

BERTOLT BRECHT'S
GREAT PLAYS

ALFRED D. WHITE

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7 The Caucasian Chalk Circle

This reworking of the traditional Chalk Circle theme was written in March to June 1944 in Santa Monica, California, with a New York production in mind: the actress Luise Rainer had been instrumental in getting Brecht a contract with a Broadway theatre. Alterations were made in July and August, the prologue was recast in September. The first performance was however not until 1948, when a student production took place in Northfield, Minnesota; the first professional performance was on 7 October 1954, when Brecht, assisted by Manfred Wekwerth, put it on in the Berliner Ensemble. Angelika Hurwicz played Grusha, Ernst Busch the Singer and Azdak, Helene Weigel the Governor's Wife. Exported to Paris in 1955, London in 1956, and Moscow in 1957, this production played a major part in establishing Brecht's reputation abroad. Both Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau have written music for the play; Dessau's (1953-4) is that used by the Berliner Ensemble. This is the most-performed Brecht play in Great Britain (443 productions up to October 1976).¹

(1) THE PLOT

The 1954 production being the last that Brecht completed of any play, our summary gives prominence to the scenic effects, as Brecht's last word.²

1. *The Struggle for the Valley.* In the ruins of a village in the Caucasus, immediately after the Second World War, the members of two colchos villages, a fruit-growing and a goat-breeding collective, sit smoking and drinking wine: women, old men, soldiers. The grouping and attitudes show that their argument is a friendly one. An expert from the capital is in attendance. Members of the fruit-growing colchos have worked out a plan for irrigating the valley for their purposes; as the plan lies on the ground, one of the goat-breeders – they held the valley before the war – is impressed by it, others are sceptical or angry. But soon they are convinced that the fruit-growers have a better use for their valley than

they themselves have; it is to be assumed that they are willing to stay further east, where they were evacuated to on Hitler's advance. To celebrate the agreement, the fruit-growers announce a theatrical performance: an old story from the Chinese. A celebrated singer has been engaged to be compère and is ready, book in hand and glasses on nose. He has three assistants, and almost every member of the collective has some part in the play he will narrate. After a meal they start:

2. *The Noble Child.* The singers describe the lavish court of the Governor of a city in Grusinia. This ruler and his retinue appear on their way to church and are delayed by a crowd of petitioners, showing how many people are reduced to misery under this régime. They block the narrow gateway, fighting amongst themselves for the best place. A few coins and many strokes of the whip are distributed to them. The Adjutant is behind the Governor's wife, and a very tall male nurse holds the Governor's son, Michel (Michael in the English), a baby, well up and in view. Two doctors are constantly in attendance on the child. The Fat Prince Kazbeki, a conspirator, hypocritically greets Governor Abashvili and his wife. His small nephew keeps behind him but turns an attentive ear to the ambiguous conversation. The lazy Governor refuses to listen to talk of the current Persian war going badly. The court enters the church in procession.

Grusche (in translation Grusha), a kitchen maid, hurrying across the courtyard with a goose for the Easter feast, is stopped by an acquaintance of hers, Simon Chachava, the soldier on duty, who teases her; she is too simple to recognise the meaning between his lines.

On the return from the Church the Adjutant in vain tries to get the Governor to receive the latest report on the Persian war; the Governor has eyes only for his peevish wife, who complains that his new building is done with Michael in mind, not her. The Governor has suspicions of the Fat Prince but does not follow them up. He goes in to eat, leaving two Ironshirts (armoured cavalry, but we never see them mounted) on guard. The Adjutant receives some architects, but the guards refuse to let him into the palace without a struggle, and instead of joining the Governor the architects think that if the Fat Prince's conspiracy is starting to act they should get out of the way.

The fall of the Governor is told in a mime sequence commented on by the Singer: the Governor is pulled on on a great rope by two heavily armed soldiers, despite his attempts to hold fast to the palace gate; he falls and has a spear thrust at his back; he is pulled across the stage, still looking back at what he possessed: his last visible attitude suggests a hanged man.

Attention is turned to the chaos among the lesser folk. The shocked servants watch a fight between the doctors, who both claim it is their

day off because neither wants to stay with the Governor's son; one of them has already packed his bag. Grusha says a comet of ill omen has been seen. Other servants say the Persian war is lost, all the princes are in revolt, the Grand Duke has fled and all his governors are to be hanged, but the poor have nothing to fear. Simon is loyal and is to be among the guard of the Governor's wife, Natella Abashvili, who is going to flee. Grusha too is in a hurry, she must help to pack the lady's belongings. But they take time for a ceremonious betrothal – it becomes apparent that Grusha has noticed him before, after all; they keep a formal distance of two yards between them and Grusha ends their talk with a song describing how faithfully she intends to wait while he is away at the war.

The Adjutant orders Simon off. The servants come, busily preparing the Governor's wife's luggage; the lady herself casually sits on the back of a crouching maid to give orders. The servants show an increasingly rebellious mood, standing up straighter than usual and even contradicting their mistress. The Adjutant presses her to hurry, but she cannot separate herself from any of her rich clothes and acts coquettishly, used to having plenty of time and all her whims attended to. Only the sight of the city, off, burning brings her to her senses, and she flees leaving everything. The nurse – a woman this time – whom she had sent to fetch something returns and realises her mistress has left Michael. She gives the child to Grusha to hold 'for a moment', but she has no intention of returning. Other servants stand around close by and watch while Grusha with her stupid conscientiousness has the Governor's heir planted on her. The cook tries to persuade Grusha to leave Michael and flee; reluctantly Grusha puts the baby down, covers him, and goes to get her things, ready to go off to her brother's in the mountains.

The Fat Prince, elegant fan in one hand, sabre in the other, appears with Ironshirts, one of whom has the Governor's head on a lance; it is nailed to the gate. The Fat Prince orders Grusha to be searched for the Governor's child: reward 1000 piastres.

As they leave, Grusha reappears with her bundle. She has heard the order. She is running off when she thinks of the child and stops. The scene is mimed and commented on by the Singer from this point; Grusha's face expresses horror at what she is doing, never goodness. She seems to hear the child telling her that one who refuses help to fellow-human will never rest content again. She stays near the child. Night falls. She gets a lamp and some milk which she warms over the lamp, hastily, as if she must be off. But she stays, and she covers the child better. Finally she sighs, picks up child and bundle and sneaks furtively off.

3. *The Flight into the Northern Mountains.* Grusha walks through a changing landscape, carrying the blanket she will need later when it becomes cold. A peasant's hut appears, the first stage and first difficulty of

the journey. Grusha needs milk, and her surprise at the price named sends one hand to her purse and the other to her ear. It is not the peasant's fault: in the war situation he must sell what little he can sell dearly. She tries to deceive the child by giving it her dry breast, looking daggers at the hut meanwhile; but she has to give in and buy milk. Showing the first signs of tiredness, she goes on.

(In a scene cut in performance, Grusha pretends to be a rich lady in order to be able to share a room at a caravanserai with two ladies who are fleeing; but her skill at making the best of a poor room, and her chapped hands, give her away as a member of the lower orders and thus a potential thief, and she has to leave precipitately. She is followed by two Ironshirts. The one in charge, the corporal, has sold their horses, so the trooper is limping, and the corporal complains of his lack of devotion to duty.)

Grusha, having no nappies, feels it is time to find a home for Michael and turn back to the town to await Simon's return. Seeing a peasant woman carrying big milk-jugs into a farmhouse, she decides that is the place, lays the child at the door, knocks, and – conscientious to the last – hides behind a tree to see what happens. The peasant woman is willing to take the child in, despite her husband's ill-temper. Grusha sets off happily but also sadly back to the town.

She runs into the two Ironshirts who are looking for the child, and her horrified gesture gives her away. When they question her about a noble child she breaks loose and runs to the cottage. She tries to get the woman to hide the child or say with some conviction that it is hers. But when the Ironshirts catch up, the woman gives the game away. The corporal gets the trooper to take the woman outside while he examines the child. Grusha seizes a log of wood and hits him over the head with it as he bends over. Climbing over his stunned form, she escapes through the window with Michael – but without her bundle.

Having cost her so much, the child is now dear to her. She removes its fine linen and wraps it in her blanket. A stunted tree shows the nearness of the mountains. A wind rises and Grusha comes to a half-collapsed bridge over a glacier. Merchants are trying to recover a fallen rope to make it safer, but with the Ironshirts following her Grusha cannot wait: she would rather risk the two thousand-foot drop. Just as she has got over the bridge the corporal, his head bandaged, wearing a fur jacket, reaches it and it collapses. Grusha goes on through the snow.

4. *In the Northern Mountains.* Whilst the musicians narrate Grusha's feelings about the welcome she hopes for from her brother, she goes on in increasing exhaustion and fever. Finally a stableman has to lead her into her brother's house. Brother and sister-in-law, eating from a common dish, are not pleasantly surprised; the pious sister-in-law immediately

wants to know whether Grusha's fever is catching and how she came by a child, and the brother is unable to assert his kinder feelings – he married for money, is ashamed of his wife and subservient to her. He claims the child is Grusha's and she has a husband with a farm who is at present away at the war. Grusha is accommodated in a scullery until spring. She makes herself useful by weaving at a large loom and sings to Michael, who remains wrapped up: it is cold in the room (and Michael has to grow rather fast without the audience noticing).

Grusha's brother comes and, standing behind her – he cannot look her in the face – makes it clear to her that the thaw is coming and he – or rather his wife – wants Grusha out of the house before her pursuers are able to arrive and before gossip about an unmarried mother starts. He has a solution: he has found a woman who, for a fee, will let Grusha marry her dying son Jussup (in English, Yussup) and so become a widow with papers to prove it.

So they go to the dying peasant. Grusha's prospective mother-in-law is in a hurry to get the ceremony over before her son dies, but bargains for a bigger fee in respect of the shame of taking an illegitimate child into the house. She tells Grusha to hide the child when the monk is fetched to perform the ceremony. The monk has spread the word, and the neighbours crowd in, to the mother-in-law's annoyance. As Grusha says her 'yes' she looks at Michael, for whom she is doing it. The monk wants to administer Extreme Unction, but the mother-in-law finds this too expensive. The bed-curtains are drawn to show the nearness of death, and Grusha's brother pays and leaves. In the living-room the wedding/funeral guests mill about, pray and joke, and are introduced to Grusha. In the bedroom the mother-in-law and Grusha break cake into small pieces. The monk makes an obscene speech. Musicians arrive, one of them with a gigantic trumpet: they too want to make money out of the wedding. An old woman stuffs on a large piece of cake, a drunkard has to be thrown out. To cover the embarrassed pause guests start talking of the latest news: the return of the Grand Duke, and peace in the land. Grusha smiles as she thinks of Simon's return. But news of peace also brings the dying bridegroom to his feet: he has only been shamming to evade military service. Haggard in his white nightshirt, he rises like a ghost. Grusha drops the tray of cakes she was about to hand round. Stuffing last morsels of cake into their mouths, the guests flee; the last to go are the monk and a couple of old ladies, who attempt an exorcism in vain.

