

Wendy Arons

## KURT HIRSCHFELD AND THE VISIONARY INTERNATIONALISM OF THE SCHAUSPIELHAUS ZÜRICH

Outside Switzerland, the Schauspielhaus Zürich (Zürich Playhouse) is best known among theatre historians for the role it played in supporting and advancing the career of German playwright Bertolt Brecht during and just after World War II. We learn, from our studies of Brecht, that while he was living in exile in Finland and the United States his plays *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, and *Galileo* all received their first productions in Zürich,

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I wish to thank here Bernard Blum, Kurt Hirschfeld's nephew, both for bringing my attention to this remarkable theatre maker's story and also for having been the driving force behind digitizing Hirschfeld's archival papers and making them publicly available through the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI). This article is an expansion of a paper delivered at the 2015 "Weltbühne Zürich" conference, which took place at the Schauspielhaus Zürich and was sponsored and organized by Bernie Blum and the LBI's Frank Mecklenburg, Daniel Wildmann, and Raphael Gross. A version of this article in German will appear as a chapter in the forthcoming *Weltbühne Zürich: Kurt Hirschfeld und das deutschsprachige Theater im Schweizer Exil*, ed. Hans Hoenes (Mohr Siebeck). Thanks are also due to Hirschfeld's daughter, Ruth Hirschfeld, who generously made a cache of her father's correspondence available to the LBI team to digitize, including newly discovered letters to and from both Thornton Wilder and Bertolt Brecht.

and that when he returned to Europe from exile the city was also his initial destination.<sup>1</sup> Brecht was not the only exiled playwright to find a producing home at the Schauspielhaus; the theatre has additionally long been recognized, particularly among German and Swiss theatre historians, for the important role it played in producing the work of many other exiled German and Austrian playwrights during World War II. Some American theatre historians have also made note of the quality of the work produced at the Schauspielhaus: for example, Oscar Brockett mentions the Zürich theatre in passing as “one of the best in Europe during the Nazi regime because so many refugees settled in Switzerland.”<sup>2</sup> But what remains underrecognized among historians outside Switzerland is the pivotal role that both the Schauspielhaus and its dramaturg (and later artistic director) Kurt Hirschfeld played in keeping an international repertoire on life support in Europe when most of the Continent was under Nazi occupation (Fig. 1). A look at the list of wartime and postwar productions at the Schauspielhaus reveals a veritable who’s who of the modern Western dramatic canon: productions of works by playwrights like Karel Čapek, Thornton Wilder, Jean Giraudoux, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Claudel, Federico García Lorca, T. S. Eliot, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Luigi Pirandello, and many, many—in fact, many dozens—of others.

As such, the largely untold story of the Schauspielhaus is one of an isolated theatre that—in the midst of a war that either disrupted or homogenized theatrical production throughout the rest of Europe—managed to remain connected with the wider world, mainly through the efforts of a dramaturg who had his finger on the pulse of the international theatre scene. Kurt Hirschfeld’s archives reveal, moreover, that it is also the story of a visionary, of a man who not only used the power of season planning to keep his creative colleagues and his local audience connected to international and anti-Fascist ideas and inspirations during World War II—an important accomplishment in its own right—but who also, through his aesthetic and intellectual choices, played a key role in establishing what would be the international canon for the German, and perhaps European, stage in the immediate postwar period.

In what follows I aim to connect the selection of international works at the Zürich Schauspielhaus both to the historical conditions in which Hirschfeld and the other members of the Zürich ensemble worked, and to the dramaturgical, aesthetic, and social mission for theatre articulated by Hirschfeld throughout his career. But before turning to that history, I want to point to and acknowledge an inherent difficulty in drawing a boundary around my subject. To a viewer from outside Switzerland, the internationalism of the Schauspielhaus during and after the war might seem primarily defined by the range and variety of works produced that were originally written in the United States, France, England, Spain, Italy, Russia, and so on—that is, plays imported from non-German-speaking lands. But of course, plays written by German or Austrian writers were and are also foreign to Switzerland. Nevertheless, it seems that there are two interrelated stories that can be told about the programming at the Schauspielhaus during and after the war: the fairly well-known story of its role as the only remaining independent home for the work of exiled German and Austrian writers, and the lesser-recognized story of its commitment to producing new work in translation by



**Figure 1.**

Photographic portrait of Kurt Hirschfeld. *Photo:* Collman Darmstadt.  
Courtesy Leo Baeck Institute, NY.

writers from around the world. It is the second of these stories that I focus on here; and in the process I hope I do not give the impression that I have forgotten that Switzerland is not Germany or Austria, and that non-Swiss German-language plays that premiered at the Schauspielhaus also contributed to the internationalism of its repertoire.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, because the theatre staged the work of so many individual authors (I stopped counting at sixty the last time I tried to tally them) from so many countries—including England, France, the United States, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and Czechoslovakia—it would be impossible for me to encompass in its entirety the scope of the Schauspielhaus's internationalism in this relatively short article. Rather than attempting a comprehensive account, I've instead chosen to focus on the authors and plays that seem to have mattered most to Kurt Hirschfeld himself. In the post-war years Hirschfeld wrote a number of speeches and articles in which he laid out his reasons for having featured the work of certain French, British, and American authors, and his archives contain those documents along with newspaper reviews, correspondence, and other writings that help us to understand the intent and impact of key productions from the modern international dramatic repertoire. By focusing on those authors and works that Hirschfeld wrote about most frequently as he looked back on his work at the Schauspielhaus, I not only find a natural framework for condensing this material into a manageable dimension, but can also use his own words to explain why he was so strongly committed to programming an international repertory during and just after the war.<sup>4</sup>

#### KURT HIRSCHFELD

The writing of theatre history usually scaffolds around the work of key playwrights, directors, actors, or companies; rarely do theatre historians shine light on the work of a dramaturg. Kurt Hirschfeld's story may be all the more remarkable because his accomplishments took place, as so much dramaturgical work does, out of the limelight. Yet both his life and his work were distinguished by considerable intellectual courage and moments of behind-the-scenes heroism. Born in 1902 in Lehrte, near Hanover, into a Jewish family, Hirschfeld studied philosophy and philology in Frankfurt and Göttingen, and then spent the first few years of his career working as a freelance editor, radio producer, and theatre journalist, apprenticing in the late 1920s under the influential Berlin critic Herbert Ihering at the left-leaning *Berliner Börsen-Courier* [Berlin Stock Exchange Courier].<sup>5</sup> In 1931, the dynamic leftist director Gustav Hartung—who had made a name for himself as a leading interpreter of expressionist plays—took over as artistic director of the Darmstadt State Theatre and brought Hirschfeld on board as the theatre's dramaturg and his own right-hand man. For the next two years, Hirschfeld helped to craft the theatre's repertoire, served as the theatre's literary manager and production dramaturg, occasionally directed, and also transformed the *Blätter des Hessischen Landestheaters* [Journal of the Hessian State Theatre] into one of the country's leading theatre newspapers.

In March 1933, the Nazi Party took control of the German government and began its purge of communists, anti-Fascists, and Jews from the theatre; on 13 March, in one of his first official acts as the newly elected governor of Hessen, the rabidly anti-Semitic Ferdinand Werner dismissed Hartung from his position as artistic director of the theatre. Hartung fled that same day to Basel, Switzerland; Hirschfeld, who had been warned that his name also stood on a

blacklist, had days earlier moved out of his apartment and into a hotel, and he now followed Hartung's lead and had some friends spirit him out of Darmstadt.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after Hartung's arrival in Basel, the owner of the Zürich Schauspielhaus, Ferdinand Rieser, called to offer him work directing in Zürich; Hartung insisted that Rieser—who had little interest in having a dramaturg on staff—hire Hirschfeld as well. It took several weeks for Rieser to locate Hirschfeld, who had gone into hiding in Berlin. Hirschfeld later would tell the following story of receiving Rieser's call at the apartment of the scenic designer Wilhelm Reinking, with whom he was living in secret:

I thought someone was playing a bad joke on me. Imagine if you will: on one end of the telephone line, in Berlin . . . a young man who had just been fired for political reasons from his prominent position at the notoriously avant-garde theatre in Darmstadt; on the other end, an upstanding Swiss theatre manager, who wants me to believe that I am the right man for him. My answer was: "I'll come if you wire me the travel money within three hours." The money came right on time.<sup>7</sup>

Hirschfeld left immediately for Zürich. He couldn't have known it at the time, but the city would become his adopted home for the rest of his life.

Hirschfeld's engagement at the Schauspielhaus would prove to have a decisive and lasting impact. When Rieser—a Jewish businessman who had made a fortune in his family's wine business—initially took over ownership and management of the theatre in 1926, he ran it primarily as a commercial enterprise, with a focus on producing entertaining plays that would fill the house and turn a profit. He had neither the interest, expertise, nor, importantly, the talent among his artists to expand the theatre's offerings beyond what Hirschfeld labeled "popular entertainment of hit-or-miss quality and indiscriminate origin."<sup>8</sup> Hirschfeld's arrival in 1933 helped to shape and influence the development of the Schauspielhaus in two important ways. The first was on the level of personnel and talent: Hirschfeld immediately went to work identifying exiled or threatened artists who could turn the Schauspielhaus into a first-class theatre.<sup>9</sup> In his history *Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus*, Werner Mittenzwei relates that as theatre artists began to flee Hitler's Germany in 1933, Rieser seized on the opportunity to engage exiled actors, directors, and designers at bargain basement wages, and he relied heavily on Hirschfeld's expertise and connections as he went about recruiting talent.<sup>10</sup> Mittenzwei writes, "It was Hirschfeld who very deliberately pointed out to Rieser certain actors who had either already left Germany or had a mind to do so."<sup>11</sup> The people Hirschfeld brought to Zürich included some of the best actors, designers, and directors of the German-speaking world, among them director Leopold Lindtberg, designer Teo Otto, and actors Therese Giehse, Ernst Ginsberg, Kurt Horwitz, Erwin Kalser, Karl Paryla, Leonard Steckel, and Wolfgang Langhoff.<sup>12</sup> For many of these artists, acquaintanceship with Hirschfeld would prove to be life saving: for example, Ginsberg, a Berlin actor who had worked with Hirschfeld in Darmstadt, later wrote, "I would have Kurt Hirschfeld to thank for my rescue to Zürich";<sup>13</sup> and actor Wolfgang Langhoff—an

outspoken communist who had been arrested and tortured by the Nazis—managed to make it across the Swiss–German border just hours before it was sealed on the “Night of the Long Knives” thanks to Hirschfeld’s success in arranging for a pair of friends to smuggle him into Switzerland.<sup>14</sup>

This “emigrant ensemble” quickly began to transform the Schauspielhaus from a commercial enterprise to a theatre of major cultural importance, as they brought not only the requisite skill and artistry to successfully produce a more expanded and challenging repertoire, but also a commitment to using theatre for social and political purposes. They worked in the belief, as Hirschfeld put it, that they “could do meaningful work, that . . . they could shine light on political, ethical, and religious issues. They could help save and protect an endangered way of life.”<sup>15</sup> For these accomplished, experienced artists, theatre’s purpose was not merely to entertain and offer diversion, but also to function as a moral institution, as the place where—again, to quote Hirschfeld—“an image of human beingness that encompasses its manifold nature, with the full breadth of its given potential, seen from every possible point of view, would repeatedly be put up for discussion.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, because all of the emigrant artists were in exile either because of their political beliefs or due to religious faith or sexual orientation (or some combination thereof), they felt duty-bound to use their work to stage resistance against Fascism to whatever extent possible.<sup>17</sup> As such, the ensemble of exiles that Hirschfeld helped Rieser assemble in the wake of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany infused the Schauspielhaus with a more urgent political and social purpose than Rieser—who was purportedly mainly interested in actors who “could wear a tailcoat”—had originally bargained for.<sup>18</sup>

