

Study Material on "The Good Woman of Setzuan"

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 (compulsory enlistment for state services typically into the armed forces) 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, *Baal*, 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 (pioneer) 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 (rising) 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 tumult 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 (typical) 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 (disappointed) 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 (rebirth) can be felt throughout contemporary theater, film, and opera.

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 (slaughter on a massive scale), events which precipitated (caused to happen suddenly) the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945. The 1930s and 1940s were largely defined by violence, human rights violations, and genocide (deliberate killing of a large group of people) on a scale that was unfathomable (immense) 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.

Key Facts about *The Good Woman of Setzuan*

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

Literary Period: Modernism; Epic Theater

Genre: Play

Setting: Setzuan, a fictionalized version of the Chinese province of Sichuan

Climax: Shen Te reveals to the trio of gods who first declared her a “good” person that she has, in fact, been living a double life, masquerading (pretending to be someone one is not) as her “bad cousin” Shui Ta in order to better run her tobacco business.

Antagonist: The Good Woman of Setzuan is unique in that it sets up almost every minor character as an antagonist to Shen Te and it demonstrates how each person antagonizes her in their own way. Yang Sun, Mrs. Mi Tzu, the carpenter, the members of the family of eight, and even Shen Te’s alter ego Shui Ta are all antagonists in their own right.

Point of View: Dramatic

Characters of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*

Wong-

Wong is a poor water seller in Setzuan. Wong acts as a sort of narrator or chorus for much of the action—despite his lowly profession, he is the first person to recognize the disguised trio of gods who appear in Setzuan for the deities they are and he offers to help them find shelter. The gods don’t see Wong as the “good” person they’ve been searching for but they nonetheless choose to appear to him in visions throughout the play as they check in on Shen Te, whom they do believe is inherently good. Wong is a man who has capitalized on a natural resource: when there is a drought and his fellow men are suffering, he earns a profit by selling them water. When there are rains and floods and no one is thirsty, Wong himself is suffering. Wong’s dilemma is symbolic of the larger struggles of life under capitalism—one’s success in terms of material wealth, Brecht suggests, always comes at the expense of another.

Shen Te-

Shen Te is the play’s protagonist. A poor but kind prostitute, she takes in a trio of gods for the night after her other neighbors refuse them shelter. Shen Te thus becomes the gods’ way of proving that there are still good people on Earth—and

yet the burdens she begins to accrue (gather/collect) as she accepts the gods' favor test the possibility of ever attaining true goodness. Shen Te is a meek woman who does her best to be a dutiful citizen. But after the gods give her a large sum for taking them in, Shen Te uses the silver to acquire a tobacco shop and she soon finds herself torn between her obligation to share her wealth and her desire to pursue success and happiness for herself. To cope with her mounting struggles, Shen Te creates an alter ego named Shui Ta, a man she claims is her cousin. Shen Te dresses up as Shui Ta in order to solve the financial and personal problems that have been heaped on her plate since opening the tobacco shop: she kicks out her lodgers, negotiates (try to reach an agreement by discussion with others) with her debtors, and even "spies" on her cruel lover, the good-for-nothing Yang Sun. Through Shui Ta, Shen Te finds herself able to maintain her "good" reputation while still accomplishing the ruthless deals and loathsome negotiations necessary to stay afloat in a capitalist society. By the end of the play, however, Shen Te is exhausted by her own charade. (an absurd pretence intended to create a pleasant appearance) She reveals the truth of her schemes to the gods—only to find that they are unwilling to have their opinion of the last "good" woman on Earth altered. As the gods ascend to heaven, Shen Te calls out to them for help, begging them to give her advice on how to be good while also living life for herself. Shen Te's screams go unanswered, however, and she's left alone. Through the parable of Shen Te, Brecht explores the pitfalls (hidden danger or difficulty) of capitalism, the constraints of femininity, and the fluctuations (an irregular rising and falling in number or amount/unrest) in identity and morality that can occur when an ordinary woman feels crushed under pressure to fulfill society's expectations.

Yang Sun-

Yang Sun is a depressed, out-of-work man who longs to be a pilot at an airfield in Peking. Shen Te meets Yang Sun on a rainy day just as he is about to commit suicide by hanging himself. She rescues him and she convinces him to keep living—soon, the two embark on an affair, even though Shen Te knows that she should be seeking a wealthy husband who can afford to help her keep her tobacco shop. Yang Sun, however, is selfish and cruel—he doesn't really love Shen

Te and he seeks only to acquire the marginal wealth she's managed to accrue (aggregate/gather) for himself in order to bribe his way into a flying job. Yang Sun is conniving (involving in something to do immoral) and detestable (despicable/hateful), yet Shen Te cannot contain or control her love for him. Shen Te's ill-advised devotion to Yang Sun is representative of the many challenges and constraints women face each day under capitalism. Ultimately, her struggle in giving up her feelings for him calls into question the nature of the conflicting desires that women are often forced to navigate (satik pathe parichalana Kara) to get by (badha satao chalia jaoa) in a greedy, patriarchal world.

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Shui Ta-

Shui Ta is Shen Te's alter ego. As Shen Te's "bad cousin," Shui Ta is an imposing (interesting/tempting) and ruthless man whose business savvy (commonsense) and unapologetic self-interest stand in contrast to the meek and sweet Shen Te's generosity and hospitality. Shen Te creates the persona of Shui Ta in a moment of desperation as an answer to her landlady, Mrs. Mi Tzu's, inquiry about Shen Te's financial references. Soon, Shen Te sees an opportunity to

“prove [her]self useful” by embodying a “strong backer” who can come not just to her aid, but to the aid of all her needy neighbors. Though Shen Te admits that she fears she will only be able to help her neighbors by denying others, she continues to appear at the tobacco shop in disguise as Shui Ta. Dressed as Shui Ta, she wards off (tarano)those who seek to extort (obtain by force)money from her or take advantage of her good fortune and she has man-to-man conversations with her distant, cruel lover, Yang Sun. Though Shui Ta is originally created as a last resort, Shen Te comes to rely on Shui Ta’s presence more and more often—especially when she becomes pregnant out of wedlock and she’s desperate for a way to hide her condition from the world. Shui Ta’s ruthlessness becomes legendary as he steals, bribes, and intimidates(terrify/frighten) the needy neighbors he was created to help and he becomes the owner of a large tobacco conglomerate(a thing consisting of a number of different and distinct parts or items that are grouped together.). When Shui Ta is arrested because the other villagers begin to suspect that he murdered the “missing” Shen Te, Shen Te knows her ruse(strategy) has gone far enough. She reveals the truth to the “judges” of her case—the gods who first declared her the “good woman of Setzuan,” who have returned to the village in disguise—but she finds that they do not fault her for becoming a “wolf” when tempted by money and power. The alias(pseudonym) of Shui Ta is not just a way for Shen Te to take hold of her fate—soon, he becomes an outlet through which she can express her frustrations, desires, and pent-up(imprisoned) rages at the hostility of the world; the burdens of capitalism; and the social superiority of men.

Character: Mrs. Mi Tzu-

Mrs. Mi Tzu is Shen Te’s landlady. She is a demanding woman who is protective of her property’s integrity(wholeness)—but who ultimately proves herself, as so many other characters do, to be crooked at heart and motivated by personal greed and satisfaction.

The First God-

The first god is the de facto (indeed)leader of a trio of gods who come down to Earth to determine whether there are any truly good people left in the world. The

first god knows that if no good people can be found, the earth will need to be remade and the rules of humanity reconfigured. Such measures would constitute an effort that none of the gods particularly wants to make. The first god is the most communicative and decisive of the trio—and the most determined (or even desperate) to find the world’s remaining “good” people. The first god is anxious to push aside any information which threatens Shen Te’s goodness—they are unwilling to accept that it is impossible for humans to attain true goodness. When confronted with Shen Te’s morally ambiguous actions at the end, the first god leads the other two in a swift ascent back to heaven rather than face down the complicated reality of life on Earth.

The Second God-

The second god is one of the trio of gods who come down to earth to determine whether there are any truly good people left in the world. The second god is the most pessimistic of the bunch and is quick to comment upon humanity’s collective incompetence and cruelty.

The Third God-

The third god is one of the trio of gods who come down to Earth to determine whether there are any truly good people left in the world. Whereas the first god is often singular focused on moving the mission forward and the second god is quick to blame humanity for their own problems, the third god is seemingly the most empathetic toward humans and the quickest to suggest lending a helping hand to the mortals of Earth. The third god is a bit more nervous and insecure than their compatriots but is nonetheless committed to finding goodness in humanity.

