



**MOTHER COURAGE
AND HER CHILDREN**

BY BERTOLT BRECHT

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BERTOLT BRECHT
(1898 – 1956)

AUTHOR

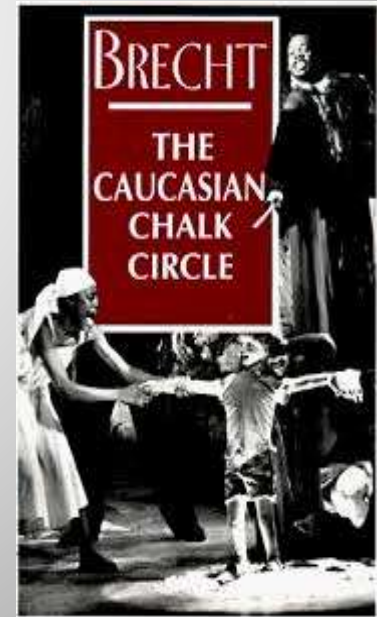
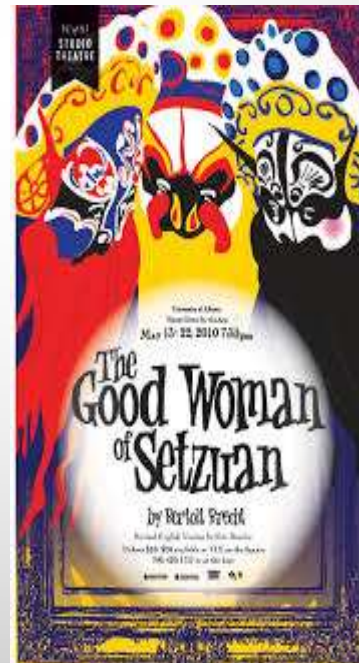
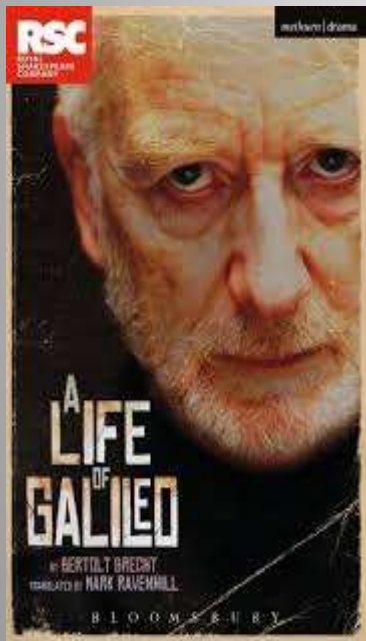
- Bertolt Brecht was one of the most influential playwrights of the 20th century.
- Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1898, and the two world wars directly affected his life and works.
- He wrote poetry when he was a student but studied medicine at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.
- After military service during World War I, he abandoned his medical studies to pursue writing and the theater.

- A member of the Independent Social Democratic Party, Brecht wrote theater criticism for a Socialist newspaper from 1919 to 1921.
- His plays were banned in Germany in the 1930s, and in 1933, he went into exile, first in Denmark and then Finland.
- He moved to Santa Monica, California, in 1941, hoping to write for Hollywood, but he drew the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee.
- Although he managed to deflect accusations of being a Communist, he moved to Switzerland after the hearings.
- He relocated to East Berlin in 1949 and ran the Berliner Ensemble, a theater company.
- As a director, he advocated the “**alienation effect**” in acting—an approach intended to keep the audience emotionally uninvolved in the plights of the characters.

- Brecht's poetry is collected in *Poems 1913-1956* (1997) and *Poetry and Prose: Bertolt Brecht* (2003).
- He wrote a wide variety of poetry, including occasional poems, poems he set to music and performed, songs and poems for his plays, personal poems recording anecdotes and thoughts, and political poems.
- Poet Michael Hofmann, in "Singing About the Dark Times: The Poetry of Bertolt Brecht" for the *Liberal*, commented, "In the course of a mobile, active and engaged life, the poems were the intelligent, compressed, adaptable and self-contained form for both his private and his public address."
- Bertolt Brecht died in 1956. He is buried in Berlin.

