Introduction

THE AMERICAN PLAYS 1942–6

I

The plays in this volume are the ones which Brecht wrote during his six-year stay in the United States. He arrived on 21 July 1941, by ship from Vladivostok, after having set out from Helsinki two months earlier via Moscow and the Trans-Siberian railway. He left again by air on 31 October 1947, to return to Europe and in due course Berlin. Most of the time in between he spent living in the Los Angeles area where he had landed, though he also made prolonged visits to New York.

As in Munich nearly a quarter of a century earlier, his mentor in this new world was the now internationally successful novelist Lion Feuchtwanger, who persuaded him to remain on the West Coast where he would be close to Hollywood and its large German film colony, several of whom (like Fritz Lang and William Dieterle) were subscribing to the fund on which he and his family initially lived. Besides the three original plays which we print, therefore, and The Duchess of Malfi adaptation given in the appendix, his output in this period also embraced a number of rejected film outlines and synopses, including the story ‘Caesar and his Legionary,’ which was later taken into Tales from the Calendar, as well as an undetermined portion of the material for the film Hangmen Also Die, which Fritz Lang actually made. To this must be added the American version of Galileo, whose evolution is covered in volume 5, and a trickle of very fine but mostly rather short poems. His theoretical writing seems to have dried up almost entirely; major prose projects like the Caesar and ‘Tui’ novels went into cold storage; and he gave up writing short stories. So it is mainly on the contents of the present volume that his American experience must be judged.

To start with, its impact on his work was disastrous. This
was due above all to something that had happened on the journey: the death of his aide Margarete Steffin in Moscow from tuberculosis. Both the group of poems which he wrote 'After the death of my collaborator M.S.' (included in Poems 1913–1936) and his own private notes and journal entries suggest that this was among the severest blows he ever suffered; a month later he could write commenting on it:

for nearly a year i have been feeling deeply depressed as a result of the death of my comrade and collaborator steffin. up to now i have avoided thinking at all deeply about it. i'm not frightened so much of feeling pain as of being ashamed of the fact. but above all i have too few thoughts about it. i know that no pain can offset this loss, that all i can do is close my eyes to it. now and again i have even drunk a tot of whisky when her image rose before me. since i seldom do this even one tot affects strongly. in my view such methods are just as acceptable as others that are better thought of. they are only external, but this is a problem which i don't see how to resolve internally. death is no good; all is not necessarily for the best. there is no inscrutable wisdom to be seen in this kind of thing. nothing can make up for it.

Very soon after arriving, too, he learned of the fate of another close friend, Walter Benjamin, who had killed himself on the French frontier in 1940 rather than risk being handed over to the Gestapo. At the same time, however, the atmosphere of southern California was hardly such as to relieve his depression. This was partly a matter of its utter remoteness from the war—'Tahiti in urban form' he called it soon after arriving—though Pearl Harbor that autumn brought reality closer; partly a deep-seated resentment of its artificiality and underlying commercial ethos. Thus a journal entry of March 1942 (one of many to the same effect):

extraordinary in these parts how a universally demoralizing cheap prettiness stops one from leading anything like a cultivated, i.e., dignified life.
On top of this came the often degrading experience of working for the films, which bore particularly painfully on him as he became drawn into the making of Fritz Lang's Czech resistance movie during the summer of 1942. Taking stock towards the end of April, he listed all the factors hampering him, from his loss of Steffin to his lack of money, and concluded that 'for the first time in ten years I am not doing any proper work'.

Yet even while he was battling over that film (for adequate representation of the Czech people, for his theme song, for a part for Helene Weigel and a scriptwriter's credit for himself: on all of which points he failed), his outlook in other respects was beginning to improve. Materially, he and his family no longer had to live on $120 a month, but were able to move into a bigger and very much pleasanter house in Santa Monica (1063 26th Street; it is still there, though the area has been much built up) on the strength of the $10,000 which Lang got for him. Once again he was working with the composer Hanns Eisler, who had arrived there in April and for whom he now wrote his 'Hollywood Elegies', condensing much of what he felt about the civilization around him. He was also in touch with a young lecturer at UCLA called Eric Bentley, who differed from the bulk of his friends in being neither central European nor involved in show-business, and who seems immediately to have helped him to widen his English reading. From Feuchtwanger he heard that the Zurich Schauspielhaus wished to stage _The Good Person of Szechwan_, while Thornton Wilder had seen and been impressed by their production of _Mother Courage_. Still more changed for him when El Alamein was followed by Stalingrad (for it should never be forgotten how closely and continuously Brecht followed the war news). And during that October he and Feuchtwanger began collaborating on the war play, a modern Saint Joan story, which was to become _The Visions of Simone Machard_.

