

REMY BUMPPPO
think theatre

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

by George Bernard Shaw

Remy Bumpo Theatre Company

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STUDY GUIDE

Compiled and Edited by Peter Davis



Table of Contents

Shaw Biography	3
Dramatis Personae	4
Synopsis	4
An Early Production History of the Play: Sensibility and Censorship	5
Glossary	6
Timeline	11
Critical Evaluation of the Play since 1902	14
The Author's Apology	
On Mrs. Warren's Profession: A Review (1905)	
Tracy C. Davis	
John A. Bertolini	
Shaw Quotations	41
Bibliography	44
Online Sources	45

Shaw Biography

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), Irish dramatist, literary critic, a socialist spokesman, and a leading figure in the 20th century theater. Shaw was a freethinker, a supporter of women's rights and an advocate of equality of income. In 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Shaw accepted the honor but refused the money. George Bernard Shaw was born on 26 July 1856, in Dublin, as the son of George Carr Shaw, who was in the wholesale grain trade, and Lucinda Elisabeth Shaw, the daughter of an impoverished landowner. Shaw's childhood was troubled. His father was a drunkard, which made his son a teetotaler. Shaw went to the Wesleyan Connexional School, then moved to a private school near Dalkey, and then to Dublin's Central Model School, ending his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. At the age of 15 he started to work as a junior clerk. In 1876 he went to London, joining his sister and mother. Shaw did not return to Ireland for nearly thirty years. Shaw began his literary career by writing music and theatre criticism, and novels, including the semi-autobiographical *Immaturity* without much success. In 1884 Shaw joined the Fabian Society, a middle-class socialist group and served on its executive committee from 1885 to 1911.

In 1895 Shaw became a drama critic for the *Saturday Review*. These articles were later collected in *Our Theatres In The Nineties* (1932). Shaw also wrote music, art and drama criticism for *Dramatic Review* (1885-86), *Our Corner* (1885-86), *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1885-88), *The World* (1886-94), and *The Star* (1888-90) as 'Corno di Basetto'. His music criticism has been collected in *Shaw's Music* (1981). *The Perfect Wagnerite* appeared in 1898 and *Caesar And Cleopatra* in 1901. In 1898 Shaw married the wealthy Charlotte Payne-Townshend. They settled in 1906 in the Hertfordshire village of Ayot St. Lawrence. Shaw remained with Charlotte until her death, although he was occasionally linked with other women. He carried on a passionate correspondence over the years with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a widow and actress.

Shaw's early plays including *Widower's Houses* (1892), which criticized slum landlords, were not well received. His 'unpleasant plays', ideological attacks on the evils of capitalism and explorations of moral and social problems, were followed with more entertaining but equally principled productions like *Candida* and *John Bull's Other Island* (1904). *Major Barbara* (1905) depicted an officer of the Salvation Army, who learns from her father, a manufacturer of armaments, that money and power can be better weapons against evil than love. *Pygmalion* (1914) was originally written for the actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and became later the basis for two films and a musical. Shaw's popularity declined after his essay "Common Sense About the War" (1914), which was considered unpatriotic. With *Saint Joan* (1924) he was again accepted by the post-war public. Shaw died at Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire, on November 2, 1950. During his long career, Shaw wrote over 50 plays.

Dramatis Personae

Vivie Warren, A recent Cambridge graduate age twenty-two

Mrs. Warren, her mother

Mr. Praed, an architect and aesthete

Sir George Crofts, Mrs. Warren's business partner

Frank Gardner, Vivie's friend, age twenty.

The Rev. Samuel Gardner, Frank's father and vicar of the local parish.

Setting: Acts 1-3: Late summer in the small town of Haslemere in Surrey.

Act Four: The chambers of Honoria Fraser on Chancery Lane in London.

Synopsis

Self-possessed Vivie Warren, twenty-two, was a maths genius at college and intends to make her fortune doing calculations for engineers, electricians, and insurance companies. Her expensive upbringing and education was paid for by her mostly absent mother whom she hardly knows. While Vivie is staying with a family friend in the country, her mother arrives with the tough and slightly vicious Sir George Crofts, and platonic friend Praed, a romantic old artist. Vivie introduces them to her charming, penniless local boyfriend Frank Gardner. But when Frank's father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner, arrives it seems he may have known Mrs. Warren from the murky days of old.

Vivie is somewhat contemptuous of her blowsy mother, but when they are alone, Mrs. Warren tells her of her hard life and confesses she made her money from brothels. Vivie's contempt turns to admiration.

However, Crofts is after Vivie, and her curt refusal leads him to tell her that he and her mother are still partners in the brothels which are still making a great deal of money. He also tells her that Frank, with whom she has been billing and cooing, is her half-brother, both sharing the Reverend Gardner as their father.

Poor Vivie returns to London to begin working and refuses any more money from her mother. Frank arrives and when she tells him of her mother's profession it is clearly all over between them—he will not take Mrs. Warren's money and he leaves Vivie a good-bye note. Mrs. Warren arrives attempting reconciliation, but Vivie rebukes her—recognizing that she must now go her own way and support herself by her own labor.

An Early Production History of the Play: Sensibility and Censorship

Although *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was only his second full-length play, George Bernard Shaw was already approaching middle-age when he wrote it in 1893. He had come to playwriting relatively late in life (or relatively late for most people—Shaw lived to be 93 years old) and he saw playwriting as his last best chance to affect the world with words after a failed effort at writing novels and a mediocre stint as a music and art critic. With theatre he found his voice—a voice that would soon dominate the English stage and rank him as one of England's greatest literary minds. But it was a voice with a distinct purpose, crafted out of the intellectual fervor and social experiments of the late nineteenth century.

While our modern image of Victorian England is one of staid prudery and suppressed impulses, the late nineteenth century was actually an age of great social, political, and sexual exploration. The term “Victorian” may imply stuffy and puritanical, yet it is just as appropriate to consider Victorian as bohemian, unconventional and even eccentric. True to the vibrant intellectualism of his age, Shaw was deeply involved with many of the latest social and political organizations that seemed years ahead of their times—antivivisectionism, vegetarianism, women's rights, and Fabianism (that peculiarly English political movement of middle-class socialists of which Shaw was a founding member). And when Shaw turned to writing plays, in some ways it was a socially risky move in an age when many respectable families would have actually preferred to have their daughters go into prostitution than perform on stage—prostitution, it was reasoned, was at least performed in private.

Just two years earlier, in 1890, Henrik Ibsen's *A Dolls' House* stunned the London stage with its modern woman choosing to leave her lifeless marriage. Shaw responded by writing one of his most famous critical works, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, the very next year. He followed this with a succession of three plays (his first forays into playwriting), *Widowers' Houses* (1891), *The Philanderer* (1892), and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*—works he would eventually publish in a collection called *Plays Unpleasant* (1898), since they dealt with topics that might prove provocative and unpleasant to the general public. Of these early plays, only *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was forbidden a license for performance by England's official censor—the Lord Chamberlain—since it dealt with both prostitution and implied incest.

But another, more subtle deterrent was that stage portrayals of strong women with independent minds were often ignored by a chauvinistic public or pilloried in the male-dominated press. In fact, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* would not be seen on the stage until 1902, when a private production was given in London. Its premiere in New York City, under the direction of Arnold Daly, was closed down on opening night for violating local decency standards. Daly and his leading lady, Mary Shaw (no relation to GBS), were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. Both were eventually acquitted, but the show would not reappear on the New York stage until 1907, when Mary Shaw finally performed it without interference. Curiously, the play would not be licensed for performance in England until 1925. While his popularity waned in the mid-twentieth century, Shaw's reputation as the most prominent provocateur of the English-speaking stage remained unassailed throughout his long life. Today, he is generally recognized as one of most important English playwrights, perhaps second only to Shakespeare.

Glossary

Act One

Haslemere in Surrey. Located in Surrey, but close to Hampshire and West Sussex, in southern England, Haslemere was once an important medieval market town. It lost a sizable portion of its population during the industrial revolution of late 18th century but revived when the Waterloo Station to Portsmouth line opened, becoming an easy day trip for Londoners.

Chatelaine. A clasp or chain worn at the waste for hold keys, a purse, or a watch.

Horsham. An ancient market town in West Sussex in southern England.

Anarchist. One who adheres to the philosophy, popular in the late 19th century, that all forms of government are unnecessary, wasteful, oppressive, and should thus be abolished. In its purest form, Anarchism believed that natural human systems are suppressed by the artificial constraints of modern governments and mores.

Third wrangler. A wrangler was a student who was awarded a first-class (i.e. the highest level) degree in mathematics at Cambridge University. The student with the highest degree was called the Senior wrangler. Vivie was obviously second behind the senior wrangler.

£50 = Approximately \$8,121.00 in 2007 dollars.

Newnham. A college at Cambridge that admitted only women.

Tripes. Tripos are the Cambridge examinations for the baccalaureate degree with honors, typically taken in two parts, Tripos I after two years and then Tripos II after the final year of specialisation. The name is derived from the traditional three-legged stool the students were once required to use to defend the degree.

£200 = Worth approximately \$32,484.00 in 2007.

“set up in chambers... actuarial calculations and conveyancing.” Vivie intends to run mathematical and statistical tables for the legal and insurance industries.

Chancery Lane. The heart of London’s legal profession. Connecting three of London’s ancient Inns of Court—Lincoln’s Inn, Grey’s Inn, and the Middle Temple—it is where many of England’s most prestigious law firms maintain offices.

Fitzjohn’s Avenue. One of the more fashionable residential streets northwest of London, near Hampstead.

National Gallery. Britain's main art gallery, situated on the north side of Trafalgar Square. Home to some of the most famous works of art in the world.

Opera. In other words, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden.

Mater. Latin for mother.

Blackguard. An unprincipled scoundrel.

Roman father. Shaw is being ironical by referring to the Reverend Gardner, not as a Roman Catholic priest, but as a man with a Roman sense of duty.

Beneficed clergyman. A clergyman who makes his living from a parish.

Redhill. A town in Surrey, south of London. The Brighton Line ran through the center of town and housed both railroad workers and tourists alike. Its convenience to rail service and its relatively short distance from London made it a popular place for trysts

Duke of Wellington. Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769-1852). Known as the "Iron Duke," he defeated Napoleon at Waterloo (1815) and served as Prime Minister (1828-1830).

"Knowledge is power... and I never sell power." Clearly derived from Shaw's affinity for Nietzsche's theory of the relationship between knowledge and power.

Act Two

"...cheek all over you..." Marked by impudence or impertinence.

Monmouthshire. A county in the southeast corner of Wales, just on the border with England.

Duke of Bedford. The Dukes of Bedford date back to the 14th century and the reign of Edward III. They are part of the English hereditary nobility and maintain a seat in the House of Lords. The Russell family have held the title since 1551 and currently control prime real estate in downtown London and the Westminster.

Tintern Abbey. Located in Monmouthshire, Tintern Abbey was the first Cistercian Abbey founded in Wales and only the second in Britain. Built in 1131, it flourished for nearly four centuries. It fell into disuse in 1536 and has since become one of Britain's more picturesque ruins. It was the subject of a Wordsworth poem and several paintings by Turner.

"He either fears his fate... To gain or lose it all." Based on a poem by James Graham, Marquis of Montrose (1612-1650): "He either fears his fare too much,/ Or his deserts are small, /That puts it not unto the touch/ To win of lose it all."

“...completely off my peck...” Not hungry, no longer peckish.

Baronet. A traditional British hereditary title reserved for commoners, ranking just below a baron and just above a knight.

Pater. Latin for father.

The Mint. The Royal Mint is the official institution designated to produce coins in Great Britain. Traditionally located inside the Tower of London, it was moved to a facility on Tower Hill in 1811, and finally moved in 1967 to site in southern Wales.

