

*AS9 dans Saire.*

# B<sup>x</sup> R E C H T

A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS

Edited by

Peter Demetz



Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Leaf 294.1. for 294  
OR 15/12 21 1959

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION— <i>Peter Demetz</i>	1
BERT BRECHT— <i>Sergey Treliakov</i>	16
FROM THE TESTIMONY OF BERTOLD BRECHT— <i>Hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities</i>	30
THE POET BERTOLT BRECHT— <i>Hannah Arendt</i>	43
ON BRECHT'S <i>IN THE SWAMP, A MAN'S A MAN, AND SAINT JOAN OF THE STOCKYARDS</i> — <i>Eric Bentley</i>	51
CONTEMPORARY THEATER AND AESTHETIC DISTANCE— <i>Oscar Buddel</i>	59
PISCATOR'S POLITICAL THEATER— <i>Ernst Schumacher</i>	86
ON THE ARTISTIC ORIGINALITY OF BERTOLT BRECHT'S DRAMA— <i>I. Fradkin</i>	97
BRECHT'S DRAMATIC THEORY— <i>Hans Egon Holthusen</i>	106
BRECHT'S <i>GALILEO</i> — <i>Günter Rohmoser</i>	117
BRECHT'S SPLIT CHARACTERS AND HIS SENSE OF THE TRAGIC— <i>Walter H. Sokel</i>	127
MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN— <i>Franz Norbert Mennemeyer</i>	138
ON BRECHT'S <i>THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE</i> — <i>Ronald Gray</i>	151
BRECHT: THE MUSIC— <i>John Willert</i>	157
BRECHT'S LANGUAGE AND ITS SOURCES— <i>Martin Esslin</i>	171
<i>Chronology of Important Dates</i>	183

Current printing (last digit):  
13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5

© 1962 BY PRENTICE-HALL, INC.  
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, N.J.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO.: 62-13723  
Printed in the United States of America

08177-C

There's a glow about him. I'd like to make him my model." Commander: "I bet your father was a soldier." Eilif: "A very great one. My mother has warned me about it. In a little song." Upon this apparently realistic dialogue which in fact has a stylized popular manner and operates with elegant abbreviations, follows Eilif's song of "The Fishwife and the Soldier." The prologue of the play, the conversation between the recruiter and the sergeant, makes the artful, non-naturalistic character of the linguistic medium which Brecht has created especially noticeable. The two slave traders in uniform speak, despite the coarse turns of phrase with which their dialogue is spiced, a topsyturvy, inverted language of eerie comedy. With the countenances of gentlemen and the vocabulary of standard morality the two are quite seriously indignant at the immorality of a population which is not willing to accommodate itself to military service and tribute. By a vivid dissociation of form and content Brecht has brought to consciousness the absurd character of war and its ideological, mendacious vocabulary. It is an example of elementary dramatic style, typical for epic theater, which mixes excitement and shock effects to the constant surprise of the audience.

Nevertheless Brecht's diction always remains close to the ground. His play is a single triumph over the tendency to a bookish and scholarly style with which German literature is always threatened. The oversimplifying statement, to be sure, that Brecht took his words out of the mouth of the people does not do justice to the complexity of this manner of writing, drawn from the spirit of popular tradition, yet indirect and full of veiled meaning. The language of *Mother Courage* provokes from the member of the audience another, more direct mode of expression which he must find himself.

## On Brecht's

### *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

by Ronald Gray

To turn from *Mother Courage* to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, not written till 1944-45, is to enter a completely different atmosphere, in which, nevertheless, many affinities can still be found. It is as well to say at the outset that the Communist message which it seems to convey is only loosely connected with the main plot. This is the story of a young Georgian girl, Grusha, who saves the infant child of a tyrannical governor during an insurrection, who brings up the boy until the day when his real mother disputes possession of him before the "good, bad judge" Azdak, and who finally, through the unorthodox wisdom of the judge, is allowed to retain the child because she alone has shown a true motherly nature. It scarcely follows from this that (as the epilogue suggests) the Soviet authorities are entitled to deprive industrious dairy-farming peasants of their land in order to hand it over to others who will make use of it for viticulture. And the prologue, in which this contemporary problem is outlined (the play itself being performed as a means of persuading the reluctant dairy farmers to yield), is remarkable for the prim, diction of the Soviet officials, the conventional picture it gives of shrewd but goodhearted peasants, and the "socialist realism" of its style and presentation.

