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THE DECEITFUL ARTIST IN GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST DRAMA

Anna K. Kuhn

“Wir Künstler sind ein
Luxusartikel der Bourgeoisie.”
Wedekind's *Kammersänger*

Given the strongly antibourgeois bias of Expressionist art, it is hardly surprising to find that the topos of the artist as imposter plays an important role in many early Expressionist dramas. Portrayed as an outsider, the artist is juxtaposed with a proprietary society that regards his art as a commodity. Depicting the materialistic assessment of art in capitalist society as a given, these plays explore the existential possibilities open to the artist faced with the devaluation of art in the early twentieth century. Thus, these plays reflect a concern common to literary Expressionism, i.e., criticism of bourgeois capitalism. Four plays that use this particular artist-society dialectic for social criticism are Frank Wedekind's *Marquis von Keith* (1900), Carl Sternheim's *Bürger Schippel* (1913), Hanns Johst's *Der Einsame* (1917), and Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* (1918). Common to these plays is an inherent antagonism between the “artist”-hero and a philistine society, a society which the artist disdains yet into which he paradoxically seeks entry or upon which he is materially and/or emotionally dependent. The responses of the artist figures in the face of their ambivalence vis-à-vis a corrupt society are strikingly similar: resorting to deceit, they seek either to outwit or to coopt the bourgeoisie. The solutions offered in these plays to the particular exigencies of the artists' situation establish the parameters of possible response — ranging from assimilation to total isolation — for the artist-outsider hero in bourgeois capitalist society.

The artist's ambivalence toward his society, his propensity to attack its values while asking to participate in its advantages, causes a shift in both the meaning and the function of his art. The etymology of the German word for art, *Kunst*, from *können*, the ability to do something, emphasizes the artist's activity. Traditionally, what the artist can do is create a beautiful simulacrum of reality: *schöner Schein*, a key concept in German aesthetics. Since Schiller, the creation of *schöner Schein* has been viewed as the task of the artist and has served to define art. *Schöner Schein* shows the real as it could be, in the ideal realm. By the time these plays were written, however, the concept of *Schein* had been corrupted. The meaning of the term had moved much closer to its commonplace usage, referring to mere appearance, empty semblance, deception, not to a positive enhancement of the real.

As the product of artistic activity changes in function, the significance of the artist's ability also changes. The goal of art is deception; the artist's *können* becomes a tool of survival. His social success depends on his ability to deceive. The shift in the meaning of *Schein* and the significance of *können* provides a heuristic device with which to approach these texts.

Like the hero of Wedekind's *Kammersänger*, the Marquis von Keith is acutely aware of art as a commodity in bourgeois society and cynically capitalizes on this insight. For the adventurer Keith, who perpetually teeters on the brink of the abyss, daily existence depends on his constant “brazening it out” and on his ability to turn misfortune to his advantage. The vitalistically conceived Keith views himself as a *Lebenskünstler*. In his own formulation: “Unglück kann jeder Esel haben, die Kunst besteht darin, daß man is richtig auszubeuten versteht.”¹ Exploitation constitutes the very essence of the Marquis von Keith. In contrast to the court singer Gerardo,

Keith himself lacks any real artistic capabilities. His only talents (in the sense of *können*) lie in his ability to sell art to the philistines. His goals are not aesthetic, they are materialistic. He seeks not to improve the aesthetic sensibilities of the bourgeoisie, but rather to amass money and power through traffic in art. Keith is the con artist, the showman, par excellence. Everything that the self-proclaimed Marquis von Keith undertakes is *Schein* based on deception; nothing is what it appears to be. Whether as PR man for the forger-artist Saranieff, whose value he inflates through journalistic propaganda, as mentor to the composer Zamrjaki, or as agent for the would-be opera singer Anna Werdefels, an artiste of dubious talents whose deficiencies Keith camouflages through an elaborate *toilette*, thus cleverly substituting the erotic for the aesthetic,² or as the agent for his own brainchild the *Feenpalast*, Keith is practicing his showmanship. Nor are the characters who they appear to be. Keith is not a marquis, Ernst Scholz is, in fact, a count, the Countess Anna von Werdefels is a former shop girl, Commissioner of Police Raspe is a jailbird, etc.

The basic dichotomy of the play, the juxtaposition of a cunningly deceitful bohème and a complacent, philistine bourgeoisie, is sustained throughout. Wedekind's satirical conception of the bourgeoisie (referred to as "schwerbäuchige, triefäugige Münchner Pfahlbürger" [463]) juxtaposed with the glorification of Nietzschean vitalism, as exemplified in the figure of Keith, would moreover seem to excuse Wedekind's hero for his use of deceit in the attainment of his goals.

