Mother Courage and Her Children Study Guide

Mother Courage and Her Children by Bertolt Brecht

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Introduction

First produced in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1939, Bertolt Brecht' s *Mother Courage and Her Children* is considered by many to be among the playwright's best work and one of the most powerful anti-war dramas in history. The play is based on two works by Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen: his 1669 novel, *Simplicissimus* and his 1670 play, *Courage: An Adventuress*. Many critics believe *Mother Courage* to be the masterwork of Brecht's concept of Epic Theater. This dramatic subgenre, pioneered by Brecht sought to present theatre that could be viewed with complete detachment. Through such techniques as short, self-contained scenes that prevent cathartic climax, songs and card slogans that interrupts and explains forthcoming action, and detached acting that wards off audience identification□techniques that came to be known as "alienation effects"□the playwright sought to present a cerebral theatrical experience unmarred by emotional judgement. Brecht wanted audiences to think critically and objectively about the play's message, to assess the effects of war on an empirical level.

Much to Brecht's chagrin, however, audiences identified with the play on a deeply emotional level, drawing immediate parallels between the Thirty Years' War that the characters face and the horrors of World War II. *Mother Courage* was written in 1938-39, just as World War II was breaking out in Europe. Brecht completed the play while living in exile, having fled his native country in the face of a rising fascist government. It would not be until 1949 that *Mother Courage* would debut in Brecht's homeland, with a production in East Berlin, East Germany. Brecht set the play during the monumental Thirty Years' War, which occurred three centuries earlier, instead of the contemporary conflict. Brecht hoped that, because the events depicted were removed in time, audiences would be more objective when they viewed the play. But many of the European viewers and critics had first-hand experience with the horrors of war. They easily found personal meaning in the play's setting and story. Brecht rewrote the play for the 1949 East German production, hoping to minimize an emotional response from the audience, but *Mother Courage* still proved a powerful experience. In the decades since its debut, the play has grown to be regarded as one of the twentieth century's landmark dramas and a potent condemnation of war.

Author Biography

Brecht was born Eugen Bertolt Friedrich Brecht on February 10, 1898, in Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany. He was the son of a Catholic father, Friedrich Brecht, who worked as a salesman for a paper factory, and a Protestant mother, Sofie. Brecht grew up in a middle-class household and was precociously intelligent in school. He began writing poems while still in secondary school and had several published by 1914. By the time Brecht graduated, he was also interested in the theatre. Instead of continuing on this path, however, he studied science and medicine at university to avoid the draft. It did not work, and he was drafted in 1918 at the end of World War I. He served as an orderly in the military hospital in Augsburg.

Both his upbringing and his experience in the military profoundly affected Brecht and his writing. He rejected the bourgeois values of his youth and also developed a keen understanding of religion, largely informed by the conflicting influences of his parents' respective faiths. The wartime horrors that Brecht experienced firsthand in the military hospital led to his life-long pacifist views. He expressed these beliefs in his depiction of the horrific Thirty Years' War in his 1949 play *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Brecht began writing plays as early as 1922, with the production of his first work *Baal*. Concurrent with his artistic work, his anti-war beliefs led him to sympathize with communist politics; he began a long affiliation with communist organizations in 1919, following the end of World War I. After finally abandoning his sporadic university studies, Brecht became the dramaturg ("drama specialist" or writer in residence) at a theater in Munich and began writing full time by 1920.

Over the next thirteen years, Brecht published several short stories and poems and successfully staged many of his own plays. He collaborated with composer Kurt Weill on several musical plays, including one of his best known works, 1929's *The Threepenny Opera*. By 1930, Brecht's plays had become highly political, espousing his belief that communism would solve many of the world's social inequalities and political problems. When the National Socialist Party (the Nazis) came to power in Germany in the early 1930s, Brecht and his works were essentially banned. He and his family fled the increasingly hostile environment in 1933; the playwright essentially went into exile for the next fifteen years.

Brecht continued to write in exile, hopping between European countries and the United States. In addition to a novelization of *The Threepenny Opera*, he produced numerous plays that were specifically critical of the Nazi regime and, in general, the world's political situation. Of these plays, the anti-war *Mother Courage and Her Children* became one of his best-known and critically acclaimed works.

The end of World War II found the defeated Germany divided into East and West factions. With the animosity of the Nazi party dispelled, Brecht was invited home. He decided to settle in the communist controlled East Germany, in part because they offered him a theatre and funding. Brecht formed the Berliner Ensemble, which debuted

in 1949. That same year Brecht wrote his last original play, *The Days of the Commune* (though the work would not see production until 1957), as he devoted all his time to running the theater and working as its stage manager. He continued to write poetry and adapt other playwright's work for his theater, however. By the mid-1950s, the importance of Brecht's plays had been realized and they became popularly recognized. Brecht died on August 14,1956, in East Berlin, from a coronary thrombosis.

Plot Summary

Scene 1

Mother Courage and Her Children opens on a highway outside of town in Dalarna, Sweden, in 1624. A recruiting officer and his sergeant are scouting for men to enlist for the Swedish Army's upcoming campaign in Poland. They discuss the fact that they are having trouble finding soldiers when Mother Courage, her children, and her canteen roll by. The military men stop the canteen, demanding Mother Courage's papers and asking about her children. She tells them how each child has a different father. The soldiers attempt to recruit the boys, especially Eilif, but Mother Courage interferes.

To distract the soldiers, Mother Courage has them draw slips of paper from the sergeant's helmet. One of them has a cross symbolizing their early death. The Sergeant feigns interest in a belt buckle Mother Courage has for sale. While she is distracted, the officer convinces Eilif to enlist, and he leaves with the soldiers. The family workforce now reduced, Kattrin joins her brother Swiss Cheese in pulling the wagon.

Scene 2

Several years later, Mother Courage is still following the Swedish Army through its Polish campaign. When the scene opens outside of the Swedish commander's tent, Mother Courage is negotiating with the Cook over the price of a chicken, eventually convincing him to buy the fowl. She plucks the chicken for him as they listen to the action inside the tent. The Commander is with the Chaplain and Eilif, who is being hailed as a hero. Eilif led his troops into a skirmish with peasants which resulted in the capture of a number of cattle. Eilif and his mother reunite.

Scene 3

Three years later, Mother Courage, Swiss Cheese, and Kattrin are with their canteen near another camp in Poland. Swiss Cheese is now a paymaster with the regiment. Yvette, a young woman who follows the camp as a prostitute, laments that all soldiers are liars. Yvette leaves, and the Chaplain and the Cook enter. They talk about politics surrounding the war. Their conversation is interrupted when the Catholic forces stage a surprise attack. In the ensuing chaos, Yvette leaves, the Chaplain hides his identity, and Swiss Cheese returns with the cash box containing the regiment's payroll. His mother wants him to throw it away, but he will not. They hide the money in their wagon.

Three days later, Mother Courage, Kattrin, Swiss Cheese, and the Chaplain sit at the canteen, prisoners of the Catholics. Swiss Cheese worries about his responsibility for the Swedish Army's money. Mother Courage and the Chaplain leave to buy a Catholic flag and meat. She tells Swiss Cheese not to get rid of the box now because there are spies. Swiss Cheese decides to take the money and bury it by the river. Kattrin tries to

warn him that the spies are watching him, but she is unsuccessful. Mother Courage and the Chaplain return. Two Catholic soldiers enter with Swiss Cheese, who has been arrested. Swiss Cheese denies that he knows anyone at the canteen, saying he just ate a meal there. Mother Courage also pretends to not know her son.

Later that evening, Mother Courage tries to come up with the ransom for Swiss Cheese. She hopes to sell her wagon to an old colonel who is involved with Yvette. When the colonel and prostitute arrive, Mother Courage tells them that she only wants to pawn the canteen, buying it back from them once she raises enough money. They negotiate a price. Mother Courage hesitates, trying to negotiate a lower ransom. Her deal making is too slow, however, and Swiss Cheese is executed. Soldiers bring the body by the canteen for identification, but Mother Courage again denies knowing him.

Scene 4

Mother Courage waits outside an officer's tent. She wants to make a complaint about damage done to her merchandise. As she waits, two soldiers approach. The younger one wants to make a complaint because he was not given a reward for saving a colonel's horse, and he has not been given enough food. The older soldier tries to dissuade him from complaining. Mother Courage empathizes with the younger soldier's situation, but she tells him if his rage is not enduring, it is not worth it. After Mother Courage sings "The Song of Great Capitulation," both she and the young soldier decide not to register their complaints.

Scene 5

It is 1631, and Mother Courage's canteen wagon is in Bavaria, outside a war-torn village. The Chaplain enters, needing linen to bandage some peasants whose farmhouse has been destroyed. Kattrin wants to give him some shirts from the wagon, but Mother Courage refuses to give up the clothing, stating that the peasants have no money for her goods. Kattrin threatens her mother with a board, and the Chaplain takes the shirts anyway. A child's cry is heard from a burning farmhouse. Kattrin runs into the building and rescues the child.

