A STUDY OF THE INNOVATIONS IN DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTION OF BERNARD SHAW, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE TECHNIQUE OF HIS DISCUSSION PLAYS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

McGill University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

---

by

Gregory Friend

August, 1955

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It is one of the paradoxes of the history of the modern drama that the works of a playwright who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, and who came to be regarded a classic writer during his own lifetime, were once considered "undramatic." It is the paradox of the literary achievement of George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), and it may be described as follows:- During his most productive years as a playwright, from 1892 until the period immediately following World War I, Shaw was not considered a "dramatist" by a number of the influential critics of the London theatre (although these critics were generally charitable enough to admit that Shaw was an "entertaining," "amusing," and in some respects even a "serious" writer). Yet in our day the popularity of Shaw almost rivals that of Shakespeare on the Anglo-American and Central European stages; the dramatist is acclaimed by critics and public alike as the brilliant author of such successful stage and cinema revival productions of the last two decades as Candida, Arms and the Man, Caesar and Cleopatra, The Devil's Disciple, Man and Superman, "Don Juan in Hell," Major Barbara, Getting Married, The Doctor's Dilemma, Pygmalion, Heartbreak House, St. Joan, and other works written during

that period of Shaw's career when theatre pundits censured him most severely.

Admittedly, dramatic opinions change with time, and artists seldom enjoy success early in life. Yet Shaw's case is singularly striking: no great modern playwright was subjected to so much critical abuse as he, and for so long. By way of introduction, the paradox may be briefly explained:- The dramaturgy that Shaw introduced to the English and European theatre was perhaps the most unorthodox of modern times: it ran counter in a great number of ways to what was accepted by critics as the more or less standard technique of the most influential nineteenth-century playwrights. As a result of this fact, Shaw encountered a great deal of adamant opposition in conservative theatrical circles, even though his revolutionary plays did not, as we shall see, merit most of the adverse comments passed upon them.

Shaw's unorthodox new technique was embodied in what are known as "discussion" plays, and it is to a critical investigation of this type of drama that the thesis will be principally devoted. In order to comprehend Shaw's literary achievement fully, it will be necessary to examine the technique of the two most influential nineteenth-century playwrights in the European theatre, the French playwright Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) and Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906).

The thesis will also deal with the dramatic opinions of the two most famous anti-Shavians, Arthur B. Walkley (1855-1926), critic of the London Times, and William Archer (1856-1924), the first notable English drama pundit of modern times.[1]

By way of a conclusion, we shall present an evaluation of Shavian drama and of the criticism levelled against it. We propose to answer three related questions which should be kept in mind throughout the body of the thesis:- What were Shaw's distinctive innovations in dramatic construction? Were his plays considered "undramatic" because of these innovations? Was he as "undramatic" a playwright as his hostile critics claimed? The answer to the first of these questions is developed in the text of the thesis as a whole and is summarized in the final chapter; the second and third are answered, specifically, in the conclusion.

Before proceeding to a chapter-summary of the thesis, it will be necessary to sketch, very briefly, an outline-history of the nineteenth-century drama. Roughly from 1830 to 1880 the technique of most European dramatists was inspired chiefly by the dramaturgy of the "well-made play," as developed by Eugène Scribe. Scribian dramas had a very limited literary value, but were imitated extensively for reason of their ingenious plots and theatrical

---

1. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of the Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900, in two vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1946), I, p. 157.

effectiveness. Following the death of Scribe, some of the most famous of European playwrights, such as Emile Augier (1820-1889), Alexandre Dumas, _fils_ (1824-1895), and Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) continued to champion Scribe's methods. It was not until 1879 that Henrik Ibsen ended the dominance of the "well-made play" as the chief model of European dramatic writers by developing a new technique; in this year, Ibsen wrote _A Doll's House_, probably the most influential play of modern times: according to the Ibsen scholar, Muriel C. Bradbrook, it "stands in relation to modern drama as Queen Victoria to the royal families of Europe."[2] Although this work contains a strong plot and many of the other features of Scribian drama, to which, technically, Ibsen was considerably, though far from completely, indebted, it is definitely a work of art. In it, Ibsen developed characterization, philosophy, and "discussion" as literary values in a manner and style found with none of the "Scribian" authors, who continued to write strictly "well-made plays" beyond the turn of the century.

Particularly in his early plays, Shaw was greatly influenced by the innovations of Ibsen, and also by those of Scribe, though to a lesser extent; however,

---

2. Muriel C. Bradbrook, _Ibsen: The Norwegian_ (London, 1948), p. 76.

already with his first plays he began to develop unusual techniques of his own. He surpassed even Ibsen in eschewing "Scribism," and devoted himself to perfecting a type of drama consisting, unlike the "well-made play," primarily of ideational discussion rather than of plot and incident. It is consequently not surprising that critics who appreciated much of the work of Scribe and Ibsen maintained that Shaw's plays were "undramatic": did they not consist principally in talk instead of plot and action? G. S. Street, writing in Blackwood's Magazine in 1900, writes as follows:

> As a conscientious critic I have pointed out that Mr. Shaw's abundance of ideas spoils his plays...3

However, like William Archer and Arthur B. Walkley,[4] Street does not develop a consistent opinion of Shaw's work. Immediately following the above sentence, we read:

> I may add as a man that to me it is their great attraction. ...It is refreshing to be addressed from the stage as though one was an intelligent person. Hardly any one else so addresses one.5

Thus we see, in outline, that nineteenth-century play-writing evolved, in one important direction at least,

---

3. G. S. Street, "Sheridan and Shaw," Blackwood's Magazine (New York), 1900, CLXVII, 832-836, p. 835.

4. See Chapter IX.

5. G. S. Street, "Sheridan and Shaw," p. 835.

from the unliterary Scribian drama of plot to the highly intellectual Shavian drama of "discussion." We also see that critics were bewildered by the "New Drama" that Shaw presented on the London stage during the 1890's and the first two decades of the twentieth century. The subject matter of the thesis will be confined to the historical frame of reference summarized here, except for a brief digression in Chapter VII, where the dramaturgy of the Russian dramatist, Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), will be examined with special reference to The Cherry Orchard (1904). This digression anticipates Chapter VIII, where Shaw's play, Heartbreak House (1917), a work inspired to a considerable extent by Chekhov's technique, will be discussed.

Summary

The first two chapters of the thesis, which deal with the dramatic methods of Scribe and Ibsen, are designed to anticipate the following chapters on Shaw, whose outstanding qualities as a dramatist will appear fully significant only when his methods are compared to those of his two most important predecessors. Chapter I will consist of an examination of the "well-made play." Since it would, of course, be impossible to discuss all of the many dramas of this genre, we shall concern ourselves with what "ranks

among the best and most successful"[6] of Scribe's works, Le Verre D'Eau (1840). An analysis of this superior "well-made play" will justify our drawing conclusions with respect to Scribian and Scribe-like dramas in general, since most of these are of no higher literary merit. General criticism of Scribe will be justified for still another reason: critics agree that Scribe's technical formula is more or less similar in all his plays.[7] In Chapter I, we shall examine the standard devices and conventions that Scribe used in building up a plot of incident with its well-known theatrical appeal; we shall also analyze Scribe's character-portrayal and dramatic philosophy. Above all, we shall consider the limitations of the "well-made play" as a work of literature, and its merits as a pièce de théâtre.

In Chapter II, we shall show how the fashion of Scribism in nineteenth-century drama was finally broken. The chapter will consist of a structure-analysis of Ibsen's A Doll's House. Ibsen's use of some of Scribe's technical devices will be noted, but, principally, the epoch-making naturalistic innovations of the play will be considered: these include the innovation of the "discussion" scene, of

---

6. Eugène Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau (Boston, 1902), p. IV. Edited with an introduction and notes by Charles A. Eggert.

7. See, for example, Brian W. Downs, Ibsen: The Intellectual Background (Cambridge, Eng., 1946), pp. 52, 55, and passim;
P.F.D.Tennant, Ibsen's Dramatic Technique (Cambridge, Eng., 1948), pp. 79, 80, 84, 102, and passim.

naturalistic characterization, and of naturalistic introduction of the play's philosophical content.

Chapter III is a summary of Bernard Shaw's dramatic opinions: Shaw's praise of Ibsenism and censure of Scribism will be outlined, as well as Shaw's own major theories. Chapters IV, V, and VI deal with the structural innovations of three representative Shavian dramas, and with the Scribian and Ibsenian derivations they disclose: Mrs. Warren's Profession (1894), an early play, in which the special influence of Ibsen is quite pronounced; Man and Superman (1903), one of Shaw's most original works, in which the playwright develops his own distinctive technique more than in any previous drama; and Getting Married (1908), the first pure "disquisitory" play of its kind. These three chapters are principally devoted to discussion of Shaw's plot construction, characterization, prose style, "discussion" scenes, and the playwright's method of introducing a drama's philosophical content. Attention will also be drawn to certain weaknesses of Shaw's dramaturgy.

As previously stated, Chapter VII will be devoted to Chekhov's dramaturgy: his characterization, style of dialogue, and symbolism will be examined, with special reference to The Cherry Orchard. Chapter VIII deals with the innovations of Heartbreak House, a work which in construction resembles both The Cherry Orchard and Getting

Married. Chapter IX includes a summary of the dramatic criticism of Archer and Walkley. The conclusion (Chapter X) contains an evaluation of Shaw and his two major critics, as well as a specific answer to the three fundamental questions posed in the thesis:- First, we shall summarize Shaw's structural innovations; secondly, we shall demonstrate that these innovations were indeed instrumental in arousing the hostility of Walkley and Archer to Shavian drama; thirdly, we shall show that Shaw is not as "undramatic" a playwright as was maintained, that technically, his indebtedness to Scribe and Ibsen, whom Archer and Walkley considered "dramatic" playwrights, was (even in an unorthodox disquisitory play like Getting Married) far greater than Walkley and Archer seemed to realize. An appendix will also include a review of Archibald Henderson's Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist?;[8] we shall draw attention to the inadequacies of Henderson's study of our subject. The great deficiency of Henderson's work is its essentially unscholarly method; in contrast, factual and extensive textual analysis are the main methodological features of this theses.

---

8. Archibald Henderson, Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist? (London, 1929).

Critical works consulted are referred to in corroboration of the writer's opinions. It seems appropriate to draw attention here to the fact that although more than fifty books have been written about Shaw, very few of these can be classified as first-class criticism,[9] and none, Henderson's book excepted, deal directly and at length with the problems posed in the thesis. For an excellent commentary on Shaw criticism in general, the reader may refer[10] to what is undoubtedly the best book Shaw has inspired, Eric Bentley's Bernard Shaw. Acknowledgment must also be made here of the Shaw criticism of Alfred C. Ward, C. E. M. Joad, Edmund Wilson, and Jacques Barzun, the Shaw "encyclopedia" of Archibald Henderson, titled Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet, the criticism of Scribe and particularly of Ibsen by P. F. D. Tennant, Brian W. Downs, and Muriel C. Bradbrook, and the Chekhov criticism of Ronald Hingley; books by these authorities have been particularly helpful to the writer.

---

9. See Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), pp. 224-225.

10. Ibid., pp. 220-228.

CHAPTER I

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE "WELL-MADE PLAY."

The French dramatist, Eugène Scribe, was one of the most prolific, most successful, and, in some respects one of the most influential playwrights of all time. His dramatic works total more than four hundred. From the 1820's until after his death (and virtually to the close of the nineteenth century), the rigid principles of construction of his so-called "well-made plays" were imitated in a countless number of dramas by French and other European and English playwrights. The "well-made play" is a drama of plot, consisting almost solely of concatenated intrigues and of incidents such as misunderstandings, accidents, coincidences, and duels. Scribe was, in fact, not a literary artist, but a dramatist who wrote for the sake of theatrical success alone. Although little important criticism has been written on this author, critics dealing with Henrik Ibsen, whose early writings reveal the strong influence of Scribe, and with the field of modern drama in general are in agreement that Scribe's works, while significant as theatre pieces, are greatly lacking in important literary values such as credible representation of character, and philosophic content. The general critical concensus is that Scribe's stage figures are, on the whole, mechanically motivated

puppets, and that philosophy in his dramas is never more "than some little moral platitude which...commands uncritical assent." It has also been said that, as a playwright, Scribe had no philosophic convictions whatsoever.[1]

When, after a long lapse of years in the nineteenth century (particularly in England), European and English men of letters renewed their interest in the theatre, the era of the "well-made play" finally was succeeded by an age of greater theatrical art. As the anti-Scribian reaction developed, Scribe's works and those of his imitators were subjected to severe criticism by rising literary dramatists such as Bernard Shaw[2] and by other serious playwrights and critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Scribe's dramas had definite and serious shortcomings as works of art, one particular Scribian technique assiduously copied by his imitators afforded an important dramaturgical lesson even to his depreciators.

---

1. See Muriel C. Bradbrook, Ibsen: The Norwegian (London, 1948), p. 77;
René Doumic, De Scribe à Ibsen (Paris, 1893), p. VIII;
Brian W. Downs, Ibsen: The Intellectual Background (Cambridge Eng., 1946), p. 55;
Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama: from Aeschylus to Anouilh (New York, n. d.), pp. 488-489;
S. A. Rhodes, "France and Belgium," in A History of Modern Drama, edited by Barret H. Clark and George Freedley (New York, 1947), 233-317, p. 237;
Hugh Allison Smith, Main Currents of Modern French Drama (New York, 1925), pp. 108, 114, and 115.

2. See Chapter III.

The Ibsen scholar, Brian W. Downs, points out that it was Scribe who taught many of the important dramatists of the nineteenth century the

> necessity of maintaining at every moment of a play the...excitement of expectation, suspense and apprehension--the tension which, if it is to remain truly operative, must...be constantly varied [rise to a climax], and proceed from a clear apprehension of all the material facts [of a dramatic plot].[3]

Eric Bentley has termed the above the "surf-board of suspense" technique;[4] in brief, it is Scribe's principle of maintaining, suspending, heightening, and resolving the tension aroused by conflicts among characters of a play, in order to create a continuously effective plot. As we shall see in this chapter, Scribe overemphasized this technique to the exclusion of other dramatic values in his plays; nevertheless, we shall also see, in later chapters of the thesis, that there is much to recommend it when it is used with discretion.

A concomitant of the "surf-board of suspense" technique is Scribe's method of dividing his plays into three interrelated parts.[5] The first of these is an "exposition," which generally takes up most of an opening

---

3. Downs, Ibsen, p. 55.

4. Bertolt Brecht, The Private Life of the Master Race (New York, 1944), p. 133. With an essay on the work of Brecht by Eric R. Bentley.

5. See P.F.D.Tennant, Ibsen's Dramatic Technique (Cambridge, Eng., 1948), pp. 89-118 and passim.

act; in it, the factual background of a play is presented through conversations among some of the members of the cast. These conversations consist, to a large extent, of gossip concerning the drama's personages, and of a general "survey" of the disagreements and problems among the major figures; this "survey" creates a sense of expectation for the occasion when open contention occurs between protagonists and antagonists. In the "complication," which follows the "exposition," conflict among the major figures actually takes place, and arouses most of the suspense for which the "well-made play" is noted. As a rule, this conflict gradually mounts to a climax; this is followed by a dénouement, the untying of the plot, in which all disagreements between people of the drama are resolved.

Plot Summary.[6]

Scribe's famous drama, Le Verre D'Eau (subtitled Les Effets Et Les Causes), will be summarized here, in anticipation of an examination of the typical technical faults and merits of a "well-made play." The drama has a fairly extensive background in English history. Of it,

---

6. This and other plot summaries in the thesis will include only that subject-matter of a play required in analyses of dramatic construction.

Scribe's editor, Charles A. Eggert, says: "Although its author has evidently aimed to use historical events for the purpose of amusement, he does by no means allow these events to remain in the background. Hence, while they are only a secondary source of interest, they must be well understood for a complete enjoyment [or at least an appreciation] of the play."[7] The background is sketched by Eggert and by Neil C. Arvin:

> During the reign of "good Queen Anne" (1702-1714) occurred the war of the Spanish succession, in which the German empire, with Prussia, was allied with England, Holland and some smaller powers against France in alliance with two German states, the Electorates of Bavaria and Cologne, and Spain. ....England...furnished one of the ablest generals of the age, [the Duke of] Marlborough, whose genius soon became recognized as one of the most potent factors in the war. ...In 1711...Louis XIV sued for peace, but being unwilling to grant the demands of the [German] Emperor, he endeavoured to detach England from the alliance by offering her territorial and other advantages.[8]
>
> For a long time, however, Marlborough's ambition and cupidity delayed the success of the negotiations, as the war perpetuated his authority and influence... His wife [the Duchess of Marlborough], all-powerful with Queen Anne, whom she tormented and persecuted with her influence and her haughty pride, constantly fought the peace party at court and in Parliament. Louis XIV's envoys were repulsed, and through the duchesses's intrigues denied entrance to the palace and access to the ministries.[9]

---

7. Eugène Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau (Boston, 1902), p. V. Edited with an introduction and notes by C. A. Eggert.

8. Ibid., pp. V-VI.

9. Neil C. Arvin, Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre 1815-1860 (Cambridge, Mass., 1924), p. 147.

> As long as the Whigs were in power England remained faithful to her pledges, but the Tories [eventually] succeeded in persuading a majority of the voters...that there was no reason for the continuation of a war when peace would secure to England all the profit she could possibly expect to gain. New elections were ordered and the Tories came into power. [The Duchess of Marlborough lost her influence at court.] A Tory cabinet, under Harley and Henry St. John, later Viscount Bolingbroke, supplanted the former Whig cabinet. Marlborough was recalled and soon thereafter a peace was signed, at Utrecht... [10]

The action of Le Verre D'Eau takes place in London, in a drawing room of Queen Anne's palace, except for the last act, which takes place in the Queen's boudoir.[11] The "exposition" begins in Act I, Scene I, as Bolingbroke, the champion of the Tory peace party, assures Louis XIV's troubled envoy, the Marquis de Torcy, that he will personally see to it that the Marquis' letter concerning French peace overtures reaches Queen Anne. The Marquis exclaims that the honour of France rests on Bolingbroke's promise. (Somewhat later in the "exposition" we learn that Bolingbroke is unable to see the Queen because of the interference of the powerful Duchess of Marlborough, the de facto mistress of the palace.)

In Act I, Scene II, Bolingbroke meets Arthur Masham, a young ensign of the Queen's guards, with whom he is well acquainted. Bolingbroke converses with Masham, and discloses that he is financially bankrupt; he also

---

10. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, pp. VI-VII.

11. The text on which the précis of the plot is based is noted in footnote 7.

tells Masham that he is certain that the Duke of Marlborough, who has the support of the Whig party, is appropriating public funds under the pretext of requiring them for the conduct of his campaigns against France. Masham relates that, through the help of an unknown benefactor, he has just acquired his post as an ensign in the Queen's guards; prior to this fortunate event he had on two occasions attempted to petition Queen Anne for a position at court, but he had, in both attempts, been rudely prevented from seeing the Queen, owing to the machinations of a mysterious stranger, who bears him a personal grudge. Then, returning to the subject of his unknown benefactor, he reveals that this person has forbidden him to marry. Bolingbroke suggests that the benefactor must be a woman. Masham contends that this would be embarrassing; he is in love, and wishes to marry Abigail, a shop girl who works at Master Tomwood's jewelry store in London's business centre. Bolingbroke reveals that he used to know Abigail, and even admits that he was once quite attracted to her. He expresses regret at being unable to help Masham and Abigail financially, so that they would be able to marry; it is his cousin, Richard Bolingbroke, who is heir to the Bolingbroke family fortune; he is (as previously stated) bankrupt. Nevertheless he thinks that it might be possible to obtain a position at court for Abigail.

Scene III opens with her arrival. She tells the two men that she has already been promised employment at court. The circumstances attending her good fortune were as follows: it had, in the past, been the custom of a cheerless, distinguished-looking lady to buy jewelry at Master Tomwood's store; this lady had taken a great liking to her, and had, in fact, from time to time, confessed to her that she was unhappy--however, without disclosing her identity; when this lady arrived at the store about a month ago, she had been unable to pay for some jewelry and she (Abigail) had therefore stood surety for her purchase; when, after several weeks, the lady finally returned to reimburse her, they had become fast friends, so much so that the lady offered her work at the Queen's court. At the end of her account Abigail shows Bolingbroke the lady's card. Bolingbroke, recognizing the handwriting, tells the astonished girl that her benefactress is none other than Queen Anne herself.

But Bolingbroke warns Abigail not to rejoice: the Duchess of Marlborough wields tremendous power over the Queen, who cannot make a decision in the palace without the Duchess' approval; the latter is the <u>de facto</u> mistress at court because she has influence in the Whig party, which at present controls Parliament, endorses the campaigns of Marlborough, and plans to continue the war against France; she has promised to prevail upon the Whigs to pass a bill

permitting the Queen's banished brother, James Edward Stuart, to return to England; it is the Queen's greatest desire that his return be legalized, since she intends to groom James Edward as the eventual successor to her throne. Bolingbroke then explains to Abigail that if the Duchess disapproves she will not obtain her post at court. However, Abigail reveals that she is distantly related to the Duchess. Bolingbroke is delighted by this news, and promises the shopgirl the fulfillment of her wish to serve the Queen; he will arrange her employment at court, since he needs a private messenger who will deliver his letters to the Queen without their being intercepted by the Duchess.

In Scene IV, Bolingbroke speaks to Abigail of his philosophy of history. The course of history, he claims, is decided not by great, but by small causes: the present war with France was brought about by Louis XIV's criticism of the design of a window in the Trianon palace; he rose to power as a Tory statesman because he knew how to dance the sarabande; moreover, he fell from power as a result of contracting a head-cold. Abigail scarcely knows what to reply to his speeches:

> Abigail. Non vraiment.
> . . . . . .
> Abigail. Est-il possible?[12]

In Scene V, Bolingbroke launches his first intrigue against the Duchess, who arrives on the scene: he threatens

---

12. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 20.

to publicize the fact that she is related to a shopgirl, unless she permits the latter to enter the royal service. The Duchess retorts that if Bolingbroke decides to carry out his scheme, she will have him sent to debtor's prison: she now controls his actions, since she has bought up all his debts. Momentarily foiled, Bolingbroke departs to a session of Parliament.

Masham returns, in Scene VII. He informs Abigail that, while walking through St. James' Park, he encountered the mysterious stranger who had twice prevented his petitioning the Queen; a duel ensued. Masham believes that he wounded but did not kill his adversary; however, of this he is not certain, since he fled from the scene of the duel, in order to avoid possible witnesses.[13] In Act II, Scene V, it comes to light that Bolingbroke has just become an heir, thanks to the violent death of his cousin, Richard Bolingbroke. In Act II, Scene VI (not yet knowing the identity of his cousin's assailant), Bolingbroke accuses the Duchess and the Whig party of having instigated the murder:

> Bolingbroke. ...j'accuse les ministres...j'accuse leurs partisans...leurs amis...je ne nomme personne, mais j'accuse tout le monde...d'avoir voulu se défaire par trahison, d'un adversaire aussi rédoutable que lord Richard Bolingbroke...[14]

In Scene VII, Abigail tells Bolingbroke that she realizes that it is Masham who is responsible for Richard Bolingbroke's

---

13. At the time, the legal punishment for dueling was severe.

14. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, pp. 40-41.

death. She is afraid that the statesman will take action against her suitor, but he relieves her distress:

> Bolingbroke, vivement. L'arrêter!... Allons donc! Celui à qui je dois tout, un rang, un titre et des millions! non...non...je ne suis pas assez ingrat, assez grand seigneur pour cela.[15]

Comforted, she begins to explain that Masham has fled from the city, but she is interrupted in her discourse by the ensign's return.

In Scene VIII, Masham relates that he has not left London; he has just been promoted to the post of officer in the Queen's guards--thanks again to the efforts of his benefactor. Bolingbroke takes the opportunity of informing Masham of the outcome of his duel, and advises him to be careful in concealing his guilt in the affair. Masham agrees, departs on an errand, and deposits with Bolingbroke a gift which he has received from his unknown "good genius." In Scene IX, Bolingbroke opens the box containing the gift, and discovers it to be an officer's diamond tag. Abigail recognizes the diamonds as those which she sold in Master Tomwood's store to none other than the Duchess; she is terrified to think that the Duchess is in love with Masham. In Scene X, Bolingbroke confronts the Duchess, and threatens to reveal her secret love for the officer, unless she finally agrees to admit Abigail to the royal service. The Duchess has no choice but, grudgingly, to comply with his wish.

---

15. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 44.

At the beginning of Act III, Scene I, the Duchess begins to offset Bolingbroke's success. She tells Queen Anne that De Torcy must leave England; she claims that if the Queen does not make it quite clear that peace negotiations between England and France will definitely not be undertaken, the Whigs will lose their majority in Parliament. In Act III, Scene VI, Bolingbroke succeeds, surprisingly, in breaking the Duchess' "cordon" at court without difficulty, and gains an audience with Queen Anne. He reminds her that if De Torcy is forced to leave England the costly war with France, which, he claims, is ruining England's trade, will be endless. He reveals to her that the Duchess has a personal motive for wishing to continue the war: with the Duke of Marlborough at the fighting front, she is able to devote her entire attention to her protégé, Masham, with whom she is in love. The Queen is greatly disturbed and angered by this news, and assures Bolingbroke that she will refuse to sign De Torcy's papers of dismissal.

In Act IV, Scene II, Masham makes the acquaintance of the Duchess for the first time; he still has not been informed that she is his benefactress; however, he has been told, by Abigail, that she is not to be trusted. He begs her to request her husband, the Duke of Marlborough, to summon him to the front, so that he may prove his mettle as a soldier. She grants his request, but asks him, in return, to track down the murderer of Richard Bolingbroke, and, thereby,

to supply her with evidence that Bolingbroke's charge of treason against the Whig party is unjustified. This prompts Masham to disclose that it was he who killed Richard Bolingbroke. Knowing duelling to be a criminal offence, the Duchess urges Masham to flee to the army in France. However, before taking leave of him, she asks him to meet her later in the evening, after the Queen's cercle;[16] she wishes to give him several important dispatches for her husband, the Duke (this is, of course, a mere pretext for seeing her protégé once more).

In Act IV, Scene VI, Abigail informs Bolingbroke that his schemes have gone awry: the Queen has signed De Torcy's papers and Louis XIV's peace envoy will be onliged to return to France. Thus we see that in spite of knowing of the Duchess' affection for Masham, the Queen has once more succumbed to the former's influence; she has not given up the hope that the Whigs will pass a bill legalizing her brother's return to England, and she still depends on the Duchess to use her influence in bringing about this legislation. Abigail then complains that her romance with Masham is being jeopardized not by one, but two rivals; she has learned, from Masham, that the Duchess wishes to meet him after the cercle, and that the Queen

---

16. The cercle is an audience which the Queen holds for members of the court and parliament.

seeks a rendez-vous with him at the same time, and for similar reasons; however, the Queen does not yet know definitely if she will be free to keep her engagement; she plans to indicate her decision at the cercle, which he will attend; if she complains of being warm and asks him for a glass of water, he will know that she desires to see him later in the evening. At the conclusion of the scene, Bolingbroke assures Abigail that she need not be discouraged by these matters, that all will yet be well;

> Bolingbroke. Le marquis de Torcy aura ce soir son invitation, il parlera à la reine!
> . . . . . .
> Nous somme sauvés! Masham, aussi...et sans le compromettre, sans vous perdre, j'empêcherai ces deux rendez-vous.[17]

In Scene VII, the statesman, true to his word, directs another intrigue against the Duchess; knowing of her affection for Masham, he tells her that she has a rival. The Duchess is highly indignant and jealous. Eager to know her rival's identity she agrees to Bolingbroke's terms: she will invite de Torcy to the Queen's cercle. Bolingbroke then informs her that she will be able to recognize her rival at the cercle, where the person will ask Masham for a glass of water.

The important cercle takes place in Scene VIII. When the Queen asks none other than Masham for a glass of water, the Duchess is aghast. She stammers that it is a point of etiquette that one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting should perform such a task. The Queen replies:

---

17. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 86.

Tant de bruit pour cela!... ...Eh bien! duchesse, donnez-le-moi vous-même...[18]

"La duchesse, d'une main tremblante de colère, lui présente le verre d'eau qui glisse sur le plateau et tombe sur la robe de la reine."[19] The Queen upbraids the Duchess for her clumsiness, and open quarrel finally develops between the two women. The dénouement follows. The Duchess, startled and irritated by the Queen's tone, offers her resignation from the royal service, and the Queen accepts it. However, before taking her leave the Duchess denounces Masham as the slayer of Richard Bolingbroke. But the young officer is not in danger, since it is Bolingbroke who takes charge of him as his "prisoner."

In Act V, the Queen begins to doubt that the Duchess is her rival; she does not think that the latter would have denounced Masham, had she really been in love with him. A reunion between the two ladies seems imminent. Bolingbroke then assures the Queen that the Duchess had, originally, planned a rendez-vous with her protégé after the cercle. This prompts the Queen to reject the proposed reunion. At the end of the play she sanctions the marriage of Abigail and Masham, and, having finally broken the influence of the Duchess at court, announces that Bolingbroke will be one of the ministers of

---

18. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 94.

19. Ibid., p. 95.

her new Tory government, that peace negotiations will begin with France, and that the Duke of Marlborough will be recalled from his post.

> Tout cela [Bolingbroke exclaims] grâce à un verre d'eau.[20]

Analysis of the Play

The structural faults, as well as the merits of the "well-made play" will be taken into consideration in the analysis of Le Verre D'Eau. We shall examine the following: the manner in which Scribe employed his "surf-board of suspense" technique to create a continuously stimulating plot; his use of plot coincidences, and the reasons why these are introduced into the drama; the nature of his character-portrayal, and the reasons why his stage figures are frequently unmotivated in their behaviour; and the dramatic philosophy of the play.

We have observed that the "surf-board of suspense" technique is the most significant feature of a "well-made play." Le Verre D'Eau is no exception. It will, perhaps, not be redundant to give Downs' definition of this technique once more; it is the

> necessity of maintaining at every moment of a play the...excitement of expectation, suspense, and apprehension--the tension which, if it is to remain truly operative, must...be constantly varied [rise to a climax], and proceed from a clear apprehension of all the material facts [of a dramatic plot].[21]

---

20. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 117.

21. Downs, Ibsen, p. 55.

A definite sense of expectation is aroused in the "exposition" of the drama. We are introduced to the urbane Bolingbroke, to the intrepid Masham, and to Abigail; from the conversations among these persons we learn a great deal concerning the power of the Duchess, and of Queen Anne; we thus come to know the concerns of each of the five main members of the cast. Masham's problems, for instance, provoke a great deal of interest: on the one hand, his fortunes have been enhanced by an unknown benefactor; on the other, he finds that this is a mixed blessing: the benefactor may be a woman intent on replacing Abigail in his affections. Moreover, he has been troubled by the machinations of a mysterious antagonist, who may conceivably trouble him again. Abigail too is confronted by a dilemma which arouses interest: she has been promised a position at the court, but cannot obtain it without the consent of the powerful Duchess. We wonder how she will solve her problem. Bolingbroke's concerns are the most significant, and suggest the scope of the major conflict which follows in the "complication": he is champion of the Tory peace party but is unable to plead for his cause with the Queen because the Duchess, his rival, is in command at the palace.

Several other signposts pointing to later action in the play are brought up in the expository interlocutions: we hear of Bolingbroke's financial embarrassment, and of his grounds for offering to help Abigail to enter the Queen's

service; we discover that the Queen is swayed by the influence of the Duchess for political reasons; we are led to expect, as a result of Bolingbroke's theorizing on historical cause and effect, that small causes will influence the plot development. Thus, in the "exposition" a definite amount of excitement arises as we await the conflicts and incidents of the play clearly indicated in the preliminary conversations of Masham, Abigail, and Bolingbroke.

The "complication" reveals the mechanism of Scribe's "surf-board of suspense" technique even further. This portion of the play deals primarily with the strife between Bolingbroke and the Duchess, whose intrigues and counter-intrigues almost constantly arouse varying degrees of tension.[22]

---

22. The sub-plots of the drama--for example, Masham's encounter with his mysterious adversary, Richard Bolingbroke, and the Queen's personal struggle with the Duchess--are, of course, not dramatically irrelevant; these matters contribute much to the play's effectiveness. It is, however, the main plot, the conflict of intrigue between the Duchess and Bolingbroke, which imparts to the play its unity and coherence, and from which tension arises most consistently. This is because the main conflict is continuous; it proceeds with varying levels of intensity from the "exposition" to the final scenes of the dénouement, and is most important in effecting the drama's climacteric. (This climacteric must not be interpreted only in terms of a scene of contention between the Duchess and the Queen as, superficially, it seems to be. It is also an incident in the dispute between Bolingbroke and his antagonist: during the course of the cercle the Queen and the Duchess become, in a sense, Bolingbroke's pawns; it is Bolingbroke, after all, who precipitates the climactic "glass of water" incident by previously revealing to the Duchess the significance of the Queen's sign to Masham. Not only did he "sell" this knowledge in return for the Duchess' consent to invite De Torcy to the cercle, but he divulged it because he knew that it would cause his opponent to bring the rivalry-in-love between herself and the Queen into the open, and thereby would occasion a situation which would further his scheme to unseat the Duchess from her place of power in the court. We see, therefore, that the major plot is interwoven with the action of one of the minor ones; further evidence of similar construction will appear in other portions of the chapter, and in the chapters on Ibsen and Shaw.)

