Grub first, then ethics | The significance of food in six of Brecht's plays

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GRUB FIRST, THEN ETHICS:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD IN SIX OF BRECHT’S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

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Grub First, Then Ethics:
The Significance of Food in Six of Brecht's Plays (74 pp.)

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This thesis examines the numerous ways in which Brecht uses food as a vehicle to express his political, social, economic, and moral views. The six plays studied are Mann ist Mann (written 1924-1926), Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe (written 1929-1930), Die Mutter (written 1931-1932), Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (written 1938-1939), Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti (written 1940), and Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg (written 1941-1944). The thesis discusses food as an element within the dramatic structure of a work, the actual appearance of food on stage and how it functions within a particular scene, and how food reflects Brecht's views on class distinction, revolution, and war. A background sketch of Brecht's basic philosophy, particularly with respect to society and the theater, is included.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the subject of food and its significance in Brecht's plays arose out of a seminar in twentieth century drama. I noticed that the Brecht plays we read seemed to put an unusual emphasis on food. Thinking back to other Brecht plays I had read, I remembered that in these, too, food was much more than incidental. I decided to study exactly how and why this basic element of life was so important in his plays.

Of course, food is only one of the many vehicles through which Brecht conveys his ideas. He concerns himself extensively with many other aspects of everyday life and of society. Sex, shelter, money, work, religion, and figures of authority could all be examined as to their functions within Brecht's plays. For example, shelter is of primary importance in the play Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, and sex plays a central role in the Dreigroschenoper. In analyzing these subjects, one could come to many of the same conclusions as one reaches in analyzing food, for Brecht looks at everything in his plays as a vehicle through which to expand and illuminate
his ideas. A house, or in the case of *Der gute Mensch*, a tobacco shop, is not just a building—it is an example and symbol of one of man's basic needs. The idea of shelter goes beyond protection from the elements and assumes a political and social nature. It is something which people are entitled to and yet which all too often is denied them because of the way society is structured. In essence, Brecht does the same thing with food in using it as a central structural and thematic element. It becomes more than just something to eat, and takes on political and social significance. The concept of nourishment, the harsh reality of hunger, the connotations attached to certain items of food, and the visual impact of reactions to actual food on stage are all vitally important to Brecht. He manipulates food as he does all of the details of his plays. He endows it with a symbolism, a significance, which expands on the initial or overt reason it appears in a scene. The study of this significance will provide insight not only into how Brecht communicates his ideas, but into these ideas themselves.

Because of his philosophy of theater, to be discussed in the following chapter, Brecht wants to reach people at their most basic and familiar level. Since food is the most basic and therefore the most universal of
man's needs, it stands to reason that Brecht would often highlight it in the structure and language of his plays. His political, social, economic, and moral views can be discerned in what the characters do with food or in what they say about food, hunger, and eating.

The fascinating aspect of this study is the myriad ways in which food comes into play in Brecht's works. I have chosen to study six of his major plays: *Mann ist Mann* (written 1924-1926), *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthoefe* (written 1929-1930), *Die Mutter* (written 1931-1932), *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (written 1938-1939), *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* (written 1940), and *Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg* (written 1941-1944). These plays are taken from all periods of Brecht's work and are representative of how he utilizes food in propounding his ideas. First, I will discuss food as an element within the dramatic structure of a work. Secondly, I will examine the actual appearance of food on stage and how it functions within a particular scene. Finally, I will consider how food reflects Brecht's views on class distinction, revolution, and war.

Before entering into these discussions, however, it would be helpful to review Brecht's basic philosophies. The following chapter, therefore, gives a background
sketch of Brecht and his ideas, particularly with respect to society and the theater.
Chapter 2

BRECHT: A BACKGROUND SKETCH

Bertolt Brecht, who was born in Augsburg in 1898 and died in East Berlin in 1956, is a man whose life and works are so enigmatic they are still being debated by scholars today. For example, his social, political, and moral philosophies contain many contradictions and paradoxes, and thus are difficult to summarize. Nevertheless, before his particular usage of food can be examined, something should be said about his basic views and their development, and about how these views directed his writing. Because the choices Brecht made in the wording, the imagery, and the settings of his plays were influenced by his philosophy, it is in these instances that references to food often play a meaningful role.

Brecht's social consciousness was apparent even when he was an adolescent. Although he came from an upper class family, he was wholly aware of the injustices suffered by those who were less fortunate than he. He found the rift between the rich and the poor unjust and base, as Norbert Kohlhase points out:
It was to express this social consciousness that he began writing.

Brecht's first plays written during 1918-1926 were in rebellion against the traditional bourgeois sentimentality and morality of the theater. Somewhat later, in 1927, Brecht began studying Marx and Engels, whose writings influenced much of the philosophical basis of his work. Moreover they provided a framework for his development, helped to define his concern with the problems of society, pointed out specific goals toward which to work, and outlined some of the methods with which one should work toward them.

One of the most important areas with which Marx dealt and which interested Brecht was economics. This concern with economics is apparent as a theme which threads through many of his works. Another of Marx's theories in which Brecht fervently believed was that the theater should and could be a tool with which to work for the change of society. Frederic Ewen comments on Brecht's reaction to Marxist theory:
He demands a closer examination of how drama is rooted in the "substructure of society," i.e., the social milieu. He asks for a theater which would create the "ideological superstructure" for the "effective and real rearrangement of our present mode of existence."  

Unfortunately, such an idealistic program for the theater is hardly workable, but Brecht hoped to reach at least some of the common people with his concept of the theater. He called this concept "epic theater."

For Brecht, epic theater seemed the best vehicle for putting into practice some of the Marxist theories of theater with which he concurred. It was in direct contrast to the traditional Aristotelian theater. In the Aristotelian theater, the public was supposed to identify so strongly with the character on stage that the action became almost real. The public could thus experience all the emotions of the characters and in this way the theater would provide a cathartic experience for the audience. The whole concept is based on feeling rather than on thought. Brecht rejected this premise. He wanted his audience to think and to reason. Epic theater was designed to present situations to the audience which they were to judge, as Hanna Arendt explains:

Epic theater differs from traditional dramaturgy in that it is not concerned with characters, their development in the world, and their conflicts
with it, but with certain series of events under particular circumstances which the public is to understand as its own in typified form, and in which types act, whose modes of behavior are measured against the events themselves.4

In order to keep the audience at a distance, the actors, as well as the play itself, had to avoid the traditional practices of the theater. The various methods with which this end was accomplished are grouped under the term "Verfremdung."

In its broadest sense, "Verfremdung" is "a bringing to consciousness of a normal procedure of everyday life."5 Brecht wanted to make people reevaluate the situations and conditions which they have routinely accepted. In order to do this he had to make the common appear uncommon, the old appear new. To accomplish this he felt that he must try to diminish the audience's involvement with the characters and the action of the play. He instructed the actors to play their parts as if they were merely telling a story; he interjected songs, had actors step out of their roles and address the audience, and employed masks, placards, and other distractions. Parody, alienation of the language itself, and the practice of setting plays in foreign or fictitious countries were other techniques Brecht enlisted to put the familiar and commonplace in a new light.
Brecht's concept of the epic theater stemmed from his belief that literature, and especially the theater, should be instrumental in working for social and political change. This belief was also one of the main tenets of the literary movement called Social Realism. Although many critics disagree about whether or not Brecht's work is an example of social realistic drama in the technical sense, Brecht did write his plays with the doctrines of Social Realism in mind: he sought to incorporate the "educational influence of the socialistic spirit," to represent the workingman's point of view, and to make people aware that they are able to master their own fate.

Brecht was not only concerned with the political and social aspects of man's existence, but also with the moral aspect, as Bamber Gascoigne points out:

Moral paradox is at the root of Brecht's theater. It arises throughout his plays from the clash between ends and means, between the intention and the effect, between the individual and the world.

Brecht deals with the concept of morality as it relates to the social and economic circumstances of the people. He does not set up an absolute measure. Willett makes this comment about Brecht's attitude: "What seems at first like amorality is really a nagging concern with the circumstances under which moral conduct is (a) possible
Brecht contends that people are by nature good, but that the world is evil. It has been made so by political and social systems which allow the few to control and oppress the many. In other words, if people are immoral and evil, it is circumstance which makes them so. The solution is to change the world, not to judge the people.

In seeking not to judge the individual, Brecht understood that the question of morality was not something clear-cut. He sought to portray the many sides of a moral question, as Willett points out:

The ethical confusion of a confused society means that evil actions may be undertaken from good intentions, or that good actions may have evil consequences, or that evil intentions may be thrust on men who carry them out laboriously and with reluctance: that the individual himself is often a peculiar mixture of extreme good and extreme bad.