Like the other two original plays in this book, _Simone Machard_ derived from a scheme which Brecht had brought in
his head with him from Europe. Already perhaps inspired by the basic idea of Anna Seghers’ radio play (which he was later to adapt for the Berliner Ensemble, as described in volume 9), he had conceived it in outline two years earlier, soon after the collapse of France:

a young frenchwoman in orléans, working at a filling station while her brother is away, dreams and daydreams of being Joan of Arc and undergoing her fate. For the Germans are advancing on orléans. the voices Joan hears are voices of the people—the things the blacksmith and the peasant are saying. she obeys these voices and saves France from the enemy outside, but is conquered by the enemy within. the court that sentences her is packed with pro-english clerics: victory of the fifth column.

Returning to it just before Christmas 1941, he sketched out a play in nine scenes under the title Th’ Voices, whose social point should be (a) that vox dei is really vox populi, and (b) that ‘owners and criminals stand shoulder to shoulder against anyone who rejects the idea of property’. Exactly at what stage he first discussed this with Feuchtwanger is not clear, but he now laid the plan aside in order to read The Devil in France, the book in which the novelist described his own experiences in 1940, when he had been interned outside Aix-en-Provence, then managed to escape across the Pyrenees at the point where Benjamin was turned back. Other readings about the French débâcle followed, though Feuchtwanger, who had spent all the early part of his exile in that country, remained in essential ways better informed about it than Brecht. Their systematic collaboration began at the end of October, just before the shooting of Hangmen Also Die, which Brecht occasionally went to watch in the afternoons. They worked mostly in Feuchtwanger’s house, a quiet Spanish-style mansion on the mountains overlooking Santa Monica and the sea, which has now been made over to the University of Southern California. The curfew imposed after Pearl Harbor, together with their status as enemy aliens, prevented their meeting at night.
In one way the work went easily. The two men got on well together, and despite their disagreement as to Simone's age (for which see the notes, pp. 254 and 277) the division of responsibility seems to have given no trouble. Brecht set up the play's structure, which was then filled out in discussion between them—Feuchtwanger evidently doing his best to see that the events were probable and the details authentic—after which the actual writing of the scenes would be done by Brecht and checked over at the next meeting. 'He has a good sense of structure,' wrote Brecht approvingly, appreciates linguistic refinements, is also capable of making poetic and dramaturgical suggestions, knows a lot about literature, pays attention to arguments and is pleasant to deal with, a good friend.

at the same time, however, he

wants to have nothing to do with the technical or social aspects (epic portrayal, a-effect, characters made up of social rather than biological ingredients, class conflicts built into the story and so on), and tolerates all that merely as my personal style . . .

Perhaps because of the effect of the previous fifteen months of largely pointless work ('that kind of thing can indeed be bad for one's handwriting,' noted Brecht of the role allotted by Hollywood to its authors) he was less able than usual to resist the pressure of convention, for aside from the dream element (itself not particularly daring by local standards) the play is quite Aristotelian in its observation of the unities. Moreover the collaborators almost certainly had Hollywood's demands in mind, both in the play and in the somewhat pot-boiling novel which Feuchtwanger subsequently wrote on the same theme (it appeared in 1944 and is briefly summarized on p. 276 ff.). Before Brecht left for New York in February 1943, leaving the ending of the play still not finally settled, an agreeement was drawn up between himself, Ruth Berlau (who is neither named as a collaborator nor known to have had any
direct role in the work), and the Feuchtwangers, dividing the
stage and screen rights equally and giving Feuchtwanger all
rights to the proposed novel. Thereafter William Dieterle
took an interest, and arranged for a rough translation into
English, which had been completed by April. On the strength
of this (so Feuchtwanger then wrote to Brecht) the agents
Curtis Brown were hoping to persuade either Ashley Dukes
or the Muirs to make a good English version. At Columbia
Pictures the story editor was favourably impressed. Not so
Hanns Eisler, who had watched the development of the play
throughout and made occasional suggestions, and was now
embarking on the music. He told Brecht in May that he dis-
liked Simone’s instinctive patriotism and saw her as the poor
victim of a patriotic upbringing. Brecht had failed to show
that she was being exploited.