Suspense begins to mount as Bolingbroke attempts to blackmail the Duchess into admitting Abigail to the Queen's service; it then subsides when the Duchess cuts the statesman short, by threatening to send him to debtor's prison. When Bolingbroke becomes an heir as a result of his counsin's death he resumes his scheming, since he is no longer in danger of being sent to prison. He discovers that it is the Duchess who is Masham's benefactress; tension rises once again as he uses his information against his rival, and then informs the Queen of the Duchess' attachment to Masham; tension then dwindles, since victory for Bolingbroke seems almost a fait accompli when the Queen decides not to dismiss De Torcy, thereby strengthening the statesman's hope that peace with France will be negotiated.

However, the Queen vacillates and finally does comply with the Duchess' command to sign the papers dispatching De Torcy from England. Excitement increases once more as, for a time, the struggle breaks out anew: Bolingbroke, having heard from Abigail of the Queen's prospective sign to Masham at the cercle, reveals the significance of the sign to the Duchess, and thus paves the way for the climactic moments of the "glass of water" scene. When the Queen quarrels with the Duchess and accepts her resignation the plot seems all but resolved.

None the less, a certain amount of suspense arises in the dénouement, when, for a brief period of time, it seems

that the struggle between Bolingbroke and the Duchess will recommence: the Queen prepares to forgive the Duchess for the "glass of water" incident because she doubts that the latter is truly in love with Masham. However, Bolingbroke dispels her disbelief, thus preventing a reunion between the two ladies. When the Queen announces that he is to be one of the ministers of the Tory government which she has caused to be formed, the main conflict of the play is once and for all resolved.

We thus see that the "surf-board of suspense" technique is, as far as theatricality is concerned, extremely effective: although Bolingbroke and the Duchess are not always engaged in open conflict, the incidents of the play unfold in such a way that one of two figures always has cause at least to prepare intrigue; moreover, the minor plots are in themselves stimulating, as we have already observed. Nevertheless, Le Verre D'Eau contains a number of serious atructural imperfections. When examining the play closely one cannot but conclude that Scribe had little or no intention of creating plausible dramatic action, and that at bottom his efforts were directed toward the single-minded purpose of developing the "surf-board of suspense" technique; he thereby sacrificed dramatic logic and verisimilitude. For example, the sustained conflict between Bolingbroke and the Duchess results in some of the most exciting moments of the play;

---

23. See footnote 22, supra, p. 18.

yet their strife is called to life by the most mechanical of means: it arises out of a number of unconvincing plot coincidences. Bolingbroke could not have carried out his first threat of blackmail against the Duchess had it not been for the fact that Abigail was that lady's distant relation; he could not have made a second similar threat had the Duchess not purchased Masham's diamonds at Master Tomwood's jewelry store; furthermore, he could not have carried out his second plot if it had not been for still another coincidence--the fact that Masham's mysterious adversary was none other than the heir of the Bolingbroke family fortune, Richard Bolingbroke, whose death was instrumental in freeing Bolingbroke from financial embarrassment.

Coincidences do occur in real life, but surely they do not occur with such amazing regularity? Surely it seems incredible to believe that Bolingbroke owes the success of his intrigues to mere chance? Scribe's use of coincidence is a serious flaw of his writing; as Arthur B. Walkley states, "It is the primary business of a play to persuade you that what you are witnessing has happened, or might happen. And this business is only executed to perfection when the resultant impression is one of inevitability, the feeling that the thing could not have happened otherwise. But let the dramatist for one moment excite the suspicion

that this or that incident is there merely because his plot ...requires it to be there, and the game is up."[24]

[Plot]coincidences are not the only "romantic"[25] conventions of a play such as Le Verre D'Eau; character too is represented in an inconsistent, illogical manner, in order to heighten the excitement. Almost a third of the scenes open with the surprise-entrance of a stage figure, notably Scenes III and VII in Act I; Scenes II, III, and VIII in Act II; Scenes II and VII in Act III; and Scene VII in Act IV. Generally these surprise-entrances occur in the following manner: at the end of a scene, or throughout, two characters discuss a third one, or subject-matter related to that third one; they are then interrupted by the unexpected entrance of this very person. One of the most conspicuous examples of this improbable technique occurs at the beginning of Scene III, Act II. Scene II, Act II, concludes as the Duchess cautions the Queen not to take Abigail into her service:

> La Duchesse. Ainsi c'est convenu...vous ne reverrez plus cette petite Abigail?...
> La Reine. Certainement.[26]

Scene III then opens. Abigail is announced:

---

24. Arthur B. Walkley, Drama and Life (London, 1907), p. 49.

25. The epithet "romantic," signifying illogicality, artifice, and "hocus-pocus" in dramatic construction, was apparently used by Shaw. See Eric R. Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker (New York, 1946), p. 143.

26. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 36.

> Thompson. Miss Abigail Churchill!
> La Duchesse, à part, et s'éloignant. O ciel!
> La Reine, avec embarras. Au moment même où nous en parlions...c'est singulier hasard.[27]

The Queen herself admits that Abigail's timing is unusual! Another similar type of entrance occurs at the end of Scene VII, in the same act, Abigail tells Bolingbroke that Masham has fled from London, but no sooner has she spoken than Masham appears:

> Abigail. ...Et comme depuis hier qu'il nous a quittés, il doit être loin maintenant... (Poussant un cri en apercevant Masham.) Ah! [28]

Here is still another example, found at the end of Scene I, Act II. The Queen soliloquizes:

> L'on verra si quelqu'un ici a le droit d'avoir une autre volonté que la mienne, et d'abord la duchesse, dont l'amitié et les conseils continuels...commencent depuis longtemps à me fatiguer... Ah! c'est elle! ... [29]

Scene II opens as the Duchess enters quite unexpectedly. Thus we see that Masham, Abigail, and the Duchess, in particular, seem endowed with the uncanny faculty of appearing on stage at the moment when they are being talked about. However, their surprise-entrances have no logical justification: they are obviously contrived merely to create a theatrical effect.

These are not the only examples of unmotivated behaviour among Scribe's figures; we cannot accept the

---

27. Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, p. 36.

28. Ibid. p. 44.

29. Ibid. p. 30.

author's personages as literary representations of real people for still other reasons. Brander Matthews writes, in this regard, that Scribe made little effort to create character-portraits:

> I do not pretend to have read all of Scribe's four hundred and more dramatic pieces...but I have read or seen acted all those which the consensus of criticism has indicated as the most typical and the best; and in all these plays I can recall only one single character thoroughly thought out and wrought out...and moving of its own will. [30]

The "single character" to whom Matthews refers does not seem to be a member of the cast of Le Verre D'Eau; none of Scribe's characterizations in the play are "thoroughly thought out and wrought out." For example, on the whole, the author depicts Bolingbroke as a fairly clever intriguer (even though the statesman's schemes are furthered, as we have seen, by a number of fortuitous events).[31] He is certainly most proficient in the art of blackmail and betrayal: in Act II he blackmails the Duchess with a threat of publicizing her attachment to Masham, thereby forcing her to permit Abigail to enter the royal household; he then promptly informs the Queen of the Duchess' secret for still further advantages. Nevertheless, at the same time, his actions are in many respects strangely unintelligent. His intrigues during Acts I and II are directed toward obtaining

---

30. Brander Matthews, French Dramatists of the 19th Century (New York, 1919), p. 82.

31. Supra, p. 21.

a position in the palace for Abigail, so that he will have a secret messenger by means of whom to communicate with the Queen. (He does, of course, also help Abigail for the sake of friendship, but he makes it quite clear to her that his prime concern is to establish contact with the Queen as soon as possible.) Yet, once Abigail is engaged at court, he uses her very little as a messenger. In Act III, despite the Duchess' "cordon," and despite Abigail's readiness to act as his internuncio, he succeeds in gaining an audience with the Queen with little effort. Scribe does not explain why Bolingbroke was so urgent in his plan to establish Abigail in the royal service; the statesman must have recognized all along that he would have little difficulty in seeing the Queen. Like the surprise-entrances described above, Bolingbroke's actions during Act II, and in some other instances,[32] are logically incomprehensible; dramatically they have value only insofar as they arouse suspense.

Other similar "romantic" flaws in Scribe's dramaturgy can be found in the characterizations of Queen Anne, Masham, and Abigail. Does it seem likely that Queen Anne would go shopping at Master Tomwood's jewelry store unattended? If so does it seem likely that she could do so without being recognized? Does it seem probable that she would confess her unhappiness to a shopgirl she scarcely knows? Would a queen allow a shopgirl to stand surety for a purchase? We have no reason

---

32. Infra, pp. 28-29.

to suppose that Abigail's tale about Queen Anne is anything but authentic. One might perhaps accept one of its details; but, the series of improbable facts taxes the reasonable imagination. In the case of the Queen, as with Bolingbroke, Scribe sacrifices consistency of character-drawing to his supreme purpose of writing a theatrically successful play. Had the Queen not gone jewelry shopping in the strange Haroun Alraschid manner that Abigail describes, she would not have had occasion to offer the shopgirl employment, and Abigail would have had little reason to come to court. Without Abigail's assistance, Bolingbroke would not have been able to carry out his intrigues: Abigail made the first of these possible with her information about her family relationship to the Duchess; the second, with her identification of the donor of Masham's diamonds; the third with her news concerning the rivalry-in-love of the Duchess and the Queen.

From the foregoing, we also see that Abigail is merely a pawn of the plot: virtually her only significant function in the play is to provide Bolingbroke with information concerning the Duchess. As far as Masham is concerned, we see that there is no logical reason that he should confess to the Duchess that it was he who killed Richard Bolingbroke. (He was not acquainted with the lady, prior to their encounter in Act IV, and he had been warned not to trust her. However, he trusts her none the less, in spite of knowing that he is thereby putting himself at her mercy.) A consideration of dramaturgy underlies Masham's gullibility: as a

result of his confession the Duchess gains an opportunity of creating a suspenseful few moments at the end of Act IV, when she melodramatically denounces the young officer as the assailant of Richard Bolingbroke.

From the foregoing analysis we see that fully effective use of the "surf-board of suspense" technique seems, with Scribe at least, to necessitate such "romanticizing" of characterization. Although the drama commands interest by virtue of the tension it engenders we do not believe in its people, since they are frequently unmotivated in their actions; nor do we believe in the reality of the plot incidents, since, as we have seen, much of the action is constructed by means of coincidences. Bernard Shaw observes that a great play like Othello, which also contains fictitious plot construction and characterization,

> has been kept alive, not by its manufactured misunderstandings and stolen handkerchiefs and the like, nor even by its orchestral verse, but by its exhibition and discussion of human nature...33

Since we do not find exhibition and discussion of human nature" in Le Verre D'Eau to compensate for the work's weaknesses in plotting and character portrayal, we are justified in classifying it not as a literary play but merely as a competent theatre

---

33. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, in The Works of Bernard Shaw, in 31 vols. (New York, Ayot St. Law. ed., 1930), XIX, 1-161, p. 151. Hereafter referred to as Works.

piece. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that the drama is quite meaningless, philosophically.

Le Verre D'Eau confirms the opinion of one of Scribe's imitators, the playwright Alexandre Dumas, fils, that Scribe was a dramatist without philosophic convictions.[34] Scribe makes little or no effort to establish a genuine theme in the work. In a few speeches directed at Abigail, in Act I, Scene IV, Bolingbroke states what could be Scribe's thesis: he tells the shopgirl that small causes frequently have great historical results; he is, thus, speaking for the author, since he expounds the idea suggested by the subtitle of the drama, Les Effets Et Les Causes. (This idea is in itself most spurious.) However, Bolingbroke does not elaborate his theory to any great extent in Scene IV, and except for some other passing remarks (such as his observation that his victory over the Duchess, the rise to power of the Tories, and the Queen's declaration concerning peace negotiations with France all occurred "thanks to a glass of water") he scarcely refers to it again. Throughout the play he is much more concerned with intrigue than with justifying his ideas. His theorizing amounts to nothing more than a momentary topic of conversation, apparently designed by the author to entertain an audience; we realize that this is the case, not only because Bolingbroke devotes

---

34. See Nicoll, World Drama, pp. 488-489.

very little time to asserting what amount to mere *obiter dicta* on history, but because these are far from convincing as such:- First, Bolingbroke's desire to theorize is not motivated: his brief lecture on historical cause and effect is delivered to Abigail, who is dumbfounded by what he tells her; the question thus arises if it seems likely that a famous statesman would need to prove his intelligence to a shopgirl, by impressing her quite purposefully, with his ideas. Since the answer is surely in the negative, we may conclude that Bolingbroke would scarcely have chosen to address the young woman in this fashion had he been master of his own will at the time; we therefore have sufficient cause not tc take his statements seriously, since during the scene we cannot take him seriously as a real person. It seems as if Scribe gives Bolingbroke opportunity to philosophize not in order to persuade an audience that small causes really do have large-scale political repercussions, but simply to arouse interest in what some may consider a novel concept of history.

Secondly, Scribe's inability--or unwillingness--to develop his dramas as ideal vehicles is shown by the fact that even if we were to consider Bolingbroke's philosophizing thematic the actual events of the play do not bear out the statesman's views. One of the work's most serious faults is the discrepancy that exists between the subject-matter of Bolingbroke's *obiter dicta* and what we may interpret as the meaning of the plot incidents. The cause which brings about the *dénouement* is

not a small cause at all, but an important one--the rivalry-in-love of the Queen and the Duchess. It is this rivalry, not the mere spilling of a glass of water, which is the key to the incidents of the final scenes of the play, in which a war is brought to an end, and a duchess falls from power.

The purpose of this chapter dealing with the dramaturgy of one of Eugène Scribe's most famous "well-made plays," Le Verre D'Eau, is three-fold. First, we described the mechanism of the "surf-board of suspense" technique for which Scribe's plays were justly famous--and influential--throughout the nineteenth century. Secondly, we discussed the flaws of the drama--the fictitious plot construction and the puppet-like and inconsistent behaviour of the stage figures. Thirdly, we came to the conclusion that Scribe was not a dramatist with a philosophical message; we based this judgment on the basis of an analysis of one of his most successful plays, which is, philosophically, quite meaningless. We come now to a study of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, the work which is generally considered to have "ended the reign" of the "well-made play" in nineteenth-century European and English dramatic literature.

CHAPTER II

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IBSEN'S A DOLL'S HOUSE

Although Ibsen was a revolutionary playwright, he owed, as previously stated, a considerable debt to the technique of Eugène Scribe; it will therefore be one of the purposes of this chapter to show how A Doll's House resembles a "well-made play." The chapter will also include an analysis of the structural innovations found in the final scene of the drama, in which a lengthy discussion takes place between two of its key figures; we shall see that in this scene character-drawing, plot, and dramatic ideology are conceived in terms of a new dramaturgy.

Plot Summary[1]

The action of the play takes place in the living room of Torvald Helmer's home, located, presumably, in a small Norwegian town. The drama opens with a brief expository interlocution between Nora and Torvald Helmer, its two chief figures.[2] Although Nora is the mother of three children, Torvald is overheard addressing her like a little girl: he calls her "my little skylark" and "my little squirrel" and also, condescendingly. reprimands her for thriftlessness

---

1. The text in which the précis of the plot is based is Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House: and Two Other Plays (London, Everyman's ed., 1911), 5-86. The translation is by R. Farquharson Sharp.

2. The exposition is found in ibid., pp. 5-21.

in her Christmas shopping. Nora does not seem to realize that her husband's attitude is condescending; she is obviously very much in love with him. Here is a sample of their conversation:

> Helmer. (calls out from his room) Is that my little lark twittering out there:
> Nora....Yes, it is!
> Helmer. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?
> Nora. Yes!
> Helmer. When did my little squirrel come home?
> Nora. Just now.[3]

The Helmers are interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Mrs. Linde, one of Nora's old schoolfriends. Nora is highly surprised to see Mrs. Linde and scarcely recognizes her friend after almost ten years of separation. The two women have much to tell each other and sit down to a lengthy conversation.

The married life of the Helmers is the main topic. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Torvald has just been promoted to the post of bank manager, with an increase in salary. She goes on to narrate that seven years ago, a year after her marriage, she had been forced to borrow money when Torvald succumbed to a nearly fatal illness caused by overwork. (This step had been necessary because Torvald had been advised to restore his health in Italy.) She discloses that she has not yet told him of her action on his behalf, because she knows that "with his manly independence" he would find it "painful and humiliating" to discover that his wife had borrowed money for his sake--and without his knowledge.

---

3. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 6.

She admits to her friend that she has been paying off her debt with her meagre clothes allowance.

At the very moment when Nora exults over her family's change of fortune, now that Torvald has been promoted, a Mr. Krogstad, a clerk at Torvald's bank, arrives at the Helmer home. Nora recognizes him as the man from whom she borrowed the money for Torvald's recuperation; she speaks to him in a hushed tone of voice, and reminds him that her monthly payment is not yet due; Mrs. Linde trembles at the sight of him. Krogstad says that he has not come for his instalment, but merely to pay a business call on his employer. He enters Torvald's study. Mrs. Linde thereupon tells Nora that she knew Krogstad many years ago, when he was a solicitor's clerk in the town.

The complication of the drama[4] begins when Krogstad, after a brief interview with Torvald, confronts Nora with the accusation that she forged her father's signature on the bond she gave him seven years ago. Nora does not deny this, but feels that in view of her husband's desperate situation at the time, her breach of the law should be forgiven. Krogstad, however, is not moved by her argument. He tells her that he himself has been guilty of a business indescretion--likewise the

---

4. The complication is found in Ibsen, A Doll's House, pp. 26-77.

forging of a name--and consequently fears that Torvald, who knows of his professional record, will dismiss him from his post in the bank. Krogstad proceeds to blackmail the young mother: he threatens to use his knowledge of her secret crime against her, unless she agrees to use her influence with Torvald to keep him at the bank.

In Act II, Torvald decides to dismiss Krogstad, despite Nora's protests. The latter does not tell her husband of Krogstad's ultimatum, but she warns him that his clerk "writes in the most scurrilous newspapers," and can do him "an unspeakable amount of harm." Nevertheless, Torvald is adamant. Due not to Krogstad's professional record, but to personal reasons, he determines to turn his employee out of the bank. He complains:

> ...I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in after life. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the bank intolerable.5

Nora declares that Torvald's attitude is narrow-minded; the latter grows quite irritated, and immediately dispatches a letter of dismissal to Krogstad.

---

5. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 44.

Later in the act, having received Torvald's letter, Krogstad returns to see Nora. Since he is in possession of her bond with the forged signature, the intriguer has, as he himself puts it, the "keeping" of her reputation and consequently the "keeping" of her husband's reputation as well. He announces that he intends to divulge her secret crime to Torvald. He is certain, he says, that knowledge of his wife's guilt will force Torvald to re-engage him at the bank; moreover, he predicts that within a year "it will be Nils Krogstad, and not Torvald Helmer who manages the Bank." The scene concludes as Krogstad departs; but, as he leaves the room, he drops an incriminatory letter into Torvald's letter-box. (We learn, in Act III, that in order to foil Krogstad's plot Nora made an effort to remove the letter [between Acts II and III], and that she attempted , without success, to force the lock of the box with a hairpin.)

Nora finally confesses her great dilemma to Mrs. Linde. Her friend now reveals that there was a time when Krogstad "would gladly do anything" for her, and consoles Nora with the hope that she may be able to prevail upon the intriguer to recall his letter. But she does not carry out her promise; in Act III she proposes marriage to Krogstad, who it appears is her former lover and whom she rejected many years ago. Krogstad is greatly moved by her offer. He declares:

> Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world.
> . . . . . .

> I have never had such an amazing piece of good fortune in my life![6]

Because of his "good fortune" he is now willing to ask for the return of his letter to Torvald; however, Mrs. Linde dissuades him from his plan because she feels that the secret between the Helmers

> must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on.[7]

Nevertheless, in his happiness, Krogstad dispatches Nora's bond to Torvald.

The reformed intriguer's second letter does not arrive at the Helmer home in time to stave off a crisis. Torvald reads the first letter, and confrcnts Nora in high indignation, calling her a hypocrite, a liar, a wife who has ruined her husband's professional career through an unwarranted action:

> Now you have destroyed all my happiness [he exclaims]. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases--I dare not refuse. And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman.[8]

Only after this climactic scene does the second letter arrive and the dénouement of the play begin.[9] Torvald discovers the bond, reads Krogstad's note that he "regrets and repents" and,

---

6. See Ibsen, A Doll's House, pp. 65-66.

7. Ibid., p. 66.

8. Ibid., p. 76.

9. The dénouement is found in ibid., pp. 77-86.

perceiving that he has nothing more to fear from the intriguer, forgives Nora for her "crime." He now says that he realizes that she borrowed money out of love for him.

However, Nora is not content to be forgiven. She has decided to leave her home and her children, Krogstad's return of the bond notwithstanding. She asks Torvald to sit down to a "settling of accounts" and gives him her reasons for her departure. One of these is her determination to discover for herself why the law, the letter of which Krogstad used to scheme against her, does not permit a woman to save her husband's life regardless of the means:

> Nora. ...I must try and educate myself...
> . . . . . .
> I am learning...that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right...to save her husband's life. I can't believe that. . . .I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.[10]

Even more important is Nora's realization that she is no longer in love with her husband; she is hurt and disillusioned by his actions. She tells him:

> When Krogstad's letter was lying out there [in the letter box], never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the whole thing to the world.
> . . . . . .
> I was...absolutely certain that you would come forward and take everything upon yourself and

---

10. Ibsen, A Doll's House, pp.81 and 83.

> say: I am the guilty one.
> . . . . . .
> ...hundreds of thousands of women have [sacrificed their honour for the one they love]. ...[11]

Possibly more important still, she realizes that up to the time when Torvald turned on her with his angry accusations she was not aware of her true status as a married woman. She did not see through his condescension and pedantry:

> Nora. ...As soon as your fear was over--and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you--when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in the future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so little and fragile. ...It was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living with a strange man...[12]

Although Nora dominates the discussion, Torvald also defends himself. He considers most of Nora's reasons for leaving him childish. He justifies his own conduct:

> I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora--bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.[13]

The tense argument between husband and wife takes up a considerable period of time. At its conclusion, Nora bids Torvald goodbye, and the play ends as "the sound of a door shutting is heard..."

---

11. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 84.

12. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

13. Ibid., p. 84.

Analysis of the Play

As in a "well-made play", the first-act exposition of A Doll's House clearly presents to an audience the significant facts which form a background to later events; at the same time it arouses expectation. We are introduced to Nora, Torvald, Mrs. Linde, and briefly, to Krogstad; we learn that Mrs. Linde used to know Krogstad a number of years ago; we overheard Torvald calling his wife pet names and criticizing her behaviour; and we are given information concerning Torvald's promotion, the circumstances attending Nora's borrowing of money, and Torvald's certain resentment if he knew what his wife had done on his behalf. We thus immediately realize that the Helmers do not fully trust each other: Torvald apeaks to his wife as if she were an irresponsible little girl, and Nora keeps a secret from her husband because she is afraid of being severely reprimanded for borrowing money without his knowledge. We tell ourselves that these two people will sooner or later engage in domestic strife.

Let us now examine the construction of the rest of the plot. The crisis in Nora Helmer's life begins in the complication, and tension arises accordingly: Krogstad blackmails Nora. Recognizing Krogstad's power, Nora speaks on his behalf to Torvald. Momentarily the tension subsides. However, Thorvald cannot be swayed from his intention of turning the clerk out of the bank. A brief quarrel ensues

between the Helmers when Nora suggests that Torvald's attitude towards Krogstad is narrow-minded. Then, disregarding his wife's concern and angered by her observation, Torvald sends Krogstad his letter of dismissal, so that suspense mounts once more. The intriguer returns to give his final ultimatum and drops his incriminatory letter into the box, thus jeopardizing not only Nora's position as a dutiful wife, but Torvald's professional career. When Mrs. Linde tells Nora that she may be able to convince Krogstad to recall his letter, the suspense diminishes once again.

However, in Act III, Torvald reads the fatal letter; the play rises to its climax: Torvald violently denounces his wife for having destroyed his happiness and his career. Then Krogstad's second letter arrives,prompting Torvald to forgive Nora and, belatedly, to thank her for what she has done for him. But the drama is not over. Excitement occurs once more: Nora announces that she is about to leave her home. A serious discussion ensues between husband and wife as a result of her decision, in which Nora states her grievances and Torvald defends his own point of view. It is to Ibsen's credit that suspense lingers on after the final curtain. What will become of Nora? What will Torvald do, having lost the mother of his children and the affection of a doting wife? These questions are

never answered.

From the foregoing we see that Ibsen, like Scribe, used the "surf-board of suspense" technique to good advantage. However, the drama also reflects the weaknesses of the "well-made play." Although Ibsen did not over-emphasize theatricality as much as Scribe, the behaviour of Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, and even of Nora, is in some instances implausible. Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, for example, both possess a degree of the uncanny--and unconvincing--intuition with which Abigail, Masham, and the Duchess were endowed in Le Verre D'Eau; they are not in every respect literary representations of real people.

After an absence of almost ten years, Mrs. Linde arrives at the Helmer home only a few minutes before the great crisis in Nora's life is precipitated by the arrival of Krogstad. Nora herself is surprised by the visit:

> Mrs. Linde (in a dejected and timid voice). How do you do, Nora?
> Nora (doubtfully). How do you do--
> Mrs. Linde. You don't recognize me, I suppose.
> Nora. No, I don't know--yes, to be sure, I seem to--(suddenly). Yes! Christine! Is it really you?
> Mrs. Linde. Yes, it is I.[14]

Not having seen her friend for a long period of time, Mrs. Linde proves a ready listener to Nora's gossip concerning herself and Torvald. In order to build up the exposition, Ibsen thus introduces a character without providing adequate motivation for her appearance. It is obviously imperative to the development of the drama that Nora should have an opportunity

---

14. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 11.

of revealing the course of her married life, and that she should do so before Krogstad's arrival. Yet Mrs. Linde might well have entered the play at some other time--or perhaps not at all. In that case, however, the expository conversation would not have taken place when it did, and Krogstad's conflict with Nora would not have been fully comprehensible. One would certainly not have known that Nora's fear of the intriguer is linked to her fear that Torvald will learn of her secret financial transaction.

Krogstad's unexpected arrival at the Helmer home, coming as it does at the end of the interlocution between Nora and Mrs. Linde, is contrived to create shock and surprise. Krogstad calls on the Helmers almost to the moment when Nora rejoices to Mrs. Linde over her family's change of fortune:

> Nora. ...My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip--perhaps I shall see the sea again! Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy. (A bell is heard in the hall).
> . . . . . .
> Who is it?
> Krogstad (at the door). It is I, Mrs. Helmer.
> (Mrs. Linde starts, trembles, and turns to the window).

> Nora (takes a step towards him, and speaks in a strained, low voice). You? What is it? What do you want to see my husband about?
> Krogstad. Bank business--in a way.[15]

As with Mrs. Linde, Ibsen gives no explanation as to why Krogstad is motivated to appear precisely when he does; the intriguer seems to divine the awe-inspiring moment in which to startle Nora out of her "dream". We sense that Krogstad has not directed himself to the Helmer home, but that on this occasion Ibsen plans his entrance like that of a mere puppet.

Nora also reveals a psychological inconsistency. After Krogstad's second departure, her attempt to pry open the lock of Torvald's letter box is unsuccessful; however, the box is partly constructed of glass;[16] since she was composed and clever enough to think of removing Krogstad's letter from it, in order to postpone the intriguer's threat to her family's well-being, we may well ask why she did not simply break the glass of the box to achieve her purpose. The excuses she might have had to make to Torvald for a shattered glass would surely have seemed slight to her compared to those she knew she would have to make once Torvald read Krogstad's letter. However, had Nora behaved as intelligently as one might assume, Krogstad would have had to take other action against the Helmers, and the plot might have had to take a different turn. For example, the exciting scene following Torvald's perusal of Krogstad's letter

15. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 20.
16. Ibid., p. 56.

might never have occurred as it did.

Thus, while Ibsen's predominant purpose in writing A Doll's House was by no means purely theatrical,[17] we do perceive some of his less praiseworthy borrowings from Scribe. Occasional weakness in characterization is only one of the dramaturgical flaws of the play; there are some others. It is surprising to find that Krogstad, Nora's moneylender, is an employee in the bank of Torvald, Nora's husband. Similarly, it is a conjuncture of events that Nora's friend, Mrs. Linde, should once have been in love with Nora's antagonist. As in Le Verre D'Eau, these coincidences, which further the development of the plot, blemish the play as a work of art to a certain extent.

Nevertheless, although it is not perfect, the drama reveals only a modicum of implausible construction; taken as a whole, A Doll's House is a literary work. This distinction it derives to a very large extent from the innovations in construction of its final scene. In the closing minutes of the play Nora discloses to Torvald her reasons for leaving him and her children, and a prolonged argument (which actually takes the form of a quiet debate) ensues between husband and wife. It is in this discussion scene that Ibsen developed a new naturalistic plot construction devoid of "romantic" technical

---

17. Infra, pp. 48-51

devices; naturalistic motivated characterization; and naturalism in establishing a true dramatic philosophy.

First, let us examine the plotting. We noted in Chapter 1 that the prime cause of tension in a "well-made play" is strife between the main stage figures--and that this strife is the result of many dramaturgical contrivances. Furthermore, the conflict of a drama such as Le Verre D'Eau is one of intrigue; one could scarcely consider it intellectual; Bolingbroke and the Duchess do match their intellects in scheming against each other, but in so doing their prime objective is a tangible material gain--not a moral victory. Bolingbroke's aims are pragmatic: it will be recalled that his main goals were to install himself as a minister in the Tory government once he had swayed the Queen to support him, and to end the war with France because he considered it too costly. Similarly, the chief plan of the Duchess was to retain her influence over the Queen, and to further the continuation of a war from which her husband was reaping financial rewards. It is obvious that neither the Duchess nor Bolingbroke struggle for an ideal which transcends their purpose to achieve material advantages.

In A Doll's House the conflict between Krogstad and Nora is also a conflict of intrigue, at least insofar as Krogstad has a definite material end in view--his post at the bank. On the other hand, the disagreement between Nora and

Torvald in the final scene is primarily moral: both characters fight for an ideal more than for a material cause; their discussion is a dispute over their respective Weltanschauungen. In spite of hoping that Nora will remain with him, Torvald insists on asserting his right of manly self-respect. Above and beyond wishing to remain with her husband and her children, Nora longs for freedom from her position as a "doll-wife," and an opportunity of understanding better the laws and social conditions of the world in which she lives. This scene is as tense and as suspenseful as any other in the play. In it Ibsen vindicated the revolutionary dramaturgical "discovery" that a contrived intrigue-conflict is not a sine qua non of dramatic art, and that, instead, naturalistic spontaneous discussion can be one of "the most...[theatrically effective] of all dramatic situations: two completely articulate characters engaged in a battle of words on which both their fates depend."[18] The articulateness of the Helmers is, of course, an important factor in the scene. Much of its excitement stems from the fact that Torvald and Nora--the latter in particular--express themselves in a manner which is highly convincing: although they speak in prose, it is with a certain amount of eloquence that they state their grievances. Even if Bolingbroke and the Duchess had fought for their moral convictions, their way of expressing these would not

---

18. See Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), p. 122.

have been arresting. Scribe's prose style, unlike that of Ibsen, is singularly pedestrian, and his characters consequently fail to command belief as reflective people. (This topic will be considered at greater length in Chapter IV.)

The discussion scene also demonstrates that character-drawing is far more convincing than in a "well-made play" when the playwright shuns the manipulation of stage figures and presents them instead in natural manner. Although Nora does, on one occasion, act unrealistically, her creator proves in the final scene that she does have the capacity to behave as any real woman might behave in a similar situation. This criterion of naturalism applies as well to Torvald, whose psychological makeup is most definitely established in the discussion. Far from preparing elaborate schemes against each other in the manner of Scribe's personages, husband and wife merely sit down to talk, as any two people in a similar emotional and moral dilemma might do:

> Nora. ...Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another. (*She sits down at one side of the table*).
> Helmer. Nora--what is this?--this cold, set face?
> Nora. Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.
> Helmer (*sits down at the opposite side of the table*). You alarm me, Nora!--and I don't understand you.
> Nora. No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either--before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.
> Helmer. What do you mean by that?
> Nora (*after a short silence*). Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

> Helmer. What is that?
> Nora. We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?[19]

Since the entire scene consists of spontaneous argument, confession, and soul-searching, no suspicion arises that these two people are fulfilling only the will of the dramatist; they speak for themselves, and they analyze their motives, so that we come to know them far better than in any other part of the play, and far more intimately than any of the figures in Le Verre D'Eau, who scarcely ever engaged in serious introspection.

We come now to an examination of Ibsen's naturalistic statement of the play's theme. Unlike Scribe, Ibsen was a dramatist of conviction. For instance, although he did not, like Bernard Shaw, write prefaces to his published plays, he did set down a type of prolegomenon to A Doll's House in one of his notebooks:

> There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman, but a man.... A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society....[20]

Ibsen chose the discussion scene in which to state his theme in dramatic form. We find the above ideas bodied forth in

---

19. Ibsen, A Doll's House, p. 79.

20. Cited in Brian W. Downs, Ibsen: The Intellectual Background, (Cambridge, Eng., 1946), p. 161.

the debate between Nora and Torvald, who, during their argument, speak for the author as well as for themselves. Nora tells Torvald that she is disillusioned: she has discovered how little he really loves her, in spite of the sacrifice she has made on his behalf--she has seen how little he appreciates the spiritual "law" which determined her action of borrowing money. Torvald states his own "law" by saying that no man would sacrifice his honour for his loved one. To this Nora retorts that thousands of women have done so; but Torvald finds most of her answers childish. Ths discussion shows that husband and wife do not understand each other, and that they do not share the same moral outlook.

