HOMERIC EPIC AND BRECHT'S EPIC THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

Brecht's use of the term "Epic Theatre" invites a literal interpretation, which in turn entails an exploration of the particular elements in his dramatic and theatrical work which may correspond to comparable elements in epic. The criteria for this investigation are derived from Homeric epic and from Aristotle's epic and dramatic models as discussed in his Poetics and other works.

Homeric epic and Brecht's Epic Theatre are considered with respect to elements of both structure and performance. The introduction explains the reasons for approaching the forms from these two perspectives.

The opening chapters look at the operation of particular structural and performance elements in Homeric epic. The epic performance occasion and story material are both characterized by explicitly social references. They also encourage on the part of the listener a greater degree of consciousness of performance skills than does traditional drama.

The following chapters examine Brecht's work in the light of the Homeric criteria previously developed. We find in Brecht's work a comparable emphasis on performance skills and an analogous influence of the social nature of the performance occasion on both dramatic and theatrical structure.

The conclusion reviews the particular correspondences between the two forms and suggests that a more particular

understanding of the specifically epic elements in Brecht's Epic Theatre may have applications in literary and genre theory, as well as in productions of the plays.

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INTRODUCTION

Through most of his career, Brecht referred to his theatre as Epic Theatre, a term which seems intended to invite comparison of Brecht's work and epic. The object of this thesis is to examine the epic characteristics of Brecht's work with particular reference to the Homeric epic. By doing so, one may perhaps lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive comparison of the two forms. By looking at the operation of performance and structural elements in Homeric epic, one may hope to discover some of the original sources from which aspects of Brecht's Epic Theatre derive and by comparing some of these to particular elements of Brecht's theatre and theory, arrive at a better understanding of his work.

Brecht himself suggests the use of Homeric rather than some other kinds of epic for such comparisons. He frequently describes Epic Theatre as an antithesis to Aristotelian drama, thus inviting one to look at Aristotle in terms not only of drama but of epic as well. In his Poetics, Aristotle's ideas are clearly based not only on 5th century tragedy but also to a considerable extent on the Homeric epic as a kind of dramatic model. Any comparison of Brechtian and Aristotelian dramatic theory thus requires a consideration of Homer. Moreover, if elements of Homeric epic have significance in both the Aristotelian drama Brecht rejects and the Epic Theatre he advocates, it would seem to suggest a need for a re-consideration of Epic Theatre's relationship to Aristotelian dramaturgy.

An extensive re-consideration is, necessarily, beyond the scope of this thesis. It would involve the investigation of such things as the sense in which Brecht uses the term "Aristotelian", as well as the artistic, historical, and philosophical influences on his interpretation of Aristotle. It would also require a detailed inquiry into the influence of the many elements in the epic tradition which contributed to Brecht's understanding of the term "epic". The aims of this thesis are thus more modest. It will focus on some of the ways in which elements of the Homeric epic operate in Brecht's theory and practice.

Any proposed treatment of epic, and in particular Homeric epic, involves a number of basic problems. To begin with, it is an oral literature, transmitted through performance. Unfortunately, we are forced to examine the form in the literary texts and thus, in a sense, are not really examining epic in its original form, but transcriptions of that oral form. Such transcriptions cannot of course fully convey the character of epic performances. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that little is known of the performance conditions and conventions of the time.

While we are in no position to ascertain the performance character in detail, we have three sources available which permit us to draw useful inferences about it. We can first infer from the general nature of performance itself (i.e. the kinds of relationships which any performance involves) certain likely

characteristics of Homeric epic performance. Second, we can derive from the Homeric epic itself and Aristotle's references to it some significant information about performance. Thirdly, we can consider the particular characteristics of epic performances in better-documented traditions. As an example of this method of approach, I will cite instances from Albert Lord's study of modern Yugoslavian epic. This work is particularly helpful since Lord devotes much of his attention to such factors as the occasions, audiences, and performers of epic. He also places particular emphasis on the semi-improvisational character of epic, a fact which the fixity of the texts might lead us to disregard, yet which is responsible for the recurrence of a number of structures in epic texts. Lord deals extensively with the store of phrases, verse structures, and themes from which the epic storyteller draws. Limited as the application of his conclusions to Homeric epic may be, it is hoped that by suggesting the possibility of analogies between the Yugoslavian and Homeric epic one can indicate a method of analyzing performance-structure relationships which is worth further and more exhaustive study.

In addition to having to work with performance material translated into texts, we have had to work with English translations of these texts. The justification offered is that we are dealing with performance and structural elements which are not significantly distorted by translation. For example, an analysis of the structural significance of the numerous plot

digressions whose length and placement affect plot development in Homeric epic is unlikely to be significantly altered by the translation. Similarly, our understanding of the structural functions of the numerous songs in Brecht's plays is not likely to be seriously hampered by the translation.

My discussion of the relationships between Homeric epic and Brecht's theatre is organized as simply as possible. I will focus in Part I on the characteristics of Homeric epic and in Part II on those of Brecht's Epic Theatre, and then summarize the main points of similarity between the two forms, trying in doing so to suggest how an appreciation of the epic elements in Epic Theatre can improve our understanding of Brecht's work. In each of the two main parts there are two chapters, one on performance and one on structural or literary elements. In Part I the performance chapter comes first, because I have operated on the premise that performance came first in Homeric epic; i.e. the transcriptions were secondary in the sense that the performers were not working from the texts and the texts were not accessible to the majority of the audience. In Part II a different premise seems called for, namely that basically performance sprang from and was determined by the written text, even taking into account Brecht's careful and extensive revisions of texts on the basis of rehearsal and performance. Essentially, then, this ordering of the discussion is meant to reflect the basic sequence of the creative process in the two forms.

Each chapter is divided into four sections. The sub-headings within the performance chapters are (i) audience and occasion, (ii) acting and impersonation, (iii) music (and, for Brecht, song), and (iv) spectacle (the visual aspects of staging). The sub-headings in the chapters on structure are (i) plot (i.e. story, argument, arrangement of incidents), (ii) character, (iii) thought (i.e. thematic and dramatic), and (iv) diction (i.e. language).

In choosing these major determinants of performance and structure, I have been aware that some overlapping is inevitable. I have tried to minimize confusion and inclarity by making frequent cross-references.

PART I

Chapter 1

1. Audience and Occasion

One important determinant of the nature of epic performance is the occasion. To begin with, it determines the length of the recital. In The Odyssey,[1] for example, the harper sings several individual themes: Odysseus' and Achilles' clash, Ares' and Aphrodite's tryst, and the tale of the Trojan horse. As an after-dinner entertainer, the singer recites relatively short pieces, taking requests from guests (as he does from Odysseus, VIII, 485ff.) and complying with the request to "sing upon what theme he will" (VIII, 46ff.). In other kinds of performance situations, rhapsodes might recite longer works over a period of successive nights, either to the same audience (e.g. at a private court) or to a changing audience (e.g. at a festival).[2] Such performances would be enhanced by the audience's familiarity with the themes. Robert Fitzgerald suggests another organization of the longer performance. He sees the action of The Odyssey breaking clearly into six segments, each of which consists of four books. The average length of a book is 500-600 lines. Thus, if the average rate of recital is 500 lines per hour, then the epic will be recited in six, four to five hour performances[3] (assuming that the rhapsode neither cuts nor expands the text, or does so in equal measure, a by

no means unquestionable assumption).

At extended events, like the Panathenaic festival, on the other hand, an entire Homeric epic was sung by a number of rhapsodes, each reciting a portion of the text and the story being then picked up by succeeding performers.[4] Using Fitzgerald's calculation, the entire epic would require over twenty-four hours to perform, so we must presume some breaks in the recital. Even allowing for these, however, such an extended performance would probably mean a fluctuating and occasionally even a distracted audience.

It is clear, then, that the occasion also determines the size, composition, and even the attentiveness of the audience. The audience size will vary with the duration and the situation of a recital. In The Singer of Tales, Albert Lord describes how the epic singers in Southern Yugoslavia recited in taverns, at parties, or weddings, where the audience would be continually in flux, their attention probably divided between the performance and the other people and events.[5] The audience might also be eating or drinking during the performance, or acknowledging who is coming or going. It is not unreasonable to assume that there were equivalent situations in ancient Greece. If other activities occurred simultaneously at the festivals where epic was performed, one might expect a more transient audience than, say, for a recital at a banquet or private party where decorum (if not interest) might demand that a guest sit it out. It would seem,

then, that most epic performances were probably parts of larger occasions. While distractions might therefore vary with the occasion, the general degree and type of concentration demanded by the form differs somewhat from the kind that is demanded by drama, the occasion for which is (and probably was) devoted more exclusively to the performance.

The variety of epic performance situations, then, suggests that the size of the audience will vary both within and between performances. The harper in The Odyssey recites to an intimate audience sitting around a dinner table, whereas the rhapsode at a public festival might recite to a much larger audience, possibly as many as 15,000 people.[6] Another aspect of this variation of audiences is their social diversity. At the intimate recital in The Odyssey, a homogeneous, aristocratic audience is present, while at the recitals at public festivals the audiences were of mixed age, sex, station, and citizenship.[7]

Although it would seem to be more difficult for the storyteller to establish rapport with the more heterogeneous audiences, he can compensate for this in a number of ways. One of these is to turn to his advantage the diverse occasions for epic recitals: the banquets, civic and religious festivals, and games.[8] In all these situations people are gathered together for some purpose besides the epic recital. (It is worth remembering how radically this differs from the situation at most contemporary theatrical performances, where the audience is

gathered solely for the purpose of seeing the performance and will afterwards disperse.) At epic recitals there is some non-artistic bond holding the audience together: they may all be guests of a particular person or at a particular court; they may all be worshippers of a common deity; they may be inhabitants of the same city or region; or they may all be spectators of and participants in an athletic event. The audience members at such an epic recital may have engaged in some common activity before the recital and may continue to do so after they leave the recital. These other audience bonds are elements in the total epic occasion, elements which must be accommodated -- and if possible made use of -- by the epic performer.

The rhapsode may therefore establish rapport with his audience by framing the action from the perspective of or with reference to them and their awareness of other elements of the occasion. For example, he can vary his invocation and selection of material in acknowledgement of the purpose of the occasion and the interests of the particular audience. The invocation might mention the object of the larger gathering, for example, the god or local heroes in whose honor the festival is held.[9] The storyteller might also acknowledge civic rulers, victorious athletes, or, if performing at a private court, the host or a special guest. He might also sing of the exploits of deities and heroes which correspond to the nature of the general occasion: thus, rhapsodes at athletic contests might sing of heroic

athletic competitions. In doing so, the storyteller identifies himself with the social environment of his listeners, pays homage to those they are honoring, thus strengthening the audience's cohesiveness and creating a more intimate bond between himself and the audience as a social or religious unit. Such means provide a kind of explicit or implicit analogy, which brings his characters and his audience, the past and the present, closer together.

The epic performer can also approach his audience by periodically addressing them directly (as Lord cites the Yugoslavian rhapsodes' doing).[10] Such direct address furthers both the feeling of audience cohesiveness and the storyteller's rapport with them. These feelings are also furthered by another important component of the performance: the storyteller's own reactions to the events he is relating. As Plato's Ion explains to Socrates:

> at the tale of pity my eyes are filled with tears, and when I speak of horrors, my hair stands on end and my heart throbs . . . for I look down upon them [the audience] from the stage and behold the various emotions . . . and I am obliged to attend them; for unless I make them cry I myself shall not laugh, and if I make them laugh, I shall do anything but laugh myself when the hour of payment arrives.[11]

Such techniques can in themselves "charm" the audience, involving them in the stories and characters, as well as make them more aware of the performance itself. The storyteller's address of the audience makes them both a party to the action and aware of the storyteller <u>qua</u> storyteller, or of the storyteller as the medium of the action. Such factors tend to make

the epic audience a critical one, not only of the epic's content but also of the performance itself. According to Pickard-Cambridge, if a performer's skill is insufficient, the audience will not hesitate to make its judgement known.[12] Albert Lord indicates that the audience at an epic recital is a critical audience which is familiar with the themes and the format, and looks at a particular storyteller's handling of a theme or cycle of themes in the light of other performances of these same themes.[13]

The premium on rhapsodic skill is reflected in the arrangement of epic contests in classical times. The epic competitions were between rhapsodes rather than between poets, whereas in the dramatic competitions the major prizes were awarded to the poets.[14] We can thus see the emphasis on performance in the critical consideration of the form.