The second way in which Hirschfeld was influential, of course, was in his capacity as dramaturg. Hirschfeld brought to Zürich a distinct understanding of the role of theatre in society, one influenced by both his aesthetic leaning toward “realism” in the theatre and his leftist–humanist political orientation. Although Hirschfeld was a close collaborator with Hartung, he did not share Hartung’s affinity for expressionism, which, in the postwar period, Hirschfeld called the “dehumanizing of theatre” and came to associate with the rise of Fascism.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Hirschfeld advocated for a theatre of “humanist realism,” in which both play and actor sought to put a “reality” onstage that depicted “the human being as human being and in the totality of his psychological and sociological connections.”<sup>20</sup> As I outline in more detail below, this interest in using theatre to explore the complexity and ambiguity of human experience would be a key factor in Hirschfeld’s programming of an international repertoire at the Schauspielhaus. As a dramaturg and director in Darmstadt, Hirschfeld had worked on a variety of both classic and modern works, and he had developed both a broad knowledge of contemporary theatre and a growing network of acquaintance among contemporary playwrights and other theatre artists.<sup>21</sup> Having helped to gather a group of like-minded colleagues in Zürich, Hirschfeld now worked with them to transform the theatre’s mission. In 1976 actor Wolfgang Heinz described to historian Werner Mittenzwei how, during Rieser’s tenure, select members of the ensemble (a group they named, in English, “Gentleman-Agreement”) met weekly with Hirschfeld not only to read and propose plays for the season, but also to discuss

how best to cast and interpret both classical and modern plays, all with the express purpose of using the theatre to counter Fascism. Hirschfeld's considerable knowledge of dramatic literature was invaluable to this task. But perhaps even more important was his political savvy in getting the selected plays into the repertoire. Mittenzwei notes that Hirschfeld had the difficult task of "pushing these proposals past Rieser. . . . The main goal was to . . . get political plays into the season and squeeze out the popular entertainment."<sup>22</sup> He was successful: in the 1933–4 season, among a slate of classics and boulevard comedies, the Schauspielhaus produced several new works by exiled German authors and contemporary international playwrights, among them two plays that were expressly critical of Nazi racial policies—Ferdinand Bruckner's *Race* and Friedrich Wolf's *Professor Mannheim*.<sup>23</sup>

Hirschfeld's relationship with Rieser was a rocky one, however, and in the spring of 1934 Rieser fired Hirschfeld after discovering that Hirschfeld had secreted in his desk drawer several letters of dismissal that Rieser had, in a fit of anger, given him to pass on to company members; Rieser was also, apparently, piqued over Hirschfeld's refusal to be his spy among other members of the company. Hirschfeld's dismissal from the theatre meant that he no longer had the work permit that allowed him to remain in Switzerland. With help from friends, he arranged to travel to Moscow in the summer of 1934, where he spent the next two years serving as a correspondent for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* [New Zürich Newspaper] and also working as assistant director to Vsevolod Meyerhold. In the spring of 1936, Hirschfeld's engagement as a guest director at the Basel Stadttheater secured him the documentation to return to Switzerland; the ensuing two years found him again in Zürich, working as an editor and reviewer for publisher Emil Oprecht. During this time, although he was not officially employed by the Schauspielhaus, Hirschfeld seems to have kept in constant contact with his old colleagues and served as a resource and advisor to the efforts by the members of the emigrant ensemble to bring more socially engaged work onto the stage—as Huonker notes, "There is little doubt that he also unofficially helped set the course for the 'Gentleman-Agreement' from 1934 to 1938."<sup>24</sup>

When in 1938 Ferdinand Rieser announced his plans to step down as owner and manager of the theatre—a development that put the emigrant artists at the Schauspielhaus at risk of losing their work permits and facing deportation and arrest by the Nazis—Hirschfeld worked behind the scenes to rescue the theatre by helping to negotiate a private–public partnership between a group of investors, spearheaded by Oprecht and other prominent Zürich business owners, and the Zürich city council, which eventually led to the establishment of the "Neue Schauspiel AG" [New Playhouse Company] as a municipal theatre and the appointment of Oscar Wälterlin as the theatre's new artistic director.<sup>25</sup> In late summer 1938, Hirschfeld again took up the reins as the theatre's resident dramaturg and occupied that position until 1961, when he was promoted to artistic director of the theatre, a post he held until his death from lung cancer in 1964. Throughout World War II, then, Hirschfeld was the driving force behind season planning for "the only free stage of high artistic rank in the German-speaking lands," and in the decades that followed the war he continued to use his power

Figure 2.

“Anhang: Auswahl von seit 1933 im Schauspielhaus Zürich  
 gespielten Stücken in chronologischer Reihenfolge”  
 [Appendix: Selection of Plays Produced at the Schauspielhaus  
 Zürich since 1933 in Chronological Order], from Theresa  
 Giehse et al., *Theater: Meinungen und Erfahrungen* (Affoltern  
 am Albis: Aehren Verlag, 1945), 59–61.





César; Hart-Kaufmann: Freut euch des Lebens (You can't take it with you).

1938/39: Sophokles: König Oedipus; Shakespeare: Troilus und Cressida; Molière: Tartuffe — Die Schule der Frauen; Lessing: Nathan der Weise; Goethe: Götz von Berlichingen; Schiller: Wilhelm Tell — Die Jungfrau von Orléans; Dostojewsky (Trivas-Schdanoff): Schuld und Sühne; Tolstoi: Die Macht der Finsternis; Dumas-fils: Die Kameliendame; Shaw: Frau Warrens Gewerbe — Helden; Hauptmann: Hanneles Himmel-fahrt; Ibsen: Die Wildente; Zuckmayer: Bellman; Kesser: Talleyrand und Napoleon; Goetz: Die tote Tante; Hare: Fräulein Dr. med. Lawrence; Horne: Ja und Nein; Wilder: Eine kleine Stadt; von Arx: Der kleine Sündenfall; Haggenmacher: Die Venus vom Tivoli; Gehri: 6. Etage; Lesch: Jedermann 1938; Guggenheim: Bomber für Japan; Gertsch: Sir Basils letztes Geschäft.

1939/40: Sophokles: Antigone; Shakespeare: Komödie der Irrungen — Viel Lärm um nichts; Calderon: Der Richter von Zalamea; Lessing: Emilia Galotti; Goethe: Faust I und II; Scribe: Ein Glas Wasser; Büchner: Dantons Tod; Grillparzer: Weh dem, der lügt; Hebbel: Judith; Nestroy: Lumpazivagabundus; Ibsen: Ein Volksfeind; Molnar: Spiel im Schloß; Hofmannsthal: Das große Welttheater; Shaw: Die heilige Johanna; Mc Craeken: Friedliche Hochzeit; Lagerlöf: Der Kaiser von Portugalien; Sherwood: Lincoln; Priestley: Die Zeit und die Conways; Williams: Die Nacht wird kommen; Giraudoux: Undine; Mäglin-Haug: Gilberte de Courgenay; Bühler: Pioniere; Welti: Steibruch.

1940/41: Shakespeare: Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor — Romeo und Julia — Julius Cäsar; Calderon: Dame Kobold; Goldoni: Das Kaffeehaus; Beaumarchais: Figaros Hochzeit; Goethe: Iphigenie auf Tauris; Schiller: Maria Stuart — Don Carlos; Raimund: Der Bauer als Millionär; Chesterton: Magie; Ibsen: Gespenster; Hauptmann: Die Ratten; Wilde: Bunbury; Bahr: Das Konzert; Feiler: Heinrich VIII. und seine sechste Frau; Kaiser: Der Soldat Tanaka; Shaw, Irwin: Feine Leute; Götz: Der Lügner und die Nonne; Brecht: Mutter Courage; Faesi: Die Fassade; Guggenheim-Ramuz: Frymann; Gertsch: Die Ehe ein Traum; von Arx: Romanze in Plüsch.

1941/42: Aischilos: Orestie; Shakespeare: König Johann — König Heinrich IV. — König Richard III. — Der Sturm; Lope de Vega: Der Ritter vom Mirakel; Molière: Heirat wider Willen; Courteline: Mimensiege — Ein ruhiges Heim; Goethe: Torquato Tasso; Schiller: Die Braut von Messina; Nestroy: Einen Jux will er sich machen; Ibsen: John Gabriel Borkman; Hauptmann: Fuhrmann Henschel; Tolstoi: Der lebende Leichnam — Er ist an allem schuld; Tschchow: Onkel Wanja; Schnitzler: Liebele; Hofmannsthal: Elektra; Shaw: Man kann nie wissen — Major Barbara; Wedekind: Frühlings Erwachen; Ardrey: Leuchtefeuer; Goetz: Ingeborg; Bourdet: Das schwache Geschlecht; Hodge: Regen und Wind; Hart-Kaufmann: Hier schlief George Washington; Pagnol: Marius; Frank-Lenz: Mira Bell; Widmann: Maikäfer-Komödie.

1942/43: Sophokles: Aias; Shakespeare: Wie es euch gefällt — Timon von Athen; Goldoni: Der Diener zweier Herren; Schiller: Fiesco — Kabale und Liebe; Kleist: Penthesilea; Grillparzer: Ein Bruderzwist in Habsburg; Ibsen: Der Bund der Jugend; Hauptmann: Schluck und Jau; Anzengruber: Das vierte Gebot; Gogol: Der Revisor; Hofmannsthal: Der Turm; Shaw: Cäsar und Cleopatra; Williams: Der Morgenstern; Kesser: Professor Inter-mann; O'Neill: Trauern muß Elektra; Raphaelson: Jugend im Herbst; Brecht: Der gute Mensch von Sezuan; Treichlinger: Göttin, versuche die Menschen nicht; Guggenheim: Der sterbende Schwan.

1943/44: Shakespeare: Othello — Maß für Maß; Lope de Vega: Wer kam denn da... ins Haus?; Molière: Der Misanthrop; Schiller: Wallenstein-Trilogie; Schiller-Racine: Phädra; Nestroy: Der Zerrissene; Tolstoi: Und das Licht leuchtet in der Finsternis; Strindberg: Königin Christine; Kaiser: Zweimal Amphytrion; Coward: Weekend; Brecht: Galileo Galilei; Claudel: Der seidene Schuh; Wilder: Wir sind noch einmal davongekommen; Lorea: Bluthochzeit; Giraudoux: Sodom und Gomorria; Steinbeck: Der Mond ging unter; Gehri: Neues aus der 6. Etage; von Arx: Land ohne Himmel; Keller: Camping.

1944/45: Shakespeare: Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung — Perikles von Tyrus; Lessing: Minna von Barnhelm; Goethe: Egmont; Hebbel: Maria Magdalene; Nestroy: Zu ebener Erde und im ersten Stok; Raimund: Der Verschwender; Ibsen: Nora; Hauptmann: Rose Bernd; Shaw: Kapitän Braßbonds Bekehrung; Tschchow: Der Kirsehgarten; Hofmannsthal: Christinas Heimreise; Synge: Der Held des Westerlandes; Cronin: Jupiter lacht; Sartre: Die Fliegen; Claudel: Der Bürge; Munk: Niels Ebbsen; Werfel: Jakobowsky und der Oberst; Silone: Und er verbarg sich; Eliot: Die Familienfeier; Schwengeler: Rebell in der Arche; Frisch: Nun singen sie wieder.

