“The point is, you don’t seem to have learnt anything”: Re-Imagining J. B. Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls* as a Brechtian *Lehrstück* for the Middle Classes

Abstract:

This article considers the applicability of Bertolt Brecht’s most radical formal innovation, the *Lehrstück* or learning play, to a play that is neither written in the Brechtian tradition nor ostensibly a *Lehrstück* itself. J. B. Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls* (1944) is a popular play, often considered ‘political’ by reviewers, yet it proposes no fundamental change to the political landscape its seeks to critique. Brecht’s *Lehrstück*, which dissolves the boundary between actor and spectator, offers a different mode of performance that actively confronts performers with the implications of their fictional counterparts and invites reflection on how the problems presented might be addressed. The article identifies the political shortcomings of Priestley’s play, introduces Brechtian categories into the analysis and performance of the play, before radicalizing these by transforming *An Inspector Calls* into a *Lehrstück*. The process the play undergoes signals the liveliness and durability of this dramaturgical form and offers an example of how Brecht can remain productive in a contemporary theater context.

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht; *Umfunktionerung*; participatory theatre; dialectics in the theatre; politicized theatre

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This article aims to perform an operation associated with Bertolt Brecht, *Umfunktionierung* or a refunctioning *(Film & Radio* 162), of one existing artistic artefact into another. The intention is to engineer a profound political transformation in the name of a revolutionary purpose. As Robert Leach argues, “Brecht wanted his theatre to intervene in the process of shaping society, so that [György] Lukács[‘] duality of form and content was replaced (to over-schematize briefly) by a triad of *content* […], *form* […] and *function*” (134). In this case, I will be considering J. B. Priestley’s classic play, *An Inspector Calls* (1944), in the light of Brecht’s theory and practice of the *Lehrstück*. While the refunctioning of one type of theatre, the dramatic play or *Schaustück* (a play to be watched) into another form may appear fanciful or a simple exercise in intellectual gymnastics, I will show how a focused re-evaluation of the play and its performance can allow it to be seen in a radical new light by rethinking its function for the actors. As will be argued, Priestley’s play presents surprisingly ripe material for a Brechtian reappraisal: its representation of class relations is realistic; it emphasizes the negative example over the positive – always a better perspective for learning according to Brecht; and it contains a repetitious structure, obscured by Priestley’s three acts, that make it particularly well suited to be read and performed as a *Lehrstück*. I will thus set out both a practicable re-imagining *of* *An Inspector Calls* and a way of taking Brecht’s *Lehrstück* form out of the 1930s and into the present as a viable performance possibility that is very much at odds with the conventional treatment of the play. In order to execute this procedure, I will start by questioning the politics of Priestley’s play on the page before applying the categories of Brecht’s epic theatre as a means of politicizing the play’s existing form. Completing the dialectical process, I will introduce the *Lehrstück* as a theory and practice of performance and then demonstrate its revolutionary political utility for Priestley’s play.

***An Inspector Calls*: A Political Play?**

*An Inspector Calls* is undoubtedly a popular play: it is a much-translated staple of the international repertoire and a frequently set text on British school examination syllabi. It revolves around a wealthy middle-class family, the Birlings, celebrating the engagement of their daughter, Sheila, to Gerald Croft. Set in 1912, shortly before the maiden voyage of the Titanic, the family’s patriarch, Arthur, extols a technocratic view of the future that will deterministically put an end to all conflict, be it an impending war or “all these Capital versus Labour agitations” (*Inspector* 7). The obvious ironies of Arthur’s sentiments immediately invite the audience to view him skeptically. The celebration is then interrupted by the entrance of what appears to be a police inspector, who is investigating the suicide of a young woman called Eva Smith. As the evening progresses, Inspector Goole moves through the party, starting with Arthur, then on to Sheila, Gerald, Arthur’s wife Sybil, and concluding with Eric, the Birling’s graduate son. At each stage, the interview reveals an apparent complicity in the death of Eva, who, we are told by Goole, assumed different names at different times in the last two years of her life. Once the truths seem to have been revealed, Goole leaves. The party, led by Gerald, then starts to doubt Goole’s identity and motives. Gerald notes how Goole only allowed one person at a time to see the photograph of Eva, casting doubt on whether the point of reference was the same woman. A call to the police station reveals that there is no inspector called Goole in the service and a call to the hospital confirms that they have received no suicides. Arthur, Sybil and Gerald breathe a sigh of relief, while Sheila and Eric face up to their actions. Just as things appear to be settled, the phone rings and Arthur tells the shocked group that a woman is on her way to the hospital and that the police are sending an inspector to investigate.

The play has received remarkably scant critical attention. Maggie Gale notes that “this is in part a response to its perceived simplicity,” something she questions by problematizing its treatment of the detective genre, time, and the nature of reality (143). That is, the detective is not involved in solving a crime, as no crime has actually been committed, and he already knows the truth and is concerned with bringing it to those involved. Time is also set to repeat itself in a most improbable way, a feature found in other plays by Priestley, such as *I Have Been Here Before* (1937). Biographer Vincent Brome notes Priestley’s indebtedness to the temporal theories of J. W. Dunne in his book *An Experiment with Time* (1927), an attempt to account for apparently precognitive dreams (284). Reality is also called into question when Goole’s identity is exposed as spurious; it is hard to determine what is true any more. It is for this reason that my description of the plot included so many markers of doubt and uncertainty. In light of all this instability, the events of the play attain a dreamlike quality ahead of the ensuing events that will play out after the curtain falls.

Critical examination of the play is hard to find, and I have only been able to identify one focused dramaturgical study. Ranu Samantrai’s article makes a number of useful points. First, she identifies not only the detective genre in the play, but also the “medieval mystery or morality play” (215). The latter forms the moral structure of the play, with each of the Birlings representing one and sometimes two cardinal sins, and Goole, his name a clear reference to the supernatural, providing a route to salvation. She adds, however, that the playwright foregoes overtly Christian content: “in lieu of the language of sin or crime [Priestley] proffers the notion of responsibility” (221). This point is echoed more negatively by Gale, who has noted that reviewers have regularly reproached the play for preaching (143). However, the focus on responsibility raises an important issue with respect to the play’s politics. Responsibility is a moral category, and the play, as written, focuses on the reconstruction of attitudes in the light of a human catastrophe. Sheila and Eric both review their roles in the story of Eva’s suicide, regardless of the reliability of Goole’s narrative. Arthur, Sybil and Gerald, on the other hand, use Goole’s questionable identity and methods as a way of revising their guilt and carrying on regardless.

