

Acting Edition

Mother Courage and Her Children:

A Chronicle of the 30 Years' War

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I began to translate *MOTHER COURAGE* sitting at Brecht's side while he directed the play in a Munich theatre. I had no script in my hand. I listened to the actors' German and jotted down English equivalents as they came to mind. That was in 1950. It was not until 1955 that I could publish a finished translation, which I did in volume two of my Modern Theatre series. I also included in that volume Paul Dessau's piano-vocal score (songs only) to which my lyrics had been made to fit.

Over the years I have changed that original Bentley Version a number of times at the behest of various publishers and producers, so that, in the end, there were several, if not more, Bentley Versions. Two are in print today. One, published by the Grove Press, is a rather close translation of the complete German text, with lyrics that fit the Dessau score.

The other, published herewith by Samuel French by arrangement with the Grove Press, is a stage version and indeed an adaptation made by me and the composer Darius Milhaud. But I did not fit lyrics to Milhaud music. He set to music freely written lyrics of mine. An adaptation is a new work, after all, and this adaptation, with its additional songs and abundant incidental music, moves the play in the direction of opera. It is hardly an American Musical. It is (German-French-English) musical theater.

—Eric Bentley

September 14, 2009

P.S. If a producer wants to use other than Milhaud music to this adaptation, he or she should consult Samuel French, Inc.

THE CHARACTERS

MOTHER COURAGE
EILIF
SWISS CHEESE } *her sons*
KATTRIN, *her daughter*
RECRUITING OFFICER
SERGEANT
COOK
COMMANDER
CHAPLAIN
ORDNANCE OFFICER
SERGEANT
YVETTE POTTIER
ONE EYE
SOLDIER
COLONEL
CLERK
OLDER SOLDIER
YOUNGER SOLDIER
FIRST SOLDIER
PEASANT
SECOND SOLDIER
PEASANT WOMAN
SOLDIER, *singing*
OLD WOMAN
YOUNG MAN
SOLDIER
LIEUTENANT
OLD PEASANT
FIRST SOLDIER
PEASANT WOMAN
SECOND SOLDIER
YOUNG PEASANT

THE TIME

1624-1636

THE PLACE

Sweden, Poland, Germany

This version of *Mother Courage* is dedicated to
the memory of my friend and collaborator
Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

PROLOGUE.

(The wagon of a vivandière.)

(MOTHER COURAGE sits on the wagon with her daughter KATTRIN. Her sons, EILIF and SWISS CHEESE, pull the wagon and join in the refrains of the song. KATTRIN plays a harmonica.)

Song – The Song Of Mother Courage

MOTHER COURAGE, EILIF, AND SWISS CHEESE. *(singing)*

HERE'S MOTHER COURAGE AND HER WAGON!

HEY, CAPTAIN, LET THEM COME AND BUY!

BEER BY THE KEG! WINE BY THE FLAGON!

LET YOUR MEN DRINK BEFORE THEY DIE!

SABERS AND SWORDS ARE HARD TO SWALLOW:

FIRST YOU MUST GIVE THEM BEER TO DRINK.

THEN THEY CAN FACE WHAT IS TO FOLLOW –

BUT LET 'EM SWIM BEFORE THEY SINK!

CHRISTIANS, AWAKE! THE WINTER'S GONE!

THE SNOWS DEPART, THE DEAD SLEEP ON.

AND THOUGH YOU MAY NOT LONG SURVIVE,

GET OUT OF BED AND LOOK ALIVE!

YOUR MEN WILL MARCH TILL THEY ARE DEAD, SIR,

BUT CANNOT FIGHT UNLESS THEY EAT.

THE BLOOD THEY SPILL FOR YOU IS RED, SIR,

WHAT FIRES THAT BLOOD IS MY RED MEAT.

FOR MEAT AND SOUP AND JAM AND JELLY

IN THIS OLD CART OF MINE ARE FOUND:

SO FILL THE HOLE UP IN YOUR BELLY

BEFORE YOU FILL ONE UNDERGROUND.

CHRISTIANS, AWAKE! THE WINTER'S GONE!

THE SNOWS DEPART, THE DEAD SLEEP ON.

AND THOUGH YOU MAY NOT LONG SURVIVE,

GET OUT OF BED AND LOOK ALIVE!

1.