Scene 6

A year later, the canteen is outside of Ingolstadt, where the funeral of a fallen commander is taking place. Mother Courage serves drinks to soldiers who are not at the funeral. While waiting on her customers and taking inventory, Mother Courage and the Chaplain discuss how long the war will last. She wonders if she should buy more goods while they are cheap. Each states their belief that the war will never end.

Mother Courage decides to buy more supplies, sending Kattrin into town to pick them up. The Chaplain reveals that he would like a relationship with Mother Courage, but she turns him down. Kattrin returns with a large cut on her forehead. Mother Courage tries

to give her Yvette' s red boots, but the clearly upset girl is uninterested in the boots that she once coveted.

Scene 7

Mother Courage, Kattrin, and the Chaplain pull the wagon down a highway. Mother Courage sings a song about the profitability of war over peace and the need for constant movement.

Scene 8

It is still 1632, and the canteen is parked outside of a camp. A peace is unexpectedly brokered. Mother Courage is pleased because she might see Eilif again. The Cook arrives. The Chaplain decides to put on his pastor's clothing now that the Catholics no longer pose a threat to him. The Cook and the Chaplain bicker over Mother Courage. Mother Courage decides that she must get rid of her goods.

While Mother Courage is in town, Yvette shows up looking for her. She sees the Cook there and realizes that he is an old boyfriend who abandoned her years ago. A soldier stops by with Eilif in chains. He has been arrested for murdering a peasant and stealing cattle. The Chaplain leaves with Eilif and the soldier. It is implied that Eilif will be executed. Mother Courage returns with news that the war has resumed. The Cook stays with Mother Courage and Kattrin.

Scene 9

It is 1634, and Mother Courage and her canteen are again traveling behind the Swedish Army. Business is bad. The Cook gets a letter that his mother has left him an inn in Utrecht. He invites Mother Courage to come and run it with him. She refuses when she learns the invitation does not extend to Kattrin. The Cook exits for a moment, and Kattrin and Mother pull the canteen away, leaving him behind.

Scene 10

Kattrin and Mother Courage stop and listen to someone singing in a farmhouse. The song concerns their prosperity in the house.

Scene 11

Near Halle, a Protestant village, the canteen is outside of a small farmhouse for the night. Mother Courage is in town getting supplies. Three Catholic soldiers come out of the woods and hold the peasants captive, including Kattrin. One of the peasant boys is taken by the soldiers. He shows them the path to town. An older peasant man climbs to

the roof and sees a Catholic regiment moving through the forest toward the unsuspecting town. There will be no warning, they believe, because the watchman must have been killed. Kattrin hears them talk of the children that might be harmed in the surprise attack. She climbs onto the roof with her drum and begins pounding out a warning on it. The soldiers come back. They shoot her when she refuses to stop making noise. Kattrin dies.

Scene 12

It is the following morning. Mother Courage sits by Kattrin's body. She expresses her disbelief that Kattrin is dead. The peasants bury Kattrin while Mother Courage departs to follow the army. She pushes the wagon by herself.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

In Poland, 1624, at the beginning of the Thirty Years War, the Swedish commander-in-chief is raising troops. On a country road near a town, a recruiter and sergeant complain about how hard it is to find solders, especially since peace has made people seem lazy and complacent.

A merchant named Anna Fierling rides up on a covered cart, pulled by her two sons. Fierling, whose nickname is "Mother Courage," sits on the cart with her mute daughter Kattrin. The two men stop the cart and begin recruiting the boys, especially the quick-witted older son called Eilif. Their mother tries to prevent it - she wants her boys to have nothing to do with the war. The sergeant chides Mother Courage, because she depends on the war for her business, but she doesn't want to sacrifice her sons.

Mother Courage draws black crosses on folded pieces of parchment and also folds blank pieces of paper. She has the sergeant and her children draw names from a helmet, to see who will live and die, if they get involved in the war. All the while, the recruiter talks to Eilif. All four draw the black crosses that symbolize death.

The sergeant becomes upset, and Mother Courage tries to calm him down by selling him a drink. With the distraction , Eilif walks away with the recruiter to become a soldier.

Scene 1 Analysis

The nickname given to Anna Fierling is an ironic one. The playwright does not view Anna as courageous, even though she may be a survivor. Throughout this play, the playwright illustrates that virtues become distorted and twisted in war. For instance, the recruiter feels that people living in peacetime become lazy, because they are not excited about going to war.

Although Mother Courage says all she wants is to survive the war with her family intact, it is apparent from the start that this will not be the case. Her first son is eager to seek fame and fortune through war. When she uses the black crosses to tell the future, she foreshadows the end. As Mother Courage tears the papers, she says, "...may all of us be torn apart like this if we lets (sic) ourselves get too mixed up in the war."

The playwright uses the recruiter and sergeant to introduce his main theme,; Mother Courage wants to profit from the war while keeping her children unharmed. This play is written to illustrate that there can be no profit from war, and all will come to ruin.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

For two years, Mother Courage crosses Poland with the Second Regiment of the Finnish Army, selling drinks, boots and supplies. In 1626, Courage is selling a capon to the general's cook. Everyone is hungry since is a siege underway. While they're haggling in the kitchen, the general enters his tent next door, along with a chaplain and Eilif.

The general is praising Eilif for acts of heroism and offers him dinner. The cook and Courage overhear this, so now the cook must pay top dollar to get the capon for the general and his guest. While she helps the cook prepare the bird for roasting, Fierling listens to her son as he describes his deeds.

Eilif became aware that local peasants were hiding their oxen from the soldiers. He cut his men's emergency rations, so they'd be extra hungry, and then followed the peasants by night to slaughter them and take over their oxen.

The general is very pleased with Eilif and assures him that he's fighting for God. He asks the chaplain to affirm that. The chaplain then says, "Our Lord...could tell people to love their neighbors as they'd had enough to eat. Today it's another story."

Eilif sings a war song for the general, and Mother Courage joins in from the kitchen tent. Eilif goes into the kitchen and embraces his mother. He's thrilled that she heard him praised by the general. He asks about his siblings and learns that his brother, "Swiss Cheese," has been taken into the army as paymaster. Mother Courage says he'll, at least, stay out of battle that way. Then she slaps Eilif, not for taking the oxen, but for putting himself in danger.

Scene 2 Analysis

When the general praises and coddles Eilif for his acts of brutality, he illustrates how war encourages the worst impulses of human nature and teaches young men to be monsters. The playwright uses the chaplain's cynical response to illustrate the failure of the Church to speak out against war. We also empathize with Mother Courage's concern for her son, even though she fails to speak against his brutality. Her own self-centeredness keeps her from being able to teach him about compassion. The playwright is showing that it's not evil villains that keep war going, but regular people who love their children and want to survive in impossible circumstances.

Scene 3

Scene 3 Summary

Three years later, Mother Courage and Kattrin fold clothes beside the cart. "Swiss Cheese," in his uniform, watches. Yvette Pottier, the prostitute of the military camp, is having a brandy. Her red high-heeled boots are laid aside. An armourer is trying to sell Mother Courage a sack of shot for money to buy drinks. Courage finally accepts, knowing she can sell it to an armourer from another regiment at a profit.

Courage then turns her attention to outfitting "Swiss Cheese" with woolen underwear for the coming fall. She's thankful that he's honest "and, above all, so stupid" that it hasn't occurred to him to run off with the regiment's pay. She thinks his honesty will keep him alive. "Swiss Cheese" goes to hide his woolies under his mattress.

Yvette Pottier has become drunk and starts telling the story of her first love, who she's not seen in five years. Courage hopes that her daughter Kattrin will learn from Yvette not to get involved with soldiers. Yvette stumbles away drunkenly behind the cart.

The general's cook and the chaplain arrive. The chaplain says he has a message from Eilif to "Swiss Cheese." Mother Courage puts a stop to that because she knows Eilif wants money. She gives it to the chaplain herself. The cook has come along, because he likes Mother Courage and wants to visit. Kattrin tries on Yvette's' hat and boots, Mother Courage talks politics with her guests When the chaplain cautions her free speech, Courage says that all present are good Lutherans.

Suddenly, cannons are fired. The Catholics have broken through. The cook runs to find the general, and the chaplain borrows a cloak from the cart to hide his vocation. Courage sees Kattrin wearing the hat and boots. She throws the hat down and tries to pull the boots off of her daughter's feet, for fear the Catholic soldiers will make a prostitute of Kattrin. Yvette runs in and grabs her hat, but leaves her boots, which are hidden under Kattrin's skirt.

Courage rubs ashes on her daughter's face to conceal Kattrin's beauty. She counsels the chaplain to take off his collar. Meanwhile, "Swiss Cheese" has come in with the Regimental cash box. He trying to be responsible, even though they are prisoners, and he hides the box in his mother's cart.

All are taken prisoner, but because the Catholic soldiers need a canteen, they let Mother Courage go on trading, even though they suspect she was with the Lutherans. She's nervous about the cash box, though. To relieve her worries, "Swiss Cheese" decides to go hide the box elsewhere, just when Catholic spies come around asking Kattrin if she's sent any of the Finnish Regiment. Because Kattrin is mute, she's unable to make her brother understand the danger.

