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# A Conceptual Analysis of Being in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* through the Lens of Sartre's Existentialism

Abdlohossein Joodaki<sup>\*a</sup> , Shiva Rashidifar<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Department of English Language Teaching, Lorestan University, Khorramabad, Iran.

<sup>b</sup>Department of English Language Teaching, Lorestan University, Khorramabad, Iran.

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### ABSTRACT

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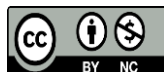
Being-for-Itself  
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This study conducted a comprehensive conceptual analysis of the existential concepts of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others in Bertolt Brecht's iconic play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, utilizing Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical lens. The narrative unfolded against war, offering a profound exploration of individual existence and interpersonal relationships. Sartre's existentialism provided a theoretical framework to scrutinize the characters, focusing on the central figure, Mother Courage. The study examined how Mother Courage embodies the concept of Being-for-Itself, emphasizing individual freedom, choice, and the continuous process of self-creation. Furthermore, it delved into the dynamics of Being-for-Others, elucidating the interplay of relationships within the context of existential philosophy. Through an in-depth analysis of the characters and their interactions, this study sought to unravel the existential nuances embedded in Brecht's work, shedding light on the intricate relationship between existentialism and dramatic narrative. Extending the analysis of works of literature from different cultural backgrounds opens avenues for exploring how existential themes are articulated in diverse cultural contexts and allows for examining potential variations in the portrayal of being-for-itself and being-for-others, offering a nuanced understanding of existential concepts across cultures.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of "being" is central to Bertolt Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children* and Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism. In particular, the ideas of Being-for-Itself and being-for-others are relevant to the characters and themes of the play. Sartre et al. (2022) indicate that Being-for-Itself refers to the individual's experience of freedom and responsibility. In contrast, he conceptualizes being-for-others as the ways individuals are defined and influenced

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by their relationships with others. The problem that this study sought to address is the need for more scholarly attention given to the intersection of Brecht's play and Sartre's existentialism. While the play mentioned above has been analyzed from various perspectives, including the Marxist perspective (Ahmadinia, 2015; Ali, 2018; Gilman, 1981) or the feminist perspective (Simamora & Satria, 2022), little has been written about the existentialist themes in the work. This study will fill this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the play through an existentialist lens.

Van der Wielen (2014) regards Being-for-Others as a fundamental aspect of one's existence that is shaped by the presence and perception of others. It involves the ability of the Other to affect and transform individuals, either by affirming their lack of being or by alienating them from their transcending, free position. The Other plays a role in shaping one's emotions and judgments, changing their meaning and object. The presence of the Other alters the nature of the emotions involved, as they become a means through which individuals become aware of their objective Being-for-Others. Coşkuner (2015) asserts that the concept of Being-for-Others is explained through the idea of the other in existentialist philosophy. According to de Beauvoir (1949), the other threatens one's existence and freedom. When individuals are subjected to the gaze of others, they become an object and lose their freedom (de Beauvoir, 1949). The other can seize and destroy the individuals, making them vulnerable and no longer subject to realizing themselves. In this sense, the other represents the being-for-self becoming an object through the gaze of others, turning the individual into a being-in-itself. The individual must deny the other that restricts their freedom (de Beauvoir, 1949).

The concept mentioned above about the other as a threat to one's existence and freedom helps to explain the concept of Being-for-Others, where the individual's actions and choices are influenced and determined by the gaze and judgment of others (Flynn, 2006). In his book, Shand (2005) investigates the concept of Being-for-Itself by analyzing Sartre's exploration of consciousness and its relation to being-in-itself according to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Furthermore, the book discusses how a fundamental self-division within consciousness marks Being-for-Itself. Consciousness is never identical to itself and is always in a state of becoming, constantly transcending its present situation toward future possibilities. This lack of self-identity is a crucial aspect of Sartre's understanding of human existence and distinguishes it from the self-

identity of Being-in-Itself. The research questions for the analysis of Being-for-Itself and being-for-others in Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage and Her Children" through the lens of Sartre's existentialism, with a particular focus on the character of Mother Courage were formulated as follows:

1. How does the character of Mother Courage embody the concept of Being-for-Itself according to Sartre's existentialist philosophy?
2. In what ways do Mother Courage's interactions with other characters demonstrate Being-for-Others in the context of Sartre's existentialism?

