

## Chapter Two

### Brecht's Epic Devices

Brecht impressed people not only by his romances and dramatic exile life but also his fame for developing his theory of “epic theatre”. As early as 1912, expressionism was highly influential in the arts of Germany, especially in writing and performance styles for the theatre. Some expressionist playwrights, such as young Brecht, were defined by their rebellious spirits against established writing conventions and by their bold distortion of reality. Others like George Kaiser (1878-1945) and Ernst Toller (1893-1939) introduced innovative theatrical techniques to drama performing. They rejected the conventions of the well-made play, which was developed in 1825 by a French dramatist Augustin Eugène Scribe and set the trend in nineteenth century France with the plausibility of stage realism. These forerunners treated the stage as a platform, not as someone’s living room in conventional plays, to comment on the social, economic, and political issues of the times (Barranger 590). For those German expressionist playwrights, plays are not set for entertainments but as a weapon to attack the society.

As a left-wing experimenter in agitprop, or propaganda theatre, Brecht’s mentor Erwin Piscator mastered many techniques that associated with the epic theatre, and more important Brecht further developed his epic theories for it. Brecht was highly influenced by this bold staging designed to make blatant political statements about contemporary events (Barranger 590). Details of Brecht’s three key devices: “historification”, “epic”, and “alienation” will be explained in following sections.

#### I. Historification

The device of “historification” is used to express his ideas and thoughts in his plays. The audience may see a play adopts a historic event, such as *Mother Courage*

*and Her Children*, or presents an ancient story, more appropriately speaking a parable, such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* which orientated from ancient China, or the autobiography of a historical eminent person, such as Galileo in *Galileo (1940)*, but actually, this playwright wanted his audience to reflect the social and political problems of the present time. The function of historification is that, as Brecht himself wanted, the stage to be a platform on which political and social issues could be understood and debated.

## **II. Epic**

The “epic” device Brecht used for epic staging is found in his writing, included progressive scenes to show the ascending or declining fortunes of the central figure, and no act divisions (Barranger 594). In other words, in the epic style, the drama is usually episodic: a sequence of incidents or events narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place, or formal plot (Barranger 590). Brecht reminded us that history does not have beginnings, middles, and endings. Rather, history moves from episode to episode and a play’s structure and action should reflect this process. As an epic, Brecht’s plays, therefore, are built with a series of loosely knit scenes, each complete in itself, and introduced by signs, placards, or announcements. The total effect was achieved through the juxtaposition of contrasting episodes moving in a forward, linear motion (Barranger 590). This epic-like technique earns the title of “epic theatre” for Brecht’s theater.

## **III. Alienation**

Another Brecht’s device is “alienation” with a goal to estrange the audience from the performers. In order to reach this goal, these estranging effects would aim to produce a double perspective on events and actions so as at once to show their present contradictory nature and their historical cause or social motivation, and then the

audience could understand and judge the underlying meanings or ideas more objectively. It is like, as Peter Brooker said, “In a frequent image, this would be like following the course of a river and staying above it, remaining both inside and above the stream.” (Brooker 215) These alienation effects assist the audience in both feeling and judging what they have seen on the stage more familiarly and clearly.

However, Brecht’s concept of alienation is at work on two principal levels. In the first level, the story is outdated which put a distance between the actors and the audience. The second level is the technique, such as the use of legends or placards to estrange the audience from the actors. However, as for acting, about two hundred years ago, French philosopher and writer Denis Diderot (1713-84) had explained an idea similar to Brecht’s alienation. A critical dialogue about the drama in Diderot’s *The Paradox of Acting* (1758), wrote: “The First: . . . In my view he (the actor) must have a great deal of judgment. He must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested onlooker. He must have, consequently, penetration and no sensibility; the art of mimicking everything, or, which comes to the same thing, the same aptitude for every sort of character and part. The Second: No sensibility? The First: None.” (Diderot 14) Here, the sensibility indicates the feelings and emotions of actors toward their characters.