"Swiss Cheese" goes to hide the box, but comes back as a prisoner in the hands of soldiers. He and his mother act like strangers, to protect her and the household. Still, she tries to convince him to turn the pay box over to the enemy, rather than be killed over it. However, because "Swiss Cheese" takes his duty to heart, he refuses to talk and is killed over the pay box.

Scene 3 Analysis

In this play so thick with irony, Courage's cruel and clever son prospers for a while, but her honest son is killed for his honesty. Kattrin's love of shoes and hats shows her child-like innocence. Virtues are worthless in war, yet Courage thinks honesty will save her son, while she profits from war. The playwright portrays Christianity in the worst light possible, through the chaplain's ready betrayal of his faith.

Scene 4

Scene 4 Summary

Mother Courage's cart has been vandalized, and she has come to the Catholic officer's tent to complain. His clerk warns her to keep quiet, saying they know she was hiding the Lutheran's paymaster. She's determined to complain, anyway.

However, a young soldier comes in to make a complaint. He brags that he'll cut up the captain, but Mother Courage recognizes that he's all bravado. She tells him it doesn't do any good to complain, if his anger isn't big enough. She sings "The Song of the Great Capitulation." The young soldier staggers off, and Mother Courage exits having realized her anger isn't big enough.

Scene 4 Analysis

By counseling the young soldier to resign himself to war, even though she agrees his complaint is just, Mother Courage reinforces her own resignation. She learns from the young soldier that it will be hopeless to expect justice from the captain, as he has failed to give the young soldier a promised reward. She realizes that she, who has not even been promised anything, cannot expect anything.

Scene 5

Scene 5 Summary

After two more years, the war is spreading to new areas. Mother Courage's cart has crossed Poland, Moravia, Bavaria, Italy and Bavaria again. Now, it stands in a badly shot-up village.

Mother Courage and Kattrin serve two soldiers at the bar. One of the soldiers has a lady's fur coat to exchange for pay, since the soldiers have received no pay. The chaplain rushes in to get linens to bandage up the wounds of a peasant family. Courage is out of bandages, and the only linens she has are officers' shirts for sale. She doesn't want to give them up. Kattrin threatens her with a plank, but the chaplain simply picks up Mother Courage and moves her out of the way. He gets four of the shirts from the cart. Kattrin rushes into the peasants' house to rescue a crying baby before the roof falls in, while the chaplain tries to stop the peasant's bleeding.

Scene 5 Analysis

The playwright provides here a harsh illustration of the stupidity of human self-centeredness. The soldiers don't have enough money to buy drinks, but Mother Courage wants to keep her expensive shirts, in case she can profit from them later. She has a simple, animal love for her children, but no human compassion for the suffering peasants.

For the first time, the chaplain is portrayed as a compassionate human. He is no longer a professional minister, but here he actually ministers to the needs of suffering people. Kattrin's rebellion against her mother's selfishness, her concern for the baby and disregard for her own safety, foreshadow her final heroic act.

Scenes 6-7

Scenes 6-7 Summary

There is a funeral going on. The Imperial Commander Tilly has died, and Courage wonders whether the war will go on without him. She wants to know, so she can decide whether to restock her cart. The chaplain assures her bitterly that there's no reason the war should stop. Kattrin runs off, upset, because her mother has promised she can find a husband as soon as there's peace.

Mother Courage goes after Kattrin and assures her that the war will go on just long enough to allow them to make a little money, "and peacetime will be all the nicer for it."

Kattrin is attacked when out buying supplies to restock the cart; she doesn't give up the supplies, but she is wounded. As a result, her face is scarred, and she loses hope of finding a husband, even in peacetime. Mother Courage curses the war.

In Scene 7, Mother Courage pulls her cart, which is hung with new items. She wears a necklace made of coins and cheerfully sings a war song.

Scenes 6-7 Analysis

Mother Courage still hangs on to the idea that some good can come from the war. Even though she curses it when Kattrin gets hurt, she's soon cheerful again, determined to profit from it. The playwright illustrates how doggedly people hang on to the illusion that war is good in any way.

Scene 8

Scene 8 Summary

The Swedish king is killed at the battle of Lutzen, and peace is declared. Mother Courage is a little annoyed that it's happened right after she's stocked up, but she says she's glad about it, anyway. She came through it all with two children still alive.

The general's cook arrives, and Courage is glad to see him. He says Eilif is on his way. The cook and chaplain argue, because they are jealous of each other over Mother Courage. The cook advises Mother Courage to go out and sell as many of her goods as she can, before prices drop.

Yvette enters, much fatter and richer than she was when we saw her last. She is now the widow of a colonel. Courage takes Yvette with her, thinking to profit from Yvette's connections to the regiment.

The cook and chaplain are surprised to see Eilif brought in as a prisoner. He assaulted more peasants, but now that it's peacetime, this no longer makes him a hero. He has been sentenced to death for it. The soldiers won't wait for Mother Courage to return, and the chaplain goes with them to accompany Eilif to the scene of his death. The cook tries to talk Kattrin out of hiding in the cart. Courage returns with the news that the war has been back on for three days. Cook doesn't tell her that her favorite son is dead.

Scene 8 Analysis

The playwright wants to make sure we understand that Mother Courage is not a monster. She is glad for the war to be over, because that means her children should be safe. However, like most of us, she does not see that her interest in profiting from the war helps keep it going. Her humanity is also underscored when we see the chaplain and the cook are both interested in her.

The fact that Mother Courage lost her favorite son in peacetime is a bitter irony. It also is a strong statement from the playwright. War teaches young men to be brutal, but punishes them for it when there is peace.

Kattrin is the one person in Courage's family that sees everything, but she has been "silenced" by the war. Courage says a soldier "put something in her mouth" when she was a young girl, and that rendered her mute.

Scenes 9-10

Scenes 9-10 Summary

It is now Fall 1634, but a harsh winter has come early. It is the 17th year of the "great war of faith," and half of Germany's people have died. Those not killed directly by the war have died from terrible epidemics. People are more prone to these epidemics, because they are hungry and exhausted.

Mother Courage and the cook take her cart through a burnt-out town, singing for food. Suddenly, the cook announces that he's received a letter. His mother died and left him an inn. He wants Courage to go with him and make a life there. The only problem is that there is no space for Kattrin. Courage would like to go with him, but refuses to leave Kattrin behind, so the cook must go home alone.

In 1635, Mother Courage and Kattrin pull their cart past a peasant's house. From inside, the audience can hear a song of content. The peasants are grateful for their warm, dry home in winter, as well as for their flowers in spring. Courage and Kattrin pause to listen, and then keep going.

Scenes 9-10 Analysis

The playwright makes it clear that the cook is not being cruel. There is literally not enough room in the inn for three people to survive. This incident is another one that shows Mother Courage's humanity. As much as she would like some economic security and a roof over her head, she will not abandon her daughter to obtain it.

It is ironic that this has been called a war of faith between Christians, and there is "no room at the end" for Kattrin. This further foreshadows Kattrin's martyrdom at the end of the play. The peasant's house in Scene 10 is a sorrowful reminder of the home that Courage could have had with the cook.

Scene 11

Scene 11 Summary

In January 1636, the cart is standing alongside a peasant's cottage outside the town of Halle. Mother Courage is gone to get some supplies. Soldiers sneak up on Kattrin and the peasants. They want the peasants' son to show them the path to the town, as they are planning a surprise attack. At first, the son bravely refuses, but when the soldiers threaten to starve his parents by killing off their few cattle and oxen, he leads them down the path.

The father climbs up a ladder to his thatched roof and sees other soldiers lying in wait. He voices a wish for God's mercy on the town. The mother takes up this theme, and she calls the father down from the roof to pray. Kattrin kneels behind the couple as the woman prays aloud. She prays for the town in general, but when she specifically names her brother-in-law's family, Kattrin becomes visibly restless.

When the wife names the children who will die at the hands of the soldiers, Kattrin sneaks over to the cart, gets a drum and climbs up on the roof with it. She pulls up the ladder, so no one can reach her, and begins drumming to warn the town. The scouts run back with the peasants' son to try and silence her. Even though Kattrin groans when they attack her mother's cart, and even though she cries, she keeps drumming. Finally, the soldiers shoot her, but not before the town has been warned of the attack.

Scene 11 Analysis

In contrast to the hypocrisy of the peasants, who pray for the town while protecting themselves, Kattrin's act is the one truly heroic act of the whole play. The playwright is bitterly skeptical of religion, and he uses Kattrin to say that our own compassion and unselfish acts are the answer to our prayers.

Scene 12

Scene 12 Summary

Mother Courage sings a lullaby over Kattrin's body, while the peasants beg her to leave. They are afraid the soldiers will blame them for harboring Kattrin and her mother. Finally, Mother Courage leaves money for a burial and pulls her cart, alone, behind a retreating regiment. Not knowing he is already dead, she hopes to see her son Eilif again.

