



Misalliance

by
George Bernard Shaw

Know-the-Show Audience Guide

researched and written by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre
of New Jersey





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Misalliance:

From the Director

In the opening of his hundred-page preface to *Misalliance*, written between 1909 and 1910, Shaw writes, “on the subject of children we are very deeply confused... If you must hold yourself up to your children as an object lesson (which is not at all necessary), hold yourself up as a warning and not as an example.”

This issue of poor parenting was one with which Shaw was intimately familiar. Shaw’s father, George Carr Shaw, was a failed corn merchant with a drinking problem and a squint, and his mother, Lucinda (whose name Shaw gives to Gunner’s deceased mother in *Misalliance*), was a mediocre singer who abandoned the family when Shaw was just sixteen so that she could move to London with her singing teacher and lover, Vandeleur Lee, a man widely regarded as a charlatan. Considering his early years, it comes as no surprise that so many of Shaw’s plays, including *You Never Can Tell*, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, *Major Barbara*, and *Misalliance* involve children somehow estranged from their parents.

In *Misalliance*, the gulf between parent and child feels particularly wide. “I tell you there’s a wall ten feet thick and ten miles high between parent and child,” John Tarleton tells Lord Summerhays. “Depend on it, in a thousand years it’ll be considered bad form to know who your father and mother are.”

The depth and subtlety with which Shaw explores the theme of parents and children in *Misalliance* seems to suggest that he is using this theme as a way of examining the state of England and Europe in 1909. In England, the opening decade of the Twentieth Century was a period of immense social and political change. The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the succession of her son, Edward VII, led to changing social values. Edward, known as ‘Bertie’ to his friends,

had such a reputation for philandering that some referred to him as ‘Edward the Caresser,’ while his voracious appetite earned him the alternate nickname, “King Tum-Tum.” The era that bears his name was one of fashionable parties, immense luxury, and shifting attitudes — a trend aided by the ascent of a wealthy merchant/industrialist class (of which the Tarletons are a part), whose wealth often dwarfed that of the aristocracy despite the aristocracy’s technically higher social status. The fight for women’s rights and suffrage, already an issue of interest in the late Victorian period, gathered momentum with the 1903 founding of The Women’s Social and Political Union, which organized highly visible pro-suffrage demonstrations. The Fabian Society, of which Shaw was an active member, was one of several Socialist organizations that experienced huge growth during these years. Colonialism was also coming under question. The Boer War of 1899 to 1902 in South Africa brought stories of English abuses back home, and led some to question to virtues of the Empire. Internationally, as England feared that it did not have the military strength necessary to defend its vast empire, the rise of Germany as a military and industrial power bred fear throughout Europe and Asia.

Thus, the generation gap that separates parents and children in *Misalliance* is also a gap of history, a gap between the inhabitants of wildly different worlds. Shaw saw his universe changing, its values transforming, and Europe spinning almost out of control.

Out of this chaos, he created parents and children that seem barely even to know one another, each driven by a different ideology, each holding dear what the other despises. In Tarleton’s conservatory, Shaw created the world as he saw it — a world of useless moralities and characters who willingly deceive themselves and those around them — a world destined for cataclysm only hinted at by the crashing of an aeroplane into a greenhouse. Shaw’s brilliance lies in his ability to do all this while keeping his audience laughing. Conveying these profound themes through humor, through biting wit and delightfully acerbic dialogue, Shaw uses delicious comedy to help us digest his often bitter pills of thought.

-Stephen Brown-Fried, Director

About George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw was born on July 26, 1856 to a lower-middle class family in Dublin. Despite being a poor student, Shaw finished his public schooling at the age of 15. Before he reached the age of 16, his parents separated, and Shaw decided to live with his father in Dublin where he received a job as a clerk in an estate office. In 1876, at the age of 20, he moved to London to live with his mother, whose financial support allowed him to follow his literary aspirations and publish his first five novels (all of which were completely unsuccessful).

Shaw politically identified as a Socialist in 1882, and co-founded the Fabian Society in 1884 — a society that promoted the rise of a democratic socialist state in Great Britain rather than a monarchy. Despite his stammer and fear of public speaking, he took to the soapbox and developed an aggressive, engaging manner of speaking, which later lent itself well to his writing.

