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Unpleasant Dramas by Shaw and Wagner

Widowers' Houses (1892) was originally titled *Rhinegold* when Bernard Shaw began to write it in collaboration with William Archer in 1884. According to Archer, the play was so titled because it was to open "in a hotel-garden on the Rhine" and in the end the hero was to "succeed in throwing the tainted treasure of his father-in-law, metaphorically speaking, into the Rhine."[1] However, when Shaw completed the play at long last in October 1892 with the new title, he did not follow Archer's ending: instead of rejecting "the tainted treasure of the father-in-law," the hero marries into the family business of slum landlordism. The wealth of the landlord and his mortgagees is not only secured but also will increase from compensations for city development plans. At the end of *Widowers' Houses*, the rich are becoming wealthier, while the poor remain impoverished. Shaw's first play denies the established moral principles of the well-made-play plot provided by Archer.[2] Ironically, with such an "unpleasant" ending, the play originally called *Rhinegold* has more in common with Richard Wagner's music drama *Das Rheingold*.

It has been argued that Shaw had not been confident enough to write such an "unpleasant" ending until he wrote *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in 1891.[3] However, the moment Shaw and Archer called their play *Rhinegold*, the young Irishman must have envisioned an unpleasant ending. He had been familiar with Wagner and Marx before he knew Ibsen. As Archer recalled, Shaw was simultaneously reading Marx's *Das Kapital* (in French translation) and an orchestral score of *Tristan und Isolde* when they got acquainted in the British Museum Reading Room. Thus it would seem natural that his first play should be a Wagnerian drama with a Socialist viewpoint. Shaw eventually summed up his views on *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in *The Perfect*

Wagnerite in 1898, but they had already been formed while he was a musical critic in the 1880s and 90s. For example, he commented in *The World* on 29 June 1892 on the production of *Das Rheingold* at Covent Garden, concluding that "Das Rheingold is either a profound allegory or a puerile fairy tale."[4] Since Shaw was only a few months from finishing *Widowers' Houses*, he most likely had already formed his ideas about the "profound allegory," or what he would elaborate six years later in his commentary on the tetralogy. Thus, although *Quintessence* might have given Shaw the last push to complete the play, his views on Wagner also played an indispensable part in his first play. This study compares the structure and characterization of *Widowers' Houses* with those of *Das Rheingold* and examines how the play relates to Shaw's analysis of the *Ring* cycle in *The Perfect Wagnerite*.

Both *Widowers' Houses* and *Das Rheingold* depict greed, sharing endings in which every character onstage is prosperous and satisfied, while those offstage bewail their misfortune and predicament. Shaw says that his first three plays were "dramatic pictures of middle class society from the point of view of a Socialist who regards the basis of that society as thoroughly rotten economically and morally."[5] The marriage of Trench and Blanche is not a triumph of romantic love but a mere piece of business. Shaw's realistic depiction of slum landlordism in *Widowers' Houses* deviates from the conventional happy ending of the well-made play, in which established moral principles are expected to be upheld. Likewise, we can better observe the corruption of the ruling class in *Das Rheingold* once the mythic settings and grand music are removed. The gods obtain the castle of Valhalla gratis after all; they have paid the giants the ransom for Freia with the gold confiscated from Alberich, which should have been returned to the Rhine daughters. The ring forged from the Rhine gold symbolizes the greed of the characters. Wotan intends to solidify his rule of the world, while Alberich vows to regain the ring and put the world under his own control. Seeing the factories along the harbor of the Thames in 1877, Wagner observed: "Alberich's dream has come true here."[6] Consequently, *Widowers' Houses* turns out to be a Shavian version of *Das Rheingold*, where, Nibelheim transferred to London slums, German myth is turned into a realistic study of a modern megalopolis.