It was part of the basic education of 5th century Athenian youths of good family to learn something of music and performance. The need for a shophisticated, critical audience in public performances is further emphasized by Aristotle's discussion in The Politics of the proper educational curriculum for youth. He advocates training in the performing arts, not with professional goals in mind, but with an eye to the student's developing critical skills.[15]

This critical view of the storyteller is complemented by his also having the prestigious function of one who conserves a long tradition of stories and brings them to the people. He

thus becomes, along with the stories themselves, an important element in maintaining and perpetuating the social traditions of the people.

ii. Acting and Impersonation

A second important determinant of the nature of epic performance is the fact that the storyteller is the sole actor. He must therefore have considerable skills. He must be able to catch and hold his audience's interest and be adept at impersonating the characters, knowing not only what people say but also how they say it. He would require a pleasing, varied, and interesting voice and manner, and be able as well to imitate the pitch, cadence, and rhythms of the characters' voices.

The performer must be adept at impersonating characters in dialogue and making full artistic use of the epithets which recur with their names. These epithets contribute significantly to a sense of the character's "look". In the performance they also provide a pause (often before and after the character speaks) which, skillfully used, provide the storyteller (and the audience) a chance to prepare for the new role.

The epic performer's skills must be more than vocal, however. Characters can also be impersonated by their facial expressions, gestures, and postures. In his discussion of dramatic choruses A.E. Haigh mentions that there were certain stylized gestures and postures in the Greek theatre which were conven-

tional tokens of emotional states. For example, the state of grief could be signified by the actor's beating his breast, tearing his hair and clothes, and pulling his beard.[16] At two points in The Odyssey (IV, 18ff. and VIII, 249ff.) there are instances of epic recitals being accompanied by this type of dumb show, though, according to Fitzgerald, there is no indication that this was a common practice.[17] One might, however, suppose that the storyteller himself used gestures, postures, and facial expressions to signify attitudes and emotions, and thus better conjure up the character.

It would seem, then, that while the storyteller shares with the dramatic actor certain techniques of impersonating character, the outcome differs because the storyteller impersonates all the characters. Thus if the "presentness" of a character is more short-lived, the audience's opportunity to strongly identify with any one character will be limited. And if the audience sees characters created through the storyteller's manipulation of intonation, inflection, gesture, posture, or facial expression, it will be proportionately more aware of performance skills.

iii. Music

In addition to the skills already mentioned, the early rhapsodes had to master the musical accompaniment to their recitals. The fact that the later rhapsodes (e.g. Ion) declaimed their material rather than sang it might explain Aristotle's statement that epic has four elements (plot, character, thought,

diction) to drama's six (1462 a).[18] Yet Aristotle seems to assert the absence of music in epic per se, independent of passing trends in performance styles. The explanation probably lies in the difference between Aristotle's definition of "music" and our own. Simply stated (he goes into greater detail on the various modes of music and the significance of particular rhythms and harmonies in the last chapters of The Politics),[19] music for Aristotle is a mimetic art; it imitates intellectual, emotional, and moral states. While music in classical drama sustains the intellectual, emotional, or moral import of the action, and is importantly linked to the presence and functions of the chorus, music in classical epic does not serve the same kind of functions. It is not a distinct element, but rather a device for marking rhythm, ornamenting certain phrases, filling in brief pauses, and, perhaps most important, making the audience more receptive or suggestible. To judge from Odysseus' reactions to the songs of the harper, the music has an almost magical effect; it charms the listener and blots out, or at least dulls, other claims to his attention which (as mentioned earlier) seem to attend most epic performances. The listener probably would not focus consciously on the music, and thus its main performance function probably operates at what would now be called the subliminal level.

iv. Spectacle

The musical background may also be useful for putting the

spectator in a frame of mind where he can visualize the action without the aid of physical scenery, lights, costumes, or props. To some extent, the audience's familiarity with the stories, and thus with the locales of the action, facilitates this visualization. The storyteller's language also helps. He may use repeated formulae and epithets which signify such things as places and times of day and which provide scenic continuity. He may use similes and personification (e.g. the angry sea, rosy-fingered dawn) which give the scene a dynamic and visual quality. The scene of the action may be further enhanced by the minuteness and exactness of detail with which it is described. Albin Lesky speaks of the importance of nuance in a storyteller's vocabulary.[20] No doubt the listener would be attuned to subtle variations of diction which the storyteller could exploit for shading or varying his depiction of the many recurring scenes in classical epic. The storyteller could also vary his tone of voice, so that even where descriptions recur, they never recur in exactly the same way. With these means at his command, the storyteller can turn epic's seeming liability to advantage: in the absence of physical scenery each audience member can perhaps imagine the scene of the action in an individually satisfying way.

The actual spectacle that confronts the audience is another consideration. There is the storyteller, who draws attention to himself by being beautifully got up (to paraphrase Socrates)[21] and is the main focus of attention. The surroundings of the

performance as well as the other audience members are also visible, and these perhaps form an important counterpart to the setting evoked by the storyteller. These surroundings no doubt contribute to the sense of the performance as a communal, social experience.

In sum, then, performances of Homeric epic cannot be regarded as mere literary recitations, where the only significant events are those described in the text. The varying and active elements of occasion, the aware interaction within the audience and between audience and performer, the rhapsode's vocal and physical skills of impersonation and presentation, the means by which he evokes both auditory and visual aspects of the epic, all these are significant parts of the artistic whole called "epic".

Chapter 2

1. Plot

One of the main determinants of epic plot structure is the varying length of performances. The structure must thus be flexible enough for the storyteller to adapt it easily to the time limits imposed by the occasion. He must also be responsive to the interest of the audience, and be able to expand or curtail the plot development accordingly. As Aristotle notes (1449 b), epic has no convention for size, and thus the rhapsode is both a "song sticher"[22] and a song selector.[23] As a song sticher he must be able to link a number of individual stories, as is done in the following illustration cited by Lesky: "Hector's epithet 'tamer of horses' was left out at the end of the verse, and the words 'but there came an Amazon . . .' replaced them, so that one passed immediately in recitation from the Iliad to the Aethiopis".[24] As a song selector, the rhapsode must be able to detach stories and incidents from larger works, as the harper in Book VIII of The Odyssey does. The audience's familiarity with the stories is one important determinant of the types of "stiches" used. The segmentation of extended actions into smaller, self-contained actions is another. In this section we will examine what these segments consist of and how they are linked.

Aristotle states that epic is longer than drama because

its plot is interspersed with more numerous and lengthier incidents (1455 b). He distinguishes the plot from the incidents and, using Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris as an example, shows how the plot outline consists of what happens:

> a girl who had been offered in sacrifice mysteriously disappeared; she was established as priestess in another country where the law required her to sacrifice strangers to the goddess; some time afterwards her brother arrived; on his arrival he is captured and is about to be sacrificed when he makes himself known . . . Hence he is saved.

The incidents consist of how or why these things happen. In this case, they would include such information as Orestes' going to Tauris on the advice of an oracle, the purpose of the oracle, the cause of the madness, and the fact that this madness leads to his capture and his escape (1455 b). He applies similar criteria to the epic, and outlines the plot of The Odyssey as follows:

> a man has been absent from home for many years, alone and under the eye of Poseidon. The situation at home is that his possessions are being squandered by the suitors, and they plot against his son. He arrives home tempest-tossed; he makes himself known, attacks and kills his enemies, and is safe. That is the essential plot of the Odyssey; the rest is incidents. (1455 b)

Gerald Else takes this a step further and cites an abstraction of the plot of Homeric epics from the incidents, determining thereby that the length of epic plot proper is comparable to that of a dramatic trilogy (ca. 4,000 lines).[25]

Aside from praising Homer for tying his incidents to the plot (1459 a) and acknowledging the importance of epic's narrative format (1459 b), Aristotle does not deal specifically with how these epic incidents are joined to the plot. I think

we should approach this question by first examining the epic incidents themselves.

There are a number of types. First, there are stock incidents (e.g. scenes of arming, cleansing, feasting, and sacrificing) which are elaborated to varying extents.[26] Second, there are digressions, which are more frequent and fully developed in epic than in drama. For example, in The Odyssey we learn what happens to the ship which took Odysseus back to Ithaka after it deposits him on his native shore. In Oedipus Rex, on the other hand, we do not find out what happens to the Corinthian messenger who brings Oedipus news of Polybus' death. Thus in epic, incidents which are not directly causally connected to the main action are in general more fully developed. Third, there are parallel actions which are often developed at greater length. There are isolated parallels, ongoing parallels, and parallel reference points. Such parallels may serve a number of functions. Nestor's anecdotes in The Iliad develop isolated parallels to the main action, and oten serve a rhetorical function. The actions and animosities of the gods in The Iliad are on-going parallels to those of the Greeks and Trojans and frequently foreshadow events in the human sphere. The Agamemnon story in The Odyssey is a reference point cited at a number of points in the story, which instigates actions, and throws actions and characters into relief. These incidents are subordinate to the main action in the sense that they are not crucial for its development, yet their own development does not reflect such

subordination. Erich Auerbach discusses this point in his chapter on Homer in Mimesis, where he focuses on the story of Odysseus' wound in the foot-bathing scene and shows how this incident is detached from the main action. First of all, the story does not arise from Odysseus' reflection on how he got the scar; rather, it is the narrator who abruptly changes the focus ("she knew the groove at once. An old wound . . ."). Secondly, the incident is told in such a way as to capture completely the attention of the reader or listener (e.g. via direct discourse and vivid language). Because the story, while being told, occupies what Auerbach calls the "foreground", the growing suspense about the possibility of Odysseus' premature recognition and betrayal is temporarily relaxed.[27] This type of interruption of highly charged situations seems to be a characteristic function of epic incidents. Of course most incidents in epic occupy the "foreground", if only because at a performance one cannot skim or skip over minor incidents, as one can when reading (a useful example of how considering performance will affect one's understanding of the structure of the text).

Another important characteristic of these incidents is that they are self-contained. The story of Odysseus' wound has an exposition (the relationship of host and guest), a climax (the hunt), and a resolution (Odysseus returns home). In The Iliad,[28] Nestor draws a parallel which is similarly self-contained (VIII, 133ff.). It too has an exposition (the history of the opponent's armor), a climax (the battle), and

a resolution (Nestor slays Ereuthalion). Nestor himself ties the story to the situation at hand; he is illustrating old-style courage and stamina in order to shame the Greeks into responding to Hector's challenge. Yet the story also stands on its own; it could be expanded or even taken out of The Iliad and placed in a different context (e.g. an extended chronicle of Nestor's life).

The incidents in epic, then, differ from those in drama in a number of ways: (a) they are often self-contained, (b) they are frequently only loosely linked to the main action, both linguistically and causally, and (c) they often interrupt the tone rather than sustain it and retard the main action rather advance it. The epic plot is segmented by these incidents and by the extensive foretelling of segments of the action, both by characters (e.g. gods or prophets) and by the narrator. The foretelling of the action allows the audience to appreciate digressions, retarding developments, or amplifications, as well as the performance itself.

We have so far been stressing how the more numerous incidents in epic give the plot a loose structure. Let us now look at some of the unifying elements in epic. First of all, the recurrence of certain incidents in epic provides formal continuity both within a work and between cycles of stories. Secondly, the recurrence of subject themes unifies incidents. For example, in The Iliad, the thematic patterns of bride-stealing and wrath (Chryses' wrath causes Apollo's causes Agamemnon's causes Achilles' causes Thetis' causes Zeus')[29] unify the opening

incidents and rapid exposition. In The Odyssey, the return theme ties the visits of Telemachus to the main action: Odysseus' return is refracted in Nestor's, Menelaus', Agamemnon's and then Telemachus' own return.[30] The thematic pattern of deception--test--recognition in the end of The Odyssey recurs in Odysseus' encounters with the Swineherd, Telemachus, the suitors, Penelope, and Laertes. Albert Lord claims that in heroic epic the return theme traditionally generates these other themes, and that these traditional thematic patterns are heavily exploited because of the improvisational nature of epic performances.[31]

An important outcome of this reliance on thematic motifs is that the elements of the complex plot serve different functions in epic than in drama. While Aristotle says that The Odyssey has a complex plot because of its recognitions (1459 b), it is obvious that the recognitions do not operate as they do in, for example, Oedipus Rex, Iphigenia in Tauris, or The Bacchae. In the tragedies, the characters' sudden realization of the implications of their actions or intentions vis-a-vis the person recognized, usually a blood relative, causes an abrupt re-evaluation of events and a radically different future course of action. The recognitions in The Odyssey, save for the suitors', are an end in themselves, and a happy end at that. They are repeated and extended over the last eight books of the epic. As a side-note, we might also consider that these recognitions are of a social rather than a moral nature. They affect

the social relationships rather than the moral orientation of the characters.

