

**A MARXIST CRITICISM OF THE BRECHTIAN
DRAMA IN BERTOLT BRECHT'S PLAYS,
MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN
AND
*THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN***

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For all those who struggle for change.

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The advanced study in the English Language and Literature graduate program of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

i) Research Methods course during the undergraduate and graduate programs.

ii) English literature as well as American literature including novel, poetry and drama studies, a comparative approach to world literatures, and examination of several literary theories as well as critical approaches which have contributed to this thesis in an effective way.

3. This thesis is composed of the main sources including several books by the major authors discussed in comparison; and the secondary sources including scholarly articles from academic journals concerning Marxist Literary Criticism.

Zeynep KOPAN

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ABSTRACT

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A MARXIST CRITICISM OF THE BRECHTIAN DRAMA IN BERTOLT BRECHT'S PLAYS, *MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN AND THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN*

The aim of this thesis is to examine the struggle for social and economic survival in class divided societies as reflected through the characters of Mother Courage and Shen Te in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Setzuan*. Both of these plays are good samples of epic theatre and might be analysed from Marxist point of view. To do so, the thesis consists of four parts after an introduction. The first chapter discusses the major principles of Marxist literary criticism and the key concepts and devices of epic dram. The second chapter analyses Mother Courage's social and economic struggles in order to exist in a capitalist society under war conditions in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. The third chapter discusses Shen Te's fight for survival against the capitalist world in which she lives in *The Good Person of Setzuan*. The fourth chapter includes a comparison of *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Setzuan* signifying the similarities between these two plays. The thesis concludes with the summary of main arguments. All in all, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The*

Good Person of Setzuan is regarded as the embodiment of the fundamentals of Marxist literary criticism and of the characteristics of epic theatre.

Key words:

Bertolt Brecht, Social and Economic Struggle, Marxism, Motherhood, Class

Conflict, Capitalism, Alienation.

KISA ÖZET

Zeynep KOPAN

Ekim 2010

BERTOLT BRECHT' N *CESARET ANA VE ÇOCUKLARI* VE *SEZUAN'IN Y İ NSANI OYUNLARINDAKİ BRECHTYAN* DRAMASININ MARKSİST ELE T R S

Bu tezin amacı, Bertolt Brecht'in *Cesaret Ana ve Çocukları* ile *Sezuan'ın yi nsanı* oyunlarındaki, sınıfla bölünmüş toplumlarda *Cesaret Ana* ve *Shen Te* karakterleri yoluyla yansıtılan sosyal ve ekonomik hayatta kalma mücadelelerini incelemektir. Tez, giriş kısmını takiben dört bölüme ayrılmıştır. Birinci bölüm, Marksist edebiyat kuramının temel ilkeleri ile epik tiyatroyun önemli kavramlarını ve tekniklerini tartışmaktadır. İkinci bölüm, *Cesaret Ana ve Çocukları* oyunundaki *Cesaret Ana*'nın kapitalist bir toplumda, sava koşulları altında var olabilmek için sürdürdüğü sosyal ve ekonomik mücadelesini açıklamaktadır. Üçüncü bölüm, *Sezuan'ın yi nsanı* oyunundaki *Shen Te*'nin hayatta kalabilmek için, yaşadığı kapitalist topluma karşı hayatta kalma kavgasını anlatmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm, *Cesaret Ana ve Çocukları* ile *Sezuan'ın yi nsanı* oyunları arasındaki benzerlikleri ortaya çıkaran bir karşılaştırma içermektedir. Tez, temel argümanların özetiyle sonuçlanmaktadır. Bir bütün olarak ele alındığında, *Cesaret Ana ve Çocukları* ile

Sezuan'ın yi nsanı, Marxist edebiyat kuramı esaslarının ve epik tiyatro özelliklerinin somutlaşması olarak kabul edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Bertolt Brecht, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Mücadele, Marksizm, Analık, Sınıf

Çatışması, Kapitalizm, Yabancılaşma.

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INTRODUCTION

Bertolt Brecht is an outstanding dramatist of the twentieth century because of his unique style of plays in the modern drama. Therefore, Brecht's works have been translated into many languages. Moreover, the studies on Bertolt Brecht have been continuing to be made by the international range of literary critics and his plays have still been being staged by the drama practitioners of various theatres all over the world. Brecht has always known as a popular contemporary playwright because of his vast and promising sphere of art. His fame is based on bilateral reasons. Initially, he is famous for his dramaturgy and then for his ideology. He has been regarded as the father of epic drama and also known as a devoted Marxist by a great many of drama critics. He combined his theory of Marxism and his practice of epic theatre in one and exemplified these theories and practices in his plays. Thus, he used his theatre as a place both to oppose the conventional techniques of dramatic theatre by applying the devices of epic drama and to proclaim his political struggle by reflecting his Marxist ideology in his work of art. In other words, Brecht's uniqueness stems from his use of theatre in the light of Epic drama and Marxism.

Brecht's intellect, imagination, philosophical ideas, artistic mastery, and social perspective distinguish his work and his life. Thus, Bertolt Brecht's innovations, theories, practices, and personality were so impressive in his time, that the term 'Brechtian' has come to be used by drama critics and practitioners. For Brecht, his theatre stands for a discussion room where the readers and the audiences are invited to think, question and criticize the play instead of involving into the action of the play or identifying the emotions of the characters in traditional sense. According to John Willett, "Brecht believed in a new age, an age of new ideas and

technologies when everything would be subject of the change and nothing would be left unquestioned, an age of productive doubt” (Willett 225). Thus, the purpose of his theatre is to change the thoughts of the viewers by encouraging them to consider on the play plied with the arguments rather than simply accepting them as they are. Thus, he created a dramatic form called epic drama in which the audiences’ critical responses and ideas are truly important rather their involvement, identification, and empathy of emotions.

Brecht’s epic theatre is also called as experimental, non-Aristotelian and dialectical drama in which didactic inferences, arguments, decisions, and ideas have a vital significance. Brecht’s aim of using epic drama is to change the world. Thus, Brecht opposed the traditional forms of dramatic theatre; and adopted the methods of epic theatre in his plays. Hugh Rorrison argues that,

For Brecht the traditional or dramatic theatre was a place where the audience were absorbed into a comforting illusion which played on their emotions and left them drained, but with a sense of satisfaction which predisposed them to accept the world as they found it. What he himself was looking for was a theatre that would help to change the world (xxviii).

It is clearly obvious above that dramatic theatre greatly differs from epic theatre. Thus, Brecht appropriated to the fundamentals of epic theatre in his plays.

According to Brecht, the theatre is to be a didactic theatre and the function of the drama should involve a critique of life. Thus, epic theatre is also a didactic theater giving didactic lessons through the critique of life. Epic drama enables the viewers to meditate about the arguments of the play and to make decisions about the

plot, characters, setting, atmosphere, symbols and motifs of the play. Thus, “Brecht tended to use characters and events set in more geographically and historically removed contexts so as to encourage comparative and problem-solving responses” (Mumford 23). Brecht’s epic drama also aims to alienate the readers and audiences from the play, so as to turn them into the critical observers by arousing their thinking faculties. To do so, there are some key concepts, techniques and devices used in epic drama such as episodic structure, alienation, Gestus, the use of songs as opposed to the devices of dramatic theatre. The aim of all Brechtian devices in his plays is to stimulate the viewers of his plays to become active observers rather than passive watchers. Brecht’s plays are the embodiments of epic drama signifying the epic characteristics.

Right along with Brecht’s use of epic drama, he also attributed to Marxism. Sara Lennox states that, “Brecht is generally considered by the Left as the single writer whose works can be regarded from the standpoint of both form and content, as authentically Marxist” (83). Brecht used his theatre as a tool for political instruction. As Peter Brooker suggests that, “The most consistent theoretical source for Brecht’s political/artistic project was accordingly Marxism, as is well known” (210). Although Brecht’s plays might be discussed from every conceivable point of view, Marxist literary criticism is one of the most popular approaches to Brecht’s drama which exceptionally paves the way for the new means of understanding about political events. Marxist criticism of his plays provides the readers and audiences to understand and interpret historical, economical and social events; and allows a critical interpretation of history, economy and society. Moreover, the purpose of Brecht’s drama is to politically examine the society and its working elements like the

class structure and socioeconomic structure. As Meg Mumford argues that, “Brecht remained committed to Marx’s idea that, through class struggle, the oppressive, capitalist mode of production, could and would be replaced” (28). Thus, Marxist literary theory appears as a meaningful way for analyzing and criticizing Brecht’s plays.

Few works in modern drama are more widely read or more often cited than Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. These two plays share some commonalities in terms of form and content. First and foremost, both of the plays all provide a synthesis between the techniques of epic drama and the fundamentals of Marxist literary criticism. The plays all shed valuable insights to the viewers of the plays about the form and the content. Moreover, two of the plays enable one to think about the subject of change through a constant dialectic. Thus, they are all considered as epic plays by the theatre practitioners; and they are all regarded as an appropriate place of study for Marxist literary theory by the literary critics. Examining the chronology of his plays, one can observe that Bertolt Brecht wrote *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* during his exile both of which are good examples of epic drama and might be examined from Marxist point of view.

Mother Courage and Her Children is one of Bertolt Brecht’s epic plays written in 1939 and can be discussed from Marxist point of view. It is the story of Anna Fierling with her three children, Swiss Cheese, Eilif, and Katrin. It is a chronicle play of the Thirty Years Wars. It is set in Sweden, Poland, and Germany between 1624 and 1636. Mother Courage, who owns a travelling canteen wagon and makes her living from the troops, loses her three children by the end of the play. Eilif

dies for bravery, Swiss Cheese for his honesty and Kattrin for her kindness during the Thirty Years Wars. Throughout her personal tragedies, Courage's main concern is to go on with her business. By the end of the play, she is left alone with her wagon, old and miserable but still determined to get her wagon. She represents a class, in Marxist terms, the Petite Bourgeoisie, who are higher than the Proletariat, but identifies with the interests of the ruling classes. Mother Courage also accepts the power of the generals in the war. She has a commercial mind rather than a maternal one with her true interests, business and profits. Brecht demonstrates the destruction of war and a critique of capitalism through *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Written in 1941 by Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is also an epic play which might be analyzed from Marxist approach of criticism. It is the story of a good-hearted prostitute who must live in the guise of her male cousin to survive in her society. It is a parable play which is set in a province of China, Setzuan. In order to justify their existence, the Gods have to produce a good person and they choose Shen Te. Although Shen Te is a poor prostitute, she sets up a tobacconist's shop with the Gods' gift of one thousand silver dollars, and the Gods watch her progress throughout the play. Shen Te understands that she cannot remain good and survive as being good by the end of the play, because most of the characters of the play take advantage of her and use her goodness and generosity to better their situations. Shen Te disguises herself as a man, her cousin who has the necessary ruthlessness to put order in her affairs. She thus changes her female identity into the male one. At the end of the play, the Gods remain ignorant to Shen Te's situation and her cries and return to heaven leaving Shen Te's problem unsolved. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* implies that economic systems determine a society's morality.

Brecht examines how to be good in an imperfect, corrupt, wicked and class-divided society in the play.

Bearing all these explanations in mind, the major aim of this thesis is to investigate social and economic roles and functions of women in their class divided societies in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. These two plays offer some common characteristics. First, protagonists of the plays are female whose struggles are determined by their socioeconomic conditions. As Claudette Sartiliot points out that, "Brecht presents characters who cannot appear unified since they are constituted by outside forces and as such, reflect social and political contradictions" (132). Secondly, these plays examine the individuals' external circumstances such as the issues of capitalism, socioeconomic circumstances of society, and class conflict rather than the individuals' inner conflicts and crises. Moreover, the plays also show how peasants and lower class citizens could be used as instruments for the needs of the Bourgeois class by exposing the commercial aspects of life through individuals are often taken advantage of. Similarly, "Brecht's epic theater focuses on the social circumstances that make up the individual as representative of other members of the same class." (Sartiliot 131). Thirdly, through these two plays, Brecht also wants his readers and audiences to critically judge the series of events and characters, and contradictions in his plays. For example, "In the case of *Mother Courage*, it is life itself and History which passes the judgment and abandons her to the hallow business of a lonely old age...and *The Good Person* the act of judgment is placed on stage: ...in the presumed reliability of the gods who come to earth to find the 'one good person'"

(Jameson 119). These three characteristics reinforce the idea behind the major aim of the thesis.

Right along with this main aim, the subsidiary aim of the thesis is to analyze how *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are depicted as the signifiers of Brecht's theories and political ideology in terms of Epic drama and Marxism. Thus, the concern of the thesis is to cite enough relevant examples that illustrate how Epic drama and Marxist criticism are embodied in Brecht's plays.

In accordance with the major and subsidiary aim, this thesis will be divided into four chapters. In the first chapter of this thesis, Marxist literary theory and Epic drama will be explored through some definitions and clarifications. This chapter will show the way to the other chapters through its assumptions and explanations about Marxism and Epic drama. In this context, some basic premises of Marxist literary theory such as class, capitalism, base and superstructure, alienation and historization will cover this chapter. Additionally, some key concepts, terms and devices of Epic drama such as episodic structure, alienation effect and historical situation will be suggested in this chapter.

After these concise explanations of the first chapter about Brecht's theory and practice, Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* will be discussed in terms of Marxist literary theory in the second chapter of the thesis. In doing so, Mother Courage's struggle for social survival will be argued in terms of Mother Courage's sense of motherhood, love, marriage, femininity and virtues. Moreover, war as business, the relationship between war and capitalism and class conflict between the

Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat will involve in this chapter under the title of Mother Courage's struggle economic survival.

The third chapter will analyze Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* for the purposes of Marxist criticism. On the one hand, Shen Te's struggles for social survival will be examined in terms of Shen Te's virtues, femininity, motherhood, love and marriage. On the other hand, the factors of Shen Te's struggle for economic survival such as her business tools, business relations and economic circumstances of her society will be included in this chapter.

The fourth chapter of thesis will contain a comparison of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in view of both form and content. In this way, *Mother Courage and Her Children* will be compared to *The Good Woman of Setzuan* identifying similarities in the protagonist of the characters, the struggle for social and economic survival of the plays.

All these considered, in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Bertolt Brecht signifies a continuous struggle for social and economic survival in class divided societies as reflected through the characters of Mother Courage and Shen Te. Consequently, the conclusion chapter will consist of a summary of the main arguments of the thesis.

CHAPTER 1

MARXIST LITERARY THEORY AND EPIC DRAMA

Literary criticism of Bertolt Brecht has assumed various perspectives in the twenty first century. Brecht still informs the literary critics from each paradigm of thought by allowing them inspiration to write critiques and commentaries; and theater practitioners from different theoretical areas to produce original plays and performances. Thus, there are a number of interpretations of Brechtian Drama both literally and theatrically in the modern world of critical approaches. Of all these interpretations, Marxist literary theory and Epic drama propose one a critical insight for understanding of Bertolt Brecht's plays

The standpoint of Bertolt Brecht has usually been considered as Marxism. Brecht's plays offer a great deal of contribution for the improvement of Marxist thought through his doctrines and writings in literary studies. On the other hand, even though most of the critics suggests that "Marxism has consequently come under fresh suspicion" (Brooker 211), it is still one of the valid tools for reading, understanding and annotating of Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgy. Furthermore, another valid tool for understanding and interpreting Bertolt Brecht's dramatic form has often been known as Epic drama. Brecht has made an enormous contribution for the development of Epic drama through his techniques and practices in modern drama. Thus, Brecht is regarded as being committed to Marxism and as the father and developer of Epic drama.