Scene 12 Analysis

The playwright has used the cart in this play to symbolize capitalism and its dependence on war. The fact that Mother Courage still clings to her cart shows that she has learned nothing. Numerous times, she has said all she wants is to get through the war with her children alive. All of them are gone, and she doesn't even know it. Similarly, the playwright wants his audience to understand that there is no way to engage in war and protect one's own.

Characters

The Chaplain

When the Chaplain is introduced, he works for the Swedish Army. He is attached to the same unit as the Cook and Eilif. In scene three, when the Catholics attack and imprison the unit, Mother Courage helps him hide his true identity. He travels with Mother Courage and Kattrin for several years as they follow the Catholics. He chops wood and helps out as he much as he can. When there is a temporary peace, he returns to his clerical life.

The Cook

When the Cook is first introduced, he is in the employ of the Swedish Army, working for the Commander. Mother Courage sells him a chicken for an exorbitant price. He is a blond Dutchman who smokes a special pipe. He was a one-time boyfriend of Yvette, and she thinks he is a scoundrel. He is attracted to Mother Courage. When the Cook's mother dies, he inherits an inn in Utrecht. He asks Mother Courage to come with him to run it, but she refuses because he will not let Kattrin come along.

Mother Courage

Mother Courage is the woman around whom the play is constructed. She is middle-aged and has three children by three different men: two sons named Eilif and Swiss Cheese and a daughter named Kattrin. Mother Courage runs a mobile canteen which sells food and goods. She is a cutthroat businesswoman and follows the war, and the commerce it provides, wherever it goes. Formerly known as Anna Fierling, Mother Courage got her name from an incident in Riga in which she drove her canteen through a bombardment to sell her bread and came out alive.

Throughout the play, Mother Courage continually demonstrates that the preservation of her business is the most important thing in her life. She tries to avoid having her sons recruited for the war, not because she fears for their safety but because their help is needed pushing the wagon. When she fails to do so and Swiss Cheese is captured and sentenced to death, she haggles over the price of his ransom until it is too late. Still, she has a soft spot for her daughter, Kattrin, who is simple-minded and cannot speak. Mother Courage refuses the Cook's offer to run an inn with him because he will not allow Kattrin to accompany them. By the end of the play, all three children have died, and Mother Courage pulls the canteen alone.

Feyos

See Swiss Cheese

Anna Fierling

See Mother Courage

Kattrin Haupt

Kattrin is Mother Courage's only daughter. The product of a relationship that Mother Courage had with a German man, Kattrin is a mute, due to an incident that occurred when she was little: a soldier stuck something in her mouth. She does a great deal of work for her mother, washing dishes and cleaning up the canteen wagon. Mother Courage promises that she will get Kattrin a husband when there is peace.

Like her half-brother Swiss Cheese, Kattrin is sensitive and simple. She likes children and pretty things. For example, she covets Yvette's red boots. When Kattrin hears that a family of peasants needs linen for bandages, she gives the Chaplain shirts behind her mother's back. She also runs into a burning house to save a child despite her mother's protests. Sometime later, Kattrin runs an errand into town for her mother and comes back with a gash across her forehead. It is implied that she has been assaulted and raped. At the end of the play, Kattrin sacrifices her own life to save her mother and thepeople in a town; she overhears about a surprise attack and bangs a drum from a rooftop to warn the townspeople. Soldiers shoot her to keep her quiet.

Eilif Noyocki

Eilif is Mother Courage's eldest son and the result of her union with an intelligent soldier. Protective of his mother, he is a hotheaded young man who is sure of his prowess with firearms and knives. He is recruited by Swedish officers at the beginning of the play to fight on the side of the Protestants. When Mother Courage sees him again several years later, he is regarded as a hero for a successful attack he has led. He stole a large number of cattle from a group of peasants. Several scenes and years later, a temporary peace has been achieved, and Eilif is arrested for stealing cattle. It is implied that he is executed for the crime, but the actual act is not shown.

Eilif s story is a prime example of Brecht's hatred of war. His rise and fall are used as an example to illustrate the playwright's belief that war creates confused values and a skewed reality. When Eilif steals the herd of cattle during wartime, he is hailed as a hero. Yet when a peace comes, he is arrested and executed for that very act.

Peter Piper

See The Cook

Yvette Pottier

Yvette is a young woman who also follows the war and the soldiers for business reasons; she is a prostitute. She was led into this life when she became involved with the Cook as a young girl in Flanders. He abandoned her, and she ran after him. She becomes involved with a colonel and tries to help save Swiss Cheese from execution. Yvette eventually marries the colonel's brother. He dies, but she is apparently left enough money to survive.

Madame Colonel Sarhemberg

See Yvette Pottier.

Swiss Cheese

Swiss Cheese is Mother Courage's younger boy. He is the son of a Swiss military engineer who was also a drunkard. Like his brother Eilif, Swiss Cheese is protective of his mother, but, unlike his ruthless brother, he is a more sensitive, honest person. His mother says that he is simple and good at pulling wagons. After Eilif is recruited into the army, Swiss Cheese works as a paymaster for the Swedish Second Regiment. During an attack by the Catholics, he tries to protect the cashbox by hiding it, first in the canteen and then in a mole hole by the river. He is caught by two Catholic officers. When the officers bring him by, Swiss Cheese pretends like he does not know Mother Courage, hoping to protect both himself and his family. He is later executed while his mother haggles over the price of his ransom. When his body is brought to her for identification, she claims to not know him. Swiss Cheese is buried in an anonymous mass grave.

Themes

War and Peace

Mother Courage and Her Children takes place during the Thirty Years' War, a religious war (Catholic versus Protestant) which ravaged Europe in the seventeenth century (1618-48). Every event, attitude, and emotion felt in this play is affected by the circumstances of war. Mother Courage's livelihood is based on a canteen wagon through which she sells food and various goods to soldiers. She and her children pull the wagon, following the Swedish regiments to wherever the war takes them.

Each of Mother Courage's children suffer the consequences of war and are eventually destroyed by it. Eilif is recruited when soldiers are needed for the Swedish Protestant army. He becomes a brutal soldier, losing his humanity, his sense of right and wrong, and, ultimately his life. Swiss Cheese joins the same army as a paymaster for a Protestant regiment—he takes the clerical position so that he will not have to fight in the war. Still, his position leads to his death. Kattrin loses her life when she tries to warn a town of a surprise attack by Catholics.

Other characters' lives are also affected profoundly by war. Yvette became a camp follower when her soldier boyfriend abandoned her. She started following regiments looking for him and eventually became a prostitute to support herself. Numerous common folk are depicted throughout the play, many of whom see their homes and land destroyed by the fighting.

Despite the loss of her children to the war, Mother Courage does quite well financially. Though business does go bad several times—notably during a short peace—Mother Courage survives every calamity that befalls her. Eilif is not so lucky. He attacks peasants and steals cattle during wartime and is considered a hero. He does the same thing during the short peace—though he does not know there is a truce—and is arrested. By the end of the play, Mother Courage has to pull the canteen wagon by herself, but her business drive motivates her to persevere. She has to survive. Through his protagonist's actions, Brecht shows war as a never-ending commercial opportunity, but he also highlights its affects on the common man and woman. He shows peace being less prosperous, a state in which finances are less assured.

Choices and Consequences: Commerce versus Family

Though Mother Courage runs her canteen to support herself and her children, she often makes choices that put her commerce before her family. Each of her children are adversely affected while she is brokering business deals: Eilif is recruited by the Swedish army officer while Mother Courage tries to sell a belt buckle; Swiss Cheese is

executed by the Catholics while she haggles over the price of his ransom; Kattrin dies while Mother Courage is in town buying goods.

Mother Courage also makes choices in support of her children, however, especially Kattrin. The Cook likes Mother Courage and travels with the canteen briefly; he asks her to run an inn with him. Mother Courage eagerly accepts, telling Kattrin that she will finally fulfill the many promises she has made to her mute daughter. Yet when she learns that Kattrin is unwelcome at the inn, Mother Courage refuses to go and abandons the Cook by the side of the road. Ultimately, Mother Courage is capable of doing right by her children but not at the expense of her business.

Style

Epic Theater

Mother Courage and Her Children is a prime example of Brecht's concept of Epic Theater. Instead of following a traditional Aristotelian model of theater, which calls for directly linked action and an emotional climax at the end of the play, Brecht constructs the play more like an epic poem. Each scene is only loosely linked, though there is something of a plot. The play also has an ambiguous, open ending; it is not clear where the remaining years of the war will take Mother Courage. Further, Brecht tries to distance the audience from the action of the play with what he calls alienation effects. He does this to limit the audience's emotional involvement with the play and its characters. This distancing is performed in the hopes that the viewer can concentrate on the meaning of the action and its inherent social criticism.

These ideas take several forms in *Mother Courage*. Before each scene, a summary of the events to come are projected to the audience. Thus, they know what will happen and can focus on the meaning of the action. Most every action that could provoke an emotional response□the execution of Swiss Cheese, for example□is not shown onstage, and its emotional aftermath□the grieving□is never shown. Such choices direct the audience's attention to Brecht's intellectual antiwar message. There are also songs that emphasize the themes of the play while undercutting its reality by interrupting the action. Black comedic elements, especially in the dialogue of Mother Courage, add to the dramatic tension, being intellectual rather than emotional in nature.

