

Hook to the Chin

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ABSTRACT. Within historical avant-garde movements from the Beginning of the 20th century, a curious taste and fascination for boxing burst out, and developed later into claim that art has to become more similar to boxing, or to sport in general. This fascination with pugilism in early stages of its popularity on the continent included such charismatic figures of Paris avant-garde as Arthur Cravan.

After WWI, one of well-known examples of connecting boxing with art was Bertolt Brecht with a statement that we need more good sport in theatre. His and other German avant-garde artists admiration of boxing included German star Max Schmelling who was an icon of Nazis as well.

The aim of the paper is to explain reasons for aesthetic fascination with boxing in avant-garde, and in Brecht. At the same time, it is necessary to examine what may be different and similar in avant-garde taste for boxing, and Nazi glorification of the same sport. Finally, a hypothesis on possible relationship between Brecht's demand for more sport in theatre, and his V-effect or distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*.) will be offered.

There are always some coincidences which we would like to interpret as more than just coincidences. To speak about boxing and art in academic circles does not come as an ordinary everyday occasion. However, during my studies for this paper, after fighting with scarce sources but those primordial and non-theoretical, two books on boxing and art appeared, both with their theoretical, even philosophical and aesthetical interest in this relationship. The first one, written by Karia Boddy — *Boxing. A Cultural History* — appeared in 2008, and represents an apprehensive report

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on boxing cultural status, context and its cultural consequences, including times before and especially after WWI, when America (i.e., USA) was treated by European cultural pessimist and avant-garde optimists as future, and boxing was part of that embraced Americanized future for Europe: especially in Germany. A quote from Bertolt Brecht's journal from 1920 can prove it: "...how boring Germany is! It's a good average country, its pole colours and surfaces are beautiful, but what inhabitants! — What's left? America!"¹ This book is not only a great source of all kinds of information on boxing and culture, especially on relationship between boxing and artists, it is at the same time analytical account of these relationships from 17th century up to now, which, perhaps, makes it a kind of book Stendhal spoke about when he said that there are books which everybody reads and uses, but rarely praises as it should be praised.

On the other side, and a bit later, appearing already in 2009, there is David Scott's book *The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing* (with well advertised foreword by MIT editor and former boxer Roger L. Conover) which covers more specific field of culture, that of the aesthetic aspect of boxing. He covers three fields: how aesthetic highlighting takes place, forms of artistic representation of boxing, and how writers revealed aesthetic and symbolic potential of box, all these to present boxing in its semiotic and aesthetic as well as more general sporting and sociological aspects.² David Scott is an active boxer as well. His approach mentions theatrical character of boxing on many occasions, including the very last sentences of the book, but his artistic material includes lyrics and prose, painting and sculpture, and no theatre, which is a pity, because dramatic dimension of boxing is acknowledged but not researched through influence of boxing on theatre, which means that Bertolt Brecht, who introduced box in his plays and wrote fiction and essays on pugilism, is not even mentioned.

¹ Bertolt Brecht's journal from 1920, as quoted in: Kasia Boddy, *Boxing. A Cultural History*, Reaktion Books, London 2008, p.228.

² David Scott, *The Aesthetics of Boxing*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 2009, pp. xxiii-xxxii ("Introduction").

1. *Artistic Avant-Garde and Boxing*

Arthur Cravan, Oscar Wilde's nephew (they never met, but he claimed that Oscar is still alive and that he visited him in Paris, while in reality they never met), a poet, an anarchist and a heavyweight boxing champion of France (who claimed his title without a single match to prove it), is one of the most fascinating persons of early avant-garde, an icon of Dada and Surrealism, admired by Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and André Breton alike. Before WWI, he published a journal *Maintenant*, writing all texts and poems by himself under different names, Oscar Wilde's signature included, and got involved in boxing fights from time to time to appear in front of public and get some money, as he was broke all through. His real artistic power was in constant public appearances, artistic and boxing alike, which turned into provocations and scandals. His last appearance was his death in Mexico in November 1918, when he disappeared at the sea. There are many versions and interpretations of this event, from suicide to tragic accident, but many did not believe that he really died, and he was seen after his presumed death appearing again on many different locations all around the world, hidden under this or that concocted and mysterious personality, novelist B. Traven included. What impressed other avant-garde artists was that he invented and designed his life and his death, and turned his body into an artwork in itself. Two meters high, strong muscular body, star of an early stage of continental boxing, he was the direct opposite of a modernist poet with his lyrical weakness and bohemian outlook. For avant-garde movements he represented anti-art, a strong pugilist body creating a space of physical fascination versus decadent no-body of the institution of art. Another paradox: he represented exactly that what Oscar Wilde has never been. But Cravan's avant-garde boxing was popular among avant-garde artists only, and it was popular because it was so unpopular among members of higher culture who looked upon such plebeian professionalism and entertainment with disgust.³

