

Past Difference— Future Possibility: Re-reading the Early Brecht

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The article considers the early work of Bertolt Brecht, particularly the first play Baal and its expression of a possible queer sensibility. My purpose in this project rests in the potential of bringing the character of Baal, a writer, into the present in order to examine the concept of recognition through the work of Judith Butler and Jessica Benjamin, and the pathology of queer under heteronormativity—past and present—through the work of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva. This exercise acknowledges that ‘queer’ does not function as a catch-all term, because it does not describe the lived experience of heteronormative hegemony.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to consider factors that relate to the question of how and why Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* (1918) can be read as a contemporary queer experience. The issues will be discussed in three parts. The first part will attend to the context for the play's writing and the relevance of context to the question; that is, why *Baal* can be read as a queer figure. This section will also consider the ways in which Brecht as a writer has been historicised by looking at the relevance of Jean François Lyotard's work on knowledge and controlled context. The second part will describe the text and its trajectories with focus on reading the significance of *Baal*'s actions to the question. I will suggest that transgression is the strongest trajectory, particularly transgressive sexuality. Part three proceeds from the question of transgressive sexuality, making use of Sigmund Freud's theory of polymorphous perverse tendencies, Julia Kristeva's theory of ideality as malady in adolescence, and Judith Butler's expansion of both Freud and Kristeva in her relation between melancholia and the desire for recognition. These three theorists are referenced as a way of speaking about the discourse on sexuality and the figure of *Baal*. Finally, *Baal*'s transgressive sexuality will be considered for its contemporary relevance.

Because the text could be described as semi-autobiographical, it is necessary at the outset to engage effectively with the question of whether or not expressions of homosexuality in *Baal* and other early plays and poetry indicate that Brecht practised homosexual acts in *real* life. Following extensive consideration of terms, conditions, relevance and after review of available biographical information, I have arrived at the question of whether or not heterosexuality can be presumed, rather than whether or not homosexuality can be proven. In other words, is the normative of heterosexual behaviour always to be taken as the compulsory expression of sexuality, and can compulsory heterosexuality be described as a form of hegemony? Further, is it a requisite that expressions of sexuality at any moment define and fix identity for all time? Inevitably, neither expression of continuous explicit exclusive homosexuality nor explicit exclusive heterosexuality can be irrefutably stated in relation to Bertolt Brecht. It is sufficient to note within the scope of this article that this instability represents a significant critique of the desire for a specific determination. Because there is contingent complexity and multiple methods of arguing determination, deterrent enough in the pursuit of *truth* and *proof* in non-judicial contexts, I

will use the term 'queer sensibility' as an affirmative way of treating a text that is transgressive. I will work from the premise that it is not necessary to diagnose or determine any particular expression of sexuality, and that this is different from naming a particular expression of sexuality at any point in time.

Is it important, then, that scholarship has tended to obfuscate what I am proposing as Brecht's early sensibility of queer? It is difficult to explore this perspective, as Brecht has so often been characterised and historicised by scholars as either the exemplar of a revolutionary political theatre and or the misogynist exploiter opportunist. This tendency may be a product of pathology with regard to *aberrant* sexualities typical of medical and psychiatric research from Freud onward, and adopted for use by literary and cultural theory. It is more likely that non-verifiable, yet taken as axiomatic, statements about normative values have over time been accepted by interlocutors within the discipline of Brecht studies.

With the publication of works such as Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990, interested scholars were provoked to reconsider the concept of a fixed core or innate gender identity through the notion of performativity developed by Butler, from J L Austin, Jean François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. Butler theorised that fixed notions of gender are installed and maintained through performativity.

Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.¹

Since most of the well recognised translations of Brecht into English were published before 1990, as was a large proportion of the scholarly writing and many biographies, it is important for my argument to note the work of Lyotard on the methodologies that serve to authenticate viewing positions. Lyotard's understanding of performativity as an exercise of power is closely related to Butler's.

Power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and good verdicts. It legitimates science and the law on the basis of their efficiency, and legitimates this efficiency on the basis of science and law. It is self-legitimizing, in the way

a system organised around performance maximization seems to be... The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal.²

While Lyotard was not speaking specifically about literary theory and the perpetuation of ideas and attitudes, this comment on systems and the technology of knowledge acquisition and research methods, taken from *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), is relevant to how the bases of knowledge can be maintained and historicised through control of context.