A series of tableaux show Grusha's married life. She spends much time with Michael and gives him simple tasks – her mode of education. Yussup calls Grusha to scrub his back as he sits in the bathtub. Her sleeveless dress excites him: he complains that, though she must have seen a naked man before, she refuses herself to him. Grusha washes

clothes in the stream and watches the local children, including Michael, playing Heads-off, a game in which the death of the Governor is re-enacted (and the audience prepared for the next act, which starts again from that event). Simon reappears, in a shabby uniform and with a saddle but no horse, on the other side of the stream. They shout happy greetings across it, but Grusha is unable to shout the explanation for her apparent faithlessness across the stream, and Simon does not think it worth going to the bridge to hear a set of excuses. As he turns away the Ironshirts finally catch up with her: the children have gone off playing, and now Michael reappears led by a trooper with an official order to take him to the city for investigation of the suspicion that he is the child of the late Governor. Grusha says he is her child, thus putting the seal on Simon's alienation. Michael is led away, Grusha follows to try and save the child for herself.

5. *The Story of the Judge.* The judge of Grusha's case is to be Azdak, and the Singer introduces his story. On the day of the revolt Azdak, a village clerk (his hut is strewn with paper and pens) with a demanding palate (a hare hangs prominently in the foreground), finds a fugitive in the woods, a man whose face and hands show he is used to prosperity. When Azdak gives him cheese the careless way he eats it also betrays that he is not used to defending every crumb he can get. He offers 150,000 piastres for a night's lodging. Azdak is about to refuse when the village policeman Schauwa (Shauva in translation) comes to make enquiries about a stolen hare. Superior to Azdak in the disciplinary structure, and sure Azdak is the offender, he is yet overawed by the intellectual superiority which allows Azdak casually to pull the wool over his eyes. He leaves. How could Azdak turn anyone in to such a policeman?

But when Azdak discovers the fugitive was the arch-criminal, the Grand Duke, he gives himself up to Shauva, has himself bound and taken into Nukha on a charge of abetting his escape; for he is under the impression that the Princes' revolt is a workers' revolution. At the court they find the Ironshirts swaggering and drinking and the judge hanged. Azdak garrulously describes the revolution in Persia forty years before, when the peasants and workers took over because there had been too long a war and no justice. When he has shown enough delight in the revolution the Ironshirts move in: there was indeed a revolt of the weavers in the town, and they strung up the judge, but Prince Kazbeki has paid the Ironshirts to suppress them (and a carpet lying around shows that they looted as well). Azdak is depressed, and the Ironshirts pretend to be about to hang him but suddenly stop and burst into laughter, in which Azdak hysterically joins. The merriment is interrupted by the Fat Prince, who comes with his nephew. The nephew is to be the new judge, but the Fat Prince is not sure enough of his power to simply impose him

on his executive, so suggests the Ironshirts should elect the judge. Had the Grand Duke been caught the Fat Prince would have been more secure: thanks to the clerk Azdak, the Ironshirts hold some temporary power. He suggests testing the nephew's aptitude for the job: he himself will act the part of a defendant. Shauva meanwhile gets hold of some wine. The nephew takes the seat of judgment and Azdak imitates the Grand Duke - accused of losing the war but blaming the Princes for the corruption and slackness which led to defeat. The nephew is no match for his arguments, which culminate in the proof that Grusinia may have lost the war, but the profiteer Princes have not. So the Ironshirts physically remove the nephew from the judgment seat and install the unwilling Azdak on it. The Fat Prince picks up his nephew - but they are only momentarily on the ground, symbolically as well as physically. The soldiers dress Azdak in the judge's robe and carry him off in the hammock-like chair, introducing his peripatetic administration of justice seen in the following scenes.

Azdak's ragged clothing remains visible under the robe throughout. He receives bribes openly at the beginning of his cases, which he generally takes two at a time whilst nonchalantly peeling apples and drinking. He uses inattention as the cover for punishing the guilty but well-defended for crimes they have not committed and not giving the rich satisfaction when they have been duped or robbed. A comic procession of witnesses, plaintiffs and defendants passes before him: the doctor who amputated the wrong leg; the doctor's patron who had a stroke when he heard that the doctor had treated a patient without first receiving the fee, and is pushed on in a wheelchair; the patient who now has rheumatism in one leg and the other leg amputated. (The doctor is sentenced to amputate the patron's leg free should he have another stroke.) A case of rape interests him - and the Ironshirts who form his retinue - more; they listen to the victim's well-rehearsed tale, and then Azdak gets her to demonstrate how she walks and bends, and finds her guilty of rape - assaulting the stableman with a dangerous weapon, her bottom. Then he goes off with her to examine the seat of the crime. In a further case, a landowner's cows were killed after he asked an old peasant woman to pay the rent for a field. She is also in receipt of a ham and a cow brought to her by St Banditus, alias the robber Irakli, who appears in court heavily armed, claiming to be an old hermit. The landowners are powerless against him, and Azdak blesses the alliance of the poor and the violent by symbolically putting the old woman on his seat of judgment and adoring her as the personification of long-suffering Grusinia. The landowners present are fined for atheism in that they do not believe in the miracles of St Banditus.

But when the Grand Duke returns fear seizes Azdak. The time of disorder, in which a judge could perform such travesties of legality un-

observed, will be over. Back in Nukha, Azdak mends a shoe whilst the Fat Prince's head is carried by on a lance, and regrets that the times described in the old Song of Chaos, which he sings elegiacally, have not yet come. He takes the law book, which so far he has only used as a cushion, to see what punishment is in store for him and to give the impression of being a pedantic judge, but a wine-jug stands near him too. The Governor's wife comes; she does not like him, but she needs a judge who will find in her favour and get Michael returned to her. Azdak, already without his robe as he was about to flee, promises to do as required; and when his noble visitor leaves, he runs for it.

6. *The Chalk Circle.* The parties to the case assemble in Court. Grusha is accompanied by the cook, who is willing to swear that the child is Grusha's, and hopes Azdak will be drunk and deliver one of his freak judgments. Simon comes too: though still unable to understand Grusha's marriage, he is ready to swear he is the child's father. Ironshirts get worried because Azdak is missing. One of them is the one Grusha hit over the head, but he cannot settle the score with her without admitting that he was pursuing the child to kill it. The Governor's wife arrives with the Adjutant and two lawyers; they are glad most of the common people are prevented from attending the trial by rioting going on in the town. The lawyers have been trying to get the Grand Duke to nominate a new judge in place of Azdak. Ironshirts drag in Azdak - who has been denounced by some landowners - and Shauva, tied up, and want to hang Azdak. The Governor's wife applauds hysterically. Azdak, cornered, reviles the Ironshirts. At this moment a rider brings a despatch containing the nomination of the new judge: Azdak, who saved the Grand Duke's life. Hurriedly the Ironshirts cut Azdak down. He is dressed in the the judge's robe, orders wine to cure his shock and the law book to sit on, and takes bribes from the lawyers, who give more when he remarks that Grusha is attractive. He interrupts a lawyer's poetic praise of motherhood to hear Grusha's case, which is mainly that she has done her best for the child. The Governor's wife, prompted by the lawyer, says a few words; but the second lawyer lets slip that not love of the child, but desire to enter into the revenues of her late husband's estate - which is tied to the son - is the moving force in the case. Azdak takes note of this and listens summarily to the lies of Grusha and her witnesses. He wants to cut the case short. Grusha says there is no wonder, he has got his money. The cook tries to restrain her, Simon argues with Azdak and is fined for indecent language, and the Governor's wife supports herself on the shoulder of her indispensable Adjutant. Grusha delivers a denunciation of Azdak, which he listens to with increasing pleasure, fining her thirty piastres for contempt of court. Then he interrupts the case to hear an old couple who want a divorce and who stand back to back, but very close to each

other: they have been married forty years. Grusha has an argument with the Governor's wife, ending when Azdak says he has reached no conclusion from the evidence and must proceed to the Chalk Circle test. Michael is put in a circle drawn on the floor and the true mother will be the one who can pull the child out of the circle. Grusha in her simplicity is so overjoyed when she touches Michael again after so long that she forgets to pull. As the real mother pulls Michael out of the circle she reaches after him. Azdak decides to repeat the test; the lawyer, leafing through his law book, objects, and Shauva is inclined to listen, but the test takes place. This time Grusha pulls, and she is stronger than the Governor's wife: but in order not to tear the child in two she lets go. Azdak starts to take his robe off: he wants to get away quickly after the verdict, which is in favour of Grusha. The Abashvili estates fall to the city to be made a playground named after Azdak. He signs a divorce, but it turns out to be in favour of Grusha rather than of the old couple. Simon and Grusha are both looking at Michael rather than at each other; when she gets her divorce Grusha kisses Azdak, but means Simon. Azdak collects the fines from them. Simon takes Michael on his shoulders so that they can get out of town quickly. The lawyers desert the Governor's wife, who is not in a position to pay their fees. She leaves in the Adjutant's arms. The Fat Prince's head is still stuck over the gateway as the less involved characters carry out a leisurely and joyful exit. The Singer ends the story: Azdak disappeared, but the moral is that things should belong to those who are good for them.

(II) FORERUNNERS

The motif of the chalk circle is ancient and widely known.³ The quarrel of two women before a wise judge over which is the true mother of a child goes back to the judgment of Solomon (I Kings 3, 16-28); in the Hui Lan Chi ('Chalk Circle') of the Chinese author Li Hsing-dao (or Li Hsing Tao, thirteenth century), the motif of personal enrichment is already present: the real object of the court case is the inheritance which is bound to the child. Hai Tang, the (socially inferior) second wife of the rich man Ma, has borne him an heir, endangering the first wife's primacy. Mrs Ma murders the husband in order to enjoy life with her lover Tschao, accuses Hai Tang of the crime, and claims the child (and the estate) as her own. She tries to kill Hai Tang, who escapes by chance. A bribed judge finds in her favour, but by pure chance an appeal judge is incorruptible and determines maternity by the chalk circle test: the child is put in a circle, the claimants are directed to pull him out, and the one who lets go because she does not want to hurt him is the true mother. The child and the estate are adjudged to her, Mrs Ma punished.

In a way the story might appeal to Brecht, with its clear social bias; dramaturgically, it has instances of self-introduction and sung interpolations which would interest him;⁴ and that Hai Tang only by very good luck survives and gets justice is perhaps an element in Brecht's conception of Grusha's vicissitudes.

In 1925 Max Reinhardt put on a lyrical and fantastic adaptation of the play by the poet Klabund (Alfred Henschke). Brecht's interest in this version was reinforced after Klabund's death: his widow, Carola Neher, was one of Brecht's actresses. The play was a success in London, and was produced by Piscator in New York in 1940-1. Another precursor to be mentioned is a celebrated German enlightenment play on parenthood, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*; as Ritchie (pp. 50f.) reminds us, looking after the child is here set alongside the ties of blood, and Nathan, after being established as a good foster-father, is revealed as the real father too.

