Migration's Alienations: Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage

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Brecht's so-called anti-war drama Mother Courage and her Children *(1939) will be read as a migration drama that demystifies rhetorical cynicism as a coping device for the traumatic torments of migration. By placing Brecht's work in the context of Peter Sloterdijk's theory of cynicism, our reading demonstrates how this work adds further perspectives to Thomas Nail's recent theory of migration and to the discussion of the play's theatrical production.*

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Brecht's Biography of Migration (MMN)

Bertolt Brecht understood the migrant condition well. When Hitler rose to power, and the Reichstag burned on February 27, 1933, and when civil liberties were suspended, Brecht and Helene Weigel decided it was time to leave Germany. They took their then three-year-old daughter with them. Brecht was 35 and Weigel was 33. They first went to Denmark, then on to Sweden, Finland, and to Russia on their way to America in 1941. In his exile, Brecht lived in Santa Monica, California, and witnessed the time when Japanese Americans were put into internment camps. Playwright Tony Kushner says,

> Brecht is in exile and he doesn't know what's going to happen to him or his family and you can feel that in Mother Courage, you hear this scream of terror and despair. He has no idea whether he'll ever be in front of German-speaking audiences again, so he writes epic plays that will survive him and find their way back to a German speaking audience at some point in the future, and he doesn't know whether he'll be alive to see it. I think he literally sets out to create a canon of text because he's lost his audience.[1]

In Germany, his books were burned and his citizenship withdrawn. He was completely cut off from the German theatre that he loved, innovated, and modernized so much. Between 1937 and 1941 he wrote some of his more classical works: *Mother Courage and Her Children*; *The Life of Galileo*; *The Good Woman of Setzuan*; *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*; and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In 1947, he was forced to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. In what many consider the greatest performance of his life, he pretended he spoke broken English and told the committee what he thought they wanted to hear. He, Weigel and Barbara left immediately after the hearings.

The Brechts first escaped to Switzerland, but, having been stripped of German nationality they could not remain there. Finally, he was invited by the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin where he staged *Mother Courage and Her*

Children. This play, about a migrant woman and her children who are forced to travel from town to town, country to country, switching religious allegiances whenever power shifts, is a daunting reflection of the forced migration that was foisted upon Brecht and his family. As they went searching for a safe shelter from the storm of Nazism in Europe, they found another storm in the guise of an anti-immigrant, ultra-nationalist Americanism awaiting them here in the "land of the free and the home of the brave." Finally, after the war's end, they returned to the shattered remains of their native Germany and took shelter in one of the few places that would offer them any safe harbor: East Germany. Establishing his own company, The Berliner Ensemble, he and Weigel created an artistic home. One can only wonder now: had the United States government not attacked Brecht, and had he been embraced rather than persecuted, might he perhaps have established his theatre in New York and not East Berlin? Can we imagine how different the American theatre would be today? Alas, we'll never know. What we do know is that Brecht's and Weigel's journey as migrants in exile led to the creation of several great theatrical masterpieces. Like Mother Courage, who says in the play, "I want nothing more than for me and my children to get through all this with our wagon," Brecht wanted nothing more than to get through his family's exile with his wife and daughter with some artistic integrity. His art was his wagon—the only shelter he had from the storms of the world.

The American playwright Arthur Miller, who himself was called before the same McCarthy committee, told a CBC reporter who asked if he was concerned that McCarthyism would destroy him, "They couldn't do that because if I can have a piece of paper and a pencil, unless they shoot me, which they weren't yet threatening to do, they couldn't destroy me. Because I could write plays and they can't…I was proud of my art, that if I had to go to some other country I would go on writing and writing against everything they believed, and nothing could stop me from doing that."[2] Brecht went to his native Germany and kept writing and directing. His rivals never realized that his art was far greater than their hatred for him. Long after the demagogues of the McCarthy era faded away into the dustbin of history,

we are still here, discussing Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel and the enduring artistic legacy they left us.

Kushner's Intervention as Translator (MMN)