Due to the structural nature of this scene between the Helmers, Ibsen, unlike Scribe, is able to state and elaborate the theme of the play in a manner fully plausible and convincing. For example, we saw in the previous chapter that Bolingbroke, in Le Verre D'Eau, voices what seems to be Scribe's philosophical comment on the play, but that the stateman's observations on historical cause and effect can not be interpreted as thematic because his desire to philosophize is not adequately motivated; we concluded that Bolingbroke's theorizing seems designed as entertaining conversation.[21] Now, we do not find such slipshod construction in A Doll's House. In the drama's

---

21. Supra, p. 28.

concluding scene at least, Ibsen's personages are entirely motivated;[22] the argument between them, unlike Bolingbroke's lecture to Abigail, is spontaneous and the natural outcome of incidents in the play. Since, therefore, we believe in the Helmers as real people, we also believe what they say, and what the author is saying through them.

Secondly, we noted in Chapter I that Scribe, via Bolingbroke, devotes little time to establishing what might conceivably be a philosophic theme; he is much more concerned with building up intrigue. (Bolingbroke's lecture to Abigail, in which the former expresses most of his theory, takes up scarcely two pages of the text.)[23] Ibsen, who devotes an entire scene to uninterrupted discussion, clarifies and elaborates his ideas at great length, so that these are consequently convincing for still another reason. After all, ideas debated throughout a complete scene make a far greater impression, intellectually, than those expressed in the form of mere obiter dicta. (In point of fact, only the most important points of the Helmers' discussion have been given in the previous summary; these Nora and Torvald repeat several times in the scene, and justify with related arguments.)

The meaning of the plot events confirms Ibsen's theme, so that, unlike Le Verre D'Eau, the play is, in this third respect as well, fully significant, philosophically.

---

22. Supra, pp. 47-48.

23. See Eugène Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau, (Boston, 1902), pp. 19-21.

it is evident that the drama is a story that tells how domestic tragedy may occur when a man "judges" a woman by man-made law. When Nora's secret comes to light, Torvald condemns his wife for her crime against society, as well as for her "crime" against himself, and thus brings about the conclusion of the denouement.

The primary purpose of this chapter has been to examine the three related innovations in construction which Henrik Ibsen introduced to the modern European drama in A Doll's House. The chapter also included an appraisal of the differences between the play's revolutionary and essentially Scribian dramaturgies. We have noted that Ibsen imitates the "surf-board of suspense" technique, that his characterization is sometimes psychologically unsound, and that he does not avoid using coincidences in order to create an effective plot. The main conclusion drawn from the examination of the work's structural innovations was that these established naturalism in playwriting. We have seen that discussion can be as stimulating as artificially-conceived intrigue-conflict; we have remarked that, far from being unmotivated and puppet-like in the drama's concluding scene, the Helmers reason out their grievances in a spontaneous manner, and that this emphasizes their reality as representations of living people; finally, we have concluded that the philosophical content of the play is meaningful, not only because the theme is corroborated by the plot events, but because the drama's ideal content is elaborately, clearly,

and naturalistically stated in a scene devoted entirely to intellectual discourse.

A Doll's House, unlike Le Verre D'Eau, is still in the modern repertoire. It has been kept alive by its "exhibition and discussion of human nature,"[24] and by its qualities as a drama devoted to the socio-philosophical problem of marriage. It is in spite of its faults, a work of literature.

---

24. See supra, p. 27.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAMATIC THEORY OF BERNARD SHAW: A SUMMARY

In the 1912 edition of The Quintessence of Ibsenism--in a chapter devoted primarily to Ibsen's dramatic technique--Shaw praised the innovations in construction of A Doll's House. He commends Ibsen for introducing to the modern drama a new type of plot--one which arises

> through a conflict of unsettled ideals rather than through vulgar attachments, rapacities, generosities, resentments, ambitions, misunderstandings, oddities and so forth as to which no moral question is raised.[1]

He also comments on the naturalism of the Ibsen method. With reference to discussion scenes in general, Shaw, in 1926, told his biographer, Archibald Henderson, that

> authors and audiences realize...that the incidents and situations in a play are only pretences, and that what is interesting is the way we should feel and argue about them if they were real. As [H. G.] Wells says, nothing can happen on the stage; but everything that happens elsewhere can be discussed.[2]

With reference to naturalistic characterization, he states that spectators at an Ibsen play may consider themselves "the persons of the drama, and the incidents of their own lives its incidents"; this takes place because of Ibsen's "disuse of the old stage tricks by which audiences had to be induced to take an interest in unreal people and improbable circumstances..."[3]

---

1. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, in Works, XIX, 1-161, p.149.
2. Cited in Archibald Henderson, Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet (New York, 1932), p. 600.
3. Shaw, Ibsenism, p. 157.

Shaw's rather sardonic opinion of the "well-made play" can be interpreted from the following passage, in which the playwright suggests how such a piece may be written:

> First, you 'have an idea' for a dramatic situation. If it strikes you as a splendidly original idea whilst in fact it is as old as hills, so much the better. For instance, the situation of an innocent person convicted by circumstance of a crime may always be depended upon. If the person is a woman, she must be convicted of adultery. If a young officer, he must be convicted of selling information to the enemy, though it is really a fascinating female spy who has ensnared him and stolen the incriminating document. If the innocent wife, banished from her home, suffers agonies through her separation from her children, and, when one of them is dying (of any disease the dramatist chooses to inflict) disguises herself as a nurse and attends it through its dying convulsions until the doctor, who should be...a faithful old admirer of the lady's, simultaneously announces the recovery of the child and the discovery of the wife's innocence, the success of the play may be regarded as assured if the writer has any sort of knack for his work.[4]

Shaw thus attacks the general structural flaws of Scribian drama and its "romantic," implausible representation of real life.

Theoretically, Shaw had no patience with fixed principles of construction, such as those governing Scribian play-writing; he held that it is "dangerous to make plots

---

4. Eugène Brieux, Three Plays (London, 1917), p. XXIII. With a preface by Bernard Shaw.

and plans,"[5] that

> ...filling up a plan may be as interesting to the planner as putting together a jig-saw puzzle; but it bores the spectator; and constructed plays always have dead wood in them.[6]

He writes concerning this subject as follows:

> ...plot construction and art of preparation are only the tricks of theatrical talent and the shifts of moral sterility.[7]
>
> Plot has always been the curse of serious drama, and indeed of serious literature of any kind.[8]

He also maintained that

> Disillusionment with the drama of incident is never long delayed. All possible varieties of plots and incidents, which really prove to be small in number after all, are quickly exhausted.[9]

He liked to announce that in his own works he was not governed by predetermined rules:

> I am not governed by principles: I am inspired, how or why I cannot explain, because I do not know.[10]

---

5. Henderson, Shaw, p. 468.
6. Ibid.
7. Shaw, Ibsenism, pp. 156-7.
8. Shaw, Geneva, Cymbeline Refinished, and Good King Charles (New York, 1947), p. 135.
9. Henderson, Shaw, p. 601
10. Shaw, "On the principles that govern the dramatist in his selection of themes, and methods of treatment," in Barret H. Clark, editor, European Theories of the Drama (New York, 1929), p. 475.

> The severity of artistic discipline is produced by the fact that in creative art no ready-made rules can help you. There is nothing to guide you to the right expression for your thought except your own sense of beauty and fitness.[11]

> When I write a play I do not foresee nor intend a page of it from one end to the other: the play writes itself.[12]

Shaw's protests against rigid construction, and his pronouncements on his own disuse of rules must both be regarded as criticism of the mechanical technique of the "well-made play"--one which he attempted to avoid in practice. For Shaw was not an opponent of techniques _per se_; he had several of his own

> [My] technique is new only on the modern stage. It has been used by preachers and orators ever since speech was invented. It is the technique of playing upon the human conscience; and it has been practised by the playwright whenever the playwright has been capable of it. Rhetoric, irony, argument, paradox, epigram, parable, the arrangement of haphazard facts into orderly and intelligent situations: these are both the oldest and the newest arts of the drama...[13]

A particular type of eloquent speech is one of the most distinctive of Shavian innovations. Most notably, as we shall see in Chapter IV, it strengthens Shaw's characterization and the philosophical clarity of his dramas.

---

11. Shaw, _The Sanity of Art_, in _Works_, XIX, 293-346, p. 335.

12. Shaw, _Buoyant Billioms, Farfetched Fables, and Shakes Versus Shav_ (London, 1950), p. 4.

13. Shaw, _Ibsenism_, p. 156.

Shaws plays were written for the sake of a definite didactic purpose; each of them contains a preface, in which the author outlines and discusses the ideas with which the work deals. For Shaw was a playwright with a definite gospel to preach; in a sense, he considered the theatre a school of reform, a forum for the most advanced ideas of the day on social, economic, scientific, and religious problems.[14] One of his most unusual dramatic opinions was that people do not

> go to the theatre to be pleased: there are hundred cheaper, less troublesome, more effective pleasures than an uncomfortable gallery can offer. We are led there by our appetite for drama, which is no more to be satisfied by sweetmeats than our appetite for dinner is to be satisfied with meringues and raspberry vinegar. One likes something solid...[15]

He claimed that the drama did

> little to delight the senses: all the apparent instances to the contrary are instances of the personal fascination of the performers.[16]

If these assertions seem somewhat hyperbolic, let us consider what Shaw once told his biographer, Archibald Henderson:

---

14. Henderson, Shaw, p. 548.

15. Shaw, Our Theatre in the Nineties, in Works, XXV, pp. 258-9.

16. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, in Works, VII, 149-253, p. 166.

> In this world, if you do not say a thing in an irritating way, you may just as well not say it at all, since nobody will trouble themselves about anything that does not trouble them. The attention given to criticism is in direct proportion to its indigestibility.[17]

By his own admission, he exaggerated his dramatic criticism in order to further his own reputation and the propagation of his ideas:

> In order to gain a hearing it was necessary for me to attain the footing of a privileged lunatic with the license of a jester. My method is to take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then say it with the utmost levity.[18]

We shall see, in later chapters, that Shaw's dramas are pleasurable, and that they do "delight the senses."; however, we shall also see that perhaps their most distinguishing feature is their didactic quality.

From all that has been said, it is evident that Shaw admired Ibsen as much as he disliked Scribe. We see that although he had no patience, in theory at least, with the mechanical technique of the latter, he did have definite dramatic theories of his own, the application of which we shall observe in the examination of his plays. We come now to the analysis of what some critics consider his first major drama, Mrs. Warren's Profession.[19]

---

17. Quoted in Henderson, Shaw, p. 341.
18. Quoted in Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), p. 188.
19. Richard Burton, Bernard Shaw: The Man and the Mask (New York, 1916), p. 54; Emil Strauss, Bernard Shaw: Art and Socialism (London, 1942), p. 31.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

In this chapter we shall discuss Shaw's structural innovations in Mrs. Warren's Profession, as well as the ways in which this drama reflects the influences of A Doll's House. We shall see how Shaw imitated the "well-made play"--despite his criticism of Scribe. (This anomaly rests on the fact that Shaw did not always practice what he preached.) We shall also study the prose style of the dialogue--a style which is, with certain variations, characteristic of all Shavian dramas-- and compare its effectiveness with what we find in Ibsen and Scribe.

Plot Summary[1]

In Act I the action takes place in the garden of a cottage near Haslemere, Surrey; the play opens with an exposition which takes up the entire first act. A Mr. Praed arrives to call on Vivie Warren, who is holidaying at the cottage. Praed tells Vivie that her mother, Mrs. Warren, has arrived from the continent and is about to pay her a visit. From the conversation which follows we learn that Vivie has been a successful mathematics student at Cambridge, where she has been studying while supported financially by her mother. In order to earn her own living she now intends

---

1. The précis of the plot is based on Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, in Works, VII, 149-253.

to enter a professional career as an actuarial scientist, but she anticipates a "battle royal" with her mother as a result of her decision to be financially independent. She is very emphatic about her desire to work, and explains her attitude to Praed:

> Vivie. I shall set up in chambers in the City, and work at actuarial calculations and conveyancing. Under cover of that I shall do some law, with one eye on the Stock Exchange all the time Ive come down here by myself to read law: not for a holiday, as my mother imagines. I hate holidays.
> Praed. You make my blood run cold. Are you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?
> Vivie. I dont care for either, I assure you.
> Praed. You cant mean that.
> Vivie. Oh yes I do. I like working, and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it.[2]

Vivie also discloses that her mother is almost a stranger to her, that she knows nothing concerning the latter's profession and source of income, since she has seen her only at brief intervals during the past years. When she questions Praed about her mother's life he is mysteriously silent.

Mrs. Warren and her business companion, Sir George Crofts, arrive at the cottage. The exposition continues. After greetings have been exchanged, Crofts takes Praed aside and asks him if he knows the identity of Vivie's father. Praed replies that he does not know. Crofts, who is attracted to Vivie at first sight, admits that he may himself be her father.[3] Later in the act, Frank Gardner, Vivie's

---

2. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 185.
3. In Act 11, we learn from Mrs. Warren that Crofts is definitely not Vivie's father. See ibid., p. 211.

beau, and his father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner, arrive at the cottage. To the Reverend Gardner's great consternation, Mrs. Warren recognizes him--and greets him--as a former lover.

The complication begins[4] in Act II, of which the action takes place inside the cottage. Mrs. Warren tells Vivie that the two of them will henceforth be living together, now that Vivie has finished her college career. However, Vivie informs her mother that she has decided to take up a professional career, and expresses doubts that they would be compatible. She does not think that she would like to live with Mrs. Warren, since she knows nothing about her. Mrs. Warren angrily reprimands her daughter for her "independent" attitude, prompting Vivie to cause an open quarrel: harshly, she asks if Mrs. Warren is really her mother, and if Mrs. Warren will reveal to her the identity of her father. She poses a number of additional questions as well, and Mrs. Warren becomes quite hysterical: she whimpers, falls to her knees, and buries her face in her hands. But then, taking courage, "with all her affections of maternal authority and conventional manners gone, and with an overwhelming inspiration of true conviction and scorn,"[5] she recounts her life history.

She relates that she was brought up in a fried-fish shop; after brief and unlucrative service as a barmaid, she

---

4. The main part of the complication is found in Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, pp. 209-219 and pp. 227-234.

5. Ibid., p. 212.

was induced by her sister to go into partnership in the ownership of a house of prostitution in Brussels, a "real high class place" where, according to her, young women were much better treated than in a factory or a bar. She attempts to justify her choice of profession by claiming that her only alternative to suffering the fate of one of her half-sisters, who died of lead-poisoning in a factory, was to prosper in the world by availing herself of her "turn for pleasing men." Vivie thinks that it is "part of what you call character in a woman that she should greatly dislike such a way of making money."[6] Mrs. Warren admits this:

> Everybody dislikes having to work and make money; but they have to do it all the same. I'm sure Ive often pitied a poor girl, tired out and in low spirits, having to try to please some man that she doesnt care two straws for--some half-drunken fool that thinks he's making himself agreeable when he's teasing and worrying and disgusting a woman so that hardly any money could pay her for putting up with it. But she has to bear with disagreeables and take the rough with the smooth, just like a nurse in a hospital or anyone else. It's not work that any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows; though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses.[7]

Vivie is still somewhat dubious, despite the good case her mother makes for herself: she suggests that Mrs. Warren considers her occupation worthwhile merely because "it pays." To this the latter has a ready answer:

---

6. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 216.

7. Ibid.

> Of course it's worthwhile to a poor girl, if she can resist temptation and is good-looking and well conducted and sensible. It's far better than any other employment open to her. I always thought that oughtnt to be. It cant be right, Vivie, that there shouldnt be better opportunities for women. I stick to that: it's wrong. But it's so, right or wrong; and a girl must make the best of it. But of course it's not worth while for a lady. If you took to it youd be a fool; but I should have been a fool if I'd taken to anything else.[8]

Vivie is moved more and more by these arguments; she finally calls her mother a "wonderful" woman for having so successfully persevered against adversity. However, she asks if Mrs. Warren was not somewhat "doubtful" or "ashamed" of her profession. This prompts the "madam" to give the key to her Weltanschauung: she claims that if "people arrange the world" for women as they do, "theres no good pretending it's arranged the other way."[9] She is not ashamed: she feels that her work as prostitute was in its own way respectable, because to her it meant financial freedom. Vivie is impressed by her mother's defence. Affectionately, she assures her that she will be her friend, now that she knows of her life, and now that she realizes that it was economic necessity which prompted her to adopt her occupation.

In Act III the complication continues; the action takes place in the garden of the Reverend Gardner's rectory. Crofts proposes marriage to Vivie, but she refuses him, quite

---

8. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 216.

9. Ibid., p. 218.

bluntly. Not at all discouraged, Crofts points out to her that she really owes her education and financial security to him, since it was he who advanced to Mrs. Warren the money by means of which she established herself in her trade; consequently he believes that it might be well if Vivie married him:

> Crofts. ...Now just think of all the trouble and the explanation it would save if we were to keep the whole thing in the family, so to speak. Ask your mother whether she'd like to have to explain all her affairs to a perfect stranger.[10]

In this Vivie sees no difficulty; she tells Crofts that she understands that the business is wound up and the money invested. Amazed, Crofts stops her short:

> Wound up! Wind up a business thats paying 35 per cent in the worst years! Not likely. Who told you that?[11]

Vivie is aghast; she had inferred from her mother's conversation that her work was a thing of the past. Crofts goes on to tell the young woman that he shares the ownership, with Mrs. Warren, of a number of "private hotels" on the continent. Vivie then surprises him by disclosing that she knows everything about her mother's occupation; she adds:

> My mother was a very poor woman who had no reasonable choice but to do as she did. You were a rich gentleman; and you did the same for the sake of 35 per cent. You are a pretty common sort of scoundrel, I think. That is my opinion of you.[12]

Though momentarily taken aback, Crofts casually reminds Vivie that he takes his interest on capital like other

---

10. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 229.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 231.

people. He attempts to prove to her that his own method of achieving capital gain is no more reprehensible than many another. In order to add strength to his argument, he suggests to Vivie that she would not, for example, "cut the Archbishop of Canterbury...because the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have a few publicans and sinners among their tenants."[13] He explains that if she intends to choose her acquaintances on moral grounds she will cut herself off from all "decent" society. As a result of what she hears from Crofts, Vivie feels like one "among the damned." When Crofts then maliciously insinuates that her father is none other than the Reverend Gardner, and that she is consequently the half-sister of her beau, Frank,[14] she can no longer contain herself. She departs for London on the spur of the moment.

The final act takes place in Vivie's business office. Mrs. Warren has followed her daughter. The dénouement begins[15] when the former inquires why Vivie left Haslemere without so much as saying goodbye. She also wishes to know why Crofts has taken offence at Vivie's behaviour, and why Vivie has returned her allowance cheque unopened. The latter states that she from now on intends to go her own way in her own business and among her own friends; she expects her mother to do the same, and bids her farewell. Mrs. Warren is appalled:

---

13. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 231.

14. In Act IV, we learn that the insinuation is most probably false. See ibid., p. 238.

15. The main part of the dénouement is found in ibid., pp. 247-253.

> Mrs. Warren. ...Goodbye?
> Vivie. Yes: goodbye. Come: dont let us make a useless scene: you understand perfectly well. Sir George Crofts has told me the whole business.[16]

As a last resort Mrs. Warren reminds Vivie that she is very rich, and that means "everything you like, everything you want, everything you can think of";[17] she urges her daughter not to throw away all her security for nothing. Society is not moral, she says: its entire morality is based on economic facts--the rich can afford to pretend to morality, but the poor always remain slaves. Vivie exclaims that she has no intention of being a slave, but that she also does not wish to be a parasite:

> Vivie. ...I know very well that fashionable morality is all a pretence, and that if I took your money and devoted the rest of my life to spending it fashionably, I might be as worthless and vicious as the silliest woman could possibly want to be without having a word said to me about it. But I dont want to be worthless. I shouldnt enjoy trotting about the park to advertize my dressmaker and carriage builder, or being bored at the opera to shew off a shop-windowful of diamonds.[18]

She would like to know why her mother insists on continuing in her occupation, now that she is financially well off. Mrs. Warren replies that she too does not want to be "worthless":

---

16. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 247.

17. Ibid., p. 248.

18. Ibid., p. 250.

> Mrs. Warren. ...I must have work and excitement, or I should go melancholy mad. And what else is there for me to do? The life suits me: I'm fit for it and not for anything else. If I didnt do it somebody else would; so I dont do any real harm by it. And then it brings in money; and I like making money. [19]

From this reply Vivie realizes that she and her mother must part because of their unique incompatability: each of them is a "worker," but the fields which they find challenging are totally different.

> Vivie. ...I am my mother's daughter. I am like you: I must have work, and must make more money than I spend. But my work is not your work, and my way not your way. We must part. [20]

Mrs. Warren leaves, vowing angrily that due to her disappointment at what Vivie has decided she will henceforth do nothing but "wrong." The play concludes as Vivie turns to her desk and absorbs herself in her work.

Analysis of the Play

We shall first examine Scribian technique in the drama. In the exposition, matters pertinent to the development of the plot are clarified in a number of verbal exchanges structurally reminiscent of Le Verre D'Eau. Vivie tells Praed that she expects a quarrel with her mother because of her firm decision to enter professional life

---

19. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 250.

20. Ibid.

(she is an extremely energetic and strong-willed person who likes to work even when on holidays); she also confesses that she knows very little about her mother. Further, we learn, from Praed's reticence in discussing the subject of Mrs. Warren's occupation, from Crofts' startling question about Vivie's parentage, and from Mrs. Warren's unexpected reunion with the Reverend Gardner, that Vivie's mother is far from conventionally respectable. We also discover that Crofts is not a man of high moral standards: he expresses to Praed the fear that he may be Vivie's father. Thus the major problems of the drama are introduced in the manner of the "well-made play," and interest is aroused with respect to the future relations between Mrs. Warren and her daughter and Vivie and her mother's business companion.

Like the exposition, the complication shows the influence of Scribe's "surf-board of suspense" technique. In Act II, Mrs. Warren precipitates the conflict to which Vivie alluded in the exposition; she states that she wishes to have her daughter live with her. Vivie doubts that her mother's way of life is compatible with her own, and proceeds to cross-examine Mrs. Warren about her past. The prolonged argument between the two women arouses a great deal of tension, which decreases only when Vivie, during Mrs. Warren's later speeches, begins to admire her

mother for her strength and courage and for what she believes to be her entire confession. For the time being, mother and daughter seal a pact of friendship and the tension diminishes. It is built up again in Act III, when Crofts proposes marriage to Vivie, only to be refused. Hardly daunted, he reminds the young woman that it would be convenient to keep Mrs.Warren's business in the family, and scoffs at her belief that it has been dissolved. Vivie is appalled by what Crofts tells her; she now realizes that her mother did not declare the entire truth concerning herself. This is the climax of the play: it is the moment of Vivie's greatest emotional crisis--caused by her discovery that Mrs. Warren has not given up her immoral trade. The argument between Vivie and Crofts ends when Vivie flees from Haslemere to London, but suspense lingers, since we realize that renewed strife between Vivie and her mother is inevitable. The dénouement then takes place. Mother and daughter once more engage in open conflict: Mrs. Warren tells Vivie that she would be foolish to throw away her opportunity of being financially independent; Vivie wishes to work for a living and insists on being allowed to follow her own way of life. Mrs. Warren takes leave of her daughter in high dudgeon, so that the play concludes on a note of tension.

We thus see that Shaw did not neglect incorporating into the drama the most important technique that Scribe

taught the nineteenth-century playwrights: the action of the play proceeds from a clear understanding of the issues involved, reaches a climax, and is then resolved. Moreover, Shaw even permitted himself to employ one of the illogical structural "tricks" of the "well-made play" and did so for a typical Scribian reason. In Act I Mrs. Warren meets her former lover, the Reverend Gardner:

> Mrs. Warren. ...Why, it's Sam Gardner, gone into the Church! Well, I never! Dont you know us, Sam? This is George Crofts, as large as life and twice as natural. Dont you remember me?
> Rev. S. (very red) I really--er--
> Mrs. Warren. Of course you do. Why, I have a whole album of your letters still: I came across them only the other day.
> Rev. S. (miserably confused) Miss Vavasour, I believe.
> Mrs. Warren. (correcting him quickly in a loud whisper). Tch! Nonsense! Mrs. Warren: dont you see my daughter there?[21]

Arriving as she does from the continent, it is unusual that Mrs. Warren should meet an old admirer at her daughter's cottage in Surrey; it is certainly a coincidence that he should be none other than the father of Vivie's beau. The chance reunion of the former lovers increases our awareness of Mrs. Warren's immorality, and thereby contributes in the Scribian manner to the clarity of the play's exposition.

Although Shaw uses the "surf-board of suspense" technique, the construction of Mrs. Warren's Profession resembles that of the discussion scene of Ibsen's A Doll's House far more than that of a "well-made play"; after all,

---

21. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 197.

the drama is made up chiefly of ideological conflict--not of intrigue. Following the exposition, the main action is composed primarily of three key discussions: those between Vivie and her mother, in Act II, Vivie and Crofts, in Act III, and Vivie and her mother once more, in Act IV. As with Torvald and Nora Helmer in the concluding scene of A Doll's House, justification of ideas and introspection is the main concern of Vivie and her two antagonists. Admittedly, each of these, like the people of Le Verre D'Eau, has a material goal: Vivie wishes to earn money; Mrs. Warren would like to have her daughter live with her; Crofts wants Vivie to marry him. Yet, above all, Mrs. Warren struggles to gain the respect of her daughter, and consequently goes to great lengths to explain the cause of her profession and way of life. She hopes Vivie will live with her, and attempts to achieve this end by convincing the latter of the rightness of her Weltanschauung--not by scheming to win her affection with subterfuge. Verbal conflict of course arises: Vivie argues with her mother in defense of her own moral standards. She also disagrees with Crofts, for similar reasons. When she refuses his proposal of marriage, Crofts, like Mrs. Warren, attempts to sway her to his point of view. He answers her charge that he is a scoundrel by pointing out that his work is as respectable as any other capitalistic endeavour. In

the final discussion scene Vivie quarrels with her mother once again. She defends her desire to pursue her enjoyment of honest work, and emphasizes that she does not wish to be a worthless member of society. Thus, the source of tension in the play, as in the final scene of A Doll's House, is discussion-conflict; one of the reasons why Mrs. Warren's Profession shows the influence of Ibsen more than that of Scribe rests on the fact that the drama demonstrates that plot made up principally of discussion--of articulate figures verbalizing and fighting for their convictions--is as stimulating--if not more so--as plot made up primarily of contrived scheming and counter-scheming. How the articulateness of Shaw's stage figures contributes to the theatrical effectiveness of the work is a matter which will be taken up in a later section of the chapter.[22]

Unlike its plot construction the characterization of Mrs. Warren's Profession and the method whereby Shaw introduces the play's theme do differ from what we find, technically, in A Doll's House. For example, Shaw's personages are not depicted purely naturalistically: when speaking for the author they are not, like Nora and Torvald, always speaking entirely for themselves as well; Shaw's dramaturgy is, on the whole, suggested by that of the concluding scene of A Doll's House, but it is not in every way identical with it. Nevertheless, the play

---

22. Infra, pp. 88-92.

does resemble Ibsen's famous scene very closely in two other ways, at which we shall look briefly. It will be recalled that Ibsen demonstrates that ideas put forth throughout an entire scene create a far greater impression intellectually, than those conveyed merely by means of occasional pseudo-thematic obiter dicta, such as we find in Le Verre D'Eau.[23] Shaw, like Ibsen--in fact, more so than Ibsen--reveals that he is, unlike Scribe, a playwright of sincere conviction: he devotes not only one scene but entire parts of three acts to intellectual discussion. Furthermore, like the theme of A Doll's House, and unlike the theme of Le Verre D'Eau, Shaw's dramatic thesis is corroborated by the meaning of the plot incidents, so that the play is,in this highly important respect, as in others, philosophically fully significant. Shaw's thesis, stated in the preface, is that prostitution results from economic causes, and that it is not carried on solely by individual "madams," but is organized and exploited as a form of international commerce by wealthy capitalists.[24] The story of Mrs. Warren's Profession stresses the fact that economic causes may force a young woman of the lower classes to turn to prostitution in order to obtain a livelihood; it points out that a capitalist may not regard white slavery as an immoral means of earning money; it also shows how a person's

---

23. Supra, p. 50.

24. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 151.

financial background may influence his life, character, and occupation--how a mother and a daughter, as a result of having been brought up in different financial circumstances, may find it impossible to achieve a common modus vivendi due to their conflicting outlooks on morality.

Shaw's characterization does resemble Ibsen's naturalistic character-portrayal in that Shaw's figures do not engage in intrigue, but in self-analysis, and justification and discussion of their ideas, moral problems, and motives. Vivie wishes to find freedom in her work; most of her activity throughout the play consists in her defence and explanation of that freedom. Mrs. Warren's energies are directed toward explaining her choice of profession. Crofts is determined to justify his status as a capitalist, and, consequently, spends quite some time defending capitalistic ideology.

However, beside these naturalistic qualities, Shaw's characterization reveals a unique feature which is distinctly Shavian. One of his major structural innovations is the creation of the "double character," a stage figure who is depicted as a credible literary representation of a real person--such as Nora and Torvald--and who is, as well, an eloquent and intellectually sophisticated "spokesman" of a dramatic theme. Such "double characters," whose function it is, on occasion, to speak more on behalf of an author than for themselves, can be found in Mrs. Warren's Profession.

Mrs. Warren, for example, is not drawn only as a doting mother who arrives in Haslemere to visit her daughter; she is not solely an elderly, garrulous prostitute intent on explaining to that daughter that in her youth she had no alternative but to choose the profession of prostitution: she is also a highly intelligent "spokesman" for the author, who, from time to time, sees fit to address his audience through one of his characters.

Jacques Barzun points out that it was Shaw who revived the classic Aristophanic device of _parabasis_ in the modern drama.[25] (_Parabasis_ refers to the statement of an author's dramatic theme by one of his stage figures; [25] it is Shaw's use of this device which results in the transformation of his characters into "spokesmen.") How Shaw employed _parabasis_ in the play will appear when we compare the actual wording of one of his prefatory statements with one of Mrs. Warren's key speeches in the discussion scene of Act II. Shaw writes:

> Mrs. Warren's Profession was written...to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of

---

25. Jacques Barzun, "Bernard Shaw in Twilight," in _George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey_, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York, 1953), 158-177, p. 167.

> them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together.[26]

Mrs. Warren's second-act soliloquy approximates the above. She replies when Vivie asks if she was not somewhat ashamed of her calling:

> Well, of course, dearie, it's only good manners to be ashamed of it; it's expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they dont feel. Liz[Mrs. Warren's sister] used to be angry with me for plumping out the truth about it. She used to say that when every woman could learn enough from what was going on in the world before her eyes, there was no need to talk about it to her. But then Liz was such a perfect lady! She had the true instinct of it; while I was always a bit of a vulgarian. I used to be so pleased when you sent me your photos to see that you were growing up like Liz; you've just her ladylike determined way. But I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. What's the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world that way for women, theres no good pretending it's arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador.[27]

Thus Mrs. Warren tells Vivie--and analyzes--what Shaw wished to tell his audience about the economic causes of prostitution. During this speech, and in some other instances throughout the play, she is, as Shaw's "spokesman," more of

---

26. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 151.

27. Ibid., pp. 217-218.

an apologist for white slavery than a credible dramatic figure. Here she is once more, describing the sordid life of her half-sisters--a life she determined to avoid:

> Mrs. Warren. They were the respectable ones. Well, what did they get by their respectability? I'll tell you. One of them worked in a whitelead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week until she died of lead poisoning. She only expected to get her hands a little paralyzed; but she died. The other was always held up to us as a model because she married a Government laborer in the Deptford victualling yard, and kept his room and the three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week--until he took to drink. That was worth being respectable for.[28]

Her gift for accurate and detailed description almost suggests that she too has been at Cambridge--where, possibly she majored in sociology.

While it is not inconceivable that a real prostitute might be intellectual and intelligent enough to theorize like Mrs. Warren (although such prostitutes are surely the exception rather than the rule), it is surprising to find that Mrs. Warren has this capacity. Just as Scribe does not explain the motivation of his figures in Le Verre D'Eau, so Shaw does not show adequately in the play how and why Vivie's mother has the capacity of adopting the tone of a lay sociologist. We must, therefore, conclude that the author's use of "spokesmen" such as Mrs. Warren is mechanical--that in order to clarify his theme beyond

---

28. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, pp. 213-214.

question, he breaks the consistency of Mrs. Warren's behaviour: for example, at one moment, in Act 11, she whimpers and cringes when Vivie questions her about her life and work, buries her head in her hands, and behaves as a real prostitute might well do in a similarly awkward situation; at the next moment she is transformed into a highly intelligible social apologist.

A similar criticism may be made of the characterization of Crofts. On the whole, Shaw portrays him as a blunt businessman, who falls in love with Vivie, as a man of his temperament might. But Crofts has a double nature. Like Mrs. Warren, he is not conceived entirely naturalistically: on occasion, he too becomes the well-informed, analytical Shavian "spokesman." His key speech during his discussion with Vivie is similar to another portion of Shaw's prefatorial text. In his foreword, Shaw states that he also wished to expose in the play:

> the fact that prostitution is not only carried on without organization by individual enterprise in the lodgings of solitary women, each her own mistress as well as every customer's mistress, but organized and exploited as a big international commerce for the profit of capitalists like any other commerce...[29]

Crofts tells Vivie what Shaw wanted his audience in the theatre to hear:

---

29. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 151.