*(Spring, 1624. In Dalarna, the Swedish king Gustavus is recruiting for the campaign in Poland. The canteen woman Anna Fierling, commonly known as **MOTHER COURAGE**, loses a son.)*

*(Highway outside a town. A **TOP SERGEANT** and a **RECRUITING OFFICER** stand shivering.)*

RECRUITING OFFICER. How the hell can you line up a squadron in *this* place – You know what I keep thinking about, Sergeant? Suicide. I'm supposed to slap four platoons together by the twelfth – four platoons the Chief's asking for! And they're so friendly around here, I'm scared to sleep nights. Suppose I do get my hands on some character and squint at him so I don't notice he's chicken-breasted and has varicose veins. I get him drunk and relaxed, he signs on the dotted line. I pay for the drinks, he steps outside for a minute. I get a hunch I should follow him to the door, and am I right! Off he's shot like a louse from a scratch. You can't take a man's word any more, Sergeant. There's no loyalty left in the world, no trust, no faith, no sense of honor. I'm losing my confidence in mankind, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. What they could use around here is a good war. What else can you expect with peace running wild all over the place? You know what the trouble with peace is? No organization. And when do you get organization? In a war. Peace is one big waste of equipment. Anything goes, no one gives a damn. See the way they eat? Cheese on rye, bacon on the cheese? Disgusting! How many horses they got in this town? How many young men? Nobody knows! They haven't bothered to count 'em! That's peace for you!! I been places where they haven't had a war in seventy years and you know what? The people can't remember their own names! They don't know who they are! It takes a war to fix that. In a war everyone registers, everyone's name's on

a list. Their shoes are stacked, their corn's in the bag, you count it all up – cattle, men, *et cetera* – and you take it away! That's the story: no organization, no war!

RECRUITING OFFICER. It's the God's truth.

SERGEANT. Course, a war's like every real good deal: hard to get going. But when it's on the road, it's a pisser – everybody's scared off peace – like a crap-shooter that keeps fading to cover his loss. Course, *until* it gets going, they're just as scared off war – afraid to try anything new.

RECRUITING OFFICER. Look, a wagon! Two women and a couple of young punks. Stop 'em, Sergeant. And if there's nothing doing this time, you won't catch *me* freezing my ass in the April wind.

(**MOTHER COURAGE** enters on her wagon and with **HER CHILDREN** as in the prologue.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Good day to you, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. (*barring the way*) Good day! Who d'you think you are?

MOTHER COURAGE. Tradespeople.

(*She prepares to go.*)

SERGEANT. Halt! Where are you from, riffraff?

EILIF. Second Protestant Regiment!

SERGEANT. Where are your papers?

MOTHER COURAGE. Papers?

SWISS CHEESE. But this is Mother Courage!

SERGEANT. Never heard of her. Where'd she get a name like that?

MOTHER COURAGE. In Riga.

EILIF & SWISS CHEESE. (*reciting together*) They call her Mother Courage because she drove through the bombardment of Riga with fifty loaves of bread in her wagon!

MOTHER COURAGE; They were going moldy, I couldn't help myself.

SERGEANT. No funny business! Where are your papers?

(**MOTHER COURAGE** rummages among papers in a tin box and clambers down from her wagon.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Here, Sergeant! Here's a whole Bible – I got it in Altötting to wrap my cucumbers in. Here's a map of Moravia – God knows if I'll ever get there. And here's a document saying my horse hasn't got hoof and mouth disease – too bad he died on us, he cost fifteen guilders, thank God I didn't pay it. Is that enough paper?

SERGEANT. Are you making a pass at me? Well, you got another guess coming. You must have a license and you know it.

MOTHER COURAGE. Show a little respect for a lady and don't go telling these grown children of mine I'm making at pass at you. What would I want with you? My license in the Second Protestant Regiment is an honest face – even if *you* wouldn't know how to read it.

RECRUITING OFFICER. Sergeant, we have a case of insubordination on our hands. (*to her:*) Do you know what we need in the army? (**MOTHER COURAGE** starts to answer.) Discipline!

MOTHER COURAGE. I was going to say sausages.

SERGEANT. Name?

MOTHER COURAGE. Anna Fierling.

SERGEANT. So you're all Fierlings.

MOTHER COURAGE. I was talking about me.

SERGEANT. And I was talking about your children.

MOTHER COURAGE. Must they all have the same name?

This boy, for instance, I call him Eilif Noyocki – he got the name from his father who told me he was called Koyocki. Or was it Moyocki? Anyhow, the lad remembers him to this day. Only the man he remembers is someone else, a Frenchman with a pointed beard. But he certainly has his father's brains – that man could whip the pants off a farmer's behind before he could turn around. So we all have our own names.

SERGEANT. You're all called something different?

MOTHER COURAGE. Are you pretending you don't get it?

SERGEANT. (*pointing at SWISS CHEESE*) He's a Chinese, I suppose.

MOTHER COURAGE. Wrong again. A Swiss.

SERGEANT. After the Frenchman?

MOTHER COURAGE. Frenchman? What Frenchman? Don't confuse the issue, Sergeant, or we'll be here all day. He's a Swiss, but he happens to be called Feyos, a name that has nothing to do with his father, who was called something else – a military engineer, if you please, and a drunkard.

