline when Léon Blum lost power in April. There and in England the 'appeasers' triumphed that autumn when Hitler's demands were granted under the Munich Agreement. Mussolini and Franco too were doing well. In Russia the purges were under way, powered by the great Moscow show trials of August 1936, January 1937 and March 1938 (with Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin as principal victims) and their promotion of 'vigilance'. The exiled German writers there were keen to comply, and obediently accused one another. Moscow-based organisations like the International Leagues of Revolutionary Writers (MORP) and Revolutionary Theatres (MORT) had been closed down. Brecht's last piece of immediate Party-Line theatre had had its première in Paris in May, and in the autumn he wrote *Galileo*, first of the new big plays.

By then he had started using the phrase 'the Dark Times', which defined the new climate of his life and art; and it is plain that the darkness was not confined to Nazi Germany, where the Second World War was already being brewed. Three years had passed since his visit to Moscow, when he had met members of the Comintern executive, exchanged views about the *V-Effekt* with Sergei Tretiakov, been honoured by Carola Neher and others with a 'Brecht evening' of songs and poems and discussed various plans for publications and performance; the signs were hopeful. By the beginning of 1938 however Tretiakov himself, the two Comintern members Kun and Knorin and the actress Carola Neher had all been arrested; Ernst Ottwalt (Brecht's fellow script writer on *Kuhle Wampe*) was expelled from the Party, and Piscator advised (by Pieck of the Comintern) not to return from France now that MORT had been 'liquidated'. At the end of the year Mikhail Koltsov of *Izvestiya*, the sponsor of *Das Wort*, the Moscow-based German Communist magazine which Brecht edited with Feuchtwanger and Willi Bredel, was also arrested on his return from the Spanish War. Two months later the magazine was closed down, and with that such small role as had been left to Brecht in Communist cultural policy came to an end.

Brecht saw clearly enough that culture in the Soviet and KPD (or German Communist Party) reckoning was 'Kulturpolitik', an amalgam of its political and artistic aspects as interpreted by 'cultural politicians' approved by the party authorities. He could not say much about the arrests, still less about the deaths which usually followed, though now and again the journal makes a brief allusion; and he was anxious not to weaken the position of what he knew to be his own side in the fight against Hitler. This led him not only to wrap up his criticisms of the USSR in the *Me-Ti* aphorisms which he now resumed writing, and to conceal his bitter poem on Tretiakov's execution in August 1939, but also to hold back nearly all ripostes to the cultural politicians, the self-righteous 'Moscow clique' (as he termed them) of Georg Lukács and other Hungarian critics who dominated the KPD pundits headed by Johannes R. Becher. But entries in the journal were evidently something different, and perhaps this difference was one of the reasons for embarking on it at such a critical time. The result is that the cultural argument gives the whole seventeen years of miscellaneous entries a certain over-arching unity, as we begin with the Moscow view of decadence, decline or degeneration in the arts, and sweep through to the distant climax, where a closely related controversy in East Berlin is resolved, so far as Brecht and his theatre are concerned, by the ironic happy ending, when he goes off to Moscow to get a Stalin Prize.

*

Brecht was very right, in his introductory remark 'On Progress' (1938), when he said that he 'always needed the spur of contradiction'. He was not by nature a conformist, nor in any sense a right-thinking person, and much of the appeal for him of dialectics was that it left room for disagreement and inconsistency; from such clashes came the 'flow of things'. But if we look back to the start of Brecht's Dark Times, which really does seem to have been where he decided to become a diarist once more, then it is not difficult to imagine how Communist culture might have gone another way. This was the way that had appeared most likely only two or three years earlier, when the newly exiled Brecht, having finished his major work the *Three-penny Novel*, set out for Moscow, Paris and New York. In Moscow he met the leading Soviet directors and Clurman, Losey, Strasberg and Gordon Craig under the auspices of MORT. In Paris he attended the Amsterdam-Pleyel anti-Fascist conference with Barbusse, Gide, Mal-

raux, Gorki, Forster, Aldous Huxley and others. In New York, where he went with Hanns Eisler for the Theatre Union's production of *The Mother*, there was a new League of American Writers headed by Waldo Frank, with Odets, Michael Gold, Langston Hughes and other Leftists. This was to be affiliated to Moscow's MORP.

It seemed like the beginning of a widespread Popular Front culture, encouraged certainly by the Russians and the Comintern, but rooted in France and the Spanish Republic with a strong offshoot in the United States and related branches in Britain, Australia and the Scandinavian countries. Picasso's *Guernica* at the Paris Exhibition of 1937, the films of Jean Renoir and René Clair, the documentaries of Grierson and Ivens, the buildings of Le Corbusier and Aalto, the novels of Malraux and Isherwood, Steinbeck and Dashiell Hammett, the poems of Auden, the woodcuts of Masereel, the music of Stravinsky, Ellington and the young Britten all could be seen as part of an enlightened modern movement which was radically (and not just ideologically) opposed to the simultaneously developing reactionary arts of the Third Reich. This constellation was at its brightest in the years just before the Second World War, and in the democracies it survived in a number of ways – the magazine *New Writing*, for instance, became the (tamer and worse-produced) *Penguin New Writing*; the documentary movement inspired the British Army Film Unit. Later the Festival of Britain in 1951 had something of a postwar résumé about it, Corbusier and Gropius were given the RIBA Gold Medal, and in post-Fascist Italy the whole of this culture got a new impetus through Elio Vittorini's review *Politecnico* and the neo-Realist film. But the slow decline into the mediocrities of Post-Modernism was already under way.

Today this broadly coherent committed culture is studied with admiration and a certain nostalgia, starting with the Left art of the Weimar Republic and continuing through the Popular Front, the New Deal, the impact of the Spanish Civil War and other socio-cultural changes associated with the Thirties and the resistance to Hitler and Mussolini. Part of the essence of this movement was that it was so opposed to the nationalistic, racially-conscious, populist, pseudo-classical art of the Nazis and Fascists, and opposed not just in a philosophically or aesthetically defined sense, but by a recognisably liberal, concerned and forward-looking attitude which appeared to be common to its practitioners across all frontiers. Brecht was not a figure who fitted all that easily into any grouping, but in his individual and sometimes cantankerous way he did fit in here, and his unrealised

plan of 1937 for a 'Diderot Society' may show it, with its list of proposed members including Renoir, Eisenstein, Eisler, Piscator, Buriakov, Tretiakov, Gorelik and Auden. Unhappily names like these were almost as remote from the new Soviet orthodoxy – with its nineteenth-century art models, its Stanislavskyan theatre, its neo-classical architecture, its romantic or folksy music and its Socialist Realist writing – as from Hitler's showpiece House of German Art in Munich. So long as Moscow contained such international arts bodies as MORP, MORT, the International Music Bureau (through which Eisler was hoping to promote serialism) and Mezhrabpom-Film, the Party's artists and writers had some freedom to choose their forms. By mid-1938 these bodies, and with them that freedom, had disappeared.

This then is when Brecht started to say what he preferred not to say publicly in *Das Wort*. What he abstained from dealing with in his opening comments on Lukács's view of 'decline' is the parallel Nazi attack on 'degeneracy' in the visual arts and music as demonstrated in two massive exhibitions around that same time, whose argument closely matched the Moscow rejection of modern idioms. Nor does he take in the political aspect which he mentioned to Walter Benjamin (see Note for 25.7.38). This link between the new Party 'vigilance' generated by the intensive purges of summer 1936 and the anti-'formalist' campaign of the same period emerges from the records of four sessions of the Moscow German writers that September, which were first made public in Germany at the end of 1991. Lukács was only at the opening meeting, but his colleagues Barta and Gabór had leading roles, and Brecht may have heard reports of the mutual accusations and confessions. It is not surprising that from the start of the journal till his departure for California three years later there was no longer any question of his working in the USSR, let alone settling there, while Hanns Eisler had already given up his role in Soviet musical life and was working in New York.

*

Unlike his Moscow initiation by Piscator and Tretiakov in 1935, Brecht's New York visit in the autumn of that year had not been a happy experience. It took place just at the beginning of the Federal Theatre Project, and the formal innovations of the Living Newspaper and the Ladies Garment Workers' revues were still to come, but he did see Odets's agitprop play *Waiting for Lefty* and seems to have made something of a disciple of Marc Blitzstein. But with the excep-

tion of the designer, Max Gorelik, he alienated virtually everyone concerned with the Theatre Union production of *The Mother*, whose closure in mid-December helped to break the company, and for Brecht their disputes fanned out into a lasting quarrel with John Howard Lawson, the Group Theatre and others now concerned in developing psychological naturalism and the Stanislavskyan 'Method'. During the rest of the New Deal his opponents prospered, till they came to dominate much of the theatre and were richly rewarded in Hollywood as writers and actors. The result was that when he arrived in Los Angeles in the summer of 1941 there were few American friends waiting for him, let alone prospective editors, producers and publishers. Nor did he need to worry about the same sharp-eyed Moscow 'Kulturpolitiker' now that the USSR was at war. His main concerns were personal ones – how to live and work with his wife and children, how to get over the loss of his beloved aide Margarete Steffin, and (more tacitly) how to fit the difficult Danish actress Ruth Berlau into his changed life. For at least a year this was enough.

