

methuen | drama student editions



BERTOLT BRECHT
THE GOOD PERSON
OF SZECHWAN

TRANSLATED BY JOHN WILLETT

EDITED BY TOM KUHN AND CHARLOTTE RYLAND

B L O O M S B U R Y

The Good Person of Szechwan

Bertolt Brecht was born in Augsburg on 10 February 1898 and died in Berlin on 14 August 1956. He grew to maturity as a playwright in the frenetic years of the twenties and early thirties, with such plays as *Man Equals Man*, *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Mother*. He left Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933, eventually reaching the United States in 1941, where he remained until 1947. It was during this period of exile that such masterpieces as *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage and her Children* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* were written. Shortly after his return to Europe in 1947, he founded the Berliner Ensemble, and from then until his death was mainly occupied in producing his own plays.

Other Bertolt Brecht publications by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

Brecht Collected Plays: One

(Baal, Drums in the Night, In the Jungle of Cities, The Life of Edward II of England, A Respectable Wedding, The Beggar or the Dead Dog, Driving Out a Devil, Lux in Tenebris, The Catch)

Brecht Collected Plays: Two

(Man Equals Man, The Elephant Calf, The Threepenny Opera, The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, The Seven Deadly Sins)

Brecht Collected Plays: Three

(Lindbergh's Flight, The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent, He Said Yes/He Said No, The Decision, The Mother, The Exception and the Rule, The Horations and the Curiatians, St Joan of the Stockyards)

Brecht Collected Plays: Four

(Round Heads and Pointed Heads, Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, Señora Carrar's Rifles, Dansen, How Much Is Your Iron?, The Trial of Lucullus)

Brecht Collected Plays: Five

(Life of Galileo, Mother Courage and Her Children)

Brecht Collected Plays: Six

(The Good Person of Szechwan, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Mr Puntilla and His Man Matti)

Brecht Collected Plays: Seven

(The Visions of Simone Machard, Schweyk in the Second World War, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Duchess of Malfi)

Brecht Collected Plays: Eight

(The Days of the Commune, The Antigone of Sophocles, Turandot or the Whitewashers' Congress)

Berliner Ensemble Adaptations - publishing 2014

(The Tutor, Coriolanus, The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen 1431, Don Juan, Trumpets and Drums)

Bertolt Brecht Journals, 1934-55

Brecht on Art and Politics

Brecht on Film and Radio

Brecht on Performance - publishing 2014

Brecht on Theatre - publishing 2014

Brecht in Practice - publishing 2014

The Craft of Theatre: Seminars and Discussions in Brechtian Theatre

Brecht, Music and Culture - publishing 2014

Brecht in Context

The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht

Brecht: A Choice of Evils

Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life - publishing 2014

A Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht

BERTOLT BRECHT

The Good Person of Szechwan

with commentary and notes by
TOM KUHN AND CHARLOTTE RYLAND

translated by John Willet

Original work entitled
Der gute Mensch von Sezuan

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

The Good Person of Szechwan originally published in this translation by Methuen in 1962 and subsequently in 1985 by arrangement with Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main
This edition first published in the United Kingdom in 2009 by Methuen Drama
Reprinted 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014

Original work entitled *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*
© Bertolt-Brecht-Erben/Suhrkamp Verlag 1955
Translation © 1985 by Bertolt-Brecht-Erben
Commentary and notes © 2009 by Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Ryland

The rights of the authors and translator to be identified as the authors and translator of these works has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

This play is fully protected by copyright. All enquiries concerning the rights for professional stage productions in the UK should be directed to Alan Brodie Representation Ltd, Paddock Suite, The Courtyard, 55 Charterhouse Street, London EC1M 6HA. All enquiries for amateur stage productions in the UK should be directed to Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1P 6JR. All enquiries concerning the English language rights for professional or amateur stage productions or concerning the music for the play in the USA should be addressed to Jerold Couture of Fitelson, Lasky, Aslan and Couture, 551 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10176. No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained.

No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the work are hereby granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

All illustrations are derived, with the kind permission, from sources in the Bertolt-Brecht Archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Further thanks for permission are due also to the Stadtarchiv Zürich/VII.200 Schauspielhaus Zürich (illustration 1); and Inge Steinert/photograph: Percy Pautschka (illustration 4). The photographer of 2 and 3 has not been identified.

Visit www.bloomsbury.com to find out more about our authors and their books
You will find extracts, author interviews, author events and you can sign up for newsletters to be the first to hear about our latest releases and special offers.