Moreover, Diderot considered that there are three different levels of actors\* and the best actors play characters without self emotions but only obey the director’s demands and orders, in other words, simply mimic the characters. As to Brecht, he also wanted these actors just acted their characters objectively. The actors should not project their own feelings onto their characters nor try to fathom them. The

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\* “My friend, there are three types—nature’s man, the poet’s man, the actor’s man. Nature’s is less great than the poet’s, the poet’s is less great than the great actor’s, which is the most exalted of all.” (Diderot 67)

actors are themselves and the characters are another, the only thing that actors should do is to speak and act these lines out properly and, of course, should not sympathize with the characters themselves and their situations. This is interesting that this idea seems to be shared by two masters in different centuries. Diderot even made a good example to illustrate his viewpoint of alienation in *The Paradox of Acting*, “Have you not observed an urchin coming forward under a hideous old man’s mask, which hides him from head to foot? Behind this mask he (the actor) laughs at his little companions (the audience), who fly in terror before him. This urchin is the true symbol of the actor; his comrades are the symbol of the audience.” (Diderot 68)

Diderot considers that the actor just like a kid who wears an eerie mask of an old man, and the audience are the kids who see that mask and being shocked. Although the mask of an old man is scary, yet that child who hides himself behind the mask is happy for what he has done. Since Diderot had explained this viewpoint with this excellent example, at least both of them agreed that actors need not to integrate with characters; however, their purposes are different from each other. For Diderot, the alienation effect is only between the actors and the characters, and its purpose is to impress the audience by the actors’ flawless mimicking. And for Brecht, he wanted the actors to act objectively so the alienation effect is between the characters and the audience in order to urge the audience to have more insight for the underlying meaning.

In order to present the alienation effect, Brecht trained the actors even with their own personalities, at times, he asked them not to project their emotions onto the characters by changing them into narrators in order to talk directly to the audience. Brecht believed that by doing so, the actors could perform more objectively. Recorded in Walter Benjamin’s *Understanding Brecht*, Brecht understood the difficult

part by saying: “The actor must show an event, and he must show himself. He naturally shows the event by showing himself; and he shows himself by showing the event.” (Benjamin 21) Even if there are emotions showed up, they are still characters’ and needed by the plots and stories, not actors’ affections toward the happenings of the characters.

On the technical level to accomplish the alienation effect, Brecht brought out by different props and the setting to the audience. Brecht also demanded the setting with different lighting, and arrangements of the chorus and the narrator at the beginning or middle of each scene to avoid the audience to project their feelings and emotions onto the stage. He demanded the setting and the lighting must be simple or even unreal so to keep the audience from a distance. Most settings do not need fancy and delicate props and backgrounds on the stage. In the same way, nonliterary elements of production— cacophonous music, harsh lighting, moving scenery, and gestural acting, retained their separate identities while contributing to the total effect (Barranger 591). This is to keep reminding the audience the stage is a platform to express the narrator’s opinion, and the audience could judge or criticize freely.

Brecht wanted the audience to evaluate the stage events objectively in order to understand the problems of today. Hence, the interrupting of action is purposeful and important in an epic theatre; for example, quite a few songs are applied to express didactic thoughts among these three plays. Thus, the more explicit an epic staging the stronger alienation effect may result, and the stronger alienation effect may help the audience to assimilate the ideas more clearly and easily. The epic devices allow Brecht to express his political, sociological, and economic arguments, such as the connection between science and industry, individuals and governments, and the ultimate victimization of common humanity by both (Barranger 594).

#### IV. The application of epic devices

Therefore, I will further explain how those devices are used in the following three plays—*The Mother*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

##### 1. In *The Mother*

The agitprop play *The Mother* was completed in 1931, and it is not only sarcastic but also didactic. It is adapted from Russian novelist Maxim Gorky's novel also by the same name "Mother". The novel was written in 1906 to reveal Gorky's thoughts about the Russian revolutionists in the aftermath of the Tsar's Bloody Sunday. However, Brecht shortened and rewrote it into a drama form. The Russian Revolution provides this play's background with its plot about a worker's Mother who is not only enlightened by Communism but also further advocates it by trying to help her troubled son and to participate in the Revolution. In Act 1 of this play, the protagonist, Pelagea Vlassova, expresses in a monologue about the poor condition in her family. A chorus sings by the characters of revolutionary workers, following her monologue. The chorus has an alienation effect for Brecht to set the distance between the audience and the characters in the play. Also Act 2, a line spoken by one of the factory workers André, shows the alienation effect to the audience:

ANDRÉ. We need to print leaflets for today. The work-  
ing class has gotten very agitated about the new wage  
cuts. (*The Mother* 40)\*

Here, instead of saying "workers", the playwright used a general term "working class" to emphasize an idea rather than to inform about an event; hence the audience has been alienated from the stage by this unusual daily utterance. Moreover, *THE SONG*

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\* The quotations from these three plays, including from their introductions and notes, will be marked as *The Mother*, *Mother Courage*, *Chalk Circle*.

