BRECHT, *BAAL*, BARTON

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BRECHT, *BAAL*, BARTON

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ABSTRACT

Bertolt Brecht, German dramatist of the first half of the twentieth century, wrote extensively about his dramatic work throughout his life. In essays, he argued for the development of a theatre of the “scientific age” wherein a play would not merely entertain audiences, but educate them as well. Brecht abandons what he calls the “Aristotelian” theatre, which celebrates the eternal man forever in an emotional struggle against fate, in favor of an “epic theatre,” which appeals to reason and shows man in an unknown social process. Theatre professionals, scholars, and critics continue to debate the exact tenets of the epic theatre and the effective methods for creating epic productions.

In Brecht, Baal, Barton, I attempt to define a method for creating the epic theatre building on the combined directorial approaches of Brecht and John Barton, a twentieth century stage director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. In the first two chapters, I introduce the two dramatists and describe their individual approaches to the stage. I then expand Barton’s acting method for playing Shakespearean characters into an epic method for playing Brechtian characters. Following these chapters, I describe my application of this epic method to a full production of Brecht’s first play, Baal. In the final chapter, I conclude that the production succeeded as an intellectually provocative performance, and as a demonstration of the epic method in its early developmental stages.
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INTRODUCTION

German playwright and director Bertolt Brecht probably intended for future scholars to study his life and work indefinitely. He is responsible for an aesthetic, the *epic theatre*, which has altered the western theatre permanently. Yet, for someone with such a profound effect, he is evasive, and his ideas are elusive. Known as dictatorial, immovable, stubborn, and direct, his plays and literary works are quite the opposite—they shift, twist, and wriggle. His plays are not simple dramatic statements about life and art, but questions that he himself could not puzzle out. His work stemmed from an inquisitive and almost child-like need to explore and to do. In the spring of 2009, I mounted a production of Brecht’s first play, *Baal*, to explore the epic theatre. I used this production to experiment with my conceptions of his difficult theories and to define a replicable method for mounting a play in the epic theatre style.

Brecht’s epic theatre began as a revolt against the dominant theatres of 1920’s Germany, which produced everything from Wagnerian operas to the new plays of the budding expressionist movement. Brecht argued famously that these theatres followed Aristotle’s definition of drama where audiences went to the theatre to identify with the protagonist, thus sharing his emotional extremes and exorcising these emotions by the end of the play, what Aristotle called *catharsis*. The dramatic theatre’s spectator says:

*Yes, I have felt like that too—Just like me—It’s only natural—It’ll never change—The sufferings of this man*
appall me, because they are inescapable—That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world—I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.¹

Rejecting the theatres and operas that swept individuals away in emotion, Brecht sought to create a theatre that engaged the mind by preventing the audience from identifying with the characters. The epic theatre’s spectator says:

“I’d never thought of it—that’s not the way—that’s extraordinary, hardly believable—it’s got to stop—the sufferings of this man appall me because they are unnecessary—that’s great art: nothing obvious in it—I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.”²

In each of his plays, Brecht tried to teach the audience about society and challenge them to acknowledge the contradictions inherent within their lives and social framework. Brecht thought that if the play could objectively bring audiences to conscious identification and recognition of society, then their own reason would impel them to change. Always reactionary, Brecht’s ideas about theatre changed drastically in response to events such as World War II and the bombing of Hiroshima. Despite its evolution, Brecht viewed his epic theatre as transformative and progressive with human civilization.

Brecht developed a technique to distance audiences from the characters, prompting them to observe the action on stage critically rather than emotionally. He called it the “Verfremdungseffekt,” which scholars have translated to the “alienation

effect” or the “estrangement effect.” I prefer the word “estrangement” because it more accurately describes (in English) what Brecht's actors were doing. The actor estranges the character from the audience by objectifying the character and his actions as if they were a subject in a scientific experiment. The actor plays the character in order to draw the audience’s attention to what is strange and remarkable about the character and his action. The audience should not relate to the character, but should be confronted by him to observe his actions critically—Brecht wanted audiences to think; emotional feeling was a by-product.

Estrangement leads to a different form characterization, yet not necessarily unrealistic characterization as some critics posit. Instead of actors “becoming” characters on stage, Brecht would have actors \textit{demonstrate} a character on stage, presenting the audience with critical attitudes toward the action of the play. Not only did this change the basic premise of an actor's role on stage, it required a more precise understanding of physical movement and action, as everything the character said or did would be the object of inquiry. Highly influenced by the mime work of Karl Valentin, Brecht’s actors performed \textit{gests}, socially driven gestures that reflect the character and their attitude toward their surroundings and emphasize the critical inspection of Brecht's dialogue. Toward the end of his life, Brecht was known to spend hours testing varying \textit{gests} trying to find the definitive actions that best illuminated the story of the play. Though the epic theatre evolved through Brecht’s experiments, \textit{estrangement} and \textit{gestus} remain two primary elements of the epic theatre.
Brecht’s epic theatre, however difficult it may seem when discussed critically, is a practical detail-oriented production style, relying heavily on actor characterization. To my knowledge, there has not been any attempt in English to outline a method for epic characterization. I identified the critical purpose of the epic theatre, estrangement, and gestus, as the fundamental elements of the epic style. Based on research, translations, video-clips and images, I found a close spoken-word stylistic parallel to the epic theatre in the directorial work of John Barton, a founding director of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His approach to playing Shakespeare was my model for a defined method for the epic theatre.

In Shakespearean circles, Barton is somewhat a legend, known for being able to identify or recite any line from the First Folio of Shakespeare’s complete works. This living Shakespeare encyclopedia is also responsible for directing and teaching some of the most prominent actors in the world, such as Ian McKellen, Derek Jacobi, and Judi Dench. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the theatre though is his directorial aesthetic—he outlined a method for performing Shakespeare for contemporary audiences.

Audiences of the second half of the twentieth century and onwards often complain that Shakespeare’s plays read and sound more like a foreign language than Standard English. To counter this problem, Barton married the twentieth century acting style of naturalism (acting that looks life-like, natural, not contrived or overtly theatrical) with that of Shakespeare's traditional Elizabethan acting, a style focused on
elocution and the aural tradition of language. The result of Barton’s amalgamation was a style of performance that justified every word of a complex text, leading them through the difficult language rather than assuming that they are fluent in Early Modern English. In 1980, he filmed a television series called Playing Shakespeare in which he and several RSC actors discussed and demonstrated this method.

I developed Barton’s techniques for playing Shakespeare into a method for performing plays in the epic theatre style. I applied this ‘epic method’ to my production of Baal. Whereas in the first half of my thesis, I introduce the reader to the two directors and outline the ‘epic method,’ in the second half, I discuss the production, and my implementation of my research with student actors and designers. In many ways, I followed traditional contemporary approaches to play production, such as developing a directorial interpretation for the play as a guiding theme, though I only discuss these aspects of the production briefly. I devote the majority of the second half to the analysis of the ‘epic method’ in practice.

I intend for the reader to view this thesis as a “Modell” book, Brecht’s term for a detailed documentation and report of the preparation and execution of a production (including pictures!), a would-be definitive guide for producing the play. Brecht believed in “the inflexible rule that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

I have tested his pudding, and these are the results, and the “Modell.”

CHAPTER I

BERTOLT BRECHT: A POET WITH AN EPIC IDEA

The Life of Bertolt Brecht

Eugen Berthold Brecht was born to Berthold Brecht and Sophie Brenzig on February 10, 1898 in Augsburg, Bavaria. His father worked for the Haindl paper factory until he became director of it in 1914. They had another son, Eugen's younger brother, Walther. Quite early on, the family met with some measure of prosperity—thus they lived a secure bourgeois life.

From an early age, Brecht disliked his education. After four years of elementary school, he attended the Augsburg Realgymnasium for another nine. He was a fairly independent student, and generally rebellious. On many occasions, he and the other students would play pranks on their teachers in revenge for hard lessons and severe grading.

In 1914, Germany declared war on Russia—Brecht was sixteen years old. Brecht, uncharacteristic of his adulthood, showed conservative nationalistic leanings toward the war, patriotic like many of his fellow countrymen—his early poems reflect this patriotism. In 1917, he was drafted into the army from the University of Munich,
where he had studied medicine, and was transferred to the military hospital in Augsburg. Brecht's patriotism declined during his time at the hospital. In later letters and diaries, he would recount that he blindly submitted to the will of his superiors, patching up soldiers post-haste and returning them to the front line. “It is out of these experiences that the true poet was born.”

After the war, he returned to university to study medicine, but this time he went to the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, a conservative city that contrarily drew many leftist writers and artists to its cafes and newspapers. There, his interests shifted from medicine to science, and then finally to literature. Brecht did most of his own writing in Augsburg where he was free from distraction, but he soon moved to Munich. At this time, tragedy struck the family—Brecht's mother died, turning his father into a crotchety man who showed little affection for his sons. Brecht mourned his mother through his poetry.

In Augsburg, he had worked for a left-wing newspaper writing dramatic criticism. In the new city, Brecht concerned himself with the cabarets and theatrical events. He learned to play the guitar and sang his poems to his own accompaniment in the local taverns. Herr von Reindl wrote of the young Brecht:

The way he had his hair growing low down on his forehead betrayed a kind of naïve coquetry. It was a queer thing that he should be so popular with women ... the man literally reeked of sweat, like soldiers on the march ..., and he smelled unmistakably of revolution. Obviously it must be his vulgar ballads that fascinated

5 Frederic Ewen, Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, His Times (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1967), 56.
Whenever he sang them in his roaring voice, the women were swept out of themselves.6

He joined a troupe of entertainers led by the once famous Karl Valentin, a Charlie Chaplinesque clown who performed comedic sketches, poems, and played music. “A number of sketches Brecht wrote in the twenties testify to the direct influence of Valentin; but even more profoundly, Brecht was impressed by Valentin's mimetic art, what Brecht was to call ‘gestus’—the totality of the imitations of the unheroic heroes of the sketches.”7

Brecht may have found excitement and intellectual pleasure in the years after the war, but the German economy and people were in shambles. The government was just as unstable—some looked toward a new socialist order while others envisioned the return of the Holy Roman Empire. The German mark (German currency) plummeted while the American dollar climbed, leading to the disorder and chaos of the proud German people.

Many artistic movements arose from the ashes of the post-war environment; Dadaism and futurism made their way across the artistic scene, but the most

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profound movement to emerge in that brief time was expressionism. Fueled by writers such as Marx, Hegel, Darwin, Zola, Nietzsche, and Freud, the expressionist writers styled their work based on those of Strindberg, Wedekind, and Büchner—it was an intellectual revolt against bourgeois society. The expressionists saw man as the creator of his own reality, often characterized in dialectic between active revolution and passive submission to the changing times. Brecht began his career in this movement with his early plays *Baal* and *Trommeln in der Nacht* (*Drums in the Night*) and with his poetry, published in *Taschenpostille* and *Hauspostille*. He was the Dramaturg—theatrical poet, reader, adviser—for the Kammerspiele Theatre. Munich would prove too small for Brecht's experimental taste for literature and theatre—soon the “city of theatres,” Berlin, drew him to its streets and playhouses. He made many visits to Berlin in the years after the war; he finally moved there in 1924.

It took him a few years before he made any impact on the Berlin theatre scene. For his directorial debut, he directed a new expressionist play written by his close friend Arnolt Bronnen. Brecht, demanded so much specificity from the performers, that he drove the two leads to quit. Brecht replaced the actors, and the play was a sensational success. Soon after, Brecht's own play *Trommeln in der Nacht* met with major critical success, though not to the level of his later plays. Brecht's interest expanded from his early expressionism to history (as with his play *Edward II*), and to the American cultural invasion of skyscrapers, boxing, bicycle races, the mob, and jazz. Brecht's work would forever be influenced by his imaginings of
America, and he set many of his plays in his vision of New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Brecht based his Dickicht der Städte (In the Jungle of Cities) on Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. It was an exciting time for Brecht on many levels—he married Marianne Zoff, the sister of one of his writer friends.

Brecht's work slowly shifted from his early expressionism and nihilism and moved toward what would eventually become social critique. Mann ist Mann (A Man's a Man) was the first of his plays to explore characters that transform, whereas in his early plays, he set characters into a type or style, and pitted them against each other as in a boxing match. Filled with anachronisms, the play takes place in India, near a Tibetan temple run by Chinese priests, during a British invasion in honor of Queen Victoria in 1925; the play tells the story of the innocent Galy Gay, who is transformed by a group of soldiers into a fighting machine. Caspar Neher, a school friend of Brecht's, had begun collaborating with the young playwright/director on his new works and productions—he designed the set for the production.

Between 1923 and 1930, Germany seemed to reach a state of equilibrium, yet this was only the outward image as the value of the mark continued to fall and the
political regimes never stabilized. The Stalin/Trotsky split divided the German left, and Hitler's “Ninth of November” putsch failed for which he was imprisoned. The theatre too saw many aesthetic and political changes, and not only from within. Konstantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre began touring the plays of Anton Chekhov throughout Europe in their new naturalistic style. In Berlin, Erwin Piscator conceived of an “epic” theatre. Brecht joined with Piscator to create a revolutionary theatre of the left—simple, direct, and anti-expressionist. Piscator eventually staged plays with masses of people and attempted to combine all arts into a single theatrical event. He would call it “Total Theatre.” An example of a theatre like this was Richard Wagner's operas, such as his Ring cycle, playing all across Europe, but particularly in Germany.

Brecht was also making changes in his life; in 1927, he divorced Marianne Zoff and married Helene Weigel, an actress and future leading lady for many of his major heroines. Also, Brecht acquainted himself with the works of Karl Marx, father of socialism and communism. Brecht wrote of Marx:

> When I read 'Das Kapital' of Marx, I understood my own pieces. It will be obvious that I desire a wide diffusion of this book. I did not of course discover that I had unconsciously written a whole batch of Marxist plays; but this Karl Marx was the only spectator of my pieces I have ever seen. For to a man of his interests, these pieces must have been of interest, not because of their intelligence, but because of his. They would represent illustrative material for him.8

Regardless of contemporary opinions of Marxism and Communism, Marx's writings permanently changed Brecht's ideas on theatre.

Approaching Brecht from an American perspective, it is necessary that I now establish some main tenets of Brecht's critical Marxist approach—dialectical materialism. According to Marx, there is only a material world, with no metaphysical reality—all is material, meaning that anything and everything can be harnessed and possessed, including man and knowledge. Marxism posits that this material world is in a constant state of change brought about by argument and conflict, called dialectic. As there are no outside forces such as destiny or god, all human change is brought about by human means, and they are knowable and rational—it is the dialectic of men vs. men and men vs. the material world. Because all of society and its well-being are determined by human interaction, a class struggle exists: “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman; in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” Marxism argues that the bourgeoisie emerged from the ruins of the aristocratic feudal society as the ruling class. The bourgeoisie oppress the mass proletariat, the workers of the world, and live lavishly on their labor. Man's thought and actions reflect the material society in which he lives. Thus, religion, literature, music, art, and all other social activities is the superstructure seated on an economic foundation, the class society. Marxism and Communism, in theory, seek to liberate
the proletariat from their oppression and create a free society where all can experience pleasure in their work. Between the literary works of Marx and the theatrical social experiments of Piscator, Brecht's aesthetic would crystallize into his vision of the epic theatre. Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) was the first of his plays to incorporate this new thought and would become his most successful.

*Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) opened on August 31, 1928—it was a triumph. Brecht adapted John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (translated by Elisabeth Hauptmann), which had been a success two-hundred years before in England. Kurt Weill supplied his atonal music to the new text. The play tells the story of the underground murderer Mackie-Messer (Mack-the-Knife) who secretly marries Polly Peachum against her possessive parents' will. Her father, Peachum, with the aid of the prostitute Jenny—she's out to revenge herself on Mackie, her former lover and pimp—, arranges for him to be hanged. Luckily, at the end of the play, the Queen's messengers arrive to pardon Mackie and make him a Baron. Mackie has taken advantage of bourgeois society, getting away with his murders while at the same time he remains childhood friends with the police chief. For Brecht the Marxist, Mackie is both hero and villain because he conquers...
the bourgeoisie, yet also victimizes the poor. “Mackie, therefore, functions in two
distinct ways, being both the agent of the author's rebellion and the thing rebelled
against.”

*Die Dreigroschenoper* aesthetically marks Brecht's shift from expressionism
into his Marxist satire. This is also the fullest expression of Brecht's epic theatre thus
far in his career, incorporating a different music by Kurt Weill that was not
necessarily devoid of feeling, but pointed and direct. During the performances,
Brecht projected signs and maxims from the Bible in an attempt to stimulate didactic
thought in the audience, literally trying to force the audience to mentally debate
whether to support Mackie's actions or condemn them. His next production *Der
Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (*The Rise and Fall of the City of
Mahagonny*) continued in this same vein, combining Brecht's old appeal toward
depicting the decadence of the bourgeoisie and nihilistic dregs of society with his
new Marxist satire.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's, Brecht moved into the political arena in
support of the Communist party to argue against the rise of other political
movements—particularly Naziism. Brecht, Hanns Eisler, Helene Weigel, and Ernst
Busch took their songs and short skits to taverns and workhouses. Brecht and Eisler
developed the Lehrstück (didactic piece), a teaching play that would involve the
audiences, allowing them to reflect upon their lives and political affiliations, and
inciting them to action. The Lehrstück was Brecht's concentrated effort at a theatre

for instruction, in which he aimed to engage the audience on a purely rational level, avoiding emotion. Brecht continued his work in the mainstream as well with the production of his play *Die Mutter (The Mother)*, aligned with his Marxist aesthetic. *Die Mutter*, based on Maxim Gorki’s novel of the same name, tells the story of Vlassova, a mother, who, in support of her son, takes up Communist political action. She transforms from a pacifist to a political activist. Brecht presented her as a model for social-political awakening.

In 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany, leading the Nazi's into complete authority. One month after Hitler came to power, the Reichstag building was set on fire. A Communist was found inside and charged with starting the fire. This led to the suppression of Communists throughout Germany—Brecht and his family fled by the end of the month. The Nazis burned his plays and poems along with the works of many other writers.¹⁰

Brecht did not expect to remain in exile very long, but the few years he anticipated grew into fifteen. For the first years of his self-exile, he moved through Vienna, Prague, and Zurich, while also continuing his anti-war/anti-Nazi productions. In these first years, he wrote several works such as *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (Mother Courage and her Children)* and completed an early version of *Leben des Galilei (The Life of Galileo)*. During the exile, his works took on a more humanistic style, with characters showing more sympathies. He continued to write with female protagonists in the same vein as Vlassova, such as Grusha, Shen Te, and Courage.

With little success in Europe, Brecht and his family moved to California, where many of their other refugee friends warmly welcomed them. Weigel, trying to keep Brecht's spirits up, would host intellectual parties bringing together these friends every now and again to discuss politics, the war, and anything to keep Brecht's mind excited and moving. Brecht had thought to come to California to make movies, but found little success.

Brecht became concerned with the responsibility of the intellectual to society and how their knowledge should be disseminated in a “scientific age”—it was a motive behind his development of the epic theatre. Brecht saw in the story of Galileo a contemporary parallel—Galileo's discoveries would usher in a new dawn of thought. Though the play was completed in 1938, he began a new English translation and production of the play with Charles Laughton in 1944. When America dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Brecht revised the play. There were only a few changes concerning Galileo's recantation of his discoveries to the Catholic Church. In the prior version, Galileo recants and then in secrecy arranges for his book to be smuggled across borders, but in the latter, he is adamant that the dissemination of the book would never atone for his crime of recantation.
In Laughton, the playwright found more than his ideal actor for *Galileo*, he found a kindred spirit, a man who seemed to have an innate understanding of Brecht’s epic theatre. Neither one had much faculty for the other’s language, but they could communicate and collaborate. Brecht had found a didactic actor who understood the political and artistic ramifications and contributions of his plays. Immediacy propelled their development of the script and the production, yet it wouldn’t see a stage until 1947, just before Brecht’s departure for Berlin. The production was unsuccessful. After a brief, awkward, yet humorous, encounter with the House for Un-American Activities Committee, which questioned the Communist elements in his plays, Brecht escaped untouched by the American Red Scare.  