Brecht's first treatment of the theme was perhaps a parody of Klabund - the interlude 'The Elephant Calf' in *Man is Man*.⁵ In 1940 a short story, *Der Augsburger Kreidekreis* ('The Augsburg Chalk Circle'), transfers the theme into the world of *Mother Courage* and radically re-evaluates it. In a Catholic attack on Augsburg during the Thirty Years War, a rich dyer is killed; his wife flees, leaving their child behind. A maid Anna takes the child to her brother's; he has married a strict and well-to-do Catholic who would not take in a Protestant child, so Anna claims it is hers. When no father turns up, the sister-in-law is dubious. By marrying a man apparently at death's door Anna regularises her position; the man does not die, but she gets used to life with him. At last the dyer's wife comes to claim her child. Anna appeals to the judge Dollinger, famed for his fairness. She is suspected in court of wanting the inheritance, but insists she does not care about that, only about the child. The chalk circle test proves she is the true mother; she keeps the child. It was of this story that Brecht thought when the chance of writing a play for Broadway was offered him. To it he adds the Azdak plot. The figure may owe something to Haitang's brother in Klabund, a revolutionary student who becomes a judge, and to the stories of a historical figure, the magistrate Pao or Bau Dschöng, best known to us as the Judge Dee stories.⁶

(III) THE DEMONSTRATION PLAY

The play is hard to classify. Brecht denied that it was a parable apparently because the argument of act 1 is resolved before the main action, the Grusha and Azak plots, starts; the main action is thus not used to help in solving any present-day problem. In early drafts, admittedly, and in later summaries, Brecht defers the decision about the valley to the

day after the performance of the main action (17, 1203; *Mat. K.*, 16). Walter Hinck points out a more basic consideration, that the main action concerns a child, the opening action land; it would thus be inconmen- are to reduce the main action to a mere backing-up of the conclusions reached in act 1. But Hinck (pp. 35f.) concludes that the first act is thus merely accidental and dispensable, a conclusion too often reached also by directors wanting to shorten the running time, and even by Harry Buckwitz in the Frankfurt production of 1955? Omitting act 1 reduces the play to an interesting anecdote in which an improbable happy ending is wrung from a continuingly hostile historical situation, and to exactly the kind of play Brecht objected to when he met it on the naturalist stage: one in which there is no criticism of the idea that social catastrophes happen by fate, no perspective towards a different, less alienatory social world. Brecht says the prologue is necessary to motivate his changes of the Chalk Circle theme: only the setting in the Soviet Union explains the whole play (*Mat. K.*, 28). Grusha and Azdak work illegally to do good in an unalterably unpromising state of affairs. The peasants of act 1 are able to do good, by considering in a spirit of amity and fairness the use of their valley, without fear of bad laws. Where the social situation is right, people can be helpful to each other without bringing trouble on themselves – and only then. The two problems – valley and child – are in some ways analogous, in others not; and whilst the finding is the same, that things should and can be entrusted to those who make the most of them and care for them best, the social worlds in which the verdict is reached are crassly contrasted. (The finding was applied by Brecht to the eastern areas of Germany arbitrarily transferred to Poland at the end of the war. *Aj.*, 2, 749: 3, 8, 45; but that he was thinking of them in writing the play⁸ is a chronological impossibility.)

The various elements (commune plot, Grusha plot, Azdak plot) use widely differing tones and conventions. Act 1 is apparently set in a particular place and time, but cannot really claim such closeness to reality. The time of the other acts is left vague, and for all it means to the Western audience, the place (Nukha, a city of Soviet Azerbaijan some 200 km east of Tiflis) might just as well be vague too. Brecht uses the unfamiliar name 'Grusinia for Georgia; Georgian names were substituted at a late stage for Russian ones.⁹ The Azdak plot is very discursive. The Grusha plot, on the other hand, despite (or because of) its episodic structure is firmly based on traditional dramatic tension, and the whole Azdak plot, interpolated by a bold stroke of disregard of dramatic chronology exactly at the point where we are most tense about the fate of Michael, is a retarding element of the first water. The stories of Grusha and of Azdak are set off by the same event, the Easter rising (2065: 61: 5), but Brecht chooses to start them separately and only bring them together with the event which ends them both.

Critical controversy rages around all these breaks. Peter Leiser finds the question of use of a tract of land that he feels Brecht has lost track of his criteria of proportion.¹⁰ Fuegi (p. 145) on the other hand makes out a case for act 1 as 'a kind of decompression chamber as we step from the here and now into the never-never': contemporary farmers lead us carefully into the stylised presentation of the ancient tale.

According to Brecht the Grusha and Azdak plots show to the colichos spectators a particular kind of wisdom, an attitude which may be exemplary in the case of their topical dispute, thus giving a background demonstration of the practicability of this kind of wisdom and some idea of its historical origins (17, 1205; *Mat. K.*, 18). Grusha and Azdak are pioneers of what will in the fulness of time become habitual attitudes. The communes have already in act 1 shown what can be done by reason. The argument about the valley is doomed, by any conventional knowledge about human behaviour, to end in deadlock and to have to be decided by higher authority or by force. But Brecht shows it being amicably settled, thanks to the secure social situation in which the goat-keepers have an alternative tract of land and can count on the same state support wherever they are. To envisage such a situation is an act, if not of faith, at any rate of optimism. The dramaturgical equivalent of a mood of optimism is a *comédie*, in the sense of a non-tragic play which may have more or fewer overt comic elements.

In line with the attitude thus imposed by the optimistic perspective, the pioneers of modern attitudes are made the protagonists of plots in which, despite the barbarous conditions of their past era, a happy ending can be salvaged. Grusha enters of her free will into a situation which by normal ideas of human nature is hopeless. A defenceless girl moving across country in time of war and rebellion, clutching a child with a price on his head – it is a hopeless endeavour. When she allows herself to be married off it seems to put an end to hopes of a happy ending to her love for Simon. A villager hurrying to accuse himself of crimes against the people, only to find that the people is no more in power than it ever was – the wonder is that he does not end on the gallows.

But the Soviet citizens of the communes are to be entertained, not saddened, by the fate of their ancestors. Mayer (p. 243) describes the conception of the Grusha and Azdak plots as 'fairy-tale material', indeed the saving of a happy ending from such vicissitudes is typical of fairy-tale – and also of sensational 'cliff-hanger' films, comic strips and stage comedy. So is the relationship of character and plot: 'the poor simple person despised by the rich proves helpful and resourceful and overcomes all obstacles to win the prize in the end.'¹¹ Brecht goes deeper than most such literature. But he also includes more overtly comic elements. Azdak is a comedy figure of vitality and cunning; his virtuoso performances of

judging two cases at once are given a serious function in the plot when he bungles a divorce and so frees Grusha to marry Simon. The Ironshirts who pursue Grusha, cavalry on foot, trudging against the stage turntable, are figures of fun, but their pursuit forces Grusha to retain the baby and thus keeps the plot moving. The scene of Grusha's marriage, for which the monk with sarcastic glee demands 'a hushed Wedding March or a gay Funeral Dance' (2055: 52; 4), is ended by the resurrection of the bridegroom, resulting in the comic exodus of the wedding guests but an unwelcome turn in Grusha's fortunes. The comic may be the final and true perspective on human life, but has to assert itself against the decidedly tragic: Brecht's optimism is not Panglossian. In act 1 the tragic is represented by the destruction in the war against fascism, in the main actions by the oppression and insecurity inherent in the feudal system; in each case it is overcome but not negated. A Hegelian synthesis, combining its elements yet not superseding them, is a possible analogy; closer is perhaps the thought of Brecht's favourite Mo Tzu on the two aspects of the universe – yang the masculine, the sunny side, the active; yin the converse; both intertwined, each a valid and necessary part of a universe in which the higher element and the guarantee of the meaningfulness of the whole is however represented by yang. Such oriental serenity on Brecht's part has led to a comparison with Shakespeare's last plays.¹²

(IV) NARRATION

The Singer, a 'summing up and extension'¹³ of all Brecht's narrative devices – placards, choruses, apostrophes to audience, scene titles, introductory verses – has affinities to the Aeschylean chorus. These appear particularly in his sententious commentaries: 'Oh blindness of the great! They walk like gods . . .' (2015; 15; 2). Here he stands above time and place and delivers general truths on the possibilities of change in human affairs. But from such a commentary he can move straight into issuing orders to the actors: 'walk even now with head up' (2015; 16). These orders are obeyed – in the Berliner Ensemble, the Governor responds marionette-like to the Singer's words. Similarly he says what Grusha is to do: 'Run, kind heart! The killers are coming!' (2037; 36; 3). So he exercises a direct control. Being in charge of the book he is also responsible for the division of the story into two chronologically concurrent halves in defiance of dramatic convention.¹⁴ He selects parts of the story to tell, aided by slips of paper he has placed in the book (2008; not in the translation; 2). He passes over long periods of time, both between and within the acts, with a few words. In fact he is the sovereign narrator of a story, and the scenes of the Grusha plot in particular merely body forth his

conceptions.¹⁵ He stands between the action and the public. Brecht placed him with his musicians in front of and in a stage-side box, a visual indicator of their function. The Singer asserts himself as the real reality we are to hold on to, and relativises the dramatic reality – a necessary counterpoise to the emotional tendencies of the Grusha plot. He is always there, and sometimes when he opens his mouth we are reminded that the action is in the past, and supplied with hints as to how to think about it, which modify our emotional response. He also plays directly with the audience, raising political hopes – 'Oh, Wheel of Fortune! Hope of the people!' only to dash them: 'When the houses of the great collapse / Many little people are slain' (2015; 15f.; 2).

The most daring aspect of the Singer's work is however that he is made to speak the thoughts of Grusha when she would otherwise have to remain silent or engage in monologue: the equivalent of voice-over narration in film, this is a specifically epic procedure.¹⁶ While the Singer holds the stage aurally, Grusha (and at the end of act 5 Simon) mimes the emotions concerned. Distancing of the words is sufficient for Brecht, the emotions need not be underplayed too. These songs do not interrupt the action in the way that songs generally do in Brecht, but transfer it temporarily from the social to the psychological level, encouraging the spectator to assess character for its own sake as well as in its social context. In a sense Brecht thus turns the wheel full circle: just where he insists most strongly on the privileged position of the Singer-narrator, emphasises the epic element and thus (theoretically) the primacy of plot over character – the greatest degree of opposition to naturalist theatre, in which character and situation often took precedence over plot – he smuggles back the drama of character, the self-revelation of the individual figure taking priority over the forcing of the pace of the action.

The musicians supporting the Singer fulfil ad hoc functions. Sometimes they act as representatives of the audience, asking questions full of dramatic tension: 'How will the merciful escape the merciless / The bloodhounds, the trappers?' (2026; 26; 3). Sometimes they supply lyrical generalisations on the basis of Grusha's plight (2035; 34; 3) – what in *The Good Person* Shen Teh had to do for herself. Once in a short interlude they even take the words of Grusha (2036; 35; 3); the Berliner Ensemble played this sense before an empty road.

