

Chapter IV

Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan*: Exercise in

Alienation Technique

Continental drama is known for investigation and experimentation with distinctive styles and techniques. Dramatists such as Pinter, Brecht, Beckett, and many others used material which had never been exploited by the playwrights of the well-made play. This material consisted of psychological probes, existential dilemmas, oriental fables, parables and many more unexplored areas of the human mind and personality. Most of these modern dramatists experimented with innovative form and content combining different genres for its depiction. With Brecht the content also consisted of Chinese fable. The genesis of Brecht's theatre self-titled, the Epic Theatre –lies in the premise that conventional contemporary theatre was no longer valid to the audience and ‘a new theatre that instructed’ was required (Gallant 104). The dramatists wished for a theatre where the intellectual abilities of the audience could be vigorously employed and the emotional quotient remained detached.

Theatre was a vehicle of social change for the German dramatist, director and poet Bertolt Brecht. In his own words:

I wanted to take the principle that it was not just the matter of interpreting the world but of changing it, and apply that to the theatre.

He emphasized and succeeded in propounding the same objective rules for living that Wedekind preached:

Rules based on undeniable truth that reality is a flux which life can come to terms with only by virtue of its plasticity, its capacity to accommodate. The star performers in the circus of existence are those with limbs of rubber; tragic moments do not leave them crushed but merely endow them with an added appreciation of the absurdities with which they have to contend (Spalter72).

In Brecht's works the desire to caricature always yielded at substantial junctures to the desire to enunciate existential misery. He gave to the world of theatre an impressive body of writing, a new method of producing and acting plays, and a theory of drama to the literary canon. After his death in East Berlin (14 Aug. 1956), his theatrical work was carried forward by Berlin Ensemble am Schiffbauerdamm, where Brecht's widow Helen Weigel guarded the techniques and policies which Brecht developed for modern stage production.

Brecht coined the term Epic theatre to enunciate the modern practical techniques and theatrical methods he expounded. Historically, Erwin Piscator pioneered 'Epic theatre. However it was Brecht who perfected the form. Piscator observed, "the epic theatre was invented by me primarily in production and by Brecht primarily in script". Thus the term did not originate with Piscator, although it is generally applied to his work today. In 1926 Brecht used it for the first time. The dramatist maintains:

"When the human being must be grasped as the totality of social relationships, only the epic form can enable the dramaturgist to find a comprehensive image of the world. The new dramaturgy must acquire a form which will not make use of throbbing suspense, but will have the suspense in the relationships of its scenes which will charge each other with tension. This form will therefore be anything but a stringing together of scenes such as we find in revues" (Bentley 217).

Thus by 1927, he was fully equipped with the prerequisites needed for establishing his great epic and documentary theatre. In connection with this 'Epic theatre' he wrote in the same year:

To expound the principles of the theatre in a few catchphrases is not possible. They still need to be worked out in detail, and include representation by the actor, stage techniques, dramaturgy, stage music, use of the film etc. The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectators reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grip with things. At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre (Willet 168).

In Epic theatre Brecht employs certain theatrical patterns that are now termed as 'Brechtian'. Their foremost function is to disrupt the flow of the narrative. As a result the audience does not empathize through responses, but gets

the opportunity to question and examine what is witnessed onstage. The new techniques, and the novel theatre conventions include songs, music, title, pastiche, anti-illusionist affects, montages resulting in a style which was "presentational as opposed to representational one" (Gallant 404).

The naturalistic illusionist theatre which was prevalent in the 1920s was anathema to Brecht. The playwright felt that:

The audience was held emotionally spellbound with all critical faculties suspended and left in the same state of ignorance and apathy which prevailed beforehand (Nicol 204).

