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Narrating the Date: Brecht's *Cäsar und sein Legionär* and the Calendar Story

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In the beginning was the date: "Seit Anfang März wußte der Diktator, daß die Tage der Diktatur gezählt waren" (53). This first sentence of Bertolt Brecht's *Cäsar und sein Legionär* introduces the beginning of March as a time of significance, the beginning of the end of Caesar's reign. The centerpiece of Brecht's collection *Kalendergeschichten*, this story joins a large number of literary works that begin with a date in order to position themselves in time. On May 23rd 1943, Serenus Zeitblom begins his work on the biography of his deceased friend, the composer Adrian Leverkühn. The date on the first page of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* connects the narrative with the 'real' world; it provides information as to the whereabouts of the narrator, as well as a temporal frame for the reader. Authors of historical novels, from Lion Feuchtwanger to Tanja Kinkel, often choose to begin their works with a date. Georg Büchner's *Lenz* (1839), Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* (1971), Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose* (1836), Christoph Gottwald's *Blüenträume* (2010), Heimito von Doderer's *Strudelhofstiege* (1951), Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), and many other texts open with a date, not to mention epistolary novels and diaries, where the date as the default chapter opening defines the genre. The date that so often marks the beginning of realistic narrative becomes an anchor, a connector between the 'world of the text' and in many cases the 'world of the reader', to borrow Paul Ricoeur's terms; an anchor, however, whose significance is limited to this act of connecting. In short, the date is an "informant," as Roland Barthes would call it. Its only function is to "inform" the reader about the when and where of the narrative, which, according to Barthes, is *per se* timeless (Barthes 96).

In each case, there is a date and a corresponding action or event in the story: the beginning of Zeitblom's work on Adrian's autobiography, Raskolnikov's stroll through St. Petersburg, or Georg Bendemann's reading of his friend's letter, for instance. In Brecht's case, however, the question arises as to what the corresponding action is exactly. "Seit Anfang März wußte der Diktator, daß die Tage der Diktatur gezählt waren." The beginning of March marks the beginning of Caesar's knowledge, but the reason for this knowledge remains unexplained. Surprisingly, the following sentences describe a lively scene in Rome without connecting any particular event to the beginning of March. The common double structure of date and event is broken in this case, which makes the date stand out. Thus, this "Calendar Story" seems to be, literally, a story about the calendar, as represented by the date.

It is informative to read Brecht's narrative in the context of the genre's history, even though *Cäsar und sein Legionär* is not a traditional calendar story that is published as part of a calendar but rather a story about the calendar as a construct;

in fact, some have argued that Brecht's *Kalendergeschichten* do not belong within the genre at all (Knopf 206). The following discussion of the calendar's role in the calendar story genre, the beginning of time narration in Hebel's *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen*, and the significance of politics in calendar stories, informs the subsequent reading of Brecht's narrative. The calendar's significance within the narrative is to be understood as a consequence of the genre's history and development. This 20th-century descendant of the *Kalendergeschichte* differs from the 19th-century calendar story in that dates seem to structure the story from within; the calendar is no longer the medium, as was the case in the original *Kalendergeschichten* of the 19th century, but has moved inside the story and has become part of the narrative so that, one might say, the story narrates the calendar. Thus, I argue, the date in Brecht's story is *not* an informant, but stands in its own right. The story can be referred to as what Rohner calls "Kalendergeschichten ohne Kalender" (Rohner 427ff.), which, as the following discussion demonstrates, represents an update of rather than a break with the genre's tradition.