In London, Shaw worked as an art critic, then as a music critic, and finally, from 1895-1898 as a theatre critic. After recovering from a serious illness in 1898, Shaw resigned as a critic and moved out of his mother's house to marry Charlotte Payne-Townshend.

His career as a playwright began in 1891 with *Widowers' Houses*, which he wrote for the Independent Theatre, a company dedicated to producing New Drama (Realism and Naturalism) as inspired by Henrik Ibsen in Germany. *Widowers' Houses* had begun years earlier as a collaboration with his friend and critic William Archer — Archer had given up on the collaboration when Shaw's political views overwhelmed his attempts at writing a "well-made play." Shaw wrote nearly a dozen more plays over the next 12 years. Few of his plays, however, were actually produced until 1904 when Harley Granville Barker took over

the management of the Court Theatre. Over the next three seasons, Barker produced ten of Shaw's plays. Over the next decade, all but one of Shaw's plays was produced by Barker, Barker's friends, and in other experimental theaters around England.

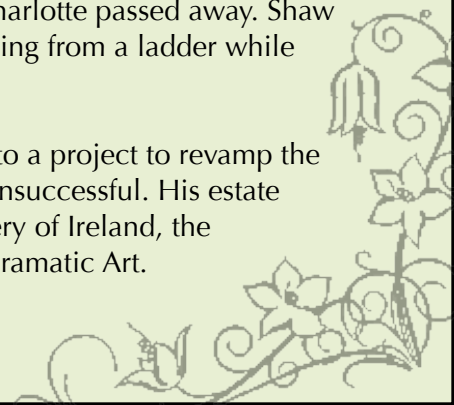
Shaw eventually became very wealthy from the royalties of his plays. He stayed active in the Fabian Society, in city government, on committees dedicated to ending dramatic censorship, and in establishing a subsidized National Theatre.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 brought on a dark period in Shaw's life. He published a series of newspaper articles that were heavily infused with anti-war sentiment, which made him tremendously unpopular. His reputation took a critical blow, and rumors circulated that he would be tried for treason. He wrote only one major play during the war years, *Heartbreak House*, through which he channeled his bitterness and despair about British politics and society.

After World War I ended, Shaw set to rebuild his reputation with a series of five plays about "creative evolution." In 1925, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, no doubt prompted by the recent success of his 1923 play *Saint Joan*, which was widely considered one of his greatest works. He accepted the award at his wife's behest, but only in title; Shaw declined the money offered along with it, asking that it instead be used to translate August Strindberg's works into English.

Shaw lived the rest of his life as an international celebrity of sorts. He traveled, remained active in politics, and continued to write over a dozen more plays (he wrote 50 plays in his lifetime, as well as essays, short stories, and novels). In 1943, his wife Charlotte passed away. Shaw himself died in 1950 at the age of 94 after falling from a ladder while trimming a tree on his property.

In his will, Shaw left a large part of his estate to a project to revamp the English alphabet; the project was ultimately unsuccessful. His estate was further divided among the National Gallery of Ireland, the British Museum, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.



Misalliance:

A Short Synopsis

PLEASE NOTE: BELOW IS A FULL SUMMARY OF THE PLAY. IF YOU PREFER NOT TO SPOIL TO PLOT, CONSIDER SKIPPING THIS SECTION.

In the garden pavilion of the Tarleton family, Johnny Tarleton's relaxation is interrupted by the arrival of Bentley Summerhays, fiancé to Johnny's sister, Hypatia. The Tarletons are a well-to-do merchant family, whose wealth has come from the patriarch's success as a linen draper and undergarment salesman. Bentley, the youngest son of an aristocratic family, has been staying with the Tarleton's and working in the family shop, much to the annoyance of Johnny. Bentley's air of superiority and self importance pushes Johnny to the breaking point. Threatened with a beating, Bentley throws himself on the floor and cries out, bringing Mrs. Tarleton and Hypatia rushing into the room. They take Bentley away, leaving the infuriated Johnny fuming. Lord Summerhays, Bentley's father, enters, and seeing the state Johnny is in, gives him a punch bowl to smash. The elder gentleman seems quite aware of his son's proclivity for driving others into a blinding rage. Both men head off for a casual stroll.

As Hypatia wonders whether aristocratic families like the Summerhays laugh at them behind their backs, her mother assures her that she has no need to fear the upper-crust of society. As the discussion turns to marriage, Hypatia confesses that she is not in love with Bentley, but that the "little squirt of a thing" has brains, which is more than she can say for the other suitors she has had.

