

M. Diafoirus. Only superficially, however. For the old mock-Latin, for the clysters, for the instruments which modern delicacy does not permit to be named, we now have barbarous Greek—opsonin and phagocytosis—surgical saws and “nuciform sacs.” *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose.* That, by the way, is the criticism which, in effect, the oldest of Mr. Shaw's physicians, Sir Patrick Cullen, is always applying to the new-fangled discoveries of his fellow-practitioners. He has seen all these “novelties” before; they have their law of periodicity—say, once in every fifteen years—and nothing is altered but the names. Sir Patrick, who stands for bluff cynical comment on scientific affectation, heads a group of half a dozen medical types. There is Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington—familiarily known as “old B. B.”—Court physician (much liked by what he invariably calls “the Family”) and platitudinously pompous bungler. He is, as you see, an entirely Molièresque figure. Good easy man, he does not know the difference between a vaccine and an anti-toxin, and is all for stimulating the phagocytes. There is Sir Colenso Ridgeon—just knighted as the curtain rises for his great “opsonin” discovery—who is all for buttering the bacilli. There is the great surgeon, Cutler Walpole, who in every human ill sees blood-poisoning, and is all for cutting out the “nuciform sac.” Physic he bluntly characterises as “rot”; the physicians, in return, dismiss surgery as mere “manual labour.” There remain two types not anticipated by Molière; Leo Schutzmacher, who has made a fortune in the East End by selling advice and drugs for sixpences, under the sign “cure guaranteed,” and Dr. Blenkinsop, a hard-working general practitioner

who has never succeeded in making both ends meet and begs fashionable consultants for their cast-off frock-coats. All these people display their several humours in a Queen Anne Street consulting-room, whither they have come to congratulate Sir Colenso Ridgeon on his Birthday Honour. The irony of the thing is that Sir Colenso's knighthood is the fruit of one of "old B. B.'s" most glaring blunders in treating one of "the Family." The disheartened and disgusted Ridgeon remarks, in an "aside," "Ours is not a profession, but a conspiracy."

Why not call it, rather, a procession? For that is what it turns out to be in the conduct of Mr. Shaw's play. Our bevy of doctors career through the play, always together (one wonders what becomes of their unfortunate patients), like the wedding guests in the *Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*. From Queen Anne Street their line of march takes them to the Star and Garter at Richmond, and thence to Louis Dubedat's studio. But who is Louis Dubedat? It is time that he was mentioned here, though it is a whole hour by the clock—an hour devoted to the exhibition and discussion of medical humours—before you hear of him in the theatre. Louis Dubedat is an artist with a tuberculous lung. Please keep one eye fixed on the art and the other on the lung, for these are the two separate elements out of which Mr. Shaw makes his play. Examine the lung first, for that *motif* still continues the original thesis—medical humbug. Louis Dubedat is the *corpus vile* on which the medical experiments are to be made. Jennifer Dubedat, Louis's wife, has sought out Sir Colenso Ridgeon, and, with great difficulty, secured his promise to undertake the case. When Ridgeon consents it is

really out of his profound (but entirely discreet) admiration for Jennifer, an idealist from Cornwall, a child of nature, to whom belief in Louis's genius is a religion. But Ridgeon's consent at once places him in a dilemma. He has only staff and accommodation for ten cases, and all his beds are full. If he takes in Louis, he must dismiss (practically to certain death) one of the original ten; life for life. Nevertheless, knowing what he does of Jennifer, and knowing as yet nothing of Louis, he consents. As soon as he gets to know Louis the case is altered. Now is the time for you to remember that Louis is an artist as well as a sick man. You find that he is a particular kind of artist—the non-moral artist, a man without any sense of conduct, to whom the words "right" and "wrong," as ordinarily understood, have no meaning. Think of him as a Pierrot, or as a Faun. *Imprimis*, he belongs to Elia's great race of borrowers. Invited to meet the doctors (in a body, of course) he "touches" each of them for a loan. *Item*, he is a bigamist. *Item*, he is a blackmailer. That people should reprobate these practices is a thing he cannot even begin to understand. When the doctors arrive (always in a body) to upbraid him, he sits down and quietly sketches them. He gaily declares himself to be a disciple of Bernard Shaw, a celebrity unknown to Sir Patrick Cullen, who, however, promptly finds in him a moral likeness to John Wesley.

And now Sir Colenso is in a worse dilemma than ever. For he finds that his poor *confrère*, the morally irreproachable Dr. Blenkinsop, has also a tuberculous lung. Which is he to save? The good Blenkinsop, who is a social failure, or the bad Dubedat, who paints good pictures? Good men are fairly common, he



argues. Good pictures are very rare. And he decides in favour of Dubedat. But here there is a fresh complication. Jennifer Dubedat's whole life consists in the worship of Louis. If Louis ceased to be her hero, she would commit suicide—has, indeed, already marked out a certain cliff in Cornwall for that purpose. To prolong Dubedat's life is to ensure that his wife shall sooner or later find him out, and so have her religion shattered and lose her own life into the bargain. Therefore, for Jennifer's sake (even although, to the vulgar mind, it may look like murdering a man in the hope of marrying his widow) Sir Colenso must let Louis die. "Rather hard that a lad should be killed because his wife has too high an opinion of him" is old Sir Patrick's comment; "fortunately very few of us are in that predicament."

Killed, however, Louis is. Killed because he is handed over by Sir Colenso, the only man who could save him (with magical opsonin butter for the bacilli), to "old B. B.," who doesn't know the difference between a vaccine and an antitoxin. Louis dies, or fades away, before our eyes, with his head on Jennifer's breast (as Duse dies on Armand's in the last act of *La Dame*), dies like one of Montaigne's Emperors "in a jest," chaffing the doctors all round and uttering his artist's *credo* with his last breath—"I believe in Michael Angelo and Rembrandt and Velasquez and the Message of Art." Incurrigible Pierrot, unregenerate Faun! *Qualis artifex pereo*, he might have said. But instead of that he says let there be no horrible crape, let not his wife mar her beauty with tears; he hates widows, she must promise him to marry again. Also he gives a plain hint that he understands Sir Colenso's game. So does Jennifer,



who coldly dismisses Sir Colenso from the death-chamber. Amateurs of the morbid will revel in this realistic death-scene. Other people will dislike it as bad taste and cheap art. Bad taste in its punctuation of solemnity by jokes (for there is a touch of the Pierrot and the Faun in Mr. Shaw himself). Cheap art in its employment of such a fact as death (realistic, not poetised death) to secure an emotional thrill; a thrill which, from the very constitution of human nature, is bound to come without any reference to the skill of the artist. Mr. Shaw made a like mistake in the face "bashing" scene of *Major Barbara*. But it is useless to argue with him over these things. He will do them. All we can do is to be sorry.

There is a brief, quaint, not entirely comprehensible, epilogue. Jennifer and Sir Colenso meet at Louis Dubedat's posthumous "One man show." Sir Colenso, treated with cold disdain, is driven to try and open Jennifer's eyes to the truth about her dead hero. He fails utterly. The secret of his love for her pops out. She mocks at the idea of love in this "elderly gentleman"—a new view of himself for Sir Colenso. Besides, in deference to her hero's dying injunction, she has already married again. The curtain descends while we are still wondering who is Jennifer's second husband. Can it be the well-groomed manager of the Art Gallery?

A thoroughly "Shavian" play, this, stimulating and diverting for the most part, occasionally distressing, now and then bewildering. O philosopher! O humorist! you mutter with gratitude. And then you whisper, with a half sigh, O Pierrot! O Faun!

## THE PHILANDERER

(COURT, February 1907)

MR. SHAW never shirks a challenge. A friend challenged him to write about Don Juan, and he produced *Man and Superman*. Another friend challenged him to write about death, and he produced *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Has he no friend who will challenge him to produce a wordless play? It would be a wholesome discipline for him and might be a joy for us. His people would then be forced to show us what they are, and from their conduct we should judge them. At present they only tell us what they are, explain their own conduct with the aid of a lecturer's wand or by the process of question and answer, or else jump out of their skins and deliver impartial judgments on themselves as though they were somebody else. Now and then Shakespeare's people did that—as when Richard Crookback said, "I am determined to be a villain." But what Shakespeare did out of inadvertence Mr. Shaw does deliberately. He has yet to learn that action and emotion do not exist dramatically just because someone says that he has done this or felt that. His people analyse their passions with a logic so complete as to convince you that they have no passions to analyse. The great passions are mute; the others are only semi-articulate, and never auto-analytical. In the club scene of *The Philanderer* Dr.

Paramore says to Charteris, who is plaguing him with inopportune talk, "Allow me to call your attention to *that*." "That" is the word SILENCE placarded on the wall. It would do Mr. Shaw a world of good to keep that placard on his desk. Let him try to invent a few people who hold their tongues, at any rate about themselves.

Are, then, self-expository characters to be entirely banished from the stage? By no means. There are, at least, two legitimate uses for them. Their first legitimate use is in a fantastic play, where every character shamelessly reveals itself for exactly what it is or naively gives itself away. See *The Palace of Truth* and the Gilbertian theatre *passim*. Mr. Gilbert made his people do this precisely because it is what real people do not do; the essence of this kind of art is a surprising and grotesque departure from life. Mr. Shaw makes his people do it because he cannot help it, and in situations which are intended not to depart from life but to adhere closely to it, to give its very form and pressure. Raina Petkoff does it. Mrs. Warren does it. The hero of *Man and Superman* does it. Louis Dubedat does it. Charteris in *The Philanderer* does it. They all do it. And why? Because Mr. Shaw does it himself. In his letters to the newspapers, in his platform addresses, in his prefaces, on every occasion on which he speaks in his own person he speaks as a man who with unblushing frankness gives himself away. That is the secret of his method, the quintessence of Shavianism. And what Mr. Shaw does in his own person, he cannot help doing through the persons of his plays.

But there is another legitimate use for the self-expository character, and legitimate, this time, in the



drama of adherence to real life. There is a certain type of person in real life who *is* self-expository, whose nature may hardly be said to exist until it has come to the stage of being expounded, whose feelings do not come into play so much for their own sake as for the sake of being analysed. Of this type, as we have seen, Mr. Shaw is himself a brilliant example. As, then, self-expository men exist, Mr. Shaw may say he is entitled to put their images on the stage. Yes. Mr. Shaw is fully entitled to make a stage-hero of the self-expository man; but he does it at his risks and perils. For we, his audience, are also entitled to say that the type is not well chosen, that it is not suitable to the subject-matter of the play, that we get no pleasure out of seeing it just where it is and doing just what it does. That is my own feeling about the eponymous hero of *The Philanderer*. I get no pleasure out of him. Charteris is a man perpetually shilly-shallying between two women, or rather pursued by one woman while he pursues another. Yesterday he was "carrying on" with Julia, but is now tired of her and is "making up" to Grace. I say "carrying on" and "making up" because I do not quite know in what category of amorous relation I am to place the two pairs. Perhaps "walking out" would be a more apt phrase, for the behaviour of the parties too often suggests the manners of "downstairs." There is a good deal of hugging and kissing, but apparently everybody's intentions are to be understood as conventionally "honourable." Charteris sometimes alludes to his proceedings as "philandering," sometimes as "sweethearting." Julia, on the other hand, talks of having been "the slave of his passion" for her. Queer as the behaviour of these very osculatory ladies is, we are to understand that

they are technically virtuous. We do not quite know where we are ; but let us be charitable and take it to be all an affair of "courtship"—courtship with a rather unusual allowance of caressing. Charteris, then, is courting Grace, in order to escape being courted by Julia. He talks of "loving" Grace, but evidently loves no one but himself. But what he loves even better than himself is the sound of his own voice. He is for ever expounding, now to Julia, now to Grace, now to both together, the nature of the emotions which they, individually and collectively, have inspired, do inspire, or may possibly inspire in him.

Mr. Shaw says that this is just the sort of thing the women like. Tired of being treated with the respect "due to their sex," they are fascinated by any man who will treat them on frank and equal terms. Charteris's idea of frank and equal terms is for the man to punctuate long and argumentative discourses with perfunctory kisses.

"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?"

Perhaps this is a specimen of *l'amour psychique* that Professor Bellac used to talk about. The Duchess did not believe Bellac, and we do not believe Charteris. We do not believe a word he says, and, further, we find him a bore. That is the worst of putting your self-expository man on the stage. The glibness of the self-exposition soon ceases to amuse us, and we look for our interest to the quality of the self-expounded. Now the fact is, the self in this case, the true inwardness of Charteris, is not interesting. He might have been interesting if he had had enough stuff in him to be a real blackguard. But he has not "betrayed" Julia, he has simply been "philandering" with her—

some sort of grown-up boy and girl nonsense. He might be interesting if he had a spark of real love for Grace; but he has not. He is simply a kind of voluble jackass who has wasted his time dangling round women or letting them dangle round him in order that he may chatter to them about emotions which he does not, in fact, feel. Well, says Mr. Shaw, that is just the sort of man a "philanderer" is, and I have put him on the stage for you to see. We answer that the sight of him gives us no pleasure, that his chatter wearies us, and that the empty insincerity of the principal character spoils the whole play.

Nor are the other characters of any compensating importance. Julia stands for the "womanly woman"; she is not, she is merely one of Mr. Shaw's shrews. Grace stands for the late Victorian "new woman," a type now so utterly forgotten that one looks upon the character to-day as rather more outrageously fantastic than one of Molière's *précieuses ridicules*. (There is an "Ibsen Club" in the play, and much talk of "Ibsenism"—oh! those remote 'nineties! Here is a play hardly more than a dozen years old, and yet already out of date and even *rococo*!) The only amusing characters are those who stand outside the "philandering" story—two heavy fathers, one of whom is an anti-Ibsenite sentimentalist (a caricature, not unkind, of a real person, now dead) and the other the luckless victim of a medical blunder. Dr. Paramore has discovered a new disease of the liver, and diagnoses its fatal presence in Colonel Craven. The colonel gives up meat and drink and resigns himself to a speedy death from "Paramore's disease." By and by it is conclusively proved that there is no such disease. Rage and despair of Paramore, aggravated by what he considers the



indecent joy of the Colonel—a scene that tells us, what we knew before, that Mr. Shaw has a true gift for Molièresque comedy. On the whole, however, the play is one of Mr. Shaw's least happy experiments.

