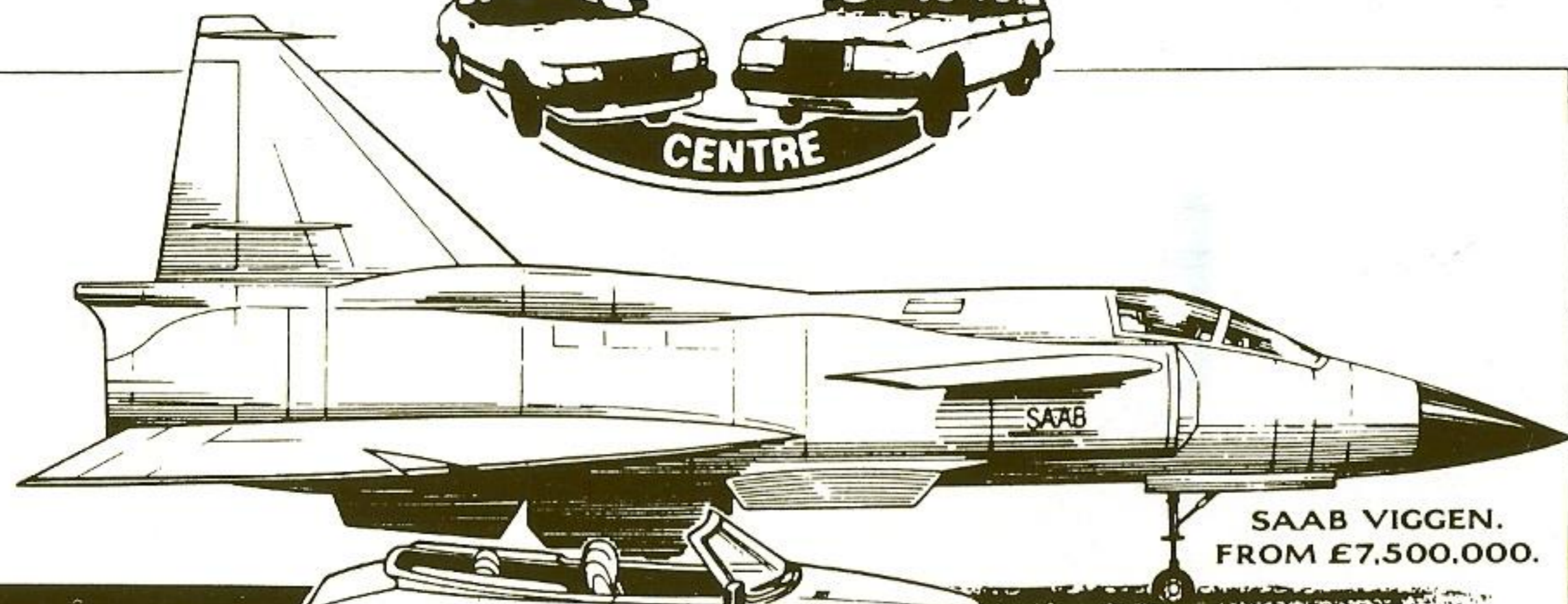


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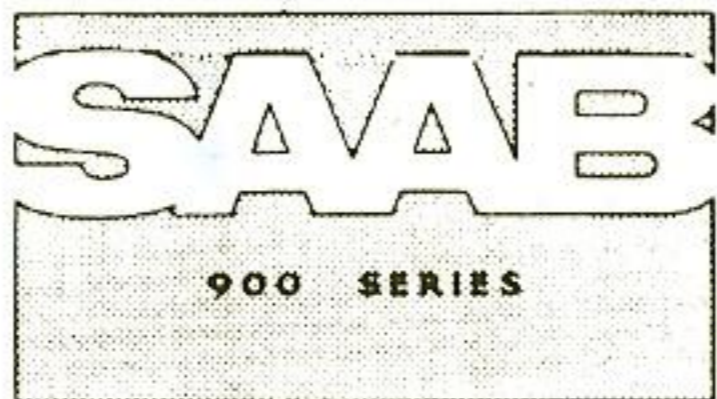
