The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent

Aus: Brecht, Bertolt

Collected plays
London: Methuen Drama

3: St. Joan of the Stockyards

S. [27] - 43
On a platform corresponding in size to the number of participants the Chorus is positioned at the back. The orchestra is on the left. In the left foreground there is a table at which the conductor of the singers and instrumentalists, the Leader of the Chorus and the Speaker sit. The singers of the Airmen’s (or Mechanics’) parts sit at a desk in the right foreground. [The offstage orchestra should be as far away in the hall (gallery) as is possible.] To clarify the scene the wreckage of a plane can be placed on or beside the platform.

I (5)

THE STORY OF FLIGHT

[CHORUS] THE FOUR AIRMEN report:
At that time, when humanity
Began to know itself
We fashioned carriages
Of iron, wood and glass
And in these we went flying.
And that with a velocity that no hurricane
Has been known to ever exceed.
And such was our motor:
Strong as a hundred horses, though
Smaller than a single one.
Ages long all things fell in a downward direction
Except for the birds themselves.
On the oldest of tablets
No one has come on drawings
Of human beings flying through the air.
Only we, we have found the secret.
Near the end of the second millennium, as we reckon time
Our artless invention took wing
Pointing out the possible
Without letting us forget:
[The unattainable.]
The yet-to-be-attained.
2 (1 continued)

THE CRASH

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS addresses the Crashed Airman:
Fly no longer.
Now no more do you have need of swiftness.
The lowest piece of earth
Is now high
Enough for you.
Lie there still and be
Content.
Not high above our heads
Not far from us
And no more in motion
But immobile
Tell us who you are.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN answer[s]:
I was sharing in the researches of my comrades.
As our airplanes grew ever better
We flew yet higher and higher
The oceans were soon mastered
And even the mountains humbled.
I had been seized with the fever
Of building cities, and of oil.
And all my thoughts were of machines and the
Attainment of ever greater speed.
I forgot in my exertions
My own name and identity
And in the urgency of my searching
Forgot the final goal I sought.
But I beg you
To come to me and
To give me water
And place a pillow under my head
And to assist me, for
I do not wish to die.

THE CHORUS turns to the Crowd:
Hearken: a man calls you

To assist him.
In the heavens
He went flying, and
Now to earth has fallen
And will not perish.
So he's calling to you
To assist him.
And here
We have a beaker of water and
A pillow.
Now you must tell us
Whether we should assist him.

[VOICES, repeated by the Crowd:
Why should we now assist him?
He has not given us assistance.]

THE CROWD answers the Chorus:
Yes.

CHORUS to the Crowd:
Have they assisted you?

CROWD:
No.

THE SPEAKER turns to the Crowd and says:
Across the body of the dying man the question is considered:
whether men help each other.

3 (2)

INQUIRY: DO MEN HELP EACH OTHER?

First Inquiry

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS comes forward:
One of our kind went sailing across the sea, and
There he discovered an unknown continent.
But many came after
And built there in that place mighty cities, with
Boundless effort and cunning.

CHORUS:
The price of bread did not get cheaper.
CROWD: No.

Second Inquiry

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS turns to the Crowd:

Look on our pictures and then say
One man helps another!
Twenty photographs showing how human beings slaughter one another in our times are shown.

THE CROWD shouts:
No man helps another.

Third Inquiry (6)

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS turns to the Crowd:

Watch now our clowns' scene, in which
Some men help another man.

Three Clowns mount the platform. One of them, called Mr Smith, is a giant. They speak very loudly.