1945/46: Shakespeare: Was ihr wollt; Goethe: Pandora; Grillparzer: Des Meeres und der Liebe Wellen; Hauptmann: Florian Geyer; Gorki: Nachtsyl; Brecht: Mutter Courage; Adam: Sylvia und das Gespenst; Coward: Fröhliche Geister; Bruckner: Die Befreiten.

## Gastspiele und Veranstaltungen im Schauspielhaus

1933/45

1933/34: Tilla Durieux, Agnes Straub, Max Pellenberg, Ensemble Bassermann — Moissi — Durieux — Deutsch, Albert und Else Bassermann, Dolly Haas, Reinhardt-Tournée, Grete Mosheim, Kabarett der Komiker: Bois — Lion — Bressard — Robitschek, Compagnie Pitoëff. — Thomas Mann sprach über: Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners — Goethe als Repräsentant des bürgerlichen Zeitalters. — Franz Werfel las aus: Die 30 Tage des Musa Dagh.

over the repertory to earn the Schauspielhaus “European significance and international standing.”<sup>26</sup>

#### THE REPERTOIRE—OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

The lists of plays produced during Hirschfeld’s tenure as the theatre’s dramaturg reveal a number of broad patterns (Fig. 2). To begin with, the repertoire was characterized by a heavy rotation of classical works from the Western canon. In addition to the occasional Greek tragedy, audiences received a steady diet of Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European canon was also well-represented, with plays by Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, Calderón, Lope de Vega, and Goldoni. In addition, the programming drew heavily not only on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German and Austrian authors—Kleist, Büchner, Wedekind, Hebbel, Hauptmann, Grillparzer, Hofmannsthal, and Nestroy—but also regularly presented plays by the major European and British writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like Gogol, Ibsen, Chekhov, Wilde, Tolstoy, Scribe, Strindberg, Pirandello, Shaw, and Synge. Thus already, even before we take the twentieth-century world- and German-language premieres into account, we see a commitment to internationalism and eclecticism in the selection of classical works and in the range of time periods and national literatures represented.

When we focus on the new and contemporary works produced at the Schauspielhaus, four generalizations can be made from an overview of the data. The first is a trend toward the inclusion of new works from Europe and abroad, and particularly from France and the United States. The records in the archives are incomplete, but to date I have been able to determine that between 1933 and 1960 at least 115 contemporary works translated from another language were produced on the Zürich stage (Fig. 3); around three-quarters of those were German-language premieres, and in several cases the Zürich production represented the very first production outside the playwright’s native country. Indeed, in many of these years the number of new plays in translation equaled, if not exceeded, the number of new works originally written in German.

The second remarkable feature is the timeliness of many of these productions; in many cases, the Zürich production occurred very shortly after the play’s writing or its native-language premiere. Taken together with the fact that, during and right after the war, the Schauspielhaus also presented world premieres of plays by leading German and Austrian playwrights like Friedrich Wolf, Georg Kaiser, Carl Zuckmayer, Else Lasker-Schüler, Bertolt Brecht, and Ferdinand Bruckner, in addition to Swiss writers Frisch and Dürrenmatt, this contemporaneity put Zürich at the center of international theatrical trends.

A third broad pattern we can discern from an overview of plays produced is a trend toward the inclusion of relatively challenging, more formally and topically diverse works. Only a handful of the international plays produced in Zürich would fall into the category of “popular entertainment,” and among the foreign works are some of the most difficult plays in the dramatic literature of the time—for example, Paul Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper*, which would run eleven

hours if performed in its entirety, or Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophically challenging *The Flies*.

And a final, fourth generalization that can be drawn about the programming at the Schauspielhaus during and just after the war is that it almost exclusively featured works written by European and American men. There is not a single non-Western work represented in any of the lists I have found, nor any works by any non-Caucasian writers; moreover, only a tiny fraction—perhaps three or four—of the hundreds of plays produced were written by women. This is hardly surprising or even particularly noteworthy, given the historical period; I call attention to it only because even though, as I soon elaborate, the selection of international works aimed at putting onstage (to quote Hirschfeld again) “the human being as human being and in the totality of his psychological and sociological connections,” the lack of racial and gender diversity among the writers represented points to the limits of that totality (and vividly reveals the implicit biases at work in canon formation).<sup>27</sup>

What Zürich audiences also saw very little of in the seven war years after the Schauspielhaus became a municipal theatre in 1938 were pointedly political plays, particularly unequivocally anti-Fascist works. As several historians have pointed out, as a private businessman running a purely commercial enterprise Rieser had enjoyed much greater freedom to stage work that was directly critical of the Nazis, and even though he was primarily interested in providing light entertainment to his audiences, he did produce a number of plays that raised hackles among Swiss “frontists” sympathetic to the Third Reich.<sup>28</sup> Once the Schauspielhaus came under the public purview, however, it had to be more circumspect.<sup>29</sup> Even though Switzerland never came under Nazi control, when the cultural ministry of the Third Reich began to pursue its policy of *Gleichschaltung* (cultural conformity) across German-language territories it put Swiss German theatres under enormous pressure to steer clear of work critical of the Nazi regime and its policies. It did this through strict policing of Reich theatre artists who crossed the border to work in Switzerland, through infiltration of Swiss theatres with Nazi sympathizers, and through diplomatic pressures at the top levels of government.<sup>30</sup> Yet although Switzerland had its own nationalist faction eager to “Swissify” cultural institutions and purge them of “foreign influence,” the discourse that eventually prevailed staunchly defended Switzerland's status as a political democracy. Switzerland—a country situated geographically between France, Italy, and Germany and constituted as a confederation of diverse linguistic and cultural communities—imagined itself, in opposition to the Third Reich, as a “voluntary nation,” and, as such, needed to find ways to define and police its “spiritual” borders as well as its physical ones.<sup>31</sup> Literature and theatre were seen as key to unifying the Swiss nation and delineating its national characteristics, among which was the defining quality of “neutrality.”<sup>32</sup> The internationalism Hirschfeld fostered at the Schauspielhaus was thus, to a certain extent, a strategic response to the call for theatre to play its role in Switzerland's “spiritual national defense,” a task that took on fresh urgency in the late 1930s with the Nazi annexation of German-speaking lands in Austria and Czechoslovakia. The

Theatre Survey

Season	W/G/ SW	Playwright	Title	Coun try	Season	W/G/ SW	Playwright
1933/34		Shaw, G.B.	<i>The Apple Cart</i>	UK	1945/46	G	Adam, Alfred
1933/34	W	Shaw, G.B.	<i>Village Wooing</i>	UK	1945/46	G	Claudé, Paul
1933/35	SW	Shaw, G.B.	<i>The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet</i>	UK	1945/46	SW	Coward, Noel
1934/35	G	Lavery, Emmet	<i>The First Legion</i>	US	1945/46	G	Giraudoux, Jean
1934/35	SW	Maugham, Somerset	<i>Rain</i>	US	1945/46	SW	Kesselring, Joseph
1934/35	G	Shaw, G.B.	<i>You Never Can Tell</i>	UK	1945/46	SW	Priestly, J. B.
1935/36	G	de Benedetti, Aldo	<i>I don't know you anymore</i>	IT	1946/47	G	Anouilh, Jean
1935/36	G	Rice, Elmer	<i>Juristen</i>	US	1946/47	G	Eliot, T.S.
1936/37	G	Capek, Karel	<i>The White Disease</i>	CZ	1946/47	G	Gorki, Maxim
1936/37	G	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>The Trojan War will not Take Place</i>	FR	1946/47	G	Osborne, Paul
1937/38	G	Capek, Karel	<i>The Mother</i>	CZ	1946/47	G	Saroyan, William
1937/38	G	Kaufman and Hart	<i>You Can't Take it With you</i>	US	1946/47	G	Vermorel, Claude
1938/39		Horne, Kenneth	<i>Yes and No</i>	UK	1946/47	G	Williams, Tennessee
1938/39	G	Wilder, Thornton	<i>Our Town</i>	US	1947/48	G	Cocteau, Jean
1939/40	SW	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>Ondine</i>	FR	1947/48	G	Druten, John van
1939/40	G	McCracken, Esther	<i>Quiet Wedding</i>	UK	1947/48	G	Lorca, Federico Garcia
1939/40	G	Priestly, J. B.	<i>Time and the Conways</i>	UK	1947/48		Pagnol, Marcel
1939/40		Sherwood, Robert E.	<i>Lincoln</i>	US	1947/48	G	Saroyan, William
1939/40	G	Williams, Emyln	<i>Night Must Fall</i>	UK	1947/48	SW	Schward, Jewgenij
1940/41	G	Shaw, Irwin	<i>The Gentle People</i>	US	1948/49	G	Casona, Alejandro
1941/42	G	Ardrey, Robert	<i>Thunder Rock</i>	US	1948/49	G	Sartre, Jean-Paul
1941/42	SW	Hodge, Merton	<i>The Wind and the Rain</i>	NZ	1948/49	W	Shaw, G.B.
1941/42	G	Kaufman and Hart	<i>George Washington Slept Here</i>	US	1949/50	G	Miller, Arthur
1941/42	SW	Pagnol, Marcel	<i>Marius</i>	FR	1949/50	G	Pirandello, Luigi
1942/43	G	Besson, Rene	<i>Le palais d'Argile</i>	FR	1949/50		Shaw, G.B.
1942/43	G	O'Neill, Eugene	<i>Mourning Becomes Electra</i>	US	1949/50	G	Williams, Tennessee
1942/43	SW	Raphaelson, Samson	<i>Young Love</i>	US	1950/51	G	Ayme, Marcel
1942/43	G	Williams, Emyln	<i>The Morning Star</i>	UK	1950/51	W	Bernanos, Georges
1943/44	G	Claudé, Paul	<i>Le Soulier Satin</i>	FR	1950/51	G	Camus, Albert
1943/44		Coward, Noel	<i>Weekend</i>	UK	1950/51	SW	Eliot, T. S.
1943/44	G	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>Sodom et Gomorrhe</i>	FR	1950/51	SW	Giraudoux, Jean
1943/44	G	Lorca, Federico Garcia	<i>Bodas de Sangre</i>	SP	1950/51	G	O'Neill, Eugene
1943/44		Steinbeck, John	<i>The Moon is Down</i>	US	1951/52	G	Fry, Christopher
1943/44	G	Wilder, Thornton	<i>The Skin of Our Teeth</i>	US	1951/52	G	Giovaninetti, Silvio
1944/45	SW	Claudé, Paul	<i>L'Otage (The Hostage)</i>	FR	1951/52	G	Sartre, Jean-Paul
1944/45	G	Cronin, A.J.	<i>Jupiter laughs</i>	SCOT	1951/52		Shaw, G.B.
1944/45	G	Eliot, T.S.	<i>The Family Reunion</i>	UK	1952/53	G	O'Casey, Sean
1944/45	G	Sartre, Jean-Paul	<i>Les Mouches</i>	FR	1952/53		Pirandello, Luigi
1944/45	W	Silone, Ignazio	<i>Ed egli si nascose</i>	IT	1952/53	W	Sartre, Jean-Paul

Figure 3.

