

The Good Woman of Setzuan



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BERTOLT BRECHT

Born into a middle-class family in Bavaria at the turn of the 20th century, Bertolt Brecht enjoyed a comfortable childhood—though later in life, he claimed to have roots in the peasant class. At the onset of World War I, Brecht avoided conscription into the German Army by enrolling in medical school. His interests soon turned to drama, and in 1918 he wrote his first full-length play, *Boo!*, a drama about a degenerate young poet. In the early 1920s, Brecht moved to Munich, where he continued writing plays and he found himself hailed by critics as a harbinger of a new era in the theater. As Brecht's star rose, his first marriage began to deteriorate; he sought the company of his lovers Elisabeth Hauptmann and Helene Weigel in Berlin, where he formed theatrical connections and built artistic collectives in the thriving cultural center. **Brecht and his collaborators sought new methods of theater-making which pointed out the hypocrisy of capitalism and the absurdity of art as escapism.** *The Threepenny Opera* premiered in 1928, becoming a verified hit in Berlin and the impetus for a new experimental era in musicals worldwide. In 1933, when Hitler assumed power, Brecht fled Nazi Germany for Denmark and he spent the subsequent years moving throughout Scandinavia as the Nazis occupied country after country, eventually fleeing to Los Angeles. Despite the turmoil of the period, Brecht produced many of his most famous anti-fascist work during it: *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and her Children*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are hailed today as emblematic of German Exilliteratur, or **"literature of the exiled."** In the late 1940s, as the Red Scare took hold of America, Brecht found himself blacklisted by Hollywood and on trial for communist sympathies (though an ideological Marxist, Brecht was never a member of the Communist Party). His testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee was controversial, and Brecht returned to Europe the day after testifying. Back in East Berlin in 1949, Brecht established the famous Berliner Ensemble, but his own individual artistic output slowed. Ongoing political strife in East Berlin distressed and disillusioned Brecht, and in 1956 he died of heart failure. Brecht's artistic contributions to drama remain influential to this day, and the epic theater movement's reverberations can be felt throughout contemporary theater, film, and opera.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While *The Good Woman of Setzuan* isn't tied to any particular year, it seems to take place in the early-to-mid-20th century, given the presence of the planes that fly frequently overhead.

Brecht began writing *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in 1938 while living in Denmark after fleeing Nazi Germany—but in 1939, when the threat of war seemed greater than ever, Brecht was forced to flee once again to the U.S. Brecht settled in Los Angeles, where he finished work on *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and he composed other seminal plays like *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. All of Brecht's plays from this period are critical of capitalism, fascism, and indeed humanity itself—his cynical views on humanity's inherent greed and cruelty is reflective of the horrors of World War II and of the Holocaust, events which precipitated the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945. The 1930s and 1940s were largely defined by violence, human rights violations, and genocide on a scale that was unfathomable even in the wake of World War I. *The Good Woman of Setzuan*'s cynical, misanthropic views, then, correlate directly with the shock, horror, and grief that Brecht felt at the time.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Several of Brecht's other works—including *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*—are also hypercritical of the greed, corruption, and cruelty which capitalism inspires in humanity. Like *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, these plays feature endings which rely on a *deus ex machina* or audience involvement in order to "solve" the complicated moral, social, and ethical questions which the drama has presented. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is another book that engages with the ways in which capitalism particularly effects women—often by forcing them to develop dual identities, to pursue unhappy relationships or marriages, or to sacrifice their own needs in order to please and satiate others. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* debuted in Europe in 1943—a time when world literature was influenced by the horrors of Nazism and the echoes of the Great Depression. George Orwell's classics *1984* and *Animal Farm* are renowned, as Brecht's works are, for their critique of the status quo and the extant social order, while plays by playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Eugene Ionesco began to dip into the realm of absurdism in order to wrestle with the painful and often disorienting realities of life lived under fascism and antisemitism.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (from the German *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, often translated literally as *The Good Person of Szechwan*)
- **When Written:** 1938-1941
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles

Good Woman Of Setzuan

Bertolt Brecht, Eric Bentley



Good Woman Of Setzuan:

The Good Woman of Setzuan Bertolt Brecht, Eric Bentley, 2007 The Open Fist Theatre presents a re imagined version of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* Set in the imaginary city of Setzuan in pre communist China the play explores themes of good and evil love and betrayal and male female identity The Brecht approach uses song dance and style to create a humorous and provocative look at how humanity deals with love money and social injustice **The Good**

Woman of Setzuan, 1966 The Catholic University of America Speech and Drama Department Rev Gilbert V Hartke O P Head presents Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* revised English version by Eric Bentley directed by James D Waring settings and lighting by James D Waring costumes designed by Richard Dulany music composed by Emerson Meyers

Women's Scenes and Monologues Joyce Devlin, 1989 New York Magazine, 1978-06-05 New York magazine was born in 1968 after a run as an insert of the New York Herald Tribune and quickly made a place for itself as the trusted resource for readers across the country With award winning writing and photography covering everything from politics and food to theater and fashion the magazine's consistent mission has been to reflect back to its audience the energy and excitement of the city itself while celebrating New York as both a place and an idea **Good Woman of Setzuan** Michael Rice, Eric

Bentley, 1989 A musical based upon Eric Bentley's translation of Bertolt Brecht's play *The good woman of Setzuan* *Views Beyond the Border Country* Dennis Dworkin, Leslie Roman, 2013-12-16 This collection examines the influence of Raymond Williams on the work of radical intellectuals It especially looks at the limitation of Williams political vision and commitment

McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama McGraw-Hill, inc, 1984 Ranging from the earliest drama to the theater of the 1980's this encyclopedia includes coverage of national drama and theater around the world theater companies and musical comedy Arrangement of the 1 300 entries is alphabetically by name or subject with nearly 950 of these devoted to individual playwrights and their works *Performing Feminisms* Sue-Ellen Case, 1990-02 A valuable provoking important

addition to any theatre scholar or practitioner's library especially since feminist theory is a relative newcomer to the world of theatre *Baal, A Man's a Man, and The Elephant Calf* Bertolt Brecht, 1964 The story of a charming ruthlessly amoral young

poet Baal 1918 is Brecht's first play and a passionate acceptance of the world in all its sordid grandeur Martin Esslin *A Man's*

A Man 1926 Brecht's first excursion into epic theater traces the terrifying transformation of the sweet good Galy Gay into a bloodthirsty human fighting machine Galy reappears in the brief sardonic *Elephant Calf* a sort of coda Powerful stage works in their own right these three early plays also provide crucial insights into Brecht's dramatic techniques and preoccupations before the decisive embrace of Marxism in 1928 *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* Manfred Pfister, 1988 Manfred Pfister's

book is the first to provide a coherent comprehensive framework for the analysis of plays in all their dramatic and theatrical dimensions The material on which his analysis is based covers all genres and periods His approach is systematic rather than historical combining more abstract categorisations with detailed interpretations of sample texts Performing Women Gay

Gibson Cima,2018-10-18 Some feminists criticize male playwrights for misrepresenting and thereby victimizing women through patriarchal narratives other feminists applaud selected male playwrights as creators of universal women's roles In this bold and imaginative book Gay Gibson Cima delineates previously unacknowledged complexities in the relationship between male playwrights and female characters in the modern theatre That relationship has been misinterpreted she maintains because the contributions of female actors and the variations in their actual performance conditions and styles are too often ignored Taking into account hypothetical as well as historical performances of works by representative male playwrights from Ibsen to Beckett Cima sheds important new light on the acting styles invented by women to create female characters on stage Changes in performance style Cima observes may alter conventional modes of viewing and disrupt behavioral codes generated by a patriarchal cultural system Performing Women is essential reading for theatre critics and historians feminist theorists theatre professionals and amateurs and others interested in film and the stage

Contradictory Characters Albert Bermel,1996 Providing an interpretation of the modern theatre this is a new edition of a classic work of drama criticism The Good Woman of Setzuan by Bertolt Brecht George R. Adkison,1994 **Asia in Western fiction** Robin Winks,2017-03-01 Any reader who has ever visited Asia knows that the great bulk of Western language fiction about Asian cultures turns on stereotypes This book a collection of essays explores the problem of entering Asian societies through Western fiction since this is the major port of entry for most school children university students and most adults In the thirteenth century serious attempts were made to understand Asian literature for its own sake Hau Kioou Chooan a typical Chinese novel was quite different from the wild and magical pseudo Oriental tales European perceptions of the Muslim world are centuries old originating in medieval Christendom's encounter with Islam in the age of the Crusades There is explicit and sustained criticism of medieval mores and values in Scott's novels set in the Middle Ages and this is to be true of much English language historical fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Even mediocre novels take on momentary importance because of the pervasive power of India The awesome remote and inaccessible Himalayas inevitably became for Western writers an idealised setting for novels of magic romance and high adventure and for travellers tales that read like fiction Chinese fictions flourish in many guises Most contemporary Hong Kong fiction reinforced corrupt mandarins barbaric punishments and heathens Of the novels about Japan published after 1945 two may serve to frame a discussion of Japanese behaviour as it could be observed or imagined by prisoners of war Black Fountains and Three Bamboos **Playwriting** Sam Smiley,Norman A. Bert,2005-01-01 The incidence of melanoma has increased by 2000% since 1930 and one person dies each hour from the disease This cutting edge guide provides scientifically accurate information which patients and their families need to understand melanoma and its treatment and to receive necessary reassurance It is also a vitally important resource for those who want information about preventing the disease or finding it early when it is most curable Catherine M Poole a melanoma survivor and melanoma patient advocate for many organisations and Dr DuPont

Guerry an internationally renowned melanoma expert have collaborated to provide current correct and easily understood information on the disease The authors have had first hand contact with a multitude of patients with melanoma and they understand exactly how to empower patients to gain control of their situations and obtain the best treatment **Bentley on Brecht** Eric Bentley, 2008-03-06 Recipient of 2007 The Robert Chesley Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award in Playwriting Winner of 2006 International Association of Theatre Critics Thalia Prize Winner of 2006 Village Voice OBIE Awards Lifetime Achievement Award Since their first meeting in Santa Monica California in 1942 Eric Bentley has been Bertolt Brecht's other offstage voice Just as Brecht reshaped modern theater Bentley's writings on Brecht helped shape his reputation in the United States and the rest of the world Bentley on Brecht represents a lifetime of critical and personal thoughts on both Brecht as friend and Brecht as influential literary figure Brought together in this volume are Brecht Bentley correspondence Bentley's personal recollections of his years with Brecht including Charles Laughton's production of Galileo Brecht's testimony before the House Un American Activities Committee and Bentley's analysis of Brecht's plays *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* Jean Albert Bédé, William Benbow Edgerton, 1980 With more than 1800 critical entries on the writers and literatures of 33 languages this work presents the entire range of modern European writing from the symbolist and modernist works rooted in the last decades of the nineteenth century through the avant garde and existentialist movement to Barthes Blanchot Breton and continental thought pertinent today Thinking about the Playwright Eric Bentley, 1987 Essays discuss Ibsen Strindberg O'Neill Brecht Shaw acting styles theater controversies translation regional drama and the nature of theater *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* Merriam-Webster, Inc, 1995 Describes authors works and literary terms from all eras and all parts of the world **The Good Person of Szechwan** Bertolt Brecht, 1965

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