



***"Capitalism's Grip: Analyzing its Impact in Bertolt Brecht's
Mother Courage and Her Children "***

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قبضة الرأسمالية: تحليل تأثيرها في عمل بيرتولت بريخت 'الأم شجاعة وأطفالها

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Abstract:

Brecht's play, "Mother Courage and Her Children" shows that capitalism influences the life of individuals and society. Against the background of the Thirty Years' War, the play presents the adventures of Mother Courage, a canny and realistic entrepreneur, while she moves across war-torn territory. Mother Courage's actions are often connected to the capitalist way of thinking as she is looking for profit and economic survival during the war in her head. With the help of characters that the main character met, Brecht exposes the unscrupulous nature of capitalism and its harmful results on human relations. The play presents several ideas such as the ethics of benefiting from war, and how capitalism makes rich people richer. Brecht employed "epic theater" techniques, such as alienation effects, for the audience to see the capitalist system and its effects with a critical eye. But, the play also demonstrates the complexities of capitalism since Mother Courage's capitalist force is both an element that sustains her and a tragic flaw. Overall, "Mother Courage and Her Children" is a figurative representation of the capital minting that not only courts destruction, but also presents particularly difficult moral dilemmas in times of war.

المخلص:

تستكشف مسرحية برتولت بريخت *الام الشجاعة وأطفالها* موضوع الرأسمالية وتأثيراتها على الأفراد والمجتمع. تدور أحداث المسرحية خلال حرب الثلاثين عامًا، وتتبع رحلة الأم الشجاعة، وهي تاجرة واسعة الحيلة وانتهازية، وهي تنتقل في المناظر التي مزقتها الحرب. يتم تصوير الرأسمالية على أنها القوة الدافعة وراء تصرفات الأم الشجاعة، حيث تسعى لتحقيق الربح والبقاء الاقتصادي وسط فوضى الحرب. ومن خلال تفاعلاتها مع مختلف الشخصيات، يسلط بريخت الضوء على الطبيعة الاستغلالية للرأسمالية وتأثيرها على العلاقات الإنسانية. تثير المسرحية تساؤلات حول أخلاقيات الاستفادة من الحرب والطرق التي تعمل بها الرأسمالية على إدامة عدم المساواة والاستغلال. إن استخدام بريخت لتقنيات المسرح الملحمي، مثل تأثيرات الاغتراب، يشجع الجمهور على إجراء فحص نقدي للنظام الرأسمالي وعواقبه. ومع ذلك، تعرض المسرحية أيضًا تعقيدات الرأسمالية، حيث أن روح المبادرة لدى الأم الشجاعة هي مصدر لمرونتها وعيب مأساوي. بشكل عام، يقدم *"الام الشجاعة وأطفالها"* استكشافًا دقيقًا للرأسمالية، ويسلط الضوء على ميلها التدميرية والمعضلات الأخلاقية التي تطرحها في أوقات الحرب.

1. Introduction to Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic and social system that has played a pivotal role in shaping modern societies and their development. Along with *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Capitalism is defined as an economic system “characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market” (Screpanti, 1999, 28). However The *World Bank* describes capitalism as an economic system “based on the private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. Characteristics central to capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, wage labor, voluntary exchange, a price system, and competitive markets”. (Mueller & Weber, 1982, 151). The principle of capitalism lies in the fundamental drive to generate profit. The renowned 18th-century philosopher and economist, Adam Smith, shared this perspective. He highlighted the importance of self-interest and profit maximization in driving economic activity within a capitalist system. As he said, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”(Solga, 2003: 344). In a capitalist system, when two parties engage in a voluntary exchange, both have their own

interests in mind. Nevertheless, they cannot achieve their goals without taking into account the interests of the other party. This concept of rational self-interest, where individuals aim to maximize their own benefits, can ultimately promote economic well-being.

The core of capitalism is an economic system in which individuals and businesses have the right to own private property, including land, resources, and the means of production. This ownership allows them to control and make decisions about how to use these assets. Capitalism relies on a “market-driven economy” (Piketty, 2014, 13). Goods and services are produced and exchanged based on supply and demand, with prices determined by the interactions of buyers and sellers in free and competitive markets. One of the central driving forces of capitalism is the pursuit of profit. Individuals and businesses seek to maximize their profits, which encourages efficiency and innovation in the production of goods and services. Capitalism thrives on competition. The presence of multiple producers and consumers in the market promotes competition, which, in turn, often leads to better products, lower prices, and overall economic growth.

In addition, Capitalist systems typically involve limited government involvement in economic affairs. The government's

role is usually restricted to enforcing property rights, ensuring fair competition, and providing some essential public services, such as infrastructure and defense. Capitalism values individual freedom and choice. People have the freedom to make their own economic decisions, including “what to produce, buy, and sell” (Jahan & Mahmud, 2015, 4). This individual freedom extends to entrepreneurship and the ability to start and manage businesses.

