

# Mother courage and her children by brecht essay sample



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Anna Fierling is a canteen woman who bears the name, “ Mother Courage” and travels in her wagon along with her children serving the Swedish Army during the Thirty Years War, (1618-1648 ). Although she has been warned that war can never be all take and no give she intends to make a living from the war whilst keeping her children out of it.

> Sweden, spring 1624

A truce has occurred in the Swedish-Polish war, a recruiter and his Sergeant are seeking without success to enlist new troops for the Swedish campaign in Poland. The recruiting officer attempts to enlist Eilif, her son, into the army.

Courage sees her brave son being seduced by the officer and demands he leaves her children alone. The Sergeant protests and asks why; since Courage wishes to live off the war should she not give it something in return.

When Eilif admits he would like to sign up, Mother Courage tells the recruiter’s fortune and then prophesises his early death. Manipulating the situation and installing fear into her children, Courage then draws black crosses out of the hat signifying her children’s death, telling them that Eilif will die for his bravery, Swiss Cheese for his honesty and Katrin for her kindness. As the play progresses we find this “ prophesy” is fulfilled. Whilst Courage is distracted, the recruiter officer takes Eilif away. The sergeant then gives a prophesy of his own, “ Like the war to nourish you? Have to feed it something too.”

> Poland, 1626

Courage has followed the army into Poland, where the Swedes are attacking the Polish fortress of Wallhof. Outside the commander's tent Courage attempts to sell the cook a capon.

Courage overhears the conversation where the commander is congratulating his brave soldier. Soon, Courage realises the brave soldier is her Eilif, and convinces the cook that he needs food for the new guest and sells her Capon at an outrageous price.

Eilif sings the " Ballad of the Girl and the soldier" and dances a sword dance. Courage adds a verse in which the foolhardy soldier dies in an icy river.

> Poland, 1629

Swiss Cheese has been made regimental paymaster. The war has taken a good turn and Courage feels her business prospects look good. Yvette Pottier, the camp prostitute, throws aside her hat and red boots and complains that her business is low now that it is known she has a Venereal Disease. She sings the " Song of fraternisation" recounting her story of her lost love, Puffing Piet.

Courage tells Katrin to let Yvette's fate to be a warning to her and have nothing to do with soldiers. Talk turns to politics between the cook and the Chaplin where Mother Courage concludes that the motives of the top men are that they are in the war for the money, just as she is. As this is happening, Katrin unobserved tries on Yvette's hat and boots. Katrin's fantasy is interrupted by cannons exploding, the Catholics presenting a surprise attack. Mother Courage smears Katrin's face with ashes telling her,

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“ a bit of muck and you’ll be safe.” Swiss Cheese returns with the regimental cash box, Courage tells him to throw it away as she brings down the Finnish regimental flag.

Three days pass, Swiss Cheese departs to return the cash box unaware that he is being watched by enemy spies waiting to arrest him. When Courage and the Chaplin return, Swiss Cheese is brought in to be identified, each pretend not to know the other for protection and Swiss Cheese is taken away to be sentenced.

Yvette returns bringing a rich old Colonel, and they check out the cart, which Courage has put up for pawn in order to pay back the money owed by Swiss Cheese.

Thanking God for corruption, Courage sends Yvette to bribe the Catholics for Swiss Cheeses life. Courage hesitates when Yvette returns with news that Swiss Cheese has thrown the money in the river, ends up caring more about her business than her son’s life, and bargains too long.

Yvette brings news of Swiss Cheeses execution telling Courage that the body is being brought to her for identification. The soldier’s bring in his body and once again Mother Courage must deny knowing her son.

> Still 1629

Courage waits outside the Colonel’s office planning to file a complaint over the destruction of her cart. A young soldier angrily storms in intent on complaining about the loss of his money that he was owed by means of a reward for saving the colonel’s horse. Courage sings the “ Song of the Great  
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Capitulation” to calm his rage telling him his spirit has already been broken and his complaint is worthless, the soldier abandons his protest. Courage realises that her argument too is worthless and lets the matter rest.

> Near Leipzig, Saxony, 1631

Two years have passed, the cart stands in a war-ravaged village. Several peasants are in need of bandages. Courage refuses, so the Chaplin pulls out some officer’s shirts and starts ripping them into pieces. Courage exclaims that the shirts will ruin her, and all she gets from victory is losses. Kattrin rescues a baby from a burning house.