His visit to New York, which lasted from February to late
May 1943, launched Brecht on the writing of Schweyk in the
Second World War as well as on the first stage of The Duchess of
Malfi adaptation. There is a long history to Brecht’s fascina-
tion with Jaroslav Hašek’s Good Soldier Švejk or Schweik,
arguably the outstanding fictional figure of our century; and
his involvement in Erwin Piscator’s dramatization of 1928 is
discussed in our notes on the play. From then on he was
repeatedly returning to the theme, first hoping that Piscator
would film it in the USSR in the early 1930s, then expecting
to be involved in the same director’s scheme to film it else-
where in 1937; ‘you really mustn’t do it without me’, he told
Piscator that spring. Though these projects came to nothing,
Piscator never abandoned his interest in the Schweik saga, and
by 1943 was engaged in discussions with the Theater Guild in
New York with a view to a new stage production. Brecht may
not have been informed about this, but the fact that Hangmen
Also Die was a story of the Czech resistance (for Brecht and
Lang were presumably unaware that Heydrich’s—the hang-
man in question—assassins were for better or worse agents from Britain) almost certainly helped to turn his mind back to Hašek’s anti-militarist epic, since it was during his work with Lang that he noted in his journal that

once again I would like to do Schweyk, interspersed with scenes from [Karl Kraus’s] The Last Days of Mankind so people can see the ruling forces up top with the private soldier down below surviving all their vast plans.

The man who actually got him to work on this project was Ernst-Josef Aufricht, the former Berlin impresario who had first staged The Threepenny Opera in 1928 and was now in New York after escaping from Unoccupied France. Partly involved in the Office of War Information German broadcasts, he was also on the lookout for a libretto to interest Kurt Weill, who had become well established on Broadway with Lady in the Dark. He helped to put on a mixed programme at Hunter College (in New York) on 3 April in which Weill and Lotte Lenya performed some of the Brecht songs, including ‘Und was bekam des Soldaten Weib?’ which Weill had recently set; this finished with a turn by the Czech clowns George Voskovec and Jan Werich entitled ‘Schweik’s spirit lives on’. At some point he reintroduced the two former collaborators, and proposed that they should make a Schweik musical, quickly raising the necessary $85,000 from émigrés who remembered their previous success.

According to Brecht’s journal he then spent a week staying with the Weills at New City, where he outlined a version of The Good Person of Szechwan which the composer thought of producing, the Zurich première having taken place on 4 February, just before Brecht came to New York. For $500 (so Hanns Eisler later reported) he agreed to provide the Schweik libretto, of which he wrote Weill an outline in May (it is printed on pp. 279–288). Having reread Hašek’s novel in the train back to Los Angeles, he quickly settled down to work on the play and had finished the first three scenes by 9 June and the whole thing by the end of the month. Though it is quite
untrue to say as Aufricht does (in his memoirs) that 'Brecht had copied whole pages of dialogue from the Schweik book' the work clearly flowed very much more easily than *Simone Machard*, without the awkward changes and compromises that mar that work. Brecht himself thought well enough of it to term it (again, in his journal)

a counterpart to *Mother Courage*. compared with the schweik which i wrote for piscator around 27 (a pure montage based on the novel) the present second world war version is a lot sharper, and corresponds to the shift from the hapsburgs' well-ensconced tyranny to the nazis' invasion.

He was more doubtful about the formal arrangement proposed, and objected to the extensive rights given to Weill. 'I'm not a librettist', he told Ruth Berlau on 26 June:

It has got to be *my* play, which it is (not just an American version, as with the Szechwan play), and it's not only America I have to think of. What's more, there are political considerations involved in this play; I have to have an equal voice.

