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BLOCH

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BRECHT

GEORG
LUKÁCS

WITH AN AFTERWORD BY FREDRIC JAMESON

V **AESTHETICS
AND
POLITICS**

RADICAL'S
THINKERS

Ever since Baumgarten and Winckelmann, Germany has been the classical land of aesthetic thought in Europe. In the 20th century, Marxism itself has repeated the rule. No other country has produced a tradition of major aesthetic debate to compare with that which unfolded in German culture from the thirties to the fifties. The key texts of these great Marxist controversies over literature and art are now, for the first time anywhere outside Germany, assembled in a coherent order. They do not form a conventional collection of separate documents but a continuous debate between their *dramatis personae*. In exile before the war, Bloch and Lukács polemicized against each other over the nature of expressionism. Brecht attacked Lukács for literary formalism. Benjamin disputed over classical and modern works of art with Brecht. Adorno criticized Benjamin's hermeneutics, and challenged Brecht's poetics and Lukács's politics. The multilateral exchanges which resulted have a variety and eloquence without rival. Fredric Jameson, Professor of French at Yale University and author of *Marxism and Form* and *The Prison House of Language*, sums up their paradoxical lessons for art and criticism today, in an essay of theoretical conclusion. *Aesthetics and Politics* will provide a pole of reference and a source of illumination to students of literature throughout the English-speaking world.



Ernst Bloch
Georg Lukács
Bertolt Brecht
Walter Benjamin
Theodor Adorno

Verso

Aesthetics and Politics

Afterword by Fredric Jameson

Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor

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Walter Benjamin

Conversations with Brecht

1934

4 July. Yesterday, a long conversation in Brecht's sickroom about my essay 'The Author as Producer'. Brecht thought the theory I develop in the essay – that the attainment of technical progress in literature eventually changes the function of art forms (hence also of the intellectual means of production) and is therefore a criterion for judging the revolutionary function of literary works – applies to artists of only one type, the writers of the upper bourgeoisie, among whom he counts himself. 'For such a writer,' he said, 'there really exists a point of solidarity with the interests of the proletariat: it is the point at which he can develop his own means of production. Because he identifies with the proletariat at this point, he is proletarianized – completely so – at this same point, i.e. as a producer. And his complete proletarianization at this one point establishes his solidarity with the proletariat all along the line.' He thought my critique of proletarian writers of Becher's type too abstract, and tried to improve upon it by analysing a poem of Becher's which appeared in a recent issue of one of the proletarian literary reviews under the title '*Ich sage ganz offen*' ('I say quite openly'). Brecht compared this poem, first, with his own didactic poem about Carola Neher, the actress and secondly with Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre*. 'I taught Carola Neher all kinds of things, you know,' he said, 'not just acting – for example, she learned from me how to wash herself. Before that she used to wash just so as not to be dirty. But that was no way to do things. So I taught her how to wash her face. She became so perfect at it that I wanted to film her doing it, but it never came to that because I didn't feel like doing any filming just then and she didn't feel like doing it in front of anybody else. That didactic poem was a model. Anyone who learned from it was supposed to put himself in place of the "I" of the poem. When Becher says "I", he considers himself – as president of

the Union of German Proletarian–Revolutionary Writers – to be exemplary. The only trouble is that nobody feels like following his example. He gets nothing across except that he is rather pleased with himself.’ In this connection Brecht said he had been meaning for a long time to write a series of such model poems for different trades – the engineer, the writer. Then he compared Becher’s poem with Rimbaud’s. He thinks that Marx and Engels themselves, had they read *Le Bateau Ivre*, would have sensed in it the great historical movement of which it is the expression. They would have clearly recognized that what it describes is not an eccentric poet going for a walk but the flight, the escape of a man who cannot bear to live any longer inside the barriers of a class which – with the Crimean War, with the Mexican adventure – was then beginning to open up even the more exotic continents to its mercantile interests. Brecht thinks it is impossible to turn Rimbaud’s attitude – the attitude of the footloose vagabond who puts himself at the mercy of chance and turns his back upon society – into a model representation of a proletarian fighter.

