CHAPTER THREE

BERTOLT BRECHT

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"I am the Einstein of the New Stage Form."1

—Brecht

Brecht's whole attitude towards life in drama and, beyond that, drama in life was based on three pillars of faith, viz., a materialistic conception of man, the primacy of reason, and an unshakable belief in the possibility of changing the world. This mode of consciousness, essentially messianic and optimistic, inspired him to look for those modes of dramatic communication which, apart from having artistic merit, would enhance his didactic purposes.

He was essentially a rebel and his theatre could be appreciated if we comprehend the object of his rebellion both on the stage and in socio-political life. In Fascism he perceived a fatal threat to the cool rational man which his new theatre tried to cultivate. It was because of the "grotesque emphasis on the emotional" that he over-stressed the rational element at the cost of feeling, which he later on corrected. As Keith A. Dickson says in Towards Utopia: "Perhaps it is only a coincidence that Hitler adored and Brecht loathed the music of Wagner, but certainly equated it
with all he most bitterly opposed in the traditional theatre which he now translated into the politics of National Socialism: the passive assault on the emotions and the inducement of a kind of hypnotic trance in the audience."

If social reality has to be changed, then the agent of change, man, must develop a cool, rational, detached attitude towards social problems. And the type of theatre man was used to or was being subjected to by the Nazis was obviously to the priacy of reason.

Therefore the theatre he was rebelling against showed either grotesque productions of the classics or the utmost naturalistic details of day to day life. He was rebelling against what he called "culinary" theatre, where the audience's emotions were fed and senses dragged by creating life-like illusion by the introduction of modern lighting techniques, stage machinery, stage properties and replicas from life.

This total overwhelming assault on the audience's senses incarnitates it for a judicious independent thinking. As he says in 'A Short Oration for the Theatre'.

Let us go into one of these theatres and observe the effect it has on the audience. Looking around one sees almost emotionless figures in a peculiar state; they seem to be
strenuously tensing up all their muscles in so far as these are not already flabby from exhaustion. They take hardly any notice of each other, their attitude being solely that of people asleep, but restless dreaming because they are lying on their backs, as it is said people having nightmares do. They have their eyes open, but they are not looking, they are staring, just as they do not simply hear what is said but listen in like eavesdroppers. They look at the stage spellbound, an expression that has come down to us from the Middle Ages, the period of witches, and alchemists. Looking and listening are activities sometimes entertaining, but these people seem absolved from all activity and resemble people to whom something is being done.

It was against this type of theatre which destroys man's thinking power that he was rebelling and presenting the only one his own dialectical theatre. He was notensible to rebel: the German Expressionists, post-dramatists like T.S. Eliot; Meyerhold and Tairov; Piscator et al, too, were fighting for the new theatre of their own choice. As Brecht said in 1931, "Today, when the human being must be understood as the total nexus of social relations, the epic form is the only one capable of grasping those processes that furnish a comprehensive world-view as the raw material of drama."

Aristotelian drama, which he opposed, purges terror and pity by first creating those emotions in the spectators' minds. This cathartic process gives the spectators relief and pleasure. This is done by creating an illusion, by identification and empathy with the hero which hypnotizes the audience into a trance — "to indulge the illusion of the power where as in reality they are at mercy of economic and
political forces beyond their immediate control. His Epic theatre would create an objective critical attitude in the audience.

In his notes on the _Opera Mahagonny_ Brecht gives a comparative list of "shifts of emphasis" in Epic form of theatre as distinguished from the Dramatic form of theatre.

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Raymond Williams in "Drama from Ibsen to Brecht" has stated the difference between Brecht's Epic theatre and traditional theatre lucidly: "Brecht lists many points but four can be taken as decisive. The drama he opposes involves the spectator in a stage-action and consumes his capacity to act; the drama he recommends makes the spectator an observer but awakens his capacity to act. Again, the drama he opposes presents experience, drawing the spectator inside this until he is experiencing the action with the characters; the drama he recommends presents a view of the world, in which the spectator confronts something and is made to study what he sees. Further, the drama he opposes makes one scene exist for the sake of another, in what is seen, under the spell of the action, as an evolutionary inevitability; the drama he recommends makes each scene exist for itself, as a thing to be looked at, and develops by sudden leaps. Finally, the drama he opposes takes men in the run of its action, as known, given, inevitable; the drama he recommends shows man producing himself in the course of the action, and therefore subject to criticism and to change."

By emphasizing **open, episodic form of theatre** where **individuals and situations are in the process of**
being produced, he thought his audience would be called upon to exercise its detached observation in evaluating the characters and their actions on the stage. This critical, cool theatre which later on he called 'dialectical' may not be the direct result of his conversion to Marxism, but he did believe that a critical, objective attitude developed by his audience would create a climate for intervention in the social reality in order to change it. It was certainly an aesthetic revolution but behind it Brecht's messianic purpose was working. Like a revolutionary writing a manifesto, he tilted too much against feeling and empathy without which dramatic communication can hardly exist.

It should, however, be noted that this list of comparative values is not supposed to present absolute antithesis but merely 'shifts of emphasis.' As he himself says,

The essential thing about Epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals more to the spectator's reason than to his feeling. The spectator is not supposed to share the experience, but to come to terms with it. It would, however, be completely wrong to deny the role played by feeling in the form of theatre.

Epic theatre does not "combat emotions" but investigates them, while traditional theatre abolishes reasons.

In an interview with the communist dramatist, Friedrich Wolf, Brecht says:
It is not the case - although this has sometimes been alleged - that Epic theatre raises the battle cry of Reason versus Feeling. It does not in any way renounce emotion. Least of all the sense of justice, the urge for freedom and righteous indignation. Far from renouncing them, it does not even rely on their presences but seeks to strengthen or create them. The 'critical attitude' it strives to inculcate in its audience can never be passionate enough.

