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Biblical Themes and Motifs in Brecht's

Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti

by Siegfried Mews

"Sie werden lachen: Die Bibel,"¹ Brecht replied on 1 October 1928 when asked by the editors of the fashionable Berlin magazine *Die Dame* about the strongest influence on his work. This pithy remark, which surely must be counted among the playwright's better-known and often-quoted phrases, is quite literally true. Although the Biblical influence on Brecht's work is all-pervasive--Reinhold Grimm called it Brecht's "lebenslange und höchst komplexe Abhängigkeit von der Bibel"²--as yet no comprehensive study exists which fully explores Brecht's use of the Bible and Christianity.³ In the absence of such a comprehensive study it is in order to examine individual works in general and dramas in particular to determine the exact nature and function of Biblical influences.

Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti, one of Brecht's master dramas from his exile period, "wuchert geradezu von dialektischer Bibelhutz," Thomas O. Brandt observed.⁴ Although, according to the same critic, "die Bibel pfiffig und doch furios in dieses Stück hineingefeixt [wird],"⁵ he essentially confines himself to listing some Biblical quotations in the play without elucidating their meaning. And despite the fact that *Puntila/Matti* has received considerable critical attention during the last few years,⁶ hardly any reference to the influence of the Bible has been made.

The play originated in 1940 during Brecht's Finnish exile and was inspired by his hostess, the writer Hella Wuolijoki, whose contribution the playwright acknowledged in a prefatory note to the play: "Geschrieben nach den Erzählungen und einem Stückentwurf von Hella Wuolijoki" (GW, IV, 1610). It is not necessary for our purposes to delve into the complex textual genesis of the play;⁷ it suffices to draw attention to the tribute which Brecht pays to his hostess in the *Arbeitsjournal*. This tribute offers a clue as to what attracted Brecht to Hella Wuolijoki's tales: "was für eine hinreiBende epikerin ist sie, auf ihrem holzstuhl sitzend und kaffee kochend! alles kommt biblisch einfach und biblisch komplex."⁸

The play itself deals with both the contrast between master and servant and the two seemingly irreconcilable aspects of Puntila: a ruthless exploiter when sober, humane and congenial when drunk. One of Brecht's early titles formulates more precisely the two aspects of the play: "Die zwei Seelen des Herrn [von] Puntila oder Der Regen fällt immer nach unten."⁹ We may interpret this title to signify that, regardless of the two souls in Puntila's breast, the fate of those dependent on him is not changed for the better; while Herr Puntila's self-contradiction may offer an amusing spectacle, it does not materially affect the lot of the servants.

Although Brecht chose the form of the "Volksstück" for his play, he made it quite plain in his "Anmerkungen zum Volksstück" (GW, XVII, 1162-1169) that he did not have in mind "krudes und anspruchsloses Theater" (GW, XVII, 1162); on the contrary, he demanded "[der Gattung Volksstück] das hohe Ziel zu stecken, zu dem ihre Benennung [sie] eigentlich von vornherein verpflichtet" (GW, XVII, 1169). In calling for "echte Artistik" and "künstlerische Einfachheit" (GW, XVII, 1167, 1168) Brecht implicitly rejected both milieu realism and socialist realism.¹⁰ In fact, in order to achieve the desired artistry Brecht postulated: "Auch die Figuren müssen mit einer gewissen Größe dargestellt werden" (GW, XVII, 1168). Brecht's utterance in the *Arbeitsjournal*, quoted above, indicates one of the models that he used to transform Hella Wuolijoki's materials into a play which unmistakably bears his own stamp. This model was the Bible. Here he found both simplicity and complexity, simplicity and greatness.

