

CHAPTER 3
THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ELEMENTS OF
THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

This chapter provides data about the internal and external world of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. Based on Goldman's *Genetic-Structuralism* which links the structure of the literary work itself with the historical and social condition of certain social group through the concept of world vision held by the author, the writer stresses the discussion on this chapter on three most significant factors. They include the synopsis of the work, biography of the author, and the last is socio-cultural background of the work and the author.

A. The Internal Elements of the Work

Since Goldman's *Genetic Structuralism* requires structuration of literary work as a whole and emphasizes its application firstly in the manner of its internal coherence, the writer presents synopsis of Bertolt Brecht *The Good Woman of Setzuan* in the first area to convey the significance of the work.



A. 1. Synopsis of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*

Three of the highest gods are on their way to save the situation at the half-Westernized city of Setzuan. Wong, the water seller is welcoming and helping them to find a room to stay a night. They have to face the reality that there is no people who has willingness to provide a little room for them. Finally, they come to Shen Te's place. She is a kind-hearted prostitute woman. She hesitates to serve them because she needs the room to earn money, but she, then, is available to give in her property.

The next day, the gods insist on giving money to Shen Te to pay for the room. She reluctantly receives it because she helps them sincerely. But, the gods ask her to keep their gift to avoid of people's misinterpretation.

Shen Te uses the one hundred-silver dollars from them as a capital to start her business by opening a small tobacco shop. As she starts to have a settled life, the problems will next, come to her. The first one, Shen Te has to face Mrs. Shin's harsh behaviour. She is the former owner of the shop. She desperately accuses Shen Te of robbing the place from her and the children. But, in the other hand, she is begging for rice. Instead of being hurt, Shen Te helps her and the children.

A family consist of an elderly husband, wife and their nephew come to Shen Te's shop. They just suffer from bankruptcy which caused them of losing the shelter and now they ask help from Shen Te. She puts behind the fact that they ever refused to help her before. She kindly provides one little room for them behind the shop. She,

next, helps an unemployed man who could not afford to buy cigarettes by giving away some of her belonging to him.

After the unemployed man leaves, a carpenter enters the shop and demands a hundred-silver dollars for the unpaid shelves. The claim should be addressed to Mrs. Shin as the former owner but she refuses her obligation. Shen Te becomes the pointed one to pay the bill. She asks time to pay it over because she has not yet sold anything. Being threatened by the carpenter to send Shen Te to jail if she could not pay the bill, the wife suddenly gives guaranty that Shen Te's cousin will settle the bill.

Shen Te still has to deal with another problem. She is required by Mrs. Mi Tzu, the land lady, to provide a reference of leasing the shop. It leads Shen Te to mention a fictive cousin's name, Shui Ta as her assurance both to Mrs. Mi Tzu and the carpenter. This idea holds her problems for temporary moment.

Shui Ta shows up in Shen Te's shop. He declares himself as the one who owns the authority while she is gone. He also announces to the family that Shen Te's charity activities is ended. His manner is very different with his cousin's. He is starting the day by ordering the family to work for him as the payment for the small room given by Shen Te.

Shui Ta meets the carpenter to handle Shen Te's bill. He heartlessly offers a difficult choices to solve the problem. He forces the carpenter to accept only twenty silver- dollars otherwise the carpenter could have back the shelves. He is winning the

situation by realizing that the carpenter will not do the second choice. The carpenter is very up set but he accepts the offer very reluctantly.

Shui Ta is later dealing with Mrs. Mi Tzu's requirement of paying six-month rent in advance. He is trying to convince Mrs. Mi Tzu not to worry about Shen Te's early reputation as a prostitute because he is now in charge for the whole operation of the shop. He successfully negotiates her to give him time to pay the rent.

The gods are asking Wong, the water seller, about Shen Te's condition after they gave her money. Wong explains that she is in love with someone and still gives goodness to other people. Even people call her The Angel of The Slum.

Shen Te comes to distribute the rice. She looks very happy and beautiful because she is in love. Mr. Shu Fu is admiring her beauty and starting to feel the love to her. Shen Te is visiting the old couple's shop. She likes their shawl and eagerly wants to buy it but she does not have money even to pay her rent. They offer to lend her two hundred silver-dollars to pay her rent. They just want the tobacco stock as a guaranty but it does not need to be written because they believe in her goodness.

Yang Sun, Shen Te's lover is being offered a job as a pilot but the director of the airfield in Peking requires five hundred silver dollars. Shen Te gives him two hundred silver dollars which is planned to pay the rent and promising the mother that she will find another three hundred silver dollars for him. She has a plan to ask Shui Ta's help.