The passage of time, and the experience of the staging of his own plays convinced him that a total exclusion of feeling and empathy was not possible. In the light of his experience he modified his views, later on, and pleaded for "a legitimate kind of empathy," a "natural unity of thought and feeling," saying that, "feelings impel us to the utmost exertions of the reason, and reason purges our feelings."\(^9\)

Commenting upon this altered view of Brecht, Keith Dickson says,

"It will generally be agreed that whereas a sense of urgency and involvement facilitates an emotional response to the dramatic situation, a sense of detachment is more conducive to rational judgement on it, and it is essentially in this sense that Brecht uses the term 'Epic' to denote his form of theatre."\(^10\)

This sense of detachment has to be achieved by "verfremdungseffekt" which, according to Martin Esslin has not been satisfactorily translated in English but is expressed variously by 'distancing,' 'making strange,' 'defamiliarizing' or 'alienation'; perhaps the expression 'verfremdung' is the equivalent of a Russian world
'ostranenie' which is translated as: "The accentuation of a particular element in a literary text, with the aim of stimulating a perception of it that is free from its customary association so that it appears as unfamiliar, something not encountered before."  

Brecht comes very close to T.S. Eliot who says that the function of poetry is to "make people see the world afresh." 13 Long before them, Coleridge talked in a similar vein of the "lethargy of the custom which clouds true perception." 14 Or as Hegel put it: "What is familiar is not recognized precisely because it is familiar." 15 In "A Short Organum for the Theatre" written in 1947-48 Brecht explains the purpose of the Alienation Effect: "To transform himself from general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry he would need to develop that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by this pendulum motion, as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come on the rules by which it was governed. Here is the outlook, disconcerting but fruitful, which the theatre must provoke with its representation of human social life. It must amaze its public, and this can be achieved by a technique of alienating the familiar." 16

Though the concept of the Alienation-Effect is used by the Oriental Theatre, its purpose as conceived by Brecht is totally opposite to that of the Oriental Theatre which aims at the
hypnotic effect. Brecht's purpose is to "enable the spectator to exercise fruitful criticism from a social point of view," so that a scientifically accurate working model of social reality is provided that would necessitate large-scale revolutionary intervention towards that ideal state where the state would wither away, where the alienation of man as seen by Marx would be alienated by a process of alienation, like the negation of negation by negation, into a higher state of consciousness. As Keith A. Dickson says, "The operation of 'verfremdung' in Brecht's form of theatre transfers the centre of gravity of a piece from stage to auditorium.... The dialectical interplay between mimesis and observation, drama and audience, was for Brecht a true image of social reality. Exposed to his form of dramatic art in the theatre, the audience participates in the revolutionary process of history." 15

To break the illusion, to remind the audience that it is sitting in the theatre, to achieve the Alienation Effect, Brecht left the stage apparatus visible, gave a synopsis of each scene on a placard, made narrators address the audience directly, used songs, music and stage decor which stood apart from the main action as if in a dialectic opposition. He asked the actors not to live their roles but to demonstrate their roles as if the actor and character stood apart from each other. The actor should not identify himself with the character, to prevent any identification of the audience with
the character. In actual practice, however, Brecht's theatre was not able to achieve that total 'estrangement' between the audience and the stage characters. As Berber Gascoigne observes, "It is by now common-place that his technique failed, fortunately, to eliminate the audience's emotional involvement with the characters; and it is one of the major paradoxes about Brecht that instead of inspiring as he intended, a simple working class audience to dispassionate thought, he moved and excited an international audience of intellectuals. This 'failure' was the result of a misjudgement in Brecht's theory. He was wrong to equate empathy, one of the oldest elements of theatre and almost certainly inseparable from it, with illusion - which is a relative upstart being the peculiar property of Naturalism. It was in fact Naturalism against which all Brecht's technique was diverted, and his theatre therefore has stylistic similarities with much of pre-naturalistic drama."

In the Mahagonny notes giving the comparative shift from the Dramatic form of theatre to the Epic form of theatre it is mentioned that while the traditional form deals with direct action, Epic form deals with narration. This might create the impression that Brecht's drama does not have direct action, and is all narration. Without direct action there can be no drama. Stylologically drama is 'doing' (from Greek 'dunam,' to do, act, perform), which
Aristotle defines as 'direct imitation of men in action.' Brecht's drama too is direct imitation of men in action, there is no doubt, but this direct action is seen through the distancing device of a narrator. In other words the action in Brecht's drama is seen as the present 'now' as well as the historic 'past.' The present 'now' creates that sense of urgency, immediacy, a threat (as we discussed in the Introduction) but this imminent visible future occurring as 'now' is viewed as a past event, which 'historicizes' it and creates that perspective born of alternative responses - 'now' and 'then'. But the question still persists: In what way the narration in Greek drama different from that in the Brechtian drama? Both use the narrator and chorus. The indirect narration in Greek drama is a substitute action whose impact has a theatrical immediacy; it lights up the whole present action. The Greek drama did differentiate 'representation' from 'narration' and relegated the 'unactable' portions to the narrative passages which were woven into the current phases of action. In a play like Agamemnon the chorus and the narrative together consume almost the whole play. What the Greeks, perhaps, did in obedience to the laws of unity, Brecht perhaps used as a sophisticated tool. One cannot say whether the Greeks deliberately used the technique of narration for the estrangement-effect. They seem to, sometimes. But Brecht makes it a refined and conscious
tool to pluck the audience out of the passionate stream of action and put them at a distance from which they can have a conspectus of the whole situation.

In Brecht, the indirect narration is a withdrawal into a still point of cool historical, distanced contemplation upon the present 'now' as if the visible imminent future, called 'Destiny' by Susanne Langer, were not only turning into present 'now' but simultaneously turning into historic past. When the audience has this kind of complex seeing of action, it should have that critical objective view of the events in contradistinction to the drugged state which illusionary theatre induces.