Character: Mrs. Shin-

Mrs. Shin is the former proprietor of the tobacco shop that Shin Te takes over. The crafty and nosy (a person showing too much curiosity over other person's affairs) Mrs. Shin eventually discovers that Shin Te and Shui Ta are one person—and when she does, she simultaneously becomes Shen Te’s sole confidant and her most direct threat

The Carpenter-

The carpenter is an opportunistic man who attempts to shake Shen Te down for a large sum of money for a set of previously-installed custom shelves. When Shen Te arrives dressed as Shui Ta, however, she's able to successfully negotiate with the carpenter and outwit(cheat) the man, sending him on his way with nothing. The carpenter later struggles to provide food for his three sons, demonstrating that even those who seem like extortionists and grifters are often just doing their best to survive and provide for their families. Through the carpenter's arc(influence), Brecht suggests that capitalism makes everyone who must function within the system greedy and opportunistic through no fault of their own.

The Unemployed Man-

The unemployed man is an elderly resident of Setzuan who dresses in rags. Shen Te often helps the unemployed man out by giving him free rice and tobacco. He is always scheming of ways to make money and outsmart those around him, yet often ends up resorting to freeloading (take advantage of other people's generosity without giving anything in return)to get by.

The Husband-

The husband is one of the heads of the family of eight alongside his wife. He feels that no matter what he does, he cannot provide for his family—to him, living a “crooked” life is just as useless as living on the straight and narrow, yet he often encourages his family to resort to crime to get by all the same.

The Wife-

The wife is one of the heads of the family of eight, a group of poor but crafty criminals who do what they must to get by in the unforgiving village of Setzuan. The wife is a self-righteous and entitled woman: she believes that Shen Te owes her and her family a debt of service since they sheltered Shen Te when she first moved to the village.

Character: The Nephew-

The nephew is a member of the family of eight. He is often coddled(adarkara) by the husband and wife.

Character: The Niece

The niece is part of the family of eight. She works as a prostitute.

Character: The Brother

The brother is the wife's brother and the sister-in-law's husband. He is a member of the family of eight.

Character: The Sister-in-law

The sister-in-law is a pregnant woman who's married to the wife's brother. She's a member of the family of eight. The sister-in-law is moody due to her pregnancy and she loves to gossip.

Character: The Grandfather

The grandfather is part of the family of eight. He is a singer and storyteller who laments that money and greed ruins people's best efforts to live life properly and morally.

Character: The Young Boy

The young boy is the youngest member of the family of eight

Shu Fu-

Shu Fu is a wealthy barber whose shop is near Shen Te's. Shu Fu is a respected businessman who falls in love with Shen Te in spite of her involvement with the scoundrel Yang Sun. Shu Fu wants to marry Shen Te because of how good, kind, and charitable she is—even though he knows that she is hung up on another lover. Shen Te rejects Shu Fu's offers of kindness, loyalty, and financial support but she instead absconds with Yang Sun, leaving Shu Fu heartbroken. Nevertheless, Shu Fu remains becomes committed to helping Shen Te's business flourish. He offers her generous loans, even writing her a blank check when she falls into dire

straits(hardships), and he offers Shui Ta the use of his property, a set of cabins behind a nearby field. Shen Te's inability to accept Shu Fu's offers of love and devotion—even as she willingly accepts his cash—demonstrates the dual identities and emotional sacrifices women must make to stay afloat in a greedy, capitalist, patriarchal world.

The Old Man-

The old man is the frail, kindly, and elderly proprietor of a carpet store near Shen Te's tobacco shop.

The Old Woman-

The old woman is the wife of the old man who owns the carpet shop near Shen Te's store. She is a devoted woman who loves her husband deeply.

Character: Mrs. Yang

Mrs. Yang is Yang Sun's mother. She is a dishonest and unkind woman who only cares about her son.

The Good Woman of Setzuan Short -Summary

Wong, a poor water seller who works in the impoverished village of Setzuan, meets a trio of shabby, weary travelers at the city gates one day. Wong instantly recognizes them as gods in disguise. When the first god tells Wong that their group is in need of a place to spend the night, Wong hurriedly tries to find someone who will shelter the gods for the evening—but they are turned away at every door in town. Eventually, a kind prostitute named Shen Te reluctantly agrees to take the gods in. Wong returns to the sewer drain where he lives. In the morning, the gods thank Shen Te for her hospitality and they tell her that she is the only “good human being” they've encountered in their travels. Shen Te says she doesn't believe she's truly good—and that she might have an easier time being good if she had more money. The second god is wary of “meddling in economics,” but the third god insists upon giving Shen Te some money for her troubles. The gods shove (push)over a thousand silver dollars into Shen Te's hands and they depart, continuing their mission of finding good people on Earth

in order to help decide whether the world can “stay as it is” or whether it must be remade entirely.

Shen Te uses the money the gods give her to rent a humble tobacco shop but she soon finds herself in trouble as news of her good fortune spreads throughout town. Mrs. Shin, the disgruntled (dissatisfied/displeased) former proprietor of the store, demands Shen Te give her enough rice to feed her family each day. The carpenter who installed the shelves in the store for the last owner threatens to take them away unless Shen Te gives him an enormous sum. An unemployed man begs for damaged tobacco stock for free. A destitute family of eight—a husband, wife, nephew, niece, brother, sister-in-law, grandfather, and young boy—who once sheltered Shen Te briefly when she arrived in Setzuan from the provinces begin squatting (unlawfully occupy an uninhabited building) in the store’s back room. Mrs. Mi Tzu, the landlady, demands male references who can vouch (testify/witness) for Shen Te’s finances—as well as six months’ rent in advance. Shen Te claims she has a cousin, Shui Ta, who is a savvy (commonsense) businessman; she promises that Shui Ta will visit soon to meet with Mrs. Mi Tzu and vouch for Shen Te. As Shen Te’s busy first day at the shop concludes, she marvels at how tightly needy people cling to the “lifeboat” (a specially constructed boat to rescue people at distress in sea) of one lucky person’s success.

As the gods continually visit Wong in his dreams to check in on whether Shen Te has remained good, things get more and more complicated for Shen Te herself. Shen Te begins disguising herself as Shui Ta in order to make the ruthless business and personal decisions needed to keep her shop afloat. Shen Te, dressed as Shui Ta, kicks the family of eight out during business hours, threatens the carpenter, haggles (bargain persistently) with Mrs. Mi Tzu, and even puts an ad in the paper for a wealthy husband who can help Shen Te run her business. When Shen Te, however, meets a suicidal, out-of-work, but romantic pilot named Yang Sun in the park one afternoon, she falls in love with him. Though Yang Sun is poor and cruel, Shen Te loves him too deeply to accept the marriage proposal (and financial assistance) of her wealthy neighbor, a barber named Shu Fu. Shen Te’s needy neighbors lament that her newfound love is distracting her from her duties to

them, while Shen Te, hoping to pull Yang Sun out of financial ruin, becomes indebted to an old man and old woman who own a nearby carpet shop in an arrangement which threatens her “goodness.”

While in disguise as Shui Ta one afternoon, Shen Te learns that Yang Sun is only using her for her money because he needs to bribe someone at an airfield in Peking for a job. Nevertheless, Shen Te chooses to move forward with her wedding to Yang Sun. The wedding is a disaster—and because Yang Sun and Mrs. Yang, Yang Sun’s mother, insist on waiting for Shui Ta’s arrival at the ceremony, the marriage is never confirmed.

Meanwhile, each time the gods visit Wong in his dreams, he tells them of Shen Te’s trials—but the gods insist that Shen Te’s burdens will only give her greater strength and more goodness. Mrs. Shin soon discovers Shen Te’s ruse when Shen Te changes too hurriedly into her disguise as Shui Ta in order to capitalize (take the chance to get advantage) on a large stock of stolen tobacco which the family of eight brings into her shop. A blank check from Shu Fu allows Shen Te—as Shui Ta—to open up shop in a series of cabins that Shu Fu owns on the outskirts of town. Shen Te, however, has become pregnant with Yang Sun’s illegitimate child. Mrs. Shin warns her that Shu Fu will cease his generosity if he learns of Shen Te’s condition.