A third unifying element is the narrative. I have previously emphasized the familiarity of the stories and the self-contained quality of the incidents, with an eye to their minimizing the need for extensive narrative expositions and transitions (often the short phrase "at that same hour" or "meanwhile" is sufficient). The narrative, however, also provides an important unifying element, not only by connecting the parts of the individual stories and the different stories themselves, but also by its form. First of all, the narrative is dispersed among the characters, so a large amount of the narrated material occurs in direct discourse. Secondly, the narrative digressions frequently employ dialogue. Thirdly, narrative and direct discourse are sometimes combined. In The Odyssey for example, the narrator repeatedly refers to Eumaios as "O my swineherd". In The Iliad, the narrator talks directly to the character: "So, Menelaos, your shapely thighs . . ." (IV, 146).

This intermingling of the narrative and dramatic method is instrumental in bringing the actions to the "foreground", so much so that Auerbach uses it to argue for epic's radical discontinuity: "It [Homeric style] yet causes what is momentarily being narrated to give the impression that it is the only present, pure and without perspective . . .".[32] In a way, however, the mixing of the dramatic and narrative methods in epic

provides greater continuity of voice, ties the narrative more closely to the action, and smoothes the transitions from narrative to direct discourse and from one incident to another.

A fourth unifying element is character. In each Homeric epic there are a handful of central characters who dominate the episodes, who are refracted in peripheral characters, and whose actions are refracted in the incidents. Characters such as the gods, especially in The Iliad, can also instigate, foretell, and provide rationales for retarding the action. Furthermore, plot digressions frequently follow from character itself. Odysseus' proclivity for deception, for example, gives cohesion to the drawn-out conclusion of The Odyssey; Nestor's age and wisdom give rise to his lengthy parallels in The Iliad.

ii. Character

A major distinguishing characteristic of epic character is its social grounding. In drama, the social background of the characters is usually elaborated largely in terms of its plot significance. In tragedy, these histories are often built up as the revelations which drastically alter the course of the action. In epic, the revelations of the characters' origins are much more routine and wide-spread. Lesky suggests that it is the heroic nature of the Homeric epics which accounts for the extensive amount of genealogical material.[33] In an epic like The Iliad, which abounds in heroic deeds, the genealogies are often as important for distinguishing the characters as

the deeds themselves. Even the most peripheral warriors have some biographical data related before they are dispatched:

> Meriones in turn killed Pherklos, son of Harmonides, the smith, who understood how to make with his hand all intricate things, since above all others Pallas Athene had loved him (V, 49ff.)

The names of major characters in epic are often accompanied by epithets specifying origin, generally along patrilineal lines ("son of --", "of the seed of --", "--'s foundling"). The introduction of characters also calls for some recounting of genealogy and past activities. These questions contribute a significantly ritualistic tone to introductions. They also establish the social background of characters although this background is not always directly relevant to the main action. This is noticeably different from tragedy where origins either have a direct bearing on the plot or are brought up, often in choral sections, because the fate of some forebearer is analogous to that of a character (e.g. the recounting of Actaeon's story in The Bacchae).

Along with a character's social and familial origins, his moral attributes are of major concern. These two aspects of character are not wholly independent, since moral qualities seem to be considered to some extent hereditary (e.g. "when you have supped, we hope to hear your names,/ forebears and families -- in your case, it seems,/ no anonymities, but lordly men./ Lads like yourselves are not base born." Odyssey IV, 59ff.).

In Homeric epic, the moral attributes of a character are frequently acknowledged in the epithets joined to his name. These attributes are often inseparable from the character: they are mentioned with the name, even when it is incongruous in the context (e.g. the plaintive Aphrodite is still "sweetly laughing", and Achilles is "fleet-footed" even when he is sitting down),[34] and they are used even where personal bias would seem to preclude such an acknowledgement (e.g. "goodly" Hector). These types of epithets convey a sense of the characters' moral consistency, just as the epithets which refer to their looks convey a sense of their physical immutability.

The narrator's character is also conceived in social and moral terms. A large part of our sense of this character comes from his perspective on the events he is relating. Plato's Ion points out that when narrating an epic, he not only enacts the roles, but reacts to them as well,[35] and in this capacity he projects a moral persona. Sometimes the narrator's reactions are identical with the character's (e.g. when Eumaios is referred to as "O my swineherd"). At other times, the narrator distinctly detaches himself from the reactions of the characters (e.g. the narrator's sardonic comments on the reunion of Glaucus and Diomedes in The Iliad VI, 234ff.).

The narrator is socially and morally oriented towards both his audience and his characters. He identifies himself with the social and moral environments of his audience by a number of techniques mentioned in the first chapter. He also identifies

himself with the social and moral environments of the characters by the values, modes of expression, and modes of perception which he shares with them. This common ground contributes significantly to our sense of the narrator as a character, and we will examine its substance and effect more closely in the sections on thought and diction.

iii. Thought

While the mode of thought in Homeric epic frequently differs from that of drama, Aristotle's major criterion for the thought element in drama also applies to epic. In both forms thought is "the capacity to express what is involved in, or suitable to, a situation" (1450 b). In both, it centers on decisions to act. In drama, such expressions often intensify the importance of the decision being debated. In epic, however, such expressions often take the form of parallels that develop incidents which are in themselves absorbing. While they are being developed, the decisions are held in abeyance and the immediate situations are to some extent forgotten. Nestor's extended parallel in The Iliad, which we discussed in section i, is a good example of this. Such parallels both instigate or discourage actions and serve as springboards for thematic statements. In The Iliad, many of these deal with the nature and manifestations of bravery and in The Odyssey, with those of loyalty.

In addition to considering epic thought in the Aristotelian

sense, we might also consider the perspective on the action as a manifestation of thought. Such perspectives are conveyed by both the characters and the narrator, and they are unified to some extent by the similar methods of characterizing things (e.g. with epithets) and their use of similar constructions (e.g. parallels, similes) for expressing their points of view. Thus while all of the characters do not have the same point of view, there is some degree of continuity in the way these diverse points of view are structured and in the way they are expressed. Before we look at the types of epic expression, however, it is worth repeating that character and perspective are also conveyed by the storyteller's gestures, postures, and facial expressions. Though the epic texts suggest that point of view is conveyed in a considerably uniform manner, epic performances might not sustain this impression.

iv. Diction

One of the major determinants of epic language and structure is the uniform hexameter. First of all, it results in the extensive use of an epic vocabulary of epithets and formulae ("a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea")[36] which contributes significantly to epic's bulk. Richmond Lattimore points out that such phrases as fit the meter tend to be retained, even where not necessary for their substance.[37] For example, a number of different types of epithets frequently

accompany the naming of a character in order to fill in a line.

While the uniform hexameter leads to the inclusion of redundant and repeated material, it is worth remembering the simple fact that repetition in an oral form is not the same as repetition in a written form. In the former, the repetition of the words themselves can be accompanied by variations of intonation, emphasis, or gesture, so that the words are never merely repeated. It is also worth noting that while formulae and epithet forms recur, a large vocabulary of such phrases for frequently named objects and people exists. A character can be identified with an epithet specifying parentage, moral bent, occupation, skill, or physical characteristic. There are epithets for aspects of physique (e.g. "white armed", "grey eyed", "ox eyed", "glancing eyed", "golden haired") and others which are emblems or tokens of the character (e.g. "aegis bearing", "well greaved", "of the bow", "of the glancing helm"). Such epithets, which help the reader or listener grasp the "look" of the actors and scenes, are important in a form where the poet is largely dependent upon language for the realization of actions, characters, and scenes.

Similes serve a similar function, and in Homeric epic they are used extensively. They can be terse (e.g. Odysseus attacks the Ithakan townsmen "like an eagle on the pounce" Odyssey XXIV, 538) or extended (e.g. Odysseus and his helpers are likened to "falcons/ from eyries in the mountains veering over and diving down/ with talons wide unsheathed on flights of birds,/ who

cower down the sky in chutes and bursts along the valley -- / but the pouncing falcons grip their prey, no frantic wing avails,/ and farmers love to watch those beaked hunters." Odyssey XXII, 306ff.).

Lattimore points out that the extended similes sometimes depict strikingly dissimilar scenes which throw the original object or scene into relief.[38] This technique is especially effective in The Iliad, where there are so many intensely heroic battles that it would be difficult to sustain the pitch without these non-heroic interludes.

Similes and epithets are used by both narrators and characters, thus contributing to the consistency of expression in indirect and direct discourse. Such linguistic similarities follow from both narrators and characters' using the uniform hexameter, and from their obligation to activate their stories for their listeners. These similarities place the narrator more firmly in the environment of the action and unify the voices in epic.

If I seem to have over-stressed epic unity so far, it is because I think it is important to recognize that those performance factors which militate against epic unity are compensated for. Our recognition of the unifying forces in epic is especially important for our understanding of Brecht, since Brecht criticism tends to identify only the disjointedness of the plot or tone as the main "epic" element in Epic Theatre. I think that by clarifying the operation of both unifying and

segmenting elements in epic itself, we may be better able to understand those elements in Brecht's theatre which are not consistent with a more one-sided view of epic.

FOOTNOTES - PART I

[1]Homer, The Odyssey, trans. with a postscript by Robert Fitzgerald, Garden City, 1963 (all further references are to this edition and are cited in the text).

[2]Andrew Lang, Homer and His Age, New York, 1968, pg. 322.

[3]Robert Fitzgerald, postscript to The Odyssey, pg. 494-5.

[4]Albin Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, trans. John Willis & Cornelius de Heer, New York, 1966, pg. 73.

[5]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, Cambridge, 1964, pg. 14-15.

[6]Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, The Dramatic Festivals of Athens, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1968, pg. 263.

[7]Ibid., pg. 263-7.

[8]Oscar Seyffert, A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities, New York, 1957, "Rhapsodist" entry, pg. 542.

[9]Andrew Lang, Homer and His Age, pg. 323-4.

[10]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, pg. 22.

[11]Plato, Ion, in The Dialogues of Plato, vol. I, trans. B. Jowett, New York, 1937, pg. 290-1.

[12]Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, The Dramatic Festivals of Athens, pg. 272-3.

[13]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, pg. 15.

[14]Oscar Seyffert, A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities, "Rhapsodist" entry, pg. 542.

[15]Aristotle, The Politics, trans. T.A. Sinclair, Middlesex, 1967, pg. 308-10.

[16]A.E. Haigh, The Attic Theatre, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1907, pg. 311-18.

[17]Robert Fitzgerald, postscript to The Odyssey, pg. 488.

[18]Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. G.M.A. Grube, New York, 1958 (all further references are to this edition and are cited in the text).

FOOTNOTES Continued

[19]Aristotle, The Politics, pg. 302-3, 305-10, 313-16.

[20]Albin Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, pg. 64.

[21]Plato, Ion, pg. 285.

[22]N.G.L. Hammond & H.H. Scullard, eds. Oxford Classical Dictionary, Oxford, 1970, "Rhapsodes" entry, pg. 919.

[23]Andrew Lang, Homer and His Age, pg. 323.

[24]Albin Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, pg. 83.

[25]Gerald Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument, Cambridge, 1957, pg. 603-4 (Else cites Gudemann's calculation).

[26]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, pg. 88-91.

[27]Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard Trask, Princeton, 1973, pg. 4-7.

[28]Homer, The Iliad, trans. with an introduction by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago, 1967 (all further references are to this edition and are cited in the text).

[29]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, pg. 188.

[30]Ibid., pg. 159.

[31]Ibid., pg. 95-7.

[32]Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, pg. 12-13.

[33]Albin Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, pg. 15.

[34]Ibid., pg. 63.

[35]Plato, Ion, pg. 290-1.

[36]Albert Lord, The Singer of Tales, pg. 30 (quotation of Milman Parry's definition of "formula").

[37]Richmond Lattimore, introduction to The Iliad, pg. 37.

[38]Ibid., pg. 40-5.

PART II

It is important to stress that Brecht generally wrote his plays with a view to their being re-worked and completed in rehearsal and performance. In other words, these texts and documentary material reflect Brecht's direct involvement with the material as both playwright and director. Thus even the reader of Brecht's work is involved in performance considerations of a different nature than he would be by other types of dramatic texts. In more conventional dramatic texts performance specifications generally pave the way for the reader's direct imaginative interaction with the characters, situations, and environments, rather than with the means by which these things are to be realized on an actual stage.

