

DRAMATURGICAL PRODUCTION BOOK FOR THE 2008  
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY-SAN MARCOS PRODUCTION OF  
*THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE*

THESIS

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## Chapter I

### THE HISTORY OF DRAMATURGY

#### The Origins of Dramaturgy

The role of the dramaturg originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Hamburg, Germany when the Hamburg National Theatre hired Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, an established playwright and poet, as their resident critic. The intent was to add credibility to their productions by publishing the positive reviews of a respected playwright. Instead, Lessing wrote essays criticizing the state of theatre in Hamburg and the German preference for French plays. In 1769, Lessing published a collection of his essays and criticisms in *Hamburg Dramaturgy* establishing the role of dramaturg as theatrical critic and dramatic theorist (Schechter 17).

At the same time, Lessing established the antagonistic stance associated with dramaturgy by assuming the position of public educator. In *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, Lessing advocated for Aristotelian theory and Shakespearean plays over the more popular French neoclassic theory and drama. As a man of letters, he chose not to confirm public prejudices but rather challenge popular tastes (Schechter 18).

Within a few years, virtually all German theatres had dramaturgs on their staff. These dramaturgs were soon publishing their own volumes of dramaturgy as well. The theatres benefited from having a staff member that possessed knowledge of playwriting and dramatic theory. This person could read and evaluate new plays as well as provide constructive criticism to directors. The role of the dramaturg eventually evolved into an advisory position held by playwrights and scholars that maintained a theatre's aesthetic principles and artistic identity.

In the volatile period following World War I, playwright and director Bertolt Brecht worked as a dramaturg for Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theatre in Berlin. During this time, Brecht expanded the role of the dramaturg by creating and advocating his own theatrical aesthetic. Though Brecht's theories advocating an "epic theatre" conflicted with conventional dramatic theory, he managed to establish a collective of writers and artists dedicated to producing his plays. The group also collaborated on plays that Brecht would revise and publish under his own name. As dramaturg, Brecht ruthlessly criticized contemporary German theatre while simultaneously promoting his own plays and dramatic theories. Like Lessing, Brecht assumed the role of public educator, but he preferred to instruct through his plays (Schechter 21).

Bertolt Brecht is also significant in that he was the author of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the focus of this dramaturgical thesis. Preparing dramaturgical research on one of the pioneers of modern theatrical dramaturgy is a daunting task. His theories revolutionized modern theatre, yet his plays are not performed as often as one would think, considering his artistic impact. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is an anomaly of sorts in the Brechtian cannon. It is one of the few examples of Brecht shaping a play to appeal

to a contemporary American audience. Additionally, the play came to represent his hopes for a peaceful and just future for East Germany under socialism and Russian authority. It was also the last play Brecht directed for The Berliner Ensemble before his death on August 17, 1956.

### **The Role of Dramaturg in the United States**

The role of the dramaturg transitioned to French and English theatres in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but only recently became prevalent in the United States. The budgets of struggling theatres rarely allowed for an in-house critic, and the success of many prosperous theatres relied specifically upon appealing to public tastes. American theatre production staff members took on the duties traditionally assigned to European dramaturgs.

As educational institutions began creating performing arts programs in the first half of the twentieth century, scholarly criticism began to shape and influence theatrical productions in the United States. Initially, professional theatres began hiring dramaturgs as editors and research assistants. As these theatres grew, so did their needs for specialized dramatic knowledge. Consequently, the responsibilities and functions of the contemporary dramaturg have become more clearly defined. There are currently three primary types of dramaturgy: new play dramaturgy, institutional dramaturgy, and production dramaturgy.

A new play dramaturg reads new plays and makes recommendations to theatrical institutions interested in producing promising work. This person may also advise new playwrights on their scripts. Often, a new play dramaturg will form professional

relationships with playwrights and promote their work within a theatrical institution. When assisting playwrights, it has become important to establish the parameters of the advisory relationship. Legal disputes, such as the one occurring between the estate of Jonathan Larson and Lynn Thomson, have arisen between playwrights and dramaturgs over intellectual property and royalties.

An institutional dramaturg has a much wider range of responsibilities. Larger theatrical institutions may hire a dramaturg as theatre manager or artistic director. This type of dramaturgy may require season planning, collaborating on a theatre's mission statement, and supervising public outreach and community education programs. This type of dramaturgy is essential in creating and retaining a diverse audience base. The research performed by an institutional dramaturg serves to enhance the institution's relationship with the community at large. This person represents the institution and its values. An institutional dramaturg may also be required to function as a new play dramaturg or production dramaturg as well.

The third type of dramaturg, a production dramaturg performs many research-related tasks for directors, acts as the playwright's advocate during the rehearsal process, and is responsible for public relations for the production. Research-related tasks generally include a play analysis, a playwright biography, a production history, research on the social and historical aspects of the play, and information relating to the director's concept. This type of dramaturg is expected to be an expert on the text, capable of answering questions during the rehearsal process. A production dramaturg also serves as the director's silent partner, observing rehearsals and providing informed, objective feedback to the cast or production staff when requested.

It is important that a production dramaturg establish guidelines with the director to determine how he or she would like feedback presented to the cast and production staff. This may vary from production to production, but it is imperative in maintaining a productive dramaturg/director relationship. Finally, the production dramaturg creates community outreach programs, writes the press release and program notes, and creates the production lobby display. Proper public relations create interest in the production and generate future audiences.

### **My Functions as Dramaturg**

I began working as the production dramaturg for the Texas State University-San Marcos production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in August of 2007, nine months before the show was scheduled to open. I was fortunate to have met with the director, Michael Costello, in May. We discussed his directorial concept and the translation he was considering for the production. There are currently five published English translations of the play. This conversation was important because the role of a production dramaturg in an educational institution is unique. The process is first and foremost an educational experience. In this situation, the director knows much more about the playwright, Bertolt Brecht, and his theories on epic theatre than I do. He has worked with people from the Berliner Ensemble and has directed other plays by Brecht. I felt that I needed to learn as much about the play, its author and his theories on theatre as quickly as possible.

I first read the translations Mr. Costello was considering using, the Ralph Manheim and James Stern translations. Mr. Costello liked the flow of the dialogue in the



Stern translation, but he also felt the Manheim translation was written in a more contemporary vernacular. I then read the Eric Bentley translation. This is one of the first published English translations of the play. It omits the socialist leaning prologue and emphasizes the poetic language. Next, I read the translation by Frank McGuinness. This translation captured the raucous comedy of Azdak's story best of all. I finished this part of my research by reading Stephen F. Brecht's translation. Despite the fact that the translator is Bertolt Brecht's son, I did not find anything outstanding about this version. In the end, Mr. Costello decided to use the Manheim translation.

After the decision was made on the translation, I performed a structural analysis on the play. As mentioned earlier, Brecht wrote plays in the epic style. This style differs significantly from the Aristotelian or cause-to-effect structure. An epic play is composed of a series of episodes, rather than scenes, presented in a non-realistic style. Narration or other devices such as signs, music, or film projections introduce the episodes and provide essential information. Rather than being unified by a plot, each episode is its own condensed story. Some unique aspects of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are its play-within-a-play structure, an early point of attack that initiates two plots, Grusha's and Azdak's, and a "flash-back" at the beginning of the second act. It also makes reference to lesser known geographic regions and military campaigns. To facilitate comprehension, I created a glossary of terms for the script.

After analyzing the script, I began to research scholarly criticism on the play. I began my research with the origins of the play. One particularly informative essay, The Chalk Circle Comes Full Circle, published in *Asian Theatre Journal* by Wenwei Du, traces the evolution of the original *Circle of Chalk*, a Chinese parable from the Yuan

dynasty. Du traces the various European versions of the story to its most recent manifestation at the Peking opera. I then researched the political themes within the play. Eric Bentley, a preeminent Brechtian scholar, wrote The Un-American Chalk Circle, an article that dealt with the play's political implications during a tense time between America and the Soviet Union. It was Bentley's translation that omitted the socialist themed prologue. I researched themes of justice and morality relating to the trial and the circle of chalk. Michael Freeman published an excellent article on the different conceptions of justice found in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In Truth and Justice in Bertolt Brecht, Freeman examines the various ethical and moral concerns surrounding Grusha's adoption of Michael, the abandoned child. James K. Lyon, another renowned Brechtian scholar, wrote an illuminating article on the various Hollywood and Broadway influences in the play. In Elements of American Theatre and Film in Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle, Lyon describes the relationship between comedians like Groucho Marx and Brecht's characters. Finally, I researched the history of Georgia and the Caucasus Mountain region. I gave special attention to the role Georgia played during and immediately after World War II.

Another interesting aspect of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is its use of musical narration by the character of the Singer. He narrates the story through song; however, each production requires a musical director to write a new score or use an existing one from another production. The last option is rarely used because each director's concept dictates the style of the score. One of my first assignments was to find any copies or recordings of the original score by composer Paul Dessau from 1954. Gordon Smith, the musical director for this production, had hoped to hear it in order to get a sense of

Brecht's original musical concept. After a lengthy search involving numerous music companies, Pacifica Radio Archives, Carl Weber (a Stanford University professor and former director at the Berliner Ensemble), and Brecht's publishing house, Suhrkamp Verlag, I could find no existing recordings or copies of Dessau's score. Ultimately, Mr. Smith composed the score for this production based upon eastern European melodies indicative of certain Gypsy tribes. He felt that these rhythms captured the essence of the cross-cultural region of the Caucasus Mountains. As luck would have it, two weeks after Mr. Smith completed the score for this production, I received an email from Pacifica Radio Archives confirming that the audio recording of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* they had in their archives was the Dessau score. Originally, they had been unable to confirm this, and the Theatre Department could not justify the expense without that information.

Next, I performed biographical research into the life of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht is credited with changing the face of modern theatre, almost by sheer will alone. Throughout his life, he wrote plays that challenged the status quo in every conceivable fashion. His theories on epic theatre flew in the face of contemporary theatrical convention. Between July and December of 2007, I read four biographical works that examine the life, art and politics of Bertolt Brecht.

The first biography I read, Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, and His Times by Frederic Ewen, divided Brecht's life into three categories and explored them individually. I found the background information on Bavarian culture under the reign of King Wilhelm II a fascinating look into the society that produced Eugen Berthold Freidrich Brecht. Brecht: The Man and His Work by Martin Esslin examined Brecht's literary work in relation to the formative events of his life. His chapter on the Berliner Ensemble was

insightful and touching. Bertolt Brecht In America by James K. Lyon captured Brecht's frustration and tenacity during his years in exile in California during World War II. This biography covered in great depth the period when Brecht wrote *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. However, the most engaging biography of the four was Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama by John Fuegi. This in-depth biography explored the unacknowledged contributions of Brecht's collaborators: Elizabeth Hauptman, Ruth Berlau, Helene Weigel, and Margarete Steffin. These women, according to Fuegi's research, greatly contributed to Brecht's major works yet received hardly any credit or royalties. This work challenges readers to rethink their opinions of Brecht and his work.

I then researched epic theatre, the style of theatre that Brecht is credited with reviving and popularizing during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I first read Brecht's "Short Organum on Theatre", found in John Willet's book, Brecht on Theatre. Brecht wrote his "Short Organum" in 1948, during a period of reflection in order to elucidate and clarify his dramatic theories. I read another work by John Fuegi, The Essential Brecht. This book examines certain plays indicative of Brecht's different artistic periods. I also found information on epic theatre in some of the biographical books mentioned earlier. Martin Esslin's book Brecht: The Man and His Work and Frederic Ewen's book Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, and His Times provided an excellent examination of epic theatre. Robert Brustein's article Brecht Against Brecht was very helpful in examining the contradictions in Brecht's theories.

I then created a production history that documented the play's major productions since being written in 1944. I focused on the Berliner Ensemble's production in 1954 as

a guide. Directed by Brecht, this production premiered at the Theatre Am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin. It also garnered critical acclaim and top honors for Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble in October of 1955 at the International Theatre Festival in Paris.

Other noteworthy productions included the first professional American production by the Arena Stage in 1961, the Royal Shakespearean Company's production in 1962, The La Mama Experimental Theatre's production in 1977, The Public Theatre's Haitian-inspired production in 1990 directed by George C. Wolfe, and National Theatre of London's production in 2007 directed by Sean Holmes. These productions all had something that made them unique. I presented the production history to Michael as he was creating his directorial concept.