Shen Te decides to stay in disguise as Shui Ta for months on end. Though the tobacco business flourishes and Shui Ta’s steady weight gain is attributed to his mounting wealth and gluttony[excessive eating], the needy of the village begin missing the sweet, generous Shen Te—and even worrying that Shui Ta has murdered her. When a policeman, at Wong’s behest, confronts Shui Ta and demands to know where Shen Te is, Shui Ta cannot answer. He is arrested. Wong warns the gods that if Shen Te has truly vanished, then “all is lost,” so the gods reluctantly agree to return to Setzuan to help look for her.

At Shui Ta’s trial, the entire village gathers. The gods enter in disguise as a trio of judges to hear the arguments. The wealthy business owners who have had good dealings with Shui Ta leap to his defense, while the needy poor who miss Shen Te and who have only ever been on the receiving end of Shui Ta’s cruelty lambast

(criticize harshly)him. As the agitated crowd demands to know why Shen Te left Setzuan, Shui Ta declares that if she had stayed, the villagers would have ripped(tear) her to shreds. Shui Ta demands for the courtroom to be cleared because he has a confession to make to the judges.

Alone in the room with the gods, Shen Te drops her disguise and she reveals the truth to them. The gods are shocked. In a sorrowful lament, Shen Te describes how hard it has been to try “to be good and yet to live”—she feels she has literally been torn in two. She hates that bad deeds are rewarded while good ones are punished. The gods, however, insist that Shen Te stop beating herself up—they tell her how happy they are to have found the one good person they encountered in all their travels. Shen Te points out that she failed to be a good woman and instead became a “bad man.” Rather than help Shen Te solve her moral crisis, the gods choose to return to their “void” by ascending into the sky on a pink(colour between red and white) cloud. Shen Te begs the gods to tell her what to do about all of her entanglements(complex situation); the gods, however, tell her simply to “continue to be good.”

In a brief epilogue, one of the actors in the play steps forward to deliver a speech which is not attributed to any specific character. The actor suggests it is up to the audience to find a happy ending for the play and to decide what will change the world, whether it be new gods or atheism, materialism or ascetism, moral fortitude(tolerance)or increased decadence.

Detailed summary of "The Good Woman of Setzuan "

Summary and Analysis of Prologue

Summary-

The play begins with a monologue by Wong, the water seller. He explains to the audience that he has heard that a few of the highest-ranking gods are on their way to the city of Setzuan. They have heard the people of the world complaining about life, so they are coming to deal with it. He is waiting at the gate of the city to greet them when they arrive.

Soon, the three gods appear and Wong recognizes them immediately. They say they need to find a place to stay the night and Wong agrees to help them find one. He knocks at the door of the first house they come to, but a voice from inside yells, "No!" This keeps happening at house after house. Wong is embarrassed for the people of Setzuan, so he lies to the gods and makes excuses for the people who are blatantly refusing to give them a place to stay.

Wong walks off, apparently in search of a more welcoming household, and the gods talk about how this has been happening in every city to which they go. They are worried they won't run into a good person anywhere; this would be unfortunate, since they have a resolution that reads, "The world can stay as it is if enough people are found living lives worthy of human beings." They have to count the water seller out as a good person, since the cup he has given them water in has a false bottom.

After being rejected yet another time, Wong tells the gods he'll take them to the house of Shen Te, the prostitute. She leans her head out the window and says she can't take the gods in because she is expecting a customer, but after Wong pleads with her she decides to hide from the customer and then take the gods in. Wong tries to hide Shen Te's profession from the gods, but it's obvious they know what's going on.

While they wait for Shen Te to "tidy up," as Wong says, the gods ask him if people in the world "have a hard time of it." He answers that "the good ones do," and the first god retorts, "What about yourself?" revealing that they know he has cheated them. Wong reveals himself to know his own personality and weaknesses, for he responds, "You mean I'm not good. That's true. And I don't have an easy time either!"

Shen Te comes down to the street, but Wong and she miss each other. The gods realize that Wong has run away in shame. She welcomes them into her house; stage directions indicate that time has passed, and now the gods are leaving Shen Te's house at dawn. They tell her she is clearly a good person, since she gave strangers a room for the night, but she protests that she must have a shameful occupation because she is so poor.

She asks them how to live a good life and still make ends meet, but the gods ignore her questions and try to leave before she can prove to them that she is anything other than good. She complains to them that she cannot afford to live, so after conferring with each other, the gods decide to give her money. They explain they are only paying their "hotel bill," and then they leave.

Analysis-

The theme of Historical Materialism, or the idea that a society's morality is determined by its economic systems, is introduced in the prologue. When Shen Te complains to the gods, "But everything is so expensive, I don't feel sure I can do it," The second god responds, "That's not our sphere. We never meddle with economics." However, the first god immediately contradicts him and they decide to give her some money to make it easier for her to be good. This irony blurs the distinction between the morality of "goodness" that the gods are searching for and economics.

It is obvious from the prologue that the gods do not adhere to the general understanding of what "gods" should be or represent. They are individuals who bicker with and contradict each other, and in the prologue, they seem to prefer a false sense of goodness over the truth, which is that Shen Te is a prostitute. As she begs with them to believe that it is hard for her to be good, they ignore her at first and try to shut down her misgivings with unsupported reasoning.

The theme of "goodness," which seems so simple in the title, is revealed as multi-faceted right from the beginning of the play. While Wong runs off to find a house that will welcome the gods for the night, the gods confer among themselves about how their mission to find a good person is failing. The second god says, "People just aren't religious anymore, let's face the fact. Our mission has failed!" The third god, reading from the resolution they are trying to follow, defines good people as those "living lives worthy of human beings." This definition is vague, since it is unclear what exactly a human being is worth.

Wong's character is set up as problematic with regard to the definition of "goodness." The third god suggests him as someone who might be "good," but

the second god quickly reveals that the bottom of the water cup from which he has been drinking is false, and concludes, "The man is a swindler." This information seems to rule Wong out as a candidate for goodness in the minds of the gods, but the line is not so clear; he is poor and needs the extra money. Likewise, he is the only one trying to help them find a place to stay, but at the same time, he is lying to them out of embarrassment.

Wong's interaction with Shen Te, in which he convinces her to let the gods stay at her house even though it means hiding from a customer (and thus losing money), introduces her character as someone who cannot say no to anyone, even when it means a personal inconvenience. Wong describes her this way to the gods: "She can't say no."

"The Good Woman of Setzuan "Summary and Analysis of Scenes 1, 1a, and 2

Summary-

Scene 1 begins with a monologue by Shen Te, explaining to the audience that after the gods gave her money, she bought a tobacco shop from Mrs. Shin. Mrs. Shin enters and demands that Shen Te give her some rice and money, weeping and accusing Shen Te of robbing her when Shen Te protests that she hasn't sold any of the tobacco yet, so there is not enough money.

An elderly husband, wife, and their nephew enter. Shen Te explains to the audience that they put her up in their home when she first arrived in Setzuan, but that they threw her out on the street as soon as she ran out of money. Rather than do the same to them, she lets them come in. Soon enough, an unemployed man enters and asks for a free cigarette; Shen Te gives it to him, but the husband, wife, and Mrs. Shin ironically criticize her for being too generous.

The next person to enter is a carpenter, who demands a hundred silver dollars for the shelves he installed in the shop while Mrs. Shin owned it. When Shen Te

asks him to have patience, he starts to take the shelves back. The wife suggests that Shen Te let her "cousin" settle the affair when he arrives, inventing the character of Shen Te's cousin on the spot. Shen Te feels ashamed that she cannot pay the carpenter for his work.

Now the wife's brother and pregnant sister-in-law enter, and Shen Te welcomes them as well. They are followed by Mrs. Mi Tzu, who introduces herself as Shen Te's new landlady. She demands references from Shen Te, and since Shen Te has none, she goes along with the wife's lie about her cousin who does not exist. She names him Shui Ta, and the wife, husband, and nephew all chime in to support her lie. A grandfather and a niece of the unwanted family show up as well, and then the whole family begins to help themselves to Shen Te's cigarettes. The grandfather sings "Song of the Smoke" to pass the time and to "keep Shen Te's spirits up."

The sister-in-law reveals that the brother pawned the family's only sack of tobacco to buy the wine they are all drinking now; the husband is appalled and starts a fight with the brother, knocking the shelves over. There are voices at the door: it is an uncle of the family, and he says the auntie and children will be arriving shortly. Scene 1 ends with Shen Te singing, "The little lifeboat is swiftly sent down. / Too many men too greedily / Hold onto it as they drown."