³ To get more on Arthur Cravan, his artistic and boxing career, see: Arthur Cravan, »Before Dawn«, 2 *Bit Poetry*, no. 1 (August 1985), LETTERS, Toronto (his poetry); Arthur Cravan, *Oeuvres. Poèmes, articles, lettres* (Édition établie par Jean-Pierre Begot), Éditions Gérard Lebovici, Paris 1987 (his poetry, texts from his journal *Maintenant*, documents on his boxing career); 4 *dada suicides*, Atlas Press, London 2005 (including his article »To Be

After World War 1, boxing was gaining popularity among continental Europeans, gentlemen and ladies alike, but nowhere it became such object of fascination as in post-war Weimar Republic. There were many boxing icons and heroes, but Max Schmeling was by far the greatest, a real champion, not a dubious one as Arthur Cravan who was in reality just the best boxer among avant-garde artists and the best avant-garde artist among boxers. Max Schmeling started his professional career in 1924, he was German and European light-heavyweight champion, and then German heavyweight champion (1928), world heavyweight champion (1930-32) and European heavyweight champion (1939-1943). What decorated his biography with a touch of a legend were his two matches with Joe Louis (1936, 1938), when he unexpectedly won the first one. After the war and when their career was over, they became friends, and Max visited Louis frequently, helped him financially, to pay at the end for his funeral as well. Two legends together, and a saga of friendship between a German boxing hero and African American champion who finally found himself without money and without “friends” who made millions from his boxing. How to explain sudden popularity of boxing in Germany both in avant-garde artistic circles and among National Socialists?

In Alfred Flechtheim’s guestbook (Flechtheim was a major art dealer of avant-garde art and publisher of “*Der Querschnitt*”), after one of his parties, Max Schmeling left his memento: “Artists grant me your favour, Boxing is also an art.”⁴ Avant-garde artists claimed that modern art with its autonomy and institutions, dwelling somewhere far away from everyday life,

or Not to Be...American« which appeared on June 6, 1909 in *L'Écho des Sports*: »Today, in contrast, everyone is American, It is essential to be American, or at least to look like you are one, which is exactly the same thing.«; María Lluïsa Borràs, *Arthur Cravan. Una Biografia*, Quaderns Crema, Barcelona 1993 (his biography). A documentary *Cravan vs. Cravan* by Isaki Lacuesta appeared in 2002 (100 min.; María Lluïsa Borràs appears here as well). Obviously, Arthur Cravan left his impact and memory in Barcelona where he stayed during the WWI, and arranged a boxing match with Jack Johnson, a sensational and memorable event (he lost, of course, but earned enough to leave Cataluña for the States).

⁴ “Künstler schenkt mir eure Gunst, Boxen ist doch auch eine Kunst.” Quoted from Max Schmeling, *Erinnerungen*, Ullstein, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 87, in: David Bathrick, »Max Schmeling on the Canvass: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture«, *New German Critique*, No. 51/1990, p.136.

has nothing to do with life and has to be abandoned, even destructed: to become part of life again, new art, or anti-art should follow attractive example of sport in general and boxing in particular. National Socialists, quite the contrary, planned and later executed destruction of avant-garde art, but adored sport, boxing and especially Max Schmeling. As much as left wing of German society glorified Schmeling for his victory over Italian Michele Bonaglia in 1928 because in this case Weimar democratic culture has defeated Fascist totalitarian culture, extreme right glorified his victory over Joe Louis in 1936 because in this case German race proved his supremacy over black race and American culture. How come that boxing was embraced as cultural and political battlefield of such importance in post-WWI Germany?!

