

THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

"LITTLE THEATRE PRODUCTION A FRAUD"

BY ALBERT THOMAS

I was amazed at the criticism of Brecht's "Good Woman of Setzuan" which appeared in your last issue. It seems obvious that your critic approached this play purely as a piece of agitational propaganda. Naturally he was disappointed with Brecht's "indecision".

Brecht was an artist of the theatre and thus the criterion of judging his plays must be artistic and theatrical. But Brecht, like all great artists, does not believe that his art is independent of the social, political and personal problems of life. Indeed his activity in the theatre is a confirmation of the highest aspiration of men to realise their humanity, dignity and self-respect.

POET OF DEMOCRACY

Politically Brecht is a socialist but beneath his Socialism one can discern Confucian ethics; i.e. his economic interpretation of human existence, his materialism, is at the service of a more finely human, ironic, salty appreciation of human existence. When he defends the normal, the ordinary, the common, he is not championing vulgarity and mediocrity, he is championing human nature. It is this that makes the average socialist writer appear bourgeois by comparison: for the average socialist writer is socialist only, so to speak, in terms of party policy. It was this that made him the most idolised, and at the same time the most mistrusted socialist writer (justified after Prof. Harisch's trial) of Eastern Germany. It is this too that makes Brecht a poet of democracy in a sense deeper than that applied to zealous supporters of particular causes.

NOT A COMMISSAR

Brecht is not a commissar. It is not enough to change the world the individual must be transformed too, because "most people ain't people" as Arthur Miller says. Perhaps Brecht wants to reach the individual via the collectivity, perhaps vice versa, we are not sure. What we can be certain of is that Brecht realises that both are necessary and important, that the one must not predominate to the exclusion of the other. That life is complex and man a labyrinth of ideals, conflicts and desires.

A MAJOR FRAUD

About the Little Theatre production I do not wish to say much. Far from being "excellent" I feel it was a major fraud which Brecht himself would have blasted to Hades. Anyone who had read the play, your critic does not appear to have, would have noticed the large cuts which were made. One whole incident was deleted. Brecht once forbade a production of his play "Mother" in New York and had "The Three Penny Opera" interdicted from the New York stage. If he had seen the U.C.T.'s production he would have blasphemed! The acting was so atrocious that the opposite of his intentions were realised; "Teutonic sentimentality", to cite THE CAPE ARGUS critic.

The U.C.T. drama school is just what it is and in no way capable of fulfilling the basic function of the Brechtian aesthetic: Theatre for the people! The coterie was catered for and they received their amusement with one eye cocked on the Suppression of Communism Act. To end here are some of the cut lines:

"Unhappy men!
 Your brother is assaulted and you
 shut your eyes!
 He is hit and cries aloud and you
 are silent?
 The beast prowls, chooses his victim,
 and you say:
 He's spared us because we do not show
 displeasure.
 What sort of city is this?
 What sort of people are you?
 When injustice is done there should
 be revolt in the city.
 And if there is no revolt, it were
 better that the city should perish
 in fire before night falls!"

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SPORT

'NEW AGE' ACCEPTS APARTHEID IN SPORT

THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS ARE NOT FROM THE 'CAPE TIMES', 'DRUM' OR 'GOLDEN CITY POST', BUT FROM TWO RECENT EDITIONS OF THE 'NEW AGE' SPORTS COLUMN BY "DULEEP".

The acceptance of aparte "Coloured", "White", "Indian", "African" and "Non-European" sport, of separate "racial" clubs and aparte "inter-racial" matches is clearly revealed in the extracts.

A demand for non-racial clubs and matches and sports federations completely free of any acceptance of "racial division" has never been raised in NEW AGE although it claims to be fighting apartheid.

A "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT"

"Local sportsmen feel that it is good to meet our European brethren on the sports field to gauge our strengthfor in most cases they are only too pleased to play against us"

"I have had the privilege of witnessing many of these games, both soccer and cricket, and have come to the conclusion that as in all communities the Whites do have gentlemen amongst them for the manner in which they mingle with us and endeavour to show where we are wrong or weak is most commendable." (from NEW AGE - 10.4.1958).

NON-EUROPEAN SPORT ?

"Table tennis is at present enjoying a very high status... It is the only Non-European sport in this country that enjoys world recognition.

"The Coloureds are renowned for their high standard of soccer..."

"COLOUREDS", "INDIANS" AND "MALAYS"

"The cricket provided by the Coloureds and Malays were of a very high standard.....

"The Indians did not fare as well but with a young and inexperienced side did better than expected.

"The Kajee Trophy will once again be competed for this season, and Cape Town's allocation will be a match between Coloureds and Africans." (from NEW AGE - 24.4.1958)
 (all emphasis ours - Editor)

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