(*SWISS CHEESE nods, beaming; even KATTRIN smiles.*)

SERGEANT. Then how come his name's Feyos?

MOTHER COURAGE. Oh, Sergeant, you have no imagination. Of *course* he's called Feyos. When he came, I was with a Hungarian. He didn't mind. He had a floating kidney, though he never touched a drop. He was a very *honest* man. The boy takes after him.

SERGEANT. But that wasn't his father!

MOTHER COURAGE. I said. he took after him. I call him Swiss Cheese. And that is my daughter Kattrин Haupt, she's half German.

SERGEANT. A nice family, I must say!

MOTHER COURAGE. And we've seen the whole wide world together – this wagon-load and me.

SERGEANT. (*writing*) We'll need all that in writing.

RECRUITING OFFICER. (*to EILIF*) So you two are the oxen for the wagon? Do they ever let you out of harness?

EILIF. Mother! May I smack him in the puss?

MOTHER COURAGE. You stay where you are. And now, gentlemen, how about a pair of pistols? Or a belt? Sergeant? Yours is worn clean through.

SERGEANT. It's something else *I'm* looking for. These lads of yours are straight as birch-trees. What are such fine specimens doing out of the army?

MOTHER COURAGE. (*quickly*) The soldier's life is not for sons of mine!

RECRUITING OFFICER. Why not? It means money. It means fame. Peddling shoes is woman's work. (*to EILIF:*) Step this way and let's see if that's muscle or chicken fat.

MOTHER COURAGE. It's chicken fat. Give him a good hard look, and he'll fall right over.

RECRUITING OFFICER. Well, I hope he doesn't fall on me, that's all.

(He tries to hustle EILIF away.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Let him alone! He's not for you!

RECRUITING OFFICER. He called my face a puss. That is an insult. The two of us will now go settle the affair on the field of honor.

EILIF. Don't worry, Mother, I can handle him.

MOTHER COURAGE. Stay here. You're never happy till you're in a fight. (*to the OFFICER:*) He has a knife in his boot and he knows how to use it.

RECRUITING OFFICER. I'll draw it out of him like a milk tooth. (*to EILIF*) Come on, young fellow!

MOTHER COURAGE. Officer, I'll report you to the Colonel, and he'll throw you in jail. His lieutenant is courting my daughter.

SERGEANT. (*to OFFICER:*) Go easy. (*to MOTHER COURAGE:*) What have you got against the service, wasn't his own father a soldier? Didn't you say he died a soldier's death?

MOTHER COURAGE. He's dead all right. But this one's just a baby. You'll lead him like a lamb to the slaughter. I know you. You'll get five guilders for him.

RECRUITING OFFICER (*to EILIF*) First thing you know, you'll have a new cap and high boots, how about it?

EILIF. Not from you, thanks.

MOTHER COURAGE. "Let's you and me go fishing," said the angler to the worm. (*to SWISS CHEESE*) Run and tell everybody they're trying to steal your brother! (*She draws a knife.*) Yes, just you try, and I'll cut you down like dogs! We sell cloth, we sell ham, we are peaceful people!

SERGEANT. You're peaceful all right. Your knife proves that.
Now tell me, how can we have a war without soldiers?

MOTHER COURAGE. Do they have to be mine?

SERGEANT. So that's the trouble! The war should swallow the pits and spit out the peach, huh? Tsk, ts, ts: call yourself Mother Courage and then get scared of the war, your breadwinner? Your sons aren't scared, I know that much.

EILIF. No war can scare me.

SERGEANT. Of course not! Take me. The soldier's life hasn't done *me* any harm, has it? I enlisted at seventeen.

MOTHER COURAGE. You haven't reached seventy.

SERGEANT. I will, though.

MOTHER COURAGE. Above ground?

SERGEANT. Are you trying to rile me, telling me I'll die?

MOTHER COURAGE. Suppose it's the truth? Suppose I see it's your fate? Suppose I *know* you're just a corpse on furlough?

SWISS CHEESE. She can look into the future. Everyone says so.

RECRUITING OFFICER. Then by all means look into the Sergeant's future. It might amuse him.

SERGEANT. I don't believe in that stuff.

MOTHER COURAGE. (*obeying the OFFICER*) Helmet!

(**SERGEANT** gives her his helmet.)

SERGEANT. Anything for a laugh.

(**MOTHER COURAGE** takes a sheet of parchment and tears it in two.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Eilif, Swiss Cheese, Katrin! So shall we all be torn asunder if we let ourselves get too deep into this war! (*to the SERGEANT:*) I'll give you the bargain rate, and do it for free. Watch! Death is black, so I draw a black cross.