PART ONE: CONTEXT AND CONDITIONS

Brecht's *Baal* reflects the conditions for a young artist's active exploration of forms of sexual pleasure and other life experience in a time dominated by war and violence. *Baal* was Brecht's first adult attempt at writing for performance in a theatrical context after many years of writing poetry and songs to be performed, according to biographer John Fuegi (1994), in local bars in the manner of a proto rock star.³ Fuegi does not provide a reference or reason for this description, and it may be that the comment on Brecht as performance poet was influenced by the 1980 BBC production of *Baal* which cast real-life rock star David Bowie as Baal. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's rarely seen performance as Baal in Volker Schlöndorff's 1970 film was banned by the Brecht Estate, which controls copyright. Uwe Janson's film presenting a grungier rock star conception was apparently more acceptable, premiering at the Berliner Ensemble in 2003. It is probable that Brecht's performance of songs was in the style of a balladeer rather than a rock star as footage from the BBC production suggests. The balladeer/rock star conception is relevant here only because the popular notion of the behaviour of rock stars is seen to be expressive or, in Butler's terms, a performative of excess and transgression through a disaffected youth culture associated with instability of gender identity.

Although *Baal* can be said to be expressive in this sense, Brecht actually positioned the work as an anti-expressionist piece. That is, as a contradistinction to the Expressionist movement, influential in Germany from approximately 1910 to 1922. That *Baal* remained

important to Brecht as a statement of antithesis and revolt against forms of bourgeois cultural sedimentation is evidenced by a comment on the early work made by the author when preparing for publication of the collected works just two years before his death.

Baal is a play which could present all kinds of difficulties to those who had not learned to think dialectically... here is an individual standing out against the demands and discouragements of a world whose form of production is designed for exploitation rather than usefulness. We cannot tell how Baal would react to having talents employed; what is being resisted is their misuse...⁴

The first *Baal*, raw, flawed and difficult, was published with the assistance of a mentor, Dr Lion Feuchtwanger, and produced after many re-workings on 08 December 1923 at the Leipzig Theatre under the direction of Alwin Kronacher. Brecht was then twenty-five and, although gleaning anything and everything as material for his verse, his politics had not yet congealed into doctrine. The first serious instruction in Marxist theory did not start until around 1932, when he formally studied in what were organised as study circles in critical Marxism with economist Karl Korsch, who was expelled from the communist party in 1926. This is not to say that there was a lack of periodic engagement with the work of Marx from the mid-1920s.

As has been mentioned, although the first works of a writer are not always autobiographical this play could be framed as such. In *Baal* there are allusions to the sometimes antisocial acts and violent relations between French symbolist poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, shown through the writing of the figures Baal and Ekart. The parallels can also be drawn with many of Brecht's relationships with male friends. The work produced is a deliberate departure from accepted subject matter and proper use of language on the stage, which follows the approach taken by Brecht's idol in the theatre, Frank Wedekind, the poet François Villon and storyteller Rudyard Kipling. As with Rimbaud and Kipling, Brecht's imagination was invested in wild adventures in exotic landscapes. The subject matter of the poetry written between 1913 and 1920 ranges from war and disillusion, a railroad gang in Ohio, a tribute to François Villon and a ballad about pirates to sensual enjoyment of simple local pleasures.

My body and thighs and resting arm
We lie in the water quite at one and still
Only when the cool fish swim through us
I sense the sun shining above the pool.⁵

This is in stark contrast to the bitter confrontation of betrayed ideals in 'Song of the Soldier of the Red Army'.