Brecht does not deal with morality in his plays as a separate problem. For Brecht the moral, social, economic and political issues of society were interrelated and inseparable. Consequently he deals with them as such in his plays.

However, Brecht's theories and ideologies did not always reveal themselves in the way he intended. There is often a discrepancy between what he wanted to
do and what was actually accomplished. For instance, his epic theater was meant to put the audience at a distance so that they would not get emotionally involved, yet audiences are still deeply moved by certain passages in his plays, such as the scene in *Mutter Courage* in which Katrin is killed while trying to warn the town of an impending attack. Also, the audience often identifies with the wrong character, or sees a character in a different light from the one intended. For example, the audience often tends to see Mother Courage not as a ruthless businesswoman, but as a mother struggling to keep her children alive in a terrible war. Indeed, she is both of these, but one identity should not obscure the other. The greatest irony lies perhaps in Brecht's belief that he was writing "theater" for the "Volk," when in fact the majority of the common working population probably had no occasion to see his plays.

As is suggested above, the complexity of Brecht's art cannot be separated from the complexity of the artist himself. Contradictions and paradox can be found again and again in Brecht's work. For example, he is strongly pacifistic in some plays, and yet condones violence in others. Kohlhase explains this seeming contradiction this way: "Brecht sieht auch Gewalt als moralisch indifferent. Ihre Rechtfertigung bestimmt sich danach,
A Marxist, Brecht believed in the dialectic method. Perhaps it was partly for this reason that he was not afraid of contradictions and ambiguities in his works. Indeed, he often purposely made use of the dialectics within his plays. Several of his main characters are made up of contradictory elements. In the play *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*, Puntila is kind and affable when he is drunk, but ruthless and unbending when he is sober. Benno von Wiese comments on this dialectical tendency in Brecht's works:

Das Brechtsche Drama stellt zur Diskussion und zwar die Veraenderbarkeit des Menschen inmitten widerspruchsvoll sozialer Verhaeltnisse. Darin ist Brecht nicht "naiv", sondern ironisch reflektierend. Dieses Drama verfaehrt nicht dialektisch, sondern macht die Dialektik selbst zu seinem Gegenstand. Daraus erlaeren sich die zahlreichen Widersprueche, die sich bei Brecht fast ueberall.. . .finden.

Brecht himself welcomed discussion and varying opinions about his work. He wanted his work to be stimulating; he wanted his audience to find a way out of the contradictions and paradoxes which occur in his plays.

If, from this discussion, there is one thing to be singled out as the basic, driving force in Brecht's work, it is his compassion for the common man and the
conviction that society can be changed for man's benefit. It is the common man he attempts to speak to, and the common man's dilemma he seeks to portray. No matter what the theme or setting, his attack on society as it stands is clear. Although Brecht says his solution is Marxism, most of his plays are not dogmatic. Except in his "Lehrstuecke" of the period ca. 1930-1935, he leaves the solution up to the people, trusting that they will find the correct one. Brecht's social consciousness prevailed over everything else--his political views, his personal enjoyment, his success, and even at times his poetic sensibilities. His dedication, however, succeeded in producing theory and art which hold a place of high esteem among the literary endeavors of the twentieth century.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 2


9. Willett, p. 82.


Chapter 3

FOOD AS A MAIN ELEMENT WITHIN THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

In three of the plays being studied, Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg, Mann ist Mann, and Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, food plays an important role within the dramatic structure; in Schweyk it is an important force in the plot, in Mann ist Mann it is a symbolic reminder of the main character and in Johanna it is a symbol connected with a religious group. In Schweyk Brecht takes a relatively unimportant character from Hasek's The Good Soldier: Schweyk, and turns him into a central character, whose obsession with meat is one of the main driving forces of the plot. Much of the action of the play hinges on Baloun's desperate need for meat, and the efforts made to obtain it for him. In Mann ist Mann, the reference is much subtler. The need for food, in this case a fish for dinner, is the impetus which starts Galy Gay on the fateful journey which will eventually change him into the soldier Jeraiah Jip. Although this detail is not dwelt upon, it is brought up throughout the play. It is used as a symbolic reminder of the old Galy Gay. In Johanna soup is a symbol which is connected with the Black Straw Hats and their attempts to minister to the poor. The
development of Johanna's attitude toward this religious group is reflected in what she does with the soup.

Let us begin by examining Baloun's obsession with meat in *Schweyk*. The character Baloun is taken from Hasek's book *The Good Soldier: Schweyk*, but he has undergone considerable changes in Brecht's hands. Hasek's Baloun appears only briefly and intermittently, but Brecht's character is one of the central figures of the play. The main character is, of course, Schweyk, and the plot follows his adventures. However, many of the incidents in the play are precipitated by Baloun's desire for a meal containing meat. Here again there is a definite change from Hasek. In Hasek, Baloun will gobble up anything in sight, but in Brecht the obsession has to do specifically with meat. The change occurs because Brecht wants to make the obsession the element around which the plot moves. Obtaining meat during the war is much more difficult than obtaining other kinds of food. Thus he makes the obsession a point of conflict. Baloun is caught between his desire for meat and his moral obligation to avoid the circumstances which would provide it for him, such as joining the German army.

Baloun's situation is an exaggeration of the conflict that a deprived person must often confront: choosing between being moral or virtuous, and satisfying
life's necessities. There is a good deal of humor in Baloun's predicament because he is not starving, he is merely starving for meat. The idea that a couple of pounds of meat could make a person upright or bring him back from the verge of suicide is somewhat ludicrous; however the converse is not so ludicrous. Behind the exaggeration is the point that the lack of food can drive a person to just such extremes.

Baloun's friends, Schweyk and Frau Kopecka, are concerned with satisfying Baloun's desire, not merely because they feel sorry for him, but because they want to keep him out of trouble. Frau Kopecka gives an example: "...gestern hat er den Herrn Bretscheider von der Gestapo,...so lang nach den Portionen in der deutschen Armee gefragt, dass er fast als Spion verhaftet worden ist." (Schweyk, p. 15) The next day he is doing the same thing with an SS-man, and is almost taken to the recruiting station because the SS-man thinks he wants to volunteer for the army. It is this danger, especially, which Schweyk and Kopecka want to avoid. The Czechs are definitely not in sympathy with the Germans, and a good Czech would never voluntarily help them. But for Baloun, being a good Czech is not easy: "...ihr muesst was unternehmen mit mir, sonst verkomm ich vollends, ich kann nicht mehr ein guter Tchech sein aufn leeren Magen."
(Schweyk, p. 15) Brecht is making a very important point here, one which he makes in many of his other plays as well. It is embodied in the famous phrase from his Dreigroschenoper: "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral." There is no question about whether Baloun wants to be good and upright, but his need, in this case a distorted need for meat, is beginning to take precedence over his moral sense of right and wrong. Baloun's need is a caricature of man's basic drive for food; however, the idea Brecht is trying to express is still valid and applicable to anyone who has reached the limits of endurance: one cannot be expected to be more concerned with morals than with survival.

In the search for a solution to Baloun's problem, Frau Kopecka turns to the young Prochazka, a butcher who expresses his love for her. She challenges his love by asking "...ob sie [die Liebe] zum Beispiel zu zwei Pfund Geselchtem auslangen wuerd." (Schweyk, p. 17) Prochazka is hurt: "Wie koennens sowas Materialistisches aufbringen in so einem Moment!" (Schweyk, p. 17) But Kopecka stands by her request. This incident is a good example of Brechtian Verfremdung. Traditionally, true love does not rest on material proof, but is something spiritual and ethereal. It is measured by such similes as "deep as the sea," "broad as the ocean," "more than
life itself." By interjecting two pounds of meat as a measure of love, he jolts the reader into sitting up and taking notice. What is expected is replaced by something unexpected. Brecht brings the concept of love down to earth, but in doing so, he is not diminishing its importance. Prochazka would be risking his life by bringing the two pounds of smoked meat.

Prochazka fails to prove his love, however. He is frightened because Schweyk has been taken away by the Gestapo, and he does not bring the meat. Baloun, of course, is very depressed, and is angry with Prochazka:

Baloun: Das is ein Verbrecher, der Prochazka.
Frau Kopecka (zornig): Redens keinen Unsinn. Die Verbrecher sind die Nazis, wo die Leut so lang bedrohn und martern, bis sie ihre bessere Natur verleugnen. (Schaut durchs Fenster.) Der da kommt jetzt, is ein Verbrecher, nicht der Rudolf Prochazka, der schwache Mensch. (Schweyk, p. 44)

Brecht withholds moral judgment of Prochazka. He is weak, but not bad. Brecht makes a point here which is found throughout his work: man is basically good, but the social and political circumstances do not allow him to express his goodness. These circumstances are usually materialistically determined. They can be seen in terms of material possessions—a conflict between those who have them and those who have not. The people in power are the
ones who have control over life's necessities, and in this play it is the Nazis who are abusing this power.