1.1. Historical development to capitalism

The term "capitalist" originally referred to an individual who owned capital, and the term "capitalism" is derived from the word "capital." The word "capital" has its roots in the Late Latin word "caput," which means "head" and also serves as the origin of words like "chattel" and "cattle" in the sense of movable property (Rajan, & Zingales, 2003, 93). Actually, the historical development of capitalism is a complex and multifaceted process that spans several centuries.

The roots of capitalism can be traced back to the late medieval and early modern periods. During this time, “merchant capitalism” emerged as a system characterized by long-distance trade, exploration, and the accumulation of wealth through commercial ventures (Appleby, 2011, 10). European cities such as Venice, Genoa, and Amsterdam became centers of trade and

finance, laying the groundwork for capitalist practices. In the 16th and 17th centuries, advancements in agricultural techniques and the enclosure movement in England led to significant changes in land ownership and agricultural production. Large landowners enclosed common lands, forcing smaller farmers off the land and creating a class of landless laborers who became available for employment in emerging industries.

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century in Britain, marked a crucial turning point in the development of capitalism. “Technological innovations”, such as the steam engine and mechanized production methods, transformed manufacturing and led to the rise of industrial capitalism (Heller, 2011, 78). Factories replaced cottage industries, and capitalist entrepreneurs invested in machinery, factories, and infrastructure to maximize profits. Also, the expansion of colonial empires in the 16th to the 20th centuries played a significant role in the development of capitalism. European powers extracted resources from colonies, established trade networks, and exploited labor to fuel capitalist economies. The wealth generated from colonial ventures contributed to the growth and consolidation of capitalist economies in the colonizing countries.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, capitalism underwent further transformations with the emergence of “financial capitalism and

the globalization of markets” (Wood, 1999,109). Financial institutions, such as banks and stock exchanges, gained prominence and exerted significant influence over economic activities. The world market integration brought about the free flow of capital, goods, and labor like never before. At the end of the 20th century, “neoliberal policies, which advocated free markets, deregulation, and privatization, became popular”. This period was a time when financial capital gained power, where financial markets and institutions took the lead in determining the direction of economic activities (Stanwick, 2016:i) .

It should be mentioned that capitalist development came with a mixture of progress and contradiction. While capitalism may have resulted in economic growth, technological advancements, and better living conditions for some, it has been linked to inequality, exploitation, and environmental degradation as well. The discussions about capitalism occurring currently are continually changing the societies and economies across the globe.

1.2. Capitalism's relationship to literature:

The relation between Capitalism and literature is diverse and complicated. Literature has always been a good mirror of social, economic, and cultural features of capitalist societies, often being its criticism at the same time. Capitalism has often been the subject

of exploration by literature, showing such vices as disparities and unjust practices. Upton Sinclair's novel "*The Jungle*" (1914) serves as an example of how an author exposed what a cruel place of work it was for immigrant laborers in the Chicago meatpacking house industry and used it to illustrate the dangerous consequences of unregulated capitalism.

Actually, Capitalism's emphasis on profit and commodification can lead to the alienation of individuals from themselves, others, and the natural world. This theme is explored in Fyodor Dostoevsky's "*Notes from Underground*," (1864) where the protagonist grapples with the dehumanizing effects of a capitalist society that reduces human beings to mere cogs in the economic machine. Literature often reflects the rise of consumer culture and the influence of materialism under capitalism. A prominent example is F. Scott Fitzgerald's "*The Great Gatsby*," (1925) which portrays the excesses and decadence of the Jazz Age, exposing the emptiness and moral decay that can accompany the pursuit of wealth and status. This kind of literature frequently stresses the social and class split that occurs in capitalist societies. The socioeconomic system and Industrial Capitalism, in Charles Dickens' novel "*Hard Times*" (1854) is portrayed with a negative notion. The key portrayed aspect is the gap between the wealthy elite and the poverty-stricken masses, with the hunger for more

earnings by the dispensable labourer often contrasting with the adverse impact of industrialization on society.

Literature, alongside the culture, also delves into how capitalism has molded individual identity and self-worth. In Ralph Ellison's "*Invisible Man*"(1952), the lead character struggles with the concept of his invisibility and powerlessness in a capitalist society where Black people are devalued and marginalized, provoking the intertwining of race, capitalism, and identity. Also, capitalistic systems are usually scrutinized by satire and irony in the literature. The use of fantastic settings and characters by Jonathan Swift in "*Gulliver's Travels* (1726)" brings to light satirical aspects of eighteenth-century society. For example, Swift makes fun of capitalism and the excesses that it brings.