The emphasis on change as a moral category raises an important question when considering the politics of *An Inspector Calls*. If we go back to the ancients, Aristotle makes a useful distinction between politics and ethics. As Kelvin Knight argues, “Being naturally incapable of self-sufficiency as individuals, humans are naturally political animals. This human activity of politics involves the domination of other activities and, for Aristotle, their hierarchical ordering” (16). The way that a society is organized, its different relations of power that define the political in its broad sense, provides a framework within which ethical decisions are to be made. By appealing to the British middle class of *An Inspector Calls* ethically to reform itself, Priestley does not call the political structures of that society itself into question. The radical political position that revolution is required to address the play’s problems is not entertained, and the gentler reformist impulse may account for the play’s popularity around the world.

In addition, Samantrai makes two crucial dramaturgical points that help articulate the political rather than the moral issues of the play. First, she draws our attention to Edna, the Birling’s maid. Samantrai reminds us of how few lines Edna has, but also how active she is on stage. While the middle classes are static, the worker is dynamic. She also notes that Priestley gives Edna the seemingly unnecessary detail of an age.[[1]](#endnote-1) This is important as it associates her with both Eva and Sheila in a “cadre of young women” (225). A young female cross-class solidarity emerges; the marginalized and the oppressed are constructed as the vanguard for change. Samantrai’s second observation ties into the first: Goole mysteriously disappears at the play’s conclusion, leaving the characters to find their own solution to the questions he has posed. The decision is, again, significant: “To leave [Goole] in place or to end the play with his climactic speech would be to replace one strong man [Arthur] with another” (226). In combination, these two features open the door for new modes of political action, undermining the privileged, individualistic status quo portrayed in the play.

One further point that should not be ignored when considering the political and ethical potential of the play is the relationship between the stage and the audience. Alex Sierz, who writes about Stephen Daldry’s stylized production of the play (1992), sets out two positions:

A naturalistic way of playing Priestley's characters allows the audience to identify with them, to see in their representation of class attitudes its own feelings writ large - the effect is that the audience is implicated and forced to examine its own prejudices. But by turning these characters into fanciful figures who inhabit a doll's house, Daldry lets the audience off the hook.

The play’s optimal function in its existing form rests on the category of empathy. The (implicitly middle-class) spectators are encouraged to see their own thoughts and actions in the behaviors of the characters and make their own changes. But without this insinuation in the stage world, the audience views it at a remove and may not feel addressed. With reference to the popular filmed version of the play, Sierz also points out that “class seems natural” when presented in a realistic manner. Both observations cement the play’s position that moral change is the only hope.

Taken together, the play and its critical reception point to a compact between form and content: unproblematized identification with the characters is the necessary relationship for the moral change that a production may bring about. In the rest of this article, I propose a different way of thinking about the play and its performance in a bid to focus on the political context rather than a moral impulse.

***An Inspector Calls* as Epic Theatre**

Before interrogating Priestley’s play for its Brechtian potential, I will briefly examine Priestley’s relationship to Brecht. Priestley was certainly aware of Brecht, at the latest by 1957, which may suggest that the Berliner Ensemble’s residency in London in 1956 had had the effect with which it is frequently credited, of introducing Britain to Brecht. However, Priestley’s reception was negative. In one case, this was based on a profound misunderstanding: “I cannot believe - as I am told the late Bertolt Brecht believed - that the drama can become the vehicle of pure thought” *(Art* 184). Elsewhere, he got a rather rudimentary sense of Brecht’s work and noted a contrast with his own: “Brecht [...] wanted to remove the drama from private life, give it an historical sweep, make it suggest the fate of whole classes [...] which sacrifices nearly everything I want in a playhouse” (Priestley qtd in Gale 52). This is a strange comment to make, given the foregrounding of class and its effects on behavior in *An Inspector Calls*. What is certain, however, is that Priestley was not aware of the *Lehrstück* when he wrote the play in autumn 1944: none had been translated into English by then.[[2]](#endnote-2) And, as discussed below, the full ramifications of the form only properly came to light in Rainer Steinweg’s pioneering study of 1972. So, there is little to connect Priestley with Brecht. Consequently, the analysis that follows takes up Brecht’s suggestion that his forms of theatre can amply be applied to plays not written in the Brechtian tradition but that provide a realistic representation of the world *(Brecht on Performance* 23).

In order to re-imagine *An Inspector Calls* as a *Lehrstück*, I will first discuss the application of the categories of epic theatre to the play. Brecht noted, with respect to performing the *Lehrstück*, that “the same instructions apply as for *epic theatre*” (“On the Theory” 91), which is entirely sensible because the former presents a radicalized iteration of the latter.

Formally, epic theatre takes its lead from Aristotle’s division of artistic genre in the *Poetics*, combining the narrative (epic) with the dramatic. Brecht wanted the actor not to *be* the character, but to *show* it, to narrate it as a more flexible figure. To this end, Brecht introduced the notions of *Gestus* and *Haltung*. Briefly, *Gestus* is the physical articulation of human being, understood in Marx’s context as the ensemble of social relations. *Haltung* is the German word that combines mental attitude and physical posture, and encourages the actor to show attitudes through the body. An attitude is always active, as it is predicated on the preposition “toward”: when a situation changes or a new idea is raised, it is likely that an actor’s *Haltung* will change and produce a discontinuous chain of *Haltungen*. As I have argued elsewhere, an emphasis on changing *Haltungen* in rehearsal allows actors to develop a task-based series of movements and deliveries into a choreography (Barnett). The audience sees a dance unfold before itself that combines realistic material with deliberate and precise movements and deliveries; the actors embody the changing facets of their figure (dramatic) while commenting on them through their unusual postures and enunciations (narrative). The “natural” is transformed into something that is both recognized *and* stylized; the familiar is made strange, the definition of Brecht’s *Verfremdung*.

The actors’ representations of reality present a particular interpretation of reality to an audience. As Brecht notes in an appendix to the “Short Organum”: “The theatre of the scientific age [i.e. epic theatre] is able to make dialectics enjoyable” (BoT 257). Steve Giles argues that, to Brecht, dialectics offered both “a mode of cognition that discloses transformative contradiction” and something “ontologically real and thus able to resist the closure imposed by cognitive patterns” (98). The centrality of dialectics cannot be overstated in Brecht’s theatre. A dialectical worldview presupposes an inherent instability in things, one defined by contradiction. It also resists the category of the “thing in itself,” proposing that “things,” be they people, ideas, institutions or situations are always already the contradictory products of previous dialectical encounters. It is the theatre’s job to perform the contradictions produced by dialectical interplay in the hope that by identifying them, they may be overcome.