There are further incidents in which Baloun's meat-mania almost gets him arrested. He is finally so desperate he threatens to commit suicide. But Schweyk arrives with a package of meat, and it appears that Baloun will finally get his meal. Unfortunately the meat never gets to the kitchen. Bullinger, the German platoon leader, arrives to search the "Kelch." During the questioning, Baloun, who cannot wait to have a look at the meat, has the package passed to him. It is traced back to Schweyk, who is taken away for dealing in the black market, and the meat is taken as evidence. This time Baloun's greediness has caused something very serious. Schweyk has been arrested and will be drafted into the German army to go to the Russian front.

The scene follows Schweyk's adventures, but Baloun's problem is not forgotten. As Schweyk marches along in the Russian snow, the "Kelch" comes into view. We see Baloun on his knees, swearing that he will never voluntarily join the Nazi army. He does this on an empty stomach, something he could not bring himself to do earlier. The idealism involved in making the vow without compensation is tempered somewhat by the arrival of Prochazka, who, after all, has brought the meat. At
the wedding feast, Frau Kopecka says, "und zum Hochzeitsmahl kriegen Sie Ihr Geselchtes, Herr Baloun. Geschworn hams ohne, das ehrt Sie, aber damit Sie den Schwur halten, is ein Stickl Fleisch hin und wieder recht am Platz." (Schweyk, p. 96) Brecht is lauding the strength of human character, but at the same time is cautioning that one must not expect too much of it. One's vows are much easier to keep if one has a full stomach.

Thus Baloun's story has a happy ending, and it is intimated that Schweyk, too, will survive the hardships of the war and will one day return to the "Kelch."

Brecht's adaptation of Hasek's book is tightly knit. The plot revolves around Baloun's obsession with meat, but this obsession is not just a device. From it stems the central conflict of the play: how to be a "good Czech" in the midst of the deprivation of war. Each character does this in his own way, but we are made especially conscious of it in Baloun's trials. In Schweyk, the characters truly show the triumph of the "little man" over the forces which seek to control him.

In Mann ist Mann, a much earlier play, it is those outside forces which triumph over the little man. The theme of the play is to show the malleability of an individual's character. In the course of the play, the
main character, Galy Gay, completely loses his identity and acquires a new one. Food is not central to the plot or to the basic theme of _Mann ist Mann_, yet it is food, specifically a fish, which initiates the action of the play and serves throughout as a symbolic reminder of the main character's original personality.

The first scene of the play begins with a discussion about buying a fish for dinner. It is part of Brecht's ever-present acknowledgment of man's basic needs. Typically, Brecht immediately makes the connection between the need for nourishment and the means to procure it, establishing the economic situation of Galy Gay, a porter in the city of Kilkoa. Galy Gay is shown at once to be a poor man when he makes such comments as, "... entsprechend unserem Einkommen..." and "Es uebersteigt das nicht die Verhaeltnisse eines Packers..." (_Mann ist Mann_, p. 7) The rest of the scene deals with characterizing Galy Gay and foreshadowing coming events. It closes, however, with another reference to the fish, as Galy Gay tells his wife to put the water for the fish on to boil. This comment provides another point of reference connected with the original Galy Gay, and also serves to increase the tension, as Galy Gay's ten-minute shopping trip stretches into hours and finally days.

From this point on, the fish is no longer important
as actual food. It takes on a connective importance associated with the Galy Gay who began the play, a poor porter, a meek man who cannot say no, a man who is too naive and at the same time too greedy for his own good. The main idea behind the play is to show that a person is not an unchangeable entity, that one can change or be changed through design and circumstance. Galy Gay, manipulated by members of a machine gun unit who need a fourth member, is eventually transformed into the soldier Jeraiah Jip, and is last characterized as a domineering, cold-blooded human fighting machine.

The fish plays an important part in underlining this transformation. It functions in two different ways at the same time. In one way, as the object of Galy Gay's journey into the city, it changes as events take place which lead to Galy Gay's transformation. He starts out to buy a fish, but ends up with first, a cucumber; next, several boxes of cigars and bottles of beer; and finally, a fake elephant. Each acquisition signals a step in Galy Gay's change to Jeraiah Jip, and each seems further removed from the original object of Galy Gay's journey, the fish for dinner.

This brings us back to the second function of the fish--a reminder of the Galy Gay who begins the play. Galy Gay is under an obligation to return home (after all,
the water is already boiling). But the more Galy Gay acts the part of the soldier, the less obligated he feels, until finally both the person of Galy Gay and the obligation disappear. Let us examine the progression.

When he is still carrying the widow Begbick's basket, he uses the fish as a reason to leave her, go to the city, buy his fish and return home. After he buys the cucumber instead, he uses the cucumber as an excuse not to play the part of Jeraiah Jip at roll call:

> Es ist nicht, als ob ich Ihnen nicht gern gefaellig waere, aber ich muss leider rasch heim. Ich habe zum Abendessen eine Gurke gekauft und kann deshalb nicht ganz, wie ich moechte. (Mann ist Mann, p. 20)

Of course, he does stand in for Jip, but the next morning when the soldiers try to convince him to stay on as Jip, he again mentions the fish as a reason for not complying: "Leider erwartet mich meine Frau wegen eines Fisches." (Mann ist Mann, p. 37) It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why Brecht has Galy Gay make these excuses. On the one hand, it shows how easily he is swayed. He knows he has an obligation to his wife, but he neglects it. In addition, he seems to need an excuse to even try to break away, and cannot do it simply because he chooses to. On the other hand, he may be using his obligation to go home as a way of extorting
more for his services. In both the latter instances, Galy Gay is kept from leaving with bribes—cigars and beer the first time, a business deal the second time. In any case, we see Galy Gay being pulled both ways. His attitude is ambivalent. He wants to play the part of the soldier, and yet he has a difficult time giving up his old life.

The soldiers and their offer begin to appeal more and more to Galy Gay, as we see when his wife confronts him in the canteen. It is in this scene that the fish begins to function more as an identifying element. After Galy Gay has denied his identity to his wife, the following exchange takes place:

Frau Galy Gay: Ich habe das Wasser in Topf gestern um diese Zeit auf das Feuer gesetzt, aber den Fisch has du nicht gebracht.
Galy Gay: Was soll das wieder fuer ein Fisch sein. Du redest, als ob du keinen Verstand haettest, vor allen diesen Herren hier! (Mann ist Mann, p. 42-43)

This exchange mirrors the statements made before—Galy Gay's wife's insistence that he is her husband, the porter, and his denial of this identity.

Galy Gay's denial of his name marks an important step in his change to Jeraiah Jip. The rest of the play is concerned with making the change permanent. It is at this midway point that the widow Begbick makes her famous
speech to the audience about how easy it is to change a man into someone else. Here, too, a reference is made to a fish, which in turn is meant to refer to Galy Gay, as far as the play is concerned:

Hier wird heute abend ein Mensch wie ein Auto ummontiert
Ohne dass er irgend etwas dabei verliert
Dem Mann wird menschlich naehergetreten
Er wird mit Nachdruck, ohne Verdruss gebeten
Sich dem Laufe der Welt schon anzupassen
Und seinen Privatfisch schwimmen zu lassen.
(Mann ist Mann, p. 44)

Galy Gay's Privatfisch is his name, his identity, and his personality. In the second part of the play we see how he gives it up for good.

The soldiers devise a plan to trap Galy Gay with a fake elephant. As soon as he realizes that he, as Galy Gay, is accused of stealing, he again denies his name. He becomes really desperate when he finds out the punishment is death. He goes through the same process of identifying himself in terms of the fish and then denying it, as he did in the exchange with his wife: "Ich bin nicht, den ihr sucht. Was ich wollte, war, einen Fisch kaufen aber wo gibt es hier Fische? (Mann ist Mann, p. 59)

Shortly thereafter the soldiers pretend to shoot Galy Gay and he faints from panic and fright. When he awakens he will be Jeraiah Jip. The fish is mentioned
three more times in the play, each time in connection with the events leading to Galy Gay's transformation. The first time it is used by Jesse to emphasize his malleable character as the porter at the beginning of the play: "Ohne Fuehrung war er nicht imstande, einen Fisch zu kaufen." (Mann ist Mann, p. 64) The second time Galy Gay himself mentions it as part of Jeraiah Jip's history: "Einer, der Gurken trug fuer Trinkgelder, ein Elefant betrog ihn, der schnell schlafen musste auf einem Holzstuhl aus Mangel an Zeit, weil in seiner Huette das Fischwasser kochte."

