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### The essential trait of expressionist drama

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S. KREBS

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THE ESSENTIAL TRAIT  
OF EXPRESSIONIST DRAMA

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N5321  
v. 47



State University of New York at Binghamton  
Harpur College

The Essential Trait of Expressionist Drama

By

Susan Krebs

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for honors in  
the Humanities Division.

Granted Honors in German  
in the Humanities Division  
June, 1968

Roger C. Moston  
Chairman, German Department  
Senior Honors Committee

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# The Essential Traits of Expressionist Drama

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interdependent today. The youth of today are for the first time in their lives being confronted with the phenomenon of war. As such, their reactions should be similar to those of the expressionist authors. This level of communion, this similarity in thought is an essential factor in the appreciation of an expressionistic work, especially the drama. As Kasimir Biechold comments in reference to Goring's play "Beerschlecht": "Das Stück brauchte wirklich eine Zeit und erschütterte Zuschauer, die im Griff des Krieges sitterten - und nicht wie es später geschah, heute die weit vom Krieg entfernt waren und es mit koketten Lächeln bemisch fanden, wenn die zornenden Matrosen schrien."

After examining the historical realm and postulating the expected reflections in the literature, the next step of the study should be an investigation of the literary traditions preceding the movement in question. Since German literature is considered in terms of movements, which are

### The Essential Traits of Expressionist Drama

In order to make a valid literary study, it is necessary to determine what elements are present in the era being studied which would likely be mirrored in the art work of the period. In the twentieth century there are certain outstanding phenomena, which, although not unprecedented in the history of mankind, are far more intensified than ever before. Men of this era have experienced a more advanced stage of both war and technology than ever before known. These disruptive forces can certainly be expected to effect a change in the arts. In the case of expressionistic drama, the most outstanding historical occurrence is undoubtedly World War I. This fact alone should cause a study of expressionism to have a particular interest for a student today. The youth of today are for the first time in their lives being confronted with the phenomenon of war. As such, their reactions should be similar to those of the expressionist authors. This level of communion, this similarity in thought is an essential factor in the appreciation of an expressionistic work, especially the drama. As Kasimir Edschmid comments in reference to Göring's play "Seeschlacht": "Das Stück brauchte natürlich eine Zeit und armselige Zuschauer, die im Griff des Krieges zitterten - und nicht wie es später geschah, Leute die weit vom Krieg entfernt waren und es mit mokantem Lächeln komisch fanden, wenn die feuernden Matrosen schrien."<sup>1</sup>

After examining the historical realm and postulating the expected reflections in the literature, the next step of the study should be an investigation of the literary traditions preceding the movement in question. Since German literature is considered in terms of movements, which are



viewed as reactions to one another, it is beneficial to determine what traditions in particular are being reacted to.

Finally it is necessary to turn to specific examples of the period and determine what it is that enables literary historians to label expressionism a movement. What is it that unifies expressionistic drama? What are its most prominent characteristics?

In this study of expressionist drama the procedure described above will be followed, using Georg Kaiser's "Gas I," and "Gas II," Ernst Toller's "Masse-Mensch," "Die Maschinenstürmer," and "Hinkemann," Reinhardt Sorge's "Der Bettler," Reinhardt Göring's "Seeschlacht," Fritz von Unruh's "Heinrich aus Andernach," and Bertolt Brecht's "Baal" as examples.

Before the outbreak of World War I, Germany had developed into a power to be reckoned with. In industry, for example, "Germany... had managed to surpass England in the production of pig iron and to run a close second in the production of coal. In chemical research, in applied chemistry, she had achieved world supremacy. In several other branches of industry... she set standards of ingenuity and high-class workmanship which were not matched anywhere in the world."<sup>2</sup> With the industrial boom came the advent of capitalism and the forming of cartels which placed the economic power in the hands of an elite group. As the start of the war approached, the German people saw their nation's power declining, and began to feel oppressed by the economic dictatorship to the point that "half of the German nation saw war as a relief from the intolerable condition and the way back to greatness."<sup>3</sup> Fermenting Germany at this point was a feeling of nationalism which was promoted by the fact that at the outbreak of the war in July, 1914, the German people felt that they had been the victims of an international plot, and that the war had been forced on them. The outburst of

## I. Historical setting

In its historical context, expressionistic drama was produced from approximately 1910 to 1925. The sentiments that flourished in those years were, as has previously been said, centered around the war. In discussing the events of this era, the concern will not be with reiterating historical facts, but rather with the reactions of the German people, and, by extension, the effect that the war had on the life of an individual.

Before the outbreak of World War I, Germany had developed into a power to be reckoned with. In industry, for example, "Germany...had managed to surpass England in the production of pig iron and to run a close second in the production of coal. In chemical research, in applied chemistry, she had achieved world supremacy. In several other branches of industry... she set standards of ingenuity and high-class workmanship which were not matched anywhere in the world."<sup>2</sup> With the industrial boom came the advent of capitalism and the forming of cartels which placed the economic power in the hands of an elite group. As the start of the war approached, the German people saw their nation's power declining, and began to feel oppressed by the economic dictatorship to the point that "half of the German nation saw war as a relief from its intolerable condition and the way back to greatness."<sup>3</sup> Permeating Germany at this point was a feeling of nationalism which was promoted by the fact that at the outbreak of the war in July, 1914, the German people felt that they had been the victims of an international plot, and that the war had been forced on them. The outburst of



the war found a German Government which ignored factions of its people, such as the pacifists; a Germany uttering slogans adopted from the Seven Years' War, such as "Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr: ich kenne nur noch Deutsche" and "Viel Feind, viel Ehr." These attitudes led, by December 1914, to a decline in the unified patriotic feeling.

As privations increased, as many families suffered the loss or crippling of their fathers, sons, and brothers, and as in contrast not a few grew wealthy and rich by unscrupulous methods, a gradual change took place in the people's basic conception of the world. Their belief in a certain standard measure of appraisal of what a man does and what he gets for it was thoroughly undermined and they lost confidence in justice as a principle regulating the course of human life. ...The masses yearned for a savior who would take the responsibility from them and give them security instead.<sup>4</sup>

The reflection of this feeling of discontent, and an attempt to provide a savior can be seen in the formation of the Independent Socialists, the party which was to become the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands. The socialists hated war. The communists hated capitalism. The peasants hated industrialization. These antagonistic views were aggravated by Germany's decision, in 1915, to use her new weapon, the submarine, in fighting Britain. By 1917, the Germans wanted peace. On July 7, 1917, the Reichstag adopted a peace resolution which stated that it was striving for a peace of mutual understanding. The high command intentionally thwarted attempts toward peace. They rejected the Pope's peace proposal in August, 1917. As Archbishop Noerber of Freiburg later commented: "The war was definitely lost in the moment when the peace of reconciliation which Benedict XV tried to bring about was rejected for no other reason than that it had come from the Pope." The military officials and Lutheran religious leaders could not allow the acceptance of a proposal which originated in Catholic minds. The German people were clamoring for peace;



the men on the front were pleading: "Lieber ein Ende mit Schrecken als ein Schrecken ohne Ende." The military commanders realized their defeat, but they were not willing to enter into a defeat which would make them a totally inferior power. They could not bring themselves to abide by Woodrow Wilson's demand for "the destruction or virtual impotency of every arbitrary power anywhere that can disturb the peace of the world... The power which has hitherto controlled the German nation is of the sort here described. It is within the choice of the German people to alter it."<sup>5</sup> The German people took action and attempted to bring about an alteration. On November 3, 1918, in the city of Kiel, naval squadrons joined by workers revolted. Mutinous uprisings spread to other cities, including Munich and Berlin. A Bavarian Republic under the Social Democratic leader, Kurt Eisner, was established which was superceded by a German Republic under the socialist Friedrich Ebert. Peace was finally negotiated, but the war had left it's mark. Approximately one million six hundred thousand were dead, four million were wounded, two hundred thousand were missing. The nation was forty-four billion dollars in debt, and was left with a weakened and starving population. The Germans hoped that a new era was dawning--an era in which political democracy and social justice would reign. "Despite their many miseries and heartaches, the Germans now breathed under a freer sky than they had for many decades, and they took a certain pride in putting their house in order and in firmly resolving to gain back the confidence of the world."<sup>6</sup> The Germans reacted favorably to defeat: "For perhaps half the nation, defeat was a release; and for a large section the humiliation of the army was a triumph. They hailed it as the fall of militarism. The army itself was permeated by a temper which prompted it to side with the revolution rather than suppress it."<sup>7</sup> Now the Germans had



to "put their house in order," and establish a political democracy. The attempts by the proletariat to set up the government were opposed by military leaders and the judiciary who were ingrained with a monarchical tradition. The Independent Socialists and the Spartacus League revolted against the elections for a National Assembly. There were disagreements as to the economic policy of the new republic. The socialists, believing that the products of industry eventually came into the hands of the workers, found in capitalism a temporary solution to Germany's economic problems. The communists sought their solution in imperialism, for they felt that industrial output necessitated foreign markets, that is, colonies. The crux of the problem, as Herford in his book The Mind of Post War Germany states it, was that the Germans were "a people deliberately left untrained in politics and accustomed to think in terms of provincial, class, or occupational, rather than national interests, found itself thrown back upon its own intellectual, moral and cultural resources if it was to be saved from complete disintegration and anarchy."<sup>8</sup> In 1919, the Weimar Republic became the savior, and was able to put down all opposition, and establish a government. The preamble to the Weimar Constitution captures much of the spirit of the Republic at that time. It begins: "This Constitution has been drafted and adopted by the German people united in its Stämme and animated by the desire to renew and strengthen its Reich on the basis of freedom and justice, to serve the cause of peace both within and without, and to promote the progress of human society." After establishing a semblance of stability in the government, the nation was left with other problems, such as educating their people and demechanizing their society. University education was made more accessible, and an attempt was made to make the worker more human and more responsible, and less under the power

of the machine. attempt of individual dramatists, to portray this need for

The intellectuals, the artists, had much the same reactions as the German people as a whole. Walter Sokel comments in his book the Writer in Extremis: "War-weariness and impatience to end the slaughter as quickly as possible were uppermost not only in the minds of activist intelligence but also of the German working class. Workers struck and sailors mutinied for an immediate peace, [i.e., the riots at Kiel and other cities] Although the poets and intellectuals were inspired by ethical and humanitarian motives and the masses impelled by hunger, rations and by resentment at gross inequality, poets and masses were, in 1917 and 1918 closer to each other than ever before or since in our century."<sup>9</sup> The artists were, however, a more observant and vocal group. Confronted by a feeling of insecurity, stemming from their unstable government, and a vision of a ruthless world where killing became an everyday matter, the intellectual attempted to rationalize his world. Kurt Pinthus, in the poetry anthology "Menschheitsdämmerung," wrote: 'In the luxuriant flower of civilization they smelt the reek of decay and their prophetic eyes saw a hollow factitious culture and a social order propped up solely on mechanism and convention, and already in ruins.' The intellectuals realized that a new world was needed. They called for a spiritual renewal. They realized "that the 'path' to 'soul' was not more easy because the 'soulless' empire had fallen; that the war which overthrew it had left moral wreckage as well as material ruin as its train."<sup>10</sup> As early as 1912, when Reinhardt Sorge wrote "Der Bettler," even before the start of the war, the artist expressed the need for a saviour, a need which the average person felt only in the wake of war. The 'dritter Kritiker' in Sorge's play says: "Wir warten auf einen, der uns unser Schicksal neu deutet."<sup>11</sup> Expressionist drama, as a



movement, is the attempt of individual dramatists, to portray this need for a spiritual renewal and the means of achieving it, if indeed there are any such means in this world.