After another meeting with Mr. Costello in November in which he explained his concept in greater detail, I began collecting images of war photography. He had planned to use the images as part of the prologue depicting the war torn area of the play. Mr. Costello instructed me to look at images of every major military conflict in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The images I collected came from the Spanish American War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, the Bosnian conflict, and the current military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I looked specifically for images that reflected the overwhelming effect of military force upon individuals and communities. One of the most striking images I found was on the cover of the April 12, 1999 issue of Time magazine. It shows an Albanian woman attempting to breast feed her child while fleeing genocide in Kosovo. She is walking in a long line of refugees. Her gaze looks far ahead to the unpredictable future. This image is

striking on many levels, but it is almost identical to a scene in the play in which Grusha tries in vain to breastfeed the abandoned child, Michael.

In January, I sat in on the auditions with Mr. Costello and gave my opinion whenever asked. I was pleased to be asked to be part of that process. As dramaturg, I walk a fine line when my opinion is solicited. (It is important to remember the advisory nature of my role when presenting an opinion.) As the playwright's advocate, I am concerned with the original intent of his play. As a directorial assistant, I must consider the director's concept when presenting any opinion. We discussed the unique considerations of casting a production at an educational institution. There were many options to consider as Mr. Costello chose his cast.

Afterwards, I attended the initial rehearsals at which Mr. Costello introduced his directorial concept to the cast. At first, he gave an interesting presentation on the importance of storytelling in Brecht's plays. Then, he explained Brecht's concept of "gestus," the essential physical manifestation of a character, in relation to the actor. Bringing these two elements together, Mr. Costello described his vision of an itinerant acting troupe wandering from city to city following a major world war. While wandering, the troupe happens into a bombed out theatre. Using whatever items they can find as props, they perform Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* to soothe and inspire the frightened people hiding in the theatre. He concluded the presentation by posing the questions, "What does the acting troupe in this play look like? How is its company organized? Who are its actors?"

Mr. Costello asked me for research into itinerant acting troupes. His goal was to create a sense of ensemble within the cast by providing our acting troupe with a greater

sense of identity. I researched commedia dell'arte and Elizabethan acting troupes to determine their organizational structure. I then researched revolutionary acting troupes such as El Teatro Campesino, San Francisco Mime Troupe and The Black Revolutionary Theatre. These companies, like the theatre of Brecht, had the explicit goal of affecting social change. The commedia and Elizabethan troupes could only perform with the consent of the aristocracy, while the revolutionary acting troupes performed in defiance of the establishment. Our troupe lies somewhere between the two extremes of these different types of acting companies. At a subsequent rehearsal I presented information on the acting companies mentioned above and the organizational structure of acting troupes throughout history.

Finally, I created a lobby display showcasing Mr. Costello's directorial concept, pertinent information on Brecht, epic theatre, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. I have also written informational essays for the dramaturgical notes for the program and the press release. While this thesis is due prior to the production's opening date, it is my hope that the work I have done has contributed to the success of the production, increased the cast's knowledge of Bertolt Brecht, his play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and his theories, and hopefully, illustrated the importance of dramaturgy. Personally, my appreciation and understanding of the artistic impact of Bertolt Brecht has grown immensely throughout this process.

## Chapter II

### BIOGRAPHY: BERTOLT BRECHT

#### Augsburg (1898 – 1920)

Eugene Berthold Freidrich Brecht was born in the southern Bavarian town of Augsburg, Germany on February 10, 1898. Brecht's father was a factory manager for the Haindl Paper Company. The family lived in a comfortable home at Bleichstrasse Number Two in a housing community owned by the Haindl Company. Though for the rest of his life Brecht would project a humble, proletariat persona, his roots were pure bourgeoisie (Fuegi 6).

While attending elementary school, young Berthold had trouble concealing his disdain for his teachers and the educational process. Like many parents at this time, Herr Brecht saw Berthold's autocratic personality as a sign of strength (Ewen 27). More often than not, Frau Brecht was incapacitated from pain or pain medication due to cancer, and the family maid acted as a surrogate mother to Brecht and his younger brother Walter (Fuegi 5). Brecht earned a reputation for being an *enfant terrible* and intellectually rebellious while attending secondary school at the Königlich Realgymnasium. He was notorious for bucking the system whenever it fit his purposes.



As World War I began in 1914, Brecht started his literary career writing patriotic poetry for the local Augsburg newspaper (Ewen 58). All over Germany, young men like Brecht's friend and future scene designer, Caspar Neher, were putting on military uniforms and marching off to fight for the glory of the Fatherland (Fuegi 19). Brecht avoided military service, however, with a student deferment.

In 1916, Brecht's insubordinate attitude nearly got him expelled, even though school was the only thing keeping him from being sent to war. His Latin class was given an assignment to write an essay in response to Horace's famous line "It is sweet and proper to die for your father-land." Brecht's essay described Horace's line as "crass propaganda" (Fuegi 21). Only the recommendation of his French teacher was able to prevent him from being expelled. If the incident had any effect on young Berthold, it was not evident. He never learned to censor himself or speak French.

In 1917, Brecht attended medical school at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. His interest in medicine soon waned, and Brecht returned to writing. Like many young German writers, Brecht was influenced by the controversial plays of Georg Büchner and Frank Wedekind. Brecht even started going by the more American sounding name of Bert, to emulate Wedekind, whose real name was Benjamin Franklin Wedekind. Brecht took courses in theatre from Professor Artur Kutscher. It was Kutscher who introduced Brecht to Wedekind and cabaret performers Liesl Karlstadt and Karl Valentin (Fuegi 60). Valentin liked the young writer and allowed him to play clarinet with his band.

Brecht's admiration for Wedekind indirectly inspired his first dramatic work. On March 9, 1918, Wedekind died unexpectedly. Upset by Wedekind's sudden death,

Brecht became indignant when Kutscher praised Hanns Johst's newest play, *The Lonely One*, over the works of Frank Wedekind. Insulting Johst's work, Brecht claimed he could write a better play in only three days (Fuegi 39). It took him longer than that, but the end result of this boast was *Baal*, Brecht's first theatrical work. More performance piece than play, *Baal* is a Wedekind-inspired collection of twenty-one scenes that depict the homoerotic adventures of its main character of the same name. Though violent and misogynistic, *Baal* is a powerful piece that showed great potential. Brecht performed songs from *Baal* in the smoke-filled cafés and taverns of Munich. His intensely powerful performance and high-pitched voice hypnotized all in attendance, especially the ladies (Fuegi 90).

Shortly before the war ended, Brecht was assigned as an orderly to the Venereal Disease ward of an Army hospital in Augsburg. In this medical unit, Brecht witnessed the mangled and destroyed bodies of the young soldiers returning from war. This event indelibly marked the young artist, and contributed to his "life long dedication to pacifism" (Ewen 61). The tone of Brecht's poetry became darker and more satirical after this experience. "The Legend of the Dead Soldier" is a primary example of Brecht's poetry at this time. This darkly ironic poem mocks the callousness of leaders who send young men off to die.

### **Munich (1919 -1924)**

After World War I, as the monarchy of Wilhelm II tumbled down, Germany experienced a volatile period of social and political reform. Socialist revolutions were occurring all over Germany, and Brecht joined the Independent Social Democratic party

in Munich in 1919. The failed Spartacist Revolution provided Brecht with the inspiration for his next play, *Drums in the Night*. Originally entitled *Spartacus*, it was first in a long line of plays condemning bourgeois security over social reforms (Esslin 282).

From there, Brecht honed his skills by writing one-act plays and dramatic criticisms for an Augsburg newspaper, *Der Volkswille*. Brecht's reviews were noted mostly for their rudeness. In a typical review Brecht wrote, "The man who has leased the Augsburg Municipal Theatre as his milk-cow knows today, after so many years, about as much as about literature as an engine driver knows about geography" (Esslin 24). In 1919, Brecht presented *Baal* and *Drums in the Night* to Dr. Lion Feuchtwanger, a writer and theatrical producer. Feuchtwanger recognized Brecht's raw talent and worked to promote him and produce his works.

His association with Feuchtwanger also led to his appointment as Dramaturg for the Munich Kammerspiele in 1920. As Martin Esslin explained in 1960, "This post, non-existent in Anglo-Saxon theatre, combines the position of a resident playwright and play-adaptor with those of a reader, literary adviser of the management, editor of the program brochure, and public relations" (Esslin 25). The position exposed Brecht to a wide variety of productions and play scripts. It also provided him the opportunity to criticize other plays, while at the same time promoting his own. The strategy worked well because in September of 1922, the Munich Kammerspiele premiered *Drums in the Night*. The play was a huge success and earned Brecht the Kleist Prize, an award given each year to the best young dramatic talent.

This was an exciting time for Munich's newest theatrical sensation. Brecht had assembled a group of collaborators and began new projects. He defied the traditional

view of a young German poet as a recluse pouring his heart into his work in secrecy. This poet/playwright preferred to be the center of a collective of artists, gathering advice and ideas from anyone who offered it (Esslin 17). It was at this time that Brecht began experimenting with his ideas on modern theatre. He first implemented his theories in an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. However, his radical views and volatile personality created chaotic rehearsals. After an exceptionally exhausting rehearsal, Rudolph Frank, one of the Kammerspiel executives, decided it might be a good idea to put Brecht's chaotic style in the best light possible. Pulling Brecht aside, Frank said, "Invent a theory my dear Brecht! When one presents Germans with a theory, they are willing to swallow anything" (Fuegi 126). From then on, Brecht would remain ready to generate theories, such as his theory of Epic theatre, as necessary to explain and promote his works.

### **Berlin (1924 -1933)**

In 1924, Brecht moved to Berlin to advance his theatrical career. He got a job as dramaturg at Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theatre. Here Brecht worked with directors like Erwin Piscator and Leopold Jessner. He collaborated with artists like the musician Kurt Weill, the playwright Carl Zuckmayer, and a young writer named Elisabeth Hauptman (Ewen 159). Hauptman and Brecht would go on to collaborate for many years on such plays as *A Man is a Man*, written between 1924 and 1926; *The Three Penny Opera*, written in 1928; *Happy End*, written in 1929; and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, written between 1929 and 1931 (Fuegi 145).

One of their first collaborations, *A Man is a Man* foreshadows Hitler's rise to power and tells the story of Galy Gay, a poor peasant who is turned into a killing machine (Fuegi 135). This dark comedy shows how easily external forces can change a man into something else entirely. "For the first time in Brecht's writings, the element of *change* begins to play a part. *Man is changeable*. Unfortunately, the changeability is a negative one" (Ewen 136).

Brecht's collaboration with Kurt Weil produced his first major success, *The Threepenny Opera* in 1928. Brecht based the play on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Brecht sets his version of the story in Soho in the late nineteenth century, but otherwise, his play's plot is essentially the same story as Gay's original musical. *The Threepenny Opera* is one of Brecht's most popular works, and was a prototype for his *Lehrstücke* (Learning play)—a didactic drama intended to instruct its audiences in creating a better society. Though *The Threepenny Opera* was a huge success, Hauptman's substantial contribution to the piece is widely overlooked (Fuegi 145).

That same year, Brecht met one of his most important collaborators and closest companion, Helene Weigel. The playwright Arnolt Bronnen, the friend who inspired the third version of Brecht's first name, recommended Weigel to Brecht when he was in search of an actress. Weigel was a promising German actress whose deep, resonating voice and androgynous appearance intrigued Brecht. They formed an immediate connection, staying up late the night they met discussing theatre. Though Brecht did not cast Weigel in anything until 1929, she would go on to become his second wife, star in one of his most noteworthy plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and become the Artistic Director at the Berliner Ensemble after Brecht's death (Fuegi 121). Despite the

fact that she was a very talented actress, Weigel was primarily responsible for raising their two children Stefan and Barbara, and quite often, she cared for Brecht's collaborators/mistresses as well.

Between the years 1925 and 1930, Brecht began to formulate the main points of what would become known as "epic theatre." Though Brecht treated the term as though he invented it, many of the aspects of epic theatre had already appeared on German stages in the plays of Georg Büchner, Frank Wedekind and Arnolt Bronnen. Erwin Piscator's emphasis on electronic media, news reels and film projections had also been described as epic. Both Piscator and Max Reinhardt produced politically oriented plays that challenged the status quo. Even Brecht's radical *Verfremdungseffekt* has its roots in the acting theories of the Russian Vsevolod Meyerhold (Esslin 37). Essentially, Brecht's "epic theatre" relied on three main points: "New forms and content emphasizing the contemporary and the technological; a new style of acting and directing that would de-emphasize emotion; and a new spectator who was supposed to both enjoy and be instructed" (Fuegi 156). The challenge came about when attempting to realize his theories on stage.