Marxist literary theory and Epic drama are the main foundations of Brechtian theatre and are the motives behind Bertolt Brecht's idiosyncratic and distinct style of

drama. Brecht's theory of Marxism and practice of Epic drama are complementary of each other. "Theory and practice and art and politics were therefore combined in Brecht's commitment to dialectics and to material change" (Brooker 210). Thus, before analyzing Brecht's plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, one is invited to look through the basic elements of Marxist literary criticism and the key devices of Epic drama.

These two foundations, Marxist literary theory and Epic drama make Brecht's plays unique and original. In order to clarify and examine these viewpoints, this first chapter is divided into two sections. Initially, the nature and scope of Marxist literary criticism will be demonstrated in the first section. Then, the major devices of Epic drama used in Brecht's plays will be explored in the second section. This chapter will allow some definitions and clarifications about Marxist literary theory and Epic drama and their relation of one another by removing ambiguities and contradictions behind the theory and the practice. Thus, this chapter might be understood as a guide to other chapter of the thesis.

1.1. The Basic Premises of Marxist Literary Theory

Derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism is a philosophical, political, economical and sociological way of thinking depended on the critique of capitalism, the abolition of classes, the proletarian revolution, and the dialectical and materialist analysis of history. As for Marxist literary criticism is a way of critical approach to literature based on the philosophy of Marxism. As Terry Eagleton suggests that,

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history (Eagleton 3).

As Eagleton explains above, a literary work is a product of historical conditions and Marxist literary criticism seeks to analyze a literary work in terms of form and content considering the historical factors which produce it. Moreover, Marxist criticism gives a clear account of historical and material situations of the characters, socioeconomic struggles of the community, class structures of a society, a critique of capitalism in a literary work. Furthermore, Marxist criticism uses some terminology through some basic premises such as the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, class conflict, capitalism, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation, alienation, and ideology. These concepts are the primary aspects which Marxist literary criticism aims to examine in a work of literature.

Marxism is a comprehensive way of thinking to vital receptions of literature. However, it is mostly regarded as a political ideology or economic system of thought. Marxism is not a new approach to analyze the literary works but has always remained as a leading and inspiring way of perspective to criticize the works of literature. Thus, Marxism has a long history. According to Drew Milne, "Marxism has also been at the centre of debates in literary theory for almost a century. It offers sustained and differentiated engagements with literature, and that against which most other forms of literary theory have defined themselves" (17). Despite the long history

of Marxism and its involvement in the literary studies, reading and understanding of Marxism is not an easy job. Since there are various interpretations of Marxist thought, Marxism is a complicated subject to study. Besides, there is a large range of thinkers, authors and critics from Marx and Engels to the present whose views and analysis might be changeable and sometimes oppositional to each other. As Arthur Asa Berger stresses that, “Marxism is not monolithic, and neither is Marxist criticism. There are a number of different schools of Marxist critics” (41).

The variety and diversity of Marxism cause both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, Marxism enables one comprehensive theoretical assumptions for seeking the meaning behind a literary work through a dialectical way of seeing and thinking rather than the dogmatic point of views. On the other hand, Marxism provides abundant way of perceptions causing misinterpretations and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, “Marxism still informs the work and dominates the thinking of large numbers of cultural critics” (Berger 41). All in all, Marxist critical theory provides the theoretical basis for a dialectical criticism of literature. This is also true for Brecht’s plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Similarly, Lois Tyson also points out that, “Marxist theory would still give us a meaningful way to understand history and current events” (53). Marxism aims to investigate a literary work historically, dialectically, critically in terms of form, content, style and meaning.

Marxism emerged in the nineteenth century and developed in the twentieth and twenty first century. Marxist tradition begins with the doctrines of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and reaches to the present with changes and developments through different interpretations of Lenin, Trotsky, Benjamin, Brecht, Barthes,

Lukacs, Gramsci, Adorno, Goldman, Althusser, Macherey, Eagleton, Williams and Jameson. All of these writers and critics have greatly had a great impact on modern thinking and contributed a lot for the development of Marxism and other critical approaches to literature. These notable figures not only raise permanent questions about the role of literature in politics and society, but also set forth their ideas about the subjects of literary works. This effect of Marxism in modern thinking is so enormous that other critical theories are greatly influenced by the idea of Marxism. Milne proposes that, “From the 1930s onwards, traditions of thought associated with existentialism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism, post-structuralism, and postcolonial theory have all developed through critical dialogues with Marxism” (17). Thus, Marxism is interactive and relational with other forms of thinking with its scope and principles.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels is the originating point of the Marxist approach for the development of Marxist literary criticism. There are two statements coined by Marx and Engels : the first one is, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx 626) and the second one is, “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx 47). Both of the statements are essentially similar, but underlie Marxist thought.

Two of the statements are specifically important and heavily influential in the Marxist philosophy. These statements assert that there is a close connection between the social existence and relations of people and material conditions which the people produce. A person’s way of thinking is shaped by the social and economic conditions of his or her society. Moreover, all of the systems, ideological institutions, and

cultural understandings are the products of social and economic circumstances. Consciousness is the reflection of historical and material conditions of a society. These two statements of Marx have greatly contributed to modern thinking and literature. Most of thinkers, writers and critics of the twentieth century have used and developed this means of consciousness in their work of art. For example, According to Etienne Baribar and Pierre Macherey,

Literature is not fiction, a fictive image of the real, because it cannot define itself simply as a figuration, an appearance of reality. Literature is the production, by a complex process, of a certain reality – not indeed an autonomous reality, but a material reality – and of a certain social effect (Baribar and Macherey 46).

Thus, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels might be considered as influential theorists trying to deconstruct the traditional idea of consciousness and to give inspirations to the other theorists for developing their theories by taking his propositions into consideration.

Right along with these two statements of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, there are some primary aspects of Marxist literary criticism which are developed by the Marxist theorists, writers and critics. These primary aspects might be summarized as class conflict, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation, alienation and capitalism.

Class conflict is one of the key concepts in Marxist thought. There are socioeconomic classes within society and there is a constant struggle between the classes in the human history from past to present according to Marxism. In order to understand class conflict, one can recognize the definition of class. As Berger

underlines that, “Class refers to categories based on the economic resources of different groups of people in a given society, and the social and cultural arrangements that stem from this division” (Berger 47). Put another way, class is socioeconomic structure determined by historical and material circumstances of different segments in a society. Moreover, class means the division of the society into the groups based on wealth.

The divisions within the society and the differentiations between the classes results with a conflict and even an antagonism because of the inequalities, discriminations and inconsistencies in the society. Thus, the term of class conflict arises. Class division causes much more problems within the society than any other divisions such as gender, race, or religion. Similarly, “From a Marxist perspective, differences in socioeconomic class divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender” (Tyson 54). The reason behind class struggle is based on the differences in socioeconomic situations of people. People are classified according to their economic status-quo as lower, middle or upper classes. As a result of this, the conflicts, differentiations, antagonism arise within the society in various forms. It is the critic’s job to signify these class conflicts and crisis resulting from the classes in a literary work.

The Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat are also central elements in Marxist Literary theory. These terms are also the names of classes within the society. The society is divided into three socioeconomic classes; The Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. The Bourgeoisie is a social class belonging “...the members of society who own and control the mode of production—the property-owning class—...” (Berger 46); the Proletariat is formed

“...by the workers who own relatively little...” (Berger 46); The Petit-Bourgeoisie is also a social class between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie and the members of middle class “...who help the Bourgeoisie maintain its control of the economy and of society” depend upon self-employed labour and small productive property ownership (Berger 46). Additionally, the Petite-Bourgeoisie is a class between The Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. Similarly, Roland Barthes argues that,

Between exploiters and exploited, there is an intermediate class of “agents.” These agents (the word is intentionally ambiguous, at once passive and active) combine a double alienation: that of the slave (they are objectively the “little men”), and that of the master (they exercise the master’s power over those who are smaller than they) (Barthes 45).

Thus, the members of the Petit-Bourgeoisie might be called as slave-masters. The bourgeoisie has a dominant, an oppressive and a superior power and control over the members of the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat in all modes of production.

Social and economic differences determine one’s socioeconomic class. The differentiations of the classes as The Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat considerably influence the members of the society in terms of their way of living and thinking. There has always been a conflict between the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat because of unequal distribution of property in a society. Moreover, although the proletariat has a powerful majority in population, and in labor, the bourgeoisie has all the control and keeps its power. “The bourgeoisie not only owns most of the property in a given society, it also controls the ideas of the proletariat” (Berger 46). Thus, analyzing the problems of the

Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat in a literary work is a major concern of Marxism. A critic's job is to identify these class differences and problems within the society in a work of art.

The Base and the Superstructure are also one of the major aspects of Marxist literary criticism. The Base is a term concerning the social and economic tools and relations and the Superstructure is a term dealing with the dominant ideologies and institutions in the society. In other words, while the Base is related to the means of production and relations of production in the society, the Superstructure refers the social, economic and political institutions in the society. "In Marxist thought, the base shapes the superstructure. The Base does not determine the superstructure." (Berger 42). Put another way, the system of social and economic relations does not determine the politics and ideologies of the society, but forms ideology and politics. Similarly, "In one account, Marx described this view in terms of an architectural metaphor: the 'superstructure' (ideology, politics) rests upon the 'base' (socio-economic relations)" (Selden 89). Social and economic histories of men depend on the dominant ideologies and politics. Thus, the connection between the Base and the Superstructure results with a conflict. Thus, exploring this conflict between the base and the superstructure is significant in a literary work.

Historical situation is a predominant issue of Marxist literary criticism. Historical situation simply means material relations of men within the society both socially and economically. As Eagleton points out, "Marxist criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions which produce it; and it needs, similarly, to be aware of its own historical conditions" (vi). In order to comprehend works of art, one has to enter the world of a literary work in terms of historical,

economical and sociological conditions. Similarly, "...neither human events...nor human productions can be understood without understanding the specific material/historical circumstances in which those events and productions occur" (Tyson 54). All of the economic, social, political and ideological conditions of men create historical situation; and the series of events and socioeconomic circumstances cannot be understood without understanding historical situation in a literary work. A Marxist critic, Lucien Goldman argues that there is a close relationship between a literary work and history, itself. According to Terry Eagleton,

What Goldman is seeking, then, is a set of structural relations between literary text, world vision itself. He wants to show how the historical situation of a social group or class is transposed, by the meditation of its world vision, into the structure of a literary work (33).

Historical materialist investigation of events and characters is also important to consider the ways of class divisions within a society. Thus, the historical context entirely gives a clear account of analysis of a literary work.

Alienation is also a key term of Marxism. The word alienation comes from, "...the word, alien is the root of the term. An alien is a stranger, a person with no ties (liens, lines, connections) with others" (Berger 50). Alienation means estrangement, distanciation or defamiliarization. In Marxian terms, Alienation is defined in *MIA: Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of Terms* as "the process whereby people become foreign to the world they are living in". The Bourgeoisie is alienated from the Proletariat who is alienated from social and economic existence. According to Berger, "But the poor are also victims of alienation; they are alienated from their work, experience themselves only as commodities, suffer grievously, both physically

and psychologically” (Berger 50). Alienation stems from the socioeconomic structures within the society, the division of classes, and capitalism. Similarly, “Marx believed that capitalism generates alienation in all sections of society, so even the wealthy are not immune to it” (Berger 50). By means of sections of society, Berger addresses the social classes, economic structures, dominant ideologies and socioeconomic relations of the individuals within the society. Thus, seeking alienation in a work of art is crucial in Marxist literary theory.

A critique of capitalism is one of the major goals of Marxist literary criticism in a work of art. Capitalism system appears as the source of all evils and Marxism aims to abolish capitalism. According to *MIA: Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of Terms* “The socio-economic system where social relations are based on commodities for exchange, in particular private ownership of the means of production and on the exploitation of wage labour”. Capitalism poses imbalances, inequalities, problems and alienation to the individuals and groups of the society. As Alison M. Jaggar argues that,

Capitalism seriously impedes human self-realization and the full flowering of human potentiality; however these notoriously vague phrases are interpreted. Moreover, the capitalist organization the production obscures the ways in which the members of a society are interdependent; it sets individuals in competition with each other so that they learn to be one another as potential enemies and are unable to perceive their mutual dependence and the interests they have in common. They conceive of themselves isolated individuals, alienated

from each other, rather than as beings who are necessarily social
(Jaggar 58)

In other words, capitalism causes a clash between base and superstructure, the conflicts between the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, and the struggles within the classes. Thus, a critique of capitalism in a work of art is one of the key concerns of Marxist literary criticism.

All of these primary aspects are the basis of Marxist literary criticism. In order to criticize Brecht and his plays, one has to bear these key concepts and terms in mind. Criticism of a literary work without an analysis of class conflict, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation and capitalism would be an incomplete criticism in terms of Marxism. Thus, these principles are important in order to answer all of the questions of a literary work and to examine a literary work critically.

1.2. The Key Techniques of Epic Drama

Epic drama is a dramaturgical structure emerged in the twentieth century which is based on the theatrical innovations of Piscator, Mayakovsky, Meyerhold and Brecht. Epic drama is developed by the doctrines and practices of these theatre theorists and practitioners. Right along with the definition of epic drama, describing what epic is also paved the way for the understanding of Epic drama. “This is the basic meaning of ‘epic’ even in Brecht’s use of the term: a sequence of incidents or events, narrated without artificial restrictions as to time, place and relevance to a formal ‘plot’ ” (Willett 169).

Bearing these two definitions in mind, Epic drama is also called as experimental, non-Aristotelian and dialectical drama which is formed as a reaction against the conventional techniques and practices of dramatic or Bourgeois theatre. The aim of epic drama is to exclude a reader or an audience from the illusion of reality, identifications of emotions with the play by encouraging the readers and audiences to think dialectically. Terry Eagleton argues about Bourgeois theatre,

Its aim is to draw an audience, by the power of this illusion reality, into an empathy with the performance, to take it as real and feel enthralled by it. The audience in Bourgeois theatre is the passive consumer of a finished, unchangeable art-object offered to them as 'real'. The play does not stimulate them to think constructively of how it is presenting its characters and events, or how they might have been different. (64)

On the other hand, in Epic theater reader or an audience always knows that he/she is watching a play on the stage. Contrary to dramatic theatre, the reader or audience in epic theatre is the active thought producer of incomplete, infinite, changeable art-object demonstrated to them as reality which is historically produced. Moreover, Epic drama uses some key concepts, devices and techniques to keep the spectators awake for critical decision-making such as episodic structure, alienation, Gestus and historical situation. These terms are the fundamental elements which Epic drama aims to theorize and practice in a literary work.

Perhaps Bertolt Brecht is a foremost dramatist who has had a substantial contribution for the development of Epic drama in terms of both theory and practice. Similarly Patterson points out that, "Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) is still the single

most important figure of contemporary German theatre. His has been the strongest influence on the development of political drama in Germany and in the whole world” (Patterson 45). Moreover, Brecht is still considered as a revolutionary in view of his theory and practice of new concepts and techniques under the title of epic drama as opposed to the forms of dramatic theatre. Brecht has revolutionized drama that there has become a term as ‘Brechtian’ to identify his distinguishing and unique features in modern drama. Brecht’s dramatic concepts and techniques of Epic drama have been used by a range of dramatist all over the world. Peter Brook clearly illustrates that, “Brecht is the key figure of our time, and all theatre work today at some point starts from or returns to his statements and achievement” (Bentley 8).

