

Evelyn Deutsch-Schreiner: The Educators of the Theatre. Dramaturgy between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment.

The development of the dramaturge parallels the European Enlightenment of the 18th century and reflects the goals of the Enlightenment itself: the start of a new individualism, the capacity and courage to think for oneself, resisting tradition, convention and authority as sources of wisdom and knowledge. A better, happier, "new" human being was the objective, a person able to decide for himself. However, the intellectuals of the Enlightenment were not only philosophers; they sought to influence realpolitik as well, hoping to emancipate the bourgeoisie from feudal absolutism. The theatre became the medium of dissemination for their views, a medium for the education of the bourgeoisie. Plays from England and France – George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731) and Denis Diderot's *Le Père de Famille* (1756) – became examples. The new genre of "domestic tragedy", or *drame bourgeois*, spoke to middle-class sensibilities, making non-nobles the subject of tragedies. In Germany, the theatre found itself at the centre of Enlightenment discourse: According to Johann Christoph Gottsched, theatre was to be a "secular pulpit"; for Gotthold Ephraim Lessing it was a "school of humanity, of feeling and the moral world". From the onset of the Enlightenment theatre was tasked with an educational responsibility in order that people might learn civic virtue. Public theatre was to instruct, to edify, and to better its audience.

The new, dramaturgical vocation was not only a product of the Enlightenment but was also intended to propagate its ideas. Lessing advocated dramaturges' working directly with theatre companies rather than in isolation. In the 1760s the German theatre was underdeveloped and of low quality in contrast to theatres in France and England, not suited to the spreading of ideology. Good German-language pieces were rare; the skills of German actors were far too meagre to meet the dramatic challenges posed by Lessing's pieces. German audiences, too, were still a long way from accepting the theatre as a kind of "civic evening school" and allowing themselves to be educated by it (Haider-Pregler 1980). It was only in the course of the Enlightenment that strolling players gradually became representatives of the bourgeois struggle for power, the German theatre an organ of bourgeois educational ideas. The splintered nature of Germany's many principalities provided a further, political complication. A discourse on national theatre conducted by Enlightenment figures saddled the theatre with the responsibility of bringing about the national unification of art and culture. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing became a role model for intellectuals and young bourgeois playwrights,

providing the movement with significant inspiration. His model of the educational theatre gave birth to the vocation of dramaturge, an important tool for the dissemination of the humanistic idea of the free individual: tolerant of, respectful and equal to other individuals. After describing Lessing's and Friedrich Schiller's work as dramaturges, this study will show the perversion of this ideal during National Socialism and the German Democratic Republic – a reversal of the dramaturgical profession and its humanitarian ideal, serving the state and repressing the citizenry.

1. Lessing, the World's First Dramaturge

In the 18th century it was very unusual for an intellectual to work for the theatre itself. In 1767, with the initiation of the ambitious and privately financed German National Theatre, Lessing was appointed as dramaturge with an annual salary of 800 talers. A consortium of twelve businesspeople financed the first attempt at the formation of a German national theatre, now known as the "Hamburg Enterprise": Lessing was the world's first officially appointed dramaturge (Lockurst 2006: 24). He codified a range of dramaturgical activities that is still valid today: play reading, literary guidance, critical reflection on both performances and acting, the impact of a play on the audience, and general consideration of the theatrical arts and theatre's role in society. As a student Lessing had already gained theatre experience with the well-known Neuber Company in Leipzig, translating and contributing his services for performances. The Leipzig company had successfully performed his debut work, *Der junge Gelehrte* (1748). As he put it, this experience had taught him "a hundred little things that a dramatic author needs to learn" (Qtd in Nisbet 2008: 70). Lessing's stable status as in-house dramaturge allowed him – for the first time – to support himself independently; the practical theatre work came at a time when he had already made a name for himself in dramatic circles.

Lessing's work *Hamburg Dramaturgy* stems from this period, between 1767 and 1769. It is not a complete or homogenous work but more of a journal, intended for the public. It might be described as a series of reviews, offering (rather unsystematic and unconventional) commentary on performances and their backgrounds. It was totally original in conception. Similar to his *Laocoon*, the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* set the standard for the discussion of aesthetic and literary theoretical principles. His plays (including *Die Juden*, *Miss Sara Sampson*, *Minna von Barnhelm* – the first German comedy – and *Emilia Galotti*, the most significant German-language bourgeois tragedy) set similar standards for German theatre.

Lessing's works, with their modern feeling of individualism and naturalistic speech, are the first plays written in the German language still regularly performed today, in both German-language and international theatres; the dramas of his contemporaries have since been relegated to college seminar discussions on literary criticism.

"Lessing's work was conceived of as an ambitious educational project" (Lockhurst 29).