This is part of the final struggle Galy Gay goes through to give up his own identity. Finally, in giving a eulogy over the casket where Galy Gay's body is supposed to lie, he identifies himself as Jeraiah Jip from Tipperary and assigns the history he had just accepted as Jeraiah Jip's to the Galy Gay in the casket. In doing so, the fish is mentioned for a third time: "...er ging weg, einen kleinen Fisch zu kaufen am Morgen, hatte am Abend schon einen grossen Elefanten und wurde in derselbigen Nacht noch erschossen." (Mann ist Mann, p. 70)

Brecht brings up the fish throughout the play to emphasize or mirror his central idea—that a man's character is not unchangeable, that his identity is not fixed. It demonstrates Brecht's principle of making every
In *Mann ist Mann*, from Brecht's earliest period, the changeability of man is shown in a somewhat negative sense. The emphasis is on the manipulation of the "little man." The change is not a conscious effort on Galy Gay's part and it is not a change for the better. In later plays the capacity for change is still looked upon as inherent in man, but it takes on a more positive aspect. In fact, Brecht considers change to be essential in the process of coming to social consciousness. This is what happens to Johanna in the play *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthoefe*. Johanna gradually becomes conscious of the social ills surrounding her and accordingly changes her attitude towards organized religion.

Here, again, food plays an important role in reflecting beliefs and attitudes. In *Johanna*, soup is connected with the Black Straw Hats. It is symbolic of what the Black Straw Hats stand for, and what Johanna does with the soup exemplifies her changing attitude toward that group. The Black Straw Hats are a religious order modeled after the Salvation Army, but they can stand for any organized religious group whose platitudes do nothing to improve the condition of man on earth. They come with music and soup to minister to the poor. This is as far as the ministry goes, however. They refuse to
become involved with the problems of those to whom they preach. The soup is really only a stop-gap measure. It will not nourish the people for long. What the poor need is the means to satisfy their hunger themselves. In the case of this play, they need decent-paying jobs in the meat-packing plants. Soup, then, is a symbol for the stop-gap type of religion which offers no substantial change to those to whom it preaches. Johanna slowly comes to realize this, and changes her attitude toward the Black Straw Hats from one of fervent support to one of complete rejection. In place of religion she sees social action as the only course which can improve man's lot in this world. Let us examine how Johanna's change comes about and how Brecht uses the imagery of the soup as one means of emphasizing that change.

We first see Johanna about to lead a group of Straw Hats to the stockyards where there is a threat that violence may break out. At this point she fully supports the ideas and methods of the Black Straw Hats, as they portion out soup and sing of being soldiers of God:

Wir werden auffahren Tanks und Kanonen
Und Flugzeuge muessen her
Und Kriegsschiffe ueber das Meer
Um dir, Bruder, einen Teller Suppe zu erobern.
(Johanna, p. 4)
It is ironic to hear these war-like words from the very people who have come to stop an outbreak of violence. It is also ironic that they will theoretically go to such lengths to bring the poor a mere bowl of soup, and yet will not become involved in the real battle between the workers and the employers. As Frau Luckerniddle, one of the unemployed workers, says, "Ich moechte auch lieber Taten sehen." (Johanna, p. 93) But the Black Straw Hats will not take action to deal with the more serious, long-range problems of the poor. They content themselves with their superficial methods of "converting" people, to which Johanna naively subscribes: "So, jetzt esst mal die warme Suppe, und dann wird sich alles gleich wieder ganz anders anschauen, aber denkt gefaelligst auch ein wenig an den, der euch die Suppe bescheret." (Johanna, p. 15)

This is a somewhat different application of "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral." Brecht maintains that one cannot expect a person to be good if he does not have enough to eat. The Black Straw Hats say that it is easier to listen to God's word on a full stomach. But for Brecht, having enough to eat means having the means to procure food. Food becomes a result of desirable social conditions, rather than a tool to be used to make people good. Yet for the Black Straw Hats, soup is just such a tool. They seem to think conversion comes because
the people have received a bowl of soup. The irony of this philosophy is that in order for the Black Straw Hats to convert people, the people must first be starving. Snyder, the leader, recognizes this fact without realizing its significance, when he comments on the possibilities for conversion of the hungry workers after they have been waiting for work for seven days in the rain and snow:

"Ach, lieber Herr Mulberry, jetzt warme Suppen/ Und etwas Musik, und so haben wir sie. In meinem Kopf/ Steht das Reich Gottes fix und fertig da." (Johanna, p. 120)

Johanna begins to glimpse the futility of the Black Straw Hats' notion when the workers, instead of staying to hear God's word, leave to inquire about factory jobs as soon as the soup is gone:

Habt ihr gesehen, wie sie fortliefen, als die Suppe aus war! . . .Denen Ist nur mehr der Hunger gewachsen. Sie Berührt kein Lied mehr, zu ihnen dringt in solche Tiefe kein Wort. (Johanna, p. 19)

She begins to break away from the group when she ignores her colleagues' admonitions to stay out of the conflict and decides to try to find out the cause of the workers' misery. She goes to see Mauler, the meat king, whom she hears is responsible for closing the meat factories. But his slyly thought-out promises to her only serve his own ends, and the workers remain out of work.
When she returns to the Black Straw Hat headquarters she finds more disillusionment. Snyder has been making a deal with the meat packers, promising them salvation if they will pay him $800 per month. Snyder has stooped to bribery of the rich because he cannot collect enough money from the poor to keep the establishment going. His opinion is that the end justifies the means, and right now his immediate end is procuring soup and maintaining his organization. In Snyder, Brecht is exposing the weakness of organized religious groups. The spiritual goals are obstructed and forgotten in the concern and worry over how to obtain the means to achieve those goals. Brecht is showing that economics affect everyone, even the soldiers of God. Although he is criticizing the hypocrisy which he sees in such groups, he nevertheless points out that they are forced into being materialistic because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The Black Straw Hats succumb not because they are bad but because they are weak, the same idea which was expressed with respect to Prochazka in Schweyk. But it is ironical that the ends for which they are sacrificing their integrity are very superficial. Their music and soup convert very few people and change nothing, particularly the circumstances which caused the suffering in the first place. It is the goals of the Black Straw Hats which
Brecht is criticizing more than anything else.

Meanwhile, the packers, like Snyder, are also more concerned about their immediate ends than about salvation. They need to buy cattle from Mauler and so they try to make a deal with Johanna because they believe she has an influence over him. If she will make Mauler sell the cattle, they will pay the rent for the Black Straw Hats for forty months. Johanna is enraged at such bribery and throws them out. Making soup and having a building to make it in are not as important to her as integrity. Still, she reveals her belief in the basic righteousness of the Black Straw Hats by resuming the traditional work of serving soup. Her own righteousness is not rewarded, however, for Snyder throws her out.

Deceived by Mauler and rejected by her organization, Johanna finally goes to the workers and vows to share their lot, to bear the cold and the hunger until their misery is alleviated. But she is not really one of the people, for she has not known the extent of their misery. She longs for her old life when she had the security of a warm room and a bowl of hot soup, and she cannot throw off the old teachings, one of which is keeping the peace. It is for these reasons that she fails to deliver the letter bringing news of a strike to the workers of one of the meat packing plants. She hears shooting in the
background and becomes frightened:

Ich will weggehen. Es kann nicht gut sein, was mit Gewalt gemacht wird. Ich gehör nicht zu ihnen. Hätteten mich als Kind der Tritt des Elends und der Hunger Gewalt gelehrt, wuerde ich zu ihnen gehöeren und nichts fragen. So aber muss ich weggehen. (Johanna, p. 111)

Johanna becomes lost in the snow, and the workers do not carry out the strike because not enough of them were able to learn about it.