6 July. Brecht, in the course of yesterday’s conversations: ‘I often imagine being interrogated by a tribunal. “Now tell us, Mr Brecht, are you really in earnest?” I would have to admit that no, I’m not completely in earnest. I think too much about artistic problems, you know, about what is good for the theatre, to be completely in earnest. But having said “no” to that important question, I would add something still more important: namely, that my attitude is *permissible*.’ I must admit he said this after the conversation had been going on for some little time. He had started by expressing doubt, not as to whether his attitude was permissible, but whether it was effective. His first remark was in answer to something I had said about Gerhart Hauptmann. ‘I sometimes ask myself,’ he said, ‘whether writers like Hauptmann aren’t, after all, the only ones who really get anywhere: I mean the *substance writers* [*Substanz-Dichter*].’ By this he means those writers who really are completely in earnest. To explain this thought he proceeds from the hypothesis that Confucius might once have written a tragedy, or Lenin a novel. That, he thinks, would be felt as improper, unworthy behaviour. ‘Suppose you read a very good historical novel and later you discover that it is by Lenin. You would change your opinion of both, to the detriment of both. Likewise, it would be wrong for Confucius to have written a tragedy, say one of Euripides’s tragedies; it would be felt as unworthy. Yet his parables are not.’ All this leads, in short, to a differentiation

between two literary types: the visionary artist, who is in earnest, and the cool-headed thinking man, who is not completely in earnest. At this point I raised the question of Kafka. To which of the two groups does he belong? I know that the question cannot be answered. And it is precisely its unanswerability which Brecht regards as an indication of the fact that Kafka, whom he considers to be a great writer, is, like Kleist, Grabbe or Büchner, a failure. Kafka's starting point is really the parable, which is governed by reason and which, therefore, so far as its actual wording is concerned, cannot be entirely in earnest. But then this parable has, all the same, to be given form. It grows into a novel. And if you look closely, you see that it contained the germ of a novel from the start. It was never altogether transparent. I should add that Brecht is convinced that Kafka would not have found his own special form without Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor or that other episode in *The Brothers Karamazov* where the holy *starets* begins to stink. In Kafka, then, the parabolic element is in conflict with the visionary element. But Kafka as a visionary, says Brecht, saw what was coming without seeing what is. He emphasizes once more (as earlier at Le Lavandou, but in terms which are clearer to me) the prophetic aspect of Kafka's work. Kafka had one problem and one only, he says, and that was the problem of organization. He was terrified by the thought of the empire of ants: the thought of men being alienated from themselves by the forms of their life in society. And he anticipated certain forms of this alienation, e.g. the methods of the GPU. But he never found a solution and never awoke from his nightmare. Brecht says of Kafka's precision that it is the precision of an imprecise man, a dreamer.

12 July. Yesterday, after playing chess, Brecht said: 'You know, when Korsch comes, we really ought to work out a new game with him. A game in which the moves do not always stay the same; where the function of a piece changes after it has stood on the same square for a while: it should either become stronger or weaker. As it is the game doesn't develop, it stays the same for too long.'

23 July. Yesterday a visit from Karin Michaelis, who has just returned from her trip to Russia and is full of enthusiasm. Brecht remembers how he was taken round Moscow by Tretyakov. Tretyakov showed him the city and was proud of everything, no matter what it was. 'That isn't a bad thing,' says Brecht, 'it shows that the place belongs to him. One isn't proud of other people's property.' After a while he added: 'Yes, but in the end I got a bit tired of it. I couldn't admire everything, nor

did I want to. The point is, they were his soldiers, his lorries. But not, alas, mine.'

24 July. On a beam which supports the ceiling of Brecht's study are painted the words: 'Truth is concrete.' On a window-sill stands a small wooden donkey which can nod its head. Brecht has hung a little sign round its neck on which he has written: 'Even I must understand it.'

