



**Bertolt Brecht's war
condemnation in
"Mother courage and Her Children"**

By

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Abstract

Brecht's play mother courage is to be considered as one of the greatest theatrical works during world war II . It represents the writer's criticism of war and capitalism especially dictators like Hitler who built their glory on blood shedding . They were the major reason for human suffering , built up a kind of enmity among human species and used people as a kind of fuel for the wars without taking care of human feelings : The freedom , dignity and rights were confiscating . They also considered war as a glory . Brecht began work on mother courage in Sweden in the summer of 1939 , he was writing it when Germany invaded Poland . he believed that the second world war ended , but the cold war was heating up . The possibility of atomic annihilation overshadowed an uneasy peace .

This study focuses on Brecht's major work and his moral concerns he shows in Mother Courage and will show the reasons that made the writer attack the war as a kind of destruction for all human beings everywhere , The study includes two sections ; Section one includes Brecht's contribution to the epic theatre and his role in achievements in artistic development , Section two mother courage as a symbol of war victims . last giving a conclusion to Brecht's points of views and sums up its findings

Section One : An Introduction to the Epic Theatre

Bertolt Brecht is considered a highly effective playwright and theatre director of the twentieth century , was born in a middle-class family , was suffering from heart disease . He started writing for newspapers in his early life and became a Marxist , a political philosophy and that was clear from his writings . His first three plays were written in his

early 20s and his language was clear and direct , he without being poetic , and over literary

Epic theatre was a theatrical movement arising in the early at mid-20th century from the theories and practice of a number of theatre practitioners who were responding to the political climate of the time through the creation of a new political theatre. Those practitioners included Erwi Piscator, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and, most famously, Bertolt Brecht.

The term epic theater comes from Erwin Piscator who coined it during his first year as Director of Berlin's Volksbühne (1924-1927).[1]The epic theatre flourished in Germany during the 1920s . Brecht expresses his concept of the epic theatre saying :

The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps
That it appeals less to the feeling than to the spectators
Reason . Instead of sharing an experience the spectator
Must come to grips with things . At the same time it
Would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this
Kind of theatre 2

The term "Epic Theatre" is now widely used to describe the style and techniques popularized in Germany after World War I by directors like Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator, and (most especially) Bertolt Brecht.

This style flourished in the left-wing theatres and cabarets of Berlin during the ill-fated German "Weimar Republic" of the 1920's and early 30's; although the rise of Hitler's Nazi Regime choked off its development after 1933, when Brecht and other epic theatre practitioners were forced to flee persecution and arrest by the Gestapo, the style spread to the U.S. and Great Britain, and returned to Central and Eastern European theatre after the end of World War II.3

The plays that most graphically illustrate Brecht's development during the Weimar Republic & The Measures are taken . These two plays mark the corner stone of Brecht transition from antibourgeois rebel at the outset to Marxist rebel at the end (Lyon & Breuer , p 45) ⁴

One of the most important techniques Brecht developed to perform epic theater is the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the "alienation" effect. The purpose of this technique was to make the audience feel detached from the action of the play, so they do not become immersed in the fictional reality of the stage or become overly empathetic of the character. Flooding the theater with bright lights (not just the stage), having actors play multiple characters, having actors also rearranges the set in full view of the audience and "breaking the fourth wall" by speaking to the audience are all ways he used to achieve([http // Google .com](http://Google.com))⁵

In 1920s Brecht and Piscator coined the term epic theatre to distinguish their practice from what they called the dramatic theatre , which replicated the view of a single individual at one point in time and place , a tradition that dominated western theatre since the renaissance .They contended that this tradition , which Brecht traced back to Aristotle(Bertail . p. 2) ⁶

Thus Brecht's name has become synonymous with epic theatre is understandable , since he has been the major force in defining it through his stage practice and theoretical writing over the past seventy years . His 1949 production of *Mother Courage* considering that the main aim in *mother courage* and other works was to critique and historically frame the cherished bourgeois notions of the autonomous individual (*ibid* , p. 3) ⁷

Epic theatre has been co-opted and commodified by Broadway and what that commodification reveals about the culture of the theatre . Simultaneously , this means theorizes how epic theatre finds or can find ways of providing a necessary bulwark against Broadway escapticism , and what this suggests for the further political theatre in the U.S . What results is a dialectical history tracing Brecht's encounters with Broadway , a history that opens-up and debates the complicated and often conflicted influence of Brecht on united states' theatre (*Wastage* . p. 196) ⁸

In the ancient Greece , the conventions of the theatre were rigid ;even the plot or the characters were known before hand by the

audience , who watched the play in an attitude of the mind quite different of that of the modern theatre-goer(Whitefield , p. 10)⁹

Brecht refused the Aristotelian construction of the play and its adherence to the plot pyramid , exposition , rising action , climax , falling action . He considered each section could be independent of the rest . He devised an acting technique for the epic theatre that he called " gestus " containing physical gestures to the audience that reveals the personality of the character

Section Two : Mother courage a symbol of war victims

Brecht began writing Mother Courage after Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, the act that precipitated the second world war, and completed the first draft in exile in Sweden (ibid , p19)¹⁰