## ELEONORA DUSE

### LA GIOCONDA

(May 1900)

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO dedicates his tragedy of *La Gioconda* to Eleonora Duse "dalle belle mani," and it is in these beautiful hands that the fate of the tragedy lies. Hardly has Silvia Settala entered when attention is directed to her hands. "Care mani," says Silvia's old friend Lorenzo Gaddi, the sculptor, "coraggiose e belle, sicure e belle!" They rival the famous hands of the "donna dal mazzolino" of Verrocchio. Her husband should carve them in marble and hang them up as an *ex-voto* for his rescue from death. For he, too, Lucio Settala, is a sculptor, and it is to his wife's loving care that he owes his recovery from the wound he has inflicted on himself. It was in a moment of passionate despair. He was the victim of a love bordering on frenzy for Gioconda Dianti, his model, and the inspiration of his art. Was? Perhaps he still is, notwithstanding his renewed love, born of gratitude, for his wife, who is in an agony of doubt because she knows the other woman is still at hand, implacable, waiting to draw Lucio back into her net. For the moment Silvia's doubt is set at rest by her husband's protestation of devotion, but we see, what she does not, that the fever of the old love is still upon him. In a scene with his friend Cosimo Dalbo

—D'Annunzio does not disdain the employment of confidants—Lucio confesses the truth. He adores his wife. Hers is a soul of inestimable price. “Ma io non scolpisco le anime,” he cries; he is not a sculptor of souls. This woman with the beautiful soul was not meant for him. Whereas the other will furnish him, not with one statue, but with thousands. When he saw her he thought of all the blocks of marble in the flanks of distant mountains, “per la volontà di fermare in ciascuno un suo gesto.” And Lucio pours forth the fervour of his love for Gioconda, which to him means love for his art, the worship of plastic beauty, everything, in short, for which he lives. Even now, it seems, Gioconda is serving the cause of Lucio's art. She comes every day to his deserted studio to preserve his last unfinished statue by keeping the clay wet. But, interjects his friend, while Gioconda has been saving your statue, Silvia has been saving your life! Lucio's reply reveals the “absolute artist”: “Quale delle due cose ha maggior pregio?” It is not permissible to argue with sculptors, or it might have been pointed out that the saving of an unfinished statue would be useless unless the sculptor's life had been saved too.

At this stage Silvia's instinct warns her that her husband is not safe so long as the other woman still holds the key of the studio. She determines then to confront her, wrest the key from her, and drive her forth. The second act has now closed, and, save for one brief minute, we shall see the husband no more. It is the turn of the two women, rivals for the man's love, to come face to face and to fight it out. A great scene it should be—a *scène-à-faire*, as M. Sarcy would have called it, if ever there was one—and a great scene it is. The wife stands, silent, posed as nobly as any



of the statues around her, while the other woman opens the studio door. There is a moment's pause, then "Io sono Silvia Settala," says the wife. "Voi?" "Which of us is the intruder? Is it I, perhaps?" "Perhaps," answers the other woman; and proceeds to make good her retort. For this studio is not the home of the domestic virtues. It is outside common laws and rights. Here a sculptor makes his statues. "And I, Gioconda, am naught here save an instrument of his art." Nature has sent her to him to bring him a message and to serve him. She is here to serve him at this moment. This is no vulgar quarrel, it will be seen. D'Annunzio fairly assigns to each side in the struggle its point of view and its complete case. And now a sudden temptation comes to the baffled and tortured Silvia; a temptation which D'Annunzio calls "la fatalità antica della menzogna." Silvia lies. She tells her rival that she has been sent to dismiss her by Lucio himself, and she lies so thoroughly that Gioconda is convinced. "Then," cries Gioconda, roused in her turn to fury, "I will destroy the statue, *my* statue, made with the life he wrung out of me drop by drop." As Gioconda rushes to destroy the statue, Silvia follows her to save it. She does save it, but at terrible cost. Her hands, her beautiful, sure hands, are crushed into a shapeless mass. Clumsy or brutal stage-management, it need hardly be said, might have made this incident a thing of horror; but Signora Duse keeps it rigidly within the limits of true art. It is the pity of the tragedy which smites the heart, not the horror.

After this terrible scene we must have peace, and the last act is strangely peaceful, touched with poetic fantasy, infinitely pathetic. The poor maimed creature, in a robe which conceals her handless wrists, is alone

by the sea, conversing with a half-crazed peasant girl, La Sirenetta, who tells her the rhyme of the Seven Sisters and their fates:—

“Eravamo sette sorelle  
 Ci specchiamo alle fontane:  
 Eravamo tutte belle.”

But where are her hands, asks La Sirenetta, the beautiful hands she had so often kissed? “I have given them,” is the answer, “to my love.” La Sirenetta would offer Silvia her own hands, were they not so rough and brown; and Silvia’s reply shows that D’Annunzio is true poet as well as playwright—“Sono felice le tue mani,” they can touch the leaves and the flowers and earth and water and the stones and the children and animals and all innocent things. And now Silvia is waiting. Not for her husband; he has left her—since the “absolute artist” can be a miserable cur—for La Gioconda. It is for her child Beata that Silvia is waiting—Beata whom she has not seen since the loss of her hands. When Beata runs in she offers her mother flowers, which the poor woman cannot take. “Why don’t you take me in your arms, mother, and clasp me tight?” And the mother sinks slowly upon her knees in speechless agony.

D’Annunzio’s style has marmorean dignity and purity and polish. There are passages of prose in it which are a sheer delight as beautiful sound, apart from the feeling and thought which have their own beauty too. And one must use the same word for Signora Duse’s performance; it is entirely beautiful. In the crises of tragic frenzy, as in the interspaces of pure pathos, she never forsakes the eternal principle of great art, the principle of beauty.

## FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

(ADELPHI, October 1903)

*D*U Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort—the strange name which Maurice Barrès has given to one of his strange books—might serve as a sub-title for the *Francesca da Rimini* of Gabriele d'Annunzio. The play reeks of blood. The roses over which Francesca bends in the first scene are dyed a deeper red with blood.

“È il miracolo del sangue!”

she cries. Rose-red and blood-red—there you have the colours of the whole play. For this vivid colour scheme there must, of course, be maintained a pitch of violent emotion. The men, all save Paolo, are wild beasts. Ostasio, Francesca's brother, cannot question a harmless, necessary jester without half-strangling him. For a sneering word he stabs his bastard-brother Bannio in the cheek. (It is Bannio's blood which stains Francesca's roses. Smaragdi, the slave, has mopped it up and poured it into the Byzantine sarcophagus that holds them.) Paolo's younger brother Malatestino is a demon of cruelty. He tortures a prisoner, then cuts off his head and carries it about in a ghastly bundle. All this violence and “human gore” cunningly prepares one for the final slaughter. We are to feel that Gianciotto's murder of his wife and



her lover, almost by the same sword-stroke, was just a typical thirteenth-century affair. Francesca herself is quite used to violence and blood. On the battlements she plays with Greek fire, will not go away when the arrows begin to fall round her, and declares her love for a good fight—

“È bello il combattente alla battaglia.”

She buckles on her husband's gorget as one quite used to it. Blood-red, then, is the dominant colour of the tragedy.

Blood-red—but also rose-red. For against the violence of the passions, the general ferocity and cruelty, you have to set the suavity of D'Annunzio's verse—rich and even (like Mr. Fred Bayham's conversation) “sumptuous,” but always beautiful, always a feast for the ear. Beauty the whole play assuredly has, the beauty of roses and the beauty of blood. Even young Malatestino, with his chopper and with only one eye, is not without a certain savage beauty. To the beauty of every form of energy D'Annunzio has always shown himself peculiarly susceptible, and this feeling for beauty he gives to all his characters. Not only Paolo, but Gianciotto and Malatestino are the slaves of Francesca's beauty. The most passionate speech of her brother Ostasio is a panegyric of that. When she herself plays with the Greek fire it is not for the sport of danger, but that she may intoxicate herself with its beauty—

“Questa fiamma è tanto  
bella che me ne sento inebriata.”

See, too, how voluptuously she caresses the rich stuffs which the merchant has brought her. Musicians are in



her train. She lives for beauty. What is the glory for her of Paolo if it be not that he is "Il Bello"? Do not the pair (in Hedda Gabler's phrase) "die beautifully"? D'Annunzio, then, in this play always makes for beauty—the beauty of suavity and the beauty of violence and death. The red of the rose and the red of blood. It is a blend peculiarly Italian and, what is more, peculiarly D'Annunzian.

Next to this primary sensation, the sensation of a rich, sensuous, multicoloured and flamboyant beauty, one gets a sensation of drama. That order, it will be said, is a covert condemnation of the play, inasmuch as the essence of great drama is, before everything, to make a dramatic appeal. The truth—surely an obvious truth—is, that the story of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo il Bello is not a first-rate subject for drama. Of course, the catastrophe—like any other scene of sudden death—is dramatic enough; but a catastrophe is only the end of a play, not the play itself. The play itself must be the story of a gradual drifting into a guilty passion, and, do what you will, you cannot make that drifting dramatic in itself. Do what you will, you cannot make Paolo anything but a stick, a beautiful stick. Further, your cardinal scene must be a transfer to the stage of the famous passage from Dante about the lovers' kiss over the book. You cannot escape that scene; the play without that scene would be *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. You may make that scene a thing of beauty, as D'Annunzio does; but neither D'Annunzio nor anyone else can make that scene dramatic. But D'Annunzio's handling of the whole story is more dramatic than the handling of anyone else. The sudden confrontation of Francesca and Paolo at the

end of the first act, with never a word spoken, is highly dramatic. There is no need for words. The twain stand spellbound. The woman hands the man a rose, a blood-stained rose. All the story to come is there. The second act, the fighting on the ramparts, if not dramatic, is full of bustle and excitement. Its one *raison d'être* as drama is that it reveals to Paolo, supposed to be wounded, the secret of Francesca's passion. Only half-dramatic, again, the third act; but it had to be there, as I have said, for the sake of the cardinal scene, the scene of the kiss and the book. In the fourth act the dramatic pulse beats hot and fierce. It is the act of Malatestino's lust for blood and his treacherous betrayal of Francesca. D'Annunzio's invention of this one-eyed traitor, Malatestino "dall'occhio," is an admirable invention. What more natural than his jealous denunciation of his sister, after he has been himself repulsed by her? He strikes the note of drama, then, as well as the note of horror. The scene of his avowal to his brother, when Gianciotto, all in armour, nearly crushes the life out of him in his fierce eagerness to know the truth, is the finest in the play. When people say, as many people do, that Gabriele d'Annunzio lacks the true faculty of the dramatist, I would ask them what other name than true dramatist is to be found for the man who conceived and wrote this scene? The final scene, too, following the authentic story in which Paolo, seeking to escape, is caught by his tunic in the trap-door, is the most dramatic arrangement of any that one has seen. Of course, the original intractability of the subject remains. It cannot be turned into first-rate drama—the drama of uninterrupted and cumulative interest. D'Annunzio has done the next best thing—he has filled out the

story with the *maximum* number of poignantly dramatic episodes. His rose-red and his blood-red are never "still-life" colours. There is no stagnation.

As for Signora Duse, it is the beauty of the play rather than the drama of it that she fastens upon and chiefly illustrates. In passages of beauty she is perfection itself. There is such a passage in the first act, wherein Francesca describes her little sister Samaritana the "piccola colomba," and one again in the second, wherein Francesca describes the wild beauty of Greek fire and her joy in it—to listen to these was to hear the most exquisite music. In the scene over the lectern it was wonderful to watch the changes of her face and the "passions de l'amour," to use Pascal's phrase, following fast upon one another there. But when she had a passage not so much of beauty as of dramatic force to deliver, as in her description to the slave Smaragdi of her terrible dream, she was far less satisfactory—dwelling almost exclusively on the musical beauty of the lines and almost ignoring the force and terror of them. If the truth must out, a simple semi-archaic type, a Francesca, a figure of little else than plastic and musical beauty, does not enable her to put forth her best and truest powers. This is by no means to say that her Francesca is not in its way a supremely exquisite thing.

## LA SECONDA MOGLIE

(WALDORF, May 1905)

SIGNORA DUSE is in London once again, and once again revitalises our theatrical emotions for us and resumes from the moment she enters the scene all her old spell. There may be changes to be noted by the curious in this our great enchantress, but they are merely trivial, external changes—a slightly heightened complexion, perhaps, and a more luxuriant *coiffure*. These are details for the gossips. All one cares about is the welcome certainty that there is no loss of magic—the magic of the thrilling voice and the nervous gesture, and the wonderful play of glance and feature. Out of compliment to her audience, or, maybe, with the aim of being more readily understood by those who have no Italian, Signora Duse makes her re-entry in an English play. For my part I should have welcomed any other choice. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is, no doubt, a first-rate specimen of our modern English drama, but I have a vague feeling that Signora Duse in this English drama is like a 'Varsity oar in a College eight—somewhat too magnificent an instrument for a comparatively humble piece of work. To vary the figure, one does not care to see a great virtuoso performing on a cottage piano. Was Paula Tanqueray, the ex-Mrs. Jarman, really so splendid, so



romantic a figure as this? I cannot believe it. She would have set all Surrey by the ears, or, rather, have turned it into some poetic place of the South, an Alban lake or a Borromean isle. This is no Mrs. Tanqueray, who "adores fruit, especially when it is expensive," but an exotic orchidaceous creature with the enigmatic smile of a Da Vinci portrait and tones in her voice that are echoed from a Straduarus. It is not Paula fondling and caressing Aubrey, but some Vivien beguiling Merlin. In a word Signora Duse inevitably poetises the prose of the play, and so warps it from its real nature; making it, to be sure, something much more glorious, but at the same time much less true. Paula Tanqueray was a vulgar "fast" woman, promoted from a "shy" villa to Anglican respectability, whereas this is some beautiful strange monster let loose among mortal men. When she is joyous there are "harps in the air," when sad, her weeping is like a convulsion of nature. She has rapid tragic moments that seem like acted readings in Dante. As when Paula, cast once more into the presence of Ardale, and with her secret divined by her step-daughter, declares that her past is written indelibly upon her face—and accompanies her words with a sudden gesture that chills the blood of the onlooker. Such art, or rather such a temperament, as this seems to cry aloud for the ample scope of some part of high romance, where everything shall inevitably be "in the grand style." In the grand style all that Eleonora Duse does is inevitably done; so that, as I have said, she drives this prosaic English part out of its nature, and you are reminded throughout of the feat which Goldsmith attributed to Johnson of "making little fishes talk like big whales." It is a wonderful thing to see, a kaleido-

scopic show of varying emotions that each communicate to the spectator their little thrill of pity or terror or delight; but it is no more Mrs. Tanqueray than the Colossus of Rhodes is one of the frock-coated statues on the Thames Embankment.