America has a special and widely explored relation to capitalism, as represented and discussed by many authors in their writings. In the case of an economic philosopher, Benjamin Franklin, the capitalist system of "*Poor Richard's Almanack* (1759)" explored. This novel provides practical advice on financial success and virtue of hard work. "*The Grapes of Wrath*," a novel by John Steinbeck (1939), explores the detrimental effects that capitalism has on workers during the Great Depression. It reflects the Joad family's difficulties in finding a place in society and living through the economic challenges, displacement and exploitation on their

way to a better life. The work of Steinbeck emphasizes the existence of the mannerisms within capitalism and its influence on the poor people or the disinherited. In the novel, "*To Have and Have Not*" by Ernest Hemingway, (1937) we see the link between capitalism and ethics. The Great Depression, the setting of the story features in the city of Key West and Cuba, as grassroots protagonist Harry Morgan, a struggling fishing boat captain, gets involved in illegal activities to meet ends. Hemingway examines the moral challenges and defeats suffered by people in a capitalist system. These two literary works manifest that American writers have used literature to tackle with capitalism, mirroring capitalism on individuals, families and national society. They bring up different views and put forth critical aspects of the inequalities, moral issues, and possible consequences for the poor people experiencing the system.

Other examples such as: "*1984*" (1984) by George Orwell, "*Brave New World*" (1932) by Aldous Huxley, *Venice* (1605) and *King Lear* (1606) by William Shakespeare, *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens. These examples explain how literature interacts with capitalism, providing social commentary, showing its faults, and posing many questions about the influence of capitalism on individuals and society. Authors thus, create a space

for pondering on the economic systems' implications and consequences for people.

To summarize, all the works of these authors over the past several decades show progress in the capitalist system. Capitalism reveals its potential to absorb emerging layers of society and fit the increasingly sophisticated demands of society.

2. Introduction to Brecht's epic theatre:

Bert Brecht, an internationally famous playwright, was a native of Augsburg, Germany, and was born in 1898. The dilemma took place when he served as a medical orderly and saw the catastrophic effects of the First World War. Therefore, he moved to Munich and then went to Berlin while pursuing a career in the theatre. Nevertheless, his stay in Germany was of short duration since the Nazi was elected to the position of power in that country in 1933. Afraid of prosecution, Brecht had to leave the country, and as a result, he lost his German citizenship officially and was deprived of any connection to his native land. The year 1941 saw Brecht leaving Germany and moving to the United States. He stayed there until 1947. Nevertheless, in the U.S., he received investigations and was summoned by the Committee on Un-American Activities that were focused on ruining the reputation and career of intellectuals and people suspected of communist

sympathies. This was followed by Brecht's insistent decision to commute from America to Europe.

In fact, upon closer examination, Brecht's plays can be categorized into three groups, depending on their evolution and thematic specification. The first group keeps the dramas made in a hedonistic and cartoon-like style of the 1920s. They differ from each other not just in their lively presence, but also in their sharp social satire. "*The Threepenny Opera*" is a quintessential play of the first type of play in the Brecht corpus. Shifting our attention to the second group, we call the didactic plays a 1930s decade. They are entirely different. Those are expressed in a colder, more accurate tone. The performances regarded in this category include "*The Exception and the Rule*" (1930) and "*The Seven Deadly Sins*" (1933) which clearly emphasize moral and social messages. The third group consists of the major plays that Brecht wrote before and during the Second World War, and as well as this period, reveals his creative spirit throughout this time as a dramatist. As for the most popular works of the group, the most outstanding are "*Mother Courage and Her Children*" (1939) and "*Good Woman of Szechwan*" (1943). It is important to note that Brecht's plays unfailingly display a social and political perspective. Many themes, such as world wars, corruption, crime, murder, rape, alcoholism, prostitution, and mob violence, are often the subjects

of their exploration. These themes are a central focus of plays like "*Mother Courage and Her Children*," which in turn feature the famous commitment of Brecht to social issues and the introspective thinking of the audiences.

The epic theatre of Brecht intended to undermine the forms of traditional theatre and to have the audiences take active parts in the thinking process. The main principle that Brecht uses in his Epic Theatre is the "Effect of Alienation" or *Verfremdungseffekt*. This technique of breaking the audience member's immersion was meant to prevent the audience from mentally putting themselves in the place of the characters and getting too emotionally involved (Held 2011, p.30). Brecht used a variety of devices, such as a direct address, stage breaking the fourth wall, and signs and placards, to bring about indifference, which makes the audience think critically about the theatrical problems represented on the stage.

What is essential to be aware of is the fact that epic theatre designed by Brecht is not simply his aesthetic choice. Instead, he was formed by the events happening in the external world. He endeavored to do this using theater as an opportunity for the people to discuss and criticize the existing societal imbalances, social power relationships, and unfair practices. Brecht thought of a task to accomplish by theater -it should be much more than reflecting existing realities but at the same time consciously arrive into

conflict with those realities, because of that it should ask for information from the audience and at the same time question something. Brecht argues, “It is insufficient to request knowledge and useful pictures of reality from the theatre. Our theatre must empower a yearning for comprehension and the experience of evolving reality” (Marranca, 1995, 59). In epic theater, characters are not presented as individuals, psychoanalytical or single agents; instead, they are a cohesive part representative of society, classes, and groups. Brecht developed the concept of "Gestus", which represents the total physical and behavioral gestures that implicate a character's class or political position (Jie & Jianjun, 2013.75). Brecht strives to emphasize the socialism of characters and, through that; he wanted to point out the bigger systematic factors and breeds of social society. Epic theatre goes on to add non-linear narratives. There are stories of broken structures, a disjointed view, and episodic structures. The philosophy of the filmmaker was to deviate from the rules of predictable consequences of a traditional narrative and to surprise the audience. Through the manner of non-chronological sequence or the way of concurrent narrations, Brecht managed to force the audience to actively come up with a coherent story and to carefully think over the foundations of the social and political affairs of the story.