Deformed "Misalliance of Classes"

Martin Meisel classifies *Widowers' Houses* as "romantic comedy," mainly because it deals with a "misalliance of classes." Of course, Shaw is the playwright least likely to write a conventional romantic comedy. Meisel argues: "In *Widowers' Houses*, Shaw has treated the conventions of courtship comedy

with scant respect, but he has exploited them extensively. . . . The notion of misalliance has been exploded, and the match is made to suggest the tacit alliance which Shaw believed existed in life between the aristocracy and the 'rising' middle class: a piratical alliance of economic interest."[7] Shaw's first play traces the courtship of Harry Trench, a doctor belonging to the not-so-wealthy upper class, and Blanche Sartorius, a daughter of the wealthy "rising" middle class. In a conventional melodrama, the young lovers are expected to overcome class differences with their strong, pure love, but in Shaw's play there is no opposition to their marriage based on the gap in their social classes. On the contrary, Lady Roxdale and other relatives of Trench are delighted to learn about the marriage, and with good reason. Lady Roxdale is the main source of funds for Sartorius, who considers the marriage an opportunity to climb a decisive step up the social ladder. Similarly, from Lady Roxdale's viewpoint, it is a lucrative proposition: the marriage is going to at once deepen the business ties with the slum landlord who skillfully manages her assets, and consolidate her nephew's relatively meager finances. Trench and Blanche reconcile at the end of Act III not in the name of love but to gain compensation. Not only is Sartorius's income "tainted," but so too is the love of the young ones, in that everyone is motivated by profit seeking. Lickcheese explains the match as a mere business transaction:

> LICKCHEESE. I know Miss Blanche: she has her father's eye for business. Explain this job to her; and she'll make it up with Dr Trench. Why not have a bit of romance in business when it costs nothing? We all have our feelins: we aint mere calculatin machines. (*CPP* I, 117)

Sartorius is "revolted" to hear this; he does not appreciate his daughter being treated as "part of a money bargain" (*CPP* I, 117). But the father himself sees the courtship from a businessman's point of view. In Act I, Sartorius negotiates the terms of his daughter's marriage with Trench as if closing a business deal. While he guarantees to provide all the money Trench and Blanche will need, he demands as guarantee that his daughter "will be received on equal terms" by his family (62). That business matters more than love makes the misalliance in *Widowers' Houses* a complete departure from the conventions of romantic comedy.

In *Das Rheingold*, the woman is even more obviously treated as a pawn in a business transaction. Freia, the sister of Wotan's wife, Fricka, is offered to the giants Fasolt and Fafner as reward for constructing Valhalla. Although she is set free after Alberich's gold is paid to the giants as ransom, the fact remains that the goddess is regarded as a substitute for money: her value

is measured in gold. From the viewpoint of Fasolt, however, the tale can be interpreted as the love story of a carpenter or mason of the lower class adoring a lady of the upper class. He does not want money: he wants the lady, yet the aristocratic family manages to raise enough money to break off the relationship.[8] Furthermore, greed prevails over love throughout the first part of the *Ring* cycle. Fasolt the lover is killed by his brother Fafner, who is more obsessed with gold than with love and who takes all the gold for himself. In its transactions between the Valhalla gods and the giant brothers, *Das Rheingold* can also be considered a play about the misalliance of classes.

Parallels of Characters Between Shaw and Wagner

No character represents or tries to carry out justice either in *Das Rheingold* or in *Widowers' Houses*. While the music drama depicts a sordid struggle for the tainted gold, Shaw's play has no one seriously attempting to redress social injustice. In a conventional melodrama, young lovers are expected to have a strong sense of justice and to challenge the corrupt establishment. However, once Trench learns that his income is derived from the interest on the mortgage on slum apartment houses, the young doctor easily reconciles with Sartorius, his future father-in-law, saying, "people who live in glass houses have no right to throw stones" (*CPP* I, 94). Neither is Blanche pure and righteous. When she learns that her father is a foul slum landlord, she urges him to evict the poor tenants in favor of more respectable ones. Her remark, which stems from her hatred of the poor, elicits Sartorius's remark, "I see I have made a real lady of you, Blanche" (110). Consequently, the dialogue onstage is concentrated on how to maintain and increase one's income. In this play, melodramatic expectations are ousted by Socialist realism.

As has been pointed out in a number of studies,[9] *The Perfect Wagnerite* provides significant clues to understanding Shaw's plays. Even though *Widowers' Houses* was written six years before *Wagnerite*, what Shaw says about *Das Rheingold* in that essay is consistent with the tenor of his first play. In Shaw's view, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is an allegory criticizing nineteenth-century capitalist society, and he compares Alberich to the capitalist, Wotan to the pope or king, and Loge to the politician. The struggle for the ring forged out of the Rhine gold is interpreted as the struggle between the old feudalistic establishment of Wotan and Loge and the new capitalist system of Alberich. In "Why He Changed His Mind," the chapter first

added to the German edition of 1907 and incorporated in the second English edition of 1913, Shaw explains in Socialist terms that in the second half of the nineteenth century, after Wagner wrote the poems of the *Ring* cycle, capitalists became allied to the pope, kings, and politicians, thereby further strengthening their capitalistic government. Meanwhile, dwarfs, who symbolize common workers, and giants, who symbolize carpenters or masons, are kept exploited and oppressed, forever alienated from the power establishment.