And the audience, "wept, applauded, dried their eyes" (204) and returned with no memories of the theatre experience. Brecht exhorted his audience to view the play with an estranged eye with total consciousness of its content as a play and not an 'illusion of reality'. He formulated a fresh vision for familiar things which included an understanding of human nature in particular and society in general. The theory of Epic theatre aimed at accomplishing this sense of detachment. However the playwright recognized that the quintessence of the playhouse can only be realized through some degree of attachment and sympathy. These viewers could not be roused to respond to basic issues outside theatre if they were not moved to exasperation and resentment by the vices of stupidity depicted on stage. By its very clarifications that the action is not happening in the present, the theory of Epic theatre avoided risks of self-identification or illusion of reality. Another reason for Brecht's disapproval of naturalistic theatre was that it accepted the world as it was, devoid of any

possibility for change. For him social reality remained a human construct therefore eminently alterable, and there was nothing absolute about the chain of events. Consequently, in his theatre the dramatist sought to breach the chronology of events or actions to encourage the audience to stop accepting a preconceived existence which could not be improved. By deliberately dissociating the dramatic action from associated event, Brecht's Epic theatre destroyed the illusion that the characters in the drama were living rigidly determined lives.

Brecht transfigured theatre at both, the aesthetic as well as ideological levels. In his essay "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" Brecht termed 'Classical Theatre' as 'Dramatic Theatre'. He simultaneously defined its polar opposite 'Epic Theatre'. The dramatist's Epic theatre theory propounds that in addition to entertainment, theatre should appeal to the reasoning faculty rather than the emotions of the spectators. In such conditions audience can be moved to action to bring change. In realistic theatre he argued, the audience emotional involvement and identification with the characters prevents stimulated thought. In order to inspire in the spectator a more critical attitude to the performance on stage, Brecht developed the technique called 'Verfremdungseffekte' (alienation effect). It uses anti-illusory or anti-realistic techniques to constantly remind the spectator that the drama enacted before them is merely an illusion of reality not reality itself.

Brecht regularly used aesthetic devices (that are taken into account separately in more details later in this chapter) such as the actors' direct address to

the audience as narrator; placards and other forms of writing which breaks the story line. Critical commentary on the action; songs exhorting the audience to question; the stage performance itself; flooding of the stage with harsh white lights regardless of actual action, keeping the stage in full view of the audience, use of minimal props, and intentional songs interrupting the action at key junctures are some significant methods employed by him to break audience identification. Brecht demands from his actors not Realism and role identification but an objective style of acting, similar to the detachment expected from the spectators gathered in theatre.

Consequently the audience experiences a twin perception of involvement and detachment which is termed as 'Alienation'. Brecht observes that Alienation' or 'Verfremdungseffekte' is not just breaking of illusion, but also:

... is a matter of detachment, of reorientation: exactly what Shelley wants when he wrote that poetry 'makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar', or Shopenhauer when he exclaimed that art must show 'common object of experience in a light that is at once clear and unfamiliar (Willet 177).

Alienation is operative in proportion to the actor's ability first to empathize with the character and then to step out of the role. Brecht always desired that his actor must first learn to identify with the portrayed characters and then step out of the role to break this spell of identification. Over-familiarity breeds insensitivity. By impeding further identification between

onlookers and characters he enables both the audience and the presenters to adopt a critical attitude to the action. These startling techniques lend a fresh touch to the stage performance and provide the audience with a new perspective. The evocation of empathy followed by unexpected spell of detachment awakens sensitivity, added understanding and cognition in both the audience and the actors. The theatre public should be made to look at relationships "with a critical estranged eye of the discoverer" (Esslin 129). "The natural must be made look surprising" (129)

Brecht sought to replace illusion, magical effects, trance and sentiments with rationality, vivacity, grace and transparency. The spectators find the illusion of "spontaneous, transitory, authentic, unrehearsed events" (Willet 79) missing in the epic performance. The alienation effect awakens the audience from stupor and breaks the illusion of the fourth wall by making them aware of the performed illusion. 'Epic' is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is not time bound. Both Aristotle and Brecht's application of the term is similar, as both define it as:

A sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place or relevance to a formal plot (Willet 169).

Yet the Epic theatre is non-Aristotelian as it disregards one of the major components of Aristotle's tragedy: the succession of time. In the earlier years of writing, Brecht stated in the notes to *Mahagony*, 'narrative' is to replace plots; each scene is to be "an entity in itself", instead of being a part of the whole;

"moving in jerks rather than in the evolutionary necessity by which one follows the other". Just a dismantling of Aristotle's sequence of time is not enough to make any dramatic theatre Epic theater. Aristotle explained, "The Epic should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, middle and an end.