In his search for the "path to the soul," the author finds that man gets bogged down by mechanization. Walter Rathenau, an important figure in business and politics saw "in the soulless labor of millions who worked that exquisitely elaborated machinery...an enslavement of the spirit to mechanism."<sup>12</sup> The enslavement of man to the machine, his forced subservience to the "great metal monster," and his dehumanization stemming from it were problems to which the dramatists also sought solutions.

As a whole, the expressionists are linked together by their common dissatisfaction with society, their pacifistic, or anti-militaristic attitude, their anti-mechanistic attitude, and their conclusion that a change must be made. Their literature is an attempt at realizing this change.

Thus, good art was a window of nature. Plato held the belief that truth was found in the self, and not in nature, and art should be an expression of the artist's inner self. In attempting to escape the world around them, and to realize a change by hypothesizing a better world, the expressionists are conveying a vision from within themselves--their inner selves.

The style of the expressionist dramatist, which is often referred to as "telegram style," has its roots in the Sturm and Drang movement. In both movements an abrupt, jerky style is employed. Speeches are not sentences, but fragments, and often such is conveyed through the use of an exclamation. The best example of the "telegram style" can be found in Georg Kaiser's plays. In "Gas I," one of the workers enters almost immediately after the explosion in the factory and says: "Feldung aus Halle

## II. Literary heritage

Expressionism bears certain similarities to, and certain striking differences from the literary movements that preceded it. Naturalism, neo-romanticism and impressionism (Expressionism being, in the most literal sense the opposite of Impressionism), were the three most influential traditions; however there are valid comparisons with other movements which may be mentioned.

A basic difference between expressionism and naturalism and romanticism can be traced as far back as Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle believed, as the naturalists and romanticists, that truth in art stemmed from nature, thus, good art was a mimesis of nature. Plato held the belief that truth was found in the self, and not in nature, and art should be an expression of the artist's inner self. In attempting to escape the world around them, and to realize a change by hypothesizing a better world, the expressionists are conveying a vision from within them--their inner selves.

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acht - Zentrale: - weisse Katze gesprungen--rote Augen gerissen - gelbes  
Maul gesperrt-- buckelt knisternden Rücken--wächst rund--knickt Träger weg--  
hebt das Dach auf--und platzt in Funken!!"<sup>13</sup>

Also common to both Sturm and Drang and expressionism is the theme of the conflict between generations. In early expressionist works, such as Sorge's "Der Bettler," this theme is manifested in a father-son conflict, but later in the movement, in Kaiser's and Toller's works, this theme is mirrored in the conflict between the revolutionary leader, and the workers. Although the later representation of the theme is not actually a conflict between generations in a temporal sense, that is, the young versus the old, it is the opposition of new ideas to old ones, and thus, in a sense a conflict between "generations of ideas."

Unlike romanticism, expressionism "is no longer selfishly romantic. Its tone and content know of human suffering. It does not aim at charming confusion but at the essential. It is not akin to ironical detachment but to a virile embrace... Instead of the romantic self perfection of the artist its message is the elevation of man."<sup>14</sup> The expressionists reacted adversely to the romantic submission to nature, fate and death. They recognized fate as a force to be reckoned with, however, their instincts were to act against any opposing force using physical or other means. Contrary to the romanticist's belief in a life in isolation, the expressionist was searching for a community united by a spirit of brotherhood and love.

There are also important comparisons to be made between expressionism, on the one hand and naturalism, neo-romanticism, and impressionism on the other. Kurt Reinhardt suggests a good general distinction between the movements. He states that the naturalists' approach to art is: "I want to portray life, nature, objects as I see them," while the impressionist's



attitude is that: "I want to depict things as I see them."<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to place the neo-romanticists into this scheme, for they are concerned with a dream world; however, the expressionists' viewpoint is very similar to that of the impressionists, but the expressionist's "I" has a much deeper significance in that it is the "inner I" that sees things.

On a less superficial level, it can be seen that naturalism and expressionism are operating in much the same realm. The basic concern of both movements is the failings of society, giving special emphasis to the horrible and grotesque aspects of life as seen through the eyes of the artist, who sets himself apart from society and regards himself as a critic thereof. Naturalism may be described as a movement in which "'nature' or... 'truth' was conceived as the faithful reproduction of a segment of reality, with particular emphasis on the cruder aspects of contemporary life, to the exclusion of any poetical adornment."<sup>16</sup> The expressionist did not occupy himself with a "reproduction" of the defects of society, but concentrated his efforts upon thinking the problem through and trying to find a possible solution. As *der dritte Kritiker* says in Sorge's "Der Bettler": Unser Haupt-Mann, sehen Sie, ist gross als Künstler, aber als Deuter befangen. Es ist sehr an der Zeit; ~~einer~~ man muss einmal für uns alle nachsinnen."<sup>17</sup> Certainly Sorge is here intentionally making a play on Gerhart Hauptmann's (the naturalistic dramatist's) name. This search for someone to explain the times is an indication of the direction which expressionist drama took. This direction, for the expressionists, was toward the eternal truth, while the naturalists were only interested in the surface truth. The accomplishment of this is not, however, realized without "poetical adornment," for the expressionists' plays contain many lyrical passages which are used to emphasize the emotional content of the speeches. The drama of the naturalists



can be characterized by certain principles, some of which have been carried over into the expressionist drama. The important points to be mentioned (excluding those that have already been discussed) are the following: naturalistic drama is character-oriented, as opposed to plot-oriented; the characters and the settings are introduced and explained in long detailed epic descriptions; the characters each speak in a manner appropriate to their class, and very often will express their feelings with a gesture, rather than a verbalization; the dramas are pervaded by a fatalistic attitude; usually a catastrophe has occurred before the play begins, and the characters are so imprisoned by their drives, their heredity and their environment that they are unable to change, and are thus incapable of coping with the catastrophe; there exists in the dramas an absence of any rising or falling action, an absence of monologues, and an absence of beauty. The expressionists' dramas are also character oriented, but their characters represent ideas or types, and thus are not described in detail at all. Often they do not even have names, and are only referred to as "Der Arbeiter," "Der Dichter," "Der Kritiker," etc. The settings, however, are usually described rather closely. For example, in setting the scene for the first act of "Gas I," Kaiser gives the following description:

Quadratischer Raum dessen Hinterwand Glas ist: Arbeitszimmer des Milliardärsohns. Rechts und links auf den Wänden vom Fussboden bis an die Decke hoch Papptafeln, die Tabellen tragen. Links breiter Schreibtisch mit Rohrsessel; ein zweiter Sessel seitlich. Kleiner Schreibtisch rechts. Draussen Schornsteine dicht und steil, in 60 Grad Strahlen Feuer und Rauch vorstossend. 18

This description, although written in the abrupt style (telegram style), so typical for the expressionists, contains the detail of a naturalistic description. There is no use of dialects or gestures in expressionist drama, nor is there the recognition of man as a bound being. Man can change,



otherwise there would be no hope for creating a new world and leaving a life of war. The catastrophe - World War I - has occurred before some of the plays were written, but why did it occur? For the expressionist, fate is a possible answer, but not the only answer. Common to both movements is the lack of rising and falling action, and little mention of beauty. The expressionists, however, in contrast to the naturalists, do use the monologue, a device which is particularly revealing about a character's deepest thoughts. The expressionists make no clear cut distinctions between the external and the internal world (conscious and subconscious), while as the naturalists are careful to make such a division.

Neo-romanticism was, similar to romanticism, concerned with beauty in an irrational dream world. The expressionists reacted adversely to many of the neo-romantics' ideas. Richard Samuels, in his book entitled Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (1910-1924), makes a good distinction. He writes of expressionism:

It disliked much that was characteristic of neo-romanticism - its cult of the past, its mystic adoration of nature, its worship of the aesthetic personality, its dissection of the soul, its aristocratic approach to art. It realized that Neo-Romanticism was little concerned with the realities of life and lacked interest in social and political needs of the time....

It could no longer enjoy the reproduction of beauty removed from the realities of life. It felt this attitude represented a flight away from reality and truth. It desired to discover all aspects of life and to make them - the ugly as well as the beautiful - the subject of its work.<sup>19</sup>

In the scene with the critics in the early version of Sorge's "Der Bettler," the expressionists' attitude toward the neo-romantics is clearly expressed. "The Neo-Romantics Hardt, Stucken and Vollmoeller are attacked by implication - in the earlier version they are mentioned by name and the discussion is more detailed - as authors who write pleasant but not great dramas."<sup>20</sup> The expressionists did adopt, however, the use of lighting to heighten the emotional effect.



The impressionists, as their name implies, describe the impression which an object or situation makes upon them. Their art is a passive, emotional response to a momentary occurrence. The expressionists are diametrically opposed to this. Their approach is action oriented with a spiritual emphasis, and is an endeavor to discover the eternal truth. This is not to say that the expressionist dramas themselves contain much action, but rather that the expressionist does not believe in passively observing a situation. He believes in doing something, in taking action.

Reacting, both positively and negatively to its literary heritage, expressionism comes to the fore being both a synthesis of and an antithesis to its predecessors.

Between the two powers lies in the activists inclination toward the naturalists and the expressionists' leaning towards the neo-romantics. Both groups recognized the decadence of their age and the need for a change - for a new spirit. The difference, as Weinshenker sees it, is that the activists believed that "the immediate need of mankind was a rationally ordered society based on the Christian ideal of social justice,"<sup>21</sup> while the expressionists sought an ideal world governed by a "new religion" whose tenets were "love of mankind, humility, self-sacrifice, and voluntary suffering for one's fellow-men." For both groups, these communities were an escape for the workers from their subservience to the machine. The activists condemned the bourgeois for his selfishness, and narrow mindedness, while the expressionist was concerned with his soullessness. The expressionists preached the destruction of the machine, and the construction of a cultic community, while the activists realized that the machine cannot be destroyed, and that the solution lay in man's mastery of the machine. The expressionists and the activists were ultimately anti-war, however the activists were of this

### III. Expressionist Drama

#### A. Activist and Expressionist drama

Before considering what, in both general and specific terms, expressionist drama is, it is beneficial to distinguish between the two major phases of expressionism-activism, and what Steinhauer calls expressionism proper. (For want of a better terminology, I accept Steinhauer's; however the use of "expressionism" as opposed to "activism" intimates that the activists are not expressionists, which is not at all the case). The basic difference between the two phases lies in the activists inclination toward the naturalists and the expressionists' leaning towards the neo-romantics. Both groups recognized the decadence of their age and the need for a change - for a new spirit. The difference, as Steinhauer sees it, is that the activists believed that "the immediate need of mankind was a rationally ordered society based on the Christian ideal of social justice,"<sup>21</sup> while the expressionists sought an ideal world governed by a "new religion" whose tenets were "love of mankind, humility, self-sacrifice, and voluntary suffering for one's fellow-men." For both groups, these communities were, an escape for the workers from their subservience to the machine. The activists condemned the bourgeois for his selfishness, and narrow mindedness, while the expressionist was concerned with his soullessness. The expressionists preached the destruction of the machine, and the construction of a cultic community, while the activists realized that the machine cannot be destroyed, and that the solution lay in man's mastery of the machine. The expressionists and the activists were adamantly anti-war, however the activists were of this



opinion for social reasons, because they saw world peace as a necessary prerequisite for their new society, while the expressionists wanted peace on religious grounds, for peace would elevate man's soul and bring him one step closer to his new religion of love and brotherhood.