History of the *Kalendergeschichte*

Around 1800, the calendar was the driving force in publishing, and the prototype of all calendar story collections, Johann Peter Hebel's *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreunds*, serves as a prime example of the interconnection of literary history and the history of marketing. Calendars sold well, and as a consequence, virtually all literary production took place within the confines of the calendar or the almanac. Accordingly, calendars were ubiquitous, and at times tried to outdo the competition with catchy titles such as "Kalender? Ey, wie viel Kalender" or "Almanach, der für zwei gelten kann" (see Mix, *Musenalmanache* 126). As there was no clear distinction between the different genres, the terms calendar, almanac, almanac of muses (*Musenalmanach*), and pocket book (*Taschenbuch*) were used almost interchangeably and were more or less synonymous in contemporary encyclopedias. No genre definition among these terms played a role, only the fact that they all sold well — better than books, in any event (Mix 16). Friedrich Schiller, right after the publication of the *Kalender auf das Jahr 1802. Die Jungfrau von Orleans. Eine romantische Tragödie*, was convinced that a publication as a calendar guaranteed a much larger edition of at least three thousand copies (see Mix 39f.). Just one year later, the book edition of the play was published — it is identical to the calendar edition with the only difference that the calendar is missing. Similarly, Johann Wolfgang Goethe also first published his *Herrmann and Dorothea* as an almanac (see Bunzel 67). The proliferation of almanacs even led to the criticism that German literature as a whole had holed up in calendars ("in Kalender verkrochen") (Ct. Mix 39). Walter Benjamin points to this notion in his satiric 1932 radio play *Was die Deutschen lasen, während ihre Klassiker schrieben*. A list of the books the "Zweite Literat" carries with him reads:

Almanach der deutschen Musen, Almanach für edle Seelen, Kalender der Musen und Grazien, Kurfürstlich braunschweigisch-lüneburger genealogischer Kalender, Almanach für Liebhaber der Gesundheit, Kirchen- und Ketzer-Almanach, Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen, Almanach für Kinder und junge Leute, Almanach zur Beförderung des häuslichen Glücks.

The character “Pastor Grunelius” says in response:

“Almanach zur Beförderung des häuslichen Glücks. Ja, das hat uns gefehlt. Da neun Zehntel des häuslichen Elends nur von eben dieser verdammten Almanachleserei kommt, über der jedes Frauenzimmer sich einbildet, eine Chloe oder gar eine Aspasia zu sein.” (Benjamin 647)

The proliferation of calendars and almanacs influenced literary production in that authors were bound to the annual publishing cycle, which, for instance, influenced Hölderlin’s poetic production, as Alexander Honold argues (Honold 230). During this time in the first half of the 19th century, the calendar story also developed as a distinct genre with the publication of Hebel’s *Der Rheinische Hausfreund*, and it has been connected with Hebel ever since.

Hebel published the calendar *Der Rheinische Hausfreund* from 1806 to 1815 — an annual publication with a calendar and various short texts of different genres, from deliberations about the weather to small riddles, anecdotes, and stories, following a tradition whose origins can be traced to Grimmelshausen’s *Ewig währender Kalender* some 200 years earlier. When Hebel collected a selection of his stories in his *Schatzkästlein*, together with several riddles, the concept of a collection of calendar stories and thus the question as to how to define the genre was conceived. Virtually all approaches to the calendar story start with Hebel’s collection, which speaks for a certain ambivalence, as the *Schatzkästlein* already represents the genre’s identity crisis: all stories have been written for a calendar, but here they appear without a reference to the calendar; therefore I suggest that the genre here begins a journey of emancipation from its medium. Already appearing early in the 19th century, anthologies of calendar stories represented the only means for single stories to transcend the annual cycle of the production and disposal of calendars. And indeed, the calendar stories that found their way into published anthologies are the ones that have received continued attention. Thus, the genre possesses an inherent drive to undermine itself — it is dependent on its medium, which it constantly and simultaneously tries to leave behind.