Pathological antipathy towards bourgeois society is the driving force of Keith's existence. As he maintains, "Meine Begabung beschränkt sich auf die leidige Tatsache, daß ich in bürgerlicher Atmosphäre nicht atmen kann." (436) Yet concurrent with this antipathy is the desire for acceptance by bourgeois society. Keith's ambition and social climbing stem, in part, from his illegitimacy. In an attempt at psychological motivation, Wedekind has his handicapped (he limps) bastard marquis explain his situation:

Ich bin als Krüppel zur Welt gekommen. So wenig wie ich mich deshalb zum Skalven verdammt fühle, so wenig wird mich der Zufall, daß ich als Bettler geboren bin, je daran hindern, den allergiebigsten Lebensgenuß als mein rechtmäßiges Erbe zu betrachten. (422)

For the *Lebenskünstler* Keith, lowly class origins are seen as an impediment to the attainment of his goal: pleasure. To circumvent this obstacle, this aristocrat of pleasure declares himself a member of the nobility, thereby adapting his heredity to suit his lifestyle. By doing so, he capitalizes on the status-consciousness of the bourgeoisie, only in turn to exploit it. Yet, even though he circumvents the bourgeoisie, it is this class which spurs him on to ever more provocative acts. As with Nietzsche, it is the enemy who defines Keith:

Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft [hegt], seit ich auf dieser Welt bin, ein geheimes Grauen vor mir. Aber diese bürgerliche Gesellschaft macht, ohne es zu wissen, mein Glück durch ihre Zurückhaltung. Je höher ich gelange, desto vertrauensvoller kommt man mir entgegen. Ich warte auch tatsächlich nur noch auf diejenige Region, in der die Kreuzung von Philosoph und Pferdedieb ihrem vollen Wert entsprechend gewürdigt wird. (436)

Yet despite Keith's cunning, despite his self-proclaimed superiority over the bourgeoisie, despite his near victory over the philistines, the bourgeoisie emerges triumphant in the end³ and the deceiver turns out to be the duped. Given Keith's solipsistic world view, self-deception is almost inevitable. Time and again both Molly and Anna explicitly point out Keith's self-

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deception, a litany in which Scholz ultimately also joins. The totally self-absorbed Keith is, however, incapable of recognizing that, while he is exploiting the bourgeoisie, he in turn is being exploited and betrayed by the “artists” he is supporting. Projecting his own fantasies onto Anna, he (despite her explicit warnings) fails to apprehend her lack of commitment to him. Indeed, he fails to understand that despite his contempt for the bourgeoisie, he himself has very bourgeois goals.⁴

The tragicomic, open-ended conclusion, in which a totally isolated Keith,⁵ labeled an embezzler, fleetingly contemplates suicide, only with his usual cynicism (“Das Leben ist eine Rutschbahn...” [517]) to opt to continue his sliding existence, is proof that Keith has not learned from his experiences.

Like Wedekind’s *Marquis von Keith, Bürger Schippel*, one of eleven comedies from Sternheim’s cycle *Aus dem bürgerlichen Heldenleben*, deals with upward mobility. It portrays the attempts of a proletarian to gain entry into the bourgeoisie. While Sternheim operates with the same socio-economic categories as Wedekind, he treats the class conflict more seriously. Schippel shares with Keith not only his *déclassé* origins but also his illegitimacy. However, while Keith, operating within the anonymity of Munich society, is able to conceal his lowly birth, is in fact able to pass himself off as a marquis, Schippel’s background is known in the provincial community in which he lives. Hence he suffers far more from the sociological and moralistic ostracism of the bourgeoisie. Sternheim has a greater ambivalence vis-à-vis bourgeois society, which manifests itself in a subtler, more varied form of satire. If Wedekind’s critique confines itself to a straightforward caricature of the Munich philistines, Sternheim articulates his criticism directly and aggressively through Schippel and parodistically through his portrayal of the bourgeoisie’s perception of itself. Like the citizens of Munich, the bourgeois in *Bürger Schippel* are philistines. In contrast to Wedekind’s philistines, however, they view themselves as representatives of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, as purveyors of culture. The bastions of the bourgeoisie, Hicketier et al., have inflated aesthetic aspirations. Indeed, much of the humor in *Bürger Schippel* lies in discrepancy between form and content. It arises out of incongruity between these men’s overblown perceptions of their undertaking and the banality of their actual endeavor.