The Perfect Wagnerite defines dwarfs, giants, and gods as "dramatizations of the three main orders of men; to wit, the instinctive, predatory, lustful, greedy people; the patient, toiling, stupid, respectful, money-worshipping people; and the intellectual, moral, talented people who devise and administer States and Churches. History shews only one order higher than the highest of these: namely, the order of Heros" (*Music* 3, 445). This is a more ramified classification of the one in *Quintessence*, in which Shaw explains that in an imaginary community of 1,000 people there are 700 Philistines, 299 Idealists, and one Realist. Quite satisfied with the existing system, the Philistines are prosaic and pragmatic enough to seek profit and love from the other sex. The Idealists, though aware of the failures of systems and institutions, dare not face reality, so that they call these failed institutions beautiful and holy ideals, and put on masks of respectability. It is the Realist who will tear the masks of ideals off the Idealists, thus clearing the ground for truth and for living a truthful life.

In Shaw's analysis, the Realist in *Quintessence* corresponds to the Hero in *Wagnerite*. But since no Realist or Hero appears either in *Widowers' Houses* or in *Das Rheingold*, let us examine how Philistines develop into the two groups of dwarfs and giants, and how Shaw's evaluation of Idealists differs from those of gods. In Ibsen's plays, profit-seeking Philistines seldom harm society, but in the *Ring* cycle Alberich the dwarf renounces and curses love, attempting to rule the world with the power of gold, which threatens the world order established by Wotan and the other gods. By contrast, the hard-working giants, Fafner and Fasolt, do not know how to gain more profit, though they worship money as well. Thus the dwarfs and the giants need to be differentiated.

Shaw severely and exhaustively attacks the Idealists in *Quintessence*, regarding "ideals" as "something to blind us, something to numb us, something to murder self in us, something whereby, instead of resisting death, we can disarm it by committing suicide."[10] However, he is more lenient with the Idealists, or gods, in *Wagnerite* than in *Quintessence*. Shaw understands, even tolerates, the sacrifices and compromises gods must make to govern the world: "Godhead, face to face with Stupidity, must

compromise. Unable to enforce on the world the pure law of thought, it must resort to a mechanical law of commandments to be enforced by brute punishments and the destruction of the disobedient" (*Music* 3, 428–29). The change in Shaw's attitude toward the Idealists and toward the gods may reflect a refining of his analysis of human nature that occurred while writing his own plays between the two commentaries. Whereas Shaw was more revolutionary while writing *Quintessence*, by the time he wrote *Wagnerite* he had learned to be realistic in evaluating politicians and financial tycoons. Even his first play can be analyzed more accurately by comparison to Wagner's *Ring* than to Ibsen's plays.

The classifications Shaw gives the characters of *Das Rheingold* in *Wagnerite* are preceded by those of *Widowers' Houses*. First, Sartorius can be called Shaw's first Alberich, having climbed from extreme poverty to being a slum landlord, just as Alberich amasses wealth based on the Rhine gold. Both merciless to the class to which they once belonged, they are responsible for the conditions of the poor slum dwellers and the Nibelheim laborers. The landlord rents sordid rooms, sometimes halving or even quartering them, and severely collects the rents through Lickcheese and others, whereas the dwarf exploits other dwarfs in the dark mines of the Nibelheim. The rich landlord is properly dressed, lives in a respectable house, and has a villa in the suburbs. While refusing to repair broken-down apartments, he carefully chooses his own houses on the gravels, which are good for the health. Sartorius's way of life reminds us of what Shaw says of the helmet Alberich orders his brother Mime to devise. Shaw compares it to a gentleman's tall hat, in which anyone can become a respectable gentleman (*Music* 3, 435). Once you wear a tall hat, you look like a respectable member of society—even if your business practices are corrupt.