And with our body hard from rain
And with our heart all scarred by ice
And with our bloodstained empty hands we
Come grinning into your paradise.⁶

This juxtaposition of death, adventure and sensuality is carried over into *Baal*, where the adrenalin rush of responses to heightened reality is drawn from experience of social upheaval. In terms of transgressive sexuality there is a strong sense of extending boundaries beyond good and evil. As context, the law on same sex activity in Germany at the time of *Baal's* writing shows a brutal disregard for and zero tolerance of those wishing to practise or fully adopt a preference for anything other than heteronormative behaviours. The prohibition enacted by Section 175 of the German Criminal Code (§175 Strafgesetzbuch) states:

Unnatural fornication, whether between persons of the male sex or of humans with beasts, is to be punished by imprisonment, a sentence of loss of civil rights may also be passed.

Note here the use of 'unnatural fornication' as substitute for the word homosexuality, use of which in everyday language dates from the late 19th century, and the association with bestiality. The word 'homosexuality' is not used anywhere at all in Klaus Völker's biography of Brecht (1979), in preference for 'dandified' or 'the Oscar Wilde type'. In other words, the references used to indicate queerness are codified or euphemistic.⁷ Martin Esslin's notes on *Baal*, and *In the Jungles of Cities (Im Dickicht der Staedte)* (1984), may be useful in assessing the importance of queer proclivities or tendencies to any study of Brecht's work.

Though it may be significant that three out of Brecht's early plays are concerned with the problem of homosexuality, the

exact nature of the subconscious urge he sought to suppress is irrelevant. What matters for the understanding of Brecht's development as a writer and his deeply felt need for political commitment is merely the indisputable fact that his whole work is deeply concerned with the problem of the struggle between subconscious impulse and conscious control.⁸

Significantly, Esslin characterises homosexuality here as a problem and frames his comment with popular use of psychoanalytic terminology. That Brecht was conflicted is not an unreasonable claim. To dismiss the nature of conflict as 'irrelevant' is to deny possibility. Denial of this particular possibility was and still is a deeply felt and traumatic event, which has become rich ground for academic study in specific disciplines in the last two decades.

Fuegi's biography (1994) is very detailed in its description of young Brecht's circle without mention of the word 'homosexuality', and although Fuegi's scholarship has been questioned, that criticism is focused on the efficacy of Fuegi's research into breaches of Brecht's responsibility to his female collaborators and the quasi feminist stance that Fuegi inhabits for his own purpose.⁹

On *Baal*, Fuegi claims that Brecht wrote the play:

In a matter of at least five weeks stitching it together mainly from his growing portfolio of violent poems, many of which were slightly modified versions of poems by François Villon, with help from Augsburg friends, he did create a dark, brilliant, misogynist, violent, homoerotic, extended poem of a play, very much in the style of Wedekind.¹⁰

Here Fuegi combines 'misogynist' and 'homoerotic' in the same sentence, inserting 'violent' between the two. The concepts of misogyny and homoeroticism as they relate to *Baal* will be explored in part two of this article. For the moment it serves my purpose to question whether some precision is lacking in this sentence, despite the use of seven descriptors. On the one hand the description could be taken as implying that *Baal* was a product of a derivative process focused on Villon and Wedekind. On the other, it may be that Fuegi implies homosexuality by avoiding use of the word itself. This open-handed writing and reading leads to the question of the

nature and influence of biography, and to the form of biography as a fictive approach to fact rather than a factual account. Interpretative biography is important to the way Brecht has been historicised and is indicative of the complexity and problematic nature of truth and proof. Further, biography has contributed greatly to the understanding of what Brecht has come to represent to political theatre and theatre studies in general. What this means to the pedagogy of Brecht is an interesting topic, which cannot be addressed here but is a question for consideration at another time.

PART TWO: TRAJECTORIES WITHIN THE PLAY TEXT

Baal can be dismissed as the product of immaturity—a young, bourgeois male artist’s sexist and iconoclastic petulance. But it would be unwise to dismiss the work of the pre-didactic Brecht as being infertile ground for a political enquiry. My concept of *Baal* as a contemporary queer reading draws from it not only a sense of a transgression in sexual expression but a politically parodic treatment of reification and commodification of the self.