Roughly half the typed pages of his journal are from America, where he spent just over six years. One quarter is from before he left Scandinavia: mainly from Finland, where he had a particularly fruitful year. Just under a quarter is from his waiting period in Switzerland, where he spent nine months, and from his last eight years in Germany, though it peters out in 1954–5 with over a year left to go. So certainly the American experience bulks large in it, even though he never really settles down in Los Angeles or New York. He starts by mingling with his German fellow-exiles, whether from the world of literature, the films or the old Berlin theatre, or from the broader intellectual-political sphere of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. About all of these he is interesting, sometimes (rightly or wrongly) damning, often memorably amusing (see the sketches of Remarque and Emil Ludwig). At the same time it is they – and for much of the time they alone – who help to give him jobs. He tries to write film stories without much success; these are not on the whole very good. And except in poems like those of Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook* he seems always to be aiming at the conventional American portals to fame: Broadway and the movies. Meantime his real progress is taking place on the other side of the Atlantic, with the production of his big Scandinavian plays – *Galileo* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* – by the anti-Nazi refugees of the Zurich Schauspielhaus, who in spring 1941 had staged *Mother Courage*.

Fritz Lang gives him his big send-off with the resistance film

Hangmen Also Die for which he writes the story and collaborates with the leftist John Wexley on the script. Lion Feuchtwanger helps him with the French resistance play *Simone Machard*, with its flashback Joan of Arc 'visions'; it finds no takers, but Feuchtwanger's novel of their story is sold to MGM. Brecht's old Berlin producer Aufricht commissions an updated musical version of *Schweyk* with Kurt Weill; Peter Lorre thinks of playing in it, but the scheme collapses. Weill himself commissions a 'semi-operatic' version of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, whose script exists but never finds a producer. Elisabeth Bergner and Paul Czinner commission an adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi*; then Georg Rylands as director scraps all Brecht's work and reverts to Webster's text. Luise Rainer, the Austrian star married to Odets, commissions a *Chalk Circle* which emerges as *Caucasian* rather than Chinese; she loses interest. The *Fear and Misery* scenes are rejigged as *The Private Life of the Master Race*, and only performed once Hitler has been defeated and the play is no longer topical; Brecht disagrees with Piscator's direction, and the result is a flop. All this is émigré stuff, and aimed to satisfy conventional criteria; there is nothing to match the pre-Hitler didactic plays or the music-theatre works with Weill. Only when Brecht gets outside the emigration and finds a new kind of partner does he manage to perfect and realise a work that satisfies him: the Laughton production of *Galileo* in 1947, directed by the Living Newspaper director Joseph Losey.

There were many other threads to Brecht's life in those six years even apart from his private concerns. Thus he began playing a role in postwar planning, and was active in the Council for a Democratic Germany which was started following the establishment of a Free German National Committee in Moscow. A few of his writings began to appear in English, notably the bilingual edition of *Selected Poems* translated by H. R. Hays; there was a tentative plan to take this further, but the publishers changed hands. What really gave him a belated place in the American context was the decision of the House Un-American Activities Committee to examine him in connection with 'Communist infiltration of the motion-picture industry' rather than his relations with the Eisler brothers, whom their sister Ruth Fischer had denounced to the FBI a little wildly along with Brecht. This final association with the 'Hollywood nineteen', which threw him together with just those naturalist writers of whom he was apt to be critical, did not strike him at the time as all that important, and his entry about the hearing is barely longer than his contemptuous

critique of the *German Stanislavsky Book* which precedes it. This told him what to expect on his return to Europe a day after testifying. The other would tell him what he was leaving behind.

*

It was November 1947 when Brecht began his period of waiting in Switzerland. The war against Nazi Germany had been over for two and a half years; the worst of the bomb damage had been cleared from the great cities; the theatres closed during 1944/5 were open again with a mixture of new and old directors; four victorious allies were pushing their own plays. Except in Zurich, where he was hoping to stage *Puntila*, fourth of his Scandinavian plays to have its world première there, Brecht was no longer any better known than in the USA; virtually all his writings since 1938 were unpublished, and anything earlier would have to be brought back into print. Moreover he was not anxious for anything to be performed unless he could direct (or at least supervise) it himself. He wanted to understand the new German set-up, with its four differently administered zones and four sectors of Berlin; nor was it going to be easy for a now stateless subversive to travel, particularly during the Berlin blockade which began in mid-1948. So he had to feel his way with the help of pre-Nazi friends like Caspar Neher; he had to try things out on a modest scale (as with the Chur *Antigone* production); he had to write new texts, of which his theoretical *summa*, the *Short Organum*, was the most pressing; and there were other new possibilities like a revitalised Salzburg Festival to be explored. This was the springtime of his return; as Hitler's fortunes sank, the Dark Times had been absorbed into his poetry, and if he soon enough spoke of 'Bad Times' (in a poem of 1949) or 'Difficult Times' (in 1955) it was no longer with horror but with a certain resignation.

His credentials for establishing himself in the Soviet-controlled third of his country, with its capital in East Berlin, were the support of Friedrich Wolf, the old Communist doctor-playwright who had preceded him as a guest of Theatre Union in 1935, and Herbert Jhering the critic who had promoted him since 1922; then there was the power of *Mother Courage*, in whose Zurich production the new Deutsches Theater Intendant Wolfgang Langhoff had played Eilif; the fact that he had a fiftieth birthday to commemorate (in German culture these dates are important); and of course his anti-Nazi and pro-communist record. So in winter 1949 *Mother Courage*, unforgett-

ably played by Helene Weigel, came to Max Reinhardt's old theatre, was seen, and conquered; and on that foundation the Berliner Ensemble was built. One of its objectives, certainly, was to introduce and establish Brecht's still unknown plays after *Fear and Misery* and *Señora Carrar*, which had so far been seen as the most acceptable; another was to develop an alternative to the Nazi tradition of high gloss and overheated acting; a third was the extension and reinterpretation of the classical repertoire for a new thinking audience. Brecht realised from the outset that not everything could be done at once, and that the ascetic, didactic forms of his last Berlin productions two decades earlier would be too much of a shock. 'Of course, it is only as epic as they can take (and we can offer) today,' he notes of the success of the Ensemble *Puntilla* on 13 November 1949. 'But when will the real, radical epic theatre come into being?'

Whether or not the new Berlin audience, many of whom had been going to theatres under Hitler, would ever have accepted this is a debatable point. But certainly the East German cultural arbiters would not, for they were dominated by reliable ex-members of the 'Moscow clique', with Lukács still as their politico-aesthetic authority, and, in so far as they were reinforced by the locals, these could have changed their political views after 1945 without abandoning Hitler's aesthetic prejudices. As in 1938 'Socialist Realism' was the criterion, and it was not long before *Mother Courage* itself was being attacked as 'negative' and 'defeatist'. Production of *The Days of the Commune* was blocked on similar grounds. The opera *Lucullus* was 'formalist' on account of Dessau's difficult music, and once again pacifist or 'defeatist' in its text; though with the second point, as explained to him in the cold war context by Wilhelm Pieck (another Muscovite who now became the East German President), Brecht rather agreed. The production of *The Mother*, which represented a considerable compromise after the agitprop staging of 1932, was still too heretical to be toured in Poland (though Brecht got this order changed). The Academy of Arts in East Berlin supported Brecht with a special issue of its magazine, but the theatre journal *Theater der Zeit*, now edited by a former colleague on *Das Wort*, pursued the old Moscow line. By 4 March 1953, on the eve of a conference called by the official 'Commission on Art Affairs' to put across Stanislavsky's ideas, Brecht could comment on the Ensemble's loss of any worthwhile public response.

The next day Stalin died, and there are no entries for another five months. This was hardly because of shock, and the Stanislavsky conference, where Brecht left the talking to Helene Weigel, was not all

that damaging. But it was followed in May–June by a concerted attack on Hanns Eisler by the party paper *Neues Deutschland* launched by Wilhelm Girnus in alliance with the experienced ‘Kulturpolitiker’ Becher, Abusch and Rodenberg, with only Brecht effectively standing up for him. The transcript of this unworthy inquest was unpublished till 1991, following the death of Hans Bunge, who had got hold of the material and edited it. The point was to stop Eisler, one of the greatest living German/Austrian composers, from writing his planned opera on the *Faust* theme, whose gist would be that Goethe’s divided hero had reneged on his peasant forebears and their struggle against feudalism, and compromised with the rulers so as to frustrate that struggle indefinitely. This was an affront not just to the traditional view of Goethe’s play, but also to the very concept of ‘the hero’ and of the German ‘national heritage’; here was the ‘German humanist’ being presented as a ‘renegade’, and the so-called ‘German Misere’ about which Brecht also wrote (for instance in connection with *The Tutor*, another play of Goethe’s time) as a national malady rather than a reactionary hiccup. Becher, who had grown increasingly nationalistic, damned Eisler’s proposed text as ‘antinational’; Girnus repeatedly said that it ‘infringed the principles of Socialist Realism’; Ernst Hermann Meyer even cited Stalin’s arts henchman Zhdanov. Eisler moved back to Vienna, and wrote to the Party at the end of October to say that he had lost all motivation. Fifteen years later the Berliner Ensemble would plan to give his text a staged reading. The Ministry of Culture advised them not to.

All this was reminiscent of 1938, but at least it was not back to the purges. Just six days after the final assault on Eisler the East Berlin building workers struck and there was rioting on the borders between East and West Berlin. Other East German cities followed suit. Brecht, unlike some more conformist intellectuals, immediately assured the Party of his support, but called for a public post-mortem; by the time of his next journal entry two months later he felt a new confidence in the working class, which had at last made its voice heard. So on the one hand his position as a political artist became greatly strengthened: the Ensemble was at last granted its own theatre, and it could travel triumphantly to Paris in 1954 with *Mother Courage*. At the same time the arts administration was reorganised so as to do away with the ‘commissions’ that had controlled licences and resources (and had for instance set up the Stanislavsky conference). These were replaced by a Ministry of Culture under the now more tractable Johannes R. Becher, who allowed the ‘formalism’ argument to wither away.