Shui Ta is in Shen Te's shop when Yang Sun is trying to find her. Shui Ta and him have a serious discussion about another three hundred silver dollars, his future plan with her cousin, and his plan to sell the shop. Yang Sun is very sure that Shen Te loves him and willingly to help him by selling the shop to get another three hundred silver dollars. Shui Ta is in doubt about Yang Sun's capability to provide a good life for Shen Te. And Yang Sun surprisingly states that he will leave her behind. This statement makes Shui Ta very angry and demand to leave two tickets for Peking otherwise he will not sell the shop. Yang Sun agrees to marry her with one condition that she should bring the money on the wedding day.

Shui Ta is concerning Yang Sun's heartlessly plan for Shen Te. And Mrs. Shin who knows the situation gives advice to ask help from Mr. Shu Fu regarding the fact that he adores Shen Te and he is very rich man although he is already married.

Mr. Shu Fu is planning to take Shen Te to a small but high class restaurant to have a small supper. And he lets Shen Te's guests to take shelter in his cabins behind the cattle run. Shui Ta leaves the place to find Shen Te. Yang Sun comes to the shop and wonders why the barber man is in Shen Te's shop. Mr. Shu Fu declares that Shui Ta is having a private discussion with Shen Te to plan her engagement with him. Shui Ta is very angry to hear this news. He attacks the barber as Shen Te enters the room. She explains that she agrees with her cousin's agreement with Shu Fu. Yang Sun is begging her love. He reminds her about their time together. Shen Te is later changing

her mind and going with him. Shu Fu turns his emotion to anger and shouting to find Shui Ta.

Shen Te and Yang Sun meet the old woman who lend the two hundred silver dollars. She told them that her husband is sick with all the worry that Shen Te could not give the money back. The old couple do not trust Shui Ta or even Yang Sun. Shen Te promises them that she would pay it back.

Shen Te is going to marry Yang Sun and they invite people to come to a 'private dining room' on the upper floor of a cheap restaurant in a poor section of the town. Mrs. Yang and her son is trying to delay the ceremony until Shui Ta arrive with another three hundred silver dollars as he promised before. She gives reason that she is still an old-fashioned one that Shen Te should wait for her family before she start the wedding. But Shen Te is sensitive enough to feel that it is not a true reason. Beside, she is been treated badly by her future husband. She has to accept his underestimating words.

Time goes by and Mrs. Yang still insist on waiting for Shui Ta. The party is indicating its pathetic end as the priest leaves the room followed by another people and the waiter demands the payment of the meals. Mrs. Yang, Yang Sun, and Shen Te are very frustrated with this condition.

The gods are coming to ask Shen Te's condition in Wong's dream. He reports that she has a lot of problems and must sell the shop. He suggest the gods to intervene her trouble. The gods explain their rule that they help people who help themselves.

Shui Ta quickly goes into the back room. He returns with Shen Te's belonging and then wraps them in a bundle. Wong asks the police to check Shui Ta's shop.

Yang Sun testifies that he heard someone sobbing in the back room and he asks the police to check it. The policeman do not find anything except Shen Te's belonging. Shui Ta is then being suspected of murdering his cousin.

The gods appear again in Wong's dream for the last time. Wong says that Shen Te is gone for months and her cousin has been arrested. People accuses him of murdering his cousin to get the shop. The gods state that the world becomes a terrible place which is full with misery, vulgarity, and waste. They will resign if Shen Te cannot be found. And they say that good intentions bring people to the brink of the abyss, and good deeds push them over the edge. Their mission is to find one human being who can stand the place.

All people are in the courtroom to see Shui Ta's trial. There is a rumor that the judges are the friend of Mr. Shu Fu and Shui Ta gives them fat goose as present only the night before the judgment day. But, three gods take over the previous judge's place and Wong notices this. After a long and hard time, Shui Ta confesses that he was Shen Te and vice versa. He was the man who committed all those crime and the good woman who did all those deeds. The gods give a spirit to Shen Te to stay good and leave Shui Ta's nature. They will continue to renounce the book of rules and the world should not be changed.

B. Biography of Bertolt Brecht

This subchapter defines biography of Bertolt Brecht to convey his background of education, family, environment, ideas, and ideology which gives important contribution to reveal his world vision expressed in the works.