His 4 great plays:

- *The Life of Galileo* (1937-39)
- *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941),
- *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1943), and
- *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944)



THEMES

- War as Business
- War as order
- War as capitalism
- Virtue in Wartime
- Allegory and the Morality Play
- Music
- Business practices
- Capitulation
- Maternity
- Courage
- Tragedy
- Silence and dumbness
- Alienation effect

CHARACTERS

- MOTHER COURAGE
- KATTRIN (dumb daughter)
- EILIF (the elder son)
- SWISS CHEESE (the younger son)
- THE RECRUITER
- THE SERGEANT
- THE COOK
- THE GENERAL
- THE CHAPLIN

SCENE - 1

- 1624, Sweden. The Swedish Commander-in-Chief Count Oxenstierna raises troops in Dalecarlia for the Polish campaign.
- During a truce in the Swedish – Polish War, a recruiter and his Sergeant complain about the lack of organization in Sweden.
- Mother Courage, the canteen woman's waggon is drawn by her two sons.
- She refuses to be intimidated when asked for her papers. Her brave son Eilif is tempted to follow the soldiers.
- To put fear in the minds of her children Eilif, Swiss Cheese and Katrin, she draws black crosses signifying death.
- The Sergeant offers to buy a silver buckle and while she sells, the Recruiter takes off Eilif along with him.

SCENE - 2

- In the years 1625 and 1626 Mother Courage crosses Poland in the train of the Swedish armies.
- In Poland the Swedes besiege the Polish fortress of Wallhof.
- Outside the General's tent Courage haggles with the cook over the price of the capon.
- There she hears Eilif being congratulated for outwitting, robbing and killing some peasants in the cause of 'true religion'.
- Mother Courage charges him an outrageous price for the bird but the cook has to prepare food for the new guest.
- She remarks that only bad Generals need heroic soldiers.
- Eilif sings the jaunty 'Ballad of the Girl and the Soldier' and dances a sword dance.
- Eilif is reunited with his mother who cuffs him for having risked his neck.

SCENE - 3

- Three years later Mother Courage is taken prisoner along with elements of a Finnish regiment.
- 1629, in Poland . Courage beats down the price of black market ammunition.
- Swiss Cheese, whom she considers too stupid to think of stealing and too honest , becomes regimental paymaster.
- Yvette, the regimental prostitute, throws aside her hat and red boots and bemoans the downturn in her business.
- She sings the ‘Song of Fraternisation’. Courage tells Kattrin to let Yvette’s fate be a warning to her to have nothing to do with soldiers.
- Courage grudgingly gives the Chaplain money for Eilif.
- Mother Courage concludes the discussion of the motives of the men at the top by observing that they are in the war for profit, just as she is.
- Kattrin tries on Yvette’s hat and boots and imitates her walk.

- The Imperial forces overrun the camp.
- The cook rejoins the General, the Chaplain hides his clerical garb, Yvette, with fresh custom in prospect, powders her face and looks for her boot.
- Swiss Cheese runs on clutching his cashbox and Courage tells him to throw it away. She hauls down the Finnish regimental flag.
- Three days later, she is to be allowed to carry on her business in the Imperial camp, and goes off to fetch new supplies and an appropriate flag.
- Swiss Cheese has been spotted after hiding the cashbox and arrested.
- Courage offers to sell her the cart in order to raise money to save Swiss Cheese.
- She haggles too long over the ransom and he is shot. Suspecting a connection with Courage, the Imperial troops show her, her son's dead body, but she betrays no sign of recognition.

SCENE -4

- Still 1629, Mother Courage waits outside the Colonel's tent to complain about the damage to her cart.
- A young soldier storms in intending to complain to the colonel that he has been cheated out of his reward for saving the colonel's horse.
- Courage sings the 'song of the Grand Capitulation' to show him that letting off steam in front of your superior's is futile.
- The soldier abandons his protest.
- Courage has also persuaded herself that in business discretion is the better part of valour and she too lets the matter rest.

SCENE – 5

- 1631 in Saxony. In a ravaged village near Leipzig the Chaplain rescues a peasant family from the ruins of her farm.
- Courage refuses to hand over her shirts and the Chaplain moves her aside bodily and tears up four shirts for bandages.
- She comments that all she gets from victory is losses.
- Kattrin rescues a baby from a burning house.
- A soldier tries to steal liquor.
- Courage relieves him of a looted fur coat in lieu of payment.