Furthermore, Brecht frequently incorporated music and songs into his plays as a means of heightening emotional impact and conveying social messages. These musical interludes, often referred to as "songs in the play," provided a breather from the narrative and allowed for reflection on the themes and ideas presented. Brecht also employed verbal montage, utilizing fragmented and contrasting language to create a sense of dissonance and provoke critical thinking. Brecht's epic theatre sought to create an active and critical relationship between the stage and the audience. By employing distancing techniques, addressing social and political issues, and using non-traditional storytelling methods, Brecht aimed to encourage audiences to engage intellectually and emotionally with the work, challenging their perspectives and inspiring them to question and transform the world around them.

Towards the end of his life, Brecht had already created the Berliner Ensemble, a theater society with a revolutionary attitude towards the theater. This was in 1956. Brecht was undoubtedly one of the greatest theater practitioners who, through his imaginative forms and the symbols he created, changed the face of theater globally with his great plays being performed even many years after his death (White, 2004; 5).

3. Introduction to Mother Courage and Her Children.

"*Mother Courage and Her Children*" is considered to be a very important play belonging to the great theatrical heritage of Bertolt Brecht outstanding playwright and poet of Germany. World War II was ostensibly the first time when words were weighed as heavier than bombs, censors were more vigilant in muzzling the press, and propaganda became more vital for warring nations than ever, as Brecht graphically illustrates in '*Mother Courage*' re-rendered in 1939 (Hecht, 1997; 566). Over time, the play has become the subject of almost unanimous criticism, and positive response by all and sundry, starting with a premiere day. Whereas the original reaction to the play was a little mixed, complaining about its harsh, challenging, and unconventional style, now it is one of his most popular works which initially took a while rather than an immediate success.

"*Mother Courage and Her Children*", frequently acclaimed as one of the best plays of the twentieth century, is often considered to be the epitome of anti-war theater. The play uses a structure of twelve scenes, each considered to symbolize a particular year from 1624 to 1636, therefore covering the story within a period of twelve years. This exact split makes it possible for the play to show the story that time is passing and the effects of the war on the characters and the situations they find themselves in. Brecht's play not only defies the traditional notion of tragedy but also lies within

an epic type of theatre which he calls the "Epic Theatre." (Volker, 1975; 92). This dramaturgical device of Brecht is intended to arouse an audience in a critical and cogitating way.

The main character of the play is Anna Fierling, called Mother Courage, a tenacious and determined woman who, with her children, is on a journey, while doing business at the same time – and aims to make a profit out of the war turbulence. In "*Mother Courage and Her Children*," Mother Courage is the central figure. She is a resolute, practical, and strong-willed woman who accompanies the army and is involved in the war by the means of trading with the soldiers. Despite the constant violence and chaos surrounding her, Mother Courage is determined to ensure her own survival and that of her three children: Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and Kattrin. The play goes ahead to look at the deep-rooted consequences of war on the individual, examines the characters' lengths, and reaches out to defend their interests in a hostile and unstable environment.

Brecht's play, therefore, acts as a critical and eye-opening factor that portrays the inhuman situations that ordinary people are subjected to as a result of war. It puts the human condition into a 360-degree view and touches on the effects of war on humans and the ethical dilemmas that do not go away even when faced with such a situation. In a very unique way of narrative and by

separating the spectators from direct involvement in the staged conflict through the use of “distancing techniques”, Brecht attempts to attract his audience’s attention to the wider issues, such as war, capitalism, and human nature (Squiers, 2021, p.66).

Hence, the criticism of the play by Bertolt Brecht has reached world recognition, as it discusses three major themes - war, capitalism, and human nature. In its influence on stage play and its power to immerse and incite audiences, it has definitely claimed its right to the place in the playwright's grand Olympic or artistic masterpiece.

4. Capitalism in *Mother Courage and Her Children*:

"*Mother Courage and Her Children*" gives the reader an in-depth analysis of capitalism, depicting it as an adversarial system, which exploits the people, and enslaves the human spirit in favour of profit. Brecht draws the audience’s attention to the exploitative capitalist regime by presenting it in the context of war so as to stimulate their minds to question the ethical consequences of such a system.

Brecht, in "*Mother Courage and Her Children*", unravels the devastation brought about by war but at the same time brings to light the link between capitalism and wars. He stresses the fact that

war is a permanent symptom of the capitalist system - the enslavement of the rich and ordinary individuals. Through the use of irony and feedback, Brecht carries on with this harsh reality of war as well as the ideas of capitalism.