Brecht's involvement with the means of production is one point of similarity with the epic storyteller. Another is Brecht's extensive work with existing material (with the work of such writers as Sophocles, Gay, Gorki, Lenz, Molière, and Marlowe). While Brecht's sources of material may seem less amorphous than the store of epic stories, there are certain similarities worth keeping in mind. First of all, Brecht's adaptation of dramas is analogous to the storyteller's reworking of oral tales. Secondly, Brecht's choice of material for adaptation is guided to a significant extent by social as well as artistic considerations, not always in the immediate sense of performing material which is suitable for a particular social occasion (as does the storyteller) but in the sense of

exploiting works whose characters and situations can be given strong social and political significance for a contemporary audience. Although Brecht's specific social goals may differ from those of the storyteller (a difference which may be reflected in the gravitation towards folk epic or heroic epic material) they share an awareness of the performance event as an important kind of social activity. This awareness governs the choice of performance material. Finally, although Brecht cannot always assume his audience's prior familiarity with the material, he employs a number of techniques to build a sense of twice-told tales into the performances and texts, so that in both Epic Theatre and Homeric epic, such familiarity becomes a premise to be exploited in a number of ways. With these points in mind, let us look at the epic elements that are built into Brecht's dramatic texts.

Chapter 1

1. Plot

One of the first things one notices about Brecht's plots is their segmentation. On the average they contain a dozen scenes, as against traditional drama's three to five acts. Yet at the same time Brecht normally adheres to traditional drama's length convention. He does not have to break up the plots, as does the rhapsode, in order to facilitate expansion or curtailment in response to the length of time permitted and the audience interest (although this structure does make it easier to excerpt and cut segments).[39] Although Brecht's plot structure does not arise out of the same necessity as classical epic's plot structure, it shares a number of its features. A Brecht play, like an epic, generally consists of several stories. The main action is interspersed with these stories, and is at the same time itself an aggregate of self-contained stories. These stories are self-contained in that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. With each new scene the focus is usually shifted to a new situation, a new locale, or a new development. They are further detached by the pre-narration of the scope and object of the segment. Such segmentation of the action is used in a number of ways: it is used to encourage the spectator to perceive smaller performance units, despite his awareness that the entire performance will be much longer; it is used to co-ordinate the parts of the plot, rather than subordinate the minor

incidents to the major actions; it is used to provide the spectator with a preliminary familiarity with the action; and it is used to frame the action, or to set it off from both the preceding and subsequent actions and from the frames themselves. Such frames consist of songs, incidents, prologues and epilogues, or narration. Before looking more closely at how the plots are segmented and framed, we should point out that Brecht does leave some aspects of the staging of these frames to the discretion of the director.

The size of the plot segments varies: at one extreme, in plays like The Measures Taken (1930) and The Caucasion Chalk Circle (1944/5), all the plot is unfolded in small segments which are linked by the storyteller's narrative; at the other extreme, in plays like the Life of Galileo (1938,55), the segments are much larger and there is more carry-over between them. Even in the second type of play, however, there are vestiges of a more segmented plot. Schweyk in the Second World War (1944/5) (sc. 8), The Good Person of Setzuan (1938/40) (sc. 8), and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui (1941) (sc. 10) each contain one scene which is reminiscent of a more segmented plot development. Brecht even suggests (though he does not incorporate it into the text) that Galileo contain titles for the individual episodes as well as for the scenes.[40]

There are a number of types of frames which segment the action in a number of ways. There are frames whose medium and method set off those of the enactment (e.g. the written medium

sets off the dramatic medium, the past tense sets off the present).

There are also frames which are designed to set off the action historically. As in Homeric epic, there are a number of senses in which the stories are historicized. They are historicized by the development of the circumstances of the action in the narration and the incidents. They are also historicized by the emphasis on their pastness, both with reference to the present audience and situation, and with reference to the passage of time within the story. For example, Brecht suggests that a title for the opening episode of Galileo read "Galileo the physicist explains the new Copernican theory to his subsequent collaborator Andrea . . .".[41] Such a title puts the action in a later time perspective and affects our view of Andrea and Galileo in that scene. In the plays where Brecht deals with historical or fictive historical characters and events, the frames often accentuate the discrepancy between the pastness and completion of these things and the presentness and non-resolution (or the non-inevitability of the resolution) in the enactment. Such perspectives can be alternated or juxtaposed (e.g. in Chalk Circle the past tense narration occurs simultaneously with a mime of the action in the last incident in sc. 2). The stories are also historicized with reference to contemporary developments. As we noted with the epic, such references do not necessarily distance the stories; where the references point to parallels between the two worlds, the stories become more

immediate. Brecht uses this device between each scene of Arturo Ui and in the beginning of Antigone (1947).

A third type of frame qualifies the stories to a particular social environment and presents the action from the perspectives of a number of socio-economic groups which are affected by it. This type of qualification is less conspicuous in Homeric epic and perhaps in heroic epic in general. Save for Thersites' outburst in The Iliad (II, 211ff.) there is no view of the action from the perspective of the "little man", and it is worth noting that even Thersites' tirade is played down: the narrator points out that not only is Thersites quickly and easily silenced, but he is ridiculed by his fellows, his views are neither popular nor typical, and they stem from his personal perversity. One wonders what Brecht might have made of this scene and imagines that he would have expanded it and exploited its dramatic and political potential. In three scenes designed to "estrange" Shakespeare, Brecht adds such scenes to Romeo and Juliet and Macbeth in order to include the servants' perspectives on the action and, in the Romeo and Juliet emendation, oppose them to the heroes' perspectives.[42] Galileo is filled with incidents which depict the responses of a variety of social forces (e.g. the peasants, artisans, aristocrats, merchants, and clergy) to the historical developments.

The segmentation and diversity of the action also result in a varied, and often abruptly varying, emotional profile. Such tonal shifts often accompany plot interludes (e.g. Arturo Ui,

Schweyk, Setzuan) or scene changes. In Mother Courage and Her Children (1939) and Galileo, the sequence of scenes often leads to abrupt shifts of tone as it underscores basic contradictions in the main characters. In Chalk Circle, the Azdak story is related in a block which comes at a point of extreme pathos and suspense and diverts our attention from Grusha's dilemma. In its placement and plot function this story is in some way analogous to the story of Odysseus' scar mentioned in Chapter 2.

Many of the plot functions of the dramatic and narrative frames (historicizing the action, retarding the action, developing the circumstances of the action, diffusing the dramatic focus and the tone) are also performed by the songs, which could be considered a variant of the Homeric epic incident. Brecht also uses the songs to develop the immediate circumstances of the action (e.g. Courage's "Song of Capitulation") and a broader perspective on the action (e.g. The Threepenny Opera (1928) finales). He also uses songs to alter the mood of the action (e.g. the war hero Eilif sings the anti-war song; the new bride Polly sings the Pirate Jenny song; the new capitalist Yang Sun joins in the anti-capitalist "Song of the Eighth Elephant"). These songs, perhaps even more than the dramatized incidents, shift the dramatic and emotional focus by highlighting the performance of the song (this technique will be examined in the music section).

The diverse stories and incidents in Brecht's plays, like those in Homeric epic, are self-contained, and the transitions

usually introduce new tones, perspectives, and dramatic focuses. But more important, the stories are overtly linked, and a number of things happen at the transition points. As the epic storyteller frequently ties the actions and stories with explanations or calls for attention, Brecht too often uses these junctures to establish a different level of involvement with the audience. The purpose of the breaks, then, is not simply to disrupt the mood and pull the audience out of the story, but to engage them on some other level. We will discuss the performance aspects of this segmentation in Chapter 2; here I would emphasize that it is the plot structure of both Brecht's drama and classical epic which admits these other types of interactions with the audience.

As in our discussion of epic plots, we should also consider the elements which offset the plot segmentation. First of all, we mentioned that Brecht uses a number of techniques to join his segments and that the medium or method changes at the junctures, along with the self-contained quality of the episodes, draw attention to the loose plot structure. This looseness is, however, offset by Brecht's frequent use of the same tying device throughout a play. For example, each segment of Mother Courage is preceded by the same type of narration, expressed in a fairly uniform tone. Thus while at first this type of interlude might seem disruptive, it would soon become an accepted, expected convention. In other words, the consistent use of a particular tying technique offsets the discreteness of the individual

segments and the formal and tonal shifts between them. The disjunction of the narrative and the enactment is further lessened by the acting style Brecht advocates. We will look at this style more closely in a later section, but the point to be stressed here is that when a narrative attitude and tone is built into the enactment, the transitions from one form to the other are smoother. Conversely, the narrative role is often dramatized (e.g. in Chalk Circle and Setzuan). In Brecht's drama, as in Homeric epic, the enactment and narrative are not clearly separated, and there is thus greater continuity between the parts and less disruption at the junctures.

The individual stories are sometimes unified by visual or musical motifs at the transition points (e.g. the music and lighting motifs which herald the interludes in Schweyk and Setzuan). Thus the plot's interruption by numerous stories is offset by the association of a story with a motif.

Subject themes also provide plot unity, and in the more highly episodic scenes the common idea running through the series of encounters is often underscored. For example, the idea that Azdak is the people's judge is made explicit between each of the small trial incidents in Chalk Circle, scene 5; the idea that justice is dying in Chicago is implicit in the music which links the episodes in the trial scene in Arturo Ui, scene 10.

Certain subject themes recur in Brecht's corpus, and these provide ideological continuity. For example, the idea that

morality is a luxury and that people cannot be moral on an empty stomach recurs in St. Joan of the Stockyards (1929/30), Schweyk, and The Threepenny Opera; the idea that survival requires caginess rather than heroics in the conventional sense (or that the folk hero's survival skills differ considerably from those of the traditional hero) recurs in Mother Courage, Galileo, and Chalk Circle. Certain songs which appear in more than one play (e.g. "The Song of Solomon" in The Threepenny Opera and Mother Courage) indicate similar continuity. In the individual plays, thematic patterns are used to link diverse actions. For example, the betrayal theme runs through The Threepenny Opera, operating in almost all of the relationships. In Mother Courage the war profiteering theme appears in the numerous small transaction incidents at the beginning of episodes. In Galileo the main character's capitulation is reflected in the capitulations of the Pope and Mucius, two other scientists. In Galileo the teaching theme also recurs in many of the incidents. The subjects that are taught in these incidents vary, as do the pupils, teachers, and success of the lessons. But the teaching attitude and obligation are constant.

In these plays, then, the central themes are reflected in the incidents. Such incidents also allow for a broader view of a theme. The loose plot structure can thus include a greater number of stories and incidents, as well as narrative commentary, and thus a fuller treatment of a theme. Even though the

individual incidents in Brecht's plays are more self-contained than the structural units of conventional drama and are not always strictly necessary for the development of the main action, they appear less disjointed and arbitrary because of their thematic significance.

As in Homeric epic, the repetition and extension of these incidents alters their plot function. In Mother Courage, often considered a tragedy in spite of itself, the same kind of reversal and recognition is repeated, and this repetition demonstrates and strengthens the initial theme, "If you want the war to work for you/ You've got to give the war its due". In The Threepenny Opera, where the repeated reversals are surrounded by commentary, the idea of reversal itself becomes a subject of analysis. In Brecht's drama, as in Homeric epic, these turning points usually have significant social consequences.

Another element which unifies the work is character. As in Homeric epic, there are main characters (e.g. Galileo, Mother Courage, Shen Te/Shui Ta) who dominate a majority of the scenes; there are also characters who move between and link parts of the plot (e.g. Wang in Setzuan). Character itself often gives rise to numerous tangential developments (e.g. Galileo the teacher, Courage the merchant, Shen Te the soft-hearted). Brecht's plays are also unified by the types of characters he creates, the way he creates character, and the functions of his characters.

ii. Character

It is to be expected that actions which are qualified to a specific socio-historical context will involve characters who are similarly qualified, and that environments which are shown to be mutable will contain characters who are similarly mutable. First of all, we see that characters are often given names or are referred to by epithets which specify their social function or class connection. This approach to character reflects comedy's traditional concern with social types. It is also a technique inherited from German Expressionism, though in Brecht's plays the result is not the frequently ominous dehumanization and anonymity of many of the Expressionist works; on the contrary, it often leads to a greater sense of group solidarity. In the more didactic plays, this device is used almost exclusively to identify all the characters, while in the later plays it is used more for peripheral characters. But even the more complex characters tend to be at least associated with such epithets (e.g. Mother Courage the provisioner, Azdak the judge, Galileo the physicist, Shen Te the tobacconist/Shui Ta the tobacco king). In Brecht's plays, as in Homeric epic, the epithets appear in both the dialogue and narration and tend to formalize the relationships within the stories: they specify the relationship or role of the character address and are an important part of social decorum. They also can be used to impart something of a third-person tone to direct discourse (e.g. Grusha refers to Simon as "the soldier" and to her husband

as "the peasant"). While the epithets themselves differ (the Homeric ones are often more varied and more elaborate, and the characteristics cited in them are heroic tokens) the use of epithets in both forms reflects a more socially aware environment where there is a greater sense of mutual respect among the characters.