Brecht attacked the set rules of the Aristotelian theatre form which move the audience to the state of trance. The difference between the two dramatic forms is, as the dramatist himself points out, Aristotelian plot is supplanted by epic narrative; spectators are no more passive recipients, Brecht intends them to observe and participate. Reason has an important role to play while emotions and instincts do not find place in Epic Theatre. Linear and logical development of events as propounded by Aristotle is replaced by circular structure. The theatre ceased to be a mere source of entertainment as Brecht used it for edifying purposes also and did not ignore the idea of amusement altogether.

For all the above mentioned techniques that were put to use and exercised, Brecht always acknowledged debt to an extensive range of theatrical conventions and traditions: Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Elizabethan theatre, the use of chorus from Greek tragedy, the technique of clowns and fairground entertainer, the Bavarian and Austrian folk plays. Many of the other staging techniques adopted by Brecht come from earlier sources. The use of three dimensional set in a huge hall stems from Jessner; insistence on actors displaying through *gestus* is derived from Meyerhold; projection of captions prior to scenes to make the audience aware about what will happen next,

mostly used as an alienation device is taken from Piscator's jotter screens and film captions.

All these have contributed, in some measure, to the broad canvas on which Brecht painted his themes. By making use of these techniques, the Epic theatre stimulates the audience's power of action and extract verdict from them. This non-Aristotelian theatre has made a remarkable contribution to the growth and improvement of the modern stage.

Heinz Politzer observes in his essay "How Epic is Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre?" that Strindberg, O'Neill, Pirandello, Artaud and Brecht belong to those "who have conquered the reality of imagination for the contemporary drama" (62,63). Thus with the intention of making Brecht's theory of alienation and Epic theatre more comprehensible all the techniques he employed will be dealt with separately and in greater detail later.

In a brief account of Brecht's theory of estrangement J.L. Styan in a, post war statement, explained that the purpose behind this phenomenon is 'to induce an enquiry, critical attitude on the part of the spectators towards the event shown'(231). The stage and the hall should be cleared of all dramatic, enchanting and magical elements. The actor should play openly to the audience. His speech delivery should not be 'like an improvisation, but like a quotation' (231) acting out the events as historical occurrences. Styan writes, Brecht summarizes the effect of such methods upon an audience:

Since the actor does not identify himself with the person he represents, he can choose a particular point of view regarding

him, and invite the spectator (who also was not asked to identify himself with the character) to criticize the person represented ... A critical attitude on the part of the spectator is a thoroughly artistic attitude (232).

Hence the actor performs the twin tasks of being an actor and a character. Earlier Stanislavsky tried to bridge the gap between the performer and the performance but Brecht purposely retained the split to ensure the possibility of an unsettling internal inconsistency. Brecht had an aversion for Aristotelian drama which, according to him attempts to create pity and fear among the playgoers to purge their emotions so the spectator leaves the theatre relaxed and refreshed. Aristotelian drama attains this empathy by creating before the spectator an illusion of real incidents and inviting near identification with the protagonist which reaches a level of complete self-oblivion. These enchanting effects of stage illusion enthrall the audience into a dream-like state which Brecht regarded as "physically disgusting and downright obscene"(Esslin123). He considered such audience as uninstructed and unimproved.

A theatre that seeks to prevent identification of the audience with the character cannot allow identification of the performer with the character he portrays. Esslin in his book on Brecht observes:

The villain as he was acted in Victorian melodrama is a perfect example of a style of acting without identification between the actor and the character he portrays (131).

Negative portraiture is more fascinating than positive as the negative role is performed in the spirit of criticism. This realization of both actor and character reminds the audience that the performance they witness is not reality, but a play, a drama, a human construct that is inconsistent and changeable.

Gesture is a term employed by Brecht to describe the basic attitude of human beings, consolidating the entire gamut of outward signs of social relationship. It comprises of gaits and mannerisms, cadence and facial expressions, and much more.