Caroline Summers' article "The Playwright as Epic Translator: *Mother Courage* and the Intertextual Construction of an 'English Brecht'" discusses the historical role of translators of Brecht's texts in the anglophone context including Eric Bentley, John Willett, David Hare and Tony Kushner. Summers notes that early translators were too "solemn and earnest, with translators and directors and actors neglecting the humor in favor of the politics of the texts," while later translations were more commercially successful, but focused their attentions on entertainment rather than politics in the plays.[3] Becht's translations into English both challenged anglophone culture and were moderated by it, and Kushner's translation is no exception to this rule. Kushner was first exposed to *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the writings of Karl Marx, and Richard Foreman's production of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Public Theatre in New York. According to Kushner, these three formative experiences combined to inspire his interest in the works of Brecht. "I read all of Brecht, and became really obsessed with that distinctive voice that, just once you've encountered it becomes indispensable."[4] The Public Theatre production of Kushner's translation premiered in 2006, three years after the United States invaded Iraq in the action then President George W. Bush termed "Operation Iraqi Freedom." When asked if the play was a direct response to the war, Kushner said, "Well, it is and it isn't." Rather than a direct political action, Kushner stated "Theater has a power, but it's a very indirect power. At least what we're doing speaks to the moment in some way. It's in dialogue with the terribleness of this moment."[5] For his part, Oskar Eustis, the Artistic Director of the Public Theatre at the time when the play was produced, stated that his first goal as AD was to have Kushner adapt *Mother Courage* and for Meryl Streep to play the leading role. "The War in Iraq, it's become like the Vietnam War. It's become one of those events in which every other political issue that's important is stripped open," Eustis said. "Because of that, it feels like the theatre is forced to try to

respond to that in as direct a way as possible."[6] Streep also viewed the play as an opportunity to "express my despair and rage about who gets mowed under in these wars of ideology."[7] Therefore, as with other versions of *Mother Courage* before it, the play was most definitely a response to war and its detrimental causes.

According to Summers, Kushner's "translation" (which is a misnomer since Kushner is not completely fluent in German), relied on previous adaptations and translations. Kushner's major interventions were: creating more emotional and empathetic characters, prioritizing the naturalness of language, using obscenities to create humor, and adjusting the language to make it resonate with a contemporary American audience. These tactics, however, move the play away from the notion of the "Brechtian" and toward what Summers calls "epic translation":

> While Kushner might consider his modernization of the play's idiom to be a necessary step of acculturation in order to make its message accessible to his intended audience, it seems that perhaps in his very attempt to prevent language from being a stumbling block he has turned it into the kind of 'Objekt' Brecht warned against. Although his prioritization of the dynamism of Brecht's dialogue contributes to a fluid performance, some of the language used in the translation seems to rob the play of its ability to invite critical reflection from the audience.[8]

Along with the additional interventions provided by directors, designers, and actors, this has the effect of removing performances of Brecht's play from the critical and reflective distance that is associated with the "*Verfremdungseffekt,*" a central feature of Brecht's vision of Epic Theatre. Ben Brantley, who reviewed the production for *The New York Times*, which was directed by George C. Wolfe, believed the production lacked the requisite "Brechtian" elements, stating, "The necessary combination of detachment and engagement is as hard as anything in modern theatre to get right."[9] Michael Najjar's University of Oregon production received a similar critique. Lisa Hoeller wrote,

> I can understand the use of more subtle alienation effects in order to retreat from the instructive style of Brechtian Theatre. To sell Brecht's radically alienating theatre productions in the U.S. is a challenging endeavor. However, in my opinion, it was also an opportunity missed to engage the willing spectator in a different experience of theatre where a play is telling a more disintegrated, fragmented story that would certainly also resonate with our reality today … it would have benefited from a heavier dose of the Brechtian radicalism.[10]

The reception of these two productions aligns with Summers' analysis that Kushner's "authoritative changes to the text result in a basis for performance that does not, at least on the page, oblige actors and audience to engage critically with the material in the same way that the German text can be said to do."[11] In translating and adapting Brecht for English audiences, a necessary compromise must be reached. In order to engage contemporary anglophone audiences the play loses some of the critical distance for which Brecht advocated in favor of a text/performance that slightly privileges the entertaining functions of theater. However, Kushner keeps Mother Courage's cynicism vibrant and vivacious and links her tragic loss of her children to the failure of her cynical rhetoric. Only two things, her wagon and herself (as the one who pulls it), are left in the end.

Dynamics of Migration (DO)

Michel Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces" (posthumously published by *diacritics* in 1986) ends with an image of a "heterotopia" par excellence: the boat … "a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures….. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up."[12] Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (written together with Margarete Steffin in 1937, completed in 1939, and performed for the first time in Zürich in 1941)[13] is fixated on a similar image: the wagon, the means of Courage's economic survival. The wagon is also her

family's home. They move from location to location following opposing armies in order to trade goods. The stage directions of Act "Five" read: "Mother Courage's little wagon travels ceaselessly, crossing Poland, Moravia, Bavaria, Italy, and Bavaria again,"[14] and she explains: "They called me Courage because I was scared of financial ruin, Sergeant, so I drove my wagon straight through the cannon fire at Riga…"[15] Fear of passing through war zones necessitates courage, and Courage substitutes her personal name "Anna Fierling" with this attribute by aligning her personal identity with the risk-taking of the migrant. The conventional Sergeant does not comprehend Courage's wit in re-naming herself. For example, when she explains that she did not name her son after his birth father but after the name of her Hungarian lover at the time, he does not grasp her unconventionalism, and comments: "But he wasn't the father."[16] Courage survives by giving up conventions of naming and speaking. She employs names strategically according to the social necessities of her migratory status. Manipulation of reality is her tactic. Sarcastically, she responds to the narrow-minded administrative questions of the Sergeant: "….you are entirely devoid of imagination, aren't you?"[17] Here she identifies the imaginary as the trademark of the migrant. As Foucault points to the imaginary as the driving force for heterotopias, Mother Courage also insists on its power. In her situation she wouldn't be able to succeed without cynicism, satire, and the manipulative of realities. Cynicism functions as Courage's linguistic heterotopia, her way of navigating survival and identity in the midst of destruction.