The epithets in Brecht's plays, which are often class genealogies, even suggest a rudimentary class consciousness. It is often accompanied by the character's awareness of how he came to be in his position and what socio-historical factors determine his actions. Such an awareness is revealed in the self-narration of the characters in Setzuan and also in songs which either chart the development of the individual character or look at the socio-historical position of the class to which the character belongs.

There is a further step in the social grounding of the characters, following the recognition of social position and the consideration of how this position conditions actions. It is the awareness that the position may be changed. In Mother Courage and The Threepenny Opera the characters discuss but never effect such a change. In Man is Man (1926,31) the change is graphically depicted. In The Mother (1932) and The Guns of Carrar (1936/7) the change is gradual; the peasant women evolve into revolutionary fighters through more orthodox means. In Galileo a wide spectrum of society realizes the possibilities and implications of social change.

The mutability of characters is underscored by the facility with which they mime other characters. They are, in a sense, socially re-created as they assume the trappings, gestures, and attitudes which are social indicators. This does not mean that one has only to change one's clothes or gestures to participate in a social revolution, but that a recognition of the determinants and their transience is a healthy revolutionary attitude at least to begin with. In Chalk Circle we see Azdak giving the fugitive Grand Duke lessons on how to mime a peasant by regarding his food in a certain way; in Mother Courage Kattrin mimes the whore by putting on the trappings and imitating the walk; in Galileo the cardinal becomes the Pope as he puts on the vestments of that office; in Setzuan Shen Te is transformed into Shui Ta and, in a more step-by-step transition, the malingerer Yang Sun is transformed into the boss' right hand man. In some plays such a social metamorphosis is central, while in other plays it is more incidental; in some the transitions are abrupt, while in others they are more gradual; in some they are temporary, while in others they are more long lasting; and in some the changes are good, while in others they are morally ambiguous (e.g. Setzuan). But in most cases the graphic demonstration of human mutability is designed to counter any fatalistic reading of social determinism.

If character, then, is socially conditioned, it follows that morality will also be influenced by social factors. Because the prevailing social system supports certain moral norms, social

and moral corruption are closely linked, and social dissidence is often marked by rebellion against conventional morality. Brecht conceives of his counter-culture morality as innate. It is, however, often confounded by the necessities of survival which militate against such natural instincts as Kattrin's, Shen Te's, and Grusha's kindness. Thus among the more street-wise characters there arises a survival morality, a flexible, accommodating morality which attempts to make the best of a bad system without totally losing sight of its badness. It results in Shen Te's sweat shops, Mother Courage's war profiteering, Schweyk's accommodation, Galileo's recantation, and Azdak's willingness to recant. It also leads to moral schizophrenia, most painfully evident in Shen Te, but also present in Courage, Galileo, and Azdak. It can even lead to the moral resignation and atrophy of almost all the characters in The Threepenny Opera.

Brecht's characters, like classical epic characters, are tied to or associated with a particular moral bent, and both forms share with comedy a socially oriented perspective on the various moral types. One obvious difference, however, is that in Homer the moral good and the social good, the individual good and the common good do not conflict. In Brecht's plays, on the other hand, moral ideals often have to be tempered by social pragmatism: in the best of all possible worlds, man's innate morality will not be in conflict with his personal or his society's interests, but in the actual environments in which most of his characters move, these interests are often at odds.

As in classical epic, the social and moral inclinations of Brecht's characters are also expressed non-verbally: in gestures which, like epithets, can systematically associate a character with an inclination (e.g. Mother Courage the merchant snaps her purse in a distinctive way after each transaction,[43] Galileo the sensualist rubs his hands in a certain way at the prospect of imminent intellectual or physical gratification) and also in the gest or attitude of the speaker. Brecht's actor, like the epic storyteller, accentuates such attitudes. While the storyteller would be even more dependent on such things as tones of voice, facial expressions, and gestures to clearly differentiate characters, a significant effect in both forms is that the performer communicates a narrative perspective on the character simultaneously with the impersonation itself. Thus it is difficult to distinguish clearly the narrative voice in Brecht's theatre and in classical epic, since the texts alone do not completely convey the narrative overlay in the impersonations.

The narrative character in most of Brecht's plays is projected through a number of overlapping methods, some of which establish it within the context of the story and others which detach it from the story. The latter is more often emphasized by both Brecht and his critics, partly because the written narration is "outside" the enactment, and also because the "objective" commentary seems designed to place the narrator and thus the audience outside, and even above, the action. There are, however, other factors which counteract the disjunctures of narrative and

character outlook and which provide a more consistent narrative attitude throughout the plays.

In Chalk Circle, for example, a single storyteller evokes all the characters and actions. In Setzuan, on the other hand, where the storyteller role is diffused among the characters, the sum of the impersonations evokes a unified storyteller tone and presence. The latter is more common in Brecht's plays, and it demands that the actors approach their roles in a similar spirit and that they are to some degree ideologically compatible. Thus while each actor conveys a distinctly individual attitude towards his particular character, the attitude towards the performance itself is consistent. Not all the characters will share the same perspective, but their creation will convey a clear and consistent perspective.

The social and moral orientation of the narrative character is conveyed by such things as the choice of material and the attitude towards the characters and the audience. In Chalk Circle the storyteller shares the values and attitudes which have determined the outcome of the prologue's decision and which also determine the outcome of his story. He succeeds in drawing the two worlds together by showing that the values and attitudes which point to the wise decision are not simply the product of theoretical speculation, statistical proof, or bureaucratic pragmatism, but also of a more basic and enduring folk wisdom and morality. While such a merger of socialism and folk values may at first seem incongruous, one could argue that in

general the epic's conservation of traditional wisdom, as well as stories, characters, and forms, is not incompatible with socialist ends. In fact, certain socialist features are indigenous to some of the traditions that Brecht's plays and Homeric epic conserve (e.g. rural peasant traditions, army traditions).

The narrative character in Brecht's plays, like that of Homeric epic, shares with the other characters certain ways of looking at and expressing things. Thus even when a character steps out of character to perform a narrative function or when he critizes the action, the ideological and historical distance is somewhat lessened. We will look at the particular characteristics of these common modes of perception and expression in our discussion of thought and diction.

iii. Thought

The thought element in Brecht's drama operates on two levels: there is thought in the Aristotelian sense of reflection on what is involved in or suitable to an action, and there are also thematic statements which involve broader generalizations about the types of situations, actions, and characters. Thus while decision itself is the central manifestation of thought, Brecht is equally interested in the decision-making process (e.g. the determinants, impetus, and means of decisions). Frequently decisions are surrounded or interrupted by digressions which develop the larger determinants of decision. Such material is digressive in its content and also disruptive in the way it

is formulated. In many of the plays this type of speculation is contained in songs which are detached from the action (e.g. preceded by some sort of announcement, by title cues, or by lighting or grouping changes) or in verse sections where the transition from prose to verse is similarly marked. Such reflections may also be addressed directly to the audience. This type of reflection in Brecht's plays is carried on by characters and narrators, so it is not a detached narrator alone who extrapolates from the action and clarifies its context.

There is a further difference between such speculations about decision and Aristotelian Thought: the latter affects the action more directly because it is more closely tied to character. For example, when Pentheus in The Bacchae considers leading an army up to attack the Bacchae or going up and spying on them himself, we know that either decision is in keeping with his (slightly schizophrenic) character, while others (e.g. compromise) are inappropriate. In Brecht's plays the reflections are less closely tailored to character. Characters step out of character both when they address reflections to the audience and when they exhibit mentalities which are not elsewhere reflected in their actions. Such characters as those in The Threepenny Opera can both clarify the broader historical or political determinants of their situations, and even explain why and how things should be changed, and still accommodate themselves to the given situation and, if possible, profit by it. Thus the moral ambiguity and sense of incongruity which hangs

over so many of Brecht's characters, as well as over Brecht himself.

So far we have been emphasizing how such speculations are disruptive. But they can also provide unity. First of all, there is the ideological continuity in the body of the works which is manifested in a number of typically Brechtian themes. There is also a gradual metamorphosis of these themes from their more orthodox and dogmatic formulation (e.g. in Measures Taken) to their formulation in the mature plays as accepted folk wisdom. In other words, there is a growing attempt to integrate these ideas into the world of the characters when the characters cease to be Comrades. Finally, when the narrative voice and the narrative mode of conceptualization follow the folk mode, the ideological, sociological, and time gaps between the narrator and the characters are diminished, as are the social, racial, national, and historical differences between the characters in the different plays (the Orientals, Western Europeans, and Americans). There emerges, then, a kind of universal folk character who shares with the narrator certain ways of looking at and articulating things. The narrator remains in close touch with this folk, because even when he regards them objectively, he does so in their own terms.

Let us look at some examples of this common mode of reflection. The most frequently recurring forms are paradoxical antitheses, parallels, anecdotes, and aphorisms. We see the first type of formulation used by the Control Chorus in Measures Taken

to explain Communist doctrine:

> Who fights for communism must be able to fight and not to fight; to speak the truth and not to speak the truth; to perform services and not to perform services; to keep promises and not to keep promises; to go into danger and to keep out of danger; to be recognizable and not to be recognizable . . .[44]

This mode of formulating first principles, taken with the repeated references to these teachings as "the classics", conveys the impression that the articles of a faith are being explained here more than those of a political movement. It is reminiscent of both the paradoxes in the Gospels and Zen paradoxes. A similar construction explains the audience's obligations in the prologue and epilogue of The Exception and the Rule (1930): "Find it estranging even if not very strange/ Hard to explain even if it is the custom/ Hard to understand even if it is the rule."[45] In Galileo such constructions are used in the verses which precede the scenes (e.g. "The old says: What I've always done I'll always do/ The new says: if you're useless you must go"),[46] the dialogue (e.g. "Unhappy the land that has no heroes!" "Unhappy the land that needs a hero"),[47] and the songs (e.g. the people in the scene 10 carnival interpret the new astronomical theories as meaning that the server will not serve, the fishwife will eat her own fish, the carpenter will build his own house, the cobbler will wear his own shoes). A similar reading of the implications of revolution occurs in Chalk Circle's "Song of Chaos".

In the last examples we also see the tendency to concretize,

to consider a general principle with down-to-earth parallels or examples. In Mother Courage, Scene 3, Courage follows up her general statement "Victory and defeat don't always mean the same thing to the big wheels up top and the small fry underneath" with a story that illustrates her experience of this principle:

> One time in Livonia our general got such a shellacking from the enemy that in the confusion I laid hands on a beautiful white horse from the baggage train. That horse pulled my wagon for 7 months, until we had a victory and they checked up.[48]

Schweyk, of course, is the master of anecdotal exposition in Brecht's play as in Hašek's novel. The referral of general themes to concrete instances is a well-used method in the songs too. In the "Song of Solomon", for example, the principle "virtues are dangerous things, better steer clear of them, enjoy life, eat a good breakfast . . ."[49] is substantiated by examples. In Setzuan examples are used both to substantiate general principles (e.g. "The Song of Smoke") and clarify particular experiences (e.g. "The Song of the Eight Elephant").

In Chalk Circle such constructions characterize the mode of thought from the prologue on. So far I have tried to show that the use of similar constructions in different plays, by different types of character, contributes strongly to the overall unity of thought. Chalk Circle, on the other hand, is an epic microcosm: we see the activities of the people before the storyteller comes, his reception, and his performance. In this play we see the storyteller in an epic performance context,

while in other plays, prologues and epilogues which attempt to create this context have to deal with the actual audience. Thus in Chalk Circle the sense of a consistent folk perspective is even stronger because it is shared by the fictive audience, the storyteller, and the characters. Furthermore the characters, like those in Homeric epic, are direct antecedents of the audience. The universality of this way of looking at things is perhaps even strengthened by its being contested:

> Peasant Woman: Comrade Expert, we're not trading now. I can't take your cap and hand you another, and say: "This one's better." The other one might be better, but you prefer yours.
>
> Girl Tractor Driver: A piece of land is not like a cap. Not in our country, comrade. [50]

The Girl Tractor Driver, who wants to get down to graphs and statistics and even wants the storyteller to cut his recital time, is clearly the exception. The storyteller is, perhaps, cherished because of his ability to draw the relevant parallels and illustrate general principles. He can show the new ideology to make sense in the terms of the people, in the language they can understand, and by a method that is familiar and beloved. In Chalk Circle, then, both the substance of the reflections and the way they are cast are shared by the characters, audience, and storyteller. They are generally the same types of constructions that we found in the other plays, with an interestingly greater number of aphorisms which are used by both the storyteller and the characters to apply folk wisdom to current situations. The "new" wisdom is also cast in this mold, so that

it too takes on the quality and tone of the old wisdom. The play further shows the folk wisdom to contain the seeds of the "new" wisdom. The benefits of mixing the old and the new are summed up by the storyteller in the prologue:

> We hope you will find that the voice of the old poet also sounds well in the shadow of Soviet tractors. It may be mistaken to mix different wines, but old and new wisdom mix very well.[51]

As with classical epic, we must qualify the cohesive property of the thought element by acknowledging that it would be at least partially offset by the distinctive gestures and modes of delivery of the characters in performance. On the other hand, it might well be sustained by certain characteristics of the diction.

iv. Diction*

How is Brecht's diction "epic"? The most striking immediate difference is that Homeric epic uses a uniform verse pattern throughout, while Brecht does not. Brecht also exploits a greater variety of language forms, media of communication, and levels of diction. Thirdly, Brecht often uses language forms for shock. Such forms both interrupt the tone and divert attention to the way language is used. This characteristic of Brecht's language is worth examining in more detail. Before doing so, however, we should note that while one may not find any identical

*Although we are not dealing with Brecht in the original German, our discussion here is of language forms which are not seriously distorted by translation.

use of language in Homeric epic, the concept of drawing attention to and inviting criticism of an element is not alien to epic.