And yet Brecht was not happy, as the all-round scepticism of that autumn's cycle of 'Buckow Elegies' shows. The Seventeenth of June, he decided, 'has alienated the whole of existence'. And again a year later, driving back from Buckow – itself an elegiac place, in a mistier and more subdued way than Hollywood, where the previous Elegies had been written – he found that he still felt uneasy in his country, whose Nazi past was not all that remote. Like Eisler, and in the end for related reasons, he had too many questions to ask. He was still working, still altering his work when done, still doubting, still enjoying – 'a mouthful of good meat', 'the kindnesses of delightful I. K.', the 'Pleasures' he listed for Käthe Reichel, and finally 'the song of every blackbird'. He could still express these enjoyments in the last poems. But not in the journal. There was no longer time.

Note on the Editing

We are very sorry to have to report the loss of Ralph Manheim, who died in Cambridge (England) last autumn after having worked on this edition and its Pantheon Books precursor ever since the project was initiated by Stefan S. Brecht in New York over twenty years ago. As the leading translator from German in his time he not only supervised the work of American, British, and other colleagues but did much of the translating himself – most recently the large volume of Brecht's *Letters* over five decades. He was still working when the present volume was being prepared. We miss his judgement and his advice.

In planning it we have followed the editor of the forthcoming new German edition, Werner Hecht, in including some material from the 'Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen' originally collected in the Suhrkamp edition of *Tagebücher* (1975), along with the earlier Diary. This accounts for the first four entries, dated 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1938. The journal proper starts with that dated 'july 38'.

We are grateful too to Helene Ritzerfeld and Günter Berg of Suhrkamp-Verlag for answering queries and supplying us with relevant background publications, some of which will be found listed in the Select Bibliography at the end of the Notes.

Throughout the text, phrases in italics marked by an asterisk were written in English by Brecht.

Denmark
1934 to 15 March 1939

1934

i am a playwright.

i would actually like to have been a cabinetmaker, but of course you don't earn enough doing that. i would have enjoyed working with wood. you don't get really fine stained and polished wood much any more, the beautiful panelling and balustrades of the old days, those pale, maple-wood tabletops as thick as the span of your hand that we found in our grandparents' rooms, worn smooth by the hands of whole generations. and the wardrobes i've seen! the way the edges were bevelled, the doors inlaid, the internal compartments offset, and such beautiful proportions. seeing a piece of furniture like that made you think better thoughts. the things they could do with a wooden fork-handle, these craftsmen who have all gone now. even in these times of ours there are good things to be seen. in bond street in london in a shop window i saw a big cigar-box, six plain maple boards and an iron catch, but it looked marvellous. the cigars were a guinea apiece. at a casual glance the unadorned box would have made one think, 'this tobacco is so costly that they can't even lay out a shilling for the packaging, a guinea is the bottom price they can take, and at that the planters are starving'. but on further inspection one could see that the firm had seen fit to provide a case too that would satisfy the expectations of their connoisseurs of fine tobacco.

i am now 36 years old and i have not wasted these years; i am entitled to say this, the more so if i think of the efforts i have made rather than of my achievements, and if i plead in extenuation that i live in times where it is not only easy to waste time, but one is also robbed of it. i haven't lived for myself, but in the public arena, for from the age of 21 i have been known for my literary works and for many enterprises connected with them. i have moreover already attracted followers, and i have advised and given a lead to others. i merely mention this to lend some weight to my statement that 'i don't know everything about life'. not that i am unpractical or live in the clouds; i don't avoid the nuts and bolts of everyday life, i am hardly an 'innocent soul'. i have arranged advantageous contracts that made possible a life that is in accord with my desires, i own houses, a motor car, i maintain a family, employ secretaries, all of this in spite of the fact that

4 Denmark, 35–38

no one could call my works marketable. but even if i am unpractical, in the sense that life, as i have said, puzzles me, there are more practical people than me who are equally puzzled.

when i weigh up where abandoning myself to my enthusiasms has got me, and what benefit repeated scrutiny has been, i recommend the latter. if i had adopted the former approach, i would still be living in my fatherland, but by not adopting the latter, i would no longer be an honest person.

1935

years after i had made my name as a writer i still knew nothing of politics and had not set eyes on a book by or about marx. i had written four dramas and an opera which had been performed in many theatres, i had received literary prizes, and in surveys which invited contributions from progressive minds, my opinions could frequently be read. but i didn't yet understand the abc of politics, and i had no more idea of the way public affairs in my country were regulated than any peasant in his isolated cottage. before i turned to literature, i had in the war year of 1917 written an anti-war poem, the 'ballad of the dead soldier', [. . .]. by 1918 i was a soldiers' council delegate and had been in the uspd. but on getting into literature i never progressed beyond rather nihilistic criticism of bourgeois society. not even eisenstein's great films, which had a colossal effect on me, nor the first productions of the piscator theatre, which i admired no less, moved me to study marxism. perhaps this was due to my scientific education (i had studied medicine for several years), which strongly immunised me against influence from the emotional side. then a sort of technical hitch helped me to move forward. for a certain play i needed the chicago wheat exchange as background. i imagined i would be able to get the necessary information quickly by consulting specialists and practitioners in the field. things turned out differently. nobody, neither a number of well-known economic journalists nor any of the businessmen – i followed one dealer with long experience of the chicago wheat exchange from berlin to vienna – could adequately explain what went on at the grain exchange. i gained the impression that the dealings were downright inexplicable, that is, not accessible to rational understanding, in other words plainly irrational. the manner in which the world's wheat was distributed was utterly incomprehensible. from any angle, apart from that of a handful of speculators, the market in wheat was one huge swamp. the projected drama was never written. instead i

began to read marx, and it was then, and only then that i did read marx. and for the first time, my own scattered practical experiences and impressions really came to life.

1936

the experiences i am having at the moment are not without value. i thought i could learn to write for films, but i see that it would take more than just a morning's work; the technique is at a quite primitive stage. however i am learning something different. although kortner treats me as an absolute equal, the nature of the work means that i am beginning to feel like an employee. i have not chosen the subject i am working on for myself, i can't relate to it and i don't know what will happen to my work when it comes on the market. i only have my labour to sell, and what is done with it afterwards has nothing to do with me. my interests are quite opposed to those of my employer. since i am on a weekly wage, it is not good for me if the work progresses quickly, quite the contrary. already i even catch myself taking out my watch as evening approaches; i want to get away, it's time for real life to begin. real life is quite separate, and incidentally quite unappealing. but in 'my own time' i don't waste a single thought on my daily work. i leave with the little englishman who works alongside me as translator and we strictly avoid touching anything that might remind us of work. i feel a sense of total solidarity with him when he refuses to work on sundays. kortner seems to have noticed this incipient class consciousness, for he often says on the phone, when he is cancelling an appointment, that with his job he has work to do – just as any boss might. whenever he can, he makes mock of his employers, points out their inferiority and laziness, whereupon we are both silent.

at lunch – i eat at his place and hanna kortner is very nice – it all stops and i am the great poet once more. i have the privilege of being able to take a nap, but then, after coffee, the situation changes once more. the paper i am using to write this is from work: i pinched it.

1938

ON PROGRESS

it pleased me to think of the progress i have made as having been a rearguard action. every retreat, or almost every retreat, had been preceded by an advance. for example i began with the simplest, most ordinary sorts of poetry, the ballad, the street-ballad, forms which the better sort of poet had not been using for a long time. i retreated to free

6 Denmark, July 38

verse when rhyme proved inadequate for what i had to say. in the drama i began with a five act play with a central figure, a plot of the most venerable sort (the enoch arden motif) and a contemporary setting. after a while i had moved on far enough to give up empathy, in which even the most progressive spirits believed implicitly. with all my love of the new, i did not give up the old without clinging doggedly to it until it finally ceased to function. when i could no longer make any headway in the theatre with empathy, try as i might, i devised the *lehrstück* for empathy. it seemed to me that if people stopped *merely* empathising intellectually, then that was enough, and something fruitful could be extracted from the old kind of empathy. incidentally i have never had any respect for revolutionaries who put off the revolution because things were too hot for them.

an error?

i have always needed the spur of contradiction.

LOVE OF CLARITY

my love of clarity comes from the unclear way i think. i became a little doctrinaire because i was in pressing need of instruction. my thoughts readily become confused, and i don't at all mind saying so. it's the confusion i mind. when i discover something, i immediately contradict it passionately and to my dismay call everything into question again, when a moment before i had been happy as a sandboy, because at least something had, in some measure, been established for my, as i told myself, modest requirements. such statements as that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, or life is a protein condition, console me uncommonly, until i run into further inconveniences. and scenes that take place between people i write down simply because i can't imagine them clearly unless i do.