While he is escaping from fascism by moving from one exile to the next (from Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, to the US), Brecht places this drama of migration into the 17th century's Thirty Years' War. This temporal distance from his present situation allows him to sharpen his point. While *Mother Courage and her Children* has often been read as critique of war and capitalism, we are viewing it here as a drama that links exile to migration and demystifies all aspects of the migrant's nomadic existence, especially its hope for freedom. Her trekking wagon and cynical mindset are Mother Courage's last bastion against her family's destruction. Cynicism is her main means of communication in her search for survival and social stability in terms of space and identity. She plays wittily with the

ideologies of religion, family, liberty, and democracy, but in the end, she loses the fight for the survival of her family. She loses everyone, and with this, the last stronghold of her social identity: Only the wagon, the means for her haggling trade, remains. By then it has also lost its heterotopian promise. The heterotopia that Foucault describes as the "greatest reserve of imagination" dries up. On first glance, Courage's wagon functions as a heterotopia, a place without place, going from port to port, tack to tack without ever arriving anywhere,[18] and driven by petit bourgeois family ideals, Mother Courage employs satire, sarcasm, irony, and cynicism in order to protect wagon and family. However, in the end her project fails miserably, relativizing the power of bending realities through a cynical mindset. Courage and her wagon remain, moving forward. While she demands from the soldiers "Take me with you" she "begins to pull her wagon, pursuing them."[19]

The tense identity-struggles of the migrant that the drama outlines contradict some aspects of Thomas Nail's theory of migration[20] in his 2015 study *The Figure of the Migrant*.[21] With his theory of movement, Nail counters traditions that link migration to social organizations of states. Not geography, places, state histories, no static starting and endings points (A to B) should define the migrant, but rather his/her movements, travels, passages, transits, translations, transformations, recalling Foucault's "from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel." The migrant moves between various locations, and what might look like the end of a journey often turns into a new starting point. The perceptions of arrival and departure shift while they are intricately linked. Nail frames his theory through a kinopolitics of social motion that describes social flows, their junctions and circulations. However, the conclusion of Brecht's play demonstrates how all fixed points turn immediately into new moments of departure[22], and since there is no end to Courage's migration, they are exposed as moments of illusions. There is no revolutionary move as long as travels are shaped and directed by fixed ideologies, in Mother Courage's case, by the ideology of the family and its need of economic survival.

Nail focuses on the dynamics of migrations and asks: What are alternative social organizations for the migrant?[23] He looks for heterotopias, not for places but for social organizations/relations, while Brecht's drama adds slightly different points of view: the idea of heterotopia crumbles. Through staging the unceasing psychological, economic, rhetorical and traumatizing torments of Mother Courage's wagon and of her haggling identity, the drama points to dystopian moments of heterotopian moves. These torments are deeply rooted in Brecht's cynical satire of failing rhetorical conventions: ironically, in the end, Kattrin, the mute and marginalized daughter, turns into the embittered and estranged heroine. Migration compromises pre-given value systems, and exposes the migrant's total corruptibility: Mother Courage, as well as the peasants who care for Kattrin in the beginning, lose both their ethics and their humanity. Kushner writes about Courage: "The selfishness, snobbery and blind stupidity we see growing in her are born directly from her son's murder. The *unheimliche* world of the war perverts every attempt at self-preservation[24]"

While experiencing absolute alienation from social engagement and social bonds, only the mute becomes the martyr figure; she sacrifices her life in order to protest, as well as to warn and protect the nearby city from the arriving enemies. The title of this essay, "Migration's Alienations," implies this ironic ambiguity of migratory movements: they are in constant danger of alienating themselves from social organizing principles such as family, language, and humanity while struggling to adhere to them and protect them. Mother Courage idiosyncratically desires to protect her family while cynically foregoing conventional ethics, and she loses in the end. Cynicism in this context means more than a rhetorical mindset: it is a condition for a survival that is bitterly compromised. Migration delineates a vast complexity of issues: political, social, psychological and rhetorical realities are linked in this cynical perspective towards war, exile, and migration.