Brecht’s *Baal* is a performance-poet, an indiscriminate consumer of people, things and pleasures who is, at the outset, being wooed by patrons—academics, corporate sponsors, critics and others. *Baal*, attractive, young, poor, auto-didactic and downwardly mobile when first encountered, is concerned not for the lure of a successful future but for the immediacy of clean clothes, food, drink and the opportunity to perform. *Baal* lives in anticipation of pleasure, constantly alert to the potential conditions for new sexual experiences. During dinner, *Baal*’s criticism of the business activities of a potential sponsor turns the tables of support, as does the consuming of large quantities of alcohol and making inappropriate remarks to the sponsor’s wife. There is a sudden shift in feeling and *Baal* finds that a door has been closed.

The worker-poet *Baal* is markedly disinterested in the opportunity being thrown away, preferring open exchange of art products for drinks, goods or cash in hand rather than the segmented world of marketing and contracts. Performing poetry in bars and on the street, drinking, working in logging camps and exploring sexual pleasure become the inexorable trajectory—a self-destructive one as too much liquor leads to failing mental and physical health. The murder of his

friend Ekart is perpetrated, followed by a police hunt and, finally, death catches up with a now dissipated *Baal* crawling through the detritus of a logging camp in a forest.

Baal’s transgressions come thick and fast; enduring in audacity and intensity, they breach normative behaviours in social, cultural and economic contexts throughout. This section will focus on transgressions of normative sexuality. *Baal*’s interactions with females are characterised by non-recognition of the sanctity of marriage or any other form of legitimated coupling. *Baal* then presents as an undomesticated and undomesticable social and political animal. Brecht clearly defines this status in the opening, ‘Hymn of *Baal* the Great’.

Where the sinners herd in shame together
Baal lies naked, soaking up the calm.
 Just the sky, but sky to last for *ever*
 Hides his nakedness with its strong arm.¹¹

In this stanza, Brecht establishes *Baal* as being outside and apart from the normative: beyond moral determination and linked to an infinite and expansive otherness. Extending this somewhat pantheistic notion further into association of pagan myths through imagery, Brecht writes:

Under mournful stars in our sad vale of trouble
 Munching, *Baal* can graze broad pastures down to stubble.
 When they’re cropped, into the forest deep
Baal trots, singing, to enjoy his sleep.¹²

Pan, who in Greek mythology was the god of nature, pastures, flocks, and forests, was believed to have a human torso and head with the hind legs, ears and horns of a goat. The entry in *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* for the fertility symbol *Baal* states:

Baal worship apparently had its origin in the belief that every tract of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, or *baal*, that dwelt there. The farmers probably thought that from the *Baalim*, or fertility gods, of various regions came the increase of crops, fruit and cattle... The worship of *Baal* was accompanied with lascivious rites. (1 Kings 14:24)¹³

The figurative language used by Brecht for the 'Hymn' that presents Baal and Pan in a relation conjures the notion of Baal in *Baal* as a consumer, appreciative of all the pleasures available yet curiously beyond attachment to the finality of death. The 'Hymn' can be seen as a statement concerning the endless cycles of birth, death and rebirth and of being powerless to control the inevitability of events. It would seem reasonable to assume that if Brecht and his generation also felt powerless to control the context for their existence, then surrender to it would be an alternative response. Baal's concept was that human ethics are not derived from a divine command; rather, that ethics are linked to factors determined by necessary contingencies embedded in the cycles of all living things.

It is from this basis that the text proceeds. Thus Baal's treatment of sexual partners can be conceived of as irrelevant according to the premise stated, but this must surely be contrasted with the conditions under which Baal conducts the interactions. Since all parties do not conduct their interactions working from the same premise, it has to be considered that Baal is an exploiter. In other words, the interactions are not equal and as a result there is an abuse of power. The females—Emilie (wife of the merchant Mech), Johanna (girlfriend of Baal's friend Johannes), Sophie Barger, the two sisters and, implicitly, many others not mentioned—could be conceived of as victims. The interactions transgress every social norm—but are these females Baal's victims, or are the females victims of the normative hegemony by which Baal refuses to be determined? That sexual encounters unaccompanied by romantic love, obligation, exclusivity and legitimation must involve shame, guilt and public humiliation for females speaks of the role females play under normative hegemony. That Johanna is shamed into drowning herself after coming to the realisation that Baal does not intend to commit to her exclusively is more an indictment of sexual prohibition rather than Baal's treatment, which has been framed as misogyny. The two sisters reiterate the presence of guilt and association of shame with sexual desire for females, and Sophie's pregnancy introduces the question of unprotected sex into the mix of social hypocrisy, differing standards of sexual behaviour for males and females, and the broader, deeper question of historical ownership and control of females by males.

