The Commodification of Motherhood: Brecht's Critique of Capitalism in *Mother Courage and Her Children*

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Abstract

This paper examines Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* through an intersectional lens, analysing how class, gender, and maternal identity intersect within a capitalist war economy. It argues that Brecht dramatizes the tension between motherhood and profit-driven survival, showing how war commodifies maternal care and corrodes family bonds.

The study situates the play within Epic Theatre and the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), highlighting how songs, placards, and fragmented staging provoke critical reflection rather than emotional catharsis. Close readings of pivotal scenes—such as Kattrin's muteness and drumming sacrifice, and Mother Courage's bargaining over Swiss Cheese's ransom—illustrate how Brecht uses form to expose the symbolic weight of maternal sacrifice under capitalism.Engaging feminist-Marxist scholarship (e.g., Silvia Federici, Nancy Fraser, and Sara Ruddick), alongside feminist affect theory (Lauren Berlant), this paper clarifies how Brecht's critique extends to the commodification of motherhood and remains relevant to contemporary debates on neoliberal care. The unresolved ending underscores historical materialism by showing survival under capitalism as inseparable from ethical compromise. Ultimately, the play compels audiences to confront how systems of profit exploit even the most intimate human relationships

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht, Mother Courage and Her Children, capitalism, motherhood, epic theatre, *Verfremdungseffekt*, war economy, Marxist critique, alienation effect, maternal identity

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تسليع الأمومة: نقد بريخت للرأسمالية في مسرحية (الأم الشجاعة وأولادها)

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليلًا نقديًا لمسرحية برتولت بريخت "الأم الشجاعة وأولادها" من منظور تقاطعي، محلِّلةً تداخل الطبقة الاجتماعية والجنس والهوية الامومية داخل اقتصاد الحرب الرأسمالي. تبين الدراسة أن بريخت يبرز تعارض الأمومة مع البقاء الربحي، مبيّنًا كيف تُسَلِّع الحرب الرعايةَ الأمومية وتفكّك الروابط الأسرية.

وتُؤطِّر الدراسة هذة المسرحية ضمن "المسرح الملحمي" و"أثر التغريب "مبرِزةً كيف تستثير المقاطع الموسيقية واللافتات و المشاهد المتشظّية تفكيرًا نقديًا بدلًا من الانغماس العاطفي. وتُبيّن القراءات الدقيقة لمشاهد مفصلية—مثل خرس كاترين وتضحيتها بالقرع على الطبول، ومساومة "الأم الشجاعة" على فدية ابنها"سويس تشيز" —كيف وظف بريخت تلك المشاهد التي تُحمَّل تضحية الأم معاني ثقيلة داخل الرأسمالية.

ومن خلال توظيف دراسات نسوية-ماركسية (مثل :سيلفيا فيديريشي، نانسي فريزر، سارا رودِّك (وبالتوازي مع نظرية العاطفة النسوية لورين برلانت)، تبيّن هذه الدراسة امتداد نقد بريخت إلى تسليع الأمومة واستمراره في تغذية النقاشات الراهنة حول الرعاية النيوليبرالية. وتُؤكّد النهاية المفتوحة للمسرحية أطروحةَ المادية التاريخية، مُظهرةً أن النجاة في النظام الرأسمالي تستدعي تنازلاتٍ أخلاقية. وفي النهاية، تُلزم المسرحيةُ الجمهورَ بمواجهة الكيفية التي تستغلّ بها أنظمةُ الربح حتى أكثر العلاقات الإنسانية حميمية.

كلمات مفتاحية: برتولت بريخت, الأم الشجاعة وأولادها, الرأسمالية, الأمومة, المسرح الملحمي, تأثير التغريب, اقتصاد الحرب, النقد الماركسي, الهوية الأمومية

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1.Introduction

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) shaped his theatre in response to war, exile, and political struggle. Born into a middle-class family, he enrolled in medical school in 1917, yet his passion for theatre and literature developed alongside those studies. During the First World War, he served as a hospital attendant in Augsburg, experiences that exposed him to the human cost of conflict and deepened his distrust of violence (Mumford, 2009, p. 7). His early poem "Legend of the Dead Soldier" (Brecht, 1958/1917) already voices this anti-war stance, condemning hypocrisy and forecasting a return of catastrophe. In the late 1920s, amid the instability of the Weimar Republic, Brecht turned more concertedly to Marxist thought. Although not a member of the Communist Party, he absorbed its analytic tools and used his craft to criticise bourgeois ideology and expose its contradictions (Glahn, 2014, p. 95). These commitments did not produce propaganda; rather, they shaped an art that asked spectators to investigate how power and profit organise everyday life.