All this is in contrast to the non-naturalistic, manysided, lyrical, humorous, Rabelaisian, socially conscious elements of the "play within the play." The girl Grusha is not in the least conventionally drawn, though she, too, is shrewd and goodhearted. We do not sit back in uncomfortable or smug comment telling ourselves that this is what sturdy peasants are really like, as we are invited to do in the prologue. She shows considerable courage in crossing a rickety bridge over a mountain chasm while being pursued by insurrectionist soldiers; she combines this with artfulness, a ready wit, blunt honesty, stubborn insistence, and

"On Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*." From *Bertolt Brecht* by Ronald Gray (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, Ltd.; New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961). Copyright © 1961 by Ronald Gray. Reprinted by permission of the author, Oliver & Boyd, Ltd., and the Grove Press, Inc.

an unshakable moral probity. When she is married for convenience' sake to a dying man who will be at least a nominal father for the child she has saved, and when the man, a skrimshanker, rises from his "deathbed" on hearing that the war is over, she continues to pay him a wifely respect, shows no resentment or self-pity. When, later, her lover Simon to whom she is betrothed returns from the war, she allows him to suspect her of infidelity rather than betray the child to its enemies. Courage, perseverance, motherliness, dutifulness, self-sacrifice she shows time and again. Yet because of her equanimity and lack of self-regard, these qualities have no false ring. And this is due also in part to the deliberately non-naturalistic language she speaks. Brecht makes no attempt to reproduce peasant speech faithfully: Grusha's is sprinkled with proverbs and dialect forms, but it also includes direct translations of English idiom; when she sings a lullaby to the child it is at once a song that vividly recalls ancient German folk art and at the same time has a modern ring. Subtly and continuously through the language Brecht persuades us not quite to believe in Grusha, to accept her as a creation of art, and to look beyond her to a reality which in part we re-create ourselves. The formality of his presentation reaches its climax in the scene, concluding the first part of Grusha's adventures, where Simon returns and speaks with her across a river that separates them. The lovers address each other at first in an exchange of proverbs which is both humorous and characteristic of their peasant origin. It is also, however, quite impersonal, a drawing on common tradition, and it is only by reflexion that the deep personal relationship between them is felt. In the climactic moment of the scene, in fact, neither speaks, and it is left to the narrator to reveal what each "thought, but did not say." Thus they confront each other in formal attitudes which are never realistically portrayed but are at the same time deeply moving, and it is by a similar estrangement that Brecht succeeds in making the outstanding human qualities of Grusha credible and acceptable.

The scenes of Grusha's escape, adventures, marriage and rejection by Simon, forming about half the play, make a loosely strung narrative in the fashion of "epic" theater. While there is a certain thread connecting them, however—they do not stand "each for themselves," as Brecht suggested earlier that "epic" scenes should do—the interest is sustained not so much by the thin plot as by the detailed interactions of the characters and by the beauty of the portrayal. Since *Baal*, Brecht had scarcely made any use in his plays of the natural scene. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, as in *Puntilla* and *The Good Woman* and in his later poetry, the world of nature returns. The scene by the river itself, indicated on the stage merely by two ground-rows of reeds, evokes by its bareness, coupled with the lyrical song of the narrator preceding it, an awareness of loveliness. The icicles above Grusha's hut, as she waits in isolation for the winter to pass, become moving tokens of spring as they

melt, and the musical notes of a xylophone offstage, recording the falling drops of water, add excitement by their rising intensity. There is time for contemplation and for exhilaration in these austere presented moments; the spectator is not whirled along as he was by the action of earlier plays, and not encouraged to indulge in ecstatic Nature worship, but rather to recognize with pleasure the delight that is to be had from Nature, off the stage. There is both detachment and attachment.

The settings also, in this part of the play, evoke an astringent delight. The descending white back cloth has already been mentioned. There is also the scene of Grusha's wedding, contrived to give a Breughel-like harmony of brown, oatmeal, sepia, and an occasional splash of red: peasant colors in a peasant setting, crowded, earthy, vulgarly frank, but shaped into a frame of unity that is comic, sympathetic, and has a loop-sided symmetry of its own. There is the strange effect of the empty stage after the insurrection has passed by, with the voice of the narrator emerging from one side to comment on the silence and thereby, oddly enough, to intensify it. Meanwhile, from time to time, the prose speech breaks into verse such as that in which Grusha affirms her love at Simon's first departure:

Simon Chachava, I will wait for you.  
Go in good heart to the battle, soldier,  
The bloody battle, the bitter battle  
From which not all come back:  
When you come back, I will be there.  
I will wait for you under the green elm  
I will wait for you under the bare elm  
I will wait till the last man comes back  
And longer . . .