List of international plays produced at the Schauspielhaus Zürich, 1933–60.

brochure for the 1938–9 season of the Schauspielhaus—the first under the Wälterlin–Hirschfeld leadership team—connects the dots clearly:

The phrase spiritual national defense is on everyone's lips today. It should not mean limitation, but expansion. The Swiss spirit has never seen our mountains as walls, but rather as heights, from which we could keep a lookout for new values, wherever they may come from. . . . At a time when factionalism threatens to drag the world to the edge of the abyss, art has its meaningful place in a country whose spirit is neutrality. Not a neutrality behind which we fearfully entrench ourselves, but neutrality as impartiality, as the ground

## Kurt Hirschfeld and the Schauspielhaus Zürich

Title	Country	Season	W/G/SW	Playwright	Title	Country
<i>Sylvie et le Fantome</i>	FR	1952/53		Shaw, G. B.	<i>Pygmalion</i>	UK
<i>Le pere humilié</i>	FR	1952/53	SW	Ustinov, Peter	<i>The Love of Four Colonels</i>	UK
<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	UK	1953/54	SW	Beckett, Samuel	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	FR
<i>La Folle de Chaillot</i>	FR	1953/54	SW	Claudé, Paul	<i>L'histoire de Tobie et Sara</i>	FR
<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	US	1953/54	W	Giovaninetti, Silvio	<i>Il sangue verde</i>	IT
<i>The Came to a City</i>	UK	1953/54	SW	Knott, Frederick	<i>Dial M for Murder</i>	UK
<i>Eurydice</i>	FR	1954/55	SW	Anouilh, Jean	<i>Leocadie</i>	FR
<i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>	UK	1954/55	G	Chase, Mary	<i>My Friend Harvey</i>	US
<i>Wassa Schelesnowa</i>	RUSS	1954/55	G	Eliot, T. S.	<i>The Confidential Clerk</i>	UK
<i>On Borrowed Time</i>	US	1954/55	G	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>Pour Lucrèce</i>	FR
<i>Twenty-four Hours</i>	US	1954/55	G	Wouk, Herman	<i>The Caine Mutiny</i>	US
<i>Jeanne avec nous</i>	FR	1955/56	SW	Anderson, Maxwell	<i>Winterset</i>	US
<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	US	1955/56	W	Faulkner, William	<i>Requiem for a Nun</i>	US
<i>L'aigle a deux tetes</i>	FR	1955/56	G	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>Intermezzo</i>	FR
<i>I remember Mama</i>	US	1955/56	G	Pirandello, Luigi	<i>Come tu mi vuoi</i>	IT
<i>La Casa de Bernarda Alba</i>	SP	1955/56		Shaw, G. B.	<i>Misalliance</i>	UK
<i>Madame Aurelie</i>	FR	1955/56	G	Wilder, Thornton	<i>The Matchmaker</i>	US
<i>Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning</i>	US	1956/57	W	Giraudoux, Jean	<i>Die Unsterbliche</i>	FR
<i>Der Schatten</i>	RUSS	1956/57	SW	Goodrich & Hackett	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>	US
<i>La Dama del Alba</i>	SP	1956/57	G	Miller, Arthur	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	US
<i>Les mains sales</i>	FR	1956/57	G	Nash, N. Richard	<i>The Rainmaker</i>	US
<i>Buoyant Billions</i>	UK	1956/57	G	O'Neill, Eugene	<i>Desire Under the Elms</i>	US
<i>Death of a Salesman</i>	US	1956/57	G	Ustinov, Peter	<i>The Empty Chair</i>	UK
<i>I giganti della montagna</i>	IT	1956/57	G	Wilder, Thornton	<i>The Alcestiade</i>	US
<i>Too good to be true</i>	UK	1957/58	G	Clavel, Maurice	<i>Leonore</i>	FR
<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	US	1957/58	SW	O'Neill, Eugene	<i>A Touch of the Poet</i>	US
<i>Der Herr von Clerambard</i>	FR	1957/58	G	Osborne, John	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	UK
<i>Die begnadete Angst</i>	FR	1958/59	G	Osborne, John	<i>Epitaph for George Dillon</i>	UK
<i>Les Justes (The Just Assassins)</i>	FR	1958/59	SW	Pirandello, Luigi	<i>Ciascuno a suo modo</i>	IT
<i>The Cocktail Party</i>	UK	1959/60	G	Camus, Albert	<i>Les Possédés</i>	FR
<i>Siegfried von Kleist</i>	FR	1959/60	SW	Eliot, T. S.	<i>The Elder Statesman</i>	UK
<i>The Iceman Cometh</i>	US	1959/60	G	Ionesco, Eugene	<i>Rhinocéros</i>	FR
<i>The Lady's Not for Burning</i>	UK	1959/60	G	Ionesco, Eugene	<i>Le Tableau</i>	FR
<i>Tanz ums Geld</i>	IT	1959/60	G	Lorca, Federico Garcia	<i>[2 plays]</i>	SP
<i>Le diable et le bon dieu</i>	FR	1959/60	G	O'Neill, Eugene	<i>A Moon for the Misbegotten</i>	US
<i>Saint Joan</i>	UK	1959/60	G	Sartre, Jean-Paul	<i>Les Séquestrés d'Altona</i>	FR
<i>The Silvery Tassie</i>	IR	1959/60	W	Simenon, Georges	<i>Maigret has Scruples</i>	FR
<i>Sei Personaggi in Cerca dell'Autore</i>	IT					
<i>L'engrénage (In the Mesh)</i>	FR					

\*W=World Premiere/ G=German Premiere/ SW=Swiss Premiere

of truth, which we want to eke out in our arena, the theatre, as much as we possibly can.<sup>33</sup>

A diverse, international repertory met the mandate of “spiritual national defense” both by mirroring Switzerland’s own intrinsic “internationalism” and by positioning the theatre as an institution above the fray, one that was looking out for new works and new ideas in all directions and offering an “impartial” range of social, political, and cultural perspectives.

In reality, however, Hirschfeld’s purposes in programming an international repertory were anything but “impartial.” He deliberately used the power of season planning to counter Fascist ideology by, on the one hand, depicting a diverse range

of perspectives that depicted “the human being . . . in the totality of his psychological and sociological connections” and, on the other, fostering free and open discussion of the political and social issues they represented.<sup>34</sup> As Hirschfeld himself recalled in a postwar lecture, it was in the international arena that he found modern plays that “had something to say about the particular situation that people and society were in during these extremely crucial and dangerous years.”<sup>35</sup> This “something” that they had to say was, of course, not just one thing; it was an article of Hirschfeld’s faith that theatre’s job was not to tell an audience what to think, but rather to pose difficult questions and spur audience members to deep listening and lively discussion. “The theatre is a forum and not a pulpit,” Hirschfeld claimed in that same lecture:

Theatre is a forum, because it puts ideas on display that include alleged truths and problematic statements. . . . If we mainly focus on the theatre in its function as a forum, it is, above all, because in times of dictatorship, or post-dictatorship, or in times threatened by dictatorship, the forgotten art of talking must be relearned. We must teach people how to listen and train them to converse again.<sup>36</sup>

The international repertory, then, was an antidote to the tyranny of the pulpit, with its singular and unified truth, and a rebuke to Fascist nationalist insistence on ideological and spiritual conformity. It offered instead a unity based on shared intellectual inquiry and doubt—a unity readily alignable to a discourse of Swiss “spiritual national defense” that put the Swiss spirit up on a mountain peak surveying valleys far and near full of competing ideas.

Hirschfeld’s programming of an international repertoire required not just strategic savviness but also tenacity and fortitude, particularly once the war was in full swing and Zürich was essentially cut off from the rest of Europe.<sup>37</sup> The story of how Hirschfeld managed to learn about and get his hands on new plays from around the world is the subject of a future research project; what the archives have yielded so far is a clear picture of both his determination and his success in regularly programming new international work in translation on the Zürich stage. Important to emphasize here is how much the Schauspielhaus programming contrasted with what audiences were seeing in the rest of Europe during this period, particularly on German-language stages. Recent histories of theatre under the Third Reich have revealed the importance of theatre as an arm of the cultural propaganda war waged by the Nazis: as Gerwin Strobl persuasively documents, one way the Nazis could prove their cultural superiority over the “decadent” and “failed” Weimar Republic was by showering “unprecedented largesse” on a theatrical industry that had been shuttered in the thirties in the wake of Weimar’s economic collapse.<sup>38</sup> From January 1933 until all theatres in occupied Europe were closed on 31 August 1944, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels both established and funded local theatres, and sent lavish productions on tour throughout the Third Reich. But very quickly Nazi theatrical programming became dominated by works from the classical canon and by light entertainment, producing a uniformity of cultural expression. As Anselm Heinrich notes,

[I]t was exactly this kind of light-hearted repertoire which presented the Nazis with the attendance records they so desperately wanted. . . . The fact that this kind of repertoire was more or less the same across Europe with only minor variations was also intended in a dictatorship keen to influence and streamline theatre repertoires. Producing the same [plays by the same authors]—from northern Norway to Greece, from the Atlantic to the Caucasus—seemed a powerful symbol of German might.<sup>39</sup>

Though the German-language stages under Nazi occupation were by no means German-only—audiences saw plenty of Shakespeare and (rather perversely) Shaw, for example—the repertoire was decidedly nationalist in both content and purpose: “Audiences . . . were entertained with an ordinary, brutally trivial repertoire at give-away prices. Hannah Arendt’s dictum of the ‘banality of evil’ never rang more true.”<sup>40</sup> Thus Hirschfeld’s programming of serious, socially engaged drama from a diversity of cultures was a trenchant and purposeful statement of contrast to the theatrical fare offered to audiences living under the Nazi regime.

No theatre in France, Italy, or England offered a repertoire with a slate of contemporary plays of international diversity comparable to that of the Schauspielhaus either. After French theatres were nationalized and placed under Vichy control in 1941, the repertoire became dominated by French melodramas and classics (Molière in particular); modern writers had to submit their works for approval by both a Vichy censor and a German censor.<sup>41</sup> In Italy, although no discernably “Fascist” theatre ever developed, all plays produced had to first be approved by the censor as well, and only a limited subset of new plays were approved for production.<sup>42</sup> Andrew Davies’s brief survey of theatre in England during the war indicates that virtually no contemporary drama in translation was staged there during this period either; the repertoires of British stages were dominated by classics (particularly Shakespeare, but also the Greeks, Shaw, and Ibsen) and contemporary British dramatists—that is, Terrence Rattigan, Peter Ustinov, Emlyn Williams, and J. B. Priestley. Only the stages in Switzerland and Sweden remained free of the pressures of Fascism, and while stages in Basel and in Stockholm both produced international work, the Zürich Schauspielhaus was distinguished by both the variety and longevity of its internationalist vision.<sup>43</sup>

#### THEATRE AS A FORUM & THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY DRAMATIC CANON

I turn now to look at some of the key international plays produced on the Zürich stage, and to unpack what they meant to Hirschfeld and to the Schauspielhaus audience. My selection of plays is drawn, as I mentioned at the outset, from Hirschfeld’s own writing, in which the same names and works surface repeatedly, ones that he believed confirmed the diversity of human existence and countered Fascist ideologies.<sup>44</sup> These names included French authors Paul Claudel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jean Giraudoux; the Spanish Federico García Lorca and Italian Luigi Pirandello; British writer T. S. Eliot; and American writers

John Steinbeck, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller.