Whitelead factory. A facility designed to manufacture lead carbonate, a deadly powder that was once used as a pigment for paint. Needless to say, working in such a plant during the Victorian era was a highly hazardous endeavor.

Nine shillings a week = Works out to roughly \$35.00/week in today’s currency.

Deptford. An impoverished industrial area east of London along the Thames, where Christopher Marlowe was murdered.

Victualling yard. A dockyard where ships were provisioned.

Eighteen shillings = Approximately \$70.00 today.

Waterloo Bridge. Built in 1817 as a memorial to Britain’s great victory over Napoleon at Waterloo in Belgium, Waterloo Bridge lies just upriver from Blackfriars Bridge spanning the River Thames in London. Its strategic location at the bend in the Thames gives it magnificent views of the City and Westminster, making it an ideal spot for sightseeing, romantic meetings and, apparently, suicides.

Scullery maid. A traditional household maid, principally responsible for cleaning and organizing the cutlery and flatware.

Waterloo Station. Like the bridge above, it was named in honor of Britain’s victory at Waterloo. It was built in the Lambeth district on the South Bank and served as both a major transportation hub, mainly to the southern counties and Europe, as a form of Victorian urban renewal. Its construction was purposely sited within one of London’s more notorious neighborhoods with intention of displacing the troublesome population and solving the immediate problem. Inevitably, it only made matters worse by forcing these homeless people into other London neighborhoods. To this day it remains the main terminus for most of the rail traffic to and from the continent, including the Eurostar “chunnel” train to Paris.

Four shillings = Worth about \$15.00 today.

Sovereign. A gold coin worth one pound.

Winchester. Once the capital of England in the 10th and 11th centuries, Winchester is located near the southern coast in the county of Hampshire. Its cathedral is one of the largest in Europe. The city is renowned as a bucolic retreat from the hustle and bustle of London.

Act Three

The Standard. One of London's major newspapers published between 1827 and 1916 as a morning paper with a conservative political bent. Since the 1960s it has been known as The Evening Standard.

Few hundred siphons. Siphon in this instance is short for "siphon-bottle" which was a Victorian term for a bottle filled with aerated water. In other words, several hundred bottles of soda water.

Freemasonry. In other words, as secretive as the Masons.

£40,000 = An impressive \$6,490,000.00 today.

Girtons. Another Cambridge College devoted at that time to the education of women only.

Duke of Belgravia. No such peerage exists. In fact, Shaw is making a joke referring to Belgravia, which is a wealthy section of Westminster, southwest of Buckingham Palace and home to many foreign embassies.

Archbishop of Canterbury. The administrative head of the Church of England.

Ecclesiastical Commissioners. These are Church of England members who are mainly responsible for the overseeing and disbursement of church revenues. Typically they include the Archbishop of Canterbury, all bishops, other assorted clergy, as well as a number of laypeople.

Publicans. A publican is a proprietor of a pub.

Croakers. A croaker is a person who grumbles and habitually predicts evil.

Act Four

New Stone Buildings. This is an actual street running parallel to Chancery Lane (see below), along the east side of Lincoln's Inn, where many of the finest legal firms in the country are housed.

Lincoln's Inn. One of London's Inns of Court, dating back to the middle ages, it is where the elite of Britain's legal profession train and hold chambers.

Primrose Hill. Located north of Regent's Park on the north side of London, Primrose Hill and the surrounding area have long been a very fashionable residential section.

Richmond. A picturesque suburb of London located about 8 miles west of the City along the Thames.

Farthing = One fourth or quarter of a penny = Worth about \$0.16 today.

Holborn Viaduct. Holborn Viaduct is both a bridge and a road that connects Holborn, immediately west of the City of London to Newgate, crossing over the long-buried Fleet River, just west of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Shilling = One twentieth of a pound = Worth about \$3.75 today.

"...cathedral town..." Mrs. Warrens' sister retired to the cathedral town of Winchester, as mentioned in Act One. Clearly, she doesn't find such a town appealing.

Rooks. Rooks are Old World birds that resemble crows and tend to flock and nest in large numbers at the tops of trees.

A Shaw and Mrs. Warren's Timeline

- 1856 George Bernard Shaw is born in Dublin, Ireland
- 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act established divorce courts. Women allowed limited access to divorce for causes other than adultery. Women were also allowed to repossess their property after a legal separation.
- 1866 Shaw's parents live in a ménage à trois with music teacher Vandeleur Lee.
- 1870 Married Women's Property Act of 1870 allowed married women to keep up to £200 of their own earnings.
- 1871 Shaw drops out of school at 15 and becomes a clerk.
- 1873 Shaw's mother leaves her husband and moves to London with Vandeleur Lee
- 1876 Shaw moves to London to join his mother and publishes his first musical criticism.
- 1879 Shaw writes first novel, *Immaturity* – not published until 1930.
Somerville and Lady Margaret Colleges (for women) founded at Oxford.
- 1881 Cambridge Tripos exams opened to women. Shaw becomes a vegetarian.
- 1882 The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 allowed all married women to continue as the separate owners and administrators of their property after marriage. It also enabled women to buy, own, and sell property, and to keep their own earnings.
- 1884 Shaw becomes an early member of the Fabian Society
- 1887 Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.
- 1889 London dock workers and match girls strike for 6d./hour.
- 1891 Shaw publishes *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*
- 1892 Shaw begins an affair with May Morris, who is also having an affair with Henry Halliday Sparling.



May Morris, Henry Halliday Sparling, Emery Walker, and GBS--circa 1893

- 1893 Shaw completes *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. It is denied a license by the Lord Chamberlain.
- 1894 *Arms and the Man* is Shaw's first professionally produced play. Writes *Candida*
- 1896 *You Never Can Tell* and *The Devil's Disciple*
- 1897 Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.
- 1898 Shaw marries Charlotte Payne-Townshend and publishes his first anthology of plays entitled *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is included among the "unpleasant" plays.



Charlotte Payne-Townsend Shaw

- 1901 Victoria dies; Edward Prince of Wales succeeds.
- 1902 *Man and Superman* completed; first performed in 1903.
- 1902 *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is given a private performance in London.
- 1905 *Mrs. Warren's Profession* opens in New York City. Play is closed for violating city decency laws. Producer Arnold Daly and leading lady Mary Shaw (no relation to GBS) are arrested, but eventually acquitted.
- 1906 *The Doctor's Dilemma*
- 1907 Mary Shaw reopens *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in New York with no trouble.
- 1910 Accession of George V.
- 1913 *Pygmalion* completed; First performed in England in 1914.
- 1913 Shaw develops an infatuation with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who plays Eliza in *Pygmalion*.



Mrs. Patrick Campbell

- 1914-18 First World War
- 1918 Representation of the People Act gave women of property over the age of 30 the right to vote. It also gave all men over the age of 21 the right to vote.
- 1919 *Heartbreak House*
- 1923 *Saint Joan* written and performed.
- 1925 *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is finally produced on the London stage.
- 1926 Shaw awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.



Shaw in his Jaeger suit

1928 Women granted full equality regarding suffrage.

1929 Stock market crash and the start of the great depression.

1936 Accession and abdication of Edward VIII, accession of George VI.

1939 Shaw wins an Academy Award for his screenplay of *Pygmalion*.

1939-40 Second World War

1947 *Buoyant Billions* (Shaw's last complete play); first performed in England in 1949.

1950 Shaw dies November 2 at Ayot St. Lawrence.

Critical Evaluation of the Play Since 1902

Mrs. Warren's Profession: The Author's Apology

Mrs Warren's Profession has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theatre critics clean out of the practice of their profession. No author who has ever known the exultation of sending the Press into an hysterical tumult of protest, of moral panic, of involuntary and frantic confession of sin, of a horror of conscience in which the power of distinguishing between the work of art on the stage and the real life of the spectator is confused and overwhelmed, will ever care for the stereotyped compliments which every successful farce or melodrama elicits from the newspapers. Give me that critic who rushed from my play to declare furiously that Sir George Crofts ought to be kicked. What a triumph for the actor, thus to reduce a jaded London journalist to the condition of the simple sailor in the Wapping gallery, who shouts execrations at Iago and warnings to Othello not to believe him! But dearer still than such simplicity is that sense of the sudden earthquake shock to the foundations of morality which sends a pallid crowd of critics into the street shrieking that the pillars of society are cracking and the ruin of the State is at hand. Even the Ibsen champions of ten years ago remonstrate with me just as the veterans of those brave days remonstrated with them. Mr Grein, the hardy iconoclast who first launched my plays on the stage alongside Ghosts and The Wild Duck, exclaimed that I have shattered his ideals. Actually his ideals! What would Dr Relling say? And Mr William Archer himself disowns me because I "cannot touch pitch without wallowing in it". Truly my play must be more needed than I knew; and yet I thought I knew how little the others know.

Do not suppose, however, that the consternation of the Press reflects any consternation among the general public. Anybody can upset the theatre critics, in a turn of the wrist, by substituting for the romantic commonplaces of the stage the moral commonplaces of the pulpit, platform, or the library. Play Mrs Warren's Profession to an audience of clerical members of the Christian Social Union and of women well experienced in Rescue, Temperance, and Girls' Club work, and no moral panic will arise; every man and woman present will know that as long as poverty makes virtue hideous and the spare pocket-money of rich bachelordom makes vice dazzling, their daily hand-to-hand fight against prostitution with prayer and persuasion, shelters and scanty alms, will be a losing one. There was a time when they were able to urge that though "the white-lead factory where Anne Jane was poisoned" may be a far more terrible place than Mrs Warren's house, yet hell is still more dreadful. Nowadays they no longer believe in hell; and the girls among whom they are working know that they do not believe in it, and would laugh at them if they did. So well have the rescuers learnt that Mrs Warren's defence of herself and indictment of society is the thing that most needs saying, that those who know me personally reproach me, not for writing this play, but for wasting my energies on "pleasant plays" for the amusement of frivolous people, when I can build up such excellent stage sermons on their own work. Mrs Warren's Profession is the one play of

mine which I could submit to a censorship without doubt of the result; only, it must not be the censorship of the minor theatre critic, nor of an innocent court official like the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner, much less of people who consciously profit by Mrs Warren's profession, or who personally make use of it, or who hold the widely whispered view that it is an indispensable safety-valve for the protection of domestic virtue, or, above all, who are smitten with a sentimental affection for our fallen sister, and would "take her up tenderly, lift her with care, fashioned so slenderly, young, and SO fair." Nor am I prepared to accept the verdict of the medical gentlemen who would compulsorily sanitise and register Mrs Warren, whilst leaving Mrs Warren's patrons, especially her military patrons, free to destroy her health and anybody else's without fear of reprisals. But I should be quite content to have my play judged by, say, a joint committee of the Central Vigilance Society and the Salvation Army. And the sterner moralists the members of the committee were, the better.

Some of the journalists I have shocked reason so unripely that they will gather nothing from this but a confused notion that I am accusing the National Vigilance Association and the Salvation Army of complicity in my own scandalous immorality. It will seem to them that people who would stand this play would stand anything. They are quite mistaken. Such an audience as I have described would be revolted by many of our fashionable plays. They would leave the theatre convinced that the Plymouth Brother who still regards the playhouse as one of the gates of hell is perhaps the safest adviser on the subject of which he knows so little. If I do not draw the same conclusion, it is not because I am one of those who claim that art is exempt from moral obligations, and deny that the writing or performance of a play is a moral act, to be treated on exactly the same footing as theft or murder if it produces equally mischievous consequences. I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective instrument of moral propaganda in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct; and I waive even this exception in favor of the art of the stage, because it works by exhibiting examples of personal conduct made intelligible and moving to crowds of unobservant, unreflecting people to whom real life means nothing. I have pointed out again and again that the influence of the theatre in England is growing so great that whilst private conduct, religion, law, science, politics, and morals are becoming more and more theatrical, the theatre itself remains impervious to common sense, religion, science, politics, and morals. That is why I fight the theatre, not with pamphlets and sermons and treatises, but with plays; and so effective do I find the dramatic method that I have no doubt I shall at last persuade even London to take its conscience and its brains with it when it goes to the theatre, instead of leaving them at home with its prayer-book as it does at present. Consequently, I am the last man in the world to deny that if the net effect of performing Mrs Warren's Profession were an increase in the number of persons entering that profession, its performance should be dealt with accordingly.

