

# [Mother courage and her childre](https://assignbuster.com/mother-courage-and-her-childre/)

Brecth’s “ Mother Courage and Her Children” is a play with a great political and social context. Brecth was a bitter commentator in the devasting efecrs if war on politics and the human spirit and a masterful black comedian. Brecth wrote mother Courage to demonstrate that it is the great enterpeneaurs as a result of captialism that make war inevitable. “ Mother Courage” comments on the socio-ecoomic aspects of war and criticises the pragamatism and bourgeouis ideology within the ranks of people.

Brecth uses the ususual situation of War to highlight the faults in humans characters and he unjust nature of society, favouring the bourgeouis and exploting the proletrait. Mother Courage is set in the Thirty Year War, and insteas of concentrating on the battles of the war but presents the evry-day war life with the inherit “ Bussinessman” Mother Courage and her three children, whom she inadvertably sacrafices one by one. Mother Courage is an ambigous figure. She embodies a clash of contradictions and ideals, she is a dialetic; both fearless and feckless, wise and uneducable, maternally caring and emotionally allof.

A amp-following trader, she picks the bones of a war-withered economy to feed her fatherless childen. She unconciously subscribes to a captialist system and does not realise the consquences of it; Mother Courage disagrees with war, but continues to exploit the commercial aspect of ot, through selling her products. Brecth is creating a world intensified by war; Mother Courage is trapped in a system driven by greed, self-interest, war and profittering, Mother Courage adheres to the rules of the captialist system and as a result ashe both succedds and fails.

Although she gains in terms of profit, she loses all of her children to the war. A life-long pacifist Brecth wrote “ Mother Courage” in 1939 at the onset of World War II. Brecht uses the character of Mother Courage as a demonstartion of his critisim “ that in wartime the big profits are not made by the little people” Mother Courage does not represent an individual but an archtype to highlight the communist philosophy of Brecht. Brecth believed in the philosophy of Karl Marx, that the captialist system was corrupt and immoral, and if a country subscrided or adhered to it then war would e inevitable.

Mother Courage represents the captialist system which acts as a catalyst for war; Brechts point in Mother Courage is that profit motive keeps the war going, it’s the price that we pay; “ Takes a war to get proper nominal roles and inventories- shoes in bundled and corn in bags, and a man and beasy properly numbered and carted off, cause it stands to reason: no order, no war” The shoes in the bundles and the corn bags are for Mother Courage stock items that lead to orders, and thus captial. War accoding to the Seargant and Mother Courage, is just ‘ bussiness’- no war no orders.

War therefore is a continuation of bussiness, that makes the humabn virtues fatal to even their possessors. The captialist sytem is based upon exploiting the majority; the proletariat for the benefit of personal gain of a few individuals of the bourgeouis. A system like captialism which was not based upon equality for all classes is a impending doom and will lead to war. From dialetic portrayal of Mother Courage the audience fail to emphatise with her, instead he wanted a play that evoked social change, it needed to be clear that the audience learnt something from their ime in the theatre.

Brecth is symbolising his ant-war message throught the presentation of Mother Courage, whom despite her motherly status he makes a criminal. Brecth is highlighting his communist message that war makes criminals out of everyone even mothers. This is done through the alientation technique, wherby Brecht wanted to distance his audience from the play and to concentrate on it’s social meaning and the issues raised, and that through his plays that the audience activily seeks to improve the problems proposed.

Alienation techniques include the various didatic devices such as osters with historical context and cabaret style songs with imedes identification. Brecht was attempting to contrast against the ideals of Aristoleain theatre which relied on catharis to evoke symapthy for the characters on stage. Brecth objected to this soprofic attuide and passive veiwing, wanting his audiences to analyse what the saw. Mother Courage’s thoughts and feelings are irrelevant, Brecht instead used Mother Courage as a carature to explain social issues.

Mother Courage is often described as a “ war play”, when really it is a “ bussiness play” in the sense that ll of the scenes are about a bussiness transaction; scene one with the deal of the belt, scene two with the deal with the capon, scene three with the wagon and scene five with the bullets and the shirts until the economic funeral arrangement of Kattrin in the final scene.

Brecht is firm in wanting to use his characters to demonstrate his political message of war being a ‘ continuation of bussiness’ and ‘ the human virtues (are) fatal even to those who excerise them. This suggests that Mother Courage is not powerless in the hands of faith or our purely reactionary but she is left free to choose. To suggests that Mother Courage has adapted may mislead the audience into thinking that she cannot do anything about her situation, and would therefore give the audience a chance to emphatise with the character, and create a theatre of illusin which is a feature of Aristoleian theatre, which Brecht was opposed to. Brecht uses epsoidic structure, the audience see various epsoides in the war, the play does not represent the play as a whole.

Therefore the play does not represent the whole war but randomly picks out points of Mother Courages journey in her individual career. According to the Aristoleian definition Mother Courage represents a tragic hero. She demonstrates the ability to survive, through which the audience regonise the strength of her character and instinct of self-preservation.