Brecht uses a number of techniques to call attention to the language and the way it is used, and these often play on the incongruity between the language forms and the character and situation. He shocks our expectations by emphasizing the gap between the context in which we usually expect a form of language to be used and the context in the plays in which it is used. Such a shock occurs when characters in dialogue alternately speak in the first and the third person, the past and the present tense, or to other characters and to the audience. A similar shock follows the shifts from spoken to written language, especially when the two are stylistically dissimilar (e.g. in Arturo Ui iambics are used in the scenes and a telegraphic headline style in the between-scene titles). In this example the use of iambics is in itself designed to give pause. The poetic form seems strikingly incongruous to the subject and the characters, and one is thus moved to think about the language form, about why it is more incongruous to Chicago gangsters than to Elizabethan characters, and about why the convention resists the new context. He uses a similar technique in St. Joan. Interestingly enough, in the same year that St. Joan was written, Brecht discussed the form/content relationship in his essay "On Form and Subject Matter" and argued that traditional poetic forms (as well as dramatic forms) were not adequate

for the new material the drama must encompass:

> Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. Can we speak of money in the form of iambics? 'The Mark, first quoted yesterday at 50 dollars, now beyond 100 soon may rise, etc.' --how about that?[52]

Yet in St. Joan the business of the Chicago commodities exchange is carried on in traditional metrical verse, and the resistance of such material to such forms throws both the language and the content into relief. Brecht exploits this device again in Schweyk, though the verse form and rhetoric in the higher regions are less incongruous to the characters. These language forms are more sharply contrasted with the typically Brechtian "little man's" idiom in the scenes. In The Threepenny Opera the language of an individual character often changes abruptly (e.g. In Macheath's prison ballads in Act III scene 3, especially the "Ballad in which Macheath Begs Pardon for All", there is a striking mixture of hymnal language and street slang). Brecht further advises actors to accompany formal breaks between different language forms and levels with various cues to call attention to the shift.

Brecht exploits such linguistic incongruities sparingly. In many of the plays there is another type of diction which prevails, and which more closely reflects the social position of the characters. It is a kind of universal "little man's" idiom which both characters and narrators employ and which, incidentally, most Brecht translators capture fairly consistently. Some of the general characteristics of the idiom are its concreteness,

directness, and earthiness. It tends to rely on certain forms such as anecdotes (e.g. Schweyk), aphorisms (e.g. Chalk Circle), and hyperbole (e.g. Mother Courage), and it projects a highly distinctive tone. It is an idiom which expresses a basic social formality and social naiveté, which is both concrete and yet adapts well to expressive poetry.

Brecht uses poetry in his plays for a number of ends. He exploits its capacity to convey the attitude and tone of "direct and spontaneous speech",[53] as well as its formal division from prose. His verses usually have short lines and employ the typically epic parallel and additive structures which facilitate the rapid building up of a story:

> His name was Georgi Abashvili . . .
> He was very rich
> He had a beautiful wife
> He had a healthy baby . . .
> No other governor in Grusinia
> Had as many horses in his stable
> As many beggars on his doorstep
> As many soldiers in his service
> As many petitioners in his courtyard[54]

> They are poor.
> They have no friends.
> They need someone.
> How can they be refused?
>
> They are bad.
> They are no man's friend.
> They grudge even a bowl of rice.
> They need it all themselves.
> How can they be blamed?[55]

The last two examples show that in addition to providing momentum, the form is well-suited to the dialectical development of ideas.

The similarities between the poetry and prose, and the narrative and direct discourse contribute significantly to the sense of a unified voice in Brecht's plays. As in classical epic, however, this would not efface the individuality of the characters: in performance the linguistic uniformity would be offset by the individual embodiments of the characters and by acting techniques which would further distinguish the modes of delivery. It does seem clear, however, that in the course of his work Brecht developed a highly distinctive folk idiom and, through its extensive use, folk character.

Such an interpretation of the plays brings a number of questions to mind. To begin with, can modern audiences identify with or respond to Brecht's fictive folk (as a classical epic audience would respond to its traditional heroes)? If not, would the epic social functions of the play be significantly diminished and the interest in the plays reside on the political or aesthetic level alone? Might not the epic quality itself be a further reminder of the modern theatre's distance from this form? These are difficult questions to answer, partly because through much of his career, Brecht was cut off from his native audience. In some ways he seems to have compensated for this with the whimsical, nostalgic re-creation of a special audience and performance situation in such a play as Chalk Circle, a play which has the best of both worlds: the revolutionary audience and environment and the audience which is in touch with an epic tradition. Perhaps this is one reason why the play is regarded

by many as the culmination of the development of Brecht's epic drama. From the late 1920's to the end of his career, Brecht built epic elements into the texts and, as we shall presently see, the performances. Such elements may not duplicate the conditions of the epic performance, but they suggest at least something of the epic event.

Chapter 2

1. Audience and Occasion

Brecht is critical of both traditional drama and traditional modes of performance, and he attacks the conventional modern theatre from two angles: the political and the artistic. He feels that it reinforces the status quo by its content, appeal, and niche in the Culture apparatus, and that it is guilty of artistic pandering and mystification. Brecht tends to correlate the ends and the means of theatre, and thus to accuse the traditional theatre of supporting the status quo not just overtly but also through theatrical techniques which encourage the spectator to respond primarily apolitically and uncritically. Obviously one could dispute his objection with examples of unconventional yet politically unprogressive theatre, as well as politically progressive melodramas and tear-jerkers. Certainly some of Brecht's acknowledged models are theatres (e.g. the classical Oriental theatre) that do not serve the kinds of social and political ends Brecht would assign to his own theatre. How much closer to Brecht's ideal is the epic form, which invites an awareness of performance skills and serves analogous (though by no means identical) social ends. For classical epic, these ends are the transmission and reinforcement of cultural history, of traditional wisdom, skills, and values. Brecht sees his theatre as having comparable ends, though obviously the versions of history

and the wisdom, skills, and values he wishes to transmit and reinforce are in some degree "counter-cultural". However inseparable ends and means may be, it is nonetheless useful to examine the particular comparability of Brecht's artistic means with those of Homeric epic.

To begin with, Brecht often uses prologues which, like the classical invocations, clarify the social nature of the occasion: they set the tone, express an attitude towards the audience, and clarify the object of the performance. Secondly, the epic storyteller exploits his audience's sense of itself as a social group, and when Brecht takes his theatre to such forums as union halls or political clubs he seeks a similarly cohesive audience. Thirdly, epic does not appeal to an exclusive or elite audience. It is a popular entertainment form, and Brecht views the theatre as a similarly non-elitist art form which can benefit from the techniques and attitudes of such popular entertainment forms as sports and cabarets. These particular correspondences arise from a larger one: Brecht is interested in creating a special kind of performance occasion which is in a number of ways similar to the epic performance occasion.

What are the characteristics of this occasion? First of all, it involves repeated reminders to the audience of the nature of the occasion. The theatrical lighting does not obscure the surroundings but reveals and thus emphasizes them; theatrical devices are used not to lull the spectator's

conscious or critical faculties but to awaken them. The spectator cannot be impervious to where he is and with whom. The occasion emphasizes the fact that entertainment is being created and encourages the spectator to look at how it is created.

While it is obviously difficult for Brecht to re-create the performance conditions of classical epic (e.g. the performance as part of a complex of activities in which the audience participates) he is able to build such elements into the plays. In the frames to Chalk Circle and Measures Taken, for example, the fictive audience has assembled not solely, or even primarily, for the performances. In both plays the performances are predicated upon a larger purpose for gathering, and the substance and methods of the performances are directly related to the larger events. In both plays the performances are concerned with issues which are important to the group, and the audiences are unlikely to forget this; not only are the larger issues repeatedly referred to, but the performers are visibly part of the group. Like the epic storyteller these performers are not remote "stars", nor are they emotionally transported or physically transformed into their roles. These performances are in the nature of demonstrations, and the performers' methods and the audiences' attitudes reflect this. It is interesting that such performance models are built into both the early, more doctrinaire work and the mature, more entertaining work; it seems to indicate that the epic quality

of Brecht's plays is not really a function of their overt didacticism but rather emerges from the performance attitude.

How is such an attitude communicated to the audience proper? Brecht does not seek the types of audience participation that become popular avantgarde techniques twenty years later. He does not antagonistically confront the audience, nor does he attempt to engage it in a transcendent, psychospiritual communality. Instead he attempts to involve the audience as a social unit. He fosters the audience's awareness of the social environment of the performance and of itself as a social group with a responsible social role that requires alert attention. The role itself varies: the spectator may be approached as a judge, a jury, a pupil, or a referee for whom the performance is a demonstration or illustration of a situation whose resolution is open.

The spectator's attention is directed to the means of performance as well as to the substance. Brecht assumes that the spectator's appraisal of these means will enhance his enjoyment of the performance, and the assumption is well-founded. At a circus, cabaret, or sporting event, for example, one remains aware of one's surroundings and can look at the "performance" critically. Even if partial to a particular performer or team, one acknowledges the basis of such partiality: the skills that are used. We pointed out in our discussion of epic that such critical awareness also stems from the audience's familiarity with the form itself. Such an audience will also

manifest its displeasure at an unskilled or awkward performance, for its familiarity with and appreciation of the form and occasion do not interfere with its critical awareness. Nor is such critical distance incompatible with emotional involvement. Brecht broadens the focus of involvement from the life of a particular character in a particular situation to the performance occasion. Brecht's notorious theatricalism does not demand that one remain uninvolved, but that one be engaged, both intellectually and emotionally (and the two are not mutually exclusive), by the means of performance as well as the substance.

ii. Acting and Impersonation

Brecht encourages his audiences to take a critical view of how the performance is created and thus seeks to focus their attention on the acting. We said before that Brecht's plot structures make the audiences aware of how plot is put together, as the social grounding of character makes them aware of the determinants of character. The creation of character in performance is similarly designed to make visible the means of characterization. Classical epic invites such a view of the acting because the storyteller is the sole actor. The audience therefore can examine the process of impersonation as the storyteller steps into a role by altering his gestures, postures, facial expressions, or tones of voice. Thus the successful storyteller will evoke a strong sense of a character's presence but will not be mistaken for that character. A similar sense of

the impersonation not obscuring the impersonator or fact of impersonation is conveyed in dramas where, for instance, actor's play more than one role, children play adult roles, or men play women's roles. Such casting prevents the actors and the audiences from identifying too strongly with the roles.

Brecht uses a number of techniques to encourage the actors and audience to take a more analytical view of the characters. To some extent such a view is demanded by the texts (e.g. where characters play more than one role, where they mime other characters, where they perform narrative functions, or where they are physically or socially transformed). In another sense, a critical concentration on the acting skills is invited by the prior familiarity of so many of the characters in Brecht's plays and Homeric epic. Brecht uses a number of performance techniques to accentuate the gap between the actor and the character and encourage both the actor and the audience to be aware of performance skills. In Antigone, for example, the actual playing area is marked off, and when an actor is not in a scene he retires to a non-playing area. Brecht gives the following explanation of his purposes: "The reason why the actors sit openly on the stage and only adopt the attitudes proper to their parts once they enter the (very brilliantly lit) acting area is that the audience must not be able to think that it has been transported to the scene of the story, but must be invited to take part in the delivery of an ancient poem, irrespective how it has been restored."[56]

Like the epic storyteller, Brecht's actor is not meant simply to portray but to "narrate" a character, not only to enact a character but to react to him as well. Because the actor does not "become" the character, he is able to look at the character critically and project to the audience his own attitude toward the character. Brecht advocates that this critique be along socio-political lines:

> The attitude which he [the actor] adopts is a socially critical one. In his exposition of the incidents in his characterization of the person he tries to bring out those features which come within society's sphere. In this way his performance becomes a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing. He prompts the spectator to justify or abolish these conditions according to what class he belongs to.[57]

(Note the term "exposition" and the acting attitude which it implies). The actor's political bias is to be apparent, yet such politicization may, in fact, contribute to a more unified tone and perspective if the actors' politics is fairly uniform. The actor's manifestation of his attitude toward his role and his audience is an important element of Brecht's overall demystification of the theatre (the occasion, the physical surroundings, and the means of performance).