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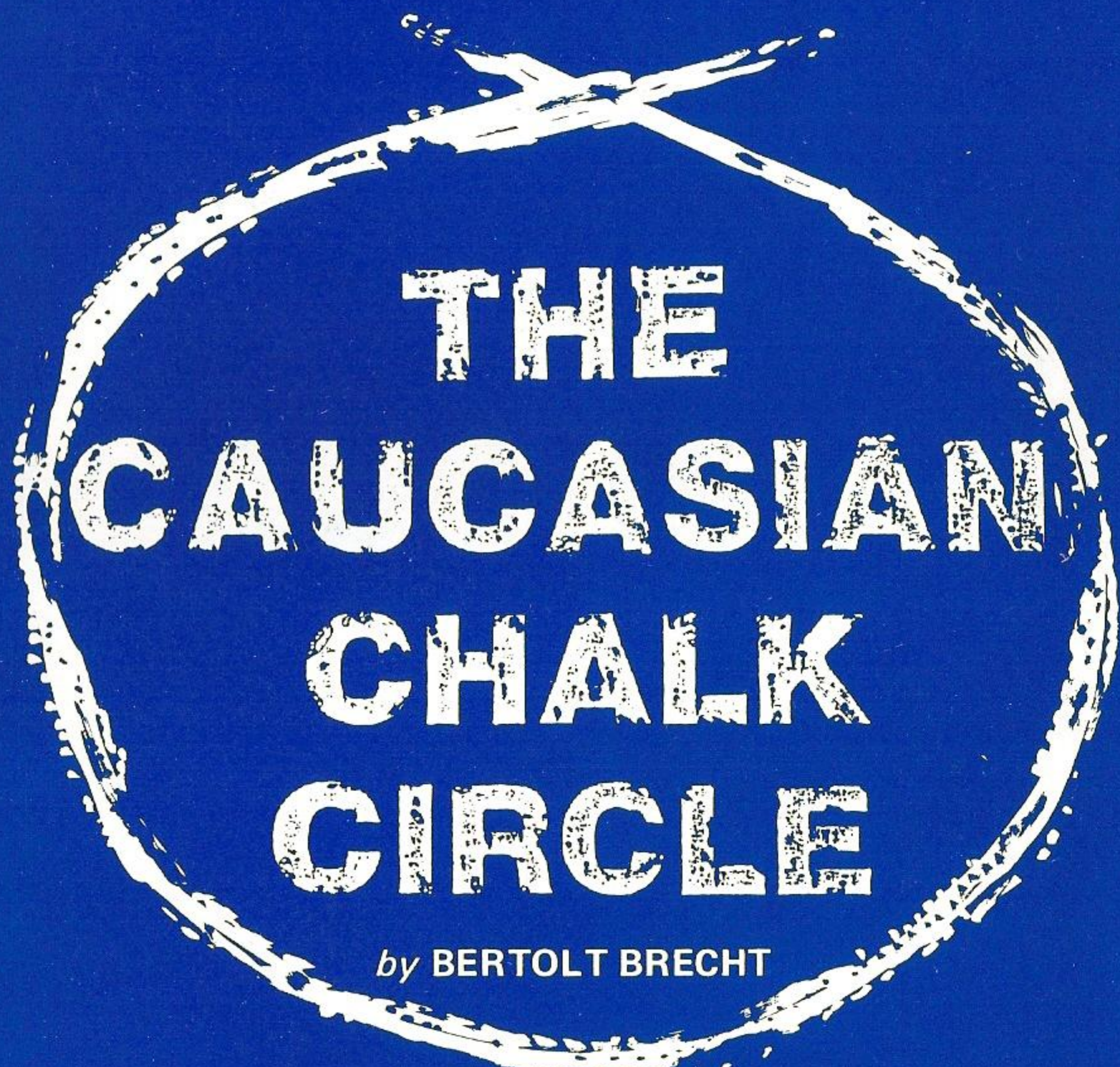
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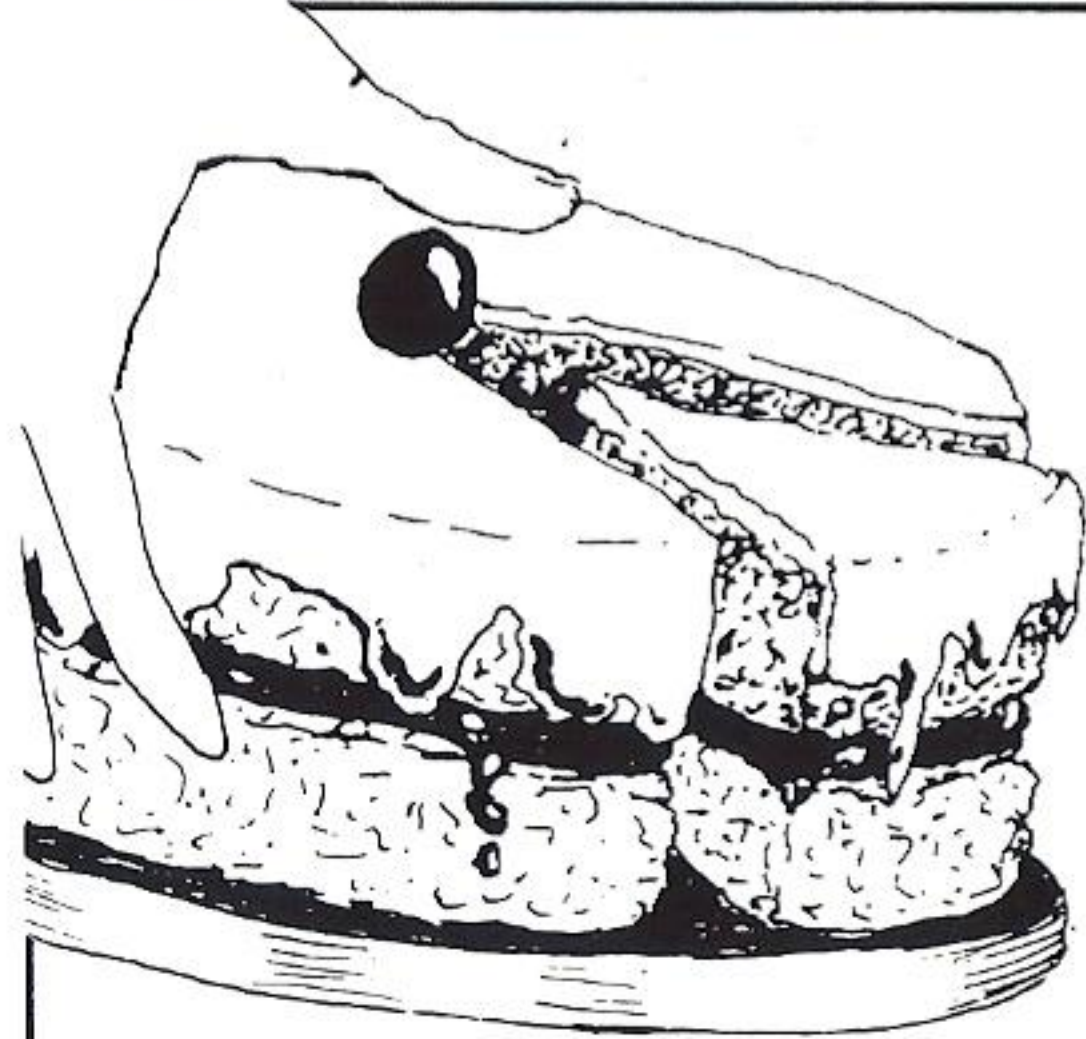