In the opening scene of the play, the Sergeant and the Recruiter struggle to find soldiers willing to join the war. This situation prompts the Sergeant to ironically praise the state of war, highlighting that during wartime, there is a semblance of order in society. He remarks, "[...] Peace—that's just a mess; takes a war to restore order. Peacetime, humans run wild" (MC 3). This is the way Brecht expresses the fundamental role of war in a capitalist society. The ability of a person to express his freedom is the greatest when he is given the authority to perform some duty during the period of war together with those coming from average people. On the other hand, it can bring people to the brink of destruction when their idealism is rubbed into obliterating their humanity as the war approaches. Because of the war, these individuals become so lonely with everything that it gnaws them and transform them into cattle. Through the use of irony, Brecht denounces the beneficial role of the war in providing order in accordance with which the society, which is considered as peaceful ensures the state is stable as if everything was under control. Capitalism, as Brecht implies, is the system where

individuals struggle to get more and more sorted to fulfil their needs. Consequently, this leads to chaos and social mess during times of peace. Democratic societies bring value to the war in the way that conflicting individuals discover the significance not only of destruction and devastation but of unity as well.

Brecht extends this ironic representation to draw public attention to the cruelty of war and the absurdity of such a nexus as capitalism and conflicts. His idea is that in a capitalist society, war is a tool to be used to keep peace and stability, but the powerful can use this situation to their advantage and exploit further the masses. They are demoted to the level of mere objects, deprived of basic human values, and pursuing the greedy purposes of the ruling classes.

In the play, *The Recruiting Officer* aims at venting his fury because of the problems he is facing as a recruiter for the war effort and this leads him to the verge of suicide. He thinks that society lacks moral virtue morally and that the youth should be ordered to never question and keep on serving in the armed conflict, suggesting that their moral value depends on their participation in the war effort. This viewpoint comes very close to a real dictator and Brecht uses this to make us question what it would be like if this were the case.

The other key figure in the play, the Sergeant, also shares the same feelings with the Recruiting Officer. He thinks winning the war is a prerequisite for teaching discipline to people. The wagon of Mother Courage, pulled by her sons Eilif and Swiss Cheese, is coming near and the Sergeant is approaching them to take Eilif for the army. Mother Courage, on the other hand, does all she can to protect her son from involvement in the war and the consequences that follow. During the entire struggle, Brecht thus emphasizes that despite all her efforts to adapt to the demands of war, she cannot detach herself from all of its aspects. She has plunged into the war by combining her activism and being indifferent to the war and it is true, but she is not aware that she has contradicted herself. The play takes place during the background of the Thirty Years` War, which is the country where Mother Courage, who is a wagon dealer, tries to become rich during the war. She is a symbol where a capitalist spirit of profit-making wins even in times of war. Her priority, naturally, was the survival of the business and making her profit. She continually competes for the market and thus depicts capitalism, transforming self-interested, profit-obsessed personalities that want to gain more.

Brecht uses Mother Courage's character to spotlight the intricate interplay between individuals and war, demonstrating that even those attempting to navigate the war to safeguard their loved ones

inevitably become ensnared in its mechanisms. Mother Courage's failure to recognize this contradiction underscores the profound and inescapable impact of war on people and their lives. During Mother Courage's conversation with the Sergeant, her profound pride in her name becomes apparent as she reminisces and reflects on her speech, "Courage is the name they gave me because I was scared of going broke, sergeant, so I drove my cart right through the bombardment of Riga with fifty loaves of bread" (MC 5). In contrast, the Sergeant mocks her, accusing her of hypocrisy for profiting from the war while preventing her sons from joining the military. He criticizes her materialistic tendencies and self-interest, evaluating her situation from a soldier's perspective, and his remarks hold a considerable degree of truth: "Oh, you'd like war to eat the pips but spit out the apple? It's to fatten up your kids, but you won't invest in it. Got to look after itself, eh? And you're called Courage, fancy that. Scared of the war that keeps you going?" (MC 9). Through a critical examination of Mother Courage's circumstances, it becomes apparent that she aims to capitalize on the war for personal gain. Her actions reflect self-centeredness and self-absorption as she embraces capitalist principles while trying to evade the consequences they bring about. By profiting from the war, Mother Courage indirectly contributes to the turmoil, disorder, and suffering in the world, she inhabits.

Symbolically, Mother Courage's act of predicting the future by drawing lots with the black cross, a symbol of death, and a blank parchment, underlines the tragic essence of her story. The Sergeant draws the black cross, symbolizing his impending demise, which deeply disturbs him. Mother Courage proceeds to draw lots for her children, foretelling misfortune for her entire family. The play reveals the tragic fate of each of Mother Courage's children. Eilif will meet his demise in the war, Swiss Cheese's honesty will be his downfall, and Kattrin's rebellion against her muteness will ultimately lead to her own death. This foreshadows the profound tragedy that awaits Mother Courage throughout the course of the play, setting a somber tone from the very beginning.