Brecht suggests a number of techniques which lay the groundwork for the actor's expressing such attitudes in performance. To begin with, the actor is encouraged to use a number of devices to narrate his character.[58] The actor thus plays the character as though he had already lived through the experience. This in turn results in an intermingling of

time perspectives which occurs in epic too: on the one hand, there is a past perspective which recalls or re-creates completed action, while on the other hand, there is the present perspective of the performance. Brecht opposes such a dual time perspective to Schiller's more rigid distinction between drama's present perspective and epic's past perspective.[59]

Brecht also encourages the actor to become familiar with the text by paraphrasing it in whatever idiom he feels most at home.[60] When the actor thus demystifies the text, he becomes more sure of and better able to project his reactions to it.

Brecht further suggests that actors stand in for each other at rehearsals so that they can see their roles "copied" and thus incorporate a similar detachment in their own approach to their roles.[61]

Finally, Brecht insists that the actor find suitable gestures to express the character:

> everything to do with the emotions has to be externalized; that is to say, it must be developed into a gesture. The actor has to find a sensibly perceptible outward expression for his character's emotions, preferably some action that gives away what is going on inside of him. The emotion in question must be brought out, must lose all its restrictions . . .[62]

He further ascribes a ritualistic and deliberate quality to the gestures.[63] The functions and qualities of the gestures are significant points of similarity between Brechtian and epic storyteller acting.

All these devices are designed to make the methods of

impersonation more obvious to the actor and the audience. When the spectator is thus aware that what he is witnessing is the actor practicing his craft, his attitude toward the actor becomes more of what it is toward other types of performers (e.g. athletes, acrobats): he can marvel at the performance skills for what they are. Thus while the character itself may become more distant from the actor and the spectator, the whole process of impersonation will become more familiar and understandable.

iii. Music and Song

Brecht's music is one element whose function differs considerably from its function in Homeric epic. As was pointed out earlier, the music in epic is essentially background, whereas Brecht insists on the music's independence and narrative potential in his works. This is in keeping with his desire for all the performance elements to remain discrete, analyzable units.[64] Music too, then, is used to jar the spectator, to work dialectically with or comment on the action, and to interrupt the tone.

Let us look more closely at the nature of this independence. Brecht uses a number of devices to emphasize the formal independence of the music: the musicians are visible, there may be distinct lighting changes or title cues before or during musical numbers, and the singers may go through various moves to show that they are going to sing a song.[65] He also uses

music in emotional or thematic counterpoint to the action: rather than underlining the emotional implications of a situation, the music may be emotionally at odds with the situation. In Mother Courage, for example, the victory and funeral music in scenes 5 and 6 run counter to the action. In Chalk Circle Grusha acts "against" the music in her mime at the end of scene 2.[66] In Galileo the threatening revolutionary undertones of the carnival scene are picked up and sustained by the musical accompaniment.[67] In The Threepenny Opera Brecht continually exploits the ironic potential of music.

As with other production elements, Brecht is concerned that the music not be taken for granted or seem to spring from some mysterious source (thus the visibility of the band and the actors' stagy acknowledgments of the difference between the songs and the dialogue). One can see that he is exploiting some of the attitudes towards the music and song which are more prevalent in opera than in other types of musical drama, though without the competition of elements for which he criticizes traditional opera. His songs, like many operatic arias, are absorbing in themselves. They often divert attention from the plot development to the act of singing. Brecht himself speaks of the desirability of these numbers coming across as "virtuoso turns".[68]

It is worth noting that Brecht worked with a number of composers, and that even with the same collaborator there isn't really a consistent musical style or form (e.g. Weill's Three-

penny Opera and Mahagonny). One tends to associate jazz or cabaret music with Brecht's plays, though much of the music is more dissonant and atonal. All the music shares a kind of of percussive insistence which seems quite different from the self-effacing music of epic recitations. Brecht himself suggests that the modern composer tackle "the art of setting epics to music" and points out that "we do not know to what sort of music the Odyssey and the Nibelungenlied were performed. The performance of narrative poems of any length is something that our composers can no longer render possible."[69] He suggests some qualities of such epic music in his notes to Chalk Circle, but his directions are somewhat vague:

> As opposed to the few songs, which can have a personal character, the narrative music ought merely to have cold beauty, and at the same time should not be difficult. It seems to me it would be possible to derive a special effect from a certain monotony. However, the basic music for the five acts should be clearly varied.[70]

His further specifications suggest that the appropriate music is a type of mood music, save for a few places where it is supposed to contrast sharply with the action. Chalk Circle is the only play in which he uses an epic storyteller format, so it is interesting that several of the music specifications (re: simplicity and monotony) point to the type of music we have ascribed to the epic, especially in the light of his more characteristic musical criteria:

> For its part, the music must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into unthinking slavery. Music does not "accompany" except in the form of commentary.[71]

Brecht's aversion to an "unthinking" or "narcotic" exploitation of music is also reflected in his approach to the songs. With the singers, Brecht is more interested in acting ability than trained singing voices. Such untrained singers might, in fact, be better suited to the self-conscious attitude towards both the songs and the fact of singing that Brecht requiries:

> Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels -- plain speech, heightened speech, and singing -- must always remain distinct . . .[72]

As in a cabaret, Brecht's songs are often preceded by an announcement of the singer and the song. Frequently the songs are interrupted by banter between the singer and the other characters or by commentary on the song itself. Such interruptions might offset the strict separation of elements Brecht calls for. So might the use of the Sprechstimme technique (a technique which might well have been used by the epic storyteller too). Brecht further advocates a type of anti-singing which emphasizes the resistance of the lyrics to the tunes: "As for the melody, he [the singer] must not follow it blindly: there is a kind of speaking-against-the-music which can have strong effects, the result of stubborn, incorruptible sobriety which is independent of music and rhythm."[73] The singer's "sobriety" encourages the

audience, then, to think about the lyrics and the context as well as the singing itself. Brecht's exploitation of some of the elements of popular (e.g. cabaret and folk) music might also encourage the spectator to respond as he would at the types of occasions which he usually associates with such music.

While Brecht speaks almost exclusively of the distancing effects of the music and songs, we should remember that there is considerable consistency in the orchestration, construction, and presentation of songs in the plays which could well offset the distancing effects of any particular song in any one context. Such consistency no doubt follows from Brecht's close collaboration with his composers.

iv. Spectacle

Brecht's scenery and stage design, like his acting and music, are designed to allow the spectators to be aware of where they are and what they are doing: the theatrical apparati are visible, the source of light is visible, one can see changes of scenery, and one can see the audience. But the scenic properties are not made visible for their own sake alone; they are part of the larger spectacle and the audience should be able to appraise their place in it. Just as Brechtian acting is intended to make the spectator aware of how the actor uses gestures or voice to create character, his scenery makes the spectator aware of how space, objects, and people are used to create a scene. Thus the interest in the story material is matched by an

interest in how the story is performed, and such structural elements as the minimization of suspense allow the spectator a diffused attention which is quite different from the rapt attention demanded by conventional drama.

Brecht makes the following suggestions about the stage set:

> It's more important nowadays for the set to tell the spectator he's in a theatre than to tell him he's in, say, Aulis. The theatre must acquire qua theatre the same fascinating reality as a sporting arena during a boxing match. The best thing is to show the machinery, the ropes, and the flies.
>
> If the set represents a town it must look like a town that has been built to last precisely 2 hours. One must conjure up the reality of time.
>
> On the time-scale the set must plainly become intensified; it must have its own climax and a special round of applause.[74]

He is working from the premise that if the theatrical apparatus is open to public scrutiny it will not cease to interest the audience, just as when the actor is not transported into the character neither the character nor the art of impersonation becomes less interesting. Such approaches arouse a qualitatively different kind of interest which is similarly aroused in other entertainment forms where one recognizes the facilities as facilities and appreciates how they contribute to the overall event. Such appreciation can well be expressed in applause which will not be inappropriate to the mood of the performance. We find a similar approach to production in opera, where it is assumed that the audience will react overtly to such

things as scenery and arias. Brecht's theatre, like opera and classical epic, is skill conscious, and this fundamental similarity overrides the more obvious differences in the uses of the skills.

Brecht's scenery contains both symbolic and naturalistic elements: he uses symbols, though not hermetic or psychological symbols, and he strives for some measure of scenic authenticity, though on a highly selective basis. Let us look first at his use of symbolism.

Brecht is largely interested in using symbols which simplify the more unwieldy scenic properties in such a way that their function is clear and they are in themselves attractive. Eric Bentley further illustrates these points:

> Thus a disk can represent the sun. Yet if we use such a symbol, we must not fool ourselves into believing that it is not a symbol but the reality. We must not hang the disk on an invisible wire and ask our audience to believe that this is a photograph of the sun. We can hang it on a visible chain. If, as in Caspar Neher's setting of The Threepenny Opera, the stage becomes a veritable network of such chains, it will be the designer's job to see that they form a pattern and not a chaos; here again the functional and the aesthetic elements have to be fused.[75]

In additon to admiring economical and attractive physical symbols, Brecht praises the Chinese theatre's use of gestures and mime as substitutes for scenery:

> A young woman, a fisherman's wife, is shown paddling a boat. She stands steering a non-existent boat with a paddle that barely reaches to her knees. Now the current is swifter, and

> she is finding it harder to keep her balance;
> now she is in a pool and paddling more easily.
> Right: that is how one manages a boat.[76]

Such gestural representations are also reminiscent of the epic rhapsode's method: in both forms the spectator can appreciate the performer's ingenuity and grace in choosing and performing the gestures.

In Brecht's own plays we can see how he uses motion, light, and sound cues to abbreviate the passage of time: in Mother Courage it is represented by the wagon's moving on the revolving stage; in Setzuan, by a lighting change; in Chalk Circle, by the music of the spring run-off.

While Brecht often symbolizes the more unwieldy scenic elements, he tends to treat the scenic details more realistically. Brecht speaks lovingly of Caspar Neher's care in selecting and crafting the props, his handling of the materials, and his painstaking authentication of details and background drops.[77] Brecht's staging thus seeks the best of both worlds: the plausibility of authentic detail and the poetic suggestion of symbolism. Furthermore, it is an uncluttered stage which neither dwarfs the action nor entirely absorbs the spectator's attention.

Brecht's approach to staging seems to have been partly a matter of choice, but also a matter of necessity. He was not, after all, established in a sufficiently endowed theatre till after World War II. Early in his career, he seemed to be interested in productions which could be staged on platforms or at

meeting houses and would have to be economical in a number of respects. During his exile he also worked with amateur and little theatre groups, so by the time he was established in East Berlin, he seems to have learned how to make a genuine artistic virtue out of necessity. If we look back at Chalk Circle once again, we sense almost a kind of artistic nostalgia for the spartan performance conditions of the collectives and storyteller.

As with most of the dramatic and theatrical elements, Brecht emphasizes the gestic and narrative potential of his staging. He speaks of the need for the scene, too, to be treated as an independent element and used to comment on the action. In his essay "Stage Design for the Epic Theatre" he gives two examples of how this can be done. One shows how in an adaptation the scenery can be used to undercut or give a different slant on the text, thus creating a tension between the dialogue, the audience's expectations, and the visual representation.[78] Another technique he suggests calls for a double set: a foreground set for the action and a background set for the environment.[79] Such a double set would emphasize the distance between both the performance's environment and that of the play's action, and the historical background and fictive events and characters. Such a background would no doubt reflect the dynamic interactions between the environment and the movements within it. That is, the environment, like the characters, would be shown to be mutable. The spectator could thus

see how the environments both modify man and are modified by man. Lukacs discusses this aspect of scenery in his article "Theatre and Environment"; he criticizes dramas which portray environment as a subjective state of mind or as an insurmountable, immutable force, and praises Brecht's use of scenery and stagecraft for capturing the "true" interrelation of man and environment.[80]

FOOTNOTES - PART II

[39]Eric Bentley, "An Unamerican Chalk Circle", in The Drama Review, vol. X, No. 4, Summer 1966, pg. 64 (Bentley notes that the Prologue of Chalk Circle is often cut, and in his own translation of the play he excerpts an incident in sc. 3).