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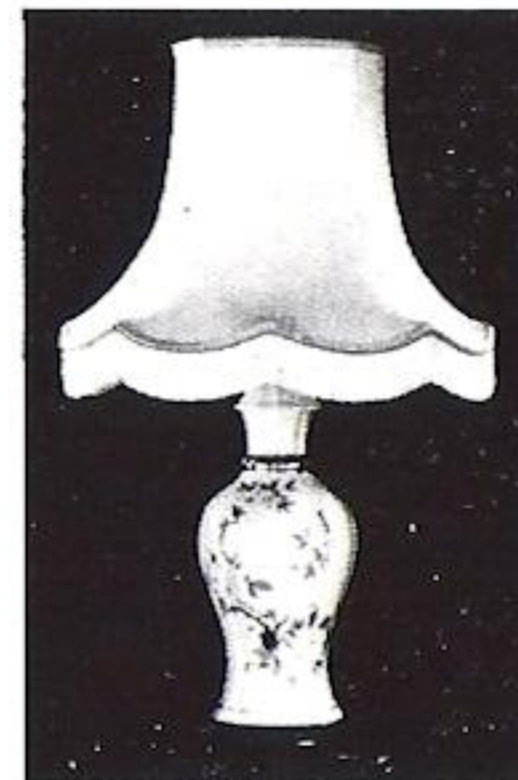
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