*An Inspector Calls* is a play that invites dialectical analysis and, consequently, performance. According to the Birling’s patriarch, Arthur, who is a profoundly undialectical and deterministic thinker (9 and 10), we are responsible only for ourselves and our families. This sentiment already presages the doctrine of neoliberalism in the West in which the individual is understood to be an autonomous, self-regulating entity, bringing a central theme of the play resonantly into the present. At the heart of the play is Eva Smith’s suicide. Suicide *appears* to be an act carried out by an individual, a self-contained act of desperation, but the play reveals the social contacts that drove the suicide as a process. Goole is thus a dialectical instrument, opening up the seemingly singular act and unfolding its various stages until its wretched end.

In order to uncover the dialectics of the plot, Goole enacts and openly states a very Brechtian method for demystifying social processes within two pages of his entrance. There he explains why he works as he does: “One person and one line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise, there’s a muddle” (12). That is, he wants to set out a clear chain of cause and effect, and as Anthony Squiers notes, “What Brecht means by the ‘laws of cause and effect’ is the laws of dialectics” (49).

The dialectical inquiry into the suicide, visible to readers and spectators in the original, can be amply supplemented by other insights and techniques offered by epic theatre. The focus of the play is the bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production in Marxist parlance, and its complicity in the suffering and death of a working woman. Bernd Stegemann opens a discussion of the moneyed middle class and its role in theatre from a Marxist standpoint: “the bourgeoisie was shaped as a class in that it was forced into individual isolation [Vereinzelung] due to its alienation from its own life,” developing individualism as a justificatory ideology (84).[[3]](#endnote-3) He continues that the drama of the middle classes hinges on the production of credibility as a means of concealing its existential ambiguity (126). The emphasis on individual guilt and the exposure of truth in such drama is undialectical because it does not call the system of alienation and exploitation into question (128) and instead bases its motivations on a “dramaturgy of want and need” (129). A Brechtian approach to representing the bourgeoisie is, conversely, concerned with exposing a nexus between apparently individual action and the broader socio-economic constitution of the class. By basing the construction of *Gestus* and *Haltung* on social relations, the actors bypass the temptation of staging “want and need” and focus on supra-individual factors in their performance choices.

In order to represent this social picture, one has to draw on another Brechtian category: historicization. This involves understanding the social relations of any given time in order to show how they differ from those of the present. One aim is to demonstrate how different things were and how change is possible. Yet historicization is not an imperative to create historically accurate costume dramas. Brecht noted in a discussion of naturalism in the *Buying Brass* project that Stanislavsky’s pre-Revolutionary productions were like being in a “museum” (BoP 29). Brecht’s idea is more dialogical. As Tom Kuhn notes, such a contextualization has a “two-way” flow: “there may be active analogies between past and present, and there may be continuities” (105). The combination of *Gestus* and *Haltung* in performance breaks the pretense of a museum-like re-creation and helps bring the action into the present.

Clearly, a play written many decades ago requires historicization if its values are not to be elided with those of the present. Priestley aids the process by setting it at a distance from its time of writing. His description of what the bourgeoisie is wearing in a domestic setting in the opening stage directions emphasizes its high social position. Women appear in “*evening dress of the period*,” men in “*tails and white tie, not dinner-jackets*” (1). This specification already puts a distance between the original audience of the mid-1940s and the stage world of 1912. But it is the middle-class figures’ behavior that can be excavated in performance in order to connect the detail in the costume with their particular forms of action and speech.

Again, Priestley provides some very useful material, yet if it is not made striking by Brechtian performance practices, it may pass under the spectator’s radar.[[4]](#endnote-4) Social anxiety, for example, runs through the play. We are told in the opening stage direction that Sybil is Arthur’s “*social superior*” (1) and that the marriage between Sheila and Gerald is not one of social equals: he is the son of Sir George and Lady Croft, and their company is older and larger than Arthur’s. An immediate contradiction that unfolds here is embedded in the opening exchange: Arthur is keen to manufacture a connection between the two families because they both use the same port merchant. The social is implicit to the dialogue here, despite Arthur’s speeches against the very notion of society shortly afterwards. Arthur presents a figure who is only interested in society’s upper echelons, not its totality, and this can be clearly shown in contradictory *Haltungen* at different moments in the play. Similarly, Arthur portrays himself as a “hard-headed practical man of business” (6), but the marriage he seeks to sponsor is actually about merging his own company with Croft’s and creating a giant that would no longer be competing in but dominating the market. Arthur actually seeks the easy life, not the cut and thrust of business. A Brechtian sensitivity to contradiction can thus help emphasize the political underlying the interpersonal.

There are likewise a number of sequences in the play that can show the social negotiations required to achieve one’s ends. Take, for example, an exchange lasting four short speeches at the beginning of Act III. Eric has just been exposed as the father of Eva’s child and asks if he can have a drink before continuing. Arthur forbids it, but Goole permits it and then convinces Arthur to agree. On a conventionally realistic stage, Goole can succeed through the force of his personality and the reason he gives to Arthur. On a Brechtian stage there is more at stake. Arthur is socially superior to Goole. Goole is a policeman, a job, at that time, that was not considered a profession and was largely populated, in its lower ranks, by members of the working class. But Goole, as a policeman, has the authority of state sanction to place himself in a domestic setting and conduct his investigations. By performing the scene in contradictory social terms, we can learn more about these aspects of the situation. Eric could open up the tension by dividing his simple line “Could I have a drink first?” (51) into two after “Could I,” addressing either Arthur or Goole first, with each option producing a slightly different meaning, before Eric turns uncertainly to the other man. The division of the line would show the social dilemma in which he finds himself and initiate the dialectical tussle that ensues.

The play often reveals the mechanisms that regulate society, too. Again, early in the play, we see the strict discipline required to differentiate gender roles. When Gerald produces the engagement ring, Sheila replies: “Oh – Gerald – you’ve got it – is it the one you wanted me to have?” (5). Sheila participates in a social ritual in which the woman is expected to defer to the man’s superiority. Brecht was particularly fond of rituals and customs because they said something about patterns of behavior for which the individual was not responsible, making clear a particular social relation.[[5]](#endnote-5) Staging this exchange as a ritual rather than as a piece of normal conversation highlights its special status and draws the audience’s attention to issues that inform the action, namely the gender hierarchy in this society. The same seemingly self-regulating behavior can be seen shortly after the ring dialogue when Sybil offers to remove herself and Sheila from the room to allow the men to continue their conversation. Arthur prevents what would have been a customary exit because he wants to praise the engagement. His intervention can thus also be shown as special: not only is he interfering with standard bourgeois behavior, but he is also trumping his social superior, Sybil.