In the light of the above discussion, it is our purpose to study Brecht's four major plays: Mother Courage and her Children, The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Life of Galileo and The Caucasian Chalk Circle written between 1937 and 1948, with a view to observe how the Alienation Effect gets translated into dramatic conventions through which the dramatist attempts communication with his audience.

(II)

The complexity of action in Mother Courage and her Children arises out of the interplay between Mother Courage's small world of business which must be carried on for the
survival of her family, and the larger world of the Thirty-
years' war (1618-1648) which envelops Courage in its folds.
The larger world of blind and cruel war stands alienated on
placards of every scene and against its nodules— the sharp
historic points—are shown the characters producing
themselves. This way Brecht bifocalizes war—first in the
larger historical perspective which appears in a projected
synopsis specifying the events to the exactitude of date and
locale, and secondly in the way its major events are
perceived by the characters, an underside view of the war
which seems to have no beginning and no end and seems ever
proliferating and ever shrinking. This is a device of
'distancing,' defamiliarizing the war: the 'verfremdungseffekt'
which Brecht talked about as the basis of his new Epic
Theatre. It shows history not as a clash of kings and armies
but the way their actions percolate to the bottom—and the
way the bottom looks at the top:

Mother Courage: To hear the big shots talk you'd think
they make war for fear of God and all
things bright as beautiful. But if you
take a closer look, they're not so
stupid. They make war for profits.
And ordinary folk like me wouldn't join
in for any other reason, either.

Thus an objective critical view of the most devastating
and prolonged European War, prior to World War I, is
communicated by this device of "verfremdungseffekt."
This "verfremdungseffekt" works because it is integrated
into the play as a way of imaginative beholding of the action.

Though the scenes are episodic and do not have the Aristotelian inevitability, they occur under the compulsiveness of war and the characters are subject to its destructiveness. It is against this fatal, inevitable destructiveness of war that Mother Courage's character should be evaluated, not in terms of morality but in terms of the greater claim of life, that of survival. Viewed from this angle Mother Courage ceases to be a bundle of contradictions, a blend of courage and cowardice. In the very first scene she predicts the death of all her three children but life has to be faced as it unfolds itself. The fear of death does not cripple her but it should not be construed that she is courageous.

Mother Courage: They call me Mother Courage 'cause I was afraid I would be ruined. So I drove through the bombardment of Riga like a madwoman, with fifty loaves of bread in my cart. They were going mouldy, I couldn't please myself.

If business is not carried on, how would the family survive? What is courage? A mere word. She is almost Falstaffian in her attitude. She looks at life with cool detachment - a point of view which sounds cynical. She is hard at bargains which cost her the life of her honest son Swisscheese: "I believe - I have haggled too long."
In the true vein of melodrama one would have expected her to launch a rescue operation for her son. Her bargaining habit lets her down and when they bring her dead son to her for identification, she stoically shakes her head.

(...Two men come on with a stretcher; there is a sheet on it and something underneath. Beside them, the serjeant. They put the stretcher down.)

The Serjeant: Here is a man we don't know the name of. But he has to be registered to keep the records straight. He bought a meal from you. Look at him, see if you know him. (He pulls back the sheet.) Do you know him? (Mother Courage shakes her head.) What? You never saw him before he took that meal? (Mother Courage shakes her head.) Lift him up. Throw him in the carrion pit. He has no one that knows him.

(They carry him off.)

From the point of view of this study, that is, dramatic communication, this is an extraordinary theatrical scene where the non-verbal theatrical language - 'Mother Courage shakes her head' - achieves poetic intensity without words. The poignancy of the situation, her anguish heart, could not have been revealed through words. This is the 'poetry' of the theatre.

Boating her breast would not bring her son back to her and, on the contrary, might land her daughter and herself in trouble. Life must continue. Yet the scene does create pathos. It is impossible not to sympathize with
Mother Courage. For very silence twitches the heart — regardless of alienation devices on the stage which might be used.

The war continues. The action is "transported thousands of miles by the change of a single word." And Mother Courage's wagon moves on from one scene of war to another, crossing Poland, Moravia, Bavaria, Italy, and again Bavaria. War is prospering, so is Courage's business. "If I look ahead and make no mistakes, business will be good." In scene VII when Chaplin pays her a compliment, "The way you run your business and always come through is highly commendable, Mother Courage — I see how you got your name," she replies.

The poor need courage. They're lost, that's why. That they even get up in the morning is something — in their plight. Or that they plough a field — in war time. Even their bringing children into the world shows they have courage, for they have no prospects.

It is this type of courage, which helps her to survive, that is important to her. "All I'm after is to bring me and my children through in that wagon." The wagon is a symbol of survival for which business must be continued through the thick of war — that either dehumanizes people like her son Silif or kills innocent ones like her daughter Katrin and another son Swisscheese. That she loses all her children is an inevitable consequence of the war over which
she has no control. As Eric Bentley says in the "Theatre of War": "Mother Courage had gone to all lengths to trim her sails to the wind but even then the ship would not move. So there is irony within irony. Courage's cynicism can cut down the windy moralizing of the Chaplin easily enough, but only to be itself cut down by a world that cannot be comprehended even by this drastically skeptical kind of thinking." 21

The drumming scene has attracted world-wide attention as one of the most remarkable scenes in twentieth-century drama. It is night. The stage is divided between a farm house and the wagon. Beyond that the Protestant town of Halle sleeps peacefully while the Catholic troops prepare to slaughter them.