ISBN PB : 978-1-4081-0007-3
ePub: 978-1-4725-3817-8
ePDF: 978-1-4725-3818-5

Contents

Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956	v
Plot	xv
Commentary	xx
Brecht's life	xxi
Brecht's politics and theory	xxvii
<i>The Good Person of Szechwan</i> : context and genesis	xlvi
Structure	xlx
The gods come to earth	xlx
Prostitution and marriage	lii
Split character and role play	liii
The Chinese setting	lv
Morality	lvii
The ending	lviii
Epic elements	lix
Tragedy or comedic parable?	lx
<i>The Good Person of Szechwan</i> in the theatre	lxii
Further Reading	lxxiii
THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN	i
Notes	111
Questions for Further Study	128

This page intentionally left blank

Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956

Brecht's life falls into three distinct phases:

From 1898 to 1933 he is in Germany.

From 1933 to 1947 during the Hitler years, he is in forced exile from Germany in various parts of the world.

In 1947 he returns to Europe, first of all to Switzerland and then to East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic (the former East Germany).

Germany

- 1898 Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht born on 10 February at Augsburg. Father employee, later director, of the Haindl paper mill.
- 1908 Goes to Augsburg Grammar School. Caspar Neher (later his designer) is one of his closest friends.
- 1913 Begins to contribute poems and essays to student newspaper.
- 1914 Begins to write poems, stories, reviews and essays for the literary supplement of a local newspaper. Outbreak of First World War.
- 1915 Caspar Neher volunteers for military service. Brecht writes to him regularly.
- 1916 Almost expelled for unpatriotic essay on the title: 'It is a sweet and honourable thing to die for one's country'.
- 1917 Enrols as medical student at Munich University. Also attends Arthur Kutscher's theatre seminar. Samples bohemian literary life of the city.
- 1918 Conscripted into the army and serves as a medical orderly at

- Augsburg Military Hospital. Writes *Baal* and does theatre reviews for local newspaper. Becomes more involved in socialist political organisations.
- 1919 Writes *Drums in the Night*. Meets the comedian Karl Valentin, the theatre director Erich Engel and actresses Elisabeth Bergner, Blandine Ebinger, Carola Neher and Marianne Zoff. Brecht and Neher work to establish as many artistic and literary contacts as possible.
- 1920 Visits Berlin. His mother dies; he writes 'Song of my mother'.
- 1921 Brecht and Neher in financial difficulties. Preoccupied, Brecht fails to register for university course and is dropped from the university roll. Ends up in hospital suffering from malnutrition. New friendship with Arnolt Bronnen, a playwright, leads him to change the spelling of his name to Bertolt or Bert.
- 1922 Brecht summarises his life so far in a letter to Herbert Jhering on October 17:

I first saw the light of the world in 1898. My parents hail from the Black Forest. Elementary school bored me for four years. In the nine years of my pickling at the Augsburg Realgymnasium I made no great contribution to my teachers' advancement. They never wearied of pointing out my penchant for idleness and independence. At the university I read medicine and learned to play the guitar. At secondary school I went in for all kinds of sports and developed a heart condition, which familiarised me with the secrets of metaphysics. During the war, I served as an orderly in a military hospital. After that I wrote a few plays, and in the spring of this year I was taken to the Charité hospital because of undernourishment. Arnolt Bronnen was unable to help me substantially out of his earnings as a sales clerk. After twenty-four years in the light of the world I have grown rather thin.

(*Letters 1913-1956*, p. 71)

Marries Marianne Zoff in Munich. Writes *In the Jungle of the Cities*. First performance of *Drums in the Night* at the

Deutsches Theater, Berlin.