In Scene 1a, Wong dreams of the gods in his den in a sewer pipe. The first god tells him that Shen Te took them in, and Wong feels ashamed for having given up and run away. The gods sing to him about how he is a "well-intentioned, and yet feeble chap," scolding him for "hasty judgment" and "premature desperation." They instruct him to find Shen Te and encourage her to continue being good.

Scene 2 begins with the arrival of Shui Ta. It is just Shen Te disguised as a man. He fools the family that has been staying in the tobacco shop, even though they know they invented this character. He tells them to leave. The husband instructs the boy to steal food from the bakery nearby and the boy leaves to do so.

Shui Ta begins to bargain with the carpenter about the price of the shelves, finally convincing him to settle for twenty silver dollars instead of the exorbitant one hundred he was demanding from Shen Te. The wife is laughing at the carpenter's misfortune when Shui Ta demands that she and her family leave as well. When they do not comply, Shui Ta opens the door on a policeman. When the boy returns with stolen goods from the bakery, the policeman arrests him; the wife and husband betray the boy by denying knowing anything about the stolen food.

Mrs. Mi Tzu arrives and introduces herself to Mr. Shui Ta. She demands six months' rent in advance, and when Shui Ta protests, Mrs. Mi Tzu brings up Shen Te's questionable profession of prostitution. The policeman returns and Mrs. Mi Tzu leaves without settling the problem of the rent. The policeman proselytizes about Shen Te and how she made her living selling "love."

A little old woman enters to buy a cigar for her husband, to whom she has been married forty years. The old woman, policeman, and Shui Ta draft up a marriage advertisement for Shen Te; the policeman has decided that marriage is the only way for her to get enough money without having to be a prostitute.

Analysis-

The interaction of the characters in Scene 1 introduces more irony. Mrs. Shin, the husband, and the wife have all taken advantage of Shen Te's kindness, but when the unemployed man enters and she gives him one free cigarette, they scold her for being too generous. Shen Te recognizes this irony and treats it with humor, laughing and asking Mrs. Shin for her rice back. After the niece has entered, the wife tells Shen Te, "Give me the key. We must protect ourselves from unwanted guests," as if her whole family were not unwanted there!

The suspicion of others is a character trait common in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*; it is contrary to the quality of "goodness" for which the gods are searching. Though the unemployed man asked for a free cigarette, after he leaves the husband says, "I bet he had money on him." When Shui Ta arrives at

the beginning of Scene 2, the sister-in-law immediately loses faith in Shen Te, declaring, "So we've been cheated. Where is the little liar?"

Shen Te reveals that, even though she is a prostitute, she has more inherent "goodness" than do any of the other characters in Scene 1. She feels regret that she cannot pay the carpenter for the job of installing the shelves in the tobacco shop; in contrast, the wife is suspicious of him and reveals her own dishonesty by saying, "He'd tear the dress off your back to get his shelves. Never recognize a claim! That's my motto."

The gods reveal a bit more about their definition of "goodness" in Scene 1a, during their interaction with Wong. They ask him to find Shen Te and "show interest in her goodness - for no one can be good for long if goodness is not in demand." This reveals that they recognize how difficult it is to be good without support from others. However, Shen Te provides her own support, in the form of her invented cousin, Shui Ta. When the carpenter asks him to call Shen Te because "she's good," Shui Ta answers, "Certainly. She's ruined."

Throughout the play, characters burst into song. Sometimes the songs are recognized as such by the characters, as in Scene 1 when the grandfather sings "Song of the Smoke." The refrain is, "So what's the use? / See the smoke float free / Into ever colder coldness! / It's the same with me." Scene 1 ends with singing by Shen Te, though it is apparently not noticed by her rude house guests. This song, "The little lifeboat is swiftly sent down. / Too many men too greedily / Hold on to it as they drown," is a commentary on the greediness of the characters around her and how impossible it is to help everyone in need. In Scene 1a, the gods sing to Wong in his dream as a way of chastising him for having no faith in Shen Te.

The theme of love as a weakness is introduced in Scene 2 as the policeman describes the problem with Shen Te's lifestyle. "Miss Shen Te lived by selling herself... it is not respectable. Why not? A very deep question. But, in the first place, love - love isn't bought and sold like cigars, Mr. Shui Ta." This is also a

reference to the play's original title, "Die Ware Liebe," which translates to "Love as a Commodity."

The Good Woman of Setzuan Summary and Analysis of Scenes 3 and 3a

Summary

As Scene 3 begins, Yang Sun, described as "a young man in rags," is contemplating hanging himself in a park. He is an unemployed pilot. An old whore and the niece of the family whom Shui Ta had to turn away from Shen Te's tobacco shop are walking through the park; they see Shen Te coming and the old whore comments resentfully about how she was able to get rich with her tobacco shop. Shen Te confirms to them that she is on her way to meet a widower whom she is going to marry.

Yang Sun tells the women to continue walking, and Shen Te notices that he is about to hang himself with a rope. It starts to rain, and Shen Te takes shelter under the tree with him. He describes to her how he is a mail pilot but there is no work for him, and now he feels useless. Shen Te bursts into tears and he scolds her and helps her wipe her face. She tells him that he probably only wanted to kill himself because it's a rainy day.

Shen Te describes to Yang Sun how she used to be a prostitute, but then she got a "gift from the gods" and was able to shun that profession. They continue talking and it turns into flirting; Yang Sun strokes Shen Te's cheek but then chastises her for being "easily satisfied." She describes to him what she understands kindness to be, and he responds, "You make it sound easy." It begins to rain.

Wong enters, singing about how he cannot sell water when it's raining. Shen Te runs out to greet him and purchases some water from him, because she recognizes the worth of "the water that you carried all this way." She says she needs it for Yang Sun, but when she returns to him with the cup he has fallen asleep under the tree. She laughs about it.

In Scene 3a, Wong is again asleep in the sewer pipe where he lives. The gods appear to him and he reports that he has seen Shen Te and that she is still good; she proved it to him when she bought his water even though it was raining. He tells the gods that Shen Te loves someone (presumably Yang Sun) and that she is "doing good deeds all the time."

The gods ask for more details, so Wong describes all the "good" things Shen Te is doing. She is giving away her tobacco if a customer can't pay for it, she is putting up a family of eight in the tobacco shop, and she hands out rice every morning to anyone who asks for it. That disappoints the first god a bit, since he recognizes how unsustainable this kind of "goodness" is.

When Wong tells the gods that Shen Te's cousin, Shui Ta, paid the carpenter less than what he demanded for the job of installing the shelves, the gods get angry. The second god declares, "One pays what one owes!" and demands that Shui Ta must never "cross her threshold" again, since he is clearly a negative influence.

Analysis

The line between morality and economics is further blurred in Chapter 3. Yang Sun is seriously contemplating hanging himself because he can no longer work as a pilot and, as he tells She Te, because "I haven't a penny... I'm a mail pilot with no mail." Yang Sun equates his economic uselessness with the overall uselessness of his life, so he has decided to end the latter.

Brecht uses the technique of analogy when Yang Sun describes to Shen Te how it feels not to be able to fly anymore. He tells her that when he was younger, he took care of a crane with a broken wing. Usually the crane was "very good-natured about our jokes," but he got restless when the cranes that were able to fly did so over his village in the spring and autumn. His analogy makes Shen Te cry, because she realizes that he is talking about himself.

The theme of goodness is revisited, this time from Shen Te's perspective as she describes it to Yang Sun under the tree. While Yang Sun is looking away from her, she says, "But to be without hope, they say, is to be without goodness!" There is a pause, and Yang Sun replies, "Go on talking. A voice is a voice." He is

demonstrating his indifference to her description of what it means to be good; this is important character development and foreshadowing, since it is later revealed that Yang Sun is dishonest and easily betrays Shen Te, who loves him.

The problem of the economy is addressed in Wong's song, "The Song of the Water Seller in the Rain." It is ironic to be selling water when it is raining, and it represents the futility of being in a profession that supplies something for which there is no demand. The lyrics, What are lawns and hedges thinking? / What are fields and forests saying? / "At the cloud's breast we are drinking! / And we've no idea who's paying!", draw attention to the tension between nature, which appreciates what it receives in plenty, and humankind, which does not want that of which there is a surplus.