> Outside Magdeburg, 1632

Courage takes stock and serves soldiers who aren’t attending the funeral of the dead imperial general, Tilly.

Courage frets that the war will soon be over, as would her livelihood but the Chaplin reassures her that war always finds a way, persuading Courage to buy supplies.

Kattrin dismayed at the prospect that the marriage she has been promised is untruthful, runs off, but her mother catches her and sends her in to Magdeburg to buy the supplies.

The Chaplin suggests to Courage that perhaps a closer relationship would be beneficial, but Courage replies she has no time for personal relationships and only aims to bring her children and cart through the war safely.

Katrin returns with a bleeding wound across her eye however she is still clutching the supplies. As a consolation Courage offers Katrin Yvette's red boots, but Katrin rejects them and slinks off.

Courage curses the war, telling the Chaplin that there is even less hope of Katrin ever finding a husband now.

> Still 1632

Mother Courage rejoices at her peak in business and her confidence in the war has returned. She sings verse 3 of " Courage's song" comparing the business of war to her own business saying that war is nothing but business, trading in blood instead of boots.

> Saxony, still 1632

A bell and voices ring out that peace time has arrived. The cook returns and Courage and the cook flirt over each others ruin. The Chaplin emerges and the two men argue which results in the Chaplin reclaiming his clerical garb whilst Courage sarcastically tells him that his " holy war" has been a flop, which provokes the Chaplin to call her a " hyena of the battlefield" who cannot accept peace because she makes money out of war. Courage has had enough of him and tells him to scarper.

Courage decides to sell her merchandise before the prices drop too much.

A much older, fatter and powered Yvette arrives, now a rich colonel's widow and identifies the cook as her aforementioned beau, " puffing Piet" the

womanizer from which her downfall began. Courage and Yvette go into town to sell the remaining goods.

Eilif returns whilst Courage is away and is under arrest for repeating previous escapades of heroics (Scene 2), but during peacetime the penalty of his “bravery” is death.

When Courage returns the cook tells her Eilif returned after repeating his heroics but had to leave, not wanting to destroy Courage’s view of her son.

Courage reports back that peacetime was once again over and invited the cook to join her as she moved off. She sings verse 4 of “ Courage’s song” as she rejoins her “ own side” the Swedes once again.

> The Fichtel Mountains, Saxony, 1634

A hard winter has come early; Courage and the cook appear begging in front of a war-torn personage wearing rags. Abruptly the cook tells Courage of a letter through which he has inherited the family inn at Utrecht. He invites her to accompany him, but refuses to take Kattrin. He sings the “ Song of Solomon.”

Kattrin, who has overheard the conversation between the two, symbolically lays a skirt of her mother’s next to a pair of the cook’s trousers on the wheel of the cart. She is on the verge of running away when her mother returns and tells Kattrin of her rejection of the cook’s offer, insisting that it wasn’t because of her daughter but because of her cart. The cook returns to find his things lying on the ground.

> Still 1634

Courage and Kattrin pause from the effort of pulling the cart outside a house in which the “ Song of Home” on the theme of comfort and security can be heard.

> A farm outside Halle, Saxony, 1636

Kattrin is alone inside the cart, Mother Courage has ventured into the town to purchase supplies. The farm which is held under the Swedish forces is invading by Imperial troops who force the farmer’s son to lead them toward the sleeping town, they head for town and the farmer’s wife considers the fate of the sleeping citizens and proceeds to pray.

At this, Kattrin climbs onto the roof with a drum in attempt to wake up the citizens of the town.

The soldiers make a swift return upon hearing the drum, and after failing to persuade her to come down, take no option but to shoot her.

Her body rolls off the roof, upon which the bells of Halle ring out the alarm, saving the town and causing Kattrin to be successful in her actions.

> Same day, Halle, Saxony, 1636

Courage despairs at Kattrin’s death and is unable to grasp that she is dead, sings her a lullaby. Courage tells the peasants that she shouldn’t of mentioned the children, to which they reply that she should of been with Kattrin, not in town trying to make a profit. Courage pays them to bury

Katrin and moves off with her cart to catch up with business. Courage sings the final verse of her song, ending with the line, “ Wherever life has not died out, it staggers to its feet again.”

\* Sub-plot

There is no real sense of sub-plot, as Brecht’s idea is not to have a sub-plot because his play is not about the psychological development of the character and their lives to create a sense of reality but to represent the society in which is being lived in.