## LA LOCANDIERA

(WALDORF, June 1905)

NO doubt it is as a great tragic actress that Signora Duse will pass into history. Hers is the tragic mask, with its knitted brow and its mouth drawn down at the corners. She has gestures of physical disgust and revolt, as when she rubs the ignoble Gaston's kisses from her hand in *Visita di Nozze*, or the pinched face and "dead" voice of blank despair, as in the penultimate scene of *Seconda Moglie*, that are almost stifling with their tragic oppression. Yet those of us who have seen her as the *Mirandolina* of Goldoni will always put that memory of her before everything else; we shall say that, tragic actress though she may be by temperament and choice, it is in her one brief moment of comedy that she casts over us her most potent spell. For my own part, I count it a unique thing. Night after night, year after year, I have gone to theatre after theatre, and, though I have not found all barren, yet on the whole I should be inclined to sigh over a misspent life were it not for the thought of Duse in *La Locandiera*. For the sake of that one supreme pleasure I might be tempted to go through it all again. . . . It would be a great comfort if one could stop at this simple statement of fact. But it is the business of criticism to try to account for just such facts as these, to trace pleasure to its source, to

separate the components of the charm. Hopeless as such an adventure is in the present case, I must not shirk it.

The place is Florence. The time, mid-eighteenth century. Gentlemen, in the rich dress of the period, wear wigs of a higher arch over the brow than was our general English fashion. Our "macaronis" adopted it, however, evidently getting their perukes where they got their name. This little detail of the wig at once gives a touch of local colour. It may be said that, laid as the action is entirely within four walls, there is no sensation of place. But that is a mistake; you are always aware of the *genius loci* in Goldoni. A Venetian (whether by birth or not I forget, but certainly by frequentation), he generally affects Venice for his scene. This comedy, however, is too light and cheerful and innocent a thing for the decadent Venice of the period—that Venice of Casanova which Théophile Gautier had a morbid longing to have lived in. No; though you do not see it, you feel that the clear air of Florence is on the other side of those inn-walls, and that the gentlemen before you, the Count and the Marquis and the Cavaliere, may be on visiting terms with Sir Horace Mann. Count and Marquis, both in love with the hostess, Mirandolina, are snarling at one another. "Contea comprata!" sneers the Marquis. "Yes, I bought my county when you sold your marquisate" is the retort. The snuffy old Marquis, "povero e superbo," with his perpetual refrain of "Son chi sono," is delightfully played by Ettore Mazzanti; the Count has little more to do than to give him his cue. They amuse you until Mirandolina appears, and then you straightway forget them. She is in flowered brocade,



with a *sacque*—rather sumptuous attire, perhaps, for the landlady of an inn; I liked better the plain, chocolate-coloured gown, with a stiff hoop, in which she used to dress the part. But she wears the same coquettish little cap. You at once see that this is a landlady in a thousand—respectful without a tinge of servility, not above her business, and yet a perfect little lady, of the frank Italian sort. Between her two admirers she steers a clear course, not caring a fig for either of them, but too adroit to turn a too cold shoulder to “gentlefolk” customers. Her tact is perfect. Though her childlike delight in pretty toys breaks out unrestrainedly in hand-clapping and “belli, belli,” over the diamond earrings offered her by the Count, she is not overwhelmed by the magnificence of the gift; and when the Marquis, in his turn, offers her a common red handkerchief, though her eyes dance with fun, she shows no offended dignity. Her dignity is not tried until the Cavaliere appears—the bear, the professed woman-hater. He grumbles rudely at the inn-linen. She replies with quiet good-breeding, showing by look, not by speech, that she expects complaints of this sort to be made to the servants. She keeps her smile—the frankest, pleasantest smile I know—and, under her smile, resolves to teach the bear a lesson. For the honour of her outraged sex she will tame him and bring him to her feet.

This she announces, formally, to the audience, as she is seated alone on the stage. Deliciously naïve, blandly artificial, Goldoni! A little touch of this kind gives one all the joy of a genuine Chippendale chair-leg or a piece of *pâte tendre*. How can one hope to set down in printer’s ink the details of *Mirandolina’s* adventure? As well try to explain the mood of a midsummer day

in the humming blazing countryside by pointing to the Ordnance map! But, groaning over what one cannot do, one must do what one can. First, then, she breaks down the outer barrier of the man's surliness by bringing him fresh linen herself—caressing its smooth surface, expatiating on the elegance of its pattern, till he finds it useless to try and silence her, and listens with a shrug. By and by he listens with attention; she has begun to interest him. Then she asks him to give her his hand. Grudgingly he gives it, and, slyly looking into his face, she says, "'tis the first time I have the honour to take the hand of a man *che pensa veramente da uomo.*" The flattery begins to work. He sits at table, and she brings him dishes prepared by her own fair hand. He smacks his lips; never was there such cookery! She must take a chair, and drink with him. Never was there such burgundy! (They drink it out of delightful squat decanters and gilt-edged stemless goblets that make the collector's mouth water.) For a moment the poor victim struggles against his fate. His only safety, he knows, is in flight; and he keeps on muttering to himself, "domani a Livorno!" He calls for his bill, but Mirandolina brings it with neatly simulated tears, and at the sight of her tears all his resolution fails. He calls her "cara," to his own dismay ("io cara ad una donna!"), and you can see her laughing on the side of her face which he cannot see.

And now she has had enough of it. She will show the man how he has been fooled. And so, when he comes to confess his love, he finds her at the ironing table, intent upon her work and receiving him with blank indifference. When he would utter impassioned speeches, she calls loudly for Fabrizio, the head-waiter, to bring another iron, and with the hot iron she contrives

to burn the Cavaliere's fingers. The Count and the Marquis enter, to find their woman-hating friend in a state of amorous frenzy. In his hot fit he would slay the Count for a gibe. It is time, thinks Mirandolina, to bring matters to an end. She blandly explains that she intends to marry Fabrizio, and *exit* the Cavaliere in a rage. "Mirandolina," says the Count, resuming the moral of the little tale, "voi siete una gran donna; voi avete l'abilità di condur gli uomini dove volete." Yes, "gran donna" is not too fine a style for this bewitching coquette. The delicious quality of it is that the coquetry is without any of the elaborate artifice, the leering archness, that the stage generally exhibits. Though Mirandolina absolutely pushes her little nose into the Cavaliere's face, leans caressingly against him, seems on the point of throwing herself into his arms, yet you feel throughout that it is all pure childlike fun; the woman is essentially modest and innocent. Mr. Meredith's phrase, now hackneyed, must be used once more; for it might have been invented for Signora Duse in Mirandolina. She is a "dainty rogue." In the epilogue which she speaks as they all join hands and come forward to the footlights (the old-fashioned conventionality of the play, its soliloquies, its "tags," and its epilogue only add to its charm), she speaks of things "dear to her within the limits *della convenienza e dell'onestà*." It is Signora Duse's triumph to have guided the part always delicately and beautifully within those limits.



## SARAH BERNHARDT

### THE MORALIST

THE editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*<sup>1</sup> has accomplished a wonderful feat. He has induced Mme. Sarah Bernhardt to write an article, a real article fifteen pages long from title to facsimile signature, the only article she has ever written. You admire his business enterprise, and still more do you admire the intrepidity of his emissary, who has effected her purpose amid the most bewildering distractions. She found the actress under the electric light in her beautiful room of cream and gold (whither she had been transported in her original-looking little carriage drawn by chestnuts), clothed in a long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress, and surrounded by flowers, jewels, rich draperies, an image of Buddha, a bronze of Christ, M. Victorien Sardou in the flesh, a terrier, a greyhound, and a secretary. It was the secretary who first regained speech when the demand for an article fell into the midst of this dazzling scene like a thunderbolt. An article? "Never, never, has Madame done such a thing; articles have been written *on* her, but never *by* her [the italics are the secretary's]—it is impossible in her busy life for her to find the time to write herself." Yet the impossible has happened, and "Madame Sarah"

<sup>1</sup> December 1902, Art. "The Moral Influence of the Theatre."



(as her company always call her, with a blend of affection and respect which recalls the case of the Cabinet Ministers and "Mr. G.") has written her article.

Well, I have every desire to be impressed. I have read the article backwards and forwards and upside down, under the electric light, but all to no purpose: do what I will, I cannot find it impressive. I am driven to surmise that it lacks the proper surroundings; the flowers, and the jewels, and the long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress. Read without these enchanting accompaniments it falls flat. Platitudes which need no demonstration are mingled with judgments demonstrably false, or personal anecdotes which have nothing to do with the case. The interstices are filled with critical "howlers." It is all the fault of the enterprising magazine editor. He has destroyed a generous illusion. The world had willingly believed that, like Habakkuk according to Voltaire, Mme. Sarah was *capable de tout*, and now it appears that there is one thing she cannot do; she cannot make a contribution of real value to that old question "The Moral Influence of the Theatre."

She starts with a sweeping proposition. The influence of the theatre on morals has never been anything but beneficial. Evidently she has never heard of the Restoration drama or of the plays of Mrs. Aphra Behn, and has never found time to visit the Palais Royal. She supports her proposition by a pompous generality which proves nothing. "Beneficial it must always be to see the evolution of the human soul; and the more intelligently this evolution of the human soul is shown, the more effectual is the lesson drawn by those privileged to witness it." The evolution of some human souls is intelligently shown in *The Way*

of the *World* and *The Country Wife*, in *Une Parisienne* and *La Sensitive*. Is therefore its effect on those privileged to witness it beneficial? Mme. Bernhardt knows, like everybody else, that it is not, for she proceeds to deplore the existence of "so many pieces which do so much harm, as they familiarise the mind with vice without showing its immorality." She has thus triumphantly refuted herself.

The fact is that you cannot hope to defend the moral influence of the drama, unless you know something of the grounds on which it has been attacked; and you may search Mme. Bernhardt's article through without finding any trace of this knowledge. For certain types of mind and temper—types as various as Plato's and Charles Kingsley's, Pascal's and Dr. Parker's—the drama has always been immoral because it is not deliberately and directly moral. The religious enthusiast and the austere moralist, the saint and the Puritan, will always distrust a force which does not work in the sphere of direct morality. In the most moral drama its morality is a by-product; "disinterestedness" is an essential condition of æsthetic feeling; and "disinterestedness" will never be palatable to men who hold that the active will, the choice of strenuous and right conduct, should fill every moment of life. They cannot abide the "play-mood," the suspension of the serious business of living, which is the mood demanded by the drama. And even as a by-product the morality of the drama, as Coleridge pointed out, is seldom the higher morality, is seldom distinguishable from worldly prudence—and to the austere moralist that is only another name for immorality. The deadliest attacks on the theatre have come not from men like Jeremy Collier, who were simply content to prove that this or

that play was immoral, but from those who urged that the drama as an art, in its essence, was immoral. Mme. Bernhardt, it so chances, mentions one of these men, and she mentions him in such a way as to show herself innocent of any suspicion as to the "true inwardness" of his attack. "Jean Jacques Rousseau" she naïvely says, "appears not to have liked the theatre." So one might say that King Jamie appears not to have liked tobacco, or that Hampden appears not to have liked Ship-money, or that Borrow appears not to have liked the Jesuits. Rousseau's famous letter to D'Alembert "Sur les Spectacles" is, despite its crotchets and exaggerations, one of the most formidable cases against the theatre ever penned. He pointed out the objection to dramatic emotion—the tragic "purging" of pity and terror—as an emotion which is an end in itself, an emotion which does not lead to action but makes a luxury of grief. The theatre, he said, flatters the passions; it changes neither feelings nor manners, it only reproduces them. What? It renders virtue amiable and vice odious? But reason could do that without it. We go to a tragedy because of the pleasure we take in seeing others suffer, so long as we do not suffer ourselves; we go to comedy because of the low pleasure we take in the consciousness of one another's infirmities. Then the theatre is a perpetual spectacle of love, and so inflames the most dangerous of the passions. It is a school of gallantry for men; and certainly not a school of modesty for women. Well, all this is, as we say nowadays, a little "steep"; but it would be idle to pretend that it is all nonsense. And it is certainly not to be disposed of by Mme. Bernhardt's quaint statement that Jean Jacques in reality "adored dramatic literature" until this taste "paled under



Diderot's cold and deadening influence." That exuberant sentimentalist Diderot "cold and deadening"! That enthusiast for the "moral theatre," the author of the *Fils Naturel* and the *Père de Famille*, Diderot, the man who deluded Rousseau into the belief that the theatre was immoral! Why, a mere consideration of dates—the letter to D'Alembert was published in the same year as the *Père de Famille* (1758)—but one must not be so clumsy as to import dates into that brilliant white and gold apartment, with its flowers and its jewels and its electric light.

In fact one is conscious of cutting a ludicrous figure in attempting to argue this subject on its merits with a charming lady (in a long white clinging ermine-trimmed dress) who gravely contends that *La Dame aux Camélias* is a piece which every young girl ought to be taken to see, that M. Sardou's *Fédora* is "a powerful sermon against revenge," not to be equalled by "many pages of philosophy," while M. Sardou, it appears, holds undisputed sway as Master of his Art. One is driven to turn to things more profitable, irrelevant though they are—Mme. Bernhardt's little personal anecdotes and confessions. She remembers that, when she first played Iphigénie at the Comédie Française and she held up her long thin arms for the sacrifice, the audience burst out laughing. She still feels nervous on the stage—especially over a new piece. She likes American and English audiences, because they take the theatre seriously, whereas the Latin nations do not. Nevertheless, the courtesy of the Spaniards is very charming, and "France retains the place of honour for literary works." Nor must one, in international comparisons, forget the society of the Entente Cordiale "at whose *soirée* I assisted in London," or the wild Iroquois in



Canada who once gave a *fête* in Mme. Sarah's honour. Also, "as a young girl I had serious thoughts of becoming a *religieuse*. It seemed an outlet for my soul, overflowing with exalted sentiment, in spite of my wayward and passionate temperament." But, fortunately, as things have turned out, instead of the cloister, you have the *boudoir* of cream and gold, with the flowers and the jewels and the image of Buddha and the terrier and the greyhound and "the fine intellectual rugged face of the great author" (who but M. Sardou?) expanding in "grateful acknowledgment to the grand interpreter of his artistic pen." Yes, the wayward and passionate temperament has done wonders, which we can all gratefully acknowledge—but it is too wayward a temperament to run into the mould of the magazine article.