As members of a male quartet, they are themselves actively engaged in *Kunstbetrieb*.⁶ Upon the demise of their tenor, Naumann, they are dependent upon Schippel’s golden voice if their group is to win the coveted prize in the singing competition. This dependency gives Schippel a decided edge over Keith and he succeeds where Keith fails. In contrast to the adventurer *manqué*, Keith, Schippel, as indicated by the title, is ultimately welcomed into the ranks of the *Bürgertum*. Schippel’s success is dependent upon a variety of factors. In contrast to the irresponsible Keith who, in his blind self-aggrandizement, fails to realistically assess the situation and overreaches himself, Schippel’s perceptions are more realistic, his goals clearer and more immediate. Because he himself is undeluded, he is more receptive to the changing needs of his situation, more adaptable, more able to deceive.

Sternheim criticism has generally viewed Paul Schippel as the prototypical parvenu, a social climber who, from the outset, is consumed by a burning desire for upward mobility.⁷ Jorg Joost takes issue with this contention, arguing that Schippel’s prime goal, after having been systematically insulted and provoked by Hicketier, is to humiliate his opponent. Recognizing that this can best be achieved by becoming Hicketier’s peer, he subsequently seeks entry into the bourgeoisie. Social climbing is, therefore, a means, not an end in itself.⁸ Joost’s point is well taken. We must remember that Schippel, unlike Keith, does not force himself upon bourgeois society. He is instead summoned by Hicketier, Krey, and Wolke. It is they, not he, who are the

supplicants. Initially forthright and subservient, Schippel's behavior, after dealing with the trio, soon turns hypocritical and aggressive, indicating that deceit is an acquired trait which has its origins in the bourgeoisie.

Although Schippel's artistic talents are real — he can sing beautifully (*können*) — his success depends not on the creation of *schöner Schein*. Rather, coincidence and misunderstanding, interwoven with deceit, create the deceptive semblance of reality which leads to Schippel's rise. The coincidence of a riding mishap leads to the prince's visit in the Hicketier household, setting the stage for his affair with Hicketier's beloved sister, Thekla. Hicketier's misguided belief that the prince places such great store in the local *Meistersinger*⁹ that he has, in fact, commanded the quartet to secure the prize again, prompts his journey to Canossa to woo Schippel back into the group. This belief stems from the exaggerated account of the prince's rather idle remarks regarding the singing contest in Hicketier's absence by the bombastic Wolke and Krey. As Krey pompously warns him, "Du kannst nicht leben, du zwängst diesen Schippel denn." (493)

Schippel, realizing he has the upper hand, returns. Sternheim, who turns to the traditional vehicle of monologue for the expression of thoughts and emotions, has his hero throw down the gauntlet in an aside:

War gestern noch ein Hase, der furchtsam in den Kohl duckte. Ist aber nun so kolossaler Auftrieb lebendig, daß vier Messer an den Zehen, Säbel aus den Zähnen wachsen. Wirst ein wenig wund im Umgang mit mir werden, muß dir deine gepflegte Stube verunreinigen, fürchte ich.
(506)

From this point on, Schippel's behavior is utterly hypocritical. He does not wage open class warfare. Instead, he learns to dissemble. In the company of Hicketier, Krey, and Wolke, he feigns bourgeois civility, while in reality nurturing an intense hatred for and aggression toward the bourgeoisie. This hatred erupts in his monologue in III, 3; it is a class hatred based on the envy of the propertied class.

Ich hasse euch! Wie ihr Süßigkeiten zusammengeballt, in eure Därme schlingt, faules Bürgerpack, euch entleert und weiterfreßt, bis mit Sänften gefüllt ihr euren Kindern die harte Glätte vererbt, die als Folge gut genährter Nerven die Welt verpestete. Inzwischen müssen wir uns in einem Wurf, oft mit uns selbst erschöpfen. Ein Enkel, der das Andenken unserer erlebten wilden Empörung als Tugend ins Blut kriegt, kommt nicht zustande, der euch erschläge!... (523)

Schippel's love-hate relationship with the bourgeoisie is exacerbated by Thekla Hicketier, who as a child had spat into his face and had caused him great pain and humiliation. In his first conversation with Hicketier, Wolke, and Krey, he attributes his inferiority complex to this traumatic experience. A glimpse of the mature Thekla at the heights of her erotic attractiveness fans the fires of Schippel's rage. In a paroxysm of lust and hatred, he determines that she will be his prize, the booty in this class warfare:

Das Mädchen nebenan — gerade das — will ich... Die Schwester gerade! Oder Ihr zieht mir mit Zangen keinen Ton aus der Kehle!... Ja Prolet, mißduftend. Heiraten die Schwester, das Aas das stolze. Aufrichten meine rote Standarte über euch! Krepriere, Alter, wackele mit dem Kopf. (525)

Schippel beats his opponents at their own game. Using his voice as a bargaining chip, he seeks

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to appropriate Thekla through that most bourgeois, most proprietary act, marriage. Astoundingly, Hicketier agrees to the marriage. He relinquishes his most prized possession to his bitterest enemy for quintessentially bourgeois reasons. Having discovered Thekla and the prince at their tryst, he knows that his sister's virtue is no longer intact. By turning her over to Schippel, Hicketier effectively casts Thekla out of bourgeois society. Before doing so, however, he informs Schippel of Thekla's fall to tarnish his triumph.

Schippel's response: "Glaube... nicht, daß der in mir wurzelnde Begriff von Mannesehre mir erlaubt, die Werbung länger aufrecht zu erhalten" (538), has been cited as proof of his total assimilation into the bourgeoisie. Yet, if we accept Schippel's newly acquired bourgeois consciousness as a given, then his behavior at the duel becomes problematic. Appearing in tailcoat and top hat (a caricature of bourgeois society), Schippel, relinquishing his social aspirations, rejects bourgeois ideology and decides to embrace his proletarian origins.

Welcher Hohn, mich in einer Angelegenheit plötzlich mit ihrem Maß zu messen, in der mir jedes andere erträglicher wäre. Gestern Fest, heute Duell. Ich komme aus dem Frack nicht mehr heraus. Aber so listig eure Grube gegraben ist, ich falle nicht hinein. Ich fliehe! (544)

The discrepancy in Schippel's behavior can be viewed either as the schizophrenic consequence of straddling two classes or as evidence lending support to Joost's interpretation. If we assume, along with Joost, that Thekla is for Schippel primarily a means of vindicating himself against Hicketier, then his reactions appear more consistent. Schippel's renunciation of Thekla is tolerable only if he can boast of having rejected her.¹⁰ Thus he informs Krey, Thekla's new fiancé, of her immodesty. Schippel's bourgeois consciousness is not so highly raised, however, that he is willing to jeopardize his life in the ensuing duel. Prevented from fleeing by his second, Schippel is forced to confront an equally frightened Krey. The outcome of the farcical duel is Schippel's apotheosis into the bourgeoisie. Hicketier, impressed by what appears to him to be behavior beyond reproach for a bourgeois, articulates his admiration:

Ein Habenichts, schlug er hunderttausend Mark, die an einem schönen Mädchen hingen aus, hat, eines kläglichen Lohns hinterher von unserer Seite gewiß, mit unentwegt himmlischer Stimme den Kranz ersungen und stellt sich, ungewohnt solcher Prüfungen, mannhaft vor die Mündung einer Pistole. (547)

Magnanimously he welcomes Schippel into the ranks of the bourgeoisie:

Ich habe Ihnen mit gehässiger Voreingenommenheit bewußter Abneigung Ihrer Herkunft wegen den Eintritt in unsere Gezirke bisher verwehrt. Sie haben mich besiegt. Für meine Pflicht halte ich es, auszusprechen, wie mich hinfort Ihr Umgang ehrt. . . . Dieser Tag soll Folgen haben. Das Andenken an das von Ihnen Geleistete darf nicht verloren gehen, und ich setzt mich dafür ein, daß Ihnen die höheren Segnungen des Bürgertums voll und ganz zuteil werden. Auf Wiedersehen, lieber Herr Schippel. (552)

Schippel's success depends as much on misunderstanding as on deceit; it is as much fortuitous as it is intentional. Schippel has indeed learned to play the part of the bourgeois (*können-Kunst* theme). Upon renouncing Thekla, he nonetheless honors his commitment to the quartet ("Ich kenne meine schwere Verantwortung als Gentleman," he maintains [339]). Yet in the decisive duel scene, Hicketier is deceived by what has the semblance of heroic behavior. Schippel's purely coincidental wounding of Krey is interpreted by Hicketier as a sign of nobility.