Among the French authors mentioned, Jean Giraudoux was the earliest to have his works produced at the Schauspielhaus, and more of his plays received their German-language premiere at the Schauspielhaus than any other modern French playwright. As early as 1930 Rieser had produced his play *Amphitryon 38*, and in January 1937 the theatre presented Giraudoux's play *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*, just a year after its Paris opening. Giraudoux's pessimistic vision of the futility of diplomacy and inevitability of war in this play would prove to be far more resonant with postwar German audiences than with the prewar Zürich audience; as Mittenzwei notes, in 1937 the critics admired Giraudoux's evident pacifism, but "the pressing question of how wars are made, which played such a large role in the discussion of the play after 1945, was not even posed at this point."<sup>45</sup> Three years later, in 1940, the theatre premiered Giraudoux's *Ondine* for German-speaking audiences, just under a year after its Paris opening, and in January 1944 it presented the German-language premiere of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, only three months after the play premiered in Paris. *Ondine* is considered by many to be Giraudoux's finest work, and, according to one historian, director Leonard Steckel's production of the play was "one of the most poetic productions" of the Schauspielhaus.<sup>46</sup> *Sodom and Gomorrah* was less well-received in Zürich, but nonetheless Hirschfeld continued to champion Giraudoux's work, even after the writer's death at the end of January 1944. For Hirschfeld, Giraudoux's pessimism was a fundamental expression of the contemporary European experience, and his drama posed the sort of important and painful question that gives theatre its essential purpose. "The greatness of this drama consists not in the answer, but rather in the question," Hirschfeld later wrote of Giraudoux's plays.<sup>47</sup>

Just after the war's end, in June 1946, the Schauspielhaus produced the German-language premiere of one of Giraudoux's best-known works, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. In his talk "Perspectives on German Theatre" Hirschfeld explained his reasons for bringing this poetic satire to Zürich: "The play expresses a revolutionary conservatism that puts forward for discussion the problem of anonymity in the modern world, the problem of capitalism, the problems of memory, of fear, of destruction and preservation, of friendship and love."<sup>48</sup> Hirschfeld here, as in so many of his choices, was remarkably prescient about the value of this play for modern audiences: *The Madwoman of Chaillot* continues to the present day to demonstrate its worth in the dramatic repertoire around the world, as its depiction of a conflict between rapacious capitalists, heedless of the environmental impact of their greed, and the "crazy" people who band together to defeat them gains new relevance against the backdrop of contemporary ecological crises. In the fifties, under Hirschfeld's continued dramaturgical leadership, the Schauspielhaus persisted in championing Giraudoux, presenting the German-language premieres of *Siegfried* in 1950, *Duel of Angels (Pour Lucrèce)* and *The Enchanted (Intermezzo)* in 1955, and even the world premiere of his son Jean-Pierre Giraudoux's *Immortelle* (as *Die Unsterbliche*) in 1957.<sup>49</sup>



## Kurt Hirschfeld and the Schauspielhaus Zürich

A second important French dramatist introduced to German-speaking audiences through Hirschfeld's efforts was Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the dominant figures of French intellectual life in the twentieth century. In October 1944 the Schauspielhaus presented the German-language premiere of *The Flies*, Sartre's 1943 reworking of the Electra–Orestes story from Greek mythology. Although the drama was not particularly well-received by Zürich audiences or critics, Hirschfeld saw it as one of the key plays produced at the Schauspielhaus during the war, because it grappled with, among other things, the problem of what comes *après la guerre*.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, *The Flies* was a play that spoke, in both form and content, to Hirschfeld's understanding of theatre as a forum, as the place that sparks dialogue and debate. Hirschfeld defended the play's difficulty:

The audience cannot simply “go along,” it continually finds itself confronted with situations that pose questions. And through this, the theatre fulfills its mission to be a forum. It brings opinions up for discussion; the form compels critical engagement, the content assaults the audience and demands to be discussed.<sup>51</sup>

And although the play had a very short run—it closed after seven performances—it had the desired effect among those who saw it. Günther Schoop reports: “The carefully cultivated contact between stage and audience was activated through the production of this play. . . . Seldom was a public gathering so evenly divided ‘for’ and ‘against’ as the one at the emotional evening of discussion hosted by the Zürich Theatre Association on October 19.”<sup>52</sup>

Sartre's plays, too, would continue to be featured in the Schauspielhaus repertory in the postwar era. His play *Dirty Hands* had its German-language premiere in Zürich in 1948, just half a year after it opened in Paris, and *The Devil and the Good Lord* debuted in German at the Schauspielhaus in November 1951, less than six months after its Paris premiere. The next year saw the world premiere of Sartre's scenario *In the Mesh* on the Zürich stage, and in 1960 the Schauspielhaus presented the first German production of Sartre's next-to-last play, *The Condemned of Altona*. In all, five of Sartre's plays debuted for German audiences in Zürich.

The third major modern French playwright whose works were featured for the first time in German at the Schauspielhaus was Paul Claudel. His play *The Satin Slipper* premiered there in April 1944, just five months after it was first directed in Paris by Jean-Louis Barrault. This long and complicated drama has only recently begun to receive productions in its entirety; director Kurt Horwitz followed Barrault's lead in shortening the text for the first Zürich audience. For Hirschfeld, the deep commitment to Catholic belief that drives the energy of this play represented an antidote to both Sartre's existentialism and Giraudoux's pessimism; as a counterpoint to other works in the repertoire *The Satin Slipper* stimulated the kind of discussion and debate he saw as the cornerstone of theatre's function. In addition, he greatly admired Claudel's innovative use of an eclectic mix of theatrical forms and conventions.<sup>53</sup> “Formally,” Hirschfeld wrote,

“C Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper* is probably the most linguistically powerful writing of modern France.”<sup>54</sup>

As challenging as Claudel’s play is, both technically and in terms of storytelling, the original Zürich production introduced into the German dramatic repertoire a play that has since been extraordinarily popular on German-speaking stages. Whereas in France Claudel’s play has received relatively sporadic production in the past seventy-five years, since 1944 *The Satin Slipper* has been produced nearly annually in Switzerland, Germany, or Austria, by dozens of different theatres. According to theatre historian Christèle Barbier, in 1985 alone there were twenty productions of the play in German (as opposed to just six in all of France for that year). She speculates that the appeal of this play to German-speaking audiences may be its depiction of a world without a center of gravity, in which the hero is brought to renounce conquest and possession—a moral that would have resonated strongly in West Germany and Austria in the postwar years.<sup>55</sup> This may also explain why Hirschfeld found Claudel’s play so compelling, even though its Catholicism did not speak to his own religious or ideological views. In addition to *The Satin Slipper*, Hirschfeld also programmed Claudel’s controversial play *The Hostage* in 1945—which raised objections among many audience members for its valorization of total submission to the authority of the church—as well as his *The Humiliation of the Father* in 1946 and *Tobias and Sara* in 1953.

Of the contemporary English-language works that premiered at the Schauspielhaus in German translation during and just after the war, many came out of the United Kingdom, although a lot of these were comedies or sentimental plays that have since passed into relative obscurity. The year 1939 saw the German-language premiere of British-Welsh playwright Emyln Williams’s psychological thriller *Night Must Fall*, J. B. Priestley’s drama *Time and the Conways*, and Esther McCracken’s light comedy *Quiet Wedding*. In 1942 the Schauspielhaus opened Emyln Williams’s sentimental drama *The Morning Star* just a week after it closed on Broadway, and in 1944 the theatre premiered Scottish writer A. J. Cronin’s sentimental romance *Jupiter Laughs*. Of the major figures in drama, George Bernard Shaw was the most popular British writer in Zürich; nine of his plays were produced between 1933 and 1964, including the German-language premiere of *You Never Can Tell* in 1935, and the world premieres of *Village Wooing* in 1934 and Shaw’s last full-length play, *Buoyant Billions*, in 1948.

The most experimental and modern of the contemporary British authors featured at the Schauspielhaus was T. S. Eliot. His play *The Family Reunion* received its German-language premiere in Zürich in 1945; *Murder in the Cathedral* opened there in 1947.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Eliot’s later, more accessible plays *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman* were also performed in Switzerland for the first time at the Schauspielhaus in 1951, 1954, and 1960, respectively. In his lectures and writings on theatre, Hirschfeld mentions Eliot in connection with other modern foreign writers as a dramatist whose formal experimentations serve the purpose of producing a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*: “their objective is always to make us sit up and take notice, to force us to reflect, to interrupt the audience’s willingness to empathize and

go along, in order to provoke thinking. Their function is to make the audience active.”<sup>57</sup>

Even more so than the British, American writers played a prominent role in the Schauspielhaus repertoire, and Hirschfeld and Wälterlin can be credited for having brought many of the twentieth century’s most significant American playwrights to European attention. One of the earliest “imports” from the United States was Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, given the German title *Eine kleine Stadt*. Wilder’s play already had a connection to Zürich long before it opened there in March 1939, just three months after it closed its Broadway premiere. Wilder had written much of it, and perhaps all of the final act, while staying in a hotel in Rüslikon, a suburb of Zürich, in the fall of 1937.<sup>58</sup> Wilder was famously well-connected among the literary and artistic lights of the time, being friends with Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and the German director Max Reinhardt, through whom he also became acquainted with Thomas Mann, who was still living near Zürich in 1937 and who shared a social circle with Hirschfeld.<sup>59</sup> It may have been through Mann that Wilder and Hirschfeld struck up what was to be an amicable and long-lived professional relationship; after the war, in 1950, Hirschfeld would introduce Wilder to his friend Hans Sahl, who retranslated all of Wilder’s plays into German (and also translated the work of many other major American playwrights, including Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller).<sup>60</sup> The version of *Our Town* produced at the Schauspielhaus in 1939, however, was translated by Wilfried Scheitlin, one of the company’s actors and, according to some sources, Oskar Wälterlin’s life partner.<sup>61</sup>

In its depiction of, as Wilder put it, “all the big subjects” of life in a “little play,” *Our Town* poses compelling questions with universal appeal.<sup>62</sup> Hirschfeld and Wälterlin were prescient in recognizing that appeal: the production at the Zürich Schauspielhaus was one of the first outside the United States. It was also one of the first plays Wälterlin directed at the Schauspielhaus. The play was relatively well received by the Zürich audience, even though, according to an essay in the archives (possibly a draft of a program note on Wilder written by Hirschfeld), “at first glance the work flummoxed spectators through both form and content.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the essay goes on to say, “those who dealt with it in more depth were enraptured by its unpretentious and yet . . . enthralling mode of expression and were deeply impressed by the insights represented there into human life, its limits, and its connections with something more-than-human.”<sup>64</sup> Certainly the play had the desired effect of stimulating discussion among audience members: in an article written for the Swiss monthly magazine *Du* [You], Wälterlin recalled that the theatre’s leadership had to find a new room for the discussion of this play, one large enough to accommodate all the people who wanted to participate.<sup>65</sup> And although the play only had ten performances, it had a material impact beyond its psychosocial effect on audiences who saw it: according to Penelope Niven, Wilder’s most recent biographer, after the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939, Wilder, “[l]ooking about for even some small way to help . . . made arrangements to give his Swiss *Our Town* royalties to an Austrian-German exile fund”—an act of generosity that cannot have remained unknown to Hirschfeld or to the rest of the Zürich exile community.<sup>66</sup>

Much more impactful for the European theatre was Wilder's second major play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, which also received its German-language premiere at the Schauspielhaus, in March 1944, just six months after it closed on Broadway. In a 1963 radio program looking back at the history of the Schauspielhaus, Hirschfeld described the lengths he had to go through to obtain a copy of Wilder's play. The shorthand notes of that interview read: "1944. During the war no direct postal connection with America. American Leg. Council had play sent through Sweden to Bern embassy. Small photographed plates that had to be copied first."<sup>67</sup> The Schauspielhaus gave this play to Gentiane Helene Gebser (wife of the exiled poet and philosopher Jean Gebser) to translate, and once again Oskar Wälterlin directed.