In trying to be good, Johanna has helped maintain the bad. Brecht sees the anti-revolutionary stance of the church as doing the same thing. He makes this point by showing the collaboration which develops between Mauler and the Black Straw Hats. Mauler makes a deal with Snyder:

Wenn wir euch Schwarzen Strohhueten
Eure Sach aufzogen in grosser Weise, wuerdet ihr da
Mit Suppen versehen und Musik und
Geeigneten Bibelspruechen, auch mit Obdach
In aeussersten Faellen, fuer uns reden
Ueberall, dass wir gute Leute sind? (Johanna, p. 131)

He is shrewd enough to realize that if he can gain the approval of the Black Straw Hats, it will be less likely that the workers will try to strike again. The theme returns to that which began the play—the suppression of violence. The Black Straw Hats, with the aid of their soup, can help control the restlessness and dissatisfaction
of the people, and that will make it easier for Mauler to exploit them. The emphasis of the teachings of the Black Straw Hats is on the rewards of Heaven. If one is good on earth (and good means non-violent, submissive, satisfied with one's lot as determined by society as it stands), then one will receive God's blessing in Heaven. Brecht is condemning the emptiness of such promises. He indicts the Black Straw Hats not only because they are of no real help to the people, but because they are actually harming them by diverting attention away from the economic, social, and political issues with which the people should be dealing.

Johanna realizes the truth in this idea after she has seen the result of her cowardice: the workers who had attempted to strike were beaten down and defeated. Eventually she is brought, along with a group of poor people, to the headquarters of the Black Straw Hats, for she is very ill. The others sit down on the benches and wait to be served soup, but Johanna rejects it. At this point, she no longer feels herself a part of the Black Straw Hats; the break is complete. She neither serves the soup nor accepts it. Mauler, however, could use a saintly figure to canonize, because it would be good publicity for him, and suggests bringing Johanna back into the Black Straw Hats and making her a saint. Here Brecht
is parodying the questionable ways that saints come into being. He is poking fun at a religion of platitudes and at the same time is pointing out the impotence of such figures as saints and angels in this world. Johanna, who does not want to be a saint, is powerless to oppose Mauler's plan. Too late she has come to realize that being righteous and good is not enough:

Schnell verschwindend aus dieser Welt ohne Furcht
Sage ich euch:
Sorgt doch, dass ihr die Welt verlassend
Nicht nur gut wart, sondern verlasst
Eine gute Welt. (Johanna, p. 143)

Brecht is not condemning Johanna for being good. Her virtues are ones he condones—she is unselfish, sympathetic, generous, caring. But she needs a heightened sense of consciousness about reality in order to channel her virtues into paths which will produce permanent change. That consciousness comes too late.

In the midst of the chaos of her canonizing ritual, the loudspeaker announces the crash of the stock market. Soon afterwards, Johanna ceases to try to make herself heard. She is powerless by herself against the forces which are trying to exploit her. Her last act is one of rebellion, of complete rejection of the whole concept of the Black Straw Hats and the power structure they help to uphold: she takes the bowl of soup which the sisters have
offered her and holding it high above her, pours it out. She then sinks to her death.

Thus Johanna changes from a dedicated member of a religious organization, portioning out soup in order to spread God's word, to a convinced revolutionary who pours out that same soup in order to show her disdain for all it stands for. The soup stands for the insufficient measures used to try to patch up the damage wrought by injustice rather than to wipe out the injustice itself. It stands for the temporary soothing of indignation and unrest, a soothing which allows injustice to continue. More specifically it stands for religion, which Brecht views with Marx as an "opium of the people."

The function of the different food items is different in each of the three plays, but in all of them it is quite evident. In Schweyk the absence of meat creates a major conflict, emphasizes man's basic need for food, and precipitates incidents in the plot. Baloun's obsession provides a situation in which Brecht can express his views about how difficult it is for man to be good in a bad world, particularly a world at war. It also provides opportunities to reveal the unsung heroism with which the "little man" faces the hardship of war. In Mann ist Mann the fish becomes a reference point for the original Galy Gay. It helps to stress the potential for
change, for the better or for the worse, which Brecht believes exists in every man. In *Johanna* soup is connected with the Black Straw Hats and their beliefs. Just as soup is shown to be merely a stop-gap measure against hunger, so religion is shown to provide only stop-gap measures against social ills. The soup stands for the ineffectiveness and harmfulness which Brecht sees in religion in an age when society desperately needs changing. Thus in all three plays food has an integral function in the dramatic structure and also underlines Brecht's social message, which is at the forefront of all of his plays.
Chapter 4

FOOD AS A VISUAL ELEMENT

Frequently within a play, food actually appears on the stage. Of course, meat and soup appear visually as well as conceptually as part of the dramatic structure in the plays Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg and Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, respectively. But Brecht also finds opportunities to bring food visually into the plot in more limited ways. Rather than functioning in the play as a whole, it often functions within a particular scene. The introduction of food in concrete, visual terms naturally adds to the realistic atmosphere of a scene, and Brecht was always concerned with realistic detail.

At the same time, on a deeper level, food is often involved in gestus, i.e., symbolic, non-verbal expression, which is such an integral part of Brecht's plays. Martin Esslin explains gestus as gestures which are quotable. He maintains that gestus is an important concept for Brecht because it is a concrete form for the transmission of truth, whereas words are an abstract version. Walter Benjamin sees this as a result of Brecht's distrust of the verbal medium. Words can be ambiguous, misunderstood,
and misinterpreted (as Brecht's often are!), whereas gestures, actions, and non-verbal expressions are much less so. Robert Hiller explains what he calls "author-ordered" gestus as being "not merely part of mimesis. It is also the attitude which the character assumes, accompanied and underlined by speech or not as prescribed by the author himself."

There are several examples of food functioning visually within a scene in the plays being studied. One role which the actual presence of food plays is in proving the axiom "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral." A good example occurs in Johanna. Frau Luckerniddle's husband has fallen into a meat cauldron in the meat-packing plant and has been killed. Not knowing this, she has been inquiring about him for several days. Slift offers her three weeks of free meals at the factory canteen if she will stop making trouble. Because she has not eaten for two days, she betrays her loyalty to her husband and even arrives at the canteen a day early. Her hunger is so great that she not only accepts the food, but refuses to give it up, even though finding out what happened to her husband makes her nauseous:

(Frau Luckerniddle wird es schlecht. Sie steht suf und geht hinaus.)
Frau Luckerniddle (im Hinausgehen zum Kellner):
Lassen Sie den Teller stehen. Ich komme zurueck.
Ich komme jeden Mittag hierher. Fragen sie nur
den Herrn. (Ab.) (Johanna, p. 41)

The act of grabbing the food and eating it greedily (as
the stage directions tell us) indicates how hungry she is
and how her baser instincts have taken over because of
her need. The fact that she becomes nauseous upon hearing
her husband's fate shows us that her feelings are not
dead. But they are nevertheless overpowered by her hunger,
as the above-quoted statement to the waiter makes clear.
Slift tries to convince Johanna that Frau Luckerniddle is
an example of how bad the poor are. But Johanna replies,
"Ist ihre Schlechtigkeit ohne Mass, so ist's/ Ihre Armut
auch. Nicht der armen Schlechtigkeit/ Hast du mir
gezeigt, sondern/ Der Armen Armut." (Johanna, p. 42)

Once again Brecht declares that poverty often makes it
impossible for people to do the right thing.

Food assumes a symbolic quality when it appears at
the end of the play Mann ist Mann. Galy Gay has changed
from the malleable object of his three companions' needs
and wishes, to the ruthless leader of the group. Brecht
makes this obvious not only from the fact that Galy Gay
gives orders and controls the identification papers, but
also from the fact that he eats his companions' rice
ration as well as his own. Their obedience to him, which
grows out of their dependence on him, manifests itself especially in the part of the scene where the real Jeraiah Jip appears and seeks to reclaim his old position. He sees one after the other of his former comrades deliver up their portion of rice to Galy Gay on command. The manner in which Galy Gay demands, takes, and eats the rice is an eloquent comment on what he has become. He is a fighting machine which needs fuel to operate: "Noch eine Portion! Ich habe heute starken Appetit vor der Schlacht." (Mann ist Mann, p. 81) His arrogance and coldness can be detected when he walks over to Jip with his last plate of rice in his hand, asks him if he isn't hungry, and then offers him a mere glass of water. Thus the actual appearance of food on stage becomes a way of communicating a relationship to the audience in a more immediate manner than the words alone would have.

In the play Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti food is often the vehicle through which Brecht points out class distinction. The contrast between the rich and the poor is brought out with the aid of the actual appearance of food in the scene in which the "brides" of Puntila have come to his daughter's engagement party. It is still early morning and preparations are being made for the feast. As the women talk with Matti they see various foods for the meal being carried into the house: butter, a butchered
pig, and two barrels of beer. They react with excitement, for these are foods which they rarely have a chance to eat, and today they believe they will be taking part in the meal. The situation helps to underline the difference between the upper and lower classes. In addition it emphasizes the unfeelingness of a sober Puntila when he turns the women away without even so much as a glass of buttermilk after their long journey from town on foot.