However, he and Weill met again in Hollywood to discuss things. Then at the beginning of July he sent the script to Weill, assuring him that it was not especially important that (the now differently-spelt) Schweik himself should talk as he does in the German version of the novel, where he speaks a now-defunct kind of Prague German. Paul Selver's translation, he found, had managed to be comic without this, and without attempting to find Anglo-Saxon equivalents for the social and political setting. He recommended getting the American poet Alfred Kreyborg to do a version of the play, saying that he was known to Ruth Berlau and 'has the right sort of opinions (liberal'). It is not clear whether Weill agreed, though apparently he was already nervous that the script would prove too un-American for Broadway. Brecht, however, went ahead and commissioned Kreyborg, paying him out of a loan from his friend the actor Peter Lorre, who he
hoped might play the name part. The translation was finished by 4 September, all except for the ‘Moldau Song’, which Brecht himself was still struggling to get right. The unavoidable effect was to infuriate Piscator, who not only regarded Schwytz almost as his own property—and indeed had spent much time in negotiations with the Hašek lawyer, who now gave the rights to Aufricht—but had been expecting Kreymborg to translate the 1928 version for the Theater Guild. On 23 September each of the collaborators got a stiff letter from him, in English, warning them that he had asked his lawyers to protect his rights.

Whether or not Piscator’s friendship with him was a factor, the finished play never appealed to Weill. Despite assurances that the landlady’s part had been written for Lotte Lenya and that he was welcome to get in an American lyric-writer for the songs, he refused to compose a note until the production was definitely fixed, so that by September Brecht had begun discussing alternative plans with Hanns Eisler. Nor did he pursue The Good Person of Szechwan project further, though Brecht had by then completed the American version and still hoped that they might come to a formal agreement. Yet, though Aufricht too had evidently rather lost heart, Brecht none the less went carefully over Kreymborg’s translation when it arrived and sent it back to New York for him and Ruth Berlau to revise. This had been done by the time of Brecht’s return to New York in mid-November. Shortly afterwards Weill, now in California, wrote to Brecht to summarize his objections. He could only collaborate, he said, on three conditions:

1. if the play is written by a top-class American author in the Ben Hecht category and put on by a top-class American producer.
2. if Lenya plays the publican.
3. if the play is written as a ‘musical play’, with more openings for music than the present version, as I do not under any circumstances wish to write incidental music.
As it stood, he thought that it

has no prospect of succeeding on the American stage without major alterations, unless there is some prominent American author (in the Ben Hecht category) who can find a way of rendering the humour of your script in American terms. Nor do I think the rights position clear enough to ensure the backing for a first-class Broadway production. But these are entirely private opinions, and I'm only telling you them because I don't want you to waste time and energy on a project which in my view hasn't much chance.

Similarly with The Good Person of Szechwan, where any agreement must be conditional on getting hold of an American writer. Their 'collaboration on the present version of Szechwan' was now at an end.

II

Around October, when Schweyk was still uppermost in his mind, Brecht went to visit Luise Rainer, who was living in Westwood not far from his 26th Street house, and without any personal acquaintance with him had signed the affidavit allowing him to come to the United States. She was then at the height of her fame after her performance in the film of The Good Earth, and as they were walking on the beach Brecht asked her what, of all plays, she would most like to appear in. When she named the Chalk Circle he instantly responded, for once again this was a theme which (as the editorial note will show) he had been taking up intermittently for several years previously; indeed he told her that he had suggested it in the first place to Klabund, whose adaptation had so successfully been performed by Elisabeth Bergner in Berlin in 1925. Miss Rainer in turn got in touch with a New York backer called Jules Leventhal, who was anxious to bring her to Broadway in a suitable work, and advised him that it would be worth commissioning Brecht and paying him a monthly salary till he had finished the play. This was formally arranged during
Brecht’s second New York visit, which lasted from mid-November to the middle of March. But he does not seem to have given Leventhal much information about his plans for the play, so that when the actress returned from performing to the troops in the Mediterranean she saw Brecht in New York to find out what was happening. According to her, he reacted so disagreeably as to make her call off her participation. None the less Brecht got down to the writing very soon after his return to Santa Monica, finishing the play in something close to its final version by 5 June, when he sent it off to her (so he noted in his journal). She was then ill with the after-effects of jaundice and malaria from her Mediterranean tour, and can no longer even recollect its arrival. She was, however, aware that the play had developed an extra act since Brecht started on it, and that this was connected with his wish to give his friend Oscar Homolka a good part as Azdak, something that had not originally been bargained for.