A lieutenant and a soldier knock at the farm house, gag the old woman and drag out the two men. They ask the young man to show them the way to the town; he refuses to help the Catholics but when their cattle are threatened he agrees to lead them. The peasant and his wife express their helplessness and fall on their knees in prayer which Brecht parodies and profanes. When they say, "And save our son-in-law too, O God, he is there with his four children, let them not perish, they are innocent, they know nothing," Kattrin the dumb girl is stirred - she has always been crazy about children and it is the plight of
children which moves her to action. She climbs the roof of the farmhouse and begins to drum hard. She has already pulled the ladder up so that none can follow her up. The Lieutenant thinks that she is trying to save her mother and promises to save her only if she stops drumming. Kattrin drums harder.

The peasant and his wife, who prayed God to save the town, now help the officer to drown the noise of the drumming by chopping wood. Kattrin laughs and continues drumming. Even when her wagon is threatened with demolition, she does not stop. Only when she is shot down, the drumming stops. But the town has been awakened and saved. Here is the triumph of non-verbal theatre but the scene has a dramatic inevitability and is integrated fully into the action.

It is impossible to avoid empathy and identification with the heroic deed of Kattrin. Commenting upon this scene J.L. Styan says,

And in the silence after this scene of prolonged excitement and suspense, one which uses all the effects of nineteenth-century melodrama the audience might well be asking whether Kattrin has not stolen the show from Courage. Unwillingly, perhaps, Brecht has allowed the girl's positive regard for humanity, with all its warmth of sentiment, to destroy the dialectic of the play and substitute unthinking persuasion. He has allowed a single and very moving character to embody all the virtues, and thus to reduce the scale of his world-wide problems. We supply an optimistic faith that an individual sacrifice will cure all its ills. Neither
Shaw nor Pirandello ever went as far as this: the Saint Jeanne appear only to remain enigmatic, uncomprehended, a cause for mirthless laughter. Mother Courage was not there.

The last scene adds greater pathos when Mother Courage sings a lullaby to her dead daughter. She is brought to her senses not because she wants to do business but because there are wolves and bandits and she must move on after giving her daughter a burial. She still believes that her son Edif is alive. After paying for the burial of her daughter, she pulls the wagon again saying: "I hope I can pull the way of myself. Yes, I'll manage, there's not much in it now. I must start up again in business."

It is impossible for the audience to hold back their tears but Brecht attempts to alienate the emotional scene by pouring in martial music. As the stage directions indicate: (Another regiment passes at the rear with pipe and drum.)

Mother Courage (starts pulling the wagon): Hey! Take me with you!

Soldiers are heard singing:

Dangers, surprises, devastation,
The war takes hold and will not quit.

And though you may not long survive.
Get out of bed and look alike
The war continues, so does Mother Courage's wagon - sans her children.

We look at Mother Courage as a small-time exploiter who turns war into a business proposition. We look at her as a victim of war, as a mother who loses her children. We are given a synoptic view of war as it hurtles from one country to another. Again, we view war as it is perceived by the underdogs. There is a shift in perspective, what Brecht called "complex seeing." Brecht himself says:

Some exercise in complex seeing is needed - though it is perhaps more important to be able to think above the stream than to think in the stream.32

It is the 'complex seeing' integrated in the plan of action which communicates to the audience the ambiguity of Mother Courage's character as the feeder of and fodder for war. Does the play preach a Marxist world view? No, it does not. It only shows war as a by-product of Capitalism. The alternative is not communicated directly. It is felt and communicated by its absence. As George Steiner says:

Is there no end in sight to waste and murder? Not until women refuse to yield their sons for cannon-fodder, not until men cease forging the weapons that kill their own children. There is a streak of dawn on the far horizon of the play. In the dialectic of events, a time shall come when nations lay down their arms by still waters. But Mother Courage keeps that time from coming nearer. Brecht would have us revile the old harpy for her stupid greed. He would have us understand
that waste is neither noble nor tragic, but simply and horribly useless. That is the whole point of the play. Mother Courage has learnt nothing so that the audience may have learnt something. End of lesson.  

(III)

In *The Good Woman of Setzuan* Brecht uses the Chinese fable for the verfremdungseffekt - for distancing - so that at the end of the play the audience rationally judges the issue posed by Shen Te: whether one can continue being good and still live in the world as it exists today. She asks:

Something must be wrong with your world. Why is there a reward for wickedness, why do the good receive such punishment?

The play written in a polite Confucian language shows three gods in search of at least one good person so that the world may continue; after a long search they find a place to rest at night - the room of a genial prostitute, Shen Te. Having found at least one good person on the earth, the gods depart after rewarding Shen Te with a thousand silver dollars so that she may continue her good deeds. Shen Te, the Angel of Slums, tries to help her neighbours, to love her lover, and to keep her son from want, but in all the attempts she fails and has to invent a hard-hearted cousin Shu Ta whose sack she wears more and more often as the action proceeds till she finds it difficult to
do without her tough ruthless cousin who assumes an independent existence. People suspect that the good Shen Te has been murdered by her scheming cousin Shu Ta. The gods themselves come to judge Shu Ta who reveals her disguise and appears as Shen Te. She tells the gods that only as a ruthless character could she protect the good person of Setzuan from ruination. As she says in the trial scene:

"Your original order
To be good while yet surviving
Split me like lightning into two people.
I cannot tell what occurred: goodness to others
And to myself could not both be achieved."

But the issue posed by Shen Te is evaded by the gods who command her to continue her good deeds. But this world where only capitalists like Shu Ta with their tobacco super-markets and tough management men like Yang Chun prosper, must be changed if the good arc to survive. This is the dialectic of the play. The characters of the play, the gods, Wong the water-seller, Mrs. Shun, the husband, the wife, the brother, the sister-in-law, the unemployed men, the carpenter, Mrs. Hi Tzu, Yang Sun, the policeman, the barber and others are all shadowy and abstract. They exist for the narrative of the fable, to demonstrate that good is just not possible on the earth as it is and toughness alone pays.