These research questions aimed to investigate the portrayal of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others in the character of Mother Courage, examining her existential dilemmas, interactions with others, and the existential tensions she experiences throughout the play. By analyzing these aspects, the research aims to provide insights into the role of Sartre's existentialist philosophy in understanding Mother Courage's character and her role within the play's broader themes.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Brecht's Life and Works**

Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright, poet, and theater director, was a prominent figure in 20th-century theater. Born in 1898, Brecht's work was deeply influenced by the political and social turmoil of his time. He sought to create a unique theatrical style that would engage audiences intellectually and emotionally while encouraging critical reflection on societal issues. Brecht's plays often employed techniques such as epic theater, alienation effect, and non-linear narrative structures. *Mother Courage and Her Children* (2015) is one of Brecht's most significant works. Set during the Thirty Years' War, the play follows the story of Anna Fierling, known as Mother Courage, a determined and pragmatic woman who traverses the war-ravaged landscape, selling goods to soldiers. The play explores themes of war, survival, capitalism, and the impact of conflict on human relationships.

### **2.2. Critical Themes in *Mother Courage and Her Children***

*Mother Courage and Her Children* (2015) addresses various thematic elements essential to understanding the play. The concept of war as a backdrop sets the stage for examining the human

condition in extreme circumstances. Brecht explores the notion of survival and individuals' compromises to endure, highlighting the tension between self-interest and collective responsibility. Furthermore, capitalism and its impact on individuals and society are the significant themes in the play. *Mother Courage's* entrepreneurial endeavors symbolize exploiting and commodifying human lives within a capitalist system. In their paper, Al-Moghales and Altobai (2021) discuss that Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Bertolt Brecht criticize the destructive consequences of war in their works by highlighting the role of capitalism in perpetuating and profiting from war. Al-Hakim criticizes war and capitalism in his play *The World Is a Comedy* by portraying the power of imperial and capitalist nations that exploit and dominate poorer countries. He refers to these powers as devils and their actions as acts of madness. Al-Hakim emphasizes that the capitalists possess enormous power that can demolish the entire world, and their sophisticated weapons have resulted in unusual diseases and epidemics. He presents war as a game of business and capitalism, indicating that as long as there are arms and guns, war will continue from one generation to another.

Similarly, Brecht criticizes war and capitalism in his play *Mother Courage and Her Children* by depicting the inseparable and interdependent nature of war and capitalism. He argues that wars are an integral part of capitalism and that capitalism is a barbaric, oppressive, and unjust system. Brecht denounces the capitalist motives that drive countries to compete for armament and engage in confrontations. He warns against the dangers of rampant Nazism and Fascism. Also, he portrays war as a cycle that continues due to the passiveness and contribution of people to war (Al-Moghales & Altobai, 2021).

Al-Moghales and Altobai (2021) also mention that Al-Hakim and Brecht use their works to denounce the destructive consequences of war and criticize the capitalist systems that perpetuate and profit from it. They highlight the economic deterioration, exploitation, and violence that result from the intertwining of war and capitalism. According to the authors, capitalism plays a significant role in perpetuating war. Tawfiq Al-Hakim argues that capitalist powers exploit and dominate poorer nations, using war to maintain their economic control and profit from producing and selling weapons. He suggests that as long as there are arms and guns, war will continue, driven by the capitalist motives of profit and domination (Al-Moghales & Altobai, 2021). Similarly, Bertolt Brecht asserts that war is an integral part of capitalism. He

argues that capitalist countries engage in wars to promote their economies and maintain power. Brecht highlights how war exhausts societies and exploits the working classes, with the rulers and business people being the only profiteers. Bertolt Brecht warns that fascism and Nazism are variants of capitalism and that capitalism thrives on war (Al-Moghales & Altobai, 2021).