Lessing – dramaturge and playwright, editor, translator and critic as well as theoretician – raised the bar very high for his successors: he was highly educated, could read and speak several languages and was conversant with drama and the development of the theatre in the ancient world. He also had a profound understanding of Aristotle's Poetics, upon which his own theory of tragedy was based. When he spoke on contemporary dramatic literature he was able to reference the entire range of European theatre. He knew the theoreticians and their objectives, the dramatists and their poetological statements; he was familiar with the theatres, the actors, and the character of the various audiences. He translated many theoretical essays, including writings on the actor's art by Rémond de St. Albine and Francesco Riccoboni. He was editor of several theatre journals. In Hamburg his major interest was the impact of theatre on the audience. In Hamburg Dramaturgy No. 12, for example, he writes about the different receptions of a Voltaire comedy in the Netherlands, France, England and Italy, setting standards with his analytical method: typically, he describes the play in its literary context and its previous reception then moves on to the theatrical performance itself. He offers expert commentary on stage adaptation and the difficulties in translating verse and metaphors – the same problems faced by modern dramaturges when translating pieces in a foreign language.

His goals were ambitious: Lessing wanted to be the in-house critic at his theatre and yet remain independent. He sought a lively discourse with the public but also to instruct actors. He strove to "follow every step of both the writer's and the actor's art", as stated in the Hamburg Dramaturgy's "Announcement". However, this first dramaturge in European theatre history soon began to feel the contradictions of his situation. The actors in particular were a problem; they did not care to see their methods criticised. In a famous quote near the end of the Hamburger Dramaturgy Lessing writes: "We have actors, but we have no dramatic art" – unjust, since at that time the National Theatre in Hamburg had the best acting troupe of its day, including Conrad Ekhof, the "father of German acting", Konrad Ackermann, Sophie Friederike Hensel and Sophie Schröder, all of whom were well-known in Europe. Lessing particularly respected Ekhof; however, Madame Hensel often suffered from the sharpness of

Lessing's tongue. He became upset when the text was not fluently spoken, when wordplay was delivered slowly or stammeringly or the punch lines failed to come quickly enough – all of which he criticised in his performance reviews (Hamburg Dramaturgy nr. 9). At some point a discussion of principles must have taken place, for Lessing soon relaxed his criticism of the Hamburg actors. The point was not so much that he criticised, but that he did it so publicly, blaming the actors' vanity. Even today, public criticism or ridicule of one's own theatre troupe would be a deadly offence. Lessing attempted to defend his position by evoking a (fictive) 'true virtuoso' – "possessed of no vanity; to him the art itself is more important than anything. He loves to be judged frankly and loudly; he would rather be criticised wrongly on occasion than too rarely." And if an artist does not behave like this, Lessing adds, "he is not worthy of being studied" (Hamburg Dramaturgy nr. 25).

Both in his role as educator of society and as a cultural intermediary between the stage and the public, Lessing felt the discrepancy between being an independent intellectual and a dramaturge bound to his theatre. Due to the limitations of his publisher he was not able to realise his plan of quickly opening a public debate after premieres. Nonetheless, in Germany the Hamburg Dramaturgy was widely read – and even appeared in pirated editions. Although Lessing considered the effect of the theatre on its audience more closely than almost anyone else, he was not able to prevent the eventual failure of the Hamburg National Theatre. Too few spectators came and the theatre's finances eventually caused its death, probably due to its repertoire. Remarkably, he was excluded from the decision-making process and allowed no influence on the repertoire. However, he also failed to use his independent position to support the theatre sufficiently and made mistakes that dramaturges today must also avoid. His desire to educate led him to underestimate the audience – in the Numbers 100-104 of the Dramaturgy he judged the Hamburg audience severely, but he had previously made derogatory comments about the crude tastes of spectators in the gallery. He failed to acknowledge that the audience might not be interested in plays with which they were already familiar but, in contrast, came in droves to see new ones. "Denis Diderot's *The Family Father* attained the record number of 12 performances. This was surpassed only by Lessing's own *Minna von Barnhelm*, which was performed 16 times – numbers suggesting that the audience's taste wasn't so bad after all" (Fick 2000: 282). Still, he knew too little about the tastes of the audience and made no attempt to open a dialogue with them. Lessing's conversation in the Dramaturgy was not with normal theatregoers but took the form of an imaginary discourse with insiders and "judges of the art", as they were then called – an elite

public. He often conducted fictional conversations with Voltaire or other intellectuals of his time. He was a polemicist, attempting to implement an open cultural debate in 18th century Germany, but this had no effect on the concrete situation and did nothing for the Hamburg Theatre. No modern dramaturge would dare to negatively criticise the productions of his or her own theatre in public but Lessing was merciless in his criticism of the plays and their adaptations – by no means an advertisement for the Hamburg Theatre. He was unaware of the effect his writings had; when approached on the subject, he said: "I was shocked to learn that my openly expressed judgement had a negative influence on some of my readers" (Hamburg Dramaturgy nr. 7). Lessing was filled with bitterness after the failure of the Hamburg Theatre and even more so in 1777, when a promised nomination for a position as director at the Mannheim National Theatre failed to materialise. This was 6 years before Friedrich Schiller became dramaturge in Mannheim.