Based on these distinctions, the plays referred to in this paper may be divided into expressionist and activist plays. Sorge's "Der Bettler," Göring's "Seeschlacht," and Unruh's "Heinrich aus Andernach," may be classified as expressionist dramas for they are all concerned with a vision of a new ideal world to supercede the horrors of life around them. Kaiser's and Toller's plays may be classified as activist plays. Although Kaiser's *Milliardärsohn* in "Gas I" does attempt to set up a primitive agricultural society, at the end of the drama he realizes that it is impossible to destroy the factory because the worker is too narrow-minded to realize that he is anything else but "Arbeiter." Thus, Kaiser belongs to the activist phase. Bertolt Brecht's "Baal" is meant in certain respects to be a satire of expressionist drama, and can thus not easily be placed in either group. The emphasis here is not on the war, or industrialism, but rather on what Brecht believes to be the true inner soul of the bourgeois. What he sees is not the ideal religious world, or a new spirit, but instead a mirror of the decadence within society in the man. Baal is a character completely freed from any forces which society might exert, who exposes himself to be as vulgar, and as murderous as society at large.

The basic difference between the activists and the expressionists was that the activists: "rebelled against the traditional German reverence for what is 'given' in nature and history and demanded that the intellectual recreate the social world according to his ideals of justice and absolute reason. They transferred the basic expressionist principle of vision and



visualization of inner or mental states to the ethical and utopian - political sphere."<sup>22</sup>

## B. The theory

Expressionist drama, in most general terms, is unified by its search for the realm of the spirit. The expressionist dramatists find themselves dissatisfied with what is going on around them, and they begin to question, much the same as people of all ages have questioned - what is reality? According to Kasimir Edschmid, "reality must be created by ourselves, because only in our own soul is the image of the world kept pure and unfalsified. He [the expressionist] tries to absorb into himself the external element in Man and to give expression to the cosmic consciousness..."<sup>23</sup> The literary predecessors of the expressionists were concerned with a momentary surface reality. They were concerned with reproducing the objects and situations as they viewed them. For the expressionist this was unsatisfactory. He was searching for an eternally valid reality; an ideal yet probable world: a world of the future.

The expressionist theorists such as Ludwig Rubiner and Yvan Goll viewed the artist as a critic, but did not expect him to operate within the realm of reality. Rubiner in his essay "Der Mensch in der Mitte" states that the goal of the artist should be to arouse the individual's awareness to the threats of the day and to force him to realize his responsibility to the community. According to Rubiner: "The true artist does not write about factories, radio stations, automobiles, but of the lines of force emitted by these things and crisscrossing through space. Things exist for man. We are not believers in idylls."<sup>24</sup> The expressionist dramatist is not writing about factories, but rather about men. Industrialism or war



are only the backgrounds in which the characters are placed. These characters are, in keeping with Rubiner's ideas, only types or forces, and the "idyll," or the savior type is never successful. Yvan Goll in the essay "Two Superdramas" says that he believes that the poet is the man who can find truth, which can be found only in life. The drama must not be limited only to real life, but must be "superreal." The unreal must become fact. The "law of the drama" is the mask. "The mask is rigid, unique, and impressive. It is unchangeable, inescapable; it is Fate. Every man wears his mask, wears what the ancients called his guilt."<sup>25</sup> Before the mask can be donned: "The first task will have to be the destruction of all external form - reasonable attitudes, conventionality, morality, all the formalities of life. Man and things will be shown as naked as possible, and always through a magnifying glass for better effect."<sup>26</sup> The drama presents characters denuded of any individual personality traits, in a situation whose magnification lies in the tenseness, or the over-emotional emphasis. These characters are often concerned with the why of their being in this tense, catastrophic surrounding - was it fate? Do they themselves wear the mask of guilt? The expressionist was, thus, attempting to find the naked facts, the real in his problem-ridden world, and yet he wanted to operate in a "superreal" world.

### C. The world of the spirit

The culmination of his quest for the real and the eternally valid - a reality which could only be discovered from within, as Edschmid says - led the expressionist into the realm of the spirit. But what is this realm? How do others who do not have the ability to delve into their souls, approach this realm?



In the most general terms, as Walter Sokel, in his book the Writer in Extremis, suggests: "'Geist,' the principle of the Expressionist revolt is connected with the poetic rather than the scientific imagination. 'Geist' is not opposed to emotion but crowns it. It is a religious principle, the divine element in man, the 'holy spirit' or Holy Ghost and in the last analysis identical with God."<sup>27</sup> A more tangible definition of this realm of the spirit (so-called because of the frequent use of the word 'Geist' in the expressionist dramas) can only be found within the individual plays. For the author is turning within himself to find this spiritual world, and thus it is to be expected that this realm of the spirit would be influenced by the individual.

In Sorge's "Der Bettler," the poet describes his vision of his own theatre - the center to which all men would come to cleanse their souls.

He dreams:

...es wird  
 Das Herz der Kunst: aus allen Ländern strömen  
 Die Menschen alle an die heilende Stätte  
 Zur Heiligung, nicht nur ein kleines Häuflein  
 Erlesener!... Massen der Arbeiter  
 Schweben an die Ahnung ihres höheren Lebens  
 In grossen Wogen, denn sie sehen dort  
 Aus Rauch und Ragen der Gerüste, aus  
 Sausenden Fährnissen der Räder ihre  
 Seelen aufsteigen, schön und ganz geläutert  
 Vom Schwarm der Zufälle, in herrlicher  
 Erhabenheit Siegerin der eisernen Nöte,  
 Lebendig Stahl und Turm, der seine Sehnsucht  
 Auftrotzet königlich... Hungernde Mädchen,  
 Die um ihr unrecht Kind sich mager mühen  
 Sollen dort Brot finden und ihre Kleinen  
 Mit Macht zum Himmel stemmen, wenn sie Auch  
 Verreckt schon sind in ihren Armen! Krüppel,  
 Denen das wimmelnde Elend dieser Zeit.  
 Der Gram und Harm ihrer Missratenheit  
 Schielt aus verborgenem Gelenken, werden  
 Mit Mut und grosser Liebe zum aufrechten  
 Leben die Herzen hemmen und den dünnen  
 Rumpel dem Tod hinwerfen. Männer aber  
 Sollen die Stirnen härten an Leid und Lust,  
 Die Herzen heben zu Sehnsucht und Verzicht!<sup>28</sup>



Against a decadent society - a society of prostitutes and a society in which people open a newspaper and immediately are confronted with earthquakes, battles, airplane crashes, revolts, mine disasters, train accidents, and other such tragic occurrences to which they respond with the refrain "Wieviele Tote?" - the poet is fighting to set up his soul-saving community. He is, however, unsuccessful. He refuses to wait, and he refuses to compromise. As Rubiner said: "We are not believers in idylls." The poet can envision this realm of the spirit, but cannot achieve it.

Göring's "Seeschlacht," set in the gun turret of a ship, presents seven sailors in a tense situation with the promise of a naval battle, and probably death staring them in the face. Placed in this situation, one of the sailors, named the fifth sailor, begins to question why he has been forced so close to death. He decides that: "The Fatherland cannot be the highest ideal for man, if sailors have to endure such ordeals in its name... He is resolved to take upon himself, for the sake of the higher value which he can realize only vaguely, death and even the disgrace of starting a mutiny. Unlike the first sailor he cannot find satisfaction in a simple belief in God, which would make him obedient to the ruling authorities and able to meet death calmly."<sup>29</sup> The other sailors begin to realize that the fifth sailor has gone into himself, and found the world of his soul. The first sailor comments: "Der sieht vielleicht, was wir nicht sehen; in dem geht vor, was in uns unten bleibt."<sup>30</sup> But this realization comes to naught, for death is too near - the battle comes, and the sailors are killed. The play ends with the fifth sailor's words: "Die Schlacht geht weiter, hörst du? Mach deine Augen noch nicht zu. Ich habe gut geschossen, wie? Ich hätte auch gut gemeutert! Wie? Aber schiessen lag uns wohl näher? Wie? Muss uns wohl näher gelegen haben?"<sup>31</sup> Göring seems



to be saying that this sailor's discovery of the spiritual realm was not in vain. The battle which continues is the fight of man to extricate himself from his war-ridden world. The eyes that cannot close are the eyes of men like the fifth sailor, the eyes that turn inward to find the real.

Kaiser describes in the Gas trilogy, different approaches to this higher world. In an article comparing Georg Kaiser's ideas to those of Walter Rathenau (a theorist), Robert Kauf elucidates Kaiser's interpretation of the spiritual realm. Basically Rathenau views the development of man in three stages: 1) the world of the primitive man, or the world of instinct; 2) the mechanized impersonal world which he calls the "world of the rational intellect," and 3) the world of the future, or the realm of the soul. In drawing the parallels, Kauf says: "1) The world of industrial civilization as it appears in Kaiser's social tetralogy resembles Rathenau's world of the instinct and of the rational intellect; 2) the new realm proclaimed by the billionaire worker in "Gas II" suggests Rathenau's realm of the soul, and 3) the evolution of human society presented in the Gas trilogy follows the pattern of Rathenau's revolutionary ideas."<sup>32</sup> The Milliardärsohn in "Gas I" wants to free the workmen from his factory by not rebuilding it after the explosion, and constructing in its stead: "Grüne Linien - Strassen mit Bäumen gesäumt. Rote, gelbe, blaue Ringe - Plätze bewuchert mit Pflanzen, die blühen aus Grasfläche. Vierecke - hineingestellt Häuser mit kleinem Gebiet von Eigentum, das beherbergt! - Mächtige Strassen hinaus - erobernd eindringend in andere Striche - betreten von Pilgern von uns - die Einfachstes predigen - uns!!"<sup>33</sup> But as Rathenau and Kaiser both realize: "A change of the inner man can never be brought about by external reform, that is by changes of the social order or the environment; nor can one return, as the billionaire's son in "Gas" attempts



to do, to a pre-industrial past; since the realm of the rational intellect, the world of mechanization is a necessary though painful stage on the way toward fulfillment of the realm of the soul."<sup>34</sup> The Milliárdärsohn who

becomes the Milliárdärarbeiter in "Gas II" realizes this when he says:

"Baut das Reich!!...--nicht von dieser Welt das Reich."<sup>35</sup> The combination

of Rathenau's and Kaiser's ideas gives the most clear definition of the

realm of the spirit. It is. "the emergence of a new and pure spirituality

at the peak of a materialistic civilization, the emphasis on renunciation

and on suffering for its own sake and without hope for reward, the election

of the downtrodden, the inner regeneration."<sup>36</sup>

Toller's use of the term "Geist" can easily be described in a political

context. From his point of view, the working class was seen as striving

toward Geist. Socialism, their objective, could be viewed as a triumph

of Geist, a social system in which, for the first time in history, the

planning, ordering, and responsible mind would shape the everyday life of

mankind. Since the working class, moreover, comprised more individuals

than any other class, its ascent symbolized to the activist the ascent of

humanity toward a spiritualized form of existence.<sup>37</sup> Jimmy in "Die

Maschinenstürmer" recognizes the crux of the problem in man's being a

slave to the machine, and hence in his enslaving the spirit.