After telling Yang Sun that he only wanted to kill himself because it's a rainy day, Shen Te sings to the audience, breaking the imaginary fourth wall that exists between characters in a play and the audience watching them. She sings "In our country..." and Yang Sun does not acknowledge it, as if the song is not heard by him but exists only in Shen Te's mind and as a commentary for the audience. It happens again as she describes to him why she won't be a prostitute anymore ("I'm rich now, I said..."), but this time Yang Sun recognizes it and responds to the words.

"The Good Woman of Setzuan "Summary and Analysis of Scenes 4, 4a, 5, and 5a

Summary

Scene 4 begins with an altercation between Mr. Shu Fu, the barber, and Wong, who has been trying to sell water to Shu Fu's customers. Shu Fu chases Wong out of his shop and hits his hand with a hot curling iron, burning it badly. The unemployed man from the first scene and Mrs. Shin are witnesses out in the street. They advise Wong to go to the police to report the crime.

Shen Te enters; she is on her way home from Yang Sun's house, where she has spent the night. She gives a monologue about how beautiful Setzuan seems in the morning, delivers rice to the people waiting outside her tobacco shop for free handouts, and goes into a carpet shop owned by the old woman and the

old man. While she is inside, Shu Fu speaks of his growing love for her. Shen Te exits and pays the old woman and the old man for the shawl she has purchased at their carpet shop. The old woman offers to loan Shen Te two hundred silver dollars so she can pay her rent.

Mrs. Shin points out Wong's injured hand to Shen Te; Shen Te says he should go to a doctor, but the unemployed man thinks he should go to a judge instead to seek compensation. When Wong looks around for people who would be a witness, nobody is willing to volunteer. Shen Te is appalled and says that if no one else will speak up, she will perjure herself and say that she was a witness. Disgusted with the others, she yells at them to go away.

Mrs. Yang, Yang Sun's mother, enters and tells Shen Te that her son has been offered a job from the director of the airfield in Peking, but that he needs to pay five hundred silver dollars for it. Shen Te pledges to try to help Yang Sun. Scene 4a consists of "The Song of Defenselessness," in which Shen Te sings first as herself, then with her Shui Ta mask on.

Scene 5 begins with Mrs. Shin explaining to Shui Ta, who takes no notice, that the barber Shu Fu has expressed interest in marrying Shen Te. Yang Sun enters and interacts with Shui Ta, having no idea he is actually talking to his lover, Shen Te. He considers how long it will take to raise the rest of the five hundred silver dollars (Shen Te has already given him the two hundred loaned to her by the old woman), and insults Shen Te to Shui Ta.

Mrs. Mi Tzu enters and Shui Ta says he would like to sell his tobacco stock to help his cousin, Shen Te, marry Yang Sun. Yang Sun demonstrates yet again that he has no interest in Shen Te's financial well-being or her ability to pay the old couple back; he just wants to get to Peking to fly again. After Shui Ta has agreed to sell the tobacco, Yang Sun reveals that his plan is to betray Shen Te: "I'm leaving her behind. No millstones round my neck!" When he leaves, Shui Ta bursts out as Shen Te, "I've lost my shop! And he doesn't love me!"

Mr. Shu Fu enters and tells Shui Ta that he would like to offer Shen Te the run of some cabins on his property and other gifts so that she can continue being kind

to everyone. Wong and the policeman enter, and Shui Ta betrays Wong (but tells the truth) in saying that his cousin was not present at the time of the assault with the curling iron. Shui Ta has let Wong use Shen Te's new shawl as a sling, implying that her affair with Yang Sun is over so she no longer has a need to impress him with beautiful things. Shui Ta runs off to "find" his cousin, and Shu Fu explains his good intentions toward Shen Te to the audience.

Yang Sun returns and Shu Fu tells him that he and Shen Te are about to announce their engagement. Just then, Shen Te emerges from the back room. When Yang Sun reminds her of how he loves her, she says, "Forgive me, Mr. Shu Fu, I want to go with Mr. Yang Sun." She proves Yang Sun's rude characterization of her correct by ignoring the horrible things he said about her to Shui Ta. They exit as she sings to the audience, "I don't want to know if he loves me / I want to go with the man I love."

Scene 5a consists of Shen Te explaining to the audience, "Something terrible has happened." She is in a wedding dress on her way to wed Yang Sun, but says that right after she left the tobacco shop in the previous scene, she ran into the old woman. The old woman had to ask for her two hundred silver dollars back, since the anxiety of having loaned them made her husband ill. She said she would.

Analysis

The theme of love as a weakness is emphasized with regard to Shen Te and Shu Fu in the beginning of Scene 4. Shen Te is walking home from Yang Sun's house and everything seems pleasant to her because she is, as she says, in love: "They say you walk on air when you're in love but it's even better walking on the rough earth, the hard cement." In Scene 4, Yang Sun will reveal to Shui Ta that he plans to abandon Shen Te and take her money. After he leaves, Shui Ta says, "One weakness is enough, and love is the deadliest." Meanwhile, Shu Fu speaks of his love for Shen Te for the first time: "I begin to suspect I am in love with her. She is overpoweringly attractive!"

The old woman is a candidate for a "good" person, and Shen Te recognizes that when she offers to lend her money to pay her rent. Shen Te says, "I wish the gods could have heard what your wife was just saying, Mr. Ma. They're looking for good people who're happy - and helping me makes you happy because you know it was love that got me into difficulties!"

Shen Te sings a lot in these scenes. When nobody will step forth as a witness to Wong's assault, she sings that she will say she saw it. This song is available to the other characters, and Mrs. Shin responds to it. Shen Te's next two songs acts as commentary on the people around her, to the audience: "They've stopped answering... nothing can make them look up / but the smell of food" and "Yang Sun, my lover: ...bringing to friends in faraway lands / the friendly mail!"

Scene 4a, which consists of "The Song of Defenselessness," demonstrates the theme of Patriarchal Capitalism. Shen Te sings first with Shui Ta's mask in her hand, then as Shui Ta, with the mask on. The first part of the song is an appeal to the gods, pointing out that "even the gods are defenseless" and asking, "Why don't the gods to the buying and selling"? As Shui Ta, she is more cynical: "You can only help one of your luckless brothers / by trampling down a dozen others."

The issue of gender comes to the forefront during Scene 4, when Yang Sun interacts with Shui Ta in a completely different manner than that in which he interacts with Shen Te. Shui Ta defends his cousin (himself) by saying, "She is a human being, sir! And not devoid of common sense!" However, Yang Sun answers, "Shen Te is a woman: she is devoid of common sense. I only have to lay my hand on her shoulder, and church bells ring."

"The Good Woman of Setzuan " Summary and Analysis of Scenes 6 and 6a

Summary

Scene 6 is set in "the 'private dining room' on the upper floor of a cheap restaurant in a poor section of town." Shen Te is there with her wedding guests: some of the family that has been taking advantage of her, the unemployed man, and Mrs. Shin. Yang Sun and Mrs. Yang, his mother, are removed from the

crowd and have a secret conversation in which Yang reveals to his mother that Shen Te has said she can't sell the shop for him because of the loan from the old couple. His mother says, "Of course you can't marry her now," and he replies that since there is nothing in writing, he will try to reason with Shui Ta about it. Mrs. Yang leaves to go look for Shui Ta. Shen Te finds Yang Sun and they have a toast "to the future," casually joking about what their marriage will be like. Mrs. Yang returns without Shui Ta, and the Priest who has been waiting to marry the couple gets up to leave. Mrs. Yang says loudly to Shen Te that she doesn't know where Shui Ta could be, revealing to Shen Te that the three hundred silver dollars is still important to Yang Sun and his mother: without the money, negotiated by Shui Ta, Yang Sun will not marry her. They decide to wait another fifteen minutes for Shui Ta.

Mrs. Yang announces to the guests that Yang Sun has been hired as a mail pilot in Peking, and that she and he are moving there. When Shen Te asks Yang Sun to let his mother down easily, he says that he doesn't agree; he still wants to move to Peking and when Shui Ta arrives, he will negotiate with him to get the money he needs from Shen Te.

At this point, Shen Te tells Yang Sun that Shui Ta will not bring the three hundred silver dollars, since he told her that Yang Sun bought only one ticket to Peking, revealing that she knows about the conversation he had with her "cousin" the day before. However, Yang Sun shows her two tickets; he tells her that they will have to leave his mother behind.