Daram and Ahmadinia (2014) explore the concept of alienation in Bertolt Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In their study, they discuss how Mother Courage's pursuit of profit in a capitalist society leads to her alienation from herself and others. The paper argues that her obsession with financial gain causes her to prioritize profit over human relationships and values, resulting in the sacrifice of her children. The study also highlights the dehumanizing effects of capitalism and war and the political alienation Mother Courage experienced. The paper critiques the capitalist system and its destructive consequences on individuals and their relationships. Daram and Ahmadinia (2014) explain that Mother Courage's pursuit of profit in a capitalist society leads to her alienation from herself and others because it forces her to prioritize financial gain over human relationships and values. She becomes consumed by her desire for wealth and is willing to sacrifice the well-being and lives of her children for the sake of her business. Her excessive desire for wealth is revealed at the beginning of the play, when she takes a deadly risk to drive her cart through bombardment to sell bread, showing her obsession with business and profit. This constant need for more things and more consumption makes her dependent on her needs and the institutions that help her attain them.

Daram and Ahmadinia (2014) conclude that Mother Courage's pursuit of profit in a capitalist society leads to her alienation from herself and others. This is evident through her prioritization of financial gain over human relationships and values and her exploitation and dehumanization in the consumption process. Her involvement in war and capitalism further exacerbates her alienation, as she becomes a subject dancing to the capitalists' tune and sacrifices her children's well-being and lives. The author argues that this portrayal critiques the capitalist system and its destructive consequences on individuals and their relationships. In their research, Simamora & Satria (2022) use feminist existentialism to analyze gender inequality in *Mother Courage and Her Children* by examining the struggles of women in the play and how they strive to overcome gender inequality. This research applies Simone de Beauvoir's theory from "*The Second Sex*" to understand the societal norms and patriarchal customs that oppress women and restrict their freedom. By using feminist existentialism as a framework, the research aims to shed

light on the gender dynamics and power imbalances depicted in the drama. To complement the findings of the studies reviewed above, in the present study we specifically focused on the concept of Being in *Mother Courage and Her Children* (2015), through an existentialist lens.

## **2.3. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.3.1. Being and Nothingness**

Jean-Paul Sartre's monumental philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*, remains a cornerstone of existentialist thought and a profound exploration of human existence. Published in 1943, this seminal text delves into the intricacies of existentialism by delving into fundamental concepts of consciousness, freedom, and selfhood. Indeed, human existence is defined by the constant interplay between Being-in-Itself (objective reality) and Being-for-Itself (subjective consciousness) (Sartre et al., 2022). He introduces the notion of bad faith, where individuals evade their freedom and responsibility by conforming to societal expectations. He also examines the inherent angst of recognizing one's radical freedom. Throughout the book, Sartre weaves philosophy, psychology, and literature together, offering a rich tapestry of ideas that have influenced diverse fields, from philosophy to literature and psychology. *Being and Nothingness* remains a challenging but rewarding read, as it compels readers to confront the complexities of human existence and the profound implications of our choices and actions on our identity and freedom. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre is not as concerned with history, rather he focuses his attention on man's ability to interpret freely his heritage as well as his environment. For Sartre, it is not time but nothingness that is the core of human existence" (Catalano, 1985. p. 13).

### **2.3.2. Being-for-Itself**

According to Blackburn (2005) Being for-itself (pour-soi) is the mode of existence of consciousness, consisting in its own activity and purposive nature. Cagri (2012) defines Being-for-Itself as a subjective being. He mentions that Being-for-Itself is the kind of being that pertains to one's own existence. Being-for-Itself entails the existence of consciousness and consciousness of itself. Because it entails consciousness, it entails that directedness towards the world called "intentionality," which consciousness entails. Being-for-Itself is free and entails a kind of lack or nothingness.

### 2.3.3. Being-for-Others

Bjorklund (1978) elaborates on Sartre's discussion of Being-for-Others as follow:

For Sartre, self-consciousness is pure interiority, and I cannot be an object for myself. The Other is thus the mediator between me and myself, and my being-for-myself depends upon my being-for-others. This self-other relation, however, is at its core one of conflict. The Other is presented in a certain sense as the radical negation of my experience since he is the one for whom I am not subject but object .... While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. (p. 340)

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research Design

This research study was based on library research and utilized a thematic approach in examining Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children* by employing Sartrean existentialism as a theoretical framework. **Braun and Clarke (2006) state that** thematic analysis is a qualitative research method for analyzing data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns. To carry out this thematic analysis, the data was derived from a close reading of Bertolt Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Furthermore, the main components of Sartre's existentialism examined in this study, 'Being-for-Itself' and Being-for-Others, were extracted from the book entitled *Being and Nothingness*. This comprehensive examination of the play served as the primary source of information for identifying instances of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others.