Courage fights for survival through trade, haggling and corruptions; the play also shows the linguistic and especially silent processes that precede and mark all these actions. From scene to scene Courage desperately attempts to stabilize the destabilized and to hold on to an intellectual identity through the social bond

of the family. In the end, however, the migrant loses not only her local, and national identity but also family and language. Throughout, the wagon is Mother Courage's resource for survival and for protecting her family. It is the last fragile ordering system in her life that she can depend on; all other systems of identity, nation, home, family, love, jobs, religion, subjectivity, language and its imaginary are broken. Physical migration, moving from place to place, is closely associated with the fracturing of linguistic, rhetorical and ideological processes and the loss of hope for stability.

Peter Sloterdijk[25] inscribes cynicism into the crevices between ideologies. Historically, he argues, the modern cynical mindset is placed in between the search for truth in the Enlightenment and the challenges of a dialogic culture in the future. "To preserve the healing fiction of a free dialogue is one of the last tasks of philosophy."[26] Sloterdijk realizes that the conditions for such utopian dialogues are not yet given because people are not competent and are enslaved by their own psychological and social needs. Sloterdijk requires "dispassionate individuals, not enslaved to their own consciousness and not repressed by social ties…"[27] While Brecht's play does not articulate such a utopia, it does expose the catastrophes of individual lives that are suppressed by the social and psychological conditions of war and migration. By systematically demystifying all heterotopias of migration the play examines the malfunctions of linguistic, social, and/ or philosophical/ethical conventions. What can be done if ethics and rhetorical conventions don't work anymore, and the last resort of cynicism, humor and wit fails?[28] Sloterdijk argues that cynical intelligence tries to be stronger than the suffocating power of enforced critical traditions and conventions. "To speak of cynicism means trying to enter the old building of ideology critique through a new entrance."[29] As a genre of critiquing ideologies, cynicism is rooted in discontentment and desired tears. Ironically, it gains strength through its deep-seated sadness: "Behind the capable, collaborative, hard façade, it covers up a mass of offensive unhappiness and the need to cry. In this, there is something of the mourning for a 'lost innocence,' of the mourning for better knowledge, against which all action and labor are directed."[30] Brecht presents Courage exactly with

such a hard façade of pretense, cynical rhetoric and unsympathetic actions, but without mourning.[31] In the beginning one can perhaps identify with her. She is not only a victim of war, but quite the opposite: she maneuvers her way through the war cleverly by selling goods to the army. As a trader, she gains mileage out of the war. However, in the end she is ruined. She enacts for us the processes of migrants falling into ruin and total alienation: loss of family, hope, identity, emotions, subjectivity, privacy, communicative language, orders and spaces. She births (and mothers) ruin and fear. Courage's migration doesn't get anywhere. Whereas heterotopias most often present an enclave of hope for change of place, Brecht's drama presents the pain of losing exactly that hope. The unknown that underlies all hope and knowledge overrides hope's positivity. It lays bare the illusions contained within the heterotopias that drive migration politics, the hope of arriving at new places with new outlooks. Instead of expressing hope, Mother Courage's discontentment with the state of her world infiltrates her conversations, and she often employs cynical perspectives towards governmental administration, political and military leadership, and religion. In scene "One" Mother Courage provocatively resists the Sergeant's request for official paperwork:

> **The Sergeant**: …gimme your paperwork.
>
> Mother Courage *reaches behind her, finds a battered tin box, removes a big stack of tattered paper. She climbs down off the wagon*
>
> **Mother Courage**: Here's paper, all I possess. A prayer book I bought in Alt-Ötting, I use the pages to wrap pickles, and a map of Moravia, will I ever get to Moravia? God knows. If I don't the map's for the cat to shit on…[32]

Mother Courage's unexpected clever play with the various semantic connotations of the word "papers" undermines the Sergeant's demand for formal papers by reassigning these documents to everyday trivialities. By also presenting her prayer

book as wrapping paper, she undermines religious, social and political authority through wit and cynicism. Being free from bureaucratic power, she points out that the status of the migrant devalues official systems that document one's national and personal identity, name, citizenship, and religion. It undermines official endorsements of identity and reduces them to nothingness. Playing with what is considered law, her irony annuls authoritative directives. Peter Sloterdijk calls such a mindset "Cynicism of Knowledge:"[33] "ironic dissolution of imposed 'orders,' in playing with what pretends to be 'law.'"[34]

Courage applies this mindset also to her critique of the army when she observes her son being praised by the General for his war crime of tricking and killing innocent farmers instead of surrendering to them. The General praises Eilif saying: "You're a Caesar in the making […] I treasure you Eilif, brave soldier boy, you're my own son, that's how I'll handle you."[35]