Now let us consider how such recruiting can be encouraged by the theatre. Nothing is easier. Let the King's Reader of Plays, backed by the Press, make an unwritten but perfectly well understood regulation that members of Mrs Warren's profession shall be tolerated on the stage only when they are beautiful, exquisitely dressed, and sumptuously

lodged and fed; also that they shall, at the end of the play, die of consumption to the sympathetic tears of the whole audience, or step into the next room to commit suicide, or at least be turned out by their protectors and passed on to be "redeemed" by old and faithful lovers who have adored them in spite of their levities. Naturally, the poorer girls in the gallery will believe in the beauty, in the exquisite dresses, and the luxurious living, and will see that there is no real necessity for the consumption, the suicide, or the ejection: mere pious forms, all of them, to save the Censor's face. Even if these purely official catastrophes carried any conviction, the majority of English girls remain so poor, so dependent, so well aware that the drudgeries of such honest work as is within their reach are likely enough to lead them eventually to lung disease, premature death, and domestic desertion or brutality, that they would still see reason to prefer the primrose path to the strait path of virtue, since both, vice at worst and virtue at best, lead to the same end in poverty and overwork. It is true that the Board School mistress will tell you that only girls of a certain kind will reason in this way. But alas! that certain kind turns out on inquiry to be simply the pretty, dainty kind: that is, the only kind that gets the chance of acting on such reasoning. Read the first report of the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes [Bluebook C 4402, 8d., 1889]; read the Report on Home Industries (sacred word, Home!) issued by the Women's Industrial Council [Home Industries of Women in London, 1897, 1s., 12 Buckingham Street, W. C.]; and ask yourself whether, if the lot in life therein described were your lot in life, you would not prefer the lot of Cleopatra, of Theodora, of the Lady of the Camellias, of Mrs Tanqueray, of Zaza, of Iris. If you can go deep enough into things to be able to say no, how many ignorant half-starved girls will believe you are speaking sincerely? To them the lot of Iris is heavenly in comparison with their own. Yet our King, like his predecessors, says to the dramatist, "Thus, and thus only, shall you present Mrs Warren's profession on the stage, or you shall starve. Witness Shaw, who told the untempting truth about it, and whom We, by the Grace of God, accordingly disallow and suppress, and do what in Us lies to silence." Fortunately, Shaw cannot be silenced. "The harlot's cry from street to street" is louder than the voices of all the kings. I am not dependent on the theatre, and cannot be starved into making my play a standing advertisement of the attractive side of Mrs Warren's business.

Here I must guard myself against a misunderstanding. It is not the fault of their authors that the long string of wanton's tragedies, from Antony and Cleopatra to Iris, are snares to poor girls, and are objected to on that account by many earnest men and women who consider Mrs Warren's Profession an excellent sermon. Mr Pinero is in no way bound to suppress the fact that his Iris is a person to be envied by millions of better women. If he made his play false to life by inventing fictitious disadvantages for her, he would be acting as unscrupulously as any tract writer. If society chooses to provide for its Irises better than for its working women, it must not expect honest playwrights to manufacture spurious evidence to save its credit. The mischief lies in the deliberate suppression of the other side of the case: the refusal to allow Mrs Warren to expose the drudgery and repulsiveness of plying for hire among coarse, tedious drunkards; the determination not to let the Parisian girl in Brieux's *Les Avaries* come on the stage and drive into people's minds what her diseases mean for her and for themselves. All that, says the King's Reader

in effect, is horrifying, loathsome.

Precisely: what does he expect it to be? would he have us represent it as beautiful and gratifying? The answer to this question, I fear, must be a blunt Yes; for it seems impossible to root out of an Englishman's mind the notion that vice is delightful, and that abstention from it is privation. At all events, as long as the tempting side of it is kept towards the public, and softened by plenty of sentiment and sympathy, it is welcomed by our Censor, whereas the slightest attempt to place it in the light of the policeman's lantern or the Salvation Army shelter is checkmated at once as not merely disgusting, but, if you please, unnecessary.

Everybody will, I hope, admit that this state of things is intolerable; that the subject of Mrs Warren's profession must be either tapu altogether, or else exhibited with the warning side as freely displayed as the tempting side. But many persons will vote for a complete tapu, and an impartial sweep from the boards of Mrs Warren and Gretchen and the rest; in short, for banishing the sexual instincts from the stage altogether. Those who think this impossible can hardly have considered the number and importance of the subjects which are actually banished from the stage. Many plays, among them Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Julius Caesar, have no sex complications: the thread of their action can be followed by children who could not understand a single scene of Mrs Warren's Profession or Iris. None of our plays rouse the sympathy of the audience by an exhibition of the pains of maternity, as Chinese plays constantly do. Each nation has its own particular set of tapus in addition to the common human stock; and though each of these tapus limits the scope of the dramatist, it does not make drama impossible. If the Examiner were to refuse to license plays with female characters in them, he would only be doing to the stage what our tribal customs already do to the pulpit and the bar. I have myself written a rather entertaining play with only one woman in it, and she is quite heartwhole; and I could just as easily write a play without a woman in it at all. I will even go so far as to promise the Mr Redford my support if he will introduce this limitation for part of the year, say during Lent, so as to make a close season for that dullest of stock dramatic subjects, adultery, and force our managers and authors to find out what all great dramatists find out spontaneously: to wit, that people who sacrifice every other consideration to love are as hopelessly unheroic on the stage as lunatics or dipsomaniacs. Hector is the world's hero; not Paris nor Antony.

But though I do not question the possibility of a drama in which love should be as effectively ignored as cholera is at present, there is not the slightest chance of that way out of the difficulty being taken by the Mr Redford. If he attempted it there would be a revolt in which he would be swept away in spite of my singlehanded efforts to defend him. A complete tapu is politically impossible. A complete toleration is equally impossible to Mr Redford, because his occupation would be gone if there were no tapu to enforce. He is therefore compelled to maintain the present compromise of a partial tapu, applied, to the best of his judgement, with a careful respect to persons and to public opinion. And a very sensible English solution of the difficulty, too, most readers will say.

I should not dispute it if dramatic poets really were what English public opinion generally assumes them to be during their lifetime: that is, a licentious irregular group to be kept in order in a rough and ready way by a magistrate who will stand no nonsense from them. But I cannot admit that the class represented by Eschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides, Shakespear, Goethe, Ibsen, and Tolstoy, not to mention our own contemporary playwrights, is as much in place in Mr Redford's office as a pickpocket is in Bow Street. Further, it is not true that the Censorship, though it certainly suppresses Ibsen and Tolstoy, and would suppress Shakespear but for the absurd rule that a play once licensed is always licensed (so that Wycherly is permitted and Shelley prohibited), also suppresses unscrupulous playwrights. I challenge Mr Redford to mention any extremity of sexual misconduct which any manager in his senses would risk presenting on the London stage that has not been presented under his license and that of his predecessor. The compromise, in fact, works out in practice in favor of loose plays as against earnest ones.

To carry conviction on this point, I will take the extreme course of narrating the plots of two plays witnessed within the last ten years by myself at London West End theatres, one licensed by the late Queen Victoria's Reader of Plays, the other by the present Reader to the King. Both plots conform to the strictest rules of the period when *La Dame aux Camellias* was still a forbidden play, and when *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* would have been tolerated only on condition that she carefully explained to the audience that when she met Captain Ardale she sinned "but in intention."

Play number one. A prince is compelled by his parents to marry the daughter of a neighboring king, but loves another maiden. The scene represents a hall in the king's palace at night. The wedding has taken place that day; and the closed door of the nuptial chamber is in view of the audience. Inside, the princess awaits her bridegroom. A duenna is in attendance. The bridegroom enters. His sole desire is to escape from a marriage which is hateful to him. An idea strikes him. He will assault the duenna, and get ignominiously expelled from the palace by his indignant father-in-law. To his horror, when he proceeds to carry out this stratagem, the duenna, far from raising an alarm, is flattered, delighted, and compliant. The assaulter becomes the assaulted. He flings her angrily to the ground, where she remains placidly. He flies. The father enters; dismisses the duenna; and listens at the keyhole of his daughter's nuptial chamber, uttering various pleasantries, and declaring, with a shiver, that a sound of kissing, which he supposes to proceed from within, makes him feel young again.

In deprecation of the scandalized astonishment with which such a story as this will be read, I can only say that it was not presented on the stage until its propriety had been certified by the chief officer of the Queen of England's household.

Story number two. A German officer finds himself in an inn with a French lady who has wounded his national vanity. He resolves to humble her by committing a rape upon her. He announces his purpose. She remonstrates, implores, flies to the doors and finds them locked, calls for help and finds none at hand, runs screaming from side to side, and, after

a harrowing scene, is overpowered and faints. Nothing further being possible on the stage without actual felony, the officer then relents and leaves her. When she recovers, she believes that he has carried out his threat; and during the rest of the play she is represented as vainly vowing vengeance upon him, whilst she is really falling in love with him under the influence of his imaginary crime against her. Finally she consents to marry him; and the curtain falls on their happiness.

This story was certified by the present King's Reader, acting for the Lord Chamberlain, as void in its general tendency of "anything immoral or otherwise improper for the stage." But let nobody conclude therefore that Mr Redford is a monster, whose policy it is to deprave the theatre. As a matter of fact, both the above stories are strictly in order from the official point of view. The incidents of sex which they contain, though carried in both to the extreme point at which another step would be dealt with, not by the King's Reader, but by the police, do not involve adultery, nor any allusion to Mrs Warren's profession, nor to the fact that the children of any polyandrous group will, when they grow up, inevitably be confronted, as those of Mrs Warren's group are in my play, with the insoluble problem of their own possible consanguinity. In short, by depending wholly on the coarse humors and the physical fascination of sex, they comply with all the formulable requirements of the Censorship, whereas plays in which these humors and fascinations are discarded, and the social problems created by sex seriously faced and dealt with, inevitably ignore the official formula and are suppressed. If the old rule against the exhibition of illicit sex relations on stage were revived, and the subject absolutely barred, the only result would be that Antony and Cleopatra, Othello (because of the Bianca episode), Troilus and Cressida, Henry IV, Measure for Measure, Timon of Athens, La Dame aux Camellias, The Profligate, The Second Mrs Tanqueray, The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith, The Gay Lord Quex, Mrs Dane's Defence, and Iris would be swept from the stage, and placed under the same ban as Tolstoy's Dominion of Darkness and Mrs Warren's Profession, whilst such plays as the two described above would have a monopoly of the theatre as far as sexual interest is concerned.

What is more, the repulsiveness of the worst of the certified plays would protect the Censorship against effective exposure and criticism. Not long ago an American Review of high standing asked me for an article on the Censorship of the English stage. I replied that such an article would involve passages too disagreeable for publication in a magazine for general family reading. The editor persisted nevertheless; but not until he had declared his readiness to face this, and had pledged himself to insert the article unaltered (the particularity of the pledge extending even to a specification of the exact number of words in the article) did I consent to the proposal. What was the result?