... Der Geist kennt keine Knechtschaft,  
Keine feige Unterwürfigkeit vor Herren dieser Erde,  
Des Geistes ewiges Gesetz, am Firmament  
Der Menschheit mit demananten Lettern eingemeisselt,  
Ruft auf zur Treue an erlebter Wahrheit.  
Wer furchtsam die Idee verlässt, verrät sein eigen Ich.  
Ich spreche hier für Tausende, die dumpf in Sielen  
Ungeheuerlicher Seelenschändung das rechte Wort  
Nicht finden, das im Pulsschlag ihres Blutes  
Lebt.<sup>38</sup>

Hinkemann also laments: "Diese Zeit hat keine Seele. Ich hab kein



Geschlecht. Ist da ein Unterschied? Gehen wir jeder unsern Weg. Du den deinen. Ich den meinen."<sup>39</sup> Jimmy believes that man should free himself by mastering the machine. The woman in "Masse-Mensch" proposes a community in which: "Masse soll Volk in Liebe sein./ Masse soll Gemeinschaft sein."<sup>40</sup> Hinkemann attempts to find the new realm in socialism. There are, however, two great problems in achieving this realm. The first lies in the materialistic, primitive instincts of the masses who are not far-sighted enough to enter this world. The second is the problem of using force to establish a community built on love and brotherhood. As Heller comments in his article "The Writer's Image of the Writer," "Toller's ideology hinges on the 'conflict of aggression' on the clash between the utopian demand for absolute love and brotherhood and the aggressive, political activism which the author considers a tragic necessity for the progress of mankind."<sup>41</sup>

Fritz von Unruh's world is one of peace and love. Kronacher comments in his book, entitled Fritz von Unruh, that "Heinrich aus Andernach" "shows that hatred and vengeance can be overcome by gentleness and justice, thus leading the world to peace and freedom in a land which, as the poet sees it, 'has found its innermost self;' a land in which art and life are fused into an inseparable whole, for art is in truth the revelation of man's soul."<sup>42</sup>

In the play, two of the characters, Konrad and Karl allude to the realm. Konrad mentions "das Tausendjährige Reich," which Steinhauer interprets "in a figurative sense, to symbolize the Christian millennial dream of Eternal Peace which will be ushered in with the second coming of Christ."<sup>43</sup>

Towards the end of the play Karl recalls the Barbarossa legend as an admonition to: "Get rid of your chauvinistic dreams, and instead of working for a restoration of past glory, look into the future and shape the national destiny on humanitarian, Christian principles, above all on a foundation of peace and love."<sup>44</sup>



"Baal," represents the artist's delving into his soul and giving free rein to all his desires. The true spirit is not, according to Brecht, the beautiful, the peaceful, but rather the perverted and the revolting. The spiritual realm which Eckart offers Baal is one of wine women and song. What Gougou envisions as "Paradies" is a place where "es bleibt einem kein Wunsch unerfüllt. Man hat keinen mehr. Es wird einem alles abgewöhnt. Auch die Wünsche. So wird man frei."<sup>45</sup> Gray suggests that... "Baal might well be taken, perhaps was meant to be taken, as the manifesto of a new humanity which, for the time being at least, appealed to Brecht, a humanity in accordance with many trends of the time, untrammelled by moral convictions of any kind and devoted to a hedonistic indulgence in the most intense experience."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Brecht is proposing a world of complete freedom.

The realm of the spirit, the escape from the abominations of their times is for the expressionists a general, but universal frame of reference for their dramas. There are many other thematic similarities, as well as similarities in characters, structure, and technique, which although not possessing the universality of the "Geist" theme, certainly occur frequently enough to be discussed.

#### D. Themes

##### 1. War; The Generation Conflict; Mechanization.

One of the sources of common themes was the common cultural heritage shared by the dramatists. Taken from the historical background, the war would obviously be a prevalent theme to which the expressionists, as has already been mentioned, reacted adversely. In tracing this idea through the plays, it is essential to consider them in the order of their appearance, because the violence of the reaction, and the degree in which the characters



vocalize their anti-war feelings is related to their historical setting.

In the earliest play, Sorge's "Der Bettler," written in 1912, war is only a mood. It is mentioned in the first act when the men are reading the newspapers aloud and one hears of the battle in Tripolis, and the revolt in Spain, and the building of new warships. The majority opinion is not yet against the war, but a voice does speak out:

Dritte Vorlesender: Zwei neue englische Kriegsschiffe  
(Bewegung)

Achter Zuhörer: Potztausend!

Sechster Zuhörer: Das ist negativ.

Stimmen: Was? Wieso?

Sechster Zuhörer: Drei Kriegsschiffe, das bedeutet: drei Hungerjahre.

Stimmen: Quatsch! Bravo! Volksfeind! Bravo! Was, Volksfeind!?!...  
Verrückt!<sup>47</sup>

By 1917, when Reinhard Göring's "Seeschlacht" was written, the Germans were tired of the war (see page 7). The workers were on strike, and the sailors were mutinying. In Göring's drama, the sailors are beginning to question why they are there. They cannot answer this. The second sailor discovers: "Wir sind hier doch fast wie die Schweine die nach der Reihe gemetzt werden."<sup>48</sup> The fifth sailor can find no purpose in all this strife. To him it's as if "stritten wir um Schaufeln Sand."<sup>49</sup> He begins to wonder if maybe the whole world is not crazy: "Kann nicht Wahnsinn herrschen unter einem ganzen Volk und denen zumal, die es leiten? Was Wahnsinnige wollen, müssen wir tun dann?"<sup>50</sup> and finally concludes: "Ich weiss, Wahnsinn und Verbrechen ist es, was wir tun..."<sup>51</sup> Not being able to rationalize and justify what the state is forcing him to do, the fifth sailor decides that mutiny is his only recourse, but the prompt arrival of an enemy ship forces him to renounce his decision and fight to survive.

Kaiser's "Gas" (Part I written in 1918, Part II in 1920), and Toller's "Masse-Mensch," written in 1921, present the German people, the proletariat,



as a group imbued with the idea of revolution, and in their midst, a pacifist who attempts to end all war, and to establish a new society. In "Masse-Mensch," the woman pleads with the revolutionaries to stop their fighting, because they are murderers, just as the state at war is a murderer:

Ich sehe keine Unterscheidung:  
 Die einen morden für ein Land,  
 Die anderen für die Länder alle.  
 Die einen morden für tausend Menschen,  
 Die andern für Millionen.  
 Wer für den Staat gemordet,  
 Nennt ihr Henker.  
 Wer für die Menschheit mordet,  
 Den bekränzt ihr, nennt ihn gütig,  
 Sittlich, edel, gross.  
 Ja, sprecht von guter, heiliger Gewalt.<sup>52</sup>

But the revolutionists cannot, at this point be stopped.

Brecht's "Baal," and Toller's later play, "Hinkemann," both written in 1922, are no longer concerned with the war per se, but focus their attentions instead on the aftermath of the war, the problems with which war has left society. Society is left with a group of cripples. The men returning from the front are wounded, or perhaps, like Hinkemann, eunuchs, who feel, as Hinkemann: "Ich habe die Kraft nicht mehr. Die Kraft nicht mehr zu kämpfen, die Kraft nicht mehr zum Leben."<sup>53</sup> There remain men like Baal, "er ist Säufer, Vagabund, Mürder, Amoralist und Zyniker."<sup>54</sup> The question to be considered is what to do with such a collection of decadent people. How can Germany approach the level of greatness she had before the war? Toller suggests socialism as a solution.

Fritz von Unruh himself fought in World War I. He was born into an aristocratic, militarily inclined family, but his experiences, climaxing in the Battle of Verdun in 1916, turned him completely against his family's tradition: "His intimate experience has taught Unruh to connect nationalism



with a morbid love of death. Passionate addiction to one's nation is disguised hatred of mankind. Exaltation of war is disguised fear of death."<sup>55</sup> In his play, "Heinrich aus Andernach," written in 1925, Unruh is asking for an end to war, an end to revenge and hatred, a world of external peace and love. Unruh is echoing the plea of the German people who, at this point, are clamoring for peace on any terms.

Ernst Toller's play, "Die Maschienenstürmer," written in 1929, is again pacifist-oriented. It is in this work that a particularly strong denunciation of war is to be found. Jimmy, the pacifist in the drama, says:

Oh, was Ihr Tugend nennt, Naturgesetz, Gebot der Starken,  
Ist Name Euer tiefen, tiefsten Not,  
Der Sklaverei, in die Ihr schuldverknüpft Euch selbst verstricktet,  
Ist Name Eures Dämons, der von Krieg  
Zu Krieg euch treibt!

Zum Kriege gegen brüderliches Blut,  
Zum Kriege der Völker gegen Völker,  
Zum Kriege der Rasse gegen Rasse,  
Zum Kriege der Kontinente gegen Kontinente,  
Zum Kriege, wahrlich! aller gegen alle,  
Zum Kriege gegen Euer eigen Selbst!<sup>56</sup>

Jimmy fails; he is killed at the end of the play by the workers whom he has been trying to save.

Pacifism in expressionism is explained by Walter Sokel as: "the outcome of a spiritual and emotional catharsis, which transforms the individual's deep-seated aggressive and self-destructive impulses into outgoing, life-affirming, 'socialized' responses."<sup>57</sup> This explanation is very much in keeping with the expressionist's idea of going into himself. But the pacifist, in his attempt to guide and save his fellow man is never successful. Using Toller as an example, this failure can be explained as follows:

For For Toller pacifism is a rational ideal and the pacifist failed when he ceased to trust the power of reason. Instead of defining and maintaining his position, he tended to shift from one leader to another. The pacifist sought to abolish



war instead of trying to eliminate the causes of war. To eliminate the causes of war meant to create new concepts and new values. False hero worship should have been eliminated, heroic life instead of heroic death should have been glorified.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the expressionists were unable to convert their anti-war feelings into anything more than a written protest.