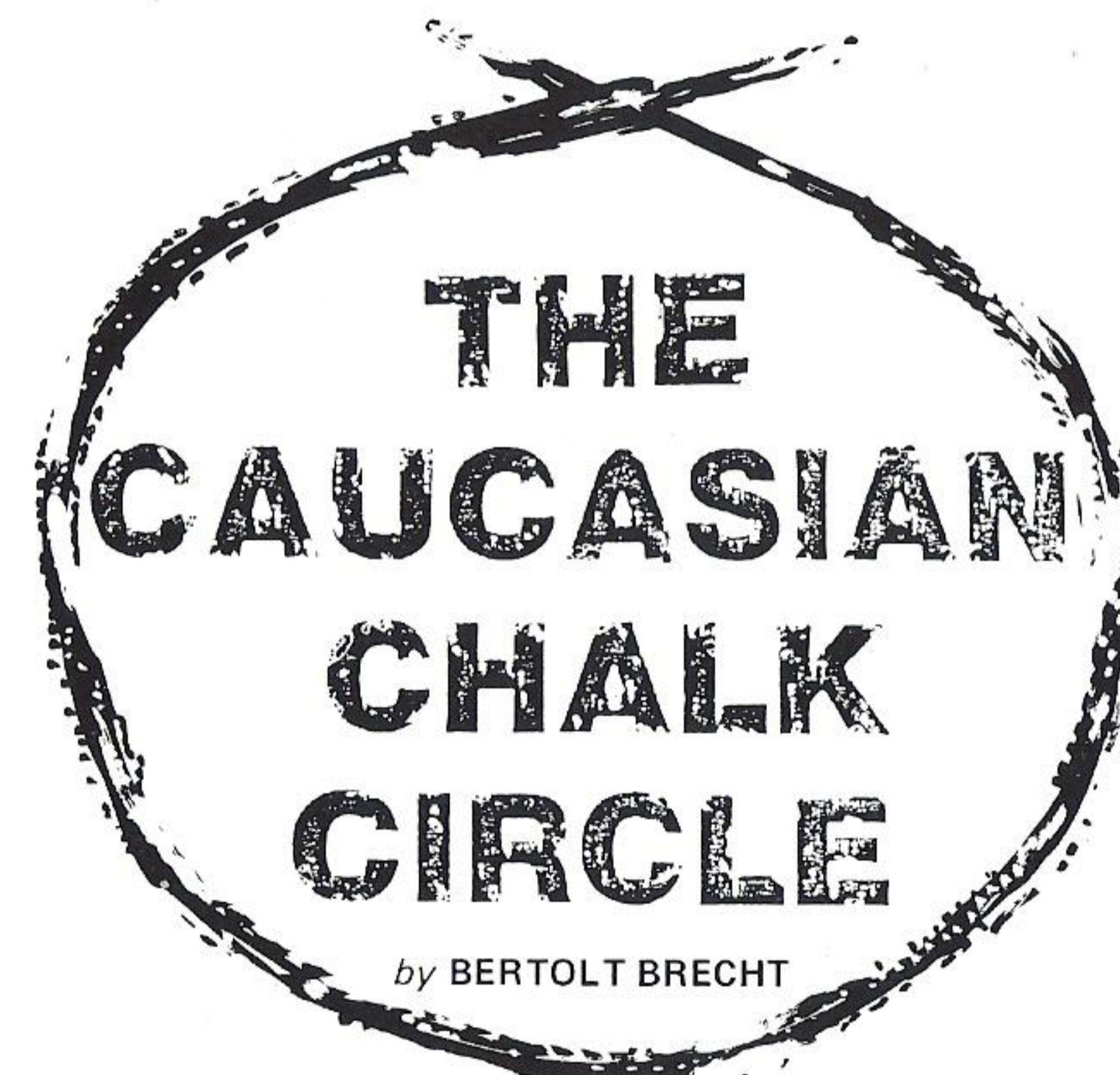
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## THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