Upon the arrival of Mr. Tarleton, Bentley jokingly refers to him as his "adopted father," explaining that a schoolmate of his, Joey Percival, had three fathers growing up (his natural father, a philosopher, and an Italian priest). The effect had broadened Joey's outlook on the world in Bentley's opinion.

Alone with Hypatia, Lord Summerhays confesses that he has come to the house to visit at her request. It turns out that a short time ago, Lord Summerhays had proposed to Hypatia, unaware that his son had already done the same. Hypatia complains about the boring, lady-like existence she must endure.

Moments later an aeroplane crashes into the family's greenhouse. Its pilot is none other than Bentley's friend Joey Percival. His passenger is a famed Polish acrobat named Lina Szczepanowska. All the men in the house are immediately enamoured of her, and Mr. Tarleton attempts to seduce her when they are alone. Though she rejects his advances, she seems to like him, and takes him off to the household gymnasium.

Into the empty pavilion enters a mysterious young man brandishing a pistol. He quickly hides just in time to overhear Hypatia aggressively pursuing the newly arrived Joey Percival. The two rush off as Mr. Tarleton enters the pavilion, where he is confronted by the young intruder, who accuses him of crimes against his mother Lucinda Titmus. Tarleton denies the accusations. Lina enters just in time to disarm the intruder.

Hypatia rushes into the pavilion flirting with Joey fast on her heels. When "Gunner" suggests that Hypatia had acted inappropriately, Joey immediately orders him to take back the calumny. As they are about to throw "Gunner" out, Mrs. Tarleton recognizes the photographs of Lucy Titmus and scolds the others for their cruelty against the young man.

The attention then turns to Hypatia and her intentions for marriage. The rejected Bentley goes into a fit, which is only stopped when Lina carries him off to the gymnasium. Joey says he would consider marrying Hypatia, but only if he could receive another 1,500 pounds a year on which to live. Infuriated, Mr. Tarleton submits. Bentley returns and later agrees to fly off the next day with Lina.

Hypatia, who frequently complained about the unending talking in the household, exclaims with joy when there is nothing else to be said as the play concludes.



What is *a Shavian Play?*

Of all of the authors, dramatists, and poets throughout history, few have periods of time named after them; George Bernard Shaw is one of these select few. The Victorian era (or as referred to by literature scholars, Shavian era) is the time between 1856-1950 when Shaw was one of the paramount writers in English literature. Even though he did not set out to create popular drama, he had the uncanny ability to get patrons into the theatre. As a playwright, Shaw knew exactly what his work was and what it stood for. When pressed, he categorized his plays as plays of ideas, problem plays, or thought-provoking plays. Shavian drama is socially conscious and strives to show society in its truest light. Shaw believed that theater was the best venue in which to address pressing social issues and that theater was uniquely suited to encourage discussions on these subjects in the hope of affecting change.

Shavian drama is heavily influenced by Ibsenism, named after Henrik Ibsen who also wrote realistic social dramas during the Victorian era. In 1890, when Shaw gave a lecture on Ibsen's works, he commented, "the conflict is not between clear right and wrong; the villain is as conscientious as the hero, if not more so; in fact, the question that makes the play interesting is which is the villain and which is the hero?" Though the same can be said about Shaw's work, it must be understood that Shavianism and Ibsenism are not interchangeable. While they both deal with similar themes and both utilize conflicts which highlight the wickedness in the Victorian social class system, the immense difference between the writers can be seen in the tones and moods of their works.

Shaw is often seen as robust and comedic and Ibsen has a more dramatic, dark tone. Shaw makes his audience laugh while they watch the play; when the curtain goes down and the audiences are come down from their laughter, they begin to realize they just watched a political, thought-provoking play. This is Shavian drama.



Hypatia Tarleton (Katie Fabel) and former suitor Lord Summerhays (Jonathan Gillard Daly). Photo © Jerry Dalia, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, 2015.



