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**SOCIOLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL ASPECTS THROUGH ALIENATION EFFECT IN  
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE: A CRITICAL OBSERVATION**

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**Abstract**

After reading and discussing the significant literary works of writers, one is convinced that the works did indeed play an important role in changing the fate of so-called literature in the world. They are truly masterpieces that are not only made with great skill. Indeed, several considerations must be taken into account before deciding what constitutes a literary masterpiece - its integrity in the light of social conditions and aesthetics. The works can be better understood, among other things, by studying and placing them in their historical and cultural context. The literary creation of Bertolt Brecht is not out of it and also intended to bring change in theater and society: sociological aspect takes over biological aspect. The study and analysis of Brecht's work *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a kind of experience for the development of enhanced critical and analytical skills in a particular historical and cultural context by applying his concept 'alienation effect'. It is possible to assert that Brecht employs the play's two protagonists, Grusha and Azdak, in the execution of his epic theater in general and the alienation effect in particular in order to focus on sociological and biological aspects. They are too "estranged" for us to accept as heroes. However, Brecht can emphasize the vitality of his central characters.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, integrity, cultural context, theater, alienation effect

**1. Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to critically observe Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and the use of his concept 'alienation effect' to unravel how sociological aspect takes over biological aspect. The emotive effects, main characters and certain dimensions of the so-called Brechtian Theater and 'alienation effect' as embodied in the play are the focus of this study and within its scope is drama as text. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is one of the "classics" of Brecht's repertoire. His other plays that most shaped his international recognition are *The*

*Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Mr. Puntilla and His Man Matti*, and *The Good Woman from Setzuan*.

Indeed, several considerations must be taken into account before deciding what constitutes a literary masterpiece - its integrity in the light of social conditions and aesthetics. The works can be better understood, among other things, by studying and placing them in their historical and cultural context. The literary creation of Bertolt Brecht is not out of it and also intended to bring change in theater and society: sociological aspect takes over biological

aspect. The study and analysis of Brecht's work *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a kind of experience for the development of enhanced critical and analytical skills in a particular historical and cultural context by applying his concept 'alienation effect'. It is possible to assert that Brecht employs the play's two protagonists, Grusha and Azdak, in the execution of his epic theater in general and the alienation effect in particular in order to focus on sociological and biological aspects. They are too "estranged" for us to accept as heroes. However, Brecht can emphasize the vitality of his central characters.

Of course, it is not easy to describe the principles of Brechtian theater or to define what Brechtian theater is, all the more because it does not exist forever. For example, a twenty-year-old Brecht is not the same as a thirty-year-old Brecht. Brecht's view of the theater in 1948 may have been his "only past" as he was in 1955, that was a year before his death on August 14, 1956. Of course, instead of saying that everything changes, one can say that everything evolves. It is understood that in the Preface on Brecht's theatre, John Willett writes that Brecht's notes and theoretical writings must be given and placed in chronological order to see how Brecht's ideas evolved, gradually becoming a concrete aesthetics. It is also important to look at Brecht's endless working and rewriting, his fretting over a certain concept until it can be reconciled. The progress from the embryo to the final concept, often formulated very differently, and the revisions and afterthoughts. (Brecht, xiii).

Brecht's essential approach, specifically his 'alienation effect', is not as straightforward as it initially appears. It involves more than mere reminders to the audience that they are watching a play, making the stage machinery visible, and having characters speak or sing directly to the viewers. Moreover, alienation effect is just one facet of Brecht's theater, is also known as Epic theater. To truly comprehend Brecht's work, it is necessary to delve into all the components of Epic theater. However, the theories that this study is based on are those of "Brecht's journeys," which he wrote from 1947 to 1948 and include his "Kleines Organon für das Theater" or "A Short Organum for the Theater." Realizing that, according to "The Cambridge Guide"

the point can be grasped without theory" can lead one to fall into the trap of Brecht's inconsistencies and simply follow the rest of "Brecht's journey." It cannot be understood solely from theory... "(187), and this study will take the compromising route: taking Brecht's theory to a certain extent, employing his own practice to create a "naive" form of theater and addressing the capacity for reflection of the audience at the same time. The emotional effects, some aspects of Brechtian theater, and the main characters in his *The Caucasian Circle Chalk* will be the sole focus of this study.