### 3.2. Materials

The primary materials for this analysis consisted of Jean-Paul Sartre's seminal philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*, and Bertolt Brecht's renowned play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* served as a foundational philosophical text that explores existential concepts such as Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others within the realm of human existence. Drawing from Sartre's existential philosophy, this analysis critically examined the thematic elements in Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which offers a rich narrative and diverse characters, allowing for an in-depth exploration of existential themes.

Closely reading the play, we focused on character dialogues, actions, and interactions. This textual analysis served as the foundation for identifying instances of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others. By juxtaposing the philosophical insights of Sartre with the narrative complexities of Brecht's work, this study aimed to illuminate how the characters in the play embody and grapple with existential themes, shedding light on their struggles for identity and freedom in the context of a war-torn world. These materials provided a robust foundation for a comprehensive exploration of the existential dimensions of the play, enriching our understanding of the intersection between philosophy and literature.

### **3.2.1. Mother Courage and her Children**

Bertolt Brecht's enduring theatrical work, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, is prominent in 20th-century drama due to its groundbreaking narrative style and profound socio-political observations. Considered by many to be one of the greatest anti-war plays ever written and Brecht's masterpiece, the play is a powerful example of Epic Theatre and Brecht's use of the alienation effect to focus attention not on individual characters but on the issues of the play. Crafted during a period marked by global turmoil, Brecht's play defies traditional theatrical norms to offer a multifaceted exploration of humanity set against the Thirty Years' War backdrop. At its core, the play delves into themes of war, violence, power, profit, survival, sacrifice, maternity, and the ethical quandaries individuals face during the conflict. Employing Brecht's distinctive use of alienation techniques and episodic storytelling, *Mother Courage and Her Children* challenges its audience to critically examine the characters' struggles while prompting reflection on the broader socio-political milieu that shapes their experiences.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Qualitative thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze themes related to Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others. In this regard, we read the play multiple times to become familiar with the text, characters, and context. The key passages, dialogues, and scenes that pertain to Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others were identified and coded. Then the coded segments were organized into overarching themes related to Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others. And finally, the identified themes were interpreted in light of Sartre's existential concepts. We analyzed how

characters in the play grapple with these existential notions and how their choices reflect Being-for-Itself or Being-for-Others. In conclusion, through a close examination of the characters and their actions, this analysis delved into the ways in which Brecht's work exemplifies Sartre's existential philosophy.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1. Findings and Discussion Related to the First Research Question**

#### **4.1.1. The Nature of Freedom**

Teichman and White (2016) mention that Sartre's interest in the nature of consciousness is partly ontological and partly ethical. One of his motives is to refute the philosophical doctrine of determinism, a theory which leads to the conclusion that responsibility is a fiction. Sartre argues that man's freedom is threatened neither by nature nor by nurture. He insists that men create their own actions and can invent their own identities. Sartre claims that consistent behavior is evidence of freedom. This view, of course, has important implications for morality. These implications are expounded in *Existentialism and Humanism* (1945). The basic axiom in Sartre's thinking on ethics is the familiar Nietzschean idea that there are no such things as objective moral laws. Morality is a kind of fiction, and moral judgements are merely a matter of personal commitment and personal choice. Sartre tries to combine this nihilistic position with a positive doctrine of personal responsibility.

Sartre (1968) also explains that “freedom is a fact, and it is the object of an imperative. To say that man is free is to say that he is responsible for what he does” (p. xxi). Let us now consider what Sartre means by authenticity and anguish. Authenticity is the recognition of one's own ontological freedom, the recognition that one is wholly responsible for one's own decisions and beliefs and character. The authentic personality, moreover, accepts responsibility for creating the ethical criteria by which his decisions, beliefs and character are to be judged. (By whom they are to be judged is a difficult question.) The authentic individual, having realized his responsibility, then begins to suffer existential anguish. Some people will attempt to flee from their anguish by pretending that their behavior has been chosen for them by others or caused by innate drives or external circumstances, and this flight, this pretense, is a manifestation of inauthenticity. Inauthenticity is much the same as bad faith. To act in bad faith is to act as if you believed yourself to be unfree. Either a man accepts freedom, responsibility, and anguish, or he

turns away from the anguish into bad faith. The harsh conclusion follows that anyone who has a philosophical position about freedom or about ethics, which differs from Sartre's, must be an inauthentic person. Some philosophers have suggested that inauthenticity is a Sartrean equivalent of immorality - after all, bad faith is bad. Sartre does, in fact, adopt a lofty and moralizing tone when describing instances of bad faith, but he would never have agreed that he was invoking an objective morality because his existentialism has no room for this concept. In the following excerpt from the play, the Sartrean existential theme of freedom can be seen:

The Bird Says: "Scarce A Year Or So And Marching With The Band She'd Go Keeping  
In Step, Now Fast, Now Slow, And Piping Out Her Little Spiel.

