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ANNA FIERLING'S DUAL PERSONA IN BERTOLT BRECHT'S *MUTTER COURAGE UND IHRE KINDER*

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Abstract

The study of women during wartime includes the analysis of both elites and subalterns alike with regard to the diversity of their attitudinal composure. Researchers have showed that women exhibit different personality behavior during war situation, with the example of the work of Vickers (1993). In *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (1939)*, personality clash is represented through Anna Fierling, the main character's individual deviation from the standards of conduct operating, being a humanist and anti-human, within the given culture. To Anna Fierling, who must see the end of the thirty years European war, we see the struggle between virtues of motherhood and vices for livelihood. However, a behavioural balance in Anna Fierling's character could seldom be achieved away from cultural relativity. This paper, therefore, presents a humanistic approach for explaining the bifoci of Anna Fierling's personality; a woman at the crossroads of playing her motherly as well as economic role in a capitalist, war-torn era.

Keywords: *Humanism, Motherhood, Anna Fierling, Dual Persona*

Introduction

This study gives a brief overview of the concept of Humanism as a literary approach, which is followed by an analysis of *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, focusing on its themes of motherhood and humanity as well as the concept of dual Persona. Anna Fierling has been a central issue in Bertolt Brecht's epic drama. Mumford (2009:171) defines epic theater as "the umbrella phrase Brecht used to describe all the technical devices and method of interpretation that contribute to the creation of an artistic socialist commentary and engaged spectator. This

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mode of literature and performance tells something about the people's past as opposed to showing it in present tense, dialogue-based form".

Until now, Anna Fierling has been criticized for her treacherous role in the drama. In their cutting edge paper, Hooti and Esmaeel (2011:40) reveal that although "Mother Courage is a human being- each human being knows that money is not more valuable than life". They maintain that Mother Courage is a deceiver of herself. In a major advance, Suleiman (2012:45) equated Courage's "relentless pursuit of profit with success and survival; she comes to believe that if she is profitable, she can survive the war". The character of Mother Courage seems not to have been profoundly dealt with from a humanist point of view. Her striking character is her dual personality: playing the role of a mother as well as that of a business woman.

Dual persona could be defined as the double personality that a person presents to other people. The concept of dual persona as it has been conceived, seeks to reveal the dual personality of Anna Fierling as shown in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. It is on the premise of this concept that the basis of this study is formed viz-à-viz Anna Fierling's Humanist and Anti-Humanist motherhood.

Woodland (1972:128) goes further in criticizing Anna Fierling even as he compares her to someone without conscience. He underlines:

> As each of the children is sacrificed to the need for survival, Mother Courage loses the human aspect represented by that child (Eilif is Swiss Chesse honesty, Kattrin is unreasoning love).With the children gone, Mother Courage's humanity is gone. She remains only with animal instinct.

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Woodland failed to see Anna Fierling's anti-humanist motherhood character. Instead, he went on to justify her decisions and motives maintaining that virtue has no chance in a society where Buying and Selling are necessary for survival. Bearing this in mind, we shall analyze her role as a mother from a humanist perspective. By so doing, we would see if she is humanist or anti-humanist in carrying out her responsibilities as a mother while trading during war time.

Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht, a German dramatist, poet and theatre director, was born on the 10th of February, 1898 in Augsburg, Bayern. He pursued his studies at Munich University where he studied Medicine and Theatre Studies. In 1930, he married his long-time collaborator and actress Helene Weigel. He published a lot of drama and also made contributions to dramaturgy (notably his epic drama and alienation effect). His TheaterWorks include *Baal*(1918), *Trommeln in der Nacht*(1918), *Mann ist Mann* (1926), *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928) amongst others.

***Mutter Courage Und Ihre Kinder*: A Resume**

The drama, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, which was intercepted by songs was written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939 and two years later premiered in Zurich. The drama is, however, an epic drama; Brecht rewrites the chronicles of the Thirty Years war (1618-1648) in Europe, thereby depicting the life of a historical figure Anna Fierling, a businesswoman, who is also known as Mother Courage. It is set during the Thirty Years' War in contemporary Poland, Sweden and Germany. The war was a source of income for Anna Fierling, but ends up costing her the lives of her three children. The drama is composed of twelve scenes and

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poses the question of Mother Courage's humanity and moral disposition in times of difficulty and dilemma.