## ANDROMAQUE

(ADELPHI, July 1903)

WE English have especial cause for gratitude to Racine for writing *Andromaque*. Namby-pamby Philips translated it into *The Distrest Mother*, a poor version—"poor but honest," however, like the parents of old-fashioned melodramatic heroines—and Namby-pamby Philips was a friend of Joseph Addison, who puffed the play in the *Spectator* and made it the pretext of an entirely delightful evening with Sir Roger de Coverley. Who can forget Sir Roger's remark about the heroine? "You can't imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow." Or his comment on Hermione? "On my word, a notable young baggage." Or his views on Astyanax, who is always being heard of but never seen? "He owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, who, says he, must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him." Before taking Sir Roger Mr. Spectator had gone to see *The Distrest Mother* with Will Honeycombe, who "feared the play was not busy enough for the present taste" and "recommended that every part should be perfectly new dressed." Will, it is perhaps unnecessary to remark, was not advocating "correct" costumes. I chance to possess a picture of "Mrs. Hartley in the character of Andromache." Mrs. Hartley wears hoops, paniers, and a sweeping train.

Her sleeves are trimmed with ermine, and her skirts are festooned with the aid of cords as heavy as the old-fashioned bell-pull. Add a tiara with tall plumes and you have a remarkable set of "weeds" for the widow of Hector.

Archæologists may smile, but really this fashion of dressing *Andromaque* accorded very happily with the stateliness of Racine. There is much to be said for reviving the "powder and patch" presentation of Racinian tragedy, much more than is to be said for the nondescript dresses worn by Mme. Bernhardt and her companions. M. de Max, as Oreste, looked as though he had strayed out of the Coronation Durbar. Hermione had obviously modelled herself on Becky Sharp as Clytemnestra, and the attendants of Pyrrhus had borrowed the clothes of Jos Sedley's hookabadar. Absurdity for absurdity, I prefer Mrs. Hartley's bell-pulls. After all, it matters very little, perhaps, what costumes are worn in *Andromaque* so long as they do not distract attention from the play itself, and playgoers who cannot attend to *Andromaque*, who are not absorbed and fascinated by it, who are not intoxicated with the beauty of it, can hardly count as human beings. For one thing, it is certain that they can never have been in love, never have been jealous, never have been jilted.

Everybody in the play is in love, and everybody is in love with the wrong person. Oreste loves Hermione, who will have none of him, but longs for Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus is betrothed to Hermione, but will have none of her and pursues Andromaque. Andromaque "never, never will desert" the memory of her dead Hector. The game is kept afoot by shilly-shallying. Pyrrhus, repulsed by Andromaque, thinks

he will take Hermione after all. Then he jilts Hermione and returns to Andromaque. Oreste exhorts Pyrrhus to relinquish his pursuit of Andromaque and his protection of her child, and is beside himself with wrath when taken at his word. What especially angers him is the thought that his own passion for Hermione has caused Pyrrhus to veer round to her. Hermione, enraged when Pyrrhus finally prefers Andromaque, offers her hand to Oreste if only he will kill Pyrrhus. He does (or his Greeks do), and then it is Hermione's turn to be beside herself with grief because she has been taken at her word. As for Andromaque, after rejecting Pyrrhus again and again, she suddenly agrees to marry him. We know, of course, that she does this thinking to ensure the safety of her child, and purposing to kill herself immediately after the ceremony. But (as was remarked early in the eighteenth century) this is a very poor scheme, as it will leave the child to the mercy of a stepfather who has been "sold" by the child's mother. The obvious truth of the matter is that the fate of the child is a mere pretext for a plot. It is Andromaque's love for Hector, not her love for her child, which is her master passion. Philips should have called his play *The Distrest Widow* rather than *The Distrest Mother*. Another point in Andromaque's character has been the subject of much curious speculation. Does Racine intend to suggest that she "flirts" with Pyrrhus, or does he not? Years ago Nisard professed to find in or between the lines of her part evidence of a certain *coquetterie vertueuse*. It was a happy phrase, and many controversialists have played with it, but M. Emile Faguet has discovered that it was not invented by Nisard, but by Geoffroy, of the *Débats*, in 1803.



The late M. Sarcey was strong for the "flirting" theory; M. Faguet is dead against it. So, for that matter, is Mme. Bartet, the incomparable Andromaque of our time.

It has been suggested that Mme. Bernhardt ought to have played the part rather than Hermione, but I think she has chosen wisely. Andromaque is a part of pathos, while Hermione is a part of passion. Andromaque is a purely classical part, and Hermione is largely a romantic part; there is more colour in it, more "modernity" even. Andromaque is all of a piece, Hermione is everything by turns. Yes, Mme. Bernhardt has chosen wisely; Hermione gives her, as Andromaque could not, opportunity for her displays of "nerves," her hoarse cries, her seductive scenes, her whirlwinds of passion. But I do not understand her whim for playing so much of this part in a recumbent posture. Does she wish to rival Mme. Réjane in the first act of *Ma Cousine*? Whatever the reason, this Hermione is, more often than not, a horizontal Hermione. M. Desjardins is only a respectable Pyrrhus; he woos Andromaque without fire, and listens to the fierce invectives of Hermione without apparent attention. It is all very well for Pyrrhus to treat Hermione as a scold, but it will hardly do for him to treat her as a bore. The Oreste is M. de Max, who, as most people know, comes from Rumania, and would seem to suggest that the son of Agamemnon was a compatriot. One feels tempted to mutter over this youth who purports to be a Greek, but obviously is not, the old joke about "si jeune et déjà Moldo-Valache!" M. de Max is all for violent colour, febrile intensity, passion which vents itself in growls and groans. In short, his method strikes one as too

flamboyant for Racine. Racinian passion never for a moment forgets to express itself nobly. It may burn with a white heat, it never sputters. Indeed, *Andromaque* is a miracle of "elegance." It shows men and women hungering for one another like wild beasts, and yet draping their desires in a style of delicate reticence as fastidious as Jane Austen's.

## ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR

(CORONET, June 1905)

THE *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt has bewildered me on many points, but it has left me quite clear about one. It has compelled my admiration for the *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of MM. Scribe and Legouvé. I had hitherto attached little value to that ancient melodrama. I had thought it stilted, artificial, and long-winded. But then I had not become acquainted with the *Adrienne Lecouvreur* of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt. What caprice tempted the actress to rewrite the old subject is beyond conjecture. Is there not a proverb that it is well to let sleeping melodramas lie? Surely common gratitude might have induced Mme. Bernhardt to respect the mortal remains of MM. Scribe and Legouvé. Time after time she has triumphantly appeared as the heroine of their unimpeachably respectable work. But, apparently, her familiarity with it has bred contempt. She has got to feel that, in Mrs. Poyser's phrase, "it ought to be born again—and born different." Different, indeed, it now is! I do not say that the lady found it marble and left it brick; let me rather say that she found it stucco and left it *carton-pierre*. Where the deceased Academicians were long-winded, she is interminably prolix; where they were merely dull, she is appallingly tiresome; where they were slightly vague, she is absolutely

incomprehensible. They, too, had now and then a gleam of fun; Mme. Bernhardt is as solemn as a mausoleum. Why, one asks again, was she not satisfied with the old work? Perhaps I shall be told that her historical conscience revolted at it, that she had gone to the original documents, and was determined to present us with the unvarnished facts. Well, it may be so. Just as Mr. Wegg admitted that he had not read Gibbon slap through just lately, "being otherwise engaged, Mr. Boffin," so I confess that, for a like reason, I have not recently consulted the original documents about Adrienne Lecouvreur. Consequently, if Mme. Bernhardt chooses to assert that the famous actress's life was mixed up with the queer proceedings of the humpbacked Abbé whom M. de Max thrusts upon our attention, I am unable to offer any denial. But there credulity stops. I draw the line at Voltaire. Not all the documents in all the archives shall persuade me that every crisis in Adrienne's existence was witnessed and provided with appropriate reflections by Voltaire. Further, most of us have read some of Voltaire's writings, and I for one utterly decline to believe that his conversation can have sunk to the level indicated by Mme. Bernhardt. "Oh, ce Voltaire," says the schoolgirl in *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*, "quel génie!" If she had seen this play she would have said "quel raseur!"

You first see Voltaire in Adrienne's dressing-room at the theatre. Adrienne wafts him a kiss from behind the curtain, and Voltaire remarks that a woman's kisses are magical, even behind a curtain. When Maurice de Saxe enters Voltaire discreetly retires, but only to bide his time, for he knows full well that it is he and not Maurice who in the long run will get the



lion's share of the play. He took no prominent part in the next scene, a reception at the Duchess de Bouillon's, but no doubt he was lurking somewhere in the background—always with his ironic smile—biding his time. In the foreground was the humpbacked Abbé, already mentioned, painting Adrienne's portrait and indulging in melancholy reflections on his hump. The *grandes dames* fondled his hump for luck, and his vexation became more marked than ever. Meanwhile, there had been a furious quarrel over Maurice between Adrienne and the Duchess de Bouillon, and the Duchess, vowing vengeance, hissed into the ear of the humpbacked Abbé that he must become her tool. In the next scene you were in the Luxembourg gardens, whither the Abbé came to inform Adrienne that the Duchess had commissioned him to poison her. "Poison her within a week or—the Bastille!" The week being now up, the police appeared to carry off the Abbé. Where was Voltaire? I began to wonder—till, sure enough, one found him, still ironically smiling, in the Abbé's cell at the Bastille, comforting the Abbé, exchanging polite repartees with Adrienne, and calmly telling the Duke de Bouillon all about his wife's infidelities. Voltaire then restored the Abbé to liberty. Was he not the champion of Calas? But he was too late to save Adrienne. The implacable Duchess told the poor woman that she was poisoned, and had only a day or two to live. In the final act you saw her die. So, of course, did Voltaire. He retired respectfully into a corner, in order that she might have room to die, and she said to him, almost with her dying breath, "Your smile has lost its irony." Maurice de Saxe and the humpbacked Abbé also arrived in the nick of time to see her die. Very likely

her death is "documentary." It is certainly very touching. She whirls round and round, as in a dance, until she stops short when confronted by the hump-backed Abbé. Then she sinks slowly into Maurice's arms, and expires. Voltaire strikes a Voltairean attitude in his corner. "Oh, ce Voltaire! Quel poseur!"

If I have insisted upon the Voltairean element in this play, it is because I suspect that therein is to be found the true explanation of its origin. Mme. Bernhardt felt, I conjecture, that MM. Scribe and Legouvé had no business to write a play about Voltaire's period and to leave Voltaire out of it. And so she has repaired the omission—given Voltaire his ironic smile and then killed Adrienne in his presence in order to purge the smile of its irony. But she cannot purge my smile in that way. It may be wrong to indulge in an ironic smile over a work which has evidently cost the actress great pains and much—far too much—ink; but I really cannot help it. I fully recognise the fine acting of Mme. Bernhardt herself in the eponymous part. But all the fine acting in the world cannot blind one to the fact that the Duchess de Bouillon is a mere mechanical *traîtresse* of melodrama, that Adrienne in the new play is not the poetic, suavely beautiful figure of the old, that the hump-backed Abbé is a grotesque nuisance, and that Voltaire, for all the wit he shows, might be—Fréron. When he let the irony die out of his smile—with Mme. Bernhardt's play still under his nose—he gave the final twist to one's conviction that he was an arrant impostor.

## RÉJANE

### LA PARISIENNE

(CORONET, June 1901)

TO say that *La Parisienne* is a clever piece would be true but inadequate. It is diabolically clever. It purports to have been written by the late M. Henry Becque, single-handed, but I suspect Old Nick to have been at his elbow, an unseen collaborator. At least, there must have been brimstone in M. Becque's inkpot. No one with the slightest sense of humour can see the piece without laughing, or rather, I fear it must be admitted, without sniggering. But that is only the superficial effect. The play cuts deep. Its irony bites like vitriol. And the ultimate impression is of something grim, cruel, malignant. It tends to make us loathe ourselves, or, at any rate, our next-door neighbours. This is a strange impression to receive from a comedy, from Mme. Réjane's face of impish mischief, her ravishing gowns. It is a strange blend, this whiff of sulphur combined with *odeur de femme*. But, then, *La Parisienne* is a strange piece.

It begins with one of the most complete hoaxes ever devised by a playwright. The curtain rises upon an empty stage. Madame enters and hastily conceals a letter under a blotting-pad. Close upon her heels follows Monsieur in a jealous fury. "Give me that



letter!" "No!" And then a long scene of bullying and bickering. The man, tortured with suspicion, plies the woman with questions. "Where have you been?" "Do you still love me?" Madame at first enjoys the man's agony, and is then exasperated by it. It is the familiar scene of jealous husband and teasing wife. They calm down, and Monsieur begs Madame to be more prudent in her conduct. "En me restant fidèle, vous restez digne et honorable." As he utters the words the door opens and another gentleman enters. "Prenez garde," whispers Madame to Monsieur—"voilà mon mari." And, lo! we find that our quarrelling couple, so conjugal in every detail of their quarrel, are not husband and wife, after all, but lover and mistress. How, then, comes it that the jealous gentleman is so like a husband? That is the point, or a point, of the play. Lafont, the lover, has assumed by usage and temperament and the inevitable tendency of things, *quasi-marital* qualities. "Un second mari, autant dire," is Clotilde's way of putting it. And so she finds herself between Lafont, the husband *de facto*, and Du Mesnil, the husband *de jure*. If anyone is shocked by the situation it is certainly not Clotilde. She does not see the irony of it, for she cannot see herself as she is. No more does Lafont, for the same reason. No more does Du Mesnil, for Du Mesnil sees nothing at all, not even when it passes under his very nose.

But the irony is there, and its teeth drive sharp into our poor human flesh. It consists in the spectacle of two people carrying on irregular relations with precisely the same set of feelings and prejudices which would be operative were their relations regular. The "immoral" is shown to labour under the same condi-



tions as the "moral." Lafont is exigent, querulous, jealous, and tiresome. He is even prudish. He forbids Clotilde to visit in a household of somewhat doubtful reputation. He is shocked to hear that one of her married friends is a faithless wife. In sum—"un second mari, autant dire."