SCENE – 6

- 1632, outside Magdeburg..
- Courage takes stock and serves soldiers who dodge the funeral of Tilly, the Imperial General.
- She discusses the fates of great men who strive for immortality only to be frustrated when the lower ranks step out for a drink at the crucial moment.
- Courage thinks that the war may end.
- But the Chaplain assures that there will always be plenty of heroes to replace dead generals.
- The war will not end and so Courage decides to invest on goods.
- Kattrin is dismayed as her promised marriage after the war will never happen.
- Her mother sends her to Magdeburg to fetch stores.

- The Chaplain admires Courage's dedication towards her business.
- Courage feels that ordinary folk should have guts to face the next day.
- The Chaplain explains that his real forte is to sweep people off their feet with sermons.
- He suggests a closer relationship but Courage disagrees.
- Her only aim is to bring her children and her cart through the war safely.
- Kattrin returns, bleeding from a wound above her eye, but still clutching her bundles of supplies.
- Courage remarks that a scar on her face and dumbness of her may stop her wedding.
- A salute is fired over Till's grave, and Courage remarks that her daughter's disfigurement, and not Tilly's death, is the historical event that matters.

SCENE – 7

- Still 1632. Mother Courage with her cart well stocked and a silver necklace around her neck, has regained her confidence in the war.
- Her career is at its peak. She celebrates verse -3 of Courage's Song; war is nothing other than business, trading in blood instead of boots.

SCENE – 8

- 1632 in Saxony. An old lady and her son are to sell their bedding to Courage to pay their taxes when the bells ring out announcing peace.
- The cook returns and supplants the Chaplain in Courage's favour.
- The Chaplain puts on his clerical garb and Courage sarcastically that war has turned out to be a flop
- She is called as the hyena the battle field, who cannot accept peace because she makes money out of war.
- Whosoever sups with the devil needs a spoon, he tells her. So she sends the Chaplain packing.
- On the cook's advice she decides to sellout before the bottom falls out of the market.

- Yvette, now a rich Colonel's widow, arrives and identifies the cook as Puffing Piet, womanizer who was her original downfall.
- Courage goes to the town to sell off her goods and was under arrest.
- He has robbed a peasant and killed his wife. Now it is peacetime and the penalty is death.
- Courage returns to find that Eilif has dropped in and had gone.
- Courage reports that the war has broken out again and invites the cook to join again.
- She sings verse 4 of 'Courage's song' as they move off to rejoin her 'own side', the Swedes again.

SCENE – 9

- 1634, in Saxony. In a wintry landscape in the Fichtel Mountains.
- Courage and Cook beg outside for a war-damaged parsonage.
- The cook has inherited the family inn at Utrecht.
- The cook invites Courage but she denies.
- He sings the ‘ song of Solomon’ on the theme of the futility of virtue.
- Kattrin is to run away.

SCENE - 10

- Still 1634.
- During the whole of 1635 Mother Courage and her daughter Katrin travel over the high roads of central Germany, in the wake of the increasingly bedraggled armies.
- Mother Courage and Katrin pause from pulling the wagon outside a house from which the ‘Song of Home’, on the theme of comfort and security can be heard.

SCENE - 11

- January 1636. The emperor's troops are threatening the Protestant town of Halle. The stone begins to speak. Mother Courage loses her daughter and trudges on alone. The war is a long way from being over.
- The cart is standing, alongside a peasant's house. It is night.

SCENE - 12

- Before the first light. Sound of the fifes and drums of troops marching off into the distance.
- In front of the cart Mother Courage is squatting by her daughter.
- The peasant's family are standing near her.
- The same day. Courage, unable to grasp that Kattrin is dead, sings her a lullaby.

- The peasants disabuse her and she tells them that they should not have mentioned the children.
- The peasant replies that she should have been with Kattrin when the soldiers came.
- Mother Courage pays them to bury Kattrin and hauls the cart off alone to catch up with business.
- The final verse of ‘Courage’s Song’ is heard offstage, ending with the lines :
 - Wherever life has not died out,
 - It staggers to its feet again

MESSAGE CONVEYED

- Mother Courage operates with business and profit as superseding all, outlasting even her children. Brecht is asking the audience to evaluate what the value of profit might be if it comes at such loss. If profit is valued above all, then war as a business can supersede the value of human life.