*OF WHAT TO DO* in the same act reinforces these workers' political belief. Masha, a worker, sings this song not only to Vlassova but also to the audience to convince them of the benefits of Communism.

Later on, when a policeman and a commissioner show up to Vlassova's house and mess up her house to warn them instead of arresting these dissidents. The self-conceited commissioner is presented as a villain with his bully behaviors rather than an officer trying to do his duty. Again in the beginning of Act 3, when Vlassova faces and talks to the audience about what she thinks about that gatekeeper, instead to other actors. The alienation device used here is to show how a stage can serve as a platform for the criticism and debates.

This play is designed for an agitprop purpose. Here the presentation is to alienate the audience in order to evaluate Communist ideas. For example, Ivan talks rather like a lecturer to the audience:

IVAN. . . . On the first of May, the international day of the  
worker's struggle, every factory in Tver will be  
demonstrating for the liberation of the working  
class. (*The Mother* 64)

And his utterance is propaganda for workers' freedom.

Again both the songs *PRAISE OF COMMUNISM* and *PRAISE OF LEARNING* in Act 6, other than for the alienation effect but also point out the power of Communism and the importance of knowledge. They have two functions: first, the songs offer the audience a pause from the alienation effect; second, the songs also bring important messages. Therefore, when Mother Vlassova wants the teacher to teach her how to write words like "worker", "class struggle", and "exploitation" instead of learning words like "branch" of a tree, "nest" of birds, and "fish" of the

ocean of these natural phenomena. The words the Mother wants to learn reveal the thoughts in the mind of a revolutionary mother. This incident can also induce in the spectator a critical approach.

To compare with *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Mother* has a clean message about Communism in Brecht's early drama-writing career. This rather rough dramatic work trims many details from the original Gorky's novel of describing daily living conditions to explicating each character's inner world and their interactions. As a dramatic adaptation, some details have to be sacrificed to fit in Brecht's performance time. The young Brecht finished this play in 1931 when KPD (Communist Party of Germany) and Hitler led NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party) wrestled fiercely, therefore, many Communist agitprop thoughts were carried out through *The Mother* by him. With the stronger power of NSDAP in the congress, the power of KPD became less influential in 1930's. Many KPD members were persecuted, in different ways in the eve of Hitler's becoming the Chancellor. Take the following song for an example, sung by the actor who plays Pavel in the end of Act 7 demonstrates the determination of the workers to break down their unfair and injustice social status:

“A day will come, it will come soon

when they'll see it all was no use.

Then they can go on screaming “Stop!”

Neither their money nor cannon will save them!” (*The Mother* 89)

Therefore, it can be understood that Pavel's song of proclamation not only reinforces the alienation effect but also encourage the audience to challenge the authority, that is, to fight for their rights.

In the beginning of Act 8, Vlassova was hit by a stone from a striker who thought



Vlassova is one of the strikebreakers. Due to those unbearable wounds, she is led by the butcher's wife to the butcher in the estate kitchen for some rest. Here a dialectical debate about the class struggle which alienates the audience from involving into the on-going plot. Both the Mother and the butcher speak to the audience directly rather than to other characters on the stage.

THE MOTHER (*to the audience*). How much more sympathy there is for a bruise from people expecting bruises, than from those dealing them out! (*The Mother 94*)

And

FIRST STRIKEBREAKER. A Russian mother struck with stones!

