

Chapter Four

Marxism, Feminism, and other wartime outlooks

All the three hardworking and courageous mothers in question are living under a capitalistic androcentric society. Thus, Marxist and Feminist approaches are used to probe into their different situations. German political theorist Karl Marx (1818-1883) and German socialist philosopher Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) were lifelong friends and collaborators. Together they wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, which has changed the world's thinking. Marx's *Capital (Das Kapital)* written in 1867-94 is his major critique of economy, which also has world influence. Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* foretells a utopian world to their contemporaries with Engels, and *Capital* is a powerful dialectical exposition to attack capitalism. Another book, *Marx*, written by Peter Singer, is a comprehensive study of Marx's thought, which enables us to grasp Marx's views as a whole. On the other hand, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), a French feminist, wrote her treatise *The Second Sex* in 1949, which has become a major classic of feminist literature. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir shows that women's plight, including physical, psychological, and economic are manifold in a male-dominated society.

I. Marxist approaches

In Act 8 of *The Mother*, Vlassova's attitude has inspired the butcher's rebellious spirit. She stands firmly for her belief and makes the butcher realize that what they need is to strike. The butcher worked in the factory canteens before his current job in the estate kitchen. His wages had been previously cut, like other workers, and may be cut again. He realizes that everything here belongs to a capitalist, Mr. Smirnov, who now lives in Odessa, a city in the Ukraine.

BUTCHER. It wasn't for nothing that I cooked in factory

canteens. It was because I couldn't take the crap I
got out of them. (*The Mother* 97)

It seems that the butcher has become enlightened by Vlassova's speeches and begins to understand his position in society. However, the liberal conception of freedom has often led to a paradox: each person chooses according to his own interests, but the result is of no one's interest. As Singer mentions that individual rationality is often collective irrationality (Singer 70). The butcher comes to a quick realization that the personal freedom he takes for granted is nothing but a "collective irrationality" in his situation.

Singer's viewpoint actually sheds a light on Marxist dialectic on commodities when Vlassova complains about her neighbor's stubbornness for refusing to offer her a piece of felt. For the movement, Vlassova needs the piece of felt to put under the printing machine to reduce the "terrible noise" of their illegal printing.

THE MOTHER. Because she made me steal it, since we
absolutely had to have it. It's a very good thing for
her children that papers like ours are printed. That's
the pure and simple truth! (*The Mother* 102)

It is ironic that this indomitable mother is stubbornly trying to obtain whatever she wants, including by theft. While Vlassova is complaining about her neighbor's stubbornness, she herself also obstinately believes her committing a theft is a righteous deed. In Vlassova's ideas, the felt is better used for the movement than being used for making neighbor's clothes. Thus, the theft here, in her mind, is for the public welfare and social justice.

The same basic idea concerning "individual rationality and collective irrationality" is also dealt with in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. To Mother

Courage, the only thing that can meet her ever changing needs is her wagon. She loves her children, but does not depend on them for her existence. In fact, at the end she loses all her three children, but not her wagon, and her pitiful life must go on:

MOTHER COURAGE (*harnessing herself to the wagon*). I

hope I can pull the wagon by myself. Yes, I'll manage, there's not much in it now. I must get back into business. (*Mother Courage* 111)

Again, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Grusha risks her life to protect the last legitimacy, the boy Michael, from the dangers. She finally gets the reward for the custody of Michael because he should belong to whoever can best take care of him. Just like what the Singer concludes: "Children to the motherly, carts to good drivers, and the valley to the waterers." (*Chalk Circle* 207). This message is what the playwright tries to relay to us at the end of this play.

The felt in *The Mother*, the wagon in *Mother Courage and Her children*, and the boy in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, are important to illustrate Brecht's point that "what there is shall go to those who are good for it". However dialectic irrationality is obviously there, if we consider the stolen felt, and about the rights of Michael's birth mother, also about the three children of Mother Courage, whose deaths are in part caused by their mother's negligence.