In the meantime Brecht’s financial circumstances, which nine months before had been very precarious, had changed as a result of the sale of the film rights of Simone Machard to MGM in February. This seems to have been due entirely to Feuchtwanger, who when Sam Goldwyn failed to understand the play got him to read the much more conventional Simone novel, buy the rights, and then buy those of the play as well. Brecht and Feuchtwanger had $50,000 to divide, in return for which there could be no stage production without Goldwyn’s permission for the next three and a half years. Perhaps this is one reason why Brecht seemed so little discouraged by the collapse of the original Chalk Circle plan (which was not yet Caucasian when his journal first mentions it in March) as to carry his preoccupation with it right through the summer of 1944. Thus he reworked the character of Grusha, whose goodness, like Simone’s patriotism, had seemed too arbitrary, and tried to make her tougher; he rewrote the prologue; and he asked his neighbour Christopher Isherwood to make a translation. When Isherwood refused it was arranged that James and Tanya Stern should translate the play for Leventhal, with
lyrics by W. H. Auden, who was sharing a house with them on Fire Island. (Part of their translation appeared in spring 1946 in the Kenyon Review, after which the script was lost, only to turn up ten years later on one of the microfilms deposited by Ruth Berlau in the New York Public Library.) By September he seems to have more or less finished the fully revised script, which was to remain virtually unchanged for the next ten years. That month his child by Ruth Berlau, called Michel like the child in the play, was born and died in Los Angeles. Coincidentally or not, he laid the play aside and by the end of the year was deeply involved instead in the Galileo project with Charles Laughton, who had recently become very taken with Brecht’s work.

Galileo aside—and it must be remembered that for all the effort Brecht put into it over the next two and a half years this was just a revision of a previous play—the only one of his ‘American’ works to reach the professional stage was The Duchess of Malfi, a play whose text has never formed part of the German collected works; it is printed as an appendix to the present volume. This interesting but largely frustrated adaptation was the result of Brecht’s keenness to write something for the most famous of all the exiled German actresses, Elisabeth Bergner, whom he had first met in his Munich days. Soon after his arrival in the United States he had shown her the script of The Good Person of Szechwan, which she found boring; the trouble (so he later noted in his journal) being that she could not conceive of the theatre audience as a group of people who would change the world—

so that the basic climate of this kind of theatre is alien to her: the beginner’s enthusiasm for a new millennium, the spirit of inquiry, the urge to unshackle everybody’s productivity. in her eyes it is all a new ‘style’, a matter of fashion, something arbitrary.

None the less she and her producer-husband, Paul Czinner, shared the Brechts’ first family Christmas in Santa Monica, entertained them in turn on New Year’s Eve, and set Brecht
to work on a film story, now lost, which according to him was successfully plagiarized by some other (unidentified) writer.

One of his projects for her was an adaptation of Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, with which he apparently thought of asking Feuchtwanger to help him. Instead, however, they tackled *Simone Machard*, and by the time this was finished and Brecht had set off for New York, either he or Miss Bergner had decided that another Jacobean work would suit her better, Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. Once in New York, Brecht got in touch with the poet H. R. Hays, a friend of Hanns Eisler’s who had already translated *Mother Courage* and *Lucullus* (the first two of his major plays to be published in the US) and also provided immigration affidavits. It was arranged with the Czinner’s that Hays and Brecht should adapt the play together, Hays (by his own account on p. 334) doing the actual writing while Brecht concentrated on story and structure. The work began in April 1943, and by 26 June, when Brecht was back in Santa Monica finishing *Schweyk*, a first script had been completed and copyrighted in both collaborators’ names. Though Brecht then showed it to Eisler and asked him to write the music nothing more seems to have been done till he returned to New York that winter, when he went back (in the words of his journal) to

work with hays and bergner on *The Duchess of Malfi* not completely finished, since bergner is short of time.

Meanwhile he asked W. H. Auden to collaborate, seemingly without mentioning or consulting Hays. ‘I have been treating Webster’s text with great care,’ he wrote on 5 December,

but I had to add a few new scenes and verses. These are now available in English, but it seems advisable to improve them and I have told Miss Bergner that no one could do it as well as you.

When Czinner told Hays of this proposal he walked out, leaving Auden to carry on as and when he could.