5 August. Three weeks ago I gave B. my essay on Kafka. I'm sure he read it, but he never alluded to it of his own accord, and on two occasions when I steered the conversation round to it, he replied evasively. In the end I took the manuscript away again without saying a word. Last night he suddenly began speaking of this essay. The rather abrupt transition took the form of a remark to the effect that I, too, could not be completely acquitted of a diaristic style of writing *à la* Nietzsche. My Kafka essay, for instance. It treated Kafka purely from the phenomenal point of view – the work as something that had grown separately, by itself – the man, too: it detached the work from all connections, even with its author. In the end everything I wrote always came down to the question of *essence*. Now what would be the correct way of tackling the problem of Kafka? The correct way would be to ask: what does he do? how does he behave? And, at the start, to consider the general rather than the particular. It would then transpire that Kafka lived in Prague, in an unhealthy milieu of journalists, of self-important literati; in that world, literature was the principal reality, if not the only one. Kafka's strengths and weaknesses were bound up with this way of seeing the world – his artistic value, but also his feebleness in many respects. He was a Jew-boy – one could just as well coin the term 'Aryan boy' – a sorry, dismal creature, a mere bubble on the glittering quagmire of Prague cultural life, nothing more. Yet there were also some very interesting sides to him. One could bring these out. One might imagine a conversation between Lao Tzu and his disciple Kafka. Lao Tzu says: 'And so, Disciple Kafka, you have conceived a horror of the organizations, property relations and economic forms within which you live?' – 'Yes.' – 'You can't find your way about them any more?' – 'No.' – 'A share certificate fills you with dread?' – 'Yes.' – 'And so now you're looking for a leader you can hold on to, Disciple Kafka.' 'Of course such an attitude won't do,' says Brecht. 'I don't accept Kafka, you know.' He went on to speak about a Chinese philosopher's parable of 'the tribulations of usefulness'. In a wood there are many different kinds of tree-trunk. From the thickest

they make ship's timbers; from those which are less thick but still quite sturdy, they make boxes and coffin-lids; the thinnest of all are made into whipping-rods; but of the stunted ones they make nothing at all: these escape the tribulations of usefulness. 'You've got to look around in Kafka's writings as you might in such a wood. Then you'll find a whole lot of very useful things. The images are good, of course. But the rest is pure mystification. It's nonsense. You have to ignore it. Depth doesn't get you anywhere at all. Depth is a separate dimension, it's just depth - and there's nothing whatsoever to be seen in it.' To conclude the discussion I told B. that penetrating into depth is my way of travelling to the antipodes. In my essay on Kraus I actually got there. I know that the one on Kafka doesn't come off to the same degree: I can't dismiss the charge that it has landed me in a diaristic style of notation. It is true that the study of the frontier area defined by Kraus and, in another way, by Kafka preoccupies me a great deal. In Kafka's case I haven't yet, I said, completed my exploration of this area. I am aware that it contains a lot of rubbish and waste, a lot of pure mystification. But I can't help thinking that the important thing about Kafka is something else, and some of this I touched upon in my essay. B.'s approach should, I said, be checked against interpretations of specific works. I suggested *The Next Village*, and immediately saw that this suggestion worried B. He resolutely rejected Eisler's view that this very short story is 'worthless', but neither could he get anywhere nearer to defining its value. 'One ought to study it more closely,' he said. Then the conversation broke off, as it was ten o'clock and time to listen to the news from Vienna.

31 August. The night before last a long and heated debate about my Kafka. Its foundation: the charge that it promotes Jewish fascism. It increases and spreads the darkness surrounding Kafka instead of dispersing it. Yet it is necessary to clarify Kafka, that is to say, to formulate the practicable suggestions which can be extracted from his stories. It is to be supposed that such suggestions *can* be extracted from them, if only because of their tone of superior calm. But these suggestions should be sought in the direction of the great general evils which assail humanity today. Brecht looks for the reflexion of these evils in Kafka's work. He confines himself, in the main, to *The Trial*. What it conveys above all else, he thinks, is a dread of the unending and irresistible growth of great cities. He claims to know the nightmare of this idea from his own intimate experience. Such cities are an expression of the boundless maze of indirect relationships, complex mutual dependencies and compart-