Setting

Mother Courage and Her Children is an antiwar drama set in Europe during the Thirty Years' War, specifically covering the years 1624-1636. The action takes place in a number of locales in Europe, including (in order) Darlana, Poland, Bavaria, Fichtelgebirge, central Germany, and Halle. Almost every scene is set in the outdoors, on roads and highways, next to camps or peasants' farms, or inside tents. This represents the constant change and flux of a wartime environment. The settings illustrate the impermanence in Mother Courage's life. There are only two constants in each scene of the play: Mother Courage and her canteen wagon, and these items are notable for their mobility; they are capable of moving quickly as the war progresses.

Foreshadowing

Though *Mother Courage and Her Children* is a factually straightforward drama that, through Brecht's alienation effects, informs the audience of forthcoming events, the playwright does employ some elements of foreshadowing to more subtly intimate future developments. One event in the first scene foreshadows the deaths of Mother Courage's children as well as others. Mother Courage claims to have "second sight."

When the recruiters try to take Eilif away, she has them all draw lots. She tears up a piece of paper into four slips and draws a cross one of them. Everyone who draws, the three children as well as the Swedish sergeant, picks the piece of paper with the cross on it. The cross symbolizes that death is coming to these characters.

Irony

Irony is defined as incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the expected result of those events. There is an underlying irony that drives the plot of *Mother Courage*. Mother Courage engages in her trade to support herself and her family in the unstable economy of war. The expectation is that she will earn enough for her family's survival. But this very enterprise□and Mother Courage's all-consuming focus on it□contributes to the death of her three children. Mother Courage focuses on preventing Eilif s recruitment by two Swedish soldiers until an opportunity for a sale presents itself. She haggles over the amount she should pay for Swiss Cheese's ransom to prevent his execution. Though she wants to save her son, she does not want to compromise her finances. Mother Courage is in a village trying to buy up low-priced goods from scared citizens when Kattrin is gunned down by Catholic soldiers preparing to make a surprise attack. Though this last death might not have been preventable by Mother Courage, her absence ensures no intercession on her child's behalf. It is ironic that Mother Courage's goal is the survival of her family but the means for that survival becomes the instrument of the children's demise.

Historical Context

The years just before and at the outbreak of World War II were tense and uncertain ones for much of Europe. Adolf Hitler, the leader of the National Socialist (also known as Nazi) party, became dictator of Germany in 1933. Hitler secretly armed Germany in violation of the Versailles Treaty which ended World War I and allied himself with Italy and Japan. In 1938, Germany occupied Austria and annexed most of Czechoslovakia in 1939. Hitler continued to invade and occupy many nations in Europe in 1940, adding Denmark, a number of Norwegian port cities, The Netherlands, Belgium, and much of France to his empire. Though Great Britain stopped Hitler's planned invasion across the British Channel in 1940, the dictator continued his march across Europe. Great Britain and other countries tried to fight back, but it was not until the United States was drawn in to the war by Japan's bombing of Peal Harbor at the end of 1941, that their efforts had success. World War II did not end in Europe until 1945.

Though *Mother Courage and Her Children* is set during the Thirty Years' War of the seventeenth century, Brecht draws several parallels between that war and the events that were unfolding in Europe as he wrote the play. Uncertainty was a way of life in both eras. Men of all ages were conscripted to fight in the war. In 1930s Germany, every man between the ages of nineteen and forty-five were deemed fit for military service, amounting to more than eight million people in the army alone.

Just as Mother Courage looks to the Thirty Years' War as a business arena, so too was World War II a commercial enterprise. The United States, as well as Germany and other European countries, converted almost all their national infrastructure to service the war; industry became focused on turning out war goods at ever-increasing rates. In the United States, the federal government spent $370 billion on World War II. Even before the U.S. entered the war, however, the American economy geared up to produce goods for war-torn Europe. This boom in production fostered a new age of industrial technology in the U.S. and would pave the way for the prosperity of the postwar years. Despite the frenzied production, which in the United States meant around the clock shifts in factories, there were shortages of consumer items all around the world. This was partially due to the scarcity of some raw materials, again because of the war. In occupied countries, shortages were the most acute. Small-time entrepreneurs such as Mother Courage were able to supply in-demand items and carve a profitable niche for themselves.

Individuals in every country, directly involved or not, suffered during World War II and not just because of the wartime economic realities. In Germany, Hitler and his Nazi party held a tight ideological grip on the populace. In addition to their anti-Semitic policies, the Nazis did not allow freedom of the press or other forms of free expression. People who did not agree with government ideology and expressed those beliefs were dealt with in a harsh manner; many were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered. A great number of Jewish scientists and artists, as well as every-day citizens, fled the country if they were able. Though Brecht was not Jewish, he professed communist beliefs and was critical of the Nazi party. Many of his plays were banned. He escaped, his family

fleeing Germany in 1936. He spent almost all of the next decade moving around Europe and the United States, avoiding the Nazi occupation. His story is typical of many people in wartime Germany. Such refugees usually had only one focus: survival, just like Mother Courage.

Critical Overview

From its earliest productions, critics praised the power and complexity of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, especially its main character. Though *Mother Courage* was written in the late-1930s, it was not produced until April 19, 1941. The play debuted in Zurich, Switzerland, at the Schauspielhaus Zurich, a major theater, and was immediately successful□despite the fact that the country was surrounded by Nazis and invasion was always a possibility. (Brecht was regarded as a leftist and his plays were banned by the Nazis in German.) One critic, for the major Swiss newspaper, compared Mother Courage to a Shakespearean character. Another critic, Victor Wittner, writing in *Theatre Arts*, found powerful commentary on World War II in Brecht's story of the Thirty Years' War: "With all its cynicism, *Mutter Courage* is a compelling portrait, often with subtle humor, often with diabolical undercurrents of meaning, often with a certain fatalism, but also often with pure human simplicity and tenderness. And what moves us even more than that is the parallel with today's events, the actual recognition that one war is like another, one misery yields nothing to another in gruesomeness."

Following World War II, Brecht directed the first production of *Mother Courage* in Germany in 1949. Eric Bentley, writing in *Theater Arts*, wrote that this production was "The big Berlin theatrical event of the past few months, if not of the whole post-war period so far." Bentley continued: "This story of the ravages of the Thirty Years' War is fearfully apt in the ruined cities of present day Germany." Some audiences were said to be moved to tears. Other productions in postwar Europe were also well-received.

The first American productions of *Mother Courage* were not as highly acclaimed as their European counterparts. The first performance, in San Francisco in 1956, received tepid reviews. The critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote that the play "lacked suspense," assessing that "There have been many plays that are sharper weapons against war." The first Broadway production in 1963 was a box office bomb, lasting for only fifty-two performances. The critic for Variety called the play "sophomorically obvious, cynical, self-consciously drab and tiresome." While other critics found much to praise in *Mother Courage*, most agreed that the play was not typical commercial theater, and the production was not true to Brecht's intentions of an emotionally detached, epic theatrical presentation.

The character of Mother Courage, and what she represents, has been a major point of critical discussion. Many critics, especially of the first production in Zurich, argued that she is a tragic character. In several articles, she is compared to the tragic figure of Niobe, a character from Greek mythology who suffers greatly and turns to stone after all her children are killed. Noted theatre critic Robert Brustein, in his essay "Bertolt Brecht" in his *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama*, said: "Mother Courage is no Niobe, all tears, but the author of her own destruction." Other critics, citing Mother Courage's numerous contradictions, find her to have more complexity than the often one-dimensional characters of classic tragedy. One scholar, Ronald Gray in his book *Brecht the Dramatist*, appraised Mother Courage as "adept at turning every situation to her own advantage, conforming with and adapting herself to it."

Another critical debate surrounds the themes of *Mother Courage*. Brecht, as well as many critics and scholars, asserted that the play is about the link between war and commerce, as epitomized in Mother Courage and her love-hate relationship with war and the money it brings her. Charles R. Lyons in his *Bertolt Brecht: The Despair and the Polemic*, argued that "Anna Fierling, Mother Courage, does not resist the war, she accommodates and uses it. It is this accommodation which Brecht decries." Ronald Gray disagreed with this assessment in *Brecht the Dramatist*, arguing that "if we look at the occasion on which she curses war, we see that she is not perceiving the commercial nature of war at all. She curses it because her daughter has been assaulted ... because her daughter has been dumb since a soldier stuffed something into her mouth ... because both of her sons have disappeared, and one of them has been killed." Gray went on to say that "Peace horrifies her." He stated that the play's real theme is "the possibility and the desirability of virtue in a corrupt world. To this question, Brecht gives, as always, an ambiguous answer."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso discusses the character of Mother Courage as both a hero and an antihero.