Not surprisingly, a survey of the play's Biblical quotations reveals that most of them are attributable to Puntila, although Hans Poser overstates the case: "Überhaupt sind die Bibelzitate, die ja Brechts Sprache kennzeichnen, immer Puntila in den Mund gelegt."¹¹ In having Puntila, particularly in his euphoric stage, quote directly from the Bible, allude to it or recreate situations from it Brecht achieved one of his objectives: he enhanced Puntila's stature and endowed him with noble and poetic qualities. To be sure, Brecht's attitude towards his character Puntila was a rather ambivalent one. On the one hand, he stated in 1940: "Die Rolle des Puntila darf also keinen Augenblick und in keinem Zug ihres natürlichen Charmes entkleidet werden; es wird besondere Kunst nötig sein, die Betrunkenheitsszenen poetisch und zart, mit so viel Variation wie möglich, und die Nüchternheitsszenen so ungrotesk and unbrutal wie möglich zu bringen" (GW, XVII, 1168). On the other hand, Brecht clearly saw the dangers in over-endowing the drunken Puntila with an excess of vitality and charm. He wrote in his "Notizen über die Züricher Erstaufführung" in 1948: "Entscheidend ist die Ausformung des Klassenantagonismus zwischen Puntila und Matti. Die Rolle des Matti muß so besetzt werden, daß eine echte Balance zustande kommt, das heißt, daß die geistige Überlegenheit bei ihm liegt. Der Darsteller des Puntila muß sich hüten, in den Trunkenheitsszenen das Publikum durch Vitalität oder Charme so mitzureißen, daß ihm nicht mehr die Freiheit bleibt, ihn zu kritisieren" (GW, XVII, 1172). In 1949 Brecht went even further in the Berliner Ensemble production of *Puntila/Matti* and had the actor who played Puntila wear "einen ekelhaft geformten Kahlkopf" mit "verlebten und niedrig aussehenden Zügen."¹² Only now, as Brecht saw it, had the proper ideological perspective been attained: "Erst jetzt wirkte sein [Puntilas] Scharm in der Trunkenheit gefährlich, wurden seine geselligen Annäherungen zu denen eines Krokodils."¹³

The liberal use of grease paint and other make-up devices, however, could not entirely change Puntila's character as it has been determined by the text. For it was difficult to completely obliterate the "gewisse Größe" with which the role of Puntila was to be played. After all, Puntila had been conceived as a "nationale Figur" which, in order to be presented properly on stage, required "alle seine [des Schauspielers] Menschenkenntnis, Kühnheit und Feinfühligkeit" (GW, XVII, 1168). In fact, as Poser correctly noted, "Ein weiterer Grund dafür, daß

Puntila Matti gegenüber an Bühnenwirksamkeit gewinnt, sind die parodistischen Anspielungen—vor allem an die Bibel—, durch die seine Sprache geprägt ist."¹⁴ Further, Poser observes, the quotations from the Bible tend to enhance Puntila's "Volkstümlichkeit" to such an extent that, paradoxically, "Die Gestalt des Gutsherrn [enthält] mehr volkstümliche Züge als die seines Knechtes".¹⁵ While Poser's observation is not entirely false, it is not comprehensive enough to elucidate the function of Biblical quotations, allusions, themes and motifs in the play. It will become evident in the course of our analysis that Brecht was far from merely adding color to the figure of Puntila by his deliberate use of Biblical allusions; in fact, a deeper probing of the Biblical references aids us in our better understanding of Puntila's true nature and the meaning of the play as a whole.

A glance at Puntila's Biblical utterances immediately reveals that quite frequently he establishes an implicit or explicit analogy to Jesus Christ or to God Himself. In an early "Stückplanentwurf" Brecht referred to the first scene of the play, which was later entitled "Puntila findet einen Menschen" (GW, IV, 1612), as "getsemaneh."¹⁶ The scene is, indeed, vaguely reminiscent of Christ's betrayal and denial by his disciples. For Puntila, who has been imbibing heavily with the socially prominent figures of the area and who is the only one to survive somewhat intact, quotes from the Bible: "Aber so fällt ihr einem alle zusammen bei der geringsten Anstrengung, denn der Geist ist willig und das Fleisch ist schwach" (GW, IV, 1612).¹⁷ He continues his imitation of Christ by reenacting Jesus' miraculous walking on water or, rather, on "Aquavit" to inspire confidence and trust not in Peter but in a "weakling," the drunken judge, who has just fallen off his chair.

Hans Peter Neureuter speaks in this context of Puntila's "biblische[s] Pathos seiner Verlassenheitsklage."¹⁸ Puntila's pathetic lament again shows him adopting a pattern of behavior which transcends his actual socio-economic status because it is derived from the Bible. At the same time, Puntila's pathos seems incongruous and ironic when one considers the circumstances which led to his loneliness.