## **2. Over view on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle***

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has consisted of one "Prologue" and five Acts. The five acts are "The Noble Child," "The Flight into the Northern Mountains," "In the Northern Mountains," "The Story of the Judge, and "The Circle Chalk". It has an unrhymed, irregular verse with a narrative chorus of three or four singers; also, twelve songs, four of which the singers sang. The play has galaxy of characters: more than 30 characters. Grusha Vashnadze and Azdak are two of the main characters in the play. Grusha, a young Georgian girl, saves the baby of a tyrannical governor during an insurrection, or rather a rebellion, in the play. A play within a play is created from this tale of Grusha and the "high-born child." A contemporary scene about what might be referred to as "The Fight over the Valley" precedes the scenes. In this scene, two collective farms from Georgia in the former Soviet Union argue over which one has a better claim to a valley.

The play's straightforward narrative appears to be sufficient on its own: First, it demonstrates that greater productivity is a better claim to the valley than traditional possession rights. Second, when the real mother disputes Grusha's claim to the child with the judge Azdak, the verdict is in Grusha's favor because she alone has demonstrated a true motherly nature and it is irrelevant to politics. The child and valley ought to go to whoever provides them with the best service as the final lesson. To be more specific, the play takes place in feudal Georgia prior to the development of firearms. The prelude depicts a meeting between two Soviet collective farms in 1945 to choose which should have a

particular valley. The story that makes up the actual play is told to them. A nobles' revolt overthrows and kills the city's governor in Georgia. His wife runs away, leaving behind her infant. It is taken in by Grusha, a servant girl, and takes care of it. She runs away to her brother's house in the mountains, where she is forced to marry a peasant who is said to be dying in order to give it a name and a status. The Governor's wife sends troops to bring Grusha and the child back to the city after the revolt ends and files a lawsuit to get the child back.

The story flashes back to the day of the revolt at the beginning of the fourth Act to trace the shady career of the "two faces-judge" Azdak. In fact, the rebellious soldiers choose him to be a judge because he is like a tramp in the village. He decides the case in the final Act by reversing the Chalk Circle's previous test: The traditional tug-of-war, which is supposed to result in the child being drawn out of the circle by maternal attraction, is too much for Grusha, so she gives the child to her. He also gives Grusha a divorce so that she can get back together with her soldier fiancé.

### **3. Brecht's Theory of Epic Theater**

In fact, the basis of Brecht's theoretical writing can be seen in his *Brecht on the Theater*, particularly in paragraph 75 of his "Kleines Organon," where he declares his war on the orthodox theater. He is not at all satisfied with the so-called demanding German classical stage. Admittedly, many theaters in the world are influenced by Aristotle, who emphasized the universality and unity of tragic action and the identification of spectators and hero in empathy, which produces a "catharsis" of emotions: the designs for the spectators' emotions undoubtedly tend undoubtedly, to keep the spectators themselves from using their heads; they are drawn into the "action" and urged to identify with the characters.

In addition, he mentions in paragraph twenty seven how dreadful things like a few cardboard pieces, a little miming, and a little text like those used in theater can amazingly move the emotions of the audience. Brecht claims that the orthodox theater is morally and intellectually degrading

because it makes it harder for audiences to comprehend the real world. John Willett writes, "even the world of the past becomes falsified when it is presented to the emotions in this way," in his book *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*. The classics are now played in fancy dress, psychologically speaking. ....Our theatres no longer have either the capacity nor the desire to tell these stories, even the relatively recent ones of the great Shakespeare, at all clearly: i.e. to establish a plausible connection between events" (Brecht, 183). According to Brecht's "The Epic Theater and its Difficulties," what the audience actually sees is a conflict between play and theater. The play's effect on the theater, not its effect on the audience, is what matters most. The objective is how the theater comes up with the production style, which can give a whole section of the theatrical repertoire new life. "The epic theatre is the theatrical style of our time," according to Brecht (Brecht, 22-23).

Explaining the principles of the epic theater, Brecht puts forward:

The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason... At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre. It would be much the same thing as trying to deny emotion to modern science (Brecht, 23).

The primary sense of "epic" even in Brecht's use of the term is "a sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place or relevance to a formal 'plot'" (Willett, 171). The term "epic" is actually an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is "not tied to time," whereas a "tragedy" is bound by the unties of time and place. In his book "The Modern Theatre Is the Epic Theatre," Brecht argues that the modern theater is the epic theater and shows how the dramatic and epic theatre are emphasized differently. (Brecht, 37)

Additionally, Brecht coined the term "Gesten," which denotes that an actor's role is to "show attitudes" as opposed to feelings. In actuality, the term "gestus" refers to a gesture as well as a gist, an attitude as well as a point: one facet of a two-person connection that is evaluated independently,

reduced to its bare minimum, and verbally or physically articulated. Brecht states that the episodic or fragmentary acting technique is meant to depict a man as a contradictory character whose unity is attained "despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps." (Willett, 175).