Later on food again plays a part in contrasting the upper and lower classes, when Puntila tries to engage his daughter Eva to Matti, his chauffeur. Matti wants to prove that Eva is unfit to be his wife because of her upper-class upbringing. She agrees to a light-hearted test of her ability to conform to lower-class living conditions, and the first matter which is dealt with is food. Matti calls for herring, a staple which constitutes a large percentage of the diet of the poor:

Matti: Ja, da ist er. Ich kenn ihn wieder. (Er nimmt die Platte.) Ich hab seinen Bruder gestern gesehen und einen aus seiner Familie vorgestern und so zurueck Mitglieder von der Familie, seit ich selber nach einem Teller gegriffen hab. (Puntila, p. 102)

Matti asks Eva, "Wie oft wollen Sie einen Hering essen wollen in der Woche?" "Dreimal, Matti, wenn's sein muss," she replies. Laina, the cook, sets her straight by telling her, "Da werdens ihn oefter essen muessen, wenns
nicht wolln." (Puntila, p. 102) Eva has failed the first test, even though she tried to react as she thought a poor woman might. Her ignorance of how the lower class lives is simply too great. Then Matti holds up a herring and praises it sarcastically: "Willkommen, Hering, du Belag des armen Volkes! Du Saettiger zu allen Tageszeiten und salziger Schmerz in den Gedaermen!" (Puntila, p. 102) While focusing on the herring, he brings up the plight of the poor servants who do the work on the Puntila estate: "Mit deiner Kraft werden die Fichtenwaelder gefaellt und die Aeccker gesaet, und mit deiner Kraft gehen die Maschinen, Gesinde genannt, die noch keine perpetua mobile sind." (Puntila, p. 102) He goes on to intimate that perhaps the servants will not always be so content with their lot: "O Hering, du Hund, wenn du nicht waerst, moechten wir anfangen vom Gut Schweinefleisch verlangen, und was wuerd da aus Finnland?" (Puntila, p. 102) The herring becomes a kind of symbol, or perhaps one might call it a focusing agent, standing for the servant class. There it is hanging from Matti's fingers, seemingly small and unimportant yet possessing the power to fell trees and start insurrections. After this speech Matti cuts up the herring and gives a piece to everyone. The contrast between the rich and the poor is again emphasized when Puntila comments, "Mir schmeckt's wie ein Delikatess, weil
There are instances in Brecht's plays where a character's reaction to food conveys an attitude, and it is here, especially, where one can speak of food as part of gestus. An excellent illustration is the closing scene of Johanna, discussed in the previous chapter, in which Johanna pours out a bowl of soup to express what words can no longer convey—her utter rejection of the Black Straw Hats and what they stand for, of Mauler and the existing power structure, and of what they are attempting to do in canonizing her. However, this is not the only scene involving food in which a gesture is eloquent. Earlier in the play Johanna goes to Mauler to ask him to pay the rent for the Black Straw Hats. Mauler is moved by her starved appearance and offers her something to eat. She looks at the food, asks the favor, and then begins to eat greedily. Mauler agrees to donate the money, and then leads into a discussion of the meat situation in which he mentions that the workers remain in the stockyards with no work. Johanna's reaction to this information is to stop eating. She says nothing until Mauler finishes what he is saying, a speech which continues for several lines. Thus her action takes on significance in itself, without immediate support from words. It indicates her surprise and distress at the situation of the workers and establishes
her concern for their plight. Furthermore, it conveys her change of attitude toward Mauler from one of confidence, when she was willing to take charity from him, to one of disillusionment, when she will no longer eat at his table.

A similar function is found in the play Die Mutter in a scene set in the kitchen of a large estate where the farmers are striking. While Pelagea is delivering leaflets on the estate she is hit with a stone meant for a strike-breaker and is brought to the kitchen to rest. The kitchen workers are serving food to two strike-breakers. The butcher in the kitchen learns that Pelagea, like himself, is on the side of the farmers and orders food to be brought to her. But Pelagea pushes the dish away. Her action indicates her attitude toward helping strike-breakers, as she explains to the butcher:

Der Metzger: Warum essen Sie dann nicht?
Pelagea Wlassova: Weil es doch fuer die Streikbrecher gekocht ist. (Die Mutter, p. 60)

This is just the push the butcher needs to change his mind and refuse to feed the strike-breakers. He gives the food to the strikers instead. Pelagea's gesture is made with a specific intent. It is meant to convey her attitude toward the strike-breakers to the cook, and it
has the desired effect. The cook is moved to action through her refusal of the food and her subsequent explanation. The point of the scene seems to be that actions speak louder than words. Words may be necessary to develop ideas, but actions are necessary to carry them out, and it is the actions which are vital to change. What someone does is often more convincing than what he says, even though both doing and saying stem from the same belief.

When food appears on stage its function cannot always be easily categorized. There are times when food is serving several different purposes within just one scene. One such instance occurs in the play Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder. The play contains a scene which is built around the buying, plucking and cooking of a capon. As the scene opens, Mother Courage is trying to sell a capon to the army cook. Haggling over the price of one small capon, and the fact that the only other meat available to the cook is spoiled, emphasizes the shortage of meat due to the war. The capon becomes the focal point for a discussion of the siege and the situation in general. Starvation reigns on both sides, except, of course, for the leaders, such as the field marshall for whom the cook is trying to prepare dinner. When the field marshall arrives with Courage's son Eilif and demands
The situation reflects the conflict between motherly love and the profit motive, which we see over and over again in Mother Courage. On the one hand she is anxious for the cook to buy the capon because her son has expressed a desire for some meat. On the other hand, she makes it more difficult for him to buy it by jacking up the price: "Hast du gehoert, was er als Gast speisen will: Fleisch! Lass dir gut raten, nimm auf der Stell den Kapaun, er kost einen Gulden." (Mutter Courage, p. 22) In this case the stakes are not so high, but in other instances Mother Courage's profit-seeking maneuvers are responsible for the loss of her children.

The cook is pressured into paying her price for the capon, but asks Mother Courage to pluck it for him. At this point it should be noted that the stage is set up in this way:

Das Zelt des Feldhauptmanns
Daneben die Kueche (Mutter Courage, p. 20)

Juxtaposed on stage are the two faces of war: on the one side, the representatives of the military, talking of battles past and future; on the other side, the representatives of the common folk, the "little man" behind the scenes, plucking a chicken. Further along in the scene the field
marshall says to Eilif, "Ich schaetz mir einen solchen Soldaten wie dich, Eilif, einen mutigen." (Mutter Courage, p. 25) Mother Courage is upset by this statement and begins to rip out the capon's feathers angrily. She tells the cook that the man must be a poor field marshall if he needs brave soldiers, because if his plans were good, average soldiers would do. Thus a gesture is used to heighten the agitation Mother Courage feels. In a way it also signifies her resignation to her impotence in this situation. A natural reaction when someone in authority makes us angry is to take out our anger on whatever we are in contact with, rather than on the authority figure. This is exactly what Mother Courage is doing. Thus the bird functions in several different ways: as a reminder of the food shortage; as a reflection of the profit vs. love conflict within Mother Courage; as a part of the realistic scenery portraying the "little man's" role in war; and as a part of gestus, heightening and revealing Mother Courage's feelings.

There are many other instances in which food appears on stage, and in almost every case, Brecht makes it an important element of the scene. Food is a common part of everyday life for all people, and Brecht, realizing that people relate to what is familiar, brings actual food onto the stage to help him visually convey a message.
Sometimes a reaction to food conveys an attitude; sometimes the presence of much-needed nourishment influences a decision; and sometimes food is involved in showing a relationship. Food as a visual element is an important part of Brecht's attention to realistic detail and to the concept of *gestus*. 
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4


Chapter 5

FOOD AS A REFLECTION OF THE CLASS WAR

At the center of Brecht's plays is his concern about the injustices arising out of class distinction. Whether the theme is war, revolution, economics, or conflict between individuals, the basic tenet at the core of the play is that the common man's deplorable lot, resulting from the economic and political situation he finds himself in, is desperately in need of change. Brecht's solution is a classless society; however, in most of his plays, Brecht concentrates on presenting the problem, rather than the solution. His purpose is to make people aware of the situation and of what he considers to be certain truths: war is a business engaged in by the upper class; religion is an opium of the people; morality is only possible on a full stomach; change is both possible and necessary; being good is not enough; violence is sometimes necessary for change. All of these truths are connected in Brecht's plays to the class war—the conflict between the rich and the poor, between those who have power and those who do not. As one reads Brecht's plays, it is obvious that food, or lack of it, plays an important role in revealing this
conflict. References to food and hunger often serve to point out class distinction or conditions created by the class structure. In the plays being studied we will examine how references to food can illustrate class distinction, the need for revolution, and the conditions of war.

