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Mother Courage And Her Children (Modern Plays)



Synopsis

Mother Courage was first performed in Zurich in 1941 and is usually seen as Brecht's greatest work. Remaining a powerful indictment of war and social injustice, it is an epic drama set in the seventeenth century during the Thirty Years' War. The plot follows the resilient Mother Courage who survives by running a commissary business that profits from all sides. As the war claims all of her children in turn, the play poignantly demonstrates that no one can profit from the war without being subject to its terrible cost also. This translation by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner is contemporary and lively, with accessible and humour language, an easy conversational flow, sympathetic, understandable characters and humor. Kushner makes a classic play which is notoriously difficult to perform both stage and reader friendly. It was staged at the National Theatre directed by Deborah Warner and starring Fiona Shaw in September 2009.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What were Penguin thinking? "Mother Courage and her Children" is a German-language play set in the 1600s. There is therefore no excuse for having one character turn to another to say "Bob's your uncle" within the opening lines. When reading this play, we are supposed to be hearing the voices of German peasants and soldiers. However, I found myself listening to what sounded like north-of-England coal-miners. (Perhaps this was translator John Willett's clever rendering of the 'Verfremdungseffekt'. If so, it has certainly succeeded in alienating this reader.) Within the first two scenes, we hear Mother Courage herself using such choice verbiage as: "Talk proper to me, do you mind, and don't you dare say I'm pulling your leg in front of my unsullied children, 'taint decent, I got

no time for you. My honest face, that's me licence with the Second Regiment, and if it's too difficult to read there's nowt I can do about it."Talk proper, indeed. It gets worse. Here is another dollop of Yorkshire pudding for the reader to chew on:"My eldest boy. It's two years since I lost sight of him, they pinched him from me on the road, must think well of him if the general's asking him to dinner, and what kind of a dinner can you offer? Nowt."The dinner, it seems, is a dog's dinner. So awful was this translation that I soon wound up buying the Eyre Methuen edition (with Eric Bentley translating). Compare-and-contrast the two translations:~~~~~Scene 1:--EYRE METHUEN:"Stay here. You're never happy till you're in a fight. He has a knife in his boot and he knows how to use it."PENGUIN:"Stop there! You varmint! I know you, nowt but fights. There's a knife down his boot. A slasher, that's what he is.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) wrote a terribly depressing play which demonstrated the loss of character and decency among soldiers and civilians caught in the middle of total war. While the background of the play was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the play was about the terrible conditions that existed during W.W. II and thereafter. Brecht knew his work would "raise eyebrows," but he wrote and spoke that he did not care who was irritated by his work. Brecht's background as a refugee from the Hitler regime and places that German forces invaded involved his relocating to avoid arrest and the ravages of war. In other words, Brecht knew the ravages and loss of self respect that war can generate. The characters in this drama were willing to "sell their souls" in order to either survive or to make money by taking advantage of the war. Mother Courage was willing to sacrifice her children to profit from the Thirty Years War. Maybe the message was that parents and cowardly political leaders are willing to sacrifice the lives of sons and daughters to satisfy their vain egos and "arm chair patriotism." The misery described in this drama reflects the tragic dilemmas faced by civilians caught in the middle of W.W. II. The German/Soviet War (1941-1945) forced civilians caught in the middle to be at the mercy or lack thereof of German and Soviet forces. A saying was that men lost all hope, and women lost sense of shame if only to survive. The same conditions were faced by Germans during the Thirty Years War especially when mercenary troops were not paid and vented their frustrations on civilians. Famine and abuse of civilians was the norm during the Thirty Years War and poor souls during W.W. II.

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