The reason behind this reputation is Brecht’s use and practice of Epic drama by breaking the conventions of dramatic or Bourgeois theatre. Eagleton also suggests that, “Dismantling the traditional naturalistic theatre, with its illusion of reality, Brecht produced a new kind of drama based on a critique of the ideological assumptions of bourgeois theatre” (64). Influenced by Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ idea of change, Brecht rejects the traditional forms, concepts, devices and techniques of classical drama and searches for the change in drama as Karl Marx suggested. As Robert Leach points out that, “...as a Marxist, he was fond of repeating Marx’s observation: ‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it’ ” (Leach 116). By the idea of change, Brecht challenges against all the archaic and classical notions of dramatic theatre both in theory and practice. Thus, there are some key concepts, terms and devices of Brechtian Epic drama such as episodic structure, alienation, Gestus and historical situation. According to Eric Bentley, “Brecht wrote plays to exemplify

these abstractions” (Bentley 10). In order to understand Brechtian Epic dramaturgy, one is invited to be familiar with all of these concepts and techniques used in the plays of Epic drama.

As clearly illustrated before, epic drama is differentiated from dramatic theatre. The characteristics of epic theatre generate thinking, questioning and reasoning of the reader or the audience to the play. Moreover, these concepts and techniques of epic drama make the reader or the audience to be aware of the realities of the play which are historically produced. As Eric Bentley, Bertolt Brecht summarizes the differences between Epic theatre and dramatic theater: The very first difference that Brecht signifies is the exposition of the events in the play. Dramatic theatre presents plots by involving the spectator in the sequence of events through empathy, identification, feelings and association to the play. Conversely, Epic theatre presents narratives by stimulating the spectator as an observer of the sequence to think and make their own decisions through constant dialectics. To do so, the spectator is brought into an action in dramatic theatre, but in Epic theatre is placed in front of action. The dramatic play is plied with suggestions and the epic play with arguments. In dramatic theatre, the play involves a growth of interdependent scenes and the course of events is embodied linearly, thus one scene makes another. However, in epic theatre, the play includes a montage of independent scenes and the course of events is narrated by curves and jumps, therefore, each scene is for itself. While thought determines reality in dramatic theatre, social reality determines thought in Epic theatre. (Bentley 42). Bertolt Brecht made up all of these contrasts between dramatic theatre and epic theatre in his notes on the opera, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, in 1930. Right along with these contrasts, Brecht also

developed some key concepts, techniques and devices concerning Epic theatre such as episodic structure, alienation and historical situation.

Episodic structure is one of the fundamental techniques used in Brecht's epic drama. According to John Willett, "'Narrative' rather than 'plot', and 'each scene for itself' are true picaresque principles" (172). A dramatic play revolves around a plot and each scene revolves around the plot. On the other hand, there is no unity between the scenes of the epic play in Brecht's Drama and the scenes may not be related to each other. Thus, each scene is for itself in an epic play. Willett also adds that, "The fragmentary, episodic style of acting, wrote Brecht in reply, was meant to show a man not as a consistent whole but as a contradictory, ever changing character whose unity comes 'despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps'" (173). The aim of using episodic structure as a technique is to demonstrate a character of a play as an alterable or contradictory character rather than as an unalterable or fixed character. Moreover, dramatic structure includes limited number of characters and events revolving around one plot in order to involve the spectator in a stage situation, but episodic structure includes many episodes and characters revolving around a number of narratives in order to turn the spectator into a critical observer to the play.

Alienation effect is the key term in Bertolt Brecht's epic drama. "This was the famous 'Verfremdung'-estrangement, alienation, or disillusion in English; *dépayement*, estrangement or distanciation in French" (Willett 177). Thus, there are many terms to identify alienation effect, for example *befremden*, *Fremdheit*, *entfremden*, *Verfremdungseffekt* and V-effect. Alienation effect is also called estrangement, and distancing effect. Alienation effect is a Brechtian technique the

aim of which is to provide the reader and the audience to think critically about the characters and events of a play through deducting and questioning.

Through alienation effect, the reader or the audience is put in a distant place in terms of time, place and feelings so that he/she can totally grasp the meaning of a literary work by excluding from his/her personal emotions to the play, can produce a different idea by inquiring on the contradictions, the characters and events of the play. As Bentley argues that, "Epic Theatre, on the other hand, famously sets the spectator at a distance ("alienation"), asks him not to identify himself too strongly with the characters, not to feel his way too deeply into the story, not to be carried away" (65). The reader or the audience is alienated from the play in Epic drama to abolish the illusion of the reality and to prevent emotional identification with the play. Thus, through alienation effect, the reader or the audience is forced to judge critically, consider dialectically, and make decisions about the play. As a result of alienation effect, the reader or the audience turns into an active producer of new ideas rather than a passive viewer.

Right along with the definition and aims of alienation effect, the use of alienation effect is also important. Eric Bentley also points out how alienation effect is used in the plays. Brecht suggests three devices for it; "1. the adoption of the third person, 2. the adoption of the past tense, 3. the speaking of stage directions and comments" (Bentley 303). Alienation effect involves these devices for arousing the spectators' critical judgments and dialectical understanding about the play.

Historical situation is one of the major concerns of Epic drama. Brecht believes that thought is determined by social reality and historical conditions produces a literary work, because, "Brecht is not a naturalist; but he is a realist. He

wishes to be as faithful as possible to objective facts” (Bentley 44). Thus, the aim of epic drama is not to display an illusion or an imitation of reality as in the Bourgeoisie theater, but to show a reflection of social reality with historical situation. As Terry Eagleton argues that,

Bourgeoisie theatre, Brecht argues, is based on ‘illusionism’: it takes for granted the assumption that the dramatic performance should directly reproduce the world. Its aim is to draw an audience, by the power of this illusion of reality, into an empathy with the performance, to take it as real and feel enthralled by it (Eagleton 64).

In Brechtian terms, the aim of drama is changed as, “The task of theatre is not to reflect a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced and so how they could have been, and still can be, different” (Eagleton 65). Thus, Brecht’s epic plays which are historically produced questions presents through the past by portraying social reality. In other words, Brecht’s plays signify a reflection of reality on social and economic circumstances of a society with historical situation.

All of these key concepts and devices are the basis of Epic drama. In order to criticize Brecht and his plays, one has to keep these basic terms and techniques in mind. Criticism of a literary work without an analysis of episodic structure, alienation effect and historical situation would be a deficient criticism in terms of Epic drama. Thus, these principles are important in order to answer all of the questions of a literary work and to examine a literary work critically.

Consequently, these fundamentals concerning Marxist literary criticism and Epic drama will show the way for the analysis of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Moreover, the combination of these two foundations in Brecht's works of art proves Brecht's mastery and originality. This first chapter allows a clear explanation of Brecht's major concepts including the basic premises of Marxist theory and the fundamental techniques of Epic practice.

CHAPTER 2

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

Bertolt Brecht's acclaimed play; *Mother Courage and Her Children* is an important play of the modern theatre which was written by him and then collectively and cooperatively rewritten by both the artists of the performance and audiences of the play. Thus, Brecht rephrases the concept of drama as a collaborative work through his plays, because Brecht's main aim is to encourage his readers, audiences and actors to think critically and to reason logically through the characters and actions of his plays. Brecht finished writing *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1939 which was given its first performance in Zurich in 1944. Of all his plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* might be regarded as his masterpiece because of its brilliant and unconventional representation of Anna Fierling as Mother Courage. Wars Brecht's play simply depicts Mother Courage's business journey with her travelling canteen during war conditions. The setting of the play is Thirty Years Wars. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht explores such social issues as notions of femininity, human virtues, socio-economic relations, class struggle, destruction of war and capitalism in a particular period. Similarly, John Rouse argues that, "The theatre is for him precisely the place best suited to examine the social conditions in any historical period as constitutive elements in human relationships" (29). Additionally, Brecht's play might be considered as a great source for critics and theatre practitioners with regard to its references to Marxism, and its epic qualities.

Mother Courage and Her Children is widely read and often criticized by the literary critics and dramaturges. Literary criticism of Brecht's *Mother Courage and*

Her Children has assumed various perspectives including feminist, psychological, sociological, and Marxist criticism in the twenty-first century. Every important paradigm of literary criticism has claimed *Mother Courage* as its own. However, of all these approaches to the modern literature, Marxism is an appropriate way to analyze his play. Marxist criticism of Brecht's play examines *Mother Courage's* social and economic struggle, the class structure of her society and oppression which she herself is caught in; and seeks to demonstrate a critique of capitalism and the roles played by ideologies behind historical and material conditions. Similarly, Franz Norbert Mennemeier points out that, "In every sentence and in every gesture *Mother Courage* reflects her "business," which serves in the play as a fixed formula for the social and economic existence of men abandoned to the irresistible current of the perverted historical world" (148). *Mother Courage and Her Children* identifies the actions and thoughts of people with the social, economical and historical circumstances of their society.

Mother Courage and Her Children is also a reflection of Brecht's aesthetic attitude and political ideology. According to Marxist critics, literature is a kind of social constitution with an ideology reflecting the author's philosophy. As Terry Eagleton claims that, "Literary works are not mysteriously inspired or explicable simple in terms of their author's psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; as such they have a relation to that dominant way of seeing the world which is the 'social mentality' or ideology of an age" (6). *Mother Courage and Her Children* has an explicit ideological purpose related to Bertolt Brecht's own ideas of his age. Thus, there is a very close relationship between a literary work and the social and economic circumstances in which a literary work is written by an

author; and Brecht's play reflects the social and economic reality of his own society through his heroic character, Mother Courage. As John Willett suggests "If Brecht's work is largely known to us through his theory; its obvious feature is its reflection of a consistent social and political point of view" (187). Thus, the play allows references to the fundamentals of Marxist thought via its complex plot, distinct characterization and poetic style.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht poses a lot of dialectical questions and forces the readers and audiences to question the play critically. Of all these dialectical questions, there is an important question to be asked and answered: How does Bertolt Brecht signify Mother Courage's struggle for economic and social survival in a class divided society under the conditions of war in his play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*? This question paves the way for addressing ambiguities in the play and for allowing a clear and concise explanation of the topic in the light of a Marxist criticism. The major goal of Marxism, "...is to explain the literary work fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles, and meanings as the products of a particular history" (Eagleton 3). Marxism's job is to fill in the blanks of the play and to grasp the meaning behind the story of the play. Similarly, Jerry Philips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews state that,

Marxism works to reclaim the reality of the text's 'political unconscious' (Jameson 1981) ---that is, the gaps, fissures, and ruptures that provoke and articulate the class conflict and economic struggle that the dominant ideology of the text, its hegemonic levels of meaning would otherwise silence (128).

Since *Mother Courage and Her Children* is full of blanks, ambiguities and contradictions which are deliberately located by Brecht, Marxism works as a complement of his play.

Right along with the Marxist qualities of the play, *Mother Courage and Her Children* is regarded as a sample of epic drama which is a dramatic technique with its aspects such as the alienation effect and the episodic structure. According to Rorrison,

Mother Courage is a good example of an epic play. It doesn't develop a conflict in terms of characters, but follows Mother Courage through twelve years, crossing Europe from Scandinavia to Italy and back again to Central Germany to show the effect that her tenacious involvement in the Thirty Years War has on her and her dependants" (xxx).

In other words, Brecht presents the events and agents of the play to his reader and audience without creating suspense or conflict. Instead, Brecht invites them to consider about the actions and the characters of the play rather than stimulating their emotions or appealing their sensations.

Encouraging the reader or the audience to think critically rather than identifying with the emotions of the characters in the play is one of the prominent qualities of epic drama. As Angela Curran demonstrates that, "Brecht wanted to get people to question what they saw so that they would then be ready to go from the theatre to work to change their situation in society" (176). Thus, drama has a sociological function aiming at the change of individuals' thinking faculties. Similarly, "...for Brecht, critical thinking in relation to drama has an important social and political aspect-it is thinking that aims to understand the specifically social and

political nature of human life and the viewer's role in supporting and changing social hierarchies" (Curran 176). Thus, critical thinking is a kind of challenge for accepted rules and traditions. As Curran adds, "It is clear why, as a Marxist playwright and critic, Brecht would assign a central role to critical viewing in his aesthetics of drama. For critical thinking in relation to drama can be a valuable tool in challenging the status quo" (178).

Through *Mother Courage and Her Children*, a reader or a spectator can challenge the dogmas and traditional ways of thinking via a critical objection instead of identifying with emotions and emphasizing feelings. For Curran,

Mother Courage is a good example of a drama that encourages the spectator to be critical of war, capitalism, and commonsense morality, but does not manipulate the spectator into accepting Brecht's own views on these topics. Comparisons and contradictions are set up to encourage the spectator's critical reflections on these issues (180).

Brecht consciously situates split characters and opposing events into the play in order to fuse an argument forcing his readers and his spectators to take decisions.

In Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Mother Courage's constant struggle to make a profit is also another quality of epic drama. As M. Helena Goncalves da Silva illustrates that, "The profit motif underlines the epic structure of this play, and is always seen from the perspective of Anna Fierling" (111). Epic qualities of the play are both complementary and supplementary of Marxist literary theory. "A combination of the dialectic (as a method) and the epic (as an attitude) would be conceivable" (Wekwerth 124). Thus, the play having both the

characteristics of epic drama and the principles of Marxist literary criticism enables a synthesis between the theory and practice.

Mother Courage and Her Children consists of twelve scenes revolving around twelve years between 1624 and 1636. The play rotates upon Anna Fierling nicknamed Mother Courage and focuses on her communal and business relations for both social and economic survival. Right along with Mother Courage, other characters are included in the play such as Katrin, her dumb daughter; Eilif, the elder son; Swiss Cheese, the younger son; the Cook, the Chaplain, and Yvette Pottier. Each of the characters is somehow related to Mother Courage and strives to live under the circumstances of the Thirty Years Wars in a class divided society. She runs after the armies with her cart, selling supplies and equipment to the armed forces. She suffers the loss of her three children by the end of the play. In the final scene, she is left alone but determinedly goes on living by tugging her cart, because “Wherever life has not died out/It staggers to its feet again” (Brecht 88). She learns nothing but forces the reader to think critically by showing an argument and mirroring a picture of the world. According to Silva, “Brecht, however, insisted that if Mother Courage learned nothing, the public could learn something by watching her” (Silva 114). All in all, Brecht wants his readers and his audiences to be critical about the influence of social and economical conditions on Mother Courage’s roles and relations. Angela Curran also proposes that,

We can see from *Mother Courage* that drama that shows the mistakes made by individuals can also prompt reflection on the social causes of human suffering. But Brecht would resist the idea that drama should represent the causes of human suffering as reducible to human error,

but should instead reveal the ways in which the protagonist's social role and social relations are relevant to understanding the tragedy that ensues from the character's actions (Curran 174).

Mother Courage's actions and ideas are heavily associated with her social and economic environment; and her suffering and loss is correlated with the war and capitalism as a result of her socioeconomic circumstances in her society.

Bertolt Brecht signifies his heroine's, Mother Courage's continuous struggle for social and economic survival in a class divided society under the conditions of war throughout *Mother Courage and Her Children*. To do so, he provides a combination of Marxist literary theory and the practice of epic drama which characterizes *Mother Courage and Her Children*. This chapter is divided into two subsections. Firstly, Mother Courage's struggle for social survival is argued in terms of her sense of motherhood, her femininity; and human virtues in wartime. Secondly, Mother Courage's struggle for economic survival is discussed in terms of war as business; the relationship between war and capitalism; and the class conflicts between The Bourgeoisie, The Petite-Bourgeoisie, and the Proletariat.