Anna Fierling, the central character of the drama, hails from Bamberg, Bavaria.She is a determined, independent, businesswoman, who was able to adapt to the pros and cons of the Thirty Years' War. She was the canteen woman during the war. Mother Courage is a mother of three grown children, Eilif, Katrin Haupt and Schweizerkas, who travelled with her from the beginning of the drama. Brecht portrays in Anna Fierling a promiscuous woman who had her three children from three different affairs. She is seen as someone who would not allow anything to keep her from business, not even the death of her children.

Humanism as an Approach in Literature

According to Baumann and Oberle (1985:39) Humanism as a movement sprang up at the end of the 15th century in Italy. It later spread to other parts of Europe notably the Netherlands, and was spearheaded by Erasmus von Rotterdam. Humanism can be interpreted as an approach to life. It stresses value on life and agency of human beings. Rockmore (1995:60) reaches the conclusion that humanism is an unclear concept, reason being that it apparently has no natural or non-normative meaning. Rockmore's conclusion about humanism calls in mind that humanism has no clear cut definition. Höffding (1955:12), in a much earlier attempt, describes humanism as being not only a literary tendency, but also a tendency of life, characterized by interest for the human. Today, people who share in the testimony and values of Höffding are called "humanists". Humanism is defined by Olearnik (2010:2) while referring to Kurz (1994), to mean "a worldview or life-stance which identifies and promotes the value of human beings and carries with it a series of obligations about how

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we ought to live and treat others". The humanists make their ethical decisions based on reason, sympathy and a concern for human beings. In literature, Michel de Montaigne: *Essais*, a collection of a large number of short subjective treatments of various topics published in 1580, François Rabelais and William Shakespeare: *The Tempest* (1610) and *Julius Ceasar* (1599) were perceived as notable "humanists" because they appeared to be enthusiasts of humanist thoughts, since they portrayed humanism in their works. The literary works of humanists were principally written to uphold good sense of justice, human rights and the value of life in the 16th century. In summary, humanism was out to depict sincerity, honesty, self-discipline and value for life, across various cultures and intellectual strata. In German Literature, F.C. Schiller's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1910) and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1928) are good examples of humanist works. Bertolt Brecht textually forms a league with these writers. In a bid to literarily portray the war-plagued German society of the early 30s in his drama *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, he alights, in the theatrical and philosophical components of his intrigue, on the fundamental framework of humanism whereby he divulges the subtle exertion of egocentrism which socially induced or inherently stationed factors had triggered in his main character, Anna Fierling.

The human nature comprises the common characteristics of humans - personality. People's motives, attitudes, interests and abilities are never exactly the same. The term "personality" has been used by Ryckman (2008:4) to refer to the "dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations and behaviours in various situations". Ryckman's definition of personality is very plausible since personality is a unique, distinctive and relatively consistent pattern of thinking, perceiving and behaving and moreso of enduring a given situation. In a social

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context such as the Thirty Years war in Europe, a mother, whose primary duty is to love unconditionally and place the needs of her children above her own, is likely to develop antihuman nature when she starts placing the love for money above the value for human lives. In his critique of Heidegger's theory of humanism, Rockmore (1995:186) summarized the anti-human nature a "not basically concerned with human beings, opposing the ideals of humanism". Her show of love should not be expressed only in words but in action.

Our definition of humanism as a literary approach captures the basis of the study of Anna Fierling's dual persona. In placing the needs of food and other financial obligation above her own needs, Anna Fierling's two-faced identity is aroused due to circumstances she was in capable of controlling.

Anna Fierling´s Two-Faced Identity

Anna Fierling, also known as Mother Courage, is represented in the drama as a true mother figure and also a heartless mother. A mother is supposed to have motherly, affectionate and loving quality, such as maternal affection. She should be creative, someone who educates and trains her children.

We shall therefore examine Mother Courage as a mother figure and her antihuman mother figure, accounting thus for her dual persona.

Humanist Motherhood

A woman, whose husband is dead, is naturally saddled with the responsibility of raising her children alone. In such a circumstance, she becomes the "father" to her children,

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and thus, has to provide their basic needs. Her name "Courage", Anna Fierling describes in the first scene, came about because she risks her life in search of daily bread.