The whole project now seems to have simmered for some
eighteen months till in mid-summer of 1945 Brecht, who had come to New York a third time to help stage *The Private Life of the Master Race*, went to the Czinner’s summer place near Woodstock, Vermont, to finish it off ‘in the rough’. There is no more mention of it in his journal after that point, but a final Brecht–Auden script was copyrighted in April 1946, and it was at last decided to go ahead with its production. Spurred by the production of the original play at the Haymarket Theatre in London a year earlier, with Peggy Ashcroft as the Duchess and John Gielgud as Ferdinand, the Czinner engaged its director George Rylands, a friend of Auden’s and an eminent Cambridge Elizabethan scholar, but almost ludicrously out of tune with Brecht’s personality and ideas. The Duchess was of course Miss Bergner; Bosola, the black actor Canada Lee playing with a whitened face; John Carradine and Robert Speaight were also in the cast; the music was by Benjamin Britten, ‘arranged’ by Ignatz Strasfrogel; Harry Bennett did the sets. Brecht’s reactions can be gauged from the ultimatum which he sent Czinner after seeing the Boston production that September (see p. 421). His criticisms were disregarded and at the Broadway opening at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on 15 October his contribution—which no critic could have detected once Rylands had chosen mainly to return to Webster—was no longer mentioned, credit being given to Auden alone. It is not known whether he even attended, despite his strong condemnatory note. The play got a bad press and ran only a few days.

Such was the one tangible result of Brecht’s four attempts to write for Broadway. As for the others, the *Simone Machard* film was never made, first because Theresa Wright, whom MGM had cast for the part of the adolescent girl, was inappropriately expecting a baby, and then because the liberation of France in 1944 made the theme so much less topical. It remained MGM’s property, so Feuchtwanger told Brecht as late as 1956, when the latter wanted to propose it to Cavalcanti, director of the previous year’s second-rate *Puntila* film. Around the same time there were various inquiries about the
play—from Akimov in Leningrad, from Norman Lloyd in
New York, and from Jean-Marie Serreau and Benno Besson
for a mixed German-French tour—and these led Brecht to
stress that

the most important thing for any production of Simone is
that the title part must on no account be played by a young
actress—not even one that looks like a child. It must be an
eleven-year-old, and one that looks like a child.

This principle was followed in the eventual première of the
play at Frankfurt in March 1957, which Brecht of course never
saw. For there Simone was played by a child who had been
trained specially for the part by Ruth Berlau in Berlin. Eisler,
who had started writing the music in 1943, now finished it off
and the whole production was a great success. None the less
Eisler himself once again did not like it. ‘The play’s too heroic
for me,’ he told Hans Bunge later. It was ‘a tribute to heroism.
And that’s not right. I don’t need to tell you how utterly con-
trary to Brecht’s whole way of looking at things that is.’ Nor
did the Berliner Ensemble ever stage it, though there was an
East German television version that included a number of
the Ensemble actors.

Schweyk remained a play, which Brecht never amended so as
to provide the greater musical opportunities which Weill had
asked for. None the less in the autumn of 1947, when Wolt-
gang Langhoff at the Deutsches Theater in (East) Berlin was
planning to present it, it was to Weill that Brecht turned for
the incidental music. Once again Weill put him off, and there
is no further record of this plan. Eighteen months later, how-
ever, when Brecht was setting up his Ensemble, he hoped to get
Peter Lorre to come to Berlin to create the part. Again, it was
not possible to organize a production before Brecht’s death
in 1956, though in 1955 (if we are to believe Hanns Eisler’s
slightly erratic recollections) he had asked Eisler to start
writing the music and to give it priority over that for Simone
Machard. ‘Interesting that you can be so amusing,’ he told Eisler
when he brought him the result a few weeks before he died.
He made me play it, and I still see him smiling at my weaknesses and his advantages.