SWISS CHEESE. (*pointing to the second piece of parchment*) And the other she leaves blank, see?

MOTHER COURAGE. I fold them, put them in the helmet, and mix 'em up, the way we're all mixed up from our mother's womb on. Now draw!

RECRUITING OFFICER. (to **EILIF**) I don't take just anybody. I'm choosy. And you've got guts, I like that.

SERGEANT. (*after hesitating, fishes around in the helmet*) It's a lot of crap!

SWISS CHEESE. (*watching over his shoulder*) The black cross! Oh, his number's up!

SERGEANT. (*hoarsely*) You cheated me!

MOTHER COURAGE. You cheated yourself the day you enlisted. And now we must drive on. There isn't a war every day in the week.

SERGEANT. Hell, you're not getting away with this! We're taking that bastard of yours with *us*!

EILIF. I'd like that, mother.

MOTHER COURAGE. Quiet – you Finnish devil, you!

EILIF. And Swiss Cheese wants to be a soldier, too.

MOTHER COURAGE. That's news to me. I see I'll have to draw lots for all three of you. (*She goes to one side to do this.*)

RECRUITING OFFICER. (to **EILIF**;) People've been saying the Swedish soldier is religious. That kind of loose talk has hurt us a lot. One verse of a hymn every Sunday – and then only if you have a voice...

(**MOTHER COURAGE** returns with the slips and puts them in the **SERGEANT**'s helmet.)

MOTHER COURAGE. So they'd desert their old mother, would they, the rascals? They take to war like a cat to cream! Well, there's yours, Eilif, my boy! (*As EILIF takes the slip, she snatches it and holds it up.*) See? A cross!

RECRUITING OFFICER. (to **EILIF**) If you're going to wet your pants, I'll try your kid brother.

MOTHER COURAGE. Take yours, Swiss Cheese. You should be a better bet – you're my *good* boy. (**SWISS CHEESE** draws.) Don't tell me it's a cross? Is there no saving you either? Just look, Sergeant – a black cross!

SERGEANT. What I don't see is why *I* got one: I always stay well in the rear. *(to the OFFICER)* It can't be a trick: it gets her own children.

MOTHER COURAGE. *(to KATTRIN)* Now all I have left is you. You're a cross in yourself but you have a kind heart. *(She holds the helmet up but takes the slip herself.)* Oh dear, there must be some mistake! Don't be too kind, Kattrin, don't be too kind – there's a black cross in your path! So now you all know: be careful! Be very careful! **(MOTHER COURAGE climbs on her wagon preparing to leave.)**

RECRUITING OFFICER. *(to SERGEANT)* Do something!

SERGEANT. I don't feel too good.

RECRUITING OFFICER. Try doing business with her! *(in a loud voice)* That belt, Sergeant, you could at least take a look at it! Hey, you, the Sergeant will take the belt!

MOTHER COURAGE. Half a guilder. Worth four times the price.

SERGEANT. It's not even a new one. But there's too much wind here. I'll go look at it behind the wagon.

MOTHER COURAGE. It doesn't seem windy to me.

SERGEANT. Maybe it's worth half a guilder at that. There's silver on it.

MOTHER COURAGE. *(now following him eagerly behind the wagon)* A solid six ounces worth!

RECRUITING OFFICER. *(to EILIF)* I can let you have some cash in advance, how about it?

(EIFIL hesitates. MOTHER COURAGE is behind the wagon.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Half a guilder then. Quick.

SERGEANT. I still don't see why *I* had to draw a cross. As I told you, I always stay in the rear – it's the only place that's safe. You've ruined my afternoon, Mother Courage.

MOTHER COURAGE. You mustn't say so. Here. Take a shot of brandy. *(He does.)* And go right on staying in the rear. Half a guilder.

(The RECRUITING OFFICER has taken EILIF by the arm and drawn him away.)

RECRUITING OFFICER. Ten guilders in advance, and you're a soldier of the king! The women'll be crazy about you, and you can smack me in the puss because I insulted you!

(They leave. KATTRIN makes harsh noises.)

MOTHER COURAGE. Coming Kattrin, coming! The Sergeant's just paying his bill. *(She bites the half guilder.)* All money is suspect, Sergeant, but your half guilder is good. Let's go. Where's Eilif?

SWISS CHEESE. Gone with the recruiting officer.

(pause)

MOTHER COURAGE. Oh, you simpleton! *(to KATTRIN)* You can't speak. You *couldn't* tell me.

SERGEANT. That's life, Mother Courage. Take a shot yourself.

MOTHER COURAGE. You must help your brother now, Kattrin.

(BROTHER AND SISTER get into harness together and pull the wagon. They all move off.)

SERGEANT. *(looking after them)*

When a war gives you all you earn
One day it may claim something in return!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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