2.1. Mother Courage's Struggle for Social Survival

Throughout the play, Mother Courage struggles for her social survival. In order to survive socially in a class divided society, she is expected to fulfil various roles in a given status of a given society. Her social roles have determining factors to her social existence in her community. Thus, she has a number of social roles in her social situation. She involuntarily assumes these roles which are directly connected with her motherhood, her gender, and her courageous personality. In other words, these roles are ascribed to her; and as a result she is tagged as a courageous mother, a

lonely female, and a virtuous widow. While she is struggling for social survival through these roles, she continuously copes with the intolerance, oppression and manipulation of being a mother, a widow, a female and courageous. In her struggle of social survival, her thoughts, behaviours, and attitudes are shaped by her social circumstances, because “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence determines their consciousness.” (Marx 11-12). Thus, as Mother Courage is living in a class divided society, her social existence determines her consciousness; and her struggle for social survival is determined by her social roles and the social circumstances of her society. Similarly, Rouse argues that, “Brecht’s point is that drama that is socially critical should represent error leading to misfortune as part of a larger social context that influences the agent” (172). All these points considered, her social roles and circumstances have a vital significance to analyze her struggle for social survival. Mother Courage’s sense of motherhood, her femininity, and her virtues in wartime are the major constituents behind her struggle for her social survival.

2. 1. 1. Mother Courage’s Sense of Motherhood, Love and Marriage

Of all her social roles, her motherhood has an utmost importance in her struggle for social survival. The title of the play, *Mother Courage and Her Children* suggests that the play is the story of a mother with her children. Therefore, social and economic circumstances shape and determine the form and relations of the family. “For Marxism, the family is not the source of the individual’s psychological identity, for both the individual and the family are the products of material/historical

circumstances” (Tyson 64). Thus, Mother Courage and her family are the products of her social and economic conditions.

First of all, she has got a family and she is a mother taking care of her three children; two sons called Swiss Cheese and Eiliff and a daughter named Katrin. Right along with these three children, she has got another child, because “The wagon [is] regarded as Anna’s fourth child by some” (Schechter 415). Nonetheless, her sense and function of family is different, because “Her family...is a work association, a cooperative. Each member has a well-defined function: the mother buys, sells, directs; the sons pull the wagon; the daughter runs the household, does some errands” (Barthes 47). She depends on her business in all circumstances and her dependence on her business is so central to her life that the family members, her sons and a daughter, works with the aim of seeking more profit like their mother. Additionally, Mother Courage’s motherhood is undeniable, but inseparable from her business. Accordingly, Barthes suggests that, “To be sure, there is a profound motherliness in Mother Courage. But this motherliness can never be dissociated from the regular running of a business.” (47). In other words, her motherhood can only be understood in relation to her business and her motherhood and business cannot be separable from each other. Since Mother Courage is both a mother of her children and of her business, she has to deal with the two of them. Nevertheless, her business is more dominant than her children. For Rouse, “Courage is both businesswoman and mother. Or rather, she tries to be both; the social realities of the total war from which she tries to profit as businesswoman prevent her fulfilling her responsibilities as mother” (36) This is a basic contradiction of Mother Courage between her job as a businesswoman and her social role as a mother throughout the play. As Charles H.

Helmetag also suggests, Brecht, "... conceived of his seventeenth-century canteen woman as the eternal capitalist merchant who subordinates her own children to the profit motive." (65-66). For *Mother Courage*, her occupation comes first in her life and then her children. Moreover, in the essence of her relation with family and her children, business is grounded on the base and then all of her roles and responsibilities are flourished around the base accordingly.

As a result, her maternity and her maternal feelings do not correspond with the description of a conventional mother, because "Brecht did not intend *Courage* to be a familiar, sympathetic rendering of mother love" (Smith 496). She is not a conventional mother who is concerned with her children's breeding, feeding, and cleaning. Her one and only concern is to deal with her occupation as a businesswoman by profiting from the war, because "Brecht's *Mother Courage* has been portrayed as businesswoman inseparable from her canteen wagon" (Schechter 415). Thus, she even fails to protect her own children. Similarly, "...her business interests prove to be incompatible with her second concern which is to bring her three children safely through the conflict" (Rorrison xviii). At the end of the play, she has lost all of her three children, but she is still determined to go on with her business, because, "In her mind is the sole idea of moving forwards" (Silva 112). She is so depended on her business that she doesn't even think of her children and continues to live apathetically, because, "*Mother Courage's* sense of motherhood is vitiated by her commercial instincts" (Rorrison xxii). Thus, *Mother Courage's* motherhood is a false motherhood and can only be comprehended via her mercantile affairs.

Brecht regards Katrin as a mother figure who is kind and goodhearted instead of Mother Courage. In opposition to her mother, she manages to save the people's and children's lives in Halle by alerting the sleeping town although she is dumb. She sacrifices her own life for the sake of others whereas Mother Courage sacrifices her children for the sake of war and profit. "In this light, we can understand the double significance of Katrin's sacrifice at the end, which is both tragic and heroic, and the revolutionary content of Mother Courage's reversal of the traditional concept of courage" (Silva 115) Furthermore, Katrin is depicted as the direct opposite of Mother Courage by Bertolt Brecht, because "Against Mother Courage's acquiescence in the war, Brecht presents Katrin's absolute revolt" (Silva 116). By establishing this duality and contradiction between Mother Courage and Katrin, Brecht wishes his reader to draw conclusions about this comparison.

Secondly, Mother Courage is a widow having lost her husband which is another ascribed role to her in her social struggle for survival. In the play, It is mentioned that Mother Courage has a husband and the children have a father, but there isn't an apparent father figure in the play. "The fathers are known, but swapped around; one gave his name, another his character, the third his features." (Barthes 49). She hasn't got any emotional affair with anybody either. There aren't any partners for either love or marriage except for her business. She is alone and "She seems always to stand on a brink, as it were. She has no real associates, no real fellows, no one who fully understands her or shares her point of view. Her decisions are completely her own" (Reichert 446). On the contrary, her one and only affair is her affair with her travelling canteen and selling provisions Moreover, she is also an asexual woman ignoring her sexuality for her business' sake.

2. 1. 2 Mother Courage's Femininity

Mother Courage's femininity is also essential in terms of her struggle for social survival. She is regarded as a female because of her gender which is also an ascribed role related to her social circumstances. She lives in a male-dominated society with her three children with her mercantile instincts. However, she has masculine qualities attributed to men instead of feminine qualities attributed to women. She is associated with manly traits, for example she is strong, rational, outspoken, active, aggressive, courageous, society and outwardly oriented, ambitious, competitive, decisive, dominant, forceful, individualistic, self-reliant, and willing to take risks. In other words, she is not gentle, nurturing, emotional, quiet, passive, receptive, family and inwardly oriented. Having these masculine traits means that she is both independent and assertive. Correspondingly, "She survives in a man's world because of her sense of humour, her shrewdness, her common-sense and her instinct for self-preservation" (Rorrison xxv). She has deconstructed the idea of an essential female identity because of her commercial instincts and business affairs. Above all her femininity, her business comes first and her femininity is depended on her occupation and business relations. In a way, her sense and way of femininity is determined by the world that she lives in; by the social circumstances that she experiences; and by the social roles that are ascribed to her.

2. 1. 3. Human Virtues in Wartime

Human Virtues in Wartime is another vital issue in Mother Courage's struggle for social survival. She is considered to be a virtuous mother and she struggles for her survival by being virtuous. Her virtue is courage and it is closely linked with her name, Mother Courage. However, "Her action was not heroic, as some who gave her the name thought" (Blau 3). She is associated as a courageous mother and is given the name Courage, because, "...she drove through the bombardment of Riga like a mad woman to save some loaves of bread she had in her cart." (3). Her courage is directly perceived in the context of her business practices, because "Business comes first, except where it threatens survival" (3). For that reason, her courage has an ironic and a dubious quality. She is not a virtuous and a courageous mother, but "Mother Courage is a pragmatist, not a martyr." (3). She implies a discrepancy between what she speaks and how she acts, because "Mutter Courage is an embodiment of contradictory forces of which she herself remains totally unaware" (Silva 111). Her contradiction stems from her will and desire to gain more profit as a result of her business.

The courage which is Mother Courage's virtue directly means its opposite, her cowardice. She is not brave, but a coward and because of her cowardice, she has lost all of her three children during the war and learnt nothing at the end of the play. Thus, human virtues in wartime cause her destruction and suffering in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. "In a bad society, virtue is harmful" and "...virtue is simply a function of the society in which it is practiced" (Barthes 53). Mother Courage and her children suffer from their virtues which are fatal for all of them. For instance, Eilif died because of his bravery. Swiss Cheese's honesty causes his

execution. Katrin's unselfishness and kindness result in her death. On the other hand, Brecht attributes these virtues ironically.

2.2. Mother Courage's Struggle for Economic Survival

Throughout the play, Mother Courage also struggles for her economic survival. In order to survive economically in a capitalist society, she is required to perform a role in a particular class of a particular society. Her social and economic roles are important dynamics in terms of her economic existence in her community. Thus, she has various responsibilities and obligations to support herself financially. She involuntarily assumes her roles which are mostly related with her occupation and business relations. She does not voluntarily obtain any roles signifying her volunteer behaviours and reflecting her personal abilities and efforts. Her economic roles are also ascribed to her like her social roles; and as a result she is labelled a petit-bourgeois, a war profiteer, and a businesswoman. She is also regarded as "a sort of social worker" or "a tradesman" (Barthes 46). Moreover, all she does is to serve and obey in given circumstances. Her actions and thoughts in her struggle for her economic survival are also shaped by the economic environment of her society. To put it another way, living in a class divided and a capitalist society, her consciousness is also determined by the economic circumstances of her community. As a consequence, *Mother Courage and Her Children* explores Mother Courage's relationship with the economic conditions of her society. Similarly, Angela Curran points out that,

The play does not attempt, however, to diminish Mother Courage's loss as due to forces beyond her control, making her a victim, not an

agent. Instead, the play reveals a complex relationship in which the business environment influences Mother Courage's choices and relationships, and Mother Courage manipulates her social environment to survive by means of the war (Curran 173).

Additionally, while she is struggling for her economic survival through these roles, she is exposed to inequalities, oppression and manipulation for being a petite-bourgeois, a war profiteer, and a businesswoman. As a result, she makes profit from the war, haggles, and struggles but loses and suffers in the end of the play. In addition to this, she is manipulated and oppressed by the generals and soldiers of the war.

In *Mother Courage and Children*, it is true that all of Mother Courage's losses and sufferings result from her dependence to her business and her job in a capitalist society. Correspondingly, "In the case of Mother Courage, the play locates Mother Courage's loss in the context of her role as a businesswoman supporting the war and the kind of social relations she has in virtue of this occupation" (Curran 174). Thus, her economic status, her class and occupation are a crucial to analyze her struggle for economic survival. Economic circumstances of her society such as the exploitation of war as business; the relationship between war and capitalism; and the class conflict between The Bourgeoisie, The Petite-Bourgeoisie, and Proletariat are the major constituents behind her struggle for economic survival.

2. 2. 1. War as Business

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, war plays a pivotal role in Mother Courage's life. Mother Courage considers war as a means of business which is noteworthy on behalf of her struggle for economic survival. "She accepts the war as an adventure and is ready to endure its consequences for the sake of profitability" (Silva 113). Similarly, Barthes supports Silva's view by suggesting, "There is a satisfaction for Mother Courage in the war itself" (48); and "For her, war is nothing but business" (49). According to Mother Courage, war doesn't mean anything and yet is a means of business. Furthermore, "The truth is that *Mother Courage* attacks not only war, but all forms of subservience to the ethics of business as usual" (Blau 8). War and business constitute and shape her way of life. In other words, social responsibilities such as her motherhood, her femininity, and her virtues are determined and shaped by war and business. Thus, while she is trying to make a profit from the war, she turns into a tool of the war. "She is an instrument of the war, and embodiment of its evils" (Silva 113). However, she remains as a contradictory character from the beginning to the end of the play, because at the end, "Courage is now alone. She must drug her wagon herself back into the war, back into the train of the army that feeds her" (Rouse 37). Thus, she accordingly continues to profit by the war by thinking about her own benefits, profits, and future. For instance, "

She cannot afford to wait to bury Katrin herself, so she pays a peasant family to bury her daughter for her. She fishes a handful coins from the leather purse at her waist, starts to hand them to the peasants, looks at the coins, hesitates, slowly puts one coin back in her purse, then gives the rest over in payment" (Rouse 37).

This clearly shows that she is restlessly determined to go on with the business without thinking about her daughter. In order to survive economically, she has to struggle and continue living with a series of business transactions by benefiting from the war to satisfy all of her requirements.

Mother Courage and Her Children consists of a series of business transactions. “The economics of her trade are quite simply those of monopoly: to buy the best bargain under the best terms, then to sell it again as dear as possible, with the maximum of haggling; that is the very definition of war profit. Here, however, the profit is tiny and precarious” (Barthes 46). In other words, although she is doing her business devotedly and ambitiously, her gains and her profits are not as big as she wants. Thus, Barthes considers that, “Mother Courage is doubly alienated: as the exploited and the exploiter” (47). While she is exploiting the war for the sake of her own profits and benefits, she becomes exploited because, she loses her own children and her own business at the end of the play. Similarly, “Although Mother Courage has many admirable qualities, she experiences a great loss as a result of her economic dependence on the war. Each of her three children gets caught up in the horror of war and dies a violent death, leaving the Mother Courage alone at the end of the play” (Curran 172). The reason for her losses is both explicitly and implicitly the connection that she has with war in her capital society, because “The play does represent the individual suffering and loss Mother Courage experiences from the death of her children in the war.” (Curran 173). However, this suffering and loss stem from the war.

Curran adds that, “But this loss is presented so that the relationship between Mother Courage’s individual loss and her occupation as a businesswoman whose

livelihood depends on the war is made clear” (Curran 173). In other words, she suffers from the loss of her children and the loss of her children is directly related to the war and the social and economic circumstances of the society that she lives in. In view of this, “Rather than suggesting that Mother Courage’s experience is a universal one, the action of the play prompts the audience to consider how her loss arises from very specific social and historical circumstances” (Curran 173). Thus, there is close relationship between her socio-economic conditions of her society and her losses in the play.

2. 2. 2. The Relationship between War and Capitalism

Throughout the play, the relationship between war and capitalism is predominant and significant in terms of her struggle for economic survival.. Rorrison suggests that, “His play is intended not only to show a connection between war and capitalism, but also to demonstrate how little man, or in this case the little woman, may contribute to wars in the vain hope of sharing spoils” (xvii). Throughout the play, war is seen as a tool for the economy. “To be sure, war is an economy, but it is not a liberal economy” (Barthes 49). On the contrary, war is a capital economy, because Brecht views, “...war as a capitalist project, ‘the continuation of business by other means’” (Thomson 10). Thus, in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, war is a capitalist project since Mother Courage continues her business in all circumstances. As a result, she is exploited, because, “In a capitalist economic system, the more directly a person engaged in production relations, the more he or she is subject to exploitation” (Benjamin 34). The more directly ia Mother Courage engaged in business to make a profit with her cart, the more she is subject to exploitation and gains nothing, learns nothing, and loses a

great deal. The reason behind why she works vigorously is purely that she has to survive in her capitalist society. Mother Courage works for money that is the only means for her survival. Thus, she is alienated from her work by vigorously working, because she does not work for enjoyment. As Berger emphasizes that, “People have commodities but also experience themselves as commodities, because their work is alien to their deeper natures and they work to make money so they can survive, not because they feel they are expressing themselves in their work” (53). Additionally, she doesn’t feel she is expressing herself in her work. Her only focus is her business instead of her family, children, and femininity. As Curran suggest in the following,

Mother Courage views every social relation, even those involving her children, in terms of the cost and benefit to her business. Through this focus on Mother Courage’s social role and the kinds of relations with family and others this occupation entails, the story prompts reflection on what social relations must be like, during war and peacetime, in a society structured around a system of private profit and individual gain. Through the interactions of Mother Courage with her children and with her business associates in the war effort, the play suggests that in the context of capitalism, even family relations come to be understood not in human terms, but as either an obstacle or a vehicle for the goal of making money (Curran 172-173).