This failure on the part of the pacifist, or the revolutionary leader can be viewed as a later version of a theme that is present in another form in the early expressionist dramas: the conflict between generations. In Sorge's "Der Bettler," the basic difference between father and son can be seen in the third act when the poet's mad father murders a bird to get red india ink to color his map. Their reactions are:

Der Vater: (fast schreiend) Ich brauche die rote Tusche, hörst du! Ich muss sie haben! Was ist denn solch Tier? wie... Ich muss die rote Tusche haben. Ich würde auch Menschen anstechen, sage ich dir, denn ich muss sie haben!

Der Sohn: Du hast ganz recht, Vater. Ich war wirklich unbesonnen. Was ist denn solch Vögelchen? Und du brauchst doch nun einmal die rote Tusche...<sup>59</sup>

The poet realizes that his generation is suffering from the activities of the older generation. The individual has no significance. It is understandable that in a society plagued by war, a society in which man is forced to kill his fellow man, great value cannot be placed on the life of an individual. There is no social justice. Just as nations are not made to reckon for the senseless deaths caused by the war, so too the son is not punished for the poisoning of his father - another senseless death. Although the poet realizes the injustice of his society, he himself is caught up in it, he becomes a "victim" of his society's decadence.

The later form of the theme, that of the revolutionary leader against society, can best be seen in Kaiser's and Toller's plays. The Milliardärsohn in Kaiser's "Gas," and the workers in Toller's "Masse-Mensch," and "Die



Maschinenstürmer" are fighting against the old generation, against the society which forces the workers in the factory to be things, not human beings, and forces children to sit at a machine without moving for hours, at all hours, earning very little wages. Toller, in his own lifetime, protested against the older generation: "His alignment with the political Left was mainly a sign of protest against the past, the older generation, and the existing social system, because he considered all of them responsible for the war. His participation in the munition workers' strike in 1918... was no more than an expression of this protest. He admits himself that he joined the workers' movement only by chance, drawn to it by its opposition to the war."<sup>60</sup>

For the activist dramatists, the symbol of the detestable work of the older generation was embodied in the war and in industrialism, and, in particular, in the paralyzing effect mechanization was having on the mind of the worker of his own generation. His opposition to this legacy was a vocalization of the attitude of the German who felt that:

In his growing sterility of soul, his worship of foul and false gods, his suicidal manias and his atavistic wars, the Human Being is left almost helpless to the menace of the Machine.

For the thing has learned to reproduce not only itself, but other Machines. The Machine, once the creation of man's hand, will increase and multiply by the magic and magnetic life that seems inherent in it. Unless the civilization to come effect the reconquest and the reenslavement of the Machine, a world of helots will sink into deeper and ever deeper bondage unto the very devices which it had invented to make it free.<sup>61</sup>

By 1918, when Kaiser wrote, "Gas I," the impact of the war had somewhat subsided. The war had been in full swing for four years, and in the air longer. The end of the international crises would come with time, but men, such as Kaiser and Toller were turning their attentions to the domestic situation, and found that their country was a group of people who had fallen



prey to a monster - the machine. In the fourth Act of "Gas I," a sister, a mother, and a wife bemoan the dehumanized states of their then deceased brother, son, and husband. The sister says: "Diese Hand war der Mensch."<sup>62</sup> The mother complains: "Meinen Sohn? - Den kannte ich nicht mehr - den begrub ich in einer Frühe, als er zum erstenmal ins Werk wegging! - Sind zwei Augen, die starr wurden vom Blick auf Sichtglas, ein Sohn?"<sup>63</sup> The wife laments: "Vorwärts - und rückwärts - rückwärts - vorwärts - der Mann rollt mit. Der Mann rollt mit - weil der Fuss an ihm ist. Bloss sein Fuss ist wichtig - der tritt den Schaltblock - auf Stillstand und Antrieb - tritt und tritt und tritt schon ohne Mann der mitrollt."<sup>64</sup> The workers can see that they are only hands, or feet, or eyes, and yet they are too narrow-minded to see that they are anything but workers. They will not reject the monster machine.

Toller recognizes the same problem. He believes: "Throughout history men have let lack of love and the resultant fear twist and thwart their emotions. Out of fear they have allowed institutions and mechanisms - their own creation - to victimize them. As a result of being victimized, men become victimizers."<sup>65</sup> The characters, such as the woman in "Masse-Mensch," and Jimmy in "Die Maschinisten," like the Milliardärsohn in Kaiser's play, who attempt to save the masses from the machine, become the "victims" of the "victimized." Toller also warns the workers what they are coming to:

Du Charles wirst Bein: Du trittst...  
 Du trittst... Du trittst dein ganzes Leben...  
 und deine Arme werden schlaff,  
 Die Augen blend, der Rücken krumm...  
 Du Georges wirst Hand und knüpfst... und knüpfst...  
 und knüpfst...  
 und deine Ohren werden taub... Dein Hirn verdorrt...  
 Dein Blut gerinnt...<sup>66</sup>



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In order to emphasize his point, Toller brings the problem closer to home by basing his play "Die Maschinenstürmer" on the revolt of the English Luddites in 1815. Putting the event within the realm of the reader's reality makes even more pertinent the engineer's point: "Was hilft es euch, zu kämpfen wider die Maschine?/ In allen Städten Englands... auf dem Kontinent.../ Beginnt sie ihr gewaltig Leben. Sie leuchtet Zukunft!/ Fortschritt triumphiert!"<sup>67</sup> The crux of the problem, the futility of attempting to destroy the machine, was recognized earlier by the woman in "Masse-Mensch." In an attempt to deter her comrades from storming the factories and wrecking the machines, the woman says:

Wir leben zwanzigstes Jahrhundert.  
Erkenntnis ist:  
Fabrik ist nicht mehr zu zerstören.  
Nehmt Dynamit der ganzen Erde.  
Lasst eine Nacht der Tat Fabriken spengen,  
Im nächsten Frühjahr wärn sie auferstanden  
Und lebten grausamer als je.  
Fabriken dürfen nicht mehr Herr,  
und Menschen Mittel sein.  
Fabriken sei Diener würdigen Lebens!  
Seele des Menschen bezwinde Fabrik!<sup>68</sup>

The solution is not to destroy the machine, for the machine plays an integral part in the progress of mankind, but to master the machine, to become the whole man and master, not the foot or the hand and the blind servant. If man lived in a different world, in the expressionists' world of the spirit perhaps this change could be affected.

The problem of the machine is given a new twist in Kaiser's "Gas II." It is complicated by the fact that the workers are being forced to produce for the enemy. As Kenworthy comments in his book entitled Georg Kaiser: "The plight of the workers invites comparison with that of the German people, whose country was occupied by a victorious enemy and burdened by huge demands for reparation... The issue between the Chief Engineer and



the New-Man is that which faced the defeated German people: should they resist by any means however desperate the occupation of their country, or should they resign themselves patiently to it?"<sup>69</sup> The Milliardärarbeiter pleads with his fellow workers to stop all the violence and hatred, but as the enemy nears, the engineer presents the workers with the ultimate weapon - a poisonous gas which will destroy the enemy. The workers do not heed the Milliardärarbeiter's words. At the end of the play the Milliardärarbeiter uses the poisonous gas on his own comrades. Kaiser here has followed the prescription he sets forth in his essay "Man in the Tunnel," that: "Writing a drama means: thinking a thought through to its conclusion."<sup>70</sup> He concludes that destroying the machine, or any part of the old regime is not enough. In order to build the new realm of the spirit, the old civilization must be blown up, it must be pulled out by the roots so that the new man in his new world may live.

## 2. Fate and Guilt

The expressionist views war and mechanizations as basic forces, and, in keeping with his desire to "think a thought through" (as Kaiser puts it), he must somehow rationalize their existence. As Gerten states in reference to Göring's "Seeschlacht": "The war is conceived as a superhuman force, embodied in the battleship to which the sailors are bound as automatons without a chance of resistance or escape. The whole work has the sweep and force of ancient tragedy with its dominant idea of inexorable fate."<sup>71</sup> The answer to the question why is embodied in the themes of fate and guilt which occur frequently in the dramas. In a sense these themes go hand in hand, for in asking the question Why?, the expressionist wants to know whose fault it is.



The fatalistic or deterministic approach of the expressionist dramatists can most easily be seen in the plays of Kaiser and Toller. In Kaiser's "Gas I," the explosion, an occurrence symbolic of other horrible events, such as war, is foreshadowed by the coming of "Der weisse Herr," and the Schreiber's comment: "Musste kommen."<sup>72</sup> The explosion was not caused by any mechanical failure, or any error in the engineer's calculations. It just had to be.

In Toller's "Die Maschienenstürmer," Lord Castlereach expresses the attitude of his class towards the tragedies of the world. He says:

Die Armut ist ein gottgewolltes, ewiges Gesetz.  
Mitleidsgefühle sind im Parlamente nicht am Platz...  
.... Wir sehen Grausamkeiten...  
Es sind die Waffen Gottes, vor denen wir  
In Ehrfrucht stumm uns neigen müssen.  
In jedem Jahre richten Kriege, Elend, Laster  
Die überschüssige Bevölkerung zugrunde.<sup>73</sup>

The Parliament will not attempt to alleviate the problems, because these same troubles always occur. As Lord Castlereach says, it is God's law, it is fate. Jimmy, in the same drama, uses a similar rationalization when attempting to dissuade his comrades from fighting against the machine. He says: "Ich weiss, dass die Maschine unser unentrinnbar Schicksal ist."<sup>74</sup> He recognizes that the machine is fated to remain, and that any changes made must be accomplished around the machine, and not by destroying it.

A less lucid example of the fate theme can be seen in Brecht's "Baal." As Esslin explains in discussing the drama: "The picture of the human condition is essentially one of passive acceptance; it matters little whether the bodies floating down the river are alive or dead, they drift along with equal helplessness. And if the living swimmer's body is not yet in a state of decomposition, it soon will be. The process of nature is seen as one of incessant birth and decay, with human consciousness powerless to



break the eternal cycle."<sup>75</sup> Baal's society, and men like Baal are all decadents, but society will always drift down this river of decay (to use Brecht's image).

Göring's thoughts, as already described, are expressed in the play as a mixture of both the fate and guilt themes. The fifth sailor says: "Wir selbst sind unser Schicksal. Ich wollte lieber noch glauben: Dass wir Glas, Spielzeug, Puppen in eines irren Riesen Hand sind, als dass Sinnvolles waltet über uns."<sup>76</sup> By saying that we are our fate, the sailor is not denying the posited superhuman force of fate, but rather is beginning to think of mutiny. He believes that man can attempt to control his fate. As a voice cries out at the end of the play: "Der Weg ist nicht gewählt von uns, die Hände nicht geführt von uns. Doch, doch wir taten es, wir führten unsre Hände. Uns ist die Schuld."<sup>77</sup> The sailors were forced into the war, but, as the fifth sailor realizes too late, the war is being prolonged by their shooting, by the sailors' craving for battle. Before his ideas can be carried out, the fated battle and fated deaths which the first sailor, at the very beginning of the play, sees as a sign from heaven materializes. (This is the typical Greek idea of fate to which Garten refers).