He returned to Communist East Berlin on October 22, 1948 where Cultural League welcomed him as a national poet.

The East German government placed the Deutches Theatre at his disposal and charged him with the responsibility to create a national theatre. He set to work immediately on a production of *Mother Courage*, a play that depicts the Thirty Years War, one of Germany’s particularly darker wars. The play highlights the capitalist motives behind the business of war, and how they only lead to senseless sacrifices. Many returned to work under him in his new theatre: “Weigel, 

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Caspar Neher, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, Erich Engel, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Ruth Berlau, Ernst Busch, Friedrich Ggnass, Gerhart Biernet, Erwin Geschonnek; Teo Otto, the stage designer; and guest artists like Therese Giehse, and Leonhard Steckel.”12 Brecht's new theatre was different from others across the world for he had no secrets—he held open rehearsals where anyone who wanted could come and watch. The director/dictator Brecht had mellowed into a very methodical persistent director of trial and error with rehearsals lasting months. He had aimed to establish a new repertory and build a theatre for the new society. In three years time he had developed an internationally acclaimed theatre with planned tours of their productions throughout Europe—despite the economic crisis of East Berlin.

Bertolt Brecht died from a coronary thrombosis on August 14, 1956. Helene Weigel took over artistic direction of the Berliner Ensemble at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm with a repertory of mostly Brecht's works, but soon branching out to include others. The Berliner Ensemble continues to produce theatre to this day.

Bertolt Brecht's plays and productions permanently altered western theatre by creating new forms of drama and production, and inspiring others to experiment with theatre as a medium for social and political change. His work has influenced the Royal Shakespeare Company in England, the Theatre du Soleil in France, and even the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia. His ideas have even permeated into film in the works of such directors as Jean-Luc Goddard of the French New Wave. His influence is profound. He was a man of contradictions, who left behind a malleable aesthetic

not easy to define.

**The Epic Theatre: an Idea with a Capacity for Change**

Brecht’s epic theatre eludes definition. Scholars and practitioners err in treating the epic theatre as something constant, unchanging. Brecht’s most concise statement of the epic theatre is his “Short Organum for the Theatre” written in the early years of his exile. In the essay, Brecht acknowledged that his idea changed after he first began writing, and even his Marxist ambitions to educate the workers using art as instruction fell short to the “noblest function” of the theatre, entertainment. Therefore, the contemporary theatre practitioner and scholar must think of the epic theatre in terms of a developing aesthetic as well as a style of production. Brecht created an epic idea with many theories of expression through playwriting and production. For Brecht, the two went hand in hand. For a contemporary director approaching a non-Brechtian script the epic idea is still applicable—it is an approach to all drama with the very specific goal of entertaining audiences, through imagination and intellectual stimulation.

As early as 1919 Brecht imagined a different theatre than the one that he saw in Augsburg, Munich, or Berlin. To him, theatre had become a stale ritual of communion, formalized, for the elite, and in an unending cycle, because it was founded on the exchange of stereotyped heightened emotions from actor to audiences. He wanted to create a theatre that defied tradition. In his early theories, he called for the theatre to emulate public sporting events: “When people in sporting establishments buy their tickets they know exactly what is going to take place; and
that is exactly what does take place once they are in their seats: viz. highly trained persons developing their peculiar powers in the way most suited to them, with the greatest sense of responsibility yet in such a way as to make one feel that they are doing it primarily for their own fun.”

Brecht was not only imagining a very active, fast-paced, high-energy performance akin to boxers in the arena, he imagined how his audiences should react, with the same enthusiasm and excitement as the audiences at the boxing match. He wanted the theatre to respond to the new society. Brecht wanted a “smoking theatre” because he thought puffing a cigar or cigarette in the theatre would create a critical atmosphere in his audience, forcing them to engage intellectually with the performance at hand. This idea of critical observation and excitement in the theatre is the seed and essence of the epic idea.

Brecht would revise his epic idea as often as necessary in order to create a theatre fit for his age, which Brecht continually referred to as the “scientific age.” In this age, life moves faster, man has extended his control over nature by harnessing the power of coal, oil, and steam. This compulsion for the “scientific age” is the same passion that drove him to his “smoking theatre.” He saw the traditional theatre as catering to an audience of an earlier barbaric age that no longer intrigued, but hypnotized the performers and the audience with emotionalism and feeling. Brecht wrote, “With my father I already spoke across the width of a continent, but it was with my son that I first saw the moving pictures of the explosion at Hiroshima.”

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Brecht, throughout his life, marveled at the capacity of technology and science, and saw society as in a great transition, the climax of a dialectic, both horrifying and profound. The epic theatre would produce plays in a manner more entertaining for audiences of this “scientific age”—immediate, fast, and intellectual.

The term 'epic' comes directly from Aristotle's *Poetics*; Aristotle contrasted this form of poetry against tragedy. The primary differences between the two are the verse structure, the manner of telling and the length of time for the action of the story. An epic, such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, establishes a verse that never changes whereas with tragedy it does; one person tells the epic (Homer in this case), adopting voices as needed. In tragedy, actors mimic the actions of the play before the spectator. An epic consists of many episodes that would require more than a day to perform. The audiences of the “scientific age” move quickly and have no time to linger in a single tragic moment. Aristotle's epic allows many events to take place across multiple scenes and multiple settings. The main goal of the Aristotelian tragedy is the literal exorcism of the audience's emotions of pity and fear. The actors move through the action of the tragedy leading the audience to mimic their emotions through sympathy, building to an emotional release of pity and fear, what Aristotle calls catharsis, what Brecht saw as the single defining attribute of the traditional theatres. Brecht generally adopted the traditional epic as described by Aristotle as a model for dramatic storytelling, only he rejected the need of catharsis as unfit for the “scientific age.” Audiences did not need to see every single interaction between characters on stage, only the significant ones. Brecht hypothesized that audiences thought faster,
understood more, and wanted more from the theatre than emotional release. In 1926 Brecht said, “The one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are grown up at seventeen. I appeal to reason.”

Brecht applied a disciplined Marxist view to the world, to history, to literature, and to his own aesthetic, the epic theatre. As a playwright, Brecht began to focus on the material human interactions as determinants of character and story, removing all mysticism from his writing. Whereas in Baal, Baal expresses esoteric power through poetry and nature, in Die Dreigroschenoper, Mackie controls his surroundings through his social and political connections, such as with the Captain of the Police. Brecht sought to liberate the proletariat of their chains through knowledge and the awakening of their class-consciousness. Thus, the epic theatre became a “theatre of instruction” with a new way of playing to audiences.

Riding his partial success with Die Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, Brecht published one of his most influential essays regarding the production of theatre, “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre.” Whereas the “Short Organum” is Brecht's most definitive theoretical and philosophical statement, this essay is his most practical description. In the essay, Brecht argues that his epic theatre offers modern audiences something that they were missing in the traditional theatres: fun, and that the theatre (Opera in the essay) must introduce innovations. Brecht then introduced the now famous chart juxtaposing the dramatic (Aristotle's and the bourgeois) theatre vs. the epic theatre as follows.

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Dramatic Theatre

plot
implicates the spectator in a situation
observer
wears down the capacity for action
provides spectator with sensations
decisions
experience
the spectator is involved in something
something
suggestion
instinctive feelings are preserved
recognition
the spectator is in the thick of things
studies
the human being is taken for granted
inquiry
humans do not change
eyes on the finish
one scene gives way to another
growth
linear development
evolutionary determinism
human being as a fixed point
thought determines being
feeling

Epic Theatre

narrative
turns the spectator into an
arouses the capacity for action
provokes the spectator to make
picture of the world
spectator is made to face
argument
brought to the point of
the spectator stands outside and
the human being is the object of
humans can and do change
eyes on the process
each scene for itself
montage
curves
jumps
human being as a process
social being determines thought
reason16

From this chart, the reader can easily see the influence of Marx's dialectical materialism on Brecht's aesthetic with all the references to a socially determined character and style of performance. The epic theatre would need a different style of acting to match the new plays and the new audiences, and of course, he would base it on Marxism. Though the idea of the epic theatre would change and shift more throughout his life, Brecht never strayed too far from the ideas he listed in this chart.

Oft-times, even in his later plays, his protagonists' main conflicts are their own dialectical battle between their emotion and their reason, the Aristotelian and the epic.

The epic theatre is an idea that Brecht never finished. Even toward the end of his life, Brecht considered abandoning the term “epic theatre” altogether in favor of “dialectical theatre.” He had revised his idea for theatre to show more the dialectical struggle between opposing ideas as expressed through people in society. As for his “theatre of instruction”, he had come to learn that instruction is an aspect of the theatre's social function, but the primary one is entertainment. Brecht reworked his productions in light of this discovery, thus creating a theatre where audiences can have fun while engaging their minds critically. In the end, Brecht created a complexly simple storytelling theatre: “The 'story' is the theatre's great operation, the complete fitting together of all the gestic incidents, embracing the communications and impulses that must now go to make up the audience's entertainment.”

**Estrangement and Gestus: the Epic Idea in Practice**

Even before Brecht read Marx, he demanded a different style of acting from his performers; he said, “they act wrong.” He wanted them to “demonstrate their knowledge ... of human relations, of human behavior, of human capacities.” Yet, this did not mean that he wanted his performers to play their roles with an emotional naturalism like Stanislavsky's actors of the Moscow Art Theatre. Brecht wanted to

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19 Ibid., 26.
show the reality of human interaction—his chief method was the “Verfremdungseffekt,” or, in English, the “estrangement effect.” Estrangement is simply making the familiar unfamiliar and remarkable. Yet, what we consider familiar can be a multitude of different actions. Estrangement, therefore, encompasses several techniques of creating critical distance between the production and the audience.

With estrangement, the actor must not only estrange a character’s actions from the audience, but the character from himself, and the character from the audience, as if he is playing a character from history. The actor objectifies the character for the audience, based on the social and political construction of that character in society. For Brecht, an actor does this to show the flow of constant change and the choices that characters makes on stage. He presents the character to the audience as an object, so they can see how the character’s actions and words affect the story. In the epic theatre, individual actors form social and political attitudes for their characters about the events and ideas of the play as they happen, and then demonstrate that attitude with their character. For example, examine Charlie Chaplin in his film The Kid. He and the kid have created a swindle that they practice on local city dwellers: the kid throws rocks at windows to break them and Chaplin, a window repairman, just happens to walk by ready to fix the window. Eventually the policeman catches on and follows Chaplin, who's trying to push the kid away with his foot so as to conceal his relationship with the boy; the boy, happy to have succeeded with his surrogate father, refuses to leave until he turns and sees the officer—then he dashes off.
This is the perfect example of estranging a character. At this point in film history, Chaplin had already established himself as a silent film star—everyone knew of his character, the Tramp. In this production, the Tramp is a window repairman while in another film he is something completely different. Chaplin's situation takes the focus because it is what is unfamiliar to the audiences—they know the Tramp, but they don't know the kid or the “job” of a window repairman, thus the familiar occupation and situation of impoverished children becomes strange and remarkable. The audience watches Chaplin's character risking everything for the kid—and that becomes the highlight of the movie, not simply Chaplin acting goofy.

Chaplin's performance demonstrates the broader aspects of estrangement, but does not necessarily match up to Brecht's productions—at least not all of them. In several productions, the characters were played much more naturalistically, such as with Helene Weigel's performance of the title role in *Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder*. Her form of estrangement was much subtler, yet still particular and socially constructed. She also spoke, whereas in *The Kid*, Chaplin is silent. Estrangement does still apply in these more naturalistic productions, yet it requires different acting
techniques to create. Brecht recounted an example of this more subtle form of estrangement in an essay describing Weigel's acting in a production of *Oedipus Rex*—Weigel played the role of Jocasta's servant, the one who announces the Queen's suicide to the other characters and audience. Instead of running on in tears and blubbering about the death of the queen, she entered calmly and coldly announcing in an "unemotional, penetrating voice, her 'Jocasta has died' without any sorrow but so firmly and definitely that the bare fact of her mistress's death carried more weight at that precise moment then could have been generated by any grief of her own."\(^{20}\) She wore white make-up to show her character's personal horror to the situation. The audience members were forced to examine the situation in regards to the social interaction of the characters on stage, rather than weep in pity and fear with a servant girl. They see the effect of the dead queen, rather than feel the sadness of her death. Yet, this does not inhibit their emotions, but makes them secondary to the event itself. The audience sees and hears a story, not just a blubbery girl, inaudibly whining about her dead mistress.

Brecht's use of estrangement may be somewhat misleading, hinting that the epic theatre style of acting is completely devoid of any emotion. This is certainly not the case. Margaret Eddershaw writes of this subtler form of estrangement: "What Brecht sought was quite simply a 'cooler' mode of performance, not less acting, but based on a different premise."\(^{21}\) The characters are not without emotions, only they

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act out of social necessity. Brecht denies the universal interpretation of characters in favor of a more particular style that the actor demonstrates through his interactions on stage. In epic theatre characters laugh and cry, but the important thing is the social situation that brought about this reaction, and how the character handles it.

Estrangement is not only an acting technique of the epic theatre, but one to be deployed in all aspects of production: singing, music, lighting, and scenic design. Brecht called for a radical “separation of the elements” so that we see and hear how they interact dialectically with one another. When an actor would sing, Brecht would require them to take an entirely different attitude and stance from the normal demonstration of the character and sing their song directly to the audience. The song was not part of the character, but a tool that the character uses to communicate. The music for productions such as *Die Dreigroschenoper* was created to be simple, direct, and memorable. What adult in America or Germany does not recognize the opening Moritat, what the English speaking world calls “Mack-the-Knife?”

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\begin{align*}
Und \text{ der Haifisch, der hat Zahne} \\
Und \text{ die tragt er im Gesicht} \\
Und \text{ Macheath, der hat ein Messer.} \\
Doch das Messer sieht man nicht. \text{22}
\end{align*}
\]

or

\[
\begin{align*}
Oh, \text{ the shark has pretty teeth, dear,} \\
And \text{ he shows them pearly whites.} \\
Just \text{ a jack-knife has Macheath, dear,} \\
And \text{ he keeps it out of sight.}
\end{align*}
\]

Americans of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century are

accustomed to this style of music for it influenced some of the major composers of Broadway musicals, such as Kander and Ebb and Ira Gershwin. The modern musical, where characters express their situation through song and dance stems directly from Brecht's epic theatre and estrangement. Not all musicals fall into the category of epic—nor do all musicals use estrangement, but the idea behind the musical is epic and concerned with the social interactions of individuals in society.

Brecht saw each of the elements in the theatre as an art unto themselves that could stand alone, and he wanted audiences to see these different arts at work. He wanted to dispel the illusion of the old theatre that made a slave of lighting and scenery; he showed the lighting and scenery for what they were. Brecht produced plays where audiences could see the lighting equipment on stage. Even the stage design itself showed the scaffolding. He would have the curtain lifted a couple feet sometimes before the show began so that audiences could see the stagehands and actors scurrying about on stage. Neher would project his artwork and titles onto screens to comment on the scenes instead of painting an elaborate illusory set for the actors and audience to pretend to live in. Of Neher, Brecht writes, “Neher's projections adopt an attitude towards events on the stage; as when the real glutton sits in front of the glutton that Neher has drawn.”

Neher has created estrangement of the glutton by presenting the audience with a caricature, which the audience could compare with the actor's presentation of the character. Each of the different elements acts independently, but collaboratively to reveal the ideas and story of the play—a

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dialectic of the elements.

There is still much room for debate concerning what level of critical distance is necessary to play a character. Obviously, there are roles such as tramps and clowns for which the broad style of estrangement works, but to play the subtler estrangement, the actor needs to speak and move less. Most theatre practitioners are familiar with characterization and the naturalistic movements and voice necessary to create the illusion of a life-like character. Most actors act as they themselves would in a given character's circumstances—lacking particularity. Brecht, along with estrangement, requires his actor to play a character through gestus, socially driven mimesis constructed of distinct physical and vocal actions called gests.

Brecht developed his conception of gestus by watching the physical comedic styling of Karl Valentin—he called it “the totality of the imitations of the unheroic heroes.”24 Once again, Brecht drew a theatrical technique from a broad style of clowning and began refining it into a more subtle style. These individual imitations are the individual gests. The social circumstances that determine each gest are objective facts: the character's socio-economic class, the specific social situation, the individuals around him, and at what point in history the play takes place. An example of a subtler gest would be how Weigel portrayed Vlassova in the original production of Die Mutter. She was to perform the simple action of carrying a pot of lard amongst starving people. Given the social circumstance of poverty and the lack of education between her character and the others, she carried the pot of lard with reverence. This

is a gest because it demonstrates to the audience how poor people interpret even repulsive foods.

A gest can take on many different actions, physical, vocal, facial, or even musical. Along with the social-determination, a key aspect of a gest is its self-reflective, demonstrative quality. In his essays Brecht often wrote of “historicizing” the character, playing the character as if in the third person—what I have called objectifying the character. To play the gest, the actor must make it definite and draw attention to it as if it were a ritualistic action. In some situations, this may entail the actor simply observing himself in the middle of the action. If Weigel reverently carries the pot of lard across the stage, while in movement she will look at her arms slowly, noticing how her hands are specifically holding the pot, and then look up at the audience as if to say, “isn’t it just like that?”

Brecht wanted his actors to know physically where they were on stage at all times, as prepared and aware of their surroundings as acrobats. The presentation of a character should be formal, not natural, not as if people were living on stage. The gesst must look planned and rehearsed. For Brecht gesstes were a way to break down the play and analyze the play’s dynamic elements—it was a system that an actor, once familiar with it, could quickly replay the same scene in the same way. This does raise a question: how many gesstes should an actor play per performance? The answer is as many as necessary. Brecht wrote most of his plays in scenes “that stand for themselves” with their own beginning, middle, and end. Within each scene, many

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gests take place because there are many social interactions. The composite of all gests in a scene determine the gestus of the scene, the primary social action of the scene. An example of a summing gestus is when Chaplin holds the kid in his arms, the kid embracing him, and Chaplin kisses the kid on the lips, a sign of their father-son relationship, and their promise to each other, despite the economic condition of the Great Depression. The actor plays a character through multiple gests throughout the scenes and the play. The actors “demonstrate their knowledge … of human relations, of human behavior, of human capacities” through gestus.

Several actors and directors object to estrangement and gestus as it requires a more cerebral approach to a character, relying less on instinct and more on conscious reasoning. They fear being “in their head” and not “in the moment”—they would rather play a general emotion because it “feels” right, rather than play the character based on the words on the page. Just as Brecht would attempt to analyze his plays objectively from his pseudo-scientific perspective, he wanted his actors to do the same. This does not mean that the characters are devoid of emotions, but that the actors play the outward appearance of those emotions only when socially necessary. Those that want to create more psychologically driven productions claim that the epic theatre is too limiting.

In early productions of Brecht’s plays in England, critics, who did admire several of the productions, “sometimes felt (and declared) that they had to overlook or

ignore Brecht's politics in order to enjoy the performance."\textsuperscript{27} Brecht was a Marxist and Communist, but before that, he was a poet, playwright, and director. He spent his entire life answering similar critical opinions of his work, and consequently never finished revising his idea of the epic theatre. To the outsider, Brecht was inconsistent, yet in production he was pragmatic, which means that oft-times he did not follow his own theories—if the experiment failed, why continue it? Sometimes it was the actor himself that attracted Brecht, as with Laughton, Chaplin, and Valentin. Lotte Lenya, wife of Kurt Weill and a star from the original production of \textit{Die Dreigroschenoper}, stated:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Right in the middle of it, I stopped for a second and said, “Brecht, you know your theory of epic theatre—maybe you don’t want me just to sing it the way I sang it—as emotional as ‘Surabaya Johnny’ has to be done?”}

\ldots He said: “Lenya, darling, whatever you do is epic enough for me.”\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Brecht praised the acting style of Peter Lorre, whom Brecht directed as Galy Gay in his second production of \textit{Mann ist Mann}. “Lorre’s instinctive way of performing was more realistic, more emotional, a style that led to his success in the cinema,”\textsuperscript{29} yet something about his physicality or his voice intrigued Brecht. Brecht ignored stage stereotypes, and often cast people that Hollywood would have considered physically inappropriate for the role. Brecht was never constant.