The biography of Bertolt Brecht is compiled and summarized from the following sources : *A Treasury of the Theatre* by John Gassner and Bernard F. Dukore, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Developing Contemporary Marxism* by Zygmunt G. Baranski and John R. Short, and *The Encyclopedia Americana*.

B. 1. Biographical Outline of Bertolt Brecht

Brecht whose original name was Eugene Berthold Friedrich Brecht was born at Augsburg on February 10, 1898. He was raised in a well-to-do family of mixed Lutheran and Roman Catholic background. He published poems and reviews at the age six teen. When World War I began in 1914, he was a patriotic supporter for the kaiser. And after finishing his study on medicine and natural science, he was sent to be a German army.

He was disillusioned by the condition of the society because of war. It influenced his ballad song "The Legend of the dead Soldier", and his first play "Baal", convey an all consuming disenchantment with society.

In 1922, Brecht achieved The Kleist Prize which was given annually to the best young German Dramatist for his *Drums in the Night* (1920). The civilization which come crashing down at the end of World War had produced a disappointment among Brecht's generation and it was reflected in his antibourgeois attitude. Brecht's friend were the member of *Dadaist Group* which aimed at breaking the false standard of bourgeois art through iconoclastic satire.

He employed Marxism in the late 1920s from Karl Korsch, a Marxist theoretician who was also a Communist member of the Reichstag but he was expelled from the German Communist Party in 1926. And as the Marxist playwright, Brecht implies the possibility of social change by emphasizing the uniqueness of socially formed characters as his chief goal. During this period of learning Marxism, Brecht wrote *A man's a Man* in 1924-25, *Manual of Piety*, a collection of poems in 1927. He also collaborated with the composer Kurt Weill. They wrote *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), portraying the city as a civilized jungle whose inhabitants must act ruthlessly to survive. Also in 1928, Brecht married to Helena Weigel. She played many of Brecht characters including *Mother Courage* (1938) and *Antigone* (1948).

Brecht did not only invent his Marxist concept but also the *Lehrstucke* or *Learning Plays*, didactic ones whose objective is to teach social attitudes by showing social types and actions. At the same time, Brecht introduced his 'epic-theatre'

attempted to make audience actively and critically analyze not only social behaviour but also the structure of society.

The important time for Brecht life arrived on February 28, 1933 when he left German because he was on the death list of Nazi. He was taken to exile because he wrote many of his left-wing thought. And Hitler who became a chancellor blamed the communist and arrested the communist leader and other anti-Nazi leftist.

After a long journey to one country to another one, Brecht settled in Santa Monica in 1941. In his exile, he wrote many important plays. This period was the most significant time in his life.

Brecht left America in 1947 after testifying in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee which investigates the spread of communism in Hollywood. He lived in Zurich for a year to produce his *Antigone Model* and *A Little Organum for the Theatre*.

He settled in Communist East Berlin with his wife and developed their own theatre company, *the Berlin Ensemble*. He could freely perform his plays and employ his dramatic theories.

During the year of 1955, he gained success at Paris Theatre des Nations and Moscow where he received Stalin Peace Prize, one of the Soviet Union's highest honors. It completed his achievement shortly before he died on August 14, 1956 because of a coronary thrombosis.

B. 2. Bertolt Brecht's Moral Vision

In the writer's opinion, the world vision which relates the significance of Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and the social condition of the associated society, could be conveyed through the exploration of Brecht's principal thought on morality. And it is summarized from the themes of his plays which most discuss about morality and his dramatic theories which support his objective to dramatize the social behavior as complete as possible.

Bertolt Brecht is a major modern playwright, a significant dramatic theorist, and an important director whose work in each capacity informs his practice in the others. His plays have humor and social indignation, bluntness and nuances. They are lyrical and obscene, explicit and ambiguous, entertaining and didactic (Gassner, J & Dukore, B. F. 1970:868). Brecht's plays show a typical problem of modern life which includes confrontation between human nature and the temptation of society.

As being discussed before that Brecht is a moralist who wrote many morality plays, he asks his audience to analyze the moral message content of his plays through the character's experience in such a troubled society. His *Threepenny Opera* views a corrupt capitalist society which causes individual to act more cleverly foul than others to survive his life. His *Mahagonny* shows the tendency to present the same theme with previously mentioned play which is about living in a big city with complex problems and people must act ruthlessly to survive.

Brecht wrote *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1930), criticizing capitalist and organized religion which led to the exploitation of the workers. In *The Mother* (1931), Brecht portrayed a working-class woman who learnt Marxism through her son's revolutionary activities taken place in Russia.