Just as Göring did, so too the other expressionist dramatists attribute the ultimate guilt to man. As Kaiser points out, the guilt belongs to man as a collective entity, not to man as an individual. The Milliardärsohn tells his son-in-law: "Ein Schuldiger bist du - wie ich schuldig bin. Und unschuldig sind wir beide."<sup>78</sup> Later on in the play he comments: "Ich übernehme die Verantwortung nicht - keiner kann sie auf sich nehmen!"<sup>79</sup> The guilt cannot be shouldered by any one person. It is humanity's guilt.

Toller's characters come to the same conclusion. In "Masse-Mensch,"



the prisoner, who has the face of the woman, admits this universal guilt:

Die Gefesselte: Ich Mensch bin schuldig.  
 Der Wärter: Masse ist Schuld.  
 Der Gefesselte: So bin ich zweifach schuldig.  
 Der Wärter: Leben ist Schuld.  
 Die Gefesselte: So musste ich schuldig werden?<sup>80</sup>

Grete Hinkemann expresses similar sentiments: "Schuld habe ich, dass ich ihn in den Krieg ziehen liess! Schuld hat seine Mutter! Schuld hat eine

Zeit, in der es sowas gibt."<sup>81</sup> For Toller guilt is part of a vicious

cycle. Man is guilty, but man in this life, in this decadent society, must be guilty.

Karl in Fritz von Unruh's "Heinrich aus Andernach," the blind man who can "see", (in an intellectual, or psychological sense), more than the

others comments: "Wie tief der Mensch/ auch seine Schuld vergräbt/ und sich brüstet.../ sie taucht doch auf!... Will denn einer immer wieder denn

andern peitschen?"<sup>82</sup> Karl wonders at man's attempt to bury his guilt, which he is only prolonging through his feeling of vengeance.

The themes of fate and guilt, war and mechanization - the main themes of the expressionist drama - can be seen to be the externalization of the problems plaguing the artist, and his attempts to rationalize them, to think them through. The new realm of the spirit is the solution to which he is led.

## E. Characters

Expressionist drama is, in general, man, or character oriented. This tendency can already be seen in the focus of some of the themes of the movement. For instance, industrialism is considered in the light of its effect on the human being. Guilt is the burden of humanity as a group.

The expressionist dramatist, however, is not concerned with man as an individual character or personality, but is interested in characters as types or as exponents of ideas. As Paul Kornfield, one of the theorists of the day prescribed: "Every actor should not merely be an 'imitator' striving to 'fake reality,' instead, 'he should venture to open his arms wide, as he would never do in life... He should abstract... from the attributes of reality and be nothing but an exponent of ideas, of emotions, or of fate!'"<sup>83</sup>

The presentation of the characters as types can be seen to have its origin both in the phenomenon of the war, in which an individual's life or death didn't matter, and in the dehumanizing effect which the machine was having on the workers. As Scheffauer comments: "The fate of the individual was no longer of moment, always he was the organ, the symbol of the community or of humanity - a type. These abstractions were subordinated to the function of parts of a machine, the machine of life, of society, of the world."<sup>84</sup>

One of the best examples of the expressionists' characters appears in Sorge's "Der Bettler." The cast is listed as follows:

Die Menschen:	Der Dichter
	Der Vater
	Die Schwester
	Das Mädchen
	Der ältere Freund
	Der Mäzen
	Die drei Kritiker
Gruppenpersonen:	Die Zeitung-Lesenden
	Die Kokotten
	Die Flieger
Nebenpersonen:	Die Krankenschwester
	Der Kellner
Stumme Personen:	Der Wärter
	Kellner
	Gäste des Kaffeehauses
Gestalten des Dichters:	Die drei Gestalten der Zweisprache
	Die Gestalt des Dichters
	Die Gestalt des Mädchens



The cast is first classified into groups and then identified by some general term, either by an occupation, or the relation to the Dichter, but the characters are never referred to by any specific name. It is very easy, on the basis of the terms which identify them, to divide the cast into the ideas, or the factions of society which they represent. Der Dichter and Das Mädchen represent the new generation; Der Vater and Die Mutter represent the old generation; Der ältere Freund and Der Mäzen represent the capitalists of the older generation; Die drei Kritiker are the intellectuals of the older generation. The Gruppenpersonen are equivalent to the German people, the decadent morality of the German people, and the heroes of the German people, or the war theme.

The characters of other plays can also be catalogued in much the same manner. As Deebold explains the characters in Göring's "Seeschlacht":

Alle sind da: der unbefangene Lebensfreuer, der unbedingt siegen will; der pflichtstarke Preusse, der ohne Begeisterungsdusel, für die Sache' zu sterben weiss; der Zweifler an Gott; der unglücksgewisse; einer, der einfach sein Leben behalten will. Und dann eben der dichtende Traümer und bei ihm der Meuterer - die zuerst in langer, leiser Zweisprache - zögernd, tastend jeder an des andern geheimster Seele - sich vergewissern wollen über jenes Ungewisse zwischen Mensch und Mensch.<sup>85</sup>

In Kaiser's "Gas I," the scene already discussed in which the sister, mother, and wife lament the dehumanization of their men into hands, eyes, and feet is another statement of the lack of individuality of the workers. This is further evidenced by the Schreiber's response to the Milliardärsohn's question "Sind Sie nur Schreiber?" He answers: "Ich habe meinen Beruf... Ich bin Schreiber."<sup>86</sup> The narrow-minded bourgeois forces himself into his undifferentiated position by his failure to see that he is more than "Schreiber" or "Arbeiter." He is "Mensch." In Toller's play "Hinkemann," the characters are typed by their names. Hinkemann translated means crippled



man, and this is certainly à propos to the character's condition. A bullet wound suffered in the war has turned him into a eunuch. Peter Immergleich justifies his name with the first words out of his mouth: "Mir ist alles gleich, wenn ich nur meine Ruhe habe... Meine Ruhe, wenn mir einer nimmt... als dann!"<sup>87</sup> Paul Grosshahn, whose name literally means "Great rooster" oftens teases Hinkemann about his handicap, and yet no mention is made of Grosshahn's fighting in the war. He spends his time "crowing," but does nothing. Thus it can be seen that although in this play the characters are given individual names, they are still only types.

The expressionist dramatist makes his characters even less individual by setting them up as forces. The plays are constructed around a central "hero," and the other figures in the play are forces which are either thwarting his mission or paralleling his ideas. In Sorge's "Der Bettler," for example, the poet's mission to create his new community is paralleled by his father's dream of Mars, and of the reproduction of the machines he has envisioned. The father's idea, however, is only an extension of the society against which the poet is fighting, and thus, in this sense, the father becomes a threat to his son, and in the end is murdered by his offspring. The son's murdering his father is paralleled by the father's murdering the fledgling bird. Der alter Freund, and Der Mäzen are part of the force that thwarts the poet. Das Mädchen is a strong supporting influence on the poet. Woman as a positive influence also appears in Kaiser's "Gas I." The woman has the potential to give birth to the new man for which the poet is searching. "Gas I" ends with the daughter's comment: "Ich will ihn, [the new man] gebären."<sup>88</sup>

Sokel describes a stylistic device used in expressionist drama in



which the dramatist: "expresses the main character's repressed awareness by embodying them in another character; this symbolic character becomes then the objective correlative for inner states which the main character has concealed from himself. He makes what is unknown to the character, but significant about him and hidden within him visible to the reader without directly informing him as a traditional narrative was wont to do."<sup>89</sup> Toller is the master of this device. In his play, "Masse-Mensch," the figures which appear in the Traumbilder, are often described as having the features of the woman or her husband. The guide who appears in the first dream scene is described as having a face: "das eine magische Ähnlichkeit mit dem Gesicht der Frau zeigt."<sup>90</sup> The ideas expressed by the guide about the precarious situation of man and society are the thoughts of the woman. In "Die Maschinenstürmer" Toller gives the direction: "Der Darsteller Jimmys könnte in Lord Byrons Maske auftreten, der Darsteller Ures in die Maske des Lord Castlereagh."<sup>91</sup> Here too he is making a parallelism in characters obvious.

#### F. The Savior Figure

Of all the types of characters in expressionist drama, the one which stands out almost as an emblem for the movement is the savior figure, the prophet, the man who will lead humanity out of its decadent existence into the new spiritual world. A psychological justification for this type of character can be given as follows: "Flight from an unendurable reality engenders a feeling of unreality, of lack of substance, of inner emptiness: then this emptiness produces the desperate need for someone strong, real and substantial, on whom the empty man can lean, whom he can exploit, whose

strength and vitality he can appropriate; finally the destruction of the strong one insures the weak man's own survival."<sup>92</sup> Toller's prophet figures, Die Frau in "Masse-Mensch," and Jimmy in "Die Maschienenstürmer" are both victims of this psychological process. The woman who says: "Ich geb/ Mich hin.../ Allen hin....,"<sup>93</sup> and who becomes the strength of the masses, is condemned to death because of her association with the workers' revolution, even though she preached pacifism. The very men whom Jimmy attempted to save turn against him and murder him. Jimmy warns John Wible: "Wer die niederen Kräfte und Triebe der Massen aufruft, den überrast ihr Sturm. Heute entfacht er den Orkan, heute ist er Führer, morgen wird er vom Felssturz blindwütiger Leidenschaften zermalmt, morgen ist er tausendfach bespieener Verräter!"<sup>94</sup> The leader, the saviour, is destined to failure.

Toller in his play "Hinkemann" gives a slightly different twist to the savior theme. Hinkemann attempts to be Grete's saviour when he advises her: "Fang ein neues Leben an... kämpf für eine neue Welt... für unsere Welt."<sup>95</sup> Hinkemann is a cripple, a weak man, who appears before society in the guise of a strong man. He accepts the disgusting job of biting into rats' and mice's necks and sucking their blood partially because of the image of virility associated with the task. As the proprietor of the traveling show describes the fringe benefits of the job: "Und dann der Nebenverdienst! Mit Heiratsanträgen können Sie einheizen. Moralische Bazillen pfeffern Sie über Bord. Jungfrauenehre ist heute reparierbar. Dafür gebt's Spezialärzte,"<sup>96</sup> Hinkemann is attracted to this vocation by the fact that this image compensates exactly for his weakness - his lack of manhood. At the end of the drama the only character left on the stage is Hinkemann. The strong people have gone, leaving only the weak one who



who lives on with the hope that the prophet may still come. As Hinkemann says: "Jeder Tag kann das Paradies bringen."<sup>97</sup>

Typical for the prophetic character is also a certain egotism which is essential to the strength he must possess in order to win the respect of the weaker man. Sokel says: "The role of Messiah serves the egocentric man whose egotism has become 'aware of itself' as a rationalization for self-aggrandizement in the guise of altruism and self sacrifice."<sup>98</sup> This

egotism can best be seen in the character of the poet in Sorge's "Der Bettler." The poet, although his age is never specified, appears to be a fairly young man who would like a patron to build a theater for him.