> Why the devil shouldnt I invest my money that way? I take the interest on my capital like other people: I hope you dont think I dirty my own hands with the work. Come! you wouldnt refuse the acquaintance of my mother's cousin the Duke of Belgravia because some of the rents he gets are earned in queer ways. You wouldnt cut the Archbishop of Canterbury, I suppose, because the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have a few publicans and sinners among their tenants. Do you remember your Crofts scholarship at Newnham? Well, it was founded by my brother the M.P. He gets his 22 per cent out of a factory with 600 girls in it, and not one of them getting wages enough to live on. How d'ye suppose they manage when they have no family to fall back on? Ask your mother. And do you expect me to turn my back on 35 per cent when all the rest are pocketing what they can, like sensible men? No such fool! If youre going to pick and choose your acquaintances on moral principles, youd better clear out of this country, unless you want to cut yourself out of all decent society.[30]

His speech is another example of parabasis. We see that on occasion, Crofts, like Mrs. Warren, speaks for the author almost like a well-versed social scientist.

Although he may not have recognized the essentially mechanical attribute of this device, Shaw had a definite reason for developing a modern type of parabasis. We noted, in Chapter III, that his purpose as an artist was a highly didactic one;[31] Mrs. Warren's Profession is a highly didactic play--more so than A Doll's House--because, unlike Ibsen's drama, it is meant to constitute an explicit "frontal attack on the existing social system"[32]--a system in which, according to

---

30. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, pp. 231-232.

31. Supra, p. 57.

32. Emil Strauss, Bernard Shaw: Art and Socialism (London, 1942), p. 32.

Shaw, women are forced to take up prostitution out of economic necessity, and in which capitalists are permitted to profit from white slavery. There was considerable controversy over the meaning of A Doll's House after its first productions.[33] Since Shaw uses parabasis, there can be no possible misunderstanding of Mrs. Warren's Profession. One of the reasons why A Doll's House is open to possible misinterpretation is surely that Nora and Torvald are not in any way "spokesmen": they do not analyze those aspects of marriage which concern them in as detailed and erudite a fashion as Crofts and Mrs. Warren discourse on the problem of prostitution. Consequently, it is conceivable that an audience might not understand the full significance of their problem quite as well as it must inevitably comprehend all the implications of the central thesis of Mrs. Warren's Profession. Shaw wished to make his dramatic theme highly explicit, and, therefore, found it necessary to transform his figures into "spokesmen" when it suited his needs.

However, one must not suppose that by using parabasis Shaw creates character in the mechanical fashion of Scribe. First, not all the figures of the play are portrayed inconsistently; this was the case in Le Verre D'Eau. For instance, even though she is frequently highly articulate and apologetic in her defence of her own Weltanschuung, one

---

33. See P. F. D. Tennant, Ibsen's Dramatic Technique (Cambridge, Eng., 1948), p. 116.

cannot say that Vivie is implausibly over-intelligible; unlike Mrs. Warren and Crofts, she always speaks in a manner commensurate with her station in life: she is a college graduate, who might be expected to express herself with considerable sophistication. By characterizing her as an intellectual, Shaw does not lead us to doubt, as we do in the case of her mother and her suitor, that Vivie has the mental capacity to be as articulate as she is. She is definitely a finished portrait of a real person.

Secondly, although Shaw's characterization of Mrs. Warren and Crofts is illogical, or "romantic" (to use the term which Shaw himself applied to Scribe's dramaturgy),[34] it is "romantic" in an unusual and dramatically most effective sense. We may recollect that Scribe's figures, in Le Verre D'Eau, are gifted with implausible intuition which serves no dramatic purpose except to arouse surprise; that they frequently conduct themselves most foolishly and incomprehensibly; and that Scribe found it necessary to depict them in such a manner in order to build up the continuity of his plot of intrigue.[35] However, we see that Crofts and Mrs. Warren behave inconsistently only when Shaw employs his version of the time-honoured literary device of parabasis which, as we have seen, contributes very markedly to the philosophical clarity of the play--unlike the devices of Scribe. Moreover, when Shaw's

---

34. Supra, p.22.

35. Supra, p.22-27.

personages transform into "spokesmen," they do not lose intelligence, but gain it; they develop more insight into their selves than might be expected of real people. Shaw writes in one of his prefaces that

> ...it is the business of the stage to make its figures more intelligible to themselves than they would be in real life; for by no other means can they be made intelligible to the audience.[36]

The author thus himself admits that he does not attempt to portray his figures entirely realistically. But although he sacrifices some of their reality, he draws them as highly articulate people, so that we come to know and to understand them better than the personages of Scribe--who carry on intrigues and scarcely think of introspection at all--and of Ibsen, who engage in the more limited self-analysis common among average people. In a sense, one may say that Scribe's people think primarily of their actions, that those of Ibsen think primarily of their feelings, and that those of Shaw think primarily of ideas concerning their selves. Is it not true, then, that Shaw's figures are the most intelligible to an audience in almost every respect?

There is a third vindication of Shaw's characterization. We do believe in Mrs. Warren and Crofts as real people--most of the time--since, unlike the people of Le Verre D'Eau, these two figures conduct themselves inconsistently only on occasion: they are not "spokesmen" throughout the entire play.

---

36. Shaw, St. Joan, in Works, XVII, 1-167, pp. 51-52.

Alfred C. Ward points out that if a character

> stands on its feet, breathes and moves and thinks and feels, laughs and weeps, loves and hates and sins and does good; if in short, it behaves as men and women do behave in common experience, and inspires in us the attractions and repulsions--in whatever heightened or refined degree--that men and women do inspire, the character may then, but not until then, go on to 'stand for,' or typify or symbolize any virtue or vice or theory or ideal the author chooses. The golden rule for a playwright is First catch your character.[37]

Shaw does not appear to have broken this rule in Mrs. Warren's Profession. Are not then, his personages far more life-like than the puppets of Scribe, who live almost only for the sake of their intrigues?

Finally, it will be recalled that in Le Verre D'Eau (Act 1, Scene 1V) Bolingbroke's inadequate motivation in speaking for the author is one of the reasons underlying the unconvincingness of Scribe's "theme" of historical cause and effect.[38] One may well ask if a parallel fault does not exist in Mrs. Warren's Profession, since Mrs. Warren and Crofts, in their function as "spokesmen" also are not adequately motivated as real people. Can we accept Mrs. Warren's and Crofts' discourse on the subject of white slavery as the author's convincing comment in the drama when, in Le Verre D'Eau we do not accept Bolingbroke's speeches on history as such? The question can be answered in the affirmative. As we shall now see, Mrs. Warren and Crofts express themselves in dialogue which, unlike that of Bolingbroke, commands belief in terms of eloquence alone. In a sense, we consequently lose sight

---

37. Alfred C. Ward, Bernard Shaw (London, 1951), pp. 141-142.
38. Supra, p. 29.

of the fact that the two figures actually speak out of character from time to time.

We come now to a critique of Shaw's prose style, with special reference to Mrs. Warren's Profession, where we shall see how Shaw's dialogue strengthened his character-portrayal and the clarity of his dramatic philosophy. (The playwright's style varies slightly in other works, but its most important features are similar, and are considered in comprehensive terms by critics.) A brief analysis of the prose style of Scribe and Ibsen will come first, in order to point out, in contrast, the exceptional qualities of the renowned Shavian turn of dramatic expression.

The characters of Scribe invariably speak in pedestrian phraseology known as the "no" style.[39] Theatrically it is most unimpressive. Even in one of his most philosophical flights in Le Verre D'Eau, Scribe's prose idiom is so commonplace that beyond surface meaning the speeches of his personages convey few overtones of striking passion or convincement. Here, for example, is Bolingbroke's important discourse on historical cause and effect in Act 1, Scene IV:

> Bolingbroke. Il ne faut pas mépriser les petites choses, c'est par elles qu'on arrive aux grandes!...Vous croyez peut-être, comme tout le monde, que les catastrophes politiques,

---

39. See Arthur B. Walkley, Still More Prejudice (London, 1925), p. 48.

> les révolutions, les chutes d'empire, viennent de causes graves, profondes, importantes... Erreur! Les états sont subjugués ou conduits par des héros, par de grands hommes; mais ces grands hommes sont menés eux-mêmes par leurs passions, leurs caprices, leurs vanités; c'est-à-dire par ce qu'il y a de plus petit et de plus misérable au monde. Vous ne savez pas qu'une fenêtre du château de Trianon, critiquée par Louis XIV et défendue par Louvois, a fait naître la guerre qui embrasse l'Europe en ce moment. C'est à la vanite blessée d'un courtisan que le royaume a dû ses désastres; c'est à une cause plus futile encore qu'il devra peut-être son salut. Et sans aller plus loin...moi qui vous parle, moi, Henri de Saint-Jean, qui jusqu'à vingt-six ans fus regarde comme un élégant, un étourdi, un homme incapable d'occupations sérieuses--savez-vous comment tout d'un coup je devins un homme d'état, comment j'arrivai à la chambre, aux affaires, au ministère?[40]

Abigail answers that she does not know. Bolingbroke continues:

> Eh bien! ma chère enfant, je devins ministre parce que je savais danser la sarabande; et je perdis le pouvoir parce que j'etais enrhumé.[41]

This is, <u>faute de mieux</u>, one of the most interesting passages in the play. As we see, it consists of flat speech, contains no imagery, and deals merely with facts--and with unconvincing ones at that. Disregarding, for the sake of argument, what we have seen with respect to Bolingbroke's inadequate motivation during this scene, we perceive that Scribe expects us to believe, for example, that Bolingbroke actually did become a minister because he knew how to dance the sarabande, and that he did fall from power due to a head cold. The statesman describes these remarkable events

---

40. Eugène Scribe, <u>Le Verre D'Eau</u> (Boston, 1902), pp. 19-20.

41. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 20.

neither with adequate explanation, nor with compelling imaginative force: he merely says that they occurred. We are far from certain. If Bolingbroke was clever enough to rise to power through knowing how to dance the sarabande (a doubtful incident in itself), why was a mere cold instrumental in bringing about his fall from power? And surely Louis XIV's criticism of a window of the Trianon palace was not the sole cause of the war of the Spanish succession? Since such questions are not answered, we may conclude that the dialogue is ineffective: it convinces neither with detailed description, nor with literary devices of imagery and rhetoric.

According to Allardyce Nicoll, it was Ibsen who, notably in A Doll's House, solved the language problem of the nineteenth-century non-poetic playwright. Nicoll states that Ibsen developed dialogue which, unlike that of Scribe, is made up of natural speech, as well as of literary and theatrical qualities.[42] The dramatist's prose style in A Doll's House is ornamental, and contains many more shades of meaning than Scribe's pedestrian turn of expression; on a number of occasions in the play, Ibsen's figures speak in periods and metaphors of a nature highly poetic and entirely convincing. It will be recalled that in the discussion

---

42. Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama: from Aeschylus to Anouilh (New York, n.d.), p. 536.

scene, for example, Nora reminds Torvald that when he received Krogstad's second letter containing the bond, he forgave her for her "crime",

> it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in the future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and so fragile.[43]

This speech, even in its translation from the Norwegian, is extremely powerful. Previously, Nora told her husband that the events of the play had made her aware of her status as doll-wife:

> Nora. ...our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife...and... the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been.[44]

Ibsen's metaphors, which are found throughout the entire work,[45] strengthen the characterization and the philosophical lucidness of the drama: Nora, by calling herself a doll-wife, is not merely stating a fact, but describes her own behaviour during, and, presumably, previous to the action of the play; she also calls attention to the way Torvald has been treating her up to the time when she decides to leave him. By means of a pungent metaphor, whereby she sums up her married life

---

43. Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House: and Two Other Plays (London, Everyman's ed., 1911), 5-86, pp. 84-85.

44. Ibid., pp. 80-81.

45. See supra, p. 31;
Muriel C. Bradbrook, Ibsen: The Norwegian (London, 1948), pp. 85-86.

in a most striking fashion, Nora thus expresses several ideas. The personages of Le Verre D'Eau, such as Bolingbroke, in their unimaginative idiom, could never be as forceful nor as lucid, even when a situation in Scribe's play would seem to call for eloquence.

We have taken note in Chapter III of Shaw's assertion that a feature of his dramatic art is the use of "rhetoric, irony, argument, paradox, epigram, parable, and the arrangement of haphazard facts into orderly and intelligent situations..."[46] Shaw practises this technique in Mrs. Warren's Profession and later plays. Since we have already shown that the important members of the cast of Mrs. Warren's Profession speak, on occasion, most rehetorically, we shall now examine other distinct features of Shavian prose: its wit, its precision, and its astonishing power of conveying facts and ideas with intellectual vigour. It has been observed that the typical Shavian sentence, "by obliterating connectives, becomes a sort of lash made up of fused ideas, written for ear and mind, and barbed to suit the occasion."[47] C. E. M. Joad confirms this point of view.[48] As evidence, Joad selects one of Shaw's typical utterances from the epilogue to Pygmalion:

> The rest of the story...would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the

---

46. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, in Works, XIX, 1-161, p. 164.

47. See Barzun, "Bernard Shaw in Twilight," p. 164.

48. C. E. M. Joad, Shaw (London, 1947), p. 67.

> ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the rag-shop in which Romance keeps its stock of "happy endings" to misfit all stories,[49]

He then shows that the sentence incorporates six separate ideas:

> (1) Most readers are addicted to romance.
> (2) This enfeebles them.
> (3) It does so by maintaining and retailing a number of stock endings which the writer does not invent to fit the occasion, but keeps ready-made and doles out as the occasion requires.
> (4) These are always 'happy endings.'
> (5) In life 'happy endings' rarely occur.
> (6) Therefore a story which terminates with a stock, romantic 'happy ending' is untrue to, 'misfits,' life.[50]

One of Crofts' caustic remarks to Vivie, reveals a similar type of sentence-construction:

> If youre going to pick and choose your acquaintances on moral principles, youd better clear out of this country, unless you want to cut yourself out of all decent society.[51]

Crofts here explains, in one sentence, that Vivie's moral standards are impractical, that those of "decent" English society are not high, and that only the humble classes would be sympathetic to Vivie's ethical views. Another of the many examples of Shaw's succinct dramatic expression is found in a speech by Mrs. Warren, which also reveals Shaw's wit. Mrs. Warren concludes her long second-act soliloquy to Vivie by commenting on the respectability of her houses of prostitution; she adds that her "girls were...

---

49. Shaw, Pygmalion, in Works, XIV, 197-303, p. 289.

50. Joad, Shaw, pp. 68-69.

51. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 232.

well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador."[52] This apothegm tells a great deal concerning the lot of the prostitute, and it derives its wit from a paradox: it is pointed out that ambassadors are not above marrying common prostitutes, and that prostitution occasionally leads to unusual social success. The truth of this statement may perhaps be questionable, but one cannot deny such aphorisms attract attention.

In his book, Shaw, Joad also takes note of the fact that the playwright chooses flat, colourless terms as his vocabulary, in order to achieve a maximum of verbal precisenees.[53] (Joad lists some of the typical adjectives of a Shavian utterance, such as "incorrigible," "mendacious," "irremediable," "mischievous," "inveterate," and "pertinacious"; and typical Shavian abstract nouns, such as "celibacy," degeneracy," "pugnacity," and "apostasy.")[54] Note the exactness with which Mrs. Warren recounts the story of her life:

> ...mother called herself a widow and had
> a fried-fish shop down by the Mint, and
> kept herself and four daughters out of it.
> Two of us were sisters: that was me and Liz;
> and we were both good-looking and well made.
> I suppose our father was a well-fed man:

---

52. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 218

53. Joad, Shaw, p. 67

54. Ibid.

> mother pretended he was a gentleman; but I dont know. The other two were only half sisters: undersized, ugly, starved looking, hard working, honest poor creatures: Liz and I would have half-murdered them if mother hadnt half-murdered us to keep our hands off them.[55]

"good-looking" and "starved looking," for example, may not be epithets of great sensuous appeal, but one cannot deny that they are explicit and unambiguous. Every word of the speech contributes to the preciseness with which Mrs. Warren describes her home and family. It seems to be the style of a soliloquy such as the above which prompted the renowned musicologist, Alfred Einstein, to observe that Shavian prose reminds him of the music of Mozart, because every word of Shaw's phraseology has its place in the development of a strikingly articulated thought.[56]

We may now definitely conclude that Shaw developed elements of the drama which Scribe completely neglected: rhetoric, epigram, paradox and "the arrangement of haphazard facts into orderly and intelligent situations." Quite likely Shaw was influenced by Ibsen's relatively colorful dialogue. With their gift of eloquent expression Shaw's stage figures command much more belief than the "no"-style speaking personages of the "well-made play," as previously suggested.[57] Admittedly, Mrs. Warren and Crofts are not in

---

55. Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession, p. 213.

56. See Edmund Wilson, "Bernard Shaw at Eighty" in George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey, 126-152, p. 140.

57. Supra, p. 84.

every way representations of real people, since, from time to time they are not credibly motivated to adopt the tone of social scientists; however, if we overlook this fact, it cannot be denied that what they say as "spokesmen" is in every way convincing; it is most important to remember once again that we cannot reason in this way about Bolingbroke in Act I, Scene IV, of Le Verre D'Eau.

In review, we see that Mrs. Warren's Profession resembles the Scribian dramas inasmuch as it contains a continuous plot constructed in accordance with the(in many ways commendable)"surf-board of suspense" technique, and as it contains an unplausible plot coincidence. We have pointed out that, structurally, the play bears a close resemblance to the naturalistic discussion scene of A Doll's House insofar as it consists, to a very marked degree, in verbal, ideological conflict, and as the cast is not greatly concerned with intrigue, but primarily with introspection and debate. We have examined the innovations of parabasis, and of the "double character," who, from time to time, speaks for the author. We have observed that Shaw's character-portrayal is not entirely naturalistic, but that it differs greatly from that of Scribe inasmuch as its personages are, in thought and word at least, highly articulate, logical, and profound. Finally, we have analyzed Shaw's innovations in prose style. We came to the conclusion that the author's writing is marked

by explicitness, preciseness, and power to convey ideas with remarkable force, and that these qualities strengthen characterization and the philosophical clarity of the drama. We now come to an examination of further Shavian structural innovations in Man and Superman.

CHAPTER V

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MAN AND SUPERMAN

Alfred Ward considers Man and Superman the first masterpiece of the twentieth century theatre, and one of the most original dramas of all time.[1] This appraisal rests largely on the fact that the play, which Shaw subtitles "A Comedy and a Philosophy," includes a unique "Philosophy" in dialogue form. As we shall see, the latter occurs in the third act, where two of the characters dream that they are in hell in the company of two other figures of the play. In hell the four personages engage in a virtually uninterrupted eighteen-thousand word discussion[2] on the metaphysical and theological implications of the social and philosophical issues raised throughout other portions of the drama. During the course of this "dream-vision debate," commonly known as "Don Juan in Hell," the actual plot is completely suspended; moreover, the discussion has no direct bearing on other events of the ac tion; it is simply designed to broaden the dramatic theme in a highly unusual manner. It is a credit to Shaw's art, as we shall see, that, in spite

---

1. Alfred C. Ward, Bernard Shaw (London, 1951), pp. 83, 85, and 95.

2. An approximate figure.

of its unorthodox structure, "Don Juan in Hell," is theatrically most impressive.

The second structural innovation of Man and Superman is one of characterization. The play is, in a sense, a comic allegory: four of its five major figures have an important function as spokesmen of a particular moral point of view, which, on a number of occasions, and during the course of most of Act III, they express in eloquent, exaggerated, and frequently in comic terms. The use of spokesmen in Man and Superman is thus more pronounced than in Mrs. Warren's Profession. However, in the play only one of the figures expresses the author's dramatic theme--but he does so very consistently--while the other three spokesmen uphold ideologies which are, in fact, antithetical to the theme.

Aside from these innovations, we shall also briefly examine the influence in the play of the techniques of Scribe and Ibsen.

Plot Summary.[3]

The action of the first act takes place in the study of Roebuck Ramsden. John Tanner, self-styled iconoclast, "member of the idle rich," and author of "The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion," finds himself

---

3. The précis of the plot is based on Shaw, Man and Superman, in Works, p. 1.

involved in a heated argument with Ramsden, "a more than highly respectable man." Tanner and Ramsden have just discovered that they have been appointed the co-guardians of Ann Whitefield by Ann's father, who has recently passed away. Neither of them wishes to cooperate with the other about Ann, and much bickering takes place between them; Ramsden resents being associated with a man whom he terms an impudent revolutionest, and Tanner, besides emphatically rejecting Ramsden as an old man with obsolete ideas, dislikes the prospect of being Ann's guardian. He is afraid of Ann. He describes her as a predatory female, and as a woman who will compromise him as much as she likes because he cannot control her. Ann then arrives on the scene and coyly implores the two men to respect her father's wish, and to protect her in her "youth" and "inexperience," Tanner and Ramsden have no choice but to comply with her request, although the former still distrusts her intensely.

Later, Tanner's young friend, Octavius Robinson, who is sentimentally and hopelessly in love with Ann, tells Tanner of his longings to become a poet. The iconoclast feels bound to tell the youth that Ann is a siren, a "lioness who breaks everybody's back with the stroke of her paw." He proceeds to enlighten Octavius on the true nature of the relations between the sexes: not only Ann, but all women are the enemies of men; they allow men no freedom because it is

their sole purpose in life to enslave them, in order to fulfil nature's behest--and their own creative function--of having children. Naïvely, Octavius expresses the thought that slavery to women must make men happy. Tanner assures the ambitious young poet that the man who wishes to be an artist must on no account allow himself to be enslaved, since in creating art he has a "purpose as absorbing and unscrupulous as a woman's purpose"; an artist strips the mask of convention from women and discovers their inmost secrets, and is, therefore, their enemy.

> Of all the human struggles [he concludes] there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman.[4]

Shortly thereafter, a discussion takes place between Tanner and Ann. Ann makes her interlocutor confess that they both have a physical attraction for each other: he can resist it no more than she. At the beginning of Act II, which takes place near Ann's country house, Octavius tells Tanner that Ann has declined his proposal of marriage; as excuses she offered her recent bereavement, and the fact that he has not been given Tanner's permission to propose. The latter, as Ann's guardian, gives his permission, and once more takes the opportunity of reminding Octavius that Ann is merely playing with him--that it is he who is really being

---

4. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 24.

pursued. Octavius claims that Ann inspires him to write poetry, but Tanner declares that if he marries her he will not find her inspiring for more than a week. Thus ends the exposition. It is made up principally of four discussions, one between Tanner and Ramsden, two between Octavius and Tanner, and one between Tanner and Ann.

At the beginning of the complication,[5] Ann makes up her mind to join Tanner in a motor trip to southern France. When the latter hears his chauffeur, Straker, remark that Ann has made this decision because she is obviously pursuing him, he decides to flee to the continent in his motor car, with his chauffeur as his only companion; Tanner knows that Straker is speaking the truth. In Act III the two men arrive in the Sierra Nevada of Spain, where they are taken prisoner by a band of brigands, who decide to hold them for ransom. The leader of the brigands, Mendoza, is a disillusioned, lonely man, who is delighted to have captured an audience; he decides to tell Straker and Tanner the story of his life. He recounts that he became an outlaw because he counted the world well lost when the woman he loved rebuked him. (This woman, it appears, is none other than Staker's sister, Louisa.) Mendoza then proceeds to read to his prisoners the maudlin verses which he has just composed in honour of the memory of

---

5. The main part of the complication is found in ibid, pp. 60-86.

his lost inamorata. The verses have a soporific effect first on Tanner and Straker, and then on Mendoze himself; the three men soon fall asleep.

Their sleep gives rise to the "dream-vision debate." Tanner and Mendoza both dream that the former is making speeches in hell, in the guise of Don Juan, the hero of Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni. Don Juan's companions in hell are Ann and Ramsden, who also appear as characters from Mozart: Ann is Dona Ana, and Ramsden is her father, the Commandant, whose statue plays an important role in the opera. Mendoza appears as the Devil, acting as host to the other three.

The scene opens as Don Juan meets Dona Ana. He informs her, to her consternation, that she is in hell, a realm for sinners, whom he equates with people who idly pursue sensuous pleasures. He complains that he is bored in hell, and that he longs for heaven, where there are no idlers. The Statue of the Commandant arrives, followed shortly thereafter by the Devil, who begins to praise hell for its sensuous delights. Don Juan, irritated by the Devil's remarks, confesses that in hell he is a social failure, because he does not in any way appreciate its delights. The Statue reveals that one of the reasons why he has come to hell is that all the "best people" are to be found there. The discussion between the three men

leads Ana to inquire about the difference between Heaven[6] and hell, for she has not decided where she belongs.

This prompts Don Juan to begin his praises of Heaven. In Heaven, he states, there is the work of helping Life[6] in its struggle upward; Life needs Man's[6] brain in order to achieve a higher consciousness of its instinctive purpose. The Devil counters Don Juan's remarks by heaping contempt on Man's[6] brain: so far Man has not used it to any purpose except to devise methods of self-destruction. Don Juan retorts that Man does fight valiantly for great ideas, even though civilization may reveal the contrary. Ana agrees: Man sometimes fights for great ideas so much that he shirks domestic responsibilities, and leaves his wife to "grapple" with these. This causes the Devil to lament:

> Alas! ...Now that we have got on the subject of Woman, he [Don Juan] will talk more than ever. However, I confess it is for me the one supremely interesting subject.[7]

Heated discussion follows as Don Juan begins to analyse womankind:

> Woman [he states] is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement.[8]

But, he continues, although Woman uses Man in order to fulfil

---

6. The capitalization in "Don Juan in Hell" is that of Shaw.

7. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 110.

8. Ibid.

her function of perpetuating the race, she has fortunately not been able to consume all of Man's energy, some of which has consequently gone to his brain; since it is the purpose of Life to attain self-consciousness and self-understanding through the help of a superior brain, the only man who gains the world's respect, and who is at the same time "happy," is the philosophic man, who uses his mental power to discover "in contemplation...the inner will of the world." Don Juan considers himself such a man. Nevertheless, he admits that he too has succumed to Woman, in spite of his philosophic ambitions; although he wanted to resist her, too often Life threw him into Woman's arms. He continues to expound at great length on the relations between the sexes, and then proceeds to attack the concept of romantic love; he becomes carried away by his own flow of words, and causes the Devil to charge him with attempt to proselytize, and with monopolizing the discussion. Don Juan retorts that his theorizing is far from over. He recapitulates some of his arguments. He points out that there is nothing sacred and holy about the coming together of Man and Woman: their union is merely the Life Force at work. At this point Ana launches one of her protests, but Don Juan continues to dominate the argument. He finally delivers a concluding sermon on his purpose as a philosophic man: he will go to heaven and there use his brain to serve the Life Force in its struggle to understand itself. He then

departs, stating that in his forthcoming endeavour he will not be bored, as he was in hell. The Devil bids him farewell:

> Well, well, go your way, Señor Don Juan. I prefer to be my own master and not the tool of any blundering universal force. I know that beauty is good to look at; that music is good to hear; that love is good to feel; and that they are all good to think about and talk about. I know that to be well exercised in these sensations, emotions, and studies is to be a refined and cultivated being.[9]

As Don Juan disappears into the void, Ana expresses a desire to follow him to heaven: but he tells her that she must find her own way there. The Statue is relieved at his departure:

> The Statue. ...Ah! there he goes. ...Whew! How he does talk! They'll never stand it in heaven.[10]

The Devil gloomily admits that Don Juan's leaving hell to serve the Life Force is a political defeat. He recalls that all the Life Worshippers, such as Rembrandt, Nietzsche, and Mozart have gone to heaven for a similar reason, and adds that the Superman is "the latest fashion among Life Force fanatics." With great interest Ana asks where the Superman is to be found:

> The Devil. He is not yet created, Señora.
> The Statue. And never will be, probably...[11]

---

9. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 132.

10. Ibid, p. 134.

11. Ibid, p. 135.

Ana, however, is of a different opinion:

> Ana. Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done. ...I believe in the Life to Come: (Crying to the universe) A father! a father for the Superman![12]

She disappears into the void as the scene concludes.

Tanner, Mendoza, and Straker are rudely awakened by the arrival of Ann, Octavius, Ramsden, and their friends; these have followed Tanner with a police escort. Ann has been the leader in the successful pursuit of the man who attempted to escape her: one of her companions remarks that she tracked Tanner at every "stopping place." In Act IV, which takes place in a villa in Granada, the climax and dénouement[13] take place. Ann tells Octavius that she will definitely not marry him. Tanner still attempts to resist her, but her magnetism finally proves too powerful; realizing that he is in the grip of the Life Force, he promises to marry her, his distrust of womankind notwithstanding. As the play concludes Tanner announces that he is not happy, and that Ann is not happy either; for, although she is triumphant, victory is always the price for which the strong sell their happiness.

---

12. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 135.

13. The main part of dénouement is found in ibid., pp. 156-172.

Analysis of the Play

As in Mrs. Warren's Profession, Shaw uses the "surf-board of suspense" technique. In the exposition we learn of Tanner's ambivalent attitude toward Ann. The former acknowledges that he is attracted to her, but distrusts her, since his theory and experience teach him that women are the enemies of creative men such as he. We see, however, that Ann does not waver in her affaire de coeur: she professes her love for her guardian almost without qualification. The major conflict of the play is thus apparent, and expectation arises throughout the four discussions of the exposition as to the course the love-duel will take. The suspense of the drama increases in the complication, when Ann decides to join Tanner on a motor trip. Tanner, perceiving her motives, flees to Spain with his chauffeur, and the tension thus decreases to a certain extent. Considerable interest is then aroused by the capture of Tanner and Straker by brigands; the excitement of the play (which by no means dies down during the "dream-vision debate") then mounts once again when Ann reappears on the scene to claim her man. The dénouement, which follows, contains the climactic moments of the play. In the final scene Tanner is no longer able to resist Ann's overpowering physical attraction, and succumbs to the charm of a woman whom, theoretically at least, he still fears.

Hence we see that, inasmuch as suspense is sustained and varied throughout the drama, plot construction in Man and Superman resembles that of a Scribian play. Moreover, Shaw uses some of the illogical technical "tricks" which also typify the "well-made play." It is highly improbable that Louisa, the former love of the brigand Mendoza, should be none other than the sister of Straker, Tanner's chauffeur. This coincidence simply arouses a comic element of surprise. Furthermore, although the story does tell of the pursuit of a creative thinker by a willful woman, and thus corroborates the dramatic theme,[14] a few of its other comic incidents, such as Tanner's flight from England to Spain, and his subsequent capture by a sentimental brigand, also seem quite far-fetched.

Nor is the characterization entirely realistic. Ann is, in one instance, gifted with the uncanny intuition typical of the personages of Le Verre D'Eau. Her instinct is so remarkable that she is able to track Tanner's itinerary from England to the Sierra Nevada! She may have made enquiries at every "stopping place," as one of her companions states, but Shaw does not tell is what these "stopping places" are, nor why Tanner, intent on avoiding Ann at all costs, should have left such clear indication of his route. In view of Ann's remarkable success in finding the man she loves among Mendoza's brigands, we must conclude that at this point Shaw's heroine is not convincingly motivated. Shaw's reason for

---

14. See infra, p. 117.

portraying her inconsistently is, as in similar cases with Scribe, a matter of technique: only by imbuing Ana with unusual intuition could the author bring about the reunion of the "lovers," and the effective conclusion of the play.

However, examples of Scribian "romantic" dramaturgy in Man and Superman are rare. (Besides, it must not be forgotten that some of these contribute a sparkling element of comedy to the play.) As in Mrs. Warren's Profession, illogical devices are not of very great significance in the work's structural fabric, since, as a whole, the drama does not consist of intrigue plot--which, as we have seen, necessitates the use of a great number of technical "tricks." Man and Superman is made up principally of lengthy ideational discussions, in which the major figures, like those of A Doll's House and Mrs. Warren's Profession, struggle for their moral ideals and engage in introspection; in these respects, which differ from what we find in Scribe, the character-portrayal may be considered naturalistic. Most of the artificiality of construction that the drama does contain is, as we shall see, not Scribian, but, as in Mrs. Warren's Profession, distinctly Shavian.

As previously stated,[15] four of the personages of the drama are depicted, partially, as allegorical figures. Ann Whitefield, for example, is on a number of occasions so seductive, and so determined in her romantic ambition to

---

15. Supra, p.95.

capture the affection of Tanner, that she becomes, in a sense, a spokesman for her sex. For instance, here she speaks during a scene of Act IV:

> Tanner. And you do care for me?
> Ann. (rising quietly and shaking her finger at him) Now, Jack! Behave yourself.
> Tanner. Infamous, abandoned woman! Devil!
> Ann. Boa-constrictor! Elephant!
> Tanner. Hypocrite!
> Ann. (softly) I must be, for my future husband's sake.
> Tanner. For mine! ...I mean for his.
> Ann. (ignoring the correction) Yes, for yours.
> . . . . . .
> Ann. (in low siren tones)...I chose you!
> Tanner. The will is yours then! The trap was laid from the beginning.
> Ann. (concentrating all her magic) From the beginning--from our childhood--for both of us--by the Life Force.
> Tanner. I will not marry you. I will not marry you.
> Ann. Oh, you will, you will.
> Tanner. I tell you, no, no, no.
> Ann. I tell you, yes, yes, yes.
> Tanner. No.
> Ann. (coaxing--imploring--almost exhausted) Yes. Before it is too late for repentance. Yes.[16]

With reference to this passage, Edward Shanks points out, quite accurately, that "people do not talk like this in real life any more than they talk in blank verse.[17] Ann's

---

16. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 168-169.