mentations into which human beings are forced by modern forms of living. And these in turn find expression in the longing for a 'leader'. The petty bourgeois sees the leader as the only man whom, in a world where everyone can pass the buck to someone else, he can make responsible for all his ills. Brecht calls *The Trial* a prophetic book. 'By looking at the Gestapo you can see what the Cheka may become.' Kafka's outlook is that of a man caught under the wheels. Odradek is characteristic of this outlook: Brecht interprets the caretaker as personifying the worries of a father of a family. The petty bourgeois is bound to get it in the neck. His situation is Kafka's own. But whereas the type of petty bourgeois current today – that is, the fascist – has decided to set his indomitable iron will against this situation, Kafka hardly opposes it; he is wise. Where the fascist brings heroism into play, Kafka responds with questions. He asks for safeguards for his situation. But the nature of his situation is such that the safeguards he demands must be unreasonable. It is a Kafkaesque irony that the man who appears to be convinced of nothing so much as of the frailty of all safeguards should have been an insurance agent. Incidentally, his unlimited pessimism is free from any tragic sense of destiny. For not only is his expectation of misfortune founded on nothing but empiricism (although it must be said that this foundation is unshakable), but also, with incorrigible naivety, he seeks the criterion of final success in the most insignificant and trivial undertakings – a visit from a travelling salesman, an inquiry at a government office. From time to time our conversation centred on the story *The Next Village*. Brecht says it is a counterpart to the story of Achilles and the tortoise. One never gets to the next village if one breaks the journey down into its smallest parts, not counting the incidental occurrences. Then a whole life is too short for the journey. But the fallacy lies in the word 'one'. For if the journey is broken down into its parts, then the traveller is too. And if the unity of life is destroyed, then so is its shortness. Let life be as short as it may. That does not matter, for the one who arrives in the next village is not the one who set out on the journey, but another. – I for my part offer the following interpretation: the true measure of life is memory. Looking back, it traverses the whole of life like lightning. As fast as one can turn back a few pages, it has travelled from the next village to the place where the traveller took the decision to set out. Those for whom life has become transformed into writing – like the grandfather in the story – can only read the writing backwards. That is the only way in which they confront themselves, and only thus – by fleeing from the present – can they understand life.

27 September. *Dragør*. In a conversation a few evenings ago Brecht spoke of the curious indecision which at the moment prevents him from making any definite plans. As he is the first to point out, the main reason for this indecision is that his situation is so much more privileged than that of most other refugees. Therefore, since in general he scarcely admits that exile can be a proper basis for plans and projects, he refuses all the more radically to admit it as such in his own particular case. His plans reach out to the period beyond exile. There, he is faced with two possibilities. On the one hand there are some prose projects waiting to be done: the shorter one of the *Ui* – a satire on Hitler in the style of the Renaissance biographers – and the long one of the *Tui* novel. This is to be an encyclopedic survey of the follies of the Tellectual-Ins (intellectuals); it seems that it will be set, in part at least, in China. A small-scale model of this work is already completed. But besides these prose works he is also preoccupied with other plans, dating back to very old studies and ideas. Whereas he was able, at a pinch, to set down in his notes and introductions to the *Versuche* the thoughts which occurred to him concerning epic theatre, other thoughts, although originating in the same interests, have become combined with the study of Leninism and also of the scientific tendencies of the empiricists, and have therefore outgrown that rather limited framework. For several years past they have been subsumed, now under one key concept, now under another, so that non-Aristotelian logic, behaviourist theory, the new encyclopedia and the critique of ideas have, in turn, stood at the centre of his preoccupations. At present these various pursuits are converging upon the idea of a philosophical didactic poem. But he has doubts about the matter. He wonders, in the first instance, whether, in view of his output to date and especially of its satirical elements, particularly the *Three penny Novel*, the public would accept such a work. This doubt is made up of two distinct strands of thought. Whilst becoming more closely concerned with the problems and methods of the proletarian class struggle, he has increasingly doubted the satirical, and especially the ironic, attitude as such. But to confuse these doubts, which are mostly of a practical nature, with other, more profound ones would be to misunderstand them. The doubts at a deeper level concern the artistic and playful element in art, and above all those elements which, partially and occasionally, make art refractory to reason. Brecht's heroic efforts to legitimize art *vis-à-vis* reason have again and again referred him to the parable in which artistic mastery is proved by the fact that, in the end, all the artistic elements of a work cancel each other out. It is precisely his efforts

connected with this parable, which are at present becoming visible in a radical form in his conception of the didactic poem. In the course of the conversation I tried to explain to Brecht that such a poem would not have to seek approval from a bourgeois public but from a proletarian one, which, presumably, would find its criteria less in Brecht's earlier, partly bourgeois-oriented work than in the dogmatic and theoretical content of the didactic poem itself. 'If this didactic poem succeeds in enlisting the authority of Marxism on its behalf,' I told him, 'then your earlier work is not likely to weaken that authority.'