And Clotilde, with all her irregularity of conduct, is entirely conventional in her ideas. She declares herself a Conservative in politics, because she inclines to the party of social "order." She is indignant at the thought that her lover might leave her for another mistress who is "without religious principles." As a matter of fact, she has no moral sense whatever. She is absolutely without conscience. Things are for her merely pleasant or unpleasant, conduct is merely expedient or inexpedient. She is a Nietzschean, a Nietzschean without knowing it, a Nietzschean in frills and furbelows of the most fashionable cut. She has lovers, but no passions, hardly even appetites, only caprices. A monster, then, something merely perverse and noxious? Yes—and No. Yes, according to any accepted standard of ethics. No, by virtue of her reality. There is a great deal of ordinary human nature in Clotilde. She desires to hurt no one, she merely means to "have a good time." She is good-humoured, patient, reasonable, tactful. Mark that she is a capable woman—indeed, the one capable member of the triangular household. She gets her fool of a husband into a good post. It would be ungenerous to inquire too closely into the means; the point is that she can do for her husband what he cannot do for himself. If Lafont were not so tiresomely jealous, she could get on excellently with him, too. This, after all, is an eminently companionable sort of monster. And,

though she has a wonderful gift of fiction, she does not tell unnecessary lies. According to M. Anatole France, that, in a woman, may be called veracity.

Nor is she without her little chastening experience. When she has dismissed Lafont she tries another lover, who bores her to death and then leaves her in the lurch. The lesson is not thrown away. There was something in the "second mari" after all. She takes him back into favour, and we leave the three people of the first scene all comfortably together again in the last. Do you not hear a chuckle as the curtain descends? It must be M. Becque's unseen collaborator. Evidently on this occasion there is no need, with the charitable lady in the Scotch anecdote, to "pity the *poir deil*." He has had it all his own way. And he could not conceivably have found a more bewitching, tantalising, irresistible interpreter than Mme. Réjane. Her performance of Clotilde is one of the most comic—and one of the most disquieting—things to be seen on the stage of our time.

## ZAZA

(IMPERIAL, May 1902)

IN Paris they have an expression that may be said to speak volumes, very trashy volumes—the *littérature de concierge*. It is not difficult to conjecture the sort of literature beloved by the autocrat of the street-door. It must be sentimental at all costs, even at the cost of dwelling upon illicit passion, provided that the superior respectability of family life be vindicated in the end. It must have the glitter of the gay world; indeed, the *concierge* will not object should it verge on the garish. As many people as possible in it must be splendidly dressed. The facile contrast of tortured hearts beating under heavily bejewelled bodices must be rigorously insisted on. No direct and original observation of life is needed; indeed, it would be resented by the *concierge*, who prefers the conventional emotions and situations which are passed on as “common form” from one hack-writer to another. In an American version of *Zaza* by Mr. Belasco the word *concierge* has, I note, been translated, presumably in accordance with American idiom, as janitor. I thank Mr. Belasco for that word. It provides a convenient and comprehensive label for this play. *Zaza* is pre-eminently janitorious. The doorkeepers of all nations—if I may use the word in a Pickwickian and metaphorical sense—will revel in it. It shows

how spangles and a career of music-hall songs are not incompatible with true love. It presents violent contrasts of households in Bohemia and "correct" homes in the most expensively respectable quarters of Paris. It gives several of its personages the opportunity of being absurdly overdressed. It toys with vice and yet pays complete, if tardy, homage to virtue. In short, it is a perfect specimen of the janitorious drama.

The play, which is in five acts (for what *concierge* does not know the orthodox number of acts required for a theatrical masterpiece?), opens behind the scenes of a concert hall in a French country town. Zaza is the "star" and, of course, has a jealous rival. They are both petulant and vixenish and, at one moment, come to blows. Zaza dresses and "makes up" for her part in view of the audience. The company come and go. Privileged gentlemen in the glossiest evening dress present bouquets. Ah! that life behind the scenes! How the doorkeeping mind revels in its gay wickedness! But Zaza, it need hardly be said, is no common "star." She has a heart—and she has lost it to one of the gentlemen in glossy evening dress, M. Bernard Dufresne, who promptly falls a victim to her wiles. In the next act—each act turning a different facet of the heroine to the limelight—shows Zaza playing at simple domestic bliss with M. Dufresne in a country cottage. The *concierge* remembers the parallel case of Margu rite Gauthier and Armand Duval, and is happy. But Zaza's bliss is shortlived. She learns from one of her theatrical comrades that M. Dufresne has a wife in Paris. The pair have been seen at the play together, drinking chocolate. "I'll spoil their chocolate," cries the infuriated Zaza, and starts for Paris. Now comes the opportunity for that family sentiment which the



doorkeeper feels to be his due. Intent on making a disturbance in the Dufresne household, Zaza is confronted by a little girl, and in the presence of childish innocence she retires humbled and in silence. Then passion has its turn. Zaza turns upon her lover and rends him, works herself into a frenzy of hysteria, and smashes the china on the mantelshelf. A woman shouting at the top of her voice and beside herself with fury is just the sort of woman the *concierge* can understand. "Women, poor things, are like that," he reflects, being in his way a philosopher and ready to take broad views of human nature. Besides, he is well aware that in all these plays a *scène de rupture* is the proper thing. Next to noise—of which in the penultimate act the *concierge* it will have been seen gets his fill—he loves worldly success, gaudy success, symbolised by extravagant costumes, the homage of the multitude, and a smart victoria. Zaza duly provides him with all this. In order to forget her lover she has devoted herself to her profession, and is now an artist of world-wide reputation and boundless wealth. When M. Dufresne comes to seek a reconciliation she parts from him more in sorrow than in anger, bidding him go back to his child, while with dignified simplicity she orders her coachman to drive her "home." A play which ends on the word "home" is bound to captivate the guardian of every street-door in both hemispheres.

Some people, not engaged in doorkeeping, may wonder why such plays as *Zaza* are written. The answer in this case is very simple. *Zaza* was constructed by MM. Berton and Simon to encircle the talent of Mme. Réjane. It is quite certain that, if Mme. Réjane had not been Mme. Réjane, there would have been no *Zaza*. That would not have been a

serious calamity. But we must take the world as we find it, and Mme. Réjane as Mme. Réjane. She must be allowed to have her fling. Where is there another actress who can be so *canaille* and frisky and sentimentally grotesque and grotesquely sentimental? Where is there another actress who can speak so comically through her nose or blow that impudent little organ so realistically after a fit of tears? Where is there another actress who can so cleverly reproduce the gradual *crescendo* from nervous irritation to suffocating or shrieking hysteria? The answer is that there is no other such actress, and that therefore Mme. Réjane must do all these things and be all these things for us in her own inimitable way, and have her fling which is like nobody else's fling. That is the explanation, though not the excuse, of such a play as *Zaza*. Surely such a combination of opposites as this play exhibits—external reality and internal falsity—never was seen before. False, its implied suggestion that the courtesan is "redeemed" by a sincere passion. False, the glamour it throws over the vulgar music-hall "star," who, purged by grief, ends as a person of lofty sentiments and elegant language. False, the sentimental excuses of *Zaza* for her—let us say Bohemian—life, on the score of parental neglect. False, the conversion of *Zaza* from a virago bent on revenge to a humbled penitent, all on account of a talk with a pert little child. False, the character of *Zaza's* lover—or, rather, not false, but null, as this personage is a mere automaton, a mere whetstone for *Zaza* to grind her various axes upon. False, intolerably false, the whole atmosphere of the play, its representation of love—and such love!—as sanctifying everything, accounting for everything, indeed, constituting everything. Looked at from the

point of view of the mind and the feelings, the heart and the brain, *Zaza* is a miracle of falsity.

And yet, externally, how real! Watch the music-hall "artist" at her toilet—how she rubs in the grease-paint, unpins her false hair, dabs the powder-puff over her shoulders, putting on a pinafore the while in order not to soil her skirt. Not a detail is missed. Even when the corset is unlaced, *Zaza* is careful to go through the pantomime of holding her breath. All the world and his wife have been shown exactly how the "artist" dresses and undresses; we feel that the sum of human knowledge has been appreciably augmented. But on the principle that you cannot have too much of a good thing, *Zaza* does it all, or nearly all, over again. Having combed her hair in Act I., she combs it once more in Act IV., and offers you a further piece of minute realism by removing the loose ends of hair from the comb and throwing them out of the window. Then she dusts the chair with her uplifted petticoats, cleans the wine-glasses by blowing into them and giving them a wipe with her dressing-gown, and performs other choice little Bohemian-domestic exploits to which only the pen of a Swift could do full justice. Or watch *Zaza* discovering a hole in the tablecloth, making faces at the *bonne* about it, and trying to hide it with a plate. What a "convincing" spectacle, what a marvellous application of another player's famous theory about holding the mirror up to nature! When you have done with these mechanical details, these "fireside concerns" as Elia would have called them, you may turn to examine *Zaza* in an attack of nerves. See her mouth twitching, her hands clenched, listen to the shrill note gradually coming into her voice. Then sit tight in your seat for the final explosion, the total physical



abandonment and degradation. It is the very thing, Coleridge had a mock apostrophe to

“Inoculation! Heavenly maid!”

So Mme. Réjane—for Mme. Réjane and Zaza are one—so Mme. Réjane is the muse of hysterio-epilepsy.

And when you have wallowed in the crapulous, and been dragged through the sordid, and shocked with the frantic, and fooled by the sham-sentimental for five acts, at the end of it all the question occurs—Is even Mme. Réjane “worth it”? She does it all to the life—seems, in fact, to *live* the character. But *Zaza* is rather a heavy price to pay even for this incomparable talent.

What really saves Mme. Réjane and the play is her unflinching sense of humour. Her winks of intelligence, her droll intonations, her irrepressible playfulness do relieve the character of some of its grossness. You come back to the old position. Because Réjane is Réjane, the disagreeable play has been written; and if, on occasion, you cannot help being pleased in spite of yourself, that also is because Réjane is Réjane.



## LA ROBE ROUGE

(IMPERIAL, June 1902)

M. EUGÈNE BRIEUX has been called a second Augier, because of his aim to make the drama an instrument of moral and social action. The dramatist, he maintains, should be the bagman of the intellectual world. Perhaps that is why you discern a touch of Herbert Spencer in *La Robe Rouge*. The English philosopher has shown the impediments to clear thinking in what he calls the "professional bias." The French playwright shows you that bias in its tragic consequences, in the wrecking of homes and the shedding of blood. But it is the picture of the bias itself rather than that of its results which is the really valuable part of *La Robe Rouge*, because a study of manners and motives is more important than the exhibition of violent acts. The professional bias selected for exposure is that of the French magistracy. M. Brieux deals seriously with the men of the law, the official lawyers, those who sit on the Bench and those who prosecute for the State, as Molière dealt humorously with the men of physic. It is desirable to be precise. You are not shown that "the law is a hass"; you are not shown that those who administer it are conscious and deliberate rogues. What you are shown is the working of the law to unjust ends through inevitable professional instincts, rivalries, practice, and traditions.

Things that are life and death, or honour and dishonour, for the accused are for the lawyers merely details of "*le métier*." The people in the dock, innocent or guilty, are for the lawyers merely pawns in the game of professional advancement. And for the moment let me also treat the accused persons of the particular story as pawns and consider solely the dramatist's picture of "*le métier*." A remote provincial criminal Court of the third class desires to be raised to the second class. Its promotion will depend on its output—the number of cases and the percentage of convictions. Every acquittal is a misfortune for it, every prospect of a capital sentence a piece of good luck. Hence the interest of every official lawyer in finding accused persons guilty. Mark the psychological consequence; the wish is father to the thought, and every official lawyer tends in advance to believe every accused person guilty. Mouzon, the *juge d'instruction*, or examining magistrate, typifies this frame of mind. A murder has been committed; he believes he has laid his hand on the assassin. Note the next psychological stage. Self-interest originated his desire to prove the man guilty, and that desire creates his belief in the man's guilt; but his belief is strengthened and becomes a fixed idea by the tendency which we all have to make good a theory when we have once pledged ourselves to it. This mental process is worked out, step by step, in the second act of *La Robe Rouge*. Unconsciously—remember that it is unconsciously, through professional bias—the magistrate twists every answer given by A., the accused person, into evidence of guilt. Possessed by his preconceived theory, he finds it monstrous that A. should profess innocence. He bullies, lays traps, even begs for a confession—a process which merely

drives A. out of his senses. Then A.'s wife is brought in and subjected to the same torture, and, bewildered in her turn by the magistrate, she herself half believes in her husband's guilt. The examination is, however, abortive, and A. is sent for trial.

Another side of the case. Mouzon has got into trouble with a disreputable woman, and is requested by his superior officer, the Procureur-Général, to resign his post. The local deputy, who knows the Minister of Justice, intervenes in his favour. Scandal must be avoided, especially with a shaky Ministry. So let Mouzon be sent away by all means—but to a higher post. Mouzon's misbehaviour, then, is the direct cause of his promotion.

Act III. exhibits a fresh aspect of the professional bias. The Procureur, Vagret, who has to prosecute A., is a simple, honest man, without "push" and without influence. His promotion depends on his getting a verdict, and the thought nerves him to a great effort. The jury, it is clear, have been convinced by his eloquence, and he is congratulated by everyone on a foregone conclusion. All of a sudden Vagret asks for a brief suspension of the trial, and makes a confession to his wife. He had honestly believed in A.'s guilt—for he too had his preconceived theory—but at the moment of his loudest thunders doubts began to occur to him. There were two men in him, one accumulating argument on argument against the accused, the other silently criticising these arguments and finding them faulty. He has now swung round to belief in A.'s innocence, and, at the sacrifice of his promotion, he feels he must move for an acquittal. He will "do his duty as an honest man." Here you have the lawyer whose conscience conquers his professional bias—in other words, the unsuccessful magistrate.



Is the theme of professional bias exhausted? Not yet. There is the President of Assize, who also depends for his advancement upon a conviction. Has not a Paris journalist come all the way to the Pyrenees to report the case? Quick, *greffier*, get him a good seat! And there is the Procureur-Général, who holds that it is the duty of procureurs to prosecute, and to leave questions of innocence to the counsel for the defence. Anyhow, he refuses to discuss Vagret's qualms of conscience, lest he might compromise his own interests. What would the local Deputy say? And what the Deputy's friend, the Minister of Justice? The only magistrate who can afford to look at the facts impartially is the one who has no professional interest in them, because he has reached the age-limit and is about to take his pension.