Who's Who in the Play

JOHN TARLETON: the vivacious patriarch of the Tarleton family, who “has made a great deal of money out of Tarleton’s Underwear”; a great supporter of free libraries, and a man of many ideas

MRS. TARLETON: wife to John Tarleton and mother to Johnny and Hypatia; “shrewd and motherly old lady who has been pretty in her time, and is still very pleasant and likeable and unaffected”

JOHNNY TARLETON: “an ordinary young business man of thirty or less”; son of John Tarleton; he has spent many years at his father’s shop, but has distinctly different views of how the business should be run



HYPATIA TARLETON: daughter of John Tarleton, fiancée to Bentley; “a typical English girl of a sort never called typical...swift glances and movements that flash out of a waving stillness, boundless energy, and audacity held in leash”; she has had enough of her boring lady-like existence

Costume rendering for Hypatia by Tilly Grimes for the 2015 production of *Misalliance*.

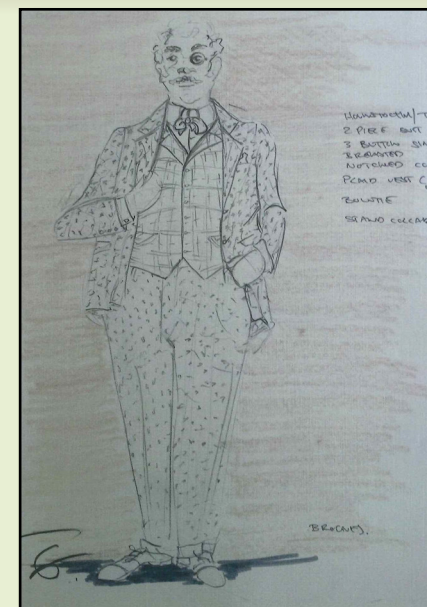
LORD SUMMERHAYS: a former colonial governor, father to Bentley; at one time, he proposed to Hypatia; a very proper Englishman

BENTLEY (“BUNNY”) SUMMERHAYS: son of Lord Summerhays, fiancé to Hypatia; “one of those smallish, thin-skinned youths, who from 17 to 70 retain unaltered the mental airs of the latter and the physical appearance of the earlier age”

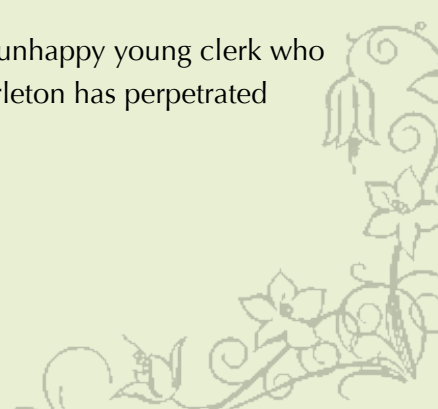
JOEY PERCIVAL: friend to Bentley and part-time aviator; “a splendid specimen of humanity”; later courts Hypatia

LINA SZCZEPANOWSKA: a proud and celebrated Polish acrobat; the members of her famous family make it a point of honor to risk their lives at least once a day; she receives advances from Mr. Tarleton, Lord Summerhays, Bentley and Johnny in the short time she is at the house

JULIUS BAKER (“GUNNER”): a peculiar and unhappy young clerk who sets out to right the wrongs he feels Mr. Tarleton has perpetrated against his mother



Costume rendering for Mr. Tarleton by Tilly Grimes for the 2015 production of *Misalliance*.





Shaw on...

ON RAISING CHILDREN: “There may be some doubt as to who are the best people to have charge of children, but there can be no doubt that parents are the worst.”

ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS: “Experienced parents, when children’s rights are preached to them, very naturally ask whether children are to be allowed to do what they like. The best reply is to ask whether adults are to be allowed to do what they like. The two cases are the same. The adult who is nasty is not allowed to do what he likes; neither can the child who likes to be nasty. There is no difference in principle between the rights of a child and those of an adult.”

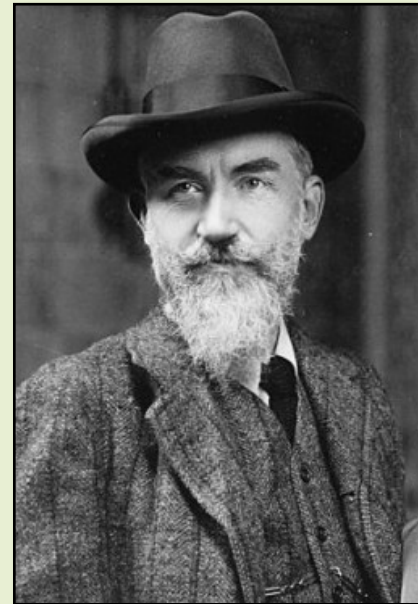
ON MARRIAGE: “Marriage: When two people are under the influence of the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions, they are required to swear that they will remain in that excited, abnormal, and exhausting condition continuously until death do them part.”