Instead, Lessing became a librarian in Wolfenbüttel, continuing in this job until his death in 1781. It was here that he wrote the Enlightenment tolerance play *Nathan The Wise*, a pioneering work that introduced inter-religious thought to the stage. The modern theatre owes Lessing its claim to a broadly educated, independent intellectual closely connected to the cultural milieu – a dramaturge who maintains an open discussion with the public and who, as an attending intellectual, codifies and encourages the development of the theatrical utopia in a continuing discourse. Lessing's concept of the German theatre as a "school of sentiment" and "school of humanity" was meant to strengthen the individual in order to challenge the dominant aristocracy. More than that of other Enlightenment figures who wished simply to teach spectators to behave differently, Lessing's aim was to "raise the individual's moral awareness through an artistic process of communication" (Haider-Pregler 1980: 169). He wanted the theatrical experience to challenge spectators to think for themselves. It is noteworthy that Lessing – both in his Enlightenment work and as a dramaturge – operated not only as a thinker and theoretician but also translated his ideas into action. The examination of theory in theatre praxis is a process in which modern dramaturges also risk ambivalent results. After Lessing the intellectual elite began to take interest in the theatre. The young Goethe, Lenz, and the young Schiller began to write plays for the German stage. The playwriting boom and the professionalisation of German acting formed the basis for an increasing public interest in Enlightenment theatre, allowing theatre in the geographically and politically fragmented Germany of the 1780s and 90s to take on a political function and promote the idea of Germany as a cultural nation.

2. Schiller as a Dramaturge

Friedrich Schiller's dramas are poetry and are considered among the greatest works of German literature, but they are also works meant to be performed, offering an abundance of acting possibilities. Schiller was a poet who was fascinated by the theatre and considered the performance while writing. In his eyes, the drama was only finished when performed before an audience: as he wrote in the prologue to his *Braut von Messina*, "tragic poetry is only completed in theatrical performance". He wrote of his love for the feeling of "holding the reins of the audience's soul, able when I will to heave it like a ball toward Heaven or Hell" – to make them "tremble" with his imagination (Qtd Safranski 2004: 18).

Schiller dealt with the theatre on several levels: as a playwright, he authored twelve plays that were successfully performed during his lifetime. As a theoretician he wrote important essays on the aesthetics of art and developed a theory of drama – and he was a dramaturge. He worked as a dramaturge twice in his life: in his youth in Mannheim at the National Theatre and during his "classical" period as Goethe's congenial partner at the royal theatre in Weimar. He loved the theatre: "My world is the theatre, it is where I live and weave..." (Qtd Brauneck 1996: 843).

In Mannheim, the best theatre of the day and the stronghold of the "Sturm und Drang" movement, Schiller caused a sensation with the world premiere of his *The Robbers* and became the idol of Germany's youth. In 1783/84 he fulfilled his contract there as writer-in-residence and dramaturge, an independent position, carrying a modest annual salary of 300 guilders. Yet it afforded him the rare chance to see his pieces performed and observe their aesthetic effects – a situation many modern dramatists can only dream of. He learned to make conceptual changes and to cut text dispassionately and without fussiness; his artistic director, Heribert von Dalberg, was not a pleasant man.

He asked Schiller for two adaptations of *Die Verschwörung des Fiesko zu Genua*. The play, directed by Schiller himself, was rejected by the audience and withdrawn after two performances. When writing *Luise Millerin* Schiller took the audience's tastes and expectations into account, choosing the popular form of a sentimental family drama but still managing to integrate social criticism. He even accepted the suggestion of famous actor August Wilhelm Iffland to change the title to the more sensational *Intrigue and Love*, though he did not care for it himself. In connection with the production of *Don Carlos* he was

prepared to make many compromises: in addition to the published version he wrote two shorter versions, specifically for the stage – one in verse, the other in prose.

As today, the work of a dramaturge included the preparation of the theatre programme and work with the actors; Schiller was also a member of the theatre board and had to read many plays. His work with the actors made him aware of the limitations of the art of acting: the actors had difficulty speaking verse fluently and changed scripts as they saw fit. This was unacceptable, but Schiller understood the actors' point of view and was able to serve as a mediator between script and stage: he took pains to write in an "appropriate, clear and speakable language of the theatre" (Qtd in Siedhoff 1983: 13). As with Lessing, Schiller's goal was to critically examine his theatrical work in a periodical, adding it to the continuing artistic discourse. This publication was to be called the "Mannheim Dramaturgy", in direct reference to Lessing's Hamburg works. However, with von Dalberg's non-renewal of Schiller's contract, the publication never came to pass. Mary Lockhurst notes: "A major difficulty was that Schiller simply did not, at that stage in his career, have the outstanding critical and creative reputation that he later acquired" (Lockhurst 38).