So much for the professional bias. You have seen it on every side and in every shade. M. Brioux omits nothing and makes every word, every action, tell towards his end. The scene of the examination by the Juge d'Instruction is a masterpiece at once of dramatic completeness and of dramatic economy. The scene of the procureur's "case of conscience" is a masterpiece of dramatic sincerity. Beyond all cavil, M. Brioux is a born dramatist "of ideas." He has set out to examine and to exhibit a professional bias, not as an abstraction, but as a basis for the natural actions of living people. And what he set out to do he has thoroughly done.

But he is also a dramatist in the lower, and more popular, sense. He can invent and develop an interesting story. For even were the "ideas" of the play eliminated, even were all the gentlemen of the long robe mere dummies instead of links in a logical chain, the story of the man whom I have called A. would be an



exciting piece of drama. To use the Aristotelian lingo, the *muthos* of *La Robe Rouge* is as good as its *ethos* and its *dianoia*. A. is wholly innocent, yet the lawyer's questions are so adroit that the audience is almost tempted, like A.'s wife, to believe in his guilt. While he is in prison awaiting trial his neighbours rob him, his men leave his fields, and he is a ruined man. But that is not the worst. Some past irregularity of his wife's, long dead and buried, and redeemed by many years of irreproachable conduct, is incidentally brought to light at the trial. For the lawyers it was a mere "point," a minor move in the judicial game. But it wrecks A.'s happiness for ever. He casts off his wife and takes her children from her. Despair prompts the woman to frenzy; she seizes a knife and plunges it into the breast of the man who is responsible for her misery, the Juge d'Instruction Mouzon. A concession to the old-fashioned "poetic justice"? Perhaps; but not forced. A picture so uniformly sombre needed the relieving splash of blood-red, the sudden catastrophe of tragedy.

Mme. Réjane is the wife, hot-headed, an "instinctive" creature, in the end a wild beast; and in that sort of part this versatile actress can do just as well as in the coquetry of *Ma Cousine* or in the *canaille* of *Zaza*.

## THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

(COURT, November 1905)

YES, decidedly the Court is our "Shavian" theatre. Mr. Shaw's own plays are shown there nightly, and in the afternoons they give you new plays by the younger men, all different in essentials, but all alike in the one particular that there clings to them a faint aroma of Mr. Shaw. It is in the air of the Court Theatre, just as a vague odour of patchouli is in the air of the Burlington Arcade or as the ballroom in *La Cagnotte*, when entered by the gentleman who had had his swallow-tail coat cleaned, smelt of benzine. Mr. St. John Hankin's *Return of the Prodigal* had been delicately scented with a Shaw *sachet*, and now *The Voysey Inheritance* of Mr. Granville Barker gratifies your nostrils with *triple extrait de Shaw*. You recognise the subtle perfume whenever the personages fall to giving solemnly nonsensical or nonsensically solemn explanations of life, morality, and one another. Mr. Barker has a story to tell, an interesting story in itself, and so long as he lets the facts speak for themselves all is plain sailing. But at periodical intervals, overcome by the atmosphere of the Court Theatre, he feels compelled to offer you a gloss, a "Shavian" gloss, on the facts. Then all is confusion, "new" morality, Nietzschean "transvaluation," and goodness knows what. It is legitimate enough for Mr. Shaw himself

to indulge in this game. He invented it. His dramatic works are so many pretexts for playing it. It would never do for *him* to let his facts speak for themselves, because observation of external facts is not his strong point. He never allows himself the chance of looking fairly and squarely at the facts, because of his haste to be evolving a theory from them. In so far as he sees them at all, he sees them only in the light of his pre-conceived explanation. It is quite otherwise with Mr. Barker, who shows in this play a real gift of keen, minute, relentless observation. If only he had been content with that! If only he had let us enjoy in peace, and without comment, the curious little spectacle of life, or a certain corner of it, which he has had the skill to put before us! But no; he must get to work with the "Shavian" scent-spray. "Conventional" morality must be made to stand on its head, and things that need no explanation must be explained all wrong. I venture to commend to him an example from China. When two mandarins are engaged in conversation they pause at intervals to exchange little scraps of paper, inscribed with jokes. Thus they fulfil the recognised duty of mingling grave thoughts with refined pleasantry. In a similar fashion the Court dramatists might serve up that admixture of Shaw which the etiquette of the place demands. The story might go on in a plain way, and at fixed intervals the personages might retire in pairs to the background and converse for a few moments *sotto voce*. We should not be bothered by hearing their remarks; but it would be an understood thing that these were the "Shavian" explanations. Another recommendation, and I have done with advice. Mr. Barker should remember the French proverb: *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint*. He

sets out to tell not one story but several—the story of old Voysey's rascality, of Edward Voysey's trials, of Hugh Voysey's matrimonial experiences. He sketches for us a round dozen of Voyseys or people allied to the Voysey family by marriage. This is a scheme of almost Balzacian dimensions, a little *Comédie Humaine*. Even with the liberal allowance of five acts and three hours it is hardly possible to handle so much matter without crowding, diffuseness, lack of perspective. At times you can hardly see the wood for the trees.

All this notwithstanding, *The Voysey Inheritance* has great merits. It has fresh and true observation, subtle discrimination of character, sub-acid humour, an agreeable irony, and a general air of *reality*. That is the important thing. We have got miles away from the theatrical. We do genuinely feel that the roof has been lifted off an office in Lincoln's Inn or a suburban mansion and that the people disclosed to view behave and talk ("Shavian" explanations always excepted) in a perfectly natural way. One supremely realistic effect Mr. Barker has adopted from a far greater master than Mr. Shaw. I refer to his gradual unfolding of the principal character by leaving parts of it at first enigmatic and then clearing them up by the method of retrospection. You have to piece this and that bit of evidence together till at last you have something like a complete picture of the man and his motives. This, of course—hats off, please!—is the famous "Ibsen touch." When you first hear Mr. Voysey's confession and *apologia*—which he makes to his son almost as soon as the curtain is up—you do not quite know how much of it to believe. Ostensibly a prosperous solicitor, of the highest respectability, a liberal father of a family, a generous parishioner, altogether one of the brightest



ornaments of our great middle-class, Voysey is in truth a thief. He has been living all these years on his clients' money, using their trust funds while regularly paying them their interest. But how, asks his horrified son (and newly-made partner) did he come to embark on his frauds? He answers that his own father began it and, like a dutiful son, he took up the burden of the inheritance. Beginning, then, as a martyr, he now considers himself something very like a hero. He has played a difficult and dangerous game successfully. It is he, the confessed swindler, who exults, while it is his as yet clean-handed son who is abashed—the son who has fed himself on books of ethics (“the kind of garden oats,” says the father contemptuously, “you young men sow nowadays”). Voysey is the Borkman of Lincoln's Inn. But why does the father confess to his son? He says it is because he feels his time is getting short and he hopes his son will take up the Voysey inheritance from him as he took it up from his own father. But is this true? Someone suggests, later, another reason, a generalisation of criminal psychology. Men who succeed at the dangerous game played by Voysey, senior, feel an overmastering impulse to disclose their secret—an instance of perverted pride. A further doubt; did the grandfather really begin the swindling? Ultimately the most probable conclusion seems to be that he did, but to an extent so slight that the son in a few years was able to replace the stolen funds, and *after that*, seeing how easy the thing was and eager for wealth, began stealing on his own account and on a large scale.

And now what will the son do? Wash his hands of the dirty business? Or take up the Voysey inheritance? If he takes it up, it shall only be in order to

devote his life to restitution. Hardly has he made up his mind to the latter course when the father gets a chill and dies. The son, Edward, tells the truth to the assembled family as soon as they have come home from the funeral. Here come in some capital scenes depicting the several members of the Voysey family—Booth Voysey, the military fool, who cannot understand, but bullies everybody in a loud voice; Trenchard Voysey, a cautious K.C.; Hugh Voysey, exponent of the unpractical "artist temperament"; Honor Voysey, the old maid of the family; and the several wives or sweethearts of the sons. They are all shocked by the disclosure (save poor deaf Mrs. Voysey, who knew something of the truth already, and now, with the insensibility of age, is unmoved); but none of them will help Edward. He at first resolves to publish the truth and take the consequences—among them, prison. His sweetheart dissuades him, not without "Shavian" reflections. Then he will carry on the old game—gradually setting aside the profits of the business to replacing the smaller sums. Thus the poorer clients will at any rate be recouped; the rich ones must wait. But suppose if, in carrying on the game, he should become demoralised, like his father, and steal, not from the rich for the poor, but for himself? His sweetheart says she will take that risk. But very soon the game is up. One of the bigger clients comes to withdraw his funds, and has to be told the truth. "And now prosecute, do prosecute," says Edward, "prison would be a rest from this harassing toil." The client wavers, finally decides not to prosecute, but tells other clients. What will be the end? We never know. Prison perhaps? Then Edward's sweetheart will be more proud of him than ever. Anything rather than a life

of slavery, in the hopeless attempt to make restitution. The debate, nebulous with "Shawisms," is cut short by the final curtain. I have an idea that the pair were discussing a case of conscience from the point of view of an entirely revised system of ethics (perhaps Nietzschean—on the principle of *omne ignotum pro Nietzscheano*); but I am not sure.

## THE WAY OF THE WORLD

(MERMAID SOCIETY, April 1904)

PLEASURE-SEEKERS ought to be grateful to the Mermaid Society for reviving *The Way of the World*. I say pleasure-seekers advisedly. For it is the primary business of dramatic entertainments, old or new, to entertain. A classic is a classic not because it is old, not (as Stendhal petulantly said) because it pleased our grandfathers, but because it pleases us. When it ceases to please it is only a *ci-devant* classic. It may still have its proper place on the museum shelf, but the theatre has no use for it. The Mermaid Society has demonstrated *The Way of the World* to be still a live classic. Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Millamant and Sir Wilfull Witwoud are brimming over with life. Congreve is still capable of giving you a vivid sense of reality. You may have suspected that as likely; but it is only through the Mermaid Society that you know it for certain. And how have they enabled you to know it? Through the quite straightforward and familiar, yet magical and inscrutable, influence of flesh and blood.

It is, I suggest, just because this influence is so familiar that its importance in the theatre is commonly underestimated. What are the elements of an acted drama? Apart from the costumes and scenery, there is the contribution of the dramatist and the contribution





toss of the head, a certain gait. It is a difference not of degree but of kind. What Congreve has done for an imaginary woman called Millamant suddenly springs into life through everything that nature has done for a real woman called Ethel Irving. Of course this flesh-and-blood element, so enormous an aid to the dramatist, may also turn and rend him. Many a speech or action will pass muster in print but stand forth as false or inadequate when actually uttered or performed before us. The character must hold together before, so to speak, the human body is put into it. Congreve's characters stand this test. Therefore *The Way of the World* is still a "live" classic.

Pursue this analysis a little further and you find the flesh-and-blood element contributing to the total effect in two rather different ways. An old play will present permanent features of human nature—scenes of love and jealousy and hate, or, it may be, a coquette's airs, or, perhaps, an old matron's vain affectations—and temporary transitory features, manners, or language now obsolete. A reader would mentally distinguish between them as the "actual" and the "historical" features. What happens, precisely, when they are presented on the stage by means of flesh and blood? The "actual" features merely become more actual. Their effect of reality is deepened. Such a scene, for instance, as that between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood in the Mall, when the guilty lovers fall out, taste something of the bitterness of a clandestine *amour* with its eternal hovering on the edge of hate, and then kiss again with tears, gains enormously in reality, though it was real enough in the printed page. It was real enough, but now it becomes "modern"; its close resemblance to sides of life that we know or divine positively startles

us. To see a beautiful, highly-strung woman, in the person of Miss Edyth Olive, before our eyes in this plight is a much more poignant thing than to read about the same situation in the book as concerning an imaginary Mrs. Fainall. Still, the difference of impression is only one of degree. So with Millamant's scenes and Lady Wishfort's scenes. These women are eternally true; Miss Ethel Irving and Mrs. Theodore Wright only come in to reinforce the author. Now turn to the "historical" features—as, for example, Sir Wilfull's tipsy scene or the dialogue between Witwoud and Petulant—and you find the flesh-and-blood element not deepening the impression, but transforming it. What was "historical" now becomes "actual." The things said and done are strange, but the fact that they are said and done by real people makes them credible. While you laughed at Sir Wilfull in the printed page, you scarcely believed in him; it is impossible not to believe in Mr. Lennox Pawle. *Could* there have been such a creature as Witwoud? the reader asks himself. Yes, answers the spectator, for there the fellow really *is*, with the voice and strut and grin of Mr. Nigel Playfair. About Petulant, perhaps, you may still have a lingering doubt; he is an untractable character, and Mr. Ian Maclaren hardly succeeds in dragging him out of the "historical" limbo. But of one thing this revival must quite convince you. It has knocked the bottom out of Lamb's plea for Congreve's immoral world as something conventional and fantastic. So soon as the characters are put solidly before you by living men and women you are absolutely appalled by their grim reality. To say that you are appalled is only another way of saying that you are pleased; you snatch a fearful joy.

I have dwelt on the impression of reality given by the revival of this play and the causes of it because one gets tired of the nonsense talked about Congreve as now fit only for the "closet." One need not examine the reasons why his *Way of the World* is so weak in plot. It is customary to say that Congreve could not invent a plot; it would be much more accurate to say that, given the existing conditions of the "platform" stage at the time, there was no particular need for him to try. The Congrevean stage was not a stage of plots, but a stage of "turns." This is the very feature which sends Londoners of to-day flocking to "musical comedy"; why, then, complain of it in Congreve? By the way, it was an actress hitherto associated with "musical comedy" who played Millamant. Miss Ethel Irving affords another illustration of what I have said about the supremacy of "temperament." She may not quite harmonise with your preconceived notions of Congreve's *grande coquette*, who is majestic, almost awe-inspiring. Miss Irving is rather the "dainty rogue," but so dainty a rogue, so "magnetic," so real a piece of womanhood, such a delight to ear and eye, that it would be affectation to profess any disappointment over her failure in exact coincidence with the ideal character.



## THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE

(May, 1903)

STENDHAL said that the greatest pleasure he had ever got from the theatre was given him by the performance of some poor Italian strollers in a barn. A little band of Irish men and women, strangers to London and to Londoners, playing in a suburban hall succeeded in giving some constant frequenters of the regular playhouses an hour or two of calm delight quite outside the range of anything which those houses have to offer. The Irish National Theatre Society is understood to consist of amateurs, all engaged in daily work, who can devote only their leisure time to the stage. That was the case, it will be remembered, with the enthusiasts who helped Antoine to found his Théâtre Libre; but there is this difference, that, while the French enterprise was an artistic adventure and nothing else, the Irish Theatre is that and something more. It is part of a national movement, it is designed to express the spirit of the race, the "virtue" of it, in the medium of acted drama. That is obviously an excellent design. If the peculiarities of Irish thought and feeling can be brought home to us through drama we shall all be the better for the knowledge; and the art of drama, too, cannot but gain by a change of air, a new outlook, a fresh current of ideas. Meanwhile, it will suffice to record the keen pleasure which an afternoon with the

Irish National Theatre has afforded, and try to analyse that pleasure.

First and foremost, there is the pleasure of the ear. This, of course, is an accidental pleasure; it has nothing to do with the æsthetic aims of the Society, nothing to do with the dramatic theories or poetic gifts of its President, Mr. W. B. Yeats, nothing to do with art at all; it results from the nature of things, from the simple fact that Irish speakers are addressing English listeners. It is none the less a very exquisite pleasure. I, for one, had never realised the musical possibilities of our language until I heard these Irish people speak it. Most Englishmen, I fancy, get their notions of Irish pronunciation from Thackeray, and though, no doubt, Thackeray's version was always good-natured enough, yet the talk of Costigan and the Mulligan and the O'Dowd tends to burlesque the truth. The association is always one of drollery, whereas the English of these Irish players gives you an impression, not of drollery at all, but of elegance. "Fool" is pronounced "fule" (with the thin French "u"), "philosophy" is "philosophæe," "argument" is "argu-mént," and the words look funny when so written; but they do not sound funny, they sound charming. The unexpected emphasis on the minor syllables has an air of not ungraceful pedantry or, better still, of an old-world courtliness. You are listening to English spoken with watchful care and slightly timorous hesitation, as though it were a learned language. That at once ennobles our mother-tongue, brings it into relief, gives it a daintiness and distinction of which, in the rough workaday use of it, one had never dreamed. But the charm does not stop there. These Irish people *sing* our language—and always in

a minor key. It becomes in very fact "most musical, most melancholy." Rarely, very rarely, the chant degenerates into a whine. But, for the most part, the English ear is mildly surprised and entirely charmed. Talk of *lingua Toscana in bocca Romana!* The English tongue on Irish lips is every whit as melodious.

The next pleasure is for the eye. These Irish gentlemen and ladies are good to look at; the men are lithe, graceful, bright-eyed, and one at least of the maidens, with the stage name of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, is of a strange, wan, "disquieting" beauty. But I am not thinking so much of what Elia's Scotch friend would call their "pairsonal pretensions" as of their postures and movements. As a rule they stand stock-still. The speaker of the moment is the only one who is allowed a little gesture—just as in the familiar convention of the Italian marionette theatre the figure supposed to be speaking is distinguished from the others by a slight vibration. The listeners do not distract one's attention by fussy "stage business," they just stay where they are and listen. When they do move it is without premeditation, at haphazard, even with a little natural clumsiness, as of people who are not conscious of being stared at in public. Hence a delightful effect of spontaneity. And in their demeanour generally they have the artless impulsiveness of children—the very thing which one found so enjoyable in another exotic affair, the performance of Sada Yacco and her Japanese company. Add that the scenery is of Elizabethan simplicity—sometimes no more than a mere backcloth—and you will begin to see why this performance is a sight good for sore eyes—eyes made sore by the perpetual movement and glitter of the ordinary stage.

But it is time to say something of the vital part of one's pleasure, the pleasure of mind and mood. That, too, is largely a pleasure of rest—and resignation. The mind is steeped in seriousness; the mood is uniformly sad. For anything of the same kind one would have to go to some of Maeterlinck's earlier plays. But that is an imperfect comparison; the Irish theatre is really of its own kind and of none other. Its sustained note of subdued gravity, with here and there faint harmonics of weird elfish freakishness ("harps in the air," Hilda Wangel would have called them) is entirely Irish and entirely delightful. Take Mr. Yeats's "morality," *The Hour-Glass*. An angel gives a man a few moments wherein to try and find means of salvation before he dies with the last running out of the sand. Imagine how the ordinary dramatist would treat this, how largely the hour-glass would bulk in the foreground, how the man would writhe and shriek in the frenzied horror of imminent death. Indeed, you need not imagine it; this very situation fills the final act of Sardou's *Dante*. Tick, tick! goes the pendulum clock. Lo! the pendulum is the figure of Death with his scythe. (Oh, symbolism! oh Sardou!) Remark the practical actor conscientiously emptying out under the limelight the whole contents of the theatrical bag of tricks labelled "Death Scenes." Then turn for a refreshing contrast to the behaviour of Mr. Yeats's "Wise Man." He is agitated, to be sure, but quietly agitated. He hardly so much as glances at the hour-glass. What you are asked to contemplate is the inner rout of his mind. A moment ago he had been so proud of his knowledge! How immeasurably superior he had seemed to Teigue the Fool! In what impassioned prose he had exulted over the folly he



thought he had overthrown! "Though they call him Teigue the Fool, he is not more foolish than everyone used to be, with their dreams and their preaching and their three worlds. But I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. With philosophy that was made from the lonely star I have taught them to forget theology . . . and with music the fierce planet's daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with grammar, that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels." And now one of the angels (it is the beautiful Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh) with a little word has cast him low. To be saved he must find one whom his teaching has not corrupted. In vain he summons his pupils (one of them a King's son, no less); they think he merely wishes to dispute with them. In vain he calls in wife and children; he has taught them not to pray. And at last it is Teigue the Fool who saves the Wise Man, Teigue who has seen scores of angels, who knows the hilltops where the country-folk spread nets to catch the angels' feet, and who always cuts the nets so that the angels shall not be caught. The whole tone of the thing, as we have said, is grave and subdued, its whole texture such stuff as dreams are made of. A little thing, it may be, but it haunts the mind long afterwards. I can still see the virginal face of the angel, who has stepped out of some Irish Book of Hours, and still hear the wheedling chant of Teigue the Fool—"Give me a pen-nee! Give me some pen-nees!"

Another play by Mr. Yeats, *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, gives us a whiff—or rather a sigh—of '98. Young Michael Gillan is going to wed Delia Cahel, and old Peter, Michael's father, sits lovingly caressing the

golden sovereigns which Delia brings as her dowry. It should be a merry family gathering, but gradually there steals over all present an uncomfortable feeling that something, they know not what, is going to happen. The vague fear of something impending, unseen—what is that but the “note” of *L’Intruse* and of many another Maeterlinck “early manner”? An old, sad-faced woman enters, begs a moment’s shelter, and is received with a simple courtesy by these Irish peasants which is as “elegant” as their English pronunciation. They ask quietly among themselves who the stranger is, and no one can tell. She sits by the fire wailing and singing strange scraps of song. Many have loved her, but those who love her must die for her. And young Michael is strangely drawn towards her (one thinks here of Little Eyolf and the Rat Wife), and when she goes out leaves father and mother and bride and silently follows her. Then the people outside are heard joyfully shouting the news that the French have landed, and someone who has met the stranger now sees her with the face of a radiant girl. She symbolises the spirit of Ireland. In this beautiful little piece you have the same dream-feeling as in the other; in this as in the other, the people move about silently, as fearing to break the dream, and speak with bated breath.

In Lady Gregory’s *Twenty-Five* there is more solid matter of fact, more of human nature’s daily food. Christie Henderson comes home from America, with sixty pounds in his pocket, to claim the girl he left behind him. But she, who has heard never a word from him, is married to Michael Ford. The Fords have been sold up and are just starting for exile in England. Will not the wife take her old friend’s sixty pounds to save her

husband? No, not a penny of it. Then a way must be found to make her, so Christie gets Michael to sit down to cards, and they play the game of "twenty-five," and by the strangest run of ill luck the whole of Christie's little fortune passes into Michael's hands. Then they all fall to dancing, save the wife, who silently weeps, and Christie starts on his return to America without a wife and without a penny, and yet well content. Mr. W. G. Fay plays Christie in a vein of mingled sadness and fun, but always *pianissimo*.

Yes, they are all from the outset to the end playing *pianissimo*, all hushed as in some sick-room, all grave and, as it were, careworn. No doubt there is a touch of affectation in their methods; they have something of the self-importance of children surplined for service at the altar or "dressed up" for a grand domestic occasion. A style "deliberately adopted" is the harmless little boast of their prospectus. Well, that is a matter of course. All new movements in art are self-conscious, abound in little exaggerations and affectations. Is there not an Irish precept, "Be aisy; and if ye can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye can"? One may commend that to the Irish National Theatre Society. And for ourselves we may be quite "aisy"; for the "deliberate" methods of these enthusiasts will surely lose their stiffness in due course of time. Meanwhile one is sincerely grateful to them for an hour or two of real refreshment, a train of curious suggestions, a series of new "thrills."

## WARP AND WOOF

(CAMDEN, June 1904)

OF course Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton's play abounds in faults. Of course her stage-craft is amateurish. Of course she overstates her case. What else, pray, did anyone expect from a novice? More important than her degree of skill or the precise measure of her accuracy is the question of her impulse and her choice of theme. It is a comfort to know, in these days of dramas manufactured for the market, that "indignation" not only "makes verses," but sometimes also makes plays. And a play which, avoiding the beaten track of amorous or domestic adventure, deals fearlessly with some actual remediable evil of our social system, however naïve in conception that play may be, however clumsily written—and *Warp and Woof* is both naïve and clumsy—is, just now, a valuable playhouse asset. The fact is, Mrs Lyttelton, in a jejune prentice fashion, has attempted to do for a corner of London life what Brieux has done for many corners of France. She sees something wrong, something which outrages her sense of justice, and she would do her best to right the wrong by exposing it before a whole playhouse. One knows all that is to be said about the difficulty of reconciling art with propagandism. One is quite aware that the best plays are written by



people whose overmastering impulse is, first and last, to write a play and not a tract. Nevertheless, the moralists and the thesis-mongers are invaluable in the theatre. They keep it real, keep it in touch with the life that we know. The English theatre especially needs them, for it is the most unreal of all theatres, the most frivolous, the most devoid of ideas. Mrs. Lyttelton's little experiment in thesis-mongering, then, crude and faulty as it is, is really more helpful than many a conventional "story" play of impeccable workmanship.

Mrs. Lyttelton sees a wrong. Being a woman, she naturally sees a wrong done by women to women. She sees that mundane and modish women are apt to be in too great a hurry to get their smart frocks home from the dressmakers, and that the dressmakers, under stress of their customers' impatience, are apt to prefer to the alternative of an enlargement of staff the cheaper expedient of "overtime." Thus, between the thoughtlessness of one set of women and the greed of another set of women, a third set—the workgirls—become white slaves, live without proper meals, proper air, proper leisure, proper sleep, so that the coarser among them become benumbed and brutalised and the more delicate perish miserably. Further than that, if the workgirl have beauty and a natural, healthy desire for the *joie de vivre*, she is like to fall an easy victim to unprincipled men. But has the law nothing to say in this matter? Yes, of course, there are the stringent regulations of the Factory Acts, and there are the surprise visits of his Majesty's inspector. But laws can be ignored and inspectors humbugged. The root of the evil is not a thing which "kings or laws can cause or cure";

it is the thoughtlessness of some women acting upon the greed of other women to the detriment of many more. Well, Mrs. Lyttelton sees all this, and is angry—and what does she do? She flings all that she has seen in a heap on the stage, pell-mell, upside-down, anyhow. She shows us the thoughtless women being thoughtless, demanding their frocks within an hour or two of the order, gabbling childish slang (“divvy,” “spity,” and other odious words which ought to be left to the vulgar tittle-tattle of “our society correspondent”), or rehearsing absurd songs and dances in fancy dress while workgirls faint and die. She shows us the greedy dressmaker being greedy, cringing to her customers, bullying, starving, and overworking her girls, and lying through thick and thin to his Majesty’s factory inspector. The inspection scene, by the way, with the girls, working “after hours,” huddled away into the next room, then discovered, but lying or keeping mute when questioned, is the one really effective thing in *Warp and Woof*. There is some attempt to differentiate the types of workgirl—the girl who is too stupid to speak, the girl who won’t blab “for the honour of the firm,” the girl who is afraid of dismissal if she speaks, and so forth. But then this crucial scene of the play does not touch the real *crux* of the thesis. The real business of the thesis-monger here is not to show an “adventure,” the attempted deception of a factory inspector, but to expose and to *explain* the root of the evil—mundane thoughtlessness acting upon commercial greed. And just there, I think, is the weakness of Mrs. Lyttelton’s play. She exhibits certain surface facts; she does not go beneath the surface and explain them. If she will look at the work of any practised thesis-monger—the aforesaid



before the curtain rose, and to have kept them there, under lock and key, to the end.

It appears that some dressmakers have protested against Mrs. Lyttelton's Mme. Stéfanie, declaring that this sketch of a fashionable dressmaker, tyrant, bully, and "sweater," "does injustice to dressmakers as a class." "But," replies Lady Frances Balfour in a letter to the papers, "Mrs Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class, and had a right, for dramatic purposes, to take an extreme case. All jealousy does not lead to murder, nor all just indignation on the part of defenders of their country who meet with ingratitude to rebellion and invasion; yet in writing a drama of jealousy, or revolt against ingratitude, the dramatist may fairly give us an Othello or Coriolanus. Mme. Stéfanies may, and do exist." This specious passage, I venture to think, bolsters up a fallacy by a false analogy.