The editor, confronted with the two stories given above, threw his pledge to the winds, and, instead of returning the article, printed it with the illustrative examples omitted, and nothing left but the argument from political principles against the Censorship. In doing this he fired my broadside after withdrawing the cannon balls; for neither the Censor nor any other Englishman, except perhaps Mr Leslie Stephen and a few other veterans of the

dwindling old guard of Benthamism, cares a damn about political principle. The ordinary Briton thinks that if every other Briton is not kept under some form of tutelage, the more childish the better, he will abuse his freedom viciously. As far as its principle is concerned, the Censorship is the most popular institution in England; and the playwright who criticizes it is slighted as a blackguard agitating for impunity. Consequently nothing can really shake the confidence of the public in the Lord Chamberlain's department except a remorseless and unbowdlerized narration of the licentious fictions which slip through its net, and are hallmarked by it with the approval of the Throne. But since these narrations cannot be made public without great difficulty, owing to the obligation an editor is under not to deal unexpectedly with matters that are not *virginibus puerisque*, the chances are heavily in favor of the Censor escaping all remonstrance. With the exception of such comments as I was able to make in my own critical articles in *The World* and *The Saturday Review* when the pieces I have described were first produced, and a few ignorant protests by churchmen against much better plays which they confessed they had not seen nor read, nothing has been said in the press that could seriously disturb the easygoing notion that the stage would be much worse than it admittedly is but for the vigilance of the King's Reader. The truth is, that no manager would dare produce on his own responsibility the pieces he can now get royal certificates for at two guineas per piece.

I hasten to add that I believe these evils to be inherent in the nature of all censorship, and not merely a consequence of the form the institution takes in London. No doubt there is a staggering absurdity in appointing an ordinary clerk to see that the leaders of European literature do not corrupt the morals of the nation, and to restrain Sir Henry Irving, as a rogue and a vagabond, from presuming to impersonate Samson or David on the stage, though any other sort of artist may daub these scriptural figures on a signboard or carve them on a tombstone without hindrance. If the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal Academy of Arts, the Incorporated Law Society, and Convocation were abolished, and their functions handed over to the Mr Redford, the Concert of Europe would presumably declare England mad, and treat her accordingly. Yet, though neither medicine nor painting nor law nor the Church moulds the character of the nation as potently as the theatre does, nothing can come on the stage unless its dimensions admit of its passing through Mr Redford's mind! Pray do not think that I question Mr Redford's honesty. I am quite sure that he sincerely thinks me a blackguard, and my play a grossly improper one, because, like Tolstoy's *Dominion of Darkness*, it produces, as they are both meant to produce, a very strong and very painful impression of evil. I do not doubt for a moment that the rapine play which I have described, and which he licensed, was quite incapable in manuscript of producing any particular effect on his mind at all, and that when he was once satisfied that the ill-conducted hero was a German and not an English officer, he passed the play without studying its moral tendencies. Even if he had undertaken that study, there is no more reason to suppose that he is a competent moralist than there is to suppose that I am a competent mathematician. But truly it does not matter whether he is a moralist or not. Let nobody dream for a moment that what is wrong with the Censorship is the shortcoming of the gentleman who happens at any moment to be acting as Censor. Replace him to-morrow by an Academy of Letters and an Academy of Dramatic Poetry, and the new and enlarged filter will still

exclude original and epoch-making work, whilst passing conventional, old-fashioned, and vulgar work without question. The conclave which compiles the index of the Roman Catholic Church is the most august, ancient, learned, famous, and authoritative censorship in Europe. Is it more enlightened, more liberal, more tolerant than the comparatively infinitesimal office of the Lord Chamberlain? On the contrary, it has reduced itself to a degree of absurdity which makes a Catholic university a contradiction in terms. All censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current concepts, and executed by supplanting existing institutions. Consequently the first condition of progress is the removal of censorships. There is the whole case against censorships in a nutshell.

It will be asked whether theatrical managers are to be allowed to produce what they like, without regard to the public interest. But that is not the alternative. The managers of our London music-halls are not subject to any censorship. They produce their entertainments on their own responsibility, and have no two-guinea certificates to plead if their houses are conducted viciously. They know that if they lose their character, the County Council will simply refuse to renew their license at the end of the year; and nothing in the history of popular art is more amazing than the improvement in music-halls that this simple arrangement has produced within a few years. Place the theatres on the same footing, and we shall promptly have a similar revolution: a whole class of frankly blackguardly plays, in which unscrupulous low comedians attract crowds to gaze at bevvies of girls who have nothing to exhibit but their prettiness, will vanish like the obscene songs which were supposed to enliven the squalid dulness, incredible to the younger generation, of the music-halls fifteen years ago. On the other hand, plays which treat sex questions as problems for thought instead of as aphrodisiacs will be freely performed. Gentlemen of Mr Redford's way of thinking will have plenty of opportunity of protesting against them in Council; but the result will be that the Mr Redford will find his natural level; Ibsen and Tolstoy theirs; so no harm will be done.

This question of the Censorship reminds me that I have to apologize to those who went to the recent performance of Mrs Warren's Profession expecting to find it what I have just called an aphrodisiac. That was not my fault; it was Mr Redford's. After the specimens I have given of the tolerance of his department, it was natural enough for thoughtless people to infer that a play which overstepped his indulgence must be a very exciting play indeed. Accordingly, I find one critic so explicit as to the nature of his disappointment as to say candidly that "such airy talk as there is upon the matter is utterly unworthy of acceptance as being a representation of what people with blood in them think or do on such occasions." Thus am I crushed between the upper millstone of the Mr Redford, who thinks me a libertine, and the nether popular critic, who thinks me a prude. Critics of all grades and ages, middle-aged fathers of families no less than ardent young enthusiasts, are equally indignant with me. They revile me as lacking in passion, in feeling, in manhood. Some of them even sum the matter up by denying me any dramatic power: a melancholy betrayal of what dramatic power has come to mean on our stage under the Censorship! Can I be expected to refrain from laughing at the spectacle of a number of respectable gentlemen lamenting because a playwright lures them to the theatre by a

promise to excite their senses in a very special and sensational manner, and then, having successfully trapped them in exceptional numbers, proceeds to ignore their senses and ruthlessly improve their minds? But I protest again that the lure was not mine. The play had been in print for four years; and I have spared no pains to make known that my plays are built to induce, not voluptuous reverie but intellectual interest, not romantic rhapsody but humane concern. Accordingly, I do not find those critics who are gifted with intellectual appetite and political conscience complaining of want of dramatic power. Rather do they protest, not altogether unjustly, against a few relapses into staginess and caricature which betray the young playwright and the old playgoer in this early work of mine.

As to the voluptuaries, I can assure them that the playwright, whether he be myself or another, will always disappoint them. The drama can do little to delight the senses: all the apparent instances to the contrary are instances of the personal fascination of the performers. The drama of pure feeling is no longer in the hands of the playwright: it has been conquered by the musician, after whose enchantments all the verbal arts seem cold and tame. Romeo and Juliet with the loveliest Juliet is dry, tedious, and rhetorical in comparison with Wagner's Tristan, even though Isolde be both fourteen stone and forty, as she often is in Germany. Indeed, it needed no Wagner to convince the public of this. The voluptuous sentimentality of Gounod's Faust and Bizet's Carmen has captured the common playgoer; and there is, flatly, no future now for any drama without music except the drama of thought. The attempt to produce a genus of opera without music (and this absurdity is what our fashionable theatres have been driving at for a long time without knowing it) is far less hopeful than my own determination to accept problem as the normal material of the drama.

That this determination will throw me into a long conflict with our theatre critics, and with the few playgoers who go to the theatre as often as the critics, I well know; but I am too well equipped for the strife to be deterred by it, or to bear malice towards the losing side. In trying to produce the sensuous effects of opera, the fashionable drama has become so flaccid in its sentimentality, and the intellect of its frequenters so atrophied by disuse, that the reintroduction of problem, with its remorseless logic and iron framework of fact, inevitably produces at first an overwhelming impression of coldness and inhuman rationalism. But this will soon pass away. When the intellectual muscle and moral nerve of the critics has been developed in the struggle with modern problem plays, the pettish luxuriousness of the clever ones, and the sulky sense of disadvantaged weakness in the sentimental ones, will clear away; and it will be seen that only in the problem play is there any real drama, because drama is no mere setting up of the camera to nature: it is the presentation in parable of the conflict between Man's will and his environment: in a word, of problem. The vapidness of such drama as the pseudo-operatic plays contain lies in the fact that in them animal passion, sentimentally diluted, is shewn in conflict, not with real circumstances, but with a set of conventions and assumptions half of which do not exist off the stage, whilst the other half can either be evaded by a pretence of compliance or defied with complete impunity by any reasonably strong-minded person. Nobody can feel that such conventions are really compulsory; and consequently nobody

can believe in the stage pathos that accepts them as an inexorable fate, or in the genuineness of the people who indulge in such pathos. Sitting at such plays, we do not believe: we make-believe. And the habit of make-believe becomes at last so rooted that criticism of the theatre insensibly ceases to be criticism at all, and becomes more and more a chronicle of the fashionable enterprises of the only realities left on the stage: that is, the performers in their own persons. In this phase the playwright who attempts to revive genuine drama produces the disagreeable impression of the pedant who attempts to start a serious discussion at a fashionable at-home. Later on, when he has driven the tea services out and made the people who had come to use the theatre as a drawing-room understand that it is they and not the dramatist who are the intruders, he has to face the accusation that his plays ignore human feeling, an illusion produced by that very resistance of fact and law to human feeling which creates drama. It is the *_deus ex machina_* who, by suspending that resistance, makes the fall of the curtain an immediate necessity, since drama ends exactly where resistance ends. Yet the introduction of this resistance produces so strong an impression of heartlessness nowadays that a distinguished critic has summed up the impression made on him by Mrs Warren's Profession, by declaring that "the difference between the spirit of Tolstoy and the spirit of Mr Shaw is the difference between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Euclid." But the epigram would be as good if Tolstoy's name were put in place of mine and D'Annunzio's in place of Tolstoy. At the same time I accept the enormous compliment to my reasoning powers with sincere complacency; and I promise my flatterer that when he is sufficiently accustomed to and therefore undazzled by problem on the stage to be able to attend to the familiar factor of humanity in it as well as to the unfamiliar one of a real environment, he will both see and feel that Mrs Warren's Profession is no mere theorem, but a play of instincts and temperaments in conflict with each other and with a flinty social problem that never yields an inch to mere sentiment.

I go further than this. I declare that the real secret of the cynicism and inhumanity of which shallower critics accuse me is the unexpectedness with which my characters behave like human beings, instead of conforming to the romantic logic of the stage. The axioms and postulates of that dreary mimanthropometry are so well known that it is almost impossible for its slaves to write tolerable last acts to their plays, so conventionally do their conclusions follow from their premises. Because I have thrown this logic ruthlessly overboard, I am accused of ignoring, not stage logic, but, of all things, human feeling. People with completely theatrified imaginations tell me that no girl would treat her mother as Vivie Warren does, meaning that no stage heroine would in a popular sentimental play. They say this just as they might say that no two straight lines would enclose a space. They do not see how completely inverted their vision has become even when I throw its preposterousness in their faces, as I repeatedly do in this very play. Praed, the sentimental artist (fool that I was not to make him a theatre critic instead of an architect!) burlesques them by expecting all through the piece that the feelings of others will be logically deducible from their family relationships and from his "conventionally unconventional" social code. The sarcasm is lost on the critics: they, saturated with the same logic, only think him the sole sensible person on the stage. Thus it comes about that the more completely the dramatist is emancipated from the illusion that men and women are primarily reasonable beings, and the more powerfully he insists on the ruthless

indifference of their great dramatic antagonist, the external world, to their whims and emotions, the surer he is to be denounced as blind to the very distinction on which his whole work is built. Far from ignoring idiosyncrasy, will, passion, impulse, whim, as factors in human action, I have placed them so nakedly on the stage that the elderly citizen, accustomed to see them clothed with the veil of manufactured logic about duty, and to disguise even his own impulses from himself in this way, finds the picture as unnatural as Carlyle's suggested painting of parliament sitting without its clothes.