4 October. Yesterday Brecht left for London. Whether it is that my presence offers peculiar temptations in this respect, or whether Brecht is now generally more this way inclined than before, at all events his aggressiveness (which he himself calls 'baiting') is now much more pronounced in conversation than it used to be. Indeed, I am struck by a special vocabulary engendered by this aggressiveness. In particular, he is fond of using the term *Würstchen* (little sausage). In Dragør I was reading Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. To start with he blamed this choice of reading for my being unwell. As confirmation he told how, in his youth, a prolonged illness (which had doubtless been latent for a long time) had begun when a schoolfellow had played Chopin to him on the piano and he had not had the strength to protest. Brecht thinks that Chopin and Dostoyevsky have a particularly adverse effect on people's health. In other ways, too, he missed no opportunity of needling me about my reading matter, and as he himself was reading *Schweyk* at the time, he insisted on making comparative value judgements of the two authors. It became evident that Dostoyevsky simply could not measure up to Hašek, and Brecht included him without further ado among the *Würstchen*; only a little more and he would have extended to Dostoyevsky the description he keeps on hand, these days, for any work which lacks, or is said by him to lack, an enlightening character. He calls such a work a *Klump* (lump, or clot).

1938

28 June. I was in a labyrinth of stairs. This labyrinth was not entirely roofed over. I climbed; other stairways led downwards. On a landing I realized that I had arrived at a summit. A wide view of many lands opened up before me. I saw other men standing on other peaks. One of these men was suddenly seized by dizziness and fell. The dizziness spread; others were now falling from other peaks into the depths below. When I too became dizzy, I woke up.

On 22 June I arrived at Brecht's.

Brecht speaks of the elegance and nonchalance of Virgil's and Dante's basic attitude, which, he says, forms the backdrop to Virgil's majestic *gestus*. He calls both Virgil and Dante 'promeneurs'. Emphasizing the classic rank of the *Inferno*, he says: 'You can read it out of doors.'

He speaks of his deep-rooted hatred of priests, a hatred he inherited from his grandmother. He hints that those who have appropriated the theoretical doctrines of Marx and taken over their management will always form a clerical camarilla. Marxism lends itself all too easily to 'interpretation'. Today it is a hundred years old and what do we find? (At this point the conversation was interrupted.) "'The State must wither away.'" Who says that? The State.' (Here he can only mean the Soviet Union.) He assumes a cunning, furtive expression, stands in front of the chair in which I am sitting – he is impersonating 'the State' – and says, with a sly, sidelong glance at an imaginary interlocutor: 'I know I ought to wither away.'

A conversation about new Soviet novels. We no longer read them. The talk then turns to poetry and to the translations of poems from various languages in the USSR with which *Das Wort* is flooded. He says the poets over there are having a hard time. 'If Stalin's name doesn't occur in a poem, it's interpreted as intentional.'

29 June. Brecht talks about epic theatre, and mentions plays acted by children in which faults of performance, which produce alienation effects, impart epic characteristics to the production. Something similar may occur in third-rate provincial theatre. I mentioned the Geneva production of *Le Cid*, where the sight of the crown worn crookedly on the king's head gave me the first inkling of the ideas I eventually developed in the *Trauerspiel* book nine years later. Brecht in turn quoted the moment at which the idea of epic theatre first came into his head. It happened at a rehearsal for the Munich production of *Edward II*. The battle in the play is supposed to occupy the stage for three-quarters of an hour. Brecht couldn't stage-manage the soldiers, and neither could Asya [Lacis], his production assistant. Finally he turned in despair to Karl Valentin, at that time one of his closest friends, who was attending the rehearsal, and asked him: 'Well, what is it? What's the matter with these soldiers? What's wrong with them?' Valentin: 'They're pale, they're scared, that's what!' The remark settled the issue, Brecht adding: 'They're tired.' Whereupon the soldiers' faces were thickly made up with chalk. That was the day the style of the production was determined.

Later the old subject of 'logical positivism' came up. I adopted a somewhat intransigent attitude and the conversation threatened to take a disagreeable turn. This was avoided by Brecht admitting for the first time that his arguments were superficial. This he did with the delightful formula: 'A deep need makes for a superficial grasp.' Later, when we were walking to his house (the conversation had taken place in my room): 'It's a good thing when someone who has taken up an extreme position then goes into a period of reaction. That way he arrives at a half-way house.' That, he explained, was what had happened to him: he had become mellow.

In the evening: I should like to get somebody to take a small present – a pair of gloves – to Asya. Brecht thinks this might be tricky. It could happen that someone thought the gloves were Jahn's¹ way of repaying Asya for her espionage services. 'The worst thing is when whole sets of directives² are withdrawn en bloc, but the instructions they contain are still supposed to remain in force.'

1 July. Whenever I refer to conditions in Russia, Brecht's comments are highly sceptical. When I inquired the other day whether Ottwald was still 'doing time' in gaol, the answer came: 'If he's still got time, he'll be doing it.' Yesterday Gretl Steffin expressed the opinion that Tretyakov was no longer alive.

4 July. Brecht in the course of a conversation on Baudelaire last night: 'I'm not against the asocial, you know; I'm against the non-social.'

21 July. The publications of Lukács, Kurella *et al* are giving Brecht a good deal of trouble. He thinks, however, that one ought not to oppose them at the theoretical level. I then put the question on the political level. He does not pull his punches. 'A socialist economy doesn't need war, and that is why it is opposed to war. The "peace-loving nature of the Russian people" is an expression of this and nothing else. There can't be a socialist economy in one country. Rearmament has inevitably set the Russian proletariat back a lot, back to stages of historical development which have long since been overtaken – among others, the monarchic stage. Russia is now under personal rule. Only blockheads can deny this, of course.' This was a short conversation which was soon interrupted. – I should add that in this context Brecht emphasized that

¹ The name, presumably that of the proposed intermediary, cannot be deciphered with absolute certainty; perhaps Hans Henny Jahn?

² Uncertain reading of the manuscript.

as a result of the dissolution of the First International, Marx and Engel lost active contact with the working-class movement and thereafter only gave advice – of a private nature, not intended for publication – to individual leaders. Nor was it an accident – although regrettable – that at the end of his life Engels turned to the natural sciences.

Béla Kun, he said, was his greatest admirer in Russia. Brecht and Heine were the only German poets Kun studied [*sic*]. (Occasionally Brecht hints at the existence of a certain person on the Central Committee who supports him.)

25 July. Yesterday morning Brecht came over to my place to read me his Stalin poem, which is entitled 'The Peasant to his Ox'. At first I did not get its point, and when a moment later the thought of Stalin passed through my head, I did not dare entertain it. This was more or less the effect Brecht intended, and he explained what he meant in the conversation which followed. In this conversation he emphasized, among other things, the positive aspects of the poem. It was indeed a poem in honour of Stalin, who in his opinion had achieved great things. But Stalin is not yet dead. Besides, a different, more enthusiastic manner of honouring Stalin is not incumbent upon Brecht, who is sitting in exile and waiting for the Red Army to march in. He is following developments in Russia and also the writings of Trotsky. These prove that there exists a suspicion – a justifiable one – demanding a sceptical appraisal of Russian affairs. Such scepticism is in the spirit of the Marxist classics. Should the suspicion prove correct one day, then it will become necessary to fight the regime, and *publicly*. But, 'unfortunately or God be praised, whichever you prefer', the suspicion is at present not yet a certainty. There is no justification for constructing upon it a policy such as Trotsky's. 'And then there's no doubt that certain criminal cliques really are at work in Russia itself. One can see it, from time to time, by the harm they do.' Finally Brecht pointed out that we Germans have been especially affected by the setbacks we have suffered in our own country. 'We have had to pay for the stand we took, we're covered with scars. It's only natural that we should be especially sensitive.'

Towards evening Brecht found me in the garden reading *Capital*. Brecht: 'I think it's very good that you're studying Marx just now, at a time when one comes across him less and less, especially among people like us.' I replied that I prefer studying the most talked-about authors when they were out of fashion. We went on to discuss Russian literary policy. I said, referring to Lukács, Gábot and Kurella: 'You can't put

on an act with people like this.' Brecht: 'You might put on an Act but certainly not a whole play. They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what's going to come out. And they themselves don't want to produce. They want to play the *apparatchik* and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.' We then got on to Goethe's novels, I don't remember how; Brecht knows only the *Elective Affinities*. He said that what he admired about it was the author's youthful elegance. When I told him Goethe wrote this novel at the age of sixty, he was very much surprised. The book, he said, had nothing philistine about it. That was a tremendous achievement. He knew a thing or two about philistinism; all German drama, including the most significant works, was stamped with it. I remarked that *Elective Affinities* had been very badly received when it came out. Brecht: 'I'm pleased to hear it. – The Germans are a lousy nation [*ein Scheissvolk*]. It isn't true that one must not draw conclusions from Hitler about Germans in general. In me, too, everything that is German is bad. The intolerable thing about us Germans is our narrow-minded independence. Nowhere else were there Imperial Free Cities, like that lousy Augsburg. Lyons was never a free city; the independent cities of the Renaissance were city states. – Lukács is a German by choice, and he's run completely out of steam.'