Having the utmost confidence in himself, and his work he expects people to flock to his theatre to be cleansed and saved. He says: "ich sehe meine Dichtungen als Grundlage und Anfang eines erneuerten Dramas an."<sup>99</sup>

Der Mäzen's comment: "Sie sprechen von einem neuen Drama, ich halte das bei unserer modernen dramatischen Dichtung in gewisser Weise für berechtigt. Und Ihre Stücke scheinen auch so vielen Keim zu tragen, dass man Ihre Selbsteinschätzung versteht"<sup>100</sup> emphasize the poet's egotism.

Part of the reason for the failure of the saviour figures lies in this trait. In the first act of "Der Bettler," there is a scene in which a group of fliers bemoans the death of one of their men. The dead man is to be taken as a parallel to the living prophet - the poet. The third flier describes his deceased comrade:

Aus tilgenden Stürmen hebt sich mein Gott,  
Saugt sich Atem aus feindlicher Sonne...  
Wo zerstorb seine Glut, wo zernickte sein Mut?  
Er fuhr flammender nur in uns nieder!...  
Sinnest ganz! Steiget tief! Starb er hin? Stand er auf?  
Unser Auge wird voll seiner Seele.<sup>101</sup>

The death of their savior is further rationalized by the first flier: "All

zu sehr presste der Mut seine Hand,/ Übermütig zerschellte schon mancher."102

The downfall of the poet, which although does not result in death, but rather in poverty, and failure, is precipitated not only by his overconfidence, but also by his complete, adamant adherence to his ideal. He will not agree to any of the arrangements which the patron offers him, and allows himself to degenerate into a "Bettler." Even after he has been forced to go to work, and has found that he cannot function in the midst of the materialistic society which is so opposite to his ideas, the poet refuses to make a small change in his work, so that it may be published, and bring in some money. The prophet (i.e., the poet) is so dedicated to his cause that he even sacrifices his own father. The father is, in his own way, a saviour figure, but he wants to redeem man within the context of the materialistic and technical world. Overpowered by his altruistic desires, the poet must kill the force that threatens to thwart him.

This overly self-sacrificial attitude on the part of the saviour figures reflects a paradox of the era: Society must fight to live in peace. The German people revolt in order to demonstrate their desire for peace. In Kaiser's "Gas I," the Milliardärsohn who pleads with the workers to set up an agricultural community, and not reconstruct the factory, thus ending senseless deaths like those caused by the explosion, refuses to put up a binder for his son-in-law who is in desperate need of money. The son-in-law commits suicide. The Milliardärsohn who is attempting to be a saviour, is actually, on a personal level, a murderer.

The expressionist dramatists very often associate the saviour figure with Christian symbols. Franz Marc in the preface to "Der blaue Reiter," an expressionist publication, writes: "We are wrestling for pure thoughts,



for a world in which pure thoughts can be spoken without becoming impure...

Here we admire the disciples of early Christianity because they found the

strength for inner stillness in the roaring noise of that time. We pray

hourly for that stillness and strive for it."<sup>103</sup> Thus the idea of a

Christian saviour is very much in keeping with the expressionists' idea of converting the hell on earth into a paradise, a world governed by brotherly love. Sokel explains the Christian symbolism in expressionism as follows:

"Disaffection with the bourgeois environment, accompanied by the wish to attract attention to provoke the enemy, and to be crucified by him, fits in well with the analogies in Expressionist literature between misunderstood artists to Christ... The crucified is also the saviour. Persecuted at present, he will inherit the kingdom of the elect. Those who scorn him will one day throng to the theaters and museums to worship him."<sup>104</sup> Thus we can understand the comment in "Die Maschinenstürmer:" "Immer verfolgt... immer gekreuzigt,"<sup>105</sup> uttered by Albert, who is referred to as "visionär." He says that the machine is not dead, but the soul is, and that mankind is killing itself with its spirit of revenge. Mankind is crucifying the attempts of the visionaries.

The best example of the saviour as a Christ figure can be seen in Kaiser's "Gas I" in the fourth act when the sister, mother and wife give their impassioned speeches. At the end of the act the Milliárdärsohn appears amidst the crowd, and in an atmosphere of "totenstille" pleads his cause. He says:

Totenstille.

Milliárdärsohn:, Stimme: Ich bin in der Halle!--

--Ich habe euch gehört!...

Stille

Milliárdärsohn: Fordert----und ich will erfüllen!--Menschen seid ihr - im Sohn - im Bruder - im Mann! Fliessende Vielheit aus euch zu jedem um euch. Keiner ist Teil - in Gemeinschaft



vollkommen der einzelne. Wie ein Leib ist das Ganze - und das ist ein Leib!-- Sammelt euch aus der Zerstreuung und aus der Verletzung heilt euch:--seid Menschen!...

Stille

Milliardärsohn: Was ihr fordert - erfülle ich: -- Menschen in Einheit und Fülle seid ihr morgen!--106

In a solemn, quiet, religious atmosphere, the Milliardärsohn seems to be elaborating on Christ's statement: "Let it be so now, for so it becomes to fulfill all justice." (Matthew 3). Not only does the Milliardärsohn want to save the people from self destruction, but he also possesses the heavenly power to fulfill and unite man. To aid him in his work, the Milliardärsohn appeals to the six black men, just as Christ appealed to twelve disciples (six times two). The Milliardärsohn says:

Ich könnte euch zwingen - ihr seht es! - ich will es nicht. Es würde euch verstimmen - und ich brauche eure Hilfe. Sechs sitzen wir um den Tisch - sechs stehen auf und treten hinaus: da schwillt die Rede von sechs zum Dröhnen, die vernehmlich wird. Ins taubste Ohr dringt der Druck der Verkündigung, die sechsfach gesprochen ist. Ihr seid die Grossen der Erde - die schwarzen Herren der Arbeit - steht auf und kommt: wir sagen das Ende der Zeit, die erfüllt ist - und sagen es wieder und wieder denen, die nicht verstehen können, weil sie im Blut noch den Wirbel tragen, der sie bis gestern schüttelte. Steht auf und geht!!107

The reference to sitting around a table brings to mind the last supper, and Christ's sitting with his disciples, one of whom will betray him. In the case of the Milliardärsohn, all betray him, and fight against his cause. Just as Christ tells his disciples to go forth, the Milliardärsohn says "Steht auf und geht" to the black men. It says in the Bible: "Then having summoned his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every kind of disease and infirmity." (Matthew 10). So too, the Milliardärsohn wants his apostles to cleanse the spirits of the people by convincing them of the wickedness of the factory, and of the necessity to return to a primitive agricultural existence.



Christian symbolism in expressionist drama, however, is only used as a context, as a frame of reference. It is very much in keeping with the idea that the earth in the state in which it was, was indeed a hell, and that the new realm for which the expressionists were searching was a paradise. Putting the saviour in a Christian context surrounds him with an aura of respect, so that his role is taken with the seriousness intended, and not on the level of a thing such as an organization as the salvation army asking mankind to save its soul. Realizing that the expressionists were searching for a spiritual realm in which the spirit, or soul of mankind would be saved, the emblem of a religious saviour, is very relevant to the movement's intents. The religious aspect emphasizes the spiritual nature of the movement, and the use of the saviour figure, taken in the most literal sense, as one who saves, is in keeping with the general direction of the movement.

#### G. Structure and Technique

As is to be expected, the method in which the basically similar themes and characters are integrated into the various dramas can also be seen to have certain aspects in common.

In the most general terms, just as the characters are important as exponents of ideas, the significance of the dramas themselves lies in the content, that is the themes and ideas expressed, rather than in the plots or the form. Kandinsky, an expressionist artist, defined content as "the inner element of the work created by the vibration of the soul,"<sup>108</sup> that is, taking into consideration the fact that the expressionists in their works are expressing their inner feelings, the content is the themes of the

dramas. This type of drama has been referred to as "Ich drama," which may be defined as concerning "das sich in Rollen multiplizierende psychologische Ich."<sup>109</sup> In most of the dramas there is relatively little action, and thus only a simple plot. The technical term for this is "synthetic drama," which means: "as applied to dramatic form that the whole action develops under the eyes of the spectators without such careful preparatory statements as are customary in the traditional form... there is hardly any action in the usual sense of the term; and the play moves towards a climax not in the working out of an action but of an idea."<sup>110</sup> Diebold, in his discussion of the structure of Sorge's "Der Bettler" finds that there are only three actions in the five acts, the first centering around the family tragedy, the second being the poet's affair with the girl, and the third is in the scenes with the critics and prostitutes. As Diebold says: "...das wichtigste in Sorges Drama zu sagen ist, beruht nicht auf dem Geschehnis der, Handlung, vielmehr im lyrisch-pathetischen Ausbruch des Bettler..."<sup>111</sup> Göring's "Seeschlacht" has no real plot. The only action in the drama occurs at the end during the naval battle, while the rest is concerned with the differing attitudes of the sailors towards the war. In Kaiser's and Toller's works the plays revolve around a revolution, however the emphasis is on the discussions of the justifications and methods of the protests, rather than the actual protests. Unruh's play is a plea for peace, and a world where brotherly love reigns, which is spurred on by Heinrich's desire for vengeance after being attacked by the enemy. The action is the attack which is only described second hand. In "Baal" also much of the action is described second hand, but Brecht's play is, in keeping with the main character's many-faced personality, much more active than the other works.



In addition to the lack of action, there is also a lack of observance of the unities. Since, as has already been remarked, the plays have generally little plot, and much of the drama is merely dialogue debating the action, there are many scenes not truly relevant to the action in that they by no means advance it. The passing of time is completely ignored by the expressionist dramatists, and they often are concerned with more than one locale. In Sorge's "Der Bettler," the settings for scenes occurring in different locales are present on the stage at the same time. Sokel explains the lack of unities as follows:

The Expressionist dramatist, like the dreamer, concentrates entirely on the purpose of expressing an inner world and refuses to let conformity to an external reality divert him from his purpose.

The physical stage, the protagonist's environment, ceases to be a fixed frame of a scene or act and becomes a projection of his inner self. For the idea of the set stage implies the concept of a fixed external nature in which the action that art imitates takes place.... The Expressionist conceived of the world to be expressed in art not as a given space of nature but as a field of magnetic and gravitational forces radiating from the soul. The scenery of the Expressionist stage changes with the psychic forces whirling about in it, just as the universe of relativity space is modified by the matter it contains, the Expressionist character is not a fixed individual personality, but the crystallization of psychic forces, modifying the scene surrounding him.<sup>112</sup>

This basically mobile nature of expressionist drama makes a discussion of the dramas in terms of traditional structure, that is, in terms of rising and falling action, almost impossible.