In contrast, Courage claims in Scene Two: "That's one lousy General…You only need brave hard-working patriot soldiers when the country's coming unglued. In a decent country that's properly managed with decent kings and generals, people can be just what people are, common and of middling intelligence…"[36] Courage refutes the army's hierarchical social structures and honors, by contrasting the General's high expectations of brave patriotism with simple decency that would accommodate common and ordinary people. In the German original, her analytical comments are much sharper and their cynicism is more pointed. Her ruminating meta-discourse presents a more abstract level of reflection than Kushner's translation indicates. According to Mother Courage's surprising perspective, "bravery" is only an example of the virtue that is demanded by leaders who are "dumm," (stupid) "geizig," (stingy) and "schlampig" (messy, slovenly). Only stupid leaders are dependent on the death-defying attitudes of their soldiers, only stingy generals need Herculeses, because they do not hire enough soldiers, and only disorganized leaders require clever and devoted followers. Requiring special virtues for the basic job of a soldier indicates weakness of governance. Courage associates virtue with corruptibility and social imbalance, and in contrast associates a "good country" with acceptable mediocracy. Her bluntness

disparages tiered organizational structures, and ironically applauds cowardness or at least hesitancy from a soldier when she criticizes Eilif for "not surrendering."[37] Courage's challenge to conventional military heroism anticipates Sloterdijk's military-related cynicism when he suggests: "Future military history will be written on a completely new front--there, where the struggles to stop struggling will be carried out. The decisive blows will be those that are not struck."[38]

A later conversation between Mother Courage, Cook and Priest exposes the deviousness of the rhetoric of liberty especially if it is used to justify capitalist and power interests in war politics. This beautifully sarcastic dialogue reveals the religious war, its territorial expansion and the politics of capitalism as the result of personal appetite and desire for power. Regarding the Swedish occupation of Germany, the cook cleverly describes the Swedish king's use of violence and imprisonment as resulting from the Germans' resistance to being liberated from the Roman Emperor and not at all as a response to their resistance to the Swedes' occupation. Religious considerations are totally missing. The Cook describes the German attitude as a desire to remain unliberated by the Swedes. His sarcasm is obvious: In the name of liberation the king kills those who choose not to be liberated. And the Swedish people are taxed for it. The various applications of the term "liberty" clash: Liberation is imposed instead of desired: it tortures and covers up political corruption. The term is utilized for the arbitrary empowerment of the politician. The Cook demonstrates its fluidity: it is not linked to any stable signified, and positive connotations of the word are subverted by their negative impact. To bring these rhetorical matters to a head the cook also refers to the religious motivation of the war as simple rhetoric for covering up the king's personal bad conscience: "….and it's a good thing the King's got God going for him. Or else people might suspect that he's just in it for what he can take out of it. But he's always had his principles, our King, and with his clear conscience he doesn't get depressed."[39]

Lies told to the outside world and to oneself stand at the center of war rhetoric, and seem to work most effectively when they use abstract concepts such as virtue, bravery, martyrdom and heroism. Mother Courage's response to The

Cook modifies his perspective. She defends the king: “The king will never be defeated, and why? Precisely because everyone knows he’s in the war to make a profit. If he wasn’t, little people like me would smell disaster in the war and steer away from it. If it’s business, it makes sense.”[40] As a trader herself she identifies with the king, and by the same token she disqualifies him as a leader. The Chaplain is another example of fake self-presentation. He switches his religious and political alliances as he shifts his interpretations of biblical texts according to the pragmatic needs of the moment.

These multiple perspectives on Courage, The Cook and The Chaplain are examples of arbitrary applications of abstract terms to political contexts. The terms function as linguistic props that take advantage of the words’ semantic fluidity and emptiness and simultaneously mask it. Liberty is an illusion and the figures know that there is no reality linked to the term. Sloterdijk calls this mindset of the cynic “enlightened false consciousness:” “Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness…. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not and probably been not able to put them into practice.”[41]

Throughout the play Kattrin witnesses and learns to understand this falseness of words. As a mute she is constantly silenced into inaction by her mother. However, stage directions indicate her increasing critical alertness. First, she listens to her mother “amused,”[42] and later she becomes actively engaged and “frantically tries” to draw her brother Schweizerkas’ attention to the danger: “she runs back and forth, gesticulating frantically, grunting.”[43] Later she critiques and protests Courage’s inhumanity by attacking her physically,[44] and resists her ruthlessness and cold-bloodedness by rescuing an infant from a burning house. She is then injured herself and withdraws from the scene by hiding in the wagon and migrating inwardly. Her final scene concludes with her total disdain for words, which empowers her resistance and decisive action. No one tells her what to do when she takes the drum, disrupts the officers’ demands to stay quiet, drums loudly and vehemently in order to wake up and protect the besieged city, while facing the threat of being killed herself.