Using cunning tactics, the Sergeant cleverly feigns interest in one of Mother Courage's goods, specifically a belt. This minor transaction momentarily diverts Mother Courage's attention, and unfortunately, at that very moment, she loses Eilif as the Recruiting Officer seizes him as the first casualty of war. The Sergeant's cynical remark, concluding the first scene, hits the mark: "Like the war to nourish you? Have to feed it something too" (MC 13). Capitalism can lead to the devaluation of human life, as people become commodities. The characters in the play are often treated as pawns in the larger game of war and profit. Through ironic business transactions almost in every scene of the

play, Brecht displays his outstanding talent. The trade of a belt, seemingly an insignificant negotiation, cost Mother Courage her son, Eilif, a dramatized illustration of the tragic outcomes that may follow even the most trivial exchanges. Likewise, the peasants are also tricked by Eilif as he bargains the price of their oxen and this exposes the fact that life, including human lives, is treated as dispensable when military victory is the end and profit is the means.

As she had foreseen earlier, Mother Courage's second son becomes deeply entangled in the war. Eilif, a bold young man drawn to the life of a soldier, transforms into a ruthless killer amidst the chaos of war. He is rewarded for brutally dismembering poor peasants to loot their possessions and cattle. The Commander commends him, saying, "You have the qualities of a young Caesar. You should meet the King" (MC 18). However, when Eilif repeats these actions in peacetime, he faces a death sentence. In his defence, he exclaims, "It's what I did last time, isn't it? Tell her [his mother] it wasn't any different, tell her it was the same thing" (MC 69) .

Brecht skilfully employs irony by contrasting Eilif's death for a wartime act with Mother Courage's announcement of the war's resumption. She proclaims, "Peacetime's over. War's been on again three days now. Heard the news before selling me stuff,

thank God. They're having a shooting match with Lutherans in town. We must get the cart away at once. Katrin, pick up!" (MC 70). This underscores the cyclicity of war, with Eilif's fate sharply differing from the renewed conflict Mother Courage reveals.

The irony lies in the fact that Eilif's actions, deemed heroic during wartime, become a condemnable atrocity during peacetime. Mother Courage had held the belief that Eilif was astute and brave and that war couldn't harm him. However, her misconception lay in failing to recognize that peace could be just as perilous, ultimately leading to Eilif's downfall. Eilif's mistake was his inability to differentiate between the moral values applicable in times of war and the moral principles relevant in peacetime. Brecht communicates to the audience that peace carries a threat to Mother Courage, putting her at risk of ruin.

After the passage of time and as the war continues to unfold, three years later, Swiss Cheese is drafted into the army. His reputation for honesty earns him the responsibility of safeguarding the regimental cash box. In a tragic turn of events, Swiss Cheese, refusing to divulge his identity or the location of the cash box to the enemy, deviates from his lifelong commitment to truthfulness and is fatally shot. This ironic twist by Brecht comments on society's precarious valuation of virtuous qualities embodied by

the character of Swiss Cheese. His death undermines the significance of the virtues he represents.

Tragically, Swiss Cheese is shot at a moment when his mother is engaged in a negotiation with Yvette Pottier, a prostitute, regarding the price that needs to be paid for his release. Mother Courage is asked to pay a sum of two hundred guilders, but she considers this amount to be excessively high and refuses to meet the demand. After an extended debate and realizing she has no other option, Mother Courage reluctantly agrees, saying, "Tell him I'll pay two hundred. Hurry! I guess I bargained for too long" (MC 42). However, when she has a deal with Yvette, it is too late for that. Her son was shot to death, and the dead body of her son was brought to one stage where Mother Courage did not even blink to see him! This highlight marks her failure to change her acquiescent character. Swiss Cheese is the other loss she has in a highly dramatic event in which she pleads desperately to save his life. On the other hand, capitalism in the play is followed by the phenomenon of alienation. Mother Courage's narcissism toward money renders her isolated from her children. She is cut off emotionally from them and thus fails to develop deep emotional relationships with them because she hardly sees to their well-being but rather focuses on her business. In this manner, Brecht informs the viewers that being involved in business with the army means,

in the end; you lose everything in which you are engaging. Moreover, the inexperienced and foolish Mother Courage does not grasp the lesson, and she does not stop her trading, even if it brings her harm.

In "*Mother Courage and Her Children*," Brecht skillfully incorporates songs that serve as poignant observations and prompt audience reflection. These songs offer an objective interpretation of the story and arise naturally from the unfolding action. One notable example is "the Song of the Grand Capitulation" in Scene 4, which gives guidance to the youthful soldiers. Here, we hear the frustration of a soldier, which shows that he has been betrayed and has lost hard-earned tips, which leaves us with sympathy. The song depicts life as an ineluctable discontentment of personal wishes for happiness, depicting a society where individual aspirations fail not only because there is no overarching plan but also because the moral virtues are missing. This state highlights the futility of efforts to assign sense and order in a hopeless and meaningless world.

