

## HEARTBREAK HOUSE--SYNOPSIS

ACT I: A young girl, Ellie Dunn, is drowsing in the reception-room of Captain Shotover's house, built and appointed like the after-part of an old-fashioned ship. Waking, she tells the housekeeper, Nurse Guinness, that though she has been invited to stay, no one has come to receive her. Captain Shotover appears, an eccentric old man dressed as a sea captain, indignant that his daughter, Hesione Hushabye, should have forgotten her guest. Ellie tells him her name, and he, despite her protests, takes her for the daughter of a boatswain named Dunn who once robbed him. When Nurse Guinness brings a cup of tea, he throws it away and goes to make Ellie a better one.

The next visitor is his younger daughter, Ariadne, returning after twenty-three years spent abroad with her husband, Sir Hastings Utterword, who has been "Governor of all the Crown colonies in succession." She, too, is unexpected and is highly indignant at her casual reception. Her father, returning with the tea, does not recognize her at first, nor does Hesione, who gushes over Ellie, but receives Ariadne very coolly.

Ellie's father, Mazzini Dunn, then appears, and is commandeered by Captain Shotover (still regarding him as the piratical boatswain) to help with a dynamite experiment in the garden.

Ellie confides to Hesione that she is engaged to the rich and middle-aged "Boss" Mangan (also a guest), to whom her father is under an obligation. She is, however, really in love with a handsome stranger, Marcus Darnley, who has told her many romantic tales of his origins. Just as she finishes her story, the man himself appears, and Ellie introduces him. "What a lark," says Hesione. He is her husband, Hector Hushabye. She has grown quite used to Hector's lies, but Ellie's disillusionment is terrible.

When the Dunns have been shown to their respective rooms, Captain Shotover tells Mangan that he must not marry Ellie because he is too old, and that, if he persists, Hesione will stop him. Their colloquy is disturbed by Randall Utterword, Ariadne's brother-in-law and tame lover, an elegant man-about-town. Ariadne is annoyed with him for following her, uninvited.

Eventually she wakes Mangan, who starts up in a fury, having heard everything they said. He is deeply offended. As he is about to leave the house, a shot is heard. Mazzini Dunn, Hector and Randall arrest a burglar who has taken Lady Utterword's diamonds. He turns out to be the real Billy Dunn, Shotover's dishonest boatswain, who is also the long-lost husband of Nurse Guinness. They do not want to charge him, but Dunn, staging a "conversion", begs them to take him into custody, or, as an alternative, to give him money for tools to set himself up "in an honest trade". On seeing Captain Shotover, however, and being recognized by him, he drops his pose and confesses that this is his usual racket when he breaks into a house. He is sent into the kitchen with Nurse Guinness.

Everyone is overwrought. Mangan bursts into tears and is taken out by Hesione for a moonlight walk. Ariadne makes a scene with Ellie, and Randall goes to pacify her, leaving Ellie and Captain Shotover together. She asks whether she should marry Mangan to feed her soul with the poetry and music and beauty that it needs. No, replies the Captain, she will be killing her soul if she lets the fear of poverty govern her life. Ellie finds him very wise; old as he is, she would like to marry him; but he tells her he already has a black wife in Zanzibar, and his wisdom is only sustained by continual nips of rum.

The act ends with a squabble between Hector, Randall--who is jealous of him-- and Ariadne, who reduces Randall to tears and sends him off to bed.

ACT III: In the garden, the company has sorted itself into three pairs: Mangan and Hesione, Hector and Ariadne, Ellie and the Captain. They discuss themselves and the influence that the house has had upon their lives. What it needs, says Ariadne, is horses. There are only two classes in good society in England: the equestrian classes and the neurotic classes. Randall is a rotter, because he is too lazy to hunt and shoot. (Randall, from his window, overhears this, and plays a few saucy notes on his flute.) In Mangan's presence, they argue whether Ellie should marry him for his money. He says he has no real money--only what he is allowed by syndicates and shareholders to start the factories that are supposed to be his own. Ellie says she never really intended to marry Mangan. In any case, she

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

HEARTBREAK HOUSE often cited as George Bernard Shaw's greatest play is suddenly his most popular as well. A major London revival, featuring Rex Harrison and Diana Rigg, came to New York in December; several regional theatres announced the play for this season's schedule. Why the sudden interest?

HEARTBREAK HOUSE was begun in the shadow of World War I and was finished several years later, in 1916 it was perhaps Shaw's most painful effort and certainly the one that took him longest to compose. For Shaw, a dedicated socialist and a great believer in man's goodness, the war was a devastating, disillusioning experience. The introduction of aerial warfare and poison gas--thus enabling man to kill large numbers of an unseen enemy for the first time--confirmed his worst fears and led him to predict, along with his contemporaries, an apocalyptic conflagration. HEARTBREAK HOUSE, the child of this despair and pessimism, is the low point of morale for this, our last great optimistic writer.