> **Der Feldwebel:** wo sind eure Papiere?
> **Mutter Courage:** Papiere?
> **Der jüngere Sohn:** Das ist doch die Mutter Courage!
> **Der Feldwebel:** Nie von gehört. Warum heißt sie Courage?
> **Mutter Courage:** Courage heiß ich, weil ich dein Ruin gefürchtet habe, Feldwebel, und bin durch das Geschützfeuer von Riga gefahren mit fünfzig Brotlaib im Wagen...
>
> **[The Sergeant**: Where are your papers?
> **Mother Courage**: Papers?
> **The younger son**: That's Mother Courage!
> **The Sergeant**: Never heard of her. Why is she called Courage?
> **Mother Courage**: My name is Courage, because I feared your ruin, Sergeant, and I ran from Riga driving in the wagon with fifty loaves of bread...]

She explains to the Sergeant, how she lives her life as a mother. She tries every day to provide the economic needs of her children even as she trades during wartime. Mousley (2007:8) asserts that literary humanism centers of the question "how to live?" the personal worth of an individual and the centrality of human lives. Literary humanism, he points out, looks to literature for images of authentic human fulfillment and also the powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life. It is on this premise that Anna Fierling defends her children again and again. In the first scene, for example, she pulls her knife to protect her son from the Recruiter.

However, one major paradox identified in this study of war events with their complexities is the very attractive reasoning that women's obligations first transit into matriarchy and then become inalterable in times of war. At such times of crossfire with

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societal feud, where economy, religion, finance, politics and other social engines fall under the massive weight of conflicting interregnum, the roles of women in the society are rather accentuated. The power of the homemaker is seen to be stretched beyond the limits of that of the home-ruler, who at this stage, often stays connected to extra-familial affairs. Motherly as the woman's position may simply appear during war, there underlie many fatherly duties which are interwoven into the woman's regular, daily ante-war chores. In this regard, the family, to the woman, is perceived more in the light of a matrimonial enterprise than of a social venture, thus she is auto-compelled to channel colossal investments by way of various resources into home management. Chief among these common roles could be designated as selflessness, displayed to a very worrying extreme, even to her own detriment. Vickers (1993:25) puts it thus:

> Women suffer greatly in their traditional roles as homemakers, mothers and care-givers in times of conflict, losing the support of husbands and sons who join the fighting, seeing their young children and aged parents go hungry when food supplies and other necessities are destroyed or sent to the war zones, and when basic necessities like bread become unobtainable. Inevitably, they deprive themselves in order to give to others.

Undoubtedly, there exists no common boundary between this preceding analysis of Vickers and the textual components of Bertolt Brecht's epic drama *Mutter Courage und ihreKinder*, which bestows upon Anna Fierling a tasking quota of keeping the home, justifying her motherhood and palliating emotional tortures that war could induce in the lives of every ward within her grasp for as long as the war lasted. Unfortunately and even more so, her motherly status resulted to an accumulation of various degrees of stress, anxieties and sufferings. In the spirit of a typical African woman, Anna Fierling is like a hen that has to

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protect her chicks from cold when it rains. She believes that it is better for it to rain on "the hen", rather than on the chicks. In a chat with the Chaplain, one learns that she make profits from the war and does not want peace because she could not otherwise care for their children;

> **Der Feldprediger:**... Sie wollen keinen Frieden, sondern Krieg, weil sie Gewinne machen,..
> **Mutter Courage:** Meine Waren sind keine alte Klamotten, sondern davon lebe ich, und sie haben bisher auch.
> **Der Feldprediger:** Also vom Krieg! Aha!! (Szene 8)

> [**The chaplain**: ... You do not want peace, but war because you are making profit…
>
> **Mother Courage**: My goods are no old clothes. I make my living from it and you have also previously as well.
>
> **The Chaplain:** Even during war! Aha!
>
> (Scene 8)

As we can see from the above conversation, she purports herself as a good mother, a caring widow, who plays a humanist, paternal role. She nurtures the hope that even the common man can benefit from the war. In addition, she is one of the greatest Brechtian mother figures as Schallenberger (2003:15) remarked, who embodies the hope of protection and survival in the capitalist world.