I have chosen most of these examples from the opening of the play because they might set the Brechtian tone for the rest of the performance. A system of deference and transgression marks the action with a strict social code applied to everyone, and this can be felt in the matrices of speech, opinion and behavior in the whole play. In a Brechtian production, the audience should never be allowed to forget the roles determined by society, especially in the light of Arthur, Sybil and Gerald’s contention that society is a fiction.

An interesting stage direction occurs early in Act I: Gerald contends that he has been desperate to become a member of the Birling family for some time. Sheila then challenges him by pointing out that he hardly saw her for the whole of the previous summer (when we later learn that he was engaged in an affair with Daisy Renton, as Eva Smith possibly renamed herself). Sheila is directed to deliver her speech “*half serious, half playful*” (3). I suggest that this direction can become a typical motif for delivery throughout the play when the socially inferior seeks to step out of that status and confront their superior with an unsanctioned view. The inability to commit to serious critique both acknowledges a limit and seeks to breach it in a socially acceptable way. The same is true when Arthur and Gerald make a jocular response to the news that an inspector has arrived by suggesting that that must have something to do with the wayward Eric. As before, humor is rarely humorous in bourgeois circles, and, as it turns out, the joke is anything but a joke. More generally, the construction of networks of motifs, marked by repeated or varied gestures, deliveries or inflections knits the figures on stage together in Brechtian theatre. For all their individual differences, they display the connected qualities of their class.

Gender, of course, plays a major role in the play, but not only because it buttresses hierarchies of class; it also speaks to common suffering among the female figures. We learn about sexual assault on a couple of occasions. Eric admits to sex with working-class Eva without her consent; so, although the word “rape” is not explicitly used, that was undoubtedly what happened. Sheila recounts how a friend of hers – marking the friend implicitly as middle class – escaped with “a torn blouse” (35) after an encounter with a local alderman of the town. But while women are subject to such casual abuse and habitual mistreatment, they are also to be shielded from talk of it. Goole challenges Gerald, for example, when he wants Sheila out of the room to avoid “unpleasant and disturbing things” (27) which will be revealed about his affair with Daisy. However, Sheila has already internalized this value system, as seen in her initial response to the gruesome description of Eva’s suicide: “Oh I wish you hadn’t told me” (17). The processes of gender oppression can thus be shown to an audience in all their complexity and contradictoriness through contrasting *Haltungen*.

The preservation of gendered class-based relationships is also crucial to the potential for a Brechtian shift from a moral to a political performance. Understandably, the play’s critics have noted the different figures’ responses to Goole’s revelations, with the older generation retrenching its reactionary views when doubt is cast on the veracity of Goole, while the younger one accepts its role in Eva Smith’s death (e.g. Samantrai 215). In the moral drama, the latter reflects the change of attitude required for reform. But in a Brechtian political production, reform itself is open to question because it fails to address the social system that brought about the catastrophe. Again, Priestley provides useful material to enact a wider critique. This is because Sheila and Eric (obviously) remain bourgeois figures, and if their *Haltungen* do not change, then the play’s conclusion can produce a jarring rather than a cathartic effect. It should not be forgotten that it is Sheila who first raises the question about Goole’s true identity as a police inspector. When threatened, her initial response is to deflect the accusation and seek to attack the accuser. And for all her apparent admissions of guilt subsequently, her final line in response to Gerald’s hope of re-commencing the engagement is: “No. Not yet. It’s too soon. I must think” (72). She does not reject Gerald for the cheating, responsibility-dodging coward we have seen him to be but entertains the possibility of a return to what is expected of her: making a good class-conscious match. A change of attitude is not a change of class, and she reverts to type in her final speech. A performance that emphasizes her deference and maintenance of the behaviors exhibited in the production as a whole moves the emphasis away from morality into politics: a class-based system like this will only perpetuate the play’s problems, no matter how many minds may have been temporarily changed in the immediate wake of the suicide. A production’s ability to portray the typicality of the figures, very much in Brecht’s sense of the word (see below), will help keep class as an active agent in the action as it unfolds, right until the end of the play.

The techniques of epic theatre can shift the focus from the individual to larger social formations. In doing so, a Brechtian production of *An Inspector Calls* can place an emphasis on the systems of power to which the figures defer in order to criticize *the systems* rather than the limited agencies and often false choices of the figures. The arraignment of the gendered class system may help to provoke questions from an audience with respect to changing it rather than emphasizing changes in individual attitudes, which, as I have shown, is no guarantor of social change at all. Yet considering the play as a *Lehrstück* presents a more radical formulation of a politicized theatre.

**Excursus: The *Lehrstück* as a Participatory Learning Experience**

As Brecht noted in one of the relatively few essays he published in his lifetime, attempts to dramatize the contemporary world required new structures: “petroleum balks at the five-act form” (BoT 49) – a new subject matter cannot be represented by outdated dramaturgies. One of his attempts to deal with this problem was the development of the *Lehrstück*, or “learning play,” the translation of the term he approved for the only essay he ever published in English (BoT 122-3). Brecht’s thoughts on the *Lehrstück* can be found in various places throughout his writings, but I will focus on a single short document before consulting others to extend my argument.

Brecht’s “On the Theory of the *Lehrstück*” essay was written around 1937 and represents a reflection on a form with which he started to experiment in the late 1920s and which he was forced to retire when he went into exile in 1933. The short, unpublished essay, barely a page in length, sets out some central principles:

The key thing about the *Lehrstück* is that people learn by acting in it, not by watching it. In principle the *Lehrstück* does not need any spectators […].

The *Lehrstück* is based on the expectation that the person acting in it can be socially influenced by the experience of performing certain behaviours, adopting certain attitudes, giving certain speeches etc.

Imitating highly skilled role models [Die Nachahmung hochqualifizierter Muster] has a key part to play in this, as does critiquing such role models by deliberately acting in a different way. […]

Aesthetic standards for character development which apply to dramatic theatre are not applicable to the *Lehrstück*. Particularly unique or idiosyncratic characters do not feature in the *Lehrstück*, unless uniqueness and idiosyncrasy are themselves the learning problem (91).