Her martyrdom presents the power of silence. Brecht stresses this empowerment when he places Kattrin's silent action in contrast to the pious farmers' prayer. The farmer's wife tells Kattrin: "Pray, you poor dumb beast pray." (tr. Kushner) "…Although you cannot speak, you can pray. He hears you, when no one else hears you."[45] Then the farmers pray aloud so that Kattrin is also unwillingly included in their powerless inaction. This scene within the scene shows her growing resistance to the prayer's evocation of divine intervention.[46] First she groans, then she gets up irritated before she sneaks unnoticed into the wagon, takes the drums and climbs up the ladder onto the roof of the house. Her double marginalization culminates in the power of resistance, which exposes Kattrin's sensitivity to the fakeness of words. In the broader context of the play, the prayer is the ultimate expression of theatrical cynicism: it exemplifies the mindset of the simple farmers. While they address the divine, they inadvertently arouse the heroism of the figure everyone considers most harmless and needy. She puts into action what the farmers project onto the ideologically constructed divine. She resists religious ideology for the sake of resistance. The drama avoids the ideological and ethical instruction that Brecht's earlier learning plays, for example *Die Massnahme* (*The Measures Taken*), involved. Her action is rooted in the power of the silence that, instead of longing for speech, learns to radically question speech, its ideologies and cynicisms. Kattrin witnessed the devastating

contradictions between religious rhetoric and the realities of war when Courage lost her son Schweizerkas, Kattrin's brother. Courage had bargained with the army so long that her son was killed in the meantime shortly after the Chaplain commented: "The Lord will steer us right, as they say." (92)[47] Kattrin understands the naivety of the farmers when they turn to their prayer, and her only way to resist is by taking action and utilizing the drum as a warning signal. As the other of rhetorical language, the drum articulates her war against war. Ironically, she turns the traditionally militaristic functions of the drum around and uses the sounds of the war's killing machine[48] for her activist disruption of it. Kattrin does not survive but mediates the survival of others. Her silent inner migration, as she accepts her loss of home and place, empowers her activism. As active silence, her drumming also wages war against speaking in the contexts of ideology with all of its religious, sublime and ethical connotations.

With Kattrin's character, Brecht inserts a sharp criticism of linguistic presence and asks: Is an ethical humanity only possible in the sphere of the silence that witnesses the failure of all kinds of cynicism? Do our linguistic capacities undermine our humanity? Sloterdijk also refers to the cynicism of silence, "a great European *silentium tradition* that was at home not only in the churches, monasteries, and schools but also the unresearched popular intelligence…" (290) With the figure of Kattrin, Brecht certainly privileges the under-researched popular intelligence of marginalized figures. The character who is perceived throughout the play as dumb gains insight and political agency.

Kattrin's silence undermines Courage's social and linguistic attempts to protect her family, her last social bond. Courage fails: she speaks and speaks but cannot protect anything--no space, no order, no family.[49] Courage's courage cynically serves only her own physical survival. All other purposes are destroyed. In the end, there is mobility without hope and future. Paradoxically, its implied flexibility, versatility, and adjustability becomes stagnant. Brecht's theatrical piece systematically and critically deconstructs and renders visible the illusions entailed by the driving force for any migration, its hope for change. The wagon in the end presents this radical provocation: stagnant mobility.[50] I don't think here anymore of

heterotopias, but of the staging of their undoing, of non-topias, non places. Mother Courage's migration is a story about loss, the loss of ideologies, the hope for heterotopias, social alternatives, and the power of speech. This is not a transit to a different destination; such a destination is lost. Furthermore, the identity of the migrant - as it is based on the hope of arriving somewhere - is shattered. There is no identity left because the linguistic power of expressing self and hope, even cynically, has diminished. Courage collaborates arbitrarily in the fight for survival in order to protect an obsolete family ideal but loses in the end. Her cynical mind is short-lived.

Staging Kattrin's Silence (MMN)

Kattrin's silence figures largely in the play, and this silence was one Najjar wished to emphasize given the fact that Kattrin is, to all intents and purposes, the protagonist of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. It is Kattrin's courage that creates the moral center of the play. Because of this reason, Najjar felt it necessary to stage Kattrin in every scene of the play, even if Brecht's stage

directions did not call for her presence. Kattrin is the silent witness to the gradual accumulation of the travesties she, her mother, and her brothers have endured.

> Look for the new and for the old!
> The hopes of the small trader Courage
> Deal death to her children.
> But her daughter's dumb despair at war
> Belongs to the new.
> Her helplessness
> As she drags up her warning drum
> To beat astride the roof,
> She the great helper,
> Should fill you with pride.
> The capability of her mother
> Who learns nothing
> Should fill you with pity.
> When you read your lines
> Trying them,
> Waiting to be surprised,
> Rejoice in the new
> Be ashamed of the old![51]

Kattrin's silence, brought on because of the horror of war, because, "…when she was little a soldier stuffed something in her mouth…"[52] Kattrin's silence, her inaction, her "dumb despair at war," all fuel her to make the greatest sacrifice of all. Brecht's desire to view Kattrin as "the new," as "the great helper," and the one who should fill one with pride, demonstrates that he viewed Kattrin as the antithesis of Courage. In her silence, which many call "dumb," she was the one who heralded the necessary change Brecht envisioned for a society that was hopelessly addicted to war.