Then One Day, The Battalions Wheel! And You Go Down Upon Your Knees To God  
Almighty If You Please!"

Our Plans Are Big, Our Hopes Colossal. We Hitch Our Wagon To A Star.

(*spoken:*) Where there's a will, there's a way. You can't hold a good man down.

The phrase "Where there's a will, there's a way" aligns with Sartre's emphasis on individual freedom. It suggests that the capacity to will, to make choices, is a fundamental aspect of human existence. According to Sartre, individuals are radically free to choose their actions and determine their own essence through those choices.

#### **4.1.2. Being-for-Itself**

At the core of Sartre's existentialism is the concept of Being-for-Itself. Hatzimoyisis (2014) explains that:

Being-for-Itself" is constantly engaging in several activities, such as negating, perceiving, imagining, thinking, nihilating, and so on. Consciousness, after all, is necessarily always consciousness of something, and it would cease to exist the moment it stopped engaging in some form of intentional activity. Thus, when it comes to the "*Being-for-Itself*" of consciousness, it is all too reasonable to talk about modes, or ways, or manners. (p. 122)

Being-for-Itself represents the inherent freedom and consciousness of the individual, emphasizing the idea that human beings exist first and then define themselves through their

choices and actions. This concept challenges the notion of a predetermined human essence and underscores individuals' radical autonomy to shape their destinies.

Sartre (1968) explains that:

From one point of view, history might be said to be the story of how human *praxis* and *pratico-inertia* are not to be equated with “Being-for-Itself” and “Being-in-itself,” but there is a sense in which they hold equivalent positions in Sartre’s most recent work. *Praxis* (the Greek word for “action”) is any meaningful or purposeful human activity, any act which is not mere random, undirected motion. The *pratico-inerte* is more than just matter, though it certainly includes the material environment. It comprises all those things which go to make up man’s experience of finitude. In his play *No Exit*, Sartre declared that Hell is other people. Now he says that Hell is the *pratico-inerte*, for it “steals my action from me. By simply being there – or even by not being there- matter provokes certain actions and prevents others. (p. xvii)

Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* provides a compelling exploration of the character Mother Courage, who, in various instances, embodies Sartre's concept of Being-for-Itself. Here are several instances from the play where Mother Courage exemplifies the characteristics associated with Sartre's notion of radical freedom and self-definition as a Being-for-Itself:

**RECRUITING OFFICER.** (*to SERGEANT*) Do something! **SERGEANT.** I don't feel too good.

**RECRUITING OFFICER.** Try doing business with her! (*in a loud voice*) That belt, Sergeant, you could at least take a look at it! Hey, you, the Sergeant, will take the belt!

**MOTHER COURAGE.** Half a guilder. Worth four times the price.

**SERGEANT.** It's not even a new one. But there's too much wind here. I'll go look at it behind the wagon.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** It doesn't seem windy to me.

**SERGEANT.** Maybe it's worth half a guilder at that. There's silver on it.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** (*now following him eagerly behind the wagon*) A solid six ounces worth!

Mother Courage's relentless pursuit of business opportunities amidst the chaos of war reflects her entrepreneurial spirit. In a scene, while departing from her son Eilif, she tries to manage her business and sell something to the recruiting officer. In setting up her canteen and trading goods, she demonstrates a determination to define herself through her economic activities:

*(THE SWEDISH COMMANDER, THE CHAPLAIN, and EILIF enter the tent. The COMMANDER claps EILIF on the shoulder.)*

**COMMANDER.** In your Commander's tent, you go, Eilif, my son, sit at my right hand! Well done, good and faithful servant – you've played the hero in God's own war, and you'll get a gold bracelet out of it if I have any say in the matter! We come to save their souls, and what do they do, the filthy, irreligious sons of bitches? Try to hide their cattle from us – meanwhile stuffing beef into priests at both ends! But you showed 'em – so here's a can of red wine for you. We'll drink together. *(They do so.)* The chaplain gets the dregs, he's so pious. And now, my hearty, what would you like for dinner?