- 1923 Daughter, Hanne, is born. The activities of Hitler's National Socialists are hotly discussed in Brecht's Munich circle. First productions of *In the Jungle of the Cities* and *Baal* take place in Munich and Leipzig respectively. Meets Helene Weigel, the actress, for the first time.
- 1924 Directs Marlowe's *Edward II* which he and Lion Feuchtwanger – celebrated novelist and playwright as well as being dramatic adviser to the Kammerspiele in Munich – had adapted. Brecht was already using certain devices (plot summaries before scenes, white face make-up to indicate fear) to induce critical detachment in actors and audience. Finally settles in Berlin. Is taken on as dramaturg (literary adviser) at Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater. Helene Weigel bears him a son, Stefan. Meets Elisabeth Hauptmann who becomes his constant collaborator.
- 1925 Writes poems, visits Marianne Zoff and Hanne. Congratulates G.B. Shaw on his seventieth birthday, commending his 'keen intelligence and fearless eloquence'. Completes manuscript of *Man equals Man* which he presents to Elisabeth Hauptmann as thanks for her unstinting and unpaid work. Joins 'Group 25', aiming to co-ordinate the interests of younger authors not represented by literary groups dominated by the older generation.
- 1926 *Man equals Man* premiered at Darmstadt and Düsseldorf. Works on a play (never finished) called *Joe Fleischhacker*, which was to deal with the Chicago Wheat Exchange; leads him to the study of Marx as the only adequate method of analysing the workings of capitalism.
- 1927 Divorces Marianne Zoff. Works with Erwin Piscator, the pioneer of Communist political theatre in Germany, on a dramatisation of Hašek's novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*. First collaboration with Kurt Weill, on *Mahagonny* – with Lotte

- Lenya and designs by Neher.
- 1928 *The Threepenny Opera*, music by Kurt Weill, words by Brecht (based on a translation of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* by Elisabeth Hauptmann), opens at Theater am Schiffbauerdamm – hit of the season. Brecht had transferred bourgeois manners to a Soho criminal setting.
- 1929 Marries Helene Weigel. *The Baden-Baden Cantata* staged at Baden-Baden Music Festival, music by Hindemith. The Brecht/Weill *Berlin Requiem* broadcast on the radio. Premiere of Hauptmann/Brecht/Weill musical *Happy End*.
- 1930 Daughter Barbara born. His *Lehrstück* or didactic play, *The Measures Taken*, with music by Hanns Eisler, is given its first performance in Berlin. The Communist didactic plays for amateur performance were intended to clarify the ideas of the performers as much as the audience. The first performance of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, an opera with words by Brecht and music by Kurt Weill, causes a riot as the Nazis voice their criticism at Leipzig. In his notes on the opera, Brecht lists the differences between the traditional *dramatic* (or Aristotelian) and the new *epic* (or non-Aristotelian) theatre at which he is aiming. The *Lehrstücke, He Said Yes/He Said No* – two 'school operas' by Brecht and Weill – staged by schoolboys and an amateur orchestra in Berlin.
- 1931 Completes *St Joan of the Stockyards* – not performed until 1959. The G.W. Pabst film version of *The Threepenny Opera* opens in Berlin following a lawsuit to prevent it, which Brecht loses.
- 1932 Brecht's only film *Kühle Wampe* held up by the censor. His dramatisation of Maxim Gorky's novel *The Mother* is performed by left-wing collective in Berlin, music by Hanns Eisler, and demonstrates development of a worker's mother towards proletarian class-consciousness. Beginning of friendship with Margarete Steffin. Studies Marxism under dissident Communist Karl Korsch.

Exile

- 1933 Nazis come to power. The night after the German parliament building (the Reichstag) is burnt down, Brecht flees with his family to Prague. Moves to Vienna, then Zurich, finally settling on the island of Fyn in Denmark. Friendship with Ruth Berlau begins. Premiere of the Brecht/Weill *The Seven Deadly Sins* in Paris with Lotte Lenya and choreography by George Balanchine.
- 1934 Writes *The Threepenny Novel*, a more obviously Marxist version of *The Threepenny Opera*. Redrafts, with Hanns Eisler and Margarete Steffin, *Round Heads and Pointed Heads or Empires of a Feather Flock Together. An atrocity fairy tale*. Walter Benjamin stays with Brecht. Visits London. Themes of flight and exile enter his poems. Helene Weigel and children in Vienna and Zurich.
- 1935 Visits Moscow, talks to Soviet dramatist Sergei Tretyakov about the ‘alienation effect’. Attends International Writers’ Conference in Paris. Brecht is stripped of his German citizenship by the Nazis. Visits New York to look in on a production of *The Mother* which does not meet with his approval. Negotiates American edition of *The Threepenny Novel* and a performance of *Round Heads*.
- 1936 Attends International Writers’ Conference in London. Lives in Hampstead. Writes anti-fascist poetry. Consultant on first production of *Round Heads* in Danish in the Riddersalen in Copenhagen.
- 1937 Completes the Spanish play *Señora Carrar’s Rifles*. Writes children’s songs for Helene Weigel. Attends International Writers’ Conference in Paris: main theme, intellectuals’ attitudes towards the Spanish Civil War. Brands self ‘one of the cowards’ for being too cautious to go to Madrid himself. In Paris, a performance of *The Threepenny Opera* and the world premiere of *Señora Carrar’s Rifles* (with Helene Weigel, ‘dedicated to the

x The Good Person of Szechwan

heroic fight for freedom of the Spanish people'). Calls Helene Weigel's acting 'the best and the purest that could be seen so far in the epic theatre anywhere'.