BUTCHER. Yes; Russian stones. (*To the audience:*) And

I have to serve my good soup to this bunch. (*The Mother 94*)

Here the Mother makes an appeal for the peasants and workers' right to the audience directly. The Mother makes a sarcastic comment at those strikebreakers and the butcher's utterance indicates that he is not willing to serve his food to them. The purpose of this alienation technique of direct speaking to the audience is to pull the audience back from the point of attentiveness where the Mother has just been hit by a striker who mistook her as one of the strikebreakers. The playwright highlights the characters' stands by arranging the characters to speak to each other and to talk to the audience at the same time. Thus, the third person approach is often used in the epic theatre. This approach is also adopted in the near end of Act 9, when Pavel eats the bread and tells about how he has escaped from Siberia to the audience.

PAVEL. (*cutting a slice of bread from the loaf while the others continue to print*). The mother of the revolu-

tionist Pavel Vlassov takes the pages out. Does she pay any attention to him? Not at all! Does she make him his tea? Does she run his bath water? Or kill the fatted calf? Not at all! He flees from Siberia toward Finland, the icy gusts of the North wind in his face, the volleys of the gendarmes in his ears, and he finds no sanctuary where he might lay his head down—save in a printshop. And instead of bending over him to stroke his hair, his mother is taking the pages out! (*The Mother* 103)

Pavel's lines are full of "he" and "she" which separately indicate "Pavel himself" and "his mother" that make Pavel stating his tough experience objectively. Moreover, a pedagogical idea has also been conveyed by this alienation technique. His grumbled statement seems not only demonstrates Pavel's astonishment toward his mother's transition in their family relationship but also provides a deeper thought for the audience to value the motivation and importance of common sense. Walter Benjamin has mentioned his thought in writing: "Once the critical moment arrives when ordinary common sense becomes the leader, theory is only just good enough to do the housework. The son must cut bread while the mother, who is illiterate, works the printing-press." (Benjamin 36) In this quotation, Vlassova is a figurative symbol of common sense and Pavel is a theory. When people encounter critical moments, it is common sense drives them to take actions not an unfathomable theory on a piece of paper.

Again, there is a chorus singing a song in the beginning of Act 11 to point out the event and the background to the audience. It is totally didactic in the end of Act 12. For Vlassova, she does not believe her country should wage a foreign war, because

workers should not fight against other countries' workers on the battlefield. In stead, the worldwide workers should be united to fight against the class enemy.

THE MOTHER. . . . All your experience is forgotten  
and forgotten the solidarity of workers of all lands  
in common fight against the class enemy. (*The Mother* 120)

The Mother's appeal is rather talking to the audience than to the characters of the workers in order to urge the audience to think and to judge. And this act is ended up with Vlassova's echo of her proletarian conviction for the purpose of urging the audience to think and to take actions.

THE MOTHER. Y-y-yesss, but think of it: all the world—  
(*she shouts, so the frightened WORKERS clap their hands over her mouth*) is living in terrible darkness,  
it's waited till now for you alone, you who could  
still be reached by reason. Just think, if you refuse!  
(*The Mother* 120-21)

In Act 13, a chorus is singing to the sick and dying Mother Vlassova to encourage her to continue her revolution, in spite of her condition, and also to persuade the audience to take actions immediately against the unfairness in the society. The plain message is that if an ill, poor, and old Mother can do it, you who sit comfortably in front of the stage can do it too. In the final act, this indomitable Mother urges people to join and carry on their revolution bravely, as the playwright wants to make the audience to ponder upon what actions they should take is for them to decide.

At the end of this play, Vlassova carries a red flag in front of the strikers. At this moment, she is not only an indomitable Mother to her son but also to the working

class in the class struggle. Doubtlessly, this play is an agitprop in order to inspire the left-wing members in chaotic Germany in 1930s.

## 2. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Brecht finished *Mother Courage and Her Children* in November, 1939 and its premiere was on April 19, 1941 in Zurich. This play is one of Brecht's most admired plays which set its background in Europe during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), a grand-scale melee among many Catholic and Protestant countries. Like *The Mother*, this play's blueprint is also derived from other's works. First, Robert Leach mentions its source material in his commentary, an article in the Thomson's edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* that Brecht's *Mother Courage* has drawn on Grimmelshausen's seventeenth-century two novels, *The Adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus* and *Mother Courage (The Runagate Courage)* (Leach 140-41). Second, the Appendix of Eric Bentley's translation of *Mother Courage and Her Children* indicates another source is from J.L. Runeberg's ballad, *Songs of Ensign Stål (Mother Courage 121)*.