The comparison between rich and poor is central in the play Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti. Puntila, the owner of an estate in Finland, is the representative of the rich. That the play will be critical of him is obvious from these lines in the prologue:

Wir zeigen naemlich heute abend hier
Euch ein gewisses vorzeitliches Tier
Estatium possessor, auf deutsch Gutsbesitzer genannt
Welches Tier, als sehr verfressen und ganz unnuetzlich
bekannt... (Puntila, p. 7)

As a comparison to Puntila, Brecht introduces several different kinds of working-class people and creates incidents, situations, and stories which show how little they have, compared to people like Puntila. Food and hunger are often involved in making this point. For example, when Puntila betroths himself to the women in town, he asks each of them what kind of life she has. None of them has an easy one. They describe their work, their social life, their finances, and also what they have to eat: bread, potatoes, perhaps an egg, never any meat.
The Finnish field hands share a similar diet, as is revealed at the Gesindemarkt. Matti tells one of the job applicants that the basic foods on the Puntila estate are milk and potatoes. The field workers are evidently not getting enough of even this meager fare, for Matti comments facetiously on their starved appearance and lack of enthusiasm: "Ich weiss nicht, warum die Leut auf dem Gut so Elend ausschauen, kaesig und lauter Knochen und zwanzig Jahr aelter." (Puntila, p. 113) On the other hand, Puntila and those of his class live in luxury. His daughter Eva's engagement banquet is sumptuous and plentiful. Eva comments at one point: "Mein Vater isst nichts, wovon es nicht viel gibt." (Puntila, p. 67) Puntila's unfeeling attitude toward his servants is revealed in several passages involving food. The most illustrative passage is the following one, taken from a lecture Puntila is giving Matti about being a good servant:

Einen Dienstboten, dem die Augen herausquellen vor Gier, wenn er zum Beispiel sieht, was die Herrschaft isst, kann kein Brotgeber leiden. Einen Bescheidenen behaelt man im Dienst, warum nicht? Wenn man sieht, dass er sich abrackert, drueckt man ein Auge zu. Aber wenn er nur immer Feierabend haben will und Braten so gross wie Abortdeckel, ekelte er einen einfach an und raus mit ihm! (Puntila, p. 35)
Matti throws this attitude back at Puntila near the end of the play, as they climb the imaginary Hætvlæmbærg. Puntila points out the pines, which he says seem to live on nothing. Matti rejoins, "Das waeren sozusagen ideale Bedienstete." (Puntila, p. 125)

Thus the conflict between the classes appears again and again. Even in his drunken state Puntila is still caught in his class milieu. He never actually gives anything away or does anything permanent to benefit the working class, with whom he seems to be on such friendly terms while intoxicated. The "brides" get only curtain rings as tokens of their engagement, not gold ones; the old field hand gets only promises, not a contract for a job; and the servants at the engagement party who are invited to sit at the table with the provost and his wife apparently get nothing more to eat than a small piece of herring left over from Eva's "examination." Brecht is making the point that nothing can change as long as the class structure stays the same. Puntila's good humor and Eva's willingness to become a poor man's wife are not enough to alter society.

The need for a new order is dealt with more specifically in the plays Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe and Die Mutter. In Johanna Mauler is the chief representative of the rich. His powerful position
is indicated not only by his economic maneuverings, but also by the fact that he eats steak while his unemployed workers are starving to death. His supposed revulsion at the slaughtering of animals does not prevent him from enjoying the product of such brutality, as long as he need not witness the brutality itself. This parallels his actions with regard to the workers. He does not mind exploiting them and enjoying the profit which accrues as a result, as long as he does not come into contact with them personally. When this happens, in the form of Johanna, it makes him uncomfortable. Brecht is implying that the distance between the classes is so great that there is no chance for understanding. As Johanna says near the end of the play:

Und es sind zwei Sprachen oben und unten
Und zwei Masse zu messen
Und was Menschengesicht traegt
Kennt sich nicht mehr (Johanna, p. 143)

The injustice of the capitalistic system is further emphasized by the irony of a situation in which workers in a meat-packing plant are going hungry. Not only that, but they are going hungry because there is too much beef! When Mauler decides to burn one-third of the cattle in order to reduce the glut on the market, Snyder, the leader of the Black Straw Hats, asks him why he could not simply
give the meat to the many hungry people outside. Mauler replies, "...Sie haben/ Den Kern der Lage nicht erfasst. Die vielen, die/ Da draussen stehen: das sind die Kaeufer!" (Johanna, p. 132) The only way to fight such logic is to band together and strike. A strike will involve violence, but in this play Brecht condones violence as a necessary part of change. He has shown the hunger and misery of the workers and the meaninglessness of a stop-gap measure such as soup or religion. On the other hand, he has shown the ruthlessness of Mauler and the futility of trying to talk with him. Only a new system will provide the opportunity for a new life for the people.

The same type of situation exists in the play Die Mutter, in which strikes are regarded as a revolutionary tactic for changing society. Brecht begins the play by showing how poor Pelagea Wlassova and her son are. Again it is the scarcity of food which illustrates their poverty. Pelagea's first speech deals with how thin the soup is which she serves her son. Die Mutter is an even more didactic play than Johanna, for the solution to Pelagea's poverty is almost immediately offered by the chorus of revolutionary workers:
Wenn du keine Suppe hast
Wie willst du dich da wehren?
Da musst du den ganzen Staat
Von unten bis oben umkehren
Bis du deine Suppe hast.
Dann bist du dein eigener Gast. (Die Mutter, p. 12)

The play follows Pelagea as she comes to accept this revolutionary idea and becomes one of the most important workers for the cause.

The first contact Pelagea has with the actual workings of the revolutionaries is when she offers to hand out leaflets at a factory. The leaflets call for a strike at the factory to protest the reduction of wages. Negotiators are unable to prevent the cut, but come back to the workers with a meaningless offer from the management. The workers sing a song which shows how they feel about such a useless concession. One of the analogies used in the song has to do with bread:

Und voll Eifer rennt ihr zu den Herren
Waehrend wir, voll Hunger, warten.
Und ihr kommt zurueck, und im Triumphe
Zeigt ihr uns, was ihr fuer uns erobert:
Ein Stuecklein Brot.
Gut, das ist das Stueck Brot
Aber wo ist
Der Brotlaib? (Die Mutter, pp. 24-25)

The song goes on to say that they need not only the bread, but the factories, the raw materials, and the power in the state. In order to convey his revolutionary message,
Brecht conjures up images such as bread loaves and crumbs, which are common to the workingman. He seems to be trying especially hard in this play to make political concepts understandable to the common man.

The play's focus is on the revolution, and it is interesting that the idea of "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral" does not seem to apply to revolutionary ideals, perhaps because these ideals are not thought of as having to do with morality—certainly not with middle-class morality. But the idea of sacrificing for a cause does come up. "Das ist wieder ein halber Brotlaib, auf den wir verzichten müssen fuer unsere Sache," say the workers as they collect money for their organization. (Die Mutter, p. 64) Brecht stresses, however, that the victory of the cause will provide the very things which one must give up to achieve it. A strike means less to eat and no money for the rent, but only temporarily. One must forget one's basic needs for the time being and concentrate on the long-range ways to obtain them. One of these ways is to become educated.

Pelagea and her neighbors want to learn to read so that they can better understand the revolutionary cause and be able to defend themselves against exploitation. A song expresses the importance of learning, even to those who are homeless and starving:
Soon Pelagea is printing leaflets, just as her son did at the beginning of the play. Her role as "mother" has broadened from being a mother only to her son to being a mother to the revolution. Her concern for the immediate present and her worry over the heartiness of her son's soup have broadened to a concern for the future and a dedication to sacrifice, if need be, for a cause which will bring everyone enough to eat. She is still a mother to her son; she still worries about whether he gets enough to eat in prison; she still greets him upon his surprise return from prison with these words: "Er wird immer magerer! Statt dicker wird er magerer!" (Die Mutter, p. 65) But the revolution comes first now. Pawel must cut his own bread because Pelagea is needed to help print the leaflets. She must even lose her son in the end, for he is shot trying to cross the Finnish border. The loss of her son makes her ill, but the threat of danger to the Party at the outbreak of the First World War gives her new energy. The last scenes in the play show her part in the events leading up to the Revolution of 1917. The progress of the play and the progression from the very personal concerns with food and clothing to the much
larger political ones having to do with the control of the state is summed up by Pelagea:

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Thus food and hunger play a very important role in conveying the political message of the play.