From this background grew Epic Theatre and the *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). In practice the idea is simple: interrupt the smooth story; use songs, titles, and tonal shifts; and keep reminding the audience that what they see is made, not "natural." The aim of such devices is to reduce passive immersion and invite judgment. Brecht wanted stages to be civic tools—places where people learn to scrutinise how things work and to imagine them otherwise. As White (1978) argues, "theatre is above all a democratic institution trying to give the audience enhanced possibilities of visualising and performing changes in the world" (p. 26). The result is a dramaturgy that discourages catharsis in favour of analysis.

This study applies that framework to *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939/1941). The play's episodic scenes, placards, songs, and abrupt shifts in tone are not decorative signatures; they are working tools that make social pressures visible. The canteen wagon, the constant attention to price and delay, and the contrast between Mother Courage's bargaining and Kattrin's speechless acts of protection show how, in a war economy, care is forced to behave like a commodity. Drawing on

Marxist criticism and extending it with feminist and intersectional work, the paper reads the play alongside Silvia Federici's account of the extraction and devaluation of reproductive labour (2004), Nancy Fraser's diagnosis of a contemporary "crisis of care" (2016), and Sara Ruddick's idea of maternal thinking as practical protection (1989). In dialogue with feminist affect theory, particularly Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" (2011), the analysis also explains why attachments to sustaining-yet-damaging structures persist. In this configuration, Brecht's alienation effects do not dampen feeling for its own sake; they redirect feeling toward diagnosis by showing how economic compulsion bends maternal identity.

The paper also addresses a gap in the criticism. Much writing on Brecht explains his rejection of Aristotelian catharsis and his political aims, but it often sidelines the theatrical treatment of care—the way scenes of feeding, bargaining, or refusing linen are staged as economic actions. Likewise, discussions of war-profiteering sometimes reduce Courage to a moral emblem (bad mother or heartless trader), which obscures Brecht's materialist point: behaviour is patterned by conditions as much as by character. By synthesising Brechtian form with feminist–Marxist social-reproduction theory, this study reframes Courage's paradox—carer and trader—not as personal inconsistency but as a structural effect of a market that prices survival and corrodes kinship.

Methodologically, the argument proceeds through close readings of key scenes: Scene 1 (Eilif's recruitment while Courage haggles), Scene 3 (the Swiss Cheese ransom and the fatal temporality of bargaining), and Scene 11 (Kattrin's rooftop drumming as speech through action). The analysis considers how songs and placards interrupt narrative flow, how the wagon's constant presence holds the economy onstage, and how the lullaby over Kattrin's body converts private grief into a public problem. These choices keep spectators in a judging posture rather than offering a redemptive release.

Overall, the contribution is both conceptual and interpretive. Conceptually, it links Brecht's epic form to a feminist–Marxist account of care, showing that alienation exposes the commodification of

motherhood rather than merely suppressing emotion. Interpretively, it demonstrates how Kattrin functions as a counter-ethic—maternal protection enacted outside cost–benefit accounting — thus reframing Courage's bargaining as a survival practice shaped by market pressure rather than as a personal failing. Finally, by connecting Brecht's stagecraft to current debates about the marketisation of care, the study underscores the play's ongoing relevance: *Mother Courage* compels us to ask what material conditions would be needed for care to be protected rather than sold.

Alienation and Social Critique in Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* exemplifies epic theatre not simply by reiterating the *Verfremdungseffekt* but by demonstrating how alienation works as a political intervention into the dynamics of war, capitalism, and maternal identity. Rather than immersing the audience in pity and fear, the play unsettles them with an episodic structure, songs, placards, and abrupt tonal shifts that expose theatre's constructedness and the economic logics shaping behaviour. In this respect, Brecht's theatrical method runs counter to the Aristotelian model that privileges catharsis and passive spectatorship; as Leach writes, "Brecht wanted his theatre to intervene in the process of shaping society" (1994, p. 134), and, as Curran explains, he rejected Aristotle's aesthetics for fostering passivity (2001, p. 176). The opening movement makes the rule legible: while Mother Courage haggles over a belt, the recruiting officer seizes Eilif—an emblematic juxtaposition of commercial transaction and militarised capture that shows how survival under capitalism fractures ethical responsibility. Alienation here is not an abstract device but a way of rendering contradictions visible—between profit and care.