Schiller – uncommon for a poet – was both able to adapt the texts of others for the stage and interested in such work: just such a dramaturgical project was the beginning of Schiller's legendary friendship with Johann Wolfgang Goethe. In 1794 Goethe requested that Schiller adapt his *Egmont* – which had been premiered in 1789 to no great success – for the stage. Schiller immediately agreed and became, from that time on, Goethe's closest colleague in his leadership of the theatre in Weimar, where his work as a dramaturge led to a boom. "We worked together on the refinement of the theatre," wrote Goethe, "Schiller wrote poetry; I taught, practiced, and executed" (Qtd in Safranski 472). Goethe was convinced of his friend's superiority as a practical dramaturge and accepted the results even when he himself was not satisfied, as with *Egmont*. Between 1794 and his death in 1805, Schiller adapted Goethe's works *Iphigenia* and *Stella*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lessing's *Nathan The Wise*, Gozzi's *Turandot* and Racine's *Phaedra*, as well as Louis Benoit Picard's *Der Neffe als Onkel* and *Der Parasit*. His dramatisations were radical and incisive but highly successful. These adaptations represent a noteworthy culture transfer: several of them, like *Macbeth*, began to appear regularly in German repertoires only after Schiller's reworking. His adaptation of *Turandot* is still performed today.

Weimar saw the development of a further aspect of dramaturgy still important today: dramaturgical programming. Taken as a whole, the programme of the Weimar theatre represented the idea of Welttheater, including important authors and plays from all of Europe, in line with Goethe and Schiller's shared belief that "provincialism has no place on the stage". They produced pieces by Lessing, Kotzebue, Iffland, Terence, Plautus, Shakespeare, Gozzi, Cervantes, Racine, Calderon, Sophocles and Euripides. However, the Welttheater concept also dictated the incorporation of international themes in original works: the Wallenstein trilogy, produced during the Weimar period, is set in Austria and Czechia; Maria Stuart is set in Great Britain, Die Jungfrau von Orleans in France, Die Braut von Messina in Italy, Wilhelm Tell in Switzerland and the fragmentary Demetrius in Russia. Schiller and Goethe strove to expand the repertoire of the small royal theatre and raise the audience's level of understanding – but also to realise the classical ideal of international literature. They succeeded in achieving their goals and the theatre at Weimar became, by dint of its wide-ranging repertoire and its production style, Germany's leading theatre. Goethe and Schiller's work in Weimar is responsible for the conviction, still held today, that a representative theatre should have an international repertoire – a reflection of the educational precepts of German classicism.

Schiller and Goethe also recognised the dramaturgical necessity to encourage the writing of new works. In 1800 they announced a playwriting contest – a "dramatic competition" – and encouraged authors to take part. The term *Entwicklungsdramaturgy* ("developmental dramaturgy") was later applied to the production of new plays and theatrical material. Schiller and Goethe made extensive use of "thrillers" for Weimar's unique repertoire and audience. Such contests subsequently became a popular means of improving the range of German language dramas.

Friedrich Schiller wrote a number of essays central to German theatre, including the 1784 paper "The Theatre as Moral Institution", in which he ascribed a powerful effect to the theatre: he claimed that, more than any other public institution, the theatre is a school of practical wisdom, a guidepost for civic life and a place of spiritual education – a "moral institution". He was convinced of the theatre's ability to aesthetically educate and psychologically influence, but also of its political function: it could teach tolerance, point out educational missteps and offer the "great men" of the world a kind of "school for princes" – a chilling example of the misuse of power. The message to the powerful is crystal clear: "The

theatre's jurisdiction begins where the sphere of worldly law ends" (Schiller, "Das Theater als moralische Anstalt") – a message that arrived with explosive force in Germany. Later, as it became clear that enlightened princes would by no means alter the prevailing societal structure, Schiller retreated from this ideal, positing that the theatre could at least offer spiritual resistance and a vision of liberty. His classical insistence on solemn nobility intimates a morally driven political emancipation, in which art plays a major educational role.

These ideas stood in opposition to conservative political tendencies as well as to the official censorship of the theatre. As early as Lessing's time the State had begun to institute theatre censorship. Paradoxically, it was initiated by Josef von Sonnenfels, an Enlightenment figure and censor for Empress Maria Theresa, as a means of compelling drama to conform to Enlightenment principles. Soon, however, the motivation of this censorship turned political – particularly in order to combat the ideas fomented by the French Revolution. Censorship reached a high point in the first half of the 19th century – the Restoration era before 1848 – with the banning or expurgation of many Enlightenment and Classicist works. With a few brief exceptions, the censorship of German and Austrian theatre continued until 1918, peaking a second time in the 20th century.