### **Exile (1933 – 1947)**

On February 28, 1933, the day after the Reichstag fire, Brecht fled the Nazis with his family and collaborators in tow. For eight years, the path of Brecht's European exile took the group through Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, and Russia (Lyon 16). During this time, Brecht continued to develop his ideas of epic theatre and wrote politically themed plays like *The Private Life of the Master Race*, written between 1935 and 1938;

*Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, written between 1936 and 1938; *Señora Carrar's Rifles*, written in 1937; and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, written in 1941. These were didactical propaganda plays that criticized and challenged the Hitler and his Nazi party. Though episodic in structure, these anti-fascist plays were designed to appeal to a wider audience than his previous works (Lyon 10). Brecht was also writing for the Soviet periodical *Das Wort* during his exile. Though a committed socialist, Brecht declined the Russian government's offer of a home in that country and a place among the upper echelon of Russian artists. It would have also meant exchanging one repressive regime for another.

Instead, Brecht fled Russia in 1941 and sailed to the United States. Margarete Steffin, one of Brecht's youngest and most devoted collaborators, managed to obtain passage for Brecht, Weigel, their children and Elizabeth Hauptman before succumbing to tuberculosis in a Russian hospital (Fuegi 417). Brecht remained in exile in Santa Monica, California from 1941 to 1947. The plays completed during this time resumed a more traditional "Brechtian" form, becoming less propagandistic and more episodic. Though Brecht longed to be hailed as the brilliant theatrical artist he had been in Europe, very few people in America had ever heard of Bertolt Brecht. Those who had heard of him either disagreed with or did not understand his theories on epic theatre. At this time in America, the realism of Stanislavski's Method was extremely popular and influenced most acting styles (Lyon 68). Brecht tenaciously continued writing and perfecting his theories despite his lack of notoriety or success in America.

These last plays not only reflect the maturity of his theories on epic theatre, they also reflect his attempts to win over Broadway. *Galileo*, written in collaboration with

Hauptman and the actor Charles Laughton between 1938 and 1939 was the closest he ever came to seeing one of his plays reach Broadway. Though the play was successfully produced in Los Angeles, Brecht's temperamental nature, his endless revisions, and his socialist politics prevented him from seeing the play reach New York. By the time *Galileo* premiered in New York in November of 1947, Brecht had already fled the United States after testifying before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He also wrote *The Good Woman of Setzuan* between 1938 and 1940, *Mother Courage and her Children* in 1939, *Schweyk in the Second World War* between 1941 and 1943, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1944. These plays along with *Galileo* are considered to be Brecht's greatest works.

Brecht never became proficient in English while in America. He had to rely heavily on another collaborator from Germany, Ruth Berlau, to translate his work. He also depended on a group of German artists living in exile to assist his family (Lyon 30). This was a trying time for the strong-willed Brecht. His family accepted handouts when money was tight. They had to get used to living in a very different culture in California and a much smaller home. With help from artists like Peter Lore, Brecht tried to break into the lucrative game of screenwriting. Though he had a lot of ideas, he could not find a producer to finance his work. Fritz Lang produced the one film Brecht had contributed to, *Hangmen Also Die*, but Brecht had his name removed from the project because of creative differences (Lyon 71).



### **East Berlin (1947 – 1956)**

In October of 1947, Brecht was summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities due to his connections with known Socialists and his writing for *Das Wort*. Using poor English to his advantage, Brecht managed to evade the committee's questions and denied any wrongdoing. Accustomed to escaping political harassment, Brecht, his family, and his collaborators left for Europe the next day. First, they stayed for a short time in Switzerland while deciding where to relocate. While considering their options, the East German government offered Brecht the position of artistic director for the Berliner Ensemble. Though directing for a State sponsored theatre usually entails a great deal of censorship, the offer also meant he would have his own theatre company with full artistic control (Fuegi 502). The shrewd Brecht eventually accepted the offer but not before obtaining Austrian citizenship and selling the publishing rights to his works to Suhrkamp Verlag, a West German publishing house (Esslin 73).

In 1949, Brecht went to East Berlin to direct *Mother Courage and her Children*, with Helene Weigel starring as Courage at Max Reinhardt's old Deutsches Theatre. The production was a phenomenal success and was named Best Play and Best Production at the International Theatre Festival in Paris. This production led to the formation of the Berliner Ensemble. The Berliner Ensemble made its debut in November, 1949 with *Mr. Puntila and His Hired Man, Matti*. Though he never wrote another play of the artistic level of *Mother Courage* or the popularity of *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht finally had the recognition and resources needed to fully develop his theories on epic theatre.

In 1954, the Berliner Ensemble relocated to Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm and scored its second success with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Eventually, Brecht's

staunch opposition to all aspects of Aristotelian drama softened. He incorporated certain aspects of the dramaturgy of the Greeks and Shakespeare into his own theories of theatre while at the Berliner Ensemble (Ewen 471). Brecht continued working there with his most loyal and trusted collaborators, Neher, Weigel, Hauptman, Dessau, and Feuchtwanger.

In the last years of Brecht's life, the Berliner Ensemble took the theatrical world by storm and firmly established Brecht's place in theatre history. On August 14, 1956, while the company prepared to present *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in London, Brecht died of coronary thrombosis. Looked upon as a great poet, playwright, director and teacher, Brecht finally found the acceptance and acclaim he always sought at the Berliner Ensemble. At the end of a life spent fighting government repression and artistic resistance, Brecht spent his remaining years in Berlin doing what he loved: writing, collaborating and perfecting his theories of epic theatre (Ewen 488).

## Chapter III

### PRODUCTION HISTORY

#### **The Origins of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle***

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht is based on the classic Chinese parable *The Chalk Circle* (Huilan ji), a zaju play by Li Qianfu written in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). A zaju play is usually made up of four acts with a xiezi (wedge). A xiezi acts as a prologue when placed at the beginning and a transitional scene when placed between two acts. The text consists of sung lyrics interspersed with dramatic dialogue (Du 307). The original parable tells a story of jealousy, murder, and strife over an inheritance within a rich family in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). The Chalk Circle was “anthologized by Zang Maoxun in 1595 in his edited collection entitled *One Hundred Plays of the Yuan Dynasty*” (Du 308). This is the version of the story that was handed down from one generation to another.

#### **Early European versions of *The Chalk Circle***

In 1832, the French poet and playwright Stanislas Julien translated the first version of *The Chalk Circle*. Though faithful to the original Chinese source, it did not make a real theatrical impact on the Western stage (Du 308). In 1925, the German poet

and playwright Klabund, whose real name was Alfred Henschke, adapted it for the stage under the name *Der Kreidekreis* (*The Chalk Circle*). Max Reinhardt first staged this highly romantic version of the Chinese parable at the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin on October 20, 1925. Brecht had been familiar with Klabund's work since their first meeting at the Romanisches Café in Berlin in 1922. The two poets often collaborated, and even belonged to the same collective of like-minded poets, Group 1925 (Fuegi 148).

### **Brecht's *Chalk Circle* at the Berliner Ensemble**

The Berliner Ensemble staged the first German production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at the Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm in October of 1954. Brecht directed the production, which followed the success of the company's first production, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. His long-time composer Paul Dessau wrote the score and Karl von Appen designed the set. Brecht's wife Helen Wiegel played the Governor's wife, and Angelika Hurwicz played the role of Grusha. Brecht made a bold creative choice by casting Ernst Busch as both the Singer and Azdak. Von Appen's set design incorporated a turntable stage and a series of backdrops like those of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Rehearsals began on November 17, 1953, and continued up until the premiere almost a year later on October 7, 1954. The production was taken to Paris for the International Theatre Festival and then to London in 1956, just after Brecht's death. Clive Barnes saw this production and wrote, "The rambling script, with all its naïve aggressions, leapt into dramatic life as total theatre" (Barnes 22). Brecht's production has been described as extremely "light and fast-paced" for such a complex and lengthy

play (Fuegi 495). The production was a resounding success and solidified Brecht's reputation as a great director as well as playwright.

### **Significant Productions**

The first American production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* occurred in 1948, one year after Brecht had left the country, at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. It used the translation by Eric and Maja Bentley and was directed by Henry Goodman. It was viewed as daring avant-garde theater. Universities and drama clubs from Urbana to Houston staged eight other productions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in America before Brecht's death in 1956 (Esslin 337). Each of these productions used the Bentley translation. This translation cuts the Socialist themed prologue that depicts the settlement of a dispute between two Soviet farming collectives (kolkhoz) over a section of valley in the Caucasus Mountains. For a pro-Communist play, these productions were politely received during a period of rising tension between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The Arena Stage produced the first professional American production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Washington D.C. in March of 1961. They chose Brecht's play for the official opening of their new location. Alan Schneider directed this highly praised production. Howard Taubman, theatre critic for *The New York Times* wrote, "Schneider has immersed himself in the spirit of the Berliner Ensemble...not that he slavishly follows Brecht's methods" (Taubman 35). David Hurst performed admirably as Azdak. Critics praised the touching performance of Melinda Dillon as Grusha. This

version was translated by John Holmstrom, and like the Bentley translation, cut the prologue.

In March of 1962, The Royal Shakespearean Company (RSC) produced the first British production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. It opened at the Aldwych Theatre in London, and was considered a “resounding success” by *The New York Times* (Reuters 28). The RSC also used the Holmstrom translation. William Gaskill directed the production. Hugh Griffith played the role of Azdak and Patsy Byrne played the role of Grusha. It is significant to note that Michael Flanders played the role of the Singer, though confined to a wheelchair during the production. By casting a person with a disability, the RSC production was the first to illustrate the interpretive flexibility of certain roles within this play. This production lead the way for other companies to make bold interpretive choices.

In March of 1966, The Lincoln Repertory Company produced the New York premiere of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Jules Irving directed the production at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre. It opened to mixed reviews by such critics as Walter Kerr, Douglas Watt, and Stanley Kauffmann. While Watt and Kauffmann were pleased with many of the excellent stylistic elements, Kerr was not as impressed. The set designer, James Hart Stearns, presented sweeping mountains, a chaotic village, and a “circus-like” courtroom that came and went on a turntable stage reminiscent of the Berliner Ensemble production (Kerr 76). Mr. Stearns also designed the rich costumes and appropriately grotesque masks with “chalk cliff noses and trailing wisps of scarlet beards” (Kerr 76). All three critics agreed that Robert Symonds gave a superb performance as Azdak. Watt considered it the only role in the play “with any real meat” (Watt 75). Elizabeth Huddle

presented an adequate performance as Grusha even though, as Kauffmann noted, “she has not quite enough voice for her songs” (Kauffman 35). Brock Peters received praise for his performance as the Singer.

In March of 1977, La Mama Experimental Theatre and the International Theatre Institute brought in guest director Fritz Bennewitz of the Weimar Theatre of East Germany to direct a unique workshop version of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This production was noteworthy because it attempted to use actors from a variety of countries and different training backgrounds. Bennewitz had worked with the Berliner Ensemble before taking on the La Mama experiment. However, some critics felt the production could not overcome some of the inherent challenges of a multi-ethnic cast. Erika Munk of *The Village Voice* considered the production less than successful, and wrote that it lacked subtlety and an effective pace (Munk 99). In his review for *The New York Times*, Richard Eder provided an explanation for the productions shortcomings. He explained that La Mama E.T.C. hired Mr. Bennewitz to lead an international workshop on Brecht. The workshop’s final project was to stage *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In his review, Eder asserted that the actor’s various origins and training were responsible for the production’s slow pace (Eder 20).

The Arena Stage produced *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the second time in December of 1977. Martin Fried directed this version with Robert Prosky as Azdak and Christine Estabrook as Grusha. Mel Gussow of *The New York Times* wrote that Mr. Fried’s production “underscores the work’s openness, humor and accessibility” (Gussow 5). This production was noteworthy for the scenic innovations of Santo Loquasto. Mr. Loquasto “treated the stage as if it were a river to be forded. He divided it with an

approximation of planked rafts, which are poled from side to side” (Gussow 5). Mr. Gussow considered Stanley Walden’s score and Terrence Currier’s performance as the Singer the low points of the production.