Yet in the same scene, Puntila invokes his rights as both temporal and spiritual Lord by paraphrasing "So gebt dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist und Gott, was Gottes ist."¹⁹ After having listened to Matti's story about Mr. Pappmann's estate where good food would have appeased the "Geister," i.e., the rebellious spirits, Puntila replies: "Ich seh, du hast deine Stell nur verloren, weil sie beim Gesind am Essen gespart haben, das setzt dich nicht runter in meinen Augen, daB du gern iBt,so lang du meinen Traktor anständig fährst und nicht aufsässig bist und dem Puntila gibst, was des Puntila ist"(GW, IV, 1617-18; my italics).

Puntila's dominant position is also clearly evident in his more intimate relationships. Thus he acts like a stern father (God) who issues commandments to his daughter Eva: "Du bist ruhig, Eva, und ehrst deinen Vater und Mutter, daB du lange lebest auf Erden!" (G W, IV, 1624). In retelling the plot (*Fabel*) of the text used by the Berliner Ensemble in 1949, Brecht and his collaborators explicitly drew attention to Puntila's elevated stature. The beginning of the plot summary of scene 2 reads in the "Plakattext": "Ein neuer König Lear: Tochter versagt Vater Alkohol und Fleischeslust."²⁰ Eva's interference with her father's pursuit

of alcohol and sex leads to her first "Verstoßung"; it is to be followed by a second one after she has resolutely decided not to become engaged to Matti.²¹ That Brecht consciously patterned certain incidents after the Bible is evident from his remark that "Puntila...verstieß seine Tochter in biblischer Weise" (GW, XVII, 1174)—that is, in a manner befitting kings and patriarchs.

Puntila's identification with Christ continues when he considers himself the heavenly bridegroom and Mrs. Klinckmann, whom he had hoped to appease by granting her sexual favors, "die törichte Jungfrau, die kein Öl in ihrer Lampe hat!" (GW, IV, 1624).²² Again, Puntila establishes a parallel to Christ when resisting the temptation not of alcohol *per se* but of bootlegged liquor: "Heb dich weg, Weib! Wie kannst du mir deinen ungesetzlichen Schnaps anbieten. Ich trink nur gesetzlichen, einen anderen brächte ich gar nie die Gurgel hinunter" (GW, IV, 1627).²³

In both cases the incongruity that arises from Puntila's identification with Christ on the one hand and his entirely worldly interests (sex and alcohol) on the other tends to reveal his true, exploitive nature.

Although most of Puntila's Biblical utterances occur when he is intoxicated, he also alludes to the Bible when he is not under the influence of alcohol. Interestingly, in his first sober appearance of the play, at the beginning of scene 4, he refers to the "getsemaneh" motif of scene 1. This time, however, he does not make any pretense of forgiveness or leniency when harshly reprimanding Matti for the supposed betrayal of his master: "Ich hab mich schon gewundert über dich, daß du mich allein hast wegfahren lassen von Kurgela, aber daß du nicht einmal gewacht hast, bis ich zurückkomm, und ich dich aus der Bettstatt ziehen hab müssen, daß wir auf'n Gesindemarkt fahren, das vergeb ich nicht so leicht. Das ist nicht besser wie die Jünger am Ölberg, halts Maul, ich weiß eben jetzt, dich muß man im Aug behalten" (GW, IV, 1633-34; my italics). As the scene progresses, Puntila gradually achieves his habitual state of euphoria—in which, according to Brecht, "der Gutsbesitzer seine Menschenähnlichkeit erringt" (GW, XVII, 1174). Now Puntila gently reproaches Matti for his lack of faith in a minor miracle by calling him "Kleingläubiger" (GW, IV, 1641).²⁴

The "miracle" Puntila performs in this scene is the rehiring of Surkkala who had been previously fired because of his anti-establishment views. In rehiring Surkkala, Puntila ignores the opinion of the representative of the church in the play, the parson. The parson is an ardent supporter of the *status quo* and had denounced Surkkala as an "ausgemachter Roter" (GW, IV, 1697). Matti's skepticism concerning Puntila's honorable intentions is ultimately proved correct, for Surkkala is unceremoniously dismissed again (in scene 11) upon the insistence of the parson.