Brecht was pragmatic. He would write with his idea of the epic theatre in mind, but as soon as he went into rehearsal, he had no problem rewriting his play to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Ibid., 37.
\item[29] Ibid., 26.
\end{footnotes}
suit the production and the performers working on it. When Teresa Ghiese played Mother Courage, Brecht re-blocked the entire play to account for the new actress. She was a different woman with a different voice and a different look, thus his play was going to be a different production altogether.

For contemporary dramatists, the practical application of estrangement and gestus remains elusive to some extent. What exactly does this more subtle version of epic acting look and sound like? Brecht's writings can be quite complicated and often contradictory, yet they do point to a reproducible aesthetic and possibly an aesthetic with more potential than just a Marxist intention. In the English-speaking world, the Royal Shakespeare Company has come the closest to emulating and progressing estrangement and gestus.
CHAPTER II

JOHN BARTON AND THE “RSC STYLE”

John Barton: an Account of Pragmatic Myth-making

Contrary to the plethora of scholarship on Bertolt Brecht, there is little to none on John Barton. Michael L. Greenwald wrote the only published critical study on Barton to date—there is no biography. Unlike Brecht, Barton’s life was—and is—a much quieter one; he never fled of political necessity, and never entered military service, as he was too young at the outbreak of World War II. Barton claims to be apolitical, identifying more with humanism. He describes his directing as a search for something lost or unknown, and finds hints of it in scripts and plays that he rewrites or directs. He said: “Sometimes one’s lucky and there’s a piece that hauntingly brings out resonances and parts of one’s own myth, and it’s all there and you don’t have to change a word of it.”30 Barton is very much the professorial archetype—an ambiguous, distant, and pithy mythmaker. Yet, like Brecht, he is fiercely intellectual—only he is much more private about it.

John Bernard Adie Barton was born on November 26, 1928 to the accountant

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Sir Harold Montague and Lady Joyce (née Wale) Barton. Barton expressed little interest in the theatre in his youth—it was considered too “low” for his social status. Barton did not get the “urge” until entering Eton College at Cambridge University in 1948. There Barton became obsessed with theatre and Shakespeare, producing, directing, and acting. Most of his work was through the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC), though he also would work with other societies, such as the Marlowe Society. Of the many stage productions that he directed at Cambridge, his most important was *Julius Caesar* in which he directed the cast to speak with an Elizabethan accent, pronouncing words such as “war” as “wharre” and “fight” as “fate.” “The commercial press praised the performance.”

Barton was not the only future director of the British stage to attend Cambridge; Peter Hall, future founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company and colleague of Barton, also attended Cambridge at this time. The two talked and collaborated on several early endeavors and experiments—Hall directed Barton's most successful play, *Winterlude*. At Cambridge they first concocted their vision of Shakespeare's Henry VI plays, what they would call *The Wars of the Roses*.

F. R. Leavis and George Rylands, two important figures in literary criticism, resided in Cambridge at this time. Leavis was a major figure in the revolution in literary criticism taking place in England and America. He advocated a cold, pseudo-scientific analysis of poetry and literature. Rylands had published scholarship tracing the evolution of Shakespeare's poetic abilities, along with work on the tradition of

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poetry. Rylands also directed and produced theatre in the Cambridge dramatic
societies, heading the Marlowe Society. Barton claims to have learned very little from
Leavis, but Rylands had a very important impact on him. From Rylands, Barton
learned attentiveness to verse-speaking and the importance of Shakespeare's verse as
it is heard, not read. Hall would later comment, “Perhaps our ideal was to speak like
Rylands, and think like Leavis.”32

Barton, accepting a lectureship in the drama department at the University of
California, Berkeley, left England in the fall of 1953. There, he also directed a couple
of Shakespeare productions, but soon became very disheartened with academic
theatre—he returned to Cambridge by fall the following year to attend to his graduate
studies, which didn't bode well either. Barton discovered that he had “little talent for
critical prose,” though he begrudgingly completed two theses: one on Renaissance
staging techniques and the other on the translation of Anglo Saxon poetry. For the
next several years Barton mentored many students, including some who would move
on to become some of famed actors of the stage and screen, such as Ian McKellen and
Derek Jacobi.

In 1960, Peter Hall assumed leadership of the Memorial Theatre in Stratford-
Upon-Avon, dedicated to the production Shakespeare's plays, with the intention to
revolutionize the British theatre—he wanted to create a professional company of
performers and artists who could work and collaborate without the burden of financial
insecurity. Thus, he renamed the theatre the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and created

the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) to house it. Actors would sign two-year contracts rather than simply working on individual productions. Hall even challenged the traditional hierarchical system of actors in lead parts: “The old habit of printing stars’ names in larger letters above the play-title on posters and on programs was immediately abandoned … and from 1963 onwards all billing became alphabetical.”

Under his artistic direction, the RSC opened its London theatres, the Aldwych, and later the Barbican, expanding the company’s repertoire to play the classics and then contemporary work by playwrights such as John Arden, Peter Shaffer, and John Whiting. Hall labored to make the RSC into England’s national theatre. Though he did not succeed, he developed a new model for theatrical practice and brought international recognition to his company.

Hall brought Barton into the revolution to coach the verse-speaking of the RSC performers, and to direct plays. Through his workshops and classes on Shakespeare's sonnets, actors gained a literary and practical understanding of the text, balancing classical methods of speaking with Stanislavsky’s style of naturalism. No longer would the actors perform verse that sounded like “poetry,” but the language would reflect the character's circumstance and situation, yet still retaining a recognizable precision in verse-speaking. Barton professes that Shakespeare's verse, through its rhythms and figurative language, subtly instructs the actor on how to speak the line and play the character. Of course, Barton leaves much room for director and actor interpretation, but he is insistent on the accuracy of the verse in

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33 Ibid., 265.
rehearsals, yet, early on, the company resisted revolution.

Hall charged Barton with directing the first play of the RSC premier season, *The Taming of the Shrew*. For those unfamiliar with producing Shakespeare, most of his texts contain many lines and characters that oft-times do not directly contribute to the story or theme of the play—it is generally unheard of in contemporary theatre to see an unabridged version of the play. Except for the first scene of the play, the “Induction,” *Shrew* is a cohesive script with fewer non-sequiturs that need cutting.

The text that most audiences recognize as *Shrew* actually comes from the play within a play performed for the characters in the “Induction.” Many cut the scene altogether, yet Barton, given his adeptness for Shakespeare and Elizabethan dramatic literature, added several scenes from a similar play by a different Elizabethan playwright to solve the dilemma of the missing conclusion. Some called it blasphemy, others, a relief. Barton had truly crossed the threshold from amateur to professional when his cast of virtuoso actors, such as Peggy Ashcroft, nearly revolted during rehearsals—they felt that Barton had the entire play worked out in his head (he probably did) and was simply “hanging all his ideas on” them. Hall nearly fired Barton over the incident, but Barton insisted on staying and completing the production. It was the first success of the new company. From that point on, Barton had the respect and trust of Hall and the RSC actors, including the fervent support of Ashcroft. By 1965, the company could see the fruits of their disciplined labor, and critics dubbed their revolutionary approach to Shakespearean performance as the “RSC style.” Out of all

the plays they produced in those first years, none was as influential and theatrically profound as *The Wars of the Roses*.

Hall and Barton had first conceived of a definitive production of the *Henry VI* plays in their Cambridge days. After the success of the RSC’s first few seasons, they renewed their efforts to make it happen—Hall would direct the production and Barton would develop the script. So, Barton went to work, condensing the plays (including *Richard III*) into three separate productions of a play cycle, cutting Shakespeare's 12,350 lines down to 6,006 and then supplementing that with 1,440 lines of Barton's creation. If critics found Barton's addition to *Shrew* blasphemous, they considered the *Wars* heretical—never in stage history had a professional company taken such liberty with Shakespeare's text. Barton developed the three plays to emphasize the power play between the nobility of the English court and to show the transformation of characters from their naïve early ambitions to the bloody consequences of their actions. During one evening of rehearsals, Hall commented on what he thought was an inserted bit of text by Barton; before cutting it, he and Barton consulted their sources to find out that the “flawed” text was actually Shakespeare's.

*The Wars of the Roses* opened in 1963, marking a definitive critical and artistic achievement for the RSC. The first play,
titled *Henry VI*, began with mostly court intrigue, all the scenes revolving around a circular table, the major symbol and metaphor for the entire play cycle. *Edward IV*, the second play, contained the majority of the violence and the warring (Barton choreographed all of the fight scenes). *Richard III*, the final play, remained the most unaltered of the trilogy, aside from a few cut lines and addition and omission of lesser characters. Many critics and scholars have compared the production to Brecht's epic productions—the stage was generally sparse, and the actors wore semi-medieval costumes suggestive of the timelessness of war. In *Henry VI*, the actors were much cleaner and elegant; in *Richard III*, they had been replaced with dark leathers, bloodstains, and metal. *Wars* was such a success that the following year Hall and Barton added *Richard II* through *Henry V* to the production season, creating the *Henriad*. It too was a major success.

Most RSC historians only emphasize Barton's contribution to verse-speaking and briefly mention, if at all, any of his directorial endeavors. Over the years, Barton has directed dozens of productions, many of which were artistic successes, while others were complete flops. Barton is known for tackling the more difficult and obscure of Shakespeare's scripts, such as *Troilus and Cressida*—“few theatre artists in this century (the twentieth century) have been so intimately involved with this difficult play.”

Barton, with assistance from Hall, directed a dark “comic” version of this play for the RSC's first season in 1960. To make Shakespeare's seemingly disconnected scenes about the Trojan War appealing to audiences, Barton chose to

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de-romanticize the mythic aspects of the production and focus on the realities of the war—much as he would later do with Wars. Leslie Hurry designed a sandpit set to demonstrate the harsh world of the Mediterranean and to emphasize the transitory lives of the characters. Though Barton had intended for the audience to walk away seeing the realities of Troilus and Cressida, his production only heightened the poetic effect of the play. The audience saw Cressida running her fingers through sand while talking of time, and the corpse of Hector dragged off the stage dune, smearing sand with blood. Indeed, with this design and the RSC “style,” Barton directed one of the few successful productions to date. The RSC remounted the production in 1962.

Barton, for the most part, approaches a production from historical naturalism, though his productions sometimes vary from his original intent. “In 1968 the unpopularity of the Vietnam War prompted societies on both sides of the Atlantic to reassess their political, moral, and sexual value; thus Barton exploited the topicality of Troilus and Cressida by equating war and sex.”36 Barton enrolled the actors in a health club to beef them up, and then dressed them in skimpy costumes adorned with primitive bracelets. In place of traditional fight scenes, the soldiers conducted the war through ritualistic sexual dances, suggesting homosexuality to some audiences. In this version, Achilles came to taunt Hector in near drag, wearing a blond wig and a dress-like cloth. Barton refuted his critics who found the drag and the interactions between Achilles and Patroclus demonstrative of a homosexual relationship, arguing that Achilles would have been interpreted by the Elizabethans as bisexual. Thus, whether

36 Ibid., 69.
or not his intent, Barton's production contributed to the “free love” movement of the 1960's.

In 1968, frustrated, recovering from shingles and exhaustion, Hall resigned from his post as Managing Director, naming the young Trevor Nunn his successor. Despite several directorial flops and failures (and few successes) early on in Nunn's professional career, Hall selected this young Cambridge alumnus because he represented a new generation and could initiate the changes needed for the company to move into the next decade. Nunn's style of theatre was theatrical and romantic, as exemplified by his production of a Jacobean drama called *The Revenger's Tragedy* by Tourneur. Nunn directed the play overly theatrical and anti-naturalistic, dismaying Barton and his attention to naturalistic detail. At the time, Nunn was an apprentice director supervised by Barton. Nunn's production went completely contrary to the “RSC style,” and during one particular rehearsal Barton noticed a tomb and asked why there was not any moss on it.\(^{37}\) The RSC refers to incident as the 'Moss on the Tomb' scandal. With a little adjustment to the aesthetic switch from a cold, intellectual, historical naturalistic style, to Nunn's “freer, more romantic, and more passionate” style, Barton continued teaching and directing for the RSC.

In August of 1968, Barton married Anne Righter, another Cambridge scholar, in the Stratford Town Hall. Anne Barton was American by birth and went to Cambridge to do doctoral research under Muriel C. Bradbrook, another influential scholar in medieval and Elizabethan theatre. Anne Barton published her thesis in a

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book called *Shakespeare and the Idea of Play*, which analyzed drama that holds art’s mirror to itself “to remind the audience that elements of illusion are present in ordinary life, and that between the world and the stage there exists a complicated interplay of resemblance that is part of the perfection and nobility of the drama itself as form.”

Anne Barton wrote many program essays for RSC productions giving scholarly insight into Shakespeare's works and Barton's interpretations. Though husband and wife, Barton rarely relies on her critical work for production concepts, and she develops her own essays and scholarship without his direct influence.

In the Nunn years of the RSC, Barton's productions followed the precedence of *The Wars of the Roses* and both versions of *Troilus and Cressida*, ranging from the subtle, Stanislavskian approach to the near farcical and gimmicky. His direction of Shakespeare's comedies tends more to resemble a production of Chekhov's moodier “comedies” (only Chekhov called them comedies, though they tend to have both tragic and comedic elements in them).

McKellen commented on Barton: “Despite his lifetime with the Elizabethans, it is with Chekhov that Barton is most intimately at home.”

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Productions of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice* met critical and public praise. Barton later countered his Chekhovian naturalism with a more abstract production of *Richard II* in which he explored the Shakespearean theme of the ‘Player King’. Through a spectacle of the two leading actors, of mirrored appearance, trading off roles every night and an elaborate symbolic set of ladders and a moveable stage drawbridge for pomp and circumstance, Barton created a world where the audience could see the transitory nature of the King, and how, for his time, he merely plays the part. One particularly brilliant moment of the production was when Bolingbrook, the ascending king, looked through the frame of a broken mirror of the imprisoned Richard, then deposed. They saw the reflection of themselves in each other in a place free from the high rhetoric of the court, base and honest.

Barton’s *Richard II* might be considered the prototype for his 1980 interpretation of *Hamlet*, starring Michael Pennington. Barton expanded his exploration of the “Player King” in *Hamlet* to encompass a broader idea of the connection between art and life—very much akin to Anne Barton’s first scholarly publication. Barton wanted to remove *Hamlet* from the “boorish lout,” existentialist interpretation that had dominated British stages for over twenty years (originating from Hall’s 1965 production) and return the Prince to his poet-intellectual roots. He did minimal editing to the text only removing 825 lines of the original 3800,
and he only added two words. During the First Player's description of Pyrrhus's attempted assassination of Priam in 2.2 he comes to the lines,

So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter ...

Hamlet finished the line:

Did nothing. (2.2 484-86)40

For Barton, Hamlet loses distinction between life and the play. Barton chose Pennington, another Cambridge alumnus, because Pennington had the necessary verse-speaking and rhetorical skill to play the poet. “Throughout the evening one was conscious of this Hamlet's enjoyment of the aesthetic and connotative value of words.”41 The stage was all but bare with five naked light bulbs dangling from the ceiling, reminiscent of the theatrical tradition of a “ghost light” (a single light left on all night on theatre stages), and a few props brought on when necessary. The players emerged from the blackness of back stage unannounced—Barton had cut those lines—feeding Hamlet's fusion of art and life. Barton had eliminated most visual distractions focusing the play on the actors who would use their words to work on the imaginations of the audience.

In 1980, Barton also produced his monumental ten-play cycle, The Greeks, a project that had haunted him for many years. Greenwald's book, Directions by Indirections, tells the reader of a constant struggle that Barton had with himself from

40 Michael L. Greenwald, Directions by Indirections, (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985), 188.
41 Ibid., 193.
his early Cambridge days; he wanted to be a playwright. Since he left Cambridge, Barton suffered a painful writer’s block (not that he had much time to write with his excessive load at the RSC). It took him twenty-five years of productions and experiments with *Troilus and Cressida*, the *Wars, Richard II, Hamlet*, and many more to discover and understand what Barton refers to as the “mythic depths” within him. *The Greeks* is Barton's assemblage of Greek literature spanning philosophy to the theatre; it tells of the fall of the Greek civilization as a result of the Trojan War. He wrote the script partially to counter the universalization and high rhetorical style of Greek plays performed by other companies at the time. His version was simple and direct—he constantly told the actors to play the characters like hobbits, because his view of the Greeks in the plays is that they were “simple folk.” The production received mixed review (how could it not, given its sheer length?). Critics praised the acting and simplicity of the story, yet tended to disagree with a lot of the anachronistic staging that Barton used including “machine-gun-toting terrorists.”42 Barton agreed that much of his direction did not really work for the production, but nonetheless, *The Greeks* represented a major achievement as a writer and director in Barton's career.

There is even less scholarship on Barton after 1984—few dissertations have been published on his work, and even fewer on his life. In 2006, Hall directed Barton's latest creation, another ten-play cycle about the Greek myths and the downfall of their post-Trojan War civilization, only this time the script was nearly

42 Ibid., 222.
almost his own. The opening in Denver (United States) met with some praise and much criticism. Currently, Barton has moved away from directing, focusing more on mentoring other directors and still holding his verse-speaking lectures.

**Brechtian Naturalism: The Subtle Epic Theatre**

In the very little scholarship published on John Barton and the RSC, there are several comments by critics and critics describing the RSC productions as “Brechtian.” Most of these references refer to the company's early years under Hall, but not all of them. Certainly, I noticed a “Brechtian” element in the later work such as Trevor Nunn's production of *Macbeth*; that is what drew me to conduct this research. Barton is at the heart of these comments for he is the constant stylistic influence since the company's founding.

Throughout the years he has directed, adapted, and produced many productions, all the while continuing his work training actors in verse-speaking. “In (Terry) Hand's (an Associate Director of the RSC) view 'Berliner Ensemble naturalism' had, by 1966, become 'the watchword of the company: if a messenger came on from a presumed journey then he must have conspicuous mud on his boots.'” Hand, along with the critics and scholars, called the productions “Brechtian” because they were mentally reminded of *Mother Courage* with Helene Weigel or *The Days of the Commune*, when the Berliner Ensemble toured England in 1956 (just after Brecht's death). Barton himself cites *Days of the Commune* as: “the greatest theatrical experience I've ever had without a doubt … It's one influence that I totally

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acknowledge, and it's haunted me. It goes into my work.” Yet, Barton remains enigmatic and defensive when a critic labeled the Wars Brechtian: “... it would have appalled Brecht. In our moral, historical, or philosophical interpretation of the action we did not take a Brechtian view. He would have violently repudiated Shakespeare's historical vision.”44 Brecht definitely would have objected to Shakespeare's historical vision. Shakespeare's plays assume a supernatural world where the Christian god reigns and imparts divine right unto kings and queens; granted, Barton's adaptation of the histories excluded the more magical moments of the plays (such as the apparition of fiends before Joan), yet this has more to do with playwriting than production.

Whether or not Barton's intentions as an adapter of the script differed from Brecht's intentions for his plays, the production style of historical naturalism was very similar, showing action on stage as the sweeping change of history, conducted by the characters of the play, designed to appeal to contemporary audiences in a direct intellectual style of verse-speaking. Indeed, the Wars was an example of the epic theatre. The audience is not left with any real catharsis as they have witnessed nearly all the characters commit some bloody act or another—there is nobody to identify with—they are estranged from the action and characters on stage. The production estranges the play from the audience on multiple levels. First, the set was bare to lend estrangement to the few set pieces that were needed. For example, they used a round table as the center for political action driving the wars. As one of the few set-pieces, any interaction on or around the table stands out as something out of the ordinary, an

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interruption Verse-speaking to the modern ear is familiar enough to be understood,
yet different enough to draw attention to itself, to make a character's dialogue strange,
and thus intriguing, for audiences to engage.