Lady Frances's primary proposition is that the dramatist has a right, for dramatic purposes, to take an extreme case. The answer is that it all depends. It depends upon the kind of drama attempted. If you are writing a romantic drama upon the heroic plane you may certainly take an extreme case. It is the very essence of your business to take an extreme case. You are showing passions in excess, great forces of nature let loose. You are picturing human beings at their *maximum* of volition and suffering, in the acutest crises of their fate. Othello is an extreme case. Coriolanus is an extreme case. Hamlet is an extreme case. Macbeth is an extreme case. But even here there are limits to your choice of extremes. You must make it clear that you are presenting human beings. You must see that they act naturally and logically



according to the law of their natures and the pressure of the particular environment which you invent for them. What is the test of that? The inherent truthfulness of the picture, the impression created in the spectator's mind that just thus and not otherwise would the thing have befallen. The test of truth, then, in this case is an internal test. It is nothing to you whether there was ever a real Coriolanus or a real Macbeth, or whether men are often or seldom placed in the predicaments of these men. The play in which they figure is self-contained, you judge it on its merits, not in relation to any set of external facts. Verisimilitude is all you bargain for, not actuality; you are dealing with poetry, not history. In this kind of drama you may go further. You may stretch your extreme case beyond the limits of humanity. You may bring in a Ghost or a Caliban—provided always that your fantastic inventions fit logically and naturally into the scheme of your play. This, by the way, is what the author of the *Poetics* had in mind when he said that "probable impossibilities" were preferable to "improbable possibilities." And this is what Victor Hugo misunderstood when he argued (in the preface to *Cromwell*) for a drama of nothing but contrasted extremes. Caliban is a "probable impossibility." Quasimodo is an "improbable possibility." To sum up: extreme cases are the legitimate subject of romantic drama on the heroic plane, are indeed its proper subject—always with the reservation of verisimilitude, of justification not by reference to external fact but to the internal logic of the play itself. Again, extreme cases are the legitimate subject of pure comedy. Malvolio is an extreme case. Lady Wishfort is an extreme case. Bob Acres is an extreme case. For this comedy makes

its account—partially, by no means entirely—out of human eccentricity. And again there is the same reservation; the extreme characters must satisfy the internal test.

But what has all this to do with such a play as *Warp and Woof*? Absolutely nothing. Is this play a work of pure "disinterested" art, aiming at interesting us in its characters and conduct for their own sake? Of course it is nothing of the kind. It is a play with a purpose, and that purpose is not the mere offer of artistic pleasure, but the awakening of the social conscience by what purports to be a faithful picture of a particular set of contemporary facts. At once we see that the internal test ceases to be adequate. It is not inapplicable; the play, whatever else it may achieve, has first of all to hang together as a play. But it is far from being, as in the other kinds of drama, the final test. The final test is now the test of external fact; the "poetry" is sunk in "history." Are there such people as Mme. Stéfanie? Are her relations to her customers and workgirls a true picture of the actual relations of real employers to real workgirls and real customers? It is upon the answers to these questions that the ultimate value of the play depends. "Mrs. Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class," says Lady Frances Balfour. Does she not? Then she is doing something very futile, figuring as *chimæra bombinans in vacuo*. For if we are to understand that Mme. Stéfanie is a mere exception, this at once gives away the dramatist's "case." What is the use of painting a picture of employers and employed, and then explaining that it has no general validity, that it does not in fact represent a state of things, but only some individual, accidental thing? Does not Lady

Frances perceive that her contention, if just, would really knock the bottom out of the play? I suspect that she does, for she has no sooner advanced it than she qualifies it, and almost withdraws it. "Mrs. Lyttelton does not profess to be describing a class." Nevertheless, "Mme. Stéfanie may, and do exist." They may? That is not the point; that does not help us in the least. But they "do exist." Well, there you have it. And the question is, to what extent do they exist? Is Mme. Stéfanie typical of a class? If she is, *Warp and Woof* is a useful (not a good; that is quite another matter, but a useful) play. If not, not. One must leave the statisticians, the experts in the Factory Acts, and other practical persons to settle that point.

## A CINDERELLA BALLET

(EMPIRE, *February 1906*)

THERE are many worthy burgesses who seem dead to the charms of ballet. The dumb show oppresses them; they are for ever wishing that "somebody would say something." The rhythm of the dance, now suavely undulating, now heavily beaten out as with hammer-strokes, by turns austere and voluptuous, stately-processional and frenzied-bacchantic, leaves them unmoved. To tolerate ballet at all these people must have the vulgar element which their jargon calls the "up-to-date"; an odious mimicry of the pavement-life outside, to say nothing of the gutter. But a ballet that condescends to matter-of-fact has abdicated its true functions. The ballet is, in essence, the most abstract of the arts that work in the medium of flesh and blood, the most remote from actual life, the most thoroughly "purged," as Schopenhauer would have said, "of the will-to-live." It should transfer us to the region of pure sensation, where things are neither good nor bad, neither true nor untrue, but merely beautiful in line and mass and motion. And yet it has a moral appeal, of a sort; that you may find in the happy faces, the irrepressible tendency to gambolling of the dancers, bespeaking that joy of the artist in his work which to a Ruskinian is the moralising element in all art.

The worst of ballet, from the reviewer's standpoint,



is that it defies review. A blend of various wordless arts, action and plastic and music, it is not reducible to words. If only one could *dance* a criticism of *Cinderella*! One's sense of the exquisite would be signified by a pirouette; praise would have its graduated scale of *entrechats*; one would perorate in a *pas de fascination*. Words can in no way reproduce the direct sensations created by ballet; the best one can hope to do with them is to set forth the resultant mental state, the dream-like mood. You begin in *Cinderella* with a dream of Watteau. There is a park with a lake, a classic temple in the distance, a hint or two of florid stonework in the foreground—very much the scene of "L'Embarquement pour Cythère." A little company of perfectly attired Watteau figures dance a languid minuet. Even more Watteau-ish are their attitudes in repose: youths in satin, with cloak hanging loosely from one shoulder, lute in hand, bending over ladies with long wasp-waists, sacque and panier, and those little turned-up cockaded hats which, by a happy revival of fashion, are to be seen at this moment in the shop-windows of the Rue de la Paix. And all the Watteau sentiment is there, the atmosphere that is a little sickly in its sweetness, a melancholy as of lovers (it is D'Annunzio who has said this of the Watteau sentiment) about to love no more. A dainty child in white, with hair *à la Pompadour* and roses over the ears, makes her little timid yet elegant curtsy to the Prince. Even the programme has caught the right Watteau tone. The courtiers are called Mutine and Celadon, Mignonne and Bel Amour. "Designed and produced," you read, "by C. Wilhelm." I could almost have fancied I read "par Antoine Watteau." The perfect taste, restraint, harmony of this scene are beyond

praise—one of the most beautiful things I can call to mind—either at the Empire or elsewhere.

Cinderella herself is mimed and danced by Mlle. Adeline Genée. It is a flawless performance. Perhaps performance is not the best word, because that suggests a conscious art, whereas Mlle. Genée's quiet charm is something wholly apart from her technical skill, wonderful as that is. It is a charm of native, even homely simplicity; a charm that is never mutinous, coquettish, "disquieting," as the French say; the charm of a child blithely yielding, without a thought of onlookers, to the play-impulse. See her when Cinderella is left alone in the kitchen, after the others have gone to the ball! At first she sits forlorn; then the picture of the ballroom takes hold of her and her face beams with delight at the idea of improvising a little ballroom scene all to herself. Up she jumps, plucks a couple of feathers from her broom and sticks them in her hair, snatches up the tablecloth to make a train, and whirls round with her broom for an imaginary partner. The dainty grace with which she makes believe to eat an ice, to bow to her partner, to yield to a pressing invitation for just one dance more! To every little endearing detail she brings some quaint touch of humour, some ingenuity of invention. As to her technical skill, I have called it wonderful, out of sheer inability to appraise it with proper knowledge. It is dancing without the slightest trace of effort, every step—in reality, no doubt, calculated to a hair's breadth and assiduously practised—having the air of a happy impromptu.

The next best dancer to Mlle. Genée is Mr. Sundberg. Towards male dancers as a rule most of us have a feeling for which the word dislike is too mild a name.

But with Mr. Sundberg's dancing I have only one fault to find; there is not enough of it. He has just one scene—wherein he gives a lesson, as Court Dancing Master, to Cinderella's stepmother. He enters, fiddle in hand, tripping on one foot and swaying the other rhythmically to and fro—a sort of glorified hop-scotch. From entry to exit he never stops dancing, and every movement is grace itself. At the same time he contrives to give to the whole thing a burlesque air, a mock solemnity, quite in the tradition of "le Diou de la Danse." His coat, with its ballooning skirts, his macaroni wig, seem to have come straight out of "*Mariage à la mode*." This Court Dancing Master is my own particular joy. But for those who like it there is plenty of grotesque dancing of the ordinary "cellar-flap" sort, from Mr. Fred Farren (in a *pas seul*) as well as from Mr. W. Vokes, who, with two others, has a clever "act" under a huge umbrella. Nor can one forget the monkey-like antics of little Black Sambo, the page, who also seems to have been cut from some canvas of Hogarth. The music of the ballet is a *pot-pourri* of tunes and scraps of tunes from Mozart and Mendelssohn to Humperdinck and Messager and Tchaikovsky; an arrangement which one may be permitted to like far better than "specially composed" music from some inferior hand. This Empire *Cinderella* is, for the moment, the most beautiful stage entertainment in London. Even those who are lukewarm about the ballet must feel the fascination of the scene, with the little curtsying Pompadourish maid in white (is it Mutine or Mignonne?) and the silk-clad page with the lute (is it Celadon or Bel Amour?). It will give them, more surely even than any picture of Mr. Charles Conder's, the true Watteau "thrill."



## THE DÉBUTANTE

(EMPIRE, January 1907)

IT has been bruited abroad that Mlle. Genée is going to America. In the native home of the Washington Post and the Cake Walk she will be like a philosopher at a barbarian Court. Is it too late to buy her off? Perhaps another First Folio would do it. London without Adeline Genée will be a mere huddle of pedestrians, a benighted place where tiptoeing is only known by hearsay. If and when Genée departs she will have to leave London her white satin shoes, to be deposited in the British Museum. Théophile Gautier, so long ago as 1868, revealed to the brothers De Goncourt the significance of the ballet-dancers' shoes. "He describes," records the Diary, "the white satin shoe which, for each of them, is strengthened by a little cushion of silk in the place where the dancer feels that she bears and presses most—a cushion which would indicate to an expert the name of the dancer." Thus we should reconstruct the wearer from the shoe. *Ex pede Adelinam.*

Meanwhile the wearer as well as the shoe has been bewitching the town in *The Débutante*, a ballet divertissement in three tableaux by C. Wilhelm. The scene is the Paris Opera House; and the period is 1835—the "palmy days," that is to say, the period of Taglioni the sylph-like, who was, however, not a bit



slimmer than Mlle. Genée, and, very likely, no better dancer. It was a delightful period for the eye, both in its everyday clothes and in its romantic travesties. The gentlemen had tight waists, high-rolled collars, enormous "toppers," trousers strapped tight under the boot, and "frogged" cloaks; the ladies wore dainty little aprons, huge bonnets, and remarkable *coiffures*. That was the costume of private life, and you have it all duly reproduced in Scene I. of *The Débutante*, the Rehearsal Room, whither comes Mlle. Delphine to join M. Pirouette's dancing class. The pupils are all in long white muslin Taglioni skirts and loll on benches in easy attitudes, like so many pictures by Degas. It is a world—and a whirl—of white muslin chequered by the brilliantly coloured coats of the gentlemen, amateurs of the ballet, who happen to have just looked in. You like to fancy that the crowd contains—as surely a crowd of the period would have contained—all the gay lions of Balzac—Rastignac and De Marsay and Lucien de Rubempré. The military gentleman with the flat cap and "ducks" must be Colonel Philippe Bridau. There, at any rate, is "The Baron" (Nucingen, you hope, rather than Hulot), and the Baron it is who puts forward Mlle. Delphine for the new ballet now in rehearsal, *The Odalisque*, when the première danseuse, Mlle. Florita, throws up her part. Despair of M. Pirouette who tears his Paganini hair; delirious delight of M. Pirouette (who is Mr. Fred Farren, at his most grotesque) when he discovers that Mlle. Delphine can dance like Mlle. Genée, who in fact she is. You, the spectator, are delighted by Mlle. Genée's dancing too, but still more by her freshness, her girlish simplicity, her spontaneity, her "petitionary" grace. There you have the true secret of Genée's charm: the purely

physical charm of perfect grace in attitude and movement, the specific charm, that is to say, of the dancer, *plus* the charm of native temperament unconsciously revealed, the charm of the woman. In speaking of players I have suggested that their ultimate appeal rests rather upon what they are than upon what they do. I have no wish to ride a theory to death, but cannot refrain from pointing out that it is just as true of the great dancers as of the great players. And now the ballet that you have seen rehearsed is actually performed. Of course, it is an Oriental ballet. All romance was Oriental in 1835. The *locus classicus* of the subject is to be found in a certain "Roundabout Paper" concerning "William IV.'s time." "Even in William IV.'s time, when I think of Duvernay prancing in as the Bayadère. . . . How well I remember the tune to which she used to appear! Kaled used to say to the Sultan, 'My Lord, a troop of those dancing and singing gurls called Bayadères approaches,' and to the clash of cymbals, and the thumping of my heart, in she used to dance!" That is just what you get at the Empire. There is the Sultan (Mr. Fred Farren, again, in a wonderful turban), and there is the troop of dancing (fortunately *not* singing) gurls called Bayadères, and to the clash of cymbals Mme. Genée as the chief Odalisque comes prancing in. The Sultan obviously suffers from senile decrepitude, as a Sultan should, but he still knows good dancing when he sees it, and with heavy bags of gold he purchases the fair Odalisque from the wicked slave-dealer Mustafa—the incomparable Mr. Sundberg—who expresses the utmost turpitude of slave-dealing by extraordinary high jumps and twirls. But, of course, it would never do for youth to be sacrificed to crabbed age in this way, and, accordingly,

the Captain of the Guard comes to the rescue, only to be cast into chains for his temerity. Then the Odalisque sues for the gallant captain's pardon in a *pas de fascination*, and all ends happily.

Delightful, then, this ballet of *The Débutante*; delightful, in that it offers a compound pleasure—the purely sensuous pleasure of the ballet supplemented and made more exquisite by the pleasure of historico-literary suggestion. It gives us a glimpse of our grandfathers' generation and the ways of 1835, and shows us, in particular, the way they were accustomed to *visualise* romance in the full tide of the Romantic Movement. And mark the advantage of ballet for suggestion of this kind. A play presenting the period would monopolise your attention; whereas the placid semi-hypnotic state in which you look on at ballet invites to reverie. You have one eye on the stage and the other, as it were, on the well-loved back of this or that volume in your library. You are reading Thackeray to orchestral music. Balzac peeps out at you through a maze of muslin skirts and twirling satin shoes. It is the old story—*que de choses dans un menuet!*

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