In the play, the Bible plays as a vital role, which Brecht realizes through the character of The Chaplain. Brecht highlights the relevance struggle of the bible at wartime using satire. In the first scene, The Chaplain, who is a capitalist character in nature, comes with his pro-war speech to instigate The Cook, an opportunist who

is morally reprehensible, to scare Mother Courage into believing Eilif may die. As Brecht illustrates, the Chaplain has faith that this war is divine, thus lending credibility to his view that scriptures can be used to justify violence and lead to strife. He tries to exploit a standing war. As he argues with The Cook, saying, "Don't give in to your feelings, cook. To fall in battle is a blessing, not an inconvenience, and why? It is a war of faith. None of your ordinary wars but a special one, fought for the faith and therefore pleasing to God" (MC 25). Typically, in the play, characters tend to place their money interests above their human side, which results in less humanity, less empathy, and compassion. This points how capitalism can turn individuals and society itself into a thing.

The Chaplain's hypocrisy is revealed in the uproar of the cannon and guns. Terrorized by how close the enemy is and how his safety can be at risk, he states, "Indeed, if the enemy is so close, it might be dangerous. Blessed are the peacemakers, is the motto in wartime. If only I had a cloak to cover me" (MC 28). Instead of offering spiritual comfort to others, the rebellious clergyman seems only concerned with saving himself from danger. Hence, he stays with Mother Courage, performing and incorporating menial tasks like chopping wood and pulling the wagon, being treated as animals. He saves himself from hunger by impersonating Mother

Courage's tapster and handyman. This is Brecht's goal to represent these hypocritical clergymen, as false, corrupted Christian morals.

The Chaplain's apt image of Mother Courage as the "hyena of the battlefield" (MC 64) is remarkably accurate, as Mother Courage, much like a hyena, thrives in the midst of war. The Chaplain's description of Mother Courage as a "hyena" underscores the idea that she is scavenging the battlefield for profit. This comparison reflects the way capitalism often encourages individuals to exploit any available opportunity to make money, even in the most morally challenging circumstances. In a capitalist society, individuals are often driven to prioritize their own economic interests over ethical considerations. Mother Courage's actions align with this principle. Mother Courage's actions also correspond to this principle. She is ready and ready to do everything to survive and keep her business running, and it does not matter what suffering and misery is caused by war as long as she achieves her goals.

Actually, in the eyes of the Chaplain, the hyena embodies opportunism and a ruthless drive for self-interest. Capitalism is also one of the other concepts that are often overlooked in association with opportunism, where individuals and businesses are looking to benefit from any situation or market for their profit. The personified character of Mother Courage represents the spirit

of this capitalist system. The Chaplain's mentioning of Mother Courage as a hyena points to the dehumanizing powers of imperialism. In their never-ending spree for profits, individuals can become desensitized morally and lose touch with their humanity, as Mother Courage also appears to do as the play advances. The play suggests that capitalism can be self-defeating by leading to immorality and moral numbness. The role of the Chaplain in criticizing Mother Courage reveals the moral failure of capitalism. It indicates that in a capitalist system, people may be a kind of pushed to decide things that are against their moral compass and personal principles since they value money first.

Mother Courage is now alone with Katrin, who is dumb and neglected and then left in the agony of the war. Katrin can be considered a victim of capitalism. Her mother, Mother Courage, is after material gains at any cost and is ready to exploit the war for personal gain. These result in the unfortunate movement of Katrin from one war-torn location to the next, whereas her mother keeps on trying to continue her canteen-wagon business. The fact that Katrin suffers is a direct outcome of her mother's capitalistic pursuits.

In Scene Six, Mother Courage sends Katrin, and The Clerk to buy supplies for their wagon. When she returns, she is assaulted by soldiers, and her face is injured deeply. Upon her return, her

mother greets her with empathy: "What happened, someone assault you? On your way back? She was assaulted on her way back. It was probably that trooper who was getting drunk here. I shouldn't have let you go, dear. Drop that stuff. It's not too bad, just a flesh wound, and I'll bandage it. In a week, it'll be all right. They're worse than beasts." (MC 58). Kattrin's muteness is a form of silent protest against the capitalist world she lives in. She is unable to speak due to a traumatic incident in her past, and this silence can be seen as a response to the harsh and dehumanizing nature of capitalism. In a society driven by profit and exploitation, Kattrin's silence symbolizes the inability to voice one's pain and suffering in a system that prioritizes economic interests.

Kattrin's deteriorating physical appearance diminishes her prospects of becoming a mother and finding a spouse. Consequently, she makes a tragic sacrifice by climbing a church tower to warn a town of an impending attack, even though it leads to her death. This act can be interpreted as a rejection of the capitalist world that has brought so much suffering to her family. She chooses to make the ultimate sacrifice to save others, embodying a sense of selflessness and a break from the self-serving nature often associated with capitalism. Her objective is to protect the town from the capitalism which represented by soldiers, and she rouses the slumbering town of Halle by beating

a drum. Despite being shot by the soldiers for refusing to cease drumming, her death conveys a message to the audience that those who resist should face consequences. Katrin's demise ultimately positions her as the tragic hero of the play. A notable critic reflects on her death, remarking, "The urgent need to preserve life is expressed solely through the drumming of the mute girl, awakening and saving the city" (Williams, 1968, 86). Katrin is the sole character in the play who vehemently protests against war and cannot remain silent. She serves as a stark contrast to her mother.