Barton's style of staging and production is incredibly similar to Brecht's, only
the plays differ. Barton, whether through study, instinct, or reminiscence of The Days
of the Commune, organizes his productions so that the choreography reflects the
movement of the story—Hall commented that he could recognize a “John Barton
production in a minute flat … Dispositions of the actors on stage, the way the groups
are closed, the focus on the person who is speaking.” Brecht too used these stage
techniques. In one of his last messages on the Berliner Ensemble's notice board,
Brecht emphasized the importance of the staging and the speed of playing for the
London tours—they would not understand the German and thus would need to be
able to understand the story through pantomime, like a silent film. As he continues in
the message, he tells the actors that the playing “needs to be quick, light, and strong.
This is not a question of hurry, but of speed, not simply of quick playing, but of quick
thinking.” Barton too emphasizes the importance of quick thinking and playing as
needed to make the verse work. The characters must not only speak faster, but also
“think faster” to make the words work on the audience. By comparing Brecht's
directions and essays to quotes and directions from Barton (primarily when concerned
with acting), there are striking similarities such as “thinking faster.” Both emphasize

45 Peter Hall to Amory, “John Barton Brings his Gift,” 45 in Michael L. Greenwald Directions by
the contradictions of characters, creating a sense of historical naturalism, and a cold, reflective, intellectual quality when playing the lines. This 60's “RSC style” of playing that Barton developed and maintained over the years, though the sets were fantastical or non-existent, continued into his later productions of Richard II and Hamlet. For Brecht and Barton, actors are storytellers—Brecht writes in his “Short Organum”: “Everything hangs on the 'story'; it is the heart of the theatrical performance;”47 and Barton gives the direction, “Always look for the storyline in a speech. A speech must move the story on.”48 It is from these parallel statements, similar images, and video clips of acting that I deduce that Barton's production style, though it assumes Shakespeare's mythic perspective of history, is the same production style as that of Brecht's epic idea. Different intentions, same epic execution.

The epic theatre is a metaphorical theatre with very sparse sets and a lot of space for actors to move across—the stage is also sparse so that the scenery does not hold the audience in one specific location, but allows the audience to see different scenes in different locations. In the epic theatre, the few objects on stage must be metaphorical and comment on the action of the play. Caspar Neher's projections, such as Brecht's mentioning of the image of glutton juxtaposed against a character who is a glutton, and Barton's chosen props or set pieces, such as Richard's broken mirror frame around his neck, are tools of estrangement, thus the audience looks at them in a different light, analyzing their potential meanings in the new social context. Neher's

projections tend to be more direct and obvious, yet his spacious set designs allow for the more subtle estrangement and gestus of the actors. The epic theatre—so much of its original conception originated from Brecht's need for a theatre that could play his dramatic poetry—hinges on the actors and their characters. The “RSC style” is very similar in this regard because of the importance and complexity of Shakespeare's words over the stage images. Shakespeare and Brecht intended for their words to stimulate the imaginations of their audiences; the audience actively participated in the play. Barton rarely directs contemporary drama for the reason that most contemporary plays lack stimulating language: “I don't myself feel the same challenge with modern drama; its problems and opportunities seem to me more limited.”

The limitations Barton speaks of are primarily verbal—the language is simply not as poetic, nor as rhetorical as earlier periods of drama. The epic theatre requires narrative and language, thus the actors must be skilled in rhetoric, not sentence fragments, and must use reason, not emotion.

The clearest outline and description of the “RSC style” to date remains a twelve-part television series that John Barton wrote for a Channel 4 weekend special in 1982. From these videos, I have assembled what I believe to be the acting technique of the epic theatre, the subtle version of Chaplin's style involving the use of words. The series was called Playing Shakespeare and included several prominent actors from the RSC led by John Barton (probably his most public appearance)

discussing the playing of Shakespeare's texts for contemporary audiences. Critics might argue that because so much of “RSC style” hinges on the analysis of Shakespeare's text that transposing the technique becomes invalid, yet Shakespearean scholars continue to publish new editions of the Bard's complete works. There exists no definitive edition of Shakespeare's plays and all of them were, have been, and are subject to much editing for any number of reasons. Barton himself is known for his liberal adaptations. Thus, as Brecht and Shakespeare are both poetic and rhetorical playwrights, I will treat the transposition of the technique as applicable to poetic and rhetorical drama, meaning drama that contains descriptive, heightened language, any type of verse structure, and employs rhetorical arguments. Bearing in mind that this analysis of technique is to be used as a rubric for analyzing the efficacy of my production of *Baal*, I shall attempt to draw close parallels between Brecht's ideas and Barton's execution through the performance of the RSC actors. It is also important for the reader to know that much of this analysis depends on direct reference to the *Playing Shakespeare* series, and to understand fully my approach to the epic theatre, estrangement, and gestus, watching the series is necessary. Realizing that most readers will not be familiar with the series (it is only recently that it has become commercially available), I have provided ample description to aid the reader in imagining these techniques. There are twelve episodes in the series, each with very interesting, applicable techniques and valuable information that can further explain the style. For the purposes of this analysis and exploration, I have broken their style into five basic aspects: Words with Intent, Sharing with the Audience, Directing the

**Words with Intent**

The first episode in the series, called “The Two Traditions,” outlines the basic assumption that Barton works from: the “RSC style” marries two acting traditions, the Elizabethan with Stanislavsky’s. Without going too deep into “method acting,” the important aspect of Stanislavsky’s approach is that a character must have an intention behind each action and spoken line. For those of the American acting “method” this means an emotional intention from the internal psyche of an actor. The actor either uses a memory that reproduces the “needed” emotion or a sense-memory, such as remembering a certain smell to bring about a feeling or mood in the actor. Barton, as does Brecht, rejects this approach as unnecessary and distracting to the language and story. For Brecht, Barton, and the RSC, actors' intentions must arise out of the social context of the scene: the history, social class, the people present, and circumstance of a character's given situation, yet, most importantly, it must drive the story forward. It is a simpler way of playing rather than taking any psychological approach. Barton warns against playing generalizations of emotions such as 'sad' or 'happy', in favor of more dynamic and specific intentions, such as for a character to explain themselves, or trying to end a conversation.

The Elizabethan tradition is one of words. “The Elizabethans loved them: they relished them and they played with them.”51 Whereas today we are a visual society

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51 Ibid., 47.
accustomed to television and film, Shakespeare's audience was an aural society—they came to listen to words and stories. It is also important to note that on the Elizabethan stage, there were no elaborate sets, the costumes were donated by the nobility, and light was entirely natural with an open ceiling for the sun to shine down on the play and audience. In addition, only the nobility sat during the play; the common audiences stood in the pit. This has an important effect on the language. Any change of setting, even if it is simply from night to day, must be conveyed through the words of the play. Macbeth enters the stage for the first time saying, “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” This isn't simply Macbeth commenting on the weather, but the actor establishing the setting for his audience.

Because of the complexity of Shakespeare's language, many actors shy away from it, when, if they would simply trust the language and attempt to communicate it directly to the audience, the words would do most of the work for them. Characters of this literary and aural tradition savor and relish their words literally by taking time with specific words, and coloring them with different intonations and pitches. In one of the later episodes of *Playing Shakespeare*, Barbara Leigh-Hunt, who played Gertrude in Barton's 1980 *Hamlet*, delivers Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death, a mostly descriptive passage. She walks on stage, stares right into the camera, and recites the following passage:

> There is a willow grows aslant the brook,
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
> Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
> Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies and long purples,
> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
> But our cold maids do dead-men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds,
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted old tunes, ...
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.52

Hamlet: IV.753

Though the speech describes a death, Leigh-Hunt takes proper time with her words, and colors them to communicate their sense. For example, she colors the word 'heavy' with a breathy lower voice as if she were almost carrying something heavy herself, thus making the onomatopoeic quality of the word apparent to the audience. I will return shortly to this sensitivity to the language, but, for now, the reader must remember that it is this play with language that separates the Elizabethan tradition from our contemporary acting tradition.

The marriage of the two traditions involves creating characters that justify the language they use with socially driven intention—essentially, assuming that the character needs that language to communicate—and supplying the appropriate visual character to accompany the words. Leigh-Hunt justifies her dark, straightforward delivery of the line by explaining that Gertrude expresses that she had hoped Ophelia to be “the wife of her only son.”54 Leigh-Hunt has derived her character’s intention

52 Ibid., 136.
54 Barbara Leigh Hunt, quoted in quoted in John Barton Playing Shakespeare, (London: Methuen
from this social and historical necessity. Leigh-Hunt plays Gertrude's lines, giving a sense of finality to Ophelia's death to the audience—her hopes are dashed for her son and for the “poor wretch.” The social intention is married with the Elizabethan acting tradition.

This assumption is important in regards to Brecht and the epic theatre because of its emphasis on language, and characters that use language. In translation, it is harder to see and understand, Brecht's language is actually quite peculiar. Martin Esslin, a Brecht scholar, explains that the peculiarity of Brecht's poetry and plays is because he invented it from multiple traditions of language.\textsuperscript{55} The actors of the early twentieth century German stage spoke a German altogether different from that of the common tongues, a dead literary and dramatic language. In the German-speaking world, several plays are completely dialect driven, thus a Viennese play would have made little sense to a Berlin audience. Brecht synthesized his Bavarian dialect with the clown stage tradition of Karl Valentin. He also relied quite heavily on the recognized language of Luther's bible. Brecht, like the Elizabethans, enjoyed playing with words, manipulating them, and experimenting with their potential ironies. For the English-speaking audiences, translators have much difficulty replicating the same effect. Brecht's style (at least in English translation) is a close parallel to Shakespeare's plays; though different, they both can be direct and hidden; simple and complex, all at once. Brecht is of an aural tradition too, and actors must play his work

that way in translation. Shakespeare and Brecht both require the epic style of
production, the marrying of the two traditions.

**Sharing with the Audience**

Estrangement is at the center of the “RSC style” just as it is for the epic
theatre. John Barton has assessed that because Shakespeare's language is about direct
communication, actors should speak directly to the audience with their characters
whenever sharing personal thoughts, such as through soliloquies or speeches.
Through this technique of direct address, the actor directs the audience's attention and
thoughts to either the estrangement from their character or an object. One would think
that Brecht, wanting audiences of the “scientific age” to watch his plays critically,
would have wanted actors to ignore the audiences, act as if nobody is watching, using
what many styles of contemporary theatre call the fourth wall. Brecht saw this
illusion as unnecessary, in fact, hiding more than it could show. Estrangement
requires actors to interact directly with the audience, breaking the fourth wall. They
demonstrate characters to the audience rather than becoming a character that the
audience just happens to be watching.

Barton, does not call it demonstrating, but he says something similar—he tells
them to share. He says:

> The actor must open himself up to his audience, and
> make them think with him because he needs to share
> his problems. In dialogue a character reaches out to
> another character and in a soliloquy a character

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56 In the proscenium stage, being made of three walls with an opening for audiences to peer through,
the actors treat this opening as a fourth wall, to create a sense that the actions are realistic, natural, and
private. The performer acts as if they are unaware of and unobserved by an audience—the audience
maintains the illusion by remaining humbly silent, voyeur-like.
reaches out to the audience. There’s no great difference between the two. The moral is simple. An actor must make the audience listen and follow the story-line of the thoughts ... Provided that he shares. Yes, provided that he 'shares'.

To share, the actor communicates directly to the audience with their words and reactions. This sharing breaks the fourth wall and allows the actor to invite the audience to examine whatever it is the actor needs to convey. Barton introduces this idea as a way to keep the audience engaged and entertained through Shakespeare's long, and oft-times rather literary, soliloquies and speeches. The character determines how big and broad the audience interaction needs to be, and an actor derive a character from the lines and language. Remember Leigh-Hunt's performance of Gertrude, how she looked straight into the camera and simply told the story—though Gertrude's reactions to the sad event may be interesting, they come second to the most important aspect of that speech, that the audience follow the story, what happened to Ophelia. Gertrude knows the story and the audience does not, therefore, she must communicate what she saw to the audience without distracting from their reception. The telling is direct, yet the actor makes the audience see the strange image and its complex thematic ramifications. Gertrude uses those words to communicate her experience of Ophelia's death. Leigh-Hunt shares with the audience what Gertrude saw, and how she took it.

Directing the Audience Through Complex Language

Shakespeare and Brecht's dialogue (especially in translation) are among the most difficult for the actor to wrap his mind around. This is where the actor needs

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technical skill and experience, so that they may speak it with ease in performance. For Barton and the RSC actors, playing Shakespeare requires an understanding of blank verse, though often in iambic pentameter, what Barton simplifies into “de dum de dum de dum de dum de dum”—ten syllables per line with five strong stresses. This is the basic pattern that Shakespeare establishes in his dialogue and breaks at significant moments in the play. Just under seventy-two percent of Shakespeare's plays are in blank verse.\(^5^8\) Barton instructs actors to pay attention to the verse and use its shift away from the iambic pentameter as directorial hints from Shakespeare—either character hints, or even stage directions. This technique works marvelously, and when working with a non-Shakespearean text should not be disregarded—Barton recognizes the strong rhythms in prose and informs the actors to use the same technique with prose as with verse, “look for the strong stresses and sense the rhythm from that.”\(^5^9\) Brecht was primarily a poet, and he too played with the dramatic potential of verse. In an essay concerning his poetry, Brecht re-wrote a line of Marlowe, changing the verse to suit his own needs:

Marlowe’s: *I heard the drumbeats ring across the swamp*  
*Horses and weapons sank before my eyes*  
*And now my head is turning...*

Brecht’s: *After those drumbeats, the swamp gulping*  
*Weapons and horses, all turns*  
*In my mother’s son’s head...*\(^6^0\)

Brecht wrote (and as Willet translated) that he did this to actually simulate the

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 68.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 68.  
characters shortness of breath. We see how to play this line given the position of the commas in the middle of lines, half pauses. Also that Brecht put this in a broken list form informs the speaker that there is no time to develop long sentences, that it is a struggle simply to get these few lines out. The line builds to an exhausted confusion with the third line. To play this line, the actor must use the verse structure to give him the rhythm of the speech, and allow the socially driven intent to give it the energy. The actor must voice this rhythm inherent in the text. Therefore, by using the rhythm as part of the character, the actor will be able to direct the audience to the meaning and story of the lines; this technique works with any playwright—Shakespeare, Brecht, whomever.

One of the unspoken tools that the RSC actors use to make their audiences listen to the complex text, directing them to the most important aspects of the story and meaning in the lines, is how they use their eyes—they convey so much through their eyes; they stare often. Yet, the stare is not awkward or obtuse, but direct and oftentimes severe, as if they are pointing with their eyes, and questioning the audience, “Did you hear that?”; “Did you see this?”; “It's like this, isn't it?”; “Do you believe it?” The eyes tell all. Part of this optical acting is self-observation, and knowing where you are as actors in the story and on stage, and what they are doing. The actor directs the audience to what is estranged with his eyes, whether the estranged is himself, an action that he is demonstrating, or an object that he has encountered.

Barton asked Judi Dench to reprise a few scenes from his production of Twelfth Night, which Dench played the female lead, Viola, who dresses as a boy and
works under the count Orsino, to survive. She has just visited the Lady Olivia, to whom she was supposed to impart her master’s love, yet things go awry:

   Viola: I left no ring with her; what means this lady?
   Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her!
   She made good view of me, indeed so much
   That-methought-her eyes had lost their tongue,
   For she did speak in starts, distractedly.
   She loves me, sure, the cunning of her passion
   Invites me in this churlish messenger.
   None of my Lord’s ring? Why, he sent her none.
   I am the man! If it be so-as ‘tis-
   Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
   Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
   Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
   How easy is it for the proper false
   In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms.
   Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
   For such as we are made, if such we be.
   How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
   And I, poor monster, fond as much on him;
   And she mistaken seems to dote on me.
   What will become of this? As I am man,
   My state is desperate for my Master’s love.
   As I am a woman--now, alas the day,
   What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
   O, Time, thou must untangle it, not I!
   It is too hard a knot for me to t’untie.

   Twelfth Night: II.2

Like Leigh-Hunt, Dench's first action is to establish eye contact with her audience. In this case, it is the camera—although the actor may and should look elsewhere every now again, she must maintain connection with the audience. If the actor’s eyes wander, so too will the audience’s thoughts. With a firm, commanding voice she states her first line, grabbing the audience’s attention. Her eyes command

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authority. Viola is supposed to be a girl struggling to survive in a foreign land
working under the Count Orsino, whom she pitifully loves. Dench plays a charming
and worrisome girl, though she never loses
her command of the language—she has taken
an attitude toward the character and
demonstrated this for her audience; she has
estranged herself from the character. We
know this because of the theatricality of
some of her line deliveries, such as when
Viola calls her disguise 'wicked;' Dench rolls
her head up and, without turning her head,
but keeping it slightly turned at a forty-five
degree angle, she cocks her eyes at us
fiercely as if she has hit upon a mystery, a secret that she would share with us.
Though her eyes alone are not creating the estrangement effect, the actress’s eyes are
the most accessible tool to share their thoughts and experiences directly with the
audience.

One of the most important ways that an actor can direct the audience through
a playwright's complex language is through an awareness, understanding, and active
use of figures of speech: schemes and tropes. Schemes are figures of speech that
deviate from the ordinary pattern of words such as alliteration and anaphora.62 Tropes

are figures of speech that deviate from the ordinary and principle signification of a word, such as a metaphor or simile. During the Renaissance, scholars obsessively categorized these schemes and tropes into very specific and individual rhetorical tools to more effectively win arguments as well as search out meaning and truth via language. It is not necessary for an actor to have a different technique to play them all, but the actor should be aware of them and know that his character has chosen to use them when speaking a line of dialogue. Shakespeare employs nearly all of them in his plays—Brecht not as many, but still several.

Probably the most important device they both use is antithesis. Both playwrights expound upon the individual antitheses to create a larger rhetorical examination of truth, and, for Brecht, a Hegelian dialectic. A literary antithesis is two opposite ideas or words juxtaposed against each other in a sentence or set of sentences, such as “Two loves I have, of comfort and despair …”\(^{63}\) The two antithetical words in this sentence are ‘comfort’ and ‘despair.’ Shakespeare often sets up a dialectical idea at the beginning of a speech, and then explores its both sides of the argument, eventually coming to a decision, or simply opting to make no choice. The most famous example of this is Hamlet’s “To be or not to be.” For Brecht, characters engage ideas, the audience, and each other through dialectical reasoning, looking at both sides of the argument, countering one another, and then coming to a conclusion or synthesis of their ideas. Barton suggests, “Shakespeare thought

I posit that Brecht did the same.

Playing the dialectic is not as difficult as it may seem. Let us return to the example of Dench playing Viola. In the soliloquy, Viola moves between discussing Olivia’s, Orsino’s, and her own states. Although there are three of them, a dialectic exists—man and woman. Viola, thematically, is both, thus she must argue them both. Whenever talking of Orsino and men, Dench speeds up her voice, frustrated for she's struggling to understand them; and when she speaks of Viola and women, her voice softens, and savors her words more. There is a tenderness and frailty that she seeks to express in the lines.

This alteration of the voice, taking different attitudes toward the different sides of the argument and demonstrating the character's facial gesture allows the actress to argue clearly both points within a speech; specifically, Dench uses her eyes to complement the words. Dench played Viola with sympathies toward women, relishing “Poor Lady, she were better love a dream,” contrasting that with her frustration for men. Dench chooses places to relish her words in order to give them weight and effect. Dench has estranged the lines from the audience by showing Viola's different attitudes toward each side of the dialectic (antithesis) and thus has commented that women are to be pitied for chasing the unattainable.