17. Edward Shanks, Bernard Shaw (London, 1924), p. 66.

conversation is comically exaggerated, so that we are compelled to take particular note of her savagely practical method of winning her love-duel with Tanner. However, immediately following the scene, Ann does conduct herself as "people do...in real life":

> Tanner. ...Are we two dreaming?
> Ann. (suddenly losing her courage, with an anguish that she does not conceal) No. We are awake: and you have said no: that is all.
> Tanner. ...Well?
> Ann. Well, I made a mistake: you do not love me.[18]

We see that Ann, like Mrs. Warren and Crofts, is conceived as a "double character," who at one moment acts as a spokesman, and at another as a woman genuinely in love. However, Shaw's portrayal of his heroine differs from that of Mrs. Warren and Crofts. Unlike either of these, Ann, at one point in the play--as Dona Ana--loses her identity as a real person completely; during the course of the "dream-vision debate" she is a spokesman for an extremely long period of time, so that we temporarily lose sight of her dual nature, and observe her only as a symbol of womankind.

Shaw employs a similar technique in his characterization of Ramsden. We frequently believe in Ramsden as a real person--as a conservative, elderly gentleman who is, for example, only understandably irritated by Tanner's observation; in Act I, that he is a man of obsolete ideas. However, it is to be doubted that a real-life reactionary would

---

18. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 169.

launch into a comic tirade such as the following, unless he were indeed a caricature of a "respectable" man:

> Ramsden. [Commenting on Tanner's book]:..I have in my hand a copy of the most infamous, the most scandalous, the most mischievous, the most blackguardly book that ever escaped burning at the hands of the common hangman. I have not read it: I would not soil my mind with such filth; but I have read what the papers say of it. The title is quite enough for me. (He reads it), The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion. By John Tanner, M.I.R.C., Member of the Idle Rich Class.[19]

In such, and similar speeches in the play, Ramsden becomes a spokesman for respectability; like Ann, he is not motivated realistically on those occasions when he expresses his conservative ideas with vituperative fervor and conviction. (Tanner, after all, is not really the devil incarnate.) Moreover, as the Statue of the Commandant, Ramsden, like Ann, has no function other than to uphold a point of view: throughout "Don Juan in Hell" he defends the cause of respectability by opposing most of Don Juan's arguments, which are of an iconoclastic nature. Furthermore, let us not forget that the Statue has come to hell because, for one important reason, the "best people" are there to be found.

The characterization of Mendoza resembles that of Ramsden. The brigand is not entirely an allegorical figure. Although it may be more the exception than the rule for a man to become an outlaw because he once experienced unrequited

---

19. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 7.

love, we do believe in Mendoza as a real person when, for example, he tells Tanner that

> Brigandage is abnormal. Abnormal professions attract two classes: those who are not good enough for ordinary bourgeois life and those who are too good for it. We are dregs and scum...[20]

However, at other instances Mendoza becomes a spokesman; his numerous high-flown, exaggerated, and comic professions of love for Louisa Straker, such as the following, would surely not be uttered by a real-life brigand:

> Mendoza. ... Louisa's [intellect] reached forward into the twentieth century: her social prejudices and family affections reached back into the dark ages. Ah, sir, how the words of Shakespeare seem to fit every crisis in our emotions!
>
> I loved Louisa: 40,000 brothers
> Could not with all their quantity
> of love
> Make up my sum.
>
> And so on. I forget the rest. Call it madness if you will--infatuation.[21]

Mendoza here becomes a disciple of romantic love, and continues to fulfil this role in the guise of the Devil, who endorses the sensuous, romantic pleasures of hell as consistently as Dona Ana and the Statue uphold their particular moral views. The Devil is a stout opponent of the arguments which Don Juan puts forth against romantic love, idleness, and pleasure-seeking. In addition, he admits that women are to him the one supremely interesting topic of conversation.

Tanner's role as a spokesman differs from that of Ann, Ramsden, and Mendoza--but only inasmuch as it is he

---

20. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 80.

21. Ibid., p. 84.

who states Shaw's actual dramatic theme. Shaw's use of parabasis in the drama is more elaborate than in Mrs. Warren's Profession: Tanner expounds Shaw's thesis in almost every major scene. The playwright states in the preface that Man and Superman was written in order

> to deal with sexual attraction...and to deal with it in a society in which the serious business of sex is left by man to women. ...That the men, to protect themselves against a too aggressive prosecution of the women's business, have set up a feeble romantic convention that the initiative in sex business must always come from the man, is true; but the pretence is so shallow that even in the theatre ...it imposes only on the inexperienced
> . . . . . .
> the whole world is strewn with snares, traps, gins and pitfalls for the capture of men by women. ...It is assumed that the woman must wait, motionless, until she is wooed. Nay, she often does wait motionless. That is how the spider waits for the fly. But the spider spins her web. And if the fly, like my hero [in the play], shews a strength that promises to extricate him, how swiftly does she abandon her pretence of passiveness, and openly fling coil after coil about him until he is secured for ever! [22]

In the drama Tanner first puts this thesis forward during the course of his discussion with Octavius, in Act I. He describes to his young friend the problem of the relations between the sexes, voices anti-romantic sentiments, and comments--in his own words--that women actually do behave as "spiders" in their efforts to ensnare the male "fly":

---

22. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. XIX-XX and XXII.

> Tanner. ...do they allow us any purpose or freedom of our own? Will they lend us to one another? Can the strongest man escape from them when once he is appropriated? They tremble when we are in danger, and weep when we die; but the tears are not for us, but for a father wasted, a son's breeding thrown away. They accuse us of treating them as a mere means to our pleasure; but how can so feeble and transient a folly as a man's selfish pleasure enslave a woman as the whole purpose of Nature embodied in a woman can enslave a man?[23]

He continues to attack womankind during the course of his discussion with Ann, later in the Act:

> I know a poor wretch whose one desire in life is to run away from his wife. She prevents him by threatening to throw herself in front of the engine of the train he leaves her in. That is what all women do. If we try to go where you do not want us to go there is no law to prevent us; but when we take the first step your breasts are under our foot as it descends; your bodies are under our wheels as we start.[24]

While engaged in his second argument with Octavius, in Act II, Tanner continues to remind the young poet that it is the natural function of women to enslave men:

> You think that you are Ann's suitor; that you are the pursuer and she the pursued; that it is your part to woo, to persuade, to prevail, to overcome. Fool: it is you who are the pursued, the marked down quarry, the destined prey. You need not sit looking longingly at the bait through the wires of the trap: the door is open, and will remain so until it shuts behind you for ever.[25]

In Act III, in the guise of Don Juan, he once more acts as

---

23. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 23.

24. Ibid., p. 38.

25. Ibid., p. 54.

spokesman. Here, however, his subject-matter is metaphysical: He clarifies another aspect of Shaw's theme by relating the struggle between Man and Woman to the evolutionary process:

> Don Juan. ...Sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutional process she invented him, differentiated him, created him in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce. Whilst he fulfils the purpose for which she made him, he is welcome to his dreams, his follies, his ideals, his heroisms, provided that the keystone of them all is the worship of woman, of motherhood, of the family, of the hearth. But how rash and dangerous it was to invent a separate creature whose sole function was her own impregnation! For mark what has happened. First, Man has multiplied on her hands until there are as many men as women; so that she has been unable to employ for her purposes more than a fraction of the immense energy she has left at his disposal by saving him the exhausting labour of gestation. This superfluous energy has gone to his brain and to his muscle. He has become too strong to be controlled by her bodily, and too imaginative and mentally vigorous to be content with mere self-reproduction. He has created civilization without consulting her, taking her domestic labor for granted as the foundation of it.[26]

In Act IV, once more as Ann's interlocutor, Tanner gives a final version of his anti-romantic ideology. The "spider" is about to catch the "fly." Tanner, therefore, begins to orate on marriage. He tells Ann that he knows that she intends to marry him; however, to him matrimony is

> apostasy, profanation of the sanctuary of my soul, violation of my manhood, sale of my birthright, shameful surrender, ignominious capitulation, acceptance of defeat.

---

26. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 110-111.

> I shall decay like a thing that has served its purpose and is done with; I shall change from a man with a future to a man with a past; I shall see in the grey eyes of all the other husbands their relief at the arrival of a new prisoner to share their ignominy.[27]

Tanner not only is Shaw's spokesman on the subject of the relations between the sexes, but also expounds the author's second, and related, thesis in the play. Shaw writes in the preface that

> Ordinary men cannot produce really impressive art-works. Those who can are men of genius: that is, men selected by Nature to carry on the work of building up an intellectual consciousness of her own instinctive purpose. Accordingly, we observe in the man of genius all the unscrupulousness and all the "self-sacrifice" (the two things are the same) of Woman. He will risk the stake and the cross; starve, when necessary, in a garret all his life; study women and live on their work and care as Darwin studied works and lived upon sheep; work his nerves into rags without payment, a sublime altruist in his disregard of himself, an atrocious egotist in his disregard of others. Here Woman meets a purpose as impersonal, as irresistible as her own; and the clash is sometimes tragic.[28]

This is a consideration of anti-romanticism from a slightly different standpoint: instead of emphasizing the struggle between Man and Woman, it points to the clash between Woman and the artist. Both of Shaw's theories are corroborated by the meaning of the plot, which is of course the story of the duel between a man who is an artist, in the sense that he is

---

27. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 166.

28. Ibid, pp. 22-23.

a philosopher and an author, and a woman who wishes to claim him and to "enslave" him as her own.

Tanner speaks to Octavius during their first discussion, in Act I; once again we find parabasis:

> Tanner. ...The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art. To women he is half vivisector, half vampire. He gets into intimate relations with them to study them, to strip the mask of convention from them, to surprise their inmost secrets, knowing that they have the power to rouse his deepest creative energies, to rescue him from his cold reason, to make him see visions and dream dreams, to inspire him, as he calls it. ...Since marriage began, the great artist has been known as a bad husband. But he is worse: he is a child-robber, a blood-sucker, a hypocrite, and a cheat. Perish the race and wither a thousand women if only the sacrifice of them enable him to act Hamlet better, to paint a finer picture, to write a deeper poem, a greater play, a profounder philosophy! ...the artist's work is to shew us ourselves as we really are. Our minds are nothing but this knowledge of ourselves; and he who adds a jot to such knowledge creates a new mind as surely as any woman creates new men...Of all human struggles there is none as treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman. Which shall use up the other? That is the issue between them. And it is all the deadlier because, in your romanticist cant, they love each other.[29]

In the guise of Don Juan, he describes the philosopher-artist's work in metaphysical and theological terms, thus adding further significance to Shaw's dramatic philosophy:

---

29. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 23-24

> Don Juan. In...Heaven...there is the work of helping Life in its struggle upward. Think of how it wastes and scatters itself, how it raises up obstaclee to itself and destroys itself in its ignorance and blindness. It needs a brain, this irresistible force, lest in its ignorance it should resist itself.30

Prior to his departure from hell, Don Juan reiterates his views:

> Don Juan. ...my brain is the organ by which Nature strives to understand itself. ...the philosopher is in the grip of the Life Force. This Life Force says to him "...I want to know myself and my destination, and choose my path; so I have made a special brain--a philosopher's brain--to grasp this knowledge for me...And this" says the Life Force to the philosopher "must thou strive to do for me until thou diest, when I will make another brain and another philosopher to carry on the work.31

We see that Tanner, as Shaw's most important spokesman in the drama, is like Ann, and Mendoza, frequently not depicted as a real person: in the "dream-vision debate" he monopolizes the discussion to such an extent that it is not far from the truth to say that he speaks miraculously almost continuously; in addition he generally expresses himself in stylized, rhetorical, and exaggerated dialogue. However, like the other three figures, he possesses a double vitality: it is possible to believe in him as a real person on certain occasions, especially when he quarrels with Ramsden, in Act I, where in a fashion not

---

30. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 104.

31. Ibid., pp. 131-132.

unlike that of revolutionary thinkers and iconoclasts of common experience, he brashly expresses disdain for the ideas of a conservative elderly gentleman.

It is evident that just as Mrs. Warren's Profession constitutes a "frontal attack on the existing social system,"[32] so Man and Superman constitutes a "frontal attack" on the "feeble convention that the initiative in sex business must always come from the man."[33] Shaw builds up his case in three ways. First, the plot demonstrates that the initiative in "sex business" actually does come from women. Secondly, Tanner conveys the author's anti-romantic ideology in numerous speeches throughout the play. Thirdly, Shaw pits his personal spokesman against three others, who uphold moral attitudes on the subject of romantic love which differ from that of Tanner. The drama is thus not only a study in character-conflict, but also in moral-conflict. The truth of this may be seen from Shaw's prefatorial comment that Ann

> was suggested to him by the fifteenth century Dutch morality called Everyman. ...As I sat watching Everyman... [he continues] I said to myself Why not Everywoman? Ann was the result: every woman is not Ann; but Ann is Everywoman.[34]

The playwright states that "every woman is not Ann": he tells us that Ann is not in every way a real woman--that she is a

---

32. Supra, p. 79.

33. Supra, p. 111.

34. Shaw, Man and Superman, p. xxxi.

symbol of womankind, and may hence be termed "Everywoman." May we not by a similar process of reasoning describe Mendoza as "Everyromanticman," Ramsden as "Everyrespectableman," and Tanner as "Everyanti-romanticman?" Since this is possible, we may conclude that whereas our interest in Mrs. Warren's Profession is aroused to a very large extent by the personal conflicts between Mrs. Warren, Vivie, and Crofts, in Man and Superman our main attention is directed not so much to personality clashes--although these are by no means unimportant--as to the intellectual, almost impersonal contest of the allegorical figures, who uphold special views on the subject of romantic love. It is evident that from the didactic viewpoint Man and Superman is thus a far more powerful play than the former.

From the foregoing we also see that Shaw's character-drawing in the play differs considerably from that of A Doll's House. Of the major members of the cast only Octavius is portrayed naturalistically. Nevertheless, although the other key personages are "double characters" depicted now as spokesmen, now as real people, they are not represented like the puppets of Le Verre D'Eau. Insofar as they engage primarily in talk, and insofar as they are not preoccupied with carrying out contrived intrigues, but with their moral problems, Ann, Ramsden, Mendoza, and Tanner may be regarded as representations of real people.

From their self-conscious appraisal of their selves we come to know and to understand them very well as thinking individuals; this we cannot say of the characters in Le Verre D'Eau.

We have drawn attention at length to the fact that the discussion-scene innovations of A Doll's House played an important role in influencing Shaw in constructing his dramas differently to those of Scribe; we have also observed that a play featuring discussion can be as suspenseful as one of intrigue. However, we see that certain Scribian principles of construction are still in evidence in both the Shavian "discussion" plays so far examined, and, in particular, that the "surf-board of suspense" technique enhances the effectiveness of these works: we have not yet put to the test the stageworthiness of the purest form of non-Scribian drama--one which contains no incident plot, and in which only verbal conflict takes place. This is what we are about to do. Despite the fact that it contains virtually no plot and consists of almost an entire act of uninterrupted discourse, the "Don Juan in Hell" scene alone has been most successfully performed, publicly, on a number of occasions. We shall now see why this has been possible.

The "dream-vision debate" contains a plot of ideas. This plot, built up like the action of a "well-made play," arouses a great deal of suspense: it includes an exposition

a complication, and a dénouement. The exposition is made up of several conversations which clearly establish the overall pattern of the intense argument that follows, and which also arouse expectation as to the outcome of the debate. In the complication we find most of the heated discussion between Don Juan and his opponents taking place. This discussion rises to a climax; the dénouement takes place when Don Juan departs for heaven, leaving the Devil, Dona Ana, and the Statue to bring the scene to a conclusion. Moreover, as Alfred C. Ward points out,

> the themes [of "Don Juan in Hell"] are introduced as in a musical composition. It would not be difficult to write 'programme notes' on the scene, using the technical terminology of music criticism to describe the introduction of 'first subject' (sin), 'second subject' (heaven and hell), and so on, with disquisitions on thematic material, development, recapitulation, and so forth.35

Thus we see that debate is stageworthy: first, because it is built up like a "well-made play" of ideas; and secondly, because it does not appear laboured or contrived, since its topics are all linked in the manner of spontaneously-developing musical themes, one of which follows the other without a break in continuity.

"Don Juan in Hell" opens as Don Juan informs Dona Ana that he does not enjoy his sojourn in hell because he is bored by the idleness and frivolity of its inhabitants--the sinners. The Devil then arrives and praises hell for its

---

35. Ward, Shaw, p. 97.

sensuous delights. Thus the main lines of intellectual contention are drawn between the "worker," Don Juan, and the "aesthete," the Devil, who dominate the argument most of the time. The complication begins, and the discussion rises in intensity accordingly: Don Juan praises Heaven, where he knows there exists the work of helping Life in its struggle to achieve a higher consciousness of its instructive purpose; he proposes to put his brain at the service of the Life Force. The Devil, in an extremely long tirade,[36] voices his contempt of Man's brain. The talk of sin and of heaven and hell leads to the subject of women when Ana complains that men are frequently too much absorbed in fighting for their ideals, and consequently neglect their wives. After a brief lull in the interlocution, tension mounts once more. In over thirty speeches[37] Don Juan launches into invective, most of which is directed against his chief anathema, Woman; the other three characters interject their opinions in opposition as best they can. Finally the Devil interrupts, and charges Don Juan with tactlessly monopolizing the conversation. The scene then rises to its climax. Don Juan recapitulates some of his

---

36. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 105-108.

37. An approximate figure. See ibid., pp. 110-122.

arguments, and thereupon delivers a final stirring speech on his duty as a philosophic man, to serve the Life Force in Heaven.[38] After this he departs; the dénouement follows. The Devil admits that he has suffered a "political" defeat--but he has also suffered an intellectual one. The scene concludes in a flurry of excitement as Ana prepares to leave hell to find a father for the Superman.

It is evident that "Don Juan in Hell" holds our attention almost continuously. The Shavian "word-music", of course, contributes a great deal to the scene's theatrical effectiveness; more prose "arias" occur during the debate than in almost any other Shavian play. Here is another of the most brilliant of these:

> Don Juan [to the Devil] ...Your friends are the dullest dogs I know. They are not beautiful: they are only decorated. They are not clean: they are only shaved and starched. They are not dignified: they are only fashionably dressed. They are not educated: they are only college passmen. They are not religious: they are only pew-renters. They are not moral: they are only conventional. They are not virtuous: they are only cowardly. They are not even vicious: they are only "frail." They are not artistic: they are only lascivious. They are not prosperous: they are only rich. They are not loyal, they are only servile; not dutiful, only sheepish; not public-spirited, only patriotic; not courageous, only quarrelsome; not determined, only obstinate; not masterful, only domineering; not self-controlled, only obtuse; not self-respecting, only vain; not kind, only sentimental; not social, only gregarious; not considerate, only polite; not intelligent, only opinionated; not progressive, only factious; not imaginative, only superstitious; not just, only vindictive; not generous,

---

38. Supra, p. 116.

> only propitiatory; not disciplined, only cowed; and not truthful at all: liars every one of them, to the very back bone of their souls.[39]

Moreover, since it is scored for contrasting voices, the scene may be considered a literary oratorio. The role of Don Juan is generally filled by a tenor, that of the Devil by a baritone, of the Statue by a bass, and of Ana by a soprano.[40] Is not this another excellent stageworthy feature?

In retrospect, we see that although Man and Superman was written a decade after Mrs. Warren's Profession, it nevertheless shows evidence of the influence of Scribe and Ibsen--to a lesser degree, of course, than the earlier play. Shaw uses the "surf-board of suspense" technique in the manner of Scribe, and also applies it in a novel fashion in the "dream-vision debate." As far as the Ibsen influence is concerned, we may say that the technique of A Doll's House is reflected in the drama primarily in terms of Shaw's emphasis on discussion instead of intrigue; although Man and Superman is, on the whole, not a naturalistic work, its characters do resemble Nora and Torvald inasmuch as they engage in self-analysis, and in justification of their ideas. The major innovation of the play, beside the effective but unorthodox structure of "Don Juan in Hell," is its allegorical element--the assumption by its stage figures of symbolic as well as realistic proportions. Finally, the drama's

---

39. Shaw, Man and Superman, pp. 128-129.

40. Ward, Shaw, p. 95.

comic element must not be overlooked. Shaw develops illogical situations far less than Scribe, and does not, except in one instance with respect to Ann, depend on them as an essential technique of plot development. Most of the "romantic" plotting that Shaw does introduce in the play is meant to contribute a true element of comedy to the work. (This, it must be observed, was seldom if ever Scribe's purpose.) As examples, we may cite Tanner's impetuous flight to Spain with his chauffeur, and the latter's surprising encounter with a brigand who turns out to be the former lover of his sister, Louisa.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GETTING MARRIED

In Getting Married Shaw established the new dramaturgy of the disquisitory plan in the English and European theatre.[1] In this chapter our main attention will be directed to investigating the features of this revolutionary dramatic form. In view of the fact that the work lacks a continuous cohesive plot, we shall be concerned with determining from what it derives basic unity; with an appraisal of its unique plot development; with discussion of its special characteristics as a dramatic allegory; and with its merits as lively farce-comedy. The analysis of this chapter will anticipate, more than that of any other, the chapter dealing with the negative criticism of Shavian theatre by Arthur B. Walkley and William Archer; for Getting Married is one of Shaw's most unconventional plays.

Plot Summary[2]

Getting Married is a play in one act, of which the action takes place in the Norman kitchen of the palace of the Bishop of Chelsea. It opens with a brief inter-

---

1. Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), p. 127.
2. The précis of the plot is based on Shaw, Getting Married, in Works, XII, 181-358.

locution between Collins, a greengrocer and caterer at the wedding, and Mrs. Bridgenorth, the Bishop of Chelsea's wife, from which we learn that the latter's fifth daughter, Edith, is to be married within a few hours. One of the guests, General Boxer Bridgenorth, the Bishop's brother, arrives. From his conversation with Mrs. Bridgenorth we learn that after twenty years he is still in love with Lesbia Grantham, Mrs. Bridgenorth's sister. The General takes a stroll into the garden. Collins then startles Mrs. Bridgenorth by confessing, à propos of the wedding, that to him matrimony did not come easily; he frequently feels the urge to leave his wife and envies his brother George, whose wife periodically abandons him; the latter is a remarkable woman who can get around anyone, including George; moreover, she is clairvoyant. Mrs. Bridgenorth tells Collins that she considers Mrs. George's marital habits odious.

The arrival of Lesbia provokes a discussion with the General. The latter has already proposed to Lesbia on nine occasions, but, in spite of his lack of success, he reiterates his suit once more. To his chagrin she refuses him again, chides him for being sentimental, and states that although she wishes to have children she does not wish to marry anyone. The General considers her views improper but Lesbia is not swayed by his opinion.

The General hears that Reginald, his other brother, is to attend the wedding. This incenses him: he does not wish to see Reginald, because the latter has been involved in a divorce suit:

> The General. But to hit her [Leo, Reginald's wife] ! Absolutely to hit her! He knocked her down--knocked her flat down on a flower bed in the presence of his gardener. He! the head of the family! the man that stands before the Barmecide and myself as Bridgenorth of Bridgenorth! to beat his wife and go off with a low woman and be divorced for it in the face of all England! in the face of my uniform and Alfred's [the Bishop's] apron! I can never forget what I felt. ...I'd cut Reginald dead if I met him in the street.[3]

Reginald arrives none the less, and is followed somewhat later by his former wife, Leo. The two greet each other cordially; they bear each other less resentment than might be expected, since their divorce was one of collusion.

> Reginald. ...Whats the good of beating your wife unless theres a witness to prove it afterwards? You dont suppose a man beats his wife for the fun of it, do you? How could she have got her divorce if I hadnt[4] beaten her? Nice state of things, that!

However, Reginald did not precisely favour the divorce; he expresses contempt for Leo's new lover, St. John Hotchkiss, and claims, to Leo's indignation, that Hotchkiss has a face like a mushroom. Leo explains that she was fond of Reginald, and that she is still fond of him; however, she

---

3. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 273.

4. Ibid., pp. 276-277.

wanted a divorce because he, unlike Hotchkiss, no longer amused her sufficiently. She goes on to say that she actually loves both men, and that she would like

> to have Rejjy for every day, and Sinjon for concerts and theatres and going out in the evenings, and some great austere saint for about once a year at the end of the season and some perfectly blithering idiot of a boy to be quite wicked with.[5]

The General feels that Leo's ideas verge on polyandry, but the Bishop, who has entered the discussion, contends that her conception of the ideal marriage is quite normal in a young woman; however, he points out to Leo that men are really quite alike, and that no matter whom she espouses she will not, after a month, find him greatly different from Reginald. This prompts Leo to ask if wedlock is not then a mistake. The Bishop replies that it is--but that avoiding it is a much bigger one.

The Bishop tells his wife that he has received another letter from "Incognita Appassionata," a woman who writes to him from time to time without giving her real name; she declares that she is happily married, but that above her earthly lover she requires contact with a great man who will never know her as she is on earth--and whom she intends to "meet in heaven when she has risen above all the everyday vulgarities of earthly love."[6]

---

5. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 280.

6. Ibid., p. 286.

Lesbia comes into the kitchen to announce that Edith, the bride, is not prepared to go through with the wedding until she has finished reading a pamphlet. The Bishop (who is writing a book on the history of marriage) guesses that Edith is at war with society's marriage laws (these being one of the subjects of his book). St. John Hotchkiss enters the palace, and discloses that Cecil Sykes, the groom, has locked himself into his room until he too has finished perusing a book. But Cecil soon arrives, and states that he will wed Edith only under protest: he has learned from an essay on "Men's Wrongs" that, legally, he would be held responsible in the event of Edith's libelling anyone after their marriage: Edith is a militant social worker, and this contingency is by no means out of the question. The prospective bride appears, and explains that there will be no ceremony: she has just read a pamphlet entitled "Do You Know What You Are Going To Do? By A Woman Who Has Done It"; from it she has learned, for example, that if Cecil committed a crime after their marriage, she would be unable to divorce him. Mrs. Bridgenorth finds that she is talking nonsense; what likelihood is there that Cecil would commit a crime? The Bishop remarks that Edith ought to realize that she must marry Cecil for better or worse. Mrs. Bridgenorth adds that affection is sufficient basis for matrimony. Her observation prompts Hotchkiss to ask why

marriage is then necessary at all. The dispute mounts, and soon involves almost all the characters.

Hotchkiss declares that the marital problems of the bride and groom and the other wedding guests might be solved by drawing up the first English "partnership deed." The Bishop agrees, but reminds everyone that when the deed is drawn up

> it will be so much worse than the existing law, that you will all prefer getting married. We shall therefore be doing the greatest possible service to morality by just trying how the new system would work.[7]

But Lesbia makes a promise:

> ...if we can agree on the conditions, I am willing to enter into an alliance with Boxer.[8]

Edith remarks:

> And I with Cecil.[9]

Leo follows suit:

> And I with Rejjy and St John.[10]

When Collins is asked for his opinion on the matter of the deed he observes that

> Marriage is tolerable enough in its way, if youre easygoing and dont expect too much from it. But it doesnt bear thinking about.[11]

---

7. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 305.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 307.

He states that there is a certain lady whom he always consults on "delicate points like this," the Mayoress of the borough, his sister-in-law, Mrs. George. The General volunteers to fetch Mrs. George from the church, where she is waiting for the wedding party. The Bishop then calls on Soames, his chaplain, to put the new deed into writing. Soames arrives; his solution to the problem of marriage is a dogmatically Christian one: the vows of celibacy and poverty.

A lengthy disputation then follows, dealing with the clauses of the contract. Almost everyone participates, but, after much discussion, no conclusion is reached. Mrs. George then arrives in the company of the General. To his mixed horror and delight, Hotchkiss decognizes her as a coalmerchant's wife to whom he had once, a number of years ago, been irresistibly attracted. He confesses to her that she still fascinates him. On condition that he abandon Leo, Mrs. George promises to give him a trial as a "visitor" at her home--if her husband finds him sufficiently entertaining. Hotchkiss agrees to break his ties with Leo: a tempestuous strange love scene then ensues between the two. This is followed by the encounter of Mrs. George and the Bishop, to whom the former confesses that it is she who is "Incognita Appassionata." With Soames also in attendance, she falls into a trance and soliloquizes on the

reality of mystical love--love devoid of practical financial considerations and purely sexual motives.

Cecil and Edith return, and disclose that they have married: they have insured themselves with the "British Family Insurance Corporation," which will protect Cecil against libel actions incurred by Edith. Cecil, for his part, has promised that if he ever commits a crime he will knock Edith down "before a witness and go off to Brighton with another lady," so that his wife will have cause for divorce. Leo, having discovered that Reginald is unable to take care of himself as a bachelor, and having heard that Hotchkiss has fallen in love with Mrs. George, decides to have her divorce annulled and to return to her former husband. Lesbia continues to refuse to marry the General; she intends to remain her own mistress, "a glorious strong-minded old maid of old England." Hotchkiss departs with Mrs. George to the latter's home, although Soames reminds them that they are both on the verge of deadly sin. But Mrs. George tells the chaplain that she and Hotchkiss are going off in Christian fellowship.

Analysis of the Play

Each of the plays we have so far examined has been a "personal" play--one which derives its unity and coherence from the all but continuous conflict among its

two or three key figures. We drew attention to the particular nature of a "personal" play in the analysis of Le Verre D'Eau, where we found that the concatenation of intrigues and counter-intrigues of the Duchess of Marlborough and Bolingbroke constitutes the major plot: this plot, we observed, imbues the work with a linked and inter-dependent beginning, middle, and end.[12] In A Doll's House, another "personal" play, it is the conflict between Nora and her husband which imparts dramatic unity, even though disagreement between the Helmers does not break out openly until the final scene; (it is, we may recall, latent throughout the drama). Similarly, in Mrs. Warren's Profession it is the dispute between Vivie and her mother which dominates the action, just as in Man and Superman it is the love-feud between Tanner and Ann.

That the above definition of dramatic unity is not arbitrary becomes manifest most strikingly in Getting Married, which is not a "personal," but a disquisitory play. This work incorporates a new type of unity. Eric Bentley observes that

> the difference between the disquisitory and personal plays...is that in the former the protagonist and antagonist have dwindled. They are only members of a group. ...Even if the plot centers on two or three characters, the play as a whole does not. The personal plays tend often to be concertos for two soloists and orchestra; the disquisitory plays are symphonies.[13]

---

12. See footnote, supra, p. 18.

13. Bentley, Shaw, p. 136 .

Although the plot of Getting Married does centre on Edith and Cecil, we see that these two figures are not "soloists," and that the conflict between them consequently does not constitute a unifying plot: the prospective bride and groom fulfil a central function in the play, since it is their impending wedding which causes the arrival of the numerous guests, and since their marital contretemps precipitates much of the action, such as, for example, the prolonged discussion of a "partnership deed," and the arrival of the clairvoyant Mrs. George, the key figure in the final scenes; however, the two characters cannot be considered "soloists," since they do not appear on stage until the play is almost one-third completed, and since, once they have presented their reasons for not wishing to marry, others, particularly the Bishop, Hotchkiss, and Mrs. George dominate the action more than they, just as the early guests did prior to their arrival. Our interest in Edith and Cecil is consequently no greater than in any one else in the drama.

In view of the fact that it has no major characters, it is not surprising to find that the play does not contain a major unifying plot, similar to those of the other works we have studied. Getting Married is made up, instead, of a number of more or less independent minor plots, in each of which a curtailed exposition, complication and dénouement is developed, and in each of which the "surf-board of

suspense" technique is employed.

There is, for instance, the conflict between the General and Lesbia. When the former arrives at the Bishop's palace we learn, from his conversation with Mrs. Bridgenorth, that he is still in love with Lesbia; this knowledge serves as an abbreviated exposition for the complication which ensues. Lesbia arrives, only to refuse the General's tenth proposal of marriage. The rather sharp dispute between the sentimental old General and the adamant Lesbia is then suspended for quite some time; however, later, Lesbia agrees to become her suitor's wife, if a new law, which will grant her honorable marital conditions, can be established; considerable apprehension thus arises as to whether or not she will become the General's wife after all. But the guests cannot agree on the clauses of a new "partnership deed," so that our interest in the problems of these two people once more diminishes: it seems almost certain that they will not marry. The dénouement of the sub-plot occurs when at the end of the play Lesbia asserts that she definitely intends to remain an old maid.

A second minor plot deals with the conflict between Reginald and Leo. We are introduced to the disagreement between these two figures when the General expostulates about his brother's disgraceful divorce case. Leo and Reginald then arrive, and argue about their reasons for having

obtained a divorce, and especially about their attitude toward Hotchkiss. The plot is then interrupted, but our interest in the divorcees is renewed when the complication takes a new turn: Leo and Reginald both participate in the discussion of the new marriage contract which, Leo hopes, will perhaps permit her to marry both of the men she likes; apprehension arises as to whether or not her wish will be realized. The disputation is, of course, unsuccessful. The dénouement of the plot, which occurs considerably later in the play, contains a theatrically effective surprise: Leo, having been rejected by Hotchkiss, decides to rejoin her husband; she finds that he is incapable of taking care of himself as a bachelor.

The exposition of the minor plot involving Edith and Cecil takes place when Lesbia discloses that Edith is determined to finish reading a pamphlet prior to marrying, and when Hotchkiss reveals that, instead of coming to the wedding, Cecil has locked himself up in his room--with a book. We realize that something evidently disturbs both the prospective bride and groom, and we are expectant as to what this might be. It does not take us long to find out. Edith and Cecil arrive in the kitchen; both doubt the wisdom of entering into matrimony, since the law does not give adequate protection to married people in the event of either party's committing a criminal offence. Shock and surprise

are caused by their decision to forego the wedding. Later in the play, after the unsuccessful debate of the new "partnership deed," the sub-plot takes another surprising turn when Edith and Cecil return to announce that they have married, privately, and that they have protected themselves from the legal liabilities of wedlock as much as possible.