The title character of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* has been the subject of much critical debate. Critics have agreed that Mother Courage's choices have been hard because of the demands of war-time life. Yet opinions vary widely on the nature of her true character. Some have labeled her a greedy coward; some call her a callous, practical businesswoman; still others deem her courageous. In this essay, Mother Courage is examined as both a hero and an antihero. For every heroic action she takes, she balances it with an antiheroic gesture. By definition, a hero is courageous and noble, distinguished by bravery and admired by others. An antihero is the exact opposite, someone who wallows in negative actions. By looking at Mother Courage in this bifocal fashion, a greater understanding of her motives□specifically the choices she makes□will be reached.

Mother Courage has two goals: for her family to survive the seemingly endless Thirty Years' War and to make a profit while doing so. The origin of her nickname "Mother Courage" is telling. During a battle in Riga, the former Anna Fierling drove her canteen wagon through a ferocious bomb attack so she could sell fifty loaves of bread before they went moldy. She claims she needed to sell the bread to feed her children, but by doing so, she put herself and everyone in the wagon at risk. How necessary a risk this was is not stated, but the act is illustrative of Mother Courage's nature as a businesswoman: she is willing to risk death to earn her profit. As a hero, she wants to survive the war and support her children. As an anti-hero, she puts that very intention at risk to earn money.

Mother Courage's canteen fulfills a need in the Thirty Years' War. Armies relied on such canteens to provide food, alcohol, and goods, as many such items were not provided for the soldiers. For an unmarried woman with three children and no place to call home, the canteen wagon offers a decent livelihood for Mother Courage's family. With few alternatives, it is definitely more appealing than prostitution. Instead of begging for a living or abandoning her children, Mother Courage is responsible for her family. Her canteen allows her to take care of her children while fulfilling a basic need for the soldiers. Yet Mother Courage takes advantage of her heroic situation, looking to the war as a potential for profit and her children as a means to that end. She charges outrageous prices for her goods and refuses charity to those in need. She is called greedy several times and regularly puts profit before people.

While Mother Courage does take care of her children, keeping them fed and clothed, and tries to protect them from direct participation in the war, she loses each of them in her quest for profit. She spends much of the first scene trying to keep Eilif from being recruited to a Swedish army regiment. He ends up joining when Mother Courage's attention is diverted by two soldiers who represent a potential sale. The officer takes Eilif aside and convinces him to sign up while the sergeant haggles with Mother Courage

over the price of a belt buckle.If she had not been so concerned with profit, Eilif would not have been recruited (and subsequently executed for a crime).

Mother Courage's overwhelming concern for money also leads directly to the death of her other son, Swiss Cheese. When he is captured by Catholic soldiers, she haggles over the amount of a ransom that is offered to save him from the firing squad. Her greed prolongs the transaction, and Swiss Cheese is killed before a price is settled. Kattrin suffers a similar fate due to her mother's negligence. The mute daughter is left with a peasant family overnight while Mother Courage is in a town purchasing goods. When Kattrin learns of a surprise attack on the town, she climbs to a rooftop and drums out a warning. Her selfless act saves her mother and the town, but she is killed by soldiers. Once again, Mother Courage's preoccupation with her business (securing materials to sell), has prevented her from properly protecting her offspring. In these situations, Mother Courage's antiheroic nature outweighs her heroic actions.

Yet this is not a black and white issue: Mother Courage does make some sacrifices for her children and others as well. Her outfit has followed the Protestant armies, namely the Swedish, for most of the war. During an attack by the Catholics and a subsequent detention, Mother Courage does her best to hide the Protestant Chaplain who had been visiting her. She makes him take off his cleric's coat and put on a generic beggar's cloak. As the canteen follows the Catholic armies around, she shelters the Chaplain's identity, though she insists that he do work to earn his keep (her antiheroic nature again revealing itself). Similarly, when the Swedish army Cook catches up to them and has nowhere to stay, Mother Courage lets him travel with them□though on the same work-for-shelter terms as the Chaplain.

Mother Courage and the Cook share a mutual affection for one another. When the Cook gets an offer to run an inn in Utrecht, he invites Mother Courage to assist him. She declines this opportunity to get away from the war. The Cook will not let Kattrin, Mother Courage's only surviving child at this point, accompany them. This act shows the title character taking responsibility for her child, though some have argued that Mother Courage is not interested in workingfor the Cook and simply needs Kattrin to carry on her independent business.

In scene five, the canteen wagon is located at Magdeburg, where a recent battle has taken place. In a nearby farmhouse, several peasants are suffering from injuries and their home is partially destroyed. The Chaplain begs Mother Courage for some linen to bandage their wounds. Mother Courage says that she has already sold all the bandages she has, and she will not give him officer's shirts, which are made of linen, for this purpose. The Chaplain begs her, but she replies, "They have nothing and they pay nothing!" It is not until Kattrin threatens Mother Courage with a board and the Chaplain bodily moves her from the wagon that he gets the needed linen. This incident is one of the best examples of Mother Courage's antiheroic nature.

Despite such selfish actions there is evidence that Brectht' s title character has redeemable qualities which she has imparted to her offspring. Of her three children, two perform heroic acts, which says something positive about how she raised them. After

Swiss Cheese is arrested by the Catholics, he protects his mother and sister by denying he is related to them (he tells his captors that he was merely eating a meal at Mother Courage's canteen). This action probably saves their lives.

The mute Kattrin pursues her heroism to much greater lengths, taking great personal risks to help others. Kattrin tries to warn Swiss Cheese about the spies that are following him before his arrest to no avail. When Kattrin overhears the Cook telling Mother Courage that Kattrin is not part of the offer, Kattrin makes ready to leave so that her mother can have a better life. Mother Courage refuses to abandon her daughter, however, and they move on together. The mute girl care also shows great concern for the wellbeing of those outside her family, forcing her mother to surrender the linen for bandages and risking her life to save children from a fire. At the end of the play, Kattrin does give her life to save a town from a surprise attack. The upbringing of these two children is implicitly heroic for Mother Courage.

Yet, in keeping with the duality of the character, Mother Courage's remaining child displays the influence of her darker side. After Eilif is recruited, he becomes a cutthroat soldier. He is lauded by his commander for his skill as a killer and for pillaging a peasant village, including the clever theft of a herd of oxen. Later, he is arrested for the same crime during peacetime. It is implied that he is executed for this. Eilif s actions are antiheroic, directly contributing to the death and destruction of war. His behavior counters his siblings' bravery, balancing the heroic with antiheroic actions.

Mother Courage and Her Children is play full of such balances and contradictions. Mother Courage continually curses war yet embraces its circumstances for profit and survival. Peace means uncertainty to her, and there is no profit in uncertainty. Of her two goals, preserving her family through the war and turning a profit, she achieves neither by the play's end. All her children are dead, the canteen wagon is nearly empty, and she has little money. She is now resigned to hauling the wagon by herself.

Mother Courage is both hero and antihero, each of her positive actions has a negative counterpart. Brecht shows this duality as a negative consequence of war. It is an unnatural perverse state in which common values are challenged at every turn; people are forced to act on both their good and bad impulses, in the hopes that a balance of the two forces will insure success. Mother Courage's behavior is driven by a need to survive during wartime, yet by the time the action in the play begins, it is clear her priorities on this matter have become skewed. She has equated the relentless pursuit of profit (her antiheroic side) with success and survival; she comes to believe that if she is profitable, it will allow her family to survive the war. She has allowed this side of her to rule each situation, despite what her heroic nature might dictate. Yet in the end her pragmatism and devotion to commerce leaves her emotionally and financially bankrupt. It is this last point that hammers home Brecht's primary theme in the play: war is pointless, it robs people of their humanity, and, ultimately, everyone involved loses. While gains may be made in geographic terms, humanity is left poorer for the experience.

Critical Essay #2

In the following critical essay, Woodland discusses the manner in which audiences identify with Mother Courage's continual suffering, examining Brecht's dramatic technique and the ways in which it, quite contrary to the playwright's intentions, serves to make his title character such a sympathetic one.

It is by now a critical commonplace that Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* owes its success, if indeed it has any, not so much to the author's implementation of his many theories of play writing as to his inability, in spite of himself, to put these theories into full practice in his own work. Thus, it is claimed, we respond not to the story of Mother Courage but to the character herself. We are inspired by the woman's courage and sent home from the theater admiring her fortitude, ourselves encouraged to emulate her ineffably good qualities. We respond to the play in terms of our response to its title character. In short, we identify with Mother Courage, make her character our own, and turn her survival into an encouraging affirmation of our own human will to survive. Mother Courage is, ultimately, truly courageous, and her courage sees her through all her tribulations: so we, as audience to her courage, take comfort and gain succor through seeing ourselves in Mother Courage. We are better able to face with internal valor the hardships of our own existence, better able to bear the burdens placed upon us by our society. The ultimate nobility of Mother Courage is the play's success, whether Brecht wished it so or not□as indeed his constant revisions and reworkings, all with a view toward making the title character less sympathetic, clearly indicate. Even the more perfervid admirers of Brecht's theories and practices of dramatic art seem to insist that the play's success arises from its strength of characterization and its affirmation of human will. Martin Esslin writes that audiences at *Mother Courage* are "moved to tears by the sufferings of a poor woman who, having lost her three children, heroically continued her brave struggle and refused to give in, an embodiment of the eternal virtues of the common people." (*Brecht: The Man and His Work*, Anchor, 1961.) Similarly, Eric Bent-ley finds in *Mother Courage* an affirmation and admiration for a certain kind of courage. "This is, to borrow a phrase from Paul Tillich, 'the courage to be'□in this case, the courage to exist in the face of a world that so powerfully recommends non-existence." (*Seven Plays of Bertolt Brecht*, Grave, 1961.)