The Arena Stage opened their 40<sup>th</sup> season with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in September of 1990. This was their third production of the play. Director Tazewell Thompson used the Ralph Manheim translation, which includes the prologue. This production was noteworthy for two reasons. First, Lewis J. Stadlen’s interpretation of Azdak was drastically different than Robert Prosky’s interpretation of the same role in the 1977 production. Mel Gussow reviewed this production as well as the 1977 production. In his review, Mr. Gussow contrasted Mr. Prosky’s “Falstafian” Azdak from the 1977 production to Mr. Stadlen’s “ferret-like” performance in 1990 (Gussow 14). Second, Mr. Thompson cast an actress, Jane White as the Singer. Her silky voice was said to have complimented Fabian V. Obispo’s tingly score. Mr. Gussow also described Gail Grate’s performance of Grusha as touching.

In December of 1990, George C. Wolfe directed a bold, innovative adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the Public Theatre of New York. Using the translation by William R. Spiegelberger, Thulani Davis adapted the play by setting it in a post-revolution Haiti intended to resemble that of Papa Doc Duvalier. Mr. Wolfe effectively used exaggerated costume pieces, puppets, masks, and shadow puppets in his Caribbean production (Richards 83). Ms. Davis’s adaptation altered the sound and rhythm of the text by adding many Caribbean phrases. Charlayne Woodard was described as passionate as Grusha, but Reggie Montgomery’s reviews were mostly negative (Stuart 17). Robert Brustein was the only critic to praise Montgomery’s performance. Novella



Nelson played the Singer with a suppressed rage that drew mixed responses (Brustein 27). Kweyao Agyapon's score of guitar and conga drums was described as distracting and grim.

David Richards of *The Sunday New York Times Magazine* was pleased by the performance. He described it as "vibrant and eye catching" (Richards 82). He was especially impressed by the half-masks of Stephen Kaplin and Barbara Pollitt. He described how the masks "turn the actors' faces into bold, porcine caricatures, just as they do for the various dolls and mannequins that come miraculously alive with no more than the wistful tilt of the head" (Richards 83). Frank Rich of *The New York Times* described the production as "highly imaginative, if at times sluggishly executed" (Rich 17). Mr. Rich was also impressed by the stylistic interpretation of certain scenes. He eloquently described some of the effects, "In one choice touch of magic realism, a sinuously entwined couple holding leaves stands in for a tree; a delicate shadow play projected onto translucent quilt conveys the melodrama of Grusha's Eliza-like flight across a rickety bridge" (Rich 17). Like most critics, Mr. Rich was not pleased with Reggie Montgomery's portrayal of Azdak. He described Mr. Montgomery's performance as "pounding in the character's message but rarely getting the laughs" (Rich 17). Clive Barnes of the *New York Post*, who had seen the Berliner Ensemble's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1956, was impressed by Thulani's adaptation and said it was "true to the human spirit of Brecht, while denying him his political letter" (Barnes 22). However, compared to the original production, Mr. Barnes found, "This production misfires. Patterns are blurred, the wit is blunted, and the almost Shavian arguments lack Brecht's own ironic passion" (Barnes 22). In *The New Republic*, Robert Brustein was

displeased with the racial overtones of this production. He noted “the fact that Wolfe and Davis have turned the struggle between equally venal opportunists into a racial confrontation. The faction of the grand duke (the Grand Blanc), including the governor and his wife, wear white masks and converse in French accents, while the good guys are black, speaking Calypso” (Rich 28). However, Mr. Brustein was won over by the production overall, largely due to the fine acting of the talented cast. He was pleased with Reggie Montgomery’s interpretation of Azdak and “found him ingratiating in a role that is usually considered unplayable” (Rich 28). Conversely, he felt that the climactic chalk circle scene lost its power because a rag-doll puppet was used to portray the child. He could not believe the audience could feel apprehensive about the tearing of wood and straw.

In May of 1998, La Mama Experimental Theatre Club celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of Brecht’s birth by remounting a production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This was the second time they had produced the play since 1977. Andrei Serban, a renowned Romanian director, and Niky Wolcz directed this production using the John Willett translation. The entire cast consisted of Columbia University graduate students. Peter Marks, critic for *The New York Times*, praised the inventive production, “Thanks to Mr. Serban’s nimble staging, Elizabeth Swados’s harmonious score and the passion of a disciplined troupe...this revival comes as a pleasant surprise” (Marks 1). The production was noteworthy for two stylistic innovations. First, the role of Grusha was double cast with Mia Yoo portraying the younger Grusha, and Angela Fie portraying the older, hardened Grusha, determined to keep Michael. Second, the play moved from one theatre to another within the La Mama space during the performance. The first half of the play

took place in the upstairs theater. The setting is a “bleached-out, gauzy joke of a fairy-tale kingdom, a cross between Shangri-La and Iran in the last days of the Shah” (Marks 1). Moving to a bare stage downstairs after intermission, Mr. Serban began the second half of the play with the prologue relocated from the first half, establishing late the play-within-a-play context. The move underscored the change in tone as the play shifted to a more didactic political satire. Elizabeth Swado’s harmonious score was praised as well.

The most recent production to open to critical acclaim was the National Theatre of London’s production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, in collaboration with Filter Theatre Collective. Sean Holmes directed this touring production in March of 2007, using the Frank McGuinness translation of the play. The McGuinness translation is noted for emphasizing the slapstick humor of the story. Sam Marlowe of *The Times of London* said, “Holmes gives the action a knockabout comedy that sometimes tips disturbingly into violent grotesque” (Marlowe). Leo Chadburn portrayed the Storyteller as an abrasive rock and roll crooner. Marlowe wrote that his performance has “rock star glamour and riveting presence” (Marlowe). Phillip Fisher of *The British Theatre Guide* described the musical score created by Chadburn, Chris Branch, and Tom Haines as “heavy on rhythm but often lacking in melody” (Fisher). Nicolas Tennant gave a powerhouse performance as Azdak, the peasant judge who “knows his liquor better than he does his law” (Fisher). With stained vest and open fly, Tennant’s performance was considered one of the highlights of the show. Cath Whitefield was equally praised as an “earthy, vigorous, huge-hearted” counterbalance to Tennant (Marlowe). Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian* likened her performance to “a new season’s apple: crisp, tangy and tart” (Gardner). However, performances aside, this production stood out for its innovative use

of video and sound technology. Designed by Anthony Lambie, the production included a large, white screen hung at the back of the set; it showed black and white video footage and scene headings designed by Lorna Heavey. Then, to contrast the video montage, Holmes set Grusha's journey across the rickety bridge in darkness so that only her ragged, terrified breathing could be heard. Other sound effects included the sloshing of water in a glass to give the impression that a character was actually taking a bath in a tub, and a whistle blown into the microphone created a haunting wind across the valley. The child, represented by an expressive dummy, was made more lifelike by an actress who made cooing, gurgling, and crying sounds into a concealed microphone. The total effect combined to create a hilarious performance that retained the play's moral message.

As this production history reveals, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a charming piece of theatre that appeals to a wide spectrum of artists and audiences. Its humanistic themes of maternal love and authentic justice transcend not only the political situation that sparked its creation but also the dramatic theories it was designed to represent. Also revealed are the hurdles and pitfalls of producing this play. The primary challenges identified in successfully staging *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are the prologue, the play's epic scene arrangement and the musical score. Many productions have simply cut the prologue, but this may hinder the play's comprehension. Equally, the unusual arrangement of scenes and the non-linear plot construction often confuse audiences. Though Paul Dessau wrote the original score for the play, a musical director is required to write a new score for each production.

While these challenges are daunting, the rewards of producing the play can be great. Grusha is not merely a simple representation of a kind-hearted peasant. Her story

is a complex tale of self-sacrifice and the very human costs of compassion during violent times. Equally, Azdak is not just a disillusioned drunk lampooning a corrupt judicial system. His paradoxical judgments reveal a higher sense of justice than is typically found in most bureaucratic courthouses. When their stories collide at the conclusion of the play, the concepts of compassion and justice are revealed in a manner that is both relevant and timeless.

## Chapter IV

### THE EPIC THEATRE OF BERTOLT BRECHT

#### The Street Scene

A group of tourists came upon a man who had witnessed an automobile accident. When asked what had happened, the man described how the accident occurred. First, imitating the low, rumbling sound of an engine, he described how one car came around the corner way too fast. Next, he impersonated the driver who lost control of his vehicle shouting, “Oh my God!” At that moment, a police car arrived on the scene. Its flashing lights and blaring siren drowned out the man’s voice. Once the sirens had been turned off, he resumed his story by imitating the frightened expression of the driver who was unable to stop. Breaking off from his narrative, he explained with a wink that he could not repeat that driver’s expletives in mixed company. Then his cell phone rang. Frustrating the tourists, he answered the call just as the story was getting good. Once he hung up, he made a squealing sound imitating the brakes of the cars trying to stop. He finished the story with a loud “BOOM” indicating the inevitable collision. When asked who caused the accident, the man said, “You tell me, I just showed you what happened!”

This scene is a variation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Street Scene*—a basic scenario containing all the elements needed to explain his theory of epic theatre (Willett 121). It

has a narrator who describes an event relevant to current social conditions. The narrator tells the story of the car wreck, but never pretends the spectators are not there. He impersonates the people involved in the wreck, but never pretends to be one of them. Whenever the spectators get caught up in the story, something happens to jar them out of their passivity. Finally, after arousing his audience's capacity for action, he invites them to judge and correct the situation for themselves. Though Brecht did not invent epic theatre, or even coin the term, he is credited with bringing all its elements together under one theoretical premise and popularizing its style.

### **The Origins of Epic Theatre**

In 1924, Brecht, a young poet and playwright, began working as a dramaturg for the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin (Ewen 147). While there, Brecht amassed a group of talented artists and collaborators dedicated to revolutionizing modern theatrical practice. Essentially, epic theatre attempts to appeal to the audience's intellect rather than its emotions (Willett 22). Brecht's work was greatly inspired by the dialectical philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel. According to this school of thought, one concept (thesis) inevitably generates its opposite (antithesis), and their interaction leads to a new concept (synthesis) (Rosen 109). This is reflected in the didactic presentations of opposing ideas represented as characters in Brecht's plays. Reflecting the influence of Karl Marx, Brecht referred to the plays he wrote after this time as "*Lehrstücke*" or learning plays (Howard 130).

Some of the concepts found in epic theatre can be traced back to Greek, Chinese and Elizabethan theatre. However, the elements that Brecht was initially drawn to appeared in Germany during the mid 19th and early 20th centuries. Playwrights such as

Georg Büchner and Frank Wedekind wrote shocking plays that defied theatrical conventions and traditional values. In plays such as Büchner's *Woyzek* and Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening*, Brecht discovered nefarious and working class protagonists shaped by societal forces. Revolutionary directors such as Erwin Piscator and Leopold Jessner were experimenting wildly at this time with new forms of electronic media, scene design and presentational styles. From Piscator, Brecht appropriated the technique of displaying signs, slide projections and filmstrips to reinforce the play's theme. He later incorporated Piscator's use of conveyor belts and mechanical equipment, but Brecht intentionally left them in view of the audience (Styan 139). From Jessner, Brecht adopted abstract set designs that used varying levels and shapes to indicate a variety of locations (Esslin 36). Brecht drew upon the individual innovations of these artists and others to create a style of theatre that appealed to an audience's reason rather than its emotions.

### **The Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht**

Brecht began building his new theatre by breaking down a wall. In opposition to the realistic style of Constantine Stanislavski, epic theatre does not pretend there is an invisible "fourth wall" between the actor and the spectator. Actors are instructed to speak directly to the audience at times. In epic theatre, the audience is not allowed the luxury of being an omniscient observer, nor is the actor allowed to pretend he is not an actor playing a role. Instead, Brecht instructed his actors to discover the appropriate stance or pose that visually conveyed that character's essence. "The actor was to make clear to his audience his '*Gestus*' or demonstrable social attitude, his basic disposition" (Styan 141). Brecht trained actors to present rather than represent their characters. Fully aware of



each other's presence, the actor and audience are to collectively participate in societal change.