There is a lot to consider here. The usually complementary practices of performing and viewing theatre are collapsed into a single act: the performer is both actor and audience, alternating the roles in an as yet unspecified fashion. Acting is understood as an activity that does not require full commitment to playing a unified role, but allows the actor to learn something about the link between social position and action, opinion and language as these change over time. One can derive from this that time to reflect and to establish connections between different forms of behavior is a pre-requisite as the actor modulates between performing and observing. The notion of the “role model” is also important when taken in conjunction with the proposition that unusual characters do not usually appear in the *Lehrstück*. The aim is not to imitate peculiarity, but typicality. Typicality is an important concept in Marxist aesthetics, denoting something that was not unusual and thus offered a link with the realities art sought to represent. Brecht proposes an interesting definition of typicality around 1951: “People and events are historically significant (typical), not when they may be the most frequent on average or most present, but are decisive for the development of society” (BFA 23 141). The shift from quantity to quality is perhaps unexpected, yet important. To Brecht, the ability to change *or* to maintain social structures reflected features of particular social types. Elsewhere, he was clear that no single person was wholly typical (BFA 22 616), and, in a reflection in his journal of 26 March 1942, noted that while Marxism could provide sound analysis of class behavior, it could only deal with individuals with “uncertainty” (1993 213). The task for the actors in the *Lehrstück* is to identify the most significant social features of their characters. The Birlings thus assume a supra-individual quality when rethinking Priestley’s drama as a *Lehrstück*: it is the network of social forces, represented by their actions and opinions, that will provide a focus for the actors here.

The function of the *Lehrstück* has been subject to much commentary. The plays that Brecht wrote with the designation “*Lehrstück*” are not identical to each other but share a family resemblance through a number of features. They are mostly short and focused on a particular problem that involves violence. A chorus is usually present and the texts are often to be performed to specially written music. Both these formal features are clearly missing from *An Inspector Calls* and require careful consideration when applying Brecht’s categories to Priestley’s drama.

The paradigmatic *Lehrstück* is often considered to be *Die Maßnahme* (translated as both *The Measures Taken* and *The Decision*) in which a political radical, the Young Comrade, continually fails in his revolutionary tasks by acting with his heart to alleviate short-term problems rather than with his head to eliminate them completely in the long term. He unwittingly follows a reformist rather than a revolutionary agenda, and finally pays for it with his life. His comrades enlist his consent to his own execution, without which their own political program cannot be realized. Importantly, the story is told retrospectively, after the execution, and the four Agitators take it in turns to play the Young Comrade in a series of different, yet related episodes, in order to experience his mistakes before reaching their absolute decision. This formal feature, the repetition and variation of the mistake, is common to many of Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*, and its importance is discussed below. Rethinking *An Inspector Calls* as a *Lehrstück* will require a re-evaluation of its plot beyond the three-act structure.

Early critics of the genre, with special reference to *Die Maßnahme*, condemned it specifically for pre-empting and then legitimizing Stalin’s show trials and more generally endorsing an ends-justifies-the-means approach to radical left-wing politics. Even that most sensitive of readers, Theodor Adorno, condemned the play as a glorification of the Party, despite Brecht’s theoretical claims to the contrary (182). Adorno, however, was a *reader* and did not appreciate the practical implications of the *Lehrstück*. It was only when Reiner Steinweg gathered the many textual fragments on the form together in 1972 that the performative ideas discussed above were brought to the seemingly dogmatic texts.[[6]](#endnote-6) Steinweg’s conclusion was that the *Lehrstück* was a model of embodied dialectical thinking, a way of processing theses and antitheses, and reaching decisions in the light of the contradictory impulses (1976 118). Clearly, *An Inspector Calls* satisfies that aspect in its dynamic portrayal of its bourgeois figures.

However, a more complex, differentiated view emerged a little later, synthesizing Steinweg and the more conservative detractors of the *Lehrstück*. Hans-Thies Lehmann and Helmut Lethen proposed this model:

[the structure of the *Lehrstück*] is not dependent, as is always asserted, on a dialectic. Rather, its dialectical contradictoriness represents only one of two levels. The totality of conceptual antitheses (Level I) is confronted by a second level: on this, it is not false ideas, but thinking itself that is called into question, not a thesis, but theses themselves, not ordered thinking, but the order of thought (306).

In effect, they insist on the ultimate reality of the violence that is at the heart of the *Lehrstück*. For all the dialectical contradictions that Brecht certainly lines up in the unremitting form of the plays, there is something resistantly corporeal that gets in the way of using the *Lehrstück* exclusively as an exercise in dialectical thinking. Accordingly, Level II can be understood as “a ‘negativity’ of the body, of the ‘biological limit’ of an idea” (308).

This interpretation of the form helps us appreciate the necessity of collapsing the distance between actor and audience: the experience of performing is a central component in the learning experience. If there is a lesson in the plays, it is exposed to its practical implementation in a confrontation between theory and practice. Rainer Nägele follows this line by considering the *Lehrstücke* as Brecht’s own “theatre of cruelty” because, like Artaud, Brecht was also keen to reintroduce the body and its fragility into the theatre. Nägele understands the *Lehrstücke* not only as “learning plays”, but as “‘teaching plays’, i.e. not merely plays that teach, but also plays about teaching, in the form of teaching. Contrary to so many well-meant ideologies, the teaching situation is never a matter of symmetrical communication between ‘equals’” (115). As such, violence is also a part of the pedagogical process. And as Freddie Rokem adds:

Benjamin argued [in his essay, ‘Critique of Violence’], and Brecht showed about ten years later in the *Lehrstücke*, that violence has its own unique ‘non’- or ‘anti’-logic and can, in fact, never be fully accounted for within social or ideological contexts where ultimately it is justice that matters, no matter what the letter of the law states. (62)

Violence, then, is not simply the application of physical force, but the imposition or the destruction of ideas and the pain that that process engenders. It is this understanding of violence that will form the painful focus of my re-imagining of Priestley’s play, not the violent death of Eva Smith, which the figures do not experience directly in any case.

It is also well-known in Brecht scholarship that the *Lehrstück* owed much to Japanese Noh theatre, with Brecht working with translations from English into German provided by his collaborator Elizabeth Hauptmann. David Pan connects the relationship of Noh theatre and religious ritual with Brecht’s own political framework: “it is by no means clear that there can ever be an objective basis from which to establish a completely secular politics” (314). Politics is thus always concerned with a kind of persuasion, not a watertight case in its favor, despite the claims of a “scientific Marxism” (Holloway). The strict, repetitive form of Noh re-echoes in the *Lehrstück* suggests that there is a connection between religious and political ideologies and that a leap of faith may well be required. Consequently, committing to socialism is potentially a form of violence against the self in the name of what politicians are wont to call “the greater good,” not a purely rational decision based on evidence.