It is quite clear then that loyalty and unquestioning faith are the virtues which Puntila expects from his employees at all times. The very fact that Puntila uses the same Biblical frame of reference when drunk and when sober offers additional evidence for the assumption that Puntila is not really a tragically split personality.²⁵ He is foremost a Lord and master who exploits and uses those dependent on him. When drunk, he merely changes the forms of exploita-

tion.²⁶ Even when Puntila seems to appear as a contrite sinner, he expects automatic forgiveness. His amazing ability to adopt roles and patterns of behavior which suit his purpose merely underlines the fact that he is usually in full control of the situation—regardless of the state he is in. In scene 2 he casts himself in the role of the Prodigal Son when Eva accords him a cool reception after several days of carousing: "Warum, ich hab mich beeilt und komm spät in der Nacht an und werd ich empfangen mit liebenden Armen? Ich erinner an den verlorenen Sohn,..., aber wie, wenn dann kein Kalb geschlachtet worden wär, sondern kalte Vorwürf?" (GW, IV, 1623). When the cook Laina timidly reminds Puntila that he is succumbing to his drinking habit despite his grandiloquent resolution to destroy all the bottles in his possession, he replies with an allusion to Peter's triple denial of Jesus: "Ich trink? Nennst du das trinken? Eine Flasch oder zwei? *Er greift nach der zweiten Flasche.* Vernicht die—*er gibt ihr die leere*—, zerschmeiß sie, ich will sie nicht mehr sehn, das hab ich dir doch gesagt. Und schau mich nicht an, wie unser Herr den Petrus, ich vertrag kein kleinliches Auf-einem-Wort-Herumreiten" (GW, IV, 1702).

In essence, all of Puntila's roles and reenactments of Biblical scenes merely tend to affirm his position as master. He can afford to appear in other guises because it does not really affect his social and economic status. If drunken Puntila happens to violate his capitalistic self-interest, the damage he causes can usually be repaired without any grave consequences for him. Even the potentially dangerous Surkkala affair, which might have led to economic sanctions against Puntila, can be settled amicably by Surkkala's second dismissal and a donation to a right-wing organization. In the end, it is the abominable "Nero" (GW, IV, 1684)—as Puntila calls himself after having evicted the "Bund der Bräute" from his estate—rather than the "Christian martyr" (GW, IV, 1682) who prevails. To be sure, calling a "Minister" a "Scheißkerl" to his face requires an act of courage; but it is sheer hyperbole when Puntila in describing the event says: "Ich bin mir wie ein christlicher Märtyrer vor den Löwen vorgekommen und hab mit meiner Meinung nicht hinterm Berg gehalten" (GW, IV, 1682).

As the examples cited suggest, many of Puntila's references to the Bible can be explained in terms of *Verfremdung* "auf ironisierende, parodistische Weise."²⁷ However, it should also be borne in mind that Brecht was not primarily interested in an intellectual game of punning. Rather, *Verfremdung* by means of "Aufzeigen von Widersprüchen" is not an isolated phenomenon but an all-pervasive structural principle which, in the final analysis, aims at transcending the theatrical production: "[Verfremdung will] zum selbständigen Durchdenken und Eingreifen auffordern...will den produktiven Zweifel wecken."²⁸

Thus, the Biblical references ultimately serve as a means of exposing social antagonisms. Puntila uses the Bible to project an image of himself which hardly corresponds to his real self by means of placing emphasis on his purely human qualities on the one hand and on his position as Lord of almost mythical proportions on the other. It has been noted that Puntila "bezieht...in gigantischer Weise die Welt auf seine Person."²⁹ Puntila's socially destructive gigantesque rapacity, which may be observed, for example, in the fact that he becomes en-

gaged to four girls instead of one, is brought into sharper focus by his assuming a Biblical posture.