In the event the play was first staged not in Germany at all but at the Polish army theatre in Warsaw, where Ludwik René directed it in January 1957. This was nearly fourteen years after it had been written. The Duchess of Malfi adaptation has never been performed again.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle was put on in America by students at Northfield, Minnesota, under the direction of Henry Goodman (now of UCLA Drama Department) who had been bitten with Brecht on seeing the Galileo production of July 1947. This took place in May 1948 after Brecht had left the country, and used Eric and Maja Bentley’s translation, which had at some point supplanted that by the Sterns and Auden. At Brecht’s suggestion the Bentleys omitted all reference to the prologue, which led to rumours alternatively that they had suppressed it as too Communist or that Brecht added it later to give a pro-Soviet flavour to an otherwise delightfully unpolitical play. Two and a half years later, when Brecht was back in Berlin, he saw the Austrian composer Gottfried von Einem in Munich and tentatively arranged for a German-language première at the Salzburg Festival, to be directed by Berthold Viertel with Homolka as Azdak and Käthe Gold as Grusha. Though their plan never materialized, he managed to interest Carl Orff in the idea of writing the music: something that Hanns Eisler found uncongenial. This was partly because there was no real certainty of a production, but above all because in his view ‘Brecht was pursuing a chimera’:

Brecht said he wanted a kind of music to which lengthy epics can be narrated. After all, Homer was sung. He used to say, ‘Isn’t it possible to write a setting or note down a cadence that would permit the delivery of a two-hour epic?’

By his own account Eisler made one or two sketches before
deciding that this was beyond him. In 1933 therefore when Brecht determined to stage the play himself with the Ensemble he went instead to Paul Dessau, who had already in America been interested enough in the 'Augsburg Chalk Circle' version of the story to draft out the framework of an oratorio. Following very much the requirements posed by Brecht in the note on p. 301, Dessau provided him with the kind of orientally-derived music which he wanted for his recycling of a popular narrative tradition still observable in North Africa and the Far East. According to the composer's Notizen zur Noten (Reclam, Leipzig 1947), he made use of Azerbaijani folk-tunes and rounded the play off with an extended dance which Brecht never staged. The production itself took about eight months to rehearse before its première in June 1934. Though it fell foul of the party critics in East Germany it made a great impression at the Paris International Theatre Festival the following year, since when the play has been among the best-known of Brecht's works. After 1964 it was even one of those most performed in the USSR, though according to the critic Kats (reported by Henry Glade), the prologue is simply not playable before a Soviet audience, presumably because it gives too unreal a picture of conditions there.

Particularly among those who disapprove of his decision to settle finally in East Germany, it has become common to contrast Brecht's six years in America with his seven years in East Berlin. And certainly the latter were not productive so far as his original writing went. But his American record is not all that impressive either, at least by the standards which he had set himself in Scandinavia and before that in pre-Nazi Berlin. Of course his initial difficulties did not last for ever, and some of the poems which he wrote from 1942 on show new qualities of concentrated observation which were a genuine gain; nor were they any the less deeply political for
being independent of day-to-day party tactics. Though he always remained in some measure dependent on the goodwill of his fellow exiles—it is difficult, for instance, to think of his involvement in *The Duchess of Malfi* as due to anything less than a wish to help on the Czinner’s part—he did gradually make his mark among the non-Germans with whom he came in contact, and here his addiction to English literature, whether classical or criminal, must surely have helped. He worked hard and systematically, witness the ‘plan for the day’ which he drew up on concluding *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Santa Monica in 1944:

get up 7 A.M. newspaper, radio. make coffee in the little copper pot. morning: work. light lunch at twelve. rest with crime story. afternoon: work or pay visits. evening meal at 7 P.M. then visitors. night: half a page of shakespeare or waley’s collection of chinese poems. radio. crime story.

But three of our four plays are to a greater or lesser extent flawed, and there was only one which he chose to stage himself when he had the chance. Thus *Simone Machard* not only reflects Brecht’s uncertainties while writing it (as our editorial note attempts to show), but is in essential ways inconsistent with his own attitude, just as Eisler—a judge whom he always respected—pointed out. (Of course some audiences like it all the better for that.) *Schweyk*, despite its success in capturing Hašek’s tone of voice, has none of the panoramic sweep of the novel, or even of the Piscator adaptation, while there is something deeply inappropriate about pitting the amiable Good Soldier—so perfect an instrument for undermining the whiskered Emperor Franz Josef—against political psychopaths and mass murderers. Both plays, moreover, take a romanticized view of the resistance movements, whose topical appeal they were in some measure surely designed to exploit. Since *The Duchess of Malfi* was so mangled that there is difficulty in reconstructing Brecht’s conception of it—something that he never seems to have wished to do himself, to judge from the absence of any German version—the only one of the
American plays to succeed in Brecht’s own terms is *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, whose original translation was dug out by us and revised by the Sterns and Auden in 1959. Despite its awkward combination of two largely unrelated stories (though these had long been married up in the author’s mind) and the uncharacteristic sweetness of the heroine, it is a truly epic work, embodying many of Brecht’s special ideas, tastes, and talents. In many opinions it is a masterpiece.