- 1938 Franco's right-wing Falangists emerge as the likely victors in the Spanish Civil War and Chamberlain signs away the Sudetenland in the Munich Treaty in an effort to appease Hitler. The growing power of fascism, developments in the Soviet Union, his steadily diminishing chances of seeing his plays performed anywhere and the ensuing money worries increase his sense of isolation. On Easter Sunday writes the poem 'Spring 1938':

In the willows by the sound
These spring nights the screech-owl often calls.
According to a peasant superstition
Your screech-owl informs people that
They haven't long to live. I
Who know full well that I told the truth
About the powers that be, don't need a death-bird
To inform me so.

(trans. Derek Bowman, *Poems 1913-1956*, Methuen, p. 304)

Fear and Misery in the Third Reich premiered in Paris. Writes *Life of Galileo*, assisted by Margarete Steffin. In December, news of fission of uranium by physicists Hahn and Strassmann causes revisions to text.

- 1939 Hitler annexes Czechoslovakia. Works by Brecht confiscated and pulped. Moves to Stockholm with his family. Finishes *Mother Courage and her Children*. Not allowed to participate in political activities but continues under pseudonym of John Kent. Father dies and is buried in Augsburg. Works on *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Soviet Union invades Finland.
- 1940 German forces march into Denmark and Norway. Moves with family to Helsinki, expressing gratitude for help and friendship he found in Stockholm:

It's a big thing to find so much intellectual solidarity even (and especially) in these dark times . . . I had the feeling that I was leaving my home.

(Letter to Henry Peter Matthys, *Letters 1913–1956*, p. 323)

Drafts *Mr Puntila and his Man Matti*, works with Hella Wuolijoki. Severe food shortage. Waits for visas to go to America.

- 1941 Completes *The Good Person of Szechwan*, *Mr Puntila and his Man Matti* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, the last in collaboration with Margarete Steffin. Writes war poetry and 'Finnish Epigrams'. Travels through the Soviet Union via Leningrad and Moscow to Vladivostock and sails to the USA. Greatly affected by death of Margarete Steffin from pneumonia in a Moscow hospital:

In Year Nine of the flight from Hitler
 Exhausted by travelling
 By cold and by hunger in wintry Finland
 And by waiting for a passport to another continent
 Our comrade Steffin died
 In the red city of Moscow.

(‘After the death of my collaborator M.S.’, trans. John Willett, *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 364)

Arrives in Los Angeles in July, settles in Santa Monica. Makes contact with other European exiles, e.g. Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger and Fritz Lang, and also with Americans such as Orson Welles and Eric Bentley. First performance of *Mother Courage and her Children* in neutral Switzerland.

- 1942 Prepares *Poems in Exile* for publication. Participates in anti-war, anti-fascist activities of exile groups. Meets Charles Laughton. Finds it difficult to adjust to American values: ‘but all that stands there as if it were in a showcase, and I involuntarily search every mountain and every lemon tree for a small price tag.’ Registered as both subject to military service and as an ‘enemy alien’.

xii The Good Person of Szechwan

- 1943 First performances of *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *Life of Galileo* in Zurich. Mussolini resigns. Brecht caught in extended argument with Thomas Mann about the differences between Germany and Hitler.
- 1944 Brecht becomes member of newly formed Council for a Democratic Germany. Finishes first version of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Studies Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese poetry. Begins to revise *Galileo* with Charles Laughton.
- 1945 *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* performed in New York under title of *The Private Life of the Master Race*. English version of *Galileo* further revised after dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to stress the social responsibility of the scientist.
- 1946 First performance of Brecht's adaptation of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in Boston.
- 1947 Charles Laughton appears in the title role of *Galileo* in Beverly Hills and New York. Brecht appears before the 'House Committee on Un-American Activities', proves himself master of ambiguity when cross-examined about his Communist sympathies.