CLOWN 1: Lovely evening today, Mr Smith.
CLOWN 2: What do you say to the evening, Mr Smith?
SMITH: I don't find it at all lovely.
CLOWN 1: Wouldn't you like to sit down, Mr Smith?
CLOWN 2: Here is a chair, Mr Smith. Why don't you speak to us any more?
CLOWN 1: Can't you see? Mr Smith wants to gaze at the moon.
CLOWN 2: Tell me, why are you always crawling up Mr Smith's arse? You're inconveniencing Mr Smith.
CLOWN 1: Because Mr Smith is so strong; that's why I crawl up his arse.
CLOWN 2: Me too.
CLOWN 1: Please, Mr Smith, come and sit with us.
SMITH: I'm not feeling well today.
CLOWN 1: Then we must try and cheer you up, Mr Smith.
The scene continues without music.
SMITH: I don't think I can be cheered up any more. Pause. How does my complexion look?
CLOWN 1: Rosy, Mr Smith, nice and rosy.
SMITH: Really? And I thought I was looking rather pale.
CLOWN 1: How extraordinary! You say you think you are looking
rather pale. Now I come to look at you, I must say I think you do look a little pale.

CLOWN 2: In that case you should take a seat, Mr Smith, looking as you do.

SMITH: I don’t feel like sitting today.

CLOWN 1: No, no – no sitting. Whatever you do, don’t sit. Better remain standing.

SMITH: Why do you think I should remain standing?

CLOWN 1 to CLOWN 2: He mustn’t sit down today, otherwise he’ll never be able to get up again.

SMITH: Oh, God!

CLOWN 1: See? He knows it himself. That’s why Mr Smith prefers to remain standing.

SMITH: Do you know, I rather think I’ve got a pain in my left foot.

CLOWN 1: Bad?

SMITH: Suffering: What?

CLOWN 1: Is it hurting much?

SMITH: Yes, it’s hurting a good deal.

CLOWN 2: That’s what comes of standing.

SMITH: Shall I sit down, then?

CLOWN 1: No, no, you mustn’t. We must avoid that at all costs.

CLOWN 2: When your left foot starts hurting you, there’s only one way: off with the left foot.

CLOWN 1: And the sooner, the better.

SMITH: Well, if you think –

CLOWN 2: No doubt about it.

_They saw off his left foot. Music plays._

SMITH: A stick, please.

_They give him a stick._

CLOWN 1: There. Can you stand better now, Mr Smith?

SMITH: Yes, on the left side. But you must give me back my foot. I wouldn’t like to lose it.

CLOWN 2: As you please – if you don’t trust us.

CLOWN 2: We can go away, if you like.

SMITH: No, no. You’ll have to stay now. I can’t walk on my own.

CLOWN 1: Here’s your foot.

_SMITH puts it under his arm._

SMITH: Now I’ve lost my stick.

CLOWN 2: But you’ve got your foot back.

Both laugh loudly.

SMITH: Now I really can’t go on standing. The other leg is beginning to hurt.

CLOWN 2: What did you expect?

SMITH: I don’t want to put you to more inconvenience than is absolutely necessary, but without that stick I find things rather difficult.

CLOWN 2: By the time we pick up the stick, we can just as well saw the other leg off, if it’s hurting you so much.

SMITH: Yes, maybe that would be better.

_Music plays. They saw off his other leg. Smith falls down._

SMITH: Now I’ll never be able to stand again.

CLOWN 1: That’s terrible, and just when we didn’t want you to sit at any price.

SMITH: What?!

CLOWN 2: You can’t stand up any more, Mr Smith.

SMITH: Don’t say that. I can’t bear it.

CLOWN 2: Say what?

SMITH: That.

CLOWN 2: That you can’t stand up any more?

SMITH: Can’t you keep your mouth shut?

CLOWN 2: No, Mr Smith, but what I can do is unscrew your left ear. Then you won’t be able to hear me saying that you can’t stand up any more.

SMITH: Yes, maybe that would be better.

_They unscrew his left ear. Music._

SMITH to CLOWN 1: Now I can’t hear you any more. _Clown 2 goes over to the other side. My ear, please._ Growing angry: And while you are about it, the other leg too. This is no way to treat a sick man. I demand the immediate return of all missing parts to their rightful owner, which is myself. _They put the other leg under his arm and lay the ear in his lap._ If you think you can play tricks with me, then you are utterly mistaken. – What’s the matter with my arm?