During his exile time he produced some sophisticated plays, among them are *Mother Courage* (1938), a woman who ironically earned money from the war. *Galileo* (1938) was about a dilemma suffered by a Renaissance scientist whether conveying the truth or following his responsibilities as scientist. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1940) focused on a woman's dilemma to be good or to survive in a corrupt society.

The important data about Brecht's thought and its implication to his works is depicted in the statement below :

To Brecht, however, the Evil One is capitalism and the road to Salvation is Marxism. One generally thinks of man being tempted toward evil behavior. To Brecht, temptation lies in the opposite direction. As he indicates in a refrain from *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), one would like to be good, "But this old world of ours ain't built that way." To Brecht, evil is socially imposed, not a natural condition. Man's natural tendencies, which are toward goodness, conflict with methods of survival in a corrupt society. In dramatizing the frustration of these natural tendencies, Brecht resolution of the conflict is to

change the corrupt society. But Brecht is a poet and a humanist as well as a Marxist. Although his remedy is always implicit in his poetic presentation of the moral problem of good and evil, it is not always explicit and it is rarely presented in simplistic terms (Gassner, J & Bernard, F. D. 1970:898)

The economic background of one's life which influences his morality is satirized also in Brecht's plays as explained that economic concerns and moralistic concerns of good and evil are inextricably entwined. Implicit in this play is the need to change the society which exploits and wraps moral values. Under capitalism, Brecht suggests, act of goodness may be fatal as well as dangerous (Gassner, J. & Dukore, F. B. 1970:899)

To Brecht, his plays teach his audience about humanity conflicts with inhumanity. It is hoped that they do not capture morality as the simple term of 'goodness' and 'harshness'. But, in a broader context, Brecht wants them to analyze and apply it in their own world.

Brecht's dramatic theories are very helpful to reveal his thought on morality as being portrayed in his works. Around 1930, he developed *Lehrstücke* or Learning Plays, didactic plays intended for working-class audiences. It teaches social attitudes by showing social types and social actions performed in the stage. To fulfill his objective, Brecht introduced the term *Verfremdung* or alienation or some called it detachment. The use of alienation effect is to avoid lulling the audience into a state of passive acceptance and shatter the illusion of reality. Furthermore, alienation does not mean

the removal of emotion but rather the prevention of total identification with any one character in order that the audience may more critically observe the actions. In part, alienation means enabling an audience to see the stage action through an unfamiliar angle of vision (Gassner, J & Dukore, F. B. 1970: 870). In conclusion, the use of emotion by the actor or actress should avoid of making the audience involves his empathy for his analysis would go beyond objectivity. To success this, Brecht's actors employ *Gestus* or *gest*, a combination of bearing, gesture, and social attitude. Each elements of the play should apply this *gest* to make the audience understand the social basis of the character's behavior.

Brecht's opinion about realism is as a laying bare society's causal network/ showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators/ writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/ emphasizing the dynamics of developments/ concrete and so as to encourage abstraction (Baranski, Z. G. & Short, J. R. 1985:109).

Brecht rejects the Aristotelian tragic theater. It means that his works do not contain artificial constraints of time and place and 'well-made' plots. He formulated the Epic theater to replace this conservative dramatic theory. His epic theater employs realistic and symbolic scenes, debate and narrative, songs and even lyric passages, as well as multiple strands of action strung together without regard for conventional crises and climaxes (Gassner, J. & Dukore, F. B. 1970:869). And the major goal of this epic

theater is to make the audience actively and critically analyze not only social behavior but the structure of society as well.

C. Socio-Cultural Background

Since Goldman's theory is a historical structuralism, the writer sees the importance to present socio-cultural background of China's society as the setting in the play and German wherein the author experienced his life which gives references to understand the global condition of certain era. The writer also indicates the correlation between the condition in China and German-the social and political upheavals which influence socio-cultural condition of their society.

C. 1. China's Socio-Cultural Background

China is the oldest continuous major world civilization covered more than 3.500 years with its 24 dynasties and two Republics, the Nationalist Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. But, in this study, the discussion about China's socio-cultural background is limited in the twentieth century's political and social upheavals. It is supported by the fact that Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is a parable play set in prewar China and Brecht produced it during his exile time in 1943 in America (The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. VI, 1977:493).

