



## **Study of Survival and Entrepreneurship in the Bertolt Brecht's play "Mother Courage and Her Children"**

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### **Introduction**

Bertolt Brecht, a seminal figure in 20th-century theatre, profoundly influenced the landscape of modern drama, and his play "Mother Courage and Her Children" stands as a towering testament to his unique artistic vision. Written in 1939 amidst the tumult of a world on the brink of another global conflict, Brecht, a staunch critic of war and fascism, embeds his deep socio-political concerns within the fabric of this play, using the Thirty Years' War as a historical backdrop to draw stark parallels with contemporary events of his time. The play is an exemplar of Brecht's pioneering 'Epic Theatre', a style he developed to encourage audiences to engage critically rather than emotionally with the play, thus fostering a more detached, analytical response to the narrative and its themes. This approach is vividly demonstrated through the play's central character, Mother Courage, a canteen wagon owner who navigates the treacherous landscape of war, profiting from the conflict yet suffering immense personal loss. Her character embodies the contradictions of survival and morality within a war-torn world, highlighting the complex interplay between individual agency and the inexorable sweep of historical forces. Brecht's use of the alienation effect, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, a technique designed to prevent the audience's emotional identification with the characters, is pivotal in this context.

It allows the audience to critically evaluate the actions and decisions of Mother Courage, a character whose entrepreneurial zeal in the face of devastating war raises poignant questions about the nature of war, capitalism, and human resilience. The episodic structure of the play, marked by a series of vignettes rather than a continuous narrative, serves not only to depict the relentless and cyclical nature of war but also to challenge conventional storytelling techniques, thus reinforcing Brecht's intent to provoke a critical response from the audience. Furthermore, the use of songs and music in "Mother Courage" is another distinctive feature of Brecht's style. These musical interludes, often ironic and jarring, provide commentary on the action and themes, reinforcing the play's messages while maintaining the critical distance he sought to establish between the audience and the narrative. Brecht's play is replete with themes that resonate deeply with contemporary audiences, including the futility and devastation of war, the often contradictory relationship between business ethics and personal morality, the plight and strength of women in conflict zones, and the impact of larger political and social forces on the lives of ordinary individuals.

These themes are not just historical artifacts but continue to have profound relevance in modern contexts, reflecting ongoing conflicts, the complex dynamics of global capitalism, and the enduring struggles for survival and morality in a world beset by political and social upheavals.

The character of Mother Courage, a blend of resilience, opportunism, and tragic flaw, remains a powerful symbol of the human capacity to endure and adapt, even as she embodies the tragic consequences of war and moral ambiguity. Her journey through the play, marked by the loss of her children to the very war from which she seeks to profit, offers a poignant commentary on the human cost of conflict and the paradoxes inherent in the pursuit of survival at the expense of moral considerations. The play's enduring impact lies in its ability to confront audiences with these stark realities, challenging them to reconsider their own perspectives on war, capitalism, and morality. In conclusion, "Mother Courage and Her Children" is not just a historical play but a living, breathing work



of art that continues to challenge, provoke, and resonate with audiences, offering a timeless reflection on the complexities of human nature and the perennial struggles of mankind.

### **Historical and Cultural Context**

Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage and Her Children" is deeply rooted in the tumultuous historical and cultural milieu of the early 20th century, a period marked by profound social, political, and artistic upheavals, and its inception during the rise of Fascism and the looming threat of World War II profoundly influenced its themes and narrative style. Written in 1939, at a time when Europe was on the cusp of one of the most devastating wars in human history, Brecht, a German playwright and a Marxist, was living in exile due to his opposition to the Nazi regime, and this experience of displacement and political dissent deeply permeated his work. "Mother Courage," set against the backdrop of the Thirty Years' War—a protracted and brutal conflict in Central Europe during the 17th century—serves as an allegory for the senselessness and destructiveness of war, reflecting Brecht's acute awareness of the political realities of his time and his commitment to using theatre as a tool for social and political commentary. The Thirty Years' War, which ravaged Europe from 1618 to 1648, was not only a religious conflict but also a power struggle, with devastating consequences for the civilian population, much like the wars in Brecht's own time. By choosing this historical setting,