BELIEF

i greatly like the proletariat's belief in its final victory. but the proletariat's closely connected belief in various other things it has been told, i find disturbing.

july 38

reading LUKÁCS'S MARX AND THE PROBLEM OF IDEOLOGICAL DECLINE. how 'mankind' moves in wherever the proletariat abandons a position. the talk is once again of realism which they have blithely debased, just as the nazis have debased socialism. the realistic writer in an

'age of decline' (our epoch that is; at the outset a few murmurings of 'age of bourgeois decline', then simply 'age of decline' – the whole thing is coming unstuck, not just the bourgeoisie) is relieved of the need to be a dialectical materialist. all he has to do 'is give properly perceived and experienced reality priority over accepted world-views and received prejudices in shaping his material'. since balzac and tolstoy did just this, they reflect reality! all the sholokhovs and thomas manns are thus vindicated, they reflect the world . . . there is no contradiction between the bourgeois realists and the proletarian realists (a glance at sholokhov seems in fact to corroborate this), nor, presumably between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat itself; how could there be, under the banner of the popular front? up with pastor niemöller! realist of the purest water! once again no knowledge is necessary to *shape your material* (for th[omas] mann indeed shapes his material, and it is a fact that he knows nothing). in shaping their material these half-wits give reality priority over prejudice without even knowing they are doing it. it is a process of direct experience: you get a kick, say: ow! he gets a kick, let him say: ow. the simplicity of it! the bold lukács is magically attracted to the problem of ideological decline. it has become his thing. with him it is a case of a kantian developing marxist categories ad absurdum not by refuting them, but by just using them. there is the *class struggle*, a hollow shell, an over-used whore of a concept, burnt out beyond recognition, but still with us, still putting in an appearance. 'among those present were . . .', '. . . also ran'. no more facts, nothing concrete. in the above essay one short quotation from marx. marx praises [EUGENE] SUE's shaping of a figure from the gutter. sue equips *fleur de marie* with beautiful qualities and thus 'slaps the prejudices of the bourgeoisie in the face'. this is concrete if it's anything. there is a slap in the face, a getting to grips with reality, more precisely with the dehumanised condition of fleur de marie. for lukács and his sort the class struggle is a demon, an empty principle which confuses people's ideas, not something that actually happens. it is part of reality and all the writer has to do is depict reality, and he will somehow include it. how this gambit resembles the national 'socialist' manoeuvres, the way these twits launch their formalistic critique with a campaign against formalism . . .

difficulties in CAESAR. he still has to be worked out more as an individual after all. he must rise between the classes. be pushed up between the struggling classes, force himself up. the proletarian revolution (in a country which after the victory had two struggling classes, the workers and the peasants) did after all make rule by one man possible. the equites

got c[esar] above them, at the same time as they got the patres and the plebs below them.

at the end the following tableau: the plebs, constantly renewed from among the slaves, reduced to the standard of slavery, provide a reservoir for the army with which foreign nations are overthrown and held down, as long as they continue to face up as nations, otherwise the armies help the foreign ruling classes to keep down their own proletariats. the plebs under the caesars do not form a proper class any longer. equites and patres are mixed on the basis of an equitable business footing. the senatorial politicians are transferred into the administration. the proletariat, ie slavery, is international, does not get developed as a productive resource. the slave economy has revealed everything it has in it, has reached and already exhausted its potential. oppression is general and embraces all levels of society.

brief, special and short-lived phase under caesar: the peasant plebs are enabled, once the transition to a slave economy in the production of cereals is complete, to participate in the introduction of slavery in the wine and olive oil sectors. this is where the lex julia comes in.

20 jul 38

CATILINA is no doubt the plebs at its lowest level, a nasty piece of work, even after you have scratched away the mud the ruling class slung at him. but perhaps it was just because of this, because certain inhibitions did not operate, that he was able, being totally immoral, corrupt, and devoid of prejudice, to see through the ideological obfuscations that were prevalent, not least among the plebs. there is an attempt here to mobilise the slaves, or perhaps better, a readiness to do so (which was part of his readiness for *anything*). it already contained the whole 'caesarian conception', in so far as it was the city's conception, with its italia programme, its projects for settlements, etc, but there was also the cancellation of debts and of course the appeal to the slaves, all of which was very much against the city. with this the plebs handed their programme to the opportunistic adventurer. it could not be put into effect without the slaves, as this man realised when he tried to implement it. two thousand years of mudslinging by the ruling classes was the result.

22 jul 38

finishing touches to POEMS IN EXILE for the malik edition. the poem TO THOSE COMPELLED TO CONFORM (AN DIE GLEICHGESCHALTETEN) is causing difficulties. it must not be addressed just to the professional ideologists. there are also all the millions of petty bourgeois and non-manual workers who are now politically 'involved' too, the barbers who are active members of SA units, the craftsmen and the small shopkeepers in their many trade associations, not to speak of the teachers, engineers etc. outside germany you imagine the ideological services performed for the regime to be worse than any other kind. this is quite false. the engineer who implements rationalisation and hence increases the physical impoverishment of the proletariat, does at least as much damage. the ideological effect is just the expression of this. the 'manifestations of ideological support' are not the driving force of exploitation and oppression. our ideologists get more excited about the misuse of words than about real damage to the proletariat. the regime's crimes consist of its crimes against the proletarian working class, and *gleichschaltung* switches certain individuals and activities into this criminal activity. the poem however is only directed against their ideological contribution, which it thus castigates as the worst thing.

23 jul 38

writing CAESAR, i have just realised that i must not believe for a moment that things had to happen as they did. that say slavery, which made politics for the plebs so impossible, could not have been abolished. searching for reasons for everything that happened makes historians fatalists. in addition to which slavery in this epoch was already cramping further 'progress'. all this talk of slaves being needed because there were no machines is so superficial and inconclusive! after all another reason they got no machines was because they had slaves. and who are 'they'? did the slaves need slavery because they had no machines? they made up two-thirds of the population of italy. i have to show how the whole of society sinks into slavery in the attempt to keep slavery going. not a single senator or banker in the time of the caesars possessed as much personal security, personal freedom, or potential for political initiative as almost all of them enjoyed in cicero's time. they paid for their fishponds with the loss of all dignity. and no caesar had in effect the power of any one of the many consuls of the republic . . .

24 jul 38

there are concepts which are difficult to defend because they spread such boredom whenever they arise. like DÉCADENCE. there is naturally such a thing as the literature of the decline of a class. in it the class loses its serene certainty, its calm self-confidence, it conceals its difficulties, it gets bogged down in detail, it becomes parasitically culinary, etc. but the very works which identify its decline as a decline can scarcely be classed as decadent. but that is how the declining class views them. on the other hand the FEAST OF TRIMALCHIO exhibits all sorts of signs of formal decadence. and if ELECTIVE AFFINITIES is not decadent, WERTHER is.

25 jul 38

the whole conception of a c[esar] is inhuman. on the other hand it is impossible to demonstrate inhumanity without having some idea of humanity. and i cannot just describe things from today's position, i have to make the alternative way seem possible from the perspective of those times too. a cold world. a cold work. and yet i can see, between spells of writing or as i write, how low we have come, in human terms.

benjamin is here. he is writing an essay on baudelaire. there is good stuff there, he shows how the prospect of an age without history distorted literature after 48. the versailles victory of the bourgeoisie over the commune was discounted in advance. they came to terms with evil. it took the form of a flower. this is useful to read. oddly enough it is spleen that enables benjamin to write this. he uses as his point of departure something he calls the *aura*, which is connected with dreaming (daydreams). he says: if you feel a gaze directed at you, even at your back, you return it (!). the expectation that what you look at will look back at you creates the aura. this is supposed to be in decline of late, along with the cult element in life. b[enjamin] has discovered this while analysing films, where the aura is decomposed by the reproducibility of the art-work. a load of mysticism, although his attitude is against mysticism. this is the way the materialist understanding of history is adapted. it is abominable.

have been translating andersen nexö's memoirs with grete. i like them in spite of the minute analysis of the soul and the repeated moralising, since there is still raw material there. a respectable proletarianism. but he has beautiful passages depicting the solidarity of the dispossessed.

27 jul 38

the moscow clique is praising hay's play HAVE to the red skies. it is true socialist realism. new, because old. the work of a genius, untouched by the fashions and confusions of his times. what is form? here is content. the play is dismal trash, sudermann is progressive by comparison. 'but here we have flesh and blood characters'. it is a well known (?) fact that for flesh and blood the stage uses cardboard and red ink, which are got up to look like flesh and blood. 'but here we have people with all their contradictions.' the dialectics of the expression 'sixes and sevens'. capitalism is bad in the play because it turns people into money-grubbers. a demon appears in the form of an old witch who leads the whole village, the women that is, to murder, and once, a high point of the evening, performs a demonic dance. according to feuchtwanger she is capitalism. which also leads men to do all sorts of diabolical things. all this you read 'avidly'. 'hay is an innovator. more accurately: the circumstances in which he was working turned him into an innovator in a peculiar sense, in spite of, or perhaps because of – following the old path' (KURELLA). feuchtwanger confirms that for hay marxism 'was not just an idea, but rather filled his entire being, his feelings, filtering deep down into the foundations of the unconscious'. the main thing is of course that marxism did not just remain, or perhaps better, become an idea in this process. the play is 'saturated from the inside with marxism'. dyed then, unfortunately not in fast colours.

3 aug 38

because i am an innovator in my field, there is always somebody or other ready to scream that i am a formalist. they miss the old forms in what i write: worse still, they find new ones; and as a result they think forms are what interests me. but i have come to the conclusion that if anything i underrate the formal aspect. at one time or another i have studied the old forms of poetry, the story, the drama and the theatre, and i only abandoned them when they started getting in the way of what i wanted to say. in poetry i began with songs to the guitar, sketching out the verses at the same time as the music. ballad form was as old as the hills, and in my day nobody who took himself at all seriously wrote ballads. subsequently i went over to other, less ancient forms of poetry, but sometimes i reverted, going so far as to make copies of the old masters and translate villon and kipling. the *song*, which descended on this continent after the

12 Denmark, 12–15 August 38

first world war as a sort of folksong of the big cities, had already evolved a conventional form by the time when i began using it. i started from that point and subsequently transformed it, though elements of this lazy, vain and emotionally intoxicated form are to be found in my mass choruses. then i wrote unrhymed verses with irregular rhythms. i began, i think, by using them in my plays. there are however some poems dating from about the time of the *devotions for the home*, the psalms which i used to sing to the guitar, which tend the same way. the sonnet and the epigram were forms which i took over as they stood. the only thing i didn't use, really, was certain classical poetic forms which struck me as too artificial.