The dialectical materialism is based on Hegel's philosophical idea that "a thesis is opposed by its antithesis, which results in a synthesis". It is one of the philosophical approaches expressed through the writing of Marx and Engels that holds all historical growth, change and development results from the struggle of opposites. And this idea has been further implemented by Karl Marx in his class struggle of the capitalist and landowning class on one hand, and the proletariat and peasantry on the

other to create the dynamic of history. Communism, which advocates community ownership of all property is the final form of society (Singer 65).

The Mother is the most elaborate use of Lehrstiick (the plays for learning). We have witnessed “a central figure who so clearly thinks and behaves the way humanity, in Brecht’s view, will necessarily come to think and behave.” (*The Mother* 26)

Vlassova voluntarily and reasonably gets involved in the Bolshevik revolution step by step; from taking her son Pavel’s place distributing leaflets at the factory, to joining the May Day demonstration and witnessing some unarmed workers being shot for demanding their rights, and finally becoming a revolutionist. The most perceptive comments on *The Mother* were perhaps expressed by Brecht’s essayist friend Walter Benjamin when he noted that Vlassova was Marx’s “praxis incarnate” (*The Mother* 20). In the end, Vlassova carries the red flag at the head of a demonstration. The red flag is a symbol representing Bolshevik members of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party that seized control in the Russian Revolution of 1917. In *The Mother*, the red flag is held by Vlassova to fight for worker’s rights. The second worker mentions the reasons for their demonstration:

SECOND WORKER. Some 250,000 men in the factories were striking as early as the winter of 1916-1917. They were brought over to us Bolsheviks by the poor wages, the climbing prices, the lack of basic essentials, the despair over the war, and the way they pushed the hungry workers and peasants out onto the fields of slaughter. (*The Mother* 130)

Therefore, comes Vlassova’s Bolshevik proclamation of seizing the power in the state.

THE MOTHER. . . . , I, Pelagea Vlassova, the widow of a worker

and the mother of a worker.

. . . . We were

involved at the time in small strikes for better wages.

Now we are in the midst of a huge strike in the

ammunition factories, and we're fighting for power

in the state. (*The Mother* 130-31)

Here, this widow's enthusiasm brings out two meanings. First, if a sixty year old working mother can stand up for her rights, all those beaten down can also rise up tall. Second, if a worker is compelled to undertake such a dangerous mission, an all out revolution could not be far away.

Some of the ideas in Marxist ideology can be seen clearly in *The Mother*, Vlassova is not only a household mother responsible for her family and child, but also a social mother who strives for social justice for the working class. At the beginning, the Industrial Revolution was largely confined to Britain from 1760 to 1830, then spread to Belgium and France and later to Germany, the U.S. and other countries. However, industrialization entails both technology and profound social developments. The freeing of labors from feudal and customary obligation created a free market in labor, with a pivotal role for the entrepreneur. As a result, cities attracted large numbers of people, massing workers in new industrial town and factories. The people in the oppressed working class exist with unfair wages and poor working conditions. Vlassova, a revolutionist, comes to believe that only by revolution could labor overthrow capitalism and only the proletariat are capable of undertaking this action. The imbalance between capitalists and proletarians will ultimately lead to a complete loss of humanity and only by revolution can society recover itself to redeem humanity. Based on the essence of this problem, the

fundamental conflict is between different human's interests. The true solution to the struggle between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species is the riddle of history (McLellan 33).

In Act 3, Karpov reluctantly accepts the wage cut and to use the money to solve the swamp problem for better working conditions; while Pavel and Anton insist the swamp problem should not be solved by workers' kopeks but the rich factory owner, Mr. Suklinov, should solve the plant's sanitary conditions by himself, instead of extracting surplus value from the workers. The surplus-value is that the product belongs to the capitalist, who obtains surplus value from the difference between the value of the product and the value of the capital involved in the production process (Bottomore 472). Marx had argued that the surplus-value of the past accumulates in the form of capital; hence capital is always increasing, and the ratio of "living labor" to capital is always decreasing (Singer 56).