The common ground of both artistic avant-garde and national socialists, but not just of their diagnosis of European and Western civilization, was that modern civilization and culture both failed. We have to understand a special meaning this differentiation between civilization and culture took in German academic, intellectual and artistic circles at *fin-de-siècle* already. Civilization was an ugly, prosaic and materialist creature of soulless progress which should get some sense and human end from high culture.⁵ The experience of decadence of culture, but much more the experience of war triggered the conclusion that civilization cannot be healed with culture because they share the same terminal illness. Oswald Spengler's claim that West has come to an end was just the most popular outcry of the common feeling. There was a radical difference between avant-garde and fascism or National Socialism in other views, but here they had the same position. And there was, in spite of everything else being different, something more: there was a need for immediate action of a kind that only heroes can deliver. For avant-garde, heroes are those who,

⁵ Relationship between sport and civilization was ambiguous. On one side, there were those who claimed that sport is on the other side of civilization, in a similar position as culture and therefore an activity beyond necessity of everyday life and vulgar strive for money and power; on the other side were those who saw in sport's popularity just another proof that civilization, together with its culture and way of life in general, is sinking, as Titanic did. This contrariness of opinion is far from over, and was discussed in the 1960s already in Bero Rigauer's polemics against Carl Diem (see Bero Rigauer, *Sport and Work* (transl. Allen Guttmann), Columbia University Press, New York 1981 (German original 1969)).

already belonging to the future, physically and with their bodies engaged in struggle to destroy continuity of present with the past — to save the future. For national socialists, heroes are those who grow from German blood and German soil into bodies which can wake German people (*Volk*) to become aware of their destiny and to become masters of the whole world. Big difference, but in both cases to be hero does not mean to have lofty ideas organized into sublime poetic performative. It means to get bodily involved, to put your own body at stake, to vouch with your bodily presence that you are — dead serious. As theoretician of contemporary art and its custodian Boris Groys begins his analysis of the hero as central figure of fascist art theory: “The heroic act transforms the hero’s body from a medium into a message.”⁶ What comes to mind first as a distinction between an athlete and an intellectual is that for an athlete body is the medium of his or her profession. But how can this body become a message? At this point, Bertold Brecht’s insistence on more good sport in art is revealing.

2. *Mehr Guten Sport — More Good Sport*

“More good sport “ (Mehr Guten Sport) is a title of Brecht’s text from 1926 which often comes to mind in connection with his revolutionary ideas on theater.⁷ In our time, it was declared that there are no certain limitations between (high) art and all other culture (Fredric Jameson⁸), that art and sport are both part of performances (Schechner⁹) and that they both turned into spectacle (Guy Debord¹⁰). Still, even in our times of body-

⁶ Boris Groys, »The Hero’s Body. Adolf Hotler’s Art Theory«, *Art Power*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass) and London 2008, p.131.

⁷ Bertold Brecht, »Mehr Guten Sport«, *Der Kinnbaken und Andere Box- und Sportgeschichten* (ed. Günther Berg), Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 2395, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 31-34

⁸ Fredrick Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, in: *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*., Verso, London 1991, and on <http://homepage.newschool.edu/quigleyt/vcs/jameson/jameson.html>.

⁹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction*., Routledge, London 2002.

¹⁰ Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*., Verso, London 1990.

art¹¹ and bio-art¹², a demand that we need more goods sport in theatre still sounds as a paradox which calls for an explanation, but our explanation is ready: there is no insurmountable difference between sport and art because they both adapted to and belong to global commodity culture. In post-WWI cultural and intellectual atmosphere in Germany, however, Brecht's paradoxical statement had another flavour, that of a double diagnosis and double healing method. Diagnosis is that of a battle between German institutionalized culture, and a healing method is a cultural turn. On one side there was the militaristic physical culture of the *Turnverein*, which should be abandoned in favour of individualist competitive professional sport following American example¹³, on the other boring institutionalized bourgeois theatre which should be abandoned in favour of new theatre of pleasurable and educative critical social engagement. Bourgeois theatre and physical culture were accused as an important part of pre-war German culture responsible for decadence of civilization and decline of the West. In German national bourgeois theatre following a doctrine introduced by Lessing¹⁴ an image of morality of domestic bourgeois life should be dramatically threatened and always victoriously re-established as human and German national virtue. After so many years of modern bourgeois German theater¹⁵, including its development into subscription sys-

¹¹ Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 1998.

¹² See: <http://www.bio-art.com>, and many other sites on the web, including definitions which say that bio-art is production of the works of art from the living matter in research laboratories.