[40]Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo: Notes and Variants, in Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays, vol. V, ed. Ralph Manheim & John Willett, New York, 1972, pg. 236-7.

[41]Ibid., pg. 236.

[42]Bertolt Brecht, "BB's Rehearsal Scenes -- Estranging Shakespeare", in The Drama Review, vol. XII, No. 1, Fall 1967, pg. 108-11.

[43]Bertolt Brecht, The Mother Courage Model, in Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays, vol. V, pg. 346.

[44]Bertolt Brecht, The Measures Taken, in The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays, trans. Eric Bentley, New York, 1965, pg. 82.

[45]Bertolt Brecht, The Exception and the Rule, in The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays, pg. 111.

[46]Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo, trans. W. Sauerlander & R. Manheim, in Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays, vol. V, pg. 28.

[47]Ibid., pg. 84-5.

[48]Bertolt Brecht, Mother Courage and Her Children, trans. R. Manheim, in Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays, vol. V, pg. 160.

[49]Ibid., pg. 198.

[50]Bertolt Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, trans. J. & T. Stern, in Bertolt Brecht: Plays, vol. 1, pg. 5.

[51]Ibid., pg. 8.

[52]Bertolt Brecht, "On Form and Subject Matter", in Brecht on Theatre, trans. and ed. John Willett, New York, 1964, pg. 30.

[53]Bertolt Brecht, "On Rhymeless Verse with Irregular Rhythms", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 120.

[54]Bertolt Brecht, Chalk Circle, pg. 9.

FOOTNOTES Continued

[55]Bertolt Brecht, The Good Person of Setzuan, trans. John Willett, in Bertolt Brecht: Plays, vol. 2, London, 1963, pg. 215,217.

[56]Bertolt Brecht, "Masterful Treatment of a Model", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 212.

[57]Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Acting Technique Which Produces an Alienation Effect", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 139.

[58]Ibid., pg. 138.

[59]Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 194 (Brecht cites Schiller's letter to Goethe of 12/26/1797).

[60]Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Acting Technique . . .", pg. 139.

[61]Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum . . .", pg. 197.

[62]Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Acting Technique . . .", pg. 139.

[63]Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 93.

[64]Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 37-8.

[65]Bertolt Brecht, "The Literarization of the Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 45.

[66]Bertolt Brecht, "On The Caucasian Chalk Circle", in The Drama Review, vol. XII, No. 1, Fall 1967, pg. 98.

[67]Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum . . .", pg. 203.

[68]Bertolt Brecht, "On The Use of Music in an Epic Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 84.

[69]Ibid., pg. 89.

[70]Bertolt Brecht, "On The Caucasian Chalk Circle", pg. 98-9.

[71]Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum . . .", pg. 203.

FOOTNOTES - Continued

[72]Bertolt Brecht, "The Literarization of the Theatre", pg. 44.

[73]Ibid., pg. 45.

[74]Bertolt Brecht, "Stage Design for the Epic Theatre", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 233.

[75]Eric Bentley, In Search of Theater, New York, 1953, pg. 140.

[76]Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", pg. 92.

[77]Bertolt Brecht, "Stage Design for the Epic Theatre", pg. 231-2.

[78]Ibid., pg. 231.

[79]Ibid., pg. 232.

[80]Georg Lukacs, "Theatre and Environment", in The Times Literary Supplement, 1964:1, April 23, 1964, pg. 347.

CONCLUSION

We have so far been looking at the particular characteristics of Homeric epic and Brecht's drama individually, without noting fully the points of correspondence between them. In this conclusion, after reviewing the points of similarity between the two forms, we will return to the question we posed in the beginning: how does the recognition of the epic elements in Epic Theatre help us to understand Brecht's work?

Before looking at the broader implications, let us note the particular correspondences between Homeric epic and Epic Theatre.

(1) Both forms allow for a more diffused attention from the audience: both encourage the audience to be aware of a variety of performance features.

(2) Both encourage a critical view of the story material and performance skills.

(3) Both are concerned with the transmission of social history and skills, the one heroic, the other folk.

(4) Both call attention to the social environment of the performance by their treatment of the audience (as a social unit), the occasion (as a social ritual), and the stories.

(5) In both, the formal recitative tone of the performance is matched by a kind of casual intimacy between the performers and the audience.

(6) Both historicize the stories (a) with reference to

contemporary events, and (b) by emphasizing the pastness and completion of the stories.

(7) Both have loose plot structures which admit a diversity of dramatic material, tones, and types of interactions with the audiences.

(8) Both develop a great deal of secondary material in the plots (background, genealogical, and tangential material).

(9) Both are theme-oriented: (a) they contain certain stock themes, and (b) they accommodate dramatic material for its thematic relevance as well as for its plot significance.

(10) In both, there is a measure of prior audience familiarity with the general outline of the plot which is used to foster the performance consciousness and the sense of the performance as demonstration.

(11) Both use a mixture and a fusion of narration and enactment (in the dispersion of the narrative role, the dramatization of the narrator, and the formal and tonal mixture of narrative and direct discourse).

(12) In both, there are a number of perspectives on the action (historical, ideological, and emotional) which are expressed dramatically and theatrically.

(13) In both, plot and performance features discourage the spectator from strongly identifying with any one character.

(14) In both, recurrent constructions and modes of discourse significantly affect the tone, structure, and unity of the works.

(15) Both rely more on contained, gestural acting than on prop-dependent acting.

The first general point we should reiterate here is that while we have concentrated on the epic in Epic Theatre we have also re-emphasized the dramatic and theatrical elements in epic itself. Brecht, too, stresses the point in his defense of the label "Epic Theatre". He asserts that the term is not a self-contradiction, because the conventional distinction between epic as a written form and drama an enacted one is false and misleading. He points out that not only were classical and medieval epics transmitted through theatrical performances, but also certain dramas are more effective as literature. Moreover, certain other types of literature are essentially dramatic (he cites the 19th century European novel, and he might also have cited the Socratic dialogues).[81] Thus the term "Epic Theatre" is not a self-contradiction at all, for the dramatic-epic distinction does not rest on the means alone. What then does it consist of?

Brecht focuses on three main characteristics distinguishing drama and epic, characteristics which are common to both epic and Brecht's theatre. The first is plot construction. He notes with approval that "with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life."[82] That is, while drama may also contain episodes, these are not the main building blocks of the plot.

His second criterion is the number of perspectives on the action. Brecht notes the technical developments in the theatre which facilitate the incorporation of narrative elements and, beyond these, points to epic's admission of more numerous and diverse points of view on the action. Once again, while there are narrative elements in drama, they mainly serve to unify the dramatic focus and tone.

The third criterion is the social milieu. With reference to this criterion, Brecht qualifies the impression he creates elsewhere in his theoretical writings that a particular performance style and dramatic content will suffice to get an audience to adopt the right critical attitude towards the stories and the performance (not to mention the larger socio-political and moral problems they may face). Here he acknowledges that there must be some prior audience receptivity to the form and content of this type of theatre. Such receptivity is conditioned by social conditions and movements. He further insists that Epic Theatre is not new; it shares a number of characteristics with other types of theatre that developed in different countries and historical periods:

> These theatrical forms corresponded to particular trends of their time and vanished with them. Similarly the modern epic theatre is linked with certain trends. It cannot by any means be practiced universally.[83]

Needless to say, all art is affected by social and historical movements, but because an epic performance requires a special kind of audience attitude, it is particularly sensitive to such

factors.

What is the attitude of the epic audience? How does it differ from that of the audience of drama? Here Brecht tends to get polemical: the epic audience is inquisitive, critical, and socially aware, while that of drama is escapist, passive, and fatalistic. If we can cut through the doctrinaire jargon and oversimplified categorization of "traditional drama", however, I think we can see that Brecht is right. The epic does encourage a more analytical view of the action. It does appeal to certain social instincts of the spectators: to their interest in their social and historical traditions, to their sense of themselves as a social unit and of the theatre as a part of a more cohesive social life.

One particular constant Brecht stresses in his consideration of the precursors of his Epic Theatre, and which he connects with the receptivity of the audience and the cultural climate, is the strong didactic element. Such a general trend is important for our placement of Brecht in a larger framework than that of Socialist art or Agit-prop theatre. If we look beyond his particular didactic intent and methods, we can see Brecht's place in an epic tradition with several distinct functions: (1) to conserve and transmit various types of cultural history, wisdom, and experience in stories of the culture's heroes, deities, movements, and skills, (2) to serve as a source of topical information as well as more remote material (e.g. the harper in The Odyssey sings of the lighlights of the recent

Trojan war, while Brecht gathers material from World War II), and (3) to bring to a variety of social situations a sense of continuity between the figures, actions, and movements of the past and those of the present. Such ends depend upon the audience's sense of itself as a social group (both in the theatre and out of it) with a coherent past which is relevant to its current activities and affairs. A further point is that epic is not a form of entertainment to be enjoyed on a solitary or purely individual basis. Drama, on the other hand, tends to elicit a more strongly personal than social response to what is portrayed, thus fostering the impression that the performance is directed to each individual spectator. This distinction, incidentally, suggests similarities between comedy and epic, particularly in the source of material and the approach to the audience: traditional comedy also tends often to exploit topical social trends; the comic types and moral lessons are socially oriented; and the presence of the audience at a comedy is often explicitly acknowledged (e.g. in asides, prologues, and epilogues). Moreover, since laughter tends to be a group activity, the spectator at a comedy remains conscious of the rest of the audience. Thus while subliminally noting perhaps what others laugh at, he learns something about his society, its values and its foibles, from the performance itself as well as from the material performed.

There is one further epic characteristic which is important in Brecht's work, one which is connected with the social function

of the epic. This is the time-distance element. In epic and Brecht's Epic Theatre the material is both distanced (e.g. through narrative forms and commentary, through remote time and exotic place settings) and brought closer to the audience (e.g. through the familiarity of the form and content, through the performers' efforts to bridge the gaps between the past and the present, through the impersonations).

In summation, then, the main points of similarity between Brecht's theatre and epic are (1) the comparative looseness and episodicity of plot structure, (2) the use of a variety of narrative perspectives in both text and performance, (3) implitic and explicit social orientation, and (4) the operation of performance awareness as a significant artistic element.

How does our placement of Brecht in an epic tradition improve our understanding of his work? First of all, it allows us to go beyond the polemics which characterize so much of his theory, especially its polarization of epic and traditional drama. If we take the epic in Epic Theatre more literally, we can see that the elements of dramatic structure, including such things as empathy and pathos, are not inappropriate to epic (given the common structural elements and performance techniques of epic and drama). Such a view of Brecht's theatre also increases our understanding of the theatrical elements of epic and of the epic elements of many types of drama. Secondly, such a view helps us to understand Brecht's purposes in using a variety of theatrical media and his interest in making the means and

skills of production visible. It also provides the basis for a kind of continuity in Brecht's works, between the early and late Brecht, between the more blatantly didactic and more subtle mature works, between the more stridently doctrinaire and more naïvly child-like plays. This continuity is to be found in his basic method of building the material and his consistent attitude toward the audience and occasion. Finally, such a view may help deter producers of Brecht's work from approaching the plays as grim didactic exercizes, period nostalgia pieces, or multimedia extravaganzas. It might also provide a way for directors to free themselves from intimidation by the performance recipes left by Brecht in the production notes and Modellbücher. For if there is one thing that an epic view of Epic Theatre provides, it is the understanding that the performance methods and tone must derive from the performance situation and occasion. Thus while Brecht's production documents suggest valuable techniques for achieving certain effects in rehearsal and performance, the approaches to the audience and the bases upon which the epic effects, tone, and atmosphere are reconstructed are not guaranteed: the means of eliciting such an attitude toward the material and performance in Berlin in the late 1940's and early 1950's will not necessarily be the most effective in all times, places, and performance situations.

Brecht's concern with performance style and social function, and his recognition of the importance of these elements in epic, indicate that he was not applying the term "epic" to his theatre

lightly. While later in his career, in response to a growing number of misconceptions about the term "epic" (for which he himself was in part responsible), he moved away from it, Brecht was well aware that Epic Theatre remained an accurate designation of his theatre. In short, in his self-proclaimed anti-Aristotelianism and pro-epic stance, Brecht himself justifies a comparison of his techniques with those of the Homeric epic.

FOOTNOTES - CONCLUSION

[81]Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre For Instruction", in Brecht on Theatre, pg. 70.

[82]Ibid., pg. 70 (Brecht paraphrases Döblin).

[83]Ibid., pg. 75-6.

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