What is most important about the genre with regard to Brecht’s work is that the typical 19th-century calendar story is written as a folk tale and often alludes to world history, historical events, wars, and kings — so that a connection is made between ordinary people on the one hand and history, politics and world events on the other. This role of the calendar story in linking popular life and history is still alive in Brecht, whose calendar story follows the tradition in this respect. This

historical tendency also helped one critic define the calendar story as a story about history, a “Geschichte über Geschichte” (Scheffel 112). In the few existing studies on calendar stories — a genre that has been widely overlooked by literary critics — time is often understood in the sense of history, historical events, and anniversaries. In general, however, the genre is not considered a genre that explores the philosophical and theoretical challenges of narrating time — the significance of the calendar story lies in its brevity and its medium, the calendar. However, time as a theoretical topic does play an important role in some of Hebel’s stories. One example of this occurs in *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen* (1811), arguably Hebel’s most famous calendar story, which Ernst Bloch called “die schönste Geschichte der Welt” (Bloch 139) and which E.T.A. Hoffmann used as a blueprint for his *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* (1819).

Hebel’s *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen* provides not only the typical connection between history and everyday individuals, but also what could be considered a specific narratology of time. In this story, a young miner in Falun, Sweden goes to work and does not return for his wedding. The poor bride waits 50 long years. “Unterdessen,” reads the famous middle of the narrative:

wurde die Stadt Lissabon in Portugal durch ein Erdbeben zerstört, und der Siebenjährige Krieg ging vorüber, und Kaiser Franz der Erste starb, und der Jesuitenorden wurde aufgehoben und Polen geteilt, und die Kaiserin Maria Theresia starb, und der Struensee wurde hingerichtet; Amerika wurde frei, und die vereinigte französische und spanische Macht konnte Gibraltar nicht erobern. Die Türken schlossen den General Stein in der Veteraner Höhle in Ungarn ein, und der Kaiser Joseph starb auch. Der König Gustav von Schweden eroberte russisch Finnland und die Französische Revolution und der lange Krieg fing an, und der Kaiser Leopold der Zweite ging auch ins Grab. Napoleon eroberte Preußen, und die Engländer bombardierten Kopenhagen, und die Ackerleute säten und schnitten. Der Müller mahlte, und die Schmiede hämmerten, und die Bergleute gruben nach den Metalladern in ihrer unterirdischen Werkstatt. Als aber die Bergleute in Falun im Jahr 1809 etwas vor oder nach Johannis ... (Hebel 283f.)

When the villagers dig up the body, nobody knows who he is until the bride, “[g]rau und zusammengeschrumpft,” (Hebel 284) comes forward with the help of her crutches and recognizes her fiancé — and a combined wedding and funeral is celebrated in the village.

Significant is not only the equation of world history, represented by historical events and political figures of the time, and everyday history with the more cyclical allusions to farmers, millers, and miners. The representation of 50 years invokes historical events that do not just mark the passage of time — each juncture also creates a new date on the calendar, a date to be remembered, an anniversary in calendars to come. Thus, this historical time lapse becomes a calendar in the sense that Walter Benjamin describes, emphasizing the difference between calendar and clock. As Benjamin puts it, “Der Tag, mit dem ein Kalender einsetzt, fungiert als ein historischer Zeitraffer. Und es ist im Grunde genommen derselbe Tag, der in Gestalt der

Feiertage, die Tage des Eingedenkens sind, immer wiederkehrt. Die Kalender zählen die Zeit also nicht wie die Uhren” (Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte” 701). Hebel’s story is not only written on a calendar, but also reflects on it and opens the path to the genre’s evolution toward independence from its medium.

The advent of the calendar story as a genre coincides with an abundance of European calendar systems in the aftermath of the French Revolution and its decimal calendar, which joined a number of calendar systems that were already competing for the ‘right’ time in Enlightenment Europe. After Pope Gregor had introduced his new Calendar in 1582 (dropping the 10 days between March 11 and March 22 of that year), most protestant principalities kept what they called the protestant calendar (the Julian or Russian Calendar). Many published calendars around 1800 came with two parallel calendars, and some even came with three or four. The calendar in Schiller’s *Jungfrau*, for instance, provides four columns: The *Reichskalender* (Gregorian Calendar), the Russian calendar (Julian Calendar), the *neufränkische* calendar (calendar of the French Revolution), and the Jewish calendar. While many European countries had adopted the Gregorian calendar by the 18th century, some waited into the 19th century. In Graubünden, for instance, it took until 1812 — and China officially introduced this Western calendar only in 1912. The decimal calendar of the French Revolution coexisted with the Julian and Gregorian calendars but was never accepted by the French populace until Napoleon finally annulled it and reintroduced the Gregorian calendar.