To facilitate this participation, plays of the epic theatre use certain techniques designed to prevent emotional attachment between the audience and the play, since Brecht held that the "emotional purgation" of Aristotle's *Poetics* depleted the audience's capacity for action. These individual techniques are not parts of a unified whole in the Wagnerian sense, but rather they are variations on the play's theme. Inspired by the cabaret performances of Karl Valentin, Brecht employs narration to interrupt and summarize the episodes within the play. He uses the technique Piscator first called "historification," and sets his plays in exotic locations like Setzuan or Gruzinia to make the familiar appear strange. Inspired by the Chinese theatre of Mei Lan-fang, Brecht had stagehands work in plain sight of the audience. These techniques combine to draw an audience in but only to hold them at a specific emotional distance. Brecht referred to this as the "*Verfremdungseffekt*" or Alienation Effect. He theorized that this allowed the spectator to judge the conditions of the play while recognizing the parallels between the world of the play and his own world.

Also contradicting *The Poetics*, Brecht's plays do not rely on a cause-to-effect plot structure. Instead, epic plays are made up of loosely connected episodes that, if disconnected, could each stand alone as a condensed story. The epic plot structure is not as tight as the traditional dramatic structure and has a very early point of attack. The relationship between the episodes is thematic rather than structural. Epic plays also cover greater periods of time and jump back and forth in time, as the story requires. In Brecht's

plays, the narrator is often used to connect the episodes by commenting on their meaning (Willett 113).

As a musician and composer, Brecht was able to incorporate music into his productions. The music comments, often ironically, on the action in Brecht's plays. He preferred dissonant chords and jarring counter melodies to music that underscored the desired emotional effect. Brecht once had his composer, Paul Dessau push tacks into the hammers of his piano, making the music sound like a surreal voice within the story (Styan 164). This way, music became another variation on the play's theme. Kurt Weill's intricate score for *The Threepenny Opera* best captures Brecht's complicated, dark themes.

Like his scripts, Brecht's theories were never completely finished. Throughout his life, Brecht continually reexamined and reworked his theories. He was notorious for seeking advice from anyone offering an opinion. The often-contradictory elements of epic theatre attest to the multitude of influences that Brecht drew upon when formulating his theories. His ultimate goal however, remained the same: Create theatre that awakens the mind of the audience and motivates them to change society.

## Chapter V

### HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

#### **Santa Monica, California, 1944**

On July 21, 1941, five months before the United States entered World War II, Bertolt Brecht, Helene Weigel, their two children Stephan and Barbara, and Brecht's collaborator, Ruth Berlau arrived in San Pedro, California. They had barely left Russia on the Swedish ship the *Annie Johnson* when the Nazis invaded. The elation of escape was tempered with the sadness of loss. Margarete Steffin, Brecht's primary collaborator on such plays as *Round Heads/Peak Heads*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, and the first drafts of *The Good Person of Setzuan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, had died of tuberculosis immediately after arranging passage on the ship for everyone in Brecht's group. Her assistance with Brecht's writing, as well as arranging his voyage to America, had been invaluable.

Germany and America could not have been any more different in the 1940s. While Europe had been struggling during the war, America had been experiencing a booming, wartime economy. "Arriving at a time of great physical mobility... he [Brecht] observed that Americans are nomads who build homes with no intention of living out their years there, and who change jobs like boots" (Lyon 30). While German society

epitomized hard work and thrift, American culture, especially in California, epitomized relaxation and extravagance.

Like many German emigrants living in exile, Brecht found it difficult to assimilate into American culture. Brecht had an especially difficult time learning new languages. He was frustrated that after a lengthy period of studying English, he could only say what he had learned, not what he wanted to say (Lyon 31). Though many German refugees tried to blend in, Brecht made a special point to stick out. He wanted America to conform to him, not the other way around. Instead of adapting his writing to Hollywood tastes, Brecht hoped to introduce his epic style to the movie industry. Although this approach had served him well in Germany, it prevented him from working in Hollywood as a screenwriter or on Broadway as a playwright. This is largely due to the fact that producers would not back an unknown, temperamental, unorthodox German writer who spoke little English. Also, American film audiences were seeking distraction at the movies, not civic lessons (Lyon 44).

Brecht had been living in California for two years when he began reworking *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. He was determined to have a play produced on Broadway while living in exile in America. In 1943, he approached Elsa Lanchester to play the lead role in his play, *Mother Courage*. She declined, claiming not to understand the role, but introduced Brecht to the Academy Award-winning actress, Luise Rainer. The Austrian-born Rainer was familiar with Brecht's work, and had hoped to have him write a play that she might star in on Broadway. While discussing possible ideas, Rainer remarked that she preferred roles like the female lead in Klabund's *Chalk Circle*. Brecht had previously written versions of the *Chalk Circle* parable as a short story and an unpublished play. He

had even been friends with Klabund when he wrote his successful *Chalk Circle* adaptation in 1925. Brecht agreed to the project and began writing the play for Rainer (Lyon 124). Jules J. Leventhal agreed to back the production and commissioned Brecht to write it. Unfortunately, creative differences caused Rainer to back out of the project.

Since the contract Brecht signed with Leventhal said nothing of Rainer's participation, he continued writing. Brecht completed a rough draft in New York and sent the pages to Ruth Berlau, who rewrote and shaped the play into a work more suitable for American audiences. While revising Berlau's changes, Brecht decided to change the role of the peasant girl. "Once he liberated himself from the notion that Rainer would play a character he originally called Katja, it underwent a transformation that improved it in Brecht's eyes and simultaneously made it less suitable for Broadway" (Lyon 127). Consequently, the play never reached Broadway during Brecht's exile years in America.

### **The End of World War II, 1945**

As World War II wound down, Brecht gathered with other German exiles to plan for postwar Germany. German artists and intellectuals living in both Los Angeles and New York formed the Council for a Democratic Germany. Some of the members included authors Thomas Mann and his older brother Heinrich, theatrical producer Lion Fuchtwanger, and historian Ludwig Marcuse. The sole purpose of this council was to ensure that a democratic Germany replaced the Nazi regime after the war (Fuegi 436). However, the FBI monitored the Germans living in exile in America because they suspected some, like Brecht, had socialist sympathies and connections to active Communists.

Opposition to the Council arose in Washington as soon as it was formed. The United States government began to apply pressure to the various members to disband when they began to hold rallies and plan actively for a postwar German government. Thomas Mann quit the council shortly after it had been formed, claiming that the Allies might perceive the group as a stab in the back. “At the same time the work of the Council for a Democratic Germany was being deliberately undermined, its views were being given powerful, poetic form in the plays Brecht was working on with Berlau and various others... The play’s new title was *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*” (Fuegi 445).

As the play evolved into something other than a star vehicle for Luise Rainer, it began to represent, in Brecht’s mind, Germany’s struggle for future prosperity. “Here, the ‘child’ in the test of the circle of chalk is explicitly identified as a metaphor for the problems of now making the best possible postwar division of land. In 1944, particularly as the child was called Michael, the German nickname for a German, the child in the circle could clearly be seen as Germany with America tugging on one of its arms and the Soviet Union tugging on the other. The great virtue of the metaphorical circle would always be that it could reflect new historical meanings for new historical situations in times to come” (Fuegi 446). The following year, at the Potsdam Conference, which determined how postwar Germany was to be run, Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin would indeed tug Germany in opposite directions.

For some, however, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* represented more than the division of territories in Germany. It also came to represent, in the mind of Ruth Berlau, the hope for a future between Brecht and herself. “For Berlau, this new play was intimately tied up with her own life. She learned in early 1944 she was pregnant. For

her, the child, Michael, of the play was not only Bebe [Brecht] himself, torn between her and Weigel (as well as a Germany being ripped apart by the competing forces of capitalism and socialism) but also the real child in her womb” (Fuegi 446). Berlau enjoyed being this connected to Brecht. They spent long hours together each day in August finishing *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Brecht notes in his diary that the play was completed on September 1, 1944. The event should have been cause for celebration, but “reality suddenly intruded... Ruth was rushed to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital where a stomach tumor was discovered and removed two days later. Her child, now in its seventh or eighth month, was delivered by cesarean section. The child, a little boy who Berlau named Michael, was born with a serious heart defect... As Berlau’s condition began to improve, Michael lost his struggle. When the surgeon ... began to say, ‘there’s something I must tell you,’ Ruth knew at once the news he was bringing and said, ‘I know already, Michael is dead’” (Fuegi 449). Sadly, Berlau had a nervous breakdown a few months later, requiring hospitalization. Though she remained a member of Brecht’s collective, she never fully recovered from the loss of Michael.

### **12th Century Georgia**

During her stay at a sanatorium in the Caucasus Mountains in 1934, Brecht’s collaborator, Margarete Steffin read the history of the Georgian region to pass the time. She became fascinated with the legends and lore of Georgia’s Golden Age in the twelfth century. During this time, a woman, Queen Tamar, ruled Georgia. Georgians agreed that she had been the finest ruler they had ever had (Fuegi 318). From her interest in social

politics and Georgia's Golden Age, Steffin wrote stories and songs that would become the rough drafts of future plays such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Of one piece in particular, a scholar wrote, "It is a very performable work still, though there are places where the references are as dated as the kolkhoz scene in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*" (Fuegi 317).

There are two fantastical depictions of Georgia in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The first is found in the prologue. Set in Soviet Georgia immediately following the end of World War II, it depicts two farming collectives resolving their differences in an idealistic socialist manner. "But American audiences no doubt would have found his utopian portrayal of two Soviet collective farms settling their dispute over a valley as implausible as a director in Russia did years later when he deleted it as being unplayable for Soviet audiences" (Lyon 130). The second is the play-within-the-play that takes place in feudal twelfth century Georgia. Brecht depicts the Grand Duke ruthlessly ruling Gruzinia with the aide of provincial governors. When the play begins, the Grand Duke has been waging an unsuccessful war against Persia for many years. His princes, tired of his rule, wage a military coup against him. The coup eventually fails, but the war in Persia continues.

While the actual history of Georgia is littered with wars in Persia, the main military conflict with Persia in the twelfth century occurred during a period of Georgian military dominance. The Georgian Kingdom reached its zenith in the 12th and early 13th centuries under the reign of Queen Tamara (1184-1213). This period has been widely termed as *Georgia's Golden Age* or the *Georgian Renaissance* (Allen 107). The temporary fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204 to the Crusaders left Georgia as the



strongest Christian state in the whole East Mediterranean area. That same year, Queen Tamar sent her troops to take over the former Byzantine Lazica and Paphlagonia. In 1210, Georgian armies, strengthened by their victories and additions of conquered soldiers, invaded northern Persia. This represents the maximum territorial extent of Georgia during Queen Tamar's rule and throughout Georgia's history (Allen 108).

As one can see, the social and historical contexts surrounding the writing of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are an integral part of its creation. Its origins lay deep within the history of twelfth century Georgia and the history of America's participation in World War II. It relies on the contributions of Margarete Steffin, a dedicated Communist and Brecht collaborator (Fuegi 315). Finally, it has taken the form modern audiences now know, a metaphoric parable of the division of post-war Germany. Like much of Brecht's work, the origin of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* depends on a variety of sources.

## Chapter VI

### STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

#### Structural Analysis

Although written in the epic style, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* can be analyzed using the same structural components as a play written in a traditionally dramatic form. For example, both styles require a protagonist, an obstacle, a crisis and a resolution. The epic style dictates the presentation, but the structural elements are still present. The full text consists of a prologue and two parts. The first part is comprised of three episodes and is dedicated to the story of Grusha, the peasant girl who takes up the abandoned child, Michel. The second part is comprised of two scenes and is dedicated to Azdak, the judge. The second part also provides a conclusion to Grusha's story.

#### The Prologue

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has a prologue that frames and provides context to the play-within-a-play parable that makes up the bulk of the story. The prologue is set in an entirely different time period and style than the rest of the play. As a Marxist, Bertolt Brecht was concerned with educating the proletariat and presenting a model of an ideal Socialist society (Esslin 37). Therefore, the prologue depicts two Soviet farming collectives (kolkhoz) in Georgia settling a land dispute immediately following the end of

the World War II. They settle the land dispute peacefully and celebrate the occasion by presenting a play: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

The play that follows the prologue dramatically represents the concept that the rightful owners of the land and its resources are those who use it most wisely. As in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the prologue is occasionally cut in production. When kept, productions often modify it to the director's concept.

### **Stasis**

The stasis, that point at the beginning of the play in which all forces are in balance, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* will exist in one of two forms depending on whether or not the prologue is staged. If the prologue is used, the play presents Soviet Georgia at end of World War II. Two farming kolkhoz have gathered to settle a dispute over the ownership of a valley. One of the kolkhoz, the goat herders, owned the valley in question prior to the Nazi invasion. The other kolkhoz, the fruit growers, owned the adjacent land but defended the valley during the war. Now that the war has ended, the goat-herding kolkhoz wishes to reclaim their valley, but the fruit-growing kolkhoz wants to use the valley for a new irrigation system that will increase the fruit crop yield. An expert from the government has been called in to mediate the dispute.