The fourth minor plot of the drama concerns the strange love-duel of Hotchkiss and Mrs. George. Early in the play we hear from Collins of Mrs. George's eccentric conjugal habits, and of her unusual spiritual powers: we are thus not unprepared for the complication, which develops when Hotchkiss is confronted by his former inámorata, whom he fears, but to whom he is irresistibly attracted. Mrs. George persuades Hotchkiss to give up Leo, and prepares to give him a trial as a platonic lover. At the end of the play, Hotchkiss and Mrs. George depart for the latter's home in Christian fellowship. Our apprehension as to the outcome of their match lingers on after the final scene.

The Bishop, Mrs. Bridgenorth, Collins, and Soames all participate in the four minor plots, as we may see from the summary in the previous section of the chapter.

It can scarcely be denied that the sub-plots of Getting Married are theatrically effective; moreover, two of them, at least, have a meaning which, we shall see, confirms the theme of the play. But what may we regard

as the unifying structural factor of the drama? Is it possible that the work has no real coherence; that, as William Archer maintains, it has merely "plum-pudding unity...the unity of a number of [dramatic] ingredients [haphazardly] stirred up together...?"[14] The answer is most certainly in the negative. The drama is not, as Archer finds, a mere "jumble of ideas...on the subject of marriage":[15] it is a systematically-constructed disquisitory play on this topic: it is definitely cohesive, since it consists almost entirely of discussions dealing, uninterruptedly, with the idea of marriage. Very few moments go by when two or more of its thirteen characters do not debate matters related to the subject of love and marriage, and to the problems occasioned by the impending wedding of Cecil and Edith; it is this debate, not plot, which commands continuous attention in the drama, and which may be considered a complete and unifying action. Shaw demonstrates in Getting Married that a theatrically successful play does not need to include continuous plot of the variety perfected by Scribe; he shows, even more conclusively than in Mrs. Warren's Profession and Man and Superman, that unlimited verbal conflict between clear-thinking people can be theatrically as effective as the incident plot of "personal" plays.

---

14. William Archer, Play-making (London, 1912), p. 104.

15. Ibid.

In a more total sense than Man and Superman, the drama is conceived as a type of allegory.[16] Each of its thirteen characters (as compared to the four allegorical figures in Man and Superman) is portrayed as a person with a special moral viewpoint on the subject of marriage, not including a beadle, who has put two speeches in the play; as William Irvine remarks, "each character is a wedge of the marriage-problem pie."[17] Collins' over-all opinion, for example, is that marriage is a good thing, if one does not reflect about it too much. Mrs. Bridgenorth generally upholds a rather conventional attitude; she is shocked to hear from Collins of his sister-in-law's philandering, and is very much disturbed by her daughter's recalcitrance on her wedding-morning. The General's views on matrimony are, on the whole, sentimental and conservative: he does not give up hope that Lesbia will marry him, even though he has been proposing to her for twenty years; he is, furthermore, quite taken aback by Lesbia's free-thinking about love. Lesbia is a convinced anti-romantic and realist: she wishes to have children, but she does not wish to marry, because she considers the existing marriage laws unjust. Leo is a

---

16. See James Bridie, "Shaw as Dramatist," in G. B. S. 90, edited by Stephen Winsten (London, 1946), 77-91, p. 83; William Irvine, The Universe of G. B. S.(New York, 1949), pp. 275-276.

17. Irvine, G. B. S., p. 276.

different type of free-thinker: she would like to have several husbands at a time. Hotchkiss is conceived as still another kind of liberal: he is a philanderer, and does not believe in wedlock, as such, but he does not reject the idea of platonic friendship with Mrs. George. The latter is a mystic, who sees beyond the married state an even higher, more spiritual bond. Reginald believes in compromise: he is altruistic enough to comply with his wife's wish to purposely arrange a reason for divorce. Soames voices the most rigid view on marriage: celibacy.

The Bishop preaches the doctrine of temperance and common sense. It is apparent that, on occasion, he speaks for the author: Shaw uses parabasis in the drama. The playwright's main conclusion with respect to marriage, as stated prefatorily, is that, except for bohemians, who have no social status to lose, and for people who avail themselves of the shelter of marriage by pretending to be married when they are not,

> open violation of the marriage laws means either downright ruin or such inconvenience and disablement as a prudent man or woman would get married ten times over rather than face. And these disablements and inconveniences are not even the price of freedom; for...an avowedly illicit union is often found in practice to be as tyrannical and as hard to escape from as the worst legal one. ...Marriage remains practically inevitable; and the sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner we shall set to work to make it decent and reasonable.[18]

---

18. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 184.

The Bishop, approximating the words of Shaw, points out to Leo that

> A man is like a phonograph with half-a-dozen records. You soon get tired of them all; and yet you have to sit at a table whilst he reels them off to every new visitor. In the end you have to be content with his common humanity; and when you come down to that you find out about men... that they all taste alike. Marry whom you please; at the end of a month he'll be Reginald over again. It wasnt worth changing: indeed it wasnt.[19]

In answer to Leo's question as to whether or not it is a mistake to get married, he states a wise Shavian paradox:

> It is, my dear; but it's a much bigger mistake not to get married.[20]

At least two of the minor plots have a meaning which may be interpreted as corroboration of Shaw's theme. Cecil and Edith, for example, iron out their pre-marital difficulties by taking legal precautions that will insure the decency and reasonableness of their marriage. They seem to come to the realization that wedlock is, with all its liabilities, indeed inevitable, but that it need not be precarious. Furthermore, Leo heeds the Bishop's advice and returns to her former husband at the end of the play, seemingly quite content with his "common humanity." Thus, since two of the minor plota have an ideological significance closely allied to the dramatic theme,

---

19. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 284.

20. Ibid., p. 285.

and since even the platonic liaison between Hotchkiss and Mrs. George suggests that marriage in one form or another is inevitable, we may conclude that the play has a consistent philosophical meaning.

Getting Married also contains unique characterization. Though they uphold particular convictions with respect to matrimony, the members of the drama's cast are not spokesmen resembling those in Mrs. Warren's Profession and Man and Superman. Admittedly, one of them does speak for the author on occasion, and all of them voice, quite articulately, opinions concerning the problem that confronts them. However, most of the personages of the play are not essentially "double characters"; most of them tend always to speak "in" character, unlike, for example, Mrs. Warren and Crofts in Mrs. Warren's Profession; furthermore, most of them do not express themselves in the stylized, exaggerated dialogue found in Man and Superman.

Let us examine the Bishop. From time to time the prelate speaks for the author, but he does so without any marked transformation of his personality taking place. When the Bishop gives Leo some sound advice on marriage, for example, he is logically motivated to do so; he is, after all, a learned man--with a sense of humour--who might be expected to give his former sister-in-law the benefit of his studied, witty opinion; he is definitely

not a John Tanner: he does not continuously overflow with words, like the philosopher, nor does he speak with the latter's intensity. We have already quoted two of the Bishop's important speeches, which partially serve to confirm our argument.[21]

That Mrs. George should soliloquize on platonic love does also not seem illogical: after all, Shaw depicts her as an impassioned mystic; if she has the gift of clairvoyance, why should she not also possess the less remarkable gift of rhetorical speech?

> Mrs. George. ...When you loved me I gave you the whole sun and stars to play with. I gave you enternity in a single moment, strength of the mountains in one clasp of your arms, and the volume of all the seas in one impulse of your soul. A moment only; but was it not enough? Were you not paid then for all the rest of your struggle on earth? Must I mend your clothes and sweep your floors as well? Was it not enough? I paid the price without bargaining: I bore the children without flinching: was that a reason for heaping fresh burdens on me? I carried the child in my arms: must I carry the father too? When I opened the gates of paradise, were you blind? was it nothing to you? When all the stars sang in your ears and all the winds swept you into the heart of heaven, were you deaf? were you dull? was I no more to you than a bone to a dog? Was it not enough? We spent eternity together; and you ask me for a little lifetime more. We possessed all the universe together; and you ask me to give you my scanty wages as well. I have given you the greatest of all things; and you ask me to give you little things. I gave you your own soul; you ask me for my body as a plaything. Was it not enough? Was it not enough?[22]

---

21. Supra, pp. 140-141.

22. Shaw, Getting Married, p. 343.

Is it inconceivable that real mystics might speak in the above manner when entranced? Do these not have unusual powers?

In Man and Superman we observed that one of the reasons why we do not always believe in its stage figures is that their discourse is frequently stylized to such an extent that it resembles blank verse more than real speech, even though the figures seem to have no logical grounds for conversing in this manner.[23] In Getting Married most of the members of the cast have, like Mrs. George, a good reason for speaking highly elegantly on a few occasions. Moreover, very frequently their dialogue is quite naturalistic, such as in the following scene, which takes place at a crucial moment of the play: the articles of the "partnership deed" are being debated. (One can well imagine how differently Tanner and Ann Whitefield would have discoursed on the matter.)

> The Bishop. [to Soames] Has Alice explained to you the nature of the document we are drafting?
> Soames. She has indeed.
> Lesbia. That sounds as if you disapproved.
> Soames. It is not for me to approve or disapprove. I do the work that comes to my hand from my ecclesiastical superior.
> The Bishop. Dont be uncharitable, Anthony. You must give us your best advice.
> Soames. My advice to you all is to do your duty by taking the Christian vows of celibacy and poverty. The Church was founded to put an end to marriage and to put an end to property.
> Mrs. Bridgenorth. But how could the world go on, Anthony?

---

23. Supra, p.107.

Soames. Do your duty and see. Doing your duty is your business: keeping the world going is in higher hands.

Lesbia. Anthony: youre impossible.

Soames. (taking up his pen) You wont take my advice. I didnt expect you would. Well, I await your instructions.

Reginald. We got stuck on the first clause. What should we begin with?

Soames. It is usual to begin with the term of the contract.

Edith. What does that mean?

Soames. The term of years for which it is to hold good.

Leo. But this is a marriage contract.

Soames. Is the marriage to be for a year, a week, or a day?

Reginald. Come, I say, Anthony! Youre worse than any of us. A day!

Soames. Off the path is off the path. An inch or a mile! What does it matter?

Leo. If the marriage is not to be for ever, I'll have nothing to do with it. I call it immoral to have a marriage for a term of years. If the people dont like it they can get divorced.

Reginald. It ought to be for just as long as the two people like. Thats what I say.

Collins. They may not agree on the point, sir. It's often fast with one and loose with the other.

Lesbia. I should say for as long as the man behaves himself.

Bishop. Suppose the woman doesnt behave herself?

Mrs. Bridgenorth. The woman may have lost all her chances of a good marriage with anybody else. She should not be cast adrift.

Reginald. So may the man! What about his home?

Leo. The wife ought to keep an eye on him, and see that he is comfortable and takes care of himself properly. The other man won't want her all the time.

Lesbia. There may not be another man.

Leo. Then why on earth should she leave him?

Lesbia. Because she wants to.

> Leo. Oh, if people are going to be let do what they want to, then I call it simple immorality. (She goes indignantly to the oak chest, and perches herself on it, close beside Hotchkiss).
> Reginald. (Watching them sourly) You do it yourself, dont you?
> Leo. Oh, thats quite different. Dont make foolish witticisms, Rejjy.
> The Bishop. We dont seem to be getting on...[24]

The above discourse is surely not unlike what the speech of intelligent, clever people might be in similar conversations in real life: the purpose of the argument may be somewhat implausible, but the way in which the characters discuss their problems must, in spite of some glibness, be considered naturalistic--or at least very close to naturalism. Let us not forget that the effective naturalistic discussion scene of A Doll's House also contains some non-naturalistic overtones: people of Nora's and Torvald's social status do not in real life, generally express their ideas by means of suggestive, imaginative metaphors, such as we examined in Chapter IV.[25] Must we not, then, also grant Shaw some poetic licence in Getting Married?

Of course, it does seem improbable that Reginald, whom his former wife describes as a bore, would make highly stimulating speeches on a few occasions;[26] furthermore, Hotchkiss is from time to time almost as rhetorical and long-winded as John Tanner,[26] so that we can scarcely consider him a true-to-life literary portrait: these are some of

---

24. Shaw, Getting Married, pp. 313-314.

25. Supra, p. 87.

26. Shaw, Getting Married, particularly pp. 277, 280, 288, 293, 326, 327, and 354.

the inconsistencies of character-drawing to be found in the work, and there are others. For instance, inasmuch as they adopt, on the whole, a highly intelligent attitude toward the problem of matrimony, it seems improbable that both Edith and Cecil would decide to inform themselves of the liabilities of wedlock on the very morning of their nuptials. Their belated perusal of the marriage laws is obviously designed by Shaw as a means of creating a startling impasse in the wedding-proceedings, and thereby of furthering the development of the action.

Other weaknesses in characterization--which are, however, essentially comic--are the following: it seems unlikely, or at least comically incongruous, that an impassioned, rhetorical mystic like Mrs. George would marry a coalmerchant; that an elderly general, no matter how sentimental, would propose to the same woman on ten different occasions; that the wedding guests stood to gain any lasting profit from a new "partnership deed"; that Reginald would go so far as to use violence against his wife, in order to give the latter cause for divorce; and that Leo would seriously consider polyandry. We see that the behaviour of the stage figures is, in some respects, quite eccentric, not to say abnormal. In fact, Edward Shanks points out that characters in the later Shavian plays conduct themselves somewhat in the manner of lunatics;[27] this, of course, contributes an additional

---

27. Edward Shanks, Bernard Shaw (London, 1924), p. 71. See also Desmond MacCarthy, Shaw (London, 1951), p. 8.

element of comedy and farce to the play, particularly in a scene such as the following:

> Hotchkiss. Unfaithful to me already!
>
> Mrs. George. I'm not your property, young man: dont you think it. (She goes over to him and faces him). You understand that? (He suddenly snatches her into his arms and kisses her). Oh! You dare do that again, you young blackguard; and I'll jab one of these chairs in your face (she seizes one and holds it in readiness)....
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Hotchkiss (admiring her) Are you really game, Polly? Dare you defy me?
>
> Mrs. George. If you ask me another question I shant be able to keep my hands off you. (she dashes distractedly past him to the other end of the table, her fingers crisping)
>
> Hotchkiss. That settles it. Polly: I adore you: we were born for one another. As I happen to be a gentleman, I'll never do anything to annoy or injure you except that I reserve the right to give you a black eye if you bite me; but youll never get rid of me now to the end of your life.
>
> Mrs. George. I shall get rid of you if the beadle has to brain you with the mace for it (she makes for the tower).
>
> Hotchkiss (running between the table and the oak chest and across to the tower to cut her off) You shant.
>
> Mrs. George (panting) Shant I though?
>
> Hotchkiss. No you shant. I have one card left to play that youve forgotten. Why were you so unlike yourself when you spoke to the Bishop?
>
> Mrs. George (agitated beyond measure) Stop. Not that. You shall respect that if you respect nothing else. I forbid you. (He kneels at her feet) What are you doing? Get up: dont be a fool.
>
> Hotchkiss. Polly: I ask you on my knees to let me make George's acquaintance in his home this afternoon: and I shall remain on my knees till the Bishop comes in and sees us. What will he think of you then?
>
> Mrs. George (beside herself) Wheres the poker? (She rushes to the fireplace; seizes the poker; and makes for Hotchkiss, who flies to the study

door. The Bishop enters just then and finds himself between them, narrowly escaping a blow from the poker.

The Bishop. Dont hit him, Mrs. Collins. He is my guest.[28]

Finally, we must draw attention to some illogical plot construction in the drama. Is it not coincidental that Collins' sister-in-law turns out to be none other than the Bishop's strange correspondent, "Incognita Appassionata," and that this person has had previous acquaintance with Leo's new lover, Hotchkiss?

We may now draw several conclusions. We see, first of all, that as in Mrs. Warren's Profession and Man and Superman, discussion is the chief dramatic element in Getting Married, and that, as in the other two plays, the exhibition and discussion of human nature and human problems is, therefore, the drama's prime claim to literary and socio-philosophic distinction. It will be perceived that the work resembles A Doll's House as far as naturalistic character-portrayal is concerned, but it is closer to the truth to say that the members of the cast are depicted as a new type of "double character": they do behave like persons of common experience, such as Nora and Torvald Helmer, but they also on many occasions conduct themselves like the "stagey" characters generally found in farce.

Like Man and Superman, the play has a number of Scribian features; however, the "surf-board of suspense"

---

28. Shaw, Getting Married, pp. 334-335 and 337-338.

technique is of relatively minor importance, and the Scribian technical conventions are, as in the earlier play, not of paramount significance, structurally. Some of the Scribian conventions are admittedly important in the development of the action--such as the coincidence of the previous acquaintance between Hotchkiss and Mrs. George--but most of them, particularly such comic incongruities as Leo's wish to keep several husbands, contribute a genuine element of humour to the work. We have seen that Scribe, in Le Verre D'Eau, actually depended on countless coincidences and illogical "tricks" of characterization in order to build up the fundamental structural foundation of his play;[29] on the other hand, we must admit that Getting Married would be quite a successful drama--if not as comic a one--even if Shaw had not introduced in it such "romantic" matters as Mrs. George's marriage to a coalmerchant, her correspondence as "Incognita Appassionata," her tempestuous love scene with Hotchkiss, the General's tenth proposal, Leo's expressed appreciation of polyandry, and Reginald's beating of his wife: like Tanner's flight to Spain and Mendoza's love for a woman who turns out to be Straker's sister, (in Man and Superman), many of Shaw's "romanticisms" in Getting Married are, unlike those of Scribe, not of fundamental--as compared to comic--importance in the drama. Above all, let us not forget that illogicalities of construction are in no way so essential in Shaw as in Scribe

---

29. Supra, pp. 20-28.

because plot-construction with the former is over-shadowed by emphasis on spontaneous, artistically-sound discussion. We thus see that Getting Married is (in more ways than one,) a work of literature far removed from "well-made plays".

CHAPTER VII

THE DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE OF ANTON CHEKHOV

Some critics consider Shaw's disquisitory play, Heartbreak House, the playwright's greatest work. Stylistically, it is modelled very closely on the dramaturgy of Chekov, and on the technique of Chekhov's play, The Cherry Orchard. Hence, before proceeding to Heartbreak House, we shall briefly examine the work of the Russian dramatist.

Chekhov, like Ibsen and Shaw, was a revolutionary artist in the European theatre. As Robert Hingley points out,

> His four major plays--The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard--mark a break with tradition so startling that many critics call him a 'revolutionary' dramatist. In defining the revolution which he accomplished it is impossible to avoid paradoxical language--he is frequently said to have 'purged the theatre of theatricality, to have written 'undramatic drama'...[1]

It is important to note the striking similarity between the criticism levelled against Chekhov and against Shaw; the latter, we may recall, was also said to have written "undramatic drama." Moreover, the theory of these two authors is in many ways similar: Chekhov, like Shaw, condemned many of the features of the "well-made play," such as stereotyped, artificial characterization:

> Retired captains with red noses [he writes], bibulous reporters, starving writers, con-

---

1. Ronald Hingley, Chekhov (London, 1950), p. 233.

> sumptive hard-working wives, honourable young men without a single blemish, exalted maidens , kind-hearted nurses--all these have been described...and must be avoided like the pit.[2]

In addition, Chekhov, like Shaw, disliked the mechanical plot-construction of Scribian drama. He maintained that the subject-matter of a play must be "new," and that "you can do without a plot."[3] However, he did not share Shaw's didacticism. He did not believe that plays should contain unrealistic features; above all, he advocated naturalistic characterization:[4]

> people...don't spend all their time [in real life] saying clever things [he observes], They're more occupied with eating, drinking, flirting and talking stupidities--and these are the things which ought to be shown on the stage. A play should be written in which people arrive, go away, have dinner, talk about the weather and play cards. Life must be exactly as it is, and people as they are--not on stilts. ...Let everything on the stage be just as complicated, and at the same time just as simple as it is in life. People eat their dinner, just eat their dinner, and all the time their happiness is being established or their lives are being broken up.[5]

---

2. Cited in Hingley, Chekhov, p. 236.

3. Cited in ibid.

4. See Edmund Wilson, "Bernard Shaw since the War," The New Republic, 1924, XXXIX-XL, 380-381, p. 381.

5. Cited in Hingley, Chekhov, p. 234.

Summary of The Cherry Orchard[6]

In Act I, the action of The Cherry Orchard takes place in the manor house on the Russian estate of Madame Lubov Ranevsky. Lopakhin, a successful merchant, whose father was a serf on the estate, and Dunyasha, a servant, are speaking of the impending arrival of Lubov from Paris; Lopakhin mentions that the latter has been living abroad for five years. Shortly thereafter Lubov arrives accompanied by her daughter, Anya, her brother, Gaev, her adopted daughter, Varya, and some other people. We learn from Anya that Lubov is almost bankrupt; Varya thereupon discloses to Anya that the mother's land will be sold in August, since the interest on the mortgage has not been paid. This news upsets Anya considerably.

Somewhat later in the act, Lopakhin tells Lubov that her cherry orchard will be sold at public auction very shortly, unless she follows his advice. He claims that because of the orchard's location near a scenic river and a railway line it would make an ideal spot on which to rent lots for the construction of cottages for "summer-folk." He admits that in order to carry out this plan the cherry

---

6. The précis of the plot is based on Chekhov (Tchekoff), Anton, The Cherry Orchard, in Plays, in two series (New York, 1916), II, 211-277. Translated with an introduction by Julius West.

trees would have to be cut down, and that even the houses on the estate would have to be razed. Lubov, who loves the orchard as her most prized possession, is unwilling even to consider Lopakhin's plan; Gaev shares her sentiment, and proudly reminds Lopakhin that the orchard is mentioned in the "Encyclopaedic Dictionary." Curtly, Lopakhin points out that they will not make money by selling cherries. He bids Lubov farewell, and urges her to reflect on his proposal. After his departure Gaev assures Varya that he will arrange a loan which will save the estate.

The second act takes place in a field near the orchard. Lopakhin still attempts to persuade Lubov to lease her land, but the latter still does not wish to do so. Gaev announces that he has been promised an introduction to a general, who, he believes, will lend him money to save the domain. Lubov says that Gaev is deceiving himself--that there are no such generals. Before leaving, Lopkhin once more reminds Lubov that the orchard will be sold on August 22, unless she agrees to his proposal.

It is August 22 as Act III opens. Varya is still confident that Gaev will save the property, but somewhat later Lopkhin arrives and discloses that it is he who has bought it, and that he intends to cut down the cherry trees and build summer homes himself. Act IV deals with Lubov's departure for Paris. At the very end of the play, after

she and her friends have already left the estate..she and Gaev in tears--we hear "the clanging of an axe...far away in the garden." Such, in brief, is the plot of The Cherry Orchard.

In anticipation of the examination of Heartbreak House, we shall now analyze three of the main featutes of Chekhov's dramaturgy: the characterization of members and hangers-on of the decadent Russian privileged class; the musical, and frequently non-logical quality of the dialogue; and the symbolism.

Each of the figures of the play is depicted in terms of his individual personality, as well as of his traits as one of the indolent, resigned persons of Lubov's aristocratic circle; the play is, therefore, in a sense, a sociological, as well as a psychological study. Lubov is a high-minded, sentimental, and extremely impractical grande dame; the drama emphasizes her inability to cope with a simple financial situation. Here is her description of herself and her life, in Act II:

> Lubov. Oh, my sins....I've always scattered money about without holding myself in, like a madwoman, and I married a man who made nothing but debts. My husband died of champagne--he drank terribly--and to my misfortune, I fell in love with another man and went off with him...last year...I went away to Paris, and there he robbed me of all I had and threw me over and went off with another woman. I tried to poison myself...It was so silly, so shameful....And suddenly I longed to be back in Russia, my own land, with my little girl....[7]

---

7. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, pp. 240-241.

Gaev, Lubov's brother, is a rather stupid, idle man, who almost thinks more of playing billiards than of saving his sister's estate. Here is a sample of his babbling conversation, in Act IV, at a time when everyone else is sadly preparing to leave the estate:

> Gaev. (Gaily) Yes, really, everything's all right now. Before the cherry orchard was sold we all were excited and we suffered, and then, when the question was solved once and for all, we all calmed down, and even became cheerful. I'm a bank official now, and a financier... red in the middle; and you, Luba, for some reason or other, look much better, there's no doubt about it.[8]

Anya, a young woman in her late teens, lives on the blind hope of youth; we realize that she faces much disillusionment:

> Anya. Mother! mother, are you crying? My dear, kind, good mother, my beautiful mother, I love you! Bless you! The cherry orchard is sold, we've got it no longer, it's true, true, but don't cry, mother, you've still got your life before you, you've still your beautiful pure soul....Come with me, come dear, away from here, come! We'll plant a new garden, finer than this, and you'll see it, and you'll understand, and deep joy, gentle joy will sink into your soul...[9]

Varya suffers from Weltschmerz and boredom, and is apparently tired of the life her society leads. She tells Anya about her feelings:

> Varya. [to Anya] ...I go about all day, looking after the house, and I think all the time, if only you could marry a rich man, then I'd be happy and would go away somewhere by myself, then to Kiev...to Moscow, and so on, from one holy place to another. I'd tramp and tramp. That would be splendid.[10]

---

8. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, p. 270.

9. Ibid., pp. 263-264.

10. Ibid., p. 219.

Lopakhin is the only truly vital person in the drama; he is practical, clear-headed and ambitious, and presents a striking contrast to the other characters; he knows what he is--the son of a serf who has succeeded in the world:

> Lopakhin. ...My father was a peasant, it's true, but here I am in a white waistcoat and yellow shoes...a pearl out of an oyster. I'm rich now, with lots of money...[11]

Like Getting Married, The Cherry Orchard is a play without "soloists," although it does have a continuous plot. One of the characters who does not participate prominently in the major plot, but is nevertheless an interesting figure, is Pischin, a landowner and friend of Lubov and Gaev. Like Lubov, he is troubled by financial difficulties:

> Pischin. ...the trouble is, I've no money! A hungry dog only believes in meat. ...So I ...only believe in money....[12]

Another important figure is Trofimov, an "eternal student," and former tutor of Lubov's children, who lives at the estate virtually in idleness; he is a dreamer:

> Trofimov. ...I'm not thirty yet, I'm young, I'm still a student, but I have undergone a great deal! I'm as hungry as the winter, I'm ill, I'm shaken. I'm as poor as a beggar, and where haven't I been--fate has tossed me everywhere! But my soul is always my own; every minute of the day and the night it is filled with unspeakable presentiments. I know that happiness is coming...[13]

---

11. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, p. 214.

12. Ibid., p. 249.

13. Ibid., p. 248.

The servants are resigned to their fate, like their mistress. Fiers, an eighty-seven year old servant, stoically accepts his senility:

> Fiers. ...They've gone away. ...They've forgotten about me....Never mind, I'll sit here. ...Life's gone on as if I'd never lived. ...I'll lie down....You've no strength left in you, nothing left at all....Oh, you...bungler![14]

Charlotta, a governess, realizes that she is very lonely:

> Charlotta. ...where I come from and who I am, I don't know....Who my parents were--perhaps they weren't married--I don't know. ...I don't know anything. ...I do want to talk, but I haven't anybody to talk to...I haven't anybody at all.[15]

Like his mistress, Epikhodov, a clerk, is troubled by misfortune: Dunyasha, a servant, descfibes him as

> a nice young man, but every now and again, when he begins to talk, you can't understand a word he's saying. I think I like him. He's madly in love with me. He's an unlucky man; every day something happens. We tease him about it. They call him "Two-and-twenty-troubles."[16]

Dunyasha is frightened by life; she confesses as much to Yasha, Lubov's lackey, with whom she has fallen in love:

> I'm so nervous, I'm worried. I went into service when I was quite a little girl, and now I'm not used to common life, and my hands are white, white as a lady's. I'm so tender and so delicate now, respectable and afraid of everything....I'm so frightened. And I don't know what will happen to my nerves if you deceive me, Yasha.[17]

---

14. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, p. 277.

15. Ibid., pp. 234-235.

16. Ibid., p. 215.

17. Ibid., p. 236.

Yasha, lika Varya, longs for a better life than he finds at the estate:

> Yasha. ...Lubov Andreyevna! I want to ask a favour of you, if you'll be so kind! If you go to Paris again, then please take me with you. It's absolutely impossible for me to stop here. ...What's the good of talking about it, you see for yourself that this is an uneducated country, with an immoral population, and it's so dull. ...Take me with you, be so kind![18]

Thus we see that the people in The Cherry Orchard have particular individual problems, and that, with the exception of Lopakhin, heartbreak and an inability to cope with their environment characterizes them all.

For the most part, the dialogue of the play consists of rather weary, musing conversations; these can not be considered discussions, since they are not written to establish highly explicit intellectual conclusions. However, despite its non-logical quality, the dialogue is very revealing: the characters of the play analyze themselves, casually, and voice their frustrations as real people of a similar temperament and of a similar social setting might do. (The naturalism of Chekhov's drama is, in fact, so true to life in general, that Joshua Logan, the American Theatre producer, adapted the work to a setting in the old American South, re-titling it The Wisteria Trees.) Here, for instance, is the typically Chekhovian conversation

---

18. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, p. 258.

which takes place in Act II; on the surface, nothing of consequence seems to be said. Yet, while they speak, rather incoherently, the characters unveil their inmost sentiments: we come to know and to understand them very well, in spite of their lack of articulation; we recognize their torpor, resignation, and heartbreak:

> Epikhodov enters at the back of the stage playing his guitar
>
> Lubov. ...(Thoughtfully) Epikhodov's there.
>
> Anya. (Thoughtfully) Epikhodov's there.
>
> Gaev. The sun's set.
>
> Trofimov. Yes.
>
> Gaev. (Not loudly, as if declaiming) O Nature, thou art wonderful, thou shinest with eternal radiance! Oh, beautiful and indifferent one, thou whom we call mother, thou containest in thyself existence and death, thou livest and destroyest....
>
> Varya. (Entreatingly) Uncle, dear!
>
> Anya. Uncle, you're doing it again!
>
> Trofimov. You'd better double the red into the middle.
>
> Gaev. I'll be quiet, I'll be quiet.
>
> They all sit thoughtfully. It is quiet. Only the mumbling of Fiers is heard. Suddenly a distant sound is heard as if from the sky, the sound of a breaking string, which dies away sadly.
>
> Lubov. What's that?
>
> Lopakhin. I don't know. It may be a bucket fallen down a well somewhere. But it's some way off.
>
> Gaev. Or perhaps it's some bird...like a heron.
>
> Trofimov. Or an owl.
>
> Lubov. (Shudders) It's unpleasant, somehow. (a pause).
>
> Fiers. Before the misfortune the same thing happened. An owl screamed and the samovar hummed without stopping.
>
> Gaev. Before what misfortune?
>
> Fiers. Before the emancipation. (A pause.)

> Lubov. You know, my friends, let's go in; it's evening now. (To Anya) You've tears in your eyes....What is it, little girl? (Embraces her.)
> Anya. It's nothing, mother.[19]

This type of scene, which occurs frequently in the play, has prompted Oliver Elton to note that Chekhov's

> true achievement...was to carry across to [an]...audience his peculiar strain of poetic musing and his picture of an action in which, externally, nothing is accomplished.[20]

But, as Robert Hingley points out,

> To Chekhov the exchange of small-talk was often a sufficient vehicle for the presentation of complex and subtle emotions. ... A conversation illustrating this takes place at the end of The Cherry Orchard between Lopakhin and Varya, both of whom know that this is a likely moment for Lopakhin to propose, and that if he misses the opportunity his marriage with Varya is never likely to take place. All that comes out in the dialogue, however, is a few banalities about the weather, the fact that the thermometer is broken, and that Varya has lost something while packing. Though the dialogue turns on such neutral themes the real situation makes a greater impact on the audience than might have been possible if Chekhov had handled it directly.[21]

As far as dialogue is concerned, the scene between Varya and Lopakhin resembles the one above to a great extent:

> Lubov. ...You know very well, Ermolai Alexeyevitch [Lopakhin] that I used to hope to marry her [Varya] to you, and I suppose you are going to marry somebody? ...She loves you, she's your sort, and I don't understand, I really don't, why you seem to be

---

19. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, pp. 244-245.

20. Oliver Elton, Chekhov (Oxford, 1929), p. 21.

21. Hingley, Chekhov, p. 236.

keeping away from each other. I don't understand!

Lopakhin. To tell the truth, I don't understand it myself. It's all so strange....If there's still time, I'll be ready at once....Let's get it over, once and for all; I don't feel as if I could ever propose to her without you.

Lubov. Excellent. ...I'll call her.

Lopakhin. The champagne's very appropriate....

Varya enters.

Varya. (Looking at the luggage in silence) I can't seem to find it....

Lopakhin. What are you looking for?

Varya. I packed it myself and I don't remember. (Pause).

Lopakhin. Where are you going to now, Barbara Mihailovna?

Varya. I? To the Ragulins....I've got an agreement to go and look after their house...as housekeeper or something.

Lopakhin. Is that at Yashnevo? It's about fifty miles. (Pause) So life in this house is finished now....

Varya. (Looking at the luggage) Where is it?... perhaps I've put it away in the trunk....Yes, there'll be no more life in this house....

Lopakhin. And I'm off to Kharkov at once... by this train. I've a lot of business on hand. I'm leaving Epikhodov here...I've taken him on.