I now come to those critics who, intellectually baffled by the problem in Mrs Warren's Profession, have made a virtue of running away from it. I will illustrate their method by quotation from Dickens, taken from the fifth chapter of Our Mutual Friend:

"Hem!" began Wegg. "This, Mr Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the Decline and Fall off ---" here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

"What's the matter, Wegg?"

"Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir," said Wegg with an air of insinuating frankness (having first again looked hard at the book), that you made a little mistake this morning, which I had meant to set you right in; only something put it out of my head. I think you said Rooshan Empire, sir?"

"It is Rooshan; ain't it, Wegg?"

"No, sir. Roman. Roman."

"What's the difference, Wegg?"

"The difference, sir?" Mr Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. "The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

Mr Wegg thus came out of his disadvantage with quite a chivalrous air, and not only that, but by dint of repeating with a manly delicacy, "In Mrs Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it!" turned the disadvantage on Boffin, who felt that he had committed himself in a very painful manner.

I am willing to let Mr Wegg drop it on these terms, provided I am allowed to mention here that Mrs Warren's Profession is a play for women; that it was written for women; that it has been performed and produced mainly through the determination of women that it should be performed and produced; that the enthusiasm of women made its first performance excitingly successful; and that not one of these women had any inducement to support it except their belief in the timeliness and the power of the lesson the play teaches. Those who were "surprised to see ladies present" were men; and when they proceeded to explain that the journals they represented could not possibly demoralize the public by describing such a play, their editors cruelly devoted the space saved by their delicacy to an elaborate and respectful account of the progress of a young lord's attempt to break the bank at Monte Carlo. A few days sooner Mrs Warren would have been crowded out of their papers by an exceptionally abominable police case. I do not suggest that the police case should have been suppressed; but neither do I believe that regard for public morality had anything to do with their failure to grapple with the performance by the Stage Society. And, after all, there was no need to fall back on Silas Wegg's subterfuge. Several critics saved the faces of their papers easily enough by the simple expedient of saying all they had to say in the tone of a shocked governess lecturing a naughty child. To them I might plead, in Mrs Warren's words, "Well, it's only good manners to be ashamed, dearie;" but it surprises me, recollecting as I do the effect produced by Miss Fanny Brough's delivery of that line, that gentlemen who shivered like violets in a zephyr as it swept through them, should so completely miss the full width of its application as to go home and straightway make a public exhibition of mock modesty.

My old Independent Theatre manager, Mr Grein, besides that reproach to me for shattering his ideals, complains that Mrs Warren is not wicked enough, and names several romancers who would have clothed her black soul with all the terrors of tragedy. I have no doubt they would; but if you please, my dear Grein, that is just what I did not want to do. Nothing would please our sanctimonious British public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs Warren's profession on Mrs Warren herself. Now the whole aim of my play is to throw that guilt on the British public itself. You may remember that when you produced my first play, Widowers' Houses, exactly the same misunderstanding arose. When the virtuous young gentleman rose up in wrath against the slum landlord, the slum landlord very effectively shewed him that slums are the product, not of individual Harpagoes, but of the indifference of virtuous young gentlemen to the condition of the city they live in, provided they live at the west end of it on money earned by someone else's labor. The notion that prostitution is created by the wickedness of Mrs Warren is as silly as the notion--prevalent, nevertheless, to some extent in Temperance circles--that drunkenness is created by the wickedness of the publican. Mrs Warren is not a whit a worse woman than the reputable daughter who cannot endure her. Her indifference to the ultimate social consequences of her means of making money, and her discovery of that means by the ordinary method of taking the line of least resistance to getting it, are too common in English society to call for any special remark. Her vitality, her thrift, her energy, her outspokenness, her wise care of her daughter, and the managing capacity which has enabled her and her sister to climb from the fried fish shop down by the Mint to the establishments of which she boasts, are all high English social virtues. Her defence of herself is so overwhelming that it provokes the St James Gazette to declare that "the

tendency of the play is wholly evil" because "it contains one of the boldest and most specious defences of an immoral life for poor women that has ever been penned." Happily the St James Gazette here speaks in its haste. Mrs Warren's defence of herself is not only bold and specious, but valid and unanswerable. But it is no defence at all of the vice which she organizes. It is no defence of an immoral life to say that the alternative offered by society collectively to poor women is a miserable life, starved, overworked, fetid, ailing, ugly. Though it is quite natural and RIGHT for Mrs Warren to choose what is, according to her lights, the least immoral alternative, it is none the less infamous of society to offer such alternatives. For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality. The man who cannot see that starvation, overwork, dirt, and disease are as anti-social as prostitution-- that they are the vices and crimes of a nation, and not merely its misfortunes--is (to put it as politely as possible) a hopelessly Private Person.

The notion that Mrs Warren must be a fiend is only an example of the violence and passion which the slightest reference to sex arouses in undisciplined minds, and which makes it seem natural for our lawgivers to punish silly and negligible indecencies with a ferocity unknown in dealing with, for example, ruinous financial swindling. Had my play been titled Mr Warren's Profession, and Mr Warren been a bookmaker, nobody would have expected me to make him a villain as well. Yet gambling is a vice, and bookmaking an institution, for which there is absolutely nothing to be said. The moral and economic evil done by trying to get other people's money without working for it (and this is the essence of gambling) is not only enormous but uncompensated. There are no two sides to the question of gambling, no circumstances which force us to tolerate it lest its suppression lead to worse things, no consensus of opinion among responsible classes, such as magistrates and military commanders, that it is a necessity, no Athenian records of gambling made splendid by the talents of its professors, no contention that instead of violating morals it only violates a legal institution which is in many respects oppressive and unnatural, no possible plea that the instinct on which it is founded is a vital one. Prostitution can confuse the issue with all these excuses: gambling has none of them. Consequently, if Mrs Warren must needs be a demon, a bookmaker must be a cacodemon. Well, does anybody who knows the sporting world really believe that bookmakers are worse than their neighbors? On the contrary, they have to be a good deal better; for in that world nearly everybody whose social rank does not exclude such an occupation would be a bookmaker if he could; but the strength of character for handling large sums of money and for strict settlements and unflinching payment of losses is so rare that successful bookmakers are rare too. It may seem that at least public spirit cannot be one of a bookmaker's virtues; but I can testify from personal experience that excellent public work is done with money subscribed by bookmakers. It is true that there are abysses in bookmaking: for example, welshing. Mr Grein hints that there are abysses in Mrs Warren's profession also. So there are in every profession: the error lies in supposing that every member of them sounds these depths. I sit on a public body which prosecutes Mrs Warren zealously; and I can assure Mr Grein that she is often leniently dealt with because she has conducted her business "respectably" and held herself above its vilest branches. The degrees in infamy are as numerous and as scrupulously observed as the degrees in the peerage: the moralist's notion that there are depths at which the moral

atmosphere ceases is as delusive as the rich man's notion that there are no social jealousies or snobberies among the very poor. No: had I drawn Mrs Warren as a fiend in human form, the very people who now rebuke me for flattering her would probably be the first to deride me for deducing her character logically from occupation instead of observing it accurately in society.

One critic is so enslaved by this sort of logic that he calls my portraiture of the Reverend Samuel Gardner an attack on religion.

According to this view Subaltern Iago is an attack on the army, Sir John Falstaff an attack on knighthood, and King Claudius an attack on royalty. Here again the clamor for naturalness and human feeling, raised by so many critics when they are confronted by the real thing on the stage, is really a clamor for the most mechanical and superficial sort of logic. The dramatic reason for making the clergyman what Mrs Warren calls "an old stick-in-the-mud," whose son, in spite of much capacity and charm, is a cynically worthless member of society, is to set up a mordant contrast between him and the woman of infamous profession, with her well brought-up, straightforward, hardworking daughter. The critics who have missed the contrast have doubtless observed often enough that many clergymen are in the Church through no genuine calling, but simply because, in circles which can command preferment, it is the refuge of "the fool of the family"; and that clergymen's sons are often conspicuous reactionists against the restraints imposed on them in childhood by their father's profession. These critics must know, too, from history if not from experience, that women as unscrupulous as Mrs Warren have distinguished themselves as administrators and rulers, both commercially and politically. But both observation and knowledge are left behind when journalists go to the theatre. Once in their stalls, they assume that it is "natural" for clergymen to be saintly, for soldiers to be heroic, for lawyers to be hard-hearted, for sailors to be simple and generous, for doctors to perform miracles with little bottles, and for Mrs Warren to be a beast and a demon. All this is not only not natural, but not dramatic. A man's profession only enters into the drama of his life when it comes into conflict with his nature. The result of this conflict is tragic in Mrs Warren's case, and comic in the clergyman's case (at least we are savage enough to laugh at it); but in both cases it is illogical, and in both cases natural. I repeat, the critics who accuse me of sacrificing nature to logic are so sophisticated by their profession that to them logic is nature, and nature absurdity.

Many friendly critics are too little skilled in social questions and moral discussions to be able to conceive that respectable gentlemen like themselves, who would instantly call the police to remove Mrs Warren if she ventured to canvass them personally, could possibly be in any way responsible for her proceedings. They remonstrate sincerely, asking me what good such painful exposures can possibly do. They might as well ask what good Lord Shaftesbury did by devoting his life to the exposure of evils (by no means yet remedied) compared to which the worst things brought into view or even into surmise by this play are trifles. The good of mentioning them is that you make people so extremely uncomfortable about them that they finally stop blaming "human nature" for them, and

begin to support measures for their reform.

Can anything be more absurd than the copy of *The Echo* which contains a notice of the performance of my play? It is edited by a gentleman who, having devoted his life to work of the Shaftesbury type, exposes social evils and clamors for their reform in every column except one; and that one is occupied by the declaration of the paper's kindly theatre critic, that the performance left him "wondering what useful purpose the play was intended to serve." The balance has to be redressed by the more fashionable papers, which usually combine capable art criticism with West-End solecism on politics and sociology. It is very noteworthy, however, on comparing the press explosion produced by *Mrs Warren's Profession* in 1902 with that produced by *Widowers' Houses* about ten years earlier, that whereas in 1892 the facts were frantically denied and the persons of the drama flouted as monsters of wickedness, in 1902 the facts are admitted and the characters recognized, though it is suggested that this is exactly why no gentleman should mention them in public. Only one writer has ventured to imply this time that the poverty mentioned by *Mrs Warren* has since been quietly relieved, and need not have been dragged back to the footlights. I compliment him on his splendid mendacity, in which he is unsupported, save by a little plea in a theatrical paper which is innocent enough to think that ten guineas a year with board and lodging is an impossibly low wage for a barmaid. It goes on to cite Mr Charles Booth as having testified that there are many laborers' wives who are happy and contented on eighteen shillings a week. But I can go further than that myself. I have seen an Oxford agricultural laborer's wife looking cheerful on eight shillings a week; but that does not console me for the fact that agriculture in England is a ruined industry. If poverty does not matter as long as it is contented, then crime does not matter as long as it is unscrupulous. The truth is that it is only then that it does matter most desperately. Many persons are more comfortable when they are dirty than when they are clean; but that does not recommend dirt as a national policy.

