

DRAMA

The statement 'There are no heroes in Brecht' is true to some extent. This is evident through my study of the two plays 'Mother Courage and her children' as well as 'Three Penny Opera'. These two plays depict the hardships that people go through and are both set in older contexts. Brecht has alienated his audience effectively for the purpose of giving them insight into the corruption of society and the values of society. It is through this that we are able to see the true heroes of the plays as well as the corrupt members of society who appear to be heroes but who are falsely judged so by society.

'Mother Courage and Her Children' is about a woman and her family who live off the war by selling the soldiers drink and items of clothing. Characters such as Mother Courage and her son Eilif appear to be heroes through society's eyes when in fact they are the opposite. The name 'Mother Courage' is ironic as the actual person does not have courage and is in fact a hypocrite who puts her children in danger for the sake of making a living for herself. This is illustrated when the Sergeant says "Oh, you'd like the war to eat the pips but spit out the apple? It's to fatten up your kids, but you won't invest in it". He then goes on to say "Want to live off the war, but keep yourself and family out of it, eh?" This is significant because before this statement the audience viewed Mother Courage as a victim of the war, trying to feed her family. However it is through this and Brecht's alienation of the audience that we are able to recognise Mother Courage (Anna Flerling) as a character who isn't strong enough to provide for herself and her family by other means. In the beginning of the first scene, Courage predicts doom for her whole family in her pantomime of fortune telling. As the play goes on, this begins to come true however she does not learn from her mistakes and continues to live off the war. Consequently, her children die yet she fails to learn the lesson that if you try to do business with the army, you eventually lose everything.

Another character of 'Mother Courage and Her Children' that appears to be a hero but in fact isn't, is Mother Courage's son Eilif. Eilif is a soldier of the war whose status is lifted due to him killing many peasants. Although this appears as if he has been courageous and is a hero of the war, he is the opposite. The reason for this is because in reality he is not killing peasants for the common good, as they are poor and harmless people. Brecht places Eilif further away from the status of a 'hero' through the scene where Eilif kills peasants during the peacetime. The lesson of eventually losing everything when doing business with the army is highlighted here. As the audience, Brecht has deliberately prevented us from feeling sympathy for the peasants in order to realise his true intent behind the play. These questions of the morals of society that the audience asks themselves occur through Brecht's use of didacticism.

The heroes of the play are actually those who play the smallest role until the end. The first example is of 'Swiss Cheese', who is the only honest character of the play. However, he is forced to lie in scene three and dies as a result. This is Brecht's ironic commentary on the value of great virtues; Swiss Cheese is a martyr yet his great virtues got him killed, thereby undermining what he stands for.

Katrin is another idealist and martyr of the play. Through her and Swiss Cheese, Brecht makes the statement that you either capitulate or you die. Brecht is in many ways telling the audience that Katrin represents the ideal person; she is what we should all strive to be. However, in typical Brecht style, she is unable to succeed in the harsh world that fails to thank her for saving lines. This is shown through our workshop of scene nine where Katrin slowly breaks out of the manacles. The manacle of the transformation is seen on stage when we exaggerated her height by putting her up on the blocks. What we showed was a child-like character contesting every instruction to her.

Furthermore, it is through these two characters that Brecht shows the audience how if everyone acted in the same manner as them, the world would be a much better place. Therefore, the statement 'There are no heroes in Brecht' is in fact only true to some extent. This is illustrated

through the contrast of the characters Mother Courage and Eilif to the characters of Swiss Cheese and Katrin. It is also illustrated through the use of our group workshop of scene nine, clearly defining Katrin as the hero of the play.