PAVEL. What you mean is, capitalism is ailing, and you
are the doctor. Do you mean to say you're for taking
the wage cut?

KARPOV. No other solution has emerged from our bargaining.

ANTON. Since you are unable to stop the wage cut, we
demand that you stop negotiations with management.

The swamp kopek is rejected. (*The Mother* 55)

Here Pavel and Anton demonstrate a radical attitude to this unfair treatment; that is, it is only through the strike that the workers hope to gain a vantage point to strive for a balance between labor and capital.

PAVEL. We think only a strike can save the kopek. (*The Mother* 56)

However, not every worker conceives the same idea as Pavel and Anton do.

KARPOV. That's how these people stir us up. A strike is a bad thing. Tomorrow morning they won't go back to work. What will it be like, tomorrow night? And next week, how will matters stand? It doesn't matter to the company whether we ever work again. To us it is life itself. (*The Mother* 57)

Although Karpov agrees to strike after they leave, yet his primary concern is about the workers' future. Most workers at first, like Karpov, want to cling to the capitalist system to make livings by using their tools and machines. They think they can not live without the factory, because it is the center of gravity that workers' daily lives circle around, even if they have to be exploited and suppressed. Each laborer's individual wage has a contract, like any other free contract, without forces on either of the participants, but workers are not free to breach their agreements, since they have no other way to live. Thus this freedom is in reality what Marx called the worker's two-fold freedom: the freedom to sell his or her labor power or the freedom to starve (Bottomore 473). The factory, the wage, and the swamp problem combine to constrain workers' freedom of choice. More specifically speaking, the economic relations between human beings determine not only our wages and the prospects of labor, but also our views towards politics, religion and ideas. Very often these relations force us into a situation in which we compete with each other instead of cooperating for the good of all (Singer 70).

Moreover, Marx expected the abolition of private property and the institution of common ownership of the means of production and exchange to bring about a society

in which people were motivated more by a desire for the good of all than by a specific desire for their own individual good. In this way individual and common interests could be harmonized (Singer 73). That is, in order to pursue a greater public welfare, some people have to sacrifice their own interests to achieve this collective satisfaction. This also can explain Karpov's concession near the end of Act 3.

KARPOV (*left alone*). Well, so strike! (*The Mother* 56)

André's pronouncement exactly echoes "the good of all", a sprouting Communist idea of the massive mobilization.

ANDRÉ. . . . But if

Every Vlassov in Tver—eight hundred Vlassovs—
get up and say the same thing, Mr. Suklinov will
have to stop laughing. (*The Mother* 63)

It is only after every worker stands up to protest against the unfair wages that the factory owner notices the seriousness of their issues. The working class was the political force which would accomplish the destruction of capitalism and a transition to socialism (Bottomore 526). André's pronouncement verifies Marx's proclamation that it is the accumulated power of the mass proletariat which will ultimately overwhelm the capitalist hegemony.

Although having many friends in the working class; the teacher, Nicholai Ivanovitch is a traditional mid-class person who demonstrates a paradoxical attitude:

TEACHER. . . . As a
teacher, I would be fired from my position, were I
to chase after such chimeras as you do. (*The Mother* 71)

A teacher ordinarily teaches students the right things to do; however, Nicholai denies the First of May demonstration. Two explanations can be applied to his standpoint.

First, his bourgeois attitude presents a middle ground between the ideas of the working class and capitalists. Nicholai, a self-contained intellectual and law-abiding citizen, is not willing to be involved in the happenings of those workers, because he is more interested in thoughts that “concern not merely the here and now, but rather the eternal, lasting and universal man” (*The Mother* 78). According to Marx, human beings are in a state of alienation if they are subject to forces that they do not understand and that can determine their thoughts and ideas (Singer 34). An individual can become a non-alienated, free and creative being only through his own activity. Second, the environment could affect a person’s opinions. It is the teacher’s incapability of looking through the simulacrum of dominative capitalism that results in his lack of acknowledgement of his real situation. The economic influence not only determines a person’s politics, religion and ideas; but also makes a person compete with another with contradistinction. The teacher’s preconception will not change unless he actively clarifies this mist and truly emancipates himself.