This is linked to the ideology of captialism, Mother Courage is a parasite of war through her socio-economic status; she is simply trying to provide for her children but is doing so in a system which exploits the ‘ little people. Mother Courage’s captialism is her tragic flaw, which eventually leads to the protagonists downfall. Mother Courage’s tragic flaw is constinently exhibted, and leads to her three childrens deaths, as she is absent conducting bussiness on all of the occassions where her children die.

However despite the initial attachment from her children, it is clear to the audience that Mother Courage herbours genuine consideration for her children: in a discussion with Cook over the fate of her children she states: “ all I’m after is (to) get meself and children through all this and with my cart. In the juxtaposition of the relecutant roles of both mother and merchant. Yet lthough her single-mindness to support her children is sympathetic, it becomes a mere aggrandisement in relation to her fourth child- the wagon.

The wagon is a visual reminder to the audience that war is the same as trading. Like a investor, she builds profits on the fluctations and requirements of the war, buying and sellling the lives on men QUOTE. Alternatively, this contrast could be interpreted as an indication that Mother Courage is morally “ neither all good nor all bad”, a quality which Aristotle states as necessary in a tragic hero.

Her intention of and attempt at providing for and rotecting her family by her existence as a “ hyena of the battlefield” is essentially good, yet it is in fact this very existence which brings about the deaths of her children and her own downfall. “ Mother Corage” is essentially the tale of a woman for whom wars mean the opportunity to make money out of shortages and how loses her children in bussiness. The irony is not that she is a bad mother, but that bussiness takes her away at crucial times in the play.

She needs the war for capital to support her children but the war takes her children away: “ Either way, victory or defeat is a diastster for the ittle people. ” Although “ Mother Courage” shows to an extent the horrors of war and the polemic for pasfism. The play is essentially a critisism of materialism, the making of money at the expense of humanity. Mother Courage represents this critisism of materialism as a result of the captialist system; because money keeps her away from her children, when they need her most.

Brecht tries to convey his anti-war message through the characterisation of Mother Courage, there is the focus that as a ‘ little person’ representing the proletarait ahe can only conduct a small bussiness. The Seargant is a narrator expressing Brecth’s point of view, observing that Mother Courage is wasting her time trying to “ get fat off war” but give “ nothing in return. ” Eventually she will have to sacrafice her children to the war, to keep the bussiness going; this is a parallel to how the bourgeouis continue to conduct the bussiness of war through the sacrafices of the lower classes.

This is a critique of how the government exploits the lower masses and how the captialist and democratic system favours the elite group of the bourgeoius and opresses the proletrait. At the end of the play, Mother Courage continues in trading despite the consquences that have arisen due to her submission to the captialist system. Her survival is based on the banal- she has limited imagination and cannot understand her own madness, and so continues her life as a merchant QUOTE.

Mother Courage has no consideration for the causes or consideration for what the war is about; swapping sides in the middle of the war and only thinking about her own profit QUOTE. Her outlook on life is simple and basic, she is not so much a war profiteer villian but is a political represenative of a mall bussiness buffered by circumstances and clinging to what dooms it; captialism and war “ I hope I can pull the wagon by myself. Yes I’ll manage, theres not much in it now. I must get back to bussiness. ” Brecht wanted the audience to question why she learns nothing about war and bussiness.

She is aware of how the captialist system works and how the lower classes suffer at the expense of the proletrait; the common people she says need to overcome the incomptence of generals and kings abd the poor “ need courage” because the leaders “ cost” them thier lives. Therefore the play could be considered to be more nstructive than reality, because the war situation has been chosen to highlight Mother Courage as a political figure of captialism and the connection between war and commerce: the proleteriat as a class can end all wars by ending captialism.

Through the ending of the play Brecht is suggesting to the audience that in peace and war, no virue will truimph. There is no noble courageousness without motive, no spirited rebellion or outrage, merely an over-riding desire whatever the consquences; Mother Courage keeps her bussiness going; she hasn’t learnt from the experiences of war, humanity goes on espite the consquences, if they can find the courage. From diadetic portrayal of Mother Courage the audience fail to emphatise with her, instead he wanted a play that evoked social change, it needed to be clear that the audience learnt something from their time in the theatre.

Brecth is symbolising his ant-war message throught the presentation of Mother Courage, whom despite her motherly status he makes a criminal. Brecth is highlighting his communist message that war makes criminals out of everyone even mothers. Brecth presents a political figure hrough Mother Courage because she is an athesis to his ideals of communism and war. Her do–or-die pragmatism psits philosophical questions about a proletrait struggle to survive in a world gone mad and the price for her survival.

Her philosophy is summed up in the refrain that conculdes the prologue and several of the accompaning songs “ And though you may not long to survive/Get out of bed and look alive! “. Kattrin is different to any other charcater in the play. She is the only true virtous child of Mother Courage, a kind and positive figure in the play. Kattrin’s personality and her qualities of humanity and ompassion, could be regarded as an athesis of Mother Courages and when juxtaposed against Mother Courage her qualities are elevated.