The canteen wagon epitomises Brecht's argument: a portable market whose profits keep the family moving while feeding the machinery of war that imperils them. The scene-work tracks how Mother Courage's maternal role is subsumed by the wartime marketplace, converting caregiving into a function of market survival. Feminist–

Marxist frames clarify this pressure: Federici's account of the extraction and devaluation of reproductive labour illuminates why Courage's care repeatedly has to "act like" a priced asset (2004), while Fraser's analysis of capitalism's "crisis of care" names the historical encroachment of markets into family life (2016). Berlant's (2011) "cruel optimism" sharpens the image of Courage's attachment to the wagon—her livelihood and her trap— Read together, these perspectives position the play as a critique of capitalism's colonisation of intimate life rather than a mere anti-war lament.

Brecht's distancing techniques—interruptions, contradictions, independent scenes, and songs—are designed to turn spectators from consumers of emotion into analysts of social practice. He sets the play during the Thirty Years' War to gain historical distance and comparative leverage: the seventeenth-century canvas universalises the patterns of profiteering and suffering while quietly warning a twentieth-century audience about renewed catastrophe. As Gleitman argues, "religion functions as just one more overt motive or surface manifestation of the deep structure of capitalist profit production that drags everything else along behind it" (1991, p. 153). In other words, even putative ideals become instruments for organising consent to loss, while ordinary people—Courage, her children, and the peasants—are positioned within a system that prices protection and monetises survival.

The play's key scenes dramatise this conversion of care into calculation. When peasants plead for help and Courage replies that she cannot spare linen because of "taxes, duties, bribes," Kattrin's mute resistance—lifting a board against her mother—registers a counter-ethic of protection enacted outside the ledger of price. Later, the ransom episode with Swiss Cheese compresses the thesis into one decision: bargaining time becomes the hinge on which a life turns. The staging mechanism withholds consoling closure so that we perceive a mechanism, not a moral failing. Courage's tenderness—bandaging Kattrin, dreaming of a dowry—complicates rather than cancels the structural critique; even hope is formatted by accountancy. Brecht thus relocates tragedy from character essence to social determination: the

conditions of war-capitalism compel behaviours that corrode the very bonds they purport to preserve.

Kattrin functions as the play's counter-pole: rendered mute by trauma yet rhetorically precise in act, she offers linen to the wounded and finally ascends to drum an alarm for the sleeping community. Denied speech, she weaponises sound; her alarm recasts muteness as conscious practice. This is the moment where Brecht's ethics of care exceeds commodification: a politics of protection that risks annihilation to preserve life. The aftermath refuses sentimental resolution. Alone with her daughter's body, Courage sings a lullaby that invites feeling while suspending recognition—an instance of consolation that is also denial. The duality is central to Brecht's method: affect is permitted only insofar as it keeps criticism awake.

At the same time, Brecht's ideological commitments give the critique historical traction. White (1978) notes that Brecht's sustained engagement with Marxism led him to embrace the validity of a social and economic analysis grounded in class struggle and to support, at least programmatically, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 35). The play translates that engagement into stage practice: spectators are asked to judge choices, habits, and axioms learned under pressure—expediency, calculation, and the conversion of love into an asset—rather than to absolve or condemn a single character's heart. The tragic irony resides in the system: Courage's final image—harnessing herself to the wagon and moving on—shows rhythms of survival reproducing the conditions that destroy what they were meant to save.

Thus, *Mother Courage and Her Children* remains pressing not because it teaches alienation as a tool for criticism, but because it demonstrates how alienation links theatrical form to lived contradiction. By aligning scene-work and song with feminist–Marxist and ideological critique, Brecht makes visible how capitalism commodifies even maternal love—and how a counter-ethic can flare up, briefly, in acts of protection that refuse the framework of price. The unresolved ending insists on the audience's critical judgment: the question is not who was

good enough, but what conditions would be required for care to cease being collateral to profit.

Literature review:

Scholarship on Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* has long emphasized its formal and political perspectives, yet the interplay of motherhood and capitalist economy remains underexplored. Angela Curran's (2001) work situates Brecht's rejection of Aristotelian tragedy against Epic Theatre's didacticism, clarifying how Brecht breaks from catharsis to provoke dialectical reasoning. Philip Glahn (2014) extends this by focusing on staging and metatheatrical devices—placards, projections, abrupt transitions—that prevent passionate response. Robert Vork (2013) highlights Kattrin's muteness as a revolutionary performance, showing how silence and gesture disrupt the dominance of dialogue. Collectively, this body of research consolidates the understanding that Brecht's theatrical method is inseparable from his commitment to alienation and political cVORKritique.