Another example of dialectical characters using antithesis in the more
traditional sense of a traditional argument (one person trying to win over another) is from *Richard III*, the wooing of Lady Anne, played by Alan Howard and Sinead Cusack. Howard takes on the guise of Richard III, holding his right arm tight against his body as if it were malformed, lifting that shoulder up to make the hump—in Brechtian terms, a gest because it demarks him as less than his peers at court and even identifying him as a monster. His posture invites the audience to glance at him, to question his tactics. Within the context of the play, Richard has told the audience that he is going to do this, almost as if he were taking bets about the verbal boxing match about to ensue. This scene forces the audience to make decisions about Richard and Anne. How is it, over the corpse of her father, this murderer woos and wins her? The scene plays out with rapid speed, Howard playing Richard as the driving force in the scene (talking too fast at times, but effectively) and Anne struggling to keep up. In one particular moment the argument goes as follows:

Richard: Let him thank me that holp to send him thither;
For he was fitter for that place than earth.
Anne: And thou unfit for any place but hell.
Richard: Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.
Anne: Some dungeon.
Richard: Your bedchamber.
Anne: I'll rest betide the chamber where thou liest.
Richard: So will it, madam, till I lie with you.

III: 1.2

They counter each other with witty quips, arguing the opposite, Richard

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pursuing Anne, and Anne rejecting Richard. When listening to the counter antithesis, one gets the sense that the speaker has acknowledged the other and then refutes it totally, by turning their phrase against them. The last antithesis of “liest” and “lie,” carries even more meaning because he has made a pun out of her word twisting her meaning (his death to mean them sleeping together). We could also expand the meaning further because he lies throughout the play to achieve his ends. These characters are constantly trying to one-up each other verbally, staring each other down the entire time.

The scene builds to a gestic spit by Cusack (called for in the script) her final attempt to take control of the argument. Her action denotes that Anne thinks lowly of Richard, and that she considers him beneath her. Critically, this is an excellent scene because both actors are estranging the audience from the characters—Howard with his hump and unfailing drive to win Anne and Cusack with her attempt to mourn her father and be rid of the murderer. Both attempt to win the argument, thus carrying the story forward and showing the audience a strange, but successful, way to woo a woman. Imagine it like lawyers in a courtroom without a judge—only a jury, the audience. Both plead their cases, only they verbally spar, rather than deliver organized speeches. It is cold, logical, practiced, and intense.

Antithesis is the most important device that the actor should be aware of, and understand that they must argue their points in order to play it effectively. A few other devices worth mentioning are alliteration, onomatopoeia, metaphor, and simile. Alliteration is the repetition of the first of several consecutive words. Shakespeare
uses alliteration in a line from the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*: “From forth the fatal loins of these two foes.” In Eric Bentley’s edition of *Baal* he uses an alliteration in Baal’s “Death in the Forest” poem: “Round him, round them, how the forest did roar!” Alliteration such as this can have several effects on the speaking of the line, one of which is to link the meaning of the words together. An actor aware of the language might slightly emphasize the alliteration by adding a little more stress to the ‘f’ syllables in the *Romeo and Juliet* line above, thus to make the audience aware of what he is doing; yet he should not overburden them with his technique—the story is most important. Barton calls it “an invitation to the audience or the person you're addressing to go with you.” These techniques enhance the sharing with the audience. In the latter example, the alliteration, coupled with the repetition of the word ‘round’, hints to the actor that he should speed up the line and end on the final word of the alliteration, ‘roar.’ This last word is also an example of onomatopoeia, a word that sounds like its meaning. Thus, this line of Brecht's poetry should simulate for the audience the sound of the forest moving around into a roar.

A metaphor is a figure of speech that is an implied comparison of two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common. A simile is an explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common, usually marked by “like” or “as.” Metaphor and simile, more than any other figure, must arise out of a situational need to explain something, an idea, feeling, experience,

etc. In life, few people actively create metaphors very often; most use ones that have been coined for some time and have become stereotypical phrases. Ironically, many of our stereotypical phrases come from Shakespeare: “All's well that ends well,” “the be all and end all,” “break the ice,” etc. Brecht too makes metaphors, though not as prolific as Shakespeare did. In Richard III, Lady Anne calls Richard a 'hedgehog.' Obviously, she means it to be an insult, and Cusack plays it as such, by stressing it more. The word is also in an apostrophe, meaning that it is an interruption in the flow of the sentence that is set of by commas. The actor must give the appropriate half-stop pause to the comma before and after the word to set it apart from the rest of the sentence, which Cusack does.

For most readers, this may seem basic, for most are familiar with at least some of the figures of speech, yet I must argue that few stage and screen performers have any idea of how to use them effectively. Again, I attribute this to our society being so visually based that the few metaphors that do work are either simple or are stereotyped phrases that we all use. Ideally, the actor should be able to narrate a passage of text, either dialogue or soliloquy, with such control and precision of language that the audience will be forced to listen, engaging their senses to understand the story at hand—they'll see, hear, feel, and even taste an idea if the actor uses the language effectively. I will not go into detail on how to use, but I encourage
the actor, director, and writer to study them more.

“Passion and Coolness”

The epic actor must separate himself from his character, yet in marrying intention with active use of language, there is a tendency for actors to go overboard with the emotions, even if their intention is socially driven. Quite often with Shakespeare, actors run on stage and declaim Shakespeare's text with a broad style, reveling in emotions, not words. Barton devoted an entire episode of the Playing Shakespeare series to this problem, what he called “Passion and Coolness.” Balancing the emotional and intellectual demands of a Shakespearean (or Brechtian) text can be very difficult, especially given the extreme nature of events that occur in the plays—fight scenes, murder, removed limbs, betrayal, parricide, suicide, and regicide. If an actor takes the emotion too far, he risks ignoring the story and language. Barton requires his actors to play their parts “coolly,” or reserved, distant, intellectually trying to cope with the situation at hand. He takes this approach based on Hamlet's advice to the players, which he claims is academically accepted as Shakespeare's advice on acting:

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I should have lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw your hands through the air, thus ... But use all gently. For in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness ... Be not too tame neither. But let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word and the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature.
Hamlet: III.2.68

Barton uses this speech to emphasize that Shakespeare himself wanted the actor to act according to the language, to control it, and act naturally, coolly, intellectually, but not without character. A very informative line is “Suit the action to the word and the word to the action,” because it emphasizes physical action, not emotion. Yet, how do they play the lines coolly? Why is this a characteristic of the epic actor?

The most important reason for playing the roles coolly is the simple practical reason that what happens on stage is NOT real and does not need to be entirely natural. Barton’s example of this is the fight scene between Percy and Hotspur from Henry IV Part I. Michael Pennington, playing Percy, ends a long sword fight by stabbing his opponent, Hotspur, played by Mike Gwilym, who in the torment and agony of death, gasping and sputtering, and is near inaudible for his final lines. In this case, the actor has lost the audience—one can imagine the audience leaning forward, squinting their eyes, and perking their ears, trying to hear the last lines, only to turn to each other and shrug. Barton has the actors play the scene again, and this time, coolly. After the stab, Gwilym drops his sword and covers the wound with his hand; he looks down at the wound for a brief moment, and then stares up at Pennington. He calmly, slowly speaks his final words, as if he were laying out his life in order. He expresses no exhaustion, or pain from the wound, but an acceptance of death. It is only after his last line—one that he does not finish—that he lies down in death. Pennington finishes

the line and says a respectful farewell to the foe. This is theatrical distance. This is
estrangement of character.

Barton asks Susan Fleetwood to perform a very useful exercise, which helps
the actress estrange the character, and the character's situation from herself and the
audience. Fleetwood performs Sonnet 129 three times in a row.

\begin{quote}
\textit{The expense of spirit in a waste of shame}
\textit{Is Lust in action: till action, lust}
\textit{Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame,}
\textit{Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;}
\textit{Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;}
\textit{Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,}
\textit{Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,}
\textit{Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait}
\textit{On purpose laid to make the taker mad, —}
\textit{Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,}
\textit{Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;}
\textit{A bliss in proof; and prov'd, a very woe;}
\textit{Before, a joy propos'd; behind a dream.}
\textit{All this the world well knows; yet none knows well}
\textit{To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.'}
\end{quote}


The first time she performs it, Barton asks her to emphasize the feelings and
emotion that the sonnet can evoke; she does so placing her hands between her legs,
toward the middle of her inner thighs, bending as if in the passion of physical lust,
almost speaking in a moan. Barton stops her before she can finish. What Barton has
proved is that by stressing the emotions of the lines, the audience loses everything
else, especially the story. The second time she performs the sonnet, she plays it
disgusted with herself, as if she were in remorse for what she has done. She chomps
through the words, trying to emphasize the disgusting quality of the words. He stops her again, for he has asked her to play another extreme. Finally, he asks her “to stand outside yourself and have a good wry, sardonic look at what you've done.” This time, without any awkward faces or a stressed voice, she simply begins and takes the audience through the sonnet, staring intently at them, and then explains something that the audience perceives she has deeply experienced, for she is calm, focused, and sure in her voice, using her language, building images with her words; she speaks from a distance. She has estranged the character from herself and from the audience as well.

This aplomb type of character is what the epic actor aims to achieve with each role—it is from that cool distance where they can show the changing of the character, their shifts in society, and decisions to change or submit to that society.

**Gestus: Quoting the Character**

Brecht outlines very clear descriptions of gests in his many essays: Weigel's carrying of the pot of lard in *Die Mutter*, or her silent scream with physical gestures to show her grief as she must deny knowledge of her dead son, Swiss Cheese, as Mother Courage. These are very informative examples of gestus for the more important moments of the play, the climaxes of scenes, but are not as helpful in the development of a physical character to embody the complex dialogue. What should the epic actor look like? As previously mentioned, Brecht chose actors because they

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70 Ibid., 138.
intrigued him and broke stereotype. In his second production of *Mann ist Mann*, he and Peter Lorre devised a series of ‘masks’ that would show the transformation of Galy Gay (Lorre's character) by the three soldiers, who were dressed in costumes that exaggerated their features. Brecht made a brief film of Lorre's Galy Gay, cut to “bring out the gists in a very abbreviated way, and this most interesting experiment shows surprisingly well how exactly Lorre manages in these long speeches to mime the basic meaning underlying every (silent) sentence.”72 This discovery in 1931 is demonstrative of one of Brecht's most important principles of staging, that the movements on stage should mirror the text, carrying the meaning by itself. According to Esslin, “Brecht wanted to arrive at a *Gestus* so simple and expressive that it could be quoted with the same ease as a well-turned line of dialogue. And he placed great emphasis on writing dialogue which would contain the appropriate *Gestus* and almost force the actor to assume the correct stance, movement, and tone of voice.”73

The RSC actors, under John Barton, come closest to creating physically quotable gestic characters.

In the *Playing Shakespeare* series, when he had covered the basics of verse-speaking and cold, intellectual playing,

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Barton devotes an entire episode to “Exploring a Character,” namely Shylock from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. He asks the actors David Suchet and Patrick Stewart to present their different interpretations of the role. Before they begin, they discuss the language and the social context of Shylock, both in his society of the play, and in that of audiences for the twentieth century. Both men were very hesitant to accept the part, thinking of the Holocaust and the tradition of the villainous Shylock. Stewart interprets Shylock as an outsider and alien in the Elizabethan world. He's foreign, with a prime concern for money, trying to ignore the “Jewishness” of the role. Suchet, takes the opposite approach—Shylock is an outsider *because* he is a Jew; indeed, in the trial scene, Shylock is called by his name only six times, and “Jew” twenty-six.\(^7\) Both notice a peculiar rhythm in Shylock's speech, that no other character in the play possesses, thus, both come to the conclusion that he should sound different.

Stewart's interpretation is much too vague, speaking quickly, running over the lines, not letting them carry meaning—his hands at times seemed to have a mind of their own, and sometimes were a bit too obvious. He looks as if he were making fun of himself. Suchet's social-material interpretation, paying close attention to the text, creates a quotable gestic character. In his scenes, he bends at his upper back, shoulders hunched, supporting himself on a cane, wearing a Yarmulke—Suchet thought that “he would dress according to the status he believes he has.”\(^7\) When confronted with Antonio asking for a loan, Suchet pierces him with his eyes. He

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responds in a higher voice, mocking submission as he slowly creeps toward him, bending his head down—then he raises his head and extends his neck, meeting Antonio at eye level. Suchet creates a somewhat foreign accent for the character, rolling his ‘r’ sounds. Suchet's body language tells the story of the play showing Shylock using his words to distract Antonio as he slowly creeps toward the sailor about to ensnare him, to close the deal.

His interpretation of the “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech carries just as much weight with movements that matched meaning, suiting “the action to the word and the word to the action.” Suchet, in one part demonstrates how all the elements of the epic style, estrangement and gestus, come together to create a character interacting in society, yet strange to the audience. His words are clear, cold, and effective—Suchet carries the audience through the story.

A Defined Method for the Epic Theatre, but Not a Guarantee

As mentioned above, the purpose of this examination of the “RSC style” in Brechtian terms is an attempt to develop and test a method for the epic theatre. Marrying the Elizabethan emphasis on language and story with social intention of the modern acting tradition is essentially what Brecht was doing in production—he literally wrote his plays so that they may be played in this way. Yet, Brecht is slippery, and he never ceased redefining his epic theatre. In addition, there is a considerable amount of Marxist philosophy that affected his work, both in writing and production. Ideally, my production of Baal would achieve the same precision and clarity as one of John Barton's productions with the RSC. The “RSC style” and
Brecht's epic theatre could exist because both directors worked in companies, where they had the time and the disciplined environment to develop the actors.
CHAPTER III

BAAL\textsuperscript{76}: INDULGENCE, CREATION,

AND DEFECATION

The young Bert Brecht arrived at the home of Lion Feuchtwanger, an established critic and poet, with a Trommeln in der Nacht (Drums in the Night), written purely for “commercial” reasons—Brecht and his young companion Arnolt Bronnen were running short on living expenses. After reading the play and marveling at the immediacy of the language, something that one might hear on the streets, Feuchtwanger phoned Brecht to find out why he had lied to him about the piece being for “commercial” reasons, obviously there was more to it than that. Brecht emphatically declared that he wrote the piece for money, but he had another play, which was “really good”, and that he would bring that. Of this “really good” play, Feuchtwanger wrote, “it was called Baal, had nothing to do with the god of this name, but proved to be much wilder and more chaotic, and a very fine affair.”\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, the play is wild and chaotic, much to the surprise of the audiences at Leipzig at the opening in December 1923. One critic called the play a “mud-bath,” suggesting that the play should never have been produced but left to people who enjoyed reading that kind of material.\textsuperscript{78} Baal engaged the audience in a dialectic of anarchy, sex, drinking, poetry, and hedonism, which was not uncommon during the expressionist movement.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[76] See Appendix for a Scene by Scene summary of the play.
\end{footnotes}
in literature. However, Brecht's *Baal* was not the typical sympathetic expressionist hero, a victim of society, a man who feels and sees too much; Baal insatiably feels and sees, a victimizer of society, and is an unsympathetic expressionist anti-hero.

*Baal* was not performed until 1923 when Brecht was 25—the play went through many manifestations before it reached production. Brecht wrote the first draft of this play over a weekend as a challenge posed to him by a professor in Munich. *Baal* is a counter-play to Johst’s *Der Einsame* (*The Lonely One*), which depicts the life of the poet Grabbe, an outsider because of his genius, loathing himself inwardly as he portrays a debaucherous life to society, all the while committing himself to his art. Brecht, appalled, rejected the romantic image of the suffering poet, and created his own, Baal, taken from the Phoenician deity of the same name. The worshipers of Baal would sacrifice their children to appease the god for rain and protect them from his thunder. Above all else, Baal chases the sky (freedom) where he can indulge in anything he wishes—he is a dangerously irresponsible intellectual, savoring control and is without empathy.

Beginning in 1911, the first act chronicles the events that lead up to Baal’s exodus from Augsburg, his hometown, and his early explorations on his own. Baal rejects the society that wants to celebrate his decadent poetry and instead thrusts himself into lower-class dives where he revels with the lower classes as their “Mr. Circus.” Yet, it is these same simple people that he so enjoys swindling. He drags woman after woman down and discards them once they become too attached. Three women in particular become attached to him, the first is the wife of a millionaire, the
second is an innocent aristocratic virgin who kills herself in shame, and the third is a middle-class girl, familiar with the struggles of the world, but still naive toward the ways of Baal. One by one, they lose themselves in him and fade away. The only real relationship he develops is with Ekart, a musician and composer—a wicked man as well. Ekart’s empathy for humanity prevents him from embracing Baal's free and antisocial lifestyle. Though the play has no official intermission, I ended the first act with Baal and Ekart abandoning the pregnant Sophie to die alone in a field.

The second act takes place eight years after the first. The wanderers, Baal and Ekart, travel the country moving from dive to dive and tavern to tavern. Baal now only cares for his poetry and Ekart. Despite his strength in freedom, certain images and people still haunt him: the virgin suicide, the dead Sophie, those poor unfortunates whom he has misled, and Death. Baal fears the potential nothingness of death; consequently, he begins to indulge compulsively. Over this span of time, Ekart has grown to resent Baal, especially for forcing him into celibacy from women. Their relationship ends on the day after the death of Baal’s mother—in a fit of jealousy, Baal kills Ekart. He leaves Augsburg again and runs back up to his “Eternal Forest.” Once there, he grows overcome with sickness and prepares for death, alone. The play ends without telling the audience whether Baal dies or not—the last image is the sick man staring up to the stars.

It is easy to see how the common critic would see only a “mud-bath” in the play, as every scene depicts some detour from the accepted morality of modern western civilization. Though the early drafts of the play were reactionary and
rebellious toward the accepted sentimentality, Brecht had set to accomplish something more with *Baal*. Of the play he wrote, “Instinctively, I've kept my distance and ensured the realization of my (poetical and philosophical) effects remains within bounds. The spectator's 'splendid isolation' is left intact …” Brecht, intended for audiences not to identify with Baal, and he expected them to reject him; Brecht argued, “A higher type of interest can be got from making comparisons, from whatever is different, amazing, impossible to take in as a whole.” Therefore, the twenty-first century director can surmise logic in the chaos, and a dialectic at work between the audience and the play.

Most directors look for a theatrical concept to tie all the interrelated pieces of a play together for an audience, which generally leads to an interpolation of the play rather than a true interpretation. For my production of the play, I knew I would need to balance the several contradictory and potentially offensive elements, and focus my audience's attention on the main through-line of the action, Baal's journey, which the audience could easily miss. It was my goal to make Brecht's logic behind the chaos accessible to the audience, so they too may question as Brecht questioned. The play does invoke the myth of Baal, the Phoenician deity, yet, as Feuchtwanger commented, denies it. There are poetic references to trees, rivers, the sky, and nature overall, that have no obvious connection to the play other than that Baal speaks of them in his poems. Beyond this, the play shows the audience many sexual situations,

80 Ibid., 9.
including a ménage à trois with sisters, which still stand outside the realm of accepted morality. Brecht's depiction of women surely upholds nineteenth century prejudices.

Finally, Baal's single most important relationship with Ekart, Brecht leaves undefined—were they lovers, or two companions, brothers?

Undoubtedly, there is much of Brecht in Baal. Hanns Otto Münsterer, a friend of the youthful Brecht, recounted his memories of Brecht in those early Augsburg days including the impact of Baal in their life and what the play received from “the life of those times.” The play captured the Augsburg atmosphere, the trees, and the taverns; even Brecht's attic littered with manuscripts became Baal's attic. “The Wolfszahn, a meadow between the rivers Lech and Wertach, with its tall old trees, lush grass and willow thickets where we bathed and lazed in the sun, witnessed the same wonderful chatter with which Baal lured to the trough his friends and his women.” Münsterer's description is the feel of the play littered with references to places, events, actions, and characters that Brecht worked into the story. Brecht has placed his audience in his Augsburg of 1919. Baal is Brecht's mythic interpretation of himself, a poetic will to indulge, create, and defecate. The early Brecht praises rampant intellectualism and sees man as a vessel of instinctual creation and decay. He announces this philosophy in the Ogre Song, calling man “A fellow who sits on the john—to feed!” Baal, like, Brecht rejects the elite of society, in favor of the common person. In the first scene of the play, a millionaire, Mech, offers Baal rare

food and wine, and offers to publish his poems, yet Baal rejects bourgeois success, questioning Mech about his deforestation of cinnamon trees, and publicly seducing his wife; like Brecht, Baal has a gift for alluring women. As many parallels as there are between Brecht and Baal though, a production of the play should not aim to recreate Brecht's Augsburg, or even Baal as Brecht on stage—there's simply too much more going on in the play than Brecht and his friends.