Here I must for the present break off my arduous work of educating the Press. We shall resume our studies later on; but just now I am tired of playing the preceptor; and the eager thirst of my pupils for improvement does not console me for the slowness of their progress. Besides, I must reserve space to gratify my own vanity and do justice to the six artists who acted my play, by placing on record the hitherto unchronicled success of the first representation. It is not often that an author, after a couple of hours of those rare alternations of excitement and intensely attentive silence which only occur in the theatre when actors and audience are reacting on one another to the utmost, is able to step on the stage and apply the strong word genius to the representation with the certainty of eliciting an instant and overwhelming assent from the audience. That was my good fortune on the afternoon of Sunday, the fifth of January last. I was certainly extremely fortunate in my interpreters in the enterprise, and that not alone in respect of their artistic talent; for had it not been for their superhuman patience, their imperturbable good humor and good fellowship, there could have been no performance. The terror of the Censor's power gave us trouble enough to break up any ordinary commercial enterprise. Managers promised and even engaged their theatres to us after the most explicit warnings that the play was

unlicensed, and at the last moment suddenly realized that Mr Redford had their livelihoods in the hollow of his hand, and backed out. Over and over again the date and place were fixed and the tickets printed, only to be canceled, until at last the desperate and overworked manager of the Stage Society could only laugh, as criminals broken on the wheel used to laugh at the second stroke. We rehearsed under great difficulties. Christmas pieces and plays for the new year were being produced in all directions; and my six actor colleagues were busy people, with engagements in these pieces in addition to their current professional work every night. On several raw winter days stages for rehearsal were unattainable even by the most distinguished applicants; and we shared corridors and saloons with them whilst the stage was given over to children in training for Boxing night. At last we had to rehearse at an hour at which no actor or actress has been out of bed within the memory of man; and we sardonically congratulated one another every morning on our rosy matutinal looks and the improvement wrought by our early rising in our health and characters. And all this, please observe, for a society without treasury or commercial prestige, for a play which was being denounced in advance as unmentionable, for an author without influence at the fashionable theatres! I victoriously challenge the West End managers to get as much done for interested motives, if they can.

Three causes made the production the most notable that has fallen to my lot. First, the veto of the Censor, which put the supporters of the play on their mettle. Second, the chivalry of the Stage Society, which, in spite of my urgent advice to the contrary, and my demonstration of the difficulties, dangers, and expenses the enterprise would cost, put my discouragements to shame and resolved to give battle at all costs to the attempt of the Censorship to suppress the play. Third, the artistic spirit of the actors, who made the play their own and carried it through triumphantly in spite of a series of disappointments and annoyances much more trying to the dramatic temperament than mere difficulties.

The acting, too, required courage and character as well as skill and intelligence. The veto of the Censor introduced quite a novel element of moral responsibility into the undertaking. And the characters were very unusual on the English stage. The younger heroine is, like her mother, an Englishwoman to the backbone, and not, like the heroines of our fashionable drama, a prima donna of Italian origin. Consequently she was sure to be denounced as unnatural and undramatic by the critics. The most vicious man in the play is not in the least a stage villain; indeed, he regards his own moral character with the sincere complacency of a hero of melodrama. The amiable devotee of romance and beauty is shewn at an age which brings out the futilization which these worships are apt to produce if they are made the staple of life instead of the sauce. The attitude of the clever young people to their elders is faithfully represented as one of pitiless ridicule and unsympathetic criticism, and forms a spectacle incredible to those who, when young, were not cleverer than their nearest elders, and painful to those sentimental parents who shrink from the cruelty of youth, which pardons nothing because it knows nothing. In short, the characters and their relations are of a kind that the routinier critic has not yet learned to place; so that their misunderstanding was a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, there was no hesitation behind the curtain. When it went up at last, a stage much too small for the company was revealed to an auditorium much too small for the audience.

But the players, though it was impossible for them to forget their own discomfort, at once made the spectators forget theirs. It certainly was a model audience, responsive from the first line to the last; and it got no less than it deserved in return.

I grieve to add that the second performance, given for the edification of the London Press and of those members of the Stage Society who cannot attend the Sunday performances, was a less inspiring one than the first. A solid phalanx of theatre-weary journalists in an afternoon humor, most of them committed to irreconcilable disparagement of problem plays, and all of them bound by etiquette to be as undemonstrative as possible, is not exactly the sort of audience that rises at the performers and cures them of the inevitable reaction after an excitingly successful first night. The artist nature is a sensitive and therefore a vindictive one; and masterful players have a way with recalcitrant audiences of rubbing a play into them instead of delighting them with it. I should describe the second performance of Mrs Warren's Profession, especially as to its earlier stages, as decidedly a rubbed-in one. The rubbing was no doubt salutary; but it must have hurt some of the thinner skins. The charm of the lighter passages fled; and the strong scenes, though they again carried everything before them, yet discharged that duty in a grim fashion, doing execution on the enemy rather than moving them to repentance and confession. Still, to those who had not seen the first performance, the effect was sufficiently impressive; and they had the advantage of witnessing a fresh development in Mrs Warren, who, artistically jealous, as I took it, of the overwhelming effect of the end of the second act on the previous day, threw herself into the fourth act in quite a new way, and achieved the apparently impossible feat of surpassing herself. The compliments paid to Miss Fanny Brough by the critics, eulogistic as they are, are the compliments of men three-fourths duped as Partridge was duped by Garrick. By much of her acting they were so completely taken in that they did not recognize it as acting at all. Indeed, none of the six players quite escaped this consequence of their own thoroughness. There was a distinct tendency among the less experienced critics to complain of their sentiments and behavior. Naturally, the author does not share that grievance.

PICCARD'S COTTAGE, JANUARY 1902.

On Mrs Warren's Profession

ANONYMOUS

[Review of *Mrs Warren's Profession*]

[From an unsigned review in the *New York Herald* (October 31, 1905), p. 3.]

'The lid' was lifted by Mr Arnold Daly and 'the limit' of stage indecency reached last

night in the Garrick Theater in the performance of one of Mr George Bernard Shaw's 'unpleasant comedies' called *Mrs Warren's Profession*.

'The limit of indecency' may seem pretty strong words, but they are justified by the fact that the play is morally rotten. It makes no difference that some of the lines may have been omitted and others toned down; there was superabundance of foulness left. The whole story of the play, the atmosphere surrounding it, the incidents, the personalities of the characters are wholly immoral and degenerate. The only way successfully to expurgate *Mrs Warren's Profession* is to cut the whole play out. You cannot have a clean pig sty. The play is an insult to decency because

It defends immorality.

It glorifies debauchery.

It besmirches the sacredness of a clergyman's calling.

It pictures children and parents living in calm observance of most unholy relations.

And, worst of all, it countenances the most revolting form of degeneracy, by flippantly discussing the marriage of brother and sister, father and daughter, and makes the one supposedly moral character of the play, a young girl, declare that choice of shame, instead of poverty is eminently right.

These things cannot be denied. They are the main factors of the story. Without them there would be no play. It is vileness and degeneracy brazenly considered. If New York's sense of shame is not aroused to hot indignation at this theatrical insult, it is indeed in a sad plight.

[There follows a summary of the story of the play.]

Does not this literary muck leave a bad taste in the mouth? Does it not insult the moral intelligence of New York theater-goers and outrage the decency of the New York stage? There was not one redeeming feature about it last night, not one ray of sunshine, of cleanliness, to lighten up the moral darkness of situation and dialogue; not the semblance of a moral lesson pointed. As Letchmere says of his family in *Letty*, 'We are rotten to the core', and the same might be said of the characters in *Mrs Warren's Profession*.

The play was well acted from a technical standpoint by Mr Daly as Frank, Miss Shaw as Mrs Warren, and others of the cast; but while that is ordinarily cause for praise in a performance, it constituted an added sirs to last night's production, for the better it was acted the more the impurity and degeneracy of the characters, the situations and the lines were made apparent. There were a few slight excisions made in the play as written, but what was left filled the house with the ill odor of evil suggestion, where it was not blatantly immoral.

After the third act Mr Daly came before the curtain and made a speech in which he rather floundered as though he had forgotten what was committed to memory. He said that the play should only be seen by grown up people who could not be corrupted. Children might be kept to the old fashioned moral illusions, including Santa Claus and Washington.

'We have many theaters', he went on, 'devoted to plays appealing to the romanticist or child-New York has even provided a hippodrome for such. But surely there should be room in New York for at least one theater devoted to truth, however

disagreeable truth may appear.

`This play is not presented as an entertainment, but as a dramatic sermon and an expose of a social condition and an evil, which our purists attempt to ignore, and by ignoring, allow it to gain strength. If Mr Comstock devoted half the energy and time to providing soft beds, sweet food and clean linen to the poor of New York that he does to the suppression of postal cards, we would have less immorality, for the logical reason that virtue would be robbing vice of its strongest features and attractiveness-comfort and health.

`It is a strange but true thing that everybody who has written to the newspapers, asking that this play be suppressed, has concluded the letter with the quaint statement, "I know the play should be suppressed, although, of course, I have not read the book". God has gifted these mortals with strange powers, indeed.

`If public opinion forces this theater to close and this play to be withdrawn, it will be a sad commentary indeed upon twentieth century so-called civilization and our enlightened new country'.

Then Mr Daly retired amid vociferous applause from the double distilled Shawites present and the speculators who had tickets for sale for to-night-if there is to be any to-night for the play.

1 . A play by A.[rthur] W.[ing] Pinero, produced in 1903 [*Editor*].

APPRENTICESHIP AS A PLAYWRIGHT

Tracy C. Davis

- From *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 44-55. Copyright © 1994 by Tracy C. Davis. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Shaw's third full-length play was considered unproducible for very different reasons. *Mrs Warren's Profession* deals with the sociological dimensions of sexual prostitution, questioning just what the precise nature of prostitution is in a society where women have so few economic choices. Shaw refused to comply with the Victorian conventions for writing about bad women and dispensing with their ruined souls, mixing up the brothel keeper Mrs Warren's reconciliation with her university-educated daughter Vivie both structurally and circumstantially, and portraying Vivie's decision to make an absolute break from her mother because living idly on her wealth would make her complicit with the reprehensible exploitation that propelled her mother into prostitution in the first place. The play is about the 'omen and men behind the gorgeous magdalens and sallow wretches of the stage and literature. The Lord Chamberlain, official licenser of drama in England, refused to sanction the play for performance. It was eventually seen by a private audience at the Stage Society in 1902 and in an ill-fated American production in 1905, but did not overcome the licence prohibition in Britain or France for several decades.

For Victorians prostitution was a topic almost as urgent, taboo, and politically heated as AIDS is in the 1990s. The spread of venereal disease made prostitution of urgent concern to the military, resulting in several Contagious Diseases Acts allowing the routine forced examination and hospitalization of women in proximity to various barracks towns. The taboo on discussing prostitution in polite society resulted in an ingenious set of theatrical codes allowing "a woman with a past" and "a fallen woman" to precisely signal indiscretions without having to mention sex. Shaw is even more circumspect. He never uses the word prostitute or even a synonym. Mrs Warren communicates her chosen profession by describing how, when she was young, her sister Lizzie simply vanished until she serendipitously reappeared at the bar where Mrs Warren was employed: "One cold, wretched night, when I was so tired I could hardly keep myself awake, who should come up for a half of Scotch but Lizzie, in a long fur cloak, elegant and comfortable, with a lot of sovereigns in her purse" (*Collected Plays with their Prefaces* 3: 66). This is sufficient to communicate to Vivie that her aunt was a prostitute and her mother an instant recruit. Later, Mrs Warren's advancement to becoming an owner of many houses on the Continent is signaled by Vivie, who calls attention to the unspeakability of the "two infamous words that describe what my mother is"-brothel keeper-which she scrawls but never utters (CPP 3: 94-99).