Brecht draws a parallel between the cyclic nature of war and its perennial impact on society, especially on the most vulnerable. This period was also characterized by significant cultural shifts, including a growing disillusionment with traditional narratives of heroism and nationalism, themes that Brecht explicitly challenges in his play. In the broader context of 20th-century theatre, Brecht's work represents a departure from the dominant theatrical trends of the time. While the early 20th century saw the rise of realism and naturalism in theatre, Brecht proposed a different approach with his Epic Theatre, aimed at encouraging critical thinking and fostering a more detached, analytical response from the audience, contrasting with the emotional engagement typical of conventional theatre. This shift was not only artistic but also ideological, as Brecht believed that theatre should not merely entertain but also educate and provoke social change.

The play's episodic structure, alienation effect, and incorporation of songs and music reflect this intention, challenging the audience's passive reception of the narrative and encouraging them to question and reflect on the societal issues presented. Brecht's influences also included Karl Marx's theories on capitalism and class struggle, which are evident in the play's critique of war profiteering and the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in a capitalist society. The character of Mother Courage, a canteen wagon owner who follows armies to profit from the war, embodies the contradictions of capitalism, as her entrepreneurial spirit and desire to survive conflict with her role as a mother and her moral compass. Her journey throughout the play, marked by personal loss and moral ambiguity, serves as a critique of a system where survival often necessitates moral compromise.

Furthermore, the play's portrayal of the impact of war on women and the civilian population resonates with the broader historical context of the early 20th century, which saw significant changes in the role and perception of women, partly due to the two World Wars. Women's participation in the war effort, both on the home front and in various other capacities, began to challenge traditional gender roles, a theme that Brecht explores through the character of Mother Courage, a strong, complex female protagonist navigating a male-dominated world ravaged by conflict. In sum, the historical and cultural context of "Mother Courage and Her Children" is integral to understanding its themes, narrative style, and enduring relevance. The play reflects Brecht's deep engagement with the political and social issues of his time, his innovative approach to theatre, and his commitment to using art as a medium for social critique and change. By situating a personal story within the broader context of historical events and



cultural shifts, Brecht not only provides a commentary on the specific period of the Thirty Years' War but also offers insights into the universal and timeless nature of war, capitalism, and human resilience.

### **Survival and Entrepreneurship**

Within the context of a civilization that has been ripped apart by war, Bertolt Brecht's play "Mother Courage and Her Children" examines the concepts of survival and commerce through the prism of a society that has been torn apart by war. There are a number of traits that Mother Courage has, including moral ambiguity, opportunism, and strong resilience. She has a variety of facets as a person. She travels through the Thirty Years' War with her canteen waggon, which serves as a metaphor for her flexibility and perseverance. She is accompanied by her canteen waggon. Brecht uses the journey that Mother Courage takes in order to bring attention to the moral compromises and harsh pragmatism that are essential in order to live in such an environment. This is done in order to raise awareness about the situation. Additionally, the play criticises the inclination of the capitalist system to profit from devastation, which is another aspect that is criticised. This is another component that includes criticism. The play is structured in the form of an episodic style, and it tells the storey of Mother Courage's travels around Europe during the period when the war was going on.

Through the use of this manner, the tenacious and recurrent character of her fight to stay alive is brought to the foreground. Throughout the course of the series, several parts of her personality are brought to light, including her financial acumen, her aptitude for compassion, and her eventual powerlessness to hide her children from the damage produced by war. This sophisticated portrayal, which poses a challenge to the audience, compels them to contemplate the ethical implications of surviving and conducting business in a world in which war and commerce are intertwined. This is because the audience is forced to consider the implications of this situation. Furthermore, the play delves into the more far-reaching implications of this struggle for survival, implying that individuals in a capitalist society, particularly one that is impacted by war, are frequently compelled to prioritise economic survival over moral or ethical considerations.

