

Sources of the play:

In 1939, Bertolt Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel had to flee Nazi controlled Germany. Five months after fleeing to Sweden, Brecht was outraged by Germany's invasion of Poland. This was the inspiration behind the first draft of *Mother Courage*. Although his wife was to later portray the title character and set the standard for *Mother Courage*, he originally wrote the play in Swedish. Because his wife could not speak the language she was cast as Kattrin, whose character has no lines. Brecht wrote the non-speaking part especially for his wife.

Brecht did not actually see the original version of *Mother Courage* as he was planning his escape to Hollywood Brecht returned to Germany in 1948. He was quickly offered a production at the Deutsches Theatre, the principal house of what later became East Berlin. Brecht's first production was *Mother Courage* and he assembled a cast of actors who later became his core group of his theatre company. Brecht developed an extension of his "epic theatre" technique; he believed that the actors should not embody the characters naturalistically. In other words, he did not want the audience to get engaged with the roles. They were only actors. The focus was to be on the story.



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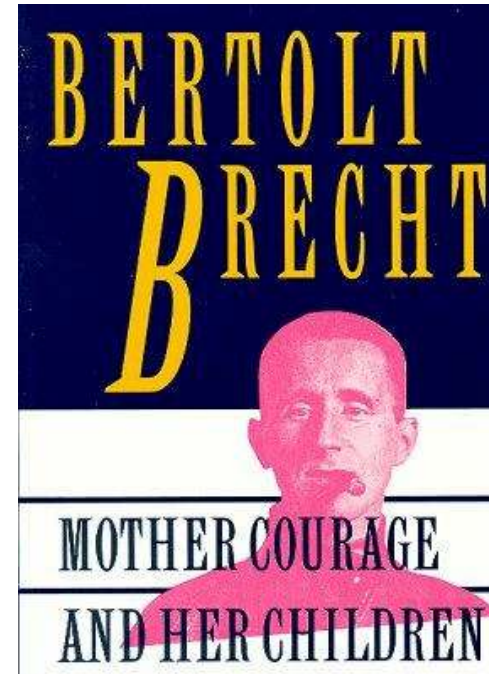
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**St. Thomas University English 2223:
From the Page to the Stage**

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A Playgoer's Guide

The author:

Bertolt Brecht was born on February 19th, 1898. He lived in Bavaria until he went to University. There in Munich, he majored in Medicine and Philosophy. His knowledge in medicine led him to join the army during WWI where he served his country as a medic. This war experience led to his disgust with war in general, and it was that feeling that spawned many of his plays and writing. Brecht went on to write plays, poems and songs, all of which were very successful and served as a basis for his career as a writer.

Some of Brecht's plays can be seen as his view on the world of war. He tried to capture the true essence of the destruction that war ensues. He does this with his own version of theatre and acting. In his mind, he sees acting as more of a narration than a performance. His acting attitudes have been commented as being "acting in quotation marks." He views an actor's performance as showing and explaining emotions rather than trying to portray them. This is known as the Brechtian style of acting. Soon after his last play, he passed away on August 14th, 1956.

The Characters:

Mother Courage: Her real name is Anna Fierling. She earned her name Mother Courage in Riga when she ran through a bombardment in order to sell her loaves of bread. She has three children, Eilif, Swiss Cheese and Katrin, whom she tries to take care of and protect throughout the play.

Katrin: Mother Courage's only daughter. She is mute but is also very emotional.

Eilif: Mother Courage's eldest son; he is brutish and loves the war. He is recruited into the army in the first scene and quickly advances because of his ability to kill peasants and steal their livestock.

Swiss Cheese: Mother Courage's younger son, he is honest and unwilling to break his promises. He is forced to become the money-carrier for the army.

Cook: The cook for the Swedish Commander first appears when Mother Courage haggles with him over the price of a capon. He is the man whom Yvette Pottier falls in love with, thereby causing her to follow the army as a prostitute for five years.

Chaplain: The religious leader of the Swedish Army. He later joins Mother Courage's wagon and lives with her.

Yvette Pottier: A prostitute; she follows the army after falling in love with the Cook. After the Catholics arrest Swiss Cheese, she picks up a Colonel and convinces him to give her money with which to buy Mother Courage's wagon. However, events change and she does not get the wagon.

The story:

The play opens in Dalarna, a province of Sweden, in 1624 during the 30 Years War. The Swedish army is recruiting for a campaign in Poland. Mother Courage runs a canteen wagon that follows the army and sells the soldiers drink and items of clothing. A Recruiting Officer and a Sergeant are trying to find troops for the Swedish Army. The Recruiting Officer pulls Eilif away from her and signs him up for the army. Mother Courage follows the army into Poland, accompanied by her younger son Swiss Cheese and her mute daughter Katrin. Eilif is being honoured for having killed some peasants and stolen their cattle. She tells him that the next time he encounters peasants he should surrender when they surround him instead of fighting and killing them all.

Three years later Mother Courage is still with the regiment. The Catholic Army attacks and wins, forcing her to switch flags. Swiss Cheese, has become the payroll master for the army and foolishly hides the money box in her wagon. Swiss Cheese decides to hide the money box somewhere else, but when he does some Catholic spies catch him. Yvette Pottier, a prostitute, arrives with a Colonel in town. Mother Courage gets Yvette to buy her wagon for a large sum of money. She then sends Yvette to the Catholics in the hopes that she can bribe one of the soldiers to release Swiss Cheese. She is too late and the soldiers bring her son's body to her with 11 bullet holes in it. The Chaplain tells Mother Courage that the war will not end and that she should add more supplies while they are still cheap. She sends Katrin into the town to buy supplies. Katrin returns with lots of goods, but is hurt on the way home and Mother Courage tells the Chaplain that it is doubtful Katrin will be unable to find a husband.

Unfortunately for Mother Courage, peace does arrive, meaning that she is financially ruined. She is, however, happy that she will get to see Eilif again. Yvette Pottier shows up again and she and Mother Courage go to sell the goods. While they are away Eilif is executed for killing some peasants for their cattle in peace time. Mother Courage arrives back soon thereafter with the news that the war has actually started again, but that they did not know it. The Cook does not tell her that Eilif has been executed. The Cook remains with the wagon for two years until he receives a letter that his mother has died and left him a small inn to take care of. He tries to get Mother Courage to accompany him, but since he refuses to take Katrin along, she turns him down. While he is eating in a parsonage, she dumps his stuff on the ground and drives off with Katrin.

Two years later Mother Courage is near the town of Halle, in which she is buying goods for her wagon. Katrin remains with the wagon near a farmhouse. Some soldiers arrive from the Catholic army and seize the peasants in the farmhouse along with Katrin. They force one of the peasants to lead them silently into town. The remaining peasants go up on the roof and realize that the army is going to slaughter the townspeople. They kneel to pray, and Katrin stays behind them and listens. During the prayer she suddenly gets a drum out of the wagon and climbs up on the roof. She starts beating the drum and pulls the ladder up with her to prevent them from stopping her. Katrin beats louder and harder until they shoot her down. However, the noise that she made successfully wakes up the town and allows it to defend its walls and to use its cannon.

The next day Mother Courage pays the peasants to bury her daughter. She then says that she must get back into business. Hearing a regiment pass by, she harnesses herself to the front of the wagon and pulls it offstage.