

# The resistible rise of arturo ui contextualising brecht's life

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\* Brecht's life can be categorised into three individual eras. From his birth in 1898 to 1933 he resided in Germany, until the Nazis came into power in the Second World War and he was forced into exile.

\* He was born in Augsburg, Germany on 19th February, 1898. He studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Munich, before becoming a medical orderly in a German military hospital during the First World War. This experience reinforced his pre-established hatred of war and influenced his support for the failed Socialist revolution in 1919. This attitude of Brecht's influenced his writing, and is so reflected in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, through the satirical way that Brecht parodies Hitler's rise to power.

\* After the First World War, Brecht returned to University, but eventually became more interested in literature than medicine. In 1922 his first play, 'Baal' was produced, which was another play parodying fascism, as *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* does.

\* From 1933 to 1947, throughout the period of Hitler's power of Germany, he was in forced exile from his home country, in various parts of the world. This gave Brecht the opportunity to experience and witness different political views and states, and his communist beliefs were effectively confirmed, and are displayed through the parody of fascism in this play.

\* He began to study the works of Karl Marx in 1926, believing Marxism to be the only study of society which he can truly rely on to help him understand his rapidly changing world. It was Marx's influence on Brecht that turned Brecht's plays into a much more didactic experience for his audience. *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is a prime example of how Brecht liked to lay the

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purpose of the play's performance before the audience. Without distracting subplots and underlying ideas, Brecht enforces his main idea on the audience.

\* Hitler becomes more powerful and influential in Germany. Brecht's hatred of Hitler's Party and its ethics are displayed clearly through the play, which was written during these first years of exile. Brecht divorced Marriane Zoff in 1927 and two years later married Helene Weigel, the actress. Their daughter was born in 1930, which proved to be a prominent year for Brecht, as it is the year that for the first time one of his plays, the rise and fall of the City of Mahogonny, a communist play, creates an outburst of Nazi criticism. It is in the notes of this play that Brecht introduces the differences between 'dramatic theatre' and the more modern 'epic theatre', which he utilises in this play.

\* In 1935 Brecht was introduced to the term *verfremdung* or 'making strange', which he then began to apply and use in his plays, such as in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*: he did not wish his actors to identify and 'become' the characters they were playing in any way, but rather wished them to convey a message about that character through satire, remaining detached from the character emotionally.

\* Brecht arrived in the USA in 1941, and in 1947 he was named by one of the 41 people who were called before the House of Un-American Activities Committee, as having left-wing views. This meant that he believed in communism; a belief that was frowned upon in America, as it contradicts the beliefs of the Capitalist Americans that were in power, and that have

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maintained the Capitalist America that exists today. Brecht denied being part of the American Communist Party and returned to Germany that year. It's perhaps due to the events that happened whilst Brecht resided in America, that he opted to set the play in this location, as a dim light is shone on it, reflecting Brecht's anger at being 'named'.

\* Politically, Brecht was extremely active throughout the period of his exile, writing many of his more famous plays, including of course The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui. Brecht was politically motivated to write each of these plays, using each one to convey a specific aspect of society that ought to be changed for the better.

\* Brecht developed a new approach to theatre, which was developed from those he'd been introduced to in his years in exile. He wanted his audience to see the stage as a stage and actors as actors, which contradicted the convention that plays were supposed to create an illusion, and draw the audience into the make-believe world created by the play.

\* The purpose of Brecht's new approach to theatre was to awaken the audience to his version of the truth about certain events taking place in society. Thus, he detested 'Aristotelian' theatre and the idea of the audience having to suspend disbelief. This hatred is depicted in Scene Six of The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, through the presentation of the Actor, as he speaks dramatically: 'Art knows no calendar, sir! Say I. And art is my life. Alas'.

- \* Also, Brecht used signs to ensure that the audience was aware that the play directly paralleled Hitler's rise to power. Through the play, Brecht overtly satirises Hitler's rise to power through using Arturo Ui, a totalitarian gangster who takes control of an economic crisis and uses it to his advantage.
- \* 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui', like many of Brecht's plays, reflects a Marxist interpretation of society.
- \* The play was written while Brecht lived in exile from Germany, after he was forced to leave, in 1933 when Hitler gained power, due to the reflections of Marxism evident in his plays.
- \* Brecht's 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui' is consciously satirical of Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany, whose rise Brecht considered parallel to that of Ui.
- \* The Play opens with a prologue, which contextualises the play for the audience and lets them know the story that's about to be displayed to them. It also introduces the characters to the audience, so that they know exactly what and whom they're about to be shown.
- \* In the Prologue, a comparison is made between Ui and Richard III. Brecht intended to draw parallels between Ui's "ghoulish" methods of blood shed, and that that took place in the War of the Roses from 1455-1487. "Has anyone heard of blood so ghoulishly and lavishly shed since the battle for roses white and red?"

\* Brecht often uses stories from Greek and Chinese theatre, as his audience would've perhaps been familiar with these. In Greek Theatre, a chorus was moved to move the action on or fill in parts of the story. This is reflective of the way Brecht uses placards in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* to display the parallels between the play and the events in Germany throughout Hitler's rise to power.

\* Brecht thought it best not to show the play to a German audience, as he believed they may take offence at the mockery of Hitler. However, he did create some additional lines to be added into the prologue, which were blatantly meant for a German audience:

'Ladies and gentlemen, the management's aware

This is a controversial affair.

Though some can still take history as they find it

Most of you don't care to be reminded.'

This indicates that Brecht did in fact intend the play to be performed before a German audience at some stage.

\* *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* does not deal with Hitler's extreme racist views, such as his treatment of the Jews, but rather it focuses on his rise to power, and places blame on the German government and society for allowing him to gain power so easily.

\* After being defeated in the First World War Germany was faced with the deciding task of rebuilding its economy. By 1929, Germany was hit with the world depression that had begun in America. The depression is described in scene one of the play; 'It looks as if Chicago/ The dear old girl, while on her way to market/ Had found her pocket torn and now she's starting/ To scabble in the dirt for pennies.'

\* In 1928 there were 1, 320, 000 unemployed in Germany; 5, 102, 000 by 1932 as a result of the depression. Hitler, and so reflectively Ui, was able to exploit this for his own means, establishing the perfect climate for the growth of the infamous Nazi party. In 1925 Hindenburg, a German World War I hero became president of Germany, accepted to this position by the country due to his hero status. He is paralleled by Dogsborough in the play.