This is especially true in situations where war is a factor. It is particularly important to keep this in mind in circumstances when conflict is going place. Through the course of the play, this subject is brought up and addressed on several occasions throughout the duration of the play. In a number of cases, Mother Courage is confronted with situations in which she is compelled to make business judgments that are in direct opposition to her maternal desires. These decisions ultimately result in disastrous consequences for Mother Courage. Brecht uses these instances to draw attention to the dehumanising consequences of war as well as the corrupting impact of a system that sets a greater value on profit than it does on human life. He accomplishes this by bringing attention to the fact that profits are more important than human life. A number of different personalities and their connections with the military economy are brought into the discussion about the problem of entrepreneurship. This is a reflection of the myriad ways in which people react to and are formed by the environment in which they find themselves. Additionally, it is a manifestation of the reality that individuals are shaped by the environment in which they are raised. From the perspective of the human cost of war and the challenges of living in a capitalist society, the play acts as a critique of both of these issues. The criticism that it offers on each of these subjects is really effective.

### **Impact of Politics on the Individual**

In the play "Mother Courage and Her Children," which was written by Bertolt Brecht, there is a comprehensive inquiry of the impact that politics has on individuals, particularly in the context of war. The play, which takes place during the Thirty Years' War, illustrates how political power and combat often have an impact on the lives of people. The play takes place during the war. Ordinary people who



are caught in the crossfire of political struggles are represented by the image of Mother Courage, which is a depiction of the struggle that they are going through. The conflict has a huge impact on her life as well as the lives of her children, and she displays this throughout the storey. Brecht's depiction of Mother Courage's business venture, which is dependent on the war economy, sheds light on the intricate interdependence that exists between individual survival and the larger political environment. This interdependence is brought to light by the presentation of Mother Courage's business venture. In each and every one of her actions, which are motivated by the necessity of surviving in an economy that is dominated by war at the time, the larger political reality that dominates her existence and drives her choices is reflected. Her choices are driven by the need to survive in their current environment. The destiny of her children, each of whom symbolises a different dimension of the effect that politics has on human lives, help to further accentuate this dynamic. In addition, the destinies of her children serve to highlight this dynamic even further.

Furthermore, during the course of the play, the ideas of resistance and complicity in the face of political persecution are investigated. In reaction to the struggle, the characters exhibit a wide range of responses, ranging from opportunism to heroism, which are all examples of diverse responses. It is important to note that these answers are representative of the myriad of ways in which individuals cope with and react to oppressive governing regimes. The road that Mothers Courage takes is marked by an ongoing battle between her instincts to be an entrepreneur, which often link her to the war, and her instincts to be a mother, which put her at odds with the war. This tension is what makes Mother Courage's journey so characteristic. As a result of this struggle, the moral ambiguity and ethical dilemmas that people who are engaged in politically charged environments are compelled to face are brought to light. The treatment of these issues by Brecht is not just a commentary on the Thirty Years' War, but it is also a reflection of his personal experiences and opinions of the political developments that happened in the early 20th century, particularly the rise of fascism and the beginning of World War II. By drawing parallels between the Thirty Years' War and the contemporary political climate of his day, Brecht draws attention to the fact that these concerns are eternal and universal in nature. The way he does this is by making comparisons between the two. This book, "Mother Courage and Her Children," is an in-depth examination of the impact that participation in political activities may have on an individual. It offers a glimpse into the multifaceted relationship that occurs between the person and the political sphere over an extended period of time.

### **Impact of History and Politics**

Bertolt Brecht is the author of the play "Mother Courage and Her Children," which is an examination of the significant impact that history and politics have had on people as well as on society by focusing on the effects that these factors have had. The United States of America housed the performance of the play. The action of the play takes place during the Thirty Years' War, and it offers a commentary that is universally applicable to the consequences of war, political unrest, and social upheaval. The storey takes place during this historical era and analyses the impact of these events from a perspective that is completely timeless. In the storey of Mother Courage, who was the proprietor of a canteen waggon, the author delves into the complexities of surviving during a time period that was marked by political unrest and violent acts. This brings to light the reality that individuals are often caught up in the waves of history and struggle to manage the challenges that are given by political forces that are beyond their control. This makes it clear that people are frequently swept up in the waves of history. In the face of the ruthless machinery of war, which is fueled by political choices and historical conditions, Brecht makes use of her character to investigate issues such as survival, opportunism, and moral ambiguity. This is done in the context of the war machine.