If the prologue is not used, the play presents Gruzinia, now called Georgia, near the Caucasus Mountains on Easter Sunday in 12th century. The country is ruled by an inept and corrupt Grand Duke. Governors of the Grand Duke rule the provinces within Gruzinia. The Grand Duke also has princes who are waging war for Gruzinia in Persia but losing, due to their own ineptitude and corruption. The peasants of Gruzinia have

been bearing the brunt of the Grand Duke's failed military policy. The princes, dissatisfied with the war and the Grand Duke, are planning a military coup.

### **Point of Attack**

As mentioned earlier, the epic structure is made up of a loosely connected series of scenes. Therefore, the point of attack, that point in the play at which the main character's story begins, occurs much earlier in an epic play than in a more conventional play. Whether a point of attack is considered early or late is determined by how closely it falls before the resolution. For example, the point of attack in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* occurs just before the end of the first episode when Grusha is left alone with Michael, the abandoned child. Before this happens, the dispute over the valley is settled, the Singer presents a story, Grusha becomes engaged, the Fat Prince leads a military coup, the Governor is executed, his wife escapes and her child is abandoned. Unconcerned with a conventionally tight plot structure, Brecht takes a great deal of time laying out all the elements of the main story. In the epic structure, a late point of attack does not adversely affect the play.

### **Exposition**

When the dispute over the valley is settled at the end of the prologue, the fruit-growing kolkhoz presents a play as a means of reinforcing the new socialist criteria for ownership. They introduce Arkadi, the singer who will tell the tale of Grusha, Azdak and the trial of the Chalk Circle. Brecht uses Arkadi's balladeer-like narration to provide the expository information that links the episodes together in the story. He does not act in

the story or play any part, but he is an integral part of the play. His songs explain the meaning of the scenes and provide the interior dialogue of characters who are not able to speak for themselves. At the end of the play, Arkadi sums up the action and presents the lesson that he believes the story should have taught the audience.

### **The Inciting Incident**

The inciting incident occurs when the Governor's wife, Natella, accidentally abandons her child while fleeing the coup. Too vain to realize the danger she is in, Natella tries to pack her entire wardrobe during the coup. Servants hurry to pack her wardrobe, as the Adjutant informs Natella that she must leave immediately or be left behind. Seeing the red glow of the burning castle, she finally realizes the danger and flees with servants in tow. In her rush, she forgets Michael who is covered under a bundle of clothes.

### **Protagonist**

Grusha is the protagonist in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Her overall objective is to care for the abandoned child. However, due to the play's episodic structure, Grusha has two separate objectives relating to Michael throughout the course of the play. Unlike the scenes of a traditional drama, each episode in an epic play should be able to stand on its own as a complete story. Therefore, the goal of the main character may change. In the first part of the play, Grusha's goal is only to protect an abandoned child. She has no intention of keeping Michael and even attempts to give him away to a family that can better care for him. In the second part of the play, she has been caring for Michael for

two years. During this time she has had to pretend he was her son in order to protect him. When she is eventually arrested for kidnapping, her goal then changes from caring for Michael to keeping him as her own child. It is this change in objectives that illustrates her growth and transformation as a character.

### **Obstacles**

The forces that obstruct Grusha from attaining her objective are both external and internal. The external forces are the great inconvenience and physical danger involved in keeping Michael. This act puts her in conflict with the authorities, her relatives, her fiancé, the peasant she marries to give Michael a legitimate home, the Governor's widow and the judge Azdak. Her internal struggle is between acting compassionately and taking care of herself. This struggle is made apparent when she waits all night with Michael for someone to come and retrieve him. All the hardships that arise by keeping Michael must be weighed against her love for him.

### **Major Crisis and Climax**

The major crisis occurs during the test of the chalk circle, when Azdak's decision could swing either way. Brecht maintains the tension of the crisis in several ways. First, Grusha argues with Azdak in a way that could hurt her case. Then, her fiancé, Simon, unexpectedly claims to be the child's father and then argues with Azdak himself. Finally, Brecht sustains the tension even longer by having Azdak give Grusha a second chance at pulling Michael out of the chalk circle. Failing twice illustrates Grusha's inability to

harm Michael, therefore proving her as the most loving of the two mothers. The climax occurs when Azdak decides in favor of Grusha.

### **Resolution**

The resolution is very brief. It takes place when Azdak “accidentally” grants Grusha a divorce. She and Simon then make plans to marry after leaving the city with Michael. There is a dance and the Singer summarizes the events and reminds the audience of the moral.

### **Dialogue**

The dialogue is delivered primarily in prose with occasional lines in verse. The prose dialogue is delivered in a variety of styles depending on the character and situation. Grusha’s dialogue is very direct and to the point, while Azdak’s dialogue is often blunt and ironic. When Azdak and Simon argue late in the last episode, they engage in an odd dual of aphorisms. The use of puns is present but less effective in an English translation. The lines of verse are sung in irregular, syncopated rhythms, reminiscent of Biblical repetition and parallel phrases.

### **Structural Criticism**

Eric Bentley, in his introduction to the play, describes the structure of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as a series of “Chinese boxes, one inside the other, Azdak’s story being a box within the Grusha story” (Bentley xlvii). Both stories fall within the largest box: the prologue. The analogy of Chinese boxes is apt because of the mystery

and surprise associated with such exotic novelties. On the surface, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* appears to be a simple parable of the triumph of motherly love and true justice. However, examining the play is indeed like opening a series of Chinese boxes. The deeper one looks, the more boxes one finds to explore.

This explains the volumes of critical commentary that find many different facets worth examining. James K. Lyon wrote, “Brecht states that its structure is conditioned in part by a revulsion against the commercialized dramaturgy of Broadway. At the same time, it incorporates certain elements of the older American theater which excelled in burlesque and shows” (Lyon 123). This observation touches upon the fact that Brecht, while writing in the epic style, drew upon many divergent influences to create *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. John Willett lists the various influences that shaped the play, “The plot and some of the language are Biblical; the ‘Song of Chaos’ Egyptian; the technique of narration and comment Japanese; the construction cinematic; the conclusion didactic; the wedding scene a reflection of the Marx brothers’ *A Night at the Opera*; the soldiers an apparent recollection of *Mann ist Mann*; the atmosphere a cross between Brueghel and the pseudo-Chinese; the frame-work a commonsense, non-political issue debated in modern Georgia” (Willett 124). Brecht pulled all these influences together to form the quaint parable with a timeless lesson.

Most critical commentary focuses on three primary structural aspects unique to this play: the question of the necessity of the prologue, the narration of the Singer, and the play’s unique episodic structure. Upon examination, these aspects reveal a much more sophisticated arrangement than is at first apparent.



## The Prologue

The prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is examined in critical commentaries more than any other aspect of the play. There is even debate as to whether it is a prologue at all. “If the *prologue* is not to make the story of the chalk circle an actuality, if it is not needed to understand *per se* the plot of the chalk-circle story, but *is* needed to understand Brecht’s play... one may ask whether the designation *prologue* is not misleading” (Bunge 134). Therefore, the prologue is occasionally referred to as the first episode of the play.

In the controversial prologue, Brecht depicts Soviet Georgia at the end of World War II as a Socialist Utopia where land disputes are settled peacefully by government mediation. Ronald Grey asserts that, “The Communist message which it seems to convey is only loosely connected with the main plot” (Gray 151). He, like many, considers the prologue tacked on Communist propaganda. “It scarcely follows from this that the Soviet authorities are entitled to deprive industrious dairy-farming peasants of their land in order to hand it over to others who will make use of it for viniculture” (Gray 151). Critics consider this view of Communism as idealistic as the fairy tale world Brecht presents in the rest of the play.

Other critics, like John Fuegi, consider the prologue an important element of the play. “If the prologue is played with the care with which it was presented in Brecht’s production, we are gradually moved from the real world (ourselves in the theatre) to the ‘real’ world of the supposed here and now of the kolkhoz. The ‘real’ farmers then lead us into the frankly ‘unreal’ world of the ancient tale of Azdak and Grusha and the frankly theatrical presentation of that tale... viewed and acted thus, the prologue can form a kind

of decompression chamber as we step from the here and now into the never-never” (Fuegi 145). Often cut simply to save time, the prologue remains the most controversial component of the play.

In Texas State University’s production, Mr. Costello has chosen to handle the prologue by projecting the information on a screen for the audience. The sign explains that after the end of a world war, two farming collectives have gathered to settle a land dispute in an abandoned theatre. To celebrate the peaceful settlement, a group of itinerant actors will present Bertolt Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

### **Narration**

The loosely structured episodes require something to link them together so the audience may comprehend them in total. “The episodes, he [Brecht] writes in “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” must be ‘knotted’ together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed” (Gaskell 85). In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht uses musical narration to link not only the two seemingly disconnected stories of Grusha and Azdak, but the prologue as well. “More significant than particular episodes is the way that Brecht presents them. The device of a singer/storyteller, with a small chorus of musicians, sets the action in the mode of narrative from the beginning. It meets the problem of knotting the episodes so that the knots are visible” (Gaskell 85).

To celebrate the peaceful settlement of the land dispute presented in the prologue, a member of the fruit growing kolkhoz introduces Arkadi, the Singer who tells the ancient tale of the Chalk Circle. Like the chorus of Aeschylus, Brecht’s singer does not act or play another part. He simply sings the narrative of the Chalk Circle parable:

There is however one interesting Brechtian innovation connected with this singer. Although he is basically ‘outside’ the action, he is also right in the middle of it. With his chorus of helpers, he speaks the thoughts of Grusha when she is forced by circumstances or her own overpowering emotion to remain silent. He assumes at these moments both the ancient function that was served by the overheard monologue or choral ode and the modern function that is called in ‘voice over narration’ (Fuegi 147).

This way, the Singer directs our attention and guides our sympathies.

Ronald Gaskell has also noted, “In the *Chalk Circle*, the recitative of Singer and Chorus is marked off by irregular syncopated rhythms, deriving partly from the Lutheran Bible and partly from Waley’s translation of the Japanese Noh plays” (Gaskell 88). Brecht pulls these vastly different forms of rhythm and verse together in a way that supports and reinforces the text. Throughout the play, the Singer introduces and comments on each scene, and in the end, sums up the lesson that the goat herding kolkhoz and the audience should receive.

### **Episodic Structure**

Though epic plays are comprised of episodes, normally they introduce all the major characters early on in the play. Interestingly, Brecht does not introduce the character of Azdak until the play is more than halfway done. “Scene 5 concentrates on Azdak’s reign. It begins at the same time as Scene 2, when war, popular insurrection and civil war force Grusha to escape with Michael to the mountains” (Shevtsova 159). It also stops Grusha’s story in order to tell Azdak’s.

In an odd sort of “flashback,” Brecht goes back to the original revolt that began Grusha’s story to show how that same event unexpectedly leads to Azdak becoming a judge. While jolting audience members out of their passivity is an essential part of Brecht’s dramatic theory, this jarring jump backwards is the source of much critical commentary. Brecht’s episodic structure and its implications on the meaning of the play as a whole is an unavoidable consequence of having Azdak arrive so late in the play (Shevtsova 153).

Upon careful analysis, Shevtsova finds that Brecht has subtly telegraphed Azdak’s arrival earlier in the play:

Although Azdak’s entrance is abrupt, it has been anticipated in three ways: through the Singer’s narrative; through the tone of the wedding/funeral scene; in the figures of Yussup and the monk whose ingenuity, resourcefulness and cunning make them reduced versions of Azdak, minus Azdak’s passion for justice (Shevtsova 157).

Even so, Azdak’s late entrance and the temporary abandonment of Grusha’s story are confusing enough to cause many critics to question Brecht’s intentions. The abrupt transition from the moving language of the first part of the play to the bawdy, ironic phrases of the second part shocks the audience. This jolting turn of events is compounded by the loss of Grusha’s story in order to present Azdak’s (Gray 153).