(V) THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE PLAY

In Brecht the behaviour of the individual is constantly determined by the social situation. A few characters have qualities which override this, and so they come into conflict with society: Katrin in *Mother Courage*, Shen Teh in *The Good Person* and Grusha here. But around them are many

others who are mere ciphers, altering their attitudes more or less as the wind blows them: the cook in *Mother Courage* is a good example, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is full of them. The architects who dance attendance on the Governor are not licksprites by nature: they need contracts (17, 1209). The doctors who abandon Michael are concerned to save their skins. The peasant who asks an impossible price for milk is not a profiteer and grasping, but poor: he gently helps Grusha to pick Michael up after their argument (17, 1209). The soldiers work for whoever pays them and change their attitude according to the news from above. In act 6 they string Azdak up on a denunciation, but on receipt of a despatch from the Grand Duke, their newly-restored master, they are on the spot. One of them immediately raises the fainting Azdak. The others are slower to grasp the situation: only after an embarrassing pause at Azdak 'like a hairdresser who wants his tip' (Brecht).¹¹ The peasant woman who panics and gives away Grusha and Michael to the corporal, too, acts in a way determined by her social situation. None of them are all bad, but they do not break out of the vicious circle. Grusha's sister-in-law treats her coldly because she fears for her own respectability; Grusha's brother is annoyed but can do nothing about it, and his defence of his wife (2049: 47) expresses a bad conscience. And so it goes on. The world in which Grusha and Azdak move is made up of people with no impetus to change it, though very few of them benefit from it. The possible changes in the world would have to start with the activation of people like this, whose true interest it would be to put an end to their exploitation by those above them. Indeed, Brecht is more interested in showing this end of society and where the shoe rubs it than in attacking the exploiters directly. Socialist realist critics objected to the lack of positive revolutionary content in Brecht.

The time of the main action is basically similar to that in *Galileo*: the feudal hierarchy is in decline. The princes fish in troubled waters, using the war in which the Grand Duke is engaged to extend their power; the Governor by his effeness and ineffectuality, shown by his lack of interest in despatches from the front, plays into their hands. The feudal powers are served by the judiciary and the armed forces, and logically reinforced by the Church. Lawyers, doctors, and architects are theoretically independent, but in practice only able to make money out of the feudalists, who alone have money. No beginnings of mercantilism are to be seen among this embryonic middle class.

The concomitant of feudalism, serfdom, is underplayed. Though in act 1 one of the older participants has been a serf, in the body of the play people behave like free peasants and townspeople, whose suffering at the hands of the nobility takes the form of taxation and the capricious exercise of violence by the powerful. The Governor and his wife

think only of property.¹² she in particular has no attitudes that are specifically feudal rather than capitalistic. The most sensitive point of property is possession of a child (here Michael), determined by begetting and bearing: 'the ultimate locus of private property is in the private parts',¹³ an aspect of capitalism that had attracted Brecht's satirical attention in the sonnet *On Kant's Definition of Marriage* . . . (9, 609; *B. Poems*, 312). The peasants vary from rich to poor, and they marry into property in the time-honoured way; Grusha's brother does it here in Grusinia just like his fore-runner in Swabia. An urban artisanate, the carpet-weavers, is kept off stage: it apparently attempts from time to time to assert itself in revolts, but has never grown strong enough to hold its own for long against the feudalists. The servants, as seen mainly in act 2, have a rudimentary solidarity in that they help each other when the quarrels of the mighty involve the powerless too. They are also seen, in Brecht's production, stealing in the time of chaos.¹⁴ This is typical of them. In the caravanserai episode of act 3, Grusha tries to pass herself off as a fine lady. When she is found out, only one construction can be made in the didactic piece *The Exception and the Rule* — be put on it: that she is out to kill or rob.¹⁵ No one is expected to believe that she had honest, let alone positively good, intentions. But in fact she is rising above class bonding and showing fellow-feeling with a member of another class because he is himself, like the servants, powerless and helpless.

Azdak, the village clerk, makes a decision like Brecht's: he espouses the revolutionary cause out of an intellectual insight. When the revolution fails him, he finds himself, in his attempt to realise what social justice he can, allied with the robber — who in a time of oppression has a positive social function, helping the poor by robbing the rich. That Irakli is also St Banditus, an old hermit, is part of the play's criticism of Christianity. For his use of force is, as the Singer adumbrates (2084: 77: 5), the correct, primevally Christian way of loving one's neighbour. Christ came to bring not peace, but the sword. Otherwise the flaunted Christianity of various figures in the play, especially those Grusha meets, is just a mask for exploitation and indifference. The peasant woman with whom Grusha leaves Michael calls this abandonment a sin (2038: 37): the real sin has been committed, just after Sunday church, by the Governor's wife. The same peasant woman, thinking only of her harvest money, denounces Grusha as soon as the Ironshirts arrive, thus forcing her to use violence to save Michael. When she comes with him to the rotten bridge, the merchant woman can only pray and say that crossing the bridge constitutes the sin of tempting God (2043f.: 42): Grusha has to act alone. In the following scene Grusha's sister-in-law with the crucifix is more concerned about gossip than about helping the child; whilst one could not expect Brecht to miss the chance of portraying a

drunken, obscene and money-grubbing monk. None of these Christians eases Grusha's lot; they censure her and let her down.

Yet Christianity is not only attacked. Grusha as virgin 'mother' of a child of high birth, whose father is not her fiancé, fleeing with it from the Prince's persecution into a far country, and married to Yussup (Joseph), has similarities to the Virgin Mary; so has the old woman, 'Mother Grusinia', who receives the gifts of St Banditus and the adoration of Azdak. Azdak breaks the laws like bread to feed the masses, bringing a temporal rather than spiritual salvation to the needy (2086; 80; 5), is mocked by the soldiers with a robe and a burlesque crown (2078; 72), greets his apparently certain end with 'The fear of death is upon me' (2089; 82; 5). But he is no Messiah. Brecht uses parts of the story of Jesus for Michael too – hailed by Grusha in the song at the end of scene 3 with an echo of Isaiah, thrice denied by her on Simon's return. Brecht finds biblical references and echoes suitable for scenes set in the feudal past, where they serve to underline the real, egalitarian message of Christ against its perversion by the hypocritical oppressors. Thus Christianity is incorporated into the humane tradition Brecht would like to formulate. But biblical echoes are lacking in act 1: Brecht does not want to risk any hint that such a debased form of organised religion might be allowed to influence modern life.

(VI) GRUSHA'S PRODUCTIVITY

'Terrible is the temptation to do good!', the Singer tells us (2025; 25; 2). As Grusha takes the child, music expresses the threat of retribution for this theft. The Singer's paradox draws our attention to the state of an age in which the ageless quality of goodness (the abstract quality is invoked in the German text) is something to be resisted. But the theme of goodness – as general charity, and as doing one's best for a single child – has been treated in *The Good Person*, and Brecht does not just repeat himself. The particular twist in this play is that Grusha takes on a strange child out of joy at her betrothal to Simon. The temptation to do good is an almost sexual one: *Verführung*, seduction.²² 'I took him because on that Easter Sunday I got engaged to you. And so it is a child of love', she tells Simon at the end (2105; 96; 6). And the child leads her into marriage to another, thus very nearly preventing the engagement to Simon from turning into marriage. Simon is invented by Brecht independently of the concept of Grusha's child not being her own, and his function is to complicate the plot.

But at the same time Simon represents the promise of a fulfilment. In *Mother Courage*, Katrin was not only prevented from taking on orphan children by the colder attitude of her mother, but also unable to get

herself a man. Grusha gets at one stroke the promise of a man, and the reality of a child. The promise is redeemed: despite her marriage to another, Simon declares himself willing to perjure himself for her (like Shen Teh for Wang), and in the comedy ending she is freed to marry him.

When Grusha actually takes on the child, under the influence of her personal joy, it is for quite direct and universal reasons. Her sensitivity is expressed in the magnificent narration (2024; 24; 2) of what she thinks she hears the child saying, and it is a threat: by closing one's ear to a cry for help one cuts oneself off from the simple contentment of existence for ever. She tries to resist the message, but in vain. In the eyes of the world she may be concerning herself with dangerous things that are none of her business, she may be infringing the sacred rule that charity begins at home; but humanitarian impulses overcome her. (The hesitation before she takes the child has been said to be borrowed from the Chaplin film *The Kid*²³). In her own view she is merely keeping the peace with herself. She sighs when she lifts up the child, for she knows she is taking responsibility for a hunted boy with a price on his head, something which must bring her anxiety and perhaps danger.

She wants at first only to get Michael out of danger. She is quite ready to leave him with the peasant couple once she has realised it is impracticable for her to take him further without nappies or supplies. At this point she is so keen to get the child safely billeted and to take up the threads of her own life that she has changed her mind about going to her brother's and wants to return to Nukha to await Simon. So she has not thought about how to bring Michael up. Then comes the realisation that the Ironshirts are searching for the child in exactly the direction where she has left him, and the turning-point of the plot when in order to save him she has to hit the Corporal over the head. After this, she as well as Michael is hunted, both are in the same boat (2043 'Mitgegangen, mitgehangen'; cf. 42 'Live together, die together'). Grusha and the peasant woman have each done exactly what they wanted not to when they see Ironshirts. The woman betrays the child though she wanted to keep it; Grusha gives herself away and has to act desperately to keep the child, though she wanted to lose it. The apparently better situation for the child was really almost fatally catastrophic.

Now, having done much for Michael already, she makes him hers. She dresses him in her blanket instead of his fine linen and re-baptises him (2041; 40). Almost the first thing she said about him was: 'He hasn't got the plague. He looks at you like a human being' (2023; 23; 2). Now, from a sort of taboo object dangerous for the lower orders to touch, he is to be transformed into a true human being. The baptism is to signify conversion to positive (rather than hypocritical) Christianity. The song at the end of act 3 is about Michael (2044, 'auf dich'; missed in

human-
izing
Michael

the translation). It has a social awareness which critics have paid too little attention to. She sets out consciously to divert Michael from the ways laid for him by heredity. His thief-father wanted to lay out a new wing to the palace, pulling down the houses of the poor to do so – all for Michael (2009, 2013: 11, 14: 1). His whore-mother is never seen without the Adjutant. Both have been a scourge to the poor, tiger and snake. But Michael is to feed children and foals. In act 4 his education is proceeding. Bent at the loom, Grusha sings a song with useful lessons about not making oneself too obvious, which she applies to their present situation as well as to war (2048; 46). After her marriage he is seen trying his hand at mending a straw mat (2058; 55): work-orientated play. Her defence before Azdak is based on her having brought him up 'to be friendly with everyone' and 'to work as well as he could' (2096; 88; 6), and she wants to teach him more words (2103; 95). Her unspoken reaction to Azdak's tempting offer that if she lets the child go to its real mother it will be rich completes the picture: 'He who wears the shoes of gold / Tramples on the weak and old . . .' (2102; 93) – and what is more, being so evil is too great a strain for a man, and it would be better for him to fear hunger than to fear the revenge of the hungry. So Grusha develops ideas on education which are typical of Brecht in their double basis: class-consciousness and humanitarianism. As in *The Good Person* the exploiting class is as alienated as the exploited, and suffers from the need to be harsh, so here. As it was not Shui Ta's fault that he was so hard, so here Grusha actually takes it on herself to save a potential exploiter from the consequences of birth into the ruling class – by making him a worker, a useful member of society.²⁴ In scene 6, finally, her attack on Azdak shows awareness of his apparent role as the judicial defender of private property and exploitation (2100; 92).