ON HUMOR: “My way of joking is to tell the truth. It is the funniest joke in the world.”

ON WRITING: “I was driven to write because I could do nothing else. In an old novel of mine — *Cashel Byron’s Profession* — the hero, a prizefighter, remarks that it’s not what a man would like to do, but what he can do, that he must make work in this world. I wanted to be another Michaelangelo, but found that I could not draw. I

wanted to be a musician, but found that I could not play — to be a dramatic singer, but had no voice. I did not want to write: that came as a matter of course without any wanting.”

ON THE CREATION OF PLAYS: “You will understand that my plays are not constructed plays: they grow naturally. If you ‘construct’ a play; that is, if you plan, you will find yourself in the position of a person putting together a jigsaw puzzle, absorbed and intensely interested in an operation which, to a spectator, is unbearably dull. The scenes must be born alive. If they are not new to you as you write, and sometimes quite contrary to the expectations with which you have begun them, they are dead wood.”



ON NOTHING: “I was, in fact, a born philanderer, a type you don’t understand. I am of the true Shakespearean type: I understand everything and everyone, and am nobody and nothing.”

ON WOMEN: “My genius for hurting women is extraordinary; and I always do it with the best intentions.”

ON THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE: “There are two tragedies in life: one is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get it.”

George Benard Shaw, 1910.

Commentary & Criticism

WHAT TO DO WITH MISALLIANCE: “Critics threw up their hands in exasperation. This was not a play. It might be amusing, it might be engaging, it might even be important—but was it drama? The theatre management was no doubt secretly relieved when, after only eleven performances, the death of King Edward VII forced all theatres to close. In another generation *Misalliance* would be understood for what it was: a new dramatic form, poised between the genteel drawing room comedies of the 19th century and the absurdist romps of the 20th. But in 1910—before The Great War irrevocably shattered the fragile gentility of the Edwardian ethos—the world was not yet ready.”

-Kate Farrington

Shaw's Edwardian Elegy: Life Under Glass

THE TWO FACES OF MISALLIANCE: “*Misalliance* is one of Shaw's more problematic plays. The first half is almost exclusively devoted to the presentation of viewpoints relating to marriage, courtship, socialism, class, science, and other assorted topics — all presented almost in the form of a debate with very little of that ‘dramatic action’ which we are told is what theatre is supposed to be all about. The wit and depth of these subjects tossed around by the play's primary characters defy all

the rules of dramatic construction and yet maintain our interest on the basis of ideas peppered with wit and delivered with tantalizing rhetoric.

In the second half of the play, we are rewarded for the sparkling verbosity of the first act with a second act filled with incident and adventure in which the ideas espoused in Act One are dramatically demonstrated. It seems a brazen way to write a mainstream commercial comedy but when Act One and Act Two are combined, it produces a thoroughly satisfying sense of amalgamation and we recognize the kinship between both parts.”

-Charles Marowitz

THE ILLUSION OF THEATRE: “Monitoring a revival of the play in 1939, *The Times* critic commented: ‘Plays of discussion that lead nowhere in particular are likely to disappoint their first audiences who naturally expect to be carried to some unusual desitnation. With the lapse of time inconclusiveness comes to seem a positive merit.’ With a further lapse of time these same qualities of unreality and madness, and the fracturing of standard plot procedures, have again altered their focus and may be seen as having their desitnation in the mystification and illusion of modern theatre. *Misalliance* has affinities with the drama of Pirandello, where events ‘erupt in the instant, arbitrarily’, as Eric Bentley described them, ‘just as his characters do not approach, enter, present themselves, let alone have motivated entrances; they are suddenly there, dropped from the sky’.”