Yet when placed in dialogue, these readings reveal tensions that invite further analysis. For instance, Vork's focus on resistance complicates Glahn's emphasis on staging by showing that alienation arises not only from formal devices but also from embodied performance. Similarly, Curran's emphasis on anti-Aristotelian structure risks overlooking how Brecht embeds economic critique within maternal relations. This study argues that bringing these perspectives together allows us to see *Mother Courage* as more than a play about war: it is a drama about how care, labour, and profit collide.

Recent scholarship has begun to point to these intersections, but engagement with feminist-Marxist and social reproduction theory remains limited. Anne Manne (2005) raises questions about neoliberal motherhood, but her framework is not fully connected to Brechtian criticism. Building on theorists such as Silvia Federici (2004), Nancy Fraser (2016), and Sara Ruddick (1989), this paper situates *Mother Courage* within debates about the commodification of reproductive labour. Federici shows how women's caregiving labour under capitalism

is systematically devalued; Fraser argues that capitalism's "crisis of care" arises when profit undermines social reproduction; and Ruddick conceptualizes mothering as a form of political labour. These perspectives reframe Mother Courage's paradox—profiteer and mother—not as a personal contradiction but as a structural consequence of capitalist war economies. The theoretical lens must therefore be foregrounded earlier. By integrating feminist-Marxist insights into Brechtian scholarship, this paper clarifies how alienation and performance expose not only class exploitation but also the commodification of motherhood.

While existing studies illuminate Brecht's innovations in form, staging, and ideology, they rarely sustain an analysis of motherhood as labour within the capitalist economy of the play. This paper addresses that gap by synthesizing Brechtian criticism with feminist-Marxist theory, showing how *Mother Courage* dramatizes the exploitation of maternal care in wartime. In doing so, it contributes to current debates on political theatre and the politics of care, extending Brecht's critique into contemporary concerns about neoliberal motherhood.

Mother Courage: The Profiteer's Paradox of Motherhood

Brecht's play stages the paradox at the heart of Anna Fierling—nicknamed Mother Courage—whose maternal devotion collides with a relentless pursuit of profit inside a war-driven market. The play's episodic, song-punctuated structure rejects Aristotelian unity to produce the *Verfremdungseffekt*: rather than inviting cathartic identification, it forces the audience to analyse how material conditions shape conduct. From its opening moments, Brecht frames the central contradiction: while Courage haggles over a belt, the recruiting officer seizes Eilif. The scene is not simply ironic; it demonstrates how survival under capitalism corrodes the very bonds it claims to protect

The canteen wagon—both livelihood and lure—symbolises the profiting machinery Courage harnesses even as it endangers her children. Her songs entice soldiers to buy, strengthening them for battle and, by extension, preserving the conflict that feeds her trade. Brecht contrasts

the recruiting officer's instrumental logic of the war machine with Courage's market logic; both are rooted in self-interest, yet the mother's logic carries the burden of care. The play repeatedly shows her trying to shield her children—brandishing a knife at the sergeant, pleading via a colonel's brother, smearing ashes on Kattrin's face to deter predation—while also returning, again and again, to the business that funds the fight. The contradiction is structural, not merely moral: Federici's account of capitalism's devaluation of reproductive labour clarifies why Courage's care cannot be simply willed into triumph over economic necessity (Federici, 2004).

The ransom episode with Swiss Cheese sharpens this critique. Confronted with the price of her son's life, Courage bargains as though the boy were another commodity: "God is merciful and men are bribable – that's how His will is done on earth" (Brecht, 2009, p. 56). Her hesitation—an ingrained habit of calculation—proves fatal, and Swiss Cheese is executed. Fraser's "crisis of care" helps name the pressure that converts obligation into budget line; Brecht's epic-theatre devices withholds tragic consolation so that the audience sees a social mechanism, not a private failure (Fraser, 2016). Courage's anguished cry—"He'll tell you! He's not that stupid! And don't you break his shoulder!" (p. 57)—registers maternal feeling, but it arrives too late and cannot offset the discipline of the market that organises her options.

Kattrin stands as the counter-ethic. Mute yet resolute, she acts from solidarity: offering linen to wounded peasants and warning a sleeping town at the cost of her life. In a telling confrontation, when Courage refuses linen—"I can't give you any. With all I have to pay out in taxes, duties, bribes…"—Kattrin threatens her mother with a board (Brecht, 2009, p. 77). Ruddick's "maternal thinking" illuminates this practice of protection that resists commodification: Kattrin embodies care as action, not accountancy (Ruddick, 1989). The daughter's gestures expose a system in which compassion is subordinated to commerce; her sacrifice reframes silence as political speech.