Just as the history of the calendar is a history of politics, the calendar story in Hebel is at times politically engaged as well. A significant number of Hebel’s stories are supportive of the status quo. For example, *Andreas Hofer, Kaiser Napoleon und die Obstfrau von Brienne, König Friedrich und sein Nachbar, Ein gutes Rezept, and Heimliche Enthauptung 17. Juni* all demonstrate an explicit pro-government bias and reinforce the suppression of the broad populace. The reason for this may be the ubiquitous censorship in Napoleon’s Europe and the Europe of the Restoration. However, the implicit connection between calendar and political power mirrors Hebel’s confession about his role as calendar author: “Auf einen Kalendermacher schauen viele Augen. Deswegen muß er sich immer gleichbleiben, das heißt, er muß es immer mit der siegenden Partei halten. Es ist immer ein gutes Zeichen für eine kriegsführende Macht, wenn die Kalendermacher des Landes auf ihrer Seite sind” (Hebel *Kalender auf das Jahr 1815*, ct. Oettinger 40). Calendars are made by the powerful, and Hebel, even though his stories are by and large for and about everyday people, is no exception.

Calendar, time, and politics set the stage for Brecht’s narrative of the final days before Julius Caesar’s murder. Since the original calendar stories written for calendars seem, in general, to be much shorter, simpler, and folkloric than Brecht’s more complex narrative, it is difficult to make the argument that Brecht’s text conforms to the calendar story genre — and it is obviously not written on or for a calendar. However, the self-designation as calendar story does place it in the genre’s

context, and the genre's discussion in turn sheds light on Brecht's story. I suggest examining the *calendar* in the narrative: the calendar not just as a medium, but as a signifier of political power, a means of remembering, a chronicle, a pointer of time — or simply as that which keeps us and the world from standing still.

Caesar's Calendar in Brecht's *Cäsar und sein Legionär*

Bertolt Brecht could well be considered Hebel's literary heir. He repeatedly mentioned the value of popular textual forms and insisted that folk literature not be neglected. To quote from Brecht: "Man versteht nichts von Literatur, wenn man nur die ganz Großen gelten läßt. Ein Himmel nur mit Sternen erster Größe ist kein Himmel. Man mag bei Lenz nicht finden, was man bei Goethe findet, aber man findet auch bei Goethe nicht was bei Lenz" (Ct. Härtl 94). Regardless of the curious evaluation of Lenz versus Goethe, Brecht's regard for popular forms is well documented in, for instance, his adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera* and the artfulness of supposed simplicity that is characteristic in Hebel's writing can be observed in Brecht's as well.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Brecht explicitly places his *Cäsar und sein Legionär* within the tradition of the calendar story by publishing it as part of *Kalendergeschichten* in 1949, a collection of eight short stories and eight poems, followed by the *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*. Significant similarities and parallels suggest reading Brecht's collection as a direct response to Hebel's *Schatzkästlein*. All texts except for the Keuner anecdotes are related to historical events, from Socrates' heroic fight in a battle, to Caesar's murder, to the WWII poem entitled *Kinderkreuzzug 1939*. Brecht emphasizes historicity and in this connects to one of the genre's established conventions. Some critics have even interpreted Herr Keuner's last anecdote as a direct reaction to *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen* and the corpse that has not changed (Härtl 94); Herr Keuner turns pale because he, supposedly, has not changed either: "Ein Mann, der Herrn K. lange nicht gesehen hatte, begrüßte ihn mit den Worten: 'Sie haben sich gar nicht verändert.' 'Oh!' sagte Herr K. und erbleichte" (Brecht 117). Intended reference or not, the anecdote could well be taken as a statement about the calendar story as a genre. While the incorporation of the Keuner stories into the *Kalendergeschichten* collection is surprising on first glance, it makes sense if Herr Keuner acts as a quasi reading guide. More than a century after Hebel, Brecht alludes to the genre but, of course, despite all parallels, changes it. Keuner's turning pale then points to the failure to recognize both the connection and the tension between Brecht's calendar stories and the 19th century genre.