Brecht puts Katrin's deeds in contrast to the peasants' prayer. Being sentimental and furious over the outrage of war, Katrin extinguished her life at a time when the peasants were convinced that it was their destiny and that they had to pray to some supernatural forces for their deliverance. Yet, following this, peace is restored just in time for the uprising to be brutally crushed, with the killing of the young mute girl. The infantry officer loudly issues the command to attack: "Set it up! Set it up!" he calls while the cannon is being readied. "For the very last time: stop drumming!" Katrin, in tears, continues drumming as loudly as she can. "Fire!" The soldiers open fire. Katrin is struck, manages a few more drumbeats, and then slowly collapses (MC 86). Through her character as Katrin, the author displays how the tragedy of innocence can be seen in a capitalist society. She notices that

grown-ups are harsh and arbitrary. Moreover, she gets to know what horrible looks like. The former is her only way to express her inner conflict and, ultimately, her tragic demise, demonstrating that the system can take away people's youthful beliefs and optimism.

While Katrin's muteness can be seen as a form of protest, her actions, such as her attempt to warn the town, can be viewed as a form of resistance against capitalist exploitation. Her act is a brave attempt to save lives, in contrast to the cynical profit-seeking behavior of her mother and others in the play. Brecht invests a significant part of his own essence in this unforgettable character. As Eric Bentley suggests: "If Brecht infused some of himself into Katrin, and she embodies Brecht the activist and the lover of humanity, he channeled even more of himself into his passive and negative heroine, Mother Courage, the timid one." (1961, p. Xliii).

In many ways, Brecht conveys to the audience that Katrin embodies the ideal person, someone worthy of emulation. However, she ultimately meets with failure in a harsh world that fails to acknowledge her efforts to save others from death. Similar to her brothers, Katrin is shot while her mother is preoccupied with her business in town.

When Mother Courage returns from town, the peasants relay the news of her daughter's death, which she refuses to accept, stating that "I think she's going to sleep." (MC 86). The shock is overwhelming for Mother Courage, but she has grown accustomed to suffering and chooses to persist in her business pursuits. Martin Esslin contends that there is no hope for Mother Courage to undergo a transformation into a better character, asserting that Brecht intended her to be a negative figure, "a profiteer who sacrifices her children to her commercial instinct and cannot learn from her experience. But the audience is invariably moved by her fate." (Esslin, 1959, 264). The question of whether Mother Courage, as an individual, should be admired or despised is not the central focus. Instead, the primary consideration is the message conveyed through the play's unfolding events. It is crucial to ponder the consequences and impact of the play. Audiences should view it "as a story about themselves, the common victims of war, undoubtedly recognizing in the play's dilemmas their own recent condition in war-torn Berlin." (Styan, 1981, 159).

Throughout the play, Mother Courage experiences the gradual loss of each of her children, ultimately leaving her alone. Nevertheless, she remains tethered to the wagon and expresses hope, saying, "I can pull the cart all right by myself. It will be fine, not much inside it. I need to get back in business again." (MC 78).

The play concludes with a song performed by a group of soldiers. Their song addresses how war enslaves and starves them, yet they feel compelled to continue fighting due to a lack of alternatives. In summary, the play encourages contemplation of the characters' predicaments and the broader implications of war. Mother Courage's individual actions and characteristics take a back seat to the larger narrative and the resonance it holds for the audience.

Conclusion

In Bertolt Brecht's play "*Mother Courage and Her Children*," the effects of capitalism are vividly portrayed as the characters grapple with the harsh realities of a war-torn society driven by economic interests. By the character of Mother Courage, Brecht projects a powerful picture of capitalism's dehumanizing, exploitative, and morally corrupt nature. The quest for profit by Mother Courage in the midst of war depicts the ethical dilemmas and sacrifices individuals encounter in a capitalist system. Mute, voiceless, and sacrificed in the end, Kattrin embodies the human cost of this profit-motivated world.

The play is directed towards personalizing the audience's understanding of how capitalism can twist people's morality, empathy, and innocence, and often makes them obsessed with the

benefits of gain at any price. The capitalist framework appears to be a lens that the author used to look at the characters' decisions and actions, thus revealing the great power of such economic interests in each person's life.

"*Mother Courage and Her Children*" written by Brecht is a work of art that demonstrates how a crisis and capitalism can change human personality. It is a universal message that talks about the perpetual importance of these subjects because societies face the effects of their economic systems, which may not be in harmony with humanitarian standards. The play confronts us with the ethical dimensions that are corruption in a world where we have poverty, violence, and exploitation.

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