The fact that Schippel's rise to bourgeois society is ultimately more the result of the irony of fate than of conscious design has caused Jorg Joost to conclude that Sternheim, who had called the first version of his drama *le prolétaire bourgeois*, could have titled the final version *le bougeois malgré lui*.¹¹

Precisely the irony of the conclusion, the dubious means by which Schippel obtains his goal of entry into the bourgeoisie, calls his victory into question. Hicketier's gullibility, the ease with which he is deluded by the *Schein* of bourgeois respectability and its code of honor, is an indictment of the complacency of his class. It has in fact been argued that in the final analysis, it is Schippel who is deceived by having attained entry into a class which has been discredited in the course of the play.¹²

In many respects, Hanns Johst's *Der Einsame: Ein Menschenuntergang* is an anamoly. Unlike the *Marquis von Keith* and *Bürger Schippel*, Johst's play lacks the ironic distance of social satire. Indeed, it is precisely its lack of distance, its pretensions to high tragedy, which make it seem a parody of itself. If Johst's bombastic style seems outdated to modern readers, one must bear in mind that the play was anachronistic even for its own time. Historically, the intellectual watershed of World War I had farreaching ramifications for the genre of tragedy. If the tragic as a principle was still feasible, the possibility of portraying the individual fate of an idealistically conceived tragic hero was called into question. The Great War dealt a severe blow to tragedy.¹³ Not so for Johst. In his hands, *Der Einsame*, the pathos-laden play about the tragic life of the misunderstood genius Christian Dietrich Grabbe becomes the vehicle for the expression of the agony and ecstasy of the *poète maudit*. As Walter Sokel has pointed out, Grabbe for the Expressionists represented a "kindred spirit who had experienced before them their insights and their ecstasy."¹⁴ The plight of the lonely Grabbe is the plight of the Expressionist poet per se, "whose tragic fate it is to perish on the shoals of rigid bourgeois society."¹⁵

The opening scene of the play, Grabbe in the afterglow of poetic creation (he has just completed his *Napoleon*), presents us with the poet's feeling of omnipotence ("Oh! Dieses Gefühl! Nicht um einen Thron möchte ich es eintauschen! Dieses Gottvatergefühl! Himmel und Erde wird Willkür meiner Gunst.")¹⁶ This romantic self-image of the poet remains unshakable even at the nadir of his decline. The only difference is that the topos of the poet as creator is superseded by a Christ analogy.¹⁷ The poet as martyr, the *poeta dolorosus*, as he is dubbed by his admirer Waldmüller, blessed by genius, is superior to mortal man. At the same time, this superiority dooms him to eternal Olympian solitude, in part self-imposed. Thus, after the child-bed death of his lover Anna, the tormented Grabbe consciously isolates himself, insulting acquaintances and pretending to betray Anna's memory by feigning an affair with a waitress in order to distance his most loyal friend, Hans. Deception turns into betrayal when he seduces Hans' innocent fiancée Isabella.

At the absolute low point of his existence (after his publisher has withdrawn his support and he has been fired from his civil service position), Grabbe not only holds fast to his belief in himself; he self-aggrandizingly paints a picture of imminent success. In a scene reminiscent of Wedekind's *Keith*, the bankrupt Grabbe grandiosely bequeaths his pension to the court clerk. Yet what from the perspective of bourgeois society appears to be outrageous mendacity (his mother, as mouthpiece for this perspective, complains bitterly about his constant lying¹⁸) is actually self-delusion. In the figure of Grabbe, solopism is carried to its logical, pathological conclusion: utter dissociation from reality.

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On the one hand, Johst grants Grabbe the clarity of vision to paraphrase Wedekind's "Wir Künstler sind ein Luxusartikel der Bourgeoisie" — "Man ist ein Stück Vieh und wird auf dem Markt verpfundet. Und kommt kein Käufer — ist man stinkiges Fleisch," (44) but does not grant him the ability to profit from this insight. Incapable of compromise, Johst's absolutist Grabbe cannot adapt to or outwit the establishment. He is the only artist figure examined who fails to delude the hated bourgeoisie. If the success of the deceitful artist lies in his ability to collude with or delude bourgeois society, Grabbe's failure can be attributed to his monomaniacal belief in his poetic mission, in his adherence to the idealist aesthetic goal of *schöner Schein*. Unable to use his art as a tool for survival, as a means of deceiving bourgeois society, Grabbe is doomed to self-deception, failure, and ultimately to death.