After Ivan takes Vlassova to the teacher’s home, the teacher finally shows a sign of breaking through his own preconception. When Ivan asks where is his portrait of the Tsar, the teacher answers:

TEACHER. I simply thought I would put it away for a while. How boring it is always to have it before one.
(*The Mother* 82)

Perhaps it shows that he has revealed more sympathetic feeling toward the proletariat.

All of these three mothers show antiwar sentiments although they are in different countries and eras. The contents of these three plays under discussion show the various sufferings of the proletarians in devastating wars. The maid in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is involved in a civil war in which some princes stage an

uprising against the corrupted governor Georgi Abasheili in a Caucasian city.

Mother Courage in *Mother Courage and Her Children* is involved in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), a series of intermittent conflicts in Europe fought for various reasons including religious, dynastic, territorial and commercial rivals. The mother in *The Mother* is participating in a class-conflicting war, or Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The mother is not interested in any war in foreign countries. That is why, when workers ask her to join them to fight the Germans, she replies:

THE MOTHER. . . .

Do you fight side by side with your class enemies,
workers against workers?

The organizations you won with hardship
by pennies of self-denial will be smashed.

All your experience is forgotten
and forgotten the solidarity of workers of all lands
in common fight against the class enemy. (*The Mother* 120)

All workers should be united and, ultimately, the local struggles become centralized with the help of modern means of communication 'into one national struggle between classes' (Bottomore 527). That is what Marx considered, that a successful revolution—at least in the long run—was impossible if confined to one country (McLellan 68).

Notwithstanding being considered as an anti-war activist, Vlassova curses other women as murderers for they are going to donate their copper to the military fighting in Przemyśl, a city nowadays in Poland. Vlassova accuses them of helping lengthen the war in a foreign land, without sense or reason and for a rotten cause. Therefore, Vlassova, a Bolshevik, is devoting herself to anti-capitalists activities.

THE MOTHER. Yes, I am a Bolshevik. And you are all
murderers; every one of you as you stand there!
There is no animal that would sacrifice its young, the
way you do yours—without sense or reason and for
a rotten cause. (*The Mother* 128)

Here, an agitating appeal has been repeated over and over again to urge people to introspect on their meaning of existence and to criticize social phenomena. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (McLellan 39).

However, we can observe a quite different point of view in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. There are quite a few scenes depicting Mother Courage's bargains in the midst of war, and those bargains are crucial for this play's plot. Although it is a war play, it is actually a business play (*Mother Courage* 10-11). This down-to-earth character, Mother Courage, takes her chance to make profits in this war. However, she still curses the war in the end of Scene 6. This play is simply trying to show small people living in the cracks of fighting.

In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, when being chained Azdak tells those ironshirts what had happened in the past in Persia.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT. And who ruled when the Vizier
was hanged?

AZDAK. A peasant rules when the Vizier was hanged.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT. And who commanded the army?

AZDAK. A soldier, a soldier.

THE SECOND IRONSHIRT. And who paid the wages?

AZDAK. A dyer. A dyer paid the wages. (*Chalk Circle* 176)

This part shows everything is upside down after the war or the revolution, just like Azdak is now a judge and the Grand Duke is now a prisoner. This conversation brings out the proletarian equalitarianism and the Communist commonwealth.

II. Feminist aspects

All three protagonists are women and, according to Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex*, throughout history woman has been constructed as “man’s Other” and was denied access to an autonomous existence (Tidd 51). In Hegelian term, “Other” is an object external to a person’s self-consciousness. On the other hand, human beings need to recognize each other as similarly conscious beings in the world to be sure that they exist (Tidd 16). However, from the viewpoint of the radical materialist feminism, like Beauvoir’s, there is no essential or ‘natural’ femininity in language, in the body or anywhere else because femininity is defined and only exists within a social context (Tidd 115). That is, women have been labeled as the “Other”, a class attaches to male-centric society. Therefore, under this patriarchal framework, she, the “Other”, has been marginalized, without her subjectivity and the performance of her own rights.