If the development of Shen Te's character had been
under pressure of circumstances, from good to amoral, then the action of the play would have been very simple, and linear. But here both the characters Shen Te and Shu Ta exist as possibilities of a single consciousness (of survival), and action is seen through this bifocal lens, as it were: a complex seeing, again. As the action unfolds itself, the characters of Shen Te and Shu Ta are seen producing themselves in the process and this process the itself becomes/ action. Thus the action and the bifocal vision are integrated into a dramatic form.

Different climes and cultures would give a different meaning to the play when it is staged. Some would see in it the horrors of the depression era because it does presuppose general unemployment on the one hand, and, on the other, slave-driver capitalists like those of the factory system in the classic era of capitalists as described by Marx and Engels. Others would interpret it as a phase representing/Stalinist/ era when men like Shui Ta could bring about the necessary correction. But that Good Woman of Setzuan would always find an audience because, as Eric Bentley says, "More permanently, the two sides of Shen Te, as they arise from the divided nature of Brecht, express such a division for all of us, and the tendency thereto which exists in all of us."25

Brecht succeeds in disturbing the equipoise of his
audience by raising an uncomfortable question: why it is not possible for a good person like Shan Te to exist and pursue her goodness in the world. There is no suggestion of a Utopia or an alternative ideology for the imagination to resort to. But the play does communicate that social conditions oblige a person to adopt predatory methods. Like Mother Courage, Shan Te too becomes a fierce tigress when she is pregnant and an expectant mother. She says:

"What I learned in my school, the gutter, through beatings and deceptions, shall now stand you in good stead, my son: I will be good to you and a tigress and a savage beast to all others if need be.

The alternative to individual predation would be the gods should intervene. As she says in the 'Songs of the Defenceless':

So why can't the gods launch a great operation
With bombers and battleships, tankers and destroyers
And rescue the good by a ruthless invasion?

But the gods are not revolutionaries; nor do they believe that their world is uninhabitable or goodness cannot exist. They leave Shan Te to her ingenuity commanding her to be good. Her existential paradox remains for the audience to contemplate.

As in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, there are deeply stirring, emotional scenes like when Shan Te meets
the air pilot Sun and saves him from suicide; again, when she as Shu Ta, discovers that her lover Sun is thinking of deserting her; when she mime to show the glory of the world to her unborn son; and when at the end she asks the gods for mercy and aid. But these scenes do not disturb the dialectic of the play. They are restrained and they build up the softness of Shen Te which necessitates her frequent masking herself as the heartless Shu Ta. The good person Shen Te and the ruthless go-getter Shu Ta mutually distance each other to create the dialectic and complex seeing in the play. Production and stage devices of alienation are not needed to enable the audience to exercise cool judgment because the action of the play itself contains the alternative responses - to create in the audience that objective-critical inquiry about the kind of the world where Shen Te could pursue her goodness without wearing the devil's mask.

(IV)

The Life of Galileo deals with an historical subject but without much historical accuracy. A historical setting, in Brecht's nomenclature creates alienation of the subject against so that by looking at the familiar subject a strange background one could look back without anger but with a critical objectivity. In this strange distanced setting
Bracht provides a situation, a chain of events, an action, which seems to push against contemporary events, in parallelism and contrast, heightening our consciousness and creating an urgency.

Before Galileo began to talk of the New Age, the people steeped in the superstitious awe of the ecclesiastical-temporal authority, grovelled in misery. After Galileo's abjuration the people are again shown talking of witches. Between these two points of darkness we find a brief span, the life of Galileo, dramatized in a highly theatrical manner, taking the action through a series of disjointed non-linear scenes, nonetheless, forming a pattern.

Throughout the play the life of Galileo is closely woven with the lives of the people and consequently his abjuration at the end turns out to be a betrayal of the people. For instance in Scene 1 when Andrea is rubbing his back, Galileo talks of the glorious new dawn which is rising because the new science of which he is the apostle would liberate people. Again, in Scene 2 the Inquisitor argues with Pope Urban VIII how Galileo's new ideas would create distrust in the Church's authority. And at the end Galileo castigates himself for backing out of the commitment to liberate people through his new discoveries.

In Scene 7 Galileo learns from Cardinal Bellarmin that a scientist may pursue his research but it
must not extend beyond the confines of mathematical hypotheses, that is, it should not disturb the existing order.

Galileo: "That means that all further scientific research...."

Bella: "I am well assured, Signor Galileo. And that, in conformity with the Church's views that we cannot know, but we may research. You are at liberty to expound even this teaching through mathematical hypotheses."

Galileo was at liberty to work provided he agreed to say that what was true in science was not necessary true in life.

Throughout the play there are repeated references to the price of milk and other hardships faced by common people. If people were less submissive the price of milk would be lower, it is suggested. The navigators want better charts and more efficient instruments, the cloth-manufacturers want better looms. The new manufacturing class represented by Veni looks forward to science, while the ruling classes, the landowners like Ludovico, and the Church are entrenched against the revolutionary aspect of Galileo's science. The image of Galileo, lovable and rogueish, is intermeshed with the images of life around him and it is the severance of this relationship which creates a feeling of pity as well as betrayal.

The play owes its vitality to the character of the
protagonist whose goodness and badness, strength and weakness, as Eric Bentley says, have the same source, that is "a big appetite and a Wildean disposition to give way to it." "His appetite for knowledge is of a piece with his appetite for food, and so the same quality can appear in different circumstances as magnificent or as mean."26

In the opening scene we find Galileo enjoying his morning bath talking in magniloquent language, highly poetic, about the dawn of a new era: "And because of that a great wind has arisen, lifting even the gold-embroidered coat-tails, so that the fat legs and thin legs underneath are seen; legs like our legs."