3. The "Reichsdramaturg" in National Socialist Germany

The goals of the Enlightenment and German classicism were freethinking, aspiring to an independent, individualist utopia. The 20th century brought a powerful backlash, a Counter-Enlightenment with its roots reaching back to the 1870s. The Enlightenment-era edifying role ascribed to the theatre was now forced to serve the escalation of National Socialism. Theatre could contribute to the expression of freedom and emancipation; instead it became a blind servant of the state. "Theatre has always been that branch of the arts with the closest relationship to the people and the branch that can have the strongest formative and ideological influence on its time," stated Minister of Propaganda Joseph (Qtd in *Völkischer Beobachter* 1938). The theatre was to become warlike: the National Socialists linked art, the State, and war – a doctrine diametrically opposed to Enlightenment ideals. The Reichsdramaturg Rainer Schlösser declared: "Government, Art, and the Wehrmacht are thoroughly aligned with one another" (1937: 7).

The connection between high culture and menacing aggressiveness was typical of National Socialist politics, as well as of its cultural policy. State-supported theatre and festivals stood in contrast to the banishment and destruction of intellectual life and the arts in Germany.

The artistic profession of the dramaturge was perverted during the National Socialist period (1933–1945) into that of a state censorship authority and political minder in the theatre. The new role of the dramaturge was to assist in the establishment of new guiding principles on which the new German citizens were to be modelled. After the founding of the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda in 1933 in Berlin, Joseph Goebbels established a completely new department: "Reichsdramaturgie", led by Dr. Rainer Schlösser. Schlösser's qualification for the post was based on anti-Semitic hate articles composed for Nazi periodicals such as *Der Angriff* and the *Völkischer Beobachter*. He had been active before the Nazis seized power as a local group leader of the "Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur" in Weimar, agitating under his leader Alfred Rosenberg against all modernist trends in the theatre and particularly against Jewish artists. In the *Völkischer Beobachter* he excoriated Carl Zuckmayer, Ödön von Horváth and the Prussian Poets' Academy and advocated the abolishment of the prestigious Kleist Award. (Hüpping 2012: 98-109). Schlösser considered himself an artist as well, publishing poems and political essays. Like Goebbels and Hitler, Schlösser affected an artistic attitude and never tired of emphasising how fortunate artists were under the National Socialist regime.

The "Reichsdramaturgie" was one of seven divisions in the theatre department of the Ministry of Propaganda. From 1935 Rainer Schlösser was the director of the theatre department, as such the most important theatre official in Nazi Germany. The department was a place of censorship and control. Schlösser was at once responsible for scrutinising and influencing German theatres' repertoires, for overseeing all dramatic production – plays, operas, operettas – and also for the production of scripts and coordination with theatrical publishers.

The department cooperated closely with the Reich Chamber of Theatre (Reichstheaterkammer), in which all theatre personnel – including dramaturges – were organised. The 1933 "Law for the Re-establishment of German Civil Service" (Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des deutschen Berufsbeamtentums) had provided the pretext to immediately dismiss all undesirable theatre personnel – meaning anyone who, due to their principles, race or artistic aesthetic, was objectionable to the National Socialist regime. Membership in the Chamber was a prerequisite for being able to work in theatrical professions; however, only those conforming to the Nuremberg race laws of 1935 – and considered politically harmless – were allowed to become members. Thus, the German Reich managed to rid itself of both Jewish and communist artists with a single stroke, moving

forward with the realisation of the National Socialist artistic ideal: racist, anti-democratic, anti-Enlightenment, anti-individualist and misogynistic, bent on maintaining the hegemony of its designers. Those not fitting this narrow definition of German culture were threatened with occupational bans, expulsion, and physical extermination. The power-hungry National Socialists achieved their aim of dictating the political direction and aesthetic of the German theatre; their goal was the re-education of the spectators in National Socialist doctrine: "It is impossible for National Socialism and the National Socialist State to require anything less of German art than that it be firmly rooted in our worldview," affirmed Führer and Chancellor Adolf Hitler (Qtd in *Die Bühne* 1937: 274).