CLOWN 2: It’s because of all that useless junk you’re carrying around with you.

SMITH softly: Yes, that’ll be it. Couldn’t you take it off me?

CLOWN 2: Yes, or we could take off the arm. That would certainly be better.
SMITH: Yes, please, if you think —
CLOWN 1: Of course.

They saw off his left arm. Music.

SMITH: Thank you. It’s kind of you to take so much trouble over me.

CLOWN 2: There, Mr Smith, now you’ve got everything that belongs to you. Nobody will be able to rob you now.

They place all the amputated limbs in his lap. SMITH examines them.

SMITH: Funny, my head’s so full of unpleasant thoughts. To

CLOWN 2: Say something nice, will you?

CLOWN 1: With pleasure, Mr Smith. Would you like to hear a story? There were these two men coming out of a pub, arguing furiously. Then they began to pelt each other with bits of horse-shit. One of them got a lump right in the mouth. So he says: ‘Right, that stays there now till the police arrive.’

CLOWN 2 laughs. SMITH does not laugh.

SMITH: That’s not a nice story. Can’t you tell me something nice? I told you, my head’s full of unpleasant thoughts.

CLOWN 1: No, Mr Smith, I’m sorry, but apart from that story there is really nothing I could think of telling you.

CLOWN 2: But we could of course saw off the top of your head, to let those stupid thoughts out.

SMITH: Yes, please, maybe that will help.

They saw off the upper part of his head. Music.

CLOWN 1: How does that feel, Mr Smith? Is that easier?


CLOWN 2: Then why not put on your hat? Bawling: Hat on!

SMITH: But I can’t reach.

CLOWN 1: Would you like your stick?

SMITH: Yes, please. Fishing for his cap: Now I’ve dropped the stick, I can’t reach my hat. And I’m feeling so terribly cold.

CLOWN 2: Maybe if we were to screw your head right off?

SMITH: Well, I don’t know.

CLOWN 2: Oh, come on.

SMITH: No, really — I just don’t know anything any more.

CLOWN 2: All the more reason, then.

They screw off his head. Music. SMITH falls over backwards.
To lay aside the claim
Together with the conditions
That give rise to the claim. Thus
Not to count on help:
To refuse help requires force
To obtain help requires force also.
As long as force reigns help can be refused
When force no longer reigns, there is no need of help.
So you should not demand help, but abolish force.
Help and force form a single whole
And this whole must be altered.

CONSULTATION

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
Comrades, we
Are about to die.

THE THREE CRASHED MECHANICS:
We know we are about to die, but
Do you know it?
Listen, then:
You will die for certain.
Your life will be stripped from you
Your achievement wiped out
You die alone
No one else is concerned
You die finally
And so must we too.

CONTEMPLATION OF THE DEAD

THE SPEAKER:
Contemplate the dead!
Ten photographs of dead bodies are shown. The Speaker then
THE SPEAKER reading:
1. He who takes something away will keep hold of something, And he from whom something has been taken will also keep hold of it. And he who keeps hold of something will have it taken away.

Whoever of us shall die, what does he lay aside? Surely he does not lay simply his table or his bed aside. He of us who dies knows this: I lay aside all that exists. I give away more than I have. Whoever dies lays aside the street which he knows, but also that which he does not know; the treasures that he has and also those that he does not have; poverty itself; his own hand.

Yet how shall he who is not practised lift up a stone? How shall he lift up a large stone? How shall he who has not learned to lay aside, lay aside his table or – even more – lay aside everything that he has and everything that he does not have? The street which he knows, and also that which he does not know; the treasures that he has and also those that he does not have; poverty itself; his own hand?

[AIRMAN sings:
So I learn to see:
What I have done was wrong,
Now I learn to see that a man
Must lie prostrate and not strive
For heights, nor depths, nor yet velocity.

THE SPEAKER reading:
2. When the thinking man was overtaken by a great storm, he was seated in a large carriage, taking up much room. The first thing that he did was to descend from his carriage. The second was to take off his cloak. The third thing was that he laid himself down on the ground. Thus he conquered the storm in his smallest dimension.