This dialectical contrast exposes not individual flaws but systemic contradictions. As Williams (1977) argues, Brecht's cultural materialism

reframes tragedy as the product of social conditions, not character destiny. Mother Courage's choices—haggling while her son is conscripted, delaying payment while Swiss Cheese is executed, prioritizing her wagon over human connection—are shaped by capitalism's imperatives rather than personal vice. Even her fleeting moments of maternal passion—her desperate appeal for Swiss Cheese in Scene 3 (Brecht, 2009, p. 57)—are ultimately overwhelmed by the logic of survival.

The script's recurrent images of price and delay make this conversion visible. Courage counts coins while soldiers count bodies; a negotiation measured in minutes becomes the hinge on which a life turns. Her vacillation over pawning the wagon to ransom Swiss Cheese compresses the play's thesis: when subsistence depends on the instrument of profiteering, even devotion is forced to operate like an asset—bargained, deferred, sometimes lost. Hence the bitter rhythm of her story: survival is purchased through trade, and the same trade erodes the lives it was meant to protect.

Brecht's dramatic method denies closure. The final image—Courage harnessing herself to the wagon and moving on—refuses redemption and returns the spectator to analysis. It is not that she loves money more than her children; rather, the economy of war renders every relation precarious and priceable. The point is diagnostic: to show how capitalism, especially in wartime, corrodes ethical life by compelling agents to reproduce the conditions that destroy them. By staging Courage against Kattrin— Courage's market rationality opposed to Kattrin's sacrificial warning —Brecht makes visible how care is split between reproduction for the market and protection against it. The audience is thus pressed to recognise a social fact: under these conditions, even maternal love is not immune from commodification.

Profiting from Pain: The Tragic Irony of Maternal Love in Wartime

Profiting from pain is the engine of Brecht's plot. What keeps Courage's family moving is the very trade that depends on others' suffering; maternal love must pass through prices, timings, and risks.

The episodic form—songs, placards, clipped scenes—keeps this irony in view, so that gestures of care appear alongside the transactions that quietly diminish them. In this wartime marketplace, the gains that secure tomorrow also subtract from what love can protect today.

Read through feminist–Marxist lenses, Courage's decisions register less as personal vice than as the habitus of a market subject. Federici's analysis of capitalism's historical extraction and devaluation of reproductive labour helps explain why maternal care is repeatedly forced to "act like" a priced asset, while Fraser's diagnosis of a "crisis of care" clarifies how the very order that demands caregiving continually undermines it (Federici, 2004; Fraser, 2016). The ransom episode with Swiss Cheese crystallises the point: Courage bargains as if her son's life were another commodity, trusting that outcomes can be bought and negotiated (Brecht, 2009, p. 56); the delay born of calculation proves fatal. Courage's intermittent tenderness complicates, rather than cancels, this structure. Dreaming of future security, she folds hope into accountancy: "Be sensible… we'll make a bit more money – then peace'll be all the nicer… Just the special things for your trousseau… Don't lose anything, think of your trousseau!" (Brecht, 2009, p. 51). Even aspiration is shaped by the logic of price.

Brecht also stages the small, everyday moves of deflection and denial that accompany marketised survival. After Eilif is taken, Courage displaces responsibility onto Kattrin: "If you hadn't gone sneaking off to the market, maybe you'd have shouted!" (Brecht, 2009, p. 37). The reproach shows how the pressures of war fracture kinship, converting grief into blame. When peasants beg for help, Courage replies, "I can't give you any. With all I have to pay out in taxes, duties, bribes…," prompting Kattrin to lift a board against her mother in mute protest (Brecht, 2009, p. 77). Gesture here becomes argument: Kattrin refuses the translation of compassion into costings. Similar expediency surfaces in the routines that keep the wagon rolling; survival inculcates habits that prize effect over integrity. At the other pole of the emotional register, Brecht scripts a desperate plea that briefly punctures calculation—but it comes too late and is folded back into the tempo of negotiation, hesitation, and loss (Brecht, 2009, p. 57).