Brecht used the Thirty Years' War as a demonstration of his historication technique. Therefore, the real historical accuracy and details of this prolonged war were slightly concerned by the playwright, as he treated the Thirty Years' War only as a symbol of all wars. The reason for him to choose the Thirty Years' War as a background and not other historic battles, according to Kenney is that "The Thirty Year's War has, incidentally, special meaning for a German, since Germany suffered especially from its effects." (Kenney 57) Thus, the performance had a greater effect upon the German audience. It does not only point out the cruelty of wars to the audience but also makes them recall the fate of their own nation. At the time, Germany was facing a similar situation as Hitler's Nazi party was leading its people

along the same disastrous path as they had in the Thirty Years' War. This didactic technique actually facilitates the audience to judge and evaluate their situation with what they are familiar with. From the endless reverberations of Mother Courage's bargaining, the whole play demonstrates the difficulty for her to survive in the war and, of course, the economic recession can be seen.

Mother Courage's real name is Anna Fierling and she is the protagonist in this play. However, she has to change her religious beliefs back and forth in the war in order to save her own life and gain the profits from both Catholic and Protestant camps. First of all, a placard which briefly illustrates each scene is needed in the beginning of each scene to contribute to the alienation effect. Its function is to outline the time, events, and characters in order to avoid the audience having the suspension toward the story development in the beginning of each scene.

Moreover, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, as an epic theatre, has twelve scenes about the lives of Mrs. Fierling and her three children in the period of this prolonged and confusing war. The Scene 1 is set in the spring of 1624, Scene 2 in 1625 to 1626, and Scene 3 in the three years later after 1626; finally the end of this play is set in 1636. An epic element is obvious from those acts' arrangement.

Therefore, Brecht's own comment on this play recorded in Eric Bentley's translated version is true: "It is not incumbent on the playwright to give Mother Courage insight at the end—she sees something, around the middle of the play, at the close of the sixth scene, then loses again what she has seen—his concern is that the spectator should see." (*Mother Courage* 120) Here, what this playwright wishes the audience to "see" is Mother Courage's temporary awareness of antiwar consciousness in the end of Scene 6, eight years after Scene 1.

In Scene 2, a song called "The Song of the Wise Woman and the Soldier" is sung


by Eilif. This song is about a wise woman's warning juxtaposed with a young soldier's daredevil bravery. However, in Scene 3 the song "*The Fraternization Song*" is sung by Yvette Pottier about her love with an army cook at 17, and later he left and never came back again. Mother Courage wants this song serves as "a lesson to Katrin, never start anything with a soldier." (*Mother Courage* 45) Also in the same scene, after a raid made by Catholics, Swiss Cheese is captured by Catholic soldiers and the execution is at hand. In this tensed moment, the Chaplain sings "*The Song of the Hours*" about the passion of Jesus Christ. Thus the song provides a platform for the audience to ponder on the issue of life and death. This tensed moment of execution has been suspended by chaplain's singing toward the story development. In other words, while the audience learns a lesson of how philanthropic Jesus was mocked and murdered within nine hours and the Swiss Cheese's execution is suspended for the moment.

In Scene 4, a young soldier complains that his captain has grabbed his rewarding money to spend it on brandy for whores. However, this incident happens right after the clerk's advice to Mother Courage not to file a futile complaint against the Captain's people for cutting her merchandise into pieces in her wagon. And now, Mother Courage sings "*The Song of the Great Capitulation*" to indicate that small people must compromise to survive. There is only surrender and compromise for the weak to the powerful. Mother Courage sings this song to the young soldier and also to herself. Therefore, both of them give up complaints because they understand that "they must cut their coat according to their cloth." (*Mother Courage* 69)

Scene 6 is a projection of the war in 1632. At the beginning, Mother Courage presents at the funeral of the fallen commander, Tilly. She is there trying to do business with the soldiers, and she arranges a regimental clerk to go with her

daughter, Kattrin, into the town to buy supplies. Unfortunately, on the way Kattrin becomes a rape victim. At the same time, the alienation effect in this scene is achieved because the action is suspended with the talking about the aimless and meaningless war and in the three soldiers' songs, about shooting (*Mother Courage* 75), hating (76), and dying (76).