In this way of thinking, all three mothers’ enthusiasm seems more powerful and more meaningful with their subjectivity. This “Other” can also indicate a slave’s status in a master-slave relationship in the Marxist idea. A growing capitalist’s desire to accumulate wealth necessarily entails a lowering of salary and accentuates the class struggle. Uncurtailed growth of the economy can mean recurrent crises, and the progress of science only serves to increase the misery of the workers (McLellan 29). If this progress, unfortunately, keeps developing this “Other” (or “slaves”, or more specifically speaking, “the labor force” in a Marxist tone) will be ultimately suppressed and exploited till they are faced with having nothing to lose,

then they will create a counteraction corresponding to this unequal relationship.

Since Brecht was once a KPD party member, and in all three plays discussed here, the workers are the others in his eyes; because Vlassova, Mother Courage and Grusha the maid all belong to the working class.

All three female protagonists are proletarians who fight for their rights and ideas. At the same time they are also the “Others” from Beauvoir’s point of view. Vlassova’s confession of being illiterate, when she distributes those agitating leaflets without understanding their content, is a sign to explain why feminists had firmly argued for women’s educational right since nineteenth century. An interesting conversation between Karpov, the workers’ representative, and Vlassova shows her ignorance of the whole issue of her illiteracy:

KARPOV. These leaflets summon the employees of the Suk-
linov Works to strike.

THE MOTHER. I know nothing about it.

KARPOV. Then why do you hand them out?

THE MOTHER. We have our reasons. Why do they arrest
our people?

KARPOV. You mean you don’t even know what it says here?

THE MOTHER. No, I’m not able to read. (*The Mother* 57)

However, it is also her illiteracy that leads her to step into the fighting for the workers’ welfare. Vlassova believes the leaflets are evil at first, for she witnesses workers are captured only because they have read those leaflets. After the explanation and persuasion of her son’s fellow comrades, Vlassova starts to realize the economic inequality between the laborers and capitalists. Her illiteracy makes her fearless in doing things without any hesitation because she does not realize the danger in which

she is involved. Not only Vlassova, but also Mother Courage the itinerant vendor and Grusha the maid have no educational background and with a low social status. From a feminist aspect, the poor level of literacy continuing among women is partly the result of a patriarchal society. In this patriarchal society there are deeply ingrained religious, cultural and customary ideas in male canons that circumscribe women's lives and choices in particularly unequal ways (Miller 153). Illiteracy has hindered the development of female characters in a male-dominated society; and thus there is a triple-exploited trait for these female protagonists, as they are female, proletarian and illiterate.

According to Barranger, Materialist Feminism is a term covering common elements of Marxist and socialist feminism, and it underscores the roles of class and history in the oppression of women (Barranger 647). Under Materialist Feminist idea, economic factors do affect profoundly upon these mothers' living styles. The domestic budget in Vlassova's family has been restrained by the factory's wages. Mother Courage has to make a living by vending her goods to the soldiers. Grusha flees on foot with Michael all the way to the northern mountains without sufficient supplies. From the materialist view, the primacy of class and socioeconomic factors are considered the exploitative forces among women, not gender (Barranger 647). Therefore, their class identity along with economic burdens restricts these mothers to developing their own personalities and their children's outlook on life. Protecting their children is their only mission in the unfair world; however, it depends on how they respond to the pressure and difficulties, and how far they can achieve their aims.

Furthermore, gender and economic frustrations block the development of these mothers, their living experiences and their will-power are also fundamental to their responses. Vlassova's self-awareness triggers her revolutionary activities to fight for

the benefit of her family and her comrades. Mother Courage travels back-and-forth in the war zone bargaining to make a living. The job of Grusha the maid is to serve her masters; therefore, she is deprived of her autonomy under the feudal system. Not until this feudal system is shattered does she regain her own physical independence. And not until she becomes an adopting mother of the boy does she realize her purpose in life. A young unmarried mother may be overwhelmed by the material burdens suddenly forced upon her, and may be overtly in despair, and yet find in her baby the realization of her secret dreams (Beauvoir 492).