¹³ On Brecht's attitudes on the States — America, see a comprehensive study by Patty Lee Parmalee *Brecht's America*, Miami University and Ohio State University Press 1981. On Brecht and Berlin, including atmosphere of sport, see Wolf von Eckhardt and Sunder L. Gilman *Bertolt Brecht's Berlin. A Scrapbook of the Twenties*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1993 (first printing 1975). For Brecht, among numerous books and studies, John Willet's classic book *Brecht in Context. Comparative Approaches*, Methuen, London 1998 (revised edition; first published 1984) in perhaps the best introduction to Brecht's fascinations. On his formation, see Hans Otto Münsterer *The Young Brecht*, Libris, London 1992 (German original 1963).

¹⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (transl. By H. Zimmern), Dover, New York 1962.

¹⁵ Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was at first published in 1767/68 as periodical criticism of theater in Hamburg where he was engaged as dramaturg after he was expelled

tem (*abonnement*.) and establishment of worker's theatres which followed the same bourgeois aesthetics and shared with it a similar *abonnement* system, and especially after the fall of modern culture and its presumed values as a consequence of WWI cultural crisis, this theatre became predictable and boring, its audience was passive and uninvolved, and its actors seemed to be just doing a job without any passion and involvement. Or, it did not touch its audience any more, after the hell they have been in and through, and chaos which they lived after the war. It still represented life, but in eyes of new audiences it represented what was defeated in WWI. The division between stage and audience became an obstacle for Aristotelian effects, and Aristotelian effects seemed to be long outdated anyway. Physical culture was a similar case. Embedded in nationalist culture, it derived its components and overall structure and values from military exercises, but covered its function with myth and ideology of formation of beautiful and virtuous men and women, with bodies always prompt and ready to be sacrificed for national community and minds prepared to listen to orders. Its proper public appearance was at festivals and parades, not in sport competitions, and it did not allow for individualism or for free play of physical abilities. Physical culture was a disciplinary and social hygienic project which included national bodies into general formation of national collective. After WWI, these values were not in fashion with so called sacrificed generations of those who spent best years of their youth at some of the fronts of Europe, or went to school to be taught about ideals and values which everyday life denied and destroyed. Sport, however, was another story. In German eyes it arrived in Europe together with Americans, as jazz did. This included boxing, a typical individual fighting skill with struggle between two wills to win, and a possibility of a knock-out always present in spite of new rules which introduced points instead of earlier "box till one drops". It was what WWI proved not to be: a noble struggle of two wills, minds and bodies determined to win, but respecting each other's manhood and opponent's skills, with real sweat, pain and blood, and with involvement of a passionate audience from all strata of society, both sexes and all age groups. Sport was seen as something hap-

from Berlin and its Academy for his quarrels with Voltaire; a year later (1769) it appeared in book form as well. This book, which however depends very much on previous Diderot's works on theater, is often considered to be the bible of new theater.

pening on the other side of society, where strict rules of behaviour did not apply. There were old media covering sport, but not a media frenzy which happened much later. If you wanted to be included in sport, you either practiced it or had to go there, to watch it live. It was not just something alternative to collective physical culture; it was far away from aristocratic values of elite, including those of Olympic sport. Under this comparison, it had more to do with Alpine climbing, car racing, over-Atlantic flying, and similar challenges and risks which could prove that great achievements are still possible, as are strong determination and deep passions. Culture of the West has no use for pre-war institutionalised art any more. What it needs is a hook to the chin.

That culture of modernity is not a solution for troubles of civilisation, but part of the problem, was a common conclusion. Those who did not accept Oswald Spengler's prediction that West is on its way down had to look for alternative cultural model which would contradict the established one, as did Bertolt Brecht or, for instance, Oscar Pannwitz, a man who invented post-modernism and started pan-European movement. The alternative to physical culture was sport, and alternative to modern art was cinematography, but Brecht insisted on radical change in theatre as well. But to be successful Brecht had to re-introduce some passion and some reality in theatre, not only for its audience but for its actors and other stake-holders as well. Sport in general and boxing in particular could show them the right direction. In boxing both athletes and their public find a lot of joy, pleasure and delight, including passionate execution of skill and involvement of the public. For something to be aesthetic and have an artistic value, it has to be attractive to senses, it has to trigger strong emotions, and it has to keep a promise of pleasure, joy and delight. Slogan "More good sport!" is about that, and about more than just that: it underlines that dramatic conflict has to be as real as life itself for all who are involved in its presentation.