Mother Courage sings while she pulls the wagon on a highway in Scene 7. This short scene explicitly demonstrates Mother Courage's gestus, or geste at the height of her business career. The definition of the gestus is "the combined sense of gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words and actions" (Brooker 219), as she sings "Let all of you who still survive get out of bed and look alive!" (*Mother Courage* 82) In Scene 8, Mother Courage's optimistic attitude is because she "lives off war" (*Mother Courage* 88). She sings the following song when she and the cook are in business, ready to move to another place for her business:



“From Ulm to Metz, past dome and steeple  
My wagon always moves ahead.  
The war can care for its people  
So long as there is steel and lead.  
Though steel and lead are stout supporters  
A war needs human beings too.  
Report today to your headquarters!  
If it's to last, this war needs you!” (*Mother Courage* 94)

This song has a two-fold meaning which is “the war is unwelcome but necessary for certain people”.

The actor who plays the cook sings “*The Song of the Great Souls of this Earth*”

which expresses scathing sarcasms in Scene 9. In this didactic and cynic song, King Solomon, Julius Caesar, and Socrates are mentioned. Although each of them possessed certain specific virtues, they all had miserable ends for their deeds. “*The Song of the Great Souls of this Earth*” makes a perfect comparison with “*The Song of the Great Capitulation*” which is sung by Mother Courage in Scene 4. In “*The Song of the Great Capitulation*”, it tells people must yield to the reality; while “*The Song of the Great Souls of this Earth*” is more destructive to tell people the futility of their virtues, which “a man is better off without.”

As story goes on, Mother Courage only has her dumb daughter Katrin left to accompany her on her voyage. Katrin, a dumb young woman can neither speak nor sing to express her ideas, is another female supporting role besides Yvette Pottier in this play. She tries to be independent to mitigate her mother’s burden in different ways. However in Scene 11, when Mother Courage is on a business trip to town, Katrin accidentally hears the Catholic soldiers’ plan of making a foray on the town. She runs up to a farmer’s roof and starts to hit the drum to warn the people in town about the upcoming raid. By the lieutenant’s order, the soldiers shoot her and she dies heroically in the end. Moreover, in her bravery and love for humanity are didactic enough to let the audience re-examine their own actions in the time of war. Mother Courage, facing such tragedy, can do nothing else but continue to pull her wagon to make a living; leaving the audience to reflect the disastrous consequences of the war.

### **3. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle***

The last play to be discussed is *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, which Brecht finished the first draft in June 1944, however, its German premiere was not until 7 October 1954 at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin. The playwright used



the technique of “a play within a play” for this play, and this technique can help to distance the audience. This play’s original idea is derived from a Chinese playwright Li Xingdao’s (李行道) play in Yuan Dynasty, and from a legend of the judgment of King Solomon (?-931 B.C.) in ancient Israel. However, Brecht rewrote these parables’ ending and awarded the custody to the foster mother rather than the birth mother. His purpose of rewriting the ending is to manifest the true meaning of being a Mother.

The device of historicization is used in this play and its prologue to foretell the political implication of this parable. About this play’s locale, Eric Bentley mentions: “The play was written when the Soviet chief of state, Joseph Stalin, was a Georgian, as was his favourite poet, cited in the Prologue, Mayakovsky. And surely there is a point in having this story acted out at the place where Europe and Asia meet, a place incomparably rich both in legend and history.” (*Chalk Circle* 112) Moreover, the names of Communist figures like Rosa Luxemburg and Tscheidse are used in the prologue in order to distance the audience in the beginning. Second, Bentley also mentions in the introduction that: “The Prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, though found in the German manuscript Brecht sent me in 1946, did not appear in English until the *Tulane Drama Review* printed it at my request in 1959.” (*Chalk Circle* 15) The manuscript without prologue delivered to the publishers was about the time of Brecht’s appearance before the US House Committee on Un-American Activities in Washington in October, 1947. It was by Brecht’s advice that the appearance of this Prologue was postponed (*Chalk Circle* 15). It stands to reason that the prologue has certain political implications.