In contrast to the colorful and exuberant Puntila, whose exploits provide the material for popular lore, Puntila's servant Matti did not receive exclusively good marks from the critics³⁰—Brecht's retroactive endeavors to establish a true balance between the two antagonists notwithstanding. Following Poser's suggestion that Puntila is actually more *volkstümlich* than Matti,³¹ one might argue that Puntila's stature as a kind of folk hero is, indeed, considerably enhanced by his liberal quoting from and alluding to the Bible—the best known and most widely read of all books. Conversely, Matti, who represents the proletarian perspective in the play, relies far less heavily on the Bible than Puntila—a fact which provides a partial explanation for Matti's comparative lack of popular appeal. More importantly, however, this fact permits us to conclude that Biblical precepts and precedents, at least as interpreted and applied by the members of institutionalized religion, tend to serve the interests of the establishment. Matti's interpretation and use of the Bible is devoid of any identification; rather, he applies the precepts of the Bible quite deliberately to the social realm and emphasizes its potentially revolutionary message. In the play within the play which Matti performs with the "Bund der Bräute" in scene 7 he freely paraphrases Romans 2, 11. Matti renders "Denn es ist kein Ansehen der Person vor Gott" in his imaginary address to the representative of the church as follows: "Herr Probst, daB die Lisu, das Kuhmädchen, heut von einem porzellanenen Teller ißt, das muß Sie am meisten freuen, denn vor Gott sind alle gleich, steht es geschrieben, also warum nicht vor dem Herrn Puntila?" (GW, IV, 1670). Scene 7, incidentally, anticipates the brief moment of social harmony during the preparations for the planned engagement of Matti and Eva in scene 9. Such social harmony could not be achieved, Brecht noted in one of his early plans, without the "austreibung der materialisten"³²—that is, those who would let their material interests interfere with the spirit of true humanity. The phrase "austreibung der materialisten," needless to say, is a direct allusion to Jesus' driving out buyers and sellers from the temple of God (Matthew 21, 12; Mark 11, 15; Luke 19, 45; John 2, 14). Brecht had used a similar paraphrase from the Bible in scene 7 of *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*, a scene which he entitled "Austreibung der Händler aus dem Tempel" (GW, II, 717).

Matti offers another example of his interpretation of the Bible which again sharply deviates from Puntila's concept. After he has constructed the Hatel-maberg for Puntila, Matti draws attention to the existing inequality among men in his account of Genesis: "So, der Berg ist fertig, jetzt könnens hinaufsteigen. Es ist ein Berg mit einem Weg, nicht in so unfertigem Zustand wie der liebe Gott seine Berg geschaffen hat in der Eil, weil er nur sechs Tag gehabt hat, so daB er noch eine Masse Knechte hat schaffen müssen, damit Sie was mit anfangen können, Herr Puntila" (GW, IV, 1704-05). The contrast between God's "imperfect" creation and the "improvements" wrought by man serves as a severe indictment of the existing social order.

Brecht does not, by any means, confine himself to the employment of Biblical allusions, quotations, etc. on the part of the two main characters. Even if it is not necessarily evident from the text itself, the Bible serves as a frame of reference. For example, the four women of Kurgela who, according to Brecht, belong "zu

Mews: Biblical Themes and Motifs in Brecht's Herr Puntila und sein den edelsten Figuren des Stückes" (GW, XVII, 1172) are elevated to the status of "biblische Bräute,"³³ yet their humble expectations—"Es ist nur ein Spaß beabsichtigt und ein klein wenig Aufzwicken beim Tanz" (GW, IV, 1667)—are not fulfilled. On the contrary, they are unceremoniously expelled from Puntila's (earthly) paradise *not* because of any transgressions for which they might have incurred Lord Puntila's wrath but because they belong to the class of people who have created Puntila's wealth in the first place. Brecht remarked: "Ihr Hinauswurf [kann] keiner anderen Ursache als ihrem niederen Stand zugeschrieben werden" (GW, XVII, 1172). In this particular instance Puntila clearly lacks the aura of greatness in which he likes to envisage himself because he acts in direct contradiction to the precepts set forth in Luke 14, 12-13: "When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours...call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."

It has been mentioned that the representative of the religious institutions in the play, the parson, is a firm supporter of the social *status quo*. The parson attempts to divert the thoughts of his flock from the here-and-now and direct them to the hereafter by getting rid of people like Surkkala who exercise "einen unheilvollen Einfluß in der Gemeinde" (GW, IV, 1697). The parson is, alas, not too successful in his endeavors because some of his parishioners have taken to considering "die Naturprodukte wie was ganz Natürliches und fressens hinunter, als ob es sein müßte" (GW, IV, 1676). Such a formulation is designed to jolt the reader/spectator into an awareness of the parson's untenable position because there obviously exists a contradiction between the logically correct statement on the one hand and the speaker's intended meaning on the other.³⁴ Another important pillar of society, the judge, washes his hands in innocence (GW, IV, 1693) because he does not wish to be part of the drunken Puntila's social experimentation, which consists of the futile attempt to overcome class barriers by uniting Eva and Matti. The instances cited tend to confirm the fact that both religion and the Bible are used as ideological devices to uphold the *status quo*.