While writing dialogues Brecht was very specific about the suitable *gestus*. He coerced the actors to adopt correct tone, movements and stance. Brecht was well versed in this gesture language (*gestische sprache*). His contrapuntal construction of sentences, fine and delicate rhythms, artfully placed pauses, their biblical correlation and sudden changes in intonation compel the speaker to follow the author's objective and to act as he utters them.

The story is of major interest in the epic narrative historical theatre; it provides a conflict, a dialectical framework for the interaction of social forces from where the lesson of the play emerges. Brecht's plays do not have the tones of suspense and thrill. They are constructed out of a number of scenes whose relationship with one another is vague and sketchy.

Instead of rising to a dynamic climax the story is revealed in a number of detached scenes, each complete in itself. The dramaturgic effect of the play is reinforced through collocation and "montage" of contrasting episodes. The

"epic plays" can thus be dissected and still make sense giving the same pleasure at all points. But the links between these sections should be clearly denoted, so that the spectators instead of mentally wandering through the story may get the time to analyze and criticize. The different scenes are cautiously placed together with a suitable heading for each division pointing towards the subsequent action. The titles are suggestive of the future course of events.

Songs, music and subtitles are other devices used by the playwright to give a sense of estrangement. They are deliberate means of interrupting a play so that the audience can think and reflect. They interrupt the flow, "break the illusion, and thereby render the action strange" (Esslin 128). The onset of such disruptions is usually announced in advance by some visible changes on stage: the title of the song may flash on the screen, special lights may be staged, or a symbolic emblem (e.g. flags and trumpets) may descend. The musical numbers not only express the mood of the scene but often comment on them and disclose the falsity of the sentiments they contain. The use of music and decor by the epic theatre is not to produce diabolically strong narcotic effects but to obliterate the illusion of reality.

In this whole new concept, one more principle is added. The process of showing must itself be shown, the actual mechanics of the work, the visible musicians, and lights deliberately breaking all the illusions because Brecht's theory concerns the reaction of the audience.

...and make

My curtain half-high, don't seal off the stage!

Leaning back, in his chair, let the spectator
 Be aware of busy preparations, made for him
 Cunningly; he sees a tinfoil moon
 Float down, or a tilted roof
 Being carried in; do not show him too much,
 But show him something! And let him notice
 That you are not Wizard,
 Friends, but workers... (Esslin136)

Brecht did not support the use of lighting effects to create atmosphere and feel:

the stage must be bathed in light:

Give us light on stage. Lighting engineer! How can we,
 Playwrights and actors, present our images of the world
 In semi-darkness? Nebulous Twilight
 Lulls to sleep. But we need the spectators'
 Wakefulness, even watchfulness. Let them dream
 In blazing clarity! (Esslin36)

The coming of the night was flashed by props like lamps or displaying a moon disc, not by reducing bright light in which the stage was immersed. Therefore

in order to keep the playgoers calm and yet receptive to arouse their critical faculties to knock at their conscience and complacency, the Epic theatre makes use of all the above mentioned techniques.

As for the various themes, human sexuality and its perversion pervade his works. Being a Marxist ideologist his plays reflect his distaste for bourgeois culture and capitalist economy. Within the body of Brecht's plays love is transient and obscure while sex is explicit and tangible, human dignity is constantly tested and challenged and an undercurrent of all the issues and problems and yearning to bring change is overspread.

The Good Woman of Setzuan is considered to be a chefs-d'oeuvre in the literary canon of Continental drama. The play comes into the category of Brecht's parable plays where he manifests his intensive desire to educate audience so that they gain a proper consciousness. On account of the dramatic form of his parable plays, Brecht does not only adopt the parable that appears mainly in a narrative form throughout history, he also combines it with his Epic theatre technique, thus, creating a unique form of parable: the epic parable. The parable puts forth several contemporary issues and problems. To cover the wide gamut of growing content ranging from the commercial society's 'modus operandi' to the conflict between good and evil, Brecht experimented with several styles and approaches.