Comparing with previous two plays, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has fewer acts but each act is longer and with more events and situations assembled. The singer’s

(The story teller in some other translated versions) narrations and other actors' utterances interweave in the beginning of the Act 1—The Noble Child. Those interweaving arrangements reveal the maturity of the playwright's alienation technique. Grusha, the main character in this play, is a maid who serves the governor's wife Natella. When the riot breaks out, the governor's wife neglects her only child due to her obsession with her boots and dresses; and when the governor's wife flees with her adjutant, the baby is handed over from Maro, the babysitter, to Grusha. This helpless maid is not hardhearted enough to leave the baby behind; therefore, after waiting a long time she creeps away with the baby boy. At the end of this act, the singer reappears once again to remind the audience that they are listening to a story about the happenings of Grusha and the governor's child, and to let the audience make their own evaluation.

In the beginning of Act 2, there are three parts: the singer's brief introduction, the chorus' lyrics, and the song of *The Song of the Four Generals* sung by the character that plays Grusha. *The Song of the Four Generals* conveys a message of fortitude to the audience that "Where there's a will, there's a way".

Day after day, the boy becomes a heavier burden in her flight with him into the northern mountains; she once intended to leave him to a peasant couple. Grusha's contradicting state of mind is brought out by the chorus:

THE SINGER. Why so cheerful, making for home?

THE CHORUS. Because the child has won new parents with a laugh,  
because I'm rid of the little one, I'm cheerful.

THE SINGER. And why so sad?

THE CHORUS. Because I'm single and free, I'm sad  
like someone who's been robbed

someone who's newly poor. (*Chalk Circle* 144)

The chorus has served many functions since the beginning of the Greek drama. It is an agent in the play; it gives advice, expresses opinions, asks questions, and sometimes takes an active part in the action. Besides, chorus helps to set the overall mood, and serves an important rhythmical function, creating pauses or retardations during which the audience may reflect upon what has happened and what is to come. Shakespeare sometimes employed the chorus; as in *King Henry the Fifth*, the chorus comments on the action, explains change of scenes, and prologue-like bags for a sympathetic attitude on the part of the spectators. Although not commonly used, the chorus is still employed occasionally by the modern playwrights; not only in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, but also in Eugene O'neill's *Morning Becomes Electra*. Here, Grusha's state of mind is brought out to the audience by the chorus to set the mood and for the "alienation".

However, things do not go smoothly as Grusha wishes. After she runs into the ironshirts, innocent Grusha rushes back to the peasant woman to ask her to be beware of the upcoming ironshirts and to make sure not let them recognize the governor's child. Due to the fear of the ironshirts, Grusha can do nothing but hit the corporal with a log before desperately rushing off with the child. Finally this tense situation is saved by Grusha's bravery and compassion. After successfully fleeing from the ironshirts, this helpless maid decides to adopt the child.

THE CHORUS. The helpless girl adopted the helpless child.

(GRUSHA squats over a half-frozen stream to get the CHILD  
water in the hollow of her hand.)

GRUSHA. Since no one else will take you, son,

I must take you.

Since no one else will take you , son,

You must take me. (*Chalk Circle* 148-49)

This is the first time Grusha calls Michael the child her son in the play. Now, the two helpless individuals are in mutual dependence upon each other. From now on, the event has transformed Grusha's position to Michael's mother. Grusha sings *The Song of the Rotten Bridge* (*Chalk Circle* 150), which explains the bound relationship between Grusha and her newly adopted son, Michael. She would rather risk her life to cross the rotten bridge with the baby than being caught by the ironshirts. This song further confirms their mother-and-son relationship by explaining their destined life together. When Grusha successfully crosses the bridge, she goes on singing *The Song of the Child* as an ending of Act two. This song tells the audience that a person's origin does not matter, what really matters is how a person acts and contributes later. This encouraging song urges the audience to take the responsibility of their actions, toward others or their nation, it does not matter who they are or what they have done in the past.

In the beginning of Act 3, Grusha finally reaches her brother's farm while she is exhausted and feeble. Day after day, she wishes her love Simon will return to her from the battlefield safely. *The Song of the Centre* illustrates her desire for Simon's safety. However, this song also conveys a scornful tone toward the war. It tells people that an act of heroism is dangerous on the battlefield, and only the one who knows how to protect himself can safely return:

“The first always die

The last are also hit

Those in the centre come home.” (*Chalk Circle* 156)

Soldiers who are at the front in an engagement always get killed first. Only the ones

who stay in the center and near the standard bearer are safer. When Lavrenti, Grusha's brother, talks to Grusha about her embarrassing situation, the sound of the dripping of melting snow is heard. The faster and steadier dripping sound which created by the glockenspiel indicates not only the upcoming spring time but also the artificial sound alienates the audience from the setting.