**EILIF.** How about a slice of meat?

**COOK.** Nothing to eat – so he brings company to eat it. **MOTHER COURAGE.** Sh!

**COMMANDER.** Cook! Meat!!

**EILIF.** Tires you out, skinning peasants. Gives you an appetite.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** Dear God, it's my Eilif!

**COOK.** Who?

**MOTHER COURAGE.** My eldest. It's two years since I saw him. He must be *high* in favor – the Commander inviting him to dinner! And what do you have to eat? Nothing. The Commander's guest wants meat! **Take my advice: buy the capon. The price is one hundred hellers.**

In the above example, despite the fact that she has not seen her son for almost two years, her ability to endure emotionally reflects her commitment to preserving her own identity, and she goes on with her business actions of selling goods to the cook. This showcases her "Being-for-Itself" as she navigates the challenges of survival independently. In another example, we can

observe the pursuit of self-interest and the tension between individual desires and external circumstances:

(**MOTHER COURAGE** brings **KATTRIN** back.)

**MOTHER COURAGE.** Be sensible, the war'll go on a bit longer, and we'll make a bit more money – then peace'll be all the nicer. Now you go into the town, it's not ten minutes' walk, and bring the things from the Golden Lion. Just the special things for your trousseau: the rest we can pick up later in the wagon. The Clerk will go with you, you'll be quite safe. Do a good job, and don't lose anything, think of your trousseau!

Mother Courage's motivation for sending Katrin into town is rooted in the pursuit of self-interest and economic rationality. In Mother Courage's perspective, the war is an opportunity to make money, and she sees the continuation of the war as a means to maximize profit. This aligns with Sartre's existentialist perspective on pursuing personal goals and desires. Mother Courage's actions reflect the individual's inclination to act in their self-interest, a theme prevalent in existential thought. Mother Courage's directive to Katrin demonstrates a sense of existential freedom and responsibility. The emphasis on Katrin's safety and the importance of doing a good job underscores the responsibility that comes with freedom. Mother Courage is entrusting Katrin with a task, emphasizing the autonomy and agency of the individual in making choices. Additionally, the tension between individual desires, such as making more money, and external circumstances, like the war, is evident in Mother Courage's decision. Sartre's philosophy acknowledges the constant negotiation between personal aspirations and the constraints imposed by the external world, and Mother Courage's pragmatic approach to the war highlights the clash between individual desires for economic gain and the uncontrollable external factors, such as the duration of the war. In a nutshell, Mother Courage's actions epitomize the existential idea that individuals navigate their lives in a world devoid of inherent meaning, making choices that shape their own existence.

#### **4.2. Findings and Discussion Related to the Second Research Question**

**Being-for-Others** addresses the impact of social interactions and interpersonal relationships on an individual's self-identity. Sartre contends that we are constantly under the gaze and judgment of others, and their perceptions influence how we view ourselves. This dynamic creates a

complex interplay between individual freedom and society's external expectations and judgments.

In his paper (Spinelli, 2004) mentions that Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others are explained as interconnected concepts. The sense of "I" or one's sense of self is also an expression of "other-ness," meaning that who one says they are is also a statement about who they are not. Being-for-Others emerges as a result of a conscious being's ability to consider the world as it is perceived by another being, leading to the recognition of our reliance upon others for our sense of self and our ability to recognize actuality (Being-for-Itself) and facticity (Being-in-Itself). The concept of Being-for-Others is also linked to the dynamics of love and freedom, highlighting the paradoxical nature of seeking security in the beloved's gaze, where the intended outcome may lead to the opposite. As such, Sartre argues that the dilemma we all face is that we are locked in a continual and unceasing struggle with others. This struggle is no minor thing: It is the basis for each person's being confronted with their actuality and facticity. When two people meet, a struggle begins between each person's desire to be perceived as a transcendent, actualizing subject and to avoid being captured as a defined and limited factual object. Each person wants the same and fears the same. And each places the outcome of the struggle, be it success or failure, in the hands, or more accurately, in the gaze of the other". (p. 3, par. 5, 6)