The most significant point of contact between Brecht and Hebel in this story is the aforementioned relation between the powerful and the powerless. On one hand, Hebel's theoretical stance remains partial to the makers of history, to authority; at the same time, however, his stories are mostly stories about everyday people for whom his calendars are made. *Cäsar und sein Legionär*, the text that marks the

middle of Brecht's *Kalendergeschichten*, is written in this spirit, as it shows the historical event of Caesar's murder from the perspective of Caesar himself and, in the story's second section, from the perspective of a poor family that has to suffer from the deeds of the ruling class. In this, the calendar plays a central role, for Caesar's days are indeed numbered as the calendar counts down.

In the first section of *Cäsar und sein Legionär*, the narrative follows Caesar's fear and indecision, the deterioration of his reign and power, the withdrawal of the palace guard, his efforts to avoid the revolution, his desire to conquer the East, and the hesitation of the financiers to provide the monetary means for Caesar's latest war endeavor. His secret service prepares a dossier with the names of the conspirators, including Cleopatra, Brutus, and Cassius, a list that Caesar is too scared to read, fearing that it will contain the names of his friends. In the end, Caesar goes to the senate where his supposed allies lay in wait to ultimately stab and kill him. The story's second section narrates the same last three days, but from the perspective of Scaper, a war veteran whose future son-in-law, Rarus, is Caesar's secretary — thereby linking two worlds and the story's two sections. Rarus, it turns out, is not only the person with the secret dossier; he also knows of Caesar's impending murder and tries to convince him to flee the city. The flight plan includes Scaper and his oxcart, as well as Scaper's last 300 Sesterces. After Rarus is killed, the murderers take the unread dossier. As Caesar does not appear at the appointment for his escape, Scaper is left with nothing: no son-in-law, no Caesar to reward him, and no money — because Rarus had used it to bribe the guards at the city gate (a complete waste of the funds Scaper urgently needed to support his family). In a subplot, Caesar argues with his financiers; they are reluctant to provide the financial means for his war even while the military industrial complex is at work as the city's prosperity builds on its war preparations.

A compelling Marxist interpretation notes that the deeds of the ruling class influence the lives of the governed class; the poor lose their means of living when politics and money-making are intertwined. However, an additional subtext is connected to the calendar and has been neglected in criticism. I suggest reading this story not only as a general reference to Hebel, i.e., a story about everyday people and their role in historical events. Brecht also builds the narration of time that in Hebel's *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen* was a chain of historical events. In Brecht, this narration captures the calendar directly, thus turning the calendar story inside out: the calendar is no longer the medium, but the narrative itself. The ruling class/ruled class dichotomy is enhanced by the notions of knowledge and power, which are directly bound to the calendar.

Already the first sentence combines time and knowledge in a peculiar way. "Seit Anfang März wußte der Diktator, daß die Tage der Diktatur gezählt waren" (53). Caesar is the story's only *knowledgeable* character. Even though he refuses to read the secret dossier and thus his chance to stop the plot against him, he ultimately knows about his murderers, which is the reason why he shies away from

reading the dossier in the first place. The narrative, regardless of the dossier, presents him as someone who knows what is happening and what will happen. And this knowledge, Caesar's repeated characterization as strikingly aware of his fate, sets him apart in a story that goes to great lengths to depict all other characters as ignorant of everything except their own immediate roles in a potential coup. Cleopatra remains unaware whether her conspiracy has been revealed, or if she is going to be captured and executed; she even tries to glean more information from Caesar. "Die Königin hat die Spannung nicht mehr ausgehalten. Sie muß wissen, wie es um sie steht" (57). Her attempts, however, are unsuccessful. Even after a harmless conversation with Caesar in which he does not hint at any misgiving, her mind is not set at rest. The narrative emphasizes that she is obsessed with knowing but denied knowledge. Rarus is ignorant as well, particularly when Caesar knocks on his door — presumably to talk about the escape plan Rarus had proposed — and Rarus does not open out of fear of the conspirators, who are indeed about to come and kill him. Scaper is completely unaware, he waits for Caesar to no avail and can only guess that with the dictator's and his future son-in-law's murders, his future will be destroyed as well.