AIRMAN addresses the Speaker:
Did he thus outlast the storm?

[CHORUS and CROWD] THE SPEAKER:
In his smallest dimension he outlasted the storm.

THE CRASHED AIRMEN:
In his smallest dimension he outlasted the storm.

THE SPEAKER continues:
3. Encouraging a fellow-being to face up to his death, the thinking man bade him lay his goods aside. When he had laid them all aside, there remained to him only his life. Lay yet more aside, said the thinking man.

[CHORUS and CROWD:
Lay yet more aside.

THE SPEAKER continues:
4. When the thinking man conquered the storm, he did so because he recognised the storm and agreed to it. Thus, if you wish to conquer death, you may conquer it by recognising death and agreeing to it. But let whoever has the wish to agree hold on to his poverty. Let him not cling to objects. For objects can be taken away, and then there is no agreement. Similarly, let him not cling to life. For life can be taken away, and then there is no agreement. Nor should he cling to his thoughts. For thoughts too can be taken away, and there too there is then no agreement.

8 (7)

EXAMINATION

The Chorus examines the Airmen in the presence of the Crowd.

CHORUS:
How high then were you flying?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
Unimaginably high was I flying.

CHORUS:
How high then were you flying?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
Over twelve thousand feet was I flying.

CHORUS:
How high then were you flying?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
Fairly high was I flying.
CHORUS:
How high then were you flying?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
I raised myself but little over the earth's surface.

[CROWD] THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS TURNS TO THE CROWD:
He raised himself but little above the earth's surface.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
I flew unimaginably high.

CHORUS:
And he flew unimaginably high.

ii

CHORUS:
Was your deed acclaimed?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
No, it was not enough acclaimed.

CHORUS:
Was your deed acclaimed?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
It was acclaimed.

CHORUS:
Was your deed acclaimed?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
It was enough acclaimed.

CHORUS:
Was your deed acclaimed?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
I for my deed was vastly acclaimed.

[CROWD] THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS TURNS TO THE CROWD:
For his deed he was vastly acclaimed.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
I was not enough acclaimed.

CHORUS:
And he was not enough acclaimed.

iii

CHORUS:
Who are you?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
We are those who have [I am he who has] flown across the ocean.

CHORUS:
Who are you?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
We are ones [I am the one] like yourselves.

CHORUS:
Who are you?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
I am no one.

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS TURNS TO THE CROWD:
They are no one.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
I am Charles Nungesser.

CHORUS:
And he is Charles Nungesser.

iv

CHORUS:
Who waits for you now?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
Many over the sea wait for us [me] now.

CHORUS:
Who waits for you now?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
Our fathers [My father] and our mothers [my mother] are awaiting us [me] now.

CHORUS:
Who waits for you now?

[AIRMAN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
No one is waiting now.

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS TURNS TO THE CROWD:
[He is no one, and] no one waits for him now.

v

CHORUS:
Who therefore dies when you die?
[AIRMEN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
We [He] whose deed was acclaimed too much.

CHORUS:
Who therefore dies when you die?

[AIRMEN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
We [He] whom no one waits for.

CHORUS:
Who therefore dies when you die?

[AIRMEN] THE THREE MECHANICS:
No one.

CHORUS:
Now you [he] have [has] seen it:
No one dies when he dies.

CROWD:
Now he has seen it:
No one dies when he dies.

CHORUS:
Now is his smallest dimension attained.

CROWD:
Now is their [his] smallest dimension attained.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
But I with my flight
Reached my greatest dimension.
However high I flew, none flew
Higher.
I was not enough acclaimed, I
Cannot be acclaimed enough
I flew for nothing and for nobody.
I flew for flying's sake.
No one awaits me, I
Do not fly towards you, I
Fly away from you, I
Shall never die.

