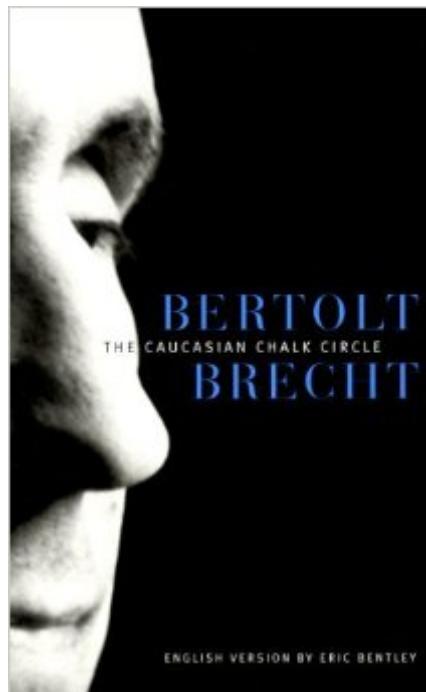


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The Caucasian Chalk Circle



Synopsis

Few authors have had such a dramatic effect as Bertolt Brecht. His work has helped to shape a generation of writers, theatergoers, and thinkers. His plays are studied worldwide as texts that changed the face of theater. The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a parable inspired by the Chinese play Chalk Circle. Written at the close of World War II, the story is set in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia. It retells the tale of King Solomon and a child claimed by and fought over by two mothers. But this chalk circle is metaphorically drawn around a society misdirected in its priorities. Brecht's statements about class are cloaked in the innocence of a fable that whispers insistently to the audience. No translations of Brecht's work are as reliable and compelling as Eric Bentley's. These versions are widely viewed as the standard renderings of Brecht's work, ensuring that future generations of readers will come in close contact with the work of a playwright who introduced a new way of thinking about the theater.

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Customer Reviews

Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle," written in self-imposed exile towards the end of World War II, is a story within a play, in which a bard, or singer, interrupts a group of Caucasian farmers arguing over ownership of land that has been ravaged by Nazi tanks and entertains them with a relevant tale of yore. In a city called Grusinia, the Governor is executed in a coup and his wife flees for her life, abandoning their baby son Michael, who is picked up by a humble kitchen maid named Grusha. Having recently betrothed herself to a soldier named Simon who is away on duty, she sets

out on a cross-country journey with the infant to get help from her brother, a farmer in a distant village. Lavrenti, her brother, suggests she get married immediately to avoid suspicion that the baby is hers out of wedlock, and the most available candidate is a local wretched peasant. After living with this man for a couple of years, Grusha is apprehended by soldiers who have come to take young Michael, the sole heir of the deposed Governor's estate, back to Grusinia. The case of Michael's custody, contested by the Governor's wife against Grusha, is brought to trial, where the judge, a drunk named Azdak whose unofficial appointment to this position is a farce, decrees that the boy will be placed inside a circle drawn with chalk on the courtroom floor, and that the woman who is able to pull him out of the circle is the real mother. (Study the judge's exact words when you read this.) Although the story is of medieval Chinese origin, Brecht's play is a sort of refashioning of the Biblical anecdote about Solomon and expands the idea by supplying a whole backstory to the women's argument.

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