We should not only emphasize the marginalization of these mothers; in stead they have their own forte. In *The Mother*, Vlassova courageously stands up for proletarian power, even without a sufficient income to support her living. But Mother Courage is economically independent because she runs a business with her wagon; and yet she does not fight for the freedom of her class or her country. As for Grusha, she does not have any income during her escape; her only mission is to protect Michael. Marxist feminists do not separate “personal” identity from class identity (Guerin 234); that is, these three mothers try hard to accomplish what they endeavor to achieve, a better welfare, survival and social justice.

Another woman, Yvette Pottier, in *Mother Courage and Her Children* can serve as a foil for these hard working mothers. This charming, sexy prostitute is also a poor proletarian, many times she lives on the wagon with Mother Courage; with her professional freedom and her common sense Yvette reaches for romance and security. In the *Second Sex*, for prostitution, many people still have a particular point of view that “the prostitute incarnates evil, shame, disease, damnation; she inspires fear and disgust; she belongs to no man, but yields herself to one at all and lives off such commerce” (Beauvoir 193). However, in Scene 8 she shows up “*decked out in*

black, with a stick, she is much older, fatter, and heavily powdered. Behind her, a SERVANT” (Mother Courage 88). And Yvette introduces herself as “Madame Colonel Starhemberg” when Mother Courage asks her why she is in mourning; she answers that her husband, the colonel, died several years ago. Mother Courage wants to know if it was the same colonel who nearly bought her wagon:

MOTHER COURAGE. The old fellow that nearly bought my wagon?

YVETTE. His elder brother.

MOTHER COURAGE. So you’re not doing badly. Good to see one person who got somewhere in the war. (*Mother Courage 89*)

Marriage can be a haven for women who need protection or security, especially in war time. Her marriages may seem ridiculous, yet she at least finds a place to settle herself down.

Another example is the farcical marriage of Grusha to a dying man, Jussup, in order to protect Michael. In this wedding ceremony, the bride is also the widow and the wedding guests are also the mourners:

MONK. Dear wedding and funeral guests! Deeply touched,

We stand before a bed of death and marriage. (*Chalk Circle 161*)

However, Grusha’s misery does not end but is just about to begin; because Jussup pretends that he is dying to circumvent the draft. It is obvious that when the war is over, he acts like a king in his cottage. This peasant reproaches Grusha for not being a proper housewife who should “weeds the fields and opens up her legs.” (*Chalk Circle 166*) The stereotype of a housewife is whether or not they are employed and have to perform most of the childcare and domestic work (Lewis 201); and of course, being obedient to her husband.

III. The morality and outlooks in the war time

Many people are morally corrupted by the devastating war: the recruiting officer in *Mother Courage and Her Children* has regretfully pointed out that a man who follows his own nature and performs good deeds still cannot be successful at the end. He makes the following comments to his sergeant:

RECRUITING OFFICER. There's no
loyalty left in the world, no trust, no faith, no sense
of honor. I'm losing my confidence in mankind,
Sergeant. (*Mother Courage* 23)

It is a strong protest against human morality, and the standards of morality seem to drop low in a lengthy war. War can make a person act heroically, like naïve Katrin sacrifices herself for the town people; and to act savagely, like brave Eilif assaults a peasant and kills this peasant's wife.

Trying to survive in the war is a basic instinct of every character in the play. Mother Courage tries hard to protect her children in this harsh living condition; ironically, the more she tries to keep her property intact; the more she puts her children in danger by her unwitting negligence. Her elder son, Eilif, gets executed because of assaulting a peasant in a truce period. Her younger son, Swiss Cheese, a clerk in a regiment, is also executed for being suspected of stealing by hiding the treasure box. Furthermore, her only daughter, Katrin, risks her life to beat a drum in order to warn the inhabitants in the town, and gets shot. In wartime Eilif's valor, Swiss Cheese's honesty and Katrin's innocence are both their distinguishing personalities and tickets for the death express. The death of the children makes a strong contrast with Mother Courage's idea about virtues.