"If conflict is the heart and stuff of drama", then critics regard *Good Woman* as "the most dramatic of Brecht's works". The main idea is the conflict

between good and evil, principles and practicality, instinct and reason symbolized by Shen Te's split personality, her dual role as Shen Te and Shui Ta. The play literally translated is the good 'person' of Setzuan. The reason perhaps is that the main character is a woman who later disguises herself as a man. Brecht calls it a parable and specified that the province of Setzuan is any generic city where virtuous and morally upright people are exploited by others. Shen Te, a prostitute is given enough money by the Gods as reward for her kindness to start a reasonably humble business. But to safeguard herself from parasitic humans taking advantage of her kindness she wears a mask of a male ruthless cousin Shui Ta. Phallus is a symbol of power. She too feels empowered with her declaration to society that she is a man. Androgeneity is considered to be the best form of existence in the contemporary mindset. It can be taken to be symbolically distinct from biological reality. Masculinity in this case is not proven by any sex determination. The society is not anxious about ascertaining it. Just hawkishness and violence in tone, behavior and gestures—qualities ascribed masculine aspect of human species—creates a blanket of protection for her. Her male attire helps her to get rid of those parasites. Thus Esslin points out, reason and emotions are two contradictory aspects of the same personality and it is hard to survive with undue generosity. Thus "the ruthless hard-boiled, rational part of human nature must take command", says Esslin (252).

Three Gods descend to look for a kind 'good' human being else the world would cease to continue. Worn out by the search they enter the city of

Setzuan, and request Wong the water-seller to find someone who can give them accommodation for a night. The selfish and unhelpful society refuses them shelter. However a kind hearted prostitute provides them a place to rest. Delighted with her compassion, humanity and benevolence the Gods reward her with money, sufficient enough to buy a small tobacco shop. As news of her good fortune breaks out, the cluster of parasites, debtors, and relatives descend and start taking undue advantage of her magnanimity and generosity.

The story moves with Shen Te falling in love with an airman Yang Sun. To her disappointment he too wanted her money as bribe for an employment. Having lost her lover, a pregnant Shen Te is close to losing her shop also.

Shen Te and Shui Ta appear alternately on stage. When Shui Ta appears on the scene, Shen Te is said to be out on some trip. In her absence he manages her affairs and dealings by establishing a tobacco factory where Yang Sun is given a job. Wong keeps the Gods informed about Shen Te. The long absences and lack of news of Shen Te's whereabouts worry both Wong and the Gods. They suspect Shui Ta of murdering her. Shui Ta is taken into remand and tried in the court where the gods are the judges. To prove his innocence he unmask himself and reveals his real identity as a disguised Shen Te. The underlying moral of the story is that it is impossible to survive in this world with kindness and liberality. Only under the appearance of insensitivity and unkindness 'the good woman' is able to survive with her unborn child. This anti-moral statement has a desired effect on the audience and they become conscious of their complacent state. The end of the play presents ShenTe

yearning for attention and the Gods avoiding the issue maintaining that she would manage. They are presented as inept, feeble and powerless. Having found one good person in the world that would keep the world going they ascend to the heavens. The play concludes with an earnest call of the dramatist that if the 'good' cannot survive then the world has to be changed.

The present analysis takes into account the 1948 translation of the German version by Eric Bentley. He translated the play thrice with slight variations in each edition such as difference in dialogues and endings. Moreover the original German play is different from the three translations. But for this version, Bentley says in the introduction to "Parables for the Theatre", "the present Good Woman adheres far less closely to Der gute Mensch von Sezuan" (18).

In order to explicate his themes, Brecht employs a pastiche of techniques to this play. Retaining the aesthetics of drama the playwright starts the play with the conventional technique of prologue. But unlike the conventional one, this prologue involves more than one character: Wong, the water seller; the three Gods; and Shen Te, a prostitute. Following the tradition it (prologue) states the theme of the play: 'Gods descend to look for the good person' and manifests Brecht's desire of changing the world: 'the world must be changed because no one can be good and stay good.'(23) The stage directions provide no suggestion of special decor or ornamentation on stage. The prologue begins with Wong's direct address to the audience. The 'direct address to audience' is a major alienation device which is most frequently used

by the dramatist, and the actor is an important instrument that creates the same. In order to break the imaginary fourth-wall, he is made to speak directly to the audience. In terms of context these direct addresses include the actor's reflections on the action that precedes his speech. Not only Wong but other characters like Shen Te, Shui Ta, Shu Fu, Mrs Sun, and Yang Sun also come out of the character to interact with the audience and instead function as narrator-participants to break the trance-like state of the onlookers. At certain instances the address to audience is such that it seems woven into the dialogue. This furnishes the play with an effect of improvisation which can be seen in the following dialogue:

WONG(*to the audience*). They gave me such a look when I
picked up my cup just now. (24)

SHEN TE. They put me up when I first came in from the country.
(*To the audience*) of course, when my small purse was empty,
they put me out on the street, and they may be afraid I'll do
the same to them. (*To the newcomers, kindly*) come in, and
welcome, though I've only one little room for you – it's
behind the shop. (29)

In the above exchange Shen Te does not refer to a particular situation in which she is addressing nor does she name the person to whom the speech is addressed. She speaks in an abstract manner and suddenly turns to the

audience. In another instance the situation is inverted. Yang Sun interacting with audience abruptly starts conversing with Shen Te:

YANG SUN (*with loud conviviality*) . And now, friends, before the wedding gets under way, I have to ask the bride a few questions. I've no idea what kind of wife she'll make, and it worries me. (*wheeling on Shen Te*) For example, can you make five cups of tea with three tea leaves? (73)

The spectators are constantly reminded that they are in a theatre, watching a play not a figment of reality. The play consists of more elements of epic theatre that are unique to the playwright. For instance, the use of salutations 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', 'Miss', before the names of actors. This is in stark contrast to generic titles as 'Husband', 'Wife', 'Sister-in-law', 'Waiter', 'Carpenter', 'Old man', 'Boy', 'Nephew', 'Niece', 'Priest', 'Brother', 'Policeman', 'Whore', to prevent any form of sympathy or identification.

The recurrent use of multiple 'pauses' by the dramatist – short pauses, slight pauses, little pauses and silences function as devices that break the communication and generate curiosity for the subsequent action among the audience.

WONG. (*Shouting at him*). Godless rascal! Have you no religion, gentleman of Setzuan?

(*Pause*) Patience, illustrious ones! (*Pause*). There's only one person left (23).

First he shouts at the gentleman, after a ‘pause’ the speech is directed towards the Gods. At certain instances ‘pauses’ perform the function of a full stop. The subject of conversation changes but the dialogue remains the same. Thus each ‘pause’ seems to convey a different message.

YANG SUN.*(breaking off)*. You’re easily satisfied, I must say.

(Pause) what a tone! (50)

YANG SUN.*(fed up)*. This isn’t much of an entertainment.

(Pause)

SHEN TE: I can play the zither a little. *(Pause)* and I am music man *(pause)* (49).

SHEN TE: Oh no *(little pause)* Oh! A drop of rain! (51)

Similarly the actors make their entrances and exits breaking the orientation of the spectators. The voices off-stage also distance the audience from the play performed in front of them. They are heard amidst the progressing conversation and are skillfully integrated within the discourse:

VOICES *(off)*. The police, the police! Going to the tobacco shop!

Something must have happened!

....

VOICES *(off in sequence)*. Shen Te’s clothes!

-They’ve been found under the table!

-Body of murdered girl still missing!

-Tobacco king suspected! (96)