In the inn scene Johst presents us with a classic example of self-deception. This scenic representation of the theme of the artist as commodity shows Grabbe as a source of amusement, as a plaything of a group of bored bourgeois. Believing his art to be indecent, they prevail upon a drunken Grabbe to read from his works. The misguided poet, believing this "recognition" to signal his long-awaited success, misinterprets the embarrassed silence of his uncomprehending audience as emotional rapture. In contrast to his unreceptive, philistine audience, Grabbe, carried away by his own art, is ultimately transfigured: "*Psalmodiert aus sich heraus, ganz geistiges Gesicht, kreischend vor visionärer Extase.*" (62) Having attained self-sufficiency at the price of total isolation, Grabbe storms out of the inn without so much as a backward glance at the bourgeois.

Johst's black-white portrayal of the problematic of the artist versus society is predicated on his utter lack of ambivalence toward the bourgeoisie, his belief that Grabbe is a genius far ahead of his time. The play, however, fails to convince us of Grabbe's genius. As Helmut Pfanner has noted, Grabbe's (as well as Johst's) aspirations outweigh his talents. He "will ständig als ein größerer Künstler erscheinen, als er tatsächlich zu sein vermag. Sentimentale Stimmungen überschatten seine eigentliche schöpferische Leistungen."¹⁹ Yet Grabbe, like Keith, retains his solipsistic perspective throughout. The wretchedness of his death is mitigated only by his complete self-delusion and his sense of outraged justice.

Johst's *Einsamer* is undoubtedly best known through its reception, as the model against which Brecht directs his polemical first play, *Baal*.²⁰ Brecht carries the *épater le bourgeois* thrust of Johst's play to an extreme, but replaces the idealistic Grabbe with the vitalistic, materialistic poet Baal. Baal, who is for Brecht not spirit, but pure flesh, is consistently referred to as an animal, as part of nature. If Johst's Grabbe is lonely because he is creative, Baal, the materialistic poet creates because he is lonely, that is, his poetry is seen as the product of unfulfilled sexual needs. This materialistic redefinition of the creative process is, as Ernst Schumacher notes, a conscious affront to the idealization of the creative process we find in Johst's play.²¹

Baal's cynical attitude towards the bourgeoisie stands in sharp contrast to Grabbe's as well. The opening scene of Brecht's play presents us with the artist-as-commodity theme. The host boasts about his acquisition:

Sie wissen, ich entdeckte unseren lieben Meister in meiner Kanzlei als Schreiber. Ich bezeichne es ohne Angst als Schande für unsere Gesellschaft, derartige Persönlichkeiten für Taglohn arbeiten zu lassen. Ich werde natürlich das Weitere veranlassen. Ihr Genie, mein Herr, jawohl Genie, wird die Welt erobern. Ich bin stolz darauf, daß mein Salon die Wiege Ihres Weltruhmes heißen wird.²²

Unlike Johst's hero, Baal recognizes the commodity aspect of art, an insight which enables him to turn the situation to his own advantage. In *Baal* it is the artist who exploits society, not vice versa. In contrast to Grabbe, who suffers from lack of public recognition, Brecht's asocial, emotionally self-sufficient hero is seemingly indifferent to public opinion. In the opening scene of the play, Brecht has Baal systematically alienate his would-be mentors. Nor is Baal deluded by the reaction of the bourgeoisie to his art. In his pendant to Johst's inn scene, Brecht has Baal ostensibly cater to the pornographic tastes of the bourgeoisie by offering them a *Schweinerei* while simultaneously subverting his audience's expectations through his "offering": the poem "Die Legende der Dirne Evlyn Roe". The fact that Baal only seemingly complies with his audience's wishes, that his poem is not really a *Schweinerei* and that he is successful nonetheless, is testimony to his cunning. He tricks them through art.²³ Thus, in the case of Baal, art (*Kunst*) equals *können* plus *Schein* in its dual meaning of aesthetic appearance and deceptive semblance.

Brecht's indebtedness to Wedekind as the model for Baal has been recognized. Clearly Wedekind's vitalism influenced Brecht. His poet Baal is a cross between the adventurer-embodier Keith and a male Lulu figure. Yet the figure of Baal also echoes the concept of the artist peculiar to Thomas Mann, specifically as articulated in "Tonio Kröger" and *Felix Krull*: the artist as criminal. As the conférencier tells the former jailbird Baal: "Für Leute Ihres Schlages bleibt nur mehr die Kunst, wenn Sie anständig Geld verdienen wollen." (50) And, as the editor of the paper from which Baal is fired notes: "Sie sind ein notorischer Betrüger. Sie waren nicht *nur* im Gefängnis sondern auch im Variété." (47)