Although he is a villainous landlord, Sartorius has some practical administrative ability. When accused by Trench in Act II of leaving the staircase boards missing, he counters that if the staircase were repaired, the boarders would take the boards away in three days to burn them for cooking (*CPP* I, 92). When asked by Blanche in Act III why he does not repair the houses, he replies that when the buildings get better the poor tenants cannot pay higher rents. When his daughter asks him to drive the poor out of the apartments to replace them with more respectable tenants, he retorts that it would be too hard on the poor (110). It is quite true that without his slum apartments the people of the lowest and poorest classes would not be able to find housing. Sartorius is correct in saying that one man alone cannot improve the situation: individuals are powerless to fight social evils.

> SARTORIUS. [*To Trench*] If, when you say you are just as bad as I am, you mean that you are just as powerless to alter the state of society, then you are unfortunately quite right. (*CPP* I, 94)

Sartorius does not share Alberich's ambition to conquer the world with plutocratic power because, while the dwarf has given up love, the landlord receives abundant love from his daughter and hopes to marry her to a man of the upper class, thus securing her happiness. As Cokane puts it, Sartorius's affection of his daughter may be a "redeeming point," to be sure, but it is a self-centered attachment. As Lickcheese astutely comments, "many another daughter has been turned out upon the streets to gratify his affection for her" (*CPP* I, 81).

That Sartorius's love of Blanche is self-centered is evidenced by his desire to make use of his daughter's marriage as a means of expanding his business. This mirrors Wotan's deeper but self-interested love of his children, Siegmund, Sieglinde, and especially Brünnhilde, all of whom he exploits in order to secure world domination in *Die Walküre*.

If Sartorius is Shaw's Alberich, Lickcheese is Shaw's Mime. In Scene 3 of *Das Rheingold*, Mime and other dwarfs are exploited by Alberich. Scared of his brother, as are other dwarfs, Mime is bullied by Alberich into making a magic helmet that enables its wearer to change his appearance. Likewise, Lickcheese fears and obeys Sartorius slavishly. By collecting rents, Lickcheese helps his employer retain his social status as a respectable gentleman. Thus he figuratively makes and maintains Alberich's helmet for Sartorius. Lickcheese is at the mercy of his master: he is mercilessly sacked because he repairs the staircase without the landlord's consent.

When he reappears in Act III, however, Lickcheese has made a dazzling change in his appearance: he sports a silk hat and evening dress. As Shaw explains in *Wagnerite*, the silk hat signifies Alberich's helmet with which to exploit workers—a tool for the capitalist to hide his greed and appear a gentleman. Lickcheese's glittering appearance visually suggests that the Shavian Mime has arrived into the same class as the Shavian Alberich. The former rent collector has launched a business to receive compensations through a paper company by taking advantage of insider information of city redevelopment projects. He visits his former employer to bring him into his business. Robert Coskren compares this scene to Act II, Scene 3 of *Siegfried*, where Alberich and Mime quarrel over the gold (especially the ring and helmet) of the serpent that Siegfried has just killed.[11] In *Siegfried*, Mime does not fear Alberich, who no longer has the ring, so that the two greedy dwarfs are on equal terms in trying to appropriate the gold. Likewise, Lickcheese is no longer employed by Sartorius, so that he visits

him as a potential business partner. While the dwarfs fight with each other, the newly established business partners collaborate to increase their wealth. This is where Shaw departs from Wagner's allegory to illustrate his own analysis of capitalism.

The partnership of Sartorius and Lickcheese leads to another Wagnerian interpretation, in which Sartorius is a Wotan and Lickcheese a Loge. In Scene 2 of *Das Rheingold*, Loge tells Wotan about Alberich's theft of the Rhine gold and suggests to the god that they confiscate the dwarf's gold as ransom for Freia. Dubbed the God of Lies by Shaw (*Music* 3, 431), Loge is not a servant of Wotan but a competent minister of his government. Loge provides Wotan with useful information and helps him get out of his predicament; with the help of Loge, Wotan captures Alberich and obtains the gold necessary to finance the construction of Valhalla. In this process Wotan is shown to be no less greedy than Alberich. In fact, class differences aside, Wotan shares with Alberich the same ambition to become a world ruler. In Act III of *Widowers' Houses*, moreover, Lickcheese's role vis-à-vis Sartorius is similar to that of Loge's vis-à-vis Wotan: he shares an informer's role with Loge. His business is derived from insider information about city development projects. His information and business offer about the compensation give Sartorius a breakthrough: by rebuilding the slum apartments, he could dodge the criticism of priest and bluebook, gain more profits with the compensation, and rearrange the marriage of Blanche to Trench. Thus Sartorius needs Lickcheese just as Wotan depends on Loge. Although the Sartorius/Lickcheese partnership is only a fledgling business syndicate, it can be compared to the political establishment represented by Wotan and Loge.