12 aug 38

we germans have materialism without sensuality. with us the 'mind' is constantly cogitating on the mind. body and objects remain mindless. in german drinking songs all you hear about are effects on the mind, even in the most vulgar songs. the smell of wine-barrels never occurs. we don't like the taste of the world. we have brought a cosiness to love, sexual pleasure has something banal about it. when we talk of taste, we again mean something purely intellectual, the tongue has long since ceased to function, taste is something like having a feeling for harmonisation. think of the combination 'purely spiritual'. with us the spirit sullies itself as soon as it touches matter. matter for us germans is crap, to all intents and purposes. in our literature this distrust of the vitality of the body is to be felt everywhere. our heroes cultivate sociability, but they don't eat; our women have feelings, but no backsides, to compensate for which our old men talk as if they still had all their teeth.

13 aug 38

benjamin maintains freud thinks that sexuality will one day die out completely. our bourgeoisie thinks it is mankind. when the heads of the aristocracy fell, at least their prickles remained erect. the bourgeoisie has contrived to ruin even sexuality. i am helping R[UTH] to put together a volume of short stories entitled EVERY ANIMAL CAN DO IT. 70% of all women are supposed to be frigid. we have good titles (HASTE IS THE WIND that brings down the wooden scaffolding. ALL THE KING'S HORSES AND ALL THE KING'S MEN. then SERVICE etc). the unproductivity of technology. orgasm as a rare fluke.

14 aug 38

from the 5th poem of the cycle TO THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE by V HUGO.

no, time takes nothing from things.
to more than one mispraised portal
his slow metamorphosis has
given belated beauty.
on the monuments we revere
time bestows a severe charm
from façade to pinnacle.
never, fracture and rust as he may,
is the surface he strips
worth the patina he gives.

it is time that cuts a groove
in too plain an archstone,
that passes his intelligent thumb
over the arid corners of the marble;
it is he, improving on art,
who places a live viper
in the coils of a granite hydra.
i think i can see a gothic roof laughing
when from its ancient frieze time
takes out a stone and puts in a nest.

15 aug 38

FEAR AND MISERY OF THE THIRD REICH has now gone to press. lukács has already welcomed the SPY as if i were a sinner returned to the bosom of the salvation army. here at last is something taken straight from life! he overlooks the montage of 27 scenes, and the fact that it is actually only a table of gests, the gest of keeping your mouth shut, the gest of looking about you, the gest of sudden fear etc. the pattern of gests in a dictatorship. now *epic theatre* can show that both 'intérieurs' and almost naturalistic elements are within its range, that they do not make the crucial difference. the actor will be well advised to study the STREET SCENE before playing one of the short scenes. the aforesaid gests are not to be performed in such a way that the audience wants to stop the scene, empathy is to be sedulously controlled, otherwise the whole thing is a dead loss. the montage, a process that has been so thoroughly conde-

14 Denmark, 16–18 August 38

mned, arose here out of letters from dudow who needed something for his little proletarian theatre-group in paris. so the proletarian theatre in exile is keeping the theatre alive. while in moscow maxim vallentin, the one-time director of a berlin agitprop group, has gone over to bourgeois theatre and announced that in art an appeal has to be made to the emotions, which can only mean reason has to be switched off.

16 aug 38

the POEMS FROM EXILE are of course one-sided. but in small works there is no point in having a mix. multiplicity can only occur within a whole, as part of the architecture of coherent works. the overall production plan is however constantly getting broader. and single works only have a chance within such a plan. to THE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES OF HERR JULIUS CAESAR must be added THE TUI NOVEL. to the dramas the *lehrstücke*. when will i be able to start BAD BAAL THE ASOCIAL MAN and LENIN'S ATTITUDES? 30 years would not be too much for what has to be done. for there is also a lot of topical stuff to do as things develop. one thing we do not have is a little realistic novel for the proletarian youth, with a hero, a child would be best, it may be koloman wallisch. meanwhile the housepainter is preparing to conquer the world. yesterday the grand german manoeuvres began, a rehearsal for mobilisation.

16 aug 38

appalling to read poems by shelley (not to speak of ancient egyptian peasant songs from 3000 years ago) in which he laments oppression and exploitation. is this how they will read us, still oppressed and exploited, and will they say: was it already as bad as that?

18 aug 38

by offering only formal criteria for *realism* LUKÁCS, whose significance is that he writes from moscow, is in the final estimate handing readers who are avid to learn on a plate to those famous contemporary bourgeois novelists on whom he has bestowed great, if slightly embarrassed compliments, because they display the said formal features (even if they are not so 'happy', 'pure' and 'creative' as the old masters of the great early period). they become his realists (he allays any suspicion by contrasting them with a form of 'decadence', to which DOS PASSOS and presumably i too belong), whose descriptions exclude the class struggle

(‘do not not take sufficiently into account’, ‘do not yet fully encompass’), so that the reader himself then has to unravel the complicated reflections which the ‘decadents’ incorporate in their books, the very reflections which establish that the events depicted derive from the class struggle. they all display LUKÁCS’s hallmarks. HEINRICH MANN presents such a ‘tangle’ of different human fates in his HENRI QUATRE that nobody can find his way around in it, and doesn’t his brother THOMAS unfold the ‘whole life of the biblical josph’ in all its ultimate fullness! in HAMSUN we have ‘very involved, very indirect relationships’ by the dozen. the class struggle is less in evidence in all three, but naturally we can add that for ourselves, for ‘in the last resort’ everything is class struggle. such obtuseness is monumental.

18 aug 38

the realism debate will gum up production if it goes on like this. LUKÁCS naturally finds a dialectic in the early bourgeois novel, and it is naturally of a different quality from the late novel. the richly ‘interwoven pattern of life’s paths’, the ‘rich tapestry of varied, interlinked motifs’ etc. in the later examples you either get the complexities combed out, or else you get something which, on the analogy of a kinking of the intestines, we might call a kinking of the motifs. a certain vacuity, a drained, encrusted quality is not merely the fault of the writer, but a failing of ‘capitalism’ in person. according to LUKÁCS there is in the early bourgeois novel (GOETHE) a ‘broad richness of life’, and the novel gives rise to the ‘illusion that all life has been given shape in its full, unfolded breadth’. follow that! it’s just that now nothing unfolds any more and life does not develop in breadth. the only possible advice would be to trample it out flat. trampling flat is something capitalism goes in for anyway, the celebrated iron heel. all we have left to describe are in fact detours, dead-ends, impediments, braking-attachments, faulty brakes etc. but as the quantity increases, a turning point is reached. LUKÁCS, who tends to transfer everything from the world into consciousness, only sees it (with indignation) in the sphere of consciousness. in ZOLA’s case a factual complex, money, the mine, etc moves into the centre of the novels. from an organic complexity of composition there develops mechanical linkage, montage, the progressive dehumanisation of the novel! it is from this that he makes a rope to hang the writers who have degenerated from ‘story-tellers’ into ‘describers’. they capitulate. they adopt the capitalist standpoint, they dehumanise life. the protests they add are not allowed to stand. they are post festum, they are laboured afterthoughts, exercises in

pseudo-radicalism. but the fact that the dehumanised proletariat puts its entire humanity into protest and takes up the struggle against the dehumanisation of production is something the professor overlooks. the circuitousness of the new ways must not break the mould of the novel. in actual fact he employs a concept of richness (in sentences like ‘the richness of this texture’) which has quickly worn out. much has become more and there is no longer any trace of richness. calculation has turned into theorising. it no longer occupies the same position, it is no longer located among the ‘hero’s reflections’. the writer is seeing something new when he watches the proletariat working in abstract terms, and we must be clear about this. the narrative form of balzac, tolstoy etc has foundered on ‘soulless’ factual complexes, coalmines, money etc. homilies from professors will not refloat it. *all the king’s horses, and all the king’s men, couldn’t humpty dumpty put together again.** GIDE writes his major novel (LES FAUX MONNAYEURS) about the difficulty of writing a novel, JOYCE writes a catalogue of modes of description, and the one great piece of popular fiction of the day, hašek’s SCHWEJK, has abandoned the drama-orientated novel form adopted by the early bourgeois novel.

10 sep 38

in literary articles in journals edited by marxists the concept of *decadence* is appearing more and more frequently of late. i discover that decadence includes me. this is naturally of great interest to me. a marxist actually needs the concept of *decline*. it serves to identify the decline of the ruling class in the political and economic spheres. it would be *stupid** for him to refuse to recognise decline in the artistic sphere. eg literature cannot exclude the great shackling of productive capacity by the capitalist means of production. i am restricting myself in the first instance to my own production. my first book of poems, the DEVOTIONS FOR THE HOME, is undoubtedly branded with the decadence of the bourgeois class. under its wealth of feeling lies a confusion of feeling, under its originality of expression lie aspects of collapse. under the richness of its subject matter there is an element of aimlessness. the powerful language is slack. etc etc. seen in this light the subsequent SVENDBORG POEMS represent both a withdrawal and an advance. from the bourgeois point of view there has been a staggering impoverishment. isn’t it all a great deal more one-sided, less ‘organic’, cooler, ‘more self-conscious’ (in a bad sense)? let’s hope my comrades-in-arms will not let that go by default. they will say the SVENDBORG POEMS are less decadent than DEVOTIONS FOR THE HOME. however i think it is important that they should realise what the advance,

such as it is, has cost. capitalism has forced us to take up arms. it has laid waste our surroundings. i no longer go off 'to commune with nature in the woods', but accompanied by two policemen. there is still richness, a rich choice of battlefields. there is originality, originality of problems. no question about it: literature is not blooming. but we have to beware of thinking in terms of outdated images. this notion of bloom is too one-sided. you can't harness ideas of value, definitions of power and greatness, to an idyllic conception of organic flowering; it would be ridiculous. withdrawal and advance are not separated according to dates in the calendar. they are threads which run through individuals and works.