Return

- Brecht and Helene Weigel go to Zurich, leaving son, Stefan, an American citizen, in USA. Meets up again with Caspar Neher as well as playwrights, Max Frisch and Carl Zuckmayer. First applies for Austrian passport (Weigel is Austrian).
- 1948 Adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* performed in Chur, Switzerland. *Mr Puntilla and his Man Matti* premiered in Zurich. Publishes *Little Organum for the Theatre*. Travels to Berlin, starts rehearsals for *Mother Courage* at Deutsches Theater in Soviet sector of city. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* first performed in Eric and Maja Bentley's English translation by

students at Northfield, Minnesota.

- 1949 *Mother Courage* opens at Deutsches Theater with Helene Weigel in title role. Brecht visits Zurich again before settling in Berlin. The Berliner Ensemble, Brecht and Weigel's own state-subsidised company, is formed and opens with *Puntilla*. Brecht applies again for Austrian passport.
- 1951 *The Mother* is performed by the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht finishes first version of adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*.
- 1953 When Stalin dies in April, Brecht writes:

The oppressed people of five continents, those who have already liberated themselves, and all those who are fighting for world peace, must have felt their hearts miss a beat when they heard that Stalin was dead. He was the embodiment of their hopes. But the intellectual and material weapons which he produced remain, and with them the method to produce new ones.

(*Brecht on Art and Politics*, Methuen, 2002)

Brecht elected President of the German section of the PEN Club, the international writers' association. On 17 June there are strikes and demonstrations protesting about working conditions in the German Democratic Republic. Brecht angry that a doctored version of a letter he wrote is published, making it seem that he sympathised with the forcible suppression of the workers' uprising.

- 1954 Berliner Ensemble acquires its own home at Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. German premiere of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* but 'The Struggle for the Valley' is omitted as being politically inopportune. Brecht makes public his objections to the Paris Treaty (which incorporated the Federal Republic of Germany into Nato) and to re-armament in general. Brecht in Bruges, Amsterdam and Paris where Berliner Ensemble gives performances of *Mother Courage* and Kleist's *The Broken Pitcher*. Productions greeted with great acclaim at the Paris Théâtre des Nations festival. Brecht awarded Stalin Peace Prize.

xiv The Good Person of Szechwan

- 1955 Travels to Moscow to receive Stalin Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech he explains how his thinking has been shaped by particular writings and events:

The most important lesson was that a future for mankind was becoming visible only 'from below', from the standpoint of the oppressed and exploited. Only by fighting with them does one fight for mankind.

(*Brecht on Art and Politics*)

- By the end of the year suffering from exhaustion and unwell.
- 1956 Travels to Milan to attend final rehearsals and first night of Giorgio Strehler's production of *The Threepenny Opera*. Brecht's health prevents him from carrying on rehearsing, preparing Berliner Ensemble, now recognised as foremost progressive theatre in Europe, for a visit to London. Hands over direction to Erich Engel. 14 August Brecht dies of a heart attack. Berliner Ensemble visit to London goes ahead very successfully. At the official memorial celebration of Brecht's life, his own version of his epitaph is quoted:

I need no gravestone, but
If you need one for me
I would like it to bear these words:
He made suggestions. We
Carried them out.
Such an inscription would
Honour us all.

(trans. Michael Hamburger, *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 218)

- 1965 Second visit of the Berliner Ensemble to London with three new productions plus a revival of *The Threepenny Opera* directed by Erich Engel.

Plot

Prologue

Three gods have been sent from heaven to investigate complaints that 'no one can stay on earth and remain good'. The water-seller, Wang, receives them but finds it extremely hard to find them a room for the night. Wang, it turns out, does not qualify as a good person either as he gives short measure. At last Shen Teh, the prostitute who cannot say no, agrees. It seems they have found a good person already. But Shen Teh complains that it is impossible to keep all the commandments without starving. The gods break their own resolution not to get involved in economics and, in order to secure the success of their own mission, they give her some money.

Scene 1

With the money Shen Teh buys herself a small tobacco shop, but before she has sold anything the shop fills up with creditors and scroungers. Shen Teh is keen to help, but she quickly realises that her business will be ruined. One of the family of eight, who come to billet on her, suggests that she invent a hard-nosed 'cousin' to fend off the creditors. Shen Teh reluctantly goes along.

Interlude

In the first of a series of Interludes, the gods appear to Wang and exhort him to help Shen Teh and at the same time report to them, while they continue their journey.