Trench and Cokane could be classified as lesser gods, as they have little economic or political power despite their belonging to the upper or middle class. Cokane, the poorer of the two, may be from a good family. He accompanies the young doctor on his European tour, arranging the itinerary and booking hotels and trains. He writes for Trench a letter to Lady Roxdale asking for permission for the young doctor to marry Blanche. In short, he acts as a secretary throughout the play, even before he officially begins to work for Lickcheese. His employment as secretary shows that economic power matters more than social status. Further, though he may be able to deal with routine paperwork, Cokane is devoid of executive business ability. This is foreshadowed in Act I when he writes the letter to Lady Roxdale at Sartorius's dictation. Cokane utters a number of moralistic clichés, but his platitudes never affect the development of the play. Although educated and intelligent, he is powerless, as is the poorer middle class to which he belongs. In other words, Cokane's personal ineffectuality symbolizes the ineffectuality of his class as a whole.

Trench, as nephew of Lady Roxdale, belongs to a higher class than does Cokane. The young doctor is liberal enough to marry Blanche, a middle-class daughter. He also possesses a sense of social justice that has him worrying about the distress of the poor. Thus, had he the ability and will, he might be in a position to improve the slums. But, as he says he is a Tory, Trench is not that eager to bring about social reform. Rather, when he learns his income is derived from the mortgage interest on Sartorius's property, he quickly asks for a reconciliation with his future father-in-law. His sense of justice is too weak to give up the income of £700 a year. On the contrary, he thinks only of maintaining the £700, with no ability or intention to increase it. When asked for his consent to the plan to rebuild the slum apartment houses in order to raise compensations, at first Trench hesitates to join the project, afraid to risk the development plan being altered. Here he is just one of the timid mortgagees who think only of maintaining small dividends rather than taking advantage of business opportunities. In the *Ring* cycle, such timid rich people are represented by Fafner; having "neither the cunning nor the ambition to establish the Plutonic empire," Shaw explains, the giant piles the gold "in a cave, transforms himself into a dragon by the helmet; and devotes his life to guarding it, as much a slave to it as a janitor is to his prisoner" (*Music* 3, 439). Likewise, had he not been asked to take part in slum reconstruction, Trench might have survived just on his comparatively small income.

By marrying Blanche, Trench eventually joins the Sartorius/Lickcheese project, which results in forming an alliance of "the haves." This is the situation that had developed in late nineteenth-century Britain and Europe, according to the chapter "Why He Changed His Mind" of *Wagnerite*. That is to say, while the alliance of the capitalist Alberich and the politicians Wotan and Loge is prosperous and rules the world, Fafner the giant, seeking a more comfortable life, has begun to invest his surplus funds in this business alliance (*Music* 3, 502–3). If the fledging syndicate of Sartorius, Lickcheese, and Trench is successful, it may expand to draw more investors, including wealthier upper-class members such as Lady Roxdale. Thus *Widowers' Houses* shows in Sartorius's drawing room the capitalist structure that has been satisfying the greed of "the haves."

Blanche, the only female main character, is not an ordinary womanly ingénue; on the contrary, she may be the most unpleasant character in the play. Since her romance and marriage are utilized as part of a financial transaction, her position is similar to that of Freia, but in disposition she is quite different from the goddess of love. Freia only asks the other gods for help when the giants demand her as the construction fee for Valhalla. The goddess plays merely a symbolic role as hostage for gold; she is not even given a chance to sing a memorable song. By contrast, devoid of

womanly grace, Blanche follows her predatory impulse in pursuit of what she wants. The landlord's daughter takes initiative in her love with Trench. In Act I, she leads him to kiss and propose to her; in Act II, her temper severs their engagement. In fact, her violent temperament becomes clearer toward the end of that act, when she seizes the parlor maid by the hair and throat. And near the end of Act III, she approaches her ex-fiancé erotically, like an animal, while cursing him in words. Finally, as Lickcheese says, Blanche has "her father's eye for business": she, not Trench, will take over her father's business.[12] Nineteenth-century theatergoers may also have found it inappropriate for a woman to have such business acumen, which would make her seem less "womanly." Thus, Blanche is the reverse of the conventional male expectations of a womanly woman.