Baal is indeed a criminal. A seducer, whose seduction borders on rape (cf. Anna, Sophie Dechant), his animalistic drives cause him to betray his friend Johannes (the pendant to Johst's Hans). As is the case with Johst's Grabbe, Baal is responsible for the death of his mother. In a drastic departure from his source, however, Brecht, in a foreshadowing of the meaningless murder in *In the Jungle of Cities*, has Baal kill his best friend Ekart. Rape, betrayal, matricide, murder, number among the litany of Baal's sins. Yet it is the cardinal sin against capitalist society — breach of contract (Baal breaks his contract with the manager of a variety theater) — for which Baal is sent to prison. A fugitive from justice, Brecht's Baal, like Johst's Grabbe, dies in total isolation. His isolation is however not that of the misunderstood and deluded poet, but that of an asocial, animalistic, provocative opponent of bourgeois society.

The anarchist thrust of *Baal* was to be a great source of embarrassment to Brecht in later years. In an apologetic letter of 1954, Brecht calls for a dialectical reading of the play:

Das Stück "Baal" mag denen, die nicht gelernt haben, dialektisch zu denken, allerhand Schwierigkeiten bereiten. Sie werden darin kaum etwas anderes als die Verherrlichung nackter Ichsucht erblicken. Jedoch setzt sich hier ein 'Ich' gegen die Zumutungen und Entmutungen einer Welt, die nicht eine ausnutzbare, sondern nur eine ausbeutbare Produktivität anerkennt. . . . Die Lebenskunst Baals teilt das Geschick aller anderen Künste im Kapitalismus; sie wird befehdet. Er ist asozial, aber in einer asoziale Gesellschaft.²⁴

In Schumacher's opinion, Brecht's mechanistic, materialistic conception of Baal arose from his inability to conceive of the working class as the proper antagonist of the bourgeoisie: "Die Negation der Bourgeoisie war für Brecht damals nicht das Arbeiterelement..., sondern das Lumpenproletariat mit seiner anarchistischen Grundhaltung."²⁵

In his *Baal*,²⁶ Brecht substitutes materialistic abstraction for Johst's idealistic abstraction. Nonetheless, he arrives at a similar solution to the problem of the artist as outsider: total lack

of socialization. Kuhn: *The Deceitful Artist in German Expressionist Drama* more destructive than Johst's, it is because he has carried the theme to its logical negative conclusion — anarchy. If the Johst-Brecht solution (total ostracism and isolation) represents one pole, then the Wedekind-Sternheim solution (assimilation) represents the other pole of the resolution of the problem of the artist versus society as presented in these four Expressionist plays.

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NOTES

- 1 Frank Wedekind, *Dramen I* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1969), p. 471. All further quotations will refer to this edition and will be indicated by page number only.
- 2 As Keith tells Anna: "Ich werde dir in Paris eine Konzerttoilette anfertigen lassen, in der du zum Singen keine Stimme mehr nötig hast." (465f.)
- 3 Ironically, the victory of the bourgeoisie over Keith is dependent not on the philistines but rather on Consul Casimir, a member of the upper middle class, who also possesses enormous vitality.
- 4 These goals become particularly clear in the pathos-laden Keith-Anna dialogues in which Keith projects his future with Anna. It is a future which consists of house and children, a future curiously reminiscent of the bourgeois idyll. For further discussion of this topic, cf. my study *Der Dialog bei Frank Wedekind* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1981), pp. 181-185.
- 5 Anna has left him for greener pastures. Scholz has entered the insane asylum. Molly has committed suicide. Wedekind himself characterized the action of the fifth act as follows:
 1. Das geschäftliche Unternehmen verabschiedet sich.
 2. Das Luxusweib verabschiedet sich.
 3. Der Leidensgefährte verabschiedet sich.
 4. Die Lebensgefährtin verabschiedet sich.
- Frank Wedekind, *Prosa* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1969), p. 348f.
- 6 Clearly the artist is less of a luxury article for the bourgeoisie when the bourgeoisie itself fancies itself to be artists.
- 7 Peter Uwe Hohendahl compares Schippel to Christian Maske in Sternheim's *Der Snob*, maintaining: "Er [Schippel] will in die bürgerliche Kreise aufsteigen, wie Christian Maske in die adelige." *Das Bild der bürgerlichen Welt im expressionistischen Drama* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1967), p. 101. Similarly, Wilhelm Emrich, editor of the Sternheim *Gesamtausgabe*, attributes Schippel's drive to his monomaniacal desire to become a bourgeois like all the others. *Carl Sternheim Gesamtwerk Band I* (Neuwied, Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag, 1963), p. 16. All quotations from *Bürger Schippel* will refer to this volume and will be indicated by page number only.
- 8 Jorg Joost, "Carl Sternheim. Bürger Schippel — Prolet und Philister," in Manfred Brauneck, ed., *Das deutsche Drama vom Expressionismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Bamberg: C.C. Buchners Verlag, 1972), p. 74f.
- 9 For a discussion of Bürger Schippel as a parody of the *Meistersinger*, cf. Wolfgang Jahn, "Sternheims Bürger in der ständischen Gesellschaft. Zu 'Bürger Schippel' und andere Komödien," in Renate von Heydebrand und Klaus Günther Just, eds., *Wissenschaft als Dialog* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969), pp. 251-256.
- 10 Schippel speaks of the "großzügiger Verzicht auf das Mädchen, der mein halbes Leben kostete," adding however, "Was aber, ihr Hunde, blieb mir von meiner ganzen Heldentat, wenn ich nicht jedem erzählen darf: ich piff auf Thekla Hicketier — He?" (544)