The Thirty Years War began in 1618 as a dispute over the kingship of Bohemia and lasted thirty years 'with falling and rising intensity'. It finally petered out in 1648. Central to the dispute was a conflict between Catholics and protestants. The war was in practice a series 'small wars' and it appears that victory usually went to the general whose armies were 'bet provisioned'. The heroes were Gustavus Adolphus on the Protestant side and Wallenstein for the Catholics. Brecht wrote this play in direct response to Hitler's invasion to Poland 1939. After the exile , Mother courage was his first production in 1941 . At the end of the play, we see that war has ruined her and failed lives her anything . The play set in Europe , in Sweden , Poland and Germany during this war ' mother courage ' a canteen woman pulls her cart along with her three children following the protestant army try to make profit from the war (peter Hinton . p. 2)¹¹

Brecht presents mother courage as a small time war-profiteer .She stands in Marxist terms for the petite bourgeoisie , the small traders and white collar workers who stand a point higher on the social scale than the proletariat and identify with the interests of the ruling classes . she recognizes that the men at the top are in war for what they can get (trans by , Willet. P 28)¹²

Mother courage and Yvette are both are victims of capitalism . capitalism can bring people to do things completely out of character in order to protect themselves and their business (gradsaver. Np)¹³

Mother Courage is considered by some to be the greatest play of the 20th century, and perhaps also the greatest anti-war play of all time¹⁴(Sparknote np)

The language of the German original is modern , modern , earthy popular speech , strongly colored in Mother Courage's case by the Bavarian dialect one would expect from someone born in Bamberg .The present translation uses a form of northern English as a working equivalent , which is a valid attempt to equate one provincial , no-nonsense idiom with another¹⁵ (Bertolt Brecht . P 44)

Bible represents one of the most concerns of Brecht in Mother Courage and her Children .The character of Chaplain gives us a picture of how the Bible fails society in wartime . The Chaplain appears praising war on the stage ,and argues with The Cook :

Don,t give way to your feelings , cook to fall in
A battle is a blessing , not an inconvenience , and
Why ? It is a war of death. None of your common
Wars but a special one , fought for the faith and
Therefore pleasing to God 16 (Eric Bentley . p78)

The use of irony was clear in Brecht's work " Mother Courage " He uses this style in every scene in the play . Mother courage loses Eilif and the peasants who are defeated by Eilif . Through the scenes of the play Brecht wanted to say that if you try to do business with the army , you lose everything eventually . That was the lesson mother courage never learns . it was too late for mother to grasp the lesson and that was clear when they brought her the corpse of her son . She is unable to change her nature . (ibid . p. 83)¹⁷

Conclusion

In the play there is a message conveyed by the writer that people pay the value of wars ;the political leaders get benefit of war that needs more people to continue . Mother courage had a wheel canteen wagon to earn her living , she sells things for soldiers , she gets money but at last she lost everything . Her three children were killed in the war . She represents the victim and fuel of war while rich people and leaders consider war as sources of their wealth .war brings poverty , hunger and destruction to poor people .The poor represents the fuel of war

The major themes of Mother Courage are war as a business : in fact the mother gets back what she has earned through her life while Europe leaders get more profits during wars that cast war as another profit venture by Europe's great leaders. Mother Courage is the play's primary small businesswoman, parasitically living off of the war with her canteen wagon. As the *Model Book* observes the "big profits are not made by little people." Courage's commitment to the business of war will cost her children, the war taking back for what it has provided her in flesh. The play concentrates on " little people " . They are the nameless sergeants and Recruiting officers freezing in a field at the start of the play , to the peasants burying mother courage's daughter at the end of the play . Other characters are only mentioned such as general Tilly or the Kaiser . The war brings poverty , hunger , pain and destruction to everyone . Yvette , the army whore , is the only one whose life has improved financially by marrying into the upper class , but she has lost her humanity . In fact war has no virtue remarks that war "makes the human virtues fatal even to their possessors." This "lesson" appears from the outset of the play, prefiguring the fate of Mother Courage and her children .

المستخلص

برتولت بريخت واستنكاره الشديد للحرب في مسرحية الام الشجاعة

لقد مثلت مسرحية " الام الشجاعة " وأطفالها الثلاث واحدة من المسرحيات الكبيرة لأعمال الحرب العالمية الثانية حيث مثلت النقد الشديد للحرب والرأسمالية وبصورة خاصة للطغاة مثل هتلر الذين بنوا مجدهم على سفك الدماء ولقد ركزت هذه الدراسة على عمل من أهم أعمال بريخت واهتماماته الأخلاقية التي بينها في هذه المسرحية كذلك بينت الدراسة الأسباب التي جعلت الكاتب يهاجم الحرب كنوع من الدمار إلى بني الإنسان في كل مكان وقد تضمنت هذه الدراسة فصلين حيث تناول الفصل الأول مساهمات بريخت في المسرح الملحمي وانجازاته الفنية في المسرح وأما الفصل الثاني فقد تناول الأم كرمز لضحايا الحرب وفي النهاية تضمنت الاستنتاج.

Notes

- 1- Fuegi John , P 69
- 2- ibid , p 72
- 3- Thomas Peter , p 3
- 4- Lyon & Breuer , p 45 .
- 5- [http // goggle .com](http://goggle.com) . np
- 6- Bertail . p 3 .
- 7- ibid , p3 .
- 8- Wastage , p. 196 .
- 9- Whitefield , p 10 .
- 10- ibid , p 19 .
- 11- Petrt Hinton , p 2.
- 12- John willett. P 12
- 13- grad saver . np
- 14- Sparknote . np
- 15- Bertolt Brecht . p 44

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