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The presence of Shakespearean elements in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* has long been recognized by scholars who have found in Shaw's play a number of specific quotations, allusions, and borrowings. The reasons vary, however, as to why these elements are present. Frederick McDowell points out Shaw's utilization of "archetypes in Shakespeare" and of "mythic and archetypal dimensions in general."[1] Miriam Chirico seeks to understand Shaw's play by studying "its use of archetypes of character and drama" in the context of "ancient Greek drama, the *commedia dell'arte*," Shakespeare, or Wilde."[2] John Bertolini goes so far as to see Shaw as anxious "about his own originality with regard to Shakespeare"; he is "an inferior son to Shakespeare"[3] (portrayed in the relationship between Walter and his son) who "competes with Shakespearean comedy by means of allusion" (158–59).

Clearly, direct connections between Shakespeare and *You Never Can Tell* exist, beginning with the title. Shaw's usual practice is to use titles that are either someone's name or denotatively descriptive, such as *Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs Warren's Profession, Arms and the Man, Candida, Man and Superman, Major Barbara*, and *Saint Joan*, to name a few. But *You Never Can Tell* resonates with a sort of whimsy, casualness, optimism, even a colloquial as well as a metaphorical quality, found in such Shakespearean titles as *Love's Labor's Lost, Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*.[4]

Moreover, direct quotations from Shakespeare are also present in Shaw's play, such as "pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow" (*Macbeth* 5.3.43) and "from the vasty deep I go" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.51).[5] A number of Shakespearean echoes also exists in Shaw's play, such as Valentine invoking Romeo's line when he says that "Gloria is the sun" after the twins have referred to Valentine and Gloria as Romeo and Juliet;[6] Crampton drawing

upon Shylock's famous speech by declaiming that "I'm a man, with the feelings of our common humanity" (259);[7] and Shaw describing Crampton as "cowed," using Macbeth's complaint that it "hath cowed my better part of man" (V.viii.18).[8]

Some scholars have also detected similarities between Shaw's characters and characters from Shakespeare's plays. For example, McDowell sees a resemblance between Shaw's Philip and Ariel of *The Tempest*, between Philip and Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and between Philip and Mercutio with their "extroverted good-heartedness."[9] In Valentine, McDowell sees a prototype of the character of the same name in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, of Orlando in *As You Like It*, and of Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*.[10] McDowell also asserts that Valentine and Gloria recall Ferdinand and Miranda in *The Tempest* in their "freshness and spontaneity" and resemble Beatrice and Benedict in some of their "contentious interchange" (69, 66). McDowell goes on to compare M'Comas to the councilor Kent in *King Lear* (79), likens Crampton to Leontes and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* in his reconciliation with his children, and regards Crampton and Mrs. Clandon as an ironic inversion of the reunion of Leontes and Hermione of the same play (78). MacDowell also sees the seaside hotel as "the enchanted isle in *The Tempest*, with William and Bohun dividing the Prospero role of magician between them" (75). Bertolini adds to this list by observing that Mrs. Clandon's reason for leaving her husband "was the father's obtaining a whip," suggesting "shades of Petruchio in *Taming of the Shrew*," says Bertolini.[11]

Additionally, the character of William has drawn much critical attention as a direct reference to Shakespeare. While the waiter's name is actually Walter, Dolly renames him William because of his resemblance to the bust of Shakespeare in the Stratford Church, or, as McDowell interprets it, she sees him "as radiating a serenity akin to that emanating from Shakespeare's bust."[12] McDowell also adds another interesting similarity: "William's tact and sagacity are Shakespearean in essence: one might cite, besides, his tolerance, his equanimity, his sympathy, and his objectivity as Shakespearean attributes."[13] Most of the above comparisons, however, remain catalogue-like, superficial, and undeveloped, with little textual support.

The Argument

In attempting to go beyond mere surface similarities between Shakespeare and Shaw, it seems relevant at this point to examine how, with *You Never Can Tell*, Shaw is trying his hand, for the first time in his career, at romantic

comedy. Such plays as *Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs Warren's Profession, Arms and the Man, Candida*, and *The Man of Destiny* preceded it, but none of them could remotely be called a romantic comedy, at least not to the extent of *You Never Can Tell*. Thus, the present argument is that when Shaw attempted to write his first romantic comedy, he turned for guidance and inspiration to the acknowledged master of the form—William Shakespeare himself, who could provide at least ten examples from the first half of his career for Shaw to learn from. While direct and indirect references to Shakespeare have been noted and are certainly there, something much deeper and more subtle in Shaw's study of Shakespeare's comic method is taking place in *You Never Can Tell*. Rather than Shaw seeing himself as intimidated by or in competition with Shakespeare (Bertolini) or as drawing upon classical comic archetypes (McDowell and Chirico), Shaw seems to be modeling his play on something much closer to the inner essence of Shakespearean romantic comedy. In fact, as we shall see, Shaw is utilizing characteristics that recur all through Shakespeare's comedies, such as tone, sea settings, coincidence, familial situations, comic characterizations, strong female characters, and a celebratory dénouement.

Tone

First, in terms of tone or atmosphere, while tragedy sometimes lurks in the background of Shakespearean comedy, as in Egeus's narration of the sundering apart of the Antipholus family at the beginning of *The Comedy of Errors*, generally Shakespeare's comedies, in spite of conflicts, confusions, and anticomic situations, have an atmosphere of lightness, of high comedy, of optimism, of carefreeness, and laughter. Again, in *The Comedy of Errors*, a spirit of fun appears a number of times in the form of mistaken identities, slapstick elements, mind-numbing confusions, or characters such as the Dromios, as when the Dromio of Antipholus tells the story of his being pursued by the fat kitchen wench and describes her body as a global map with different countries found in various parts of it. Shakespeare's comedies are made lighter by such characters as the Dromios, Speed, Lance, Crab and his dog, Costard, Dull the Constable, Grumio, Bottom, Dogberry, Touchstone, and Feste, and a positive mood presides over every dénouement with the satisfactory resolution of conflicts, except perhaps in the case of Malvolio, which is compensated for by the pairing off of Orsino and Viola. Typically, Shakespeare provides entertainment in mistaken identities, disguises, cross-gender dressing, screen scenes, *deus ex machinas*, and surprising twists and reversals.

Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* maintains a similar tone through such characters as the genial waiter William, through the hijinks of Dolly and Philip, the lighthearted humor of Valentine, and the universal appeal of the "duel of sex." Margery Morgan describes it as a "festive play, a celebration," a "sweet-tempered play," "with nothing melancholy about it,"[14] Anthony Gibbs labels it Shaw's "festive comedy[,] a celebration with feasting, music and dance,"[15] Dorothy Hadfield notes its "sense of whimsy, joy, and magic . . . permeated with a sense of the carnivalesque,"[16] and Chirico says that Shaw uses "the conventions of a typical farce, complete with misrecognitions and maskings."[17]

Much of the lightness and fun in Shaw's play is provided by the twins, Dolly and Philip, who often chatter on with their high energy, overlapping each other's speeches, completing each other's sentences, interrupting other people, asking too many questions, being guided by their curiosity, indulging in the comic device of stichomythia, and jumping to conclusions. As Dolly says, "the old story. We talk too much" (217). Dolly sums up the play's attitude when she is asked why she accepted the first officer's proposal of marriage: "for fun, I suppose" (226). William also provides a light and pleasant touch.

Sea Settings

Another Shakespearean trait by which Shaw may have been inspired is Shakespeare's use of the sea, which appears in many comedies as well as noncomedies and influences the action and meaning in significant ways. In *The Comedy of Errors,* the opening speech by Egeus depicts in great detail the terrible tragedy of how his family was separated at sea by shipwreck and bungled rescue efforts, and all the cities of the play—Syracuse, Epidamnum, Epidarus, Corinth, and Ephesus—are all coastal cities. There is also talk of the oceanic rivalry between Ephesus and Syracuse, a situation that precipitates Egeus's arrest. The setting of *The Merchant of Venice* is in a city that is nothing more than a conglomeration of islands in the ocean and in which sea commerce and descriptions of sea conditions are an integral part of the action. *Much Ado About Nothing* is set in the port city of Messina on the island of Sicily, and the soldiers therein cross and recross the Mediterranean Sea to Spain and back, and of course *Twelfth Night* is located in Illyria on the Adriatic Sea and opens with the story of Viola's survival of a shipwreck at sea and her concern for her brother's fate at sea.

As Shaw tells us, *You Never Can Tell* is set "*on the sea front at a watering place on the coast of Torbay in Devon,*" with, in the opening scene, "*a broad window*

looking on the sea" (211). The second act is located on the terrace of the Marine Hotel with much interplay between the ocean, the beach, and the luncheon party, members of which repeatedly go and come to the beach down by the ocean. In addition to being at a seaside resort, with its casual, leisure-time mood that contributes to the light tone of the play, much is made of the fact that a resort community has a different way of life. As Valentine tells the twins, "you are neither of you capable of conceiving what life in an English seaside resort is" (217). In Dan Laurence's edition of Shaw's *Collected Letter II, 1898–1910*, there is a photograph of Shaw's own sketch for the set of *You Never Can Tell* (rendered in 1905), which speaks volumes about the importance to Shaw of the sea in the play. The most dominant feature of the set is the expansive sea itself. The audience looks directly and squarely across the terrace and small balustrade to the sea fading into the distance and at the activities thereon: a ship, a rowboat, an umbrella, and seagulls. The front of the hotel barely holds a place to the left and the terrace is basically uncluttered.[18] In Shakespeare's comedies, the sea is often threatening, and Gibbs notes, in relation to Shaw's drawing, that the "action of the play takes place on *terra firma*. But the image of the sea, as a place of hazard, unpredictability and turbulent depths, is a strong background presence."[19] As with many of Shakespeare's plays, the sea, and talk of the sea, forms an integral part of the background, atmosphere, action, and dialogue of Shaw's play.

Coincidence

Another essential ingredient in Shakespearean comedy is its tendency toward farce, or at least high comedy, much of it achieved by Shakespeare's use of coincidence and improbability. In *The Comedy of Errors*, it just so happens that all four family members, and the Dromios, have ended up, unbeknown to them, in the same town of Ephesus, which situation forms the basis of the entire plot; in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, it just so happens that Proteus hires his beloved Julia, disguised as a boy, as his aide and that Valentine just happens to be standing nearby when Proteus starts to rape Sylvia; in *Love's Labor's Lost*, it just so happens that after the men at the court of the king of Navarre take an oath of chastity, the Princess of France and her ladies arrive at Navarre's court, providing the main plotline; in *The Taming of the Shrew*, it just so happens that Petruchio arrives in Padua to visit his old friend Hortensio, who, it just so happens, desires to court Bianca, who has a shrewish sister named Katherine who must be married before Bianca can become available for courtship; in *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream, it just so happens that Oberon overhears Demetrius cruelly rejecting the brokenhearted Helena and instructs Puck to put the "love-in-idleness" potion on the eyes of the young man in "Athenian garments," thereby initiating the main conflict; in *Much Ado About Nothing*, it just so happens that Dogberry's men overhear Borachio and Conrad discussing the plot against Hero, "accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully" (4.2.48–49), which event provides the resolution of the conflict; in the beginning of *As You Like It*, it just so happens that Rosalind and Celia, "here, where you are" standing, is the very "place appointed for the wrestling" (1.2.136–37) match where she sees Orlando defeat the king's wrestler Charles and falls in love with Orlando, and he with her, and the main plotline of the play begins; in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, it just so happens that Mistresses Ford and Page compare the love letters they have received from Falstaff, which happen to be identical in language, and the plot for revenge against Falstaff begins; and in *Twelfth Night*, it just so happens that when Viola delivers Orsino's message of love to Olivia and Olivia falls in love with Viola disguised as the page Cesario, Olivia later accidentally encounters Viola's twin brother Sebastian and marries him, thinking he is Cesario.

These examples show how coincidence pervades all of Shakespeare's comedies. The device is also present in *You Never Can Tell*, where it just so happens that Mrs. Clandon has brought her three children to an ocean resort town that just happens to be the residence of her estranged husband, Crampton, and the twins happen to be in Valentine's dental office, the landlord of which is Clampton, at the same time Mr. Crampton arrives to have his tooth extracted. Shaw, perhaps feeling a little self-conscious about relying on coincidence, puts a sort of apologia in the mouth of Philip: "I warn you that if you stretch the long arm of coincidence to the length of telling me that Mr Crampton of this town is my father, I shall decline to entertain the information for a moment" (244). Other instances of coincidence include Valentine and Gloria both being single, eligible young people who, after some hesitation, manage to fall in love; all the characters come together in Act II on the hotel's terrace for lunch; Crampton is very rich, which will aid Valentine's impoverished condition after marriage to his daughter; the regatta committee is giving a party in the evening "for the benefit of the Life Boat" (290); and William the waiter is the father of one Mr. Bohun, who is the lawyer M'Comas has hired to resolve the Clandon/Crampton case. All these instances are summed up by William's observation that "it's the unexpected that always happens" (262), which of course is announced by the play's title, *You Never Can Tell*. This same use of coincidence is what also lends a tone of farce to Shaw's play, just as it does to Shakespeare's comedies.

Familial Situations

You Never Can Tell uses three recurring family situations also found in Shakespeare: the presence of twins, the disintegrated family, and the lone parent. Shakespeare, with gender-opposite twins, Hamnet and Judith, of his own, had some affinity for using twins in his comedies: the Antipholus twins in *The Comedy of Errors* and the gender-opposite twins in *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Sebastian, who look so much alike that Olivia marries Viola's twin Sebastian thinking that he is the same person as Viola/Cesario. Viola's love for her brother is also very evident in the fact that she is in deep mourning over the assumption that her twin brother was drowned in the shipwreck from which she escaped.

Something of that same quality exists in Shaw's twins. Shaw infers that they look alike when he notes that Philip is "*obviously the young lady's twin*," that he has "*his sister's delicate biscuit complexion*" and is built "*on the same small scale*" as his sister (213). Morgan points out that they are "in harmony with each other" and that their "thought and speech" "chime together."[20] One is reminded of Viola and Sebastian, for Philip's and Dolly's actions suggest that they are constantly together and quite close. This is also suggested by the fact that they know what each other is thinking: they finish each other's sentences, interrupt each other, agree with each other, and discuss matters between them, presenting a unified front when they confront their mother. At the ball in Act IV, their appearance as harlequin and columbine symbolizes their close and complementary relationship.

The second familial resemblance in Shaw and Shakespeare is the presence of separated or broken families, with which Shakespeare dealt almost exclusively in his comedies. In *The Comedy of Errors*, we know that the family was separated by a sea misfortune and have been apart ever since, and, while one twin is seeking his lost brother throughout the play (and for the past five years), the family—a lone exception in Shakespeare's comedies—is eventually reunited. It is also the only comedy in which a mother appears. Other broken families are represented by Egeus-Hermia; Sylvia and the Duke of Milan; the Princess of France and the King of France; Baptista-Katherine-Bianca; Portia, without a mother or a father; Shylock-Jessica; Leonardo-Hero; Duke Senior–Rosalind; Viola-Sebastian; and Olivia, who is mourning the loss of both a father and brother.

In Shakespeare's day, life expectancy was much shorter than in Shaw's time, and families broken up by the death of one or more family members was not uncommon. Shaw modernizes the motif in his play by having the family torn apart by separation, the mother having left the husband because

of his violent and cruel nature. Moreover, in the single-parent family of *You Never Can Tell*, Shaw reverses the situation in Shakespeare's comedies and has the mother raising her three children alone instead of the father. Apparently there is not one scene in all of Shakespeare's comedies in which a mother and daughter engage in a discussion, as happens in Shaw's play. Shaw does have a typical Shakespearean scene, however, when Gloria holds a conversation, alone, with her father. And while the father does make an appearance in Shaw's play, tries to reconcile with the children and even to gain custody of the twins, the family will never reunite and Mrs. Clandon will continue raising the twins as a single parent. Hadfield suggests this much by stating that "family differences have not been smoothed over."[21]

Comic Characters

Shakespeare's comedies are full of comic characters, but two of his most masterly creations are Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Both are egocentric, crave to be the center attention, lack self-objectivity, talk incessantly, and think that they know more than they really do. These same characteristics might well apply to Shaw's twins, Dolly and Philip, who are high-spirited, self-absorbed, extremely garrulous, and disruptive. One is reminded of Bottom's and Dogberry's "know-it-all" attitude, as Philip constantly reminds everyone, some dozen or more times, that "my knowledge of human nature teaches me not to expect too much" (243) and continually referencing "judging from my knowledge of human nature" (223), each time just before he begins to pontificate. Also, like Dogberry's misguided attempts at erudition, and somewhat like Bottom's, Philip's language tends to be unnecessarily formal, ornate, showy, and convoluted: "in pursuance of the precepts in your treatise on Twentieth Century Conduct, and your repeated personal exhortations to us to curtail the number of unnecessary lies we tell, we replied truthfully that we didnt know" (224). Dolly and Philip, like Bottom and Dogberry, present comic types that are funny because they are unaware that they are so. Chirico adds that "through the disruption of every possible social code, Dolly and Phil carry the spirit of rebellion into the play";[22] with a liberal interpretation of her observation, one may well say the same of Bottom and Dogberry in their "disruption of every possible social code." Chirico also points out that the twins' "playfulness is a political gesture intrinsic to Shaw's critique,"[23] just as Bottom and Dogberry are Shakespeare's critique of human, and political, experience: think of Bottom's behavior at the wedding of Theseus and

Hipolyta and at the court of Theseus, and Dogberry's position as a public official, symbolizing the society of Messina, and his bumbling ineptitude, a scathing satire on petty bureaucrats with a little power.

Strong Women

Shakespeare and Shaw share a positive portrayal of women in their plays. We know what Shaw's attitude toward women was because of all his pronouncements on the subject, and while we do not have such personal statements by Shakespeare, we can certainly surmise what his attitude was by way of his female creations in his comedies: in all of them, there exists not a single weak major female portrait, including Hero, who has a silent strength and self-assurance. A natural compatibility seems to exist between Shaw and Shakespeare on this subject, especially as reflected in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*. Not only does Shakespeare create such strong women as Sylvia, the Princess of France, Katherine, Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Viola, to name a few, but he also pairs them with men who seem weak or, at the very least, less than admirable. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Sylvia, as well as Julia, proves to be steadfast, strong, patient, faithful, and firm—unlike Proteus, a would-be rapist, and Valentine, a weakling who offers his beloved to her attacker, both of whom by the end of the play are quite despicable. By comparison, Sylvia is a tower of strength. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, the King of Navarre and the gentlemen of his court take an oath to devote themselves to intense study for three years, which oath is immediately broken when the Princess of France and the ladies of her court take up residence in the park near Navarre's castle. The women prove to be more cautious, sharper-tongued, quicker-witted, and more stable than the men, and by the end of the play the men are forced to take a vow to wait "twelve month and a day" (V.ii.867) before pursuing romance any further, while the Princess and her ladies depart "to some forlorn and naked hermitage" to live "an austere insociable life" (V.ii.791, 795), at which they will be more successful than the men.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine is certainly a portrait of an extremely strong woman, mentally sharp, aggressive, verbal, willful, and independent, while the weak men of Padua are intimidated by her. By the end of the play, Katherine, far from being tamed, has learned to bide her time, and, in all circumstances, to match her behavior with the occasion. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, who single-handedly manages a wealthy estate and is one of Shakespeare's finest female creations, shows integrity by abiding by her

father's will, reveals intelligence and determination in rescuing Antonio from Shylock's legal grip, reveals a largeness of mind and a solid and humane value system in her "quality of mercy" speech, and exudes poise and presence of mind in conducting the courtroom proceedings—while Bassanio appears to be an impecunious, avaricious manipulator of people, a sycophant and a weakling.

Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Rosalind in *As You Like It* give us two more examples of very strong, principled, and determined women, but Shakespeare's crowning achievement in his comedies is Viola in *Twelfth Night*, who finds herself in an extremely precarious, even dangerous, situation but remains steadfast to her value system and her moral code, acts with complete integrity, becomes the moral center of the play, and, through her evenhandedness, resolves the main conflict of the play.

The women in *You Never Can Tell*, especially Mrs. Clandon and Gloria, share similar characteristics with Shakespeare's strong women. Mrs. Clandon, before the play has opened, has chosen, in order to protect her children, to leave her husband, raise her children on her own, move to the island of Madeira, write books on the twentieth-century lifestyle, help liberate other women, and raise her daughters with the same values. Some critics believe that the men in *You Never Can Tell* suffer in comparison to the women. Morgan states that Mrs. Clandon "does not lose control," asserts herself at the end and defeats Valentine, for it is with her, rather than the daughter, that Valentine "really struggles for power in the 'duel of sex.'"[24] Hadfield believes that Mrs. Clandon "remains independent of her husband to the end,"[25] and that when M'Comas says that Mrs. Clandon will have to become Mrs. Crampton, or Crampton must become Clandon, it confirms that "there is no automatic assumption that the woman should subordinate her identity to the man's" (64). Hadfield also comments that the play has a cast of "emotional, subservient men and powerful, independent women" and that the women even have financial power (74). During the "courtship" between Gloria and Valentine, Gloria continuously holds the upper hand—"I am a free woman" (270)—while Valentine fawns over her. Her articulations show her strength: "I do not think the conditions of marriage at present are such as any self-respecting woman can accept" (266), she says, while she assures her mother that "if a woman cannot protect herself, no one can protect her" (280). She refuses to be emotional and when Valentine starts to leave, she commands him with, "you shall not go" (314). Gloria agrees to give Valentine a "settlement," but the stage directions "indicate she does it '*proudly*'—benevolent, but aware of the power she wields." Hadfield adds that Gloria, by all indications, will be "master of the house" (68), and at the end, Valentine, who has no money, is powerless to command his future wife, as Gloria "dances off to a party without him," while he is left

alone onstage, an emblem of his lack of strength and control over a strong woman.

Celebratory Dénouement

Shakespeare has a habit, as is common knowledge, of ending almost all of his comedies with a feast or dance, or a hint that a celebration is about to begin, and several scholars in writing about *You Never Can Tell* compare Shaw's ending to Shakespeare's comic ones.[26] In Shakespeare, the celebrations that come most readily to mind are Bianca's wedding dinner at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the triple marriage celebration, with the play-within-the play, at the end of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the return to a party at Portia's house in Belmont at the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, and Benedict's request at the end of *Much Ado About Nothing*, "let's have a dance ere we are married"; the last words of the play are, "strike up, pipers."[27]

You Never Can Tell ends with costumes and masks, with feasting and drinking, with music and dancing, similar to Shakespeare's comedies. At the end of Act III, the Waiter announces that "there will be the band and the arranging of the fairy lights":

> DOLLY: Fairy lights!
> PHILIP: A band! William: what mean you?
> WILLIAM: The fancy ball, miss.
> DOLLY AND PHILIP [*simultaneously rushing to him*] Fancy ball!!!
> WAITER [. . .] Chinese lanterns in the garden, maam: very bright and pleasant, very gay and innocent indeed. (290)

In Act IV, the first costumed attendee arrives, "*a grotesquely majestic stranger, in a domino and false nose with goggles, appears at the window*" (297). This turns out to be Bohun the attorney and the waiter's son. Soon is heard the "warning chime of glasses in the room behind them" (303) and William arrives from the bar "jingling his tray as he comes softly to the table." (303) The next costumed participants arrive,

> *a harlequin and columbine, waltzing to the band in the garden, whirl one another into the room. The harlequin's dress is made of lozenges, an inch square, of turquoise blue silk and gold alternately. His bat is gilt and his mask turned up. The columbine's petticoats are the epitome of a harvest field, golden orange and poppy crimson, with a tiny velvet jacket for the poppy stamens.* (304)

Shaw meticulously adds a feeling of gaiety and festivity with his detailed inclusion of colors that present "*an exquisite and dazzling apparition*" (304). All the while the music plays, and Valentine's and Gloria's betrothal is settled. By the end of the play, Bohun has danced off with Gloria, Dolly with M'Comas, and Philip with his mother, while William consoles Valentine with "you never can tell" (316).

Shaw scholars have commented on this "fancy dress ball." Gibbs opines that it "enabled Shaw to heighten the stylistic register of the play" with a "festival atmosphere,"[28] and sees it as "an epitome of the larger artifact of the play which contains it," in which "youth, vitality, and hope are the prevailing forces" (94, 91). Chirico contends that the dance is a "point of reconciliation" while it "symbolizes family unity and commonality of spirit."[29] Bertolini believes that by means of the dance "the older generation reconciles itself to the younger generation replacing it,"[30] but Hadfield argues that the "specifics of who dances off with whom show that . . . the family differences have not been smoothed over as the genre might predict."[31]

Finally, it is hard to think of a Shakespearean comedy that does not end with either a wedding or the promise of a wedding: *The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Noting, As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, while in *The Merchant of Venice* Bassanio and Portia have already wed, while in *Love's Labor's Lost*, the lone exception, the men will have to wait "twelve month and a day," if they can prove themselves in the interim.

In *You Never Can Tell*, Valentine and Gloria, after much contention between them and considerable doubt as to whether they can reconcile their differences, decide to get married, in true Shakespearean fashion—or as Dolly says, "the matter is settled; and Valentine's done for" (315).

Conclusion

Shaw's true attitude toward Shakespeare is confusing at best and presents us with something of an enigma. On the one hand, he is sometimes fiercely critical of the bard and often ranks himself superior to him. He claims, for example, in a letter to William Archer, that he was "considerably his [Shakespeare's] superior on a good many points,"[32] and he writes to Siegfried Trebitsch, his German translator, "you must begin where I leave off & surpass me as far as I surpass . . . Shakespeare."[33] He says, "I am as willing to hang up my *theatre* beside Shakespeare's . . . as Turner was to hang his landscapes beside Claude's,"[34] and claims that his Caesar is "an

improvement on Shakespeare's."[35] To Vladimir Tchertkoff, translator of Tolstoy, he admits that "I have striven hard to open English eyes to the emptiness of Shakespeare's philosophy," and that "I place Shakespeare with Dickens, Scott, Dumas *père*, etc., in the second order."[36] With Tchertkoff, Shaw gets on the subject of Tolstoy, who was a notorious critic of Shakespeare, with whom Shaw seems to agree, and says to "be careful not to imply that Tolstoy's great Shakespearean heresy has no other support than mine," that "in Tolstoy's estimation, Shakespeare must stand or fall as a thinker, in which capacity I do not think he will stand a moment's examination," and that "Tolstoy considers his own works greater than Shakespeare's (which in some respects they most certainly are)" (552). In a letter to H. M. Hyndman, he admits, "I campaign against Shakespeare, who is as old as Ecclesiastes" and,[37] regarding Shakespeare's practice of solving his plot problems at the end "by killing somebody," Shaw says he has no respect for that practice at all, for "such maudlin tricks may impose on tea-drunkards, not on me."[38] He also admits to his criticism of Shakespeare by addressing those who have "exclaimed against my criticisms of Shakespeare as blasphemies" (78). It seems that Shaw was wary of going too far in praising Shakespeare and claims that the genuine critics of Shakespeare, such as Ben Jonson and Frank Harris, "have always kept as far on this side of idolatry as I" (79). He also blames Shakespeare by wondering what is the use of writing plays if "you have nothing more to say" than Shakespeare does and points out that, from his perspective, Shakespeare's "technical skill" "was by no means superlative" (80, 81).

On the other hand, Shaw's admiration for Shakespeare can be seen in his praise of the bard. He says that "Shakespeare had the gold gift, too"[39] and concedes that "when we search for examples of a prodigious command of language and of graphic line, we can think of nobody better than Shakespeare and Michael Angelo."[40] Shakespeare's influence on him is seen in his concession that "I learnt my flexibility & catholicity from Beethoven; but it is to be learnt from Shakespeare to a certain extent."[41] He brags that he is going to make such a "blinding display" in playwriting that "has not occurred in the British drama since Shakespeare's advent," that he, Shaw, is "a very great deal the best English-language playwright since Shakespeare,"[42] and, in addressing the issue of influences on his own writing and indirectly suggesting Shakespeare's pervasiveness, he declares that "the English dramatists after Shakespeare do not count at all."[43]

You Never Can Tell may be able to shed some light on the Shaw/Shakespeare relationship. Judging from Shaw's play, several things seem to be inferred: one, Shaw had an extremely close acquaintanceship with Shakespearean comedy; two, he respected Shakespeare's work sufficiently to turn to him as a model in composing his own first romantic comedy; and

three, if it is true, as the aphorism suggests, that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Shaw, consciously or unconsciously, concedes his deep admiration, contrary to some of his pronouncements, for Shakespeare, especially when one considers that *You Never Can Tell* is in many ways a very personal document for Shaw. Some scholars see close parallels between Shaw's family background and the family situation in his play. Margery Morgan believes that *You Never Can Tell* "can be regarded as the most personal play he [Shaw] ever wrote,"[44] and Gibbs ranks it "as one of the outstanding achievements of the early period of his career as a dramatist."[45] And Shaw himself vigorously defended it in a letter to William Archer in 1906: "The thing is a poem and a document, a sermon and a festival all in one."[46] It may be of significance that when Shaw came to writing his most personal work, if we may so regard it, he turned, not coincidentally, to Shakespeare for his inspiration.

Notes

1. Frederick P. W. McDowell, "Shaw's 'Higher Comedy' Par Excellence: *You Never Can Tell*," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 7 (1987): 65. For a fuller discussion of Shaw's relationship with Shakespeare, see Sonya Freeman Loftis, "Shakespeare, Shotover, Surrogation: 'Blaming the Bard' in *Heartbreak House*," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 29 (2009): 50–65.

2. Miriam Chirico, "Social Critique and Comedic Reconciliation in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 25 (2005): 108.

3. John A. Bertolini, "Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 27 (2007): 161.

4. Bertolini also cites the last three named titles in his observations (158).

5. McDowell says that Philip is quoting Ariel of *The Tempest* and misquotes Philip's remark as "To the vasty deep I go," 79. The actual quotation from Shaw is, "from the vasty deep I go." Bernard Shaw, *Plays Pleasant* (London: Penguin Books, 1946), 314. The quotation is actually from 1 Henry IV (III.ii.51), when Owen Glendower boasts, "I can call devils from the vasty deep." *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

6. McDowell, "Shaw's 'Higher Comedy' Par Excellence," 66.

7. Ibid., 77.

8. Bertolini, "Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," 159.

9. McDowell, "Shaw's 'Higher Comedy' Par Excellence," 79.

10. Ibid., 67.

11. Bertolini, "Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," 158.

12. McDowell, "Shaw's 'Higher Comedy' Par Excellence," 72.

13. Ibid.

14. Margery Morgan, *The Shavian Playground: An Exploration of the Art of George Bernard Shaw* (London: Methuen, 1972), 84.

15. A. M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw: Essays in Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 91.

16. Dorothy A. Hadfield, "What Runs (in) The Family: Iterated Retelling, Gender, and Genre in *You Never Can Tell* and *Major Barbara*," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 26 (2006): 74.
17. Chirico, "Social Critique and Comedic Reconciliation," 107.
18. Bernard Shaw: *Collected Letters 1898–1910*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), facing 453.
19. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, 98.
20. Morgan, *The Shavian Playground*, 90.
21. Hadfield, "What Runs (in) The Family," 72.
22. Chirico, "Social Critique and Comedic Reconciliation," 120.
23. Ibid.
24. Morgan, *The Shavian Playground*, 98.
25. Hadfield, "What Runs (in) The Family," 70.
26. Chirico, "Social Critique and Comedic Reconciliation," 108; Bertolini, "Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," 158.
27. Attic comedy closed with a celebratory *komos*, a procession of dancers in which the whole community joined, and it is possible that Shaw's friend Gilbert Murray, a scholar and translator of ancient Greek drama, could have discussed with Shaw the structure of Greek comedy, or that Shaw could have read Murray's book on Aristophanes.
28. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, 93.
29. Chirico, "Social Critique and Comedic Reconciliation," 124.
30. Bertolini, "Wilde and Shakespeare in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*," 158.
31. Hadfield, "What Runs (in) The Family," 72.
32. Shaw, letter of 27 January 1900, *Collected Letters 1898–1910*, 143.
33. Ibid., letter of 26 December 1902, 298.
34. Ibid., letter to William Archer, 2 September 1903, 359.
35. Shaw, "Better Than Shakespeare," in *The Complete Prefaces, Volume 1: 1889–1913*, ed. Dan H. Laurence and Daniel J. Leary (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1993), 79.
36. Shaw, undated letter to Vladimir G. Tchertkoff, c. August 1905, *Collected Letters 1898–1910*, 551, 552.
37. Ibid., letter of 28 April 1900, 162.
38. Shaw, "Better Than Shakespeare," 77.
39. Shaw, letter to Elizabeth Robins, 13 February 1899, *Collected Letters 1898–1910*, 77.
40. Shaw, "Better Than Shakespeare," 81.
41. Shaw, letter to Max Beerbohm, 30 December 1900, *Collected Letters 1898–1910*, 215.
42. Ibid., letter to William Archer, 27 January 1900, 143.
43. Ibid., letter to Archibald Henderson, 18 February 1905, 515.
44. Morgan, *The Shavian Playground*, 87.
45. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, 90.
46. Shaw, letter to William Archer, 10 July 1906, in Charles Archer, *William Archer: Life, Work, and Friendships* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 295.