The waiter enters and asks if they want another pitcher of wine. When Mrs. Yang says no, he asks her to pay the bill. She refuses, and the waiter reveals that this is not the first time Mrs. Yang hasn't been able to pay the bill at this restaurant. Finally, the priest leaves, and it becomes clear to everyone that the wedding is not going to happen because Shui Ta has not arrived with the rest of the money Yang Sun needs to get the job in Peking.

All the wedding guests exit except for Shen Te, Yang Sun, and Mrs. Yang. Yang Sun makes a fake announcement to the wedding guests, who are no longer there, explaining that the ceremony is postponed because Shui Ta has not

arrived: "Also because the bride doesn't know what love is." He is taunting Shen Te for not "loving" him enough to sell everything she owns so he can follow his dream of becoming a pilot again. He sings a song about wasted dreams, which he calls St. Nevercome's Day.

Scene 6a takes place in Wong's sewer. The gods visit him in a dream again, and he asks them to intervene in Shen Te's life since "she's in great trouble from following the rule about loving thy neighbor." However, they refuse to intervene, citing various clichés like "suffering ennobles!" and "the gods help those that help themselves" to justify it.

Analysis

Brecht's use of dramatic irony is especially poignant in Scene 6. As the scene opens, Yang Sun and his mother say they have to find Shui Ta so he can get out of marrying Shen Te. Immediately following this exchange, which Shen Te does not witness, Shen Te addresses the audience, explaining that she "wasn't mistaken" to trust Yang Sun. The audience knows that she in fact was mistaken to trust him.

At the end of Scene 6, Yang Sun sings The Song of St. Nevercome's Day, about the day people wait for when their lives will change. Of course, it never comes. His dream is to be a pilot, but because he doesn't have the money to buy the job in Peking, the day when he flies again will never come. The song occurs within the context of the play: he tells Shen Te, "While we're waiting, the bridegroom will sing a little song." However, the scene ends with him, Shen Te, and Mrs. Yang looking at the door, waiting for Shui Ta. Shui Ta will never come.

"Goodness" as a theme is addressed in Scenes 6 and 6a by Yang Sun and by the gods, respectively. The Song of St. Nevercome, sung by Yang Sun, reveals that he believes it is futile to try to be "good." He sings sarcastically, "Oh, hooray, hooray! That day goodness will pay!" and describes the day that will never come as when "all men will be good without batting an eye." To him, this day is unachievable. The gods cite goodness as a strength, telling Wong that they

cannot intervene in Shen Te's life because "The good man finds his own way here below! The good woman too."

Love is represented as a weakness in Scene 6. After the would-be wedding guests depart, Yang Sun makes a fake announcement, explaining that the ceremony is postponed because Shui Ta has not arrived, but "also because the bride doesn't know what love is." He is making the point to Shen Te that if she loved him, she would sell her shop to support him in his dream of becoming a pilot in Peking. Nevertheless, it is clear to the audience that it is Yang Sun himself who doesn't know what love is, since he has betrayed Shen Te.

The theme of Patriarchal Capitalism is apparent in Scene 6, when it is revealed that the marriage will not happen without Shui Ta's presence (which is, of course, impossible). This is because Yang Sun believes Shui Ta will sell Shen Te's tobacco shop in order to get Yang Sun the money he needs to fly again. When Shen Te tells him that she has promised the money to the old couple to repay the loan they gave her, Yang Sun retorts, "And since you always do the wrong thing, it's lucky your cousin's coming."

"The Good Woman of Setzuan " Summary and Analysis of Scenes 7, 7a, and 8

Summary-

As Scene 7 opens, Mrs. Shin and Shen Te are taking the washing off the clothesline. Mrs. Shin discovers a pair of Shui Ta's pants and is suspicious, but the secret is not yet revealed. Mr. Shu Fu enters and hands Shen Te a blank check, explaining that he wants to support her so she can continue being good. Mrs. Shin advises her to cash the check immediately, scolding Shen Te for still having feelings for Yang Sun after how he humiliated her.

Shen Te stumbles as she carries some of the washing, and Mrs. Shin becomes suspicious that she is pregnant. After Mrs. Shin exits, Shen Te feels her belly and realizes that she is, in fact, pregnant. She imagines a little boy to be present and

introduces him to the audience as "my son, the well-known flyer!" She sings to him but is interrupted by Wong, who is leading a real child by the hand.

Wong introduces the child as one of the carpenters' children. They are starving because their father has lost his shop and has turned to alcohol. Shen Te says that the carpenter and his children can live in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins, to which he has allowed her total access. She also reveals to Wong that she is pregnant, but asks him not to tell Yang Sun since "we'd only be in his way." She asks about Wong's injured right hand and though he doesn't complain about it, she tells him to take a cart from her and sell everything that's on it, then use the money to see a doctor. Wong says that he is first going to find the carpenter and tell him that he and his children can live in Shu Fu's cabins.

The wife and husband who had previously taken advantage of Shen Te enter dragging tobacco sacks. After confirming that Shui Ta is not around, they ask her to keep the sacks of tobacco in her home. Clearly, the sacks are stolen; they tell Shen Te to say they are hers if the police ask about them. When she refuses, the wife mocks her: "Listen to her! The good woman of Setzuan!" Shen Te then agrees to put them in the back room.

Shen Te sees the carpenter's child digging in the garbage and something in her changes. She decides that in order to provide a life for her son, she will be "a tigress to all others if I have to." With that, she takes Mr. Shui Ta's pants from the clothesline and leaves. Mrs. Shin sees this happen and is more suspicious. She directs the sister-in-law, the grandfather, and the unemployed man to Mr. Shu Fu's cabins as well. The sister-in-law complains about the quality of the cabins, even though she gets free lodging and should be grateful. The carpenter and the rest of his children return with Wong, also planning to move into the cabins.

Suddenly, Shen Te reappears, dressed as Shui Ta. Shui Ta says that the people may only stay in Shu Fu's cabins if they work for Shen Te. Mrs. Mi Tzu enters and Shui Ta tells her that he has decided not to sell the shop after all. He fills out

the blank check Shu Fu gave Shen Te and shows it to Mrs. Mi Tzu; finally, she will get the six month's rent she keeps demanding.

The carpenter and the unemployed man, who have gone and retrieved the tobacco sacks the husband and wife put in the back room of the shop, return with them. The sister-in-law identifies them as her family's tobacco sacks. Knowing the tobacco is stolen, Shui Ta says, "Really? I thought it came from my back room. Shall we consult the police on the point?" As Shui Ta leads the group of new workers back to Shu Fu's cabins, Mrs. Shin realizes that Shen Te and Shui Ta must be the same person.

Scene 7a takes place in Wong's sewer. He tells the gods that he has had a nightmare about Shen Te and asks them to help her. He asks them to relax the rules and provide her with "good-will" instead of love. However, they refuse, shaking their heads and concluding that "the rules will have to stand," since helping Shen Te would only create more problems and would be too much work for them.

Time has passed before the beginning of Scene 8; Mrs. Yang reveals this to the audience, explaining that Shui Ta has given her son new motivation. She remembers their interaction from three months before, and it comprises Scene 8. She and Yang Sun reveal to Shui Ta that Yang Sun has spent all the money Shen Te gave to him and that he still doesn't have a job as a flyer. Shui Ta offers Yang Sun a job.

Not long after, Yang Sun discovers that the foreman, who is the former unemployed man, has been overpaying people. He is about to be overpaid, but is honest enough to reveal the miscalculation to Shui Ta. As a reward, Shui Ta promoted him to the position of foreman. He excels in that position of power, encouraging the workers to sing to work faster. Shui Ta witnesses this and concludes that he has brought out the best in Yang Sun.

Analysis

The quality of "goodness" is challenged in Scene 7. Shu Fu seems like Shen Te's guardian angel in many ways; he hands her a blank check even though she

won't marry him, simply because he wants her to be able to continue being "the good woman of Setzuan," as he says. But the audience witnessed Shu Fu injuring Wong's hand with a hot curling iron earlier in the play. When Shen Te offers to help Wong go to the doctor about his injured hand, he says to the audience, "She's still good."

When Shen Te realizes she is pregnant, her perception of goodness changes as well. She sees the carpenter's child digging in the trash and realizes her son will be born into this world. She sings and it is unclear whether the song is heard by anyone else. She sings that, "To be good to you, my son / I shall be a tigress to all others / If I have to. / And I shall have to." With this resolve, she will stand up for her own property as Mr. Shui Ta.