These characters' ignorance is worth mentioning only because it is presented in stark contrast to Caesar himself, whose *knowing* is repeatedly emphasized in the narrative's first section. *Cäsar und sein Legionär* is thus as much about knowledge, access to information, and what one could call the 'epistemological power of the calendar' as it is about a materialistic class struggle. "Seit Anfang März wußte der Diktator, daß die Tage der Diktatur gezählt waren" (53). Here, the reader learns about Caesar's knowledge of his imminent assassination. A specific point in time is linked to this knowledge: the beginning of March. What follows, however, is not what one would expect, namely an explanation of what happened in the beginning of March to help Caesar realize the danger in which he is. Instead, the reader is provided with an illustrative description of a lively Rome that in the eyes of a stranger would have been more imposing than ever before, with no sign of Caesar's upcoming downfall in sight. "Das Regime schien befestigt. Der Diktator war eben zum Diktator auf Lebenszeit ernannt worden und bereitete numehr *das größte seiner Unternehmen* vor, die Eroberung des Ostens" (53). No hint of any early March event, not even the famous warning, 'Beware the Ides of March', that marks Caesar's impending demise in Plutarch and Shakespeare. Instead, the narrative cuts back to Caesar, who *knows*: "Cäsar wußte, daß er den Monat nicht überleben würde. Er stand auf dem Gipfel seiner Macht. Vor ihm lag also der Abgrund" (53).

The introduction to the story is thus framed by Caesar's knowledge of his impending end of which there is no obvious sign and for which there is no explanation other than the logically questionable conclusion that he must fall steeply because he is at the height of his power — hardly a reliable predictor of an assassination. Moreover, why would Caesar know that he is at the peak of his power? The one thing that is not questionable is the calendar: "Seit Anfang März wußte der

Diktator, daß die Tage der Diktatur gezählt waren.” We don’t know why he knows, but we do know that the choice of words not only introduces a specific moment, but mentions the calendar a second time. Given the metaphor of the “gezählte Tage,” the introduction of a calendar paradoxically introduces an end of time — and this is directly linked to Caesar’s awareness.

Throughout the story, calendar and knowledge remain Caesar’s domain. The next day is introduced with the following paragraph: “Der nächste Tag, es ist der 14. März, verläuft wirr und peinvoll. Bei dem morgendlichen Ritt in der Reitschule hat Cäsar einen großen Einfall. Senat und City sind gegen ihn, was weiter? *Er wird sich an das Volk wenden!*” (56). Again, there is a logical gap in the narrative. A supposedly confused and painful day is introduced with the great idea Caesar has on a leisurely horseback ride: the reintroduction of democracy. The following events are indeed confusing, but this paragraph makes the reader stop just as the opening paragraphs did — and return to the first sentence. The calendar here has become an individual one, a personally confused and painful day marked March 14th. The fact that the date is even mentioned is more than a reminder for the chronology of the story. Just two and a half pages earlier, the 13th was mentioned. Thus the reiteration (the next day is obviously the 14th) connects and even overemphasizes the link between calendar and Caesar.