Another theme that is touched on in the play Die Mutter is the idea that war is waged by the upper class leaders of a country for their own benefit and profit, while the common man is exploited. "Wir haben nichts mehr zu essen, aber wir siegen!" Pelagea exclaims indignantly and with disgust, as she tries to convince people to support the Revolution rather than the Czar. (Die Mutter, p. 86)

This theme is treated more thoroughly in the play Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder. "Der Krieg ist nix als die Geschäfte/ Und statt mit Käse ists mit Blei," sings Mother Courage at one point in the play. (Mutter Courage, p. 75) Occasionally there are other references to the fact that the Thirty Years' War is being waged
for profit and gain and not for religious reasons, but ironically the personification of war as a business is Mother Courage herself. She is a businesswoman who lives off the war, following the armies and selling them sundries, clothing, and, of course, food:

Ihr Hauptleut, eure Leut marschieren
Euch ohne Wurst nicht in den Tod.
Lasst die Courage sie erst kurieren
Mit Wein von Leibs- und Geistesnot.
Kanonen auf die leeren Maegen
Ihr Hauptleut, das ist nicht gesund.
Doch sind sie satt, habt meinen Segen
Und fuehrt sie in den Hoellenschlund. (Mutter Courage, p. 9)

Mother Courage may give her blessing to others who march off to battle, but she is not willing to give her own children to the war. She is a paradox in that she hates what the war does to people, especially to her children, yet she needs it in order to continue to exist; therefore she desires and rejects it at the same time. She is constantly pulled between her business instincts and her instincts as a mother, and because she cannot make a clear choice, the war eventually takes all her children. It is also paradoxical that though she is exploiting the war, it is at the same time exploiting her. She feels its effects not only through the loss of her children, but also through hunger and lack of trade when conditions become extreme. Brecht often shows the hardship of war
by showing the lack of food and by indicating how important food becomes during wartime.

The first indication we get of this importance is when we learn how Mother Courage got her name:


Bread, then, is important both as food and as a commodity. It is also used in the imagery of the play. For example, the field marshall refers to the war as Mother Courage's Brotgeber, and the army cook, who also lives off the war, is reminded figuratively that he owes his position to the Swedish king with these words: "Schliesslich essen Sie sein Brot." (Mutter Courage, p. 36) Later on in the play bread is involved in showing the ruthless and senseless destruction which is caused by war. A young soldier complains of the fact that the army cooks have to bake bread out of acorns and hemp seeds, but Mother Courage points out that it is because the army purposely destroyed the wheat fields the last time it marched through.

Such ruthlessness is also displayed by Eilif when he cuts his men's meat ration in order to make them so desperate for meat that they are willing to fight a group of farmers who outnumber them three to one. The soldiers
kill the farmers and confiscate the beef; Eilif is honored as a hero. But later, during a brief period of peace, when the need for food again drives him to such tactics, it costs him his life. Here, as in so many passages in the play, Brecht manages to bring out the ambiguity of a situation. That the same act can occasion praise during wartime and the death penalty during peacetime should not make sense, and yet this is exactly what happens in the real world—in a war-people are rewarded for killing others. Brecht brings in yet another aspect, however, and that is the old idea of "Erst Kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral." When the others present maintain that stealing the farmers' cattle was stupid, Eilif defends himself by saying, "Wenn ich dumm gewesen waer, dann waer ich verhungert, du Klugscheisser." (Mutter Courage, p. 87) Basically, he is saying that he did not take the cattle in order to be a hero, but in order to eat. It was not a question of right or wrong, wartime or peacetime, but of survival or starvation.

Brecht's view of morality is expressed in another way by Mother Courage and the cook when they stand in front of a preacher's house, begging for food. In their song of Solomon and other great people they show that all the virtues exemplified by these great men were useless in the end. In between verses they comment that
their own decency has not brought them any nourishment and that they would rather have soup than virtue. The preacher takes pity on them and invites them in for a bowl of soup, a gesture which implies that perhaps the world is not all bad. Typically, though, Brecht injects a note of cynicism from the cook, who objects to taking Kattrin along with them: "Lieber steck oben was fuer sie ein. Wenn wir zu dritt anruecken, kriegen sie einen Schreck!" (Mutter Courage, p. 96) It is only because Mother Courage comes back right away with the soup that Kattrin is prevented from running away. She wants to allow her mother a chance to settle down with the cook, who has told Mother Courage that Kattrin would be a liability at the tavern he has inherited. Thus good and bad, morality and survival vascillate back and forth in this scene.

Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder is one of Brecht's most complex plays. The role of food in the play is thus also complex. It is never used in only one way, but rather as a vehicle of many ideas, often at the same time—food as nourishment, as a commodity, as a necessity, as spoils of war, as an expression of concern, and as a figure of speech. Always, however, it reflects the problems of the class war and the effects that those problems have on the common man. Mother Courage, as well
as certain characters in the other plays, is a representative of the "little man," to whom life's necessities are an ever-present concern. It is this concern which is central in all of Brecht's plays.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to show that Brecht involves food extensively in his plays in specific ways and for specific reasons. To understand both how and why he does this, one must understand his purpose in writing. Everything in Brecht's writing stems from a deep social concern for the common man. He strongly believes that society is in need of drastic change. All his efforts are directed toward helping to bring about such a change, as Hans Mayer points out: "Sein Werk diente ihm von jeher dazu, Klaerung zu bewirken--und durch die Klaerung schliesslich Veraenderung der Umstaende."¹ Brecht's premise is that in order to bring about effective change, one has to open the eyes of the people, in particular those people whom the change would benefit, namely the working class. Thus he speaks in his plays primarily to the common man, and his plays deal primarily with characters and situations typifying the common man and his social predicament. This fact is noted by Margret Dietrich: "Die 'kleinen Leute,' die 'von unten' sind es immer wieder, deren Leiden er zeigt."²
Because the people are both the subject and the object of his works, he strives in every way possible to make his plays typified versions of real situations and to make them understandable and identifiable to the common man.

When one considers these things, one can understand why food, hunger, and eating occur so often in Brecht's plays. Food is a basic need with which all people must be concerned. It is one of the primary and overriding considerations of the working class, and is therefore a very familiar and integral part of their lives. It lends a situation the realistic atmosphere which helps make it believable and also provides a familiar basis from which to communicate ideas. Frederic Ewen speaks of "that unique capacity which Brecht possessed for transmuting profound ideas into everyday common sense." Thus soup becomes a symbol for an impotent religion (Johanna), or an impetus for a revolution (Die Mutter); meat becomes a vehicle for irony (Johanna), or a focal point in examining the unsung heroism of the little man within the context of history (Schweyk); bread becomes a manifestation of the hardship of war (Mutter Courage), or an analogy for the power to control one's own life (Die Mutter).

Neither references to food nor its appearance on stage is ever incidental. There is always an express
purpose or a multiple meaning attached to it. The fact that such a seemingly mundane subject could be treated in such a variety of ways and for such a broad spectrum of purposes is indeed fascinating. Food becomes a means for expressing Brecht's social, political, economic and moral views, while at the same time functioning dramatically as a part of gestus, realistic detail, irony, and imagery. It is equally noteworthy, however, that in this multifarious usage, an all-embracing theme emerges—the need for change in the structure of society. Sergey Tretiakov explains Brecht's attitude toward this social problem:

Brecht demands that the struggle of class instincts be replaced by the struggle of social consciousness, of social convictions. He maintains that the situation must not only be felt, but explained, crystallized into the idea which will overturn the world.4

Even before Brecht became acquainted with Marxist philosophy, he recognized the need for constructive change in the world. Marx narrowed the target somewhat by focusing on capitalism, but most of Brecht's work is not so specific that the ideas he expresses cannot be applied to any system where there is exploitation and suffering. No matter what the subject or setting, he is always nurturing a critical, open-minded attitude with which to look at the world. With the exception of certain of his
Lehrstuecke, he avoids being sentimental, or seeming to be a crusader for a specific cause. Instead, he "bears witness," as Arendt puts it, to the situations which society has created and encourages the public to make judgment upon it. It is an intellectual appeal, rather than an emotional one, but it nevertheless calls for action. He presents a situation which seems to say: "Here is a predicament which could be your own if you look closely enough. What are you going to do about it?"

Brecht's social message seems to flow from all areas of his work. It reveals itself in the theory, in the epic form of theater, in the characters, in the plot, in the actions of the players, and in the detail which he forms so carefully. And one of the most important elements of that detail is food. Its inherent universality and familiarity make it an excellent vehicle through which Brecht can convey his philosophy of social consciousness and action for change.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 6


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B. SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Books


2. Reference Books

