

# [To what extent are mother courage and paulina strong female characters essay samp...](https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-mother-courage-and-paulina-strong-female-characters-essay-sample/)

To define the words ‘ strong’ and ‘ character’, the dictionary offers these definitions;

Strong – 1- having great power, energy, effect, flavour etc.

2 – not easy to break, damage or defect.

The word strong can be used in many contexts. It relates to Mother Courage and Paulina as I am exploring to what extent they are both strong in terms of how they both cope and achieve from their backgrounds.

Character – 1 – all the qualities that make a person of thing what he, she or it is.

2 – a person in a play, book, film etc.

Both definitions of the word character are relevant to Mother Courage and Paulina. First, they are both in plays, and secondly I am exploring what their main qualities are.

“ Death and the Maiden” was written in 1991 by Ariel Dorfmann. Paulina, the main female character, thinks she has found the man who subjected her to rape and torture in which seems to be the country of Chile, while it was under the rule of the dictator General Augusto Pinochet. The events that follow help Paulina to try and make the doctor, Roberto, confess to being the one who treated her in this fashion while she was being held hostage.

“ Mother Courage and her Children” was written in 1938-9 by Bertolt Brecht. The play follows Courage through twelve years of the thirty years war, these being 1624 – 1656. It follows her journey across Europe and how she comes to lose her children to the war. Throughout the play she will not part with her favourite possession and livelihood – the cart.

Both Mother Courage and Paulina have basic character strengths.

Paulina uses her vocal and mental skills to create an atmosphere where Roberto feels pressure, as so to make him confess. If this confession is true or not is insignificant, as Paulina achieves her goal.

Although she doesn’t reflect the usual temperament of a female character, she however manages to express herself through her hidden femininity. She ensures that Roberto and Gerardo understand how damaging rape and torture can be. This can been seen in her monologue in Act 1 Scene 2:

“ I’ve never told Gerardo, or my sister, certainly not my mother. She’d die if she knew exactly what I’ve got in my head.”

The use of the gun strengthens her character as it makes the men fear her. It prevents the men from retaliating her, especially when she fires the gun at point blank. The stage directions show the reactions from both men.

“ Gerardo takes a step backward and Roberto looks desperate.”

The reaction form Gerardo is patronizing to Paulina, but in spite of this, she still refuses to pass over the gun. She keeps her character strong although Gerardo believes that treating her as a child will be effective.

“ Don’t shoot, Paulie. Don’t shoot that thing off again. Give me that gun.”

Mother Courage uses her knowledge of war to make her a strong character. This aids her in self survival (but not that of her children) as she keeps her business running throughout the duration of the play. She can talk her way out of situations so that she always ends up with a business deal, without losing profit. This does not mean that she doesn’t win in other areas, such as her children’s’ protection form the war. A fine example is from the first scene, where she loses Eilif due to a business deal.

“ I got no faith in any kind of money. Burnt child, that’s me, sergeant. This coin’s good, though. And now let’s get moving. Where’s Eilif?”

Her main strength is not to let people know her feelings, especially her children, or find out too much about her past. This makes her hard to break emotionally as another character cannot determine whether she has been upset by the current situation in the play. An example is in Scene 2 where she and Eilif are reunited. She doesn’t show great happiness in seeing her son again – the two of them talk about meaningless events.

“ Eilif: How’s the old feet?

Mother Courage: Bit tricky getting me shoes on of the morning.”

Her other main strength is making people help her without minimal effort. This is evident by how she manages to make business without losing (except in the case of her children).

” This coin’s good, though. And now let’s get money.”

Paulina also has weaknesses which are exposed in the play. We can see that she has an unstable mind form the first scene. Her uneasiness shows that she is not comfortable when around strangers. This is heightened by the use of the gun.

“ She hurriedly stands up……. She goes to the sideboard, takes out a gun,”

She loses her temper easily throughout the play. This is especially noticeable when the male roles do not follow her orders. Although she loses her temper, she hardly ever raises her voice. This is because she is trying to show the men that she is keeping calm, although her actions tell differently.