Minister Goebbels, who had studied German philology and considered himself a great theatre expert, dictated the direction of the Reichsdramaturgie. At pomp-filled events such as theatre festivals and at culture-political press conferences he announced the new requirements for the theatre. Goebbels co-opted the history of theatre in order to praise German theatre as the best of its kind, at the expense of other countries: "It is an eternal stamp of our fame that a German wrote the Hamburg Dramaturgy, giving theatre for the first time an essential structure. For this reason, we are far ahead of other peoples in the theatrical arts" (Qtd in *Deutsches Bühnenjahrbuch* 1937: 2). However, the regime failed in its attempt to use Lessing for its own ends: *Nathan The Wise*, the great work of Enlightenment tolerance, was banned. Schiller, on the other hand, was named a "comrade in arms" of National Socialism, his essay "The Theatre as Moral Institution" reinterpreted as a template for a theatre of Nazi indoctrination: "The German stage today is once again becoming a "moral institution" according to Schiller's vision, a podium for the political and social mores of our time," said Goebbels in his speech at the Reich Chamber of Theatre's annual meeting in 1937 (*Die Bühne* 277). However, Schiller's great emancipation drama, *Don Carlos*, was rarely approved for performance.

Under Goebbels Reichsdramaturgie pursued representative high culture – the bourgeois, established theatre of the 1930s such as the Festspiele in Bayreuth and Salzburg and city and national theatres. However, the aesthetic experiments of the avant-garde and the political theatre of the 1920s were labelled "degenerate" and banned. The once-lively dance theatre scene, the new expressive dance of Germany, was brought to an end.

Since ideological plays could only fill about a third of the season, emphasis was placed from the beginning on the traditional, bourgeois canon, approved according to the well-known criteria: no Jewish playwrights, no political freethinkers, no artists from "enemy states", no

"degenerate art". Goebbels demanded a theatre of "steely romance" and "heroic objectivity": a dramaturgy combining neo-romanticism's yearning for belief and destiny with the glorification of power and elemental forces, couched in a realistic – but idyllic or elevated – form.

The Reichsdramaturgie examined all dramatic works past and present for their political permissibility. Rainer Schlösser's colleagues included Eberhard Wolfgang Möller, author of the Thingspiel or open-air drama, *Das Frankfurter Würfelspiel* (The Frankenburg Dice Game which premiered at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin), and Sigmund Graff, co-author – with Carl Ernst Hintze – of the military-themed *Die endlose Strasse* (The Endless Street). They wrote assessments of selected plays according to the tenets of National Socialism; these assessments decided whether the plays were to be banned or allowed. Another major focus of the Reichsdramaturgie was the writing of new, ideologically appropriate plays. But in spite of high promotions dramaturgically “good” plays could not be generated.

In close cooperation with the Reich Theatre Chamber, publishers and local propaganda offices, the approximately 150 theatres in Germany were closely observed. Private theatres were mostly taken over by the State. In accordance with Paragraph 1 of the 1934 Theatre Act, all theatres were now under the control of Reichsminister Goebbels; all theatre directors were made subject to the state dramaturge. The Reichsdramaturgie maintained a close relationship with directors, dramaturges and publishing houses: political standards for theatres were established; all theatres were forced to submit their programmes for approval. Theatres were forced to tailor their productions to guidelines established by the Minister – tellingly, these guidelines were referred to as "decrees". Thus, the stagings were no longer created by the director and dramaturge and no longer bore the artistic signature of the director either, but were constrained by the staging guidelines of the Reichsdramaturgie. Characterisation was also prescribed by National Socialist societal models. The dramaturgical development of pieces was substantially affected as well: editing of plays forced a politically acceptable interpretation, the Reichsdramaturgie had no qualms about adding textual passages in order to achieve ideological clarity. The messages of plays were trivialised, themes were rendered idyllic or heroic. Even the classics were not spared; their characters and plots were mostly twisted to match the ahistorical, "pure-blooded" Nazi ideal (cf. Schreiner 1981).

In accordance with Paragraph 2 of the Theatre Act of 1934, the Ministry assumed control not only of the appointment of theatre general and artistic directors and heads of stage design but

also the posting of head dramaturges. The position of head dramaturge was itself an invention of the National Socialists, furthering their hierarchical methods of control. General directors received "recommendations" for head dramaturges close to the regime; the Vienna Volkstheater, for instance, was forced to accept Otto Emmrich Groh – a National Socialist playwright – as its head dramaturge. During his tenure in the theatre many Nazi-sympathetic plays were produced. Friedrich Bethge, author of the National Socialist play *March of the Veterans*, became head dramaturge in Frankfurt, Möller was head dramaturge in Königsberg when he was called to join the Reichsdramaturgie; Hanns Johst, author of the most famous National Socialist play *Schlageter*, was forced onto the National Theatre in Berlin. The dramaturge became an informer, politically influencing productions, putting Nazi cultural policy into action and making the theatre meet the political ends of the Ministry. Before that time only a few theatres had been equipped with a dramaturge; under National Socialism this position was implemented at all state and city theatres, a practice which remained after 1945.