- 11 Joost, p. 74. **University of Dayton Review, Vol. 16, No. 3 [1983], Art. 3**
- 12 Cf. Peter Haida, *Komödie um 1900: Wandlungen des Gattungsschemas von Hauptmann bis Sternheim* (München: Fink, 1973), p. 116. Cf. also Elise Dosenheimer, *Das deutsche soziale Drama von Lessing bis Sternheim* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), pp. 299ff.
- 13 For a historical discussion of the tragic post-World War I drama, cf. Frank Trommler, "Tragik und Drama im Umkreis des zweiten Weltkrieges," in *Drama und Theater im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Walter Hinck*, ed. Hans Dietrich Irmischer and Werner Keller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982), pp. 281-293.
- 14 Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 55.
- 15 Mathilda Hain, *Studien über das Wesen des frühexpressionistischen Dramas* (Frankfurt am Main: Moritz Diesterweg, 1933), p. 44. Quoted and translated by Sokel, footnote, p. 55.
- 16 Hanns Johst, *Der Einsame. Ein Menschenuntergang* (München: Albert Langen, 1925), p. 6. All further quotations refer to this edition and will be indicated by page number only.
- 17 In protesting to his mother about her lack of faith in him, Grabbe says:
- Der Sohn Marias wurde als Verbrecher ans Kreuz geschlagen, und Maria nahm ihn doch als den Sohn Gottes! Und glaubte an ihn und sein Reich!
Und sein Reich kam. (50)
- 18 Grabbe's mother plays a role analogous to Molly in the *Marquis von Keith*: she points out the discrepancy between delusion and reality.
- Worte, Worte, nichts als Worte! (*heulerisch*) Und man soll dir glauben? Habe ich dir nicht geglaubt damals in Berlin und immer wieder geglaubt? Und wie hast du meinem Glauben entgolten?... Mit Lügen! Nur gelogen. Von Unsterblichkeit hast du gefaselt, von großen Freunden geschwätzt... Was nützt ein Glaube - wenn die Wahrheit ununterbrochen beweist, daß alles Lüge ist! (49f.)
- 19 Helmut Pfanner, *Hanns Johst: Vom Expressionismus zum Nationalsozialismus* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 98.
- 20 Brecht, delivering a paper to Artur Kutscher's Theaterseminar in Munich, lambasted Johst's play, indicating that he was writing a counter-play to Johst's idealistic *Der Einsame*. Dieter Schmidt, "*Baal*" und der junge Brecht: Eine textkritische Untersuchung zur Entwicklung des Frühwerks (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966), p. 28.
- 21 Ernst Schumacher, *Die dramatischen Versuche Bert Brechts 1918-1933* (Berlin: Reprint, verlag das europäische buch, 1977), p. 36.
- 22 Bertolt Brecht, *Baal: Drei Fassungen* (Frankfurt, Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 13. All further quotations will refer to this edition and will be indicated by page number only.
- 23 As Dieter Schmidt notes: "Das, was er (Baal) als Schweinerei anbietet, ist in Wirklichkeit keine, Scheinbar auf die Bedürfnisse der Bürger eingehend, überlistet er sie durch Kunst." In Bertolt Brecht, *Der böse Baal, der asoziale: Texte, Variante und Materialien*, ed. Dieter Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 29.
- 24 Quoted by Dieter Schmidt, p. 32.
- 25 Schumacher, p. 32.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 33.