



THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST

SOURCE MATERIAL

DAVID BELASCO'S *THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST*

David Belasco (July 25, 1853 – May 14, 1931), American playwright, director and theatrical producer, was born in San Francisco, California. His parents moved from London, England during the Gold Rush, and he was surely inspired by this colorful period in American history. He began working in San Francisco theatre, holding a variety of routine jobs such as call boy, script copier, eventually advancing to the position of stage manager. His early work in San Francisco allowed him to learning the business inside out. Belasco moved to New York City in 1882 where he worked as stage manager for the Madison Square Theater while writing plays. By 1895, he was so successful that he set himself up as an independent producer. Between 1884 and 1930, Belasco wrote, directed, or produced more than 100 Broadway plays, becoming one of the most powerful personalities on the New York city theater scene. Most famously, two of his plays, *Madame Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West* for the stage, were adapted as operas by Giacomo Puccini.

Belasco's plays were exciting and melodramatic, but rooted in realism. He had an eye for detail when setting the atmosphere for his plays, and his script for *The Girl of the Golden West* opens with ten pages of stage directions describing in detail the setting, props, music, and lighting effects. Costs and available technology limited what could be shown on stage, but the visual information imparted by Belasco's plays was attractive to filmmakers. Belasco mentored Cecil B. DeMille and also influenced D. W. Griffith, two of the most important early film directors. Over forty motion pictures, including DeMille's *The Girl of the Golden West*, have been adapted from Belasco's stage plays, which are rarely seen today.

Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*, opened at the Belasco Theater in Pittsburgh in 1905 to great success, starring Blanche Bates, actress who had also created the role of Madame Butterfly. Giacomo Puccini saw the play in New York in 1907, and immediately determined that the play should be turned into an opera. Belasco's play was translated into Italian and work on a libretto based on Belasco's stage western began. Puccini's opera, *La fanciulla del West*, the first piece to be commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, premiered at New York in 1910, with Belasco as stage director and a stellar cast of Italian and American singers. The audiences receive the new work with great enthusiasm, and, once again, impresario David Belasco had his hand in a hit.