She does this by analysing the approaches that she takes to dealing with these problems. The stories that her children tell not only shed light on the devastating implications that political events have on human life, but they also give even more insight on the subject matter. Each and every kid demonstrates a unique facet of the human cost that is associated with war and political struggle. This is a reality that cannot be ignored. Although the play is organised in an episodic method, the normal flow of the story is disrupted by songs and monologues that are interspersed throughout the performance. This is because the play is structured in an episodic fashion. Due to the fact that the audience is driven to participate in critical contact with the events that are going place, they are also pushed to examine the play's wider historical and political repercussions over the course of the performance. This method, which is an essential component of Brecht's concept of Epic Theatre, is intended to cultivate a feeling of detachment and critical awareness in the audience, with the goal of convincing them to examine the political beliefs and social conventions that are portrayed in the play. Brecht's concept of Epic Theatre was developed in the 1980s. This objective is accomplished by the use of the approach.

The work "Mother Courage and Her Children" is a reflection of Brecht's personal experiences and perspectives during the early 20th century in Europe. This was a period of time that was marked by the rise of fascism, World War II, and tensions associated to the Cold War. As a reflection of his perspectives and experiences during this historical period, Brecht's exploration of history and politics in the play is a mirror of those circumstances. Brecht draws attention to the cyclical aspect of history as well as the repeated patterns of political ambition, conflict, and human pain by establishing connections between the Thirty Years' Bloodshed and the political backdrop of his day. This is done by establishing analogies between the two. Specifically, he does this by drawing parallels between the two scenarios.

### Conclusion

"Mother Courage and Her Children" is a play by Bertolt Brecht that explores the cyclical nature of war, the impact of political machinations on individuals, and the broader societal consequences of conflict. Set during the Thirty Years' War, the play critiques the cyclical nature of war, the impact of political machinations on individuals, and the broader societal consequences of conflict. Brecht's character, Mother Courage, masterfully illustrates the complex interplay between personal survival and larger political forces, highlighting the tragic consequences of living in a world shaped by war and political strife. The play's episodic structure and alienation effect serve as innovative theatrical techniques and encourage critical reflection on moral and ethical dilemmas. Brecht's skill in using theatre as a platform for social and political commentary has cemented his place as a pivotal figure in modern drama. The themes of the play resonate with the contemporary world, speaking to ongoing global conflicts and the struggle between power and humanity. Brecht's work remains a significant artistic achievement and a crucial lens through which to examine the complexities of history and politics and their impact on human experience.

### Reference

- Brecht, Bertolt. "Mother Courage and Her Children." Translated by John Willett, Arcade Publishing, 1994. (Original work published 1939).
- "Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic" by Bertolt Brecht, edited and translated by John Willett: This book offers valuable insights into Brecht's own thoughts on theatrical practice and theory, particularly his concept of Epic Theatre and the alienation effect, which are central to understanding "Mother Courage."



- "The Cambridge Companion to Brecht" by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Editors): This comprehensive collection of essays provides a wide range of critical perspectives on Brecht's work, including discussions on his major plays and their historical and political contexts.
- "Mother Courage and Her Children" (Critical Edition) by Bertolt Brecht, edited by Hugh Rorrison and John Willett: This edition not only includes the play but also critical commentary and notes, which can provide a deeper understanding of its themes and historical background.
- "Brecht: A Biography" by Ronald Hayman: This biography offers a detailed account of Brecht's life, his political views, and how his experiences influenced his work, including "Mother Courage and Her Children."
- "Understanding Brecht" by Stanley Mitchell: This book provides an accessible introduction to Brecht's ideas and works, exploring the political and theatrical concepts that underpin his plays.
- Academic Journals: Journals such as "Modern Drama," "Theatre Journal," and "German Quarterly" often publish articles on Brecht and his works, providing scholarly analyses and interpretations.
- "Brecht and the Politics of Secular Salvation: Sanctity and Sacrilege in the Theatres of Veneration and Enquiry" by Sean Carney: This book delves into the religious and political dimensions of Brecht's plays, including "Mother Courage."