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre begins his discussion of interpersonal experience or "Being-for-Others" by considering the feeling of shame. Shame thus constitutes the relation of "being-seen-by-another" the "Look" of the "Other." Sartre stresses that

This "Look" is not a matter of being seen. Rather, it is about having the *sense* of being seen. Thus, although the Look is often associated with the perception of eyes pointing in one's direction, it could just as well arise as a result of a "rustling in the branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence. (p. 346)

In Bertolt Brecht's play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the character of Mother Courage encounters situations that exemplify the Sartrean concept of Being-for-Others. Here are instances where Mother Courage's interactions with other characters highlight the influence of external perceptions and judgments on her sense of self:

(**KATTRIN** *ties a kerchief around her head and leaves with the CLERK.*) Now you can chop me a bit of firewood.

(*The CHAPLAIN takes his coat off and prepares to chop wood.*)

**CHAPLAIN.** Properly speaking, I am a pastor of souls, not a woodcutter.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** But I don't have a soul, and I do need wood.

In the play, Mother Courage interacts with the Chaplain, and their dynamic reflects the concept of Being-for-Others. The Chaplain, a representative of religious authority, imposes moral judgments on Mother Courage's actions, particularly her profit-oriented ventures during the war. His disapproval and ethical scrutiny contribute to Mother Courage's self-awareness, influencing her perception of her actions and identity.

Mother Courage's statement can be seen as rejecting imposed values or roles. Sartre emphasizes the idea of individuals creating their own meaning and values rather than conforming to externally prescribed norms. Mother Courage asserts her independence from traditional religious or moral frameworks in rejecting the notion of having a soul. This aligns with Sartre's idea that individuals must define their own essence through their actions and choices.

In addition, the exchange between the Chaplain and Mother Courage highlights the conflict between individual needs and societal expectations. The Chaplain is bound by his role as a spiritual guide, but in asserting her need for wood, Mother Courage challenges the prioritization of spiritual concerns over practical necessities. Sartre's existentialism often explores the tension between individual freedom and societal expectations, and this exchange reflects that struggle.

In another scene, the interaction between Mother Courage and the Chaplain can be analyzed through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of Being-for-Others:

**MOTHER COURAGE.** I see nothing special about this pipe. It's been used, of course...

**CHAPLAIN.** It's been practically bitten through! Oho, he's a wild man! That is the pipe of a wild man! (*The axe falls more violently than ever.*)

**MOTHER COURAGE.** Now it's my chopping block that's bitten through!

**CHAPLAIN.** I told you the care of souls was my field. In physical labor my God-given talents find no adequate expression. You haven't heard me preach. Why, I can put such spirit into a regiment with a single sermon that the enemy's a mere flock of sheep to them

and their own lives are no more than a smelly old pair of shoes to be instantly thrown away at the thought of final Victory! God has given me the gift of tongues! I can preach you out of your senses!

**MOTHER COURAGE.** But I need my senses. What would I do without them?

**CHAPLAIN.** Mother Courage, I have often thought that – under a veil of blunt speech – you conceal a heart. You are human, you need warmth.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** The best way of warming this tent is to chop plenty of firewood.

**CHAPLAIN.** Seriously, my dear Courage, I sometimes ask myself how it would be if our relationship should be somewhat more firmly cemented. I mean: now the wild wind of war has whirled us so strangely together.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** The cement's pretty firm already. I cook your meals. And you lend a hand – at chopping firewood, for instance.

*(The CHAPLAIN flourishes the axe as he approaches her.)*

**CHAPLAIN.** Oh, you know what I mean by a closer relationship. Let your heart speak!

**MOTHER COURAGE.** Don't come at me like that with your axe! That'd be *too* close a relationship!

**CHAPLAIN.** This is no laughing matter. I have given it careful thought.

**MOTHER COURAGE.** My dear Chaplain, be sensible, I do like you. All I want is for me and mine to get by in this war. Now chop the firewood and we'll be warm in the evenings. What's that?