Social structure of the audience is very important for Brecht. He claims that bourgeois elite theatre's regular visitors belong to upper strata of society, and present themselves there more or less because it is a place which belongs to their collective identity. Quite the contrary, Brecht dislikes this kind of social division of theatrical space, and rejects stalls dramatic taste, their attentiveness and their tendency to get emotionally lost in fiction.

He prefers mixed audiences of all strata of society and mixed sexes, ages and races. Such audiences were not common before WWI, with exception of motion pictures which were thoroughly examined from moral point of view for that reason. Masses enjoying boxing were of that kind, massive mixed audiences in big halls with one thing on their mind: to get what they wanted — a battle of wills and passions, bodies in action, and some real life drama. And what they wanted, quite contrary to traditional theatre, they got. This was what theatre needed: urban mixture of folks. This mixture was the reason that movies were called “democratic art”.¹⁶ Boxing seemed to be even more democratic, because it had an appeal of plebeian taste for loosening the grip of ordinary rules of behaviour, and ability to push people over the line. Conventions, good behaviour and do-nots of theatre do not apply here. This mixed audience of boxing, an urban massive bunch of human bodies absorbed in dramatic event, was what Brecht loved and tried to transport into theatre. And this was also the dangerous mass of modernity, a necessary product of modernity but what modern times were and still are afraid of: subjects out of subjection to rules and control, out of their mind but fully inhabiting and enjoying their bodies, an erotic image of passionate absorption in event, capable of who knows what, seeing with a touch of camaraderie each other watching and enjoying the same thing, and each one seeing himself or herself unleashed and unplugged of ordinary social mechanisms of self- control and obedience.

Brecht believed *kalokagathia* to be in conflict with such understanding of sport, because it was a try to pacify and perhaps even erase this out-of-control situation with the help of morality, he felt also that sport might develop in wrong direction if it will be pressured to follow useful and rational ends. In his texts “*Sport und Geistiges Schaffen*” (1926) and “*Die Krise des Sportes*” (1928) he turns attention to processes which want to get general recognition of sport as socially useful and rational activity. This means, he thinks, that sport is getting clean of its subversive components, which are substituted by morally acceptable goals, while the whole field of public sport is constrained by more and more rules and by more and more scientific measurement of results. Taken together, these tendencies put sport in a straight-jacket of social acceptability. In the first text, he begins

¹⁶ Gart Jowett, *Film: the Democratic Art*, Little and Brown, Boston 1976.

by rejecting beautiful-and- virtuous as aesthetic and moral ideal of sport because even ugly or unhealthy body can do spiritually great things (some of this comes from his own health condition and physical inabilities), to attack preachers of hygiene immediately after: “Sport aus Hygiene ist etwas Abscheuliches” (*Sport for the sake of hygiene is something disgusting*).¹⁷ Hygienic purposes are those which use sport for healthy reasons, muscles building, keeping beautiful appearance and acceptable body weight, and many other similar reasons which turn sport into just a tool for non-sport use, while all its authentic desires, passions and delights born from conflict and playfulness disappear. This disappearance of autonomous core of sport is an announcement of its crisis: “Man könnte eine Menge verlockendes Arguments dafür anführen, dass der Sport in den Schulen gelehrt, von der Akademie kontrolliert und von der Nation zum Kulturgut arhoben werden müsse. Soll man es?”¹⁸ — *We can bring out a lot of attractive arguments in favour of sport being taught in schools, controlled by university and installed by nation into cultural good. But should we?*

When sport was still far from being controlled and pacified, boxing even more so, Brecht felt what is coming, and declared himself an enemy of prevailing developments in sport which turned sport into this kind of over-institutionalised global entertainment industry we have. Cultural goods, however, were his initial target already in the Twenties: “Kurz: ich bin gegen alle Bemühungen, den Sport zu einem Kulturgut zu machen, schon darum, weil ich weiss, was diese Gesellschaft mit Kulturguten alles treibt, weil und solange er riskant (ungesund), unkultiviert (also nicht gesellschaftsfähig) und Selbstzweck ist.”¹⁹ *Shortly: I stand against all efforts to turn sport in cultural good, firstly because I know what this society does with cultural goods, while sport is risky (unhealthy), uncultured (therefore socially not useful) and an end in itself.* That is a kind of theatre, against its traditional formula, Brecht wants: unhealthy, socially not useful, and uncultured. Society is in such a state that socially useful cultural goods cannot help it, quite the contrary, only those activities which are socially unacceptable

¹⁷ Bertolt Brecht, »Sport und geistiges Schaffen«, *Der Kinnhaken und andere Box- und Sportgeschichten*. (ed. by Günther Berg), Suhrkamp Verlag (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 2395), Frankfurt am Main 1995, p. 35.