Like **Puntila**, **Der kaukasische Kreidekreis** (**The Caucasian Chalk Circle**) could be described as a fairy story for grown-ups. Outdoor scenes and natural images abound in both plays, and both deal with extremes of goodness and badness, leaving out the middle range of qualities. Both plays demand a production style which could not have been achieved at the time Brecht wrote them - he achieved it later, himself, in the Berliner Ensemble - and both are balladesque, but the ballad element in **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** is stronger; nothing in **Puntila** is stylistically comparable with the sequence when the narrator sings in verse the thoughts that Gruscha cannot articulate.

Brecht's short story "The Augsburg Chalk Circle", which was written in January 1940, shows that the Gruscha story in the play has roots in **Mother Courage**. In the fifth scene of the 1939 play, Dumb Katrin rescues a baby from a house where the roof could fall in at any moment. Rocking the baby, she makes inarticulate lullaby noises, ignoring Courage, who tells her to give the infant back to its mother. The sequence lasts for only two and a half pages, and the next episode, which occurs the following year, contains no reference to the baby or to Katrin's frustrated maternal instinct, but in the story, which is also set during the Thirty Years' War, an Augsburg maid, rescues an abandoned baby from the house of a Protestant tanner, Zingli. For years she looks after it, and eventually, when the mother tries to reclaim it, the case is heard by the judge Ignaz Dollinger, 'who is famous throughout Swabia for his crudity and his wisdom'. He asks for a chalk circle to be drawn on the ground and for the child to be put inside it. The two women are then ordered to pull it out.

One index of the play's quality is the richness of its dramatic texture. The story-telling is vigorous, the language muscular. When Gruscha and her lover talk across an imaginary stream or when she, to save the baby from the pursuing soldiers, has to walk across a frail and swaying bridge over a precipice, we are closer to **King Lear** and to the intensity of the demands it makes on an audience's imagination. These are scenes Brueghel might have depicted; another is the peasant wedding with a big cluster of neighbours gathered tightly around the bed of a man who, to avoid enlistment, pretends to be dying. It was partly from Brueghel, but also partly from observation that Brecht had learnt how ugly elements could be incorporated into a beautiful stage picture. He had also learnt something from Brueghel about the value of hinting that the patterns of human idiocy are as unchanging as the pattern of the seasons.

At the same time as having second thoughts about Gruscha and wanting to make her less virtuous, Brecht was having second thoughts about his other main character. Azdak is a more obviously Brechtian creation than she is - a ribald, drunken Schweyk, elevated to the role of judge, so that once again, as in **The Exception and the Rule**, **The Roundheads and the Sharp-heads** and **Fear and Suffering of the Third Reich**, Brecht would have a yardstick for measuring the corruption of justice.

The justice he dispenses is exceedingly rough. He solicits and receives bribes, even if they have no influence on his verdicts. When an innkeeper accuses a stableman of assaulting his daughter-in-law, Azdak condemns the girl for assaulting the man.

**The Caucasian Chalk Circle** reprises many themes Brecht had handled in earlier plays. In **Mother Courage** the characters had to change their image, their values and their life-style when war gave way to peace, though none did so as funnily as Jussup, the peasant who pretends to be dying until the danger of enlistment has passed.

In **Drums in the Night**, a soldier returned from a war to find his girl pregnant by another man; here Simon Shachava returns to find Gruscha with a child and married. The comedy and the neat dramatic trick which removes the obstacle to the lovers' reunion would have been beyond Brecht's powers when he wrote **Drums in the Night**.

In one sequence Gruscha attempts to pass herself off as a well-born lady, when, wanting shelter for the child, she spends the night at an inn in the company of noble refugees. Here Brecht is inverting the substance of the sequence in **Puntila** when Eva tries to prove her downward social mobility. Both girls fail: in Brecht's view the social hurdles can be removed only by revolution.