The play has an intricate arrangement of the scenes. The structure is linear comprising of numerous scenes. Loosely knitted and blended with interludes each scene stand for itself. The scene division is a characteristic feature of Brecht's art of writing. Of the ten scenes, seven have sub-division (1,1(a); 3,3(a); 4,4(a); 5,5(a); 6,6(a); 7,7(a); 9,9(a)) whereas scene 2, 8 and 10 are not given this segmenting. This eccentric configuration is seemingly peculiar to *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. The play is placed within a Chinese setting but it could be the slums of any big city. Wong the water-seller introduces the play with his address to audience. He connects the front scene through his recurring dialogues with the Gods, commenting upon the situation and informing them about Shen Te who is the connecting link in the play. Like Greek chorus, he takes part in the action and stands apart as a spectator also. The movement of the play is disrupted from time to time through songs, each with its own significance. They are used as a major distancing device. 'The Song of the Smoke' synthesizes the major theme of the play. The verses ascribed to grandfather, husband and niece manifest the thoughts and opinions of the three successive generations. Their expectations are contrary to the existing reality. 'The Song of Water Seller in the Rain' introduces Wong, the water seller. This song is complementary to his character. 'The Song of Defencelessness' mocks at the ineptness of the gods. 'The Song of the Eighth Elephant' refers metaphorically to Yang Sun. 'The Song of Nevercomes Day' echoes

hopelessness for the utopian world. The untitled song in the last scene contains the justification for the Shen Te's double role, her alter ego Shui Ta. And lastly 'The Valedictory Hymn' is a reverential song dedicated to the 'Good Woman of Setzuan'.

Language is a significant instrument in modern contemporary drama. In Brecht too, language forms a major tool to elucidate the epic style. In this didactic oeuvre he made use of irregular and unrhymed verses in between the prose:

SHEN TE...(*To the audience*):

They've stopped answering

They stay put

They do as they are told

They don't care

Nothing can make them look up

But the smell of food (60)

SHEN TE....

He is eating the refuse in the garbage can!

Only look at his grey mouth! (83)

Prose slides into inflated prose or irregular unrhymed verses. Blank verses and prose oscillates alternatively and songs interrupt the irregular flow of dialogues. The pastiche is suited to Brecht's idea of conflict. Influenced with Nietzsche's philosophy of 'god is dead', Brecht establishes the loss of faith among people and presents the gods as feeble beings, ineffective and ignorant of the happenings in the world. The playwright introduces a song in which he loathed their (god's) incompetence and lack of abilities. Moreover Wong refers to the gods sarcastically as "illustrious ones". Looking for a dwelling place for the gods Wong is disappointed at every doorstep:

VOICE FROM MR CHENG'S. Keep your gods. We have our
own troubles!

...

SECOND GOD....people just aren't religious anymore, let's face
the fact (22).

The responses of the people indicate a definite incredulity in gods, or at least the gods who are benevolent and helpful. The second god is disheartened that people just do not believe anymore.

Thus from a description of stage décor to an account of lights, from silences and pauses to long discourses, ellipses, word repetition, gestures, and movements everything communicates that meaninglessness is meaningful. The dramatist used cryptic dialogues which are short or monosyllabic in contrast to

long monotonous speeches that recur alternately in the play. The illustrations are:

YANG SUN. And now you're marrying one! The one at the tea-room by the pond?

(Shen Te *is silent*)

YANG SUN. What do you know about love?

SHEN TE. Everything.

YANG SUN. Nothing (*Pause*) or d'you just mean you enjoyed it?

SHEN TE. No.

YANG SUN. You like that?

SHEN TE. Yes (50).

And the long speeches:

POLICEMAN (*taking two cigars and placing both in his pocket*):

Thank you, Sir – I see your point. Miss Shen Te – let's mince no words – Miss Shen Te lived by selling herself. 'What else could she have done?' you ask. How else ... (44)

SHU FU. Not a word! Total silence! I know all. You have sacrificed your own love and happiness so as not to hurt a dear old couple who had put their trust in you! Not in vain ... (79)

The speeches are punctuated by pauses, broken short sentences marked by hyphens, exclamatory and interrogative sentences, ironical remarks, keywords in italics. The speeches are in indefinite present and past tense.

Further, the dialogues in the play are interposed by ellipses at several places; each time conveys a different idea. For example:

MRS MI TZU. Where is your shop, Mr...Ma Fu? (33)

suggests that Mrs Mi Tzu is trying to recall his name.

SHEN TE. I have ... a cousin.

SHEN TE. He lives ... in another city.

SHEN TE (*with an effort*). Mr... Shui ... Ta (33)

The above mentioned instances allude to Shen Te's inability to speak a lie. She, being a 'good woman', finds it difficult to form an imaginary cousin. The ellipses give a suggestion of reluctance but it was impossible for her to survive without forming her alter ego Shui Ta.