The structure of varied repetition is also important for the actors themselves and ties in with a somewhat enigmatic comment from Brecht looking back on the *Lehrstück* in 1938: “When I couldn’t, with the best will in the world, do anything more for the theatre with empathy, I created the *Lehrstück* for empathy” (BFA 22 447).[[7]](#endnote-7) Empathy, according to Bruce McConachie, is the means

by which one person can come to know something about what another person is intending and feeling. In this sense, empathy is a kind of mind-reading that allows one person to step into the shoes of another and experience that person’s world from her or his point of view (15).

Empathy was a process Brecht considered dangerous because human beings have no control over its operation: it does not differentiate between rich or poor, saint or sinner. However, Brecht still saw it as useful for the actor in the *Lehrstück*. Steinweg reconciles the apparent contradiction by arguing that capturing socially articulated physicalities or ways of talking would be impossible without empathy (1976 162). Yet this was not an immersive empathy, as with more conventional theatre, but one that was fragmentary and selective. As Nägele points out, Brecht’s interest in the body in performance is built on his notion of *Gestus*: “*Gestus* is the sum of concrete bodily gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and rhythm and figures of speech, but is not identical with any of these. It contains the *relation* to another body and *Gestus*” (113). In combining elements of observed reality into a complex and contradictory whole, the actor in the *Lehrstück* is involved in an intricate play of proximity and distance in the very act of performing a role. Such a process of approaching a role is a learning experience in itself, with the actors continually articulating their own impressions of the figures they are seeking to represent together with their attitude toward them.

As Peter W. Ferran observes of the unique performative context of the *Lehrstück*, “Without an audience’s perceptual experience and response - its reception - there is theoretically no true play, no ‘dramatic event.’ Nor is this practicing activity a rehearsal, for rehearsal also implies preparing a performance for an eventual audience” (20). This observation emphasizes the potential freedom that actors can experience without the pressure to show the fruits of their labor; there is no endpoint. The *Lehrstück* becomes a means to turn the practice of making theatre into something that is both educative and liberating, a safe environment in which to explore some very painful political problems.

It is also worth considering the status of the *Lehrstück* in Brecht’s *oeuvre*. Back in the early 1970s, Steinweg was already asserting that epic theatre was a compromised form when contrasted with the radical nature of the *Lehrstück* (1971 116). This sentiment is certainly still to be found in more recent scholarship, such as when Nikolaus Müller-Schöll argues that even Brecht’s great theatre triumph, the production of *The Tutor* at the Berliner Ensemble in 1950, was inferior to the possibilities offered by the *Lehrstück* (77-8). Brecht himself expressed a preference for the *Lehrstück* over the *Schaustück* in an unpublished essay of c. 1930, during the period of intense work on the *Lehrstück*. Here he distinguished between “major” and “minor” pedagogy. The former “abrogates the system of actors and spectators. It only recognizes actors who are simultaneously students” (88). Its minor variant, that is, epic theatre, “merely carries out a democratization of theatre in the transitional era of the first [i.e. Russian] revolution” (88). Yet perhaps the most telling indication of Brecht’s own sustained interest in the *Lehrstück* is to be found in a report presented by one of his closest collaborators at the Berliner Ensemble. Manfred Wekwerth asked Brecht in August 1956, the month of his death, for the name of a play that would represent the *form* for the theatre of the future. Brecht “fired straight from the hip: *Die Maßnahme*” (78).

One might, however, ask how a form that is almost a hundred years old can offer anything new to contemporary theater-makers. Certainly, early receptions of the *Lehrstück* were underwhelming, possibly because the form had not properly been understood in theory or tested in practice. For example, Max Frisch’s play of 1958, *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (*The Fire Raisers*), was subtitled “a *Lehrstück* without a lesson [my translation].” The play, however, is far more a *Schaustück* that can be and often is performed conventionally for a paying audience and actually aims at teaching a lesson rather than engaging with the problems of the lesson itself. Helmut Baierl’s *Die Feststellung* (*The Statement of Fact*, also 1958) formally imitated the *Lehrstück* in order to deal with the topic of illegal emigration from the German Democratic Republic. However, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes, the play’s potentially open form is compromised by its closed treatment of its subject matter (51).

More interesting engagements were to follow, most notably in Heiner Müller’s experiments with post-Brechtian forms of the *Lehrstück*.[[8]](#endnote-8) For example, *Der Horatier* (*The Horatian*, 1968) includes no named characters and invites the performers and/or the creative team to decide who is speaking when. Müller then rejected the *Lehrstück* in 1977 in an open letter to Steinweg before returning to it in the *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* cycle (*The Road of Tanks* – 1983-7), a period that coincided with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev and the return of (with hindsight, misplaced) hope to the Soviet experiment. The post-Brechtian impulse can also be found in more contemporary examples. Anja Hartl identifies David Greig’s *The Events* (2013) as a post-Brechtian *Lehrstück* that radically interrogates the nature and functions of empathy (Hartl 82-98). Andy Smith has also employed the *Lehrstück* form in his “Plays for the People” project. Here he offers performers reading aloud to each other the opportunity to explore radical politics (in *The Action* - 2019) and possibilities for an uncertain future (*The Rule of Six* - 2020). Both plays are short and are designed to provoke active discussion, once contradictory positions have been assayed in the performed readings themselves.

As should be clear, the move from Brechtian to post-Brechtian appropriations of the *Lehrstück* form can open rich new experiences for participants. The following section seeks to show how the imposition of the form on a play that would appear to resist it can be made productive for a contemporary theater.

***An Inspector Calls* as *Lehrstück***

My starting point for considering *An Inspector Calls* as a *Lehrstück* is a formal one, harking back to the rigidity of the plays in Brecht’s construction. The deliberateness of the plotting in *An Inspector Calls* has led to it being understood as a “well-made play” (Brome 284). Its division into three acts provides cliff-hangers between the acts, stoking audience tension regarding what is to follow. However, there is a second structure, dispersed throughout the three acts. It is based on Goole’s repeated interviews, which usually start with seemingly innocuous questions, their incriminating development and contextualization in the demise of Eva, and a moment of realization. This realization is not, however, to be confused with a classical *anagnorisis*, a point to which I will return. There are five sequences like this, for Arthur, Sheila, Gerald, Sybil and Eric, in that order. And this is a structure that Sheila recognizes and signals to the audience midway through the play as a reproach to her mother who tries to deny all involvement: “We all started like that – so confident, so pleased with ourselves until [Goole] began asking us questions” (30). This already suggests that the apparent bourgeois individuals display strikingly similar initial responses, something that Brechtian theater can signal clearly.