Mother Courage's ending has been one of the sites where directors make their individual contributions. For Brecht himself, it was necessary that Mother Courage choose that she continue on in business after her sons and daughter are lost, in order that Courage has lost nothing. In this way, Brecht wanted to avoid that the ending be played as a tragedy. For example, it sounds from the press notices and spectators' reports as if the Zurich premiere, while attaining a high artistic level, simply presented a picture of war as a natural disaster, an unavoidable blow of fate, and so confirmed the petit-bourgeois spectator's confidence in his own indestructibility, his power of survival. Yet the play always left the equally petit-bourgeois Courage quite free to choose whether or not she should take part. Hence the production must have represented Courage's business activity, her keenness to get her cut, her willingness to take risks, as a 'perfectly natural,' 'eternally human' way of behaving, so that she was left without any alternative.[53]

As seen above, in his *Poems on the Theatre*, Brecht wrote that one should feel pride for Kattrin and pity for Courage. In Brecht's version, Courage kept pulling the wagon in circles as the lights fade, in order that "a deeper understanding sets in" about the notion that "No sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war."[54]

Other directors have made various interventions as well at the end of the play. In Richard Schechner's 1977 Performance Group performance, after Kattrin's death, Courage strips her body of her clothing in order to sell them. In Najjar's version, Courage sings her mournful song "Eia Popeia" over the body of Kattrin. The Farmer encourages her to leave quickly, stating "There are wolves around here, and people who're worse than the wolves."[55] The Farmer then offers to bury Kattrin's body. Najjar instructed his actor playing Courage to offer money for the burial, and The Farmer to refuse the payment. This was important in order to show that Courage's transactional mode of behavior may work with others who transact with her in that manner, but not with the simple peasants who are caught in the juggernaut of war. She then takes up the reins of the Wagon and says, "I have to get back in business." Unlike Brecht, who allowed Courage to pull the wagon in repeated circles until the lights faded to black, Najjar believed that it was

necessary to demonstrate that Courage learns nothing, and that she dies with the knowledge of her failure; that death prevails over all transactions, business or otherwise.

Given the overwhelming situation of the refugee crisis stemming from the wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and various African countries, it seemed necessary to not make Courage anything special. According to the International Rescue Committee, Inc., as of July 2018 there were 68.5 million people displaced by wars worldwide.[56] The seemingly endless stream of stories and images of desperate refugees, along with the hardening stance by many European nations and the United States against refugees, left little space for a capitalist critique of war in the 21st century. For Najjar, Brecht's critique of capitalism had been tested by multiple Marxist wars in the 20th century that led only to more misery, more horror, and more death worldwide. If there were petit-bourgeois merchants in contemporary wars, they paled in comparison to the horrific crimes of the Islamic State, the Assad regime in Syria, or the overwhelming civilian casualties inflicted by the coalition forces fighting in Iraq and Syria. In other words, she was just another economic refugee who has been ground up in the machine of war. The audience should pity her for her dogged commitment to her desire to capitalize on the war, but they should also realize that there is nothing particularly special about her. She is one more cog in a massive machine; as soon as she dies another will surely take her place. Courage's collapse after desperately screaming "Take me with you!" was an attempt not to create pity for her, but rather to demonstrate that Courage dies still wanting to make money off the war, but ends as another unwitting victim to a war that has consumed millions.

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[1] *Theater of War*. Directed by John Walter, performance by Meryl Streep & Kevin Kline. Kino Lorber Films, 2010. *Kanopy, https://www.kanopy.com/product/theater-war.*

[2] CBC Online. "Playwright Arthur Miller on communism, 1971: CBC Archives." *YouTube*, 2 February 2011, https://youtu.be/zxjhq4dr7QY.

[3] Caroline Summers, "The Playwright as Epic Translator? Mother Courage and the Intertextual Construction of an 'English Brecht'." *German Life and Letters* 69.2 (2016): 234.

[4] *Theater of War*.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Summers 248.

[9] Ben Brantley, “Mother, Courage, Grief and Song.” *The New York Times,* 22 August, 2006. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/22/theater/reviews/22moth.html.

[10] Lisa Hoeller, “Review: Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the University of Oregon, director Michael Malek Najjar.” https://e-cibs.org/issue-1-2019/#hoeller.

[11] Summers 253

[12] Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/464648. Accessed: 04-02-2018

[13] Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, tr. Tony Kushner. London, New York: Bloomsbury 2017.