To put in another way, Mother Courage lives and struggles in a capital society based on private property and individuality. The system which Mother Courage experiences, is operated according to the rules and principles of capitalism. Mother Courage’s struggles

and losses clearly display that war and capitalism are not vehicles for making a profit, but obstacles.

Capitalism also creates many inconsistencies and contradictions within the individuals of a society and their relations with society. This is evidently seen in the case of Mother Courage, because she has a lot of internal and external contradictions which are the essence of dialectics. The internal contradictions are related to herself; such as being a mother or being a businesswoman; being feminine or being masculine; and being courageous or being a coward. On the other hand, the external contradictions are related to her relations; with her children, the soldiers, the officers, The Cook and The Chaplain. If Mother Courage wishes to survive in this capital society, she has to work a lot as a businessman for the needs of her capital system without thinking about herself and her relations. For that reason, *Mother Courage and Her Children* is a play for Brecht to criticize capitalist society through a malicious war from which Mother courage is making a profit. As Helmetag also points out that,

Brecht is writing a critique of capitalistic society, a society in which the cruelty of war serves as an example of the degradation to which the little man is subjected in peace as well as in war. The canteen woman who seeks a profit at the expense of others is just another manifestation of the capitalist business man and both are reprehensible. Brecht would eliminate war, the profit motive and the exploitation of the weak. (68)

In the play, Brecht obviously demonstrates that there is a close relationship between war and capitalism, because war is another way of doing business in a capital society. Thus, *Mother Courage and Her Children* is an anti-war and an anti-capitalist

play depicting a wide variety of ideas and attitudes that demonstrate the destructive side effects of war and capitalism.

2. 2. 3. Class Conflicts between the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat

Mother Courage and Her Children involves a conflict of different socio-economic classes within society. Thus, class conflict plays a central role throughout the play that is directly seen between The Bourgeoisie, The Petit-Bourgeoisie, and the Proletariat as a result of capitalist society. These class conflicts can be analysed from Marxist point of view because, “Marxist analysis of human events and productions focuses on relationships among socioeconomic classes, both within a society and among societies, and it explains all human activities in terms of distribution and dynamics of economic power” (Tyson 54). Thus, the reasons for Mother Courage’s actions and thoughts in her struggle for social and economic survival are related to the socioeconomic class that she belongs to. On the other hand, Mother Courage has free will and is responsible for her own actions in her struggle for social and economic survival, because, “Brecht created his Mutter Courage as a person who had the freedom to choose her way of life and who suffered because she made the wrong choice and supported war” (Reichert 447). However, she does not have free will as it is seen. She was born into a class and that class shapes her life. This means that all of Mother Courage’s roles, behaviours and relations are determined by her socioeconomic class into which she was born.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, there are economic class divisions and those divisions appreciably influence the members of the society, because “...members of specific classes tend to have similar educational levels, occupations, lifestyles, values, aesthetic sensibilities and so on, and differ in these respects from members of other socioeconomic classes.” (Berger 48). In the play, The society is divided into three socioeconomic classes; The Bourgeoisie, the Proletariat, and The Petit-bourgeoisie.

With regards to the play, Mother Courage is a member of petite bourgeoisie. Similarly, Rorrison claims that, “She stands in Marxist terms for the petite bourgeoisie, the small traders and white collar workers who stand a point higher on the social scale than the proletariat and identify with the interests of the ruling classes” (xxiii). She is in a constant conflict with the other classes as a member of the Petite bourgeoisie, because “A victory for the generals can lead to losses for her, and a defeat to profits” (Rorrison xxiii). Similarly, “Tilly wins a battle at Lutzen, Mother Courage loses four shirts” (Blau 3). As Mother Courage is talking with the Cook and the Chaplain, she reveals what she has thought, “But look closer, they ain’t so silly, they’re waging it for what they can get. Else little folk like me wouldn’t be in at all.” (Brecht 27). She means the generals by saying ‘they’ which refers to Bourgeoisie and little folk which refers to Proletariat. In the play, “The real work of war is done by small men” (Thomson 25). Thus the real work of war is done by Mother Courage and her children, The Cook and The Chaplain. Thus, this is a clear demonstration of the class conflict among the classes of Mother Courage’s society.

On the other hand, Mother Courage is also considered a symbol of the Bourgeoisie, reflecting the ideas of ruling class. According to Herbert W. Reichert,

“Audiences, and even reviewers, have not infrequently taken Mutter Courage to represent "the little people who were the victims of war," a point of view which disturbed Brecht as he meant her to be, above all, a symbol of the bourgeoisie” (Reichert 440). Additionally, “Mother Courage is no “proletarian” but rather a businesswoman, temporarily even a rich one” (Mennemeier 143). Since she regards the war as a means of doing business, she represents the ideological purposes of the Bourgeoisie. Thus, “War, the play tells us, is not a conflict of ideals but is just another way of doing business. Mutter Courage, we learn, was not caught up in the maelstrom of war, but had gone of her own free will to join the army as a canteen woman” (Reichert 440). Thus, since Mother Courage’s only wish is the continuation of the war to make more profit and increase her gains, she can be regarded as a symbol of the Bourgeoisie. Profit-motive is another explanation for being a part of the Bourgeoisie. Reichert proposes as in following,

Profit was considered by the Marxist Brecht as the basis of the bourgeois way of life; profit was the cornerstone of Mutter Courage’s outlook...It should be clear, then, that Mutter Courage is portrayed in the drama as an exponent of Brecht’s conception of the bourgeois way of life and that she is only indirectly a victim of war” (441)

According to this passage, Mother Courage is exposed as a representative of the Bourgeoisie, because profit is a key motive to understand her character, her roles and her relations in her socio-economic situation.

Profit is a central concern in her life; th for the sake of getting more benefits and making more profits from the war, Mother Courage has lost all of her children as a result of her commercial mind and practices. For instance, her children died

because of her. For instance, “Had she not forgotten the imminent danger in her greedy desire to sell a buckle, her son Eilif would not have been drafted into the army. Had she not haggled over the amount of the ransom, her other son Schweizerkas would not have been shot” (Reichert 441). These instances clearly show that Mother Courage is deeply devoted to her business, interests, and profits rather than thinking and caring about her children, because “...she believes in the economic miracle of the war, accepting for the sake of its opportunities every sort of brutality, including even the death of her children.” (Silva 113). Thus, she is considered to be a symbol of the Bourgeoisie.

All the things considered, Mother Courage is in fact an ambiguous character in terms of her class. It is difficult to decide whether she is a representative of the petite-bourgeoisie or of the bourgeoisie. Reichert argues that, “On the realistic level, we see a struggling little woman who appeals to our sympathies. On the symbolical level we note that she is an incongruous and despicable caricature of the bourgeoisie” (442). He also explains why she is both incongruous and despicable. “She is incongruous because she is such a little person and yet embodies all the evils of the bourgeois outlook. She is despicable because her very existence is predicated on war” (Reichert 442). She carries the class characteristics of both the Bourgeoisie and the Petite-Bourgeoisie. However, she is still in a conflict within the classes.

The conflict within the socioeconomic classes stems from the fact that, “The Bourgeoisie not only owns most of the property in a given society, it also controls the ideas of the proletariat” (Berger 46). As a result, the divisions within the classes and the inequalities within the society cause alienation in all the members and institutions of the society. Arthur Asa Berger argues that,

The wealthy, those in the ruling class, who own the means of production, are of necessity alienated from the poor people in society, the proletariat, who are terribly exploited and are the source of wealth of the ruling classes. But the poor are also victims of alienation; they are alienated from their work, experience themselves only as commodities, and suffer grievously, both physically and psychologically (Berger 50)

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the reader or the audience doesn't know anything about how the war is going on and what kind of impact of the war has upon the people. On the Contrary, the readers and the audiences read and watch the common life and common division between people in society. For instance, "...we see soldiers reduced to pilfering their own stores, and raping, murdering, and robbing the peasantry, we see peasants selling their last possessions, valuing their cattle more highly than their lives, having their farms bombarded by armies which don't bother to establish whose side they are on" (Rorrison xxi). The soldiers are associated with the oppressors, the exploiters, the manipulators as being robbers, rapist, murderer, whereas The Proletariat, the common folk and peasants are oppressed, exploited, and manipulated by the Bourgeoisie, the ruling class.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

Bertolt Brecht's, highly praised play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was completed in 1943 in collaboration with Margarete and Ruth Berlau and was first performed in 1943 in Switzerland. Through *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht provokes the readers or the audiences to consider dialectically and to question the reasons of the actions and the characters in the play instead of empathizing with the feelings of the characters. Thus, the play has pedagogical and didactic functions. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is also a parable suggesting a moral lesson which is set in a province of China, Szechwan, Setzuan or Szechuan.

Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is thought as one of the major plays because of its remarkable and unusual presentation of Shen Te called the Angels of Slums. In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Bertolt Brecht offers a timeless woman figure, Shen Te and investigates some universal themes. In the play, Brecht basically portrays Shen Te's goodness, business relations, and sense of love in a class-divided and a capitalist society. In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht explores socioeconomic issues related to the issues of goodness and wickedness, of femininity and masculinity, of success and failure, of wealth and poverty. As Ernst Loeb argues

“The play of the Good Woman of Setzuan is a parable, pointing – by definition—to a didactic intent diametrically. Brecht uses the individual case of one Chinese girl to prove a point of general validity, i.e., to demonstrate a basic weakness in the setup of our world: the impossibility to be good and live decently at the same time” (286).

Brecht attempts to show social circumstances of a society through an individual character. To do so, Brecht's play is a good sample for the literary critics and the dramatists with its references to Marxist literary criticism and epic drama.

The Good Woman of Setzuan is extensively read and repeatedly analysed by critics and theatre practitioners. Literary criticism of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is especially popular among feminist literary critics because of its split character, Shen Te and Shui Ta, her male persona. The play is also analysed according to its universal issues such as politics of gender, gender difference, and social inequalities. On the other hand, another good way to approach Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is from Marxist literary criticism. As Gay Gibson Cima suggests, "The Good Person of Szechwan has typically been read as a Marxist allegory about the difficulty of being good in an evil capitalistic world" (92). Marxist criticism of the play explores Shen Te's social and economic struggles, the class structure of her society, and her exploitation and oppression by the socioeconomic conditions of her community. As Terry Eagleton argues, "...Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression." (vii).

Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* goes around the theme of impossibility of being good in an imperfect society, a critique of capitalism, and the reasons of historical, social and economical conditions. Thus, there is a close relationship between the principles of Marxist literary theory, and the play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. According to Eagleton, "Marxist criticism is part of a larger body of

theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies – the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times.” (Eagleton viii).

Brecht reflects the ideology of his age through *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. As a devoted Marxist, one can see Brecht’s ideological perspective as a relation to his society in which he lives. Brecht creates *The Good Woman of Setzuan* to reflect the realities of his time and to criticize the social and economic structures of his society. Thus, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* mirrors the social and economic realities of Brecht’s own age through his heroine, Shen Te like Mother Courage of *Mother Courage and Her Children* because, “Great writers are those exceptional individuals, who manage to transpose into art the world vision of the class or group to which they belong, and to do this in a peculiarly unified and translucent (although not necessarily conscious) way” (Eagleton 32). As Eagleton suggests, Brecht manages to reflect the world vision of his society to which he belongs into his work of art. Moreover, Rumanian Marxist critic, Lucien Goldman is especially proposing that there is a close link between a literary text and the material and historical conditions. As Eagleton clearly demonstrates that, “What Goldman is seeking, then, is a set of structural relations between literary text, world vision and history itself. He wants to show how the historical situation of a social group or class is transposed, by the mediation of its world vision into the structure of a literary work.” (33). Thus, Brecht does this accordingly: he tries to demonstrate the ideology of his age and the historical, social and economic situation of his society with his play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan* includes numerous dialectical questions and forces its readers and audiences to make decisions about these

questions. For example, How does Brecht signify Shen Te's struggle for social and economic survival in a class divided society?' This question gives a clear account for the ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts in the play and seeks to demonstrate a subtle clarification of the topic according to the fundamentals of Marxist perspective and epic drama. Thus, a critic or a reader aims to highlight and solve those ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts of the play. Similarly, "The critic's task is not to fill the work in; it is to seek out the principle of its conflict of meanings and to show how this conflict is produced by the work's relation to ideology" (Eagleton 35). Thus, the aim of this part of the thesis is to demonstrate how Shen Te's struggles for social and economic survival in a class divided society is signified.

In addition to the Marxist qualities of the play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is also regarded as a great example of epic drama with the techniques of alienation and the episodic structure. Right along with these qualities, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is a play not only reflecting an illusion of reality, but also showing the reality with the socioeconomic and historical circumstances. This is one of the characteristics of epic drama. According to Brecht, "The task of theatre is not to reflect a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced and so how they could have been, and still can be, different" (Eagleton 65). Furthermore, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is a play indicating that the reality is changeable through oppositions, contradictions, conflicts and dilemmas. As Ruppert argues,

The dialectical pattern of oppositions in *Der gute Mensch* yields the possibility of change, and in the case of Sezuan this means a society free from exploitation, violence, and irrational authority, a society that

will develop utopian potentials and human creative possibilities. Because characters and events are historically conditioned for Brecht, they are subject to change. Change becomes, then, the key to his entire dramaturgy (Ruppert 38).

As demonstrated above, the issue of change which is one of the qualities of epic drama, plays an important role in Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. It is suggested in the play by Brecht that, "The world must be changed because no one can be good and stay good" (710). Human beings and events are alterable and namely they aren't unchanging according to epic drama.

Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* tells a story of Shen Te and invites the readers and audiences to make their own decisions by being critical about the actions and ideas of the story. Posing questions and presenting an argument are also qualities of epic drama. Through *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht is asking rhetorical questions to the audience. Equally, Loeb points out that, "The fact that we find a question rather than an obvious answer at the end of Brecht's parable turns out to be an artistic device of great ingenuity" (288). All in all, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is a good example of epic drama.

The Good Woman of Setzuan unwinds in a prologue, ten scenes, an epilogue and a number of interludes at a time between World War I and World War II. The play revolves around Shen Te nicknamed the good woman of Setzuan and Angels of Slums. The action of the play focuses on her goodness, her business transactions and relations, her struggle for social and economic survival. In addition to Shen Te, other principal characters are Wang, a water seller; the three Gods, who are searching for a good person; Shui Ta which Shen Te created as her male persona and a hard-nosed

businessman; Yang Sun, an unemployed pilot; Mrs. Yang, Yang Sun's mother; Shu Fu, a wealthy barber; Mrs. Mi Tzu, the owner of the house; and Lin To, a carpenter. Shen Te tries to be good with a small amount of money given as a reward by the gods with which she buys a tobacco shop. By the end of play, she understands that it is difficult or even impossible to be good in a class divided and a capitalist society because the other characters in the play demand money, food and shelter and take advantage of her goodness. Thus, she creates a male cousin who is tough, ruthless, merciless, and a firm businessman to survive both socially and economically. Throughout the play, she changes between these two gender roles: Shen Te and Shui Ta. At the end of the play, the reader or the audience questions the possibility of being good and surviving under the conditions of a capitalist society. For that reason, she asks for help from the Gods, but they disregard her demands for help. By the end of the play, Shen Te's virtues and behaviours and her relations are greatly associated with her social and economic environment. As Eagleton suggests, "The social relations between men, in other words, are bound up with the way they produce their material life" (4). Besides, the impossibility of being good and the inability of Shen Te's survival as a good woman are related with the capital society in which she lives and the economic circumstances that she experiences.