FAME AND DISPOSSESSION

CHORUS:
But now
Show what you have achieved.
For only
Achievement is real.
So now lay aside the engine
Wings and undercarriage, everything
With which you flew and
Together made.
Lay it aside.

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
I will not lay it aside
What is
The aircraft without the airman?

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
Take it!
The aircraft is carried off to the opposite corner of the stage by the
Crashed Airman. During the dispossession, the chorus acclaim
the Crashed Airman.
Rise up, airmen, you have changed the earthly laws.
Ages long all things fell in a downward direction
Except for the birds themselves.
On the oldest of tablets
No one has come on drawings
Of human beings flying through the air.
Only you found the secret.
Near the end of the second millennium, as we reckon time.

THE THREE CRASHED MECHANICS suddenly point to the Crashed
Airman:
Look, what is that?

THE LEADER quickly to the Chorus:
Begin the 'Completely Unrecognisable'.

CHORUS groups around the Crashed Airman:
Completely unrecognisable to us
Has now become the face
Of him who
Needed us as we
Had need of him: for such
Was he.

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
This
Holder of a function
Though but self-assumed
Took from us what he needed, and
Denied us that of which we had need.
Thus his face
Was extinguished with his function:
He had but one.

Four members of the Chorus discuss him over his body.

THE FIRST:
If he was here —

THE SECOND:
He was here.

THE FIRST:
What was he?

THE SECOND:
He was no one.

THE THIRD:
Had he been someone —

THE FOURTH:
He was no one.

THE THIRD:
How did one bring him into sight?

THE FOURTH:
By giving him something to do.

ALL FOUR:
By calling on him he comes into existence.
When one changes him he is there.
Who needs him recognises him.
Who finds him useful enlarges him.

THE SECOND:
And still he is no one.

CHORUS all together, to the Crowd:
What lies there functionless

Is no longer human.
Die now, you No-Longer-Man!

THE CRASHED AIRMAN:
I cannot die.

THE THREE MECHANICS:
Man, you have dropped out of the flow.
Man, you were never in the flow.
You are too big, you are too rich
You are too self-contained.
That is why you cannot die.

CHORUS:
But
He who cannot die
Will yet die.
He who cannot swim
Will yet swim.

10 (3)

THE CHORUS SPEAKS TO THE CRASHED AIRMAN

CHORUS:
One of our kind
In his body, face and his thinking
To us all akin
Must now take leave of us, for
He has been branded overnight and
Since this morning has his breath been stinking,
See how his flesh decays, and his face which
Once we knew, is now strange to us.
Come, speak to us now, we await
From the usual place the sound of your voice. Speak!

He speaks not. Not a word from
His mouth. Be not afraid, for you
Must go now. Go at once!
Do not look round, go
Away from us.
AGREEMENT

CHORUS addressing the Three Mechanics:
You, however, who have shown you agree to the flow of things
Do not sink back into the void.
Do not dissolve like salt in water, but
Dying
Rise to your death
As you worked at your work
By revolutionising a revolution.
So in your dying do not
Observe death's demands
But accept from us the charge
To rebuild our aircraft.
Begin!
So as to fly for us
To the place where we have need of you
And at the necessary time. For
We call on you
To march with us, and with us
To change not only
An earthly law, but
The basic law
Accepting that all must be altered
The world and all mankind
Above all, the disorder
Of human classes because there are two kinds of people
Exploitation and ignorance.

THE THREE MECHANICS:
We agree to the alteration.

CHORUS:
And we request you:
Alter our engine and improve it.
Also increase safety and speed
And in the swifter outset do not forget the goal.

THE THREE MECHANICS:
We improve engines, safety and

Speed.

CHORUS:
Then lay them aside.

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
March on!

CHORUS:
Having improved the world, then
Improve the improved world.
Lay it aside.

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
March on!

CHORUS:
If in improving the world you have fulfilled truth, then
Fulfil this fulfilled truth.
Lay it aside!

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
March on!

CHORUS:
In altering the world, alter yourselves!
Lay yourselves aside!

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
March on!