-Michael Holroyd

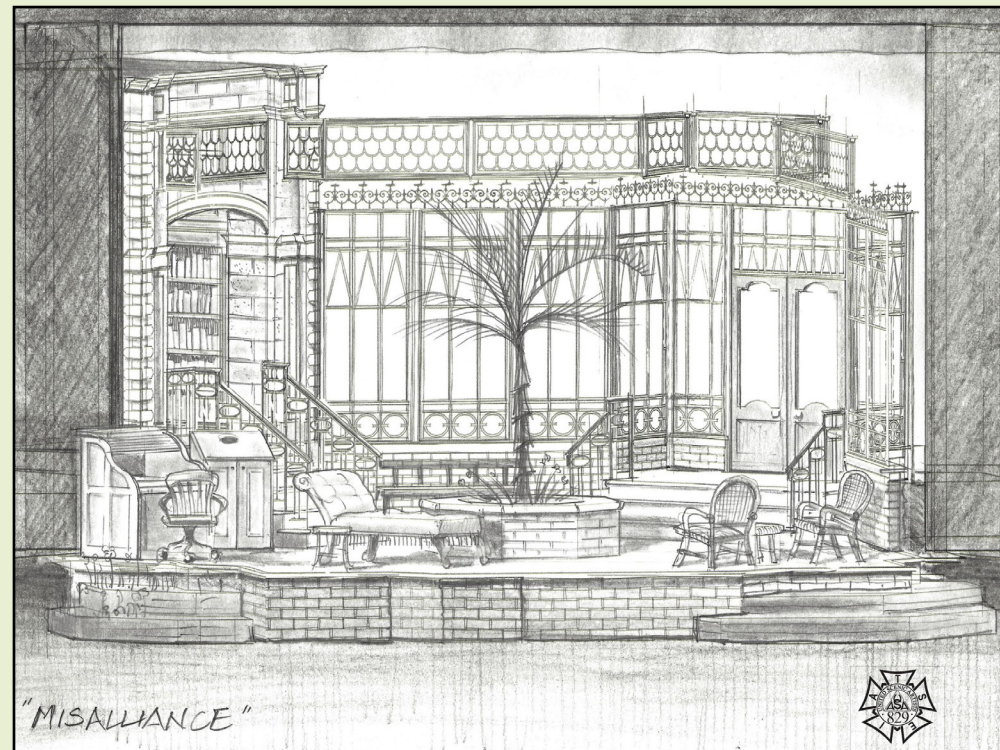
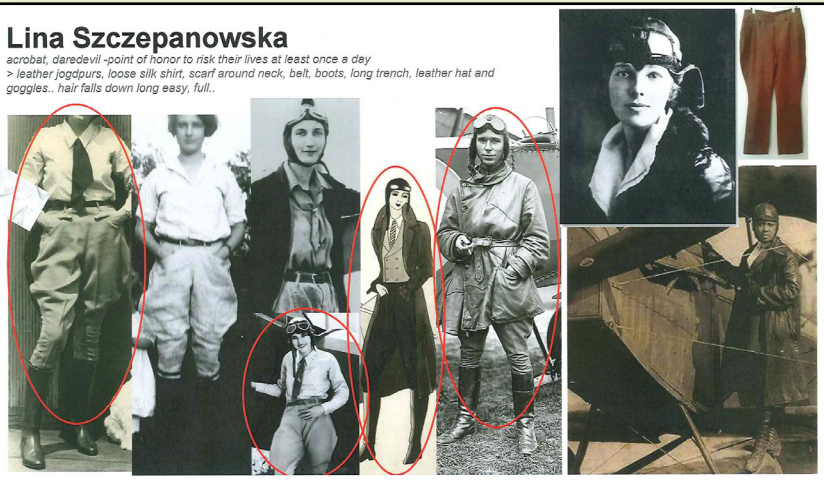
Bernard Shaw 2 - The Pursuit of Power: A Biography



In This Production

Lina Szczepanowska

acrobat, daredevil -point of honor to risk their lives at least once a day
> leather joggpurs, loose silk shirt, scarf around neck, belt, boots, long trench, leather hat and goggles... hair falls down long easy, full..



"MISALLIANCE"



Bentley Summerhays

"one of those smallish, thin-skinned youths, who from 17 to 70 retain unaltered the mental airs of the latter and the physical appearance of the earlier age"
> Blue blazer, contrast summer pant and shoe, stand collar, bow tie, boater?... norfolk jacket/ navy?



Far Left: Costume research panels for Lina and Bentley by Tilly Grimes.

Above: Set design by Brian Clinnin.

Left: Ames Adamson as Mr. Tarleton.



