

Mother Courage. A Chronicle of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).

A single mother and her grown children. A team now. The fathers have come and gone and are barely remembered. These are her children. By contrast, Matthew (27; 56) identifies an anonymous woman as "the mother of Zebedee's children." We'll talk about it, for what it may mean.

More important is the fact that this group is headed by a **dominant female**. Let's see if it makes a difference. Demian, as you'll remember, was the product of matriarchy, as it were, and seemed to be none the worse for it. It wasn't even worth mentioning. Fifty years later, Edgar Wibeau of Plenzdorf's **The New Sorrows of Young W.** (1972), a modern version of Goethe's bestselling novel **Werther** written 200 years earlier, and one of the most brilliant pieces of theatre post-Brecht, does find it worth mentioning. He is "sick & tired" of being paraded as living proof that "a single mother can successfully raise a male."

We'll have an unconventional introduction to the historical period by means of

1) The music of the age by composers from the turn of the 16th/17th century. The theme: "A rose will bloom / and will fade / so does a youth / so does the fairest maid" (Lorenzo di Medici?) from the party scene of Zeffirelli's adaptation of Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet**.

Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594):

"Todesca: matona mia cara" (soldiers' serenade)

"Echo"

Leonhard Lechner (1553-1606)

From "Neue Deutsche Lieder"

Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1517)

"Ach weh das Leiden, muss es denn sein das Scheiden?"

"Tanzen und springen"

"Jungfrau, dein schoen Gestalt"

And as an example of musical recycling **Heinrich Isaac's** (1450-1517) "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen" and **J.S. Bach's** (1685-1750) streamlined version of it in his **St. Matthew Passion** (Choral "Ich bin's, ich sollte buessen, #16; better known with Paul Gerhardt's text "Nun ruhen alle Waelder")

All musical examples from recordings by the Deutsche Grammophon-Gesellschaft, Archive Production.

2) The violence of war.

The battle of Agincourt (1415) from Kenneth Branagh's turbulent adaptation of Shakespeare's **Henry V**.

Napoleon, directed by Abel Gance. (Re-issued by Francis Ford Coppola).

Tolstoy's **War and Peace**. Russian film adaptation of the novel, directed by Sergei Bondarchuk.

The fascination with violence. You know it from TV and the movies. Let me introduce you to the violent poetry of **Archy the Cockroach**:

the cockroach stood in the mickle
wood in the flush of the astral dawn
and he sniffed the air from the hidden

lair where the khyber swordfish spawn
and the bilge and the belch of the glutton
welsh as they smelted their warlock cheese
surged to and fro where the grinding
floe wrenched at the headlands knees

.....

the waterspout came bellowing out of
the red horizons rim
and the grey typhoon and the black
monsoon surged forth to the fight with him
with threefold might they surged to
the fight for they hated the great bull roach
and they cried begod as they lashed
the sod and here is an egg to poach
we will bash his his mug with his own raw
lug new stripped from off his dome
for there is no law but teeth and claw
to the nor nor east of nome

.....

the cockroach spat and he tilted his
hat and he grinned through the lowering mirk
the cochroach felt in his rangoon belt
for his good bengali dirk
he reefed his mast against the blast
and he bent his mizzen free ...

You get the idea. Fantasy hour. The worm's heroic day dream, facing down the chicken. The sentiment, comically pathetic here, turns vicious in **The Threepenny Opera**. Stay tuned.

And please go discover **don marquis, the lives and times of archy and mehitabel** (1916 ff.). The Doubleday edition of 1950 has a splendid introduction by Cornell graduate E. B. White. You'll find the heroic poetry quoted above on p. 191, "archy experiences a seisure"

Since Mother Courage was compared to **Niobe**, much to Brecht's annoyance (or so he claimed) please read the ancient Greek legend of the mother who loses all of her children. Also recall the icons of the **mater dolorosa** ("the woman of the seven sorrows") we saw in connection with the iconography of **Death in Venice**. We'll listen to **Palestrina's** musical setting of **Jacopone da Todi's** (1230-1306) **Stabat mater dolorosa** (text hand-out; some claim it is by **St. Bonaventure**, 1217-1274). There are strong echoes of the story of Christ's passion in Scene Three; let's listen to excerpts from J.S. Bach's **St. Matthew Passion**. Since it is Easter week, and time permitting, we'll add Palestrina's **Improperia**, liturgical music for Good Friday, and a scene or two from Wagner's **Parsifal**.

We'll compare the different motherly types that Anna Fierling and her daughter Katrin represent with those of Grusche from Brecht's **Caucasian Chalk Circle** (the "irresistable temptation to do good"-- the end of Scene Two, hand-out) and Shen Te/Shui Ta from his **Good Person of Szechwan** ("To be

good to you, my son / I shall be a tigress to all others"-- Scene Seven, hand-out). If we can all agree for once we'll draw some obvious conclusions.

The May 24, 2003 edition of [Science News](#) has an essay, **REPEAT AFTER ME**, that deals among other things with compassion and empathy, i.e. the ability to adopt the victim's or sufferer's perspective and act upon it. It goes a long way to explain Kattrin's and Grusche's "motherly" attitude. It is a stroke of sheer genius that Brecht has Grusche actually "hear" the abandoned baby address her "calmly and sensibly, or so it seemed to her, 'Woman', it said, 'help me'."

Mouther Courage instructs her adult children on how to survive. But there is no learned behavior that guarantees survival. How do you explain this compulsion to teach it anyway? On cultural transmission among whales & dolphins (with a ref to chimpanzees) see "Culture of the Sea" in the October 28, 2000 issue of [Science News](#) (link below).

The March 28, '98 issue of [Science News](#) has yet another discussion of "group interest vs individual interest". Two earlier articles on the subject, "Return of the Group" and "Ultrasocial Darwinism" appeared in the 11/18/95 and 11/25/95 issues, respectively. The May 8, 1999 issue features a lengthy report on co-operative spiders.

The March 27, 1999 of [The Economist](#) has an interesting, if somewhat chatty, article about co-operation among horses; the research findings appeared in [Animal Behaviour](#).

Frans de Waal, **The Age of Empathy**. Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society. Harmony Books / Random House, 2009. Excerpted in the September 2009 issue of [Natural History](#).

These investigations and other studies of the relative merits of individual or collective altruism in the animal world are most helpful in our context, once we abandon the common prejudice that "the crown of creation" cannot learn from "lower life forms."

Read or re-read Kafka's **The Burrow**. A trusted partner might solve the animal's "problem", namely the futility of his solitary search for absolute security.

A recent book on the subject is by Matt Ridley, **The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation**. 1997.

Frans De Waal writes on **How Animals Do Business** in the April 2005 issue of [Scientific American](#).

Why does Anna Fierling choose the Cook ("Peter the Pipe") over the Chaplain? Read all about it in:

Meredith F. Small, **Female Choices: Sexual Behavior of Female Primates** (1993, CU Press).
Lee Alan Dugatkin and Jean-Guy J. Godin, "**How Females Choose Their Mates**" in [Scientific American](#), April 1998.

Deeper still:

Tim Birkhead, **Promiscuity: An Evolutionary History of Sperm Competition** (HUP, 2000)
Read the cover story in [Natural History](#), November 2000, by the same author, "Hidden Choices of Females" ("picky, picky" sayeth the editor).