The repetitious, secondary structure becomes *the* structuring principle of the play when re-imagined as a *Lehrstück*. This is because it now provides the focus for the action and the learning. When understanding the play in this way, notions of suspense or tension, associated with the well-made play, are replaced by an emphasis on a repeated process and a play of similarity and difference in those Goole interviews. In *Die Maßnahme*, each of the four Agitators has the opportunity to play the Young Comrade. As Ferran observes, “In Brecht’s described *Einübung* of this piece - a practicing activity not aimed at an audience - the chief thing the players must ‘conceptually master’ is *Verhalten*, meaning conduct that reveals attitude (*Haltung*)” (14). In *An Inspector Calls*, the actors playing the bourgeois figures are, by extension, able to focus on the process *they* undergo under interrogation, suffused not by individual difference, but by the differences that mark the range of options open to them as bourgeois figures (when performed with techniques of an epic theatre). The few pages before the repeated structure is initiated now allow the actors to develop their bourgeois *Gestus* while the aftermath of Goole’s visit shows the actors playing the figures just how little has changed in the social order.

An important formal element of the *Lehrstück* was also the presence of a chorus. The chorus offered both an on-site collective and a multivocal challenge to the actors playing single figures. Here I suggest that Goole himself can be played chorally, but not necessarily in the sense of numerous voices delivering his lines in unison, a task made difficult by the lack of Brecht’s helpful choral verse form in his *Lehrstücke*. However, a chorus of Gooles could be staged using punctuation as a cue for a change of speaker. This rule could denote a switch on every full stop, or at every punctuation mark, depending on the desired effects. My own practical experiments with such a choral format have shown me just how effective a simple line of about six chorus members can offer a challenging wall of resistance to individual figures. The chorus need not deliver their lines with any vestige of realistic inflection; a more neutral approach lands the lines with a nonetheless varied forcefulness that can be unremitting and insistent, which, after all, is the nature of Goole’s challenge. This expansion of Goole, again, shifts the performance work away from the dramatic into the realm of learning, of responding to a questioner who will not give up. That static nature of the bourgeois figures, noted above, can also help the actors articulate appropriate *Haltungen* before the chorus without having to worry about carrying out too much stage business.

Learning is certainly a theme in *An Inspector Calls*, especially toward the end of the play. Priestley clearly demonstrates a notion of false learning in the figure of Arthur. After watching Eric expertly handle a decanter, Arthur declares: “I understand a lot of things now I didn’t understand before.” Goole replies: “Don’t start on that” (51). Arthur has acquired more information about the seamier sides of both Gerald and Eric, but he has learned nothing. With respect to Eric, for example, Arthur arraigns him for theft of monies from his company but fails to bat an eyelid at the rape. The explicit critique of Arthur’s “understanding” bleeds into the other figures because of the bourgeois *Haltungen* they share towards the process of learning: it is singly self-serving. Their moments of recognition are hollow as well. In classical Greek tragedy, *anagnorisis* leads to concrete and violent change as instanced in *Oedipus* or *Antigone*. Shortly after Goole leaves, Sheila says to Arthur: “The point is, you don’t seem to have learnt anything” (58). This would appear to differentiate her from Arthur, but as I have already argued, Sheila is hardly committed to radical action and ends up in a position of compromise. In his final line, Eric, the only other potentially positive figure, sympathizes with Sheila’s sentiment that she no longer wants to hear the others dismiss what has just happened. But this is another example of shielding oneself from unpleasantness, not combatting it. In “On the Theory of the *Lehrstück*,” Brecht noted the importance of portraying negative figures (91), suggesting that there was more to be learned from them. This would certainly be the case in *An Inspector Calls* which both thematizes failures of learning and connects them to social status.

An important element that is yet to be considered and that is central to the *Lehrstück* as Lehmann, Lethen and Nägele understand it, is the role of violence and pain. Yes, Goole repeatedly refers to Eva’s suicide in the most graphic of terms. Arthur, right at the end of the play, observes how Goole’s repetition of those details had an almost Pavlovian effect of eliciting guilty confessions. But this is not the violence that is being dealt with when rethinking the play as a *Lehrstück*. Instead, the revolutionary prospect facing the bourgeois figures is their loss of power, privilege and influence: their extinction as a class. As Roswitha Mueller states, “The *Lehre* [lesson] itself, learned in practical exercises, is concerned with the acquisition of a number of attitudes - not specific political decisions - that are necessary for a strategy in the political struggle towards a socialist society” (104). The violence the figures have to confront is the end of their way of life as they know it, and this fuels the overt resistance mounted by Arthur, Sybil and Gerald *and* the concessions Sheila and Eric make to reform. In Brecht’s *Lehrstück*e, death was a concrete part of the texts themselves. In *An Inspector Calls*, the agony is protracted into a potentially infinite loop, as the play threatens to repeat itself when the party receive the phone call from the police.

Another question that arises when considering the transformation of *An Inspector Calls* into a *Lehrstück* is whether a form designed for the proletariat can be re-functioned for the middle classes. Andrzej Wirth offers a useful insight into the possibility of updating the *Lehrstück*, based on his own experiences: “The originally envisioned target groups of the *Lehrstücke* (for example, the workers' choruses of the Weimar Republic) belong to the past. What is learned from a *Lehrstück* depends upon the composition of the actual target group” (113). If that is the case, then a middle-class group of actors may well prove useful to the exercise, updating Brecht’s form for the present. Goole opines towards the end of Arthur’s interrogation: “In fact, I’ve thought that it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women” (19-20). This is a practical principle of the *Lehrstück*, the ability to experience the other. Given that this play was written in 1944 and is set in 1912, even a familiar social concept as “the middle class” is exposed to further scrutiny by contemporary actors due to the temporal distance between themselves and the play. By placing themselves in the place of others, they can compare and contrast their own middle-class attitudes with those of the interrogated figures.

The privileges of a white middle class still endure, although the high bourgeois status of the figures in the play may provide an interesting difference for the actors to process. The play of self and historicized other can generate productive contrasts between a present-day middle class and one from over a hundred years ago. The formality of the social rules of yore can be picked up from the play’s realistic relationships and the opportunity to experience the same structure five times over points to the differences between the figures within the class when confronted with their complicity in a gruesome death.