Ronald Gaskell seems to come closest to comprehending Brecht’s intent:

No doubt the stories of Grusha and Azdak could have been presented together rather than consecutively, the action being laid out as a pattern of relationships developing from beginning to end. Nothing, however, would have been further

from Brecht's purpose, since development encourages in the audience that emotional absorption in the play that he sought to avoid. With rare exceptions he plans the action of a play loosely, arranging it as narrative rather than plot, breaking it down into scenes of a few minutes, and preventing the scenes from gliding into each other... A spectator can then enjoy the play critically, judging the action as it proceeds (Gaskell 87).

This arrangement, according to Gaskell, is an extreme example of narrative estrangement.

Finally, Brecht pulls the two stories together in the trial of the Chalk Circle, the linchpin that holds the two stories together. "The trial is Brecht's favorite dramatic situation, since it challenges the audience to assessment and decision. At the same time, as he well knew, it provides that clash of opposites that is the simplest and most primitive source of excitement in the theatre" (Gaskell 88). The separate parts of the play become welded together at last as the audience is raced toward the denouement.

Whether an epic parable or some new kind of folk play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is, in the end, Brecht's final treatment on his own unique aesthetic. However, Brecht, the eternal contrarian, prevents complete satisfaction even in his last play:

The play does not close on an unqualified happy ending. The feudal order of the Grand Duke is restored. Grusha and Simon have to leave town. Azdak, the harbinger of social change, disappears, never to be heard of again except in legends and folk-tales—or in Brecht's theatre (Fuegi 157).

Seamlessly bringing together a variety of theatrical influences, this play, his last complete work, is a shining testament to his artistry and genius.

## Chapter VII

### DRAMATURGICAL LOG

**April 24, 2007** - Dr. Charlton presented the idea of possibly performing a dramaturgical project for the Texas State production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as my thesis. We discussed the idea and she suggested that before deciding, I meet with Michael Costello, the director, to see if we had the proper chemistry for such a project. I appreciated her consideration because the director/dramaturg relationship is a close one, and if there is friction, the experience can actually be counterproductive. Mr. Costello and I e-mailed each other and finally decided to get together in Austin next month when we would be able to discuss things in a relaxed environment away from campus.

**May 26, 2007** – I met with Mr. Costello at 3:30pm at the Green Muse Café in Austin to discuss the possibility of my working as dramaturg for the production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the spring semester of 2008. He appeared excited about the project and genuinely pleased about my possible participation. It was an interesting conversation because aside from learning about his reasons for wanting to direct this particular play, I was attempting to determine whether or not we had the chemistry conducive to a productive director/dramaturg relationship.

First, we discussed what originally drew him to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the first place. While listening to a National Public Radio program on the

Israel/Palestinian conflict, Mr. Costello was reminded of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. He was astounded at the level of violence over what was essentially a land dispute. He envisioned the final two people left alive, surrounded by the corpses of the dead combatants. No one had won the war, but both sides had lost everything in the fighting. After the program had concluded, he decided he wanted to direct the play because of its metaphoric message of peace, rightful ownership and justice. Mr. Costello finds Brecht's work fascinating because he presents the world as it is, while showing how it could be. His vision impressed me, and being sympathetic to such causes myself, I became more and more interested in the play.

I then asked what his thoughts were on dramaturgy and how he felt about having one on this project. He replied candidly that some productions do not necessarily require a dramaturg. He said that dramaturgs are beneficial no matter what, but not necessary for every play. However, he did feel that it would indeed be very helpful to have a dramaturg for this production. Brecht is an important but enigmatic playwright, and the more knowledgeable members we have on this production, the better off we will be.

We both seemed to enjoy the conversation. We talked about the current war in Iraq and other military conflicts. He and I both feel that theatre still has a valuable role in bringing people together to address social problems. Mr. Costello gave me some copies of three different English translations of the play. I explained that I would not be able to begin research until after I returned from my study abroad class in England but would begin reading the play as soon as I returned. He was fine with that and asked that when I begin reading the plays to think of possible ways of staging the prologue. He said it is one of the most problematic aspects of the play.

After the meeting, I felt that we had a good rapport and was confident that Mr. Costello and I could work together successfully. I e-mailed Dr. Charlton the following day to inform her that all went well and that I would be very happy to be part of this production.

**August 27, 2007** – Mr. Costello and I met for coffee at Joe On the Go to discuss the two translations of the play that he is considering using, the prologue, and to go over some production ideas. First we went over the Ralph Manheim translation. Mr. Costello liked this one because he thought it truly got to the heart of Brecht's play, but he felt the language was dated. When reading it, one continually had to go back and forth, checking the notes at the bottom of the page. I was relieved to hear that I was not the only one who had to do that. He thought the James Stern translation flows better but did not capture the spirit of the play as well the Manheim translation. He had not yet decided which translation he would use for the production.

Mr. Costello was considering filming the prologue and projecting it on to a screen, like a CNN news segment. He had some actors in Austin in mind who were older and looked the part of European peasants. He did not want the production to be set at the end of World War Two though. Instead, he wanted it to be set at the end of a war that occurs some time in the near future. This war has destroyed most of the major cities and people are just beginning to pull their lives back together. In this scenario, people get their news and current events in theatres, like people did in the thirties and forties. After the news segment on the land dispute settlement, Bertolt Brecht's play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, would be performed for the people huddled together in the theatre.



Mr. Costello asked me to start gathering images of war photography. He wanted images from all the wars throughout history. His goal was to find images that captured the human costs of war. I actually bought a book of war photography last year and will be able to use many of those images.

**September 13, 2007** – This evening, we held an informal meeting at Sheila Hargett's house to let the designers get to know each other and discuss our personal responses to the play. In attendance were David Bishop, the lighting designer; Michael Costello, the director; Sheila Hargett, the costume designer; Gordon Jones, the musical director; and myself. This was a fantastic way to begin the design process. Although Mr. Costello had stated that we would only be discussing our initial responses to the play, everyone was full of ideas about how it might be staged. Mr. Costello began the conversation by talking about his original inspiration for doing the play. He talked about the parallels between the ideas in this play and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. He described how he envisioned the characters in the play. The Governor's wife appeared to be a Paris Hilton-type character, and the Singer reminded him of Tom Waits.

Ms. Hargett was candid about her objections to the play. She said it read like a "Bavarian melodrama." She wanted to know how much of Brecht's theories Mr. Costello wanted to incorporate into the production. Mr. Costello was more concerned with getting the moral across than "alienating" the audience, a reference to Brecht's theory known as the "alienation effect." Mr. Smith played some of the various recordings he had brought to give everyone an idea of his musical concept. The songs were of an Eastern European origin and reminded me of gypsy music.

After listening to a few pieces of music, Mr. Costello brought the meeting back on track by reminding everyone that this was not a design meeting. We were only there to discuss our first reactions to the play. Mr. Bishop said the play reminded him of a Green Day music video called “Working Man.” Ms. Hargett said it reminded her of a Martha Graham or Alvin Ailey performance piece, referring to the musical interludes. Mr. Costello respectfully disagreed in that it felt earthier or rougher than Graham or Ailey. Mr. Costello asked my opinion of the play, and I described how funny I found the second part of the play. One could really sense the Marx Brothers influence on Brecht’s work in that section.

Next, Mr. Costello discussed his concept for the play. The play could take place at the end of World War III. A group of itinerant actors have been brought in to assist in solving a social dilemma between the fruit growers and the goat herders. That is how he saw the play beginning. The actors would take found items within the theatre and use them as props in an improvised telling of Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This sparked a great deal of conversation about how that could be done. At the end of the evening, everyone left excited and energized about the production.

**September 16, 2007** – Mr. Costello sent me an e-mail going over the minutes of the gathering at Ms. Hargett’s house. He asked me to prepare an overview of the wars going on in the *Chalk Circle* for the designers who will be attending the meeting on September 21. He also reminded me of my advisory role in this process. He said it was important to remember that the dramaturg is the director’s silent partner. I appreciated his tact, and the polite way in which he reminded me of the importance of presenting only one directorial voice to the production team. I have always been especially conscious of

not overstepping my role as a production advisor. So far, I have enjoyed this process very much.

**September 21, 2007** – Two days ago, I sent out the dramaturgical overview of the military campaigns going on in Gruzinia during the play. It can be a very complex and confusing aspect of the play. The Grand Duke has been waging a losing campaign in Persia. The princes stage a military coup to depose the Grand Duke. The peasants take the opportunity to overthrow the ruling class but are rebuffed. The Grand Duke escapes capture during the coup, and the whole country was in a state of flux until a legitimate leader is declared. This was how Azdak was made judge.

At the design meeting, there were many ideas on how the set should look. Mr. Costello wanted the set to present the appearance of a bombed out theatre. The actors would come in and begin taking articles of clothing out of trunks and items off shelves to use as props for the play. This was an exciting idea because not only was it theatrical, it also accomplished the Brechtian task of reminding spectators that they were in a theatre. This concept made no attempt to fool the audience this way, and it actively involved their imagination. Ms. Hargett was concerned about the confusion involved with all the costume changes. She presented some of her renderings for the characters. Their costumes were reminiscent of older European fashions but also did not indicate a specific time period. We have not decided yet if we are going to use masks or not. Afterwards, Mr. Costello thanked me for the overview on the wars in the play. He said it helped quite a bit.

**September 28, 2007** – Mr. Costello and I discussed translations again today. He has decided to go with the Sterns translation. Being that we are going to be performing

primarily for college students, he felt it was important to make it as understandable as possible. At this point in my research, I needed to begin reading some biographical work on Brecht. Mr. Costello recommended *Brecht & Co.* by John Fuegi, *Brecht: The Man and His Work* by Martin Esslin, and *Bertolt Brecht in America* by James K. Lyon. The library had all these books available. I was a little intimidated by all the reading. I wanted to read quickly enough to get the reading done, but if I go too fast, I will lose comprehension.

**October 10, 2007** – Mr. Costello and I discussed Brecht's concept of *gestus*, the physical stance taken by an actor that indicates the essential quality of a character. I was trying to gain a better understanding of this confusing Brechtian concept. Our conversation focused on what qualities an actor can express nonverbally. I had been doing a great deal of research on the topic and simply needed to talk about the theories with Mr. Costello. Fortunately, he had found some of the information I had given him on the subject useful.

We went over some of the images I had collected. He really liked a photograph I discovered on the cover of an issue of Time magazine from 1999. It shows an ethnic Albanian woman attempting to breast-feed her child while escaping genocide in Kosovo. It was a moving picture and reminiscent of the scene from the first half of the play in which Grusha tries to breast-feed Michael, the abandoned child. It was a very haunting image of the human cost of war.

Mr. Costello was beginning to have doubts about the practicality of filming the prologue. The shoot would be as much of a logistical challenge as staging a play. He thought the prologue could perhaps be presented using the war images and projecting the

information for the audience to read. I suggested something like a CNN scroll at the bottom of the screen. He was not happy with any of his ideas yet. I liked how open he was to any suggestions I made. It was a very Brechtian trait.

**January 8, 2008** – Both Mr. Costello and myself have been busy with other duties for a while and had not had a chance to get together until now. I had been searching for a copy of the original musical score for the play without any success. Paul Dessau wrote the first score, but it did not seem to be available. I had found one audio recording of the play in the Pacifica Radio Archives, but they could not tell me whether or not it was Dessau's score on the recording.

We went over the upcoming auditions on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. We discussed how Brecht cast the same person to play the Singer and Azdak in the Berliner Ensemble performance. The Singer simply stopped narrating in the second part of the play and took on the role of Azdak. We both agreed that would be the preferable way to cast the show, but we did not know if we would be able to do that in an educational institution with all the other requirements the students have to fulfill.

**January 15, 2008** – The auditions took a very long time. There were so many actors to see. They came out in groups of eight to ten students at a time, and the monologues were very interesting. I was very pleased that Mr. Costello allowed me to be a part of this process. It was interesting to see how his ideas on the characters differed from mine. As the Head of Acting at the Theatre Department, he was already familiar with the vast majority of the students auditioning. So, in many ways, he knew whom he wanted to cast, but other considerations had to be taken into account. Many students could not be cast because their grades were too low. Others, like Steve Kelley, were

already involved in other productions. He and Steve spoke separately to discuss his participation in the production. Many students were completely unprepared to audition but gave it a good try anyway. It was obvious that some students chose monologues from Brecht's plays but did not necessarily understand the role they were performing. Afterwards, Mr. Costello asked me many questions about the students I would cast if I were directing the show. It was a spirited conversation that I thought contributed to the process.