Varya. Well, well!

Lopakhin. Last year at this time the snow was already falling, if you remember, and now it's nice and sunny. Only it's rather cold....There's three degrees of frost.

Varya. I didn't look. (Pause) And our thermometer's broken....

Voice at the Door. Ermolai Alexeyevitch!

Lopakhin. (As if he has long been waiting to be called) This minute:

Varya, sitting on the floor, puts her face on a bundle of clothes, and weeps gently.[22]

---

22. Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard, pp. 273-274.

> Tchekhof did not often use symbols in the old-fashioned sense, material objects adumbrating immaterial meanings, designed to catch attention by their superficial irrelevance, like the lambs and lilies of pictured saints.[23]

In The Cherry Orchard his symbolism is anything but crude. He sees the beautiful cherry trees which lie beyond the manor house, and for which almost everyone in the play, with the exception of Lopakhin, has a strong affection, as symbolic of the fate of the "beautiful," cultured Russian gentry about whom he writes the play. In full bloom the orchard seems to symbolize what the Russian aristocracy once was--powerful, and wealthy, as well as cultivated; when it is finally razed by the axes, it symbolizes what Lubov's social class has become--resigned, heartbroken, and poverty-stricken.

---

23. Chekhov (Tchekhov), Anton, Two Plays (London, 1912), p. 20. With an introduction by George Calderon.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSTRUCTION OF HEARTBREAK HOUSE

Shaw's disquisitory play, Heartbreak House, subtitled a "Fantasia in the Russian [Chekhov] Manner on English Themes," is constructed by means of a novel technique: the dovetailing of the dramaturgy of Getting Married with that of The Cherry Orchard. As Eric Bentley writes,

> The play is genuinely Chekhovian in that its people are cultured talkers, members of a decadent rich class, who never do anything; the scene is a country house; the method consists of stringing together rather weary conversations in a musical, non-logical manner. One might list half a dozen more Chekhovisms, but the conclusion must be that these are only the externals of Chekhov's art and thought, and that if Shaw had made a play out of these elements alone, it would not be a very good play.[1]

Shaw superimposes his own distinctive dramatic style on that of Chekhov.

Summary of the Plot[2]

The action takes place in (and outside) a country house constructed in the form of a ship, and located in Sussex. The room in which the first two acts occur "has been built so as to resemble the after part of an old-fashioned high-pooped ship with a stern gallery.[3] A young

---

1. Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), pp. 132-133.

2. The précis of the plot is based on Shaw, Heartbreak House, in Works, XV, 1-149.

3. Ibid., p. 43

lady, Ellie Dunn, comes to the "ship" as the invited guest of Hesione Hushabye. Shortly thereafter, Lady Utterword, Hesione's sister, arrives to visit the latter after an absence from Sussex of many years. Hesione tells her that Ellie is about to marry a "hog" of a millionaire "for the sake of her father who is as poor as a church mouse," and that she does not approve of the match. Ellie insists that her fiancé, Alfred Mangan, is not a "hog," and that she is grateful to him because he has helped her father in important business matters. Later, her father, Mazzini Dunn, arrives at the house.

Ellie eventually admits to Hesione that she is actually in love with a man, Marcus Darnley, whom she met quite by chance at the National Gallery; he is of noble blood and professes to be a socialist revolutionary. Darnley then enters the house. To Ellie's great surprise he is none other than Hector, Hesione's husband. She scolds herself for having been foolish enough to fall in love with a perfect stranger, and for having believed his boasts. Hesione is full of understanding for Ellie; she consoles her by telling her that very few young women find it possible to resist Hector's charms. Quite angrily, Ellie terms Hector a braggart and a coward; but Hesione assures her that he is quite brave, and that he never boasts of anything he has really accomplished. Ellie, nevertheless, feels

that her heart is broken by what she has just discovered. Hesione assures her that heartbreak is only "life"--"life" educating her.

Mangan, the millionaire, arrives. The aged Captain Shotover, Hesione's and Lady Utterword's father, confronts him and informs him that he too is not in favour of his marrying Ellie; he is certain that Hesione will contrive to break off the match. Lady Utterword's brother-in-law, Randall Utterword, a diplomat, then arrives.

At the beginning of Act II, Mangan asks Ellie if she still considers herself engaged to him. She assures him that she does. During the course of their conversation, Mangan tells her that far from having helped her father financially, as she believes, he ruined him as a "matter of business." Ellie replies that she will marry him nonetheless; her mother married a "good" man who turned out to be a failure in almost every way; she does not intend to make the same mistake as her parent. The two then confess to each other that they are in love with Hesione and Hector, respectively. Mangan is irritated to think that Ellie would marry him purely for the sake of convenience. This prompts Ellie to say that he is free to break off their engagement, but that if he does so he may rest assured that he will never enter Hesione's house again. When Mangan threatens to tell Hesione of Ellie's love for Hector, Ellie informs him that

their hostess already knows. This causes Mangan to wail that "his brain won't stand" the life in the "crazy house"; distractedly, he throws himself into a chair. To soothe his nerves Ellie massages his head, thereby hypnotizing him.

Later, Hesione reprimands Dunn for forcing his daughter to marry Mangan, whom she considers a ruthless capitalist. Mazzini does not believe that this is the case, and points out that Ellie will surely dominate Mangan if and when she marries him. Mangan finally shakes off his hypnosis, and, having heard Hesione's remarks, begins to weep: he realizes that Hesione does not care for him. Hesione is touched, and apologizes to him, and explains that she is surprised to find that he has genuine emotions.

A burglar is then caught in the house. He turns out to be none other than Billy Dunn, Captain Shotover's former boatswain. Nurse Guiness, a servant at the "ship," surprises everyone by disclosing that the burglar is her former husband; Shotover asks her to take him into her "custody." After these events, Ellie speaks to Shotover about her forthcoming marriage to Mangan, and admits that she is marrying for money. The old man suggests that there are other means of obtaining money: she would be selling her soul if she married for money alone. This gives Ellie courage to tell the captain that he would be an ideal match for her, since he is old, rich, experienced, and reliable.

Shotover replies that he is already married, and that he is by no means wealthy. Ellie is disappointed.

Act III takes place at night on the "poop" of the "ship." Hesione hears a "sort of splendid drumming in the sky," and wonders what it might be. Mangan suggests a train, but Hesione tells him that no trains run by at that time of night. Ellie's marriage to Mangan once more becomes the topic of conversation, but Mangan suddenly interrupts by announcing that, contrary to general belief, he has no money, his factories all belong to syndicates and shareholders, who pay him to operate enterprises which he himself does not own. This surprises even Ellie; shortly thereafter, she states that she has decided not to marry Mangan since she is already married "in heaven, where all true marriages are made," to her spiritual husband and second father, Shotover. At the end of the drama a bombing attack occurs (the drumming noise was not a train). Mangan and the burglar hide for safety in a gravel pit near the house, but the other inhabitants do not leave the "poop." A bomb strikes the gravel pit, killing its two occupants. In the last moments of the play, after the attack, almost everyone expresses regret that the "glorious" excitement of the bombardment is no more.

Analysis of the Play

Heartbreak House contains a continuous plot, and shows evidence of the "surf-board of suspense" technique. The action deals principally with the inner conflicts of Ellie Dunn, the young woman who learns the meaning of life through heartbreak, just as in The Cherry Orchard the action concerns, somewhat less pointedly, the inner conflict of Lubov Ranevsky; the drama poses the question of whether or not Ellie will sell her soul to Mangan, the capitalist. In Act I we learn that she is torn between duty and inclination: she is in love with "Darnley," but she feels obligated to marry Mangan. With apprehension, we consequently wonder which of these men she will choose. When it appears that "Darnley" is actually Hector, her inner conflict is resolved--practically at least: there are, for the time being, no longer two men in her life. However, we know that she does not really wish to marry Mangan, and again we wonder, expectantly, whether or not she will commit a sin against her spirit by marrying the capitalist out of gratitude for what she believes he has done on behalf of her father.

At the beginning of Act II, Ellie tells Mangan that she definitely intends to marry him; she even shows, as her father predicts, that she is capable of dominating

him: she succeeds in hypnotizing him against his will. We are relieved to know that even if Ellie does marry him the capitalist will not be able to injure her spiritually, since she is mentally his superior. However, Shotover tells her that she would be selling her soul if she married for the sake of money alone. Ellie is touched by what he tells her, and expresses a wish to marry him instead of the businessman; but Shotover claims that he is already married. Nevertheless, we see that there are again two men in Ellie's life, and apprehension thus once more arises with respect to what she will do in this situation.

In Act III, two of the climaxes of the play take place. Mangan states that he does not possess as much money as everyone believes, and Ellie announces her platonic union with her kindred spirit, Shotover.

Despite our interest in Ellie, we see that plot does not command our main interest in the drama. Like The Cherry Orchard, Heartbreak House is primarily a study in the character of the sophisticated, decadent leisure class (in this case the English leisure class of pre-war [1914] times). Like Lubov, Gaev, Varya, and almost all the other figures of The Cherry Orchard, the people of the drama are depicted as resigned, idle personalities--"heartbroken imbeciles," as Hector describes them. Ellie, for instance, although she acquires much maturity as a result of her life at the "ship," and as a result of her

disappointment at discovering that "Darnley" is an impostor, becomes stoically and negatively resigned to life as she discovers it to be. Here she speaks to Shotover, after her éclaircissement:

> Ellie. ... to Shotover I feel so happy with you. ...I thought I should never feel happy again.
> Captain Shotover. Why?
> Ellie. Dont you know?
> Captain Shotover. No.
> Ellie. Heartbreak. I fell in love with Hector, and didnt know he was married.
> Captain Shotover. Heartbreak? Are you one of those who are so sufficient to themselves that they are only happy when they are stripped of everything, even of hope?
> Ellie. ...It seems so; for I feel now as if there was nothing I could not do, because I want nothing.[4]

When the bombs fall near the house at the end, Ellie does not seek protection, but, like a true fatalist, remains on the "poop" with Hesione and most of the other characters. Like these she expresses her disappointment at the passing of the attack:

> Mrs. Hushabye. ...what a glorious experience. I hope theyll the bombers come again tomorrow night.
> Ellie (radiant at the prospect) Oh, I hope so.[5]

Is this wish not the hope of the resigned, who welcome any stirring event that helps to distract them from the awareness that they are heartbroken--even if the event means death?

Hesione is heartbroken becauses she realizes that she no longer possesses the vigour of youth; she is

---

4. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 120.

5. Ibid., p. 149.

middle-aged, and her time of love-making has passed:

> Mrs. Hushabye. [to Hector] We were frightfully in love with one another, Hector. It was such an enchanting dream...[6]

She admits to Ellie that she frequently pretends to herself that for her love and gaiety are not over, but that she sometimes cannot help facing the truth:

> Mrs. Hushabye. ...when I am neither coaxing and kissing and laughing, I am just wondering how much longer I can stand living in this cruel, damnable world.[7]

Hector, who like Hesione is middle-aged, suffers from the dispiriting after-effects of great love; he maintains that his youthful passion for his wife was a "confounded madness," and that he cannot believe that "such an amazing experience is common":

> Hector. ...[Love for Hesione] has left its mark on me. I believe that is why I have never been able to repeat it.[8]

Like Ellie and Hesione, he expresses regret instead of relief when the bombers pass away:

> Hector. (disgustedly) ...safe. And how damnably dull the world has become again suddenly.[9]

Lady Utterword is heartbroken because she is unable to fall in love: Randall states that "she doesnt really care for the men she keeps hanging about her,"[10]

---

6. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 77.
7. Ibid., p. 99.
8. Ibid., p. 77.
9. Ibid., p. 99.
10. Ibid, p. 122

and Hesione mentions that her sister "has never been in love in her life, though she has always been trying to fall in head over ears."[11] Randall Utterword's heartbreak stems from his unrequited love for Lady Utterword. He tells Hector that

> There is no animal in the world so hateful as a woman can be. ...you will not believe me when I tell you that I have loved this demon Lady Utterword all my life; but God knows I have paid for it.[12]

Mazzini is heartbroken because he is poor and unsuccessful: he has come to consider money a pre-requisite to a contented life, simply because he has never earned any.

> Mazzini. ...I think that what is the matter with me is that I am poor. You dont know what that means at home. Mind: I dont say they have ever complained. Theyve all been wonderful: theyve been proud of my poverty. Theyve even joked about it quite often. But my wife... has been quite resigned--.
> Mrs. Hushabye. (shuddering involuntarily)!!
> Mazzini. There! You see, Mrs. Hushabye. I dont want Ellie to live on resignation.
> Mrs. Hushabye. Do you want her to resign herself to living with a man she doesnt love?
> Mazzini. (wistfully) Are you sure that would be worse than living with a man she did love, if he was a footling person?[13]

Captain Shotover is heartbroken because he cannot live the life of a hermit:

> Captain Shotover. [to Ellie] it confuses me to be answered. It discourages me. I cannot bear men and women. I HAVE to run away. I must run away now (he tries to).[14]

He is also heartbroken because he has grown very old and feeble. In the following speech he sounds very much like

---

11. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 76.
12. Ibid, p. 125.
13. Ibid., pp. 94-95.
14. Ibid., p. 118.

Fiers (in The Cherry Orchard):

> Captain Shotover. I am too weary to resist, or too weak. ...I feel nothing but the accursed happiness I have dreaded all my life long: the happiness that comes as life goes, the happiness of yielding and dreaming instead of resisting and doing, the sweetness of fruit that is going rotten.[15]

Mangan's heart is also broken: he discovers, in Act II, that Hesione does not care for him:

> Mangan (depths of emotion suddenly welling up in him) I shant forget, to my dying day, that when you gave me the glad eye that time in the garden, you were making a fool of me. That was a dirty low mean thing to do. You had no right to let me come near you if I disgusted you. It isnt my fault if I'm old and havnt a moustache like a bronze candlestick as your husband has. There are things no decent woman would do to a man--like a man hitting a woman in the breast.
>
> Hesione, utterly ashamed, sits down on the sofa and covers her face with her hands. Mangan sits down also on his chair and begins to cry like a child. Ellie stares at him. Mrs. Hushabye, at the distressing sounds he makes, takes down her hands and looks at him. She rises and runs to him.
>
> Mrs. Hushabye. Dont cry: I cant bear it. Have I broken your heart? I didnt know you had one. How could I?
>
> Mangan. I'm a man, aint I?[16]

But when the bombing attack occurs Mangan does not defy death; like Lopakhin (in The Cherry Orchard) he possesses greater vitality than the other figures, and consequently values his life more than they. When the bombers arrive he flees to the gravel pit for protection, and, paradoxically,

---

15. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 120.

16. Ibid., pp. 102-3.

is killed.

The burglar, Billy Dunn, contributes a social comment on the ease with which swindlers exploit the pity--and moral indifference--of the privileged class. He is caught stealing some of Lady Utterword's diamonds, but Hesione feels that it would not be right to send him to prison for his crime:

> Hesione. ...we cant bury a man alive for ten years for a few diamonds.[17]

Lady Utterword feels that it would be undignified to take action against him:

> Lady Utterword. Think of what it is for us to be dragged through the horrors of a criminal court, and have all our family affairs in the paper! ...here in England there is no real protection for any respectable person.[18]

The burglar is advised to take up another profession for which he is suited, such as that of a locksmith; he is thereupon sent away with a sovereign. However, Shotover enters in time and recognizes him as his former boatswain, Dunn. To Shotover the burglar confesses that he is a swindler:

> The Burglar. I dont set up to be better than my fellow-creatures, and never did, as you well know, Captain. But what I do is innocent and pious. I enquire about for houses where the right sort of people live. I work it on them same as I worked it here. I break into the house; put a few spoons or diamonds in my pocket; make a noise; get caught; and take up a collection. And you

---

17. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 107.

18. Ibid., pp. 107-8.

> wouldnt believe how hard it is to get caught when youre actually trying to.[19]

The incident shows how unwilling, not to say incapable, the inhabitants of the "ship" are in taking firm and decisive action against a clever exploiter of high society. The events are of course in some respects most improbable: burglar-swindlers such as Dunn are the exception rather than the rule; moreover, it seems highly coincidental--though it is certainly comic--that Dunn should turn out to be none other than the Captain's former boatswain, and that he should also be the former husband of Nurse Guiness. (The burglar claims that the marriage was not legal.)[20] Apparently Guiness has also experienced heartbreak. She is disappointed that Mazzini did not shoot Dunn when he discovered him in the house:

> Nurse Guiness. [to Mazzini] Why didnt you shoot him...? If I'd known who he was, I'd have shot him myself.[21]

Thus we see that, from the psychological viewpoint, Shaw's characterization in the play is similar to that of Chekhov; are not the figures of The Cherry Orchard also "heartbroken imbeciles?"

Heartbreak House also resembles The Cherry Orchard in terms of symbolism. Just as Chekhov sees the beauty

---

19. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 111.

20. See ibid., p. 112.

21. Ibid.

and the ultimate fate of the cultured Russian aristocracy, so Shaw seems to view Shotover's house, built eccentrically, in the form of a ship and set far from the sea in the Sussex hills, as symbolic of the life and fate of the English pre-war leisure class: the inhabitants of the house have chosen to retire from the world of practical affairs to a home which, through its location and unorthodox construction, reflects the escapism and impracticality of its occupants.

The dialogue of the play does not resemble that of Chekhov in every way. As Alfred Ward points out, Shaw cannot capture the elusive, almost bodiless style of Chekhovian conversation: the playwright's mind is robust and thrusting--and, we may add, too didactic.[22] However, moreso than any other Shavian play, the dialogue of Heartbreak House does reveal a definite weary, musing quality. Frequently, as in Chekhov, interlocution in the play is non-logical, and on many occasions is not directed toward an explicit intellectual conclusion: instead of debate, casual conversation and small-talk typify much of the work. The following scene in Act III, for example, is characteristically Chekhovian. The inhabitants of the "ship" broach rather inconsequential matters, such as the weather, inexplicable noises in the sky, and domestic affairs; but, although--or because--their speculation is haphazard, we are very much aware of their boredom and resignation. Almost everyone is

---

22. Alfred C. Ward, Bernard Shaw (London, 1951), p. 135.

on the "poop," on a fine moonless night:

Lady Utterword. What a lovely night! It seems made for us.

Hector. The night takes no interest in us. What are we to the night. (He sits down moodily in the deck chair).

Ellie (dreamily, nestling against the captain) Its beauty soaks into my nerves. In the night there is peace for the old and hope for the young.

Hector. Is that remark your own?

Ellie. No. Only the last thing the captain said before he went to sleep.

Captain Shotover. I'm not asleep.

Hector. Randall is. Also Mr. Mazinni Dunn. Mangan, too, probably.

Mangan. No.

Hector. Oh, you are there. I thought Hesione would have sent you to bed by this time.

Mrs. Hushabye (coming to the back of the garden seat, into the light, with Mangan) I think I shall. He keeps telling me he has a presentiment that he is going to die. I never met a man so greedy for sympathy.

Mangan (plaintively) But I have a presentiment. I really have. And you wouldnt listen.

Mrs. Hushabye. I was listening for something else. There was a sort of splendid drumming in the sky. Did none of you hear it? It came from a distance and then died away.

Mangan. I tell you it was a train.

Mrs. Hushabye. And I tell you, Alf, there is no train at this hour. The last is nine fortyfive.

Mangan. But a goods train.

Mrs. Hushabye. Not on our little line. They tack a truck on to the passenger train. What can it have been, Hector?

Hector. Heaven's threatening growl of disgust at us useless creatures. (Fiercely) I tell you, one of two things must happen. Either out of that darkness some new creation will come to supplant us as we have supplanted the animals, or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us.

Lady Utterword (in a cool instructive manner, wallowing comfortably in her hammock.) We have not supplanted the animals, Hector. Why do you

ask heaven to destroy this house, which could be made quite comfortable if Hesione had any notion of how to live? Dont you know what is wrong with it?

Hector. We are wrong with it. There is no sense in us. We are useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished.

Lady Utterword. Nonsense! Hastings told me the very first day he came here, nearly twenty-four years ago, what is wrong with the house.

Captain Shotover. What! The numbskull said there was something wrong with my house!

Lady Utterword. I said Hastings said it; and he is not in the least a numbskull.

Captain Shotover. Whats wrong with my house?

Lady Utterword. Just what is wrong with a ship, papa. Wasnt it clever of Hastings to see that?

Captain Shotover. The man's a fool. Theres nothing wrong with a ship.

Lady Utterword. Yes there is.

Mrs. Hushabye. But what is it? Dont be aggravating, Addy.

Lady Utterwood. Guess.

Hector. Demons. Daughters of the witch of Zanzibar. Demons.

Lady Utterword. Not a bit. I assure you, all this house needs to make it a sensible, healthy, pleasant house, with good appetites and sound sleep in it, is horses.

Mrs. Hushabye. Horses! What rubbish!

Lady Utterword. Yes: horses. Why have we never been able to let this house? Because there are no proper stables.[23]

We shall now discuss the distinctive Shavian elements of the play. Shaw states in the preface that Heartbreak House was written to represent "cultured, leisured Europe before the war [of 1914]."[24] He observes that

> Tchekhov had produced four fascinating studies of Heartbreak House, of which three, The Cherry Orchard, Uncle Vanya, and The Seagull, had been performed in England.
> . . . . . .

---

23. Shaw, Heartbreak House, pp. 129-131.

24. Ibid., p. 3.

> these intensely Russian plays fitted all the country houses in Europe in which the pleasures of music, art, literature, and the theatre had supplanted hunting, shooting, fishing, flirting, eating, and drinking. The same nice people, the same utter futility. The nice people could read; some of them could write; and they were the only repositories of culture who had social opportunities of contact with our politicians, administrators, and newspaper proprietors, or any chance of sharing or influencing their activities. But they shrank from that contact. They hated politics. They did not wish to realize Utopia for the common people; they wished to realize their favorite fictions and poems in their own lives; and, when they could, they lived without scruple on incomes which they did nothing to earn. The women in their girlhood made themselves look like variety theatre stars, and settled down later into the types of beauty imagined by the previous generation of painters. They took the only part of our society in which there was leisure for high culture, and made it an economic, political, and, as far as practicable, a moral vacuum; and as Nature, abhorring the vacuum, immediately filled it up with sex and with all sorts of refined pleasures, it was a very delightful place at its best for moments of relaxation. In other moments it was disastrous. For prime ministers and their like, it was a veritable Capua.[25]

From these prefatory remarks we see that the drama had a sociological and political--and didactic--purpose which we do not find explicitly in The Cherry Orchard. Sociologically, Shaw describes the members of the cast of Heartbreak House in the Chekhov manner, inasmuch as these, like Chekhov's figures, are represented as the heartbroken, "nice people" class of the pre-war era. Because of their nescience

---

25. Shaw, Heartbreak House, pp. 3-4.

in practical, political, economic, and social affairs, these people were, according to Shaw (as we see above), indirectly responsible for bringing about the world tragedy of 1914; Julius Bab states their problem as follows:

> Die Leute in "Haus Herzenstod" haben viel zuviel mit Ihren Nerven, mit thren Flirts, mit ihrer Seele und mit ihren tiefen Gedanken zu tun, als dass sie sich um so etwas wie Staat, Volk, Politik, Frieden oder Krieg kuemmern koennten.[26]

However, Shaw does not describe the inhabitants of Heartbreak House solely in the "Russian" manner: he strengthens the meaning of his play by incorporating in it a type of allegory,[27] in some respects similar to the allegory in Getting Married; he does not study merely the English leisure class itself, but examines, symbolically, the various classes of which even this class is made up, thereby pointing still more directly at the types of people who contributed little to the improvement of the pre-war European moral climate.

Hesione symbolizes the cultivated, convivial but impractical English and European woman of the day; she is the mistress of the "ship," but is most inefficient, as Shotover and others point out. For example, when Ellie arrives at the house there is no one to receive her. Shotover asks Guiness why Ellie has been invited:

---

26. Julius Bab, Bernard Shaw (Berlin, 1926), p. 294.

27. See Bentley, Shaw, p. 138;
William Irvine, The Universe of G. B. S. (New York, 1949). pp. 294-295;
Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter (New York, 1952), 267-268;
Ward, Shaw, p. 140-141.

> The Captain. And had she no friend, no parents, to warn her against my daughter's invitations? This is a pretty sort of house, by heavens! A young and attractive lady is invited here. Her luggage is left on the steps for hours; and she herself is deposited in the poop and abandoned, tired and starving. This is our hospitality. These are our manners. No room ready. No hot water. No welcoming hostess. Our visitor is to sleep in the toolshed, and to wash in the duckpond.[28]

Hesione finally discovers that she has a guest:

> Mrs. Hushabye. Ellie, my darling, my pettikins (kissing her): how long have you been here? Ive been at home all the time: I was putting flowers and things in your room; and when I just sat down for a moment to try how comfortable the armchair was I went off to sleep. Papa woke me and told me you were here. Fancy you finding no one, and being neglected and abandoned.[29]

Hector symbolizes the man who might be an active fighter on Europe's behalf, but who, instead, prefers to deny his own bravery; he is a type of Munchausen. Ellie describes him as "Darnley":

> Ellie. ...He saved the life of the tiger from a hunting party: one of King Edward's hunting parties in India. The King was furious: that was why he never had his military services properly recognized. But he doesnt care. He is a Socialist and despises rank, and has been in three revolutions fighting on the barricades.[30]

Hesione reveals his true nature:

> Mrs. Hushabye. He never boasts of anything he really did: he cant bear it; and it makes him shy if anyone else does. All his stories are made-up stories.[31]

---

28. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 45.

29. Ibid., p. 52.

30. Ibid., p. 62.

31. Ibid., p. 65.

Lady Utterword, the wife of a prominent diplomat, symbolizes the haughty, socially-pretentious members of the privileged class; her snobbery is probably best expressed in the following speech:

> Lady Utterword. ...Why have we never been able to let this house? Because there are no proper stables. Go anywhere in England where there are natural, wholesome, contented, and really nice English people; and what do you always find? That the stables are the real centre of the household; and that if any visitor wants to play the piano the whole room has to be upset before it can be opened, there are so many things piled on it. I never lived until I learned to ride; and I shall never ride really well because I didnt begin as a child. There are only two classes in good society in England: the equestrian and the neurotic classes. It isnt mere convention: everybody can see that the people who hunt are the right people and the people who dont are the wrong ones.[32]

Randall symbolizes incompetence. He is one of the most helpless figures in the play. His sister-in-law does not think highly of him:

> Lady Utterword. Why is Randall such an obvious rotter? He is well bred; he has been at a public school and a university; he has been in the Foreign Office; he knows the best people and has lived all his life among them. Why is he so unsatisfactory, so contemptible? Why cant he get a valet to stay with him longer than a few months? Just because he is too lazy and pleasure-loving to hunt and shoot. He strums the piano, and sketches, and runs after married women, and reads literary books and poems. He actually plays the flute, but I never let him bring it into my house.[33]

---

32. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 131.

33. Ibid.

Ellie symbolizes pre-war youth; she is disillusioned by life as she finds it at the "ship," and, sensation-hungry, is thrilled by any alleviation of her boredom, such as a bombing attack. Mazzini symbolizes the inefficient humanitarian who contributed little to alleviate pre-war conditions; as Ellie says,

> [Mazzini] should never have been in business. His parents were poets; and they gave him the noblest ideas; but they could not afford to give him a profession.[34]

Hesione describes him as follows:

> His name is Mazzini Dunn. Mazzini was a celebrity of some kind who knew Ellie's grandparents. They were both poets, like the Brownings; and when her father came into the world Mazzini said, "Another soldier born for freedom!" So they christened him Mazzini; and he has been fighting for freedom in his quiet way ever since. Thats why he is so poor.[35]

Shotover, of course, symbolizes the old generation; he is no longer strong enough to crusade for his ideals. Mangan symbolizes the "big" businessman--the capitalist and financier. His class--which is not one of leisure--profited from the war. Hector comments about this:

> We sit here talking, and leave everything to Mangan and to chance and to the devil. Think of the powers of destruction that Mangan and his mutual admiration gang wield!

---

34. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 56.

35. Ibid., p. 53.

> It's madness: it's like giving a torpedo to a badly brought up child to play at earthquakes with.[36]

Heartbreak House resembles other Shavian plays for still another reason: it contains discussion. Although much of the dialogue is constructed à la Chekhov, the drama does, as we have seen, present an explicit thesis--which, with Shaw, at least, calls for debate among the stage figures. The following is one of the key discussions in the work; Hector's and Mazzini's words, in particular, reflect Shaw's prefatory statement that the "nice" people of pre-war society, who had "social opportunities of contact with politicians, administrators, and newspaper proprietors, or any chance of sharing or influencing their activities... shrank from that contact":[37]

> Hector. We sit here talking, and leave everything to Mangan and to chance and to the devil. Think of the powers of destruction that Mangan and his mutual admiration gang wield! It's madness: it's like giving a torpedo to a badly brought up child to play at earthquakes with.
> Mazzini. I know. I used often to think about that when I was young.
> Hector. Think! Whats the good of thinking about it? Why didn't you do something?
> Mazzini. But I did. I joined societies and made speeches and wrote pamphlets. That was all I could do. But, you know, though the people in the societies thought they knew more than Mangan, most of them wouldnt have joined if they had known as much. You see they never had any money to handle or any men to manage. Every year I expected a revolution, or some frightful smash-up: it

---

36. Shaw, Heartbreak House, p. 143.

37. Supra, p. 182.

seemed impossible that we could blunder and muddle on any longer. But nothing happened, except, of course, the usual poverty and crime and drink that we are used to. Nothing ever does happen. It's amazing how well we get along, all things considered.

Lady Utterword. Perhaps somebody cleverer than you and Mr. Mangan was at work all the time.

Mazzini. Perhaps so. Though I was brought up not to believe in anything, I often feel that there is a great deal to be said for the theory of an over-ruling providence after all.

Lady Utterword. Providence! I meant Hastings.

Mazzini. Oh, I beg your pardon, Lady Utterword.

Captain Shotover. Every drunken skipper trusts to Providence. But one of the ways of Providence with drunken skippers is to run them on the rocks.

. . . . . .

Hector. Well, I dont mean to be drowned like a rat in a trap. I still have the will to live. What am I to do?

Captain Shotover. Do? Nothing simpler. Learn your business as an Englishman.

Hector. And what may my business as an Englishman be, pray?

Captain Shotover. Navigation. Learn it and live; or leave it and be damned.

Ellie. Quiet, quiet; youll tire yourself.

Mazzini. I thought all that once, Captain; but I assure you nothing will happen.[38]

We thus see that, as in his other plays and unlike Chekhov, Shaw does not represent life in Heartbreak House "exactly as it is," but allegorizes and stylizes it to a certain degree, in order to develop a particular social and political conception of pre-war Europe in dramatic form; as far as structure and prose style are concerned, the scene above undoubtedly resembles similar

---

38. Shaw, Heartbreak House, pp. 143-145.

ones in other didactic Shavian dramas. However, it cannot be denied that the foregoing dialogue evinces certain Chekhovian overtones of weariness and non-logicality none the less. Because of Chekhov's influence, the qualities typical of Shaw's more clearly didactic works are not of paramount significance in Heartbreak House, even though certain scenes are, admittedly, much less Chekhovian than others. There is, for example, no parabasis in the play; its figures are not spokesmen, since they are, after all, more symbolic in terms of what they do than in what they say: they do not orate very frequently, nor is their speculation and discussion imbued with the logic and erudition found with such persons as John Tanner. Aside from their allegorical function, the inhabitants of the "ship" resemble, to a very marked degree, the persons depicted by the Russian dramatist, in whose works, it will be remembered, people are portrayed naturalistically.[39]

Beside the allegory, there are, of course, other non-naturalistic elements in the drama; Shaw, we may recall, terms it fantasia. For example, the burglar incident is highly improbable, though comic. Moreover, despite its excellence as a device, the "ship" set in the Sussex hills is an exaggerated symbol, if we compare it to the symbol of the orchard in Chekhov's play: the "ship" is unique;

---

39. Supra, p.153.

cherry orchards in bloom are certainly not of rare occurrence.

We have now come to the end of our detailed investigation of Shavian drama, and shall proceed to examine the views of the two most influential anti-Shavians, Arthur B. Walkley and William Archer.

CHAPTER IX

THE DRAMATIC CRITICISM OF ARTHUR B. WALKLEY AND WILLIAM ARCHER

Archer and Walkley were (with Shaw) the pioneers in modern England of serious dramatic criticism without too prominent dependence on systematic scholarship;[1] these three established some of the important modern standards of playwriting. There were others as well, reviewers rather than critics, who wrote of Shaw at and beyond the turn of the century; for example, Max Beerbohm (born 1872), and Desmond MacCarthy (1878-1952). However, Beerbohm and MacCarthy do not greatly concern us here, since they were never as influential as Walkley and Archer, and since they almost always commented favourably on Shaw's work. The anti-Shavians were led by Walkley and Archer, and although the views of these two critics can now be shown to have been frequently invalid (at least by today's standards) they were always pointed and original, and therefore attracted considerable attention, (including public attention) which they still merit today. In point of fact, the two critics can be held partly responsible for preventing Shaw from achieving financial success on the London stage for over two decades.[2]

---

1. See Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres (London, 1953), p. 42; Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900, in two vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1946), I, p. 157.
2. Archibald Henderson, Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet, (New York, 1932), p. xxx.

Shaw's opponents in the London theatre world held remarkably similar opinions concerning matters "dramatic" and "undramatic," markedly different from those of Shaw. Both men endorsed the drama of action and incident, constructed according to rigid rules of form and proportion more or less in the Scribian fashion, as well as realistic characterization such as we find in Ibsen. Both censured Shaw as "undramatic" for disregarding these qualities in his works.