**A Future for the *Lehrstück***

The final question to ask is what happens when one tries to force the square peg of a dramatic play into the round hole of the *Lehrstück* form. In response, I will return to the three components of Brecht’s *Umfunktionierung* as articulated, above, by Leach.

In my re-imagining, the play’s content remains the same. There is no need to alter the speeches because, as shown in the analysis, Priestley’s representation of the bourgeois figures offers a strong connection to social reality. This can be highlighted by a mode of performance that proceeds from the play’s articulation of social relations. And, ironically, the perhaps overly transparent lines that condemn the bourgeois figures from their own mouths or that extol the value of community, such as Goole’s final speech, serve the new form particularly well. They are comparable to songs like “Praise of the Party” or the chorus’s approval of the Young Comrade’s killing in *Die Maßnahme*. What had been condemned as preachy sloganeering become clearly expressed, unvarnished positions that the actors, through their figures, have to confront, not simply to affirm.

Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*, however, are conspicuous by their brevity, and so some judicious cutting may make the five interviews more comparable while retaining their formal structural similarities with each other. As the play is not to be performed to an audience, there would be no problem with abbreviating the text as rights holders would not be involved.

Brecht’s writing also casts a retrospective gaze on the action he presents, as in *Die Maßnahme* when the four Agitators re-tell their experiences of the Young Comrade after his death. *An Inspector Calls* possesses a dreamlike quality because the nature of reality is undermined by the revelations about Goole’s identity, his relationship to reality, and the threat of time repeating itself. So, while there is no overt narration or foregrounding of conscious representation when performing actions that have already taken place, the play’s present is itself problematic. The actors, employing the epic techniques discussed above, can thus suggest that they are engaged in conscious representation throughout the *Lehrstück* process. There is no need for Brecht’s formal markers of the action taking place in the past when the performances themselves are understood as provisional.

The primary spark for my interest in the drama as a potential *Lehrstück* was the repetitive form of *An Inspector Calls* and its potential for the play of similarities and differences in the five interview sequences. This focuses the actors’ learning on the contradiction between the advantages of middle-class privilege for the bourgeois figures and its deleterious effects on lower social strata (in the representative persons of Eva and Edna). Here the transformation from *Schaustück* to *Lehrstück* necessitates a new set of divisions in the play, eliminating the existing act breaks and re-inserting them before and after each interview sequence. Re-drawing the play like this is easily implemented and sets out a new agenda for the actors.

The absence of an already written chorus is not necessarily a problem if the play’s interrogative voice becomes collective. The absence of a strict musical accompaniment is, however, a potential stumbling block. The *Lehrstücke* are not operas, and *Die Maßnahme*, for example, uses music for designated songs and choral speech. The dialogues often proceed unaccompanied. Priestley includes no songs and no chorus, of course, and so it may be the case that the rigors of an epic theatre coupled with the new scenic divisions may suffice to maintain the new emphasis on learning. The imposition of an epic insistence on socially contextualized *Gestus* and *Haltung* should then galvanize the text into one that is socially critical, a quality of Priestley’s play in a general sense, but one that is diluted by an emphasis on the moral category of responsibility. Re-imagining the play as a *Lehrstück* exposes the political weakness of such a position and instead arraigns a whole class for the different yet similar behaviors it produces. Sierz’s critique, above, that distancing audiences from the action in this play lets them “off the hook” no longer applies here. The stylizations brought about by the deliberateness and precision of the acting require the special kind of empathy Brecht sought to develop in the practice of the *Lehrstück*.

The potential for learning from the negative example is also pronounced in the play, and it offers the possibility to transform a classic play of the repertoire into a means to confront many a social problem today. The middle class’s acquisitive nature, hypocrisy, self-interestedness, indifference to the suffering of others, and its unwillingness to confront the consequences of its own actions provide clear targets for exploration in a politicized theatre.

The function of the play is thus radically transformed. Rather than offering an audience behaviors for its judgement, *An Inspector Calls* as *Lehrstück* presents the actors with behaviors that they have to embody and to which they have to respond. More importantly, however, it confronts them with an uncompromising lesson to be drawn from the play: to resolve the play’s questions, one has to abolish the class system that sustains it. This, like Brecht’s own *Lehrstücke*, is not a lesson that can be learned easily, yet it opens the way for a consideration of what might be necessary to achieve such an end, a post-Brechtian openness regarding future strategy and action. As such, a play that confirms the social order in its dramatic form fundamentally challenges it as a *Lehrstück*. Refunctioned, it presents the actors with a contradiction at the very heart of the revolutionary project: a utopian prospect and apparently insurmountable historical impediments. If a politicized theatre is charged with thinking the unthinkable in the name of liberation from exploitation and the introduction of equal opportunity for all, then understanding *An Inspector Calls* as a *Lehrstück* might offer a concrete example of how to apply Brecht’s radical form in the twenty-first century. In addition, the process of *Umfunktionierung* illustrates how an imaginative engagement with works from the dramatic repertoire may harness their social energies and re-purpose them for the challenges of the contemporary world. The *Lehrstück* remains a potent theatrical form that can confront performers with positions that need to be overcome if a more equitable society is to emerge.

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1. Although Samantrai is drawing on an edition of the play published in 1945. Some of the details, such as this one, have been excised from the modern, standard edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. To my knowledge, the earliest English translation of a *Lehrstück*, *He Who Said Yes/He Who Said No*, translated by Gerhard Nellhaus, was published in autumn 1946, in the American journal *Accent*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Translations from the German are mine unless otherwise acknowledged. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Indeed, Priestly himself signs up to the hierarchical status quo by referring to Arthur and Sybil in thecharacter attributions as ‘Birling’ and ‘Mrs Birling’, respectively. The heads of the household are afforded generalizing titles, while their children are referred to by their forenames, even though Eric could equally be called ‘Birling.’ As will have already become clear, I have rejected Priestley’s deferential nominations in this article. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example, Brecht, in Käthe Rülicke, “[documentation of *Katzgraben* rehearsals],” undated, n.p., entry for scene I/iv/1, 5 March 1953, Berliner Ensemble Archive File 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. However, even in the light of this, later critics can still subscribe to the view of the *Lehrstück* as the worst kind of political tragedy: see Friedrich 59, for example. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Thanks to Tom Kuhn for his help with the translation. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Briefly, I define “post-Brechtian” as forms of theatre that are dialectical, but not restricted by Brecht’s narrow ideological interpretations of the dialectic. See Mumford for a discussion of his restrictive practices at the Berliner Ensemble. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)