MOTHER COURAGE. Whenever there are great virtues,

It's a sure sign something's wrong. (*Mother Courage* 39)

There is a strong appeal for antiwar sentiment in *The Mother* when Vlassova urges these women not to take their copper products to the collection depot for remaking them into cartridges; because by doing so would not shorten the war, but lengthen it. Vlassova advises them better to fight for the rights of working class than to donate copper products.

THE MOTHER. . . . Go on back to your
factory now—and see to it you get better wages and
don't come slipping in here where you don't belong. (*The Mother* 125)

This idea echoes with the previous one which explains that war should not exist between nations but between classes. Indeed, the ruling class might start a war for its ambitious undertakings, but the proletariat only needs food and shelter. This is why Grusha denounces the war in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

GRUSHA. The soldier is pigheaded; he is running into danger
for nothing—nothing at all. (*Chalk Circle* 131)

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, an ordnance officer bargains the price of bullets with Mother Courage, because this officer wants to sell bullets to buy wine for his superior. Moreover, when Mother Courage asks why he does not sell these bullets himself to another officer in the Fourth Regiment, the ordnance officer tells her because they are friends and he does not trust him. This is just a case of both mistrust and corruption in the military.

It seems that there is no empathy left between people in the war. In Act 2 of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, an old peasant arbitrarily raises the price of a little drop of milk. In spite of this unfavorable charge, Grusha has no choice but bargains with him; and finally spends two piastres for the milk. Again, in the beginning of Scene

11 in *Mother Courage and Her Children* when Catholic soldiers threaten to kill the young peasant if he does not show them the path to the Protestant town, the young peasant, at first, prefers to die than lead them to the town. Then the soldiers threaten to slaughter his cattle in order to make him obey. And this time the young peasant gives in to the soldiers' demand. It is interesting that a man would value his cattle's life more than himself. Living under such unbearable circumstances, to get killed quickly is better than to starve to death. Moreover, the cattle are their food supply; the young peasant would rather die than let his family members have nothing to eat.

According to the explanation of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a French existentialist philosopher and literary critic; existentialism is a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity (Sartre 10). That is, existence preceding essence and human subjectivity must be the starting point for a man to make himself. Therefore, atheistic existentialism states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or in other term, the human reality (Sartre 15). Therefore, instead of denying the existence of God, the existentialists rather believe in what human can do for themselves than what God can do for them.

The action of Vlassova turning down the Bible from the landlady in Act 11 indicates this existentialist spirit. It can be explained through a radical Hegelian criticism of religion: "Wisdom, love, benevolence—these are really attributes of the human species, but we attribute them, in a purified form, to God. The more we enrich our concept of God in this way, however, the more we impoverish ourselves" (Singer 16). According to this explanation, a contradictory relationship exists between God and human beings, because religion alienates human's self-realization of

an ultimate freedom. Under this circumstance, religion will overwhelm the human in the end. To abolish religion one had to abolish an irrational and unjust society. Vlassova refuses to impoverish herself by believing in herself rather than in God. This explains her cause to turn down the Bible and her devotion to the revolution. The landlady tries to persuade Vlassova to believe in God by saying no one can go against fate and the omnipotent God. However, The Mother has a different opinion about the landlady's argument:

THE MOTHER. What we say is this: the fate of man is man.

(*The Mother* 114)

This utterance means that only a human being can change his own fate. And such statement surly provokes the Landlady's resentment.

LANDLADY. Mrs. Vlassova, don't you forget why God has taken your Pavel from you.

THE MOTHER. Oh no; it was the Tsar, the Tsar is who took him from me. And I don't forget why, either.