The language which the expressionists use in their dramas coincides with the general trends of the movement and the era. As has already been mentioned, Kaiser's telegram style reflects the mood of panic of the times, and also, as Scheffauer points out: "His plays in their structure and in the ratchet and gear work of the surcharged dialogue that drives the action along, have something of the relentless will and directness of machines."<sup>113</sup>



A similar comment is made in reference to Göring's "Seechlacht": "Die Wechselreden und Einzelaussagen sind wie Maschinenteile: klar gegliedert, deutlich begrenzt, als Einzelne vollendet und fest verbunden zum ganzen. Die Knapphut ist beiläufig nicht ärmlich, nicht einmal, Karg' - aber das Herz schlägt stark und schnell; der Puls drängt."<sup>114</sup> Juxtaposed to this abrupt, tense style is the very lyrical language which can be seen at its best in Sorge's "Der Bettler." This poetic style appears when either the father or the son, (that is the poet), speak of their ideal world. In this context the use of the lyric mirrors the vision of Paradise and the new world of spiritual regeneration. Brecht satirizes this lyrical style in "Baal." In a very humorous passage, Baal, poetically describes a favorite place on earth - the john:

Orge sagt mir: Der liebste Ort, den er auf Erden hat  
 sei nicht Rasenplatz am Elterngrab.  
 Sei nicht ein Beichstuhl, nicht ein Hurenbelt  
 und nicht ein Schoss weich weiss und Warm und fett.  
 Orge sagte mir: Der liebster Ort  
 Auf Erden war ihm immer der Abort.  
 Dies sei ein Ort wo man zufrieden ist,  
 dass drüber Sterne sind und drunter Must.  
 Ein Ort sei einfach wundervoll, wo man  
 selbst in der Hochzeitsnacht allein sein kann.  
 Ein Ort der Demut, dort erkennst Du scharf,  
 dass Du ein Mensch nur bist, der nichts behalten darf.  
 Ein Ort der Weisheit, wo Du Deinen Wanst  
 für neue Lüste präparieren kannst.  
 Wo man indem man lieblich ruht  
 Sanft doch mit Nachdruck etwas für sich tut.  
 Und doch erkennst Du dorten was Du bist:  
 Ein Bursche, der auf dem Aborte frist.<sup>115</sup>

Here are the prerequisites of an ideal world. A place where man can escape from the decadent chaotic society, and be alone and satisfied. Thus, in general, the style of the expressionists is a verbal repetition of the impact of the culture on the dramatist.

In communicating his ideas, the expressionist employs certain types of symbolism. The use of Christian symbolism and characters as symbolizing



psychic ideas or forces has already been discussed. Also in the realm of psychology is the symbol of the dream. Just as the expressionists use other characters to express the inner feelings of a central character, Toller uses the dream scene to reveal the inner connections between types of people or aspects of reality. In the first dream picture in "Masse-Mensch," a group of bankers are buying and selling war bonds, and are bidding on things such as munition factories and poison-gas works things which emphasize the atrocities of their society. Toller is here postulating a connection between the war and capitalism using the dream as a shield.

It is also interesting to examine the color symbolism in expressionist drama. R. C. Wyatt published an article on a study of "The Symbolism of Color in the Drama of German Expressionism." He concluded that:

Almost all chromatic and achromatic colors with the exception of orange were used. Definite preferences were evidenced for bright, vital, important hues. The Expressionists might be characterized by one color - the regnant red, since it led all the rest in frequency of use. Green was the second most used color, while third and fourth place go respectively to achromatic black and white. Blue was the fifth in preference, followed by yellow, gray, and gold in that order. Other colors which appeared but relatively rarely were purple, violet, brown, pink and various combinations such as red-yellow and gray-green.<sup>116</sup>

The red which was found to be the main color, represented various things; in "Der Bettler" it symbolized madness; in Toller's and Unruh's work it was revolution and bloodshed, and in Kaiser's "Gas I" and "Gas II" it symbolized violence and destruction. Göring's "Seeschlacht" has the least use of color symbolism. Blue is used in this drama to signify at times madness, and at times peace. White was a negative color, the color of horror. In Kaiser's "Gas I," "Der weisse Herr" foreshadowed the explosion. Green is a symbol of hope such as it is used by the Milliardärsohn in "Gas I" when he describes his paradise. Black, similar to white, portrays evil.



The capitalists whose machines are wreaking havoc with civilization are described as "schwarze Herren" in "Gas I." It can be seen that the use of colors by the expressionists was a means of separating characters into positive and negative types.

The expressionists dramatists established some new techniques in the actual staging of their plays. The settings were very simple, and economical, but described in detail. For example, the stage directions for the first act of "Der Bettler" begin:

Jetzt teilt sich der Vorhang und man blickt in den Saal eines Kaffeehauses, Er ist gegen den Hintergrund hin erhöht, Stufen führen durch die Mitte. Rechts: im Vorder- und Mittelgrund: Tische in der üblichen Ort, zahlreiche Gäste, Kellner auf und ab. Links: freier Raum, an der Wand Zeitungen, vorn Kleiderständer, im Mittelgrund ein langes, an den Enden umgebogenes Ledersofa....<sup>117</sup>

The detail in the setting, as has already been mentioned, was a legacy of the naturalists. However, the idea of showing various scenes all on the same stage was relatively new. In the course of the play, the section of the stage in which a scene was taking place was indicated through the use of a spotlight. This was an innovation introduced by the expressionists. Steinhauer comments: "It proved so effective that spotlight illumination became a regular accessory of stage technique. Sometimes several rooms were set side by side or on top of each other on the stage; then the spotlight was turned on one of these sections at a time, while the rest of the scene remained in darkness. In this way the drama was given a new sort of unity of time and place; for what had formerly been represented as a sequence was now depicted as happening simultaneously."<sup>118</sup> The effect of this technique was further dramatized in Toller's play "Masse-Mensch." The background of the scenes was a dark curtain with heavy iron folds. As Scheffauer remarks: "The actors were kept from being swallowed up in



these gulfs of shadow by adroit cross and top lights which tore them out of the darkness, and, as it were, kept them afloat on a middle plane. This world was a limbo, a prison - dusk lay over all, and the fallow, corpse-like light in which mysteries or abominations bred. This light, this atmosphere worked mightily upon the spectator who sat rigid as in a vice, between dramatic enthrallment and aesthetic wonder."<sup>119</sup> Even in his technique, the expressionist was intentionally emphasizing both horror (the horror of that time), as well as beauty (the beauty of the future world).

#### H. The Mood and Outlook

Despite the horror of their times, the general mood of the expressionists, even in the face of failure, was optimistic. The most frequently given example is the daughter's comment at the end of "Gas I," "ich will ihn gebären." The "Neue Mensch" will be born. The fifth sailor's comment at the end of "Seeschlacht": "Die Schlacht geht weiter, hörst du?" contains this same hope for the future. The battle he is referring to is not just the naval battle and the war, but also the battle on an individual level which he was attempting to spark - his idea of mutiny. Man should be freed from the insanity that was ruling the world. The same feeling of hope is echoed at the end of Toller's "Die Maschinisten" when Ned Leed says:

So sperrt uns ein! Wir wissen, was wir taten!  
Und wollen sühnen, dass wir den erschlugen,  
Andre werden kommen...  
Wissender, gläubiger, mutiger als wir.<sup>120</sup>

This orientation toward the future is inherent in the beliefs held by the expressionists - their idea of a new world superceding their decaying one. But in the last analysis, they were disillusioned. As Toller wrote in his

"Briefe": "If I could only, as formerly, believe in rebirth, in growing purity [reineres Werden]. Mankind - always helpless, always crucified. Justice - a bitter taste is on my tongue. I believed in the saving power of socialism; that was perhaps 'the illusion of my life.'"<sup>121</sup>

The expressionists can be seen to have been a group of individuals perplexed by the turbulence and irrationality of their times, who were attempting, in their own way to extricate themselves and others from this world by establishing another. The consensus is that the means to this end is through the destruction of this world, for here the poet cannot establish his ideal community; the machine cannot be destroyed; explosions will always occur; people will always seek revenge. The dramatists realize the futility of trying to create their world within the context of this society. They also discover, however, that they cannot expect members of this society so engrained with the phenomenon active in this realm, such as mechanization and war, to rise up to their level and accept "sight unseen" the superiority of a spiritual realm. Thus, thwarted in their attempts, they resign themselves to a hope for the future, the birth of the "Neue Mensch."

<sup>12</sup>Harford, pp. 43-44.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Kuhn, *Das I.*, in *Stilke, Brühlmann, Aufhäuser, Gedichte*, ed. Walther Kuhn, (Munich, Berlin; Aufhäuser & Kirsch, 1964), p. 179.

<sup>14</sup>Schulz, *The Writer in Exile*, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup>Reinhart, Kurt, "The Expressionist Movement in Recent German Literature," *Germanic Review* V, VI, 1932, p. 263.

<sup>16</sup>H. V. Garton, *Modern German Drama*, (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1962) p. 28.

<sup>17</sup>*Das I.*, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup>*Das I.*, p. 179.



## Footnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Kurt F. Rheinhardt, Germany 2000 Years, Rev. Ed., (New York; Friedrich Ungar Publishing Co., 1965) II, 631.
- <sup>3</sup> C. H. Herford, The Post-War Mind of Germany and other European Studies, (London, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 10.
- <sup>4</sup> William Karl Pfeiler, War and the German Mind, (New York; Columbia University Press, 1941) pp. 10, 16.
- <sup>5</sup> Above quotes from Rheinhardt, Germany 2000 Years.
- <sup>6</sup> Rheinhardt, Germany 2000 Years, p. 644.
- <sup>7</sup> Herford, p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Walter H. Sokel, The Writer in Extremis, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959) p. 182.
- <sup>10</sup> Herford, p. 25.
- <sup>11</sup> Reinhard Johannes Sorge, Der Bettler, in Werke, ed. Hans Gerd Rötzer, Zweiter Band, (Nürnberg; Glock und Lutz, 1964) p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Herford, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>13</sup> Georg Kaiser, Gas I, in Stücke, Erzählungen, Aufsätze, Gedichte, ed. Walther Huder, (Röln, Berlin; Kupaenheuer & Wirsch, 1966) p. 179.
- <sup>14</sup> Sokel, The Writer in Extremis, p. 158.
- <sup>15</sup> Rheinhardt, Kurt, "The Expressionist Movement in Recent German Literature," Germanic Review V, VI, 1931, p. 263.
- <sup>16</sup> H. F. Garten, Modern German Drama, (New York; Grove Press Inc., 1962) p. 28.
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- 23 Samuels, p. 12.
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- 31 Ibid., p. 42.
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- 33 Gas I, p. 188.
- 34 Kauf, p. 315.
- 35 Georg Kaiser, Gas II, in Stücke, Erzählungen, Aufsätze, Gedichte, ed. Walther Herder, (Köln, Berlin; Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966) pp. 250-251.
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