*The Skin of Our Teeth* is far more complicated and challenging in both form and content than *Our Town*. But in its challenges and ambiguities, the play exemplified the "humanist realism" that Hirschfeld sought to promote. As the essay on Wilder in Hirschfeld's archives puts it: "In [the character of] Mr. Antrobus, *The Skin of Our Teeth* shows us our own reflection, our confusions and our entanglements in the present catastrophe."<sup>68</sup> The play's open form, which steals elements from farce, burlesque, satire, *commedia dell'arte*, and from Pirandello and Brecht, allowed it to offer a reflection on history that spoke particularly poignantly to the Zürich audience in 1944. The essay writer observes that, with this play,

Wilder was likely the first to succeed in keeping the distance necessary to derive the events that overwhelm us and the catastrophe that has befallen us from the human character itself. Not only does he distance himself from the present that day by day becomes history, he reflects the present backward onto known events of history and prehistory, and conversely projects the past onto what we are experiencing today.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, *The Skin of Our Teeth* went on to become one of the most popular American plays in the postwar German repertoire and helped cement Wilder's status as one of the most highly regarded American writers in Germany during his lifetime.<sup>70</sup> The Schauspielhaus's introduction of this play to German-speaking audiences in Switzerland thus served to bring an important voice to the theatre culture of postwar Germany, that of one of the "most important champions . . . for a . . . theatre in which we come together to take the path that leads us away from division and separation and to a redeeming clarity, to a perpetual affirmation of everything that in the truest sense means life."<sup>71</sup>

In the postwar years, Hirschfeld continued to program an international slate of plays, for both practical and philosophical reasons. On the practical side, the end of the war revealed not only the material destruction wrought by the Nazis, but also the cultural destruction. In his talk "Perspectives on German Theatre," which appears to have been written in late 1945 or 1946, Hirschfeld explains: "At one time we believed that when the war was over and National Socialism was dead and gone, the drawers would open up, and out of them would come some good stuff that had been written during the years of oppression. As of yet, unfortunately, we've seen nothing of the sort."<sup>72</sup> In the meantime, Hirschfeld promised, they

would continue to look abroad for plays by modern authors “that could build the foundation for dialogue and discussion.”<sup>73</sup> Hirschfeld’s correspondence from these postwar years reveals his tireless networking with contacts in New York, Paris, and London to get recommendations for new plays and to secure the rights to premiere foreign works in Zürich. In the years after the war ended, the Schauspielhaus produced a number of new works by French playwrights, including Jean Cocteau’s *The Eagle Has Two Heads* in 1946, Jean Anouilh’s *Eurydice* in 1947, and Albert Camus’s *The Just Assassins* in 1950. The postwar years also saw the German-language premieres of works by British writers Christopher Fry and John Osborne, the Italian playwrights Luigi Pirandello and Silvio Giovaninetti, and the Spanish dramatist Alejandro Casona. But perhaps the greatest service the Schauspielhaus provided to postwar European theatre came in its introduction of new American plays and playwrights, writers like William Faulkner, Eugene O’Neill, William Saroyan, and, in particular, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. The German translator to all these American playwrights was Hirschfeld’s lifelong friend Hans Sahl, who had emigrated to New York in 1942, and who also frequently assisted Hirschfeld in obtaining the rights to the German-language, and in some cases European, premieres of American plays. In 1947 Zürich audiences were among the first Europeans to see Williams’s play *The Glass Menagerie*, and in 1949 the Schauspielhaus presented the German-language premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire* a month before the play closed on Broadway in New York.<sup>74</sup> Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* premiered in Zürich in the same season, in one of the very first productions to bring Miller’s work to a non-Anglophone audience.<sup>75</sup>

From the evidence in his archives it can be deduced that Hirschfeld was personally not a great admirer of either Williams or Miller, both of whom he considered “second-rate”:<sup>76</sup> in one letter he reminds Sahl of a conversation they had in which “I laid out for you rather precisely what I have against *Death of a Salesman*,”<sup>77</sup> and in another he responds to Sahl’s negative review of Williams’s play *Sweet Bird of Youth*: “We’re no huge fans of this writer.”<sup>78</sup> But Hirschfeld recognized the value of these two authors’ work nonetheless; in his lecture “Problems of Modern Dramaturgy” Hirschfeld observed that their plays show

a brutal reality, perhaps somewhat too brutal for our tastes. But American playwrights know that some things that are to be said must be said explicitly, even at the cost of aesthetics. . . . We should not allow ourselves to be deterred by the bluntness of these plays. A dramaturgical and theatrical culture is developing here that, though overrun and overgrown with much that is negative, nonetheless demonstrates among its few proponents a potential that we dare not exclude in our overview of international dramaturgy.<sup>79</sup>

Rather faint and backhanded praise, to be sure; but, as it turns out, quite prophetic.

Which brings me to the final set of observations I want to make about the Schauspielhaus as an “international stage” and the role Kurt Hirschfeld may have played in shaping the modern canon. First, the impact of Hirschfeld and the Schauspielhaus on postwar European theatre can hardly be overstated. In his

programming of modern international works, Hirschfeld maintained an artistic and philosophical continuity at the Schauspielhaus that allowed theatre as an art to move forward in Europe despite the fact that nearly every other European theatre on the Continent was either shut down or under Fascist control.<sup>80</sup> The influence of the Schauspielhaus on postwar German theatre has long been widely recognized by Swiss and German theatre historians. As Henning Rischbieter observed in 1984, during the war and in the first few years afterward the Playhouse formulated in advance “what constituted the share of contemporary international drama in the repertory of the German stages after 1945, at least in the three Western zones of occupation. . . . [Kurt Hirschfeld] saw a born-of-necessity, once-in-a-lifetime dramaturgical opportunity and used it masterfully; he crucially predetermined the repertorial structure of the postwar West German theatre.”<sup>81</sup> But beyond that, as Christopher Innes has observed, Hirschfeld’s commitment to importing new American plays to Switzerland also had a profound impact on postwar European theatre as a whole. American writers “served as models of a new stylistic freedom and social relevance that helped to liberate theatre elsewhere. Their work was staged in all the European centres, which had been cut off from foreign developments during the war. . . . Miller and Williams, along with Thornton Wilder, were the general catalyst for a revival in Europe.”<sup>82</sup> The primary conduit for these authors’ entry into the postwar German theatre was the Zürich Schauspielhaus, and despite whatever personal misgivings Hirschfeld may have had toward some of their plays, he understood their significance both to the Schauspielhaus and to theatre history: “Is there nothing new in America?” he pleads in a letter from January 1951 to Hans Sahl; “We’re going to be in a really tight spot in the coming season if we can’t import at least two good plays from over there.”<sup>83</sup> The American authors Hirschfeld was able to discover through his network of New York informants not only attracted audiences, but also injected critical fresh energy into the European theatre scene.

Moreover, the slate of modern, international plays produced at the Schauspielhaus was fertile soil for the blossoming of the two great Swiss playwrights of the postwar period, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch, whose plays clearly show the influence of exposure to writers like Wilder, Brecht, and Pirandello.<sup>84</sup> Hirschfeld was right: there really were no important German plays tucked away in drawers or attics waiting to be produced in the immediate postwar era; Dürrenmatt and Frisch essentially jump-started German language drama anew after the war, “dominat[ing] the stage of the early ‘fifties,” as Peter Demetz observed.<sup>85</sup> Thus Hirschfeld’s legacy extends not only to the repertorial structure of postwar German theatre, but also to the generation of postwar German and Austrian playwrights whose own work builds on and responds to the formal innovations and thematic provocations found in Frisch and Dürrenmatt, as well as in the work of Brecht, Wilder, and the other writers the Schauspielhaus nurtured during the war years.

And finally, Hirschfeld’s influence might possibly also be seen in the canonical status that so many of the works he programmed went on to achieve during the twentieth century. Noteworthy, in hindsight, is his track record in selecting plays that would later become “twentieth-century classics.” Of the roughly thirty-six American works produced during his tenure, seventeen—or about half—continue

to be regularly staged over a half-century later, and several—*Our Town*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *The Iceman Cometh*—are solidly ensconced in the twentieth-century American canon, read by most high school or college students in the country, and regularly revived and produced. With regard to the French authors featured on the Schauspielhaus stage, Sartre and Anouilh have firm places in the French canon, and Giraudoux and Claudel have each had a season of Paris's Theatre du Nord-Ouest devoted to their works. Though Claudel continues to be more well-known on German stages than elsewhere in the world, Sartre, Giraudoux, and Anouilh regularly find places in the season plans of theatres across the United Kingdom, the United States, and Europe. Moreover, whereas only three contemporary plays from Spain received production in Zürich during the time under consideration, two of them—Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* and his *Blood Wedding*—have become standard plays in the international canon. Since one way dramatic literature enters the canon is through production, we might moot the possibility that Hirschfeld's inclusion of all of these works in the Schauspielhaus repertoire served to give them the exposure, recognition, and production continuity that led to their "canonization." This is, of course, something of a chicken-and-egg historical question, because we can't rewind history to find out if these plays would have had an afterlife without their Schauspielhaus debut. But certainly given that, as Mittenzwei notes, during the war the playhouse produced "all of the plays of bourgeois modernism that determined both the repertoire of the German theatre and the audience's interests in the early postwar period," it does not seem too great a stretch to propose that the Zürich Schauspielhaus, through the programming of dramaturg Kurt Hirschfeld, may have helped shape and determine the mid-twentieth-century Western dramatic canon.<sup>86</sup>

A corollary of that claim points to a potential historic irony: the mid-twentieth-century modern dramatic canon—with its appeals to universality, its focus on the individual, and its tendencies to avoid staking out strong ideological positions—may consequently have been shaped at least in part by the Swiss discourse of "neutrality" and "spiritual national defense," a discourse that led Hirschfeld to what can be seen as essentially a compromise strategy that cloaked the fight against Fascism in the language of bourgeois liberalism.<sup>87</sup> This is an irony not lost on Hirschfeld's contemporaries; as the Marxist German-Jewish literary scholar Hans Mayer, who also emigrated to Switzerland in 1934, observed in 1945:

Only a theatre in which concrete individuals could recognize themselves was in keeping with the stability of social conditions and political democracy in Switzerland—and that had to be a bourgeois theatre in the sense that it offered freedom of discussion. It put dramatic works next to each other that served a living worldview, but the theatre itself did not take a position on them, except in the liberal sense that [the plays all] had equal claim to be produced and brought to life in juxtaposition with one another. . . . The spectator's task was to choose for himself—or not to choose and simply to enjoy. In this non-decision, too . . . one once again perceived a form of the bourgeois theatre in a society with largely unshaken liberal, democratic traditions.<sup>88</sup>

Hirschfeld's season planning—grounded, as he claimed, in “humanist realism”—served both Swiss “spiritual national defense” and the ideal of liberal democracy by provoking debate and discussion; yet in its love of ambiguity and “question-posing” rather than “answer-providing,” the canon of plays he preserved and passed on to the postwar German and European theatre might be characterized, in a less flattering light, as one that also encapsulated neutrality's refusal to take a firm moral, political, and/or ideological stand.