As a religious figure, the Chaplain sees his role in the care of souls and attempts to bring spiritual depth to their interactions. His desire for a "closer relationship" suggests an attempt to establish a more intimate connection with Mother Courage, transcending their functional roles. On the other hand, Mother Courage is firmly grounded in the pragmatic concerns of survival during wartime. Her resistance to the Chaplain's overtures and her insistence on the practical task of chopping wood highlight the conflict between individual autonomy and societal expectations. The Chaplain's insistence on a closer relationship and his claim that Mother Courage conceals a heart may be interpreted as attempts to objectify or instrumentalize her. "Being-for-Others" often

involves individuals viewing each other as a means to an end, projecting their own desires and expectations onto the other. Mother Courage's resistance to the Chaplain's advances and her insistence on maintaining a practical, functional relationship underscores her awareness of potential objectification. She values their interactions for their utility in the context of survival. Also, Mother Courage's indifference towards the Chaplain's excitement about the pipe, stating, "I see nothing special about this pipe," reflects a certain detachment and independence. However, the Chaplain's interpretation of the pipe as belonging to a "wild man" introduces an element of how individuals construct identities based on the perceptions of others. Mother Courage's indifference towards the Chaplain's excitement about the pipe, stating, "I see nothing special about this pipe," reflects a certain detachment and independence. However, the Chaplain's interpretation of the pipe as belonging to a "wild man" introduces an element of how individuals construct identities based on the perceptions of others. The Chaplain's attempts to define Mother Courage's identity and to characterize her as potentially having a concealed heart indicate the influence of "Being-for-Others." Mother Courage, in contrast, seems more concerned with practical matters such as chopping wood.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

In this study, exploring Mother Courage's character revealed clear instances of Being-for-Itself, aligning with Sartre's notion of individual freedom and responsibility. Mother Courage's relentless pursuit of self-interest and determination to survive and protect her interests, even at the cost of others, painted a vivid portrait of existential autonomy. Her decisions in the face of war and adversity epitomized the existential struggle for individual identity and the creation of meaning within a seemingly indifferent world. In addition, the interactions between Mother Courage and other characters illuminated the concept of Being-for-Others. Despite her self-centered pursuits, Mother Courage found herself entangled in relationships that demanded consideration for the well-being of others. The complex dynamics with her children, companions, and the larger societal context highlighted the tension between individual freedom and responsibility towards others. Mother Courage's struggles to balance her self-interest with the needs and aspirations of those around her unveiled the intricate web of being-for-others in the existential narrative.

This study contributed to the broader understanding of existential themes in literature. Dissecting the character of Mother Courage through Sartre's philosophical lens provides a nuanced perspective on how existential concepts can be embedded and explored in dramatic narratives. The implications extend beyond Brecht's play, inviting scholars and literary enthusiasts to unearth existential layers in diverse works of literature. Also, the analysis of Mother Courage's character underscores the complexity of human nature and the moral ambiguity inherent in existential choices. Mother Courage emerges as a multifaceted character, navigating a world where survival often clashes with ethical considerations. This complexity resonates with the existential acknowledgment of the absence of predefined moral norms, pushing individuals to grapple with ethical dilemmas in a world where absolutes are elusive.

## **6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While this study delved into the existential dimensions of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, emphasizing Sartre's concepts of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others, avenues for further research remain open. Therefore, it is implied that there is a need for further studies to analyze this play through different perspectives of existentialism. Exploring comparative studies that analyze characters from different works of literature within the existential framework can provide valuable insights into how various authors employ existential themes. This may reveal whether there are recurring patterns or unique interpretations across different literary works. Also, examining how gender influences the manifestation of Being-for-Itself and Being-for-Others in existential literature allows for an investigation into potential differences in the existential dilemmas experienced by male and female characters.

### **Bio-data**

#### **Abdolhossein Joodaki:**

Abdolhossein Joodaki, holder of a PhD. in English literature, is an associate professor and a faculty member of Lorestan University. He has been teaching a variety of English literature courses for about 20 years at graduate and post graduate level. He has guided more than 40 students with their M.A. thesis and researches. He has also published above 40 articles in prestigious international and domestic journals

**Shiva Rashidifar:**

Shiva Rashidifar has studied English Literature in Lorestan University, Iran.

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**Authors' contributions:**

**Abdolhossein Joodaki:** Conceptualization-writing-the analysis of the data-revision.

**Shiva Rashidifar:** The analysis of the data-revision.

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