Some German dramaturges fought to maintain the ideals of the Enlightenment but could do so only in exile, beyond the borders of Germany. Kurt Hirschfeld was fired from his job as dramaturge in Darmstadt in 1933 in accordance with the "Law for the Re-establishment of German Civil Service" and fled to Switzerland. As dramaturge in the Zurich Theatre, he contributed to the theatre's role as a symbol of intellectual resistance against National Socialism. In Zurich, pieces by dramatists banned in Germany – such as Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* – were performed, Schiller and Goethe's "Welttheater" repertoire ideal was preserved and new authors were encouraged, including Max Frisch. Hirschfeld was successful with his "humanistic dramaturgy" concept after the war, a concept that proved decisive for Zurich:

It was necessary to make the theatre an effective cultural institution once more, to define its spiritual standpoint and restore its functions at a time in which German theatre was solely a weapon of propaganda. It was necessary to spotlight artistic, ethical, political and religious problems at a time in which discussion seemed replaced by blind allegiance. It was necessary to preserve and display the vision of man in his diversity, taking a stand against the destructive forces of Fascism. It was necessary, in opposition to the jingoist, warlike style of the official German theatre, to cultivate a sober, humanist style that communicated the content of works and encouraged their discussion. (15)

4. The Dramaturge in the Service of the Party in communist Germany

In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – and before 1949, in the Russian zone of occupation – diverse state and communist party authorities did the work of the dramaturge. This interference in artistic work increased to the point that it could be described as a kind of state dramaturgy. Typical for the German Democratic Republic, state, theatre, and science were very closely linked – in this sense, the theatre obtained an additional function in its role as educational institution. The state tasked the theatre with an important role in the socialist re-education of the people, prioritising its own demands above artistic liberty. From the beginning until the political turnaround in 1989, censorship was commonplace. All theatres were under the control of the Ministry of Culture's theatre department,¹ in which the minister, together with the Advisory Board for Drama, took the decisions concerning premieres and production concepts. Theatres were influenced by the “Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the SED” (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), the powerful “Association of Theatre Creators” and scientific institutes such as the “Department of Art and Cultural Science of the Academy of Social Sciences” at the SED Central Committee, as well as the Artistic Trade Union. Political directives for dramaturgy were announced at party conferences and at the meetings of the Central Committee, where artists were also regularly reprimanded when they failed to enact party edicts quickly enough. Subsequent theatre conferences, the “Performing Arts Section of the German Academy of the Arts” and all dramaturges were expected to follow the guidelines of the SED's cultural politics for the creation of assertive and idealised art (Stuber 2000: 207). Only a single theatre periodical was in print – Theater der Zeit, founded in 1946 – and only a limited number of plays was available from Henschel, the monopolistic theatre publisher. Regional party officials were responsible for their local theatres, deciding on schedules and productions. The artists had to deal with amateurishness and incompetence but also with ideological indoctrination, like the apodeictic *Das kleine Einmaleins der Dramaturgie* (Dramaturgy 101) (Erpenbeck 1947). The author of this work was Fritz Erpenbeck, editor in chief of Theater der Zeit, opponent of Brecht and advocator of socialist realism. As in all dictatorships, the statements of the party leadership were sacrosanct – for instance, the playwright Heiner Müller was publicly condemned by Presidents Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, resulting in a ban on the performance of his works.

¹Forerunner of the Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten 1951-53

The ever-present question was what the socialist theatre should look like. The cultural policy predetermined the content of plays, bans were pronounced and specific systems imposed, such as the Stanislavsky method and later the so-called "Bitterfeld Way", calling for blue-collar workers to write plays and for dramatists to search for new themes inspired by the industry. In order to establish a national theatre unique to the GDR, modern Western "aesthetics", like those of Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd, were denounced. The "heritage" of classical German theatre was conjured and a contemporary style was ordered – one showing the reality of the German Democratic Republic not in ambiguous terms but in a positive, heroic dramaturgy, with unified stories and resolved conflicts. "Decadent", "formalist", "non-folkloric" and "contradictory" were the epithets applied to silence dissenters. The Soviet Socialist Realism of the 1930s, as defined by A. Shdanow, was doctrine.

The antipode to this movement was Bertolt Brecht, with his epic model of theatre, in which the theory and practice of the dramaturge were developed. The new generation of dramaturges, including Heinar Kipphardt, Peter Hacks and Heiner Müller, was also in opposition: they advocated a socialist theatre, but one including critical content and new aesthetics. The GDR leadership avoided criticising the world-famous Brecht, whom they welcomed in 1948 as a figurehead, but reprimanded other dramatists.

