



MOTHER COURAGE & HER CHILDREN



STUDY GUIDE

Eric Stroud, Dramaturg

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DRAMATURG'S NOTE: WAR. WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

One of the most eye opening experiences I had while doing research for *Mother Courage and Her Children* came when I was looking up a phrase found in the play's first scene. Mother Courage is explaining how she got her name and she claims to have delivered bread to some soldiers after driving her cart through the 'bombardment of Riga.' When I looked it up to see what it meant, I learned that the bombardment of Riga was one of the most deadly battles in World War II.

I was confused. How could Mother Courage have gotten her name from a battle that took place more than 300 years after she lived? Could playwright Bertolt Brecht have overlooked this historical error? Or was he trying to say something?

This discovery opened my eyes to other inconsistencies. It turns out that Brecht purposefully interchanges historical accuracy with relation to war throughout the play. Whether this is with weaponry, location, word usage, or other elements, Brecht shows that it all simply blends together. No matter the "just cause" we assign to it, the glory we hide it under, or the time period it is taking place in, war is still just humans killing other humans.

Brecht's aim in *Mother Courage* lies less in telling the tender story of a struggling mother, and more in using the story as a means of stimulating our thoughts as an audience. Brecht would like us to see that Courage sacrifices her children to maintain her human habit of greed. He would show us how war changes people and takes loved ones. He would have us realize that at the end of the play we are left with a childless mother, continuing on her cyclical pattern of destruction.



Brecht's felt theatre had the ability to inspire social change. There is not one "right" message that you should receive from *Mother Courage*, but that's exactly how social change comes to life. As each of you will approach what you see tonight with different life experience, the change that you want can be supplemented with a sense of ownership. My hope for you is not that you simply enjoy this play, but rather that it moves you and makes you think. I hope that each of you can explore how you benefit from war. How war affects the world around you. And what each of you sacrifice to maintain your worst habits. Most importantly, I hope you are inspired to act on what you feel.

—Eric Stroud, dramaturg

BRECHT AND MOTHER COURAGE



BERTOLT BRECHT

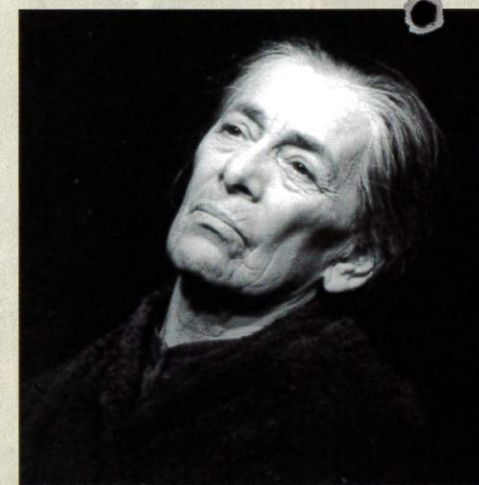
- Born in Germany 1889
- Died in East Berlin 1956
- Significant playwright of the 20th century.
- Raised in a Protestant family
- Plays of Note: "Gallileo," "Baal," "The Caucasian Chalk Circle," "The Three-penny Opera"

MOTHER COURAGE

Mother Courage and Her Children is an anti-war piece written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939.

The play takes place over a twelve-year span in 1600s Germany, during the 30 Years War. As Brecht was an extreme Marxist and peace advocate, he originally wrote *Mother Courage* as a direct response to Hitler's Nazi regime. However, once the Nazi party found this out, Brecht was forced to flee Germany, and take refuge in Poland. *Mother Courage* was not put on stage until April of 1941. While the production was well received by the audience in Zurich, Brecht became frustrated with them. Often those who saw it would only sympathize with the character of Mother Courage, while Brecht wanted them instead to see her faults.

Brecht directed *Mother Courage* only twice in his lifetime. Brecht's second wife, actress Helene Weigel, starred as Mother Courage in both productions. The above picture shows her during her 1949 performance.



EPIC THEATRE: HONORING BRECHTIAN VERFREMDUNGSEFFEKT WITH MASKS, MUSIC, AND MOVEMENT

Brecht believed that theatre should not only entertain, but also educate. Taking from the influences of the expressionist movement, he clung to a new type of theatre, called Epic Theatre. Epic Theatre was a push back against 19th century melodrama, which Brecht believed was shallow, inflated, and simplistic in its goal only to entertain the audience.

Brecht wanted people to “engage” with the theatre on a political and intellectual level. However, Brecht felt that the only way to accomplish this was through a process he called Verfremdungseffekt (in America we often refer to it as the V-Effect). Brecht used the V-Effect to jolt the audience from their emotional connection and into a mindset of critical objectivity. Brecht used many tactics to accomplish Verfremdungseffekt. Here are a few:

Placards, or signs to tell you what was going to happen in the next scene.

Discordant music that was particularly displeasing to the ear.

“Spass” or German for fun. These were basically off color jokes: Are you feeling low? Depressed? Think there's no way out? Then you need new ‘End it All’....

SO HOW WILL YOU SEE THE V-EFFECT USED IN THIS SHOW?