11 sep 38

skimmed through BAAL for the complete works. pity about it. it was always a torso, and then it was operated on several times, for the (two)



Barbara (left) and Stefan Brecht, children of Bertolt and Helene, 'in the first year of exile (1933)'.

Steff und Barbara im ersten
Jahr des Exils (1933)

18 Denmark, 12 September – 23 November 38

book versions and the production. the meaning almost got lost in the process. baal the provocateur, the worshipper of things as they are, living life, his own and other people's, to the full. a lot could be got out of his 'do whatever is fun', if handled properly. wonder whether i should take the time. (the lehrstücke about BAD BAAL THE ASOCIAL MAN remain in reserve.)

12 sep 38

in the DZZ something about the late stanislavsky. his cult is a catchment area for everything that is sanctimonious in theatre arts. reason, far from being suppressed in his 'method', is the 'control mechanism'. first of all you 'feel', you bring yourself by means of spiritual ablutions into a state where you can feel (mainly by forgetting that art is a business), and then you allow 'it' to be corrected by reason, or as the expression goes, justified. tuism itself. whether something is 'real' is proved in the feeling. (the antonym would be: right.) as if emotions were not at least as corrupt as the rational functions! a few marxists then spill much ink proving that this is deathless art. 'and now art turns to feeling.' the emotional element is stowed in the 'substructure', the intellectual in the 'superstructure'. people tamely go along with the separation of feeling and reason. if people like me stress the rational, they register the absence of the emotional by the same token. at least they talk (not always with any expression of regret) about an unhealthy separation of feeling and reason in my work. in actual fact there is no sense in talking about feeling in art (except for purposes of criticism), because that would only mean allowing reason free play. every thought that is necessary has its emotional correlative, every feeling its intellectual one. the hypocrisy of the stanislavsky school with its temple of art, its service to the word, its cult of the poet, its inwardness, purity, exaltation, its naturalness which one fears and must fear slipping 'out' of, corresponds to its intellectual backwardness, its belief in 'man' and 'ideas' etc. that is 'real' naturalism, nature is the great unknown, and to imitate it is to imitate its false beard.

25 sep 38

very worth noting for CAESAR the french ruling class's about-turn in the face of hitler's threat of war, the breach of treaty, czechoslovakia wiped off the map, france's position as a great power destroyed. they only wage wars of conquest, they only defend their own conquests. at any time they will sacrifice political power for business reasons when this astonishing

choice in fact appears. a war with a forty-hour week? can't be done. these people are a magnificent example of iron logic and immunity to idols. how to defend their country when it doesn't belong to them?

· sternberg here, returning from a tour of scandinavia. from friday to sunday (the night of godesberg) we sit up till three in the morning. there are reports every ten minutes on the wireless in all different languages.

5 oct 38

on *literary value*: what a writer GIDE is, whose beautiful book on earthly pleasures the army of the french popular front carries in its kitbag as it marches! or alternatively keeps on the bedside table and gives marching a miss. and HAŠEK: his great book is shrinking by the hour as the v-zones are occupied by hitler's army. it was the victory report of an oppressed people, the odysseus report. but the victory was too brief. it now stands on a list of suspect books and deals with events that people no longer know.

7 oct 38

the fall of czechoslovakia is remarkable for the way it happened. eg people continue to speak about that country as if it were still the same, and for that reason some of its actions are surprising. people have understood that it has to hand over something to germany, but now it is handing over more, in fact everything as far as everybody is concerned. including the jews and refugees. people forget that this defeat has brought different class forces to the helm, so the state has become a different person in law, one can no longer speak of czechoslovakia. and how did this come about? 'england' could not enter into a war which its russian ally would have won. the russian ally could not enter into a war which the russian generals would have won. france could not enter into a war which the popular front would have won. and none of them, naturally, could lose a war.

23 nov 38

finished LIFE OF GALILEO. it took three weeks. the only difficulties arose with the last scene. just as in the case of ST JOAN, i needed a neat stroke at the end to ensure that the audience had the necessary detachment. even somebody empathising without thinking must now feel the a-effect when he empathises with galileo. with rigidly epic presentation an acceptable empathy occurs.

january 39

koltsov too arrested in moscow. my last connection there. nobody knows anything about tretiaikov, who is supposed to have been a 'japanese spy'. nobody knows anything about neher who is supposed to have done some business for the trotskyists in prague on her husband's instructions. reich and asya lacis don't write to me any more, and grete gets no answer from her acquaintances in the caucasus or leningrad. béla kun too is arrested, the only one of the politicians i saw. meyerhold has lost his theatre, but is supposed to be allowed to direct opera. literature and art are up the creek, political theory has gone to the dogs, what is left is a thin, bloodless, proletarian humanism propagated by officialdom. in an official article (THE THEORY OF LENIN AND STALIN ON THE VICTORY OF SOCIALISM TRIUMPHS IN THE SOVIET UNION) a certain vokressensky declares stalin's theory to be that 'the death of the state takes the form of its fortification on all sides' and 'the socialist state is necessary in order (!) to instill the new socialist work discipline in the masses' and 'if the best stachanov-norms in the country were to be made the average norms, the decisive prerequisite for the transition from socialism to communism would be achieved.' workers' switching (between factories with different wage-rates) has been stopped by law, and there are reported to have been strikes. all you hear about political 'democracy' are clichés, and you hear nothing about the social form for the organisation of production. marxists outside russia find themselves in the position marx adopted towards social-democracy. one of positive criticism.

meanwhile capitalism in the form of imperialism and trust capitalism fights out its economic battles in national units. this national form will not disappear before it has done its worst (also to develop the productive forces, which it has now converted into destructive ones).

12 feb 39

translation of nexö's memoirs in three volumes completed with grete. wrote three novellas (THE HERETIC'S COAT, SOCRATES WOUNDED, LUCULLUS'S TROPHIES). a lot of theory in dialogue form THE MESSINGKAUF DIALOGUES (spurred to use this form by galileo's DIALOGUES). four nights. the philosopher insists on the p-type (planetarium-type, instead of the c-type, carousel type) theatre purely for didactic purposes, movements of people (also shifts of the emotions) organised as simple models for study purposes, to show how social relationships function, in

order that society can intervene. his wishes turn into theatre, since they can be implemented in the theatre. from a critique of theatre a new theatre emerges. the whole thing so conceived that it can be performed, with experiments and exercises. centring on the a-effect.

february 39

via korsch's MARX, which he roughed out here and which has now appeared in english, i come back to the question of formalism. compared to LENIN'S short summary MARX, KORSCH'S excellent book is a little formalistic. the method which he extracts tends very much to schematic presentation. it is not shown in application, in action. its historical birthplace is not shown. eg he says: marxism exists not only because hegel and ricardo were inadequate, but, (mainly) because the proletariat existed. this is not however shown. etc.

literary formalism has not been defined politically either, that is, it has not been defined at all. the good LUKÁCS simply-mindedly derives it from decadence. the literary avant garde are bourgeois decadents, end of story. What one has to do is ignore them and look to the classics. nowhere does he deal with the formalisms of the democracies and the fascist state. (cranking up production – of the means of destruction, liquidating the class struggle, instead of the classes etc.) the decline of narrative is viewed as pure decline. *montage* is viewed as a characteristic feature of decadence. because unity is torn apart by it, and the organic whole dies. naturally one could also make a concrete study of *montage*. (in IVENS' film ZUIDERZEE, which shows the reclamation of fertile earth and the parallel destruction of the fruits of the earth in other places.) the other sin is the *inner monologue*. nobody has ever examined this or exposed its actual flaws (you could take the one by the woman in ULYSSES and hitler's from THE SPEECH in [HEINRICH] MANN'S COURAGE). you would not then have extirpated its root and branch as an artistic device, but presumably shown its flaws in concrete terms. for, of course, as pure empathising this must have gigantic potential for error. there is naturally such a thing as an empty self-generated movement of form, a purely formal satisfaction of real needs, a violation of the facts by generalising treatment etc. but you can also treat formal questions formalistically, and this is what happens in the case of the bold lukács. according to these marxists [*sic*] this is how matters stand: the bourgeois realists practised an imperfect realism, still had idola; let us forget about these, and everything will be in order. their facts are accepted, and rearranged. marx is no more equipped with the correct conclusions than ricardo.

22 Denmark, 19–26 February 39

sholokhov is balzac with the blinkers removed. in actual fact these sholokhovs don't have an iota of balzac's materialism (a remarkable brew of romanticism, hunger for facts, collector's mania, speculation etc) and have innumerable more blind spots. the recommendation to study the bourgeois realists is utterly formalistic, since it is not connected with any thoroughgoing critique of them.

19 feb 39

the émigrés sleep, but it is a disturbed slumber. there are certain nightmares, that hitler will *not* run out of small change, that the wrong pope will be elected, that churchill will cave in. the little horse people like to put their money on, the favourite, is 'the german people's longing for peace'. chamberlain, who shares this dream, is at least rearing vigorously at the same time (just in case). not that a fear of war does not actually exist in germany, but for the regime that is merely a psychic phenomenon with no sound basis and can be overcome by propaganda. it has good grounds for thinking this, and a handful of aces. from my CAESAR studies i can see how easily the rapidly degenerating roman plebs could be brought to accept wars of conquest. and the working men? they have swallowed a great deal for the abolition of unemployment. *absence* of war means unemployment, the regime will say (and it is right). i see more and more clearly as an old hand in the study of *tuisism* that what lends the regime that aura of intelligence is its consistent late capitalism, by taking evasive action it is pursuing a consistent policy, hence its 'instinctive assurance'. hitler's criticism of the social democrats and the frankfurt school (in his last speech) is excellent. without changing production the idiots wanted to change consumption. then they build a gigantic, rationalised industry in a land deprived of political power, and pursue a policy of peace. at least hitler is consistent. the borders that goods cannot cross will be crossed by tanks. which in turn are goods (along with the working men who operate them). the tuis are confused.