The clearest example is when she shoots the gun as Gerardo goes to untie Roberto. She shows a huge loss in temper, as it could have resulted in death.

When her husband, Gerardo, tries to talk some sense into Paulina, she is too self motivated to take into account any of his advice.

“ Gerardo: Are you deaf? I just told you I’m going to have to resign.

Paulina: I don’t see why.

Gerardo: You don’t see why, but the rest of the country will…”

Mother Courage also has character weaknesses. She doesn’t protect her children enough, due to her pride in her business. This in effect causes her to lose all of her children to the war. First she loses Eilif due to a business deal, then he is later killed by his heroicness. She loses Swiss Cheese by denying that he his her son, as he is caught by the opposing tem in the war. Although she does try to save him, this is only slightly noticeable and we see that she would rather protect herself and the cart then her eldest son.

“ Of course he’d give it over rather than be a goner. Right out he’d say: I got it, here it is, you’re too strong.”

She then loses Kattrin as a result of her caring for others over herself. Kattrin knows that she is a nuisance to her mother on her travels, and dies for the respect of her mother because she knows that the cart is more important to Mother Courage than herself. This shows how Mother Courage probably has treated her children throughout other wars in the same way, as Kattrins’ feelings wouldn’t have allowed to her to make the decision to take her own life.

Both characters are aided in the plays by male admiration.

Paulina is helped by Gerardo’s affection for her as being her husband. Although he knows that the way Paulina is treating Roberto is wrong, he only outlines what she is doing wrong rather than taking action against her. He understands what she has been through and isn’t afraid to show his emotions when Paulina explained again what happened to her when she was held captive.

“ Paulina: They tortured me. And what else? What else did they do to me, Gerardo?

Gerardo goes to her, takes in her his arms.

Gerardo: (whispering to her). They raped you.”

This male admiration helps her to strengthen her character as she knows that one of the men in the play is under her power. This makes her feel more mentally strong and aids her in making Roberto respect her. This is because he will be looking for help from Gerardo and when he sees that he is under paulinas’ strength, he will feel isolated. This is probably one of the reasons why Paulinas” took this course of action.

With Mother Courage, the Cook admires her throughout the play. He follows her on her journeys through Europe and the war. The reason for his admiration for her is not entirely evident although one can deduce that it is because of her long prosperous business thorough which she has achieved many things although it must have been difficult for her.

Paulina and Mother Courage are not the only two females in the world literature plays who show strength.

The first character we can look at is Kattrin. Although Kattrin is speechless and dumb, she still can show strengths of communication, although these are generally misunderstood by Mother Courage. For example, in the first scene when Eilif is being pulled in to the power of the Recruiter and his target to make Eilif join the war. Kattrin signals to Mother Courage that this is happening, but she doesn’t recognise the signs that Kattrin is portraying to her.

Another female character with strength is Feletti from ‘ Accidental Death of an Anarchist.’ she uses her power to manipulate the men into a false sense of security, then makes them all say different scenarios of what happened when the anarchist ‘ flew’ out of the window.

The title ‘ To what extent are Paulina and Mother Courage strong female characters’ can be answered from the bulk of my essay.

Paulina is a strong character in accordance to her background. Many people who have been rape and tortured may not have reacted so severely, but may have hidden away from their feelings. She lets her feelings known to Gerardo and Roberto, but always manages to stay in control of them both. She aims what she wants to achieve – a confession from someone admitting that they were the one who subjected her to her rape and torture.

Mother Courage is also a strong character, apart from she loses all of her children to the war. She has lived for a long time and has been to many wars but in this war the loss of her children is what separates them form the rest. Although this happens, she manages to carry on and keep going with her business and her livelihood – the cart. The cart is never harmed throughout the play, although all of her children do die. Mother Courage’s strength is supported by her lack of showing her emotion at losing her children.

Her children themselves help to strengthen her character, as they provide her necessary backup for helping with business deals and getting out of ‘ sticky’ situations. We see the love her children have for her, as they all risk their lives for her.

Overall, I would say that Paulina is the strongest character of manipulating other, but Mother Courage is the strongest character in emotion.