China's contemporary history in the twentieth century is marked by the revolution and reformation led by China's scholars who crashed down the Qing

dynasty's power and replaced it with Nationalist Republic of China on February 12, 1912. Unlike the previous dynasty which was able to rule more than 300 years before it faced with Western imperialism, the Nationalist Republic of China authorized only from 1911 until 1949. The Communist movement took over the Nationalist Republic's power through two-decade civil war and proclaimed the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. The remnant Nationalist Republic's people went to Taiwan.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen as the leader of the Nationalist movement introduced his doctrine, *San Min Shu Yi* which struggled for people's freedom from imperialism's oppression and soon it was hoped to build 'a new nation' or 'a new society' by developing a changing system for the agrarian-based Chinese. In the following years, China was still not gain its stability both in political and social life. The people remain suffered from economic concerns and exploitation of China's workers and poor peasants. The period was marked by the class struggle between working class and the bourgeois; and of the peasantry against feudal exploitation in the countryside.

In the early 1930s, Mao Zedong outlined the principles of the Agrarian Revolution: Relying on the poor peasants and farm wage-labourers, uniting with the middle peasants, restricting the rich peasants, protecting the medium and small industrialist and businessmen and liquidating the landlord class (Chossudusky, 1986: 28)

China's social structure distanced the peasants into categories-poor, lower middle, upper middle, and rich. The poor peasants worked as labourers because they

did not own any land or any property at all. They had to live in the barns or outhouses of the landlord to whom they worked. During the difficult years, they were often unemployed and the first to starve. The condition of the lower middle is not different from the poor ones. They worked as labourers in their rented land.

On the other hand, upper middle peasants owned a better condition than the two categories previously mentioned. They worked at their own land and had enough food and clothing. The last category is the most prosperous ones. They had enough land for their own capacity and rent to others.

The condition of economic sector in China was suffering from severe dislocations caused by decades of war and inflation. The government concerns were to restore public order and eliminate widespread unemployment and starvation. Poverty characterized the condition of the lower class in China as they suffered from the needs of economic and survival their life. The decline of human rights practices in China contribute the worse condition in social life. The government restricted freedom of assembly, expression, and the press and repressed most dissent.

C. 2. German's Socio-Cultural Background

German socio-cultural condition in the twentieth century shared the similar phenomenon with the one occurred in China. It was accompanied by a series of social and political upheavals and an explosion of new ideologies between fascism in the right wing and socialism in the left wing although both of the movements were hostile

to a democratic state. There was an effort to weaken the aristocratic authority by the challenge of democratic ideologies. The aristocratic era was identified with monarchy, the church, and a hierarchical society which developed a landowning aristocracy.

Socialism criticized the values of capitalist society with its dehumanization of man into types identifiable with economic function. The employer would hire the worker at the lowest possible wage and it supported by the worker's need of survival so they were forced to accept this condition. The working class as the lower community in the structure of society moved to the cities with their peasant background. They was drawn to Socialist parties by both class consciousness and trauma of having to adjust to an urban industrial environment (Schain, 1976: 14).

After World War I, the inflation and unemployment made the promises of radical Marxism even more appealing. It proposed the idea of historical change as the result of the violent collision of social classes, each limited in its awareness by its specific class ideology. The transformation of a capitalist society into a communist society was supported by the revolutionary efforts of the working class.

In conclusion, German's condition after World War I was marked by the elimination of the monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic institution although many Germans were not ready to face this gradual changes. The inflation of the early 1920s and the Great Depression that began in 1929 influenced the social life of the peasants, small businessmen, and the white-collar workers. All this national ills,

plus the general ferment of the twenties, produced a moral and intellectual turmoil that seemed to threaten all traditional standards (Schain, 1976: 42).

On January 30, 1933, Hitler was made chancellor. Hitler's aim was to create a new and mighty Germany, ruled by a heroic, disciplined, responsible racial elite—a racial community unified by blood and thriving in unit and harmony (Schain, 1976: 43). Hitler, then, created a corporate society. He accommodated both workers and employers in a National Labor Front directed by the Nazi Party. To achieve German's greatness, Hitler ordered to diminish 'undesirable' individuals by killing the feeble-minded, the elderly, the incurably ill, and homosexuals. And later the programs included genocide all gypsies and millions of Jews, Poles, and Russians. In the other hand, Hitler believed that the elite race would success a thousand-year empire, greater than the Holy Roman Empire—which had been the First Reich.

European Society and Politics (1976) concluded that postwar developments had continued the process of weakening traditional values which the Nazis, despite their propaganda, quickened. German was in ruin accompanied by the political system changes—the political pattern and political institutions that have come to characterize their societies, and the problems of class structures existed in the social life.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF BRECHT'S MORAL VISION AS REFLECTED IN THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN