



George Bernard Shaw's
MISALLIANCE

May 12–June 9, 2024

DIRECTED BY **Guillermo Cienfuegos**

STUDY GUIDES FROM **A NOISE WITHIN**

A rich resource for teachers of English, reading, arts, and drama education.

Dear Reader,

We're delighted you're interested in our study guides, designed to provide a full range of information on our plays to teachers of all grade levels.

A Noise Within's study guides include:

- General information about the play (characters, synopsis, timeline, and more)
- Playwright biography and literary analysis
- Historical content of the play
- Scholarly articles
- Production information (costumes, lights, direction, etc.)
- Suggested classroom activities
- Related resources (videos, books, etc.)
- Discussion themes
- Background on verse and prose (for Shakespeare's plays)

Our study guides allow you to review and share information with students to enhance both lesson plans and pupils' theatrical experience and appreciation. They are designed to let you extrapolate articles and other information that best align with your own curricula and pedagogical goals.

More information? It would be our pleasure. We're here to make your students' learning experience as rewarding and memorable as it can be!

All the best,

Alicia Green
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



Pictured: Erika Soto, *Much Ado About Nothing* Spring 2023.
PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Character Map	2
Synopsis	3
About the Author: George Bernard Shaw	4
Timeline of Shaw's Life	6
Edwardian Society and Values	7
The Victorian Woman and the New Woman	8
George Bernard Shaw's Influence and Impact	10
Themes	12
“An Awful Thing, An Impossible Thing”: The Debate Between Parents and Children in <i>Misalliance</i>	14
Pre-Show Preparation: Research	16
Pre-Show Preparation: Activities	17
Essay Questions	19
Additional Resources	20

THANK YOU

A Noise Within gratefully acknowledges the generosity of our ANW Edu donors. Your support allows us to produce award-winning productions of classic plays as well as reach more than 18,000 students in a typical year through our extensive education programs.

BCM Foundation

California Arts Council

Dwight Stuart Youth Fund

Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger

Mara W. Breech Foundation

Michael & Irene Ross Endowment Fund
of the Jewish Community Foundation
of Los Angeles

Sally & Dick Roberts Coyote Foundation

Steinmetz Foundation

The Ann Peppers Foundation

The Capital Group Companies
Charitable Foundation

The Green Foundation

The Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation

The Michael J. Connell Foundation

The Youssef & Kamel Mawardi Fund

Rose Hills Foundation

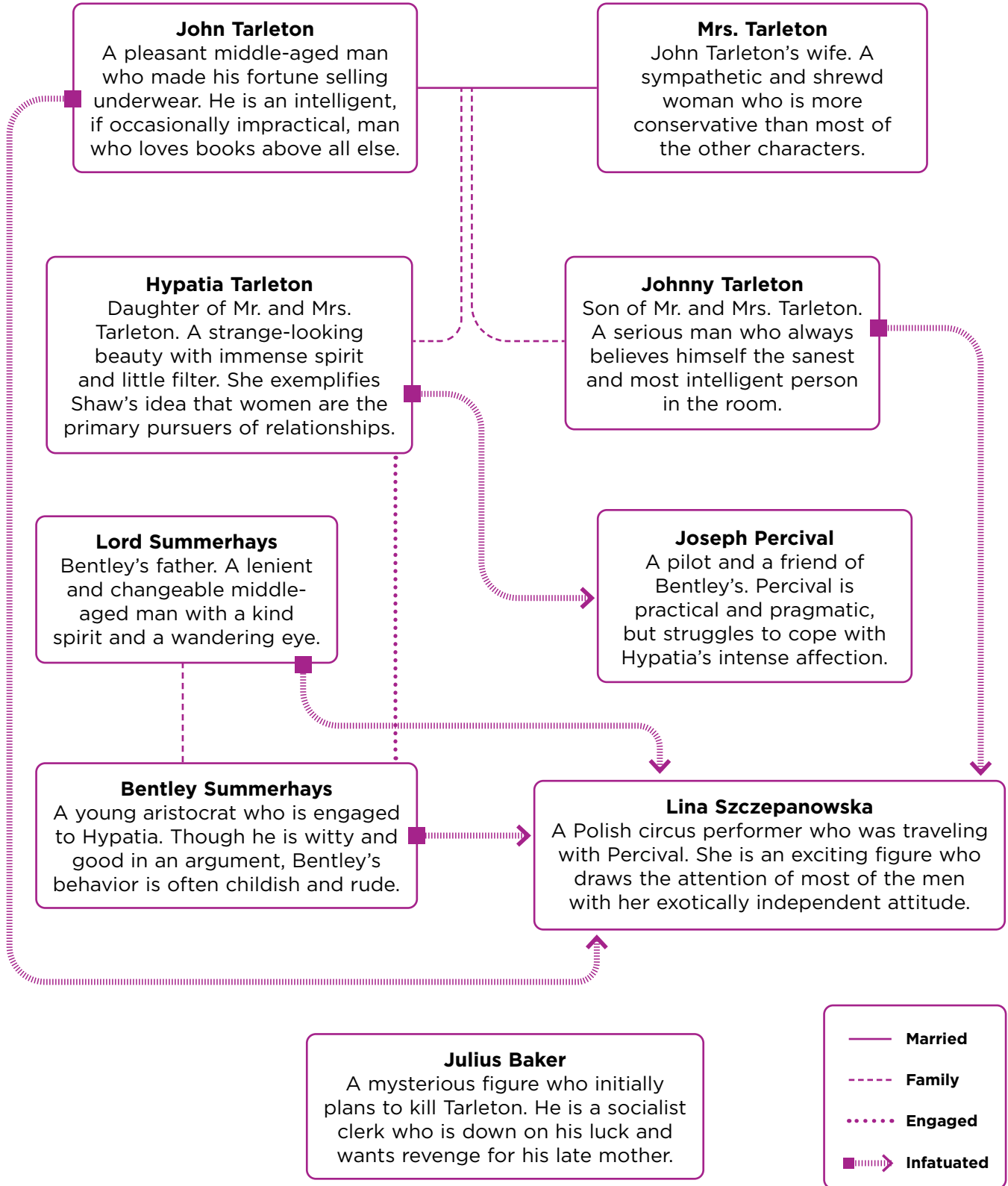


This organization is supported in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency. Learn more at www.arts.ca.gov.



This organization is supported in part, by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Department of Arts and Culture.

CHARACTER MAP



SYNOPSIS

Misalliance is a witty, farcical comedy that examines gender roles and marriage ideals over the course of a single summer afternoon. It serves as an ironic examination of marriage conventions of the time, and explores George Bernard Shaw's ideas of gender roles. Much of the action of the play lies in the complexity of the dialogue, with characters discussing everything from gender and marriage to current events and local gossip. Romance abounds, for better or for worse—mostly centering around Hypatia Tarleton, the daughter of self-made underwear salesman John Tarleton.



"Misalliance" from the Otterbein University Theatre & Dance production of *Misalliance*. 2016.

The Tarletons are newly wealthy and Hypatia is engaged to Bentley Summerhays, a frail but intelligent aristocrat, though it is unclear if the family truly approves of the match. The four men at the estate—Tarleton, his son Johnny, Bentley, and his father Lord Summerhays—spend much time talking about business, and each man has a wildly different idea of what it means to be successful. Hypatia seeks adventure above all and is already unsure about marrying Bentley. She reveals that she previously had an offer of marriage from Bentley's father Lord Summerhays, which she denied because he is too old and she does not yet want to be a nursemaid or widow.

Hypatia's prayers for a break from the status quo are answered when an airplane conveniently crashes out of the sky and into the Tarletons' sunroom. The aviator, Joseph Percival, is a very handsome man who immediately catches Hypatia's attention. The passenger in the plane, who miraculously saves Percival's life before impact, is revealed to be Lina Szczepanowska (Sh-che-pan-ov-ska), a Polish daredevil. All of the men are taken with Lina, whose exciting and sensual personality has earned her many proposals in her short lifetime.

Tarleton is the first to officially proposition Lina, who refuses gently and offers him friendship instead. A strange man with a gun sneaks onto the



"Edwardian Woman on the Beach" by Thomas Pollock Anshutz. Circa 1900.

property and hides just in time to avoid being seen by Percival, who is running away from Hypatia's relentless pursuit. The armed stranger witnesses an interaction between Hypatia and Percival wherein she slaps him and begs him to kiss her. He is scandalized by the display, but stays hidden until Tarleton enters. Tarleton is startled by the appearance of the uninvited guest, who reveals himself to be Julius Baker, the son of a woman with whom Tarleton once had a dalliance. He wishes to shoot and kill Tarleton but does not have resolve enough to pull the trigger. Baker is a poor cashier who blames the wealthy for their greed and mistreatment of the underprivileged. Lina gets the gun away from him, and he gives up his pursuit of revenge.

Percival and Hypatia reenter, and Baker divulges that he observed their earlier interaction. Percival lies for Hypatia, insisting that nothing untoward occurred and forcing Baker to sign a written confession stating that he lied. Before Baker can leave, his dignity in shambles, Mrs. Tarleton recognizes photos of his mother and becomes instantly sympathetic. Baker tells the truth about what he saw in the pavilion and after many questions, Percival agrees to marry Hypatia if Tarleton pays him. Lina then storms in and declares that she must depart. Tarleton, Lord Summerhays, Bentley, and Johnny have all propositioned her in one afternoon, and she is fed up. All she wants, she says, is to be a free woman.

Everyone insists that Lina stays for dinner, although she is itching to get back up in the sky, and the afternoon concludes with Bentley promising to go up in the airplane himself, conquering his fear and perhaps turning over a new leaf. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

WRITTEN BY ELYSE GRIFFIN

George Bernard Shaw is one of the most prolific writers of the modern era. Though he is best known as a playwright, Shaw was also a respected critic, journalist, novelist, and essayist. A noted social reformer, Shaw wrote plays that dramatized social commentaries, and in 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his achievements. Today, his works are studied in literature classes worldwide and are considered classics of modern drama.

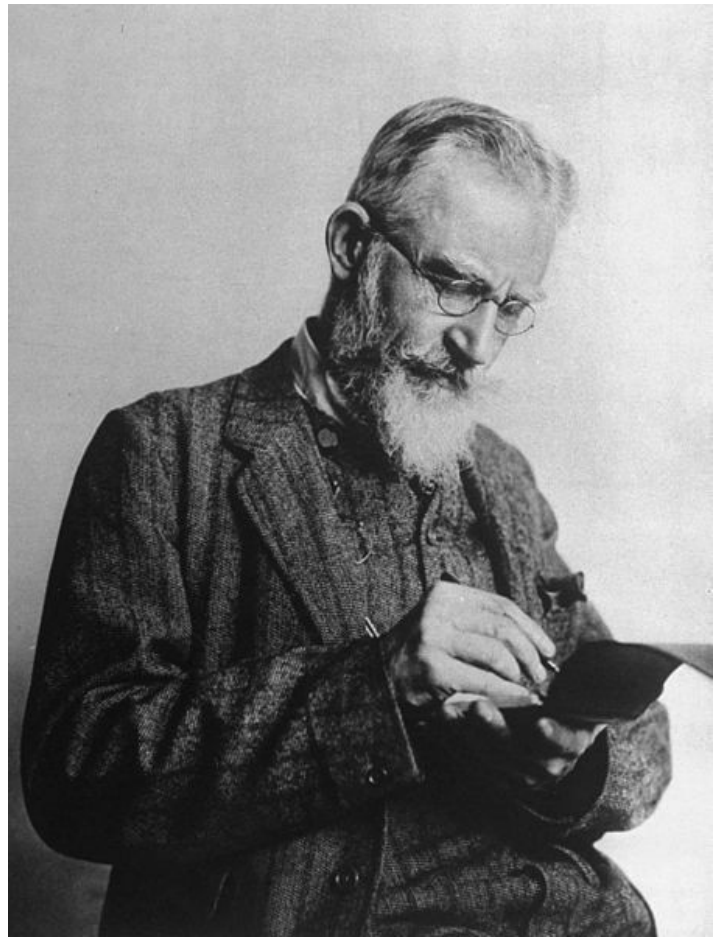
Born July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland, Shaw was given a Protestant upbringing by his father, a civil servant, and his mother, a music teacher and vocalist. Through his mother, Shaw gained an appreciation for classical music that he later credited as a formative interest for his eventual successes.

The young Shaw disliked organized education; at 14, he decided the whole schooling system was valueless and promptly dropped out. But he had a passion for learning, so Shaw gave himself an informal education. He read voraciously, and he frequented the National Gallery of Dublin, where he studied art and history.

At age 20, Shaw moved to London to begin a literary career. He made a name for himself as a music critic, and soon he was writing reviews of art, literature, and drama. By 1890, Shaw had been published in nearly every major London publication, including *The Pall Mall Gazette* and *Saturday Review*. During this time, he also wrote five novels, published mainly in socialist papers, which never achieved the same success as his plays and essays did.

By this time, Shaw had become an active member of the socialist movement. He had read Marx's *Das Kapital*, and by 1884 he had joined the Fabian Society, an influential group dedicated to establishing a socialist democracy in Britain. As a Fabian, Shaw learned to articulate his ideas and philosophies. He quickly became a spokesman for the Fabians and their ideals. This gave him his first opportunity to express his beliefs in a public forum and brought his name to the public as his writing never had.

Shaw was greatly impressed by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen's plays embodied a realism that Shaw hadn't known was possible within theatrical writing and production. For the first time, Shaw saw that the stage could become a platform for the communication of ideas. He despised



“Anglo-Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw writing in notebook at time of first production of his play *Pygmalion*.” 2014.

the sentimental melodrama produced in London theatres at the time, so he began writing plays of his own.

In 1898, Shaw published his first six plays together in a volume titled *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, which included the play *You Never Can Tell*. The plays were produced to great critical acclaim by independent and experimental theatres in London. Several plays followed, including such classics as *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, and *Pygmalion*. Soon Shaw's plays were being published and produced on both sides of the Atlantic.

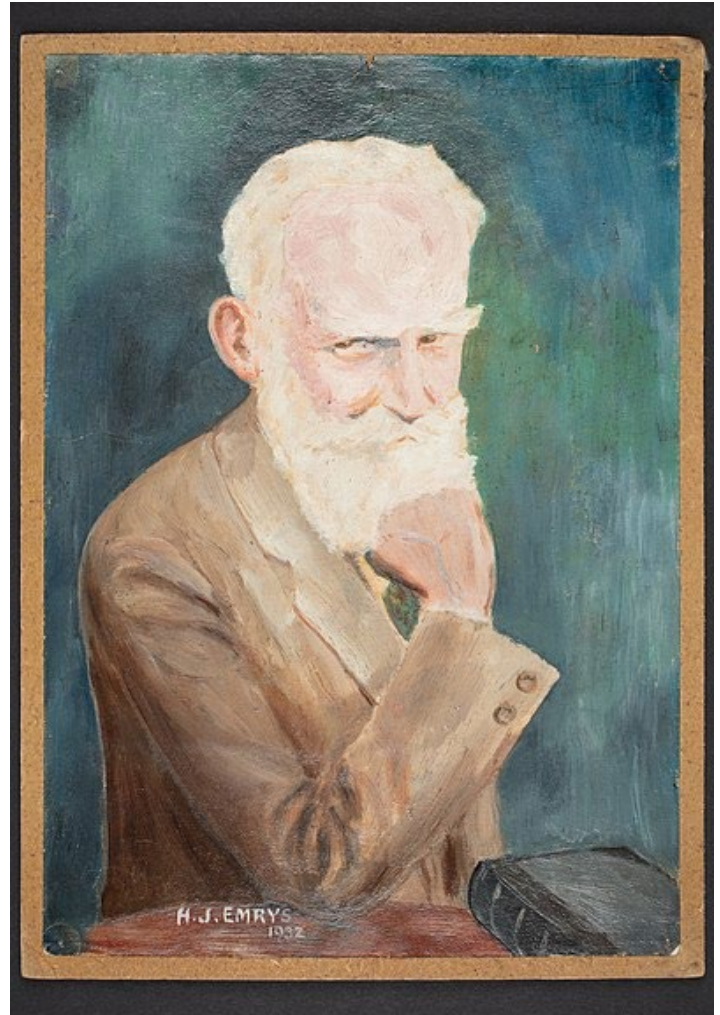
With each play, Shaw began to place more emphasis on social commentary and less emphasis on story or plot. That's not to say that Shaw's plays were boring; to the contrary, Shaw was a master of wordplay, paradox, and character, and audiences were entertained by his works even more than they were enlightened. But entertainment was not Shaw's intent. To him, the world was an imperfect place

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **GEORGE BERNARD SHAW** CONTINUED...

desperately in need of change, and the theater was a place to showcase those flaws to the public. Whether the cause was ending poverty, reorganizing government, or destroying cultural stigmas and limitations, Shaw sought to confront audiences with issues of social and political importance. Not everyone, however, embraced Shaw's work as great theatre.

His many critics argued that art was a means of communicating human experience, and not a forum to teach or preach. Shaw's plays, they contended, were seriously flawed because of their wordiness, their excessive argument, and their lack of interesting story. "Primarily, they are not plays," one critic wrote. "They are tracts in dramatic form." But Shaw strongly disagreed, arguing that "social criticism is the most important function of all art," and that "literature should imitate life so that we might act on it rather than on some misinterpretation of life."

After winning the Nobel Prize in 1925, Shaw continued to write plays until his death in 1950. His later works never enjoyed wide success. Still, Shaw stands as one of the great playwrights of the modern era. Regardless of one's personal opinion about Shaw's body of work, it is undeniable that he changed the landscape of Western theatre in ways that still influence what we watch today. ♦



"George Bernard Shaw" by Herbert Jones Emrys. 1883-1948.

TIMELINE OF SHAW'S LIFE AND WORK

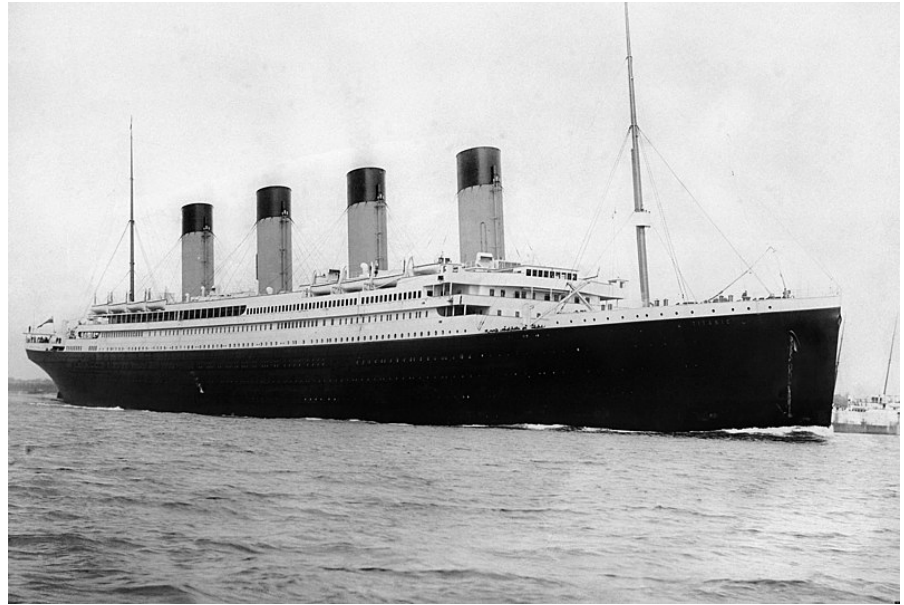
WRITTEN BY ELYSE GRIFFIN

- 1856** George Bernard Shaw is born July 26, in Dublin, Ireland.
- 1867-71** Shaw attends various schools in Dublin before leaving at age fifteen to work first as an office-boy and later as a cashier in a firm of land agents. He is already deeply interested in and knowledgeable about literature, music, art, and theatre.
- 1876-82** Writes five novels and works in London as a music critic, and briefly in the newly established Edison Telephone Company.
- 1879-82** Writes his first novel, *Immaturity*, and three more. In 1882, he meets Alice Lockett, with whom he has the first of many love affairs.
- 1884** Shaw joins the Fabian Socialist Society.
- 1888** Begins a two-year stretch as music critic for *The Star* under the pseudonym "Corno di Bassetto."
- 1890** Begins a four-year stretch as music critic for *The World*.
- 1891-93** Writes several plays, including *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, which is banned by the censors for its treatment of the subject of prostitution. It is performed privately in 1902 but does not receive a public production until 1925.
- 1895** Legend has it that after viewing *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Shaw bets Oscar Wilde that he could write a better and funnier show. Wilde says it can't be done. In response, Shaw writes *You Never Can Tell*.
- 1898** Marries Charlotte Payne-Townshend.
- 1901-03** Composes his "comedy and philosophy" *Man and Superman* in which he first gives expression to his "religion" of Creative Evolution and ideas about the Life Force.
- 1904-07** New plays composed and presented during this period were *John Bull's Other Island*, *Major Barbara*, *How He Lied to Her Husband* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*.
- 1909-10** *Misalliance* is written and performed for the first time.
- 1912** Falls in love with actress Stella (Mrs. Patrick) Campbell, who would originate the role of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion*. The affair threatens Shaw's marriage.
- 1920** Completes his five-play cycle on evolutionary themes, *Back to Methuselah*.
- 1926** Shaw is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1928** *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, a major political work written for Shaw's sister-in-law, is published.
- 1933** Shaw makes his first visit to America, where he meets Randolph Hearst, Charlie Chaplin and other celebrities.
- 1943** Death of Shaw's wife Charlotte, after suffering for a long period of time from a chronic bone disease.
- 1949** Writes a puppet play *Shakes versus Shav* for presentation at the Malvern Festival. Publishes a collection of autobiographical essays, several of them revised versions of earlier pieces, entitled *Sixteen Self Sketches*.
- 1950** Writes his last play, *Why She Would Not*. In November, Shaw dies of kidney failure. The lights of Broadway are dimmed, and theatre audiences stand in silence as a mark of respect.
- 1956** Lerner and Loewe's musical *My Fair Lady*, an adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, opens on Broadway and runs for more than nine years.

EDWARDIAN SOCIETY AND VALUES



“Woman Wearing a Corset” by Esmé Collings. Circa 1900.



“RMS Titanic departing Southampton on April 10, 1912.” by Francis Godolphin Osbourne Stuart. 1912.

George Bernard Shaw was born in 1856, in the middle of the Victorian Era, which spanned the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian Era was characterized by a departure from the looser culture of the previous Regency Era. Queen Victoria herself spearheaded this change, as she was known for her conservative ideals and dress. After the death of Queen Victoria, Edward VII ascended to the throne, ushering in a new chapter for England. In response to the old-fashioned prudence of the Victorian Era, the Edwardian Era, often called the Gilded Age, fostered progress and opulence. To quote American author Samuel Hynes, it was a “leisurely time when women wore picture hats and did not vote, when the rich were not ashamed to live conspicuously, and the sun really never set on the British flag.” *Misalliance* takes place toward the end of the Edwardian Era, which lasted from 1901 to 1910 and ended shortly before World War I.

The Edwardian Era was the beginning of the end for British aristocracy as it had previously functioned. It was a final stand, as it were, for the culture of servants, butlers, and British imperialism. Intent to show off the wealth and power that conquering other nations had wrought, the British upper class enjoyed new inventions, large parties, and lavish clothing. The rules of Edwardian etiquette were numerous and strict. Ladies always wore gloves in public and men always removed their hats in the presence of a superior. People did not shake hands, nor did they openly express affection or emotion. At

all times, they attempted to embody the “stiff upper lip” attitude that typified the British.

Meanwhile, the lower classes struggled to keep food on the table. Rumblings of revolution in Russia stirred up ideas of socialism in Britain. To the working class, who toiled for hours in service of an uncaring aristocracy, socialism seemed like the perfect solution. The suffragette movement began in earnest during this time, with women demanding equal rights and equal treatment under the law. Liberal ideas became more accepted, and the National Insurance Program was made available to unemployed, disabled, and elderly citizens.

Although the Edwardian Era technically ended with the death of Edward VII in 1910, the spiritual death of the era is typically thought to be two years later, with the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. With its enormous size, its luxury, and its shiny new systems, the Titanic embodied all the Edwardian Era stood for. In many ways, the catastrophe represented the loss of the era’s hopeful yet naive attitude, and the fact that most of the survivors were upper class highlighted the issues that the era had yet to meaningfully address. Shaw addresses these issues in *Misalliance* as well as many of his other plays. His socialist ideals and radical thoughts about gender roles developed during this time and served him well as the first Modern Era began in 1914. ♦

Further information:

Hynes, Samuel. *Edwardian Turn Of Mind*. United Kingdom, Random House, 2011.

THE VICTORIAN WOMAN AND **THE NEW WOMAN**

WRITTEN BY ELYSE GRIFFIN

“Oh, I daresay it’s vulgar; but there’s no other word for it. I’m fed up with nice things: with respectability, with propriety! When a woman has nothing to do, money and respectability mean that nothing is ever allowed to happen to her. I don’t want to be good; and I don’t want to be bad: I just don’t want to be bothered about either good or bad: I want to be an active verb.”

—*Hypatia*

During the Victorian Period, men and women’s roles became more sharply defined than at any time in history. As the 19th century progressed men increasingly commuted to their place of work—the factory, shop, or office. Wives, daughters, and sisters were left at home all day to oversee the domestic duties that were increasingly carried out by servants. During the 1830s, women started to adopt the crinoline, a huge bell-shaped skirt that made it virtually impossible to clean a grate or sweep the stairs without tumbling over.

The two sexes now inhabited what Victorians thought of as “separate spheres” which only came together at breakfast and again at dinner. This ideology rested on a definition of the “natural” characteristics of women and men. Women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere. Women were kept safe at home where they could uphold domestic values and prepare the next generation to carry on this way of life. The fact that women had such great influence at home was used as an argument against giving them the right to vote.

Though a woman’s life centered on marriage, a young girl was not expected to focus too obviously on finding a husband. Being “forward” in the company of men suggested a worrying sexual appetite. Women were assumed to desire marriage because it allowed them to become mothers, not to satisfy a sexual or emotional attraction.

Unmarried women were not even allowed to speak to men unless there was a married woman present as a chaperone. Higher education or a profession was also out of the question. Frustration with these suffocating restrictions could lead to all sorts of covert rebellion. Young Florence Nightingale longed to be able to do something useful in the world but was expected to stay with her mother and sister and supervise the servants. She suffered from “hysterical” outbursts as a teenager, and could not bear to eat with the rest of the family.



“Victorian “Photoshop”: Portrait Manipulation.” Photographer unknown. Circa 1900. Posted by Victorian Roses Ladies Riding Society.

THE VICTORIAN WOMAN AND **THE NEW WOMAN** CONTINUED...

Elizabeth Barrett, meanwhile, used illness as an excuse to retreat to a room at the top of her father's house and write poetry. In 1847, Charlotte Brontë poured her strong feelings about women's enforced limitations into the mouth of her heroine Jane Eyre:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags (ch. 12).

However, some women did challenge traditional Victorian gender roles, ushering in progress for the Edwardian era. With hope for educational and employment prospects for women on the horizon, marriage followed by motherhood was no longer seen as the inevitable route towards securing a level of financial security. These opportunities and attitudes gave rise to the concept of "The New Woman," a term that became a popular shorthand to describe a new breed of independent, educated women.

The phrase "The New Woman" was coined in 1894 by a pair of articles written by the novelists Sarah Grand and "Ouida" (the pseudonym of Maria Louise Ramé) in the *North American Review*. Grand published an article titled "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" from which "Ouida" then extrapolated the soon-to-be famous phrase "The New Woman" for the title of her essay. Grand's groundbreaking piece addressed the double standards inherent in Victorian marriages, which insisted on impeccable sexual virtue from wives but not from husbands.

The New Woman was a figure seen in real life as well as in popular culture. In society she was a feminist and a social reformer, or perhaps a poet or a playwright who addressed female suffrage. In literature, readers and audiences saw a female character who was outspoken about her desires and aspirations.

Arguments for and against the New Woman were



"Woman with a Camera" by A.J. Davison. 1880.

made by men and women alike. Many men found the idea of women making their own way in the world both sensible and desirable, while many women—the novelist Mary Augusta Ward, who wrote under her married name Mrs. Humphry Ward, being a notable example—were passionately against female emancipation and the threat it posed to the status quo of marriage and motherhood. Either way, whether admired as an intelligent free spirit or despised as a lascivious degenerate, the New Woman remained a force for change throughout the Edwardian era. ♦

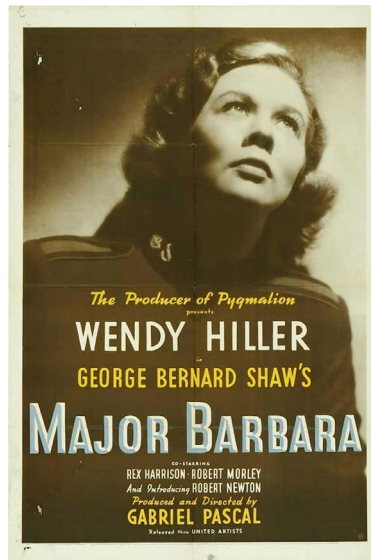
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

Humans have always cherished great storytelling. When people like a story, the story gets told over and over again. Often, it is translated into other languages and adapted to other mediums to make it more widely accessible. Below are a few film adaptations of Shaw's plays. Consider watching these films if you enjoy *Misalliance* and want to dig deeper into Shaw's lasting body of work.



Poster for *My Fair Lady*. Directed by George Cukor. 1964.

By far the most well-known adaptation of Shaw's works, *My Fair Lady* is a musical that follows the story of *Pygmalion*. The film stars Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison.



Poster for *Major Barbara*. Directed by Gabriel Pascal. 1941.

Known for her role in the 1974 film *Murder on the Orient Express*, Wendy Hiller plays titular Salvation Army worker Major Barbara. Again, Rex Harrison co-stars.



Poster for *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Directed by Gabriel Pascal. 1945.

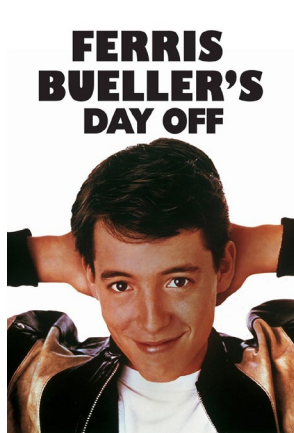
Capitalizing on a popular interest in the exotic, Gabriel Pascal directed the lavish *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Please note that this film portrays a wildly historically inaccurate version of ancient Egypt.

INFLUENCE AND IMPACT CONTINUED...

Though many people today would not necessarily recognize the names of Shaw's plays, he is still referred to as one of the most prolific writers of modern times. This is because Shaw, along with contemporaries like Oscar Wilde and Noël Coward, revolutionized the modern comedy. His use of fast-paced, witty dialogue paved the way for today's entertainment writers. Below are a few films that, while not adaptations of Shaw's work, use similar story and dialogue structure. When watching these films, think about what they have in common with *Misalliance*. Can you see how the high comedy genre of Shaw's time transformed into the witty modern comedies?



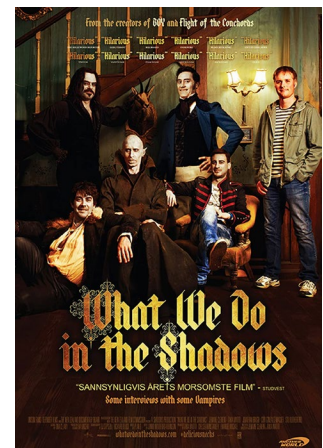
Poster for *The Big Lebowski*. Directed by Ethan Coen and Joel Coen. 1998.



Poster for *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Directed by John Hughes. 1986.



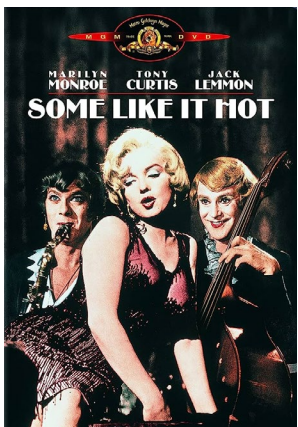
Poster for *Shaun of the Dead*. Directed by Edgar Wright. 2004.



Poster for *What We Do in the Shadows*. Directed by Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement. 2015.

Although the plots of these two farces revolve around crime and truancy instead of romance, *The Big Lebowski* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* resemble *Misalliance* in pacing and story structure.

Shaun of the Dead and *What We Do in the Shadows*, though comedies about a zombie invasion and vampire roommates respectively, follow a similar dialogue structure to *Misalliance*. All three works feature characters breaking up intense moments of physical and situational comedy with seemingly asinine conversation, to hilarious effect.



Poster for *Some Like It Hot*. Directed by Billy Wilder. 1959.



Poster for *The Proposal*. Directed by Anne Fletcher. 2009.

Some Like It Hot, a movie about two accidental drag queens, and *The Proposal*, a feel-good rom-com, both discuss topics of gender roles and class differences in a comparable way to *Misalliance*.

THEMES

Gender Roles

“Stop, stop. Can no woman understand a man’s delicacy?”

—Lord Summerhays

Throughout *Misalliance*, the characters frequently have discussions of gender that echo the conversations and questions of the time. During the Edwardian era, the idea of the New Woman had emerged, and gender roles were frequently challenged as women fought for their right to vote. In *Misalliance*, Shaw frequently presents his opinions about the roles of men and women, with characters often citing gender as the reason behind their actions. Johnny, embodying the more conservative ideals left over from the Victorian era, states, “Well, obviously, that independence for women is wrong and shouldn’t be allowed. For their own good, you know. And for the good of morality in general.” It is clear that Johnny’s statement is at odds with the beliefs of the other characters, as well as Shaw’s. Tarleton takes a surprisingly egalitarian view on gender for a man of his age. When first meeting Lina, a woman who defies nearly every expectation of a woman of her time, Tarleton says, “I must apologize, madam, for having offered you the civilities appropriate to the opposite sex. And yet, why opposite? We are all human: males and females of the same species. When the dress is the same the distinction vanishes.” This sentiment is echoed by Baker later in the play when he talks about Hypatia’s romantic advances. He rationalizes, “After all, why shouldn’t she do it? The Russian students do it. Women should be as free as men. I’m a fool. I’m so full of your bourgeois morality that I let myself be shocked by the application of my own revolutionary principles. If she likes the man why shouldn’t she tell him so?” Hypatia herself has strong opinions about male privilege. As the men sit and argue about propriety yet again, she declares, “Men like conventions because men made them. I didn’t make them: I don’t like them: I won’t keep them. Now, what will you do?”

These discussions of gender roles build over the course of the play, until finally culminating in Lina’s refusal of Johnny’s proposal. In her monologue, Lina tears down any lingering Victorian ideals, proclaiming “I am strong: I am skilful: I am brave:

I am independent: I am unbought: I am all that a woman ought to be.” With her absolute rejection of marriage, love, and relationships, Lina epitomizes the New Woman archetype. She seeks success, adrenaline, and happiness, and feels secure in her ability to achieve those goals on her own. Shaw’s discussion of gender roles, though antiquated in its use of a binary, is significantly ahead of his time. It creates multidimensional characters with complicated relationships to themselves and others and rejects the idea that gender typifies or defines one’s personality.

Marriage and Courting

“Mother: do you think marriage is as much a question of fancy as it used to be in your time and father’s?”

—Hypatia

Contrary to the Victorian model of courting, George Bernard Shaw deeply believed that in relationships, men are the objects of affection and women are the relentless hunters. From what he saw of the aristocratic courting of the time, women had their hearts set on a good marriage match, and they wouldn’t let that go for anything. Additionally, though men acted like they wanted a modest and quiet woman, Shaw believed they actually desired someone who could match them in passion and wit. This belief is reflected in many of Shaw’s plays but especially in *Misalliance*.

Hypatia, for example, offers an exaggerated portrayal of the tenacious pursuer. She sets her sights on Percival and never gives up. Percival, in turn, refuses advance after advance, only to end up kissing Hypatia in the heather and standing up for her against Julius Baker. All told, there are eight couple combinations offered up in the course of one afternoon. This number takes unlucky courtship to a hilarious extreme, with each poor match proving Shaw’s theory that marriage is essentially a game of pragmatism and pure, dumb luck. Tarleton claims that he and Mrs. Tarleton married for love, but Mrs. Tarleton refutes that, saying to Hypatia, “Oh, it wasn’t much fancy with me, dear: your father just wouldn’t take no for an answer; and I was only too glad to be his wife instead of his shop-girl.”

THEMES CONTINUED...

Though the entire play uses irony to prove how ridiculous Shaw finds the conventions of marriage and courtship, Percival underscores the point when he utters the famous line: “If marriages were made by putting all the men’s names into one sack and the women’s names into another, and having them taken out by a blindfolded child like lottery numbers, there would be just as high a percentage of happy marriages as we have here in England.”

Class Differences

“And do you suppose I believe such superstitions as heaven? I go to church because the boss told me I’d get the sack if I didn’t.”

—*Julius Baker*

The fact that the characters in the play have time to argue for hours on end about love, proposals, and current events speaks to a level of privilege not afforded to most people at the time. The main characters are wealthy, whether newly or generationally, and this status shapes their worldview and how they react to the events of the play. Several of them lack perspective entirely. Hypatia, for example, pouts about how hard it is to be wealthy when she says that her life is “more unbearable than any poverty: more horrible than any regular-right-down wickedness[...]. The poor escape. The wicked escape. Well, I can’t be poor: we’re rolling in money: it’s no use pretending we’re

not.” Bentley, too, is unaware of how entitled he acts. The man is liable to burst into tears at any singular inconvenience, consistently complaining about how hard his life is.

The only outsider is Julius Baker, the mysterious gunman. He exemplifies Shaw’s long-held socialist ideals and serves as a grounding force of perspective in the play. Upon witnessing the encounter between Percival and Hypatia, Baker is scandalized. When he tries to speak up, he is immediately silenced. Finally, fed up with the trivial problems of the upper class, he bursts out, “If people only knew what goes on in this so-called respectable house it would be put a stop to. These are the morals of our pious capitalist class! This is your rotten bourgeoisie!” Baker allows the audience to take a step back and remember that the story they are witnessing is at its core, a farce. Baker contrasts the Tarletons’ priorities with those of the aristocracy of other countries. He says,

“Women— beautiful women of noble birth— are going to prison for their opinions. Girl students in Russia go to the gallows; let themselves be cut in pieces with the knout, or driven through the frozen snows of Siberia, sooner than stand looking on tamely at the world being made a hell for the toiling millions. If you were not all skunks and cowards you’d be suffering with them instead of battenning here on the plunder of the poor.”

Through Baker, Shaw is able to place the central plot of *Misalliance* in a global context, affirming the working class and honoring his political beliefs. ♦

“AN AWFUL THING, AN IMPOSSIBLE THING”: THE DEBATE BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN *MISALLIANCE*

WRITTEN BY EMMA BAKER

George Bernard Shaw subtitled *Misalliance* “A Debate in One Sitting”. This debate is between many parties: men and women, old money and the nouveau riche, socialists and business tycoons. The core of the play, however, is the unavoidable, frequent debate between parents and children. Shaw’s fascination with political and social systems extended to the family, which he believed was a unit made up of people with fundamentally incompatible needs. “Old people and young people cannot walk at the same pace without distress and final loss of health to one of the parties. When they are sitting indoors they cannot endure the same degrees of temperature and the same supplies of fresh air,” he remarks in the preface to the play (19). As *Misalliance*’s characters struggle to get their needs met and their desires acknowledged, they must fight against the natural differences of perspective that come with youth or age. These difficulties make up a central part of the play’s conflict and serve as the timeless framework upon which the other debates rest.

Shaw shows that it is in the nature of youth to reject the burdens of expectation and convention, just as it is in the nature of age to impose them. Lord Summerhays and the Tarletons raised their children according to the “usual routine of their [social] class[es]” during a time when the average parent-child relationship was much more rigid and less openly affectionate than today (205). Though the Edwardian era was a time of evolving social attitudes towards children’s rights, the child-rearing traditions of the time might still seem archaic and distant compared to the way families function today. Child labor was still common, and it was not unusual for upper-class children to see their parents “only three or four times a year” (20). (Lord Summerhays notes that Bentley has escaped this, and has become accustomed to the privileges of an aristocratic life without the accompanying coldness and formality.) Hypatia and Johnny were raised by savvy, upwardly mobile parents who took pride in letting them “do what [they] like” (204), but even they are expected to undertake or abstain from certain things for their family’s sake.

Hypatia Tarleton is the clearest example of the difficulties that can occur when the demands of growing up meet the demands of familial expectation. Her pleas for adventure go unheard by

her father, who has refused her request to work in his shop on the grounds that it is not respectable for a woman of her class. Her sheltered childhood has led her to look at life as a great game; since “nothing is allowed to happen to her” (201), she has never had the opportunity to meaningfully play. The wild youth that naturally animates Hypatia is a liability to Tarleton and a heartbreaking joke to Lord Summerhays, who cannot conceive of why she would want to “go on like the most unwholesome product of the rankest Bohemianism” (201). Bored to tears, she finds freedom the only way she knows how—first through her cheeky refusal of Lord Summerhays’ proposal and then by confidently pursuing Joey Percival. Percival is the “son of three fathers” (230), which include a philosopher and priest as well as the “regulation natural chap” (183), and is therefore used to debating moral issues. This upbringing echoes Shaw’s own (Weintraub). The ample guidance he has received predisposes him to consider things carefully and approach life more calmly. Despite his more measured outlook, even he must eventually give in to the whims of youth when Hypatia chases him through the heather.

The burdens of familial duty are not limited to the aristocracy. The mysterious Gunner carries both photographs of his mother as well as the desire to avenge her ruined honor. Tarleton becomes the target of the many grievances, both personal and political, that stem from the way Gunner’s life has gone since her death. Much of the humor in his dialogue comes from the conflict between two contradictory conventions: “affirming [one’s] manhood” through violence and following orders given by one’s social superiors (265). Only Mrs. Tarleton is able to bridge the divide when she speaks tenderly to Gunner on his own terms, remembering his mother from her own lower-class youth. Her empathy transforms him from an angry agitator into a “poor orphan with nobody to take [his] part” (257), and she excuses his misbehavior with a lenience she does not show to Hypatia.

The parents in the play experience the expectations of family life differently. As enforcers of convention, they long for closer relationships with their children even as they are embarrassed by their behavior. As caretakers, they worry about how they have spoiled them or denied them opportunities. Despite the hopes that they have for their children, they feel that by the very nature of their relationship they cannot bring themselves to explain the difficult facts

“AN AWFUL THING, AN IMPOSSIBLE THING”: CONTINUED...

of life. Tarleton laments the “wall ten feet thick and ten miles high” that stands between parents and children (207). By the end of the play, this wall has become a mountain range. After being humiliated by Hypatia’s impetuous pursuit of Percival, he compares his situation to that of King Lear. “Let the family be rooted out of civilization! Let the human race be brought up in institutions!” he bellows (287).

Only Shavian superwoman Lina Szczepanowska seems to have a positive relationship with the expectations her family places on her. Lina, freed from the usual societal constraints of both womanhood and youth, takes pleasure in upholding her family’s honor by risking her life daily according to their 150-year-old tradition. Her youthful desire for adventure is not only whetted by her death-defying exploits but regarded by her family as an indispensable aspect of a proper and noble life. When Mrs. Tarleton asks her whether she went up in the airplane to spite her mother, Lina’s frank reply is “And why would I want to spite my mother?” (216). This exchange reveals how ignorant she is of the power struggles families like the Tarletons take for granted. Lina’s unconventional life and her family’s unusual profession are points of pride for her because they enable her to live fully as the “strong...skilful...unbought” woman she is (281). Lina and Hypatia share what Tarleton calls the “superabundant vitality” of youth (205), but Lina’s is tempered by the emotional and spiritual maturity that comes from succeeding on one’s own terms. She is also, along with Mrs. Tarleton, one of the least selfish characters in the play; she manages to save Percival, stop the Gunner from shooting Tarleton, and encourage Bentley to live a little bit. In Lina, Shaw hopes to give the audience a glimpse of what young women like Hypatia could be, and what might happen to us all if we can only try, as Bentley does at the end of the play, to dare as she does.

Like many of Shaw’s plays, *Misalliance* is not a debate with a simple outcome. Shaw did not know whether these differences would ever be resolved, and neither do we. What is certain is that the debate will continue to recur over generations, which is why these struggles are so familiar to us more than one hundred years later. The only solution is to accept the mutually conflicting natures of age and youth as facts of life and be lenient with our family members as they pursue their natural desires. *Misalliance*’s characters are so compelling because they follow their impulses, whether they are fighting to grow up or resigning themselves to growing old. Children will always break away, as Hypatia and Bentley do; parents like Tarleton and Summerhays will always want stability and comfort for the people they brought into the world. In the prologue, Shaw offers his best response to this evergreen dilemma: “We cannot break up the facts of kinship nor eradicate its natural emotional consequences. What we can do and ought to do is to set people free to behave naturally and to change their behavior as circumstances change.” ♦

Works Cited

Shaw, George Bernard. “Misalliance, with a Treatise on Parents and Children.” *Misalliance: Revision B1*, Project Gutenberg, 2 Feb. 2008, www.sandroid.org/GutenMark/wasftp.GutenMark/MarkedTexts/bstpc10_msali10.pdf.

Weintraub, Stanley. “Shaw, George Bernard (1856–1950), Playwright and Polemicist.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 11 June 2020, www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-36047;jsessionid=5C1218B849A1125CEDB14FD3FB0C6D0F.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **RESEARCH**

Purpose:

These research prompts will help students develop an understanding of the historical, cultural, and literary context of *Misalliance*.

Prepare:

To prepare for seeing *Misalliance*, have students break into small groups to research the following topics either in their groups or individually. When they are ready, have students present their findings to the class.

Edwardian Era

- Politics
- King Edward VII
- Manners
- Courtship and Marriage
 - » Balls
 - » Debutante Season
- The Titanic
- Gender Roles

Farce Genre

- Origin of the farce
- Examples of farce throughout history

George Bernard Shaw

- His childhood
- His family
- His politics
- His early life
- His career

Misalliance

- Publication and performance history
- Critique
- Themes
- Motifs
- Symbols

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES**

Purpose:

These activities will prompt students to think critically about the themes and ideas in *Misalliance* and engage with the narrative.

What's in a Name?

Throughout the play, the couples discuss what makes a misalliance and their dismay over potentially being caught up in one. By the end of the play, a whopping eight couple combinations have been discussed over the course of a single afternoon.

1. Break students off into eight groups. Assign each group one of the following couple combinations:
 - a. Hypatia and Bentley
 - b. Hypatia and Lord Summerhays
 - c. Hypatia and Percival
 - d. Mr. and Mrs. Tarleton
 - e. Mr. Tarleton and Lina
 - f. Lord Summerhays and Lina
 - g. Bentley and Lina
 - h. Johnny and Lina
2. Instruct each group to argue why their couple would NOT be a misalliance using examples from the text. If you'd like to make the activity more competitive, have each group argue why their couple is the most likely to stay together forever.
3. Give students 5-10 minutes to consider and then have each group present.
4. Then ask each group what actually happened to their couple in the play.
5. Finally, ask the class which couples they believe are misalliances. Why? What about the pairing lends them to believe that it won't last? Are similar warning signs present in relationships they see today?

The Essentials

In this activity, students will engage with the plot and themes of *Misalliance* by breaking it down into its most essential parts.

1. Start by breaking students off into groups and assign each group an act of the play.
2. Ask each group to condense the events of their act into one paragraph then have a representative from each group read their paragraph aloud.
3. Re-form the groups and have each summarize their act in one sentence. Again, have a representative from each group read the sentence aloud.
4. Have the groups come together one last time and encapsulate their act in just one word. Have a representative from each group share their words aloud.
5. Ask the students if the entire play can be summarized in one sentence. In one word?
6. Facilitate a discussion on what this activity reveals about the plot and the themes of the play.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION: **ACTIVITIES** CONTINUED...

Plan an Adaptation

In this activity, students will have the opportunity to develop a well-thought-out plan for how they might adapt the core story of *Misalliance* into a narrative in a new medium.

1. Have students read Shaw's *Misalliance*.
2. Facilitate a class-wide discussion about the core themes of the novels, and list the themes discussed for all students to see.
3. Have students break into small groups to discuss where they have seen themes and characters similar to those in *Misalliance* in other novels, news stories, films, music, paintings, etc.
4. In groups, ask students to devise a plan of how they would adapt the play into a different artistic medium (a play, a film, a comic book, a graphic novel, a song, a television series, a web series, a choose-your-own adventure novel etc.) The adaptation could involve transposing the setting of the ordinary world of the work from Edwardian England to another time period/location.
5. When ready, have each group present how they would plan to adapt *Misalliance* to the rest of the class. Presentations might include PowerPoints, costume sketches, set models, or vision boards.
6. After the presentations, open up a class-wide conversation about what new light would be shed on the core themes and characters from Shaw's original story in each adaptation proposed.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Research the definition of a farce. Is *Misalliance* a farce? Support your argument with examples from the text. Why do you think Shaw structured the play like he did?
2. Is Hypatia a strong female character? Why or why not?
3. What purpose does the pavilion serve as the setting of the play? Why do you think Shaw set the play when and where he did? What would be different if *Misalliance* took place in the a different season or setting?
4. How are Shaw's ideas of gender similar and different from our views of gender now?
5. Why is reading and watching high comedy still important? Do you believe that the art form is still relevant?
6. Does anyone in the play truly love anyone else? If so, who? Support your claims with examples from the text. Does love play any part in marriage, according to Shaw?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles

Davidoff, Leonore. "Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England." *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1974, pp. 406–28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786464>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Ducat, Vivian, and G. Bernard Shaw. "BERNARD SHAW AND THE KING'S ENGLISH." *Shaw*, vol. 9, 1989, pp. 185–97. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40681273>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Holroyd, Michael. "George Bernard Shaw: Women and the Body Politic." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1979, pp. 17–32. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343083>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Thane, Pat. "Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England." *History Workshop*, no. 6, 1978, pp. 29–51. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288190>. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Books

Griffith, Gareth. *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw*. Routledge, 2006.

Shaw, Bernard, and David Kornhaber. *Major Cultural Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Shaw, George Bernard. *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*. Welcome Rain Publishers, 2016.

Films

Cukor, George, director. *My Fair Lady*. Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures, 1964.

Plays

Shaw, Bernard. *Man and Superman: A Comedy and A Philosophy*. Penguin Books, 2004.

Shaw, Bernard. *Pygmalion*. Dover Publications, 1994.

Online Resources

"The Manners of the Edwardian Era", *Driehaus Museum*, driehausmuseum.org/blog/view/the-manners-of-the-edwardian-era. Accessed 18 June 2023.

"Manor House. Edwardian Life." *PBS*, www.pbs.org/manorhouse/edwardianlife/index.html. Accessed 18 June 2023.

Starmans, Barbara J. "Victorian Etiquette." *The Social Historian*, 27 Sept. 2015, www.thesocialhistorian.com/victorian-etiquette/.

ABOUT THEATRE ARTS: **KEY THEATRICAL TERMS**

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

After this *A Noise Within* performance, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

blocking: The instructions a director gives actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

character: The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

conflict: The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

dramatic irony: A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

genre: Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce, or social drama.

motivation: The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

props: Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

proscenium stage: There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

set: The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

setting: The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

stage areas: The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

theme: The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

thrust stage: A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

A NOISE WITHIN produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW’s production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue.

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at A Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.

Study Guides

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: www.anoisewithin.org. The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, the Common Core, and 21st Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within’s artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

Credits

- Alicia Green Education Director and Editor
- Kale Hinthorn Author
- Emma Baker LACAC Education Intern
- Dr. Miranda Johnson-Haddad Editorial Consultant
- Craig Schwartz Production Photography
- Teresa English Graphic Design



Geoff Elliott & Julia Rodriguez-Elliott
Producing Artistic Directors

ADDRESS 3352 E Foothill Blvd
Pasadena, CA 91107

TEL 626.356.3100

FAX 626.356.3120

EMAIL info@anoisewithin.org

WEB anoisewithin.org