In the final analysis, the gist of the play and the essence of the master-servant relationship are summed up in the herring episode, which constitutes the first part of Matti's examination of Eva. In his examination, Matti wishes to determine whether Eva has the qualifications of a proletarian housewife. In particular, Brecht attributed great importance to Matti's "Lobgesang auf den Strömling" which was to be presented as a poem, "mit Distinktion, 'auf goldenem Teller gereicht'" (GW, XVII, 1167). The passage in question reads, "Er nimmt einen Hering und faßt ihn am Schwanz. Willkommen, Hering, du Belag des armen Volkes! Du Sättiger zu allen Tageszeiten und salziger Schmerz in den Gedärmen! Aus dem Meer bist du gekommen und in die Erde wirst du gehn. Mit deiner Kraft werden die Fichtenwälder gefällt und die Äcker angesät, und mit deiner Kraft gehen die Maschinen, Gesinde genannt, die noch keine perpetua mobile sind. O Hering, du Hund, wenn du nicht wärest, möchten wir anfangen, vom Gut Schweinefleisch verlangen, und was würdest du aus Finnland? Er legt ihn zurück, zerschneidet ihn und gibt allen ein Stückchen" (GW, IV, 1687). Hans Bänziger sees in this episode an analogy to the Lord's Supper, "nicht bloß Spott

und Verulkung...Ein Weihespiel, dem alles Spirituelle fehlt."³⁵ However, Herbert Knust has advanced a more convincing interpretation which, in part, is corroborated in this essay.³⁶ Not the Lord's Supper but rather Jesus' feeding of the four or five thousand with bread and fish is to be considered as a parallel here. In the Bible the miracle of feeding the multitude is immediately followed by another feat of a similarly miraculous nature: Jesus' walking on water.³⁷ In a dialectical reversal of the Bible Brecht strongly suggests that Puntila's being fed by his servants is equally miraculous. For the only recompense the servants receive for their labors is some morsels from Puntila's table. And Puntila will be able to continue walking on aquavit, i.e., "Lebenswasser," as long as the populace continues to believe in the kind of miracle Puntila seeks to perpetuate, i.e., the feeding of the one by the many.

The brief exploration of Brecht's deliberate and conscious use of the Bible—"einfach" and "komplex"³⁸ at the same time—adds to our better understanding of a play which has been called "so widerspruchsvoll, so facettenreich, so satirisch und zugleich so 'genüßlich'..., wie man sich das von Brecht nur wünschen kann."³⁹ Ultimately, Puntila's pretensions to being a good, humane, noble Lord and master in the Biblical mold are exposed as sham by his own actions and by the clear-headed Matti. Puntila's imagined martyrdom of being betrayed and misunderstood by his fellow men is shown to spring from the (possibly subconscious) desire of a ruthless exploiter to hide his true motives rather than from the spirit of Christian fellowship and love. A world in which there is no true communion among men because of their differing socio-economic status, and in which the bare necessities of life are doled out in miserly fashion to those who produce them, Brecht wishes the spectator to realize, is in dire need of change. Yet Brecht does not proclaim his message with gritted teeth and clenched fists. Rather, as for example at the beginning of scene 9, Brecht has the upper-class characters expose themselves as social parasites: "Im jeweiligen Charakter wird der Standestyp enthüllt: ihr parasitärer Glanz funkelt im Licht der Komik und beleuchtet ihre Bewegungen, den Sprachduktus wie auch das, was sie sprechen."⁴⁰ As to Puntila himself, his "Doppelrolle [ist] das konkrete Sinnbild der Selbstentfremdung des Menschen in der Klassengesellschaft."⁴¹ Since, according to Marx, landowners and capitalists experience their "Selbstentfremdung" as "Macht," Puntila can adopt and discard his Biblical roles almost at will,⁴² without ever being fully able to live up to the grandiose image he likes to project of himself. The contrast between what Puntila would like to be but cannot objectively become is comical. But Brecht had to defend his apparent levity in the newly established German Democratic Republic where the landowners had been expropriated and where an even remotely sympathetic portrayal of exploiters was not deemed desirable. In defending *Puntila/Matti* against charges of lacking relevance Brecht referred to Marx's *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*. Marx had pointed to comedy as the literary genre most characteristic of a disappearing historical period. Comedy, Marx opined, would enable "die Menschheit heiter von ihrer Vergangenheit [zu] scheide[n]."⁴³ But lest his subtle and complex message should be lost, and the fascination exercised by Puntila's Biblical stature should obscure the real issues at stake, Brecht at the end of the play dispenses with paradox and irony

and has Matti proclaim the didactic application:

Es hilft nichts und's ist schade um die Zähren:
's wird Zeit, daB deine Knechte dir [Puntila] den
Rücken kehren.
Den guten Herrn, den finden sie geschwind
Wenn sie erst ihre eignen Herren sind. (GW, IV, 1709)

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NOTES

1. **Bertolt Brecht**, *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden*. werkausgabe edition suhrkamp (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), XVIII, 12*. In the following, this edition will be referred to as GW plus volume (Roman numeral) and page (Arabic numeral). Brecht's quote is cited by Hans Mayer, "Bertolt Brecht und die Tradition," *Brecht in der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971), p. 61.
2. Reinhold Grimm, *Brecht und die Weltliteratur* (Nürnberg, 1961), p. 61.
3. In his dissertation, "Bertolt Brecht's Use of the Bible and Christianity in Representative Dramatic Works" (The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1969), Gary Neil Garner confines himself to the following dramas: *Baal*, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, *Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar*, *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*, *Leben des Galilei*, and *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*. Cf. *Dissertation Abstracts*, 30/12 (June 1970), 5443A-44A. The discovery of a Bible Brecht owned has shed new light on the playwright's use of the scriptures. Cf. G. Ronald Murphy, "Brecht's Pocket Bible," *The German Quarterly*, 50 (1977), 474-84. However, Murphy's findings do not have any direct bearing on our essay. The dissertation by the same author, "Bertolt Brecht and the Bible: Religion's Nihilism and Human Weakness" (Harvard, 1974), deals with *Die Bibel*, *Baal*, *Mahagonny*, and *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. The study by Hans Pabst, *Brecht und die Religion* (Graz, 1977) was not available when this essay was completed.
4. Thomas O. Brandt, "Brecht und die Bibel," *Die Vieldeutigkeit Bertolt Brechts* (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 21.
5. *Ibid.*
6. It is no longer correct to claim: "Despite the great popularity of the comedy, most critics and scholars have little to say about it and tend to see in it a pleasant but minor work of little weight." (Claude Hill, *Bertolt Brecht* [Boston 1975], p. 127). Several interpretations of *Puntila* have appeared in the last few years which are here given in chronological order: E. Speidel, "Brecht's 'Puntila': A Marxist Comedy," *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 319-32; Jost Hermand, "Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti. Brechts Volksstück," *Brecht heute*, 1 (1971), 117-36 [republished in *Die deutsche Komödie—vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Walter Hinck (Düsseldorf, 1977)]; Hans Mayer, "Herrschaft und Knechtschaft. Hegels Deutung, ihre literarischen Ursprünge und Folgen," *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 15 (1971), 251-79; Marita Gilli, "Problèmes de structure et d'interprétation dans deux pièces de Brecht: *Maitre Puntila et son valet Matti* et *La Vie de Galiléé*," *Recherches en linguistique étrangère* (Paris, 1973), 117-50; Hans Poser, "Brechts 'Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti'. Dialektik zwischen Volksstück und Lehrstück," *Theater und Gesell-*