The final scene in **The Threepenny Opera**, when the arrival of a royal pardon saved Macheath from the gallows, is echoed in a sequence at the beginning of the Azdak section. Screaming, he is being dragged to the gallows by soldiers who suddenly release him. Another familiar element is the satire on law courts, while the explicit insistence that laws should be re-examined to see whether they are still valid is reminiscent of the boy's attitude in **The One Who Says No**: why not reconsider the old customs and preserve only the ones which are good? There is, finally, also a counterpart in **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** to the sequence in **Galileo** which shows how Cardinal Barberini's attitude changes as he is dressed in the Papal vestments: Azdak has the line: 'It would be easier for a judge's robe and hat to pass sentence than a man without all that.'

Though none of these arguments is new in Brecht's work, he had never advanced them in such a relaxed way. Of all his plays **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** is his most joyful celebration of being alive.



**CAST:**

**ALAN CHAMBERS** 2nd Doctor (Niko Mikadze); Chef; 2nd Merchant (Andrei); Lavrenti's Stableman; Monk (Brother Anastasius); Shauva.

**PAUL CHINN** 1st Doctor (Mikha Loladze); Servant; Corporal (Shotta); Drunken Peasant; Azdak.

**LUCY CURTIN** Beggar; Rider; Servant (Assia); Ironshirt; Younger Lady; Wedding Guest; Girl; Fat Prince's Nephew (Bizergan Kazbeki); Farmer (Suru).

**KERRY DRURY** Beggar; Grusha Vachnadze; Ironshirt.

**SUE GASSER** Beggar; Ironshirt; Servant (Sulika); Peasant Woman (who takes in child); Wedding Guest; Michael Abashvili; Farmer.

**JAMES GOODDEN** Adjutant (Shalva); Blockhead (an Ironshirt); Yussup (Grusha's Husband); Ironshirt; Lusty Stableman; Bandit (Irakli).

**PAUL JIGGINS** Guitar; Beggar; Stableman; Musician; Rider.

**MONYENE KANE** Fat Prince (Arsen Kazbeki); Servant (Masha); Elder Lady; Wedding Guest; Ironshirt; 2nd Lawyer (Sandro Obolodze).

**RENATA NASH** Ironshirt; Cook (Grusha's Friend); 1st Merchant; Wedding Guest; Tallest Boy; Invalid.

**ANNE SAWBRIDGE** Beggar; Ironshirt; Architect; Servant (Nina); Peasant; Aniko (Grusha's Sister-in-Law); Wedding Guest; Old Woman (Mother Grusinia); Old Wife.

**TANYA SCOTT-WILSON** Governor's Wife (Natella Abashvili); 2nd Singer; Inn - Servant; Wedding Guest; Fat Boy; Doctor; Ludovica.

**JENNIFER TUDOR** Beggar; Architect; Servant; Nurse (Maro); Merchant Woman; Grusha's Mother-in-law; Farmer (Shutoff); Ironshirt; Old Husband.

**HELEN WALKER** The Singer (Arkadina Tsheidse).

**ALAN WIDDRINGTON** Ironshirt; Simon Chachava; Architect; Innkeeper; Wedding Guest; Limping Man; Ludovica's Father-in-law.

**NORMAN WILKINSON** Governor (Georgi Abashvili); Servant; Ironshirt; Old Man (with milk); Lavrenti Vachnadze (Grusha's Brother); Fugitive (Grand Duke); Blackmailer; 1st Lawyer (Illo Shuboladze).

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## BERTOLT BRECHT 1898-1956

Brecht's life falls into three distinct phases demarcated by his forced exile from his native Germany during the Hitler years. From 1898-1933 he was in Germany; from 1933-1947 he is in exile in various parts of the world; in 1947 he returns to Europe, first to Switzerland then to Berlin.