My claim about Hirschfeld's influence on the canon may be overstated; certainly it's one that we'll never have the evidence to fully ground. But it is undoubtedly true that during and just after the war, a slate of Western playwrights received international exposure in Zürich, on “the only important free German-speaking stage on a continent held captive by Adolf Hitler,”<sup>89</sup> and that European, and especially German, audiences gained access to these important, paradigm-shifting, and now-canonical works largely due to Kurt Hirschfeld's tireless and steadfast commitment to finding, presenting, and promoting international plays. As such, the legacy of the Zürich Schauspielhaus as an international theatre, and that of Hirschfeld as a key figure in twentieth-century theatre history, have, until now, far outstripped their fame.

## ENDNOTES

1. Brecht's biographer Stephen Parker characterizes the Schauspielhaus as “the last major European theatre that was prepared to perform a Brecht play”; Stephen Parker, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 428. Dramaturg Kurt Hirschfeld was a friend, ally, and staunch supporter of Brecht, and also worked with Brecht on the world premiere of *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti* (coauthored with Hella Wuolijoki) in Zürich in 1948; correspondence between Hirschfeld and Brecht can be found in the digital archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, NY.

2. Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 3d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977), 553.

3. Although it is somewhat outside my topic, it should be added here that the Schauspielhaus's internationalism also took place against the backdrop of a concerted effort among Swiss playwrights to see Swiss theatres prioritize Swiss drama. Swiss plays of the time period, however, tended to be provincial, mediocre, patriotic, and forgettable; see, for example, Louis Naef, “Theater der deutschen Schweiz,” in Hans-Christof Wächter, *Theater im Exil: Sozialgeschichte des deutschen Exiltheaters 1933–1945* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 241–63, at 246–7; and Louis Naef, “Harmlosigkeit als Zeitkrankheit,” in *Das verschonte Haus: Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Dieter Bachmann and Rolf Schneider (Zürich: Ammann Verlag, 1987), 141–61.

4. All translations from German of quotations in the present article are my own.

5. Gustav Huonker, “Emigranten—Wege, Schicksale, Wirkungen,” in *Das verschonte Haus*, ed. Bachmann and Schneider, 107–39, at 108.

6. Several versions of the story of Hartung and Hirschfeld's departure from Darmstadt circulate in histories of the Zürich Schauspielhaus; the most closely researched version, and the one I follow here, appears in Hannes Heer et al., *Verstummte Stimmen: Die Vertreibung der “Juden” und “politisch Untragbaren” aus den hessischen Theatern 1933 bis 1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 92–5, 228–30. For a capsule biography of Hirschfeld, see Rolf Badenhausen, “Hirschfeld, Kurt, Dramaturg, Regisseur, Theaterleiter,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Otto zu Stolberg-Wernigerode (Berlin: Hess-Hüttig, 1972), 9: 225–6, [http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00016326/image\\_239](http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/bsb00016326/image_239), accessed 21 December 2018.

7. Artur Joseph, *Theater unter vier Augen: Gespräche mit Prominenten* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), 121.



## Kurt Hirschfeld and the Schauspielhaus Zürich

8. Kurt Hirschfeld, "Anspruch und Funktion des zeitgenössischen Theaters" [lecture], n.d. (ca. 1953), 2; Kurt Hirschfeld Collection, AR 7066 / MF 608 [hereafter KHC], Box 4, Folder 4/20, Leo Baeck Institute [hereafter LBI]; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n927/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n927/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019. See also Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus 1933–1945* (Berlin [GDR]: Henschelverlag, 1979), 33–5; and Curt Riess, *Das Schauspielhaus Zürich: Sein oder Nichtsein eines ungewöhnlichen Theaters* (Munich and Vienna: Langen Müller, 1988), 111.

9. Hirschfeld claims to have said to Rieser at their very first meeting: "I take it that you have hired me so that I can pull together a few good people for you"; Riess, 58.

10. Most historians concur that Rieser not only took advantage of the desperation of exiled theatre artists by vastly underpaying them, but also subjected them to grueling working conditions—see, for example, Jean-Rudolf von Salis, "Die Saga vom Zürcher Schauspielhaus," in *Das verschonte Haus*, 5–13, at 6; Huonker, 112; Mittenzwei, 39, 69–70; Riess, 105–11. Kröger and Exinger, however, dispute Rieser's reputation for stinginess, claiming he paid some of the best wages in Switzerland; see Ute Kröger and Peter Exinger, "In welchen Zeiten leben wir?" *Das Schauspielhaus Zürich 1938–1998* (Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 1998), 25.

11. Mittenzwei, 34. See also Huonker, 109; Riess, 58; and Heer et al., 229.

12. Riess, 58; Kröger and Exinger, 26; Joseph, 121.

13. Mittenzwei, 37, who takes the quote from Ernst Ginsberg, *Abschied: Erinnerungen, Theateraufsätze, Gedichte* (Zürich, 1965), 130.

14. The story of Langhoff's (1901–66) emigration to Switzerland reads like a gripping political thriller; indulge me for elaborating it in this endnote. The day after the Reichstag fire, the Nazis arrested and imprisoned Langhoff—a handsome and charismatic actor-director who was one of Germany's most popular leading men. The German and Swiss theatre communities clamored in the press for his release; at the same time, Rieser and Hirschfeld went to extraordinary lengths to try to secure his freedom. Hirschfeld risked travel to Berlin in an attempt to use connections there to try to free Langhoff from incarceration, and Rieser—who, once he had made up his mind to do something, was tenacious in its pursuit—wrote an ingratiating letter to State Commissioner Hans Hinkel in July 1933 requesting Langhoff be released so that he could join the Zürich company for its 1933–4 season. Neither of those efforts bore fruit, and Langhoff languished in a concentration camp for over a year. When he was finally set free as part of the "Easter Amnesty" of 1934, he was denied a passport; Hirschfeld went to Basel and arranged for two friends—the writer C. F. Vaucher and the architect Paul Artaria—to smuggle him illegally over the border. Hirschfeld later told historian Curt Riess that he spent an anxious evening at the cinema with Langhoff's wife waiting for the men to cross the border; meanwhile, Vaucher, Artaria, and Langhoff got drunk on schnapps at a pub just over the German side of the border, both to fortify themselves and to provide themselves with a cover story for their late-night crossing. Riess claims that they slipped past the border guards in heavy rain just in the nick of time—the evening was 30 June 1934, the "Night of the Long Knives," and "the borders were hermetically sealed an hour after" the three men made it through. After his long incarceration, however, Langhoff was no longer the dashing leading man Rieser thought he had hired: the Nazis had knocked out all of his teeth. Nonetheless, after Rieser paid for a new set of dentures, Langhoff went on to have a thriving career as an actor at the Schauspielhaus and later as a director in East Berlin; his son, Thomas Langhoff (1938–2012), was also one of Germany's leading theatre directors, and his grandchildren Tobias and Lukas continue the family tradition of work in the theatre (Riess, 88–93; see also Mittenzwei, 45–8; Huonker, 111–12; and "Die Theater-Familie Langhoff," *Die Welt*, 20 February 2012, [www.welt.de/print/die\\_welt/kultur/article13876985/Die-Theater-Familie-Langhoff.html](http://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/kultur/article13876985/Die-Theater-Familie-Langhoff.html), accessed 23 May 2019). For additional stories of Hirschfeld's role in spiriting threatened artists out of Nazi Germany, see Riess, 58–94; Huonker, 109; and Heer et al., 229.

15. Kurt Hirschfeld, "Dramaturgische Bilanz," in Theresa Giehse et al., *Theater: Meinungen und Erfahrungen* (Affoltern am Albis: Aehren Verlag, 1945), 11–16, at 13. KHC, Box 7, Folder 10/12, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel13#page/n1021/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel13#page/n1021/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Louis Naef, "Vom Variété zum Schauspielhaus," in *Das verschonte Haus*, 17–34, at 29.

18. Several historians echo Mittenzwei's report that Rieser "primarily judged actors over whether they could wear a tailcoat" (48); see also, for example, Huonker, 113; Naef, "Vom Variété zum Schauspielhaus," 23; and Riess, 54.

19. Kurt Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie" [speech], n.d. (ca. 1950), 21; KHC, Box 4, Folder 4/18, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n882/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n882/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018. Excerpts from this speech were published by Hirschfeld as "Dramaturgische Notizen," in *Für die Bücherfreunde* (Zürich: Verlag Oprecht, 1945), 28–39 (quote on 38).

20. Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie," 22; "Dramaturgische Notizen," 39.

21. Hans Mayer described Hirschfeld as "multifaceted, at home with all styles and dramatic forms"; Hans Mayer, "Eine Stimme aus dem Zuschauerraum," in *Theater: Meinungen und Erfahrungen*, 54–8, at 54; KHC, Box 7, Folder 10/12, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/01\\_reel13#page/n1047/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/01_reel13#page/n1047/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019. See also Kröger and Exinger, 78.

22. Mittenzwei, 69. Scene designer Teo Otto also later lauded Hirschfeld's strategic finesse in *Theater—Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit: Freundesgabe zum sechzigsten Geburtstag von Kurt Hirschfeld am 10. März 1962* (Zürich: Verlag Oprecht, 1962), 166–7. Huonker provides evidence, however, that before 1933 the Schauspielhaus produced plenty of works from the classical and more "serious" repertoire, particularly Shaw, Shakespeare, and Schiller; nonetheless, Rieser's focus on his commercial bottom line led him to favor plays that would yield a return on investment, and he did not program explicitly political plays before Hirschfeld and the other emigrants joined the company (113).

23. For more on these two productions, see Mittenzwei, 73–88; Naef, "Vom Variété zum Schauspielhaus," 28–9; and Riess, 59–62 and 81–5.

24. Huonker, 115; Kröger and Exinger also note that even though Hirschfeld had been fired from his post, he still maintained a tight and friendly working relationship with his former colleagues (32).

25. The negotiations over the establishment of the new business model for the theatre were not without friction: right-wing Swiss nationalists allied with the Nazi Party launched a vigorous campaign to purge the theatre of foreigners and Jews and put it in the hands of Swiss nationalists. Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, Wälterlin's appointment as artistic director was, in the end, mandated by the Swiss immigration authorities, who felt that a "job that was so important to Swiss interests should be entrusted to a Swiss citizen"; Kröger and Exinger, 39. Kröger and Exinger speculate that Oprecht and the other city leaders negotiating to save the Schauspielhaus may have conceded to the imposition of Wälterlin as artistic director in exchange for allowing them to give the position of dramaturg to Hirschfeld (32–9).

26. Joseph, 120.

27. See note 20 above.

28. See, for example, Naef, "Vom Variété zum Schauspielhaus," 26–7; Huonker, 114–15; Ursula Amrein, "Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus und die Geistige Landesverteidigung," *Schweizer Monatshefte: Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur* 75.4 (1995): 34–40, at 34–5.

29. During this period there were firm limits to the political positions that could be taken by any civic institution—indeed, any Swiss citizen—without overstepping the boundaries of official Swiss neutrality. Swiss writer Jean Rudolf von Salis observed in 1945 that "no one has the right to contradict the political course established by the state through imprudent actions or even words"; quoted in Naef, "Theater der deutschen Schweiz," 257. Rieser's decision to step away from the Schauspielhaus may have been motivated in part by his perception that he had already pushed the boundaries too far and put himself in personal danger; see Naef, "Vom Variété zum Schauspielhaus," 26–7.

30. For this complicated story, see Naef, "Theater der deutschen Schweiz," 252–4.

31. Amrein, 36.

32. This, too, was complicated; see Naef, "Theater der deutschen Schweiz," 257–9.

33. "Einleitung," *Schauspielhaus Zürich 1938/39* (season brochure), 2–3; KHC, Box 6, Folder 8/1, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel12#page/n136/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel12#page/n136/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018.