Bertolt Brecht depicts his timeless heroine's, Shen Te's persistent struggle for social and economic survival in a class divided society throughout this play. This section is divided into two subsections. Firstly, Shen Te's struggle for social survival is discussed in terms of her virtues; her femininity and masculinity; and her sense of motherhood, love and marriage. Secondly, Shen Te's struggle for economic survival

is examined in terms of Shen Te's business practices; her business relations and economic circumstances of the society.

3. 1. Shen Te's Struggle for Social Survival

Throughout the play, Shen Te struggles for social survival. During her struggles, Shen Te performs various roles and has several goals in the community in which she lives. Her social roles and goals have the greatest impact on her social survival. What is meant by her social roles and goals is that Shen Te is a provider of food, shelter and money, the supplier of love for Yang Sun, and the protector of her own child. These are the gist of Shen Te's roles and goals. Accordingly, "In *the Good Woman*, Shen Te's goals are articulated in three distinct sections, all of which emanate from the gods' instruction to be good. It is these goals that form the narrative drive of the play and may be described thus: to help her neighbours, to love her lover, and to protect her unborn child from want" (McCullough 127). These social roles and goals which are associated with her gender, motherhood, love, marriage and virtues, determine her survival in her society. By the end of the play, she performs all the roles and tries to achieve all of her goals, but she fails. It is clearly understood from her speaking with the gods in the play that,

All that I have done I did

To help my neighbour

To love my lover

And to keep my little one from want

From your great, godly deeds, I was too poor. (Brecht 747)

Shen Te assumes a number of roles, for instance she accepts the identity of a woman as Shen Te and of a man as Shui Ta. She assumes herself as an affectionate mother thinking about her own child's future. She is known as a warm hearted partner loving Yang Sun truly. She is also recognized as a good and generous woman of Setzuan labelled as the Angel of the Slums. Additionally, these social roles which are the determining aspects of the social survival behind her struggle are ascribed to her. She unconsciously assumes those roles because, as Marxists would argue "...men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity – by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production" (Eagleton 6).

Furthermore, being a good and generous woman, she tries to deal with the problems such as oppression, manipulation, poverty, and failure. Thus, her struggle for social survival entails her to cope with problems and troubles. Since she lives in a corrupt, class-divided, flawed, and capitalist society, it is impossible to survive and protect Shen Te's own interest by being a good and generous woman. Her society shapes her social existence, but she couldn't exist and survive in her society which shapes her. Thus, her social roles and conditions are crucial to criticize her struggles for social survival. Shen Te's virtues, her split personality, her femininity and masculinity, and her sense of motherhood, love and marriage are the main components of her struggles for social survival.

3. 1. 1. Shen Te's Virtues

Of all her social roles, Shen Te's virtues are the basis of the play and important in terms of her struggle for social survival. The title of the play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, directly implies that the play is an account of a good woman in Setzuan. Shen Te is recognized as a good woman of Setzuan by the other characters of the play. In addition to her goodness, she is also regarded as a generous woman. Both of these virtues are important social roles for many ways which constitute the essence of the play.

As the title of play and the other characters in the play suggest, Shen Te is a good and generous woman. In the prologue of the play, Wang, the water seller tries to help the Gods and finds a shelter for them who are searching for a good person, but nobody in the play accepts the gods in spite of hWang's great efforts from house to house a, person to person. However, Wang shelters the Gods in Shen Te's home and Shen Te voluntarily accepts the Gods in her home. Thus, Shen Te's goodness starts with the acceptance of the three Gods in her home. Besides, she is rewarded by the Gods because of her goodness, and given one thousand silver dollars, provided that she must remain good. The gods are happy to find a good person like Shen Te because their ultimate aim as stated in the play is that, "...the idle chatter about the impossibility of goodness will stop" (716). As for Shen Te, in order to survive socially in the society in which she lives in, she needs to be a good and a generous person. However, the Gods' concept of goodness is both complex and vague in the play. Christopher McCullough suggests that,

The Three Gods' idea of 'being good' is based on an essentialist notion of ethical goodness that bears little relationship to the realities

of the world in which good deeds are hoped for. The gods abstract concept of goodness makes inflexible moral demands on society, without reference to what is practical and what is not. Shen Te's 'good actions', apart from being practical (feeding and housing the poor), combine altruism with a desire for pleasure through giving (McCullough 122).

Thus, she buys a small tobacco shop with the money. By means of this shop, she helps the other characters in the play by giving food for the hungry, allowing shelter for the homeless and spending money for the ones who are in need of it. She is the constant supplier money, shelter and food for the characters of the play who are in need of them. Accordingly, her goodness combines with her generosity. Peter Ruppert considers Shen Te as kind, generous, compassionate and loving. Additionally, he also argues,

“Her goodness is a natural unfolding of herself; she shares her possessions freely, loves spontaneously, and reveals a genuine desire to help others. The significant values that emerge from her actions are friendliness, co-operation, peace, equality. These values flow effortlessly, without conscious deliberation.” (38-39).

Shen Te behaves naturally and her behaviours are for the sake of the good intentions.

The more Shen Te supplies money, shelter or food to the other characters in the play, the more they demand. Many people of a class divided and a capitalist society in the play take advantage of her good nature and generous personality and try to benefit from her goodness and generosity. Shen Te cannot reject their claims for money, food and shelter. Subsequently, her goodness fails. Similarly, “But in a

world of strife, hunger, and poverty, Shen Te's generosity and kindness prove self-destructive" (Ruppert 39). By the end of the play, it is impossible for Shen Te to be good and generous in a society suffering from conflicts, unemployment, hunger and poverty. Similarly, " 'Goodness' being the kind of luxury one can ill afford in our kind of world now becomes a distinct possibility" (Loeb 287) Thus, goodness and generosity in a capitalist society are forlorn hopes in vain. In other words, "...goodness cannot survive in a capitalistic world" (Gima 98). Consequently, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* poses a rhetorical question: How can a person be good in an imperfect, corrupt, mercenary and class-divided society? The answer is concealed in the question itself.

3. 1. 2. Shen Te's Femininity and Her Male Persona as Shui Ta

Shen Te's femininity and masculinity are also significant in terms of her struggle for social survival. Shen Te has a split personality, her female side as Shen Te and her male persona as Shui Ta. "Here Brecht embraces the idea of the "fusion and dissolution of the two characters, while at the same time he states his wish to confuse the issues of good and bad within each character" (Cima 105). Furthermore, Shen Te and Shui Ta cannot be thought of as different individuals. On the contrary, they are in the same body, but in a different guise in spite of their clashing personalities from femininity to masculinity and from goodness and evil. As Cima suggests, "Instead of viewing the characters Shen Te and Shui Ta as entirely separate entities associated with need-oriented naïveté and goal-oriented evil, respectively, we may perceive them as two characters in one, refusing to accept either gender choice" (106). In other words, Shen Te's personality is not divided into two which are

independent from each other. On the contrary, Shen Te and Shui Ta are two psychic parts of her personality determined and constructed by her society. Thus, Shen Te and Shui Ta might be viewed as two souls in one body.

There are a number of reasons concerning Shen Te's split personality. However, the most apparent reasons behind her split personality is to save herself and protect her interest. In other words, in order to exist in a poor, wicked, brutal and capitalist society, she needs to invent a male persona who saves his profits and protects her business. Thus, she creates a male cousin, Shui Ta, who is a bad, wicked, hard-nosed, and heartless man.

Shui Ta is the secondary identity or the alter-ego of Shen Te. "He is simply another side of Shen Te's personality" (Ruppert 39). While Shen Te is regarded as a good, generous, kind and soft woman, Shui Ta is mostly known as bad, hard, ruthless and crabby. Thus, she suffers from an inner conflict because of her split personality, both being a woman and a man, and both being good and wicked. "For the two sides of her personality, being neither totally good nor evil, activate within her a permanent state of conflict" (Silva 123). Although most people in the play love Shen Te and appreciate what she has done, they dislike Shui Ta and are scared of what he has done. Shui Ta succeeds many things that Shen Te couldn't. For example, the carpenter, Lin demands from Shen Te 200 silver dollars for the shelving and fixtures, but Shui Ta tells Lin to pay only 20 silver dollars. Shen Te uses Shui Ta's masculinity as a defence mechanism for her femininity. Sarah Lennox points out that:

Shen Te's goodness – her generosity, kindness, and nurturance – are closely tied to her female sex, and only in male guise is she able to

assert herself sufficiently to prevent her own exploitation and act to her own economic and personal advantage. Nevertheless, since it is Shen Te herself who incorporates this male self-interest, Brecht seems to be indicating that such sex-related differences are tied more to the social expectations accompanying gender than to any natural differentiation by sex in psychological characters (Lennox 92).

In other words, Lennox advocates that Shen Te's use of Shui Ta's masculine characteristics and her appearance in male guise are to protect her from oppression and manipulation and to save her own benefits and profits. Moreover, according to Lennox, a society expects such sexual differences between male and female and the differentiations of femininity and masculinity is determined socially, not naturally. Shen Te's male persona, Shui Ta is a medium of her struggle for social survival in a capital society.

Shen Te's split personality might also be considered as the metamorphosis of her identity in order to show the contradictions and circumstances in her society. Her clashing personalities, Shen Te as a good woman and Shui Ta as a wicked man reveal the conflict between the individual and the collective, and between Shen Te and her society. M. Helena Goncalves Da Silva argues that, "And although, through the motif of the metamorphosis, Brecht provides a release for a partly unconscious psychological process, he does not fall into subjectivism or simple character analysis; for, in an inexorable dialectic, he relates Shen Te's moral dilemma to social circumstances" (117). Shen Te's invention of a male persona is not a stereotypical and an individual struggle; instead it has a direct relation with her social and economic circumstances.

Another reason of her split personality is to show her dilemma in a dialectical way to arouse thinking of a reader or an audience about the contradictions in the play. According to Ruppert, “The split character of Shen Te/Shui Ta is a device that should be associated with Brecht’s famous *Verfremdungseffekt*. By contrasting the values and actions of Shen Te with those of Shui Ta, Brecht provides the reciprocal distancing necessary for “cool” critical judgment and at the same time makes visible the dialectical pattern of the play” (37-38). In other words, Shen Te’s split personality is a technique of epic drama which is called ‘Alienation’ making the reader and the audience estranged from Shen Te’s emotions in order to be critical about the play.

Shen Te’s split personality does not only deal with her gender, but she has a contradictory and conflictual personality in many ways. For instance, “Shen Te moves between the two poles of motherhood: between the self-effacing, desexed figuration of the parent and the self-authoring, sexually desiring mother” (Cima 106). Right along with motherhood, she also has a dilemma in terms of her roles and her sense of love: “She also clarifies the differences between her role as a commodified woman and her cross-dressed self-authorship. She marks the boundaries between romantic love for a man and a rejection or subversion of the romance and “angel of the slums” plots (Cima 106). Moreover, she tries to create an identity in a capitalistic society. As Cima stresses, “Shen Te’s counterpart Shui Ta, pregnant-woman-as-man, moves between an oppressive capitalism and a pragmatic, necessary self-love leading to the creation of self” (106). Shen Te is trying to construct an identity though she experiences a lot of clashes, contradictions, and dilemmas. “Authoring the self does not mean choosing between bipolar opposites; it can mean moving between them,

refusing fixedness.” (Cima 107). Thus, Shen Te demonstrates that human beings are not fixed, permanent and unalterable entities.

3. 1. 3. Shen Te’s Sense of Motherhood, Love and Marriage

Shen Te’s sense of motherhood, love and marriage is also noteworthy in terms of her struggle for social survival. Her sense of motherhood, love and marriage are related to each other. Additionally, all of these issues are related to Yang Sun, because she is in love with Yang Sun, wishes to marry him and becomes pregnant by him. However, Shen Te’s senses of motherhood, love and marriage are complicated issues to analyze.

Shen Te’s sense of love is problematic since Yang Sun and Shen Te have a problematic relationship. Although Shen Te loves him deeply, he mostly uses her. Thus, Yang Sun’s love for Shen Te might be understood in material terms. According to Cima, Brecht, “...creates a situation in which love is treated as a commodity” (93). Yang Sun regards his love as a commodity. In other words, he uses love to better his situation. As McCullough suggests, “Intermingled by business narrative is Shen Te’s love for the feckless airman, Yang Sun, which creates a tension with Shui Ta’s actions. This relationship further endangers her financial security as she is drawn, by her love for Yang Sun, into funding his ambition to be an airman” (118-119). On the other hand, Shen Te regards love as a holy thing, because she says in the play,

I want to go with the man I love

I don’t want to count the cost

I don’t want to consider if it’s wise

I don't want to know if he loves me

I want to go with the man I love (Brecht 731).

Shen Te also thinks in the play that "...it was love that got me into difficulties" (Brecht 725). Thus, in order to survive and cope with Yang Sun, she creates Shui Ta as her male protector and saviour. "Shen Te/Shui Ta may be regarded, in part, as an expression of a sexually desiring pregnant woman who tries to retrain her lover so that he might learn to be worthy of her desire" (Cima 105). In order to get rid of Yang Sun or survive without him, Shen Te invents Shui Ta.

Shen Te's sense of marriage is also a complicated issue, because her lovers, Yang Sun and Shu Fu do not marry in spite of their intention of marriage. Shui Tai does not come to their wedding to pay 300 silver dollars as Yang Sun and Shen Te have previously agreed. Right along with Yang Sun, she enamours Shu Fu, the wealthy barber with the intention of marriage. Similarly, McCullough states that, "Shen Te is on her way to meet Shu Fu the barber, with a view to a possible marriage. This marriage of convenience, a good match by worldly standards, is, of course, a 'respectable' bourgeois form of prostitution" (124).

Shen Te's sense of motherhood is much clearer and stronger as opposed to her sense of love and marriage. When Shen Te becomes pregnant; she also thinks about her unborn child's future with her maternal instincts and becomes more powerful, as well. As Cima argues, "The image of a mother-as-businesswoman, however, can be a useful source of power in certain situations for certain women" (107). Cima also exemplifies this statement as, "Shen Te/Shui Ta, the woman-as-businessperson is clearly pregnant: she has authored herself as Shui Ta and at the same time holds onto herself as Shen Te. This is very different from the more

customary representation of the unattached woman-as-businessperson.” (Cima 107). Thus, Shen Te is breaking the stereotypical concept of female gender with her sense of motherhood. “Shen Te not only produces another version of herself but also simultaneously acknowledges herself as a mother, breaking the taboo which mandates that powerful women must be childless.” (Cima 108). Shen Te proves that she is both a businesswoman and a mother. That means she is powerful.