Archer and Walkley, let it be said, shared, though to a much lesser extent, Shaw's professed distaste for Scribian drama. Archer, perceiving that Scribe sacrificed virtually all other dramatic values to concentrate on the construction of a plot of incident and suspense, writes that a play

> will be of small account as a work of art unless character, at a very early point, enters into and conditions its development. The story which is independent of character--which can be carried through by a given number of ready-made puppets--is essentially a trivial thing.[3]

In a superior play, he holds, character controls plot; in an inferior one (as we have seen in Chapter I) plot controls character.[4] Moreover, he took exception to Scribe's use of obviously artificial plot devices, particularly coincidences. Be it noted that he criticized even his

---

3. William Archer, Play-making (London, 1912), p. 17.

4. Ibid.

favourite dramatist, Ibsen, for this fault. (Archer championed Ibsen in England, and was responsible for the earliest translations of Ibsen into the English language.) For instance, he points out, as indicated in Chapter II,[5] that Krogstad's unexpected arrival at the Helmer home (in A Doll's House) is a contrived incident, since it occurs at the very moment when Nora exults over her family's change of fortune:

> This happy conjuncture of events is manifestly artificial: a trick of the dramatist's trade: a point at which his art does not conceal his art.[6]

Walkley also deprecates Scribe's artificiality:

> Everything of value in the modern theatre, its intellectual dialectic, its emotional sincerity, its fundamental verisimilitude, has been a revolt against that shallow theatricality which we call Scribism.[7]

With respect to Scribe's use of coincidences and other such devices, we may recall Walkley's statement previously quoted in Chapter I:[8]

> It is the primary business of a play to persuade you that what you are witnessing has happened, or might happen. And this business is only executed to perfection when the resultant impression is one of inevitability, the feeling that the thing could not have happened otherwise. But let the dramatist for one moment excite the suspicion that this or that incident is there merely because his [plot] ...requires it to be there, and the game is up.[9]

---

5. Supra, pp. 42, 43.
6. Archer, Play-making, p. 82
7. Arthur B. Walkley, Still More Prejudice (London, 1925), p. 44.
8. Supra, pp. 21, 22.
9. Arthur B. Walkley, Drama and Life (London, 1925), p. 49.

Nevertheless, despite Scribe's limitations as a thinker and a portrayer of character, and despite his reliance on "romantic" structural tricks, both critics commend certain features of his rigidly constructed incident plots, and their theatrical effect. Walkley praises Scribe explicitly for having "vindicated" a rule of classic drama:

> Scribe triumphantly vindicated in practice a position of Aristotle's, which has been violently but by no means intelligently assailed--the position that while you can have drama without character you cannot have drama without plot.[10]

He admits that Scribe made too much of plot--but draws attention to the fact that with the "well-made play" the French playwright provided a new craftsmanship for the modern dramatist.[11] (This fact, as we have noted, is entirely true in the case of such exponents of Scribism as Dumas _fils_, Augier, and Sardou, and is true in great part of Ibsen, and somewhat less so of even Shaw.

Archer also approves of certain aspects of Scribism, especially rigid construction and the "surf-board of suspense" technique:

> Construction means dramatic architecture, or, in other words, a careful pre-arrangement of proportions and interdependencies.[12]

---

10. Walkley, _Drama and Life_, p. 24.

11. _Ibid._, p. 25.

12. Archer, _Play-making_, p. 147.

> To engender, maintain, suspend, heighten and resolve a state of tension--that is the main object of the dramatist's craft.[13]

Where Shaw is concerned, Walkley agrees with Archer that the playwright is "undramatic" because he relies on his virtuosity as a philosopher and as a writer of dialogue (particularly in a drama such as Getting Married), to dispense with dramatic "architecture" and naturalistic characterization in his plays.[14] The latter complains that Shaw does not use a plot scenario:

> Go as you please composition may be possible for the novelist, perhaps even for the writer of a one-act play, a mere piece of dialogue; but in a dramatic structure of any considerable extent, proportion, balance, and the interconnection of parts are so essential, that a scenario is almost as indispensable to a dramatist as a set of plans to an architect.[15]

Walkley holds that a dramatist's first and prime concern must be with the construction of a plot of incident and action (to establish the necessary basic form of a play); he claims that Shaw does not do this, and criticizes especially Man and Superman for its superfluous intellectual discussion, and its consequent lack of action and emotion-stirring events.[16]

---

13. Archer, Play-making, p. 148.

14. See ibid., pp. 104-5.

15. Ibid., p. 43.

16. Walkley, Drama and Life, pp. 226-227.

As regards character-portrayal, Archer contends that Shaw cannot "throw his characters outside himself"--that he is an "imperfect ventriloquist" in his plays: [17]

> Mr. Shaw is not, primarily, either a character-drawer or psychologist, but a dealer in personified ideas. His leading figures are, as a rule, either his mouthpieces or his butts.[18]

Walkley, also criticizing Shaw for the same alleged fault, insists that "the essential law of the theatre is thought through emotion," and claims that "no character exhibits real emotion in those fascinating exercises in dialectic which Mr. Shaw miscalls plays."[19] In one of his reviews, he describes Shaw as a dramatist "who knows no other way of expressing himself in drama than the essentially undramatic way of speech-making."[20]

However, despite these seemingly categorical animadversions upon Shaw's work, Archer and Walkley were, in fact, not quite certain of Shaw's "dramatic" value. Archer, deprecating Widowers' Houses, Shaw's first play, declares:

> It does not appear that Mr. Shaw has any more specific talent for the drama than he has for painting or sculpture.[21]

---

17. William Archer, The Old Drama and the New (London 1922), p. 126.

18. Archer, Play-making, p. 290.

19. Walkley, Drama and Life, pp. 44-45.

20. Ibid., p. 233.

21. Cited in Henderson, Shaw, p. 359.

Yet, we also find that he can write as follows (albeit a number of years later):

> Many of his [Shaw's] productions are quite good plays, or would be if he did not deliberately subordinate the artist to the humorist, the paradoxist and the preacher.[22]

Even more surprising than the difference in tone of the two above statements is the fact that, despite his pronouncements on "architecture" and other essential qualities of the drama, Archer was, in one instance, inspired to admit that the supreme "dramatic" principle is interest; that the

> only really valid definition of the dramatic is: Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theatre.[23]

Walkley's indecision with respect to Shaw's work is best shown by comparing three of his assertions from Drama and Life:

> Mr. Shaw has no dramatic skill, has apparently no dramatic instinct...[24]

> When I venture to say that Mr. Shaw is no dramatist I do not mean that he fails to interest and stimulate and amuse us in the theatre. Many of us find him more entertaining than any other living writer for the stage. But that is because he is bound to be an entertaining writer in any art-form.[25]

---

22. Archer, Old Drama, p. 342.

23. Archer, Play-making, p. 38.

24. Walkley, Drama and Life, p. 234.

25. Ibid., p. 225.

> ...by representing life in general and love in particular as based upon ratiocination, Mr. Shaw obtains most amusing results.[26]

The critic holds that Shaw is "no dramatist," yet that he is "more entertaining than any other living writer for the stage!" We are surely not far from the "contradictio" ad absurdum.

From all that has been said, we see that Archer and Walkley took exception to a number of real and alleged features of Shavian drama: Shaw's "preaching" in his plays, and the superfluous speech-making of his stage figures; his disregard of naturalistic characterization--his neglect in representing people with real emotions; and the formlessness of his plots. We also see that, in general, Archer and Walkley determined the nature of the "dramatic" in terms of the Scribian tradition as regards plot construction, and in terms of (Ibsenian) naturalistic tradition as regards characterization.

Finally, we see that the revolutionary and unfamiliar nature of Shaw's dramas in the English theatre led Archer and Walkley into certain blind alleys of Shaw criticism. Eric Bentley writes:

> The gist of the early reviews [of Shaw] is that, though it wasn't drama, it was something as serious as it was entertaining, as brilliant as it was funny. The more intelligent reviewers began by gravely observing that it wasn't drama and ended by saying precisely the opposite.[27]

---

26. Walkley, Drama and Life, p. 215.

27. Eric R. Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947), p. 116.

Bentley's opinion notwithstanding, it is difficult to say whether or not Walkley and Archer, by such admissions as that the criterion of the "dramatic" is interest, and that Shaw is an entertaining writer, intended to "say precisely the opposite" of the fact that Shaw was not "dramatic." They never really changed their attitude toward Shaw's plays: in one of his last reviews of Shaw, in the London Times (1924), Walkley, writing of Shaw's Saint Joan, still refers to "overlong debate," typical "Shavian blemishes," "artistic error," and other alleged faults; although he admits that the drama is one of Shaw's best, the passage of time did not greatly alter his opinion of the playwright.[28] Similarly, when we read Archer's last book, The Old Drama and the New (1922), we see that the latter also did not cease, in later years, to deprecate Shaw's work.[29] It is evident that, for the greater part, the appraisal of Shaw by the two critics is negative, while the ambivalence of their assessment of Shavian drama indicates that they were incapable of taking a really definite stand; this surely points to a certain lack of perceptiveness. We shall have to make a decision for them. We shall show, in the next chapter, inter alia, that, judged in terms of

---

28. Arthur B. Walkley, [Dramatic Review], Times (London, March 27, 1924), p.12.

29. Archer, Old Drama, pp. 341-355, passim.

the Scribian and Ibsenian traditions, which Walkley and Archer do acknowledge as "dramatic," Shaw is far from "undramatic," and that the two critics seem to have misunderstood his purposes and techniques even while censuring them.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

We shall now attempt to give specific answers to the three fundamental questions posed in the thesis, as indicated in the introduction:- What were Shaw's distinctive innovations in dramatic construction? Were his plays considered "undramatic" because of these innovations? Was Shaw as "undramatic" a playwright as his hostile critics claimed? In an appendix we shall examine Archibald Henderson's study of our subject, Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist?

Shaw's Structural Innovations

A brief review will suffice to recall Shaw's main innovations as discussed in previous chapters:

1. His conception of the "double character" in a drama, represented as acting and speaking both for himself as a real person, and for the author as a spokesman, this innovation--like all his innovations, relative, of course, to his more immediate predecessors and his contemporaries--being a modern version of parabasis, as found in the plays of Aristophanes. (We observed the mechanism of this literary device in Mrs. Warren's Profession, Man and Superman, and Getting Married.)

2. The character in a drama--conceived as a type of modern morality play--who is represented as a real

person, as well as an allegorical figure symbolic of certain moral convictions. (This we found in Man and Superman and Getting Married.)

3. The character in a drama who is represented both as a real person, and, in the sociological sense, as an allegorical figure symbolic of a type of person found in a distinct social class (in Heartbreak House). Of course, it may be held with considerable justification that many of Shaw's characters in other plays are symbolic of a class of people: to cite examples, Mrs. Warren, the prostitute, Crofts, the unscrupulous capitalist, or Tanner, the revolutionist. However, it is the opinion of the writer that Shaw was principally concerned with making such figures the spokesmen of certain of his doctrines (on capitalism, love, marriage), in order to give vent to one of his chief purposes--his didacticism--in the most direct manner open to him.[1] We must not forget that Heartbreak House, for all its merits, is, as a result of Shaw's use in it of symbols rather than spokesmen, the least explicitly didactic play of the four we have examined.

4. The creation of stageworthy drama consisting solely of a plot of ideas rather than of incident ("Don Juan in Hell"). This "dream-vision debate" takes the

---

1. See supra, pp. 57-58, and, for example, pp. 75-80.

form of a "well-made play" of ideas, complete with an exposition, complication, and dénouement; also, it is a "literary oratorio" sui generis.

5. The new dramaturgy of Getting Married, a play remarkable particularly because it derives its basic unity not through the full-length incident plot typical of "personal" plays, but through the virtually uninterrupted discussion by its personages of a single moral situation: marriage.

6. The use of "romantic" devices, such as coincidences, not to further plot development in the manner of Scribe, but to create incongruous and hence comic situations. (This we found in Man and Superman, and particularly in Getting Married.) However, be it noted that Shaw does not entirely avoid employing devices precisely in the fashion of Scribe: we may recall that in Mrs. Warren's Profession, Man and Superman, and Getting Married there occur coincidences which serve as essential mechanisms of plot construction. In such instances, Shaw imitates one of the most artificial features of the "well-made play," and consequently loses some stature as a serious artist.

7. The development of a unique English prose style in drama, "the technique of playing upon the human conscience... [with] rhetoric, irony, argument, paradox,

epigram, parable, the arrangement of haphazard facts into orderly and intelligent situations..."[2] We may recall that Shaw's prose style is particularly effective where characterization is concerned: his stage figures speak most eloquently--one may say musically--and hence most convincingly.

8. The creation of a form of drama more explicitly didactic than that of Ibsen or Chekhov (and Scribe), through the use of dramatic spokesmen and symbolic characters, and through extensive creation of ideational discussion. No modern dramatist has surpassed Shaw in making of the theatre a place of education and enlightenment, as well as of entertainment.

Let it be said that these innovations do not occur solely in the Shavian plays examined, but may be found in other of the author's works. However, as indicated, for purposes of the thesis, we have chosen what are probably Shaw's four most epoch-making and unusual dramas. It is in these that we perceive most readily the revolutionary dramatic techniques that Shaw evolved during the heyday of his career.

When we bear in mind the substance of the previous chapter, we readily see that Shaw was impugned by Walkley

---

2. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, in Works, XIX, 1-161, p. 156.

and Archer as an "undramatic" playwright precisely because he introduced these innovations in his plays. When, for example, the two critics deprecate Shaw's neglect to use a scenario, the absence of "action" in his plays, and the failure of these to conform to orthodox (i.e. Scribian) concepts of proportion, balance, and the interconnection of parts,[3] it is evident that they inveigh against Shaw's greater concern with discussion scenes than with incident plot, and especially against the unusual dramatic construction of such works as Getting Married and "Don Juan in Hell." Here, for example, in its entirety, is Archer's comment on the unity of the former play:

> Plum-pudding unity...--the unity of a number of ingredients stirred up together, put in a cloth, boiled to a certain consistency and then served up in a blue flame of lambent humor--that is precisely the unity of Getting Married. A jumble of ideas, prejudices, points of view, and whimsicalities on the subject of marriage is tied up in a cloth and boiled into a sort of glutinous fusion or confusion, so that when the cloth is taken off they do not at once lose the coherent rotundity conferred upon them by pressure from without.[4]

Again, when Archer and Walkley claim that Shaw is "undramatic" because he is not a psychologist, and that he is merely an "imperfect ventriloquist" whose characters evince no real emotion and merely, endlessly, make speeches

---

3. Supra, pp. 194-196.

4. William Archer, Play-making (London, 1912), p. 104.

on lofty topics,[5] they are obviously taking exception to the nature of Shaw's "double characters." These, as we know, are represented as impassioned spokesmen of a moral viewpoint, or as morality symbols of a viewpoint or a class of people, as well as real persons with emotions recognizable to average men.

Finally, when, for example, Archer dispraises Shaw's "preaching," and when Walkley complains[6] of excessive intellectual discussion in Shavian drama, the critics are obviously voicing their disapproval of the highly didactic play as such. Archer once wrote to Shaw on this subject in a personal letter:

> We have never agreed about plays, and we never will. ...I have never given a red cent for the ideas in plays. ...the play has always been the first thing to me; it is the last thing to you.[7]

(There is, of course, a certain amount of truth to this statement: ideas were Shaw's primary concern in the drama. But we shall see that the "play" was not the "last thing" to Shaw: his works include--if in a special way--most of the "dramatic" qualities with which Archer was so greatly preoccupied. Shaw may not have devoted to the "play" the attention that Scribe, or Ibsen, gave it; but he certainly did not neglect "play" construction in practice,

---

5. Supra, p. 196.

6. Supra, p. 197.

7. Charles Archer, William Archer, Life, Work, and Friendships (London, 1931), pp. 263-264.

8

as, judging by his theory, one might suppose; nor was he in any way as imperfect a portrayer of character as Archer and Walkley maintained.

We thus see that Shaw's innovations in dramatic construction were the major occasion of the criticism levelled against his work by the anti-Shavians. If Shaw's work had no relation to the main traditions of nineteenth-century playwriting the appraisal of such criticism would be quite a complicated task. However, as we have already seen in previous chapters, this is not the case. Shaw does belong, in many fundamental ways, to what Archer and Walkley, and other critics, considered to be "dramatic" playwriting--the schools of Ibsen and Scribe.

Shaw as "Dramatist"

One of the striking features of Scribe and Ibsen criticism is that neither of these playwrights seems ever to have been termed "undramatic"--that, in fact, quite the contrary has been the general consensus about them. We have already noted that Ibsen was Archer's favorite playwright, and that both Walkley and Archer had a number of kind things to say of Scribe. Muriel C. Bradbrook, for example, tells us that

> the [late] nineteenth century dramatic tradition is Ibsen: And Ibsen for many

---

8. Supra, p. 56.

> years, and to some people even today, means the author of A Doll's House.[9]

Charles E. Eggert, writing of Scribe in 1902, gives a typical turn-of-the-century view of the French Author:

> Scribe's literary fame [sic] rests...on a series of the most sprightly comedies of modern times. ...several of his works will live as long as the language in which they were written.[10]

Now, throughout the preceding chapters, we have purposely drawn considerable attention to Shaw's indebtedness to the techniques of Ibsen and Scribe in what are probably his four most epoch-making plays. In view of this indebtedness, the question may well be raised as to why Archer and Walkley considered Shaw's plays basically "undramatic," when these contain definite--and frequently generous--admixtures of Ibsenism and Scribism. There are several good reasons why Shaw, despite his innovations, can surely not be considered so "undramatic" a playwright as his critics claimed--why, in fact, he cannot be considered "undramatic" at all.

1. We have seen that Shaw, by employing Scribe's "surf-board of suspense" method, does carry out what Archer terms the "main object of the dramatist's craft"--"to engender, maintain, suspend, heighten and resolve a state of tension"[11]

---

9. Muriel C. Bradbrook, Ibsen: The Norwegian (London, 1948), p. 78.

10. Eugène Scribe, Le Verre D'Eau (Boston, 1902), p. IV. With an introduction and notes by Charles E. Eggert.

11. Archer, Play-making, p. 148. See also supra, p. 195.

in a play. In none of the four Shavian dramas we have examined, not even in "Don Juan in Hell," do we find this principle neglected.

We have also noted that although Shaw does not employ plot scenarios, his plays, contrary to what Archer and Walkley maintain, do reveal proportion, balance and interconnection of parts, and considerable action. Each of the works examined (and be it remembered that, with the exception of Mrs. Warren's Profession, they are among Shaw's most unorthodox) contains an important incident plot, and includes the Scribian "proportions" of exposition, complication, and dénouement. Even in Getting Married, the Scribian mode of play construction is by no means abandoned: the four minor plots of which this drama is comprised each contain an exposition, complication and dénouement, albeit of an abbreviated nature.

2. It does not seem accurate to say that Shaw is not a psychologist, that his characters do not evince emotion, and that these spend virtually all their time making speeches. Admittedly, Shaw's figures do engage in a great deal of discussion, and are not in every way conceived as realistic figures. However, we have shown that they differ very markedly from the puppets of Scribe,[12] whom neither Archer nor Walkley admired for his one-dimensional characterizations; we have also shown in

---

12. Supra, pp 80-93.

various chapters, that insofar as Shaw's personages are concerned with their selves, and with their ideas concerning their selves and their relationship to their environment, they have much in common with Nora and Torvald Helmer of A Doll's House (who, be it recalled once more, are conceived in terms of a naturalistic psychology). Jacques Barzun states another important aspect of the problem of Shavian characterization:

> In the sense of detailed psychological studies there are no characters whatsoever in ancient drama, in epic poetry, or in such fictions as Cervantes', Swift's, or Rabelais'. And when we come down to modern times, no two people agree on whether Scott, Dickens, or Zola depict 'real characters.'[13]

This point may be open to debate. But Barzun does not leave the argument there; he goes on to say that Shaw's characters are impugned for their high articulateness, their talk of intellectual matters, and their function of frequently speaking for the author, and continues:

> This is equally true of Shakespeare or Molière, but the passage of time has made us think that whatever they do is perfectly natural; that Alceste in Le Misanthrope would of course know himself as thoroughly as Molière; that a Scotch ruffian like Macbeth would examine his motives and generalize about murder; that a cowardly buffoon like Falstaff would be a wit and a poet in prose. ...a time will come when the well-known spiritual eminence of the 20th century will make it seem equally natural for a Shaw personage to combine recognizable traits with self-knowledge and philosophic reflectiveness.[14]

---

13. Jacques Barzun, "Bernard Shaw in Twilight," in George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York, 1953), p. 168.

14. Ibid., p. 169.

Thus, while such personages as Mrs. Warren, John Tanner, Ann Whitefield, St. John Hotchkiss, Captain Shotover, and others may not be our next-door neighbours--as the Helmers could conceivably be--their revealing, over and above their evident, real selves, a higher self of ideas and ideological aspirations, increases their stature as representations of modern man, not only as he is, but as his thinking reveals he would like to be. One of Shaw's greatest "dramatic" achievements is to have depicted characters whose personality dimensions are not confined to the level of those of common humanity--let alone to those of Scribian puppets--but who are, both in spite and because of their function as spokesmen and living symbols, vital, highly idealistic, and "dramatic" figures that live in our minds as much, if not more, than those of Ibsen. This is one of the chief justifications of the development by Shaw of the discussion play as a dramatic genre.

4. We have shown that if we judge Shaw in the light of the Scribian and Ibsenian traditions, his character-portrayal and plot construction cannot be termed "undramatic": his technique is not so far removed from the traditional patterns of nineteenth-century drama as the criticism of Walkley and Archer suggests, and when it does radically differ from these patterns, as in the case of characterization, it gains rather than loses "dramatic" qualities. Above all, however, Shaw's plays must be considered "dramatic" because they answer what

Archer--seemingly in agonizing reappraisal of his "rules" for playwrights--calls "the only really valid definition of the dramatic": "Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theatre." [15] As Walkley freely admits,[16] as Archer concedes,[17] and as playgoers for over fifty years have had occasion to discover and appreciate, the Shavian drama is highly entertaining--for its people, its discussions, its wit, its humor, and its "word-music." This, surely, is the best substantiation of Shaw's "dramatic" genius.

---

15. Archer, Play-making, p. 38. See also supra, p. 197.

16. Supra, p. 197.

17. Supra, p. 197.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Original Works

Shaw, George Bernard, The Works of Bernard Shaw, in 31 vols. (New York, Ayot St. Law. ed., 1930).

Shaw, George Bernard, Buoyant Billions, Farfetched Fables, and Shakes versus Shav (London, 1950).

Shaw, George Bernard, Geneva, Cymbeline Refinished, and Good King Charles (New York, 1947).

Shaw, George Bernard, "On the principles that govern the dramatist in his selection of themes, and methods of treatment," in Barret H. Clark, editor, European Theories of the Drama (New York, 1929), 475.

Chekhov (Tchekoff), Anton, Plays, in two series (New York, 1916), II, 211-277, Translated with an introduction by Julius West.

Ibsen, Henrik, A Doll's House: and Two Other Plays (London, Everyman's ed., 1911), 5-86. Translated by R. Farquharson Sharp.

Scribe, Eugène, Le Verre D'Eau (Boston, 1902). Edited with an introduction and notes by Charles A. Eggert.

Critical Works

Archer, Charles, William Archer: Life, Work, and Friendships (London, 1931).

Archer, William, Play-making (London, 1912).

Archer, William, The Old Drama and the New (London, 1923)

Archer, William, The Theatrical 'World' of 1894 (London, 1895).

Arvin, Neil C., Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre, 1815-1860 (Cambridge, Mass., 1924).

Bab, Julius, Bernard Shaw (Berlin, 1926).

Beerbohm, Max, Around Theatres (London, 1953).

Bentley, Eric R., Bernard Shaw (Norfolk, Ct., 1947).

Bentley, Eric R., The Playwright as Thinker (New York, 1946).

Bradbrook, Muriel C., Ibsen: The Norwegian (London, 1948).

Brieux, Eugène, Three Plays (London, 1917). With a preface by Bernard Shaw.

Burton, Richard, Bernard Shaw: The Man and the Mask (New York, 1916).

Chekhov (Tchekhof), Anton, Two Plays (London, 1912). With an introduction by George Calderon.

Chesterton, Gilbert K., George Bernard Shaw (New York, 1909).

Colbourne, Maurice, The Real Bernard Shaw (London, 1949).

Collis, John S., Shaw (London, 1928).

Doumic, René, De Scribe à Ibsen (Paris, n. d.).

Downs, Brian W., A Study of Six Plays by Ibsen (Cambridge, Eng., 1950).

Downs, Brian W., Ibsen: The Intellectual Background (Cambridge, Eng., 1946).

Elton, Oliver, Chekhov (Oxford, 1929).

Hamon, Augustin, The Twentieth Century Moliere: Bernard Shaw (London, 1915). Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul.

Henderson, Archibald, Bernard Shaw: Playboy and Prophet (New York, 1932).

Henderson, Archibald,, Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist? (London,1929).

Hingley, Ronald, Chekhov (London, 1950).

Irvine, William, The Universe of G. B. S. (New York, 1949).

Joad, C. E. M., Shaw (London, 1949).

Kronenberger, Louis, The Thread of Laughter (New York, 1952).

Matthews, Brander, French Dramatists of the 19th Century (New York, 1919).

MacCarthy, Desmond, Shaw (London, 1951).

Nicoll, Allardyce, World Drama: from Aeschylus to Anouilh (New York, n. d.).

Nicoll, Allardyce, A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900, in two vols. (Cambridge, Eng.), 1946, I.

Shanks, Edward, Bernard Shaw (London, 1924).

Smith, Hugh Allison, Main Currents of Modern French Drama, (New York, 1925).

Strauss, Emil, Bernard Shaw: Art and Socialism (London, 1942).

Tennant, P. F. D., Ibsen's Dramatic Technique (Cambridge, Eng., 1948).

Walkley, Arthur B., Drama and Life (London, 1907).

Walkley, Arthur B., Still More Prejudice (London, 1925).

Ward, Alfred C., Bernard Shaw (London, 1951).

Williams, Raymond, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London, 1952).

Critical Essays

Barzun, Jacques, "Bernard Shaw in Twilight," in George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York, 1953), 158-177.

Bridie, James, "Shaw as Dramatist," in G. B. S. 90, edited by Stephen Winsten (London, 1946), 77-91.

Child, Harold, "Arthur Bingham Walkley," in The Post Victorians (London, 1933), 619-632. With an introduction by W. R. Inge.

Edwards, G. B., "Shaw," The Adelphi, 1926, IV, 17-32.

Howe, P. P., "The Dramatic Craftsmanship of Mr. Bernard Shaw," Fortnightly Review, 1913, XCIV, 132-146.

Peacock, Ronald, "Shaw," in George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York, 1953), 178-183.

Rhodes, S. A., "France and Belgium," in A History of Modern Drama, edited by Barret H. Clark and George Freedley (New York, 1947), 233-317.

Street, G. S., "Sheridan and Shaw," Blackwood's Magazine (New York), 1900, CLXVII, 832-836.

Wilson, Edmund, "Bernard Shaw at Eighty," in George Bernard Shaw: A Critical Survey, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York, 1953), 126-152.

Wilson, Edmund, "Bernard Shaw Since the War," The New Republic 1924, XXXIX-XL, 380-381.

n. n., "Mr. Bernard Shaw's Dramatic Criticism," The Spectator, 1907, XCVIII, 567-568.

n. n., "Where Barrie and Bernard Shaw Fail," Current Literature, 1906, XL, 524.

Daily Newspapers

Walkley, Arthur B. [Dramatic Reviews], Times (London),
Dec. 10, 1892, p. 5;
April 23, 1894, p. 3;
May 13, 1908, p. 13;
Feb. 24, 1910, p. 12;
April 20, 1911, p. 8;
Sept. 2, 1913, p. 6;
Oct. 19, 1921, p. 8;
Feb. 19, 1924, p. 10;
Feb. 20, 1924, p. 10;
Feb. 21, 1924, p. 10;
Feb. 22, 1924, p. 10;
Feb. 23, 1924, p. 8;
March 27, 1924, p. 12.

APPENDIX

Appendix

Archibald Henderson's Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist?

Having provided answers to the three central problems of the thesis, the merit of Archibald Henderson's book dealing with our subject may be examined. In Henderson's work, subtitled a "Scientific, but imaginary Symposium in the neo-Socratic Manner,"[1] Shaw and his biographer communicate with the ghosts of Archer, Walkley, and Ibsen by means of an instrument known as "The Spirit Recall." Archer (who died in 1924) is their first guest. He spends his time gossiping about his collaboration with Shaw on the latter's first play, Widowers' Houses,[2] and states little with respect to the central problem. However, before returning to his eternal habitat, he does announce that

> In my last book on drama [The Old Drama and the New], I affirmed that...the technic of Shaw's plays is that of a jelly-fish.[3]

The ghost of Walkley then appears; here are his important remarks:

> The trouble is that Shaw is such a delightful fellow that he could make a funeral jolly and an inquest hilarious.[4]
>
> His plays are conversations, dialogues, debates--yes, true enough. ...But where is the conflict? As soon as pressure is

---

1. Archibald Henderson, Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist (New York, 1929), p. 1.
2. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
3. Ibid., p. 9.
4. Ibid., p. 12.

> brought to bear on one of Shaw's characters, he grins sheepishly and collapses with a pop.[5]

Ibsen's ghost is then conjured up. Henderson claims that

> So far as possible, the known views of the various characters in this playlet are expressed, even to the actual words they have employed.[6]

However, Ibsen's contribution to the problem of Shaw's dramaturgy is, in part, a paraphrase of some comments by Shaw in The Quintessence of Ibsenism.[7] (It is not known to the writer that, publicly, Ibsen ever contributed important comments on Shaw.) The ghost of Ibsen speaks:

> Down to the time of A Doll's House, standard commercial plays consisted of an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and a getting out of the situation in the best way possible in the third. But I changed all that. I don't deny that A Doll's House is built like a Scribe 'well-made piece' up to the last scene of the last act. That's where I come in. At this point, Nora, true child of my fancy, instead of falling into the arms of a reconciled and forgiving husband, suddenly turns on Torvald and says: 'We must sit down like two rational beings and discuss all this that has been happening between us.' This was one of my best technical innovations. ...My innovation went like wildfire; A Doll's House conquered Europe. Since that time, intelligent audiences demand a discussion as well as an emotional situation. All of my plays after A Doll's House are dramas of discussion: the characters turn their souls inside out. I repudiate Shaw, because he kept

---

5. Henderson, Is Bernard Shaw a Dramatist, p. 13.

6. Ibid., p. 5

7. Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, in Works, XIX, 1-161, p. 148.

> the discussion and eliminated the emotional situation--with the result that his theatre entertainments are only stage representations of a lot of people holding public meetings in which each one orates about his own very peculiar state of mind.[8]

The last part of the symposium is devoted to pronouncements by Shaw. Here are the most important:

> Of the moderns I particularly like Pirandello [the Italian dramatist, Luigi Pirandello, 1867-1936 and Strindberg [the Swedish dramatist, August Strindberg, 1849-1912]. Pirandello has followed me in driving home the view I have constantly stressed that intellect is one of the passions and is capable of giving a more lasting enjoyment than any other passion.[9]

> ...a logically developed play cannot possibly contain any surprises for me. I know what will happen from the beginning and accordingly lose interest. But when a play goes along without any apparent plan and when at first no consecutive development or plot appears evident, I am at once intrigued into discovering the plot and outcome.[10]

> I claim for the theatre that it is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages...A theatre to me is a place 'where two or three are gathered together.' Unfortunately this Christian Church...has become the Church where you must not laugh; and so it is giving way to that older and greater Church where the oftener you laugh the better, because by laughter only can you destroy evil without malice, and affirm good fellowship without mawkishness.[11]

---

8. Henderson, Shaw, pp. 16-17. Cf. Shaw

9. Ibid., p. 26.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 27.

> With each new play I have brought a message to mankind.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> [For example] Getting Married: on our most licentious institution. Heartbreak House: on contemporary civilization.[12]

We have given the substance of Henderson's work. In it, as we see, Archer briefly complains about Shaw's non-rigid plot construction; Walkley remarks that the Shavian dramas lack conflict and convincing character-portrayal; and Ibsen speaks of the innovations of A Doll's House, and of Shaw's failure to include "emotional situations" in his plays. Shaw himself affirms his lack of interest in mechanically constructed plays of incident; his conviction that the theatre should be a very important source of moral improvement; and the interesting observation that ratiocination is one of the human passions. (This last observation can be interpreted as further corroboration of the fact that Shaw's character-drawing is not merely a matter of creating "mouth-pieces" for his own ideas, as Archer contends: thinking as an activity definitely is one of the passions; our universities would be sadly understaffed if it were not. Hence, even while they perform as spokesmen, Shaw's figures evince a definite, though special, form of emotion.)

However, the above are obviously a mere few of the considerations which must be taken into account in a proper

---

12. Henderson, Shaw, p. 31.

study of Shaw's dramaturgy; moreover, Henderson discusses none of them at length (the "symposium" takes up but thirty-three pages in large type). Most important, Shaw's structural innovations are referred to but little, and the question as to whether or not Shaw is a "dramatist" is left in abeyance. We may say, therefore, that Henderson does not contribute a great deal to our subject; and that this subject cannot lightly be touched upon in an "imaginary symposium" of this type, if substantiated conclusions are to be drawn.