It comes as a shock to go on from this moving language and these scenes to the following series which forgets Grusha entirely in order to introduce the story of the judge Azdak. From Azdak's first speech, the spectator is hit by a forceful language which English can barely reproduce: "Schnaub nicht, du bist kein Gaul. Und es hilft dir nicht bei der Polizei, wenn du läufst, wie ein Rotz im April. Steh, sag ich. . . . Setz dich nieder und futtre, da ist ein Stück Käse. Lang nichts gefressen? Warum bist du gerannt, du arschloch?" The crudity of this, the rough vigor, the cynicism and humor and the underlying sympathy introduce the character of Azdak himself, which stands in strange contrast to Grusha's. Azdak is a thief, a timeserver, a coward, who by a lucky accident is raised during the insurrection to a position of authority. As a judge he is corrupt, licentious, contemptuous of law and order, a lickspittle. His life is spent, unlike Grusha's, not in rebellious opposition to society's moral standards, but in careful adaptation to them, going

along with the tide, and keeping an eye on the main chance. But such an account does less than justice to this unpredictable rogue. In the first scene, finding that the poor man he thought he was sheltering is in fact the Grand Duke, fleeing from the insurrection, he still does not hand him over to the police, although whether from sheer contempt for the police, as he says, or contempt for the Duke, or from an inscrutable sympathy such as Ernst Busch implies when he plays him, is never clear. Promptly, he rushes into town to denounce himself, believing that the soldiery will welcome the news of his treachery—some strange conscientiousness is at work in him. Yet on discovering them to be indifferent to the rights and wrongs of the insurrection, he willingly allows them to clothe him in judicial robes, and goes off on his rampaging processions through the countryside, delivering sentences that completely reverse accepted standards of justice. He accepts bribes, but (though he keeps the money) only as an indication of the wealth of the litigants, which stands in his eyes in inverse proportion to their rights. He makes an award in favor of a poor woman who has been helped by a bandit, on the grounds that only a miracle could explain how a leg of pork came to fly through a poor woman's window: those who accuse the bandit of stealing the pork and throwing it through the window are condemned for godlessness and disbelief in miracles. When a buxom young woman accuses a farmhand of rape, he considers her luxurious gait and the shape of her buttocks and finds her guilty of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, after which he goes off with her "to examine the scene of the crime." And when order is re-established he falls over himself with dutiful promises that Grusha, whom he has not yet met, shall be beheaded as soon as she is found.

Azdak is a standing affront, and at the same time a standing reminder of the questionable values on which society is based. He has one principle, that the rights of the poor are disregarded and that this situation must be reversed. Apart from that, he proceeds *ad hoc*. If a buxom girl is likely to commit rape he offers her the opportunity. On the other hand, if he foresees danger in maintaining his one principle, he gives way immediately: "I'm not doing any one the favor of showing human greatness." Yet all this is not mere self-gratification or concern for his own skin. There is nothing that can properly be called a self in Azdak, nothing consistent or foreseeable in his actions: he acts on impulse. He sets no store by his actions, any more than Grusha does by hers, and it is this that helps to make him the most fascinating character in the play, insulting and generous, preposterous and humble, ignorant and wise, blasphemous and pious. In his Villonesque song to the poor woman he addresses her as though she were the Virgin Mary and begs mercy for such damned creatures as himself—a strange translation from religious into human terms which still has an atmosphere of genuine devoutness. In the scene where he is buffeted in his false robes by the

soldiery, the production of the Berliner Ensemble is deliberately styled to recall another buffeting. And in the comment of the narrator there is a further suggestion of a wider scope: "And so he broke the laws, as he broke bread, that it might feed them." The suggestion need not be taken too far. Yet there is in Azdak, the scandal, the gnome, the cynical good-liver, something immensely disturbing and provocative as well as attractive. He denies all the virtues, mocks at repentance and charity, ridicules courage, and, strangely enough, he gets our sympathy in the process. For he is plainly being himself to the top of his bent, lusting and helping the poor, crawling in abject fear and at the same time inviting the soldiers to recognize their own doglike obedience, answering every prompting with instinctive recklessness. If we give him our sympathy, as we cannot help doing, in a way, so long as he dominates the stage, he sets all Grusha's virtuousness at naught. This is Baal, returned to the scene in a new guise, and all Baal's fascination pours out of him.