It is significant that although this play was commissioned for a Broadway production Brecht himself could attribute its structure to ‘a revulsion against the commercialized dramaticity of Broadway’. For everything else that Brecht wrote in America, apart from his poems, was written for more or less commercial ends; and if he kicked against the commercial spirit it was surely because he knew that he was being conditioned by it. Most obviously this was so of his film stories, which were without exception what he termed ‘daily bread and butter work’ even though he could hardly help imbuing them with some of his own qualities (whence, no doubt, their ill success). But *Simone Machard* too was written with one eye at least to the film industry; *Schweyk* was to be a Broadway musical, while not only the other two plays but also the adaptation of *Galileo* were written with Broadway productions in view. For the first time in the fourteen years since the success of *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht was writing exclusively for the commercial stage in its most nakedly competitive form; nor was anything that he is known to have written in America (apart possibly from a short unpublished ballet libretto for Lotte Goslar) performed by the students, musicians, or left-wing amateurs who had helped to shape some of his most original works. He was never particularly good at working for the box-office or respecting other people’s conventions, while his natural cussedness made him spoil any chance he might have had of succeeding: witness his wanton (was it unconsciously deliberate?) antagonizing of Leventhal and Luise Rainer. One might almost say that it was his very failures that justify this group of plays.
Why then did he never make contact with any other form of theatre (or cinema) in the United States during those years? Perhaps it was the result of his experiences over the New York production of *Mother* in 1935 that alienated him so from the American left-wing stage; certainly he seems to have had little use for the ideas of Odet or John Howard Lawson, while even so good a friend as Gorelik was largely in disagreement with him. Nor was university theatre then anything like so active as it has since become. Perhaps too the identification of Hollywood and Broadway with the war effort was itself misleading, for Brecht was always primarily concerned to see the Nazis beaten. *Hangmen, Simone*, and *Schweyk* all deal with the same theme of European resistance to Hitler, while the revised prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* sets it too within the framework of the war, despite the remoteness of its legend. Oddly enough he never again took up those American themes which had fascinated him earlier, from *In the Jungle of Cities* to *Arturo Ui*, in other words from Munich days right up to his departure from Europe. As Professor James Lyon has pointed out, he did come to take a good deal of interest in the affairs of his half-adopted country and at one point considered basing a script on Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology*; but the only direct reflection of his surroundings is in his poems. Much must have been due to his lack of money and dependence on the German colony’s esteem for him; much too to the lack of his two most-valued women collaborators, Margarete Steffin and Elisabeth Hauptmann (though the latter was then living elsewhere in the US). One can only speculate what might have happened if he had come into contact with the student movement as it later developed, or chosen to associate himself with the blacks. As it was he did not.

He already seems to have decided to return to Germany well before his summons to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947. 1946 is a mysteriously blank year in his life, when he wrote virtually no poems, worked on no plays other than *Galileo*, and made no entries in
his journal (unless the relevant pages have somehow been lost). But by that winter he was already planning his return, to judge from his correspondence with Piscator and Caspar Neher, to whom he reported receiving offers ‘to be able to use the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm for certain purposes’. His hearing by J. Parnell Thomas’s committee the following autumn was in some measure a by-product of their investigation of the motion-picture industry, though his only real link with the so-called Hollywood Ten was his friendship with Donald Ogden Stewart and his wife. What clearly was of more interest to the investigators was his association with Hanns Eisler and through him with his brother Gerhart, the one genuinely important international Communist functionary whom they were able to unearth. This was in some measure due to the Eislers’ sister Ruth Fischer, who had been one of the leaders of the German Communist Party in her youth, knew Brecht, and now coined the pleasant phrase for him ‘minstrel of the GPU’. Hanns was effectively deported in February 1948; Gerhart (whose prosecution was called for by Richard Nixon in his maiden speech as a Representative) left the US on a Polish liner and was lucky to escape arrest. Brecht stood up well under examination, made the committee laugh, and left for Europe under his own steam a day later. He never came back.

The Editors