The other, more obvious, side of Grusha is her naivety. At the beginning, the cook tells her she is none of the brightest (2023; 23; 2). Her kindness lacks anything to moderate it. She calls herself a sucker (2051, 'die Dumme', Brecht's translation of 'sucker' as explained 17, 1206 and *Mat. K.*, 19; cf. 48 'the fool'; 4). But really she is closer to Katrin, who becomes self-sacrificingly good only after a series of catastrophic alienations, than to the unstoppable existential goodness of Shen Teh. Like Mother Courage's daughter she is a tireless worker, the one sent for the extra goose, a strong and willing girl – Brecht cast Angelika Hurwicz in both parts, solid and down-to-earth, her physique and face counteracting any desire to see her as a little-girl-lost. Grusha is the timeless, practical, four-square peasant, but with some of the monomania afflicting Bruegel's *Dulle Griet*, the madwoman rushing open-mouthed through a nightmare world on a mission she alone understands.²⁵ At the beginning, at least, she may be helpless and silly, but she has the stamina and obstinacy she will need for her task. Grusha was pure

and goody-goody only in the first version written for Luise Rainer; immediately after sending the script off to her Brecht was discontented and rewrote the part completely (*Aj.*, 2, 671: 8.8.44; *Mat. K.*, 32f.). In rehearsal, he contemplated hinting that she stole on her journey with Michael in order to feed the two of them (*Mat. K.*, 72f.). In fulfilling her function vis-à-vis Michael, Grusha develops herself, 'changes herself, with sacrifices and through sacrifices, into a mother for the child' (*Mat. K.*, 23), from a naïve girl into a thinking woman.

She also undergoes the strangest twists and turns of the plot, as when the end of the war transforms her from a virgin widow with an adopted son and a lover far away, into an unwilling wife who must fear the return of her lover and cannot account to him or to her husband for the child. A final irony in the last scene is that, having looked after Michael when the Governor's wife could not be bothered with him, she wants nothing more badly than to be allowed to go on wearing herself out and involving herself in expense for it! Here she and her poor friends are contrasted in the stage grouping with the Governor's wife and lawyers: the productive against the parasites of society.²⁶ In the meantime she has survived a series of dangers so crassly presented as to verge on the comic. The way she hits the bending corporal is certainly funny; her crossing of a bridge which collapses immediately afterwards takes one into the world of Victorian melodrama. With each of these perils she adds to the self-sacrifice which is implicit in taking the child on in the first place. The more pressures are put on her, the more her refusal to let society alienate her stands out. What began as a quick rescue undertaken to salve her conscience turns gradually into a total commitment.

Finally Azdak's freak judgment gives her peculiar productive talent as a mother free rein; it is blessed by society, institutionalised. At last she can be herself without fighting everyone else. The ending emphasises that men are made what they are by social life, not by biology. For all practical purposes Michael is Grusha's child now. This application of the Marxian statement that social being determines consciousness has alienated some believers in *la voix du sang*, but is surely understandable even to them as an answer to the racial madness which is what National Socialism made of theories of heredity.

(VII) AZDAK'S PRODUCTIVITY

Perhaps Brecht's most energetic character, full of zest and quirkiness, Galileo and Schweyk rolled into one, Azdak from the outset gives lessons to Shauva, demonstrations to the Grand Duke. He runs of his own accord to the centre of what he hears is a revolution, just as Mother Courage sets

off to the war, though with different intentions. He has an alert political consciousness and the mental agility and self-confidence to use it; he is ready to be appointed judge. His first political song (2071f.; 66f.) is a striking example of Brecht's technique of the missing third strophe. Because the king is carrying on a war and taxing everyone, because the government is ruinous and the workers impoverished – for these reasons, it says, we no longer bleed and weep, leaving bleeding to the calves and weeping to the willows. The missing link is, in this case, in the middle: because of war and injustice the workers have revolted and abolished the cause of their sorrow. The omission has a poetic and an ideological purpose. The poetic one is to force the reader to supply the missing link – and the structure of the song, consisting of a question, two strophes of description and the paradoxical assertion that they answer the question, scarcely makes it easier. The ideological purpose is to conform to the general ambivalence of Marxian theory according to which the dictatorship of the proletariat has indeed to be worked for, but is at the same time a historical necessity. The alienation described classically in the song in the image of the ragged weaver has in itself the germ of its downfall.

The song nearly results in a catastrophe. Azdak's celebration of the 'new age' (1069; 65) was premature. The new age arrives in the unexpected form of the Fat Prince (1073; 68), just as Galileo's new age turned out to be a new age of exploitation. Azdak does not give up. Soon, to the Ironshirts, in the presence of the Fat Prince, he expresses utter contempt for the forms of law (2074f.; 69f.). He has recognised in the soldiers fellow-proletarians; even if at this moment they are not to be diverted from the service of their oppressors, they will not take a little satire amiss. Here he shows the cunning in finding and spreading the truth demanded in *Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth* (18, 222–39). His performance in the role of the Grand Duke unmasks the new rulers as no better than the old, their claims to change things for the sake of the people as hollow. This need to show up the apparently new as really old, mentioned in the essay, is basic in such anti-Hitler plays as *Roundheads and Peakheads* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Here, the nephew claims to represent the People – 'Volk' (2076; 71), with no more justification than Hitler. Azdak works against this, which brands him in the Fat Prince's eyes as a revolutionary. His second song (2087; 81) ironically pretends to deprecate the state of chaos in which the common people come into their own.²⁷ It resembles the carnival ballad in *Galileo* in its Utopian expectations. As often with Brecht, order is the principle of exploitation, disorder the chance for the individual's self-realisation. This song is already used as an instance of cunning used to broadcast truth under a tyranny in *Five Difficulties* (18, 234f.); it is an adaptation of an Egyptian lament of c. 2500 B.C.²⁸

Ernst Busch in the Berliner Ensemble played Azdak as a representative of the lower classes: lolling back incongruously in his red robe, watching the emotional Governor's wife's attempts to convince him of her right to the child with the air of an old trade-unionist listening to the employer justifying a pay cut.²⁹ To him everything is reducible to a class aspect. The Princes win their battle for profits in millions of piastres when Grusinia loses the war. Conversely, Mother Grusinia's surprise at a poor person being given a ham goes straight to his heart.³⁰ His justice is that of a disappointed revolutionary reduced to playing the fool (17, 1206). Brecht's intention of making him a purely selfish judge (*Aj.*, 2, 650: 8.5.44) is not realised: an ambiguity remains, Azdak is now selfish and now altruistic (in rehearsal Brecht stressed these aspects alternately). He uses his power in the interest of the poor, thus establishing an enclave of fairness in a general atmosphere of class justice. He works pragmatically: there being no hope of revolution, he is willing to try and alleviate the effects of tyranny. He is the good bad judge: morally good, professionally bad.³¹ He takes bribes openly, a practice obviously to be expected of the regular judge, which he satirises by taking it to absurd lengths. He complains that the poor expect justice without payment (2099; 91; 6). The cynical openness is intended to show up the usual practice. 'It's good for Justice to do it in the open. The wind blows her skirts up and you can see what's underneath' (2081; 75; 5) is not only a reference to Ludovica. He turns the language of jurisprudence upside down, declaring Ludovica's waggling of her hips to be rape (2083; 77; 5). Sometimes he is content to modify somewhat the workings of the caricatured market economy: the doctor in his first case gets away with loss of his fee, the poor patient has to drown his sorrows in a bottle of brandy. In the case of Mother Grusinia the presence of Irakli allows a more direct judgment in favour of the poor, and rich farmers are sentenced to fines. Bribes and fines flow into Azdak's pocket; he is punctilious about collecting fines for contempt of court (even from Simon at the end). Social justice and self-interest concern him about equally. If he loves troubled waters, he does not forget his fishing-rod. He wants to gratify his senses, and like Galileo's scientific urge, his love of justice is bound up with sensuality. The set for his hut, with hung hare, onions and garlic as well as the demonstratively displayed handiwork of the scribe, says as much. Beauty for him is often connected with food; he cannot do without wine. 'With me, everything goes on food and drink' (2100; 91; 6). The theme centres on Azdak but is not confined to him: intelligent appreciation of food is a motif of act 1, whose goat-and-fruit-tree motif is repeated in act 3 where the Old Man mentions his goats (2027; 27) and the innkeeper his cherry and peach trees (2028f.; 28). Similarly Azdak's revaluation of the concept of justice is summed up by the girl tractor driver: The laws will have to be re-examined in any case

to see whether they are still valid' (2003: 5), but only Azdak actually undertakes the examination.

If Grusha was subject to the seduction of goodness, he can be seduced by a question. He sees himself as an intellectual, a logician, not as good-hearted (2067: 63: 5). His anomalous activities culminate in act 6 – the climax of Brecht's whole *oeuvre*, with its riches of argument and paradox, and a comic perversion of the court scene. In Hauptmann's *Der Biberpelz*, a comedy which was among the early productions of the Berliner Ensemble, the magistrate von Wehnhahn is so blinkered by political prejudice that the rascally protagonist, Mother Wolfen, gets away with her blatant theft. Azdak distorts the law in a nicer way. Even the restoration of the Grand Duke cannot remove him from his place, and threats of what will happen if he gives judgment against the Governor's wife do not make him forget his pragmatic and philanthropic jurisprudence. He says beforehand (2089: 82: 5) that he will not show 'human greatness': but unlike Galileo in a similar situation he remains true to himself and his work. What most attracts him about the Grusha case seems to be the chance to shake Grusha out of her bovine slowness into a more active assertion of her right to Michael: when she becomes excited and denounces his apparent class justice he is delighted (2100: 92). Not only does he allow this unmasking of feudal justice: he also distorts the point at issue, refusing to take seriously the evidence on the legally decisive matter of maternity (2096: 88), never touching on the mother's abandonment of the child, and finally wrongly claiming that the case is obscure and the duty of finding a mother for the child thus devolves on him (2103: 94). Thus he puts the utility of the judgment before its legality, as he does too in pronouncing the wrong divorce and in declaring the Abashvili estates forfeit to be used as a playground because the city children need one (2104: 95).³³ His liking for Grusha and the poor performance put up by the lawyers on the other side make him determine to disregard the duress he is under. (He does not forget it: he prepares, and makes, a quick getaway after his judgment.)

In *The Augsburg Chalk Circle* Dollinger similarly put utility first, but with no intention of permanently damaging, still less of mocking, established law. Azdak has more in common with Till Eulenspiegel in another Brecht story, *Eulenspiegel als Richter* ('Eulenspiegel as Judge', 11. 371f.). He creates around himself a Saturnalia, a period of mischief, like that which in Greek comedies figures as a reminiscence of the Golden Age of Kronos³⁴ – the Golden Age is invoked by the Singer (2105: 96: 6). He is a rogue and jester, a parodist who excels himself when for once he sets up a positive principle. And after doing so he must disappear (with an echo of Goethe's poem *Der Fischer*: 'und ward nicht mehr gesehen', 2105): he is no longer safe. He has clarified and modified a

few things about the feudal order, given impulses to action – and he leaves the seeds without seeing whether they will grow.