SHUI TA. I can hardly say how sorry I am that my
establishment... (42)

MRS MI TZU. No sentimental rubbish Mr Shui Ta. Your cousin
was a common... (43)

WONG. That Shen Te is still in Setzuan. She's been ... (*He
breaks off*) (93)

SHU FU. My dear Shen Te ten thousand apologies! Perhaps
you... (70)

HUSBAND. Tell them the place isn't your's to despose of.
Belongs to... some relative who insists on all accounts being
strictly in order... (31)

In the above mentioned examples the dialogues are curtailed and incomplete indicating the unwillingness to communicate or to carry the conversation. The Husband's speech shows the incompleteness of thought.

Besides words in italics the playwright used the technique of repetition to emphasize the ideas. He embellished the play with clichés and platitudes figurative language and proverbs.

Though the play is in expressionistic mode one finds it a pastiche of different genres. Symbolism, Surrealism, parody, the implication of pantomimes, commedia dell'arte, makes the play a 'montage'. Wong the water seller could symbolize Christ, the savior, his dreams to be interpreted as visions, burnt hands as biblical overtones; rain water is the symbol of hope. Reference to 'friendly mail' can be indicative of Brecht's desire to bring change, a transformation of world into a better society. The playwright is hopeful that someday somebody would bring that 'friendly mail'. The ascent and descent of Deux ex machina with symbolic clouds and the transparent pipe where Wong retires illustrates Brecht's notion of showing every happening on stage to the spectators so that they can think and react and become active

participants Brecht explored several ideas and throws light on contemporary issues and problems. Constant references to theories of profit and loss, business, bargain, exchange and silver dollars become a manifestation of the influence of capitalism in his writings. Brecht concerns himself with the plebeians therefore like epic there are no superheroes with supernatural powers. The predicament and dilemmas can be the predicament and dilemmas of any ordinary human being. He wished his audience to grasp the ideas and attitudes he communicates through his works. "There is nothing in Brecht's writing that is obscure", says Willet (104).

After the two startling climaxes the playwright introduces a mock eighteenth century epilogue to mark the end of the play. It is a humble call of the dramatist and an earnest desire to bring change. The epilogue summarizes the unresolved problem and leaves the play open ended. A single actor appears on stage and talks directly to the audience and present problem of a disappointing end in rhythmic form. The last words of the epilogue are a direct appeal to the audience to find an appropriate end. He ends the play with an exclamation mark and a modal word "must". Through the anti-moral theme and epilogue the dramatist appeals to the audience to change the conditions in real life.

The problem from the beginning is solved. Watching the ambivalent action of Shen Te is being approved by the three Gods, who alone can actually answer the question, the audience comes to the conclusion that one has to be mean in order to survive. On the other hand Shen Te struggles because she

follows these values. Using this anti-moral statement Brecht manages to show a form of parable that preaches through an unethical message.

Applying this anti-moral message to their real lives, the audience comes to terms with the actual state of the world and consequently cannot be satisfied with this type of conclusion. Brecht is therefore successful in attaining his objective, to instill proper consciousness among the audience. The audience would disagree with the anti-moral theme and expected to react and formulate its own opinion. As a result audience becomes a part of it as judges. This role change is a part of alienation technique, reduces the distance between audience and stage, breaks the fourth wall convention and destroys dreamlike state created by earlier drama forms. It also disregards the role of actors as active participants and audience as passive onlookers. They are deliberately made part of the plot by judging it. Brecht's aim was more than that. He wished his audience to criticize and change it in real life.

The real essence of his writings lies in unrelentingly varying inventiveness which he mixes with his techniques. He embellished them with pseudo Shakespearean blank verse, classical hexameters, formal prologue and epilogue, music and lyrics, pastiche of prose and poetry, and rhymed and unrhymed verses. His compositions are a blend of Expressionism, Symbolism, and Surrealism and other doctrines.

To conclude, a critique of capitalism by a socialist playwright, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* interrogates whether it is possible to be good and remain good in an evil society.

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