In order to get a title and reputation for herself and the child, she willingly marries a fake dying peasant who wants to avoid being draft. By doing so, both Grusha and her son can have shelter and food. "Now, with the passing moons the child grew up" is expressed by the singer about the transition of the time (*Chalk Circle* 166). One day when Grusha sits by a stream, dipping linen into the water and Michael is playing with other boys, Simon comes back from the service and meets Grusha again by the river. The singer begins to chant the words expressing what Simon and Grusha want to say to each other; however, the singer chants first the words of Simon, and follows with the words of Grusha:

THE SINGER. So many words are said, so many left unsaid.

The soldier has come.

Where he comes from, he does not say.

Hear what he thought and did not say:

'The battle began, . . . , I slept on stone, in water.' (*Chalk Circle* 169)

And

THE SINGER. There was yearning but there was no waiting.

The oath is broken. Neither could say why.

Hear what she thought but did not say:

'While you fought in the battle, . . . .

The lamb loses its way when the shepherd is asleep

And its cry is unheard!' (*Chalk Circle* 169-70)

A tableau of silent Simon and Grusha enhances the playwright's mature alienation effect.

Actually *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is made up of two stories, Grusha's which starts in Act 2, and Azdak's which does not begin until Act 4, the penultimate act of the play. These two stories converge in Act 5 to bring a more or less "happy" ending. The focus of Act 4 is to introduce how Azdak the rascal is made a judge.

The arrangement of this act not only offers the playwright a space to convey more dialectical ideas to the audience through this judge character, but also indicates that it takes a series of chances, whims, mistakes and misunderstandings to ensure that the only judge with whom Grusha stands a chance is in office at the right time (Rorrison xxii). This act also provides the audience some basic information about Azdak's character before entering the next act.

*The Song of Injustice in Persia* in Act 4 again serves the function of alienation and historicification. The song not only alienates the audience from paying attention to Azdak's strange behaviors and witty speeches, but also shows the injustice in ancient Persia to get the audience to reflect upon the unfairness in their own society. In Azdak's various trials, he demonstrates how he deals with trickery, blackmail, greed and mendacity in order to bring justice to the poor. When Azdak finishes each case, there will be the chanting from the singer and chorus. The function of such arrangement is to let the audience have intervals to compare Azdak's verdicts with their own viewpoints.

In Act 5, the last act of this play, the rhythmical sound also plays an important role in this part. Grusha mistakenly assumes that Azdak is in collusion with Natella and her lawyers; she makes a tirade against him. Grusha's words of outcry are

accompanied with the knocking on the table by Azdak's little hammer. The same sound effect has been adopted here, like the glockenspiel dripping sound in Act 3. Therefore, her tirade has been highlighted for the audience to pay attention to her points. In the near end of this play, the same technique adopted in Act 3 is used again. The singer states Grusha's thought in stead of Grusha's own utterance:

THE SINGER. Hear now what the angry girl thought but did not say:

Had he golden shoes to wear

He'd be cruel as a bear.

Evil would his life disgrace.

He'd laugh in my face.

Carrying a heart of flint

Is too troublesome a stint.

Being powerful and bad

Is hard on a lad.

Then let hunger be his foe!

Hungry men and women, no.

Let him fear the darksome night

But not daylight! (*Chalk Circle* 204)

This inner monolog serves as an explanation of his verdict, a positive response to Grusha's standpoint. Finally, Azdak confessed: "I think I understand you, woman."  
(*Chalk Circle* 205)

The conclusion, which is uttered by the singer, clearly points out the motif of this play:

THE SINGER. . . .

Take note what men of old concluded:

That what there is shall go to those who are good for it,

Children to the motherly, that they prosper,

Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well,

The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit. (*Chalk Circle* 207)

This conclusion not only echoes with the Kolkhoz's cultivation of the fruit in the prologue but also urges the audience to see and appreciate the real values in this world.