Just as in the old system the universe moved around the earth as the fixed centre, in the social system, the people moved around the ecclesiastical-temporal centre. By disturbing the universe, Galileo was disturbing the social system. When he is warned about the consequence he says, "Were I prepared to keep silence, it would doubtless be for the basest of reasons: comfort, freedom from persecution, etc." Again, "He who does not know the truth is merely an idiot. But he who knows it and calls it a lie, is a criminal."

In spite of this heroic grandeur Galileo capitulates before the authorities. The scene of his capitulation is one of the most magnificent scenes of modern drama. Instead
of seeing Galileo confronting his enemies in a heroic manner what we see is the effect of his capitulation on his disciples and his daughter. His fall comes as a shock. As Galileo returns after his abjuration, Andrea is heard saying, "Unhappy the land that has no heroes." Then he calls Galileo a wine-bag, a small eater who saves his skin at any cost. Galileo gives a characteristic reply "Unhappy the land that needs the heroes." People should not depend upon the greatness of heroes who might betray them, as he almost did:

Why did Galileo capitulate? Throughout the play hints are thrown out about his weakness. The Inquisitor informs the Pope that "In practice one would not have to go very far with him. He is a carnal man. He would succumb immediately." The Pope agrees with him. "He even thinks from sensuality. To an old wine or a new idea, he cannot say no." In scene 3, Galileo himself says to Sagredo, "A man such as I can only obtain a moderately dignified situation by coming crawling on his belly. And you know, I despise people whose brains are not capable of filling their bellies."

But does Galileo retreat because of his sensuality, or because of his fear of torture? Or did he want to continue working for science as the scientists in Hitler's Germany did? In the 1937 version the motive of contributing to science secretly is brought into focus. There is at once moral disapproval and sympathy for Galileo's
action. But in 1945 mankind entered the atomic age with
a bang at Hiroshima. As Brecht says:

The atomic age made its debut at Hiroshima
in the middle of our work. Overnight the
biography of the founder of the new system of
physics read differently. 27

The revised version of 1945-47 condemns Galileo in
very strong language because the issue had taken a serious
turn. In the penultimate scene when Andrea knows that
"Discorsi" has been completed he says, "Even in the field
of ethics, you were a thousand years ahead of us," because
he was "withdrawing from a hopeless political squabble in
order to be able to carry on with your business of science."
But when Galileo says that he recanted out of fear,
Andrea consoles him by saying that science knows only one
commandment: contribution to science. At that point
Galileo indulges in the most lacerating masochistic
self-condemnation: "Welcome to the gutter, brother in
science and cousin in treachery."

Again in a long poetic speech he explains how his
recantation has caused a set-back to mankind:

But could we deny ourselves to the crowd
and still remain scientists? ... I maintain
that the only purpose of science is to ease the
hardship of human existence. If scientists,
imintimidated by self-seeking people in power,
are content to amass knowledge, then science
can become crippled, and your new machines will
represent nothing but new means of oppression...
If only I had resisted, if only the natural
scientists had been able to evolve something like the Hippocratic oath of the doctors, the vow to devote their knowledge wholly to the benefit of mankind... I have betrayed my profession.

The relevance of this utterance to modern times not only in this clime and culture but to all times is clear. Dramatic experience has found perfect communication in the distanced setting of history. The play does induce a mood of objective thinking but does it destroy sympathy for Galileo? Probably not, in spite of the fact that Galileo launched a campaign to change the world but later on deserted the field. Commitment abandoned and betrayed is the hinge of the action but we do not despise Galileo though we are critical of him. Commenting upon the play, Eric Bentley says: "The play is a tragi-comedy of heroic combat followed by the unheroic capitulation and the ending of the later version is of the harrowing sort common in tragi-comedy when it achieves greatness: no noble contrition, no belated rebellion even, but savage misanthropic self-hatred."23

This misanthropic self-hatred though an alienation-device, creates pity in the heart of the spectators and Galileo emerges as an unheroic hero, like most of us. It is impossible to condemn him though what persists in the audience's mind is the dialectic of two images of Galileo, one with a glass of milk in his hand heralding a new world
The prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle presents us with a utopia as perceived by Brecht, towards which the communist civilization, represented by Russia, would move in future. The people of two collective farms in Georgia solve their dispute over the title of the ownership of a valley in a unique Marxist manner. The way this dispute is settled not only endorses the Marxist approach to private property but also finds its echo in a re-fashioned Chinese fable set in a charmed atmosphere.

The prologue and the actual play present the same problem: Who is the rightful owner? The farmers of the two collectives solve the problem of ownership by referring it to the fact of maximum utilization of the resources of the valley – in a golden age towards which Soviet Russia is hurtling headlong. The valley belongs to those who can make the
best use of it. Private property is theft.

In the play the dispute is over a child, Michael, who is claimed by Grusha the maid who saved him from his murderers, and Matella Abashwill, the biological mother who deserted him at the time of crisis. In brief Golden Age of Asadak, the Judge, the child is awarded to the 'real' mother, Grusha, who looked after him during the time of danger. The valley goes to the 'waterers' and the child goes to the 'real' mother. Thus we see the problem from two points of view, a kind of complex seeing - one in the context of the golden age of the future which shall be based on enlightened reason, and the other in the distant hoary past in the land of fable and fantasy. The golden age of the fable was a brief interregnum, that occurred because of some fluke, therefore, unreliable, though full of charms. The golden age of the Soviet shall be the product of a different civilization, a superior mode of living. It is the contrast between the golden age of the prologue and that depicted in the play which makes the play thrilling - each becomes a commentary upon the other. To stage the play without the prologue is to deprive the play of its real meaning - however bitter and unacceptable it may be. The audience has to make a choice between a never-never-dream-world of fable where the coming of an Asadak is an uncertainty and a society of the future based upon Reason which is within man's grasp. Thus the play is
didactic. It is like a morality play where the message is there, sugar-coated. Even if the message is overlooked, 
The Caucasian Chalk Circle remains one of the most exhilarating plays of Brecht. How does Brecht hold communion with 
his audience? The secret seems to lie in the character of 
that charming rogue, Azdak — the like of whom do populate 
the Brechtian world. But Azdak makes his appearance in 
the second half of the play while the audience feels 
spell-bound from the very beginning. It is the charm of the 
tender story, re-enforced by songs and poetry, farce and 
melodrama (Grusha, marrying the dead man who later on gets 
up) that holds the audience; a fact which may be overlooked, 
because of Brecht's excessive preoccupation with Marxism 
and theories of drama, is that Brecht was essentially a 
man of the theatre who instinctively acknowledged that it 
is empathy, the shared feeling, which is at the basis of 
dramatic communication.