Typically, Shaw reacted to his despair with his three greatest weapons: reason, intelligence, and most importantly, humor. Not surprisingly, then, this is Shaw's funniest play. He offers a manic concoction that spins with farce like energy, and a look at a zany family that suddenly finds meaning and life through a confrontation with death--a confrontation that literally drops from the sky. For Shaw--the man who laughed

ON THE CREATION OF HEARTBREAK HOUSE--Excerpts from Archibald Henderson's biography of Shaw, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century

Farfetched as the characterization may seem, Heartbreak House (1913) is a play of international politics. It was begun before the War of 1914-18 but not published until 1919. Shaw rather infelicitously describes it as a "Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English themes." In a long discussion I once had with him on the genesis of his plays, he significantly observed that Heartbreak House "began with an atmosphere and does not contain a word that was foreseen before it was written." The play defies explanation: here and there luminous ideas break through the fog. So far as I know, this is the only one of his plays which Shaw, always eager to enlighten the misguided critics and stupid public as to his meaning, brusquely refused to explain. "I am not an explicable phenomenon, neither is Heartbreak House . . . These things are not to be explained; and I am no more responsible for them than the audience." . . . Asked by a befuddled company to explain the meaning of Heartbreak House, Shaw cryptically replied: "How should I know? I am only the author." As who should say, "Interrogate the Life Force," or better, "Ask God."

Many of Shaw's plays originate from a single character or a single situation. Heartbreak House originates from a single anecdote. It was Lena Ashwell, gifted actress and intimate friend of the Shaws, who must take the responsibility as the "onlie begetter" of this play. We have it from Shaw himself, who neither knew the character nor anything of him save the one story. Says Shaw: "Sometimes one conceives or observes or hears of a character who insists on being dramatized. Lena Ashwell created Heartbreak House by an anecdote of a delightful character, whom I felt I had to put on the stage: hence the immortal Captain Shotover." It was her own father, she told me, who, first a sea captain, later became a clergyman.

The atmosphere of this play is one of aimlessness, futility, and frustration. At the outset, however, we are not obsessed with a sense of impending disaster. The spectator has no premonition that he is to see unrolled before him a contemporary allegory, in which Love, Pride, Heroism, and Empire are personalized in the old sea captain's daughters and their men. "The house," as Shaw later explained, in the

AN INTERVIEW WITH LESLIE TAYLOR -- SET DESIGNER

LUPKE: What are your options as a set designer. Are there guidelines. for instance that come with a play script?

TAYLOR: Really anything is an option. Any set direction that comes with a play is from the first production not from the author. The set is not a major portion of the theatre action, so it is how the set designer and the director want to approach the play.

LUPKE: Is a set always an attempt to recreate a space exactly or naturally?

TAYLOR: No, it depends on the kind of play and the way it is written. Generally, if the writing of the play is realistic the set will be more realistic. In other words the action may demand realism such as water turning on and off or food cooking on a stove.

LUPKE: Would you consider the HEARTBREAK HOUSE set to be a realistic set?

TAYLOR: No, not realistic. It isn't an abstract set but there was no attempt to make the backdrop appear to be more than a backdrop. The trees are definately painted trees for example..

LUPKE: HEARTBREAK HOUSE is considered to be Shaw's commentary on the life of British aristocracy, are you attempting to continue this commentary someway in the set?

TAYLOR: Yes, in a way, because we are making the set very presentational. We have chosen to show the play in a way that will make the social comment clearest. The set itself does not enhance the social comment but rather allows it to come through.

LUPKE: Explain what this means for the set exactly.

TAYLOR: The set is a unit. There are no doors or wings leading to or from the set as you would need in a very realistic set. The audience will see the actors walk from offstage onto the set. It is very clear that this is a play.

LUPKE: Are there basic "rules" of set design, in other words, are there procedures every set designer goes through in creating a set?

TAYLOR: Every set designer would read the play, begin to form some ideas, talk to the director about the overall concept of the play and then make ground plans.

LUPKE: Explain what ground plans are and what they are for.

LUPKE: With a play do you have to have the audience interact?

TAYLOR: Oh yes. Movies are much safer for the audience member than a play. A play has live people on the stage not light on a screen. At a movie at most you interact with other audience members.

LUPKE: Are there techniques in set design that encourage interaction?

TAYLOR: Yes, light can produce more or less interaction with the characters. How close the actors are and how they move in relation to the audience and the set also affects how well an audience interacts.