Wong is aware that love is a weakness and he reveals this to the gods in Scene 7a. They ask him how he wants them to help Shen Te and he suggests, "Well, um, good-will, for instance, might do instead of love?" This is because Shen Te's love for Yang Sun has created so many problems for her. This belief is reaffirmed by Shui Ta as he offers Yang Sun a job "in consideration of my cousin's incomprehensible weakness" for him. It is ironic that Shui Ta is able to recognize this weakness, yet as Shen Te he still acts on it.

In Scenes 7 and 8, Shui Ta creates a new kind of "goodness" for Shen Te to live by, employing those people who had come to expect free handouts from his "cousin." Being forced to work to earn his keep in Shu Fu's cabin seems to transform Yang Sun from "a dissipated good-for-nothing into a model citizen," as his mother puts it. This demonstrates the theme of historical materialism, since morality is being questioned alongside economics.

In Scene 8, music is used as encouragement to work. After he is promoted to foreman, Yang Sun directs the workers to sing to make them work faster. They sing The Song of the Eighth Elephant, which is about how the world values power over hard work. The eighth elephant is lazy but is rewarded even though his seven brothers do all the work; he is the one with tusks, so they are at a disadvantage. The song concludes, "Seven are no match for one, if the one has a gun!"

"The Good Woman of Setzuan" Summary and Analysis of Scenes 9, 9a, 10, and Epilogue

Summary

More time has passed, and now Shui Ta is quite fat (because Shen Te is pregnant). Mrs. Shin tells him that the old couple has lost the carpet shop because the repayment of the 200 silver dollars came too late. Then she reveals to Shui Ta that she knows he is the same person as Shen Te, and that "he" is pregnant. As she comforts "him," Yang Sun enters and reveals that the police want to shut down the shop because they have over twice the lawful number of workers living in Shu Fu's cabins.

Wong enters and reveals that it has been six months since Shen Te has been at home. In front of Yang Sun, he tells Shui Ta that Shen Te is pregnant. Shui Ta leaves and Yang Sun assumes that Shui Ta has sent his cousin away so that Yang Sun wouldn't discover her pregnancy. Shui Ta goes into the back room and sobs loudly; Yang Sun overhears it and thinks that it's Shen Te. When Shui Ta returns, Yang Sun accuses him of locking Shen Te up in the back room. When Yang Sun leaves, Shui Ta gathers Shen Te's clothes from the back room.

Mrs. Mi Tzu enters with Mr. Shu Fu, and Shui Ta has to hide Shen Te's clothes under the table. Shu Fu complains that Shui Ta is taking advantage of his kindness toward Shen Te, but Shui Ta tells him that Shen Te is about to return. Then Shui Ta tells Mrs. Mi Tzu that he wants to buy half of her property, and she wants to give it to him in exchange for Yang Sun. At that point, Yang Sun enters with the policeman. The policeman looks in the back room for Shen Te, but finds it empty. Yang Sun discovers Shen Te's clothes under the table and rumors begin that Shui Ta has murdered his cousin. The policeman leads him away.

Scene 9a takes place in Wong's den. The gods visit him there for the last time; they are clearly distressed and fatigued. They have given up all hope of finding another good person in the world; they conclude that the people of the world

are "a worthless lot" and that they are "too weak." Then they set off to find Shen Te to make sure she stays good. She is their only hope.

Chapter 10 is set in a courtroom. The policeman introduces the judges, who are the three gods. They are nervous that they will be caught posing as judges. Shui Ta recognizes them and nearly falls over. He pleads not guilty to "doing away" with his cousin Shen Te. The policeman, Mr. Shu Fu, and Mrs. Mi Tzu all testify in favor of Shui Ta. In contrast, the people the policeman calls "riff-raff" testify against him. Surprisingly, Yang Sun speaks up for Shui Ta and says that although he may have taken advantage of many poor people, he is not a murderer. Yang Sun says he heard Shen Te's voice in the back room of the tobacco shop, so he knows she is still alive.

Wong says that Shui Ta has spoiled the tobacco shop, which was meant to be "a fountain of goodness." When he raises his right hand to swear that Shen Te was a good person, the gods notice his injury. He blames it on Shui Ta, since Shen Te was going to help him go to a doctor but Shui Ta refused. Shui Ta begins to cave in and tells the judges to clear the courtroom so he can make a confession.

When the courtroom is cleared, Shui Ta reveals to the gods that he recognizes them and that he is, in fact, Shen Te. After she has explained why she had to take these measures, the first god chooses to be in denial about it. He says that Shen Te is still good, though the other two gods insist that he didn't hear a word she said and that he is ignoring the fact that she committed bad deeds while disguised as Shui Ta.

The gods exit, singing the "Valedictory Hymn" and ignoring Shen Te's pleas to stay. The people reenter the courtroom and realize that the judges were the gods, and they are in awe at Shen Te's reappearance. She yells after the gods that she still needs her cousin's help, and they agree that he can come back once a month. They make their final exit, singing "The Trio of the Vanishing Gods on the Cloud" as Shen Te's cries for help interrupt them.

Brecht added the epilogue after the rest of the play; it can be spoken either by Shen Te or by Wong. In the epilogue, it is acknowledged, "A nasty ending was

slipped up on us"; the play has ended with no satisfactory conclusion and it must be frustrating to the audience. Therefore, the audience is implored to "write the happy ending of the play!" They must figure out for themselves how to reconcile goodness in a world where it apparently cannot exist.

Analysis

It is clear in Scene 9 that Shui Ta has let economic success get the best of him. He is called "The Tobacco King of Setzuan," since he has continually expanded the small tobacco shop into a huge factory system. He has turned Shen Te's "goodness," which was a weakness, into economic success, which is a strength. This value is in accordance with the theme of Historical Materialism. The theme of Historical Materialism is evident in Scene 10, when Mr. Shu Fu testifies on behalf of Mr. Shui Ta. He tells the judges, "Mr. Shui Ta is a businessman, my lord. Need I say more?" The first god answers, "Yes." This is because economics make no sense to the gods; it is not their realm.

When the gods appear to Wong in Scene 9a, they reveal how little goodness they have found in the world. Shen Te is the only person who has "stayed good," and Wong draws attention the fact that she hasn't even done that. The third god concludes that, "Good intentions bring people to the brink of the abyss, and good deeds push them over the edge." The gods have discovered that it is impossible to be "good" in accordance with their rulebook.

When the courtroom has been cleared, Shui Ta reveals that he is just Shen Te, disguised. Shen Te then tells the gods, "Your injunction / To be good and yet to live / Was a thunderbolt." It was impossible for her to be good to others and herself at the same time. The first god refuses to hear that Shen Te did bad things disguised as Shui Ta, instead congratulating her for remaining good. They leave without changing anything; Shen Te still has the same problems and still will struggle to be good.

In Scene 10, music is used to drown out reason. The gods sing "The Valedictory Hymn" ironically, since there is no victory to be celebrated. They have not fixed anything about Shen Te's life. While they make their final exit, they sing "The

Trio of the Vanishing Gods on the Cloud" in which they admit that "If we watch our find too long / It will disappear." They do not want to stay in case Shen Te proves to not be good after all; they would rather be ignorant of that change if it does happen, so they won't have to change their rule book.

The epilogue, which was added after the Viennese premiere of the play, implores the audience to write their own ending. It acknowledges that the current ending of the play is not quite satisfactory, since nothing is fixed. The gods are unable to accept that their rulebook must be changed in order to make it possible to be good in the world, and they leave in denial of Shen Te's situation. This technique of addressing the audience directly is an example of alienation, which forces the audience to see the play for what it represents rather than be caught up in it as an analogy for real life.

Questions and answers from The Good Woman of Setzuan for 10 marks

Discuss the theme of goodness in The Good Woman of Setzuan.

The theme of "goodness," which seems so simple in the title, is revealed as multi-faceted right from the beginning of the play. While Wong runs off to find a house that will welcome the gods for the night, the gods confer among themselves about how their mission to find a good person is failing. The second god says, "People just aren't religious anymore, let's face the fact. Our mission has failed!" The third god, reading from the resolution they are trying to follow, defines good people as those "living lives worthy of human beings." This definition is vague, since it is unclear what exactly a human being is worth.

The gods reveal a bit more about their definition of "goodness" in Scene 1a, during their interaction with Wong. They ask him to find Shen Te and "show interest in her goodness - for no one can be good for long if goodness is not in demand." This reveals that they recognize how difficult it is to be good without support from others. However, Shen Te provides her own support, in the form

of her invented cousin, Shui Ta. When the carpenter asks him to call Shen Te because "she's good," Shui Ta answers, "Certainly. She's ruined."