Speaking of *The Finest Legends of Woynok the Brigand* by Anna Seghers, Brecht praised the book because it shows that Seghers is no longer writing to order. 'Seghers can't produce to order, whereas without an order, I wouldn't even know how to start writing.' He also praised the stories for having a rebellious, solitary figure as their central character.

26 July. Brecht, last night: 'There can't be any doubt about it any longer: the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology.'

29 July. Brecht read to me some polemical texts he has written as part of his controversy with Lukács, studies for an essay which is to be published in *Das Wort*. He asked my advice whether to publish them. As, at the same time, he told me that Lukács's position 'over there' is at the moment very strong, I told him I could offer no advice. 'There are questions of power involved. You ought to get the opinion of somebody from over there. You've got friends there, haven't you?' – Brecht: 'Actually, no, I haven't. Neither have the Muscovites themselves – like

the dead.'

3 August. On 29 July in the evening, while we were in the garden, the conversation came round to the question whether a part of the *Children's Songs* cycle should be included in the new volume of poems. I was not in favour, because I thought that the contrast between the political and the private poems made the experience of exile particularly explicit, and this contrast would be diminished by the inclusion of a disparate sequence. In saying this, I probably implied that the suggestion once again reflected the destructive aspect of Brecht's character, which challenges everything almost before it has been achieved. Brecht: 'I know; they'll say of me that I was manic. When the present is passed on to the future, the capacity to understand my mania will be passed on with it. The times we live in will make a backdrop to my mania. But what I should really like would be for people to say about me: he was a *moderate* manic.' – His discovery of moderation, Brecht said, should find expression in this volume of verse: the recognition that life goes on despite Hitler, that there will always be children. He was thinking of the 'epoch without history' of which he speaks in his poem addressed to artists. A few days later he told me he thought the coming of such an epoch more likely than victory over fascism. But then, with a vehemence he rarely shows, he added yet another argument in favour of including the *Children's Songs* in the *Poems from Exile*: 'We must neglect nothing in our struggle against that lot. What they're planning is nothing small, make no mistake about it. They're planning for thirty thousand years ahead. Colossal things. Colossal crimes. They stop at nothing. They're out to destroy everything. Every living cell shrinks under their blows. That is why we too must think of everything. They cripple the baby in the mother's womb. We must on no account leave out the children.' While he was speaking like this I felt a power being exercised over me which was equal in strength to the power of fascism, a power that sprang from depths of history no less deep than the power of the fascists. It was a very curious feeling, and new to me. Then Brecht's thoughts took another turn, which further intensified this feeling I had. 'They're planning devastations on a mind-chilling scale. That's why they can't reach agreement with the Church, which is also geared to thousands of years. And they've proletarianized me too. It isn't just that they've taken my house, my fish-pond and my car from me; they've also robbed me of my stage and my audience. From my own vantage-point I can't admit that Shakespeare's talent was categorically greater than mine. But

Shakespeare couldn't have written just for his desk drawer, any more than I can. Besides, he had his characters before his eyes. The people he depicted were running around in the streets. He just observed their behaviour and picked out a few traits; there were many others, just as important, that he left out.'

Early August. 'In Russia there is dictatorship *over* the proletariat. We should avoid dissociating ourselves from this dictatorship for as long as it still does useful work for the proletariat – i.e. so long as it contributes towards a reconciliation between the proletariat and the peasantry, giving prime recognition to proletarian interests.' A few days later Brecht spoke of a 'workers' monarchy', and I compared this creature with certain grotesque sports of nature dredged up from the depths of the sea in the form of horned fish or other monsters.

25 August. A Brechtian maxim: 'Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones.'

Translated by Anya Bostock