Her compassion and humanity are poignantly demonstrated in scene five, where Kattrin selflessly “ dashes” into the ruins of a house to rescue a baby, while Mother Courage refuses to donate linen to help the injured peasant “ I got to think of meself… ” Kattrins personality is antithetical to Mother Courage’s she is selfless and generous rather like Grusha from the “ Chausian Chalk Circle”, whilst Mother Courage repeatly prioritizes the interests of her bussiness and herself ver anything else.

The qualities of Katttrin are more heroic than any which Mother Courage could possess, which make Kattrin the genuine heroine of the play. Kattrin is “ generally good… and fine”, which is specified by Aristotle in the “ Poetics” as the criteria for a tragic hero. At the climax of the play, she becomes a martyr as a result of her death in an attempt at alerting others that their lives are in danger. This is Kattrin’s “ noble and complete action”; a deed that we could never expect from Mother Courage.

She dies for a cause that is worthy in her eyes, yet her goodness nd generosity pass by largely unnoticed by anyone other than us, the mere observers. Kattrin is a familar form of Katherine which means ‘ pure’ and the etmology of the word reflects the purity of her chracter. Kattrin represents the suffering of war; Kattrin’s muteness is due to an unknown incident with a solider but yet despite her muteness makes expressive and gestural responses.

Kattrins dumbness is even equated to the terrors of war, “ a solider stuck something in her mouth when she was little” and she is attacked and mutilated by some viscous maraduersn while collecting supplied or her mother. This induces a change in Kattrin, and possibly a reversal of her fortune, as is indicated by her sudden lack of interest in Yvette’s red boots. It appears that Kattrin accepts that she will now never be desirable to men and therefore will never be married and have a family of her own.

From this moment, she is dedicated to protecting others with a refreshed selflessness, and is highlighted in the following scene when she risks her life to save the child’s. The political message of Kattrin is that intellgent people are born into the world and then crippled by the ar, as represented by her dumbness. With the exception of her final act, Kattrin does precisely as she is instructed, despite the consequences. This is demonstrated in her resistance to her assailant after Mother Courage warns her “ don’t let them steal nowt”: Kattrin returns with the articles but has been assaulted as a consequence.

This is the first glimpse of Kattrin’s sense of duty to others as a flaw that will lead to her downfall. Mother Courage’s “ Song of Solomon”, relating the danger of the virtues of her and her family, foreshadows Kattrin’s death through “ unselfishness”. A sharp contrast is made between the two women in Mother Courage’s notion that virtues are simply “ wickednesses” and the increasing effect of Kattrin’s strengthening morals on her actions. This builds up to the climax of the play, where Kattrin’s selflessness is realized as her tragic flaw.

Kattrin represents the political ideal of Jeremy Bentham and his utilitarian ideals that believed in ‘ the greatest happiness for the greatest number’. Kattrin is agitated by the likelihood of the soliders attacking the nearby village and attcking and killing the civilians in it, she climbs on the oof of the farm house, taking a soliders drum with her, and using this “ instrument of war” she ‘ speaks’ to the inhabitants of the town with a gesture. The soliders shoot her, but by this time it is too later Kattrin has already warned the local town of the danger and has paid the action with her life.

The political message is that she allows her self to suffer to a great extent, for the greatest number of civilians in the local town. No doubt the audience would be stirred by this scene, and Brecth states that “ epic theatre is in a position to portray” events that can be emotional. As this scene successfully juxtaposes the apt contradiction in the play of the different approaches to life that both Mother Courage and Kattrin represent, an essential woman and Mother Courage who is socially constructed one which has the power to make her own bussiness-as-usual choices.

The real struggle in “ Mother Courage” is about money, food and clothing. These were the basic communist ideals, which can be reflected in the promise of Lenin “ Bread, Peace and Land. “ Through “ Mother Courage” Brecht examined the relationship between captialism and crime, his Marxist ideolody s examined through the crimes of history themselves. If the bussinessman is identified with the ganster in the “ Threepenny Opera” then he is identified with the war-maker in “ Mother Courage.

Brecth is inferring that property is not only theft, but the murder of Ellif, the rape of Kattrin and pillage are too; war may be the extension of diplomacy but it is also the extension of free enterprise. Mother Courage and Kattrins characterisation demonstrate how religious pity, patrosim and bourgeouis respectablity are just synonmons for greed, aqusition an self-advancement. Through Mother Courage the heme of war as bussiness is highlighted, thus demonstrating that war is just ‘ the same as trading’, and the morality ehich justifys war must be considered an evil sanction.

Mother Courage” represents the fact that the war keeps the profit going and there will always be those who take advantage of it. The characterisation of Mother Courage, whom is often perceived to be a athesis to Brechts own philosophy, demonstrates Brecths ant-captialist and anti-war philosophy. Through her characterisation Mother Courage wanted to demonstrate the unfairness of the captialst system and encourage the udience to change thie attutidutes, their fixtation of materialism, which has overshadowed and confused their basic principles and morals to life.

Kattrin is the opposite to Mother Courage, although she never speaks she has suffered a great deal of personal set-backs due to the war, she is still prepared to save people. The juxtapostion of the different approaches to life that both Mother Courage and Kattrin represent, an essential woman and Mother Courage who is socially constructed one which has the power to make her own bussiness-as-usual choices.