My interpretation of the play stems from Baal's three primary actions: to indulge, create, and defecate. Though Brecht never forces his audience to come to recognize it directly, the play overlaps the years of the First World War—Brecht would not have had to make this fact explicit to his audiences in 1924, as it was painfully apparent. The play, without direct mention, represents a traumatic shift in the zeitgeist of Germany. In the first act, Baal manipulates and exploits the pre-war Augsburg society, not overtly, such as Johanna to his attic, and by corrupting Johannes to abandon his life. He swindles lumberjacks out of their dead companion's brandy. He convinces the young Sophie to leave her family and love him for a time. He over-indulges in society, which rejects him when it can no longer support his hunger. It is only in the second half of the play that Baal, having rejected society, fails to realize that those
who once would follow him, have now embraced a new world, one where Baal does not belong. In the end, a worker, who would have loved the Baal at the start of the play, literally spits on him.\textsuperscript{84} This shift from a proud German people to a broken empty existence is a background that cannot be ignored in the production. This social background influenced my insertion of an intermission after the death of Sophie. Dramatically, it is the closest thing to a climax for a first act, yet it also represents the beginning of Baal and Ekart's journey alone as vagabonds and draft dodgers.

Beyond the implied social crisis, on a much more individual level, Brecht separated himself from Baal, creating a character to observe and marvel upon. The point at which Baal separates from Brecht is exactly where Feuchtwanger dismisses the title, the mythic Baal. Brecht, knowingly has created a mythic character, and has assembled, from his own life, a world in which his anti-hero may act. Accepting that an audience will not see the direct parallels to Brecht's life, and that Baal's obsession with trees, rivers, white bodies, women, and even decay will have no direct connection to the story unless they are made to represent that which is primal in the poet. Many characters reference Baal's animal nature: Johannes notices Baal's yellow uncanny teeth; Ekart calls him a degenerate beast; Sophie comments that he's a like a child, yet also a wild animal; Baal even calls himself a beast in his poem “Death in the Forest.” Baal shares more with his namesake than Feuchtwanger realized. Baal is of the “King of the Wood” pagan tradition—a human who has taken on the life of a deity. His means of creation is his poetry.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 93.
Thus, I turned to Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, an immensely influential study of early man and his myths ranging from the classic Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, trailing the development of all the local folk deities and traditions across the globe. His study geographically scans every continent, and encompasses many peoples. Frazer’s thesis is essentially that the roots of all myth and religion across the world lie within the imagination of man. He argues through many examples that men around the world developed their complex belief systems out of natural instincts and inclinations. He explains that early man could not separate his imagination from reality and his imagined self was as real as the flesh on his bones. “The danger, however, is not less real because it is imaginary; imagination acts on man as really as does gravitation, and may kill him as certainly as a dose of prussic acid.”85 This imagination, to early man, demonstrated his supernatural power, which led him to the belief that he could somehow literally influence the world around them.

Of the Phoenician god from which Brecht’s hero received his name, Frazer explains that in times of calamity, the Phoenicians sacrificed their dearest child to appease the angry god. Brecht literally borrowed this mythic ethos, which means that Baal, on stage, would have to stand opposed to the modern German order of society. In the script, Baal goes from dive to dive, and tavern to tavern, weaving in and out of different levels of society including the upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and then retreats into the forest.

Frazer explains that to a primitive man, such as Baal, the natural world takes on a

life of its own and that man begins to ascribe human and animal qualities to natural occurrences such as the wind rushing across the cornfields. For example, early Germans would likely have interpreted this as the Corn Wolf running among the corn stalks. Baal describes himself in similar terms connected with nature. Essentially, the actor portraying Baal would have to create a character with an imagination more potent and full than the rest of the characters in the play. Baal, when trying to express himself to Ekart, says: “My soul, brother, is the groaning of the cornfields when they roll in the wind, and the glitter in the eye of two insects that want to gobble each other up.”86 Yet, how does an actor demonstrate such imagination, especially when the borders between where the character ends and nature begins seem so thin? Surely, the contemporary audience should not walk away thinking that Baal is literally the part of nature. How do we make the audience perceive Baal’s speech metaphorically? The key is in Frazer’s descriptions of other elements of “savage” life.

To influence the world around them, early man practiced sympathetic magic. “The basic principle of sympathetic magic is that any effect may be produced by imitating it.”87 If they wanted rain, they would sprinkle water over the ground. Sympathetic magic would be used in connection with the extended poetic speeches of the play. For example, in the fourth scene of the play, Baal drags himself away from his bed after discarding several women that he has used, and sits at his desk. About to write poetry, he states, “Now I’ll make the summer. Red. Scarlet. Greedy.”88 The

88 Bertolt Brecht, “Baal” in Baal, A Man’s a Man and The Elephant Calf: Early Plays by Bertolt
imitation would not be a direct one such as with early man sprinkling water on the ground to make it rain, but the act would be the ritualistic act of writing poetry to bring in summer. What the audience would see is not a powerful god making the next scenes magically happen through illusion, but a primitive man in a modern world obsessed with poetic power.

Early man saw the natural world as much alive as he, believing in the literal personification of the sun, the sky, rain, and trees, which are several of Baal's most important poetic symbols. How could early man not think the natural world as alive when, if he cut a vine, it seemed to bleed its sap? The opening poem of the play, the Chorale of the Great Baal, alerts the audience to the central natural force to which Baal worships and even fears, the sky.

In the white womb of his mother Baal did lie.
Huge already, calm, and pallid was the sky,
Young and naked and immensely marvelous
As Baal loved it when Baal came to us.89

The play ends with Baal looking up toward the sky, still craving more. Therefore, the play itself should take on the form of a ritual, a mock celebration to a decaying god. To reveal this structure to the audience and highlight Baal's role as the anti-hero in a ritual, I emphasized the role of Baal's mother, the white womb from which he came, the White Goddess.

In his critical study, The White Goddess, which analyzes the many Goddess legends of Europe, and builds on Frazer's Golden Bough, Robert Graves elaborates on

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89 Ibid., 20.
what he calls the “Theme” of true poetry. The Theme of all true poetry tells the story of the White Goddess in one of her many forms, and how she mates with the Serpent of Wisdom, and thus gives birth to her child, the Star-son. The Star-son wars with the Serpent of Wisdom, his father and counter self, sharing the White Goddess’s bed with him. In the Prologue, we find this immediate connection, seeing both the Star-son and his love of the White Goddess, Baal's encounter with “That Girl the World.” As the play progresses, it is his seduction and subjugation of women that reflects the Star-son sleeping with his mother. Baal's poetry reflects this Theme. Baal’s mother haunts the play, much as Graves points that the White Goddess haunts poetry. Seeing as there is direct mention in the script of a “white womb”, and that Baal returns to Augsburg for his mother’s funeral, and at the end of the play, he literally calls out to her, “Mother!”, establishing the image of the White Goddess in the audiences mind seemed appropriate. During the Prologue, we choreographed the White Goddess in a ritualistic dance. This served three purposes: to establish the mythic interpretation of the play, to point to Baal's mother as a central figure and ghost behind the play, and to establish a ritual framework—the White Goddess character would also continue the ritual by carrying sign designating the titles of each different scene, projecting a sense of control to the audience, yet still absent from the main action of the play. Within the context of the play, the White Goddess takes on the form of the women that Baal devours, haunting Baal, similar to classical images of the fallen maidens such as Persephone and Shakespeare's drowned Ophelia.

With every other aspect of the text, I conservatively stylized the play within a framework of myth, with only one addition to the play. My one addition was fruit for Baal to consume and dispose of so that the audience would see the remains of the food pile up during the performance. This was simply to make a physical metaphor for the audience, to show Baal literally consuming ceaselessly, and disposing as necessary. The early scenes started with basic fruits that he mentions in the text, especially the enigmatic plum, which represents no single form of indulgence for Baal, but varying degrees of sexual, material, intellectual, and overall pleasurable sensations. There’s something very sexually suggestive of a plum half-bitten into—the plum became the metaphor for the production when I chose Ekart’s line, “Why do you run away from the plum trees like an elephant?” and placed it on the production posters, which were pictures of plums.

Indulgence, myth, creation, and defecation were the themes of the production, and provided the play with a framework to highlight Baal’s story and character. I wanted to stay true to Brecht's appeal to the audience's higher interest “from making comparisons, from whatever is different, amazing, impossible to take in as a whole” through distance and objectivity to the themes. The rehearsal process brought about new ideas, especially through the different characterizations of Baal, Ekart, and Sophie. John Barton romantically calls the rehearsal process, “the voyage of

discovery”93 for this very reason. I may have started with indulgence, creation, and defecation, but, out of necessity, actors introduced serial killers, cult leaders, and waltzes, making the production “a very fine affair.”94

CHAPTER IV

THE COMPANY

From the Elizabethan era to the present, the common thread in theatrical innovation is the collaboration of a theatre company. Shakespeare had his players in the Globe, Stanislavsky had his actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, Brecht had the Berliner Ensemble, and John Barton had the Royal Shakespeare Company. In each of these situations, the director, who sometimes doubled as the writer, worked intimately and collaboratively with a group of performers trying to realize a vision, not just of a single play, but of a style. Within the span of only the twentieth century, Stanislavsky took Chekhov’s “comedy”, The Seagull, which had already failed once in the theatre, deconstructed the script, and work-shopped it with his actors creating what we now refer to as “method” acting, the naturalistic acting style that we see in film. Brecht, at the age of twenty-five, commanded seasoned professionals of the German stage with ease, forcing them to account for specific detail, all the while developing a dialectic of action in the play, imbuing the seemingly simple actions with social meaning and critique. Barton, with his attention to textual and literary detail, guided the Royal Shakespeare Company’s productions from the standard declamatory, over-emotional style of performance, to the cool, collected, intellectual “RSC style.” In each of these companies, the human story of the play was the central focus. For Baal to succeed theatrically, I needed a company of performers who could work together in this way, through discussion and experiment.

With a company in mind, I devised a more literary and textual style of
audition, I did not rely on either monologues or cold readings from *Baal*. Instead, I assembled a collection of scenes from plays by Brecht, Shakespeare, Büchner, Beckett, Sophocles, poems, and even a segment from Faulkner’s short story “The Fire and the Hearth.” The performers would read from this collection, and not just by themselves, but also collectively, so I could see how they moved and worked together—they had to be able to play multiple roles. I did not hold call-back sessions, which are the norm for a stage show. I cast the play after one evening of auditions.

Individually, only a few people were impressive with their reading of the selected poetry and scenes. It was not until they read the Faulkner piece and the Elephant scene from Brecht’s *A Man’s a Man* in groups of five or six, that I could identify the storytellers of the group. No matter how uninspired the earlier readings were, talking about Old Carothers slowed everyone down, they could hear their words and comprehend what they were saying. Whereas everyone performed the speech well, the storytellers of the group demonstrated a command over Faulkner’s language; they knew how to read him out loud, starting slow, almost reminiscent and then altering the pace to build up to the climax and Faulknerian paradox of human blood and identity. This piece also allowed me to listen to their best voice—from very brassy, to the somewhat sensual, the perky and precise, and then even booming.

“Building the elephant” was the most telling of the auditioning pieces. The actors, in groups of five or six, used chairs and other miscellaneous properties to “make an elephant” on stage, and then they played the scene from *A Man’s a Man*. Because it was Brecht’s words, the characters were very reminiscent of characters in
Baal, but more approachable for a cold reading. After two hours of tense and focused work, everyone was laughing and having a good time playing the ridiculous scene.

Unlike the other scenes of the audition, this scene allowed me to switch performers around, having each person play the more talkative roles. By this time it became clear who were the more seasoned actors of the bunch; I put that group together last. This was my company.

I cast the roles of Baal, Sophie, and Ekart based on the auditions. I had decided that the actors playing these characters would need to devote their full attention to them. The table readings allowed the other actors the chance to experiment with the many different characters.

**Cast**

Emily, Younger Sister..........................................Allie Benson
Mech, 2nd Teamster, Bum, Mjurk,
2nd Farmer, 1st Lumberjack, Beggar,
Watzman, And 1st Man.........................................Matthew Biery
Louise, Elder Sister, Chanteuse,
Young Woman.....................................................Heather Bullard
Dr. Piller, Teamster 1, Lupu,
First Farmer, 2nd Lumberjack,
Bolleboll, 1st Ranger, Second Man...................Charlie DiBlasi
Teamster 3, Pianist, Parson, Third
Lumberjack, Third Farmer, Googoo,
2nd Ranger, Third Man......................................Sean Douglas
That Girl the World...........................................Aisling Niestroy
Ekart...............................................................Keith Paxton
Sophie Barger (waitress).................................Ariane Powell
Johannes, Landlord...........................................James Robles
Baal...............................................................Zachary Schulte
Johanna, Land Lady, Maja..............................Angeliea Stark
Design and Production Team

Set Design...........................................................Daniel LeFave
Costumes.............................................................Abbey Graff, Tiffany Harris
Stage Manager.....................................................Nicole Maldonado
Properties Master and Dresser.........................Heather Ross
Choreography......................................................Cole Harrell

Set Design

“Brecht insisted on very primitive simple stage sets.”95 The epic style only requires a minimal design—the performers should convey the majority of the story. Audiences often see a minimalist motif in smaller theatres, more out of financial conservation than artistic choice. Costs also directed my decision to use a generally bare stage, which meant that any object on stage would become more symbolic to the audience. Very much influenced by the minimalist sets of Brecht’s plays, designed by Neher, and filmed productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company such as Macbeth, I did not hesitate to adopt this basic design approach for my production of Baal.

Simply, I chose to use two backdrops, one for each act, as the background for the play. The first act depicts Baal's youthful exuberance for life. Given all the plum references in these early scenes, I selected a plum tree for the backdrop. To contrast from Baal's joy in the first act, I chose a willow tree for the second act. Again, Brecht literally mentions a tree in the text, but the willow is traditionally associated with death and the Hag incarnation of the White Goddess. A Texas State alumnus, Daniel LeFave, painted the backdrops on two white queen-size bed sheets. We built the framework from inexpensive PVC pipes. The backdrop stood up-stage center

95  Frederic Ewen, Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, His Times, (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1967), 129.
throughout each scene. I borrowed two tables and a few properties from a local theatre company, Troupe Texas (which co-sponsored the production). Other set pieces and properties called for in the script, such as a bed, cups, plates, lanterns, etc., I borrowed from the Texas State University Department of Theatre and Dance.

For scene changes, the Stage Manager sounded a gong signaling the performers to walk on stage as themselves (not playing any character) and change the set, while Niestroy, playing “That Girl the World” (the White Goddess), walked across the front of the stage carrying a sign displaying the title of the next scene. These titles served to hint at the location of the next scene, but fell more in line with Brecht’s estrangement in taking an attitude toward the scene at hand. I intended for the gong and change of set to mirror a boxing rounds.

Costumes

Costumes were to be as simple as the set, using only property-costume *pieces*: hats, gloves, coats, etc., over a base costume (black pants, grey shirt) to demonstrate the differences between characters—there were forty characters played by eleven performers. I selected Tiffany Harris, a Bachelor of Fine Arts student, to design the costumes from this basic conception. She envisaged something more lush for the play—she wanted to fully costume every character in the show to period. In our discussions, we decided that she could not realize such an ambitious design under our financial and time constraints, but we found an economic compromise between our two ideas; Tiffany clothed each performer in a basic period costume, and then changed the property-costume pieces to change characters. We would borrow these
pieces from the Department of Theatre and Dance’s costume stock.

To depict the era more accurately, Harris relied on Eric Hobsbawm’s *Age of Empire*, a scholarly text that analyzes the modern era from about 1875 to 1911. Harris tried to be as class specific as possible in her choices for the character bases. For Baal, who must travel amongst the social classes, she devised a simple white shirt and trousers with boots; for the second half of the play, she draped Baal in a long overcoat. For Ekart, Harris mirrored Baal's costume, only cleaner. The clean Ekart would emphasize Baal's ugliness and decay in the second act.

Due to other production responsibilities, Harris was not able to see the project through to its fruition. Collaborating with the Theatre Department, I arranged for another recent Texas State design alumnus, Abbey Graff, to fill in where Harris left off. Graff, relying on Harris's basic design renderings and costume pieces already fitted to specific actors, balanced Harris's lush designs with utility—there was little time allotted for costume changes during the performances. Graff simplified the design by taking articles of clothing away. With a basic shirt, trousers, and suspenders as the base costume, the distinguishing costume characteristics between lumberjacks, farmers, teamsters were changes in gloves, bandanas, and props—the lumberjacks carried axes. The women wore their corsets on the outside, unless they took on one of the many cameo roles, such as the disgruntled landlady of Baal's attic, in which case they wore a more exaggerated dress or garment easily placed over the basic costume. Graff made only a few non-essential changes to Harris's design for Baal and Ekart.

**Properties**
The properties were to match the quasi-historical approach to the play, yet also be symbolic of the action in the text. Heather Ross and I worked together to assemble a list of all the necessary properties for the play and then figure out how best to gather them. Properties that served as costumes, such as the Lumberjacks' axes, were more symbolic than historical, thus they were contemporary. Other anachronistic properties included the Chinese gong for set changes and metallic flasks for Baal and Ekart. Ross and I found the more historically accurate properties in the Theatre Department's properties closet. During performance, Ross also worked backstage as Properties Master and Dresser for the actors.

Make-Up

To complete the look of the play, I wanted to estrange the actors’ faces from the audience, which meant make-up. Brecht had experimented with distorting his characters with outrageous costumes and cartoonish make-up, which he used in a production of his *Mann ist Mann* (*A Man's a Man*) with Peter Lorre. As Galy Gay underwent internal changes, Lorre changed “masks” i.e. simple make-up. For instance, when he became petrified at the sight of his own “death,” he covered his face in white make-up to symbolize the paling of the face. For *Baal*, I decided to use an expressionist make-up design borrowed from the films *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. I wanted the characters of *Baal* to have this strange and intense look to them. Everyone used the more feminine make-up style of Nina from *Nosferatu*, the heavy, dark eye make-up. The men went lighter on the eyes, while the girls went very dark. Zachary Schulte, playing Baal, needed to look meaner, harsher than Schulte’s
natural face. Simply, his features were too soft; the darker make-up helped to vilify his character.

The design of the play, though simple, was effective in creating an environment where the performers could interpret their characters through action. The performers used the set, properties, and costumes as tools to aid them in telling the story. Referring to Aristotle and Brecht, the spectacle of the play is the least important element of the play. The performers are the object of inquiry; they map out the thought of the play through their action and storytelling. The minimalist set forces the audience to engage the action of the play and challenges them to use their imagination to fill in the missing details. In the epic theatre, the audience walks away actively aware of the story, discussing its details.

**Choreography**

To establish the ritual structure of the play, I drew an image out of the text and made it into a character. Niestroy, playing “That Girl the World,” performed a dance to the “Chorale of the Great Baal,” accompanied by a guitar. As mentioned above, she also contributed to scene changes, carrying signs displaying the titles. “That Girl the World,” in the context of the play, represents both the primitive world and the changing society of Augsburg. The choreographer, Cole Harrell, developed the ritual dance loosely based on ballet highlighting the ambiguous blend of basic movement and traditional dance to match the text of the poem with physical actions.

**Stage Management**

A reliable stage manager is probably the single most important position in a
production organization. The stage manager, who is responsible for documenting each rehearsal, keeping the work on schedule, and coordinating the different elements of production, also oversees and runs the performance. I did not have a stage manager until the night of auditions. Nicole Maldonado was recommended to me as responsible and organized; she volunteered for the position and I gladly accepted. Beyond her duties as stage manager, she had a knack for efficient communication and organizing the rapid scene changes. Without her, the production would not have succeeded.
CHAPTER V

PRODUCTION

Before moving onto the analysis of the production, I recommend that those unfamiliar with Baal read the Scene by Scene Guide to Baal of the play in the Appendix. It will be difficult to follow the analysis of the production without a general knowledge of the story and the characters.

