theatres...
Brecht's pacifism captured at Charles

By Cary Bullock

Haid Bertolt Brecht saw The Charles Playhouse's production of his play, Mother Courage and Her Children, he would have been very pleased. His only request would probably have been that the audience be allowed to smoke. But for that restriction, the play was presented with close adherence to Brecht's theories of the "epic theater."

Mother Courage is an anti-war play which assumes that war will never end. Indeed, war seems the natural way of life. But war is a way of life only to those who will accept the rules. For those who don't, it is sure death. Those who survive must cast off the fatal virtues of honesty, bravery, and selflessness.

Mother Courage, played by Olympia Dukakis, is a peddler who meanders endlessly through the Thirty Years' War buying and selling. She seems to come from nowhere, and she goes nowhere. She merely follows the war which nourishes those who can stand its bitter milk. She has only her children, her three children, Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and Kattrin played by Charles Keating, Barry Michlin, and Lynn Milgrim, respectively. Her commercial instinct is in opposition to her maternal instinct. Ultimately, the commercial instinct triumphs, and she loses each of her three children while trying to make a fast buck. Until the sixth scene she hardly seems like a mother. There she comes the war for taking her two boys. But in the very next scene, she grudgingly says that no one is going to spoil her war for her. When the war finally takes her last child, Kattrin, she is very pleased. At least she is not her fault. It is rather the fault of the audience who are not prepared for the same type of caution, but of a more delicate nature. Miss Milgrim as Kattrin is excellent. If she seems to achieve pathos, that is not her fault. It is rather the fault of the audience who are not objectively critical spectators Brecht would have approved.

The support actors, the best of whom were Louis Zorich who played the Cook and Gwyllum Evans who played the Chaplain, with few exceptions complemented the performances of Miss Dukakis and Miss Milgrim very well. They brought out easily the sparkling wit and bitterness which characterize all Brecht's plays. The technical support, with the exception of costume design, was excellent. The helmets were just a little too shiny and unedent. The uniforms just a little too neat. Designer William Roberts could have been more careful.

Talos as a whole, The Charles Playhouse's production of Mother Courage and Her Children is an excellent example from the modern theater. It is an enjoyable evening for students of the theater as well as people who just want to be entertained.

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MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

Mother Courage and Her Children is a one-act play which Brecht, suffering from his German pacifism, was presented with close adherence to Brecht's theories of the "epic theater."