Just like Brecht, Director David Morgan would like you to think critically about this production. While there are many elements of the show that incorporate Brecht's V-Effect tactics, I want you to pay special attention to these three: MASK, MUSIC, AND MOVEMENT.



Mask: Character mask is inspired by the 16th century Italian art form of Commedia dell'arte. Each character mask is unique to the individual it represents. Actors will hold the mask by their side, but when they put the mask on, they become the character to whom the mask belongs. Character masks remind you that you are watching a performance, not real life. Pay attention to how you feel as actors take the masks on and off. Does it jolt you from the performance? Do the character masks help you to critically think about what you are seeing?

Music: All of these instruments will be used in the show. Each has a unique and wacky sound to it. Pay attention to when these instruments are used. Think about why, and how they change your perspective on the scene at hand. Do they make it less real, or more real?



Movement: Actors will use “tableux” (when the freeze in a particular position) to help emphasize the meaning of a scene. What characters do you notice participating in tableaux? What does that mean to you?

30 YEARS WAR OVERVIEW: 1618-1648



The 30 Years War is collectively held to have begun in 1618. The future Holy Roman emperor Ferdinand II, in his role as king of Bohemia, attempted to impose Roman Catholic **Absolutism*** on his domains, and the Protestant nobles of both Bohemia and Austria rose up in rebellion.

While the 30 Years War may have begun as a religious war between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics, the war was being waged within so many countries that

the purpose slowly changed over time. Rivalries still extended to religion, however money and property became the main motivations for all countries invested.

As the majority of the war took place in Germany, this was where most damage was dealt. Perhaps 20 percent of Germany's total population perished during the war, with losses of up to 50 percent along a corridor running from Pomerania in the Baltic to the Black Forest. The violence only got worse as the war drew on. As most soldiers fighting were mercenaries, their motivations were purely monetary. When they were not being paid, they took it out on innocent civilians who were caught in the middle of the war. Murder, rape, thievery, and mutiny were common practices during the war.

INTEL:

Although the war ended with the Treaty of Westphalia, less than a decade later, Sweden was back at war with Poland, Denmark, and Russia.

*Absolutism: the acceptance of or belief in absolute principles in political, philosophical, ethical, or theological matters.

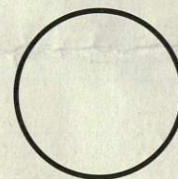


DIRECTOR'S THEME

As *Mother Courage* was written by Brecht as a response to the Nazi Regime, it already comes with some heavy connotations and opinions on war. However, Director David Morgan wanted to explore how applicable Brecht's text is to us today.

While some assume that killing or invading another country is a means of progress, Morgan explores the idea of war as a process of mindless repetition. The cyclical cycle of killing that has existed since the dawn of time is less heroic than we think it is. Below each image is a short description of one potential meaning the object's presence in the show creates..

Below each image I have written a short description of what that object's presence might represent. As you watch the show, look for other images or themes that stand out to you. Write them down, and how you think they relate to the overall theme of "the pointlessness of war"?



Pointless Repetition



False Perception



The Brittle Nature of Life

DID THIS PLAY ENGAGE YOU?

Brecht wanted an audience that would leave a production ready to take action. What will *Mother Courage* inspire you to do?

ACTIVITY:

There are a total of 12 scenes in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. For this activity, either during or after the show, write what speaks to you most within each scene. This could be someone's line, an acting choice, or even a moment of silence. After filling out your thoughts for each scene, write on the final line what you will do because you saw this show.

SCENE 1: _____

SCENE 2: _____

SCENE 3: _____

SCENE 4: _____

SCENE 5: _____

SCENE 6: _____

SCENE 7: _____

SCENE 8: _____

SCENE 9: _____

SCENE 10: _____

SCENE 11: _____

SCENE 12: _____

WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE FELT? _____

TO LEARN MORE

Interested in learning more about this production of *Mother Courage and Her Children*? Check out The 4th Wall, BYU's dramaturgy blog: 4thwalldramaturgy.byu.edu/category/mother-courage-and-her-children



PRODUCTION STAFF

Jackie Barrett
Sound Design

A senior in the theatre program. Previous sound designs at BYU include the ballet *Alice in Wonderland*, *Misalliance*, and *See How They Run*. She loves singing and performing whenever she gets the chance. She is grateful to her husband Michael for putting his dreams on hold while she finishes her degree.

Rebekah Jackson
Asst. Makeup Designer

From Mapleton, UT. Senior in theatre art studies with an emphasis in costume design. Recent BYU credits include costume design for *Misalliance* (2015), assistant costume design for *The Winter's Tale* (2015), and assistant costume design for *Pride and Prejudice* (2014). In February 2016, she presented a fashion collection at Utah Fashion Week and competed in the regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in Honolulu, HI. She is the daughter of Robert and Milana Jackson.

Donette Perkins
Co-Costume Design

BYU costume shop manager and adjunct faculty for Theatre and Media Arts. Previously worked as a costumer for the Utah and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals and the American Conservatory Theater. Recent BYU costume design credits include *Manon*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Fisherman and His Wife*, *The Nightingale*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Tales of Hoffman*, and *The Gondoliers*.

