### War as Business

Brecht states in the *Courage Model Book* that the play conceives of war as a "continuation of business by other means." War is neither some supernatural force nor simply a rupture in civilization but one of civilization's preconditions and logical consequences. In this respect, there are many dialogues—the most explicit one appearing in Scene 3—that cast war as another profit venture by Europe's great leaders. Mother Courage is the play's primary small businesswoman, parasitically living off of the war with her canteen wagon. As the *Model Book* observes the "big profits are not made by little people." Courage's commitment to the business of war will cost her children, the war taking back for what it has provided her in flesh.

### Virtue in Wartime

The *Model Book* also remarks that war "makes the human virtues fatal even to their possessors." This "lesson" appears from the outset of the play, prefiguring the fate of Mother Courage and her children. Telling each of her children's fortunes, Courage will conjure their deaths at the hand of their respective virtues: bravery, honesty, and kindness. Later, The Cook will rehearse this lesson in "The Song of the Great Souls of the Earth." As we will see, Brecht often attributes these virtues ironically. Courage, for example, is often a coward, and Eilif is more a murderer than a brave hero.

### *Verfremdungseffekt*

The *Verfremdungseffekt,* alienation or "distanciation" effect, is the primary innovation of Brecht's epic theater. By alienating the spectator from the spectacle, its devices would reveal the social *gestus* underlying every incident on-stage and open a space for critical reflection. Often alienation also means making the workings of the spectacle possible, and decomposing the unity of the theatrical illusion. Brecht called for the spectator's alienation to oppose the mystifying tendencies of the conventional stage, tendencies that reduced its audience to passive, trance-like states. The possible techniques of alienation are endless. Slight chances in pace, alternative arrangements of the players on-stage, experiments in lighting, gesture, and tone. The success of each scene in *Mother Courage* hinges upon these devices. For example, Courage's "Song of the Great Capitulation," when played without alienation, risks seducing the spectator with the pleasures of surrender rather than exposing the depravity in the submission to an unjust authority.

Allegory

As the name of its eponymous heroine suggests, *Mother Courage* poses the tradition of the morality play as its backdrop. Pedagogical in its intent, the morality play is conventionally organized around Everyman as its protagonist and various characters personifying Vices and Virtues. Action consists of their struggle, whether for the Everyman's soul or otherwise. Similarly *Mother Courage* offers Courage and her children as sense personifications the virtues that do them in during the war: wisdom, bravery, honesty, and kindness. Obviously, it is also profoundly pedagogical in its intentions.

Despite these similarities, it is clear that Brecht fundamentally departs from the morality play tradition as well. Certainly Courage—explicitly located in her particular socio-historical context as well as the context of the performance—is no Everyman. Moreover, the epic form militates precisely against a structure of ready identification between spectator and character that the universal Everyman clearly establishes. In the morality play, we are all "Everyman." Also, Brecht's play distorts the one-to-one correspondences (e.g. Kattrin is kindness) the morality play poses, exploiting the dissonances and arbitrary relations between the terms of its allegories. In the "Song of the Great Souls of the Earth," which awkwardly uses Socrates to figure for the simpleton Swiss Cheese, the spectator becomes conscious of the structures of figurative language that make these relations possible. By playing on the dissonances between song and action, song and character, the play would again distance the spectator from the spectacle and generate his critical reflection.

### Music

At times the reader of Brecht feels trapped in a Marxist Gilbert and Sullivan musical. Rather than accompany or integrate itself into the theatrical illusion, music largely assumes an independent reality in *Mother Courage,* standing apart from the action. Brecht often underscored this separation by lowering a musical emblem whenever such a song would arise. Music is neither a simple accompaniment nor exclusively the expression of a character's current state, at times functioning instead in its autonomy as allegory, or as covert political commentary. Often it assumes a pedagogical function. Note, for example, how Courage teaches the soldier surrender through her song of capitulation or Yvette attempts to harden Kattrin to love through her "Fraternization Song."

### Business practices

Deemed a "damned soul" in the *Model Book,* Mother Courage works tirelessly, resting only once in the course of the play. Her haggling, careful inventory, and so on frame and punctuate the action, emphasizing its underlying the social *gestus.* Courage always protects her interests shrewdly, inquiring into the fate of the war with only her profit in mind. Her practices emerge from the social conditions that determine the characters, committing her to the war. Ultimately she will lose each of her children as a result. Moreover, as the final scene chillingly shows, so ritualized are these practices that Courage will not learn from her losses.

### Capitulation

Written in the midst of the growing Nazi terror, *Mother Courage* would impel its spectators to oppose war. In this respect it features a number of moments of capitulation as object lessons: most notably, the withdrawal of Courage and the Young Soldier from the captain's tent in Scene Four and the submission of the peasants in Scene 11. *Mother Courage* emphasizes the ritual character of capitulation. Years of war have frozen the people into fixed patterns of surrender and lamentation. Standing against these surrenders is Kattrin, disfigured and silenced by war trauma to which she continually bears witness, who risks both livelihood and life to save a town under surprise attack.

### Maternity

Against Mother Courage—a mother who fails to protect her children—the play places Kattrin. Her kindness involves an impulse to mother in opposition to her mother's coldhearted business sense. As the *Model Book* notes, if Courage's war spoils consist of the loot she can scavenge, Kattrin's are the children she saves. Notably, her heroic intervention—one that breaks her stony silence—is the salvation of the children of Halle.