Against Courage's survival logic, Kattrin enacts a counter-ethic of care—speechless, yet legible in gesture, she gives scarce linen to peasants, tries to rescue a child from flames, and finally drums to rouse a sleeping town (Brecht, 2009). In Ruddick's terms, this is "maternal thinking" as practical protection—care enacted, not accounted (Ruddick, 1989). Denied speech, Kattrin weaponises sound; the rooftop drumming functions as a "silenced scream," a politics of warning rather than prayer. The action is legible as both heroic and doomed: it saves others at the price of her life, embodying Brecht's dialectic of agency and determination—under conditions that commodify care, meaningful action remains possible, but it is costly and non-redemptive. In the aftermath, Brecht counters Kattrin's enacted care with Courage's consolatory denial: a lullaby that tries to turn death into sleep. As Robert Vork (2013) observes, this duality is central to the play:

> Later, without companions to shield her, Courage is fully confronted by the annihilating force of her daughter's death, but even then the terrible fiction of her world maintains her and binds her to it. Far beyond the boundaries of reason and rational thought, Courage's grief takes the form of a softly sung lullaby, as though Kattrin were only drifting off to sleep, or as though this were all simply a bad dream from which Kattrin and the other children were about to awaken (p. 42)

Courage's market pragmatism is framed not as innate monstrosity but as a learned survival strategy. Williams's cultural materialism helps relocate tragedy from character essence to social determination (Williams, 1977). In this light, Courage's notorious principle about bribery is less a moral lapse than a rule of the world she must inhabit; the war-profit system renders every relation precarious and priceable. Glahn's stark formulation sharpens the paradox: "Courage, despite her experiences of war and the loss of her children, remains a cunning profiteer, valuing her business interests above compassion and truth—even when it hurts her personally" (Glahn, 2014, p. 150). The

contradiction is precisely what Brecht wants us to see: subjective love inside an objective war-market produces tragic outcomes.

The play's concluding image denies the audience any redemption. Courage straps herself once more to the wagon and marches on with the army; Kattrin's alarm may have briefly disrupted the logic of commodification, but the mechanism reasserts itself as Courage declares, "I'll pull the wagon myself," reaffirming her submission to war-profit system (Brecht, 2009, p. 122). Brecht's aim here is not to punish a "bad" mother or canonise a "good" daughter, but to render the mechanism of survival under capitalism visible. By setting Courage's economic logic against Kattrin's sacrificial alarm, the drama exposes how care is split between reproduction for the market and protection against it. What emerges is a diagnosis rather than a moral: when subsistence relies on the very instruments of profiteering, even devotion is forced to function like an asset—bargained, deferred, and at times forfeited. Maternal care persists, but under war capitalism it is compelled to speak in the language of price. The abiding question Brecht leaves with the audience is therefore not who was "good enough," but what material conditions would be required for care to cease being subordinated to profit.

Conclusion:

Mother Courage and Her Children remains one of Brecht's most incisive experiments in epic theatre, deploying alienation not for emotional consolation but for critical awakening. By dismantling Aristotelian norms of catharsis and linear closure, Brecht insists that theatre function as a site of analysis, compelling audiences to scrutinize the material forces that structure human suffering.

At its centre is the paradox of Mother Courage herself: at once caregiver and profiteer, protector and betrayer. Her oscillation between maternal instinct and economic calculation embodies what Silvia Federici (2004) identifies as the historical subordination of reproductive labour to the demands of capital. Nancy Fraser's (2016) "crisis of care" further illuminates her entrapment: compelled to provide as a mother while simultaneously undermined by the very system that makes such

care impossible. The fate of her children—consumed by the war machine—renders visible how capitalism corrodes not only institutions but also the intimate textures of family life.

Kattrin's silent resistance gestures toward another possibility. As Sara Ruddick (1989) suggests, maternal practice can cultivate an ethic of protection and care that resists commodification. Yet Brecht refuses to let her sacrifice resolve into redemptive catharsis. The final lullaby, sung over her body, dramatizes what Raymond Williams (1977) called the tragic persistence of cultural materialism: affect emerges, but only as evidence of a system that forces even love into contradiction.

Today, the play's urgency has not diminished. In an era of wars, mass displacement, and global care crises, Brecht's critique resonates as more than historical allegory: it exposes the continued commodification of life under neoliberalism. Mother Courage's trudging return to the wagon encapsulates not heroic survival but what Berlant (2011) names cruel optimism—clinging to the very structures that devastate.

Thus, Brecht offers no resolution but a provocation. His drama insists that the contradictions between conscience and commerce, care and capital, are not past dilemmas but present realities. *Mother Courage and Her Children* endures as a warning and a demand: that we confront how systems of profit continue to fracture the very bonds that make us human.

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