**January 18, 2008** – I had to tell Mr. Costello that I could not find a copy of the Dessau score. My last hope had been Suhrkamp Verlag, Brecht's German publishers. They did not know of any copies of the score available for purchase. Mr. Smith was disappointed but he understood. He and I had been in contact throughout the search, giving each other ideas on new places to look. I had even contacted Dr. Karl Weber, a former director at the Berliner Ensemble. He was unaware of any copies of the score, and he did not think they would be very helpful anyway. Every production creates a new score. That is one of the challenges of doing this play. Dr. Weber was pleased that we were doing it though. Mr. Gordon played some of the music he had composed so far for Mr. Costello and me. It had a haunting quality that I had not expected. Even without the original score, I thought the music was going to be an exceptional part of this production.

**January 25, 2008** – Mr. Costello and I had a meeting today to go over the acting troupe in the play. He wanted to know what that troupe would look like. How would they be structured? He asked me to begin researching the business models of acting troupes throughout history. He was very busy now with all the production elements coming together, but I could still see the ideas forming in his mind. It was an exciting

part of the process. The students in our play would be playing actors playing a role. The layers of separation were going to be interesting. The challenge would be portraying both identities at once. Therefore, Mr. Costello really wanted to give them a tangible idea of what that acting company might look like. He was going to ask each student to prepare a mini-biography on his or her actor. They would present their character at the early rehearsals.

He would also like me to find any film footage on Berlin immediately following World War II. I asked if he wanted footage from any other wars, especially since there had been so much footage shot since the Vietnam War. He said that the students were too familiar with the footage of the more contemporary military campaigns. With recent movies like *Forrest Gump*, everyone knew those scenes too well. He intentionally wanted footage from Berlin because no one filming at the time had ever seen that level of destruction. He said the devastation of that city was what he was looking for specifically.

**January 29, 2008** – Mr. Costello and I discussed the information I have found on itinerant acting troupes. I have gathered information on the business models of 16<sup>th</sup> century comedia troupes and Elizabethan acting companies. Otherwise, there was not a great deal of information on itinerant troupes that wandered from town to town during wartime. He understood and was pleased with the information on the earlier acting companies. He asked for information on more contemporary acting companies such as El Teatro Campesino and San Francisco Mime Troupe. He would like me to give a presentation on what I have found at a later rehearsal.

Mr. Costello also gave me copies from a chapter on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* from John Fuegi's *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos According to Plan*. There were some great

photos in there of the Berliner Ensemble production of the *Chalk Circle* that I will be able to use for my lobby display.

**February 3, 2008** – Mr. Costello and I reviewed some video footage that I have been able to find of El Teatro Campesino and the San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT). This was exciting research. These troupes had the explicit purpose of social change. They were greatly influenced by the work of Brecht. It was fascinating to see the direct influence of Brecht's work on contemporary companies. SFMT is hilarious. They have been performing satirical sketches with a political edge for many years. I was not able to locate any video footage of Amiri Baraka's Black Revolutionary Theatre. I also shared with Mr. Costello information I had found in a book called *Durov's Pig* by Joel Schechter. It described in great detail some of the first twentieth century revolutionary theatre companies in Eastern Europe.

We also looked at the model of the set today. It is going to have scaffolding on casters that the actors will be able to move around the stage. The scaffolding will become whatever is needed in each scene. In one scene it will be the castle of the Grand Duke, and then in another it will be the gallows where the Azdak was almost hanged. The stage will look like the ruins of an old grand European theatre. I told Mr. Costello how much it reminded me of the set of *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford. He showed me how Mr. Bishop, the lighting designer, was going to be able to cast beams of light that appear to be sunlight or moonlight. These beams of light could act as an improvised spotlight when needed.

We are still not sure how the prologue is going to be handled though. Mr. Costello asked me to check on whether or not the university has to pay royalties for the



images of war that I had found if we project them on a screen during a performance. I said that because those images would become part of a production that people pay to see, we would probably have to pay royalties. However, I did not know that for sure and will check with Dr. Charlton and Dr. Fleming.

**February 9, 2008** – I e-mailed Mr. Costello with information on the royalties issue. Dr. Fleming said that as long as we can show that we had made the effort to locate the photographer and cite the image, everything should be fine. He also said that often photographers would allow educational institutions to use their images free of charge. Dr. Charlton was a little more cautious but deferred to Dr. Fleming's opinion.

Ms. Hargett also contacted me today with a question about a costume piece. She wanted to know whether or not it would adversely affect the play to refer to a "mantle" as a "cloak." I told her I would look into it and let her know what I find.

**February 14, 2008** – I was able to find out information about a mantle for Ms. Hargett. A mantle is a longer winter version of a mante, a short scarf-like garment edged with ruffles or lace. I told her it would be fine if we refer to it as a cloak. The audience will be more familiar with that term, and it will not adversely affect the meaning of the dialogue or the playwright's intent. She was glad to hear the information and thanked me for getting it to her so quickly.

**February 20, 2008** - Rehearsals tonight went very well. I presented my information on the business model of acting companies. The most common business model was referred to as the "sharing plan" in which members assume financial risks and divide the profits. Later, troupes modified the "sharing plan" so that members could buy into the ownership of the company. Especially valuable actors were encouraged to invest

a sum of money in the company in order to insure their continued service and loyalty to the acting company. Some members performed duties off stage as well. Contemporary acting companies like El Teatro Campesino and SFMT have adopted similar profit sharing structures.

**March 18, 2008** – This dramaturgical thesis is due prior to the production date of this show. I plan to continue to attend rehearsals and confer with Mr. Costello as we approach that date. Brecht's theories, though revolutionary, can be puzzling at times. Even with full artistic control during his years at the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht was not able to fully realize his ideas without some level of compromise. Questions and concerns are bound to present themselves before the curtain rises. It is my hope that the research I have conducted and the knowledge I have gained will assist Mr. Costello in dealing with these issues.

## Chapter VIII

### PRODUCTION MATERIAL

#### Dramaturgical Program Note

“Terrible is the temptation to do good.”

Bertolt Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle

No other playwright of the twentieth century embodies this contradictory warning like Bertolt Brecht. From the very beginning, he saw theatre as a powerful tool for initiating social and political change. Heavily influenced by the teachings of Karl Marx, Brecht’s plays question the legitimacy of a political system that favors the elite at the expense of the working classes. His protagonists resort to immoral and illegal activities in order to survive a corrupt and indifferent world. His paradoxical situations prevent audiences from identifying emotionally with the play’s characters. Instead, they force audiences to examine the world of the play, thereby perceiving their own world in an entirely new light. Emotional distance, known as the “alienation effect,” lies at the heart of Brecht’s aesthetic theories, which he collectively referred to as “epic theatre.” As he defined it, epic theatre is broad in scope, appeals to the intellect rather than emotions, incorporates a variety of theatrical techniques and electronic media, and reveals how societal and economic forces shape one’s identity and morality.

During World War II, Brecht went into exile along with many other German artists and intellectuals. While living in California, Brecht initially wrote The Caucasian Chalk Circle as a Broadway vehicle for Academy Award-winning actress, Louise Rainer. However, she backed out of the project after reading the first draft, citing “creative differences.” Despite the loss of Rainer, Brecht continued writing the play, as it had come to represent his hopes for Germany’s future after World War Two.

In 1949, the East German government offered Brecht the opportunity to become the artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble, the premier theater of the newly formed Communist nation. Though censorship goes hand-in-hand with State sponsorship, Brecht took the position, finally acquiring the theatre and resources needed to develop his theories of epic theatre. Six years later, the Berliner Ensemble staged the European premier of The Caucasian Chalk Circle at the Ensemble’s new home, the Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm. The play’s resounding success firmly established the Berliner Ensemble as one of Europe’s finest acting companies and Brecht’s reputation as a world-renowned playwright, director and theatrical innovator. As the play went on to take top honors at the International Theatre Festival in Paris, Brecht passed away due to coronary thrombosis in Berlin, on August 14, 1956. The Caucasian Chalk Circle was the last

production he would ever see the Berliner Ensemble produce. The play is considered one of Brecht's finest and remains a testament to the scope and magnitude of the creative vision of Bertolt Brecht.

John Iverson  
Dramaturg

## Press Release

**Title:** The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Bertolt Brecht

**Production Company:** Texas State University-San Marcos, Department of Theatre and Dance

**Description:**

**Dates:** April 8<sup>th</sup> – 12th at 7:30pm. Matinee performance on Sunday, April 13<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm.

**Theatre Space:** Mainstage University Theatre, Texas State Theatre Center

**Address:** 601 University Dr., San Marcos, Texas

**Tickets:** \$10 general admission and \$5 for students with a valid Texas State ID. For reservations, call the Texas State Box Office at (512) 245-2204.

Tickets will go on sale beginning April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Box Office hours are: 12:00pm to 6:00pm Monday through Friday.

For additional information contact (512) 245-2147.

**The Caucasian Chalk Circle** - Texas State University-San Marcos Department of Theatre and Dance presents Bertolt Brecht's epic play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The play tells the story of the kitchen maid, Grusha, who risks life and limb to protect an abandoned child of nobility, and the drunken, irreverent judge, Azdak, who uses the ancient Chinese test of the chalk circle to determine her worthiness to keep the child when the biological mother returns. Michael Costello directs fourteen actors who perform over 60 characters in Brecht's most widely produced classic work.

## Chapter IX

### CONCLUSION

As the production dramaturg for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, I have learned a great deal throughout this process. Normally, the dramaturg serves as the literary expert on a production. However, Mr. Costello is more familiar with the plays and theories of Bertolt Brecht than I am. Therefore, my first priority was to learn as much about Brecht as quickly as possible. I was fortunate in that I had more than six months to research Brecht's life, plays and theories. I now have a much deeper understanding of his ideas, their influence and how they were formed. Many of his theories were formed in reaction to the theatrical practices of his time, and many more were appropriated from other directors and playwrights. To know the work of Bertolt Brecht is to know the work of many artists.

I have also gained insight into the collaborative methods of Brecht, and how those collaborations were conducted. John Fuegi's controversial book, *Brecht & Company*, explored in great detail the women who contributed to the success of Brecht's work but received very little recognition for the participation. This is a well-documented and thought-provoking work. Though my thesis will be completed soon, I will be rereading this work for many years to come.

I now understand, to a much greater degree, the responsibilities, duties and value of a production dramaturg. Though much of my time was spent reading biographies and various translations of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, in this particular situation, the educational experience has proven invaluable. My familiarity with Bertolt Brecht will be of immeasurable benefit in my upcoming scholarly endeavors.

In the future, I plan to do some things differently to enhance the efficiency of my work. First, I will carry a pad of paper at all times solely dedicated to documentation of conversations, meetings and information received while performing research. I had to search through so many different note cards, notebooks, scraps of paper and notations on pages to find pieces of information that I probably spent as much time doing that as actual work. I will create a better data research methodology. The technological advances made in computer-based research are wasted if one does not know how to take full advantage of them. Finally, I plan to find an effective time management course to take this coming summer. I now fully realize what a hindrance my lack of organization is to others and myself. I have greatly appreciated Dr. Charlton's patience in this process.

This thesis has been the perfect capstone project to my time at Texas State University-San Marcos. During my graduate program, I have performed dramaturgical research on some of the greatest playwrights in the history of theatre. In my first semester, I discovered the play *The Iceman Cometh* and thereby rediscovered Eugene O'Neill. I connected with this play on such a level that I felt as if I knew each one of the characters personally. I will present my research paper on this play this summer at the International Eugene O'Neill conference in San Ramon, California. In the summer between my first and second year, I attended the Texas State University-San Marcos

study abroad program in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. My work with Dr. Charlton and Patricia Delorey at the Royal Shakespeare Company has increased my knowledge and understanding of William Shakespeare dramatically. It will always remain one of the greatest experiences of my life. Finally, this past year has been a learning experience like no other. Incredibly stressful at times, incredibly rewarding at other times, there is no way I can accurately estimate the value I have received studying the life, works and theories of Bertolt Brecht.

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## **VITA**

John Charles Iverson was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, on September 14, 1967, the son of Mary Sue Iverson and Joseph Kenneth Iverson. He received his high school education in Yoakum, Texas, graduating in 1986. He entered Southwest Texas State University in May 1986 and left in January 1988 to serve in the United States Army. Upon completion of his military service in May 1993, he returned to Southwest Texas State University, attaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts in December 1995. During the following years he has worked as a playwright, director, and business owner in Austin, Texas. In September of 2005, he entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos.

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This thesis was typed by John Charles Iverson.