If critics have made of Mother Courage primarily a play of character and attributed its success to the empathy audiences feel for the title character, producers and actors have been quick to respond to this challenge. The recent New York production, under, as a matter of fact, Bentley's supervision, is reported to have ended with Mother Courage's having drawn the wagon twice around the stage□ the extra turn being obviously a play for a final upheaval of sympathy from the theater party sentimentalists in the audience. And what actress can really be impervious to the temptation of playing for this empathy. Even Helene Weigel, once Brecht was gone, seemed in the eyes of at least one observer, to be playing for more empathy than the playwright might have wished. "Weigel's performance [is] more winning, coy, and less distant than the depths other voice and the worldliness of her character lead one to expect. ... She did not so much

underplay, I felt, as overstate, taking a good deal more time to cool things (if that was it) than she needed." (*Tulane Drama Review*, Vol.3.)

This is all very fine□one supposes. But it is not the play Brecht wrote. Nor is it as good or as important a play as the one Brecht wrote. As a play of character, *Mother Courage* is an insignificant portrait. if we as audience identify with Mother Courage as character and believe her to triumph, then her triumph is ours and we are left only with a rather narcissistic satisfaction. We learn nothing. Our consciousness of human existence is no more broadened than when we entered the theater. If, on the other hand, we are unable to identify with Mother Courage, unable to feel empathy for such an unsavory heroine, we are able to see the causes and roots of the evil she represents. We then share not in Mother Courage's humanity, but in Brecht's anger at the evil her story portrays. Realizing further that this evil is a result of the nature of society, we, as parts of society, share in the guilt for that evil. Without empathy we see ourselves not as Mother Courages preyed upon by a hostile society, but rather, as members of that predatory and hostile society. Where our critics, actors, and producers □ and ourselves as playgoers, no doubt□have made of *Mother Courage* a play that is in the long run comforting, Brecht wrote a play that is highly disturbing, a play that brands us all with a collective guilt for the evils of the world.

One reason, probably, for the misdirection which analyses and productions of *Mother Courage* have taken is that most of the playwrights of the last hundred years at least have accustomed us to viewing plays primarily in terms of character. The psychological complexities of a Willie Loman, a Hedda Gabler, or a Henry IV are meant to give us valuable insight into our own psychologies. If we accept a system of belief in which behavior is controlled by individual psychology, then indeed those plays do accomplish their task. Brecht, however, we must remember, was, whether or not he was an orthodox Soviet Communist, a thoroughly conditioned and fully believing Marxist. For him, the primary determinant of human behavior was external. Individual behavior, to any Marxist, is the product of the social and economic structure in which that individual lives. Individual psychology is merely a superstructure built upon a pre-established socio-economic foundation. Given this presupposition, Brecht, when he wrote plays dealing with individual human beings, had to find a way of showing the action of these individuals in relation to its social foundations. To do this, he turned from the individually oriented drama of character to the drama of action or narrative. In the drama of narrative, we are to be concerned not so much with the individual character's psychology as with the relationship between one incident in the narrative and another. We are to see the progress from event to event, to see how one event causes or leads to another. In Brecht's plays, we are to see also how this progression of events is caused by conditions external to the characters, how those characters are at the mercy of the relentless logic of universal socio-economic-historical law. All the devices of Brecht's much eulogized but little analyzed "Epic theatre" are aimed at making the audience see more clearly the relation of events both to each other and to the laws under which they take place. The alienation effect in acting, the rejection of suspense by announcing to the audience what is about to happen in a scene, the non-realistic scenic devices, are all calculated to take the audience's mind away from individual character and to concentrate it upon the action or narrative itself.

That *Mother Courage* is to be regarded as a narrative play is clear from its subtitle: A *Chronicle of the Thirty Years' War*. The action of the play is Mother courage's fight for survival during that war. Survival, for Brecht, is the first instinct of the human race, and to assure that survival the first principle of all behavior. When other instincts run contrary to the instinct to survive, they will be sacrificed. Thus, Mother Courage, when faced with the loss of her children as the price of survival, has no choice in the matter. In the haggling scene, for instance, the price of Swiss Cheese's life will be the selling of Mother Courage's wagon, the means of her livelihood. She has no choice but to haggle until it is too late. Similarly, she has no choice but to deny recognition of her son anti leave him without ministration. The same lack of choice is evident in the death of Kattrin. In order to provide for her livelihood Mother Courage must leave her daughter unwatched, where she can bring harm upon herself. Again, Mother Courage must deny her daughter any last ministrations in order to catch up with the marching soldiers from whom she gains her living.

In each major episode of the narrative, Mother Courage, to assure her economic survival, has to deny some good instinct that threatens by ramification that survival. The narrative of her struggle for survival thus becomes also the narrative of the loss of whatever goodness Mother Courage might once have had within her. Her mother love, a symbol Brecht uses repeatedly in his plays to stand for pure, instinctive, and uncomplicated goodness, must finally be sacrificed to the need for survival. As the narrative goes on, Mother Courage is driven to increasingly desperate measures, and this desperation leaves her little time for her children. At each new point in the play, it becomes more inevitable that she will have to give up her motherhood in order to survive. At the end, she has lost all her children and all her instinctive goodness. She has left at this point only the basic animal need to survive. Leaving the body of her daughter behind her in the end, she leaves only a "little" of the great deal of money she has made in the town. Physically she is reduced from the human being riding on the wagon to the animal pulling it. From a human being with some instinctive goodness at the beginning of the play, she is reduced to an animal with the instinct only to survive. Another indication of the progressive dehumanization of Mother Courage is that each of the children represents some aspect of the goodness that is, at first, instinctive to Mother Courage. Eilif is courage, Swiss Cheese honesty, Kattrin unreasoning love. As each of the children is sacrificed to the need for survival Mother Courage loses the human aspect represented by that child. With the children gone, Mother Courage's humanity is gone. She remains only with animal instinct.

The thought behind this action is that the condition of human society makes necessary the sacrifice of innate human goodness to the exigencies of economic subsistence in the world. In setting the play during the Thirty Years' War, Brecht has chosen a time in which war is not exceptional but routine. Thus, metaphorically, he characterizes the routine life of capitalistic society as a life of constant warfare. In a society where trading and bargaining are necessary to survival, goodness does not have a chance. It even defeats itself. Mother Courage refuses to leave Kattrin for the Cook only to bring herself to the necessity of leaving Kattrin unprotected at the peasants' farm. The greatest act of goodness Mother Courage tries to perform leads to the final deprivation of her humanity. In the action of Mother Courage's fight for survival, we see the sacrifice of humanity

which that fight requires. We see also that it is the constant warfare state of capitalist economy that makes these sacrifices necessary.

As written, as a play of narrative exposing the social causes of Mother Courage's inhumanity, this is anything but an inspiring and comforting affirmation of the human will to live. It is, instead, a condemnation of each of us who contributes to the society in which the requirement of such sacrifice becomes inevitable. Just as Mother Courage shares in her guilt by living according to the laws of that society, so we share in her guilt by assenting to those laws. *Mother Courage* as Brecht wrote it is not an easy play for Western audiences to take; the truth, someone once said, always hurts. But it is a much our critics, producers, and actors have been representing Brecht as having written.

Critical Essay #3

In this 1963 essay, Brustein examines Brecht's political motivations in creating Mother Courage and Her Children. *Finding the play to be a prime example of the playwright's pacifist views, the critic asserts that the work is a "Marxist indictment of the economic motives behind international aggression."*

Brecht's masterly chronicle of the Thirty Years War, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, is often interpreted as a straightforward pacifist document, but it is not simply that. It is also a relentless Marxist indictment of the economic motives behind international aggression. If property is theft in *The Threepenny Opera*, it is rape, pillage, and murder in *Mother Courage*□war, in short, is an extension not of diplomacy but of free enterprise. As for the financier, he is no longer a gangster, like Macheath. He is now a cynical warlord□like the Swedish King Gustavus, who pretends to be animated by religious zeal but who is actually seeking personal gain and territorial aggrandizement. In this atmosphere, where Protestants and Catholics slaughter each other for fun and profit, all human ideals degenerate into hypocritical cant, while heroism shatters into splinters of cruelty, madness, or greed. Brecht works these grim sardonic ironies, however, without bringing a single military adventurer center stage. Like the invisible bourgeoisie of *Threepenny*, the kings and commanders of *Mother Courage* remain in the background of the play, as well as in the rear of the battles. The external conflict is narrated, like newspaper headlines, in legends preceding each scene; but the dramatic action focuses on the lives of the war's subordinates and noncombatants, playing local commerce. "The war is just the same as trading," and "General Tilley's victory at Leipzig" has significance only insofar as it "costs Mother Courage four shirts."