The female characters in Shaw's plays are generally the reverse of those in Wagner's operas, although both groups of women experience similar situations. With the possible exceptions of Brünnhilde and Kundry, most of Wagner's female characters are typecast and follow the conventional patterns of innocent damsels (Elizabeth and Elsa), voluptuous beauties (Venus), and plotting witches (Ortrud). Conversely, Shaw's heroines express their idiosyncratic personalities and are keen to choose their own way of life and gain what they wish.

Blanche is a mass of vitality that stands as the forerunner of Shaw's "New Women" characters. Although raised a lady, she ignores established moral principles to make straightforward demands. However, her actions lack a clear direction: she acts according to her animal-like instinct. She has a sadomasochistic relationship with the parlormaid, and the scene in which she asks her father to cancel the engagement to Trench has incestuous overtones. She has neither the firmness of Vivie in *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893) to reject her mother and lead an independent life nor the strong resolution of Louka in *Arms and the Man* (1894) to climb the social ladder. The slum landlord's daughter may have her father's aptitude to pursue worldly desires, but she lacks the insight to understand and direct her way of life. In other words, though Blanche is full of vitality, her insight remains instinctive and chaotic.

Comparisons of the Endings

Although the endings of *Widowers' Houses* and *Das Rheingold* appear to be similar, there are two significant differences closely related to Shaw's later creative activities. The similarity is that both dramas have happy endings

only for the privileged classes; all the onstage characters are satisfied—but at the expense of those offstage. In Wagner's music drama, after rescuing Freia from the giants by paying the ransom of Alberich's gold, the gods enter Valhalla together, hand in hand, to glorious music. In Shaw's play, after settling the business and marriage, everyone leaves the stage for dinner, arm in arm. However, those offstage are left in distress. On the one hand, the Rhine daughters cry over the stolen gold, while the dwarfs keep on digging gold in the dark caves of Nibelheim. On the other hand, the slum tenants will be driven out of the apartments for rebuilding, or else keep on living amid wretched circumstances. In this sense, both *Das Rheingold* and *Widowers' Houses* are capable of producing pre-Brechtian alienation effects in their audiences.

The first of the two differences between the two works is that *Widowers' Houses* lacks Loge's cynical point of view, which suggests the downfall of the gods. Shaw says Loge despises the gods: "They are all overcome with Valhalla's glory except Loki. He is behind the scenes of this joint reign of the Divine and the Legal. He despises these gods with their ideals and their golden apples. 'I am ashamed' he says 'to have dealings with these futile creatures'" (*Music* 3, 441). Loge's prediction comes true at the end of *Götterdämmerung*, when Valhalla is burned down, the ring finally returns to the Rhine daughters, and the government headed by the gods comes to an end. However, in *Widowers' Houses*, no character has such a discerning vision. Lickcheese may be a shrewd businessman, but has no insight that would enable him to predict the downfall of a civilization.

The other, more significant difference is that Sartorius is as far from a Wotan as Lickcheese is from having Loge's foresight. In fact, no one in *Widowers' Houses* possesses Wotan's contradictions and aspirations. Shaw argues that Wotan, who finds that "there is no race yet in the world that quite spontaneously, naturally, and unconsciously realizes his ideals" (*Music* 3, 440), hits upon an idea to breed, with the help of Erda, the First Mother, "a race of heros to deliver the world and himself from his limited powers and disgraceful bargains" (441). The Hero, Shaw explains, would be the creature "in whom the god's unavailing thought shall have become effective will and life, who shall make his way straight to truth and reality over the laws of Fricka and the lies of Loki with a strength that overcomes giants and a cunning that outwits dwarfs" (440).

However, Wotan himself does not express this idea in *Das Rheingold;* all he says is that he will visit Erda to obtain her counsel about the gods' destiny. The plan to breed the Hero is conceived just before entering Valhalla, but this is only indicated in the stage directions as he acts "very resolutely" and the orchestra plays the leitmotif of the sword, suggesting the revelation to the god.[13] Although the leitmotif implies a glimmer of hope, Wotan's

determination is not clarified until Act II, Scene 2 of *Die Walküre*, when he explains his plan to Brünnhilde. After all, if the audience saw only the first part of the *Ring* cycle, without knowing what would happen in the following parts, their impression might not be so different from that left by seeing Shaw's first play.