#### **4. The Alienation Effect and Attitude of Inquiry and Criticism**

The alienation effect, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, coined by Brecht implies two things. First, the severing of the explicit connection that existed between the actor and the spectator. Second, the conflict that he creates between the concrete actor and the abstract character. In other words, it refers to the audience's disengagement with the locus as a result of the actor's separation from the character or any of the Concrete/Abstract binaries. Therefore, the goal of this technique, which is referred to as the alienation effect, is to induce the spectator to approach the incident with an attitude of inquiry and criticism (Brecht, 136).

When discussing alienation effect, one of the challenges we face is having to talk about other aspects of Brecht's epic theater. As a result, it is unavoidable to occasionally deal with narrative issues as well. These issues involve making the viewer an observer and arousing his or her desire to take action. The viewer is taught that man is a subject of investigation and is interested in the course of action. The action of the play is being broken up into distinct and dialectically opposed episodes, each of which has its own basic *Gestus*. The division of the various dramatic arts for the same reason of mutual estrangement.

#### **5. Presenting Songs for Alienation Effect**

It's true that theory and practise don't often mesh well. Although we can clearly sense "catharsis" coming from Grusha, Brecht attempted to apply his theatre theories in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. His methods for exposing both the singer's role and the characters' roles can be used to judge his theories' consistency. removing the audience and reader from his trance and forcing him to employ his critical faculties by breaking the magic spell. Thereby indirectly convincing the audience that he or she is

watching a play. Again, this is done through the presentation of songs and subtitles of each act as a deliberate break in the piece.

#### **6. Episode of Simon and Grusha**

Given that Brecht makes use of innovative dramatic forms, we can, indeed, expect that *The Caucasian Circle Chalk* is rich in emotive effects. At the heart of the play's emotional appeal, of course, is the maid Grusha. During the panic of a palace revolution, for example, she calmly decides to take responsibility for the baby. In two scenes where she is initially taunted by soldier Simon Shashava and later urged to propose marriage, Grusha is also shown attractively. She seems to benefit from being somewhat new and slow to pick things up because she is direct and honest in her feelings, which makes her attractive. However, as we can see towards the end of Act III, she is not without common sense, particularly when she makes it clear to Simon that she is against any excessive heroism. (Brecht, 169):

SIMON. I see a cap in the grass. Is there a little one already?

GRUSHA. There is, Simon. There's no keeping that from you. But please don't worry, it is not mine.

The readers can observe how Grusha finally picks up the abandoned child and leaves with it in quest of a sanctuary if they go back to Act 1, especially towards the end of it. The concentrated emotional effects can already be felt in the previous scenes. Why does the mother of the child simply forget her own baby? Her first concern is what clothes she will take with her, and then her own safety. How ruthlessly the other servants, including the nanny Natella Abashvili, put their own interests first and simply abandon the child to its fate rather than risk being caught with a child that the new masters surely want to kill? How does a group of lance-headed soldiers carry in the governor's severed head and impale it over the palace gate? After wrapping the child, it even appears that Grusha will follow in the footsteps of the other servants. However, just as she is about to leave, she hears the child through the voice of the singer "speaking" to her and requesting for her assistance: "... woman ...

help me ... don't you know woman, that she who does not listen to a cry for help ... will never hear the gentle call of a lover ...." in.

Next, we learn how Grusha spends the night taking care of the child while the city is engulfed in flames and civil war is raging around her. In fact, as the story progresses, the emotional connection that Grusha, the child, and the audience form in Act I grows stronger. During her journey into the mountains, for example, she encounters one danger after another, and each situation makes her human worth more and more apparent. With what little money she has, she has to pay almost half a week's wages to buy milk for the child. She is also willing to pay an even more outrageous sum just to offer the baby shelter from the freezing winds at night. Brecht amplifies this emotion by simultaneously exposing the heartlessness of a noble refugee couple.

Brecht, however, wants to point out in the Act II, that the relationship between Grusha and the child is not one of simple saintliness. Exhausted, she decides to leave the child in front of the door of a farmer's hut. When she sees that the child has been carried into the hut, Grusha, laughing at her trick and glad to be free of the burden, turns in the opposite direction. By doing this, Brecht wants to demonstrate once more that Grusha still has her own interests, particularly that she has an older, distinct connection to the soldier Simon.