34. For the quotation, see note 20 above.

35. Hirschfeld, "Anspruch und Funktion des zeitgenössischen Theaters," 2. It must be added that—as Hirschfeld also notes in this same lecture—the classical plays programmed into the Schauspielhaus repertoire frequently served a similar purpose: salient design, staging, and casting choices breathed new political relevance and an anti-Fascist message into classics like Schiller's *William Tell*, Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Faust*, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, and many others; see Amrein, 39; Kröger and Exinger, 47–51; Mittenzwei, 69, 104–18; and Riess, 155–7.
36. Hirschfeld, "Anspruch und Funktion des zeitgenössischen Theaters," 5–6.
37. On Switzerland's isolation, see Naef, "Theater der deutschen Schweiz," 247; and Riess, 194.
38. Gerwin Strobl, "Making Sense of Theatre in the Third Reich," *History Compass* 8.5 (2010): 377–87, at 382.
39. Anselm Heinrich, *Theatre in Europe under German Occupation* (New York & London: Routledge, 2017), 238.
40. *Ibid.*, 239.
41. Merrill Rosenberg, "Vichy's Theatrical Venture," *Theatre Survey* 11.2 (1970): 124–50, at 129. See also Mary Ann Frese Witt, "Fascist Ideology and Theatre under the Occupation: The Case of Anouilh," *Journal of European Studies* 23.1 (1993): 49–69.
42. Pietro Cavallo, "Theatre Politics of the Mussolini Regime and Their Influence on Fascist Drama," in *Theatre and War 1933–1945: Performance in Extremis*, ed. Michael Balfour (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 21–31.
43. Even the "internationally oriented" Theatre Guild of New York compares poorly to the Schauspielhaus in terms of numbers of international plays: to take just one year for comparison, in the 1939–40 season the Theatre Guild presented five plays in total, all by American playwrights; in the same season, the Schauspielhaus's thirty-play repertoire included five international plays, three of which were German-language premieres, and one of which was by an American writer (Robert Sherwood); see Norman Nadel, *A Pictorial History of the Theatre Guild* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969), 282.
44. Kurt Hirschfeld, "Perspektiven des deutschen Theaters" [speech], n.d. (ca. 1945–6), 4; KHC, Box 4, Folder 4/15, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n758/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n758/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018.
45. Mittenzwei, 135.
46. *Ibid.*, 136.
47. Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie," 15.
48. Hirschfeld, "Perspektiven des deutschen Theaters," 7–8.
49. Regarding the 1957 production, see Curt Riess, "Der falsche Giraudoux: Die zweite Generation zehrt voll den Ehren der Väter," *Die Zeit*, 30 May 1957, [www.zeit.de/1957/22/der-falsche-giraudoux](http://www.zeit.de/1957/22/der-falsche-giraudoux), accessed 21 December 2018.
50. Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie," 8.
51. *Ibid.*, 10.
52. Günther Schoop, *Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus im zweiten Weltkrieg* (Zürich: Verlag Oprecht, 1957), 136.
53. As John O'Connor, Claudel's first English translator, puts it: "The whole world, especially the sea, is the stage, and the constellations roof [Claudel's] theatre. Movies, talkies, Pirandello inversions, angelic influences, actor–author–producer interventions, high tension relieved by low comedy, all these devices are enlisted . . . the work is vastness embodied"; John O'Connor, "Claudel and His *Satin Slipper*," *New Blackfriars* 12.139 (1931): 603–19, at 603–4.
54. Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie," 11.
55. Christèle Barbier, "Le Soulier de satin au théâtre et au cinéma," in Société Paul Claudel, "L'Année du Soulier de satin: En mémoire de la mise en scène d'Antoine Vitez, cour d'honneur d'Avignon, 1987" [www.paul-claudel.net/actualite/lannee-du-soulier-de-satin#theatre](http://www.paul-claudel.net/actualite/lannee-du-soulier-de-satin#theatre), accessed 3 January 2015.

56. The first German production of *Murder in the Cathedral* was in Basel in 1939, translated by Werner Wolff and directed by Wilfried Scheitlin; see Thomas Blubacher, *Befreiung von der Wirklichkeit?: Das Schauspiel am Stadttheater Basel 1933–1945* (Basel: Editions Theaterkultur Verlag, 1995), 7, 207. Yet the Schauspielhaus Zürich advertised its June 1947 production as a German-language premiere, likely because it was the first production of a new translation by Rudolf Alexander Schröder; see advertisements in *Die Tat*, 12/138, 21 May 1947, 8 and *Die Tat*, 13/139, 22 May 1948, 13. Four months after the Zürich production, *Der Spiegel* (mistakenly) claimed for productions of the same translation in Köln and Göttingen the honor of the German premiere; “Vierfache Versuchung,” *Der Spiegel*, 43/1947, 25 October 1947, 16; [www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41123371.html](http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41123371.html), accessed 21 June 2018.

57. Kurt Hirschfeld, “Probleme der neueren Dramaturgie” [speech], n.d. (alternative draft), 19; KHC, Box 4, Folder 4/19, LBI, [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n905/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n905/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019.

58. Penelope Niven, *Thornton Wilder: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 442; Schoop, 129.

59. Huonker, 117.

60. See the correspondence between Hirschfeld and Hans Sahl, 30 January–6 March 1950; KHC, Box 1, Folder 1/1, LBI; correspondence appears in reverse chronological order beginning at [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel01#page/n626/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel01#page/n626/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019.

61. Letter from Hirschfeld to Hans Sahl, 7 February 1950; KHC, Box 1, Folder 1/1, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel01#page/n630/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel01#page/n630/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019. On the relationship between Scheitlin and Wälterlin, see “History of Gays in Switzerland: Oskar Wälterlin,” <https://schwulengeschie.ch/epochen/3-die-schweiz-wird-zur-insel/schauspielhaus-zuerich/neue-schauspiel-ag/oskar-waelterlin/>, accessed 25 April 2019.

62. Niven, 440.

63. [Author unknown], “Zu Thornton Wilder’s Werk *Wir sind noch einmal davongekommen* (*The Skin of Our Teeth*),” n.d., 1; KHC, Box 5, Folder 6/9, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel10#page/n1103/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel10#page/n1103/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018. This essay appears to have been written in conjunction with the first Swiss production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1944, and may have been authored by Hirschfeld; alternatively, this may be the text for the speech Wälterlin gave to the *Zürcher Theaterverein* on 6 March 1944 described by Schoop, 128; but the quotes from that speech included in Schoop’s history do not appear in this document.

64. “Zu Thornton Wilder’s Werk,” 1.

65. See Schoop, 129, and 209 n. 377. The cited article is Oskar Wälterlin, “Die letzte Probe,” *Du* 10 (1942): 65–6, at 66.

66. Niven, 478.

67. Kurt Hirschfeld and Gert Westphal, radio script, “25 Jahre Schauspielhaus,” 1963; KHC, Box 4, Folder 4/17, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n854/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n854/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018. The indirect path Wilder’s play took to the Schauspielhaus was not unusual; as Riess notes, “Switzerland was almost completely cut off from the outside world” during the war; Riess, *Das Schauspielhaus Zürich*, 194.

68. “Zu Thornton Wilder’s Werk,” 5.

69. *Ibid.*, 2.

70. See, for example, Peter Demetz, *Postwar German Literature: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 104.

71. “Zu Thornton Wilder’s Werk,” 16–17.

72. Hirschfeld, “Perspektiven des deutschen Theaters,” 10.

73. *Ibid.*, 8.

74. The German-language premiere of *The Glass Menagerie* was at the Basel Stadttheater, 17 October 1946. In his 2012 article “When Broadway Came to Sweden: The European Premiere of Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*,” Dirk Gindt notes that all of Tennessee Williams’s major plays had their European premiere in Sweden—which, like Zürich, having been spared the physical devastation of other major cities, had a theatrical infrastructure in place and a hunger for new work. *Theatre Survey* 53.1 (2012): 59–83, at 60.

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75. The German-language premiere of Miller's play occurred in Vienna in early March 1950, in a version translated by Ferdinand Bruckner; see "Kunst und Kultur: *Der Tod des Handlungsreisenden*," *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna), 4 March 1950, 5, [www.arbeiter-zeitung.at/cgi-bin/archiv/flash.pl?seite=19500304\\_A05;html=1](http://www.arbeiter-zeitung.at/cgi-bin/archiv/flash.pl?seite=19500304_A05;html=1), accessed 21 June 2018. The Zürich production opened about two weeks later. In the 1950s Zürich also saw the first German-language productions of several of Eugene O'Neill's major plays, including *The Iceman Cometh* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*—both of which were directed by Hirschfeld himself—and *Desire under the Elms*.

76. Kurt Hirschfeld, fragment of untitled speech, n.d.; Kurt Hirschfeld Collection, AR 7066/ MF 608, Box 4, Folder 4/15, Leo Baeck Institute; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel09#page/n753/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel09#page/n753/mode/1up), accessed 22 May 2019.

77. Letter from Hirschfeld to Hans Sahl, 23 December 1949; KHC, Box 1, Folder 1/1, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel01#page/n634/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel01#page/n634/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019.

78. Letter from Hirschfeld to Hans Sahl, 13 March 1959; KHC, Box 2, Folder 1/14, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel05#page/n287/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel05#page/n287/mode/1up), accessed 21 December 2018.

79. Hirschfeld, "Probleme der modernen Dramaturgie," 16–17.

80. As noted by Christopher Innes, "Theatre after Two World Wars," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Theatre*, ed. John Russell Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 380–444, at 420: "Of all Europe, only Switzerland, secure in its neutrality and still prospering, continued the line of development that had flourished in the 1930s."

81. Henning Rischbieter, "Dramaturgie Heute: Zur Geschichte der Dramaturgie," *Dramaturg: Nachrichten der Dramaturgischen Gesellschaft* 2 (1996): 3–10, at 7. Kröger and Exinger echo this sentiment: "This much-lauded repertoire was the model for German and Austrian stages after the end of the war" (78); they also note that members of the Zürich ensemble provided crucial material support to German and Austrian theatrical colleagues in the immediate postwar era, sending—in addition to food, coffee, and cigarettes—scripts "typed in the middle of the night with myriad strike-throughs" (88). See also Mittenzwei, 192; Beat Schläpfer, *Theater in Switzerland*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Zürich: Pro-Helvetia, 1994), 59; and Rolf Schneider, "Das Zürcher Schauspielhaus und das Theater in der Bundesrepublik," in *Das verschonte Haus*, 45–54, at 51.

82. Innes, 423.

83. Letter from Hirschfeld to Hans Sahl, 9 January 1951; KHC, Box 1, Folder 1/1, LBI; [www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld\\_01\\_reel01#page/n611/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/kurtkirschfeld_01_reel01#page/n611/mode/1up), accessed 23 May 2019.

84. See Mittenzwei, 192; Demetz, 124, 150; Therese Poser, "Friedrich Dürrenmatt," in *Zur Interpretation des modernen Dramas: Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Frisch*, ed. Rolf Geißler (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1960), 69–96, at 71; and Wilhelm Ziskoven, "Max Frisch," in *ibid.*, 99–144, at 104–6.

85. Demetz, 105.

86. Mittenzwei, 133.

87. I am grateful to the anonymous *Theatre Survey* reviewer who called my attention to this irony.

88. Mayer, 56.

89. Demetz, 104.