Mother Courage, to be sure, is a pathetic victim of this war□she sacrifices three children to it. She is not, however, simply a passive sufferer, she is also an active agent in her own destruction. Precariously suspended between her maternal and commercial instincts. Courage may curse the war as a mother, but as a businesswoman, she is identified with it. A "hyena of the battlefield," she speculates on the lives of men. And since her canteen wagon is her only means of survival, she treats it as a fourth child, tied to her by a commercial umbilical□the three children of her flesh, significantly, are all taken off while she is haggling. Thus, Mother Courage is another of Brecht's split characters, a compound of good and evil□but one which adds up to more than the sum of its parts. For Courage achieves a third dimension beyond her ideological function. Like Falstaff (her Shakespearean prototype), she is an escaped character who baffles the author's original intentions. Salty, shrewd, hardbitten, and skeptical, Courage is a full-blooded personification of the anti-heroic view of life. In a moving lyric, "The Song of the Great Capitulation," she traces her progress from a youthful Romantic idealist to a cautions compromiser, marching in time with the band, and, throughout the play, she remains faithful to the doctrine of number one. What she preaches is that the Ten Commandments are a mug's game, and that virtues like bravery, honesty, and unselfishness will invariably bring you low□as indeed such virtues flatten foolhardy Eilif, simple-minded Swiss Cheese, and, finally, kindly Kattrin. Restraining her motherly feelings, Courage survives; yielding to hers, Kattrin dies. But in the world of the play,

death and survival are equally dismal alternatives. At the end, childless and desolate, Courage straps herself to her battered wagon and continues to follow the soldiers, having learned nothing except that man's capacity for suffering is limitless. But this knowledge is the tragic perception; and Brecht, for all his ideologizing, has recreated a tragic universe in which the cruelty of men, the venality of society, and the indifference of the gods seem immutable conditions of life.

The ideological structure, however, provides the intellectual spine of the drama; and I have stressed its importance because the current production is intellectually spineless. It is difficult to say why, since it is totally free from the usual Broadway hokum or cynicism. Eric Bentley's idiomatic translation preserves the bite of the German, Paul Dessau's score is sharp and wheedling, and Jerome Robbins' direction proceeds, in all externals, with almost reverential fidelity to the text. Still, the only episode which works is the emotionally charged Drum Scene (virtually stage-proof anyway). The rest of the evening is too often static and labored, and the ironies very rarely register. Certainly, the affluent Broadway audience is partly to blame. Lacking either the wit or the inclination to respond to Marxist mockery, it has a Yahoo's appetite only for blunt obscenities (a soldier's "Kiss my ass," for example, brought the opening night house down)□and no actor is going to press for unappreciated subtleties. Then, again, Mr. Robbins, for all his good intentions, is not enough of a director for a play of this scope, mounted in a four-week rehearsal period. Taking place on a clean bare stage, dressed only with Courage's wagon and occasional set pieces, the action itself seems peculiarly clean and bare. One misses stage business, directorial detail, the bustle of life; the actors do not seem sufficiently at home with their props and costumes; and underneath the surface scruffiness, a hint of American wholesomeness still sneaks through. One of Robbins' effective devices is to project, on a burlap cyclorama, photographs of twentieth-century soldiers and civilians in dusty retreat□but this merely emphasizes the play's anti-war implications, which are already rather obvious.

Even this scheme could have been partially compatible with Brecht's design; but the central role of Mother Courage is disastrously miscast. Ann Bancroft should probably be commended for undertaking a character beyond her years, training, and talents□but like the bravery of Courage's son, Eilif, this often strikes one as mere foolhardiness. Miss Bancroft's impersonation of age is particularly unconvincing, partly because of flat make-up and a form-fitting waist, partly because of her own inexperience. In order to overcome these handicaps, she has been forced into monotonous vocal intonations, which, along with her aphoristic inflections, account for much of the evening's tedium. Beyond this, the part of Mother Courage demands intelligence and a capacity for being unpleasant; Miss Bancroft is an exclusively emotional actress who cannot resist playing for sympathy. Her best moments, apart from her rendering of the songs, come in climaxes of grief, and the final scene, where Courage painfully pulls at her wagon, her mouth agape like a wounded animal, is truly harrowing. For the balance of the play, however, Miss Bancroft has the sound and gestures of a tired Jewish housewife, with no more cutting edge than Molly Goldberg. Zohra Lampert, on the other hand, is expressive, lovely, and poignant as the mute Kattrin (though perhaps too spastic in her movements). And though Barbara Harris lapses into Second City vocal mannerisms as the whore Yvette, Mike Kellin and Gene Wilder contribute moments of crisp humor as

the Cook and the Chaplain, and Eugene Roche and John Harkins are vigorous in lesser roles. I have harped on the failures of the production; but there are still sufficient virtues in it to make this an important theatrical occasion. A Brecht masterpiece has been produced with all the care, respect, and expertise that our professional theatre can muster. If this is still not quite enough, we must locate the inadequacy in the nature of the American theatre itself.

Adaptations

Mother Courage and Her Children was filmed in 1960, featuring much of the cast of the 1949 German stage production, including Helene Weigel as Mother Courage. It was directed by Peter Palitzsch and Manfred Wekwerth.

The play was also adapted into a television production by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1959.

Topics for Further Study

The character of Mother Courage is often compared to Niobe, a character in Greek mythology. Research Niobe and compare and contrast her with Mother Courage.

Research the effect of war on the psyche of the common man. Is there a psychological explanation for Mother Courage's actions?

Compare the histories of the Thirty Years' War and World War II. How do events in World War II parallel what is portrayed in *Mother Courage and Her Children?*

Playwright Brecht was a communist. How do the tenets of communism manifest themselves in the themes and events of *Mother Courage*?

Compare and Contrast

1600s: The Thirty Years' War rages in Europe from 1618 to 1648.

1930s-40s: World War II ravages Europe and the Pacific from 1939-45.

Today: There is no widespread warfare in the world. Global or continent-wide wars have given way to small pockets of geographically contained conflict such as the Persian Gulf War of the early-1990s.

1600s: The Thirty Years' War begins as a conflict of religious ideology, Catholic versus Protestant.

1930s-40s: World War II is a tactical war fought for geographic gain. A religious element still persists, however, in Nazi Germany's persecution of European Jews as well as other ethnic minorities who do not fit Adolf Hitler's Aryan ideal.

Today: Religion plays a role in several regional conflicts in the world. In Northern Ireland, it is Catholic versus Protestant; in the Middle East, it is Jewish versus Muslim.

1600s: Because the Thirty Years' War drags on for so many years, armies have a difficult time replenishing their fighting forces.

1930s-40s: Germany has mandatory military service for men aged eighteen to forty-five. The United States has a similar policy.

Today: The United States has an all-volunteer army and has a hard time recruiting enough personnel. However, eighteen-year-old men are required to register for the draft in the event of a war.

1600s: The population of Europe, especially in Germany, becomes severely depleted because of the long war and unchecked disease. For example, in the Wuttemberg, the population drops from 450,000 in 1634, to 100,000 in 1638.

1930s-40s: World War II leads to widespread death of both civilian and military personnel, though not nearly as bad as the Thirty Years' World. Still, as a result of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, 50,000 people immediately die.

Today: The peacetime population booms. Diseases such as AIDS, cancer, and other health concerns are the primary causes of death.

What Do I Read Next?

The Private Life of the Master Race, written by Brecht in 1944, is his interpretation of Hitler's New Order policies.

Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's *Courage: The Adventuress*, a novel written in 1670, is centered around a character much like Mother Courage. It is one of the sources Brecht used for *Mother Courage*.

King Lear, a play by William Shakespeare written around 1605, concerns a family in which the tension between greed and caring plays a role in their destruction.

The Thirty Years' War, a nonfiction book published by C. V. Wedgewood in 1938, is a history of the war, focusing on its effects in Germany.

Germany, Hitler, and World War II: Essays in Modern German and World History, is a collection published in 1995 and edited by Gerhard Weinberg. The topics include Hitler and German history, including events leading up to and including World War II.

Further Study

Bentley, Eric. "Bertolt Brecht and His Work" in *Theatre Arts*, September 1944, p. 509-12.

This journal article gives an overview of Brecht's career and writing through 1944.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, translated by John Willet, Methuen, 1963.

This nonfiction book discusses Brecht's theories of writing and theater, including epic theater.

Demetz, Peter, editor. *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essay s,Prentice* Hall, 1972.

This includes a number of essays on many aspects of Brecht's work, including one solely concerned with *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Ewen, Frederic. *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, and His Times*, Citadel, 1967.

This biography concerns Brecht's life as well as the context in which his work was written.

Speirs, Ronald. *Bertolt Brecht*, St. Martin's, 1987.

This work discusses all of Brecht's works, including an in-depth analysis of *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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