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht, »Die Krise des Sportes«, *ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁹ Bertolt Brecht, »Die Krise des Sportes«, *ibid.*, p. 98.

may produce a healthy shock. It is not for sport or theatre to please society.

In his text “Die Todesfeinde des Sport” (1928/29; *Sport’s Deadly Enemies*) Brecht summarizes. There are two kinds of deadly enemies of sport, those who want to turn it into a hygienic movement for healthy mind in healthy body, and those who, with help of scientific drive of rationalisation and precise measurement want to confine it in rule-obedient and exactly measured noble art. Again, boxing is prime example, because its attractiveness comes from “box till one drops” execution, and not from socially pacified collecting of points.

According to Brecht, sport and theatre have an ability to reach beyond the ordinary, literally, beyond the established social order. Of course, artistic modernism of the fin-de-siècle worshipped trans-social power of the art, but what it had in mind was artistic nobility of sublime, something which everyday life of modern civilisation is deprived of. What Brecht claims is that art as sublime accessory cultivating vulgar everyday life kills exactly its ability to become a performative which opens horizons of social possibilities different from those which are already established. Traditional art of theatre confirms what already is even when it seems to be critical. The source of out-of-the-ordinary power is in the unhealthy, ignoble and self-sufficient which is to be found in sport, but not just in any kind of sport: boxing is here a primary example of primordial form of plebeian masculine combat which emanates aura of aesthetic power. This means, by the way, even if German has no distinction of the English pair of concepts, that Brecht call for more conflicting game in a theatrical play, where, beside performers on the stage entangled in their dramatic narrative, audience is attracted into the conflict, taking positions, expressing feelings and calculating about the outcome. This kind of public so common to sport spectatorship could bring real life into theatrical space. This means that all involved in this kind of theatre are taking a risk, sharing this risk, because something of utmost human and social value is at stake.

That is what Brecht had in mind when he repeatedly recommended boxing as a paradigm for new theatre, when he demanded more good sport in art, and when he warned against deterioration of sport into hygienic and pure rational, mathematically and rationally controlled contest. It might sound too daring to say that his theory of *Verfremdung* effect is a knockout

approach to theatre, to overthrow theatrical fiction which keeps audience in entertaining and pacifying illusion, and to turn attention on total risk involved in its drama.

There is one additional reason for boxing: it is a man's sport, a sport where concrete manhood is at stake. Not that victory means that you are a man, and defeat that you are not. In boxing, fighters enter into a ring which symbolises the four sides of the masculine universe of will, conflict, skill and nobility. You risk all these just entering into a combat which, according to Brecht, should still, in spite of new rules, continue till one or the other fighter drops down. That is also the point made by the "Hook to the Chin" short story. Freddy, upcoming champion, goes to a bar before his most important match, and feels an urge to drink a glass of beer, but his manager advises him not to, because it would be sheer madness just before the fight. Freddy obeys this prohibition, but feels that he is not equal to other men around the table any more, and that his passion for boxing became an obligation and obstacle. He leaves the bar in bad mood. After the match, again with beer in their hands, a company of friends with their elbows in puddles of beer give this report:

Although we were all pretty clear in our minds about the outcome of the fight, I nevertheless asked for the sake of completeness, "Yes, and..."

"He was knocked out in the second round. What else did you expect?"

"Nothing, but why was it, do you think, that he was k.o'd?"

"Quite simple. When we went out of the bar I knew Freddy had a low opinion of himself."

"That is pretty clear," I said, "but what, in your opinion, should a man in Freddy's position have done?"

The man emptied his glass and said, "A man's got to do what a man's got to do. In my opinion. You know, caution is the mother of the knock-out."²⁰

²⁰ Bertolt Brecht, "A Hook to the Chin", *Bert Brecht Short Stories 1921-1946*, Methuen, London and New York 1983, p. 71.