On the subject of homoeroticism, or homosexuality in the relationship between Baal and Ekart, the last section of the play in particular

explores feelings explicitly stated. In the scenes that follow Ekart's announcement:

I'm not going with you any farther. I've got a soul too. You corrupted my soul. You corrupt everything.¹⁴

'Corrupt' here can be read as 'destabilise' or 'confuse'. Baal's toast to Ekart as response is:

Your health! I love you.¹⁵

Ekart does not in fact ever leave Baal, and they continue to lie in thickets together near the water's edge gazing at clouds, oblivious to all else, to the extent that Baal declares:

I don't care for women any longer.¹⁶

The sense of Baal being beyond attachment begins to dissolve with what can be described as jealousy and or mutual dependence. Baal's relationship with Ekart is not one that can be experienced on a sexual level or homoerotic level alone. Baal actively thwarts Ekart's interactions with females by engaging with those very same females himself. After eight years of a life together, sometimes on the road, Ekart meets Johannes in a favourite drinking haunt. Baal is described as having become disgusting and is strongly defended by Ekart.

Don't say that. I don't want to hear it. I love him. I don't resent him, because I love him. He's a child.¹⁷

Baal then arrives very drunk, sings falteringly and sadly in the dark about a 'land where life is best', having smashed the light with a guitar. When the light is put on once more, Baal becomes enraged at seeing Ekart with the waitress on his lap, her arms wound round his neck. They fight. Baal fatally wounds Ekart.

PART THREE: SEXUALITY AND TRANSGRESSION

If I am to relate the behaviour of Baal to the discourse on sexuality I can only, within the scope of this article, mention the concept of

polymorphous perverse tendencies from Freud's 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality' (1905), and Kristeva's 'Adolescence, a syndrome of ideality' (2007) as being contra to Butler's conception of recognition and melancholia in queer youth presented in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004).

In chapter two of the 'Three essays' outlining infantile sexuality, Freud defines the term 'polymorphous perverse' as 'a generalized sexual desire that can be excited and gratified in many ways, normal in young children, unusual in adults.'¹⁸ For the adult to be subject to this irregularity Freud believes that an innate disposition to perversion must exist, cultivated by the influence of some sort of seduction. By way of example, Freud offers the instance of prostitutes who 'exploit the same polymorphous perverse disposition for their work/profession'.¹⁹

Contemporary use of 'perverse' refers to it as that which is contrary to accepted standards or practice, or a distortion of or corruption of what was first intended. In terms of human behaviour and use of the word 'perverse', should it not be irrefutably established that what was first intended is actually knowable? Being contrary to accepted standards or practice is another matter. Use of the concept in Freud serves the notion that a normative hegemony has been installed for the purpose of regulating a moral standard which is taken to be innate.

Kristeva, in response to Freud's three essays, writes of adolescence as a syndrome of ideality. Kristeva theorises that in contrast to the polymorphous perverse child who is a 'seeker of knowledge—a little researcher', the adolescent is both tantalised and tormented by the quest for an ideal object of desire. The torment is derived from the fear that existence of the ideal object is under threat. From the torment a possible cycle of disappointment, depression, suicide, the anorectic or an addiction/substance abuse syndrome results.

For the moment, let us consider that Kristeva's conception or Freud's conception may apply to the figure of Baal. That is, Baal is either presenting irregular polymorphous perverse behaviours or is caught up in a syndrome of ideality. Kristeva writes that ideality dominates the adolescent unconscious. Further, as a defence mechanism, ideality 'induces a perverse type of exponential pleasure'. Ideality, then, if absolute can become a source of pleasurable suffering, as the adolescent believes firmly that the 'Great Other' (the ideal object) exists and that this belief is the pleasure in itself. Taking this ideality into the realm of malady involves consideration of some of the

repercussions from failure of the ideal—for example, substance abuse and the 'orgasmic regression' contingent to experiences of induced pleasures. Kristeva concludes that ideality is a fragile state, constituted by not only erotic and thanatic components but risk and extreme *jouissance*. From the analyst's perspective, Kristeva asserts that:

adolescence can perhaps be seen in terms of its possibilities though this outlook is contingent on our (the analysts') ability to accompany the subject in the need to believe, co-extensive to the impossibility of this belief.²⁰

What does this theorising mean in the context of a queer reading?