Theatre dramaturges were busy integrating such different forms as Stanislavsky's psychological theatre of illusion and Brecht's theatre of alienation in their work. Their first task was the education of the spectators: a broad educational movement had indeed been ordered by the state. Their responsibilities were numerous: dramaturges had to lecture on Marxism and Leninism, organise "Stanislavsky circles" to implement his programme of training actors, coordinate theatre clubs and take part in various meetings and seminars. In 1951/52 "concept rehearsals" became obligatory. Dramaturges and directors were forced to write conceptual papers in which the cardinal political purpose of a play, as well as the method of its accomplishment, were described; these were to be submitted to the authorities and fulfilled in the rehearsal process. In practice, the dramaturge generally wrote these papers; they were often delivered after the premiere – a custom that was grumbled about at the Stanislavsky conference. The Association of Theatre Creators archived all directing concepts and rehearsal notes on scene variations – ostensibly so that other dramaturges could review

them; in fact, this was a further means of political supervision. Another method, in the guise of "democratic collaboration", encouraged actors not currently involved in a production to visit the rehearsals of other productions and discuss them with the dramaturges. Factory workers entered into collective consultation with the artists, which made life difficult for city theatre dramaturges and meant more non-artistic work. Heinar Kipphardt, head of dramaturgy at the Deutsches Theater Berlin (1951-59), in his play *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* satirised the hectic life of the dramaturge – in search of the ultimate new contemporary play and plagued by the obstructionism and senseless suggestions of narrow-minded officials of the omnipresent bureaucracy – officials who themselves were drowning in paperwork. In the play, a female party functionary appears as a "dea ex machina", assisting the dramaturge in his battles with the head of the city theatre department. All this, of course, was irony: the mechanisms inimical to artists' work were generated by the party itself, not by the petit-bourgeois incomprehension of a few individuals. For this play, performed in 1953, Kipphardt was recognised with the National Award, Third Class. Some years later, when supporting Peter Hack's plays and publicly rejecting Shdanov's socialist realism, Kipphardt came into conflict with the leadership of the SED and was denounced as a "reactionary head dramaturge" and a threat to German theatre. (Franzkowiak 2002: 119). He continued writing in West Germany, creating several major works of the documentary theatre – including *In der Sache Oppenheimer* – and became head dramaturge at the Kammerspiele in Munich.

In the 1970s and 1980s the dominant SED gradually began to lose its power, but in 1976, an exodus of theatre people followed the exile of Wolf Biermann, a singer and co-founder of the Berliner Arbeiter- und Studententheater (b.a.t). This represented a significant brain drain but, paradoxically, for the remaining dramaturges it meant more artistic opportunities – although, until the turnaround in 1989, such opportunities were confined to the regime's margin. Still, Brecht's model of the artistic-scientific dramaturge was able to assert itself in the theatres of the GDR. The position of production dramaturge became common – a dramaturge specifically responsible for research and developing the directing concept in co-operation with directors and designers, with a critical role in rehearsals and the collection of programme material.

Brecht's dramaturge was not only a production dramaturge but also an in-house intellectual placing a high value on artistic reflection, political discussion and the documentation of theatre performances – the most important development in German dramaturgy since Lessing.

This model was based on Brecht's own working method and was developed in the Berliner Ensemble – in dialogue with the communist leadership, to be sure, but also partially in opposition to it. In the final years of the GDR, the theatres – with the help of their dramaturges – became an important voice for public criticism of the government, ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The concept of the dramaturge under National Socialism and in communist East Germany was the polar opposite of the vocation first defined by Lessing and represents a Counter-Enlightenment ideal. The Frankfurt School philosophers Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer maintain, however, that the Enlightenment und Counter-Enlightenment share ideological roots. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first published in 1944, they saw a dichotomy at the heart of Enlightenment thinking: on the one hand, the Enlightenment made great strides in terms of humanity's technical understanding of the world and its capacity to manipulate it; however, it failed spectacularly to provide humans with the moral understanding to avoid replicating the barbarity of less technological ages on an ever more grotesque scale.

According to this interpretation, the role of the dramaturge as censor and suppressor in the service of an authoritarian State is the "dark side" of the labour of the Enlightenment dramaturge, educating people to become free individuals. This view of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment as two sides of the same coin is controversial to this day: the opposition posed by Kurt Hirschfeld in Zurich, as well as the self-determination of East German theatre from 1976 (with the help of the Brechtian dramaturgical model), show the potential of liberating critical dramaturgy, allowing it to uphold Enlightenment values. It is useful for dramaturges – practitioners of a young profession – to remember that though the German dramaturgical model is rooted in the Enlightenment, it was negatively impacted by National Socialism and state-imposed communism. The further development of the vocation and its responsibilities is closely linked to societal development – and also to the further development of the Enlightenment project. The failure of the Enlightenment in society is not necessarily due to the bankruptcy of humanist/Enlightenment thought: as Hans Meyer states, contradictions in societal existence confirm the need for Enlightenment (Mayer 1975: 9). The dramaturge today is no longer possessed of a state-dictated educational "mission": instead, the dramaturge supports, accompanies and reflects on the artistic approach of his or her production team. The dramaturge refers to areas of conflict within society, using the theatre as

an artistic location where new and different points of view on human co-existence can be researched – thus furthering the continuing project of the Enlightenment itself.

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