'Table-work'

Rehearsal methods vary among directors: some spend many rehearsals reading the script multiple times through, and some jump right into blocking the first scenes—some directors even read the play backward, starting with the final scene and then working to the beginning. Whatever the process, the first few rehearsals are vital in establishing the rhythm, discipline, and process of the production. It is at the beginning that the director and the actors work the most collaboratively in defining the narrative of the play and mapping out how each scene and character contributes to it.

We spent the first two weeks of rehearsal in round-table reading and discussion of the play—professionals call it 'table-work.' Wishing to avoid a too casual and unproductive reading, I requested that everyone arrive dressed in professional attire. Before we began the reading, I asked that everyone be prepared to mark their scripts when they came across something they questioned or something that astounded them. Brecht also stressed the importance of working directly with the
script in early rehearsals, urging the actor to memorize his first impressions: “Before memorizing the words he must memorize what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are the dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance.” I did not require the actors to memorize their first impressions.

I did enforce one policy to instill an objective mindset. Often an actor will read a part and talk about their character as if it were themselves, saying: “When I said this,” or “I’m doing this,” when they should refer to the character in the third person: “Baal said this,” or “Baal did that.” It may have been tough in those early rehearsals, but the distinction became very important, especially to the actors having to play six to eight characters. Each character behaves differently, and the actor must approach them individually instead of as aspects of the actor's personality and ego.

We sat round the table and read the script—actors traded off playing different roles. At the end of each scene, we would discuss the action and try to establish the relationships. Consequently, the read-through took two evenings and felt very slow. There was too much discussion. It became apparent that I had not adequately defined the narrative when one of the actors asked me what the play was about. The episodic structure of the play confused the actors because it was not a typical progression of
character and emotion. They had never encountered a character like Baal. I had underestimated the difficulty of the script. For the rest of the evening, we returned to script analysis, deconstructing the episodic structure to identify the narrative.

Over the next few days of table work, we analyzed thematically connected scenes, such as scenes involving Baal's disregard of women, Baal's poetic scenes, and scenes involving the relationship between Baal and Ekart. These rehearsals were not as productive as I had planned. I suspect that actors did not respond to the table-work because they had no reason to invest the time and energy into different characters that they may or may not play. In the future, casting all the roles will probably be a more effective strategy.

From Rehearsals to Performance

With only two months to rehearse and produce the play, I did not have time to explain Barton's method to the actors thoroughly. In the early rehearsals, I did show clips of the Playing Shakespeare series and noted that they could watch several clips available online via YouTube. I emphasized the importance of the videos, and that the performance style I was aiming for derived from Barton's work, but my protestations failed to reach them. To my knowledge, nobody watched the videos. Thus, in every rehearsal I had to balance thematic, narrative staging rehearsal with technical study. As to be expected, each individual actor seemed to have strength in one or two of the techniques, but rarely in all of them. Through rehearsal, we sought to balance the strengths and weaknesses of the company, to tell the story most effectively.

Words with Intent—Analysis
The social intentions of the character provide a framework of accepted social interactions that the actor must play. When the actor deviates from a social interpretation of the role in favor of an emotional one, the scene will go awry. At first, the company had difficulty comprehending the difference. For several of them, their emotional responses to the characters’ situations, however valid, would not work in the scenes. For example, in the first scene of the production, Baal openly seduces Emily, while her husband, Mech, seems to sit back and let it happen for quite sometime before he does anything. In the earlier rehearsals, Biery, played Mech as incensed as soon as Baal made his first move, but this caused the dramatic climax of the scene to occur before the literary climax, leaving five minutes of undramatic dialogue in the scene. If Mech gets too angry too quickly, the rest of his lines must be played angrily for the sake of continuity. Mech is a man of business, trying to win Baal with boasts of wealth and luxury—however ineffective, these are Mech's tactics for winning Baal. When Biery began to play each line from the perspective of an elite businessperson, Mech's lines began to coincide with his actions, leading up to a final outburst at Baal's seduction of Mech's wife. Biery's interpretation showed a Mech so ruthless in business that even his wife became a commodity to be traded or sold at the appropriate price. This Mech, to the audience, creates a much stronger dialectic between Baal and society. The audience witnesses a man seducing another man's wife, but society has dictated that in certain situations this is expected. In performance, Biery played the social intention correctly.

In the previous example, the character and his text were in a rather obvious
social situation that the actor should play realistically. A more abstract situation and line is in the fourth scene when Johanna wakes up next to Baal. The line is “Oh, what have I done? I am bad.” The line is peculiar in that it requires the character to think about her situation in a much broader and more complex context than simply and emotional. It is a social and moral statement.

Stark's early interpretations of the text led her to play Johanna as struggling with a very private emotional situation; she stares at Baal, but sympathizes with herself. As rehearsals progressed, Stark began to play the character from the social perspective.

In performance, she pulled her body from Baal's as she asked what she had done, and then looked directly at the audience and simply spoke her line in an unemotional manner, “I am bad.” The effect was chilling and immediate. In one dimension, the character Johanna appeared to realize her situation entirely, yet in another dimension, Stark confronted the audience, suggesting they decide if Johanna is truly bad, or a victim of manipulation.

The scenes in which actors fully characterized the social dimension were generally the more successful scenes. In addition, scenes in which many different

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social interactions were at play tended to confuse the company and the audience. These scenes required a much tighter choreography than I had anticipated. In the third scene, several different social classes have gathered in one tavern. To show the animosity and the fear of the lower classes, I blocked the bourgeoisie at their own table, so that each group could look at the other as something foreign. Outside of this basic blocking, I had not specifically choreographed each character's movement. This led to chaotic early interpretations of the scene. By performance, we had choreographed much more specific movements that, rather than simply showing the audience a social dialectic, led them through a dialectical argument for the scene.

The social intention behind the words was an approach that the company developed throughout the rehearsal process. By performance, the play retained much influence from the contemporary theatre's emotional interpretation, but in several scenes, a much deeper interpretation of the text became apparent to the audience.

**Sharing with the Audience—Analysis**

The actors most readily adopted direct address and the soliloquy as techniques of sharing with the audience. A few actors were hesitant at first, but soon everyone became comfortable playing their characters directly to the audience. These techniques were necessary for scenes that involved poetry. In situations where Baal performs poetry or songs for the teamsters or other characters, Schulte would face the audience, make eye contact, and deliver the speech directly to them. By implementing this element of the epic style, we realized that the mechanics of the technique require some characters to act similar to the traditional Greek chorus.
Brecht explores all of the themes of the play most intensely through Baal’s poems. For the actor to not speak them directly to the audience would leave something missing from the story. Not only did sharing directly with the audience tell the story more effectively, it gave the actor more control over the scene, allowing him to create the critical attitude toward the events of the play, the themes, and himself. In scene seventeen, Baal recites his song “Death in the Forest” to Ekart. At this point in the play, Ekart notices Baal loosing control over his appetite for life by indulging compulsively. Ekart who no longer understands his companion, growing fearful of him, tells Baal to read his poem and he will “know” him. Ekart's line here, however personal and intimate with Baal, is a choric line, setting Baal up to perform his poem for the audience. Paxton played Ekart as the chorus by drawing attention to Baal, by staring at him throughout the song, moving very little. When Schulte delivered the poem, he had complete control of the audience, leading them through each moment of the poem. The text foreshadows Baal's eventual abandonment and end. Schulte won the audience's favor, even though he had raped a woman in the previous scene.

Sharing with the audience contributed to several other scenes as well, especially scene ten when Baal witnesses the death of Teddy with the lumberjacks. Though this scene only has a few moments that dramatists could interpret as monologues, the majority of the scene is the interaction between Baal and the lumberjacks over what to do with Teddy's corpse. Instead of playing these characters with the fourth wall, the actors played it broad and theatrical, like a scene from Monty Python. We choreographed the lumberjacks moving and speaking together; this
established a choric pattern. Anytime they broke away from it—as by one stepping out of the unit and going opposite to the group—made for very comedic moments.

Schulte's actions were demonstrative, playing on the lumberjack's sympathy for the poor dead Teddy; the audience saw Baal manipulating a group of people. After performances, audiences often commented that they thought this was our most effective scene.

**Directing the Audience Through Complex Language—Analysis**

Directing the audience through complex language is not an easy task for actors of my generation. Coming from a visual society and with contemporary American education, they have neither the literary training to identify and understand the mechanics of textual rhythm and rhetorical devices, nor do they know how these literary elements affect playing a character. It is just not taught anymore. We spent a few rehearsals working through the “Chorale of the Great Baal” to familiarize everyone with a natural rhetorical understanding of the language. Lacking experience in critical analysis, the actors soon tired of the exercise, thus, I abandoned group rhetorical rehearsals in favor of individual work with actors who needed training to play their parts including Schulte, Paxton, Powell, among others.

Ekart's first appeal to Baal is probably his most poetic and rhetorical speech in the play; it is also the first time that Ekart speaks to Baal. Following Barton's advice about when analyzing prose rhythm and looking for the strong stresses in the speech, we noticed that the strong stresses are always on the nouns and adjectives that Ekart is emphasizing to Baal—he uses them to win Baal to his favor. Rhetorically, Ekart
speaks in fragmented sentences when listing off the images, metaphors, and
metonymies that build to a climatic series of antitheses: “Rain soaking you to the
skin! Sun burning your skin! Darkness and light! Women and dogs!” Ekart entices
Baal with opposites, juxtaposing the life he could live on the road with Ekart to the
safe, secure and boring life he has made for himself in Augsburg as the “operatic
tenor” of the local tavern. Paxton understood the sense and rhythm of the line, and
that thematically it was the first spoken interaction between two characters who will
become intimately involved with each other (not necessarily sexual).

It only took a few times through the speech for him to adopt the critical stare,
pointing at the language with his eyes, though it took much rehearsal for him to focus
precisely. Skill in actively using rhetorical devices lies in connecting them with the
intent of the words—not in just understanding how the devices look and work on the
page. To guide the audience through the complex language of a play, the actor must
find the character's social need that propels the rhetorical language, so that in
performance, they can demonstrate the character coming up with an original phrase,
or 'coining a phrase.' In this scene, Ekart wants Baal to join him and his vagabond
lifestyle on the road; and to do so, he juxtaposes the glory and decadence of the road
to the reserved, safe environment of the city. Ideally, Paxton would have played the
speech mostly staring at Baal, but occasionally looking elsewhere to emphasize his
point. To create the image and show the antithesis to the audience, Paxton needed to
use his hands to emphasize the antithesis of the end. By performance, Paxton

97 Bertolt Brecht, “Baal” in Baal, A Man's a Man and The Elephant Calf: Early Plays by Bertolt
delivered the speech effectively, using his eyes to guide Baal and the audience through his appeal, yet relied on his hands too much. As a director I should have found another action for him that would further emphasize the social juxtaposition—such as looking at Emily crying and her mascara running as he spoke his line, “The women you have filled with your seed tumble into the black rivers.”

The language of the play is where intention and action meet; moderating the two is a balance between technique and ability. Schulte needed physical action to express Baal's language. Schulte's Baal spoke with gestures and mime, a playful Mr. Circus, as active as a child. To guide the audience through the complex language of his several poetic pieces, he would first establish the critical eye contact, and then use his hands and body to create the images for the audience by gesturing toward the sky when he spoke of it—literally pointing with his language. In rehearsals, he developed a hand that became his gesturing hand; in the play, other characters call Baal an elephant, so we considered this hand the “elephant's trunk.” Like Paxton, Schulte developed a sense of the rhythm of the text quickly once he had learned the lines. Subsequently, the task was to develop precision with the language and his body, balancing the rhetorical technicality with his ability for gesture.

Although we did not have time to explore directing the language of the play, this production provided an introduction to the aural aspect of the production—directing the audience through the language of the play requires much practice, both in literary analysis and in vocal ability.

“Passion and Coolness”—Analysis
Playing their characters coolly was by far the most difficult element for the actors to adopt; I expected they would resist this at first. Nearly every acting book in English espouses the “method” with lists of examples of celebrities, such as Marlon Brando, that have used their own private emotions to create some of the most beloved film characters during the second half of the twentieth century. A major difference between film and theatre is that in film, actors perform as many takes of a scene as are necessary—oft-times varying different interpretations—and then they never play the scene again. The director and editor select the interpretation most effective for the film. The stage actor must replicate their performance night after night and across a room with anywhere from a few to thousands of seats. In film, the director controls everything; on stage, the actors control their own performance. For the production of *Baal* one of my tasks was to shift the actors' thinking toward the stage.

With much trial and error during rehearsal, the actors began to offer moments where each played a distanced character. One particularly troublesome scene was the end of act I, scene twelve. In this scene, Baal and Sophie's relationship comes to a vicious climax, with Ekart stuck in the middle—the scene ends with Baal and Ekart abandoning Sophie and running off to the forest together. To prepare Powell (playing Sophie) and Schulte for the conflict in the scene, we tried to interpret the scene as an argument where characters verbally topped each other. The actors...
understood the interpretation, but this only led to a more passionate, but confusing scene. Paxton was the odd-man-out in the scene, as he played the coolest character on stage. I was unable to give the scene proper form; I allowed the actors to continue. I should have clarified the different character's intentions. Baal wants to continue on the road with Ekart; Sophie will do anything to stay with her beloved Baal; and Ekart wants to remain with Baal, but feels responsible for Sophie's demise. Baal sees Ekart as torn between the absurdity of human emotions and sympathy, and he tries to win him back to a life of hedonism and freedom as limitless as the sky. The scene ends in a fight in which Baal wins Ekart back into his favor. Sophie is the obstacle in Baal's way, not the opponent in the argument. I had Schulte and Powell arguing literally over nothing, thus they relied on their emotions, which turned the scene into a shouting match. From this instance, I learned to check the interpretation of the text when actors are having difficulty playing the character coolly—something in the text hindered them from a more effective portrayal of the scene.

Despite the difficulty with scene twelve, most actors were able to play their characters coolly. Johanna's last scene with Baal illustrates how playing the character coolly intensified the effect of the scene, and accomplishes the effect most actors attempt to provoke through passion. In the scene, Baal cruelly taunts Johanna with his words. The scene could easily have turned into histrionics from the actress playing Johanna, but Stark's interpretation of the scene remained reserved and focused on Johanna's few words. Stark awoke in the beginning of the scene, spoke her first line, and then went to look for her clothes. Instead of showing the audience
Johanna’s weakened emotional character, Stark demonstrated a broken woman trying to hold herself together despite the many vulgar insults from Baal’s character. At the climactic moment of the scene, Stark focused her attention on getting Baal to say whether he loved her. She stared at him, unemotionally asking him to speak; she spoke in a clear voice that penetrated the silence of the room—the effect was powerful because she let the words raise the dramatic tension to a climactic moment. After suspending the moment for a few seconds, Schulte turned and delivered his final insult: “I’m fed to the teeth.” Stark let just a touch of worry into her voice when she spoke Johanna’s final line, “Johannes?” This one short scene completely realized the thematic importance of Johanna.

The cool form of playing is a tool to establish a critical distance to the character, and to create dramatic intensity into the story. From this experience, I have derived a working principle that the most intense moments of plays will require the coolest interpretation.

**Gestus: Quoting the Character—Analysis**

Gestus is a generally unknown concept to “method” acting. It challenged the actors who are accustomed to internal characterization. Unexpectedly, the actors resisted this technique less. As there are over forty different characters in *Baal*, there

98 Ibid., 37.
99 Ibid., 37.
should be over forty different quotable characters. Such a spectacle is an ambitious task for young actors. In many instances, the cast created quotable characters, although they did not fully realize each character. Actors developed their most successful characters in one of two ways: by either relying on outside material such as models for the actors to imitate, or by discovering the characters through rehearsals.

As explained above, Schulte needed a physical character to attach the words to—he thought from the outside back to the text. His approach required more trial and error than working from the text, but developing the physical character first was the only thing that worked for him. After several discussions analyzing Baal in the mythic terms of Frazer and Graves, Schulte and I set to work to craft the physical interpretation of Baal. This took many individual rehearsals, working closely with the text. Finally, however, the mythic, textual perspective distracted from Baal's actions. We began to look for physical models on the internet and in the public media. After trying several different characters, (mostly rock stars) we hit upon two serial killers that worked: Charles Manson and Ted Bundy.

Manson was more than just an average serial killer, he was a manipulator and cult leader, who, despite, his appearance, managed to convince many men and women to follow him and do his bidding. They became his Family. In one video, Manson described the poetry he

23: Charles Manson
recited to the Family; he spoke in noises and awkward gestures that were incomprehensible as a spoken language, but uniquely articulate. In another video, Manson, asked who he was, responded with a long series of very intent and serious movements, facial gestures and contortions. He ended calmly saying, “I’m nobody.”

Schulte planned certain moments in the script where he could demonstrate Manson’s actions as Baal. He used this playful side of Manson in the third scene where Baal speaks about contradiction and sensation. Baal states:

\begin{quote}
What do you have to write poems for when life’s so decent: if you drift down a fast-flowing ricer, naked, on your back under an orange-colored sky, and you see nothing but the sky as it turns purple and later black like a hole ... if you trample an enemy into the dust ... or turn sorrow into music ... or cry for unrequited love and eat an apple ... or bend a woman’s body over a bed ... Did you feel it? Did it pierce your skin? A circus! You have to lure the animal into the open! Out into the sun with the beast! The check please! Out into daylight with love! Naked in the sun beneath the sky!\end{quote}

Schulte choreographed a physical gesture for each image in the piece. Using the idea of Manson’s movements, each image took on a different character: Schulte leaned backward and reached for a hole in the sky, turned sorrow into music by covering his face, then mimed music by moving his hand through the air, and ended the images.

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100 Ibid., 35.
by bending the actress playing Emily over the table. He let her go and then looked at
Johanna as Johannes dragged her from the tavern. Baal asked her if she “felt it,”
which propelled him to the big finish of all the exclamations, just as if he were the
ringmaster.

The other physical model we used to develop Baal was Ted Bundy. Though
blatantly arrogant and insulting, he was a much colder and more calculating murderer
than Manson. We referenced Bundy more for his lack of empathy. Bundy’s sincerity
and spontaneity were used in
tavern scenes; Schulte also
tried to use some of his hand
gestures and eye movements,
by engaging the audience with
a facial gesture that resembled
Bundy’s. Though very
different on Schulte’s face,
Bundy's stare still created a chilling effect on the audience. This action transformed
Baal's soliloquy into an epic gest.

Likewise, Heather Bullard's interpretation of Louise, the bar maid of the
Augsburg tavern, was also a noteworthy example of a gestic character. Though she
played the character in only one scene, she played it effectively. Bullard observed
how fashion models would strike a certain pose, bending over at the waist, rather
awkwardly, as if to bring emphasis to their breasts. While playing around with this
pose in the mirror, Bullard concluded that this structure of body movement could express not only the old whore Louise, but could also show that running the tavern had reduced her to a hunched woman. During the performance, Bullard spoke her lines like an old chain smoker, ready to serve, anyone in any way that would make her a buck. The audience barely noticed the effect, but it was exemplary of the epic style of gestus. Like Schulte, she relied on outside models in society to develop her character, only she drew from a more abstract dimension, reinterpreting “model” behavior into a bar maid's bread and butter.

James Robles discovered his gestic portrayal of Johannes's final scene, scene eighteen, through trial and error, balancing language with action. In scene eighteen, after returning to Augsburg for the funeral of Baal's mother, Ekart goes to the old tavern where he meets Johannes, a decrepit and wasted drunk. When Baal finally arrives on the scene, Johannes becomes re-infatuated with his former idol, yet he is haunted by the death of Johanna. He describes how this affects him—that he feels he is walking through hell and there are knives that cut his legs as he passes by. When he drinks brandy, he literally feels a small version of Johanna's corpse being caught in his throat. Robles played the monologues with his eyes. He would shift his glance between audience members, and then to Baal on the more pointed lines of criticism. He used his fingers to show the tiny corpse of Johanna, lifting his head, and touching it to his throat to show the audience where she gets stuck. After Schulte finished reciting Baal's last line of the song, Robles clapped mockingly, yet then sincerely spoke to Baal, telling him that he would travel with him from then on. He does not
travel with Baal, but Robles gestic character, developed entirely out of rehearsal, made its poetic impact on Baal, the play, and the audience.