In the second section of the story (the part that is written from the perspective of everyday people), the calendar seems to lose its significance, as it does not play the role for the protagonists that it plays in the first section for Caesar. “Im Morgengrauen fährt ein Ochsenkarren durch die frühlinggrüne Campagna auf Rom zu” (61), reads this section’s first sentence, and a date appears only at the end of the first paragraph: “Es ist der 13. März des Jahres 44” (61). While the first sentence of the story’s first section mentions the 13th and Caesar’s knowledge of his impending downfall, thus making the calendar Caesar’s personal matter, here the perspective remains distant. The date, accordingly, has nothing to do with the protagonists. It is a necessary reminder for the reader that the same ‘time’ is being narrated again. Moreover, the year is mentioned for the first time in this second section, thus emphasizing the happenings as historical, while the calendar for Caesar is a personal one. This is especially true since the year 44 — a fine Brechtian irony — would not say much to anyone, as it refers to 44 BCE — in Rome at the time, this year would have been the year 240 A.D. (Anno Diocletiani). By using the modern Western A.D. (Anno Domini) instead, Brecht makes the disconnect between calendar and the Roman everyday protagonist even more obvious, while simultaneously undermining Caesar’s calendar in suggesting that, ultimately, an event that will take place 44 years after Caesar’s death would be much more influential in determining time.

Another interesting appearance of the calendar in the second section of the story is the mentioning of the 15th, the Ides of March. Here, the link between Caesar and the calendar is even more obvious: “In der Frühe des 15. März wird

dem Diktator berichtet, daß sein Sekretär nachts im Palast ermordet worden ist” (69). At this point in the narrative, two small paragraphs before the end of the story, a radical shift takes place: as Scaper is left waiting in his oxcart, the narrator suddenly abandons his perspective, which had dominated the story’s whole second section. The narrative moves away from the point of view of the governed and reasserts Caesar’s story and the prominence of the calendar. Caesar thus interrupts the segment of the story assigned to Scaper.

The calendar in Brecht’s calendar story is neither a means of guiding the reader through the story’s chronology nor a way of reminding the readers where they are in an overwhelming plotline. On the contrary, the dates are not necessary as temporal anchors in this short narrative. They are redundant at times and do not function as mere “informants” whose only function is to connect the story with a time frame that lies outside of it. Dates in the story are conjoined with Caesar and his knowledge. Dates are absent when Caesar is absent. Dates even become Caesar’s personal matter, as March 14th is no longer a general time marker, but rather Caesar’s very own. Instead of orienting the reader, the dates introduce the calendar as Caesar’s calendar, from which the knowledge of his downfall derives.

And Caesar’s calendar it is, indeed. Just one year prior to the events depicted in Brecht’s story, Caesar had introduced the Julian Calendar, though it was only later named after him. The seventh month, July (formerly *Quintilis*, the ‘fifth month’, with March counting as the first month in the original Roman calendar), had already received his name in the year of his assassination. In Brecht’s story, Caesar may have known since early March that the days of his dictatorship were numbered. The numbering, however, he did himself by introducing the new calendar — the calendar usually marks the new era, the hour zero, the revolution — so that, ultimately, this is a *Kalendergeschichte* in which revolution devours its own children via the calendar that numbers its own days.

Brecht’s *Kalendergeschichten* were published in 1949. In the same year, a production of *Mutter Courage* led to the breakthrough of this play in Berlin, and Brecht edited a special issue of *Sinn und Form*, including his *Kleines Organon für das Theater*. Critics have pointed out that this concentrated publishing activity, which coincides with the year of the German Democratic Republic’s founding, establishes Brecht as the representative socialist author in drama, prose, poetry, and theory, in accordance with his own dictum that literature must be engaged, reflecting its revolutionary character in content as well as form (Härtl 87). How better to establish oneself in a new political environment and a newly established republic than with a calendar story — on the side of the rulers, but with an ideological emphasis on the governed? Brecht appears to propose that Hebel’s calendar philosophy works best in a socialist state where the rulers and the governed are identical, and that is how one could understand his positioning with the *Kalendergeschichten*: as an introduction of a new state and a new calendar, following the socialist revolution. Of course, Brecht would not be *Brecht* if he did not go one step further: the power

of the calendar carries its own demise. In this sense, the story is a vote of confidence in a new German state as well as an implicit warning to the revolutionaries, as if to say: don't take yourself and your newfound power for granted, don't make Caesar's mistake and turn from leader of the people to dictator, because it might be too late, as it is in Caesar's case. On the 14th, Brecht's fictional Caesar decides to reintroduce democracy, but the people no longer want him — again something Caesar knows is a certainty: “Der Traum der Demokratie ist ausgeträumt. Es ist klar: Wenn einen Umsturz, dann wollen sie ihn nicht mit ihm” (Brecht 59). In any event, this calendar story is much more than a mere allusion to Hebel's short form of popular literature — it is, indeed, a story about the calendar and as such can be understood as Brecht's own critically-aware welcoming of what is to become East Germany.