25 feb 39

HEGEL's reproduction of the aristotelian theory of art in the introduction to his aesthetics is extraordinarily beautiful. the key sentence seems to me to be: 'thus one adduces as the final purpose of humans living together and of the state, that *all* human potentialities and *all* individual strengths should develop on *all* sides and in *every* direction so as to achieve expression. but such a formal view soon raises the question of the *unit* in

which these various formations will be contained, and of the *single goal* which will serve as their fundamental concept and final purpose. as with the concept of the state so also with the concept of arts there arises on the one part a need for an aim that is *common* to particular sides, on the other part for an overriding *substantial* aim.'

LIFE OF GALILEI is technically a great step backwards, like SENORA CARRAR all too opportunistic. the play ought to be completely rewritten, in order to capture this 'breath of wind that/cometh from new shores', this rosy dawn of science. everything more direct, without the interiors, the 'atmosphere', the empathy. and everything based on planetary demonstrations. the structure could be kept, the characterisation of galileo likewise. but the work, which would be fun, could only be done in a practical situation, in contact with a stage. first the FATZER-fragment, then the BREADSHOP-fragment would have to be studied. these two fragments are of the highest technical standard.

26 feb 39

this man hegel's PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY is a tremendous piece of work. his method enables him not only to see the positive and the negative in any historical phenomenon, but also to make this polarity the cause of further development. amazing how he depicts the formalism of the constitution under the emperors, where wealth was 'not the fruit of industry'. how superb the way the turning points appear in a few concentrated pages. for example, how the gracchi attempt 'to populate italy with citizens instead of slaves'. under the caesars it is *depopulated!* and how the inner contradiction under CAESAR is externalised, the empire founded which 'collapsed under the weight of taxation and plundering'. and compare with this the mention of caesar in the INTRODUCTION as the 'managing director of the world spirit'. in those 'spiritual leaders' it is the classes, in this spiritual leader it is the debased senate and the degenerate plebs that irresistibly confront their own inner spirit. and after 'these colossal individuals have emerged from the collapse of the state', the individual characteristics of the caesars become so insignificant, that it can be said that 'under the most brutal and despicable tyrant (domitian) the roman world took a rest'. i was not making any headway with CAESAR, was beginning to think he was incomprehensible. now i am getting visitors. grete's sister, a metalworker's wife, is here from germany. she reads the second book in a single evening and finds it highly interesting. questioned by grete, it appears that she has understood more or less everything. BENJAMIN and

24 Denmark, 4-15 March 39

STERNBERG, very highly qualified intellectuals, did not understand it and made pressing recommendations for more human interest to be put in, more of the old novel . . . and then of course there is steff, pressing for the next instalment. that should suffice.

4 mar 39

today i at last realised why i have never been able to produce the little *lehrstück* on the adventures of BAD BAAL THE ASOCIAL MAN. asocial people have no part to play. they are merely the possessors of the means of production and of other sources of livelihood, and that is all they are. naturally there are also their helpers and their helpers' helpers, but they too only as such. it is nothing short of the gospel of the enemy of mankind to say that there are asocial drives, asocial personalities, etc.

5 mar 39

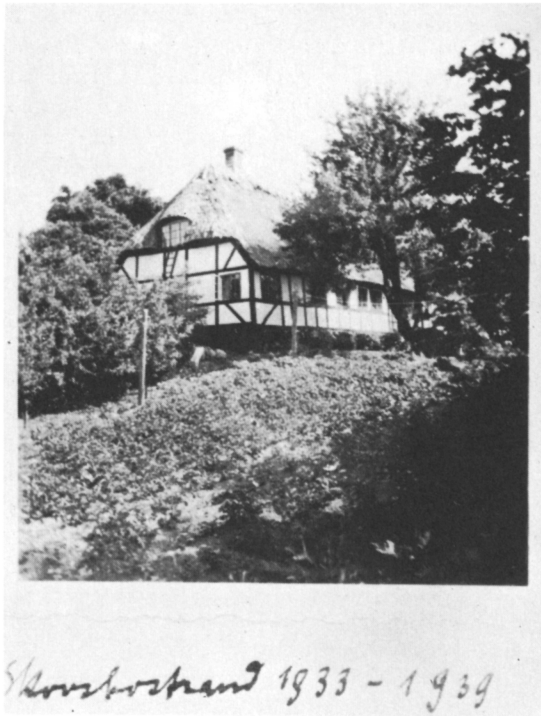
interesting, the new 'realistic' american literature (CAIN, COY, HEMINGWAY). these people protest against the prevailing descriptions of certain milieux, bank heavily on the novelty of 'unbiased' description. it all remains within the domain of the formal. at its inception stands the experience of film (and at the end stands hollywood). film, especially the silent film, needed an unexpectedly large amount of action (consumed a large amount of expression). psychologists at the time were discovering behaviourism, psychology seen through the eye of a camera. literature is now catching up. but with these *hard-boiled men** it is a matter of producing *hot stuff**, they need to arouse emotions because they are part of the great emotions racket. so they use the emotions as driving force, as the path of least resistance. they give a new 10 horse-power engine, complete with the appropriate brakes to the man in the street, to each of roosevelt's new-deal types, garage mechanics, farmhands, reporters. the souped-up petty bourgeois, a romantic character, comes into existence. he is a poor devil who is highly strung beyond belief, has been given a *second spirit** by rationalisation, stands gasping, is threatened by unemployment, and invests his last vestige of strength in competitiveness. he bestrides the stage as hero and muscle-man, and the boards cave in.

15 mar 39

a few days ago i took out the old draft of THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN (begun in berlin as LOVE IS THE GOODS). there are five scenes, four of which are usable. it is a bit of a charade, what with the costume switches and the changes in make-up. but i can use it to develop the epic technique and get back up to standard again. for a desk drawer you need make no concessions.

interesting how with these thin steel structures the slightest miscalculation takes its toll. there is no mass there to balance out inexactitudes. the *reich* is expanding. the housepainter is sitting in hradčany.

The Brechts'
thatched house at
Skovsbostrand, Fyn
Island, Denmark,
where they lived
from December
1933 to April 1939.



Sweden
23 April 1939 to 19 March 1940

23 apr 39

travel to stockholm, because of the danger of war. visa arranged by swedish social-democratic committee (branting, ström, etc) in return for lecture at stockholm student theatre. country number three. ruth sees to printing of SVENDBORG POEMS in copenhagen on a subscription basis. wieland [herzfelde's] prague type-formes are lost (along with those for FEAR AND MISERY and the COLLECTED POEMS).

4 may 39

lecture at the stockholm student theatre. EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE. the work seems quite usable. of course no such knowledgeable questions were asked, nor calculated experiments carried out as the lecture might lead people to think. i brought the epic elements 'into the business' ready-made from the KARL VALENTIN theatre, the open-air circus, and the augsburg fair. then there was film, especially the silents in the early days before the cinema began to copy drrrramatics from the theatre (chaplin). as difficulties cropped up with didactic theatre this 'style' was there to turn to and had only to be modified. the lecture covers the external development, presents the experiments as leading to reflections, pursuing goals etc. provides a good introduction to the essay NEW TECHNIQUE OF ACTING.

25 may 39

discussions with the german refugee actor greid who is organising theatre groups for the social democrats here, but is close to the communists. he has written a book on dialectics and – optimism. a petty bourgeois with ethical propensities who has taken to thinking. (he himself financially secure on account of well-off swedish jewish wife.) wants to take ethical interests further. 'give these people something.' page-long quotations from engels. 'where is the positive element in marxism?' the search goes on in the ethical sphere. interesting question, when seen in concrete terms. our attitude to petty bourgeoisie utterly pathetic. on the one hand

30 Sweden, May – 1 September 39

conciliatory; marxists not so bad – as hitler paints them. on the other hand abstains from suggesting any solution. though 800,000 craftsmen have been sifted out in the last year as uneconomic but needed in the factories (where the ten-hour day is being introduced.) the flight from the land is growing constantly. here we could contribute plenty that is positive. the ethical needs of these social strata need not be satisfied ethically. the satisfaction of their material needs is ethical enough. interesting how this man sees the dialectic: all that interests him is the third stage. everything that happens follows the well-known 'spiral' upwards. $3 = 1$ plus 2. reconciliation of contradictions with a 'shift of emphasis'. what becomes clear is the petty bourgeois strand in engels's philosophy of nature. in social terms things then look like this; without satisfaction of material needs no ethics, and that is acceptable. but: ethics for the satisfaction of these needs is not acceptable. material needs as ethical, ethical ones as material, this is not grasped. all sorts of material for the book of change.

may 39, whitsun

stockholm. SPEECH TO WORKING-CLASS ACTORS ON THE ART OF OBSERVATION. on the occasion of a meeting to discuss the foundation of an amateur theatre group for social-democratic trade unions.

brooded over the GOOD PERSON. how can luxury be brought into the parable?

and how to avoid the impression of a milkmaid's accounts. the calculated must be paired with the dainty. the girl must be a big powerful person. the city must be a big, dusty uninhabitable place. the drawback is too much action. no room for digression and detour. so everything is much too rationalised. dramatic taylorism. some attention must be paid to countering the risk of chinoiserie. the vision is of a chinese city's outskirts with cement works and so on. there are still gods around but aeroplanes have come in. perhaps the lover should be an unemployed pilot?