The fable begins with the good girl, Grusha who 
yields to her goodness and is punished for being good. 
Through hail and snow, valley and glacier, she saves the 
child only to lose it; not only that, she loses her soldier 
fiance also for whom she has loyally waited. She is 
foresaken and isolated.

The ironshirts took the child, the beloved child.

The unhappy girl followed them to the city, the dread city
She who had borne him demanded the child,
She who had raised him faced trial.

Brecht could have shown justice being done to Gruska
by showing a communist revolution which would have restored
the child to her - but that would have been a repetition of
the idea in the prologue which might have been doctrinally
correct but artistically facile. Brecht was primarily an
artist. He finds the solution in the ambiguous personality
of Azdak.

Who will decide the case?
To whom will the child be assigned?
Who will the judge be? A good judge? A bad?
The city was in flames.
In the judge's seat sat - Azdak.

Azdak is no Solomon. He is a cowardly knave who after
giving shelter to the Grand Duke indulges in a masochistic
self-denunciation thinking that it was an anti-revolutionary
activity, but when he realizes his mistake, that revolution
has not taken place, he cringes like a thief. He is
neither revolutionary nor anti-revolutionary. He is a
cynic with a bitter sense of humour who knows the truth too
much to be fooled by anyone, as his speech during his own
mock trial above. When he says, "I accept" he delivers a
judgement on all cultures throughout mankind's history. In
a corrupt society judges would always accept, sometimes in
cash, sometimes in kind. But why does he give judgement in favour of Grusha? Is it because of the class consciousness aroused by the piercing speech of Grusha? According to Eric Bentley, "The Test of the Chalk Circle with which the action culminates does not follow automatically from the philosophy of Azdak but is a product of a dramatic development."\[29\]

Azdak is sensitive to all the happenings around him. When Grusha denounces him in that long spontaneous outburst, he comprehends his own position immediately and realizes the class to which he belongs and that makes him guilty.

Grusha: ... How dare you talk to me like the cracked Isaiah on the church window? ... Aren't you ashamed of yourself when you see how I tremble before you? You've made yourself their servant so no one will take their houses from them - houses they had stolen! Since when have houses belonged to the bedbugs? But you're on the watch, or they couldn't drag our men into their wars! ... You can take the child away from me, a hundred against one, but I tell you one thing: only extortioners should be chosen for a profession like yours, and men who rape children. As punishment! Yes, let them sit in judgement on their fellow creatures. It is worse than to hang from the gallows.

"His decision to give her the child grows out of his sense of guilt and out of his delight in opportunities to make good,"\[30\]

Moreover it is observed that in all the six cases Azdak decides, he favours the poor. Grusha's case was the
last one which followed the pattern. As the Chorus says, Azdak breaks the law like bread to distribute it to the poor. Brocht had already won over the audience by showing Grusha's heroism, determination and self-sacrifice in protecting the abandoned child when the biological mother was engrossed in packing her dresses and ornaments. Thus Azdak's justice creates a wave of sympathy for Grusha and admiration for Azdak who concludes his judgement day by the deliberate though seemingly 'accidental' divorce of Grusha and her husband Jussup whom she had married, thinking he was dead, to give legitimacy to Michael.

The thrill of the theatre lies in seeing how Grusha becomes Michael's mother, from her earlier hesitation when she wanted to lay the child on a peasant's threshold... to the final assertion 'he is mine.' Azdak only recognized what was already a fact.

Children to the motherly, that they prosper.
Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well.
The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit.

Thus the prologue and the play become a dramatic whole reinforcing each other by their contrasts and parallels. The audience's sympathy is with Grusha and nothing is done to alienate it. Her actions do not invite any complex seeing because it is a simple straightforward action. It is only the parallel between the case of valley-dwellers'
Like James Joyce, Kafka and the French existentialists, Brecht too perceived the irony of the human condition and man's predicament. He anticipated Sartre and Camus by seeing man determined by social forces and he saw the possibility of changing man by changing the social environment.

Brecht's Baal says, "I see the world in a mellow light: it is the God's excrement." "In The Man is Man, he says that "the meanest thing alive, the weakest is man." Shen Te the good prostitute of The Good Women of Setzuan expresses the same conclusion:

He who helps the lost
Is lost himself. For who could long
Refuse to be wicked, when those die who eat no meat?

Again,

Something must be wrong with your world. Why
Is there a reward for wickedness? Why do the good receive
Such hard punishment?
It is a waste to be virtuous because it brings no reward. In fact virtue is a kind of evil. This cynical view is expressed by Mother Courage:

If there is too much virtue somewhere, it is a sure sign that there is something wrong. Why, if a general or king is stupid and lands his people in a mess, they need desperate courage, a virtue. If he is too mean and recruits too few soldiers, then they have to be as strong as Hercules. And if he is slovenly and pays no attention, they have to be as clever as snakes, or else they are done for. They need special loyalty if he always asks too much of them.... All virtues that a proper country and a good king and general can do without. In a good country you need no virtues; people can all be quite ordinary, of middling intelligence and cowards, for all it matters.