**An Epic Method—Training Necessary**

Though there were definitely difficulties in implementing the epic method, the company came an incredible distance in a short amount of time. Each of the techniques of the epic theatre needs individual attention to develop, yet none create the estranging effect by themselves. The epic style is a rational style based on analysis of the story and the language of the play, relying on specificity of details and juxtaposition. Ideally, a resident company would develop the style over the course of several seasons. It would be exciting to continue working with this company further. With a few more productions, I am certain that we would be able to implement the epic style fully.
CONCLUSION

Our audience consisted of parents, faculty, a few members of the community, and many university students. Each night after the performance, we conducted a talkback, a post-play conversation between the audience and the company, to discuss the audience's responses to the show. As a theatrical production, opinions varied over different details, but the responses were unanimously positive. As a production in the epic style, the play seemed to lead audiences to follow secondary issues instead of focusing on Baal, the central character, as a poet that literally feeds on life. I attribute this reaction partially to the success of the epic method of characterization and partially to my own inattention to the overall story structure and blocking needed for the epic style. Every night, audiences commented about the particular efficacy of Schulte’s portrayal of Baal. One lady even left after the first scene because Baal reminded her of someone she actually knew. Several other audience members identified hedonists and villains from their past in Schulte’s portrayal of Baal. Schulte gained an impressive technical understanding of the epic method, which, when combined with Brecht’s language in translation and the gluttonous actions of constant feeding on fruit, prevented audiences from identifying with Baal—who
would want to identify themselves with a disgusting glutton and hedonist? Instead, 
audiences tried to understand the play through a projected empathy, viewing Baal as 
the quintessential hedonist and manipulator that everyone knows now and recognizes. 
Though we succeeded at estranging the audience from identifying with Baal, we did 
not estrange them from their own preconceived notions of what a person like Baal is 
and does. They accepted Baal’s actions, expecting him to get his come-uppance.

The most potent example of Schulte’s use of estrangement was in scene 
seventeen when Schulte gluttonously fed from a pineapple and then performed a 
poem while dripping in juices and pineapple bits. Because the audience could not 
relate to Baal personally, they focused on the poem and reflected on how it pertained 
to Baal’s life. Baal’s poems throughout the play stood out as something remarkable, 
because they came unexpectedly from such a grotesque individual. Yet, with some 
audiences, this estrangement effect backfired because they did not identify with Baal. 
They felt no reason to inquire mentally about his life or his art. Baal’s unnecessary 
suffering caused some audiences simply to disregard Baal as beyond help, beyond 
change. For some audiences, because they did not feel for him, they did not think 
about him. They mentally left the room with the lady that knew a man like Baal. 
Overall, Schulte estranged Baal from the audience and caused them to think about his 
poetry, but they were prepared for the hedonist, and rejected him much earlier in the 
play, long before the lumberjacks in the final scene.

Schulte’s and Paxton’s portrayal of the ambiguous relationship of Baal and 
Ekart engaged the audience in an unexpected dialectic about homosexuality and the
gray area between best friends and lovers. It distracted from the story and larger dialectic of Baal’s hedonism. Each night there was always a student who asked if their relationship was specifically homosexual, and each night I replied that it is simply unknown. Brecht never explicitly defined the sexual orientation of their relationship. The evidence of the play is inconclusive as there is no homosexual act described in the text. For the twenty-first century audience, Baal’s and Ekart’s formation of a vagabond brotherhood led audiences to question their conceptions of this apparently provocative topic. Schulte and Paxton effectively embodied the sexual ambiguity without driving the audience to any conclusions. Only somewhat satisfied with my answer, the audience member likened their relationship to a term coined during the 1990’s called “bromance,” combining “brothers” and “romance.”

The actors stimulated the audience’s critical thought, and then the audience devoted much of their mental work to trying to identify what they saw as something they already understand. Audiences became stuck on specific ideas, such as this potential homosexuality, and ruminated over them, rather than following the rest of the play. In future productions, I will need to make sure that the action of the play drives the audiences’ thought forward and not around in circles.

Scene ten with the lumberjacks and poor Teddy was the audience favorite each night. The simplest explanation for the scene’s success is that it starkly deviates from the darker tone of the play with its comedic banter. I choreographed this scene with greater precision than any other scene in order to illuminate Baal’s manipulation of the lumberjacks. Given the images and videos of Brecht’s final productions with
the Berliner Ensemble, this scene more closely matched what theatre-going audiences recognize as a traditional Brechtian scene, what general audiences understand as a formal movement oriented style similar to Chaplin’s films. The humor of the scene, slapstick comedy, actually impeded the estrangement, as it diminished the arguments between the characters and hid Baal’s manipulation rather than exposing it. The humor washed away critical thought. The scene made audiences comfortable, and they questioned why other scenes and, at times, even the entire play was not as strictly choreographed.

For the most part, the company succeeded in implementing the epic method of characterization, yet, because it was not properly focused, the varying characters and themes engaged the audience in personal thoughts and identification of universals rather than the specific focus of a hedonist in modern society. Our success caused the confusion. Brecht asked that each scene stand for itself, and our production did just that, but to the detriment of the story, which remained nebulous to many of the audiences. As a director, I focused too much on characterization, and not enough on highlighting the story. I did not take into account that the different ideas of the play may be so
contradictory and so varied that audiences would not engage them dialectically, but simply discard the contradictions altogether.

Oft-times, audiences did think proactively incorporating each new contradiction, but many meditated on single themes and ideas that were most apparent, such as Baal’s repulsive behavior, “bromance,” and the comedic moments. Audiences did not identify with the play; they tried to “essentialize” it by identifying major themes and character lessons. Each night, audiences interpreted Johanna’s plight in many different ways. Some recognized her as a poetic image of the White Goddess that hauntingly inspires Baal and Johannes, while others recognized Johanna as the good girl that always goes for the bad boy. The play lacked the through-line and forward momentum that a more systematic blocking scheme would have provided. In future productions, I will develop the characterizations and thematic dialectics with more precision, emphasizing the story, and leading the audience to an understanding of the whole play, and not just stimulating them enough to fill in the cracks mentally.

With this thesis production, I aimed to identify and develop a method for producing plays in the epic theatre style; I have succeeded in attaining that goal. As of now, the epic method needs refinement through the incorporation of a broader range of directorial elements, such as a specific dialectical blocking pattern and a more focused use of characterization and comic vs. dramatic moments. In addition, the actors’ difficulty with adopting the older rhetorical approach to spoken dialogue illuminated a great potential for a more sophisticated form of the epic style that
combines skilled use of classical rhetoric with our contemporary visual media. To do this, I will need actors with a higher mastery of language and rhetoric than is generally taught in actor training programs.

Overall, the epic style is only one stage in the development of my own theatrical aesthetic. Brecht practiced a detailed dialectical approach to story and character that he felt most appropriate for the “scientific age.” John Barton appealed to the humanity of characters through his emphasis on language and poetics. My aesthetic, presently, is an amalgam of the two.
APPENDIX

Scene by Scene Guide to *Baal*

**Act I: Augsburg, 1911.**

**Prologue**

A performance of The Chorale of the Great Baal, a poem set to music depicting Baal's metaphorical birth from the “white womb of his mother,” his life of debauchery, chasing his symbol of freedom, the sky, and then his death rotting in the Earth.

**Scene 1:**

In the opening scene, Mech, a man who has made millions on deforestation and animal trade, has invited Baal to a dinner in order to acquire the rights to publish Baal's poems. Piller, a professor and link to the newspapers, offers Baal aid in developing his career. Baal drinks Mech's wine compulsively, dismissing all attempts to purchase his poems, and openly seduces Mech's wife Emily. Johannes, a young bourgeois admirer of Baal, shows his support for the poet, though he does not attempt to defend his ways to the other bourgeois. The scene ends with Mech and Piller abandoning Baal. Emily and Johannes linger for a moment: Emily out of pity, and Johannes out of admiration.

**Scene 2:**

Baal and Johannes sit by the window in Baal's attic; papers and bottles are scattered all around. Johannes tells Baal of his young, virginal mistress, Johanna, a bourgeois girl whom he dreams of mating with a holly tree. He expresses concern and guilt for
having such sexual desires. Baal reprimands him for his weakness, boasting poetically about the experience of “love,” instructing Johannes that the only danger of love is pregnancy, which only means that one must abandon the woman. “Love” for Baal is both violent and intoxicating, which he warns the young Johannes against, feeling he is too weak for the experience.

Scene 3:
Baal has been entertaining teamsters in a local Tavern, lamenting his sexual rendezvous with Emily Mech, and how he is sick of her. Soon Johannes enters the tavern bringing Johanna. Baal immediately perks up taking Johanna's hand and escorting her to the table. Then Emily bitterly enters the tavern, in love and heartbroken that Baal is now rejecting her. Baal, annoyed that his guests lack his courage and bravado for drinking, poetry, vulgarity, and debauchery, sings his Ogre song, in which he proclaims the happiest place on Earth is the toilet where humans eat only to defecate; all is transitory. Excited by the song, Ekart, a vagabond musician, stands and invites Baal to journey with him in a never-ending quest of women, poetry, music, nature, and filth. Baal, extremely tempted, resists because of his ties to Johannes, Johanna, and Emily. Ekart leaves. The scene ends with Baal forcing Emily to disgrace herself publicly by kissing one of the teamsters. Johanna and Johannes leave in a rush.

Scene 4:
Johanna awakens next to Baal in his attic. Ashamed of what she has done, she quickly tries to put her clothes back on to go home. After one last attempt at winning Baal's
love, she runs out of the attic muttering, “Johannes.” Baal's taunts her from his window.

In the second part of the scene, two sisters visit Baal's attic for a sexual rendezvous. In the midst of their passion, the older sister tells Baal that a girl, Johanna Reiher, has drowned herself in the river Laach. Suddenly, the landlady beats on the door, interrupting Baal with his women. She shoos the girls off, mocking Baal's slothful existence. She gives him a two weeks notice to move out.

In the third part of the scene, Baal has grown weary from the winter and decides that he needs a “woman with a face.” He runs out of his apartment. While he is gone, the disheveled Johannes enters the room to look through Baal's papers, perhaps to learn more of Johanna. Baal re-enters the attic dragging along the proletariat girl, Sophie Barger. He scares Johannes off with threats, and then manipulates and seduces Sophie, who insists she must run home to take care of her family.

Scene 5:

It is the Corpus Christie procession, where members of the Lutheran denomination march by, celebrating the Eucharist. Baal walks by a forest where the trees have been cut down to make crosses for the celebration and the houses have been painted white. He comes across a drunken bum sitting on a stone. Together they drink the bum's brandy and marvel at the “corpses” of trees, proposing that the trees were unnecessarily slaughtered for Jesus. Baal leaves unaffected, while the bum call after him, appalled that Baal will not stand up against the sacrifice of the vegetation; the bum is out of brandy.
Scene 6:
Baal and Sophie have finished making love under a tree one night in May; the rain has stopped. They lie there, taking in the forest and listening to the wind on the foliage. Sophie cannot decide whether to stay with Baal or return home to her mother. Baal reels with delight in the blackness of the sky, and the sensual experience of the night, trees, and rain. Sophie pulls close to him, savoring that she is his; Baal, with the care of a father to his daughter, pulls Sophie's slip off to make love to her another time.

Scene 7:
Baal is drunk at a nightclub, the White Cloud; he has been performing his songs and poems commercially. Another entertainer, Lupu, sits backstage with Baal, taunting him that Mjurk, owner of the establishment, will not give him any more brandy. Mjurk enters to rush Baal back on stage. A minor argument takes place, but Baal gives in and enters the stage. The chanteuse and a pianist come off stage discussing Lupu's shameless mimicry of Baal's poetry and style and gossiping that Sophie has been sleeping with him. Baal performs a particularly naughty poem, which enrages some audience members and astounds others; Baal flees to the backstage bathroom. Mjurk, scandalized, demands that Baal come out of the bathroom. Lupu enters reporting that Baal has fled out the window. The scene ends with voices shouting rhythmically, “Baal!”

Scene 8:
Baal has joined Ekart on the journey. They rush past the cornfields, running into
freedom, the bliss of youth. The two joke, play, and try to figure the other out, like two young boys driven mad by a summer's day. Baal compares his soul to the wind rushing on the cornfields, and to the “glimmer in the eye of two insects that want to gobble each other up.” Ekart resists this soul searching in favor of a cool pool nearby. They run to it.

**Scene 9:**

Baal and Ekart have been drinking their fill of brandy in a rural tavern, convincing farmers from nearby villages that Baal's brother, a particularly wealthy man, would be coming into town the next day looking to buy the best bulls the area could gather. The farmers, excited by the prospect, promise to bring their bulls the next day by four o'clock, and leave. Ekart, very concerned, pesters Baal, trying to get him to sneak out with him. Baal lazes back in a chair, promising Ekart a great treat. A parson walks up to the two of them, demanding that they leave at once—he has figured out the swindle. Baal explains that the farmers and the bulls would enter the next day from over the hill, all gathering into a fantastic spectacle of animals (the farmers and the bulls) that have miscalculated. Ekart begins to laugh uncontrollably at the thought of the beautiful confusion. The parson demands they leave, and offers to pay for their drinks. The landlord calls out to him, “Eleven brandies, your reverence.”

**Scene 10:**

In the forest one evening, a tragic lumbering accident has occurred and a tree has fallen on one unfortunate lumberjack, Teddy. The lumberjacks and the drunken Baal

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have gathered around the man's corpse, trying to figure out what to do about the body. Some offer to send the family a letter, but, then, they are not so sure Teddy has a family. Baal moves over to the body and speaks a eulogy about Teddy and death; the lumberjacks do not take too well to this, but they do not interfere. In honor of the death, they decide to give Teddy a funeral post-eulogy in which they would drink poor Teddy's brandy rations in celebration of his life. The lumberjacks exit to get the brandy while Baal shares a moment with the corpse, observing Teddy's body. The lumberjacks come back incensed; Baal drank all the brandy.

**Scene 11:**

Baal and Ekart have retreated to the dead Teddy’s cabin in the forest to escape the rain. Inside they drink and talk. Baal tells Ekart that he does not want to die—he wants to keep going even after he loses his skin. He claims that he will “swallow death and pretend not to notice.” Baal, peeved that he has divulged himself, yet still knows nothing of Ekart, interrogates the musician. Ekart reveals a nihilistic tendency in himself. Baal refuses to believe it, opting that Ekart is a wicked man too. Sophie appears in the door, begging to come in. She is pregnant.

**Scene 12:**

Baal, Ekart, and Sophie travel the fields close to evening. Sophie, too pregnant to go on much further, collapses from the running. Baal has rejected her, calling her “a millstone round my neck.” Ekart shows her sympathy, offering to stay with her and help her find shelter, but Baal will have none of this. Jealous, Baal reasons with Ekart

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102 Ibid., 64.
that Sophie no longer means anything to him, and the only one he loves now is him.

Ekart tries to convince Sophie to return to her mother, but she refuses because she loves Baal passionately, and will not let go; she is not jealous of Ekart, only craving closeness to Baal. She tells Baal to beat her, and begs only that he let her stay. She calls Baal a child and a beast; he does not know what he says and how much it affects her. Baal tells her to leave or stay, as long as she does not follow; yet she persists, begging on her knees and asking Baal what she should do about his child. He says, “Bury it!” Ekart, having enough, offers to take Sophie home if she renounces her love for Baal. She cannot, and this drives Ekart into a frenzy. He attacks Baal, screaming, “Degenerate beast!” They wrestle like animals to Sophie’s dismay. Finally, Baal ends the fight by clasping Ekart to his breast, forcing Ekart to be close to him, to make a decision to stay with Baal and on the journey. They leave together; Sophie, alone, waiting to die, calls out Baal's name.

**Act II**

**Scene 13:**

Baal and Ekart come upon a hospital dive bearing champagne and friendship. The residents of the dive are all sick with rather gruesome diseases: Bolleboll has cancer, the beggar is mentally unstable, Googoo has pleurisy, and Masha has syphilis and a child. They sit, drink, and talk—the beggar tells the story of a man from the forest who *thought* he was healthy until he returned to the forest and gained a reverence for the tall trees that are older and higher; the man “died easier” because of it. Googoo also “sings” an aria about the meaninglessness of life, that all is nothing, to which
Ekart listens attentively. Baal, brutally rejects Googoo’s aria by reciting his own poem of freedom and life. Baal becomes uneasy with the company of the dive; he had thought to revel there with those celebrating decay, but alas, they are all ready to die: “This is no mudbath.”\(^\text{103}\) He walks over to the crying child and picks her up. He looks at her while reminiscing about a woman whom he had impregnated and left to die—not Sophie, but another. He and Ekart then leave to go wash themselves in the river.

**Scene 14:**

Baal enters from the river alone, reeling with sensual delight, happy. He calls out to Ekart, who calls back, slightly ashamed. He says that a woman just went by. Baal tells the audience, “I have no further need of women ...”

**Scene 15:**

On a highway, in the middle of the night, Ekart sleeps. Baal drunkenly runs across the field with his clothes open like a sleepwalker to wake Ekart. He has a poem that Ekart must hear. He reads a poem about a white virgin, dead, floating down a river. Though heaven has opened up to receive her body, the water weighs her down, and the rats have nested in her hair. God forgets her. Ekart notices that death and Johanna haunt Baal, which is both stimulating and fearful for him. Baal senses his end. They celebrate the decay of life and the distortion of the human body, that God sufficiently declared his true nature by “combining the sexual organ with the urinary tract.”\(^\text{104}\)

Yet, Ekart still resists letting Baal consume him entirely. He tells Baal that he has a woman. Baal is jealous.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 73.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 78.
Scene 16:

Baal has found the tree where Ekart has sex with his woman. She comes under the tree expecting to find Ekart, yet is quite surprised. Baal draws her close and then grabs her, refusing to let go. He drags her off screaming. He rapes her, though it is unknown if she lived. Baal sees his action as saving Ekart.

Scene 17:

Ekart has noticed Baal “eating” more and more; women have disappeared. Baal is content to keep on his path, refusing to succumb to death. He sings a song, “Death in the Forest,” which tells the story of a man rotting to death in the forest and how his friends abandon him to die there. As they flee the forest, they see the tree that he was lying under towering toward the sky with a bright light above it. Ekart sees through the subtext of the song. He sympathizes with Baal, retracting his accusation that Baal has been sleeping around with many women. Baal laughs.

Scene 18:

Baal and Ekart have returned to Augsburg after eight years. Baal's mother has died. Ekart sits in the tavern where Baal used to sing to the teamsters, talking with Watzmann about Baal and how he cannot abandon him, though he wants to. Johannes is there, wretched and low, drinking incessantly, longing for Johanna and a purpose. The waitress resembles Sophie. Baal slowly enters the tavern. Johannes comes to him, and, as he did eight years before, tells Baal his dreams, now turned into nightmares of Hell, knives, and Johanna still floating down the river, or down his throat where she gets stuck. Baal smashes the light and sings a song of remembrance
for the fields and his journey with Ekart. Ekart kisses the waitress and tells Baal to sing on. Watzmann puts on a light. Baal sees Ekart with the waitress, a ghost image of the days with Sophie and Ekart. He becomes angered. He attacks Ekart and they fight. Baal stabs Ekart with a knife. The light goes out again and Baal calls out, “Ekart!”

**Scene 19:**

Baal flees from the police, heading toward the forest. He cannot stop, for he has vowed to live on.

**Scene 20:**

Two mountain rangers search for Baal, but to no avail. They talk of Baal's life, trying to put the facts together. As they leave, the hidden Baal learns that Ekart died from the stab wound.

**Scene 21:**

Baal has returned to the lumberjacks in the forest. He lies in the cabin bed, sick and rotting, while the men play cards mocking him. They leave him there to go to work. One lumberjack even spits on him as he leaves. Another man stays for a moment to examine Baal, a moment of kindness for the undeserving, yet he leaves anyway. Baal, though decaying and dying in agony, refuses to stop. He drags himself out of the bed toward the door. He looks up to the stars, still questioning.

**End of play**
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