Scene 2

Next morning, to everyone's dismay, the 'cousin', Shui Ta (played

xvi The Good Person of Szechwan

by Shen Teh), really does appear. In this guise, s/he sorts out the creditors and the family of spongers, and decides that Shen Teh needs a rich husband.

Scene 3

On the way to meet a rich suitor, the barber Shu Fu, Shen Teh meets and falls in love with the unemployed pilot, Yang Sun.

Interlude

The gods appear again to Wang, who involuntarily reveals to them some of Shen Teh's difficulties, and the existence of the 'cousin'. The gods are sympathetic but disappointed. They are tired because they have not found proper accommodation, and they grumble at the inadequacies of mankind.

Scene 4

At the same time as Shen Teh returns home happily after her night with Sun, Wang gets his hand smashed by Shu Fu for hawking water in the barber's shop. An old couple lends Shen Teh the 200 silver dollars she needs for the rent, and she is in such a good mood that at first she does not notice Wang's injury. Then, disgusted at her own lack of consideration, she decides to testify for him, even though she did not witness the assault. When Sun's mother arrives with the news that Sun has the chance of a job as a pilot if he can raise 500 dollars, Shen Teh gives her the old couple's money. Her 'cousin' will have to help again to sort things out.

Interlude

Shen Teh sings the 'Song of the Defencelessness of the Good and the Gods' as she changes into Shui Ta's outfit and dons his mask.

Scene 5

Shui Ta discovers that Sun is not to be relied on and resolves that Shen Teh must marry Shu Fu after all. When Wang arrives with a policeman to check on Shen Teh's statement, Shui Ta declares that she was not a witness after all. But, transformed once more into Shen Teh, she succumbs to Sun again and rejects Shu Fu in order to go off and marry her true love.

Interlude

In a monologue, Shen Teh, dressed in her wedding clothes, tells the audience that the old couple need their money back and reflects ruefully on her situation.

Scene 6

The wedding party is assembled, but Sun refuses to go ahead without Shui Ta, who is supposed to be bringing him the rest of the money he needs (raised from the sale of the shop). Of course Shui Ta cannot come as long as Shen Teh is there, and the wedding falls through. Shen Teh seems irrevocably ruined, since she cannot even get the 200 dollars back.

Interlude

The gods appear to Wang again. He tells them a parable about the curse of usefulness. Their mission is not going well. They are sleeping rough and they are even more run-down than before. Nonetheless they dismiss Wang's worries and insist that suffering will ennoble Shen Teh.

Scene 7

Shen Teh is offered a way out when Shu Fu gives her a blank cheque. She is pregnant and determined to defend her child in the face of the evil world. Turning back into Shui Ta, she decides to cash the cheque. She appropriates the tobacco that the family of eight had left with her for safe keeping, and, with Shu Fu's money,

starts a tobacco factory. The poor, the onetime scroungers and creditors reluctantly go to work there. Wang's hand and the debt to the old couple are forgotten.

Interlude

Wang tells the gods of a dream in which he saw Shen Teh struggling under an invisible burden. The gods reject his proposal for a 'slight reduction of the precepts', and move wearily on.

Scene 8

Shui Ta has become the 'tobacco king' and offers Sun a chance to avoid prison. Sun quickly becomes a ruthless foreman.

Scene 9

Shui Ta seems to have succeeded and covered his/her tracks – with Mrs Shin's help – despite the advanced pregnancy. Then Sun learns from Wang that Shen Teh is pregnant and hears her sobbing in a back room. While Shui Ta negotiates the expansion of his tobacco factory, the police are called. They cannot find Shen Teh, but they do find her clothes. Shui Ta is arrested on suspicion of having done away with his cousin.

Interlude

By now the gods are dreadfully worn down by their experience of the world. Wang tells them about Shen Teh's disappearance and they are distraught. They begin to doubt that the world is fit to live in.

Scene 10

The three gods reappear disguised as magistrates. Shui Ta recognises them but tries to defend himself against the people's charges, declaring that goodness needs the means to survive. Shui Ta asks for the courtroom to be cleared and then reveals him/

herself to the gods and begs for guidance. They are pleased to have found her again, insist that everything is fine, and disappear into 'nothingness' on a pink cloud, leaving Shen Teh to cope with the impossibility of her situation.

Epilogue

A player appears before the curtain, apologises for the unsatisfactory ending, and exhorts the audience to find a better one.