If queer youth are included in Kristeva's generalised use of the term 'adolescence', can I not assume that an expectation of queer youth—to be able to grow and develop in a community where abuse, violence and derision are not used as foreclosure to activities that are for the heterosexual perceived as normal—is conceived of as valid and reasonable and not an ideal? Am I to consider that, if I accept Kristeva's concept of ideality as malady, the developmental processes of adolescents who choose a queer existence may be somehow compounded by a failure of the community to recognise them, or am I to accept that queer adolescents must come to terms with the impossibility of their expectations? In relation to the possible impact of this for Baal, Butler advances on both Freud and Kristeva:

In melancholia the loved object is lost through a variety of means: separation, death, or the breaking of an emotional tie. In the Oedipal situation however, the loss is dictated by a prohibition attended by a set of punishments.²¹

Melancholia here is seen as the suppressed and ambivalent form of mourning. My proposition is that 'the loved object' could refer not only to a person but to a place, a thing or a concept, and that grief could attend the loss of recognition as well as the loss of a reasonable expectation. Thus, for the queer adolescent living under heteronormativity, pleasure and life force are linked to melancholia in ways that are not considered in Kristeva's essay. For Baal, Butler's concept of the need in young adults for recognition may be the key to a contemporary understanding:

Our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves (makes us ec-static) in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have. This means that the ec-static character of our existence is essential to the possibility of persisting as human. In this sense we can see how sexual rights bring together two related domains of ecstasy, two connected ways of being outside of ourselves.²²

Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin reasons, 'If we do not begin with the opposition between woman and man with woman's negative position in that binary, we seem to dissolve the very basis for our having questioned gender categories in the first place.'²³

Butler, however, emphasises that since we do not yet live in a post-gendered society there is an imperative to work within the terms of power and a need to continue questioning:

If what we want to do is offer recognition, if we believe that recognition is a reciprocal process that moves selves beyond their incorporative and destructive dispositions toward an understanding of another self whose difference from us is ethically imperative to mark.²⁴

CONCLUSION: TRANSGRESSION AND SUBVERSION

The question of how the normative hegemony impacts on Baal and those who come in contact with Baal is, finally, relevant to the question that needs to be addressed—that is, the factors that relate to how and why Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* can be read as a contemporary queer experience. For this purpose I go back to the 'Hymn', which establishes Baal as being outside and apart from the normative; beyond moral determination and linked to an infinite and expansive otherness. Whether that otherness for Brecht is beyond description, or represents pre-Christian value systems, or is a conception of an impossible unmediated utopian sense of *Nature* is not clear, but it is a clear attempt to present the idea of the normative as hegemony.

That Baal degenerates and eventually dies through the course of

the play could be read as punishment for transgression, or as sewing what one reaps, or even as martyrdom—but would that not betray the premise of the 'Hymn'? Is Baal's trajectory transgression for its own sake, without being productively subversive at the same time? 'The Utterances of a Martyr' written around the same time as *Baal*, vents Brecht's frustration with moral determinations:

What business have they got putting that stuff about Truth
in the catechism
If one's not allowed to say what is?²⁵

Could it not be that Brecht confronted the reality of normative hegemony at this time as having the potential to destroy those who cannot learn to compromise or negotiate occasional acts of discontinuity within it? Butler affirms that working within systems is not the same as to repeat, to legitimate and 'to replicate uncritically relations of domination'.

If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is 'before', 'outside', or 'beyond' power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself.²⁶

In a contemporary queer reading, Baal's choice need not necessarily be between evils but rather to acknowledge the idea that refusal to navigate the terms of power is inevitably a doomed project. ❖

ENDNOTES

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25. Willett and Manheim, 16.
26. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 40.