15 jul 39

still on the GOOD PERSON. reworked the first scene again. the main thing was to bring some development into bad lao go. then the play got too long. my time-cards for the scenes showed terrible overruns. true, five-hour plays are not too long for the three-hour day, especially if they are epic, ie not taxing. but for the moment two and a half hours are

enough.

the house is ideal. it is on the island of lidingö, with firs running right up to it on two sides. the study, previously a sculptor's studio, is 7 metres long, 5 metres wide. so i have many tables.

steff brought a volume of karl sandburg, chicago poems, and translated them from swedish, with relish and skill. good stuff, it has connections with chinese forms.

now and again émigré academics come here. i try to interest them in producing a dictionary of fascist slogans.

august 39



13 & 39.

L. Kraft

The house on Lidingö Island, off Stockholm. Brecht with Margarete (Grete) Steffin, seated, the Danish writer Martin Andersen-Nexö and his wife and daughter. See 25 July 38.

1 sep 39

at 8.45 in the morning germany warns all neutrals against flying over polish territory. hitler addresses the wehrmacht. in between, the melancholy marches with which german militarists like introducing their bloodbaths. yesterday a british veteran, an officer of course, made an appeal to germans who fought in the great war. conclusion: '... otherwise we shall teach the rulers of germany a lesson on how to deal decently and honourably with their neighbours. good night.'

then jazz. on the german side, marches.



The Brechts and their daughter Barbara, outside the new house.

the neutrality pact with the USSR ratified last night. from the english point of view henceforward sacrificing poland no longer means helping hitler's march to the east, but the sacrifice of an ally behind g[ermany]'s back. this was promptly followed by a hardening of the british position and an alliance with poland. they think it will be easier to fight without the USSR (the horse-trading could have been done more easily with a pseudo-alliance). for the dominions and america that is probably true.

hitler's speech on the wireless strikingly insecure ('i am determined to show determination'). the loudest applause when he says that traitors have nothing to expect but death. this is the clique, the gang, the foreign body that begins a war minus god and plus bread coupons. blanquism on a national basis.

in the evening the english wireless was already beginning to discuss the question of war guilt. the germans are permitted to hear (before the iron curtain is lowered), that hitler's 'surprisingly generous proposals' were never actually made.

then on the german wireless more military marches, creating the mood for dying, on the english wireless instructions to the population, the evacuation of 3 million people from london.

grete shakes her head over the 'berliners', who have nothing but sandbags on the landings with which to extinguish incendiary bombs.

at noon lunch for thomas mann at the town hall. (ström, the lord mayor, ljungdal, edfelt, matthis.) mann is opposed to the USSR's support for hitler. erika mann, his daughter, finds the pact logical and comprehensible, but is against the view that it helps the cause of peace.

3 sep 39

only in the evening did the terrible truth dawn on everybody. that was when the english wireless reports on the session in the commons came through. a dreadful spectacle, even if it was only the first act and the mildest one. the german government wants war, not the german people. the french and english governments don't want war, the french and english peoples do, to stop hitler.

4 sep 39

i was pretty convinced the english would draw back at the last minute. but churchill seems to have pulled it off. the question now is whether they will actually fight a war. the machinery will probably be very hard to set in motion. hitler will soon have achieved a fait accompli in the east, at which point they may negotiate after all. the legal position is that there is peace in poland and people are fighting, whereas in the west war has been declared and peace prevails.

5 sep 39 (tuesday)

spooky, this war which isn't being fought . . . in the swedish press there still has not been a word about the fact that not a shot has been fired in the west. four bombs from english bombers off wilhelmshaven, according to german reports. esbjerg bombed 'by an unknown plane'. and an english passenger steamer torpedoed west of the hebrides. the only thing dropped over western germany is leaflets. and from all points of the globe come declarations of neutrality, which appear to isolate hitler, but in fact merely isolate his war of annihilation against poland. the other gangster sits smiling on the axis and plays the neutral, 'to keep the war from spreading'. the war which is quite small. for even the war in poland consists merely of a german advance. poland is not fighting at all. everything is being made to ripen towards a conference: hitler is conquering enough ground to be able to withdraw on his own terms.

7 sep 39

a few people are beginning to realise what a remarkable war it is. the french military command claims to have made contact with the enemy in the vicinity of saarbrücken. the germans issue denials of such horror tales. the english drop leaflets, thereby infringing holland's neutrality but no shot is fired at them. mussolini is silent. but how is one to believe in betrayal when there is no apparent bribe? the germans' statements that the russians are reaching military agreements with them grow more and more definite. this nonsense is gladly disseminated.

the fact is that the russo-german pact makes the air clearer. what we have is a war between imperialist states. we have germany as the aggressor and warmonger. we have aggressive capitalism against defensive capitalism. the central powers need the war for conquest, the western powers need it to defend their conquests. there is enough barbarism to maintain a barbaric situation. for the ussr it would only be possible to enter the war on the western side, it would be more a 'matter of state', would be more akin to the way the social-democratic parties caved in during the great war, would be more like power politics, participating in a reckoning between capitalists, rather than keeping clear of it.

the slogans are now improving, it seems to me. the british labour party now has 'with chamberlain, but not for him'. the germans can have 'against hitler but not for chamberlain', etc. and the ussr can wait until peoples come along with whom they can enter into alliances. instead of just governments. though in fact this involves a great risk. it makes a general agreement among the capitalist states more likely.

9 sep 39

the germans have occupied warsaw. the campaign lasted eight days and the western powers, as hitler forswore, have not intervened. but hitler is lost if the western powers do not capitulate and conclude a peace (as they will). his war is contained, all he can do is break through or starve. of course chamberlain's leaflets are not going to bring about a revolution in g[ermany]. a childish delusion, were it not plain eyewash. a swedish paper reports that only after reports of victories were people heard in berlin greeting one another in restaurants with 'heil hitler'.

the russo-german pact of course caused great confusion among the proletariat everywhere. the communists immediately claimed that it was a contribution to peace by the soviet union and should be respected. shortly afterwards of course – a few hours afterwards – war broke out,

and hitler claimed in major appeals that this pact had made it possible for him to lead the country against poland. now it may be that the soviet union assumed that the western powers would never enter a war for poland's sake. today, on the 8th day, this assumption is still not invalidated. as matters stand the soviet union would now be facing germany alone with poland, for the west is not yet fighting. possible too that poland in that case would not have tried to defend herself. chamberlain's line (hitler is to be directed against the soviet union) would then have triumphed. now however it is more than possible that poland will be subjugated without any great war, and poland is in the east and not in the west. and the union will in the eyes of the proletariat of the world bear the terrible stigma of aiding and abetting fascism, the wildest element in capitalism and the most hostile to the workers. i don't think more can be said than that the union saved its skin at the cost of leaving the proletariat of the world without solutions, hopes or help.

10 sep 39

i dip into goethe's PANDORA and again i am struck by the SHEPHERDS' SONGS. the way the refined and the primitive come together there!

who will a shepherd be
long time has he
let him count the stars that shine
let him blow upon the leaf

again and again the hand here plunges into the depths, bringing up something, part of which runs off, but something sticks, totally alienated in its new company. the stream's smoothness reveals its depths.

11 sep 39

H. G. WELLS publishes the speech he intended to deliver at the PEN-club congress. really, what a mountain of a philistine! he views hitler and mussolini simply as writers. and he finds them stupid. as if lack of literary talent couldn't prevent the cleverest person from appearing clever in a work of literature. WELLS himself exemplifies the opposite. by means of a modicum of smartness in literary matters he contrives without further ado to give the impression of common sense.

i am getting bogged down in the work on the *parable*. it doesn't flow properly. much of it is too contrived, the whole is still just so many parts. beautiful, realistic, astute – and so on.

36 Sweden, 18 September – 7 November 39

wrote little essay on photos that i had taken while SANTESSON, the sculptress, was working on helli's head. you can see the stages of her modelling. instructive for dialecticians. in fact something oddly good emerges at the end: the head is allowed to keep its contradictions unresolved.

18 sep 39

the soviet russian invasion of poland, preluded by the sensational pravda article in which the military collapse of poland was attributed to the suppression of minorities, awakens fears in the first instance that the USSR could be stumbling into a war on germany's side. this does not seem to be the case. then of course hitler stands to lose a lot. the balkans can be kept neutral. hitler's access to romania is blocked. hungary's neutrality gets some support. italy too is held in check. hitler's war aims in poland can no longer be achieved. in addition to which hitler grows even more suspect for the german bourgeoisie. and the workers more and more become the only partners for the USSR who can sign and deliver, the class that really can seal an alliance. (a war with the USSR would have been terrible. in stockholm the slogan 'the USSR must free the germans from hitler through a war against germany' is much easier to proclaim than in berlin.) but it is still very difficult to get used to the naked reality, with every ideological veil torn to shreds. here we have the fourth partition of poland, the abandonment of the slogan 'the USSR needs no foot of foreign soil', the appropriation of the fascist hypocrisies about 'blood-brotherhood', the liberation of 'brothers' (of slav descent), all the terminology of nationalism. this is addressed to the german fascists, but at the same time to the soviet troops.

19 sep 39

the soviet russian invasion of poland proceeded in a curiously napoleonic form. there was no advance war propaganda of any sort, no preparation of 'public opinion', no councils deciding or approving anything at all. the government decreed. meetings across the country acclaimed the decree. their communiqués are framed to accord with the national tone. in the shadow of great struggles two provinces which formerly belonged to the russian empire are occupied.

diplomatic considerations? before a great army is set in motion, a great empire hears things which only europe, capitalist europe should hear. the text sounds as if hitler had edited it. and yet it snatches *his* war aim away from him. the red army marches into europe.