LUPKE: How is the audience to interact with the characters in HEARTBREAK HOUSE?

TAYLOR: HEARTBREAK HOUSE is intended more as a voyeur play. Shaw doesn't have you interact with the characters. They don't know you are there. But, the actors acknowledge your presence. The set is not intended to have the kind of total realism as if you were eavesdropping on a family. There is no pretense that it is more than it is. The audience interacts with the actors.

LUPKE: Do you feel you have more or less freedom as a set designer for a play rather than a movie?

TAYLOR: More freedom, because you have more choices. Your options are broader in terms of approach. You would have much more money with a movie though.

LUPKE: Has the fact of your designing more than one show here this season caused you to change your approach to designing in any way? What are some of the advantages or liabilities of this more permanent association with the IRT?

TAYLOR: The space demands a certain kind of approach. I know what can and cannot be done realistically. I can also make the money go further because I don't attempt things that won't work in this space. I like doing more than one play; I am more comfortable with the people. I know how to work with them. There are some things you can't do in a vacuum.

LUPKE: As this season's resident Upperstage designer, how do you feel about also working on the Mainstage? What are the differences?

TAYLOR: Mainly there's a monetary difference. Things are on a grander scale. There also is more pressure downstairs. It produces more anxiety as the main production.

LUPKE Would you do things that are riskier or more avant-garde upstairs?

## *The Shaw Years*

It is always difficult to say of an author's work when it was written since any book or play may have been in mind for a long time, begun, laid aside, and finished much later. *Heartbreak House* for example was begun in 1913 and not seen in London until 1920. Definite dates can only be given for publication or production. Many of Shaw's plays were staged in other countries before they could be seen in his own. For brevity and convenience only British productions are mentioned here. Full details are to be found in Maurice Colbourne's book, *The Real Bernard Shaw*.

- 1850 George Bernard Shaw born at 33 Synge Street, Dublin, July 26th. Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde born in Dublin. Crimean War ends.
- 1857 The Queen's reign now twenty years old. The early Victorian period in British life is shifting to mid-Victorian. Charlotte Frances Townsend, later Payne-Townshend, later Mrs Bernard Shaw, born at Derry in Ireland, January 20th.
- 1859 Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* published. Long controversy about evolution and natural selection begins.
- 1861 American Civil War. Death of the Prince Consort.
- 1866 H. G. Wells born. Fenians active in Ireland.
- 1867 Shaw sent to his first school in Dublin. *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx published.
- 1870 Education Act provides foundation for a national system of schooling in England and Wales.
- 1871 Shaw enters an estate agent's office in Dublin. Sees Henry Irving act the part of Digby Grant in *The Two Roses* and picks him out as 'an actor for me'.
- 1872 Shaw's mother and sisters move to London.
- 1876 Shaw leaves his work in Dublin and joins his mother in Fulham.
- 1879 Shaw briefly employed by the Edison Telephone Company. Joins Zetetical Society and becomes a speaker. Begins to meet Socialists and starts his life-long friendship with and admiration of Sidney Webb. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* published.
- 1879/ Shaw writing but not finding a publisher for his novels, 1881 *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, and *Love among the Artists*.
- 1881 Suffers from smallpox.
- 1882 Shaw hears Henry George speak and is much impressed.
- 1883 Death of Karl Marx. Fabian Society founded. Shaw meets and becomes friends with William Archer. His first love affair, Miss Alice Lockett is the lady.
- 1884 Much Socialist activity in London. Foundation of H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and William Morris's Socialist League. Shaw joins the Fabians.

1903 Shaw resigns from St Pancras Borough Council, the new title of the previous Vestry. H. G. Wells joins the Fabians.

1904 Shaw stands unsuccessfully as a Progressive for the London County Council. Defends Municipal Socialism in a short book, *The Commonsense of Municipal Trading*. Granville-Barker starts producing for the Vedrenne-Barker seasons at the Royal Court Theatre. *John Bull's Other Island* staged there.

1905 The country house at Ayot St Lawrence bought. *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara* produced at the Royal Court Theatre. Death of Sir Henry Irving.

1906 General Election. Overwhelming victory of the Liberal party. Strife with Wells in the Fabian Society. *The Doctor's Dilemma* produced at the Court Theatre. Ellen Terry appears as Lady Cecily Waynflete in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Shaw sits for sculpture by Rodin.

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1907 *Caesar and Cleopatra*, written nine years earlier, produced by Forbes Robertson at the Savoy Theatre.

1908 Publishes short book on *The Sanity of Art*, included in Major Critical Essays, Standard Edition.

1909 *The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet*, banned by the Censor in England, produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Shaw contributes his statement on the Censorship to Joint Parliamentary Committee appointed to report on the working of the Censorship.