LANDLADY. God took him, not the Tsar. (*The Mother* 116)

Vlassova protests against both the absolute power of the ruling class and the exploiters who use religion as a disguise to suppress the truth. In this case, Vlassova would rather have a lower rent from the landlady than a Bible.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Mother Courage expresses the same idea in a different situation. When Mother Courage is asked to show her license for selling food, she shows sheets of paper from a holy prayer book which she uses to wrap the sundries.

SERGEANT. No funny business! Where are your papers?

MOTHER COURAGE. . . . Here's a missal—I got it in Altötting to

wrap my cucumbers in. (*Mother Courage* 25)

A missal should be a spiritual consolation for the Roman Catholic, but Mother Courage uses it as a wrapping sheet. It is because she is at a loss in the war and confesses that she does not have a soul when she asks the chaplain to help her chop some firewood in Scene 6:

CHAPLAIN (*reluctantly taking his coat off and preparing to chop wood*). Properly speaking, I'm a pastor of souls, not a woodcutter.

MOTHER COURAGE. But I don't have a soul. And I do need wood. (*Mother Courage* 78)

Mother Courage's materialistic attitude is quite clear, the supplies for daily needs are the most important things to her; therefore, she would rather have firewood to get warm instead of talking about souls.

Finally, Katrin's death in Scene 11 fortifies a man's will can be powerful. A strong existentialist protest lies within this dramatic contrast between Katrin and the old peasant couple. They call themselves Protestants, religious people only demonstrating a selfish attitude, and Katrin is the only one who warns the people in the town about the approaching enemy. Katrin's sacrifice proves the validity of this proverb: "action speaks louder than words". It is the dumb Katrin who saves the people in the town.

Another example is in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*: when Azdak finishes judging the rape case involving the innkeeper's daughter-in-law; the singer and chorus not only praise his righteousness but also satirize the validity of humanity:

THE SINGER AND CHORUS. . . .

All mankind should love each other

But when visiting your brother
Take an axe along and hold it fast.
Not in theory but in practice.
Miracles are wrought with axes
And the age of miracles is not past. (*Chalk Circle* 187)

This passage means that man should love his brother, as the Bible indicates, but if there is no miracle of love, the axe's edge will bring justice. A better world can not be realized by an indiscriminate reliance in an invisible God.

Existentialistic ideas can also be found in the verdicts made by the Judge Azdak. Before he becomes the judge, he recants his beliefs in order to save himself. As Rorrison comments: "he [Azdak] is one of nature's incurables, a slave to the gab, a joker and a judge, an immoralist and amateur politician, a chameleon who will wear whatever face the situation will bear." (Rorrison xxxi) His verdicts are often persuasive.

AZDAK. . . .

(*Bellowing at the FARMERS*) Admit you don't believe in miracles, you atheists! (*Chalk Circle* 190)

This reproach is ironic because the old woman's miracles are created by the bandit Irakli, not by God. These rich farmers do not really believe in God, because they do not show generosity toward poor people. In fact, all cases Azdak presides over end up with his surprising verdicts; for man's social status and motivation are his concerns in those sentences. "He is a swindler and a bumpkin under a judge's robe; however, Azdak's vulgarity is an affirmation of his solidarity as a bourgeois intellectual with the poor and an assertion that the attributes of poverty have their own dignity" (Rorrison xxxi). Therefore, the perpetrator in fact is a victim; and a man who bribes

the judge cannot necessarily receive a verdict that could satisfy him.

Vlassova turns down the Bible, Mother Courage uses a missal to wrap her cucumbers and asks the chaplain to help her chop firewood, Kattrin sacrifices herself to warn the people in the town, and Azdak's verdicts all embrace the existentialistic thoughts in believing that an individual man should have his freedom of choice instead of relying on God. Both Vlassova and Mother Courage have lost their children. Pavel's strength inspires Vlassova's devotion to the workers' revolution; while Mother Courage grieves for her children's death and still goes on pulling the wagon in the miserable world. Grusha is the only lucky one who gains the custody of Michael legally after years of hardship. They all rely on themselves without the help of God.