(VIII) THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE COMMUNES

The Soviet citizens of act 1 have not only just fought Hitler, an expression of the political will of the Socialist system: they also live in a state which by its very nature is a constant challenge to all forms of capitalism. In contrast to the state of destructive competition in capitalism, of which Hitler's war was in Brecht's view only the most striking development, here the good of society and the good of the individual converge. The pleasures of living in Communism are the pleasures of production. The people we see are connoisseurs of cheese, whether themselves goat-keepers or not. They are fascinated by the tools of progress, such as plans for new technical advances: they vindicate Galileo's confidence that manifold is open to the workings of reason. They take pleasure in discussion, they can quote Mayakovsky, and they have enough leisure to rehearse the play of the *Chalk Circle*, which has been revised (2007: 8: 1) – this clearly refers to the fact that the biological mother does not get the child – to bring it into line with new ideas of productivity. They feel pleasure that their existence allows decisions for the benefit of all to be made so easily, whereas in the feudal world many chances were necessary to provide a happy ending. T. M. Holmes, however, points out that even in 1945 the wise communal decisions are only made possible by a bureaucrat, the visiting commissar, waiving his right to impose his will on the communes, so that there is in act 1 at least some of the same tension as in the rest of the play.³⁵

The only thing to suffer in the communal life shown here is the individual's attachment to a particular piece of ground. The old man on the right appeals to law, history and sentiment – 'what kind of tree stands beside the house where one was born' (2003: 5) – in his attempt to keep the valley, and finds the cheese produced elsewhere 'barely decent' (2003: 4) on the unprovable ground that the goats like the strange grass less. But his opposite number disagrees about the cheese: it is excellent. This fits with the reversal of the Chalk Circle story. Another mother, is not necessarily bad for the child: other ground is not necessarily bad for the goat. The two concepts attacked here are foundations of National Socialist ideology, the components of the slogan 'Blut und Boden', blood and soil: the ties of blood leading to the concept of race and Aryan purity, the attachment to the soil considered to justify the building of a Greater Germany. It is the modern Georgians who not only overcome Hitler, but also change the old play to give it lessons opposed to his ideology.

Brecht's answer to Hitler is not now, as in the first version of *Galileo* or in *Schweyk*, the answer of the little man who has to duck under until it is safe to show his head again. It is a triumphant assertion which need not stop to argue or question. Hitler and his ideology vanquished, the world is again safe for those who are truly modern, who in their working life are busy improving things, putting to work a productive critical attitude, and able to entertain themselves with plays which, as adapted, mixing old and new wisdom (2007; 8; 1), show the same attitudes in an embryonic stage. The topicality and relevance of the Grusha and Azdak plots thus depends on their being embedded in a post-Hitler reality.

A frequent excuse for cutting this scene – which is not a 'prologue': Brecht dropped this designation of it in 1956 – is that it is impossibly starry-eyed in its view of Soviet Russia. Critics who believe that Brecht the Communist and Brecht the Writer kept tripping each other up explain it as the product either of wilful blindness to facts or of a cynical acquiescence in East German demands for ideology and socialist realism (though it was written before East Germany was invented). The truth is more complicated. Brecht had written 'the USSR is still very far from reaching the state of productive forces in which leadership, e.g., no longer means domination' (Aj., 1, 77: 1.1.40). He did not believe Stalin's state would wither away: Walter Benjamin charmingly describes Brecht impersonating the Soviet Union: he 'assumes a cunning, furtive expression . . . and says, with a sly, sidelong glance . . .: "I know I ought to wither away"'.³⁵ And Rosa Luxemburg, after whom one of the colchoses is named, was a Communist leader by no means happy with Russian developments between October 1917 and her death. Incidentally, Brecht almost named the goat-owning commune after her, but Eisler pointed out that 'goat' in German is a term for a silly female, not to be associated with a great revolutionary!³⁶ Russian critics, notably Ilya Fradkin, are rightly sceptical about the scene as a portrayal of Russian actuality, and at least one Russian director has declared it unstageable in Russia.³⁷ Nor is it a tongue-in-cheek tractor-Utopia; if Brecht wrote such pieces at all, it was only after settling in East Germany. Nor is it a forecast about Soviet reality of 1985 or 2025, for in the course of historical development dialectical changes would by then have come about which a writer in Brecht's time could not anticipate.³⁸

Perhaps we can best call it a provisional Utopia: people in the present represented as acting in ways which can only be expected, if at all, in a very distant future. Scene 10 of *Galileo* foreshortens history similarly, making an ideal state spring out of the seventeenth century. Brecht chooses to disregard all the evidence about the Russian reality of 1945 and to hold fast to one overriding aspect: as the most progressive country, Russia is the one to associate with an ideal of humane be-

haviour. That the visiting arbitrator-commissar finds no work to do adumbrates the Marxian withering-away of the state in a quite fantastic manner. Brecht presumably holds on to the apparent presentation of a real place in the present time only as a counterbalance to the vague chronology of the other two plots and their fairy-tale improbability. Discussion will continue as to whether the treatment is adequate; but we should do Brecht the justice of assuming that he sincerely wanted to portray, just for once, a positively better society such as he is striving towards, and that this was the best way he could find.

(IX) PRESENTATION AND LANGUAGE

The bridge episode of act 3 is a vehicle for empathy with Grusha, and – like the death of Swiss Cheese in *Mother Courage* – does a great deal to undo the effects of all the social comment, the coolness and the distancing techniques used elsewhere. The most notable of these are dealt with under the headings of narration and setting, but it should be pointed out here that whilst the Grusha plot has an epic narrator the Azdak plot is less in need of one. Thus by a bold stroke Brecht was able to make Ernst Busch double as Singer and Azdak in the 1954 production. This underlines that against Grusha's silence and hesitancy, Azdak is voluble and in control, the driving force of his plot,³⁹ just as in *Galileo*, which has a similar lack of epic effects, Galileo was. It also stresses that the Azdak we see is an actor, whom for the first part of the play we have seen as an actor-singer; and it allows Ernst Busch to show the range of his talents.

When Grusha does talk, she is down-to-earth. The pithy 'Mittagszeit, essen d'Leut' (2027; cf. 27 'Noon time, eating time') shows a South German stamp in its elision and impure rhyme, and the following sentences vary from the colloquial ('wie bei Fürstens', bringing the nobility down to the level of neighbours) to the vulgar ('earned our money sitting on our bottom'). False deference to superiors is not in her make-up; she calls Azdak a 'drunken onion' (2100; 92). Her songs are popular: that promising to wait for Simon (2018f.; 19; 2) echoes distantly a popular song of the Second World War by the Soviet writer Konstantin Simonov;⁴⁰ the song of Sosso Robakidse (2026; 26; 3), intended to give her courage, has also a topical reference at the time of a Persian war.

Azdek on the other hand has a rich plebeian language and a stock of proverbs which get great social statements into a small compass.⁴¹ In a few lines of dialogue with Simon, 'When the horse was shod . . .' (2099; 91; 6), the truism that the weaker is subject to the stronger (from *Galileo*) is followed through a series of absurd consequences culmin-

ating in the weak person asserting the freedom he claims only by hurting himself (a theme from *Mother Courage*). Finally Azdak objects to Simon's crudity, but he himself is none too careful. Also part of his linguistic virtuosity is the parody of the Grand Duke's clipped speech, leading into the proof that all the princes have a way of speaking that should be suspect to the lower orders (2078; 72). The comic element is obvious in this overflowing energy, set against the muted lyricism of the Grusha scenes. The Singer too in his ballad of Azdak gleefully presents such pairs of concepts as 'Gibher und Abgezwick' (2083; cf. 77, 'Come Here's and Listen-You's') among its colourful rhymes to the name Azdak.

The Singer's language is marked by rhetorical procedures, such as parallelism with variation: 'Then the Governor . . . / Then the fortress . . . / Then the goose . . .' (2013; 14; 2). Adjectives appositionally placed after their nouns lend emphasis: 'Die Panzerreiter nehmen das Kind fort, das teure' (2064; cf. 61, 'The Ironshirts took the child away, the precious child'). Apostrophe and invocation give a solemn tone: 'Oh, blindness of the great! . . . Oh, Wheel of Fortune! Hope of the people!' (2015; 15; 2) – but this is also parodied: 'Oh, confusion! The wife discovers that she has a husband!' (2058; 55; 4). His lyrical descriptions of the effect of passing time on Grusha are reminiscent, with their emphasis on transience, of Brecht's early poems: 'As she sat by the stream to wash the linen . . .' (2059f.; 56; 4). 'Mit gehenden Monden' makes two poetic effects in the German which are lost in translation ('As the months passed by'). But a more sophisticated way of producing sympathetic awareness of Grusha's problems is to interpolate officialese and contorted syntax to contrast with the emotive terms: 'Sehnsucht hat es gegeben, gewartet worden ist nicht. / Der Eid ist gebrochen. Warum, wird nicht mitgeteilt' (2063; cf. 60, 'There was great yearning . . .'). Sentiment is prevented from relapsing into sentimentality by avoiding such obvious terms as 'empfinden', to feel emotions. Another way of encouraging sentiment without false pathos is by introducing everyday actions among the potentially emotive content: 'I had to care for what otherwise would have come to harm / I had to bend down on the floor for breadcrumbs / I had to tear myself to pieces for what was not mine . . .' (2064; 60; 4). The leisureliness of the singer's reports of Grusha's inner life, the cunning metrical variations, even the idyllic comment in some places, as in the evocation of the evening Angelus (2024; 24; 2) cannot blind one to the social context. Mention of the Angelus is part of Michael's threat to Grusha: if she does not heed him, she will not partake of life's satisfactions. But more in evidence in the play, and in the singer's comments, is the obverse: the punishment for heeding Michael's cries, the punishment inflicted by a hostile society on goodness.