The subject of prostitution was highly relevant to millions of Victorian women whose financial means were insufficient to allow them to survive in comfort or even provide what was necessary for basic sustenance. Prostitutes were very visible and available everywhere except the most reform-oriented family suburbs, at prices that matched virtually every pocketbook. It is the latter point that Shaw takes up most vigorously in the play. Instead of trying to justify Mrs Warren's choices or dramatize the consequence of her infamy, he puts the subject forward like a writer of Fabian tracts, emphasizing the similarities between prostitution and other types of business speculations, with the consequences of poor pay and high unemployment. He condemns the economic system where women find their best (and perhaps only) avenue to riches (and perhaps survival) through their sexuality. Mrs Warren's stepsisters perished by making respectable choices, one the victim of lead poisoning and the other the wife of an alcoholic labourer whose eighteen shillings a week was insufficient to support three children. Lizzie was wiser.

MRS WARREN When she saw I'd grown up good-looking she said to me across the bar "What are you doing there, you little fool? wearing out your health and your appearance for other people's profit!" Liz was saving money then to take a house for herself in Brussels; and she thought we two could save faster than one.... where can a woman get the money to save in any other business? ... Of course, if you're a plain woman and can't earn anything more; or if you have a turn for music, or the stage, or newspaper-writing: that's different. But neither Liz nor I had any turn for such things: all we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men. Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shopgirls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely. (CPP 3: 67)¹

For Mrs Warren, prostitution is a business decision, not a lustful fall, she goes into it as an exercise of choice, not a consequence of seduction.

Shaw sets up for discussion the conflicts prostitution creates among women, pitting the working-class pragmatist Mrs Warren against the analytically minded mathematician Vivie has become in ignorance of her mother's livelihood and friends. Vivie does not make moral judgements, and acknowledges the wisdom of her mother's decision. What she cannot live with is the fact that her mother continues to pursue and expand her businesses despite her wealth, and that her own allowance is from the fruits of this trade. Even her Cambridge University scholarship-the one aspect of her support not devolving from prostitution-came from an equally heinous enterprise. Her mother's business partner cuts her to the quick with this revelation. "Do you remember your Crofts scholarship at Newnham? Well, that was founded by my brother the M.P. [Member of Parliament] He gets his 22 per cent out of a factory with 600 girls in it, and not one of them getting wages enough to live on" (CPP 3: 83-84). By never having questioned the sources of her wealth and advantages, Vivie finds herself just as reprehensible as her mother and the Crofts.

This is precisely the anagnorisis² Trench reached in *Widowers' Houses*. Trench and Vivie each encounter male investors utterly comfortable with their complicity in degrading the powerless, and realize that they too gain by accepting profits other than from their own labour. The difference is that Trench is squeamish on moral grounds while Vivie sees the matter more systemically. She resolves to break from the whole system, including all remnants of "family." Vivie accepts a partnership in the actuarial office of Honoria Fraser and devotes herself to work. Presumably this profession is Shaw's deliberate choice: actuaries statistically predict calamity, but they do not directly profit from or deal with its occurrence. Vivie becomes part of the competent administrative middle class Fabians needed for bringing about social change.

The social and educational advantages that qualify Vivie to take her place with Honoria are silently counterpointed to Mrs Warren's partnership with Lizzie years before. Vivie writes to Honoria announcing that she is penniless and Honoria unquestioningly takes her in, a circumstance not unlike the brothel keeper's relationship to new recruits. The apt similarities that J. Ellen Gainor discovers between mother and daughter would astound and appall Vivie.

Both first went into partnership with another woman already established in the business, who showed them the desirability, profitability, and suitability for themselves of the field. And both women operate within the patriarchal structure, Vivie and Honoria organizing their office along traditional hierarchical lines, with a male clerk and with no mention of their partnership as in any way distinct from that of other businessmen's, and Mrs Warren, enmeshed in a capitalist, profit-making network recognized by, but not discussed in, good society.³

Vivie can take up a respectable occupation which relies on her intellectual capacities, but the mentoring relationship between Honoria and Vivie, like Mrs Warren and her "girls," is salient even though Shaw refrains from having them say so.

Shaw does not portray Vivie as an unequivocal heroine. She rejects the sensuality, frivolity, and pretence of her mother's life and friends but proclaims her similarities with

respect to devotion to work and making more money than is strictly necessary. As Germaine Greer asks, "The mystery remains-what is prostitution? What is it more than practicing upon sexuality for gain? It need not involve indiscriminacy, or even sexual intercourse, or even money, but simply gain."⁴ She sees this as a failing in Shaw's analysis:

It is not vice at its worst or virtue at its best which exploits men and women, but the profit motive, which is indifferent to ethics and has no sex at all. Shaw could get no nearer the correct etiology of whoredom than the feeble Fabian diagnosis that women were overworked, undervalued and underpaid so that they were powerfully tempted to a way of life falsely represented as easier.⁵

Greer reflects first-and second-wave feminists' concern with meticulously documenting the interconnectedness between prostitution and marriage. Frank Gardner's hopeless suit for Vivie's hand reverses the usual situation, for he would be "kept" by Vivie and (he presumes) her mother's money. The effect rendered by Shaw is substantially comic rather than political. Ultimately, *Mrs Warren's Profession* is not about sex or even sexual politics. Prostitution is a metaphor for the Fabian "law of rent": all capitalist production is like rent in that it produces a differential advantage of one social group over another, and the exercise of this control is at everyone's expense.

On documentary criteria, *Mrs Warren's Profession* adds a new perspective to Victorian discussions of prostitution. Josephine Butler's campaigns against the "instrumental rape" of the Contagious Diseases Acts claimed much attention in the 1880s and resulted in repeal in 1886. Just as Butler's Ladies' National Association was settling this old offence, William Stead's sensational newspaper articles likened London to a modern Babylon, where the purchase of young girls was as pervasive and reprehensible as the eighteenth-century slave trade. This provided a focus for more politically conservative reformers who believed there was a "white slave trade" among Britain, Europe, the Middle East, and North America.⁶ By comparison, Shaw's evidence and tactics are mild and fulfill his preference for "pure philosophy" over "mere news."⁷ His artistic achievements, apart from refining his skill at plotting and dialogue writing, include inventing a modified type of the stage prostitute (Mrs Warren) and rejecting moral stances, which for a British dramatist was revolutionary.

1. Compare the poem by Thomas Hardy, "The Ruined Maid," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 7th ed., vol. II (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 1938 [Editor].

2. Recognition leading to denouement [Editor]

3. J. Ellen Gainor, *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender* (Ann Arbor; University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 38.

4. Germaine Greer, "A Whore in Every Home," in *Fabian Feminist: Bernard Shaw and Women*, ed. Rodelle Weintraub (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 165.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

6. Shaw supported Stead's stance until it was revealed that he had misrepresented the facts. Stead was convicted. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *Cite of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of*

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

(from MAN AND SUPERMAN and Three Other Plays, George Bernard Shaw, ed. John A. Bertolini)

Mrs. Warren's Profession was written in 1893, published in 1898, but not performed until 1902, and even then privately. Its first public production in New York in 1905 resulted in the actors' being arrested, for one of the play's two main protagonists was a prostitute and a procuress, and therefore in violation of stage censorship. It was Shaw's third play, his last play written after the pattern of Ibsen's plays, and his first masterpiece. The two plays that preceded it, *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and *The Philanderer* (1893), paid special homage to Ibsen: the former by imitating Ibsen's dramatic structure (one based on the gradual revelation of a hidden transgression from the past that has been poisoning the characters' present lives), the latter by having as its setting the Ibsen Club, a place where the members, who are advanced thinkers, can express their advanced thoughts and also romance one another.

Shaw was a socialist, and therefore a severe critic of capitalism, from his reading of Karl Marx and other economists of the 1880s, *Widowers' Houses* made a socialist point that *Mrs. Warren's Profession* would reiterate namely, that as we all participate in capitalism, whether we like it or not, none of us can have clean incomes, meaning incomes that do not at some point or in some way derive from the exploitation of other people's labor. As a consequence, it does no food for one participant to point to another and call him villain; Shaw believed it was the capitalist system that needed to be transformed, and by everyone. In keeping with that principle, Shaw does not assign villain status to any of his characters in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, not even the woman whose past transgression—prostitution—is the Ibsenite secret from the past that comes back to affect the characters' destinies.

Instead Shaw crafts a series of ambushes for the audience, leading us to sympathize with one character in the first act only to reveal something in the second act that discredits that sympathy. One of the great theatrical pleasures of watching *Mrs. Warren's Profession* with an audience is to feel its sympathies seesawing between Mrs. Warren and her emancipated daughter, Vivie, who represents "the New Woman" of her era. As act II begins, Vivie, who has never met her father and has just finished a distinguished academic career at Newnham, the women's college at Cambridge, prepares to challenge her mother's authority over her, particularly her mother's plan to live with her daughter and, in Lear-fashion, set herself on Vivie's "kind nursery." She bases her challenge on her mother's secretiveness about her past, so her mother reveals the secret, which is that she has been a prostitute and made the money that supported Vivie from that profession of prostitution. Vivie is only cowed, however, when her mother explains the circumstances in which she chose to become a prostitute. Mrs. Warren explains that she saw her half-sister die of lead poisoning after working "in a whitelead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week," Meanwhile, Mrs. Warren's older sister, Liz, had left home only to return

after a time fashionably dressed and with plenty of money. Liz advised her younger sister not to let other capitalists exploit her good looks for their profit, but to become instead a prostitute like her and maintain her self-respect by making her own way, free of exploitation by others. Vivie is impressed by her mother's tale because of the gumption she displayed and particularly by her apparent lack of shame, which seems to Vivie like a kind of integrity. The curtain falls on Vivie's admiring her mother for her strength of character ("you are stronger than all England") and on the procurers Mrs. Warren's bestowing "a mother's blessing" on her daughter. It is one of the most strikingly odd and ironic curtains in British drama because the audience does not know quite what to think or with whom to side. And because Shaw believed the primary purpose of drama was to stir people out of conventional thinking and automatic assumptions so they would think for themselves, such a state of unease and discomfort suited his purpose perfectly.

The play's ending similarly disallows the audience a complacent position. Vivie renews the struggle with her mother until she learns that her mother has not renounced her "profession" and yet pursues the image of respectability. Not being able to stand her mother's hypocrisy in this regard, which to Vivie signifies a lack of integrity, she breaks with her mother finally and fully in a scene of compelling conflict in which every line between them contains a bullet wrapped in an irony.