Narrating the Date

As the discussion has shown, the implications of dates in Brecht's story go beyond mere genre discussions, but are narratological as well. While in general dates and calendars are scarce in narratology, Roland Barthes has laid out a theory that directly points to dates in literary texts. For Barthes, time does not exist from the point of view of narrative. Rather, it is a mere referent, a frame within which narration takes place. A date in a story is a pointer to the real world, but not part of the narration (Barthes 96). The dates in the texts from Dostoevsky, Dumas, Doderer and others anchor the narrative in the world, providing information as to the narrator's temporal placement; but they have, according to Barthes, no significance beyond this simple act of informing the reader. In our story, however, the date is much more than that and cannot be defined in common terms. As such, this calendar story points to a gap in common narrative theories. Simultaneously, it raises the date and the calendar to their own level of the narrative, drawing them from the outside as “informants” or “medium” inside the narrative, going beyond being mere “informants” for the reader's convenience and thus defying Barthes' timeless notion of narrative.

There are other examples of *Kalendergeschichten* without calendars, whose ‘hidden’ calendars can be uncovered. Examples include Max Frisch's story entitled *Kalendergeschichte* in his first *Tagebuch* (1946-49) — a cryptic narrative that takes place some time before 1806 in Prague in which nothing is certain but one specific date, September the second; a story by Heinrich Böll that was included in a collection of *Kalendergeschichten*, even though it was written for a newspaper, most likely because the protagonist keeps track of the measurements of an inaccurate scale on the back of old calendar pages; and Peter Maiwald's *Kalendergeschichten*. In this story collection, twelve chapters superficially point to the calendar. Clocks rather than calendars are in focus, as one story, entitled *Die verrückten Uhrmacher*, is about a small town whose clockmakers' clocks run fast or slow so that the clockmakers have to be institutionalized. The result of the clockmakers' disappearance is that there is no longer any time measurement in town, no time and thus, the story

claims, no history. This is a surprising effect, as day and night come even without clocks and as history is traditionally the calendar's domain. Robinson Crusoe, after all, did not have a clock but made his own calendar, otherwise he could neither have named Friday by his name nor celebrated the anniversaries of his arrival on the island. In Maiwald's *Kalendergeschichten*, there is an almost telling absence of calendars that as such merits further examination. In one way or the other, all of these calendar stories narrate the date and thus mark the latest chapter in the history of the calendar story, the *Kalendergeschichtengeschichte*, as one that is more closely associated with the calendar as a narrative structure — a structure in which the calendar is no longer the medium but has moved inside and which treats the date as something that is indeed being narrated.

In the specific case of Brecht's *Cäsar und sein Legionär*, the date stands out in its peculiar relation to Caesar's power and knowledge and its absence in relation to everyday people. Brecht alludes to the tradition of the calendar story, but deviates from it at the same time. Only the background of this tradition, however, reveals the full significance of this calendar narration. Calendar stories are for the people, as are the original 19th century calendars (featured weather proverbs and moon cycles make them useful in agriculture, for instance). Medium and simplicity underscore the folksy character of the genre, even though Hebel concedes that his calendar production happens within the confines of the political powers and therefore is not exclusively the domain of everyday people. In Brecht, however, the calendar is taken from everyday people. The powerful take over, and the story thus becomes a case study of what happens if the power balance is disrupted. The answer is history: the end of the calendar maker Julius Caesar. The date, however, and its narration only reach their own new meaning in Brecht's extrapolation of the calendar story.

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