There are frightening elements in the play. The Ironshirts in their stiff, shapeless clothing and grotesque attitudes repeat an effect which

had been a success in the pre-Hitler *Man is Man*. Against a background of a severed head (the Governor's head is displayed in Nukha after his execution right to the end of the play) and a hanged judge they listen threateningly to Azdak's self-denunciation and then suddenly, with demonic laughter, turn to his persecution, which ends just as abruptly. But the two who pursue Grusha are also comic, and a microcosm of the social order: one to give orders, the other to execute them. Brecht rubs in the unfairness of things by using N.C.O. clichés. The private is always a 'blockhead', his every movement shows he is 'insubordinate', he is subjected to orders in the infinitive (a nuance lost in the English) and little sermons: 'A good soldier has his heart and soul in it . . .' (2034; 33; 3). The corporal's rough sadism comes out in his coarse innuendoes in dealing with Grusha. Otherwise verbal humour is rare in the play: a restrained pun on *Trauung*, wedding, and *Trauer*, mourning (2053; cf. 50) comes in the wedding scene, an episode of wild movement. The apparently imminent death of the bridegroom makes everyone hurry over the marriage: his mother rushes around making arrangements, the villagers rush in so as not to miss anything – and crowd the room intolerably. Finally the two women, unable to get round the guests, have to throw the bits of cake among the crowd, a buffeted and swaying knot of eating, chattering, singing, praying people among whom eventually the talk about the end of the war becomes audible. The dying husband, a pale and skeletal figure, suddenly appears at the door – a *memento mori* turned into a husband, the spectre at the feast who turns the mock wedding into a reality and stops Grusha's intention of using it as a social convenience. This night-shirted apparition causes a swift exodus of screaming guests.⁴² Movement is important at the end of the play too. Brecht intended, in order to avoid intrinsically false folkloristic dancing, to arrange the final dance as a set of mimes by which all those present would demonstrate their work – emphasising the theme of productivity better than general pointless merrymaking could; but as this turned out hard to understand, it was cut to a few dance steps before the final curtain.⁴³

As usual, Brecht added plenty of business in rehearsal. The peasant woman to whom Grusha wants to entrust the child, for instance, expresses when she comes out her suspicion of anything left lying around in these uncertain times, her fear that someone may be lying in wait with a cosh to catch her off guard, her apprehension that the child has some infectious disease, her awareness that children picked up off the street usually turn out ne'er-do-wells whatever one does for them; then she finds the child has fine linen, is of good family; and suddenly she decides to give the child a home despite all doubts (*Mat. K.*, 65–7). And after she has put forward her arguments for keeping the child, her husband does not follow her in immediately, which could mean he is going to continue arguing inside; he stays to shake his head at the folly of

women and, still more, at the folly of men who let the weaker sex get the better of them (*Mat. K.*, 69). In the final scene, the first lawyer advances to make his plea with self-satisfied bounds and an exaggerated bow to the judge. A similar incongruity is that between the nephew's diminutive figure and his family mask, clipped speech, marionette-like movements, and pretensions to the office of judge.⁴⁴

Dessau's music is difficult and controversial.⁴⁵ Some of the melodies are taken from Azerbaijan folk music, with characteristic ornamentation; but the melodic ornamentation of the Jewish synagogue tradition, and a whole catalogue of other exotic effects, are also drawn on. Special percussion, including three tomtoms, gives more atmosphere than Grusinian authenticity, and the Berliner Ensemble used a special *Gongspiel* – a set of eight gongs played by hammers like a piano and having pedals for damping or for a special steely effect. Dessau desires nine instrumentalists; at least five are necessary. For Azdak's investiture as judge Dessau provides a little march quoting the waltz from Act II of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* – with melody in the accordion and accompaniment in the percussion! Controversy centres, however, around the long part of the Singer, which is laid out for v-effects. Coldness in telling Grusha's story suggests the horror of an era in which kindness is self-destructive. Such phrases as 'Feuer schlügen sie aus meinem Nacken' (2063; 59 'My neck was burnt by fire' is not so graphic and direct; 4) are set in the cadence of a question and with musical accent on grammatically unstressed syllables, to aid the singer in expressing surprise at the emotion or its formulation; but critics merely found this, like the arbitrary melismatic treatment of some words intended to give oriental atmosphere, made the words incomprehensible, and few hearers or musicians have defended the difficulty of comprehension as a spur to greater attentiveness.

(x) SETTING AND COSTUME

Among the techniques which relativise the reality of stage events and work against uncontrolled empathy are Karl von Appen's sets. The backdrops are of silky white, painted in Chinese style and having the primary function of being beautiful and giving pleasure in their own right.⁴⁶ They are frequently changed during the individual acts, particularly act 3. Not weighted by battens, they swirl over the stage like flags as they are dropped.⁴⁷ For acts 2, 5 and 6 the town is painted – a mass of box-like houses jumbled on top of one another, of central Asian inspiration. In act 3 the delicate calligraphic style comes into its own for distant mountains, gnarled trees and threatening percipices. In act 4 a broad landscape suggests Simon's wanderings, in act 5 Azdak's perambula-

tions. At the end, when Azdak has invited those present to an open-air dance, the procession out takes place in front of a drawing of a group of musicians and a dancer with a tambourine.

What is placed before the backdrop should, according to Brecht, remind one of the Christmas crib: overloaded, precious and naïve. The palace has a richly worked silver gate – in which the red fires of rebellion can be reflected.⁴⁸ Another, less pretentious, gate represents the church: the two stand side-by-side on stage, not spatially tied to the idea of a building behind. A curving red carpet connects them. Props in act 2 include large, heavy, practical pieces of luggage: a wicker basket, studded trunks and so on. In act 3 the turntable stage is much used. Grusha runs against its turning, and sets for the various episodes come to her on it, having been quickly built up during the previous episode behind a drop screening the back third of the turntable. There is no real break between episodes. Walking from one episode to the next, Grusha sees the next building or landmark in front of her. The music supports the idea of a continuum in which the tension is not allowed to drop – a film-style chase sequence.⁴⁹ The peasant's hut is solid, heavy wood; at the climax of the scene, the bridge is realistically rickety, with missing floor laths and only one rope to hold on to. Act 4 is largely interiors: solid furniture, a loom as high as Grusha, and after the marriage an out-sized cask for Yussup's bath. When Simon returns, the river is shown by two ground-rows of rushes running from backdrop to proscenium, a true naïve effect. In act 5, the court has a heavy practical gate and gallows, in contrast to a light-framed, pointed construction which is the roomy judgment-seat in which Azdak can recline as he is carried round the assizes.

Karl von Appen took responsibility for costumes as well as for sets. The women of the communes, even the agricultural expert, are in voluminous shawls covering the head like a wimple and reaching over the upper arms and back; the same folksy headdress is worn by married women in the main plots. Among the men of 1944, if not in uniform, fur hats are in favour; in the historical scenes there are steeple hats for those in authority, spiked helmets for the soldiers, a high pudding-basin shape for peasants and servants. The architects wear cloche hats crowned with the emblem of a snail, architects being in von Appen's opinion slow-moving creatures.⁵⁰ The Governor's wife has a cross between coronet and tiara, crowned with peacock feathers. Grusha generally wears her own hair, parted in the middle and formed into long plaits; the female singers show a similar arrangement under their wimples.

The lords and ladies have masks, partly to complement their exaggerated costumes, partly because the actors are to be thought of as amateurs who will take pleasure in dressing up. Their servants and soldiers not involved in the action have partial masks, attaching them to the

ruling class, but incompletely (and facilitating doubling). The poorer people could not have masks, as their costume was drab and inexpressive. The double function of Simon, who as a soldier should inspire fear, but as Grusha's lover must not, meant his having not the mask other Ironshirts had, but a very masculine beard instead. Masks do not separate the good from the bad: Grusha's sister-in-law did not have one. Rather, once limited to the upper classes, they show the rulers' immutability. Whereas the evil sister-in-law has changes of mood and rich expression, the Governor is always bored, the Fat Prince always grinning, the nephew always stupid. The Governor's wife has a half-mask, so that she can be seen to smile at the Adjutant.⁵¹

The Governor and his wife are in long, rich, light-coloured robes; the architects, doctors, lawyers, have darker dress. The Ironshirts, of apparently Samurai inspiration, have long, stiff, heavy tabards over long-skirted coachman's cloaks. The Fat Prince — that Goering-figure — also has quasi-Japanese armour, incongruously completed by a dainty fan. Ser-vants, peasants and townspeople have more or less ragged clothes of rough material: leggings, short overcoats and tied belts are typical of the men, shapeless heavy jackets with skirts down to the ground, and aprons almost as long of the women, the whole in brown and beige, occasionally a touch of red. The same clothes, in better material, better preserved and with the addition of a cross at the neck, show the prosperity of Grusha's sister-in-law. The girl whom Azdak finds guilty of rape has a skirt slit right up the front to show close-fitting ankle-length drawers. Michael was represented at first by a doll, but after the winter in the Northern Mountains a real boy appears.

8 Assessment

Practically all Brecht did is based on opposition: the split of Shen Teh and Shui Ta is the most obvious example. It is useless to object to the crassness of this duality, dismiss Brecht as simplistic, and go on to conclude that despite his errors he did quite well considering the era he had to live through.¹ The shock-effect of the extreme is only part of his uniqueness, and so is the tenacity with which he applies Marxian views to the business of men's communal life. Each one of the plays we have examined is influenced in its very structure by Marx's concepts of historical movement and of society. Another part of his impact is based on his willingness to differentiate within the contradictions. Shui Ta is not all bad. Grusha is not all good. Theoretical Marxism does not sit like an incubus on the characters either, but is thoroughly modified by the application of Chinese concepts of politeness, needed to complete the image of people living in harmony as an ideal. The battle against oppression makes those who participate in it tense and even evil, but its aim, never to be lost sight of, is goodness and relaxation. Art must (for, if one does not believe in a religion, no other area of life can) represent the aim too, however hard the struggle, and must exemplify the serenity which in real life there is little chance for.

When we consider the interplay of exaggeration and nuance, of mass constraints and individual dignity, of action and relaxation, of commitment and distance, in Brecht, and when we ask what other playwrights offer similar fruitful complexities, then we may come close to grasping his greatness. Next we might look at the unmatched lyrical form in which he can put his thoughts, for instance the words which the Singer in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* attributes to Michael and which make Grusha pick him up. What use, Hanns Eisler asks, are distancing and Marx and Lenin to a non-politician, until they fall into the hands of 'one of the greatest poets of German literature'?'² And Ronald Bryden some years ago expressed discontent that, until the English are converted to learning foreign languages, 'discussion of Brecht here seems doomed to centre on what he said rather than how he said it; on Brecht the translatable political didact rather than the greatest modern German poet.'³ One can be more sanguine: few of Brecht's effects rely on pure sound, and many

of the effects that rely on the riches of the German language and tradition can be approximated to by transposition into English; certainly the translations of the four plays we have dealt with show very much more than just politics in dialogue form.

3 If we then examine his plays as the writings of a man steeped in theatre practice, embodying a new vision of a possible theatre experience, we have the third element of Brecht's greatness before us. The epic components of the plays serve to open up the stage for the presentation of the dramatic action in the context of a wide historical development, and most of all they aim at a unique interplay of appeal to the head and appeal to the heart. In keeping with the general demand for serenity and relaxation, the play on the stage is to allow the audience to keep cool and laughing, not to put it into emotional tension which impairs possession of the faculties. Brecht-theatre should make us use our senses and our sense to the full, not sweep us off our feet and make us passive. In producing such effects, the collective of people who bring about the theatrical experience exemplify the kind of human co-operation which is Brecht's ethical ideal, and we are to be aware of this realised ideal at work for our pleasure.

Theatre, freed by the rise of film and television from the constraint to imitate reality, can develop as a means of commenting on reality in many different ways. In this development Brecht's conception of theatre must have a major role to play, since it uses to best advantage precisely the things about theatre which film cannot do or cannot do so well, mainly because in the theatre living actors supported by a range of techniques of various kinds confront a living audience. The specifically theatrical experience is Brecht's first aim, never propaganda; and his theatrical imagination, his eye for stage movement, also adds an extra note to his style as a playwright. He is not so much of a political activist, certainly not in the plays we have considered, as were Piscator's writers before him or as is Peter Weiss after him. But the construction of situations and dialogue with the stage in mind allows him to incorporate, without apparent effort, at least as much basic political content as they can, without interfering with the gracefulness and humour he demands of theatre.