The final phase of their confrontation begins with Mrs. Warren appealing to her daughter on the basis of duty and justice, and as she does so Shaw directs that she fall back into her dialect "*recklessly*," as a way of showing the emotional pitch she has reached, in which she is no longer in control of what she says or feels. But she errs when she invokes Vivie's daughterly duty. Such an appeal, based as it is on convention, will not sway the hardheaded Vivie. Mrs. Warren's other appeal, "Who is to care for me when I'm old?" makes it seem as if she only supported Vivie so she would have a prop for her old age. But when she adds that she kept herself "lonely" for Vivie by letting go all of the girls who had formed an attachment to her, she hits the audience right in the heart, though she touches Vivie not at all. Quite the opposite: Mrs. Warren's regression to her native accent (according to Shaw's stage directions) jars and antagonizes Vivie. Another dramatist might have made Vivie melt a little at her mother's self-denial, but it is precisely Shaw's strength and originality that he does not and instead has Vivie firmly repudiate her mother's assertion of her daughterly duty. Mrs. Warren then shifts to a more aggressive tactic. And by her economic vocabulary, Shaw shows how capitalism marks every aspect of human relations: She accuses Vivie of "stealing" an education from her mother, and avers that instead of sending Vivie away to school, she should have brought her up in her own house. As if correcting her mother's grammar, Vivie says, "[*quietly*] In one of your own houses," reminding her with devastating insult that she is a procurer. This is too much for Mrs. Warren, and she begins to separate herself from her daughter by referring to Vivie in the third person: "(*screaming*). Listen to her! listen to how she spits on her mother's grey hairs! Oh, may you live to have your own daughter tear and trample on you as you have trampled on me. And you will: you will. No woman ever had luck with a mother's curse on her" (p. 102). Here Shaw deliberately invokes King Lear's curse on his daughter, Goneril, for driving him from her house, in which he likewise refers to his daughter in the third person though she is present: "If she must teem, /

Create her child of spleen, that it may live / And be a thwart disnatured torment to her... that she may feel / How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child" (act I, scene 4). Though this allusion is ominous in so far as it predicts Mrs. Warren's being driven away by her daughter, it also begins to betray the presence of comic and ironic elements. For example, Mrs. Warren invites an invisible audience to "listen" to how Vivie "spits on her mother's grey hairs"—a mixing of the aural and the visual, not unlike Bottom's proclamation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that "the ear of man bath not seen... what my dream was" (act 4, scene 1). The simultaneity of authentic tragic emotion and the faintly ridiculous is deeply Shavian (even though it derives partly from the Ibsen who wrote *The Wild Duck*).

Shaw augments both the tragedy and the comedy in Mrs. Warren's next speech to her daughter by having her invoke Heaven (the only time in the play she does) to forgive her for only doing *good* to Vivie. Such irony---her asking Heaven to forgive her for doing good--marks the moment as Shavian: Just when the pathos of the scene reaches tragic proportions, when the mother-daughter bond's being violently severed produces the proper tragic awe, Shaw chooses just this moment to have Mrs. Warren become ridiculous by exhibiting a shocking misapprehension of the circumstances in which Heaven normally forgives people. Shaw compounds the tragicomedy of the intense moment the climax of the play, really by having Mrs. Warren invoke Heaven again: "From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I'll do wrong and nothing but wrong" (p. 103). A detached observer might have pointed out to Mrs. Warren that the people Heaven usually helps in their last hour are not those who have done nothing but wrong during the period preceding their last hour.

The closest analogue to such an unsettling mixture of comic and tragic registers, perhaps, would be found in *The Merchant of Venice* when Shylock reacts to his daughter's rejection of him, when she elopes with Lorenzo and steals her father's money (act 2, scene 8). Shylock cannot seem to make up his mind about which is the greater loss (or betrayal), his stolen ducats or his deserting daughter, Jessica: He seems to feel both keenly and to be unaware of the irony of such an economy of emotion. Likewise, Mrs. Warren's sorrow and anger at what she feels is a betrayal by her own daughter seem to stem more from the disappointment of her hopes that Vivie would be the prop of her old age than from the loss of her daughter's affection and companionship, particularly since Mrs. Warren was quite generous in providing materially for Vivie, but quite stingy with maternal care and time. After all, Mrs. Warren had a business to run and so could not be a mother; and now Vivie has her own business to tend, doing actuarial calculations for a woman lawyer, and so cannot be a daughter. Justice has an ironic sense of humor.

Shaw's final stage direction in the scene, Vivie "*goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in her figures*" (p. 103) maintains the perfect ambiguity with which Shaw presents the reunion and re-separation of mother and daughter. If we find Vivie hard-hearted, like Lear's daughters, and Mrs. Warren a pitiable and cruelly rejected weak figure, we must ignore her mother's lifelong egoism, her regarding her daughter as a financial investment against the loneliness and enfeeblement of old age, and above all, her ridiculously contradictory invocation of Heaven's aid in her vow to do nothing but wrong henceforth. If we find Mrs. Warren a monstrous

parody of maternity, and Vivie's self-emancipation a liberation from her mother's oppression, we must ignore how Vivie severs all intimate human connections (her suitor, Frank, and her mother) in favor of turning herself into one of the drowned numbers in her actuarial calculations ("*goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in her figures*"). No choice is made easy: The cost is laid out nakedly for each reader to gauge and decide its worth. Vivie does liberate herself, but was it worth the cost? The play began with Vivie alone on stage, lying in a hammock while reading a book and making notes; it ends with Vivie alone, sitting at a desk, having read a final note from the suitor she has rejected, and making notes again. In between, she has reunited and re-separated from her mother. Is she now a grown-up, independent, liberated woman? Assuredly, yes. And yet...

To its would-be censors, Shaw's play was about prostitution; to Shaw's socialist friends, it was an indictment of the capitalist system; to readers and playgoers of the twenty-first century, it is still a play about costs, but not in the sense of capitalism's profits and losses. Rather, it teaches the lesson that everything, even reputed social progress, comes at a cost, sometimes at the cost of humanity.

Shaw's distinctness as a playwright in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is not exhausted by either his mixture of comic and tragic tones, or his evenhanded, if not downright ambiguous, presentation of both sides of a given issue; his distinctness is also defined by his bold and unsettling (not vulgar or obscene) treatment of sexuality. There is a momentary yet extraordinary sexual tension in the opening of the second act between Mrs. Warren and her daughter's suitor, Frank, a tension that Shaw presents as arising on the instant and subsiding as quickly and spontaneously as it arose, just as such tensions rise and fall in life, without specific impetus and without furtherance. As Frank helps Mrs. Warren take off her shawl, Shaw's stage directions indicate that he gives "*her shoulders the most delicate possible little caress with his fingers*." Mrs. Warren, while continuing her idle conversation with him, dances "*hack at him] r an instant from the corner of her eye as she detects the pressure*" (p. 47). Interestingly, when Shaw revised the text for a subsequent publication (and after more experience with staging his plays), he changed the stage direction to an action more readily detected by the audience: "*gallantly giving her shoulders a very perceptible squeeze*." A camera could easily convey the action and its significance in the earlier version, but on stage the new formulation would be more clear to the audience.

As the scene progresses, what began as a silent, subtle exchange of sexual signals between Frank and his girlfriend's mother becomes something more than mere naughtiness. Frank continues to flirt with Mrs. Warren by asking her to take him with her to Vienna, by teasing her with his playacting, and by using his wooing voice on her until finally he makes a cheeky remark that provokes her to pretend "*to bob his ears*." So far the bantering, though odd, seems not too far beyond the playful and harmless. But then Mrs. Warren looks at his "*pretty, upturned face for to moment, tempted. At last she kisses him and immediately turns away, out of patience with herself*" (p. 48). What motivates her to do this? Sexual competition with her Cambridge-educated daughter? An aging woman's impulsive attempt to assert her continuing sexual attractiveness? A momentary surge of sexual appetite? This moment is genuinely Shavian because of its fidelity to the suddenness of human impulse and the mysteriousness of human motivation.

As rapidly as the impulse arises in Mrs. Warren, it subsides and changes into half-hearted regret: "There! I shouldn't have done that. I a m wicked.. Never you mind, my dear: it's only a motherly kiss." (The spaced lettering in "a m" was Shaw's way of telling the actor where the accent should fall in the delivery of the line.) Her self reproach would be more convincing if she did not quite relish her own misbehavior so much, which relish the emphasis on "am" enacts. But even more Shavian (or ironic) is her use of the word "motherly" here. Her kiss is "motherly" only in the sense that Jocasta's kisses to Oedipus were "motherly." And her "motherly" kiss utterly undermines any "motherly" claims she makes upon Vivie in the final scene of the play. Shaw's characters are complex and contradictory, and he gives them a moment-to-moment life on stage that is as unpredictable and funny and disturbing as that of anyone you are likely to meet on the planet Earth.

Mrs. Warren's Profession would be the last play Shaw would write in Ibsen's mood, meaning a play in which Shaw almost always compresses his humor into irony and allows darker human impulses to dominate the more genial ones. For example, Frank woos Vivie by playing a fantasy-game with her in which the two imagine themselves as the Babes in the Wood covered with leaves. What Shaw would later convert into the ridiculousness of human romantic impulse he here makes ironically sinister: The Babes in the Wood of legend were young brother and sister orphans whose bodies, after the two children were abandoned in the Wood and starved to death, were covered in strawberry leaves by the birds. Frank's invitation to Vivie to get covered with leaves, therefore, suggests that their potential sexual relations would be a perverse death for Vivie. But Shaw simply did not have the gloomy Norwegian's relentless appetite for unrelieved irony and darkness, though he admired the depths of human nature Ibsen's genius allowed him to reach.

Shaw Quotations

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.

We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it.

What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.

He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches.

When a man teaches something he does not know to somebody else who has no aptitude for it, and gives him a certificate of proficiency, the latter has completed the education of a gentleman.

We learn from experience that men never learn anything from experience.

Men are wise in proportion, not to their experience, but to their capacity for experience.

A little learning is a dangerous thing, but we must take that risk because a little is as much as our biggest heads can hold.

A man of great common sense and good taste - meaning thereby a man without originality or moral courage.

He knows nothing, and he thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career.

The golden rule is that there are no golden rules.

Beware of the man whose God is in the skies.

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

I never resist temptation because I have found that things that are bad for me do not tempt me.

There is no love sincerer than the love of food.

Animals are my friends... and I don't eat my friends.

When a man wants to murder a tiger he calls it sport; when a tiger wants to murder him he calls it ferocity.

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.

My reputation grows with every failure.

To be clever enough to get a great deal of money, one must be stupid enough to want it.

We don't stop playing because we grow old; We grow old because we stop playing!

Which painting in the National Gallery would I save if there was a fire? The one nearest the door of course.

A fashion is nothing but an induced epidemic.

Beauty is all very well at first sight; but who ever looks at it when it has been in the house three days?

Better keep yourself clean and bright; you are the window through which you must see the world.

Cruelty would be delicious if one could only find some sort of cruelty that didn't really hurt.

Go on writing plays, my boy, One of these days one of these London producers will go into his office and say to his secretary, "Is there a play from Shaw this morning?" and when she says, "No," he will say, "Well, then we'll have to start on the rubbish." And that's your chance, my boy.

A drama critic is a man who leaves no turn unstoned.

My method is to take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then to say it with the utmost levity.

I can forgive Alfred Nobel for having invented dynamite, but only a fiend in human form could have invented the Nobel Prize.

I dislike feeling at home when I am abroad.

I dread success. To have succeeded is to have finished one's business on earth, like the male spider, who is killed by the female the moment he has succeeded in his courtship. I like a state of continual becoming, with a goal in front and not behind.

The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor; he took my measurement anew every time he saw me, while all the rest went on with their old measurements and expected them to fit me.

The only way to avoid being miserable is not to have enough leisure to wonder whether you are happy or not.

The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.

The trouble with her is that she lacks the power of conversation but not the power of speech.

A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul.

Anarchism is a game at which the police can beat you.

Assassination: The extreme form of censorship.

Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all others because you were born in it.

You'll never have a quiet world till you knock the patriotism out of the human race.

Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.

Perhaps the greatest social service that can be rendered by anybody to the country and to mankind is to bring up a family.

When the master has come to do everything through the slave, the slave becomes his master, since he cannot live without him.

The liar's punishment is not in the least that he is not believed, but that he cannot believe anyone else.

What really flatters a man is that you think him worth flattering.

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.

Better never than late.

Pessimist: a person who thinks everybody as nasty as himself, and hates them for it.

Everything happens to everybody sooner or later if there is time enough.

You see things as they are and say, "Why?" But I dream things that never were and say, "Why not?"

Dancing is a perpendicular expression of a horizontal desire.

Advice is like kissing: It costs nothing and it's a pleasant thing to do.

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