- schaft. *Das Volksstück im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jürgen Hein (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp. 187-200; Edward M. Berckman, "Comedy and Parody of Comedy in Brecht's *Puntila*," *Essays in Literature*, 1 (1974), 148-60; Fritz Martini, "Bertolt Brecht: 'Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti'—Das Volksstück als komisches Spiel," *Lustspiele—und das Lustspiel* (Stuttgart, 1974), pp. 236-56 [republication of an essay published twice before]; Siegfried Mews, *Bertolt Brecht. Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti. Grundlagen und Gedanken zum Verständnis des Dramas* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975); Hans Peter Neureuter, "Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti. Bericht zur Entstehungsgeschichte," *Mitteilungen aus der deutschen Bibliothek*, 9 (Helsinki, 1975), 7-42; Klaus Völker, "Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti," *Bertolt Brecht. Eine Biographie* (München, 1976), pp. 303-312; Madgi Youssef, *Brecht in Ägypten. Versuch einer literatursoziologischen Deutung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Stückes "Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti"* (Bochum, 1976).
7. Neureuter, "Herr Puntila," offers the most up-to-date account of Brecht's cooperation with Hella Wuolijoki and of the textual genesis.
 8. Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal 1938-1942* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), p. 164.
 9. *Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv. Bestandsverzeichnis des literarischen Nachlasses*. Bearbeitet von Herta Ramthun. Vol. 1: *Stücke* (Berlin and Weimar, 1969), p. 148 (no. 1716).
 10. In the essays "Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus" (GW, XIX, 322-31) and "Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise" (GW, XIX, 340-49), both written in 1938, Brecht defined his concept of realism.
 11. Poser, "Brechts 'Puntila'," 195; my italics.
 12. *Theaterarbeit. 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles*. Redaktion Ruth Berlau, Bertolt Brecht, et al. (Dresden, [1952]), p. 22.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Poser, "Brechts 'Puntila'," 195.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv. Bestandsverzeichnis*, vol. 1, p. 148 (no. 1717).
 17. Matthew 26, 41; Mark 14, 38.
 18. Neureuter, "Herr Puntila," 33.
 19. Matthew 22, 21; Mark 12, 17; Luke 20, 25.
 20. *Theaterarbeit*, p. 9.
 21. The second "Verstoßung" takes place in scene 9 (GW, IV, 1692); however, in the production of the Berliner Ensemble it took place in scene 8, Cf. *Theaterarbeit*, p. 9.
 22. Cf. Matthew 25, 1-13.
 23. Matthew 4, 10.
 24. Cf. Matthew 8, 26; 14, 31.
 25. The thesis that Puntila is a split character with tragic implications has been advanced by Walter H. Sokel, "Brecht's Split Characters and His Sense of the Tragic," *Brecht. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), pp. 127-37.
 26. Cf. E. Speidel, "Brecht's 'Puntila,'" 327; "Far from being a tragic figure when he is drunk, Puntila only uses a different system of exploitation less objectionable at first sight, but in fact more dangerous because it is less easily recognized for what it is."
 27. Reinhold Grimm, *Bertolt Brecht. Die Struktur seines Werkes*. 5th rev. ed. (Nürnberg, 1968), p. 44.

Mews: Biblical Themes and Motifs in Brecht's Herr Puntila und sein

28. Grimm, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
29. Neureuter, "Herr Puntila," 31.
30. Cf., e.g., Franz Hubert Crumbach, *Die Struktur des epischen Theaters. Dramaturgie der Kontraste* (Braunschweig, 1960), p. 41; Volker Klotz, *Bertolt Brecht. Versuch über das Werk* (Bad Homburg, 1957), p. 51.
31. See n. 15.
32. Early title for scene 9 of the final version. Quoted by Neureuter, "Herr Puntila," 31, from the "Stückentwurf" listed as no. 1717 in *Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv. Bestandsverzeichnis*, vol. 1, p. 148.
33. *Theaterarbeit*, p. 23.
34. Cf. Grimm, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
35. Hans Bänziger, "Zuerst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral," *Reformatio*, 11 (1962), 501.
36. Herbert Knust, "Brechts Dialektik vom Fressen und von der Moral," *Brecht heute*, 3 (1973), 221-50, especially 244-47.
37. Matthew 14, 13-21; 15, 32-39; Mark 6, 31-44; 8, 1-21; Luke 9, 10-17; John 6, 1-13 (feeding of the multitude); Matthew 14, 22-23; Mark 6, 45-52; John 6, 15-21 (walking on water).
38. Cf. n. 8.
39. Hermand, "Herr Puntila," 127.
40. Peter Christian Giese, *Das "Gesellschaftlich-Komische." Zur Komik und Komödie am Beispiel der Stücke und Bearbeitungen Brechts* (Stuttgart, 1974), p. 83.
41. Giese, *Das "Gesellschaftlich-Komische,"* p. 98.
42. Cf. *ibid.*
43. *Theaterarbeit*, p. 16.