Explore Online

To read and get the free e-book of *Misalliance* and the rest of Shaw's works in the public domain, check out:

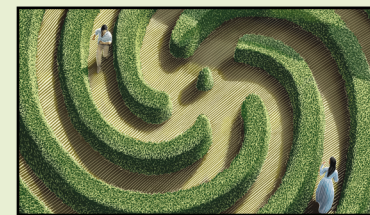
https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Bernard_Shaw_George_Misalliance?id=tIl-xVW3KhcC

Various links to all things Shavian can be found through this portal, which includes a virtual tour of Shaw's London:

<http://www.shawsociety.org.uk/index.html>

Attend the upcoming Shaw in New York Conference this October. For more information, visit:

<http://www.shawsociety.org/Shaw-in-New-York-Conference-2015.htm>





Shaw

Selected Works

Plays

- Widowers' Houses, 1892
- Arms and the Man, 1894
- Candida, 1887
- The Devil's Disciple, 1897
- Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, 1898
- The Philanderer, 1898
- You Can Never Tell, 1899
- Captain Brassbound's Conversion, 1900
- Caesar and Cleopatra, 1901
- Three Plays for Puritans, 1901
- Mrs. Warren's Profession, 1902
- John Bull's Other Island, 1904 (stage play 1907)
- Man and Superman, 1905
- Major Barbara, 1905
- Doctors Dilemma, 1906
- Getting Married, 1908
- **Misalliance, 1910**
- Fanny's First Play, 1911
- Overruled, 1912
- Androcles and the Lion, 1912
- Pygmalion, 1913
- Heartbreak House, 1920
- Back to Metusalem, 1922
- Saint Joan, 1923
- The Apple Cart, 1929
- Too True to Be Good, 1932
- The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, 1935
- The Millionairess, 1936

Fiction and Non-Fiction

- Immaturity, 1879
- The Irrational Knot, 1880
- Love Among Artists, 1881
- Our Corner; Cashel Byron's Profession, 1882
- An Unsocial Socialist, 1883
- Fabian Essays on Socialism, 1889
- The Quintessence of Ibsenism, 1891
- Cashel Byron's Profession, 1885
- The Man of Destiny, 1897
- The Perfect Wagnerite, 1898
- Fabianism and the Empire, 1900
- The Common Sense of Municipal Training, 1904
- On Going to Church, 1905
- Dramatic Opinions and Essays, 1906
- Socialism and Superior Brains, 1910
- Great Catherine, 1913
- Peace Conference Hints, 1919
- Imprisonment, 1925
- The Socialism of Shaw, 1926
- The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, 1928
- What I Really Wrote about the War, 1931
- Doctor's Delusions, Crude Criminology, and Sham Education, 1932
- Essays in Fabian Socialism, 1932
- Major Critical Essays, 1932
- Our Theaters in the Nineties, 1932
- Music in London 1890-94, 1932
- American Boobs, 1933
- Prefaces, 1934
- Village Wooing, 1934
- William Morris As I Knew Him, 1936
- In Good King Charles's Golden Days, 1939
- Everybody's Political What's What, 1944
- Sixteen Self-Sketches, 1948
- Buoyant Billions, 1948
- Farfetched Fables, 1950





Sources & Further Reading

Cheerio, Titan: The Friendship Between George Bernard Shaw, Sean, O'Casey, and Eileen O'Casey by Eileen O'Casey

George Bernard Shaw by Harold Bloom

The Proverbial Bernard Shaw compiled by George B Bryan and Wolfgang Mieder

Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition by Michael Holroyd

The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw by Christopher Innes

Shaw on Shakespeare edited by Edwin Wilson

Shaw: An Autobiography 1856-1898 by George Bernard Shaw

Letters to Beatrice Webb by George Bernard Shaw

The Bernard Shaw Collected Letters (4 volumes) by George Bernard Shaw, edited by Dan H. Laurence

Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells (Selected Correspondence of Bernard Shaw) by George Bernard Shaw, edited by Percy Smith

Agitations: Letters to the Press, 1875-1950 by George Bernard Shaw, edited by Dan H. Laurence and James Rambeau

George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre by Tracy C. Davis

The Playwright as Thinker: A Study of Drama in Modern Times by Eric Bentley

Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaws Plays: A Linguistic Perspective by Zsuzsanna Ajtony

Bernard Shaw by Eric Bentley

Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England by Judith Flanders

A Visitor's Guide to Victorian England by Michelle Higgs

What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist—the Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England by Daniel Pool