The old woman is a candidate for a "good" person, and Shen Te recognizes that when she offers to lend her money to pay her rent. Shen Te says, "I wish the gods could have heard what your wife was just saying, Mr. Ma. They're looking for good people who're happy - and helping me makes you happy because you know it was love that got me into difficulties!"

"Goodness" as a theme is addressed in Scenes 6 and 6a by Yang Sun and by the gods, respectively. The Song of St. Nevercome, sung by Yang Sun, reveals that he believes it is futile to try to be "good." He sings sarcastically, "Oh, hooray, hooray! That day goodness will pay!" and describes the day that will never come as when "all men will be good without batting an eye." To him, this day is unachievable. The gods cite goodness as a strength, telling Wong that they cannot intervene in Shen Te's life because "The good man finds his own way here below! The good woman too."

When Shen Te realizes she is pregnant, her perception of goodness changes as well. She sees the carpenter's child digging in the trash and realizes her son will come into this kind of world. She sings and it is unclear whether anyone else hears the song. She sings, "To be good to you, my son / I shall be a tigress to all others / If I have to. / And I shall have to." With this resolve, she will stand up for her own property as Mr. Shui Ta.

When the gods appear to Wong in Scene 9a, they reveal how little goodness they have found in the world. Shen Te is the only person who has "stayed good," and Wong draws attention to the fact that she has not even done that. The third god concludes that, "Good intentions bring people to the brink of the abyss, and good deeds push them over the edge." The gods have discovered that it is impossible to be "good" in accordance with their rulebook. When the courtroom is later empty, Shui Ta reveals that he is just Shen Te, disguised. Shen Te then tells the gods, "Your injunction / To be good and yet to live / Was a thunderbolt." It was impossible for her to be good to others and herself at the same time. The first god refuses to hear that Shen Te did bad things disguised as

Shui Ta, instead congratulating her for remaining good. They leave without changing anything; Shen Te still has the same problems and still struggles to be good.

Comment on the theme of Patriarchal Capitalism in "The Good Woman of Setzuan".

In order to be a true capitalist capable of getting what she wants, Shen Te must "become" Shui Ta, a male alter ego.

The issue of gender comes to the forefront during Scene 4, when Yang Sun interacts with Shui Ta in a completely different manner than that in which he interacts with Shen Te. Shui Ta defends his cousin (himself) by saying, "She is a human being, sir! And not devoid of common sense!" However, Yang Sun answers, "Shen Te is a woman: she is devoid of common sense. I only have to lay my hand on her shoulder, and church bells ring."

Scene 4a, which consists of "The Song of Defenselessness," demonstrates the theme of Patriarchal Capitalism. Shen Te sings first with Shui Ta's mask in her hand, then as Shui Ta, with the mask on. The first part of the song is an appeal to the gods, pointing out that "even the gods are defenseless" and asking, "Why don't the gods do the buying and selling"? As Shui Ta, she is more cynical: "You can only help one of your luckless brothers / by trampling down a dozen others."

In Scene 6, when Shen Te is planning to marry Yang Sun, it is revealed that the marriage will not happen without Shui Ta's presence (which is, of course, impossible). This is because Yang Sun believes Shui Ta will sell Shen Te's tobacco shop in order to get Yang Sun the money he needs to fly again. When Shen Te tells him that she has promised the money to the old couple to repay the loan they gave her, Yang Sun retorts, "And since you always do the wrong thing, it's lucky your cousin's coming."

Discuss the theme of Love as a Weakness In 'The Good Woman of Setzuan'

In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, love is not equated with goodness. In fact, it is “love,” or what is described as such, that most hinders Shen Te. The theme of love as a weakness is introduced in Scene 2 as the policeman describes the problem with Shen Te's lifestyle. "Miss Shen Te lived by selling herself... it is not respectable. Why not? A very deep question. But, in the first place, love - love isn't bought and sold like cigars, Mr. Shui Ta." This is also a reference to the play's original title, "Die Ware Liebe," which translates to "Love as a Commodity."

The theme of love as a weakness is emphasized with regard to Shen Te and Shu Fu in the beginning of Scene 4. Shen Te is walking home from Yang Sun's house and everything seems pleasant to her because she is, as she says, in love: "They say you walk on air when you're in love but it's even better walking on the rough earth, the hard cement." In Scene 4, Yang Sun will reveal to Shui Ta that he plans to abandon Shen Te and take her money. After he leaves, Shui Ta says, "One weakness is enough, and love is the deadliest." Meanwhile, Shu Fu speaks of his love for Shen Te for the first time: "I begin to suspect I am in love with her. She is overpoweringly attractive!"

The issue of gender comes to the forefront during Scene 4, when Yang Sun interacts with Shui Ta in a completely different manner than that in which he interacts with Shen Te, Shui Ta defends his cousin (himself) by saying, "She is a human being, sir! And not devoid of common sense!" However, Yang Sun answers, "Shen Te is a woman: she is devoid of common sense. I only have to lay my hand on her shoulder, and church bells ring." Moreover, when Shen Te returns and Yang Sun reminds her of how he loves her, she says, "Forgive me, Mr. Shu Fu, I want to go with Mr. Yang Sun." She proves Yang Sun's rude characterization of her correct by ignoring the horrible things he said about her to Shui Ta. They exit as she sings to the audience, "I don't want to know if he loves me / I want to go with the man I love."

Love is represented as a weakness in Scene 6. After the would-be wedding guests depart, Yang Sun makes a fake announcement, explaining that the ceremony is postponed because Shui Ta has not arrived, but "also because the

bride doesn't know what love is." He is making the point to Shen Te that if she loved him, she would sell her shop to support him in his dream of becoming a pilot in Peking. Nevertheless, it is clear to the audience that it is Yang Sun himself who does not know what love is, since he has betrayed Shen Te.

Wong is aware that love is a weakness and he reveals this to the gods in Scene 7a. They ask him how he wants them to help Shen Te, and he suggests, "Well, um, good-will, for instance, might do instead of love?" This is because Shen Te's love for Yang Sun has created so many problems for her. This belief is reaffirmed by Shui Ta as he offers Yang Sun a job "in consideration of my cousin's incomprehensible weakness" for him. It is ironic that Shui Ta is able to recognize this weakness, yet as Shen Te he still acts on it.

Comment on the symbol of Water for 5 marks

Water, and the way in which it's commodified, represents the moral conundrum (puzzle or riddle) of the capitalist system. Wong, a water seller, functions as a kind of narrator or observer throughout the play's action. At the start of the play's prologue, Wong addresses the audience directly and he proceeds to describe the central contradiction or dilemma of his profession: it is a conflict at once practical, moral, and ideological. As a water seller, the impoverished (poor/penniless) Wong has resorted (adopted) to commodifying a natural resource to make his living under capitalism. When water is scarce, he must travel far and work hard but is able to make a lot of money—when it rains, however, he has no source of income (even though his fellow citizens are able to slake (mitigate/soothe,) their thirst for free.) This central dilemma—that Wong must profit off of his neighbors' suffering in order to survive himself—provides a metaphorical critique of the capitalist systems that force people to work against one another to simply get by (konokrama proyojon metano). In this way, water-selling is a small-scale representation of capitalism at large, which Brecht believes is founded upon greed and immorality.

Comment on the symbol of plane and flying. For 5 marks

Like the symbol of water, planes and flying represent the ways in which capitalism controls nearly every element of human society. Whereas Brecht uses the symbol of water to point out how humans engage in the commodification of everything material, even natural resources, for personal gain, he uses the symbol of planes and flying to demonstrate how capitalism often makes the dreams of the working class impossible for the individuals who belong to it to ever achieve. Yang Sun dreams of being a pilot and he's willing to do nearly anything to achieve his goals—even if it means he has to bribe and cheat his way into a flying gig (a light narrow boat) or betray his kind and devoted lover, Shen Te, to get to the nearest airfield. Shen Te, too, begins paying closer attention to the planes that fly overhead over the course of her involvement with Yang Sun. While Yang Sun longs for flight, Shen Te longs for Yang Sun's love—but love, too, is a commodity few can afford under the restrictive and prohibitive chains of capitalism. When planes are heard overhead or when dreams of flight are mentioned throughout the play, Brecht is signaling the physical awe felt by his characters—and indeed the dread as well—at how far away they are, physically and ideologically, from their greatest dreams.