Anti-Humanist Motherhood

Conversely, Anna Fierling's virtuous motherhood appears to mask her identity as a heartless mother. By "heartless", we mean that Mother Courage appears to be callous and hard. Even Brecht goes on to show by her example in Scene 3, how heartlessness leads a

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mother to set business over life. Schweizerkas, her son, was taken into custody by a Sergeant while trying to save the regimental box. He agrees to free him in exchange for two hundred gilders. Mother Courage could afford such an amount if she sold her wagon and the stock in it. However, she oscillates in her decision holding tight to her wagon and not willing to part with it. She later tells Yvette "tell him, I'll pay two hundred. Run!".

Moreover, as Brecht shows time and again the anti-humanist nature of Fierling in being self-perpetuating and her crave for wealth, her haggling over the price of the bribe cost in order for Schweizerkas to be freed later cost the life of her son, because at the time Yvette reaches where Schweizerkas was being held captive, he had already been executed. From Anna Fierling is an action at this point we could tell that she did not show value for the life of her son neither did she show ethical reasoning at his death. Elder and Paul (2009:6) use the term ethical reasoning to denominate doing what is right even in the face of powerful selfish desires. They further maintain that humans naturally develop into narrow-minded and self-centered thinkers. They further point egocentrism as a fundamental barrier to ethical reasoning. When Schweizerkas' corpse was brought to Mother Courage, she denies knowing him. We have to emphasize here that the person whose corpse was brought in was her own son; a son she bore in her womb during conception, who she probably had to breastfeed till he was weaned. The inability for anyone to recognize and claim the corpse made the Catholic Sergeant to say, "*Gebtihn auf den Schindanger. Er hat keinen, der ihn kennt*"["Chuck him in the pit. He's got nobody that knows him"](Scene 3). Mother Courage loses her son when she focuses on the superficial aspect of life- which is profit making rather than value for life, and ethical decisions based on reason. There is recognition, here, according to the assertion of Elder and Paul (2009), that egocentrism is truly a fundamental barrier to ethical reasoning.

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Brechts manages to draw our attention to a striking comment about Mother Courage at the beginning of Scene 11:

> Januar 1636. Die kaiserlichen Truppen bedrohen die evangelische Stadt Halle. Der Stein beginnt zu reden. Mutter Courage verliert ihre Tochter und zieht allein weiter. Der Krieg ist noch lange nicht zu Ende.
>
> [Januar 1636: The imperial troops threaten the evangelical town, Halle. Mother Courage loses her daughter and moves on alone with her cart alone. The war is long not over yet.

This speaks of a mother who had just lost her last surviving child, and in spite of the loss she moves on alone, uncaring because of the profit she can still make from the still raging war. The question that needs asking here is: is Mother Courage humanistic in her decision to move on alone with her cart even after the death of her daughter? This question is pertinent because she shows no empathy over her daughter´s death. She only thinks of money making. This action of Fierling of not showing empathy over her dead children appears to be well substantiated in the words of Kuhn (2009:2) that "Humans can also be damaging to humans". She was not seen for at least a day mourning her only daughter. Nonetheless, she acted like wise when she learnt of the death of her two sons. She sang many songs like *The Song of the Great Capitulation* (she uses the song to point out how everyone will eventually give in to the larger capitalist system of war), *the "Landstraße" song* in Scene 7, in which she sings cheerily, advertising her wares and even praises the war as a good provider, but no dirge for her dead children. She behaved in a way that questions her maternity over the children.

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Conclusion

Mother Courage and Her Children is a drama that portrays the life of a mother and her three children during the thirty years war. In this article, we have presented a humanistic study of the persona of Anna Fierling. We tried to explore humanism as a theory that espouses ethics and moral reasoning which forms part of our personality. Bertolt Brecht presented a historical event in his drama. Considerable insight has been gained with regard to Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* as being a humanistic drama that chronicled the everyday life in a war torn era of a woman faced with the challenge of bringing up her children while profiting at the same time from the war. Our research outlined the importance of applying ethical reasoning on the worth of an individual and the centrality of human lives.

NOTE:

This translation and other ones in this paper are entirely mine.

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