Shaw emphasizes in *Wagnerite* that *Das Rheingold* not only criticizes nineteenth-century capitalist society but also depicts the beginning of Wotan's struggles to breed a more evolved being. Although Wotan is aware of his inability to realize his ideals in the real world, Shaw adds, the god makes every effort, despite his limitations, to arrange for circumstances that will give birth to someone who can carry out a thorough reform. *Widowers' Houses* lacks any such character as a Wotan with revelation. The play illustrates a sordid social problem—slum landlordism—but offers no solutions. It is a good, realistic Socialist play, but not yet a fully Shavian play in which one or more characters, full of vitality or the Life Force, clash with each other or with the System. While *Das Rheingold* is the first part of the *Ring* tetralogy, *Widowers' Houses* constitutes a prelude to Shaw's more mature plays, which will discuss the salvation of the soul and society and the survival of civilization.

Notes

1. William Archer, *The World* (14 December 1892), quoted in Bernard Shaw, "The Author's Preface" to the 1893 edition of *Widowers' Houses*, in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with Their Prefaces*, vol. 1, ed. Dan H. Laurence. (London: Bodley Head, 1970), 38. All quotations from Shaw's plays and prefaces are from the Bodley Head edition, hereafter abbreviated as *CPP*, and given parenthetically in the text followed by the volume number.

2. Archer's plot was based on *La Ceinture Dorée* (1856) by Émile Augier (1820–1889), in which the young lovers are married after the father goes bankrupt due to a national emergency and the barrier to their honorable marriage is cleared.

3. Yoshikazu Mizuno, "*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* no yakuwari—Gekisakka Bernard Shaw tanjo no katei ni okeru" ("The Role of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* in the Birth of Bernard Shaw the Playwright"), in *Bernard Shaw Studies*, ed. the Bernard Shaw Society of Japan (Tokyo: Gaku Shobo, 1986), 43–44.

4. Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Shaw's Music*, vol. 2, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Bodley Head, 1981), 663. All quotations from *The Perfect Wagnerite* and Shaw's musical criticisms are from this edition, hereafter abbreviated as *Music*, and given parenthetically in the text followed by the volume number.

5. Letter to Golding Bright, 10 June 1896, in Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters I, 1874–1897*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965), 632.

6. Nobuya Takahashi quotes from Cosima Wagner's Diary. Takahashi then concludes: "When the *Ring* cycle is seen as a criticism to contemporary society, it applies to England most accurately." Nobuya Takahashi, "Wagner to Igirisu" ("Wagner and England"), *Wagner no Chikara* (*The Power of Wagner*), ed. Shotaro Terakura (Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2005), 70–71.

7. Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963; repr. Greenwood Press [Westport, Conn., 1976]), 168.

8. Although traditionally no love relations are seen between Freia and Fasolt, some recent productions show the goddess in love with the giant—a case of the hostage falling in love with her kidnapper. See Taro Yamazaki, "Wagner Enshutsu no Chiso (6)—*Der Ring des Nibelungen* (III)," ("Layers of Wagner Directions (6)—*Der Ring des Nibelungen* [III]"), in *Wagner Forum 2008*, ed. Richard Wagner Gesellschaft Japan (Hatano, Kanagawa: Tokai University Press, 2008), 36.

9. The following two studies are especially notable in establishing the significance of *Quintessence* and *Wagnerite* in Shaw studies: J. L. Wisenthal's *The Marriage of Contraries: Bernard Shaw's Middle Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), and Alfred Turco Jr.'s *Shaw's Moral Vision: The Self and Salvation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976).

10. Bernard Shaw, *Major Critical Essays*, with an introduction by Michael Holroyd (London: Penguin, 1986), 53.

11. Robert Coskren, "*Siegfried* Elements in the Plays of Bernard Shaw," *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 2 (1982): 29–30.

12. In taking over her father's morally questionable business, Blanche seems to be anticipating Barbara Undershaft in *Major Barbara* (1905), though the former lacks the latter's passion for salvation and social improvement.

13. This is the first and only time when the leitmotif of the sword—Nothung—is played in *Das Rheingold*, so that the orchestra eloquently suggests that something significant is happening in Wotan's mind.