1910 Death of King Edward VII. Charles Frohman starts repertory season at the Duke of York's. The programme included Shaw's *Misalliance* and John Galsworthy's *Justice*. *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* produced at a matinée in aid of the proposed National Theatre.

1911 *Fanny's First Play* produced at the Little Theatre. Proves exceptionally popular, moves to the Kingsway Theatre in 1913, and has 624 performances in all.

1913 *Androcles and the Lion* produced at the St James's Theatre. Additions made to a new edition of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. *Great Catherine* produced at the Vaudeville Theatre. Death of Shaw's mother.

1914 *Pygmalion* produced in April by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre. First World War begins on August 4th. In November Shaw writes *Commonsense about the War* as a supplement to the *New Statesman*, subsequently issued as a pamphlet.

1916 Asquith's government replaced by a Coalition with Lloyd George as Prime Minister. Abortive attempt to overthrow English rule in Dublin. With serious theatrical activity abandoned, Shaw writes some short, light plays, two of which, *O'Flaherty V.C.* and *Augustus Does His Bit* are produced in the following year.

1917 Shaw visits Western Front. Russian Revolutions. Kerensky's moderate government set up in February and overthrown by Lenin and the Bolshevik Communists in October. Death of Sir Herbert Tree

1936 Death of King George V. Abdication of King Edward VIII who becomes Duke of Windsor. Shaw writes *The King, the Constitution, and the Lady*. *The Millionairess* produced at Bexhill. The chief part is subsequently played in London by Dame Edith Evans and Katharine Hepburn.

1937 Berlin-Rome Axis agreed between Hitler and Mussolini. Neville Chamberlain succeeds Baldwin as Prime Minister.

1938 *Geneva* produced at Malvern and the Saville Theatre in London. Hitler and Neville Chamberlain sign the Munich Pact. Shaw threatened with pernicious anaemia but cured by liver injections.

1939 Hitler invades Czechoslovakia. *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* produced at Malvern and at the New Theatre in London in the following year. Outbreak of Second World War.

1940 Germans overrun France. Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister.

1943 Death of Mrs Shaw after painful and crippling illness.

1944 Shaw publishes *Everybody's Political What's What*. 'D-Day' and invasion of Hitler's Europe.

1945 The age of atomic warfare arrives. End of war against Germany and Japan. Sweeping Labour victory at general election. Clement Attlee Prime Minister.

1946 Shaw's ninetieth birthday. He is able to broadcast and is made Freeman of Dublin and St Pancras. Death of Granville-Barker. Death of H. G. Wells.

1948 National Health Service begins.

1949 *Buoyant Billions* produced at Prince's Theatre, London. *Sixteen Self-Sketches* published.

1950 Shaw falls while pruning trees in his garden and taken to hospital in Luton. Desires to return home to Ayot St Lawrence. Dies there on November 2nd. His ashes with those of his wife scattered in the garden. In his will he had said, 'I prefer the garden to the cloister.'

in a house, where there was a kitchen and a drawing room and at least one thorough-servant". George also had two sisters.

George pretty much grew up on his own. His father was busy with his failing businesses and his mother with her musical endeavors. It was said his mother was a very cold person, especially to her husband and children. George Bernard Shaw was tutored in the classics by his uncle, The Reverend William George Carroll, vicar of St. Brides, in Dublin and at ten entered the Wesleyan School. He quickly rose to the top of his class but just as quickly was at the bottom, never to rise again. He took refuge in idleness. On his own he excelled in English composition, read much literature, graphic arts and music from his mother. She mostly helped him with voice, which he used in later life when he was on the lecture circuit. He sang to himself often and claimed that he knew at least one important work of Mozart, Handel, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Verdi and many others cover to cover. He scribbled incessantly with colored crayons, but he felt he had no talent for art. George haunted the National Gallery of Ireland and he loved what he called "the free-sky gallery" at their summer home. At 15 he was a fairly mature, self-educated lad.

In 1871, George took a job in a real-estate office at a monthly salary of \$4.50. He worked at this for four years ending with a salary of \$450.00 annually. In 1876 he quit the job, moving to London and promised himself to never again to do an "honest day's work". He said he disregarded "all the quack duties which

time. He had had a nervous breakdown and needed someone to take care of him. Charlotte had already moved in with him to nurse him back to health but they both decided to make it legitimate.

George Bernard Shaw was a man of great vitality and he lived until he was 94. His character Captain Shotover in HEARTBREAK HOUSE said "A man's interest in the world is only the overflow from his interest in himself. George Bernard Shaw was a man to be heard.