### 7. Estrangement and Alienation Effect and the Character of Azdak

However, it is clear that Grusha can only bring herself to do so because it seems to be in the best interests of the child. However, she is terribly heartbroken at that moment. In the end, Grusha has barely taken a few steps and flees back to the hut in a panic (Brecht, 146). Brecht, too, seems to use the usual dramatic tension in the play when he gets Grusha to adopt the child by substituting rags for its fine linen and baptizing it with glacier water (Brecht, 149). In addition, she has to risk her life by crossing a primitive bridge with rotten boards and a broken guide rope over a mountain cliff (Brecht, 151). Here one can point out rationally without emotionally that how sociological aspect of Grusha that loves and cares the child in the place the real mother's

biological aspect that abandons the child to face the risk. Brecht triggers a kind of shock when he suddenly leaves the Grusha story altogether in order to introduce the story of judge Azdak through the singer in the fourth act. Here Brecht's use of alienation and the effect of alienation can be clearly seen. From Azdak's most memorable discourse we can likewise detect how Brecht presents the personality of Azdak, in bizarre differentiation to Grusha. Azdak is a thief, a temporary servant, a coward who is promoted to a position of authority by serendipity during the uprising. He spends his life carefully conforming to society's moral standards, going with the flow, and keeping an eye on the greatest opportunity. It is a constant affront and at the same time a constant reminder of the questionable values on which society is based. There is nothing in Azdak that can rightly be called self, nothing consistent or predictable in his actions. He is indeed abusive and generous, absurd and humble, ignorant and wise, blasphemous and pious.

### 8. Sociological Judgment of Azdak

In the fifth act of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* we can see Grusha and Azdak confront each other: the disruptive, ambiguous underminer and the quiet, smart, maternal girl who would rather die than renounce her humanity. Azdak is assigned to try the case in which the child's real mother, the wife of the former governor of the province, is claiming her son's property. By a fortunate turn of events, the same Grand Duke whose life Azdak had previously saved has now returned to power, and Azdak's disdainful promise to the governor's wife no longer has any power over him. However, Azdak continues as usual, mistreating Simon and Grusha, who have nothing to offer him, and taking bribes from the more powerful party. This brings with it the first serious resistance he must face. Grusha explains that she has no respect for a judge like him, "... no more than for a thief and or a bandit with a knife! You can do what you want" (Brecht, 203). Anyway Azdak being a judge, orders for a piece of chalk and tells to draw a circle and to place the child in the center of it. Then he tells the real mother and Grusha to stand each other that too opposite of the circle and tells them to pull the child out of the circle. While the real mother, the wife of the governor pulls the child



strongly out of the circle and tries to prove motherly position. But Grusha pulls the child gently and lets the child felling that it gets hurt. The act of Grusha and the mother represents sociological and biological aspects respectively.

Grusha has generally our compassion, and to be sure we can figure the finish of the piece. The boy Azdak solemnly declares that Grusha is the true mother because only she has shown genuine maternal feelings after the so-called chalk circle experiment, in which each woman is supposed to pull on the child from different sides. However, Grusha does not pull on the child because she is afraid of hurting herself. It's very obvious that it's Azdak's instinct, so it's kind of his nature. Second, he respects virtue in Grusha. Thus, the merging of the sociological value that is Grusha's human essence and Azdak's unpredictable judgement leads to the accomplishment that is the humanitarian solution. The narrator, through the singer at the verge of the ultimate act, says, "... The period of his judging as a brief golden age. Almost an age of justice ... That what there is shall go to those who are good for it ... ..." In fact, it is almost an age of justice: not the golden age, but a brief golden age, not an age of justice, but almost an age of justice. Here one can know that the judgement of Azdak is based on sociological aspect than biological one. The mother tries to prove that she is selfish without bothering about the pain of others (child) whereas Grusha being silent in pulling the child exposes that selflessness thinking about the suffering of others therefore sociological aspect overtakes biological aspect. If biological aspect represents emotionality, whereas sociological aspect represents rationality. This is what Bertolt Brecht tried to do in his 'Epic theater' through 'alienation effect'.

### 9. Conclusion

Looking at Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, we can point out that the play's two main characters, Grusha and Azdak, are used by Brecht to practice his epic theater in general and his alienation effect in particular. They are too alienated for us to accept as heroes. However, Brecht manages to emphasize the vitality of his main characters. It is understandable that Speirs points out in his work

"Bertolt Brecht" that the story of Grusha contains mainly sentimental and heroic effects with occasional touches of comedy to involve the audience in her struggle for human behavior in a society where the majority of people living classes are alienated from their own humanity by conflicts of material interests. While Azdak's social concerning story seems to rely mostly on comedy to inspire sympathy for a slightly different, less sacrificial approach to defending human values in a hostile world (Brecht, 167). Thus, biological aspect represents emotionality whereas sociological aspect represents rationality. This is what Bertolt Brecht tried to do in his 'Epic theater' through 'alienation effect'.

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