Here is the detailed chronology from 1933

### Exile

- 1933** The Nazis come to power. The night after the German parliament building (the Reichstag) is burnt down, Brecht flees with his family to Prague. He moves to Vienna, then Zurich, finally settling on the island of Fyn in Denmark. His friendship with Ruth Berlau begins.
- 1934** Brecht visits London. The themes of flight and exile enter his poetry.
- 1935** Brecht is stripped of his German citizenship. He visits Moscow and meets the Soviet dramatist Sergei Tretyakov. He attends the International Writers' Conference in Paris. He visits New York to look in on a production of **The Mother**, which does not meet with his approval.
- 1936** Brecht attends the International Writers' Conference in London. He writes anti-fascist poetry.
- 1937** Brecht attends the International Writers' Conference in Paris.
- 1938** Brecht finishes writing **Life of Galileo**. **Fear and Misery of the Third Reich** is given its first performance in Paris.
- 1939** Brecht moves to Stockholm with his family. He finishes writing **Mother Courage and Her Children**.
- 1940** German forces march into Denmark. Brecht's household moves to Helsinki in Finland where his friendship with the writer Hella Wuolijoki begins.
- 1941** Brecht completes **Mr Puntila and His Man Matti**, **The Good Person of Szechwan** and **The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui**. He writes war poetry and 'Finnish Epigrams'. Leaving Finland Brecht travels through the Soviet Union via Leningrad and Moscow (where Margaret Steffin dies) to Vladivostok and sails to the U.S.A. He arrives in Los Angeles in July and settles with his family in Santa Monica. He makes contact with other exiles (Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger and Fritz Lang, the film director) and with the natives (Orson Welles). First performance of **Mother Courage and Her Children** in neutral Switzerland.
- 1942** Brecht prepares his **Poems in Exile** for publication. He participates in the anti-war, anti-fascist activities of exile groups. He meets Charles Laughton.
- 1943** The first performances of **The Good Person of Szechwan** and of **Life of Galileo** take place in Zurich. Brecht writes **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**.
- 1944** Brecht becomes a member of the newly formed Council for a Democratic Germany. W.H. Auden works on an English version of **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**. Brecht studies Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese poetry.

- 1945** **Fear and Misery of the Third Reich** is given its first English performance in New York under the title **The Private Life of the Master Race**. Brecht and Charles Laughton complete an English version of **Life of Galileo**.
- 1946** The first performance of Brecht's adaptation of Webster's **The Duchess of Malfi** takes place in Boston.
- 1947** Charles Laughton appears in the title role of **Life of Galileo** in Beverly Hills and New York. Brecht appears before the **House Committee on Un-American Activities** and proves himself a master of ambiguity when cross-examined about his communist sympathies.
- Return**
- Brecht and Helene Weigel go to Zurich, leaving their son Stefan, who is an American citizen, in the U.S.A. Brecht applies for an Austrian passport. (Helene Weigel is Austrian.) He meets Max Frisch, his old friend and designer Caspar Neher, and the playwright Carl Zuckmayer.
- 1948** Brecht's adaptation of **Antigone of Sophocles** is performed in Chur, Switzerland and **Mr Puntila and His Man Matti** is given its first performance in Zurich. He publishes the **Little Organum for the Theatre**. Brecht travels to Berlin and starts rehearsals of **Mother Courage** at the Deutsches Theater in the Soviet sector of the city.
- 1949** **Mother Courage** opens at the Deutsches Theater with Helene Weigel in the title role. Brecht visits Zurich again before settling in Berlin. The **Berliner Ensemble**, Brecht and Helene Weigel's own state-subsidised company, is formed and opens with **Puntila**.
- 1951** **The Mother** is performed by the **Berliner Ensemble**. Brecht finishes the first version of his adaptation of Shakespeare's **Coriolanus**.
- 1953** Brecht is elected President of the German section of the PEN Club, the International writers' association. On 17 June there are strikes and demonstrations protesting about working conditions in the German Democratic Republic. Brecht writes a letter to the Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party which is released to the press in a doctored form.
- 1954** The Berliner Ensemble moves into its own home, the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm (where he had triumphed with **The Threepenny Opera** in 1928), and performs **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**. Brecht makes public his objections to the Paris Treaty (which incorporated the Federal Republic of Germany into Nato) and to re-armament in general. The Berliner Ensemble's productions of **Mother Courage** and Kleist's **The Broken Pitcher** are enthusiastically received as the highlights of the Paris Theatre des Nations festival. **Mother Courage** is awarded the prizes for best play and best production.
- 1956** Brecht is preparing the Berliner Ensemble, which by that time has become generally recognised as the foremost progressive theatre in Europe, for a visit to London when he dies of a heart attack on 14 August. The visit went ahead and **Mother Courage**, **The Caucasian Chalk Circle** and **Trumpets and Drums** were presented at the Palace Theatre at the end of August for a short season — a landmark in Brecht's reception in the United Kingdom.





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