3. 2. Shen Te’s Struggles for Economic Survival

Throughout the play, Shen Te struggles for economic survival. During her struggles for economic survival, Shen Te has also got several roles to perform in her society in which she lives . Her economic roles influence her economic existence in her community. These economic roles which are connected with her business practices, business relations and economic circumstances, determine her survival in her society. Like her social roles, she assumes a lot of roles and responsibilities; for instance she initially works as a prostitute and later runs a tobacco shop. She has relations with the Gods, Wang the carpet dealer and his wife, the Elderly couple, Shu Fu, Mrs. Shin, and Yang Sun. Shen Te is also affected by the economic circumstances of her society as a result of being a poor businesswoman and a petit-bourgeoisie. In addition, these economic roles which are the decisive elements of her economic survival behind her struggle are ascribed to her. Like her social roles, she involuntarily assumes her economic roles. Moreover, she faces a lot of problems such as objectification, manipulation, class oppression, and exploitation as a result of her occupation as a prostitute and a businesswoman and of her business relations in a capitalist society. It is difficult to exist and continue her business by being a good

and generous businesswoman in a poverty stricken and class divided society in which she lives. Similarly, McCullough suggests that,

The society of Setzuan, as depicted by Brecht, is a society in which it is difficult to survive. It is a society where poverty governs every action, turning some people to crime of a one sort or another and others to greed (which is a crime of a different sort). Survival demands unfriendliness. Shen Te and Shui Ta are alternative responses to the society of Setzuan” (125).

This kind of a society described above shapes her economic existence, but she fights for existing and surviving by disguising her gender, personality, and habits. Thus, her economic roles and circumstances give clues about her struggles for economic survival. Shen Te’s business practices, business relations and economic circumstances of the society are the vital fundamentals of her struggle for economic survival.

3. 2. 1 Shen Te’s Business Practices

Shen Te’s business practices are by far the most considerable elements in terms of her struggles for economic survival. Since she needs to survive in a capitalist society economically, she needs to work and support herself with some business practices. Her business practices are twofold. Initially, she financially supports herself by being a prostitute. In the play, Shen Te says that, “I’d like to be good, it’s true, but there’s the rent to pay. And that’s not all: I sell myself for a living” (Brecht 711). After the God’s intervention and their gift of a thousand silver dollars, she spends her money buying a small tobacco shop and starts to work being a

shopkeeper and businesswoman. According to Christopher McCullough, “Shen Te has a similarly ambivalent relationship to money-making. When we first meet her she is having to sell her body. Her ‘social progression’ by the dint of the gods’ gift is to selling tobacco (or opium)” (121). Thus, she regards both prostitution and tobacco shop as her business tools in order to survive economically.

3. 2. 2. Shen Te’s Business Relations

Shen Te’s business relations are also vital parts of her economic struggles for her economic survival. She has a series of business transactions with Gods, Wang, the carpet dealer and his wife, the elderly couple, Shu Fu, Mrs. Shin and especially Yang Sun. Since Shen Te is considered as a source of charity among her people, her kindness, goodness and generosity are taken advantage of by them. In addition, Silva points out that,

Although the characters are dependent on the ideological design of the play, Brecht also shows them in genuine human situations, often of a very contradictory kind, which give them a dimension of individuality and freedom. On the other hand, they are abstract types, categorized products of social conditions and circumstances, but in a wider sense, they are also reservoirs of a deep humanity that transcends any simplistic causality (120).

Silva summarizes the characteristics of individuals about Shen Te’s business relations. The characters, with whom Shen Te has business relations, are both

produced by the socioeconomic circumstances of her society and take advantage of Shen Te.

The three Gods are first and foremost partners in business with Shen Te. In search of goodness, the Gods propose to Shen Te to be good by giving her a thousand silver dollars and they occasionally come to see Shen Te's progress. This is a kind of a business deal. The Gods only think of their benefits, not anyone else's. Moreover, Shen Te does not benefit from her tobacco shop and suffers from being good and generous. According to Ruppert, "The three gods, who in the beginning of the play come to earth in search of a good person, seek only to justify the status quo" (40). The deal between the gods and Shen Te fails, because the gods only think of their own benefits. This is clear at the end of the play, because the gods ignore Shen Te's cries for help and do not appear in the last scene.

Shen Te also has a relation with Wang, because he is a mediator between the Gods and Shen Te. He is a business tool used by the Gods in order to control and check Shen Te's goodness. Furthermore he is a water-seller, so Shen Te buys his water though she doesn't need it. Wang says in the play that, "She bought a cup of water from me even though it was raining" (723). He is a commercial figure and there is a commercial relationship between the Gods, Shen Te and him. Additionally, Wang, "...pleads on behalf of Shen Te and of mankind for compromise and moral relativism, haggling with the gods for more accessible laws, for benevolence instead of love, for fairness instead of justice, for decency instead of honour (Silva 120). Thus, he functions as a pleader for Shen Te and her interests against the gods.

The Carpet dealer and his wife are also Shen Te's neighbours in business, because they run a shop near Shen Te's tobacco shop. She buys a shawl from their

shop. Moreover, since Shen Te does not have enough money to pay her rent, they lend her money. Thus, they are Shen Te's supporters. Then, she does not manage to repay her debt to them. Thus, they lose their shop because they could not pay their taxes.

The Elderly couple were Shen Te's first house owners when she moves to the city from the countryside. They take advantage of Shen Te's goodness and generosity, because they demand shelter for their relatives. Besides, they make her leave when she doesn't have enough money. On the other hand, they are Shen Te's protectors from creditors and beggars.

Shu Fu is also a next-door neighbour in business who runs a barbershop near Shen Te's tobacco shop. "He would certainly be stung into righteous indignation by the epithet exploiter" (Loeb 287), because he has both good and bad characteristics. He attacks Wang, breaks his hand and does not help him. On the contrary, he loves Shen Te, helps her and offers to marry her to save her business, but she doesn't want to marry him. Shui Ta takes advantage of Shu Fu, because he gives Shen Te a blank check and Shui Ta, her other self writes ten thousand silver dollars on it.

Mrs. Shin is the owner of the tobacco shop and Shen Te buys the tobacco shop from her. Thus, they have a direct business relation, because Mrs. Shin sells the shop and Shen Te purchases it. However, the sale makes Mrs. Shin a poor woman. She is also one of the people who takes advantage of Shen Te, because Mrs. Shin demands rice and money from Shen Te.

Yang Sun is an unemployed pilot whom Shen Te loves. However, he benefits from her love for him and her good nature. In order to get a pilot's job, he needs five hundred silver dollars. Thus, he tries to persuade Shen Te to give him two hundred

dollars from the carpet dealer and his wife and then wishes her to sell her tobacco shop to give him another three hundred dollars. “Sun is also the man who will eventually not hesitate at the thought of throwing Shen Te back into poverty and prostitution so that he may fulfil his dream” (Silva 121). Yang Sun is so selfish that he only thinks about his own benefits and profits. Thus, his relation with Shen Te is obviously to better his situation accompanied with his mercantile desires. His desire is for money, not for love. Thus, the relationship between Yang Sun and Shen Te might be comprehended in business terms.

3. 2. 3. Economic Circumstances

Economic circumstances and structures of Shen Te’s society are the real determinants of her struggle for economic survival. Shen Te lives in a province of China, Setzuan which is a class-divided, poverty-stricken, corrupt, wicked and imperfect society. As Peter Ruppert stresses, “Brecht’s Sezuan is a dehumanized society in which survival depends on cunning, deceit, and aggression – a society in which human beings are instruments and human relationships are determined by commerce. In Sezuan, the values of love and compassion represent a form of suicidal weakness” (37). In other words, the social and economic relations between people are determined by trade and people are the tools of the economic system. Moreover, the major cause of the economic circumstances in Shen Te’s Setzuan is directly related to capitalism.

Capitalism is responsible for all of the ills of Shen Te’s society. For instance, poverty is a result of capitalism and class conflict between Bourgeoisie, Petit-

Bourgeoisie and Proletariat stems from the capital system. All of the characters of the play try to survive under heavy conditions. Since capitalism causes the unequal distribution of goods, there arise poverty rather than wealth. As most of the characters in the play suffer from poverty, only a few characters are wealthy. . For instance, Shen Te's cousin, Shui Ta talks about her situation in the play as, "Yes. My cousin has the worst possible reputation: that of being poor" (Brecht 718). Besides, there are different socioeconomic classes within her society as a result of capitalism and unequal distribution of goods. Members of different classes suffer differently under the harsh economic conditions and view the world in different ways. The economic and, "...the social conditions that breed poverty and corruption do not allow Shen Te to be good and survive" (McCullough 118). Not only Shen Te but also other characters of the play cannot be good and survive because of the society in which they live. Thus, *The Good Person of Setzuan* is a critique of Shen Te's class divided and capitalist society.

Shen Te lives in Setzuan which is a poor province of China and all of the inhabitants of Setzuan are also poor people with a few exceptions. Most of the characters including Shen Te continuously struggle for survival and suffer from hunger, unemployment and despair. Helena Goncalves Da Silva argues about the town of Setzuan that:

Material and moral misery is its prevailing feature: most of the people are half-starved beggars, whole families are unemployed, and children search for food in the public dustbins. A large number of these people live from petty criminal activities, theft in particular. Always on the brink of survival, they are indifferent to other people's misery. The

social strata range from this desperate sub-proletariat to a commercial lower middle class, represented by the barber, Herr Shu Fu, and by Shen Te's landlady, Frau Mi Tzue. Contemptuous of everyone below their social position, they are respectable people of the area. Somewhere in between are Sun and his mother, prototypes of petit-bourgeois pretentiousness (Da Silva 119).

Silva's offers a clear account of the town of Setzuan and of its inhabitants. By showing these examples such as the half-starved beggars, the unemployed families, and the hungry children, and the indifferent people in *The Good Person of Setzuan*, Brecht criticises the capital system in the light of Shen Te's actions and thoughts. For example, even, "Shen Te's apology for her double-faced friends contains a critique of the social system in which they live" (Silva 118).

In *The Good Person of Setzuan*, there are representatives of the base and the superstructure. For example, Shen Te is a representative of the Base since she runs a tobacco shop and has business relations with the other characters. Moreover, the three Gods are the representatives of the superstructure since the Gods symbolize religion. The Gods reflect the Bourgeois mentality because they do not respond to Shen Te's cries for help at the end of the play and they just leave her and disappear. In doing so, they prove that they have no value and no authority over the destinies of men in the capital system. Thus, according to Brecht, religion is useless and only a false illusion of reality through the Gods. Equally, "Brecht is showing that religion is a farce, an illusion" (Silva 120). As Ruppert also supports Silva's argument, "But the play demonstrates that there is no redemption forthcoming from another world. The three gods, ignored in the province, confess their own uselessness... they do not

understand the world as it really is. If a better time is to come, man cannot rely on the impotent and unknowing gods.” (Ruppert 40). In other words, men should not expect anything from ineffective and mysterious Gods since religion is only a false consciousness as the play, *The Good Person of Setzuan* suggests.

Furthermore, the policeman is also a representative of the superstructure since he is associated with the law. The policeman also reflects a bourgeois mentality, because he not only gives Shen Te an opinion about marrying for money, but also criticizes her because of her prostitution. Thus, Brecht illustrates that law has a direct relation to the Bourgeoisie in a capital system through the representation of policeman. Similarly, “...the law is on the side of the rich in a capitalist society” (Silva 119). All in all, Shen Te and other characters in the play through the mode of production and their economic relations shapes the institutions of the society, they don’t determine the superstructure.

Brecht’s *The Good Person of Setzuan* has an open-ended conclusion and it doesn’t develop a resolution. Instead, Shen Te’s situation and the economic circumstances of her society remain vague. “The play ends with none of the problems resolved and the gods ascending to heaven still urging Shen Te to be good” (McCullough 119). Ruppert also supports McCullough’s opinion about the ending of the play and adds that,

In *Der gute Mensch*, however, there is a bitter end: Sezuan remains in all its imperfections, and Shen Te, with outstretched arms, pleads for help. In this way, Brecht focuses not on individual salvation but on social consciousness. Shen Te’s desire is to be good to others and to herself. She wants to be kind to her lover, her child, and all those who

depend on her for survival. It is the social-economic conditions of Sezuan that cause her self-division and that force her to rely on the repulsive means of Shui Ta (Ruppert 40-41).

Thus, all of Shen Te's thoughts and actions depend on the socioeconomic circumstances of Setzuan. Her split personality, her business relations, her dilemmas stem from the society in which she lives in. Thus, by creating such a character, Shen Te in a capitalist society, Brecht provides a cue for dialectics between individual as Shen Te and collective as the society, Setzuan.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPARISON OF BERTOLT BRECHT'S *MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN* AND *THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN*

Brecht's plays provide a medium for thinking and questioning. Thus, the aim of Brecht's theatre is "...to change our conception of the world, or more simply even, to change the way we think, by questioning our most common metaphysical, political, social beliefs which Brecht sees as linguistic constructs, as forms of representation" (Sartiliot 120). In order to achieve this aim, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* present two female characters whose struggles for social and economic survival in class divided societies suggest a critical basis for literary theoreticians and drama practitioners. However these two female characters are not regarded as the heroes of the plays, on the contrary, they are portrayed as alterable and contradictory characters determined by their socioeconomic environments. As Sartiliot argues that, "In Brecht's plays, characters are not heroes, that is, central figures around whom time (and thus history) is organized, whose fate the spectators are asked to follow unquestioningly, with whom they are supposed to identify. For Brecht, the hero is a thing of the past" (124). Thus, both *Mother Courage* and *Shen Te* are not heroines, but the agents for dialectical thinking. Through these two female characters, Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* have some common characteristics underlined by Marxist literary theory and epic drama. Thus, in the second and third chapters of the thesis, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of*

Setzuan are individually examined in detail. However, these two plays allows some commonalities to investigate as well.

Throughout Bertolt Brecht's plays *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, there are many similarities along with many differences. These plays are both Brechtian plays which identify collective troubles and contradictions of the society by means of individual problems and conflicts under the name of Mother Courage and Shen Te. In other words, both of the plays demonstrate socioeconomic circumstances of the society reflected through the struggles and clashes of untragic heroines, Mother Courage and Shen Te. Moreover, two of the plays are the good examples of epic theatre and can be discussed from Marxist point of view. Furthermore, these two plays are business plays which portray a series of business transactions through individual characters: Mother Courage is a coldhearted businesswoman who struggles to survive by making profit from war with her canteen wagon; and Shen Te is a good-hearted prostitute who tries to survive by being good and generous. Thus, there are many comparative aspects in these plays in terms of both form and content.

After a detailed analysis of Marxism literary criticism and epic drama in the first chapter, an interpretation of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in the second chapter, an examination of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in the third chapter, The fourth chapter discusses these two plays in terms of comparisons in the light of Marxist literary theory and epic drama. This fourth chapter of the thesis is divided into two sections. The first section will compare *Mother Courage and Her Children* to *The Good Woman of Setzuan* signifying the basic similarities in terms of the

content. The second section will compare *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* illustrating the essential affinities in terms of the form.

4. 1. A Comparison of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in Terms of Content

Mother Courage and Her Children and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are akin to one another in terms of content. Thus, these two plays might be analyzed from Marxist literary theory. Both plays allow a critique of capitalism along with the notion of class conflict, of the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, of the Base and the Superstructure, of historical situation, and of alienation.

The first common point of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is the critique of capitalism. Both plays criticize capital system through the characters Mother Courage and Shen Te. Mother Courage and Shen Te struggles to survive in the capitalist societies and needs to support themselves financially through their business tools and practices. In capitalism, "Work is seen as the unfortunately necessary condition of survival. People are thought to work only because they want the results that the work brings: goods, and money" (Jaggar 208). The societies that Mother Courage and Shen Te have lived, are both capitalist societies divided into different classes, and impoverished by the socio-economic circumstances. Thus, there are imbalances, divisions, and inequalities between the members of the society in the plays. As Alison M. Jaggar argues that, "Capitalism creates a certain type of social structure in which the majority of people are poor or near poverty and it creates an ideology characterized by the values of

individualism, competitiveness, domination and a certain kind of consumption” (Jaggar 71). All of these results of capitalism are true for Brecht’s plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

In both plays, a majority of people, especially Mother Courage and Shen Te, are under pressure of poverty and dominated by the idea of individualism and competitiveness. Mother Courage is a war profiteer who sells supplies with her canteen wagon in the war circumstances. Mother Courage tirelessly works, persistently continues to make profit from the war and gladly celebrates the war. In spite of Courage’s labors and her will to survive, she learns nothing, and earns nothing at the end of the play, because she becomes alone, miserable, poor and penniless. She have lost all of her children and still been determined to go on her business. Similarly, Shen Te is also a businesswoman like Mother Courage. Initially, she works as a prostitute and later as a shopkeeper. She also works tirelessly, relentlessly continues to run her tobacco shop in order to be good and generous. She even changes her female personality into a male one to keep her business alive. Notwithstanding Shen Te’s efforts and her will to be good and generous, she is left alone and her cries for help are ignored by the gods. She is also lonely, wretched, poor and impoverished at the end of the play.

By illustrating these two characters’, Mother Courage’s and Shen Te’s situation in a class-divided and capitalist societies, Bertolt Brecht allows a critique of capitalism. Brecht tries to demonstrate the impacts of capitalism on individuals and groups of a society through his women characters, because,

Capitalism seriously impedes human self-realization and the full flowering of human potentiality. Moreover, capitalist organization of

production obscures the ways in which the members of a society are interdependent; it sets individuals in competition with each other so that they learn to view one another as potential enemies and are unable to perceive their mutual dependence and the interests they have in common. (Jaggar 58)

As clearly stated above, capitalism causes great ills and problems for the members of the society. For example, Mother Courage and Shen Te forget their mutual dependence to other members of the society and individually struggle to survive only for their interests. Thus, Mother Courage and Shen Te have a capitalist-oriented human nature isolated from society and alienated from the other members of the society.

Throughout Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the notion of class conflict is at the centers of the plays. Brecht identifies a conflict between the classes, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat in his plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In both plays, the society is divided into socioeconomic classes. Mother Courage is a representative of the Petit-Bourgeoisie who is a small trader identifying with the interests of the ruling classes. But, a victory for the generals in the war causes her losses. Besides, Shen Te is also a representative of the Petit-Bourgeoisie who is working to be a good person and survive in a capitalist society with the help of the Gods' gift, a thousand silver dollars. Yet, she gains nothing at the end of the play by being poor and alone. Thus, both Mother Courage and Shen Te are oppressed, manipulated and exploited in these class-divided and capitalist societies. Similarly, "Women's oppression resulted from the institution of class society, and its

form is determined by the current form of class society and it can be abolished only by the abolition of class society. Under capitalism, women are oppressed primarily because their oppression benefits capital” (Jaggar 70). Thus, in order to abolish Mother Courage’s and Shen Te’s oppressions, conflicts and contradictions in class-divided societies, the classes are to be abolished. According to Bertolt Brecht, the notion of class conflict is one of the major concerns of all social phenomena and puts this notion at the base of his plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Brecht also signifies a clash between the Base and the Superstructure in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Both Mother Courage and Shen Te are the representatives of the Base, because Mother Courage is in charge of a canteen wagon with her series of business transactions and Shen Te is also responsible of running a tobacco shop with a number of business relations. On the other hand, while the generals in the war are the representatives of the Superstructure in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the Gods are the representatives of the Superstructure.

Historical situation is one of the common concerns of Bertolt Brecht in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. The gist of historical situation is, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 626). Social and economic structures and materialist understanding of history are determined by the social and economic circumstances of life or the material means of existence. Similarly, Influenced from Marx’s idea, Brecht also believes that thought doesn’t determine being, but social being determines thought. This is called as

historical materialism. “According to historical materialism, ideals are not only developed by people in specific material circumstances; they are shaped by people’s experience of those circumstances.” (Jaggar 207). In other words, social and economic circumstances of the society create ideals and thoughts. Thus, Brecht’s women characters, Mother Courage and Shen Te reflect social and economic circumstances of their societies through their individual situations. As Claudette Sartillot suggests that, “Brecht presents characters who cannot appear unified since they are constituted by outside forces and, as such, reflect social and political contradictions (132). Mother Courage and Shen Te are the individuals who represent social and economic conditions. Similarly, “As a reader of Marx, Brecht portrays individuals as the sum of their social circumstances” (Sartillot 132). In other words, Brecht’s characters’, Mother Courage’s and Shen Te’s social and economic existence and circumstances determine their consciousness. To sum up, Mother Courage’s and Shen Te’s capital and class-divided societies, their classes as a member of the Petit-Bourgeoisie and their social, their representation of the Base determine their consciousness.

Alienation is also another similar point of Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. There are three forms of alienation in Brecht’s plays: alienation from actual work activity, alienation from species-life and alienation from other human beings. Firstly, Mother Courage and Shen Te are alienated from their actual work activity, because Mother Courage is obliged to work under war conditions and Shen Te is obliged to run a tobacco shop. As Jaggar points out that, “Workers are alienated from their actual work activity because they are forced to undertake that activity in conditions over which have little control” (216).

Secondly, Mother Courage and Shen Te are also alienated from their species-life. Two of the characters work for their social and economic survival, not for enjoyment. Accordingly, “The structure of work under capitalism also alienates workers from what Marx calls their “species-life...Workers do not work for enjoyment; they work in order to survive” (Jaggar 216). Lastly, Mother Courage and Shen Te are alienated from other human beings and they consider other human beings as competitors of themselves. According to Jaggar, “Workers are alienated from other human beings. The structure of the capitalist mode of production makes other people seem to workers to be simply competitors for scarce resources, either competitors for their jobs, or employers who are attempting to exhaust their life energies” (216). Thus, In Mother Courage’s and Shen Te’s societies, other members of the society take advantage of Mother Courage and Shen Te to better their situation because of this competitive environment. For example, Mother Courage’s son, Eilif is taken into army by the soldiers and Shen Te⁸ gives supplies to other characters who demands money and shelter.

4. 2. A Comparison of Bertolt brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in Terms of Form

Mother Courage and Her Children and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are also similar to each other in terms of form. Thus, two of the plays embody key concepts and devices of epic drama such as episodic structure, alienation effect and historical situation. These commonalities help the readers and audiences of the plays about the understanding of Brecht’s dramaturgy.

Brecht's plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* have an episodic structure. Similarly, Claudette Sartiliot also points out that, "In Brecht's epic theatre, the action no longer develops in a linear and unified fashion, but rather in an episodic manner" (126). In an episodic structure of play, the scenes might be linked together by the characters, setting and theme, but each scene is for itself. There is no unity between the scenes of the play. Narratives are suggested through the episodic structure and so they do not develop a conflict and an action. There is no definite beginning, conflicts-climax and ending of a play in traditional sense. Instead, there are pauses, fragments, interludes; short scenes alternated longer scenes, songs, lights and illustrations. "Brecht's whole theatre is based on interruptions meant to prevent the spectator's identification with the characters and to give him time to think. With Brecht, the theatrical performance stops being a supposedly unified and integrated whole" (Sartiliot 126). Thus, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* expose these characteristics of the episodic structure of an epic play.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht uses alienation effect to turn the passive readers into the active observers who are able to make decisions to the play critically. Alienation effect is simply a dramatic technique to provide the reader or the audience to work his/her thinking faculties instead of identifying the characters' feelings or associating oneself with the events of a play. Its aim is to abolish the viewer's emotional involvement to the play in order to make decisions and judgments about the play. Thus, Brecht uses a number of alienation techniques in his plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

In doing so, Brecht put his characters and events historically and geographically into remote places and times. This is a kind of an alienation technique. For example, the setting of *Mother Courage and Her Children* is the Thirty Years Wars between 1624 and 1636 throughout Europe, Germany, Poland, Bavaria and Saxony. Similarly, the setting of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is the Chinese city of Setzuan, but the time of the play is not identified because of the play is a parable the aim of which is to teach a lesson. Thus, through this kind of alienation techniques, illusion of reality that is represented via the text and performance of the play is shattered and even broken. However, according to John Willett, Alienation or “ ‘Verfremdung’, in fact, is not simply the breaking of illusion; and it does not mean ‘alienating’ the spectator in the sense of making him hostile to the play. It is a matter of detachment, of reorientation” (177).

Brecht’s use of songs, interludes and titles in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is also a kind of alienation technique which breaks the illusion of the reality and allows pauses to the reader or the audience in order to think critically and make judgments about the play. For instance, Mother Courage’s song of the Grand Capitulation is a lesson for the soldier about his anger and their environment. Moreover, the interludes between the scenes in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are explanations to the spectator about the play such as revelation of Shen Te’s as Shui Ta or Wang’s progress reports to the Gods about Shen Te’s goodness. These alienation techniques of epic theatre deconstruct the traditions of dramatic theatre. As Sartiliot emphasizes that, “This new epic theatre, which explodes the unity of the representation, breaks the law of genre, welcomes other arts such as music, songs, film projections, titles, does so in order to draw the

attention of the spectator to the conventions of the theatrical representation” (Sartiliot 126).

Brecht also challenges the notion of the fourth wall with the achievement of alienation techniques in his plays. Thus, Brecht collapses the fourth wall between the spectator and the play with the alienation effects and manages to draw the viewer’s attention that he/she is watching a play. Finally, Hugh Rorrison summarizes that,

The aim of all Brecht’s alienation effects was to reveal character and incident in an unfamiliar light, which would sharpen the audience’s attention and stimulate their critical faculties. The dangers of emotion, emotional involvement and seductive illusions are that they blind the audience to the social mechanisms Brecht set in motion before them.

(xxxiv)

As Rorrison suggests, Brecht’s alienation techniques interprets *Mother Courage’s* and Shen Te’s situation in a different manner which provides the viewers to think and criticize the characters rather than identifying their roles and empathizing their emotions.

All things considered, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* include a number of similarities addressing the same characteristic in Bertolt Brecht’s theory and practice. The common points of the plays are from both the point of view as Marxism and the form as Epic drama such as critique of capitalism, class conflict, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation, alienation, episodic structure and alienation effect.

These similarities allow one to compare two plays with a critical way of understanding. Moreover, Brecht's plays are usually open-ended and unfinished for discussion and debates. For example, Mother Courage's and Shen Te's situation is ambiguous and unsolved at the end of the plays, because Mother Courage is alone with her canteen wagon without her children and Shen Te is also left alone and ignored by the Gods at the last scene of the play. There are several reasons for this kind of ending of his plays. According to Sartiliot, "First, they are open-ended in the sense that they are supposed to be finished by the spectator in real life. Second, most of Brecht's plays are already readings of other theatrical works and as such already intertexts, rather than original texts" (124). Consequently, these commonalities and pave the way for the new interpretations of Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgy.

CONCLUSION

Brecht is mostly known with his playwriting because of his distinct style in drama. As Sergey Tretiakov suggests that, “Brecht’s plays usually bear several signatures. This is the result of his special way of working on them. He does not write them but composes them, acting them out before a small group of collaborators” (19). Thus, Brecht’s theatre is not conventional, but highly challenging to the dramatic theatre. Brecht is not a playwright who produces plays and then put them on the stage for the spectators’ pleasure. On the contrary, he is a political dramatist who composes his plays collaboratively and put them on the stage for the spectators’ both enjoyment and didactic learning. Thus, his concepts, practices, and techniques on drama turn the spectators into critical observers to the play rather than passive watchers. Brecht “...teaches people how to reach a verdict, transforming the spectator’s chair into that of the judge” (Tretiakov 22). Brecht’s drama has judgmental, didactic, dialectical and pedagogical purposes in order to work the spectators’ thinking and criticizing faculties.

Bertolt Brecht’s artistic style stands for his theory of Marxism and his practice of epic theatre. Since Bertolt Brecht is a devoted Marxist, his plays might be analyzed from Marxist point of view. Moreover, Brecht’s plays are the good examples of epic theatre, because he is one of the makers of epic theatre. Thus, Brecht is considered as a Marxist and an epic dramatist. Brecht employs his Marxist approach and epic style in his plays. For example, Brecht’s plays, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are the exact embodiments of his theory of Marxism and his practice of epic drama.

Mother Courage and Her Children and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* portray the constant struggles for social and economic survival in class divided societies as reflected through the characters of Mother Courage and Shen Te. Brecht tries to demonstrate social and economic circumstances of society through individual characters' struggles by alienating the spectators from emotional identification and providing them to think and question critically. Thus, the aim of the thesis has been to examine Mother Courage' and Shen Te's socioeconomic struggles for survival in connection with the Marxist point of view and the principles of epic drama in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Thus, the thesis has been divided into four chapters with the introduction and conclusion sections.

The first chapter has discussed the basic principles of Marxist literary theory and the key concepts and devices of epic drama. Bertolt Brecht's fame through *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* still continues to exist. All of these two texts allow different way of perspectives from different literary criticism and theatres. However, the most reliable theory is Marxist literary criticism and the most suitable practice is epic drama for Brecht, because Marxism reveals the answers of the questions in Brecht's texts and words dialectically. Right along with Marxism, Brecht's use of epic form in his plays is also notable, because epic drama is a supplementary of Marxism. Thus, the notions of class conflict, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation, alienation and capitalism; the concepts of episodic structure, alienation effect and historical situation have been investigated in this chapter.

The second chapter has explored *Mother Courage and Her Children* in terms of Mother Courage's social and economic struggles in a capitalist society under the war conditions. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, there are a lot of references for Marxism and Epic Drama. Thus, firstly, Mother Courage's sense of motherhood, her femininity human virtues in wartime have been analysed in terms of her struggle for social survival. Secondly, war as business, the relationship between war and capitalism, and the class conflict between The Bourgeoisie, The Petite-Bourgeoisie, and the Proletariat have been criticised in terms of Mother Courage's struggle for economic survival.

The third chapter has examined *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in terms of Shen Te's socioeconomic struggles in class-divided, money centred, and an imperfect society. In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, there are also numerous references for Marxism and Epic Drama. Thus, initially, Shen Te's virtues, femininity and masculinity and sense of motherhood, love and marriage have been discussed in terms of her struggle for social survival. Then, Shen Te's business tools, her business relations and economic circumstances of her society have been argued in terms of her struggle for economic survival.

The fourth chapter has been argued *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* by comparing characteristics of the plays in light of Marxist literary criticism and epic drama. These two plays suggests a number of similarities in terms of both the content including issues of a critique of capitalism, class conflict, the Bourgeoisie, the Petit-Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, the Base and the Superstructure, historical situation, and alienation and the form including the notions of episodic structure and alienation effect.

Bertolt Brecht deconstructs the traditional conventions of drama through representation of Mother Courage and Shen Te by illustrating them as business tools in capitalist societies. *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* also subvert the stereotypical representation of woman and class oppression. Thus, Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* challenges to the clichés and breaks the habits about conventional depictions of gender and class. Brecht stresses that there might be shifts, changes and exceptions rather than fixity, stereotypes and generalizations in societies. Thus, Mother Courage's and Shen Te's socioeconomic struggles for survival in class-divided societies provoke the readers and the audiences to think critically. It is obvious that *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* by Bertolt Brecht will be read with a great pleasure for didactic purposes in next years.

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