[14] Ibid, 109.

[15] Ibid, 9.

[16] Ibid, 13.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Michel Foucault. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces.” *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/464648. Accessed: 04-02-2018

[19] *Mother Courage and her Children*. 205, 203.

[20] Brecht writes this anti-war drama during WWII in exile, presenting a migrant family, its economic uncertainty and its fight for survival without ever reaching any stable place. Throughout this time Brecht closely collaborates with Margarete Steffin, and he suffers immensely when Steffin is too sick to leave with his family for the US and dies soon after they left. Brecht’s performance in Berlin might also be viewed as an expression of his mourning for Steffin. She taught him the proletarian language that became so essential for his style.

[21] Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*. Stanford: Stanford UO, 2015.

[22] Ibid 12, and bibliographical note about philosophies of movement pg. 240, endnote 14, pg 240.

[23] For a brief overview of his project see: Ibid 7. Part three and four of his book analyze specific historical examples “for social motions that” migrants “invented on” their “own.’ (Ibid 122ff)

[24] Kushner, xi.

[25]Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1987.

[26] Ibid 14.

[27] Ibid 13.

[28] For references to Brecht and Comedy see: Marc Silberman, “Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy,” *Social Research* Vol. 79, No. 1, Politics and Comedy (SPRING 2012), pp. 169-188.

[29] Sloterdijk, 3.

[30] Ibid, 5.

[31] Najjar inserted into the performance an intimate silent scene of care and love between Courage and Kattrin to indicate their supportive relationship that is otherwise hidden behind the bitter façades of their communication. Such empathetic moments are not present in Brecht’s original play. See Najjar’s comments.

[32] Brecht, 9-11.

[33] Sloterdijk, 287.

[34] Ibid 292.

[35] Brecht, 39.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid 45

[38] Sloterdijk, 229.

[39] Brecht, 59.

[40] Ibid, 61.

[41] Sloterdijk, xii. In the essay "Ideological cynicism in the modern information age with Sloterdijk and Žižek," Liyan Gao argues: "For Sloterdijk, the key issue with modern subjectivity is not the lack of knowledge, but rather that the power of knowledge is nullified by cynicism. When one always expects the worst, one is not surprised by the revelation of oppressive conditions: at an unconscious level there is already an acknowledgement of such conditions, and it is the underlying assumption of their worldview. The cynic might proclaim its illegitimacy but nevertheless continues to live within it, and a society that is not plagued with the same problems cannot be imagined. Hence, cynicism prescribes a self-deceptive psychological defence against what are social and political problems. Though we are not fooled in the same way as the subject of Marx's false consciousness, the effect is the same, and it stifles the ability to act against an oppressive system. The traditional Kynikoi of Ancient Greece, in contrast to modern cynics, were outsiders to society who aimed to subvert society through satirical activity. The modern cynic is no longer the outsider who rejects official norms through action. They continue to sustain and reproduce society's oppressive functions, falsely believing they have no other options."

https://www.academia.edu/28276231/Ideological_cynicism_in_the_modern_information_age_with_Sloterdijk_and_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek. Last Accessed: 8/20/2020

[42] Brecht, 12.

[43] Ibid, 77. Kushner adds to the translation of the German lines the following remarks: "trying to make words" by replacing the German word "Laute" (sounds) with "words."

[44] Ibid, 110.

[45] Kushner does not translate this complex reference to the play's complex reflections on speaking and silence, and thus misses some aspects of Brecht's sarcasm.

[46] Kushner omits the dramatic climax of Kattrin's silent reactions, the basis for her activism, during the prayer scene.

[47] The priest had also initiated her into the religious punning for political reasons when he talked about his profession to preach: "I can so intoxicate a battalion they think the enemy army's a grazing flock of fine fat mutton" (127)

[48]Brecht, 60, 92.

[49] Migration in war contexts leads to total loss and the dehumanization of social and family relationships in the fight for survival. Mother Courage is not a figure of an ideal migrant but an abstract figure that challenges the audience to critically reflect on the external and internal disasters of aloneness that displaced migrants face.

[50] As a female martyr, Kattrin, functions as an anti-figure to the Junge Gelehrte in Brecht's learning play "Die Massnahme." She acts because of empathy and not because of any allegiance to ideological demands.

[51] Brecht. Bertolt. Poems on the Theatre, trans. by John Berger and Anna Bostock. Suffolk: Scorpion Press, 1967: 10-11.

[52] Brecht and Kushner: 70.

[53] Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang: 1964, 221.

[54] Brecht, quoted in Willett, 220.

[55] Brecht, Bertolt, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Tr. by Tony Kushner, 103.

[56] "Millions on the Move: Refugee Crisis." *International Rescue Committee, Inc.* <https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis>

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