As a Marxist, an intellectual, a proponent of reason in the theatre, Brecht sometimes seems an outsider in an age whose drama seems to have moved towards sensual and a-logical adventures, from Sartre's *Huis clos* through Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter to the recent writers who each seem to have developed some sensational neurosis to call their own. As Martin Esslin has pointed out, the common core Brecht and his great contemporaries have is the disorientation of personality, and for this the contradictoriness of modern society is responsible. All these dramatists show an alienated vision of the existent, or a vision of the

existent as alienated. Brecht was fascinated enough by Beckett to work on an adaptation of one of his plays. He is aware of the nightmare aspects of our communal schizophrenia. But he does not trap himself in an irrationality that would cut him off from giving any answers. For him man is good, if not perfectible, and he is able to see his work, in classical style, within a tradition of humane elements: Jesus, Luther, Bacon, Goethe, Marx, Mo Tzu – none of them accepted uncritically, but all pointing to the idea that it is worth while for men to attempt to alter their fate.

- 29 Ralph Brustein: *The Theatre of Revolt*, London, 1965, p. 273.
 30 See E. Speidel: 'The Mute Person's Voice: Mutter Courage and her Daughter', *German Life & Letters*, XXIII (1969-70), 332-9.
 31 Pohl, pp. 22-4.
 32 Examples from Pohl, p. 28.
 33 Pohl, p. 25.
 34 See Pohl, pp. 37f., with extract.
 35 John Willett: 'The Poet Beneath the Skin', *Bjb*, 2, 88-104, p. 102.
 36 See Hinck, p. 42.
 37 Eisler, p. 377 (footnote by Hans Bunge); Pohl, p. 63.
 38 For details on the music in this section I am much indebted to Hennenberg's book. See also Dessau's essay *Zur Courage-Musik*, in *Mat. C.*, 118-22, and with further musical examples in *Theaterarbeit*, 274-80.
 39 See Hinck, pp. 37f.
 40 Wekwerth, pp. 384f.; *Mat. C.*, 77.
 41 Well described by Gray, pp. 123f.
 42 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 175, with photo.
 43 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 199, with photo.
 44 See Wekwerth, pp. 86f.
 45 *Theaterarbeit*, p. 297, with photo.
 46 Giehse, pp. 115-18, with photos.
 47 *Theaterarbeit*, p. 317.
 48 See Nick Wilkinson: 'Mutter Courage in Westafrika', *Bjb*, 4, 117-24.
 49 See the description by Paul Ryder Ryan in *The Drama Review*, XIX, 2 (June 1975), 78-93. On Jerome Robbins' New York production, see Lee Baxandall: 'The Americanization of Bert Brecht', *Bjb*, 1, 150-67, esp. pp. 154-7.

CHAPTER 6 (pp. 113-39)

- 1 Hennenberg, p. 452.
 2 My scene titles are taken from a list of scenic elements in Brecht's working notes, printed in *Mat. S.*, 86f.
 3 See Reinhold Grimm: 'Bertolt Brecht: Der gute Mensch von Sezuan', in Manfred Brauneck (ed): *Das deutsche Drama vom Expressionismus bis zur Gegenwart*, Bamberg 1972, 168-73, esp. p. 169; and Henning Rischbieter: *Brecht*, vol. 2, Velber 1966, p. 39.
 4 See Hill, pp. 125f.
 5 Hill, p. 125, following other American scholars.
 6 See Hinck, pp. 85-7.
 7 Renata Berg-Pan: 'Mixing Old and New Wisdom: The "Chinese" Sources of Brecht's *Kaukasischer Kreidekreis* and Other Works', *German Quarterly*, 1975, 204-28, pp. 209f.
 8 Willett, pp. 96f., 237.
 9 Berg-Pan, op. cit. (n. 7 above), p. 210.
 10 Much of this section is based on Antony Tatlow: 'China oder Chima?', *Bjb*, 1, 27-47, esp. pp. 44-6.
 11 Klotz, p. 19.
 12 Klotz, p. 18.

- 13 After Friedrich Engels: *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Special Introduction to the English edition of 1892.
 14 Klotz, pp. 19f.
 15 See Jendreiek, p. 216.
 16 See Jendreiek, p. 240.
 17 See Müller, op. cit. (n. 4 to Chapter 3), p. 62.
 18 See Jendreiek, p. 238.
 19 See Henning Rischbieter: *Brecht*, vol. 2, Velber 1966, p. 37.
 20 See Karl-Heinz Schmidt: 'Zur Gestaltung antagonistischer Konflikte bei Brecht und Kaiser', in *Mat. S.*, 109-33, esp. p. 117.
 21 On the sex-bound elements see John Fuegi: 'The Alienated Woman: Brecht's *The Good Person of Sezuan*', in Mews and Knust, op. cit. (n. 13 to Chapter 3), 190-6.
 22 See Walter H. Sokel: 'Brecht's Split Characters and His Sense of the Tragic', in Demetz, op. cit. (n. 20 to Chapter 5), 127-37, esp. p. 128.
 23 See Mayer, p. 179.
 24 See Klotz, pp. 15f.
 25 Klotz, p. 16.
 26 Sokel, op. cit. (n. 22 above), p. 129.
 27 Sokel, p. 130.
 28 See Mayer, pp. 165-70.
 29 Willett, p. 91.
 30 See on this song Hinck, p. 43; Jendreiek, p. 224; Willett, op. cit. (n. 39 to Chapter 5), p. 90.
 31 See Hinck, pp. 49-51.
 32 See H. G. Huettich: 'Zwischen Klassik und Kommerz. Brecht in Los Angeles', *Bjb*, 4, 125-37.
 33 See Wendt, op. cit. (n. 55 to Chapter 3), p. 11.
 34 See Mayer, p. 173.
 35 Fuegi, pp. 135f.
 36 Fuegi, pp. 136f.
 37 See Pohl, p. 32.
 38 This section is very dependent on Hennenberg's book; see also *Mat. S.*, 145-53.

CHAPTER 7 (pp. 140-70)

- 1 Bertolt Brecht in Britain (n. 56 to Chapter 3), p. 92.
 2 Based on Angelika Hurwicz's narration in her photographic record of the Berlin production (n. 40 to Chapter 3; the narration is not included in *Mat. K.*).
 3 See Leiser, op. cit. (n. 6 to Chapter 5), pp. 56-8.
 4 Berg-Pan, op. cit. (n. 7 to Chapter 6), pp. 215f.
 5 Ritchie, pp. 12f.
 6 Ritchie, p. 17.
 7 See Leiser, op. cit. (n. 6 to Chapter 5), p. 59.
 8 As an anecdote in Müller and Semmer (n. 14 to Chapter 1), p. 56, has him claiming.

- 9 Ritchie, p. 17.
- 10 See Leiser, op. cit. (n. 6 to Chapter 5), p. 85.
- 11 Ritchie, pp. 52f.
- 12 Qayum Qureshi: *Pessimismus und Fortschrittsglaube bei Bert Brecht*, Cologne and Vienna 1971, p. 133.
- 13 Fuegi, p. 147.
- 14 See Hinck, p. 49.
- 15 See Jendreiek, p. 295.
- 16 See Fuegi, pp. 147f.; and the same author's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle in Performance*, *Bjb.* 1, 137-49, p. 140.
- 17 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 176 - note from rehearsal of 6.2.54.
- 18 See Qureshi, op. cit. (n. 12 above), pp. 145-7.
- 19 Eric Bentley: 'An Un-American Chalk Circle?', *Tulane Drama Review*, no. 32 (summer 1966), 64-77, p. 67.
- 20 Kesting, op. cit. (n. 1 to Chapter 4), p. 123.
- 21 Ritchie, p. 28.
- 22 Ritchie, p. 26.
- 23 Kesting, op. cit. (n. 1 to Chapter 4), p. 109.
- 24 See Hill, pp. 136f.
- 25 See Robert Spaethling: 'Zum Verständnis der Grusche in Brechts Der kaukasische Kreidekreis', *Die Unterrichtspraxis*, 1971 (4), 74-81, on the analogy with this 'Mad Meg' drawn by Brecht (*Mat. K.*, 32).
- 26 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 190, with photo.
- 27 Hennenberg, p. 89.
- 28 Quoted by Bentley, op. cit. (n. 19 above), p. 71.
- 29 Wekwerth, p. 19.
- 30 See Qureshi, op. cit. (n. 12), p. 152.
- 31 See W. A. J. Steer: 'The Thematic Unity of Brecht's *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*', *German Life & Letters*, xxi (1967-8), 1-10, esp. p. 3.
- 32 On this, and Azdak in general, see Jürgen Jacobs: 'Die Rechtspflege des Azdak', *Euphorion*, lxxii (1968), 421-4.
- 33 Bentley, op. cit. (n. 19), pp. 69f.
- 34 See the collective work *Bertolt Brecht - Leben und Werk*, Berlin 1963, p. 143; and T. M. Holmes: 'Descrying the Dialectic . . .', *Journal of European Studies*, vii (1977), 95-106.
- 35 Benjamin, op. cit. (n. 2 to Chapter 1), p. 115.
- 36 Eisler, p. 78.
- 37 A. Kats, quoted by Glade, op. cit. (n. 51 to Chapter 3), p. 171.
- 38 On this rejection of Utopian anticipation see Ludwig, pp. 148-50.
- 39 See Fuegi, p. 149.
- 40 Ritchie, p. 25. Brecht incorporated an English version in his journal (*Aj.*, 1, 548: 24.11.42).
- 41 On the language of Azdak, and of the Singer and the corporal, see Pohl, esp. pp. 12f., 26, 39, 138f., 144.
- 42 See Hinck, pp. 106f.
- 43 See Hennenberg, p. 380.
- 44 See Hinck, p. 105.

- 45 On the music to the play see Hennenberg, pp. 216-23, 248f., 329-35, chap. 6 *passim*, pp. 378-80; and Paul Dessau: 'Zur Kreidekreis-Musik', in *Mat. K.*, 87-94.
- 46 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 210.
- 47 Karl von Appen: 'Über das Bühnenbild', *Mat. K.*, 95-100, p. 96.
- 48 Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 214.
- 49 See Fuegi, pp. 151f.
- 50 Wekwerth, p. 16.
- 51 On masks see Hurwicz, op. cit. (n. 40 to Chapter 3), p. 4; Rüllicke-Weiler, p. 216, with photos; and Joachim Tenschert: 'Über die Verwendung von Masken', *Mat. K.*, 101-12.

CHAPTER 8 (pp. 171-3)

- 1 Gray, pp. 176-81.
- 2 Eisler, p. 139.
- 3 Ronald Bryden: 'Pop goes Imperialism', *Observer Review*, 7.3.71.
- 4 See A. D. White: 'Brecht's Quest for a Democratic Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, no. 5 (Jan 1972), 65-70, esp. p. 70.