Sarah Stewart
Co-Costume Design

From Evergreen, CO. Senior in theatre arts with emphases in costume and makeup design, and with minors in visual arts and nutrition. Recent costume design credits include BYU's *Water Sings Blue* and *Microburst 2015*. She has worked as the assistant costume designer for BYU's *Princess Academy*, *Our Town*, and *A Man for All Seasons*. She recently designed the makeup for BYU's *Twelfth Night*. Sarah tours with the Young Ambassadors as their student costumer.

Juliette Lewis-Mergist
Makeup Design

From Mesa, AZ. Junior in the theatre arts program, emphasis in costume and makeup design. Design credits at BYU include assistant costume and makeup design for *Misalliance* and *Beauty and the Beast* (respectively), costume design for *Microburst*, and makeup design and supervision for *Mary Poppins*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*, and *Crazy for You* at the SCERA Theater. She also works on indie films, commercials, and photo shoots as a makeup artist.

PRODUCTION STAFF (CON'T.)

Sarah Barrus
Production
Stage Manager

From San Francisco, CA. Junior emphasizing in stage management. She has worked at BYU as the stage manager for *See How They Run* and assistant stage manager for *Pride & Prejudice*. She has also worked on BYU's productions of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Selfish Giant*, as well as *For Tonight*, a new musical at the New York Musical Theatre Festival. Recently she toured to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, and Germany with BYU's Contemporary Dance Theatre company and around the states with the Theatre Ballet and Ballroom companies.

Nathan Stout
Properties Designer

From Zanesville, OH. Senior in the theatre arts studies program. Past technical credits include *Christmas Around the World* (property designer), *dancEnsemble* (property designer), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (light board operator), and *The Light in the Piazza* (dresser). Past performance credits include *The Selfish Giant* (puppeteer, BYU) and *Henry V* (Scroop/Pistol/Dauphin, BYU).

Bradlee Hagar
Projection Designer
and Assistant
Scenic Designer

From Camarillo, CA. Bradlee is a senior in theatre arts design. Recent credits include scenic design for BYU Theatre Ballet's *Alice in Wonderland* and projection assistant for *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Susan Ostler
Assistant Stage
Manager

From Irvine, CA. Sophomore in theatre arts studies. Before returning from a mission in Buenos Aires, Argentina, she was an electrician at BYU-Idaho and a technician for their 2013-14 productions, including *It's A Wonderful Life* and *Lend Me a Tenor*. Previously, Susan was a stage manager at Northwood High School for productions such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Mulan*.

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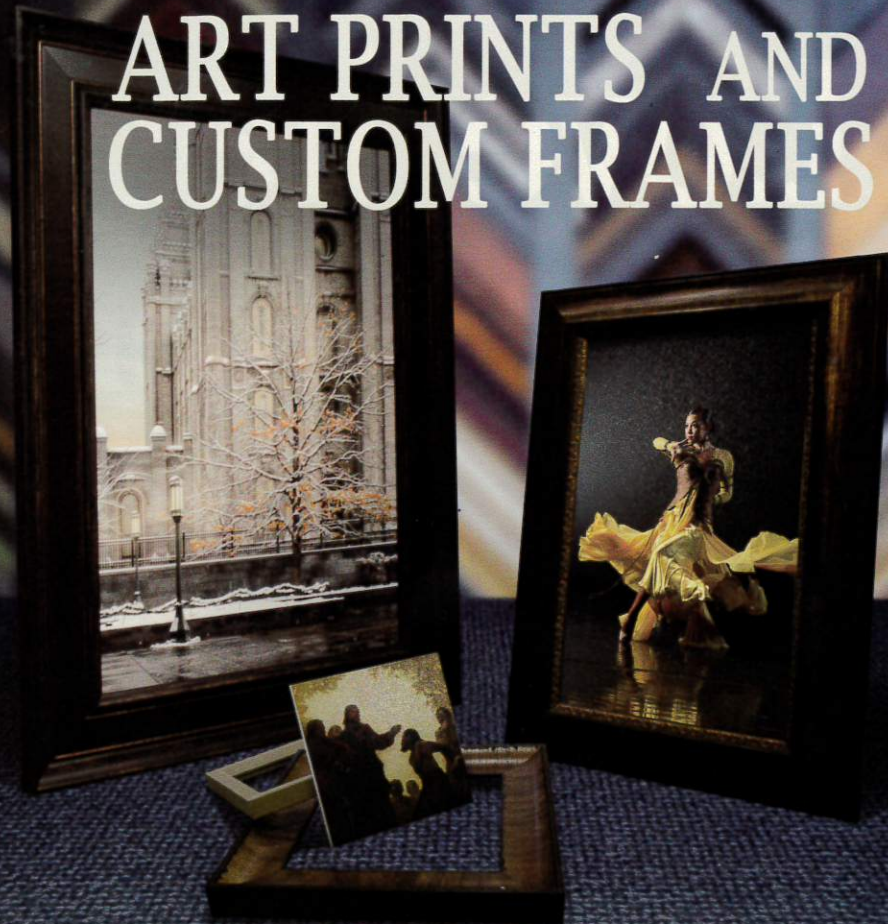
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