Brecht's world is full of rascals, rogues, knaves, murderers and cheats. Only a few characters like Joan Dark of the Chicago Stockyard, and Grasha in The Caucasian Chalk Circle etc. are innocent and good, and they suffer.

However, this world he thought, can be re-fashioned by the Marxist revolution. In Marxism he saw the only hope for mankind, though, he was never completely happy with Stalinism and the communists never fully accepted him. The only play where Brecht shows a communist Utopia is in the prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle. In the other plays he only shows a distant possibility of a future golden age.

Fortunately, he was never a doctrinaire communist; his dogmatism never stifled his art. It is through the force of
his language and poetic vision that his plays communicate a throbbing vitality. Brecht was essentially a poet. Though he never wrote his plays in verse, his language shows the same flexibility as that of T.S. Eliot, which changes from naturalism to the poetic intensity of a song.

When someone asked him about the strongest literary influence on him he said it was the Bible. As Martin Esslin says, "And in fact the vigorous, outspoken language of Luther's Bible pervades the writings of the atheist and blasphemer Brecht. He made masterly use of Biblical constructions: the juxtaposition of contrasted half-sentences, parallelism, repetition and inversion." This can be illustrated from Mother Courage and Her Children:

(a) The Chaplin: ... Our Lord made five hundred loaves out of five so that no such necessity would arise. When he told men to love their neighbours, their bellies were full. Nowadays things are different.

(b) The officer: I don't trust him. We are friends.

(c) Mother Courage: ... He is not his brother's paymaster, and I won't have him led into temptation.

(d) Mother Courage: ... I must get you both something to drink or you will be making improper advances out of sheer boredom.
(e) ... Instead of keeping the peace the Poles were always meddling in their own affairs.

(f) The Cook: ... For he had one thing in his favour anyway, God's Holy word, which was all to the good, because otherwise they could have said he did it for himself or profit. That's how he kept his conscience clear. He always put conscience first.

(g) The Chaplin: Blessed are the peacemakers.

(h) Mother Courage: When a soldier sees a clean face, there is one more whore in the world.

Brecht uses fairy tale elements, musical numbers, and comical characters drawn from diverse sources to make scenes thrilling. The vigour and the force of his dialogue comes from the down-to-the-earth speech of clowns.

Commenting upon Brecht's dialogue, Bamber Gascoigne says, "More interesting than the technical aspect of the Alienation Effect such as leaving the stage machinery visible, is its effect on Brecht's dialogue, and through the dialogue, on the style of acting of his company. A naturalistic scene achieves its purpose obliquely - an essential piece of exposition, for example, will be introduced so subtly and naturally that the audience is unaware that it is being 'told' anything. Brecht, desiring clarity and distrusting
the oblique approach, starts directly with the essence of his scene. His characters state immediately, and baldly whatever is necessary.

This, however, does not mean that Brecht is prosaic. In fact the chief attraction of his plays is a haunting lyricism which envelopes the audience. It is not only the thrills in each scene of his plays which keep his audience engaged to the open work, episodic structure but also the all-pervasive lyricism which has an imperceptible influence upon the audience. The words he uses have a marked simplicity and are made of everyday speech, slang and colloquialism as can be illustrated from the impassioned outburst of Crushe before Azdak, quoted elsewhere. The impression on the whole is hauntingly elusive, as if we have come to a territory where everything is vaguely familiar though nothing can be pinpointed. This feeling of general vagueness, half-reminiscent, induced by his all-pervasive lyricism along with his insistence upon lucid and direct dialogue creates that ambiguity which is the badge of the man. This is another form of dialectic - an omnipresent lyricism against clarity and directness - which, he thought, would induce that mood of inquiry and objective critical attitude. "Ambiguity is the formal principle of his work, the key to its charm, the secret of its success. Form and content walk along different paths. Content itself is divided into advocacy and negation of advocacy by means of
persiflage. Form is divided into lyricism and the negation of lyricism by means of the excessively prosaic."

Through the mystical beauty of his language, the Biblical allusions, exotic names, the archaisms, and the garish rhythm of the street ballad, the song, the chorus, the narrative and the use of placards, Brecht enlarges his freedom to communicate his poetic vision of a world gone sour, which, nonetheless, has the possibility of redemption. His alienating, distancing devices make it possible to view the issues critically and objectively though it must be explicitly stated that such devices even when they are embodied in the play as dramatic conventions do not dampen sympathy; rather they add to the fire of imagination which leaps to bridge the gaps created by the alienation devices. His alienation devices spur the imagination. In fact, every device which he uses to destroy the hypnotic effect, magic of the stage, creates a spell. The posters, slides, proclamations - devices to alienate - are couched in such poetic diction that they intensify the point. The songs, choruses and other studied interruptions instead of halting empathy, strengthen it because Brecht's style has an ingrained poetic intensity and a sense of wonder.

It is this sense of wonder which brings him closer to the Greek and the Elizabethan non-illusory theatre. Added to this is his convention of the sequence of scenes which
stand on their own, isolated yet connected in a pattern, a
movement, a flow of action, an open process, where characters
produce themselves and are subject to our critical analysis.
It is the matching of these dramatic conventions and his
vision of the world which gives his plays a perennial interest,
contemporary urgency and an international audience.
Notes

5. Ibid., p.231.
8. Brecht on Theatre p.23.
10. Ibid., p.162.
12. Ibid., p.242.
16. Brecht on Theatre p.142-144.
17. Ibid., p.144.
23. Brecht on Theatre, p.44.


25. Eric Bentley, Theatre of War, p.113.

26. Ibid., pp.102-3.

27. Cited, Keith Dickson, Towards Utopia, p.90.

28. Eric Bentley, Theatre of War, p.156.

29. Ibid., p.178.

30. Ibid., p.179.