In the final scene of all, the two sides are confronted with one another, the disruptive, ambiguous underminer and the calm, shrewd, motherly girl who would rather die than forego her humanity. Azdak is called to try the case in which the real mother of Grusha's "child," the wife of the former governor of the province, claims possession of her son. By a fortunate turn of events, the same Grand Duke whose life Azdak saved earlier on has now returned to power, and thus Azdak's servile promise to the governor's wife no longer has any hold over him, if indeed he ever meant to keep it. Azdak proceeds, however, as usual, accepting bribes from the wealthier party, while abusing Simon and Grusha who have nothing to offer him, and it is this which brings on the first serious opposition he has had to encounter. Grusha declares that she has no respect for a judge such as he is, "no more than I have for a thief and a murderer that does what he likes." Her moral protest is a straightforward indictment of his libertinism (which is no mere show), and none the worse for that; in fact she has all, or nearly all, our sympathy. Yet the end will have already been guessed. After the "trial of the chalk circle" in which each woman is to pull at the child from different sides, and Grusha fails to pull for fear of hurting the boy, Azdak ceremonially declares that Grusha is the true mother since she alone has shown true motherly feelings. This is not, however, a sentimental ending awarding victory to justice against the run of the odds. Rather, it is the fusion of two conceptions of justice. Azdak's instinctive prompting on this occasion (he is, after all, in safety now, with the governor's wife in political disgrace) is to award Grusha the custody of the child. But this instinctive prompting is a part of his elemental originality, his closeness to the roots of his nature, and his complete detachment from them. His decision has gathered the weight and incontrovertibility of a natural phenomenon, and despite his mockery of the virtues here is one virtue in Grusha that he respects without thought of argument.

Thus the two sides come together. Like Nietzsche, Azdak demands opposition such as he gets from Grusha, and thrives on it. Like Nature itself, he is ambiguous and amoral and requires the rebelliousness of humanity to bring out his qualities to the full. Then, however, when he meets with opposition, he reveals an unexpected generosity (as Nietzsche never did). He is like Baal, it is true. But Baal was never opposed, lived his life in pure self-fulfillment, and died only to the tune of contempt from others. Azdak is Baal, and all that lies behind Baal, brought into relationship with human beings, and this relationship and conflict serve to make *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* far greater in scope than its predecessor. The virtue of Grusha is both convincingly stated and brought into question; the amorality of Azdak is made to look both repugnant and curiously attractive; and yet in the final moments a fusion of Grusha's human demands and Azdak's inhuman unpredictability brings about a sense of at least temporary fulfillment. As the narrator has it, the period of Azdak's life as a judge could be looked back upon as "a brief Golden Age almost of justice." It was not *the* Golden Age, and it was not a time of complete justice. Both Azdak and Grusha have been too "estranged" for us to be able to accept them as models or heroes. But while steering clear of absolutes Brecht creates here an ending which is satisfying on a purely human plane. Despite the riotous exaggeration of a great part of the play, from which he never recants for an instant, the conclusion is moderately and accurately stated.

## Brecht: The Music

by John Willett

Brecht was no trained musician, but far more than most writers he had musical ideas at the back of his mind, and his work is full of musical implications. This began with his early settings of the "Legende des Toten Soldaten" and other poems to his own tunes, where "actual delivery" became bound up with questions of intelligibility and of verbal punch. For the first few plays he assembled his own music in the same rather rudimentary fashion: for *Baal*, for *Edward II* and *Trommeln in der Nacht* [*Drums in the Night*]. Then for *Mann ist Mann* [*A Man's a Man*] and even for *The Threepenny Opera* he sketched rough drafts of the songs that Edmund Meisel and Weill actually composed; and from then on he found that he could collaborate with certain composers so closely and effectively as to realize many of his own musical aims. More than most playwrights, more even than the majority of poets, he has become known by the musical settings of his works. *The Threepenny Opera* lives mainly by its songs, *Happy End* by nothing else; *Mahagonny* and *Lucullus* are highly original operas; while the whole group of didactic pieces or *Lehrstücke* has a special part in the musical life of the time. Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, Rudolf Wagner-Regeny: all the composers with whom Brecht worked are figures of some importance, and the particular movement with which they became linked—the socially orientated music promoted by the publishers Schott and Universal-Edition, and tried out at the Donaueschingen and Baden-Baden festivals—is among the most interesting and most neglected aspects of recent musical history. Like Jean Cocteau, Brecht had a strong influence on the form, orchestration and general approach adopted by his collaborators, but this was exercised by practice rather than by any public whip-cracking or polemics. It was just that poetically, as well as dramatically, he seemed to think in near-musical terms.

The musical movement in question developed out of that with which Cocteau was associated, for it started by reflecting many of Stravinsky's

"Brecht: The Music." From *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* by John Willett (New York: New Directions; London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1959). Copyright © 1959 by John Willett. Reprinted by permission of New Directions and Methuen & Co., Ltd.