

Roundabout Theatre Company

Misalliance



Illustration by Scott McKowen

From Page To Stage Study Guide

Misalliance

by **George Bernard Shaw**
directed by **David Waren**

STUDY GUIDE

written by
Margaret Salvante, *Education Director*
and **Andrew Eggert**

WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

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

— George Bernard Shaw

Although not one of Shaw's well-known works, *Misalliance* is an important play in that it merges the conventions, modes, and techniques of the Nineteenth Century popular theatre with the rhetorical drama of ideas. Shaw drew from the theatre of his youth, employing the farcical situations and melodramatic subplots that dominated the performance style of the mid-1800s. But *Misalliance* also breaks new ground, exploring in all seriousness the social and political issues of the early Twentieth Century.

The story centers around an afternoon in the home of Mr. John Tarleton, a wealthy businessman who made his fortune in the underwear industry. Hypatia Tarleton, his only daughter, is engaged to Bentley ("Bunny") Summerhays, the bright but physically weak son of an aristocratic family. Bentley's father, Lord Summerhays,

has been invited to visit in order to discuss the children and their upcoming marriage with the Tarletons. However, all is not as proper as it appears on the surface. Shortly after his arrival, Lord Summerhays confesses his love for his son's fiancée, beginning a downward spiral from controlled decorum into outright farce. Events escalate when an airplane crashes into the greenhouse, introducing Joey Percival, a friend of Bentley's from Oxford, and Lina Szczepanowska, a Polish acrobat. All of the characters get swept up into the chaos, and the play becomes an outright farce with Lord Summerhays' proposal to Hypatia, Hypatia's pursuit of Joey, Mr. Tarleton's proposition to Lina, and Lina's liaison with Bentley.

While a zany tale on the surface, *Misalliance* remains at the heart a philosophic work. Shaw's disapproval of the rigid British class system is reflected in this meeting of the aristocracy and business classes, and Lina's arrival brings feminist dogma boldly into the play. At first, the play's title refers to the mis-matched marriage of Hypatia and Bentley, since the existing class system destroys any hope that this unlikely couple will find happiness together. But by the end of the play, Shaw's much deeper meaning becomes apparent. It is Shaw's belief that parents and their children — the old and the young — are naturally at odds, an inevitable "misalliance."

WHO'S WHO

JOHN TARLETON (played by *Brian Murray*):

Patriarch of the family, Tarleton made all of his money through underwear manufacture. He fashions himself “essentially a man of ideas” and constantly quotes thinkers of the day. Though an incredibly wealthy man of business, Mr. Tarleton wishes he could have gone into the profession of literature and squanders all of his money supporting free libraries.

MRS. TARLETON (played by *Patricia Conolly*):

Mrs. Tarleton is stable and tolerant, deeply loving her husband in spite of his quirks. She is also very motherly and sympathetic, always rushing to the aid of any troubled youngster.

JOHNNY TARLETON (played by *Don Reilly*):

Perhaps more mature than his own father, Johnny is a complete contrast to all of the eccentric characters of the play, representing stability and prudence.

HYPATIA TARLETON (played by *Joanna Going*):

“I want to be an active verb,” Hypatia tells Lord Summerhays, summarizing her entire character. She is a strong, independent young woman who is bored by her life at home since she is not allowed to earn a living. Constantly craving adventure, Hypatia is thrilled by any episode that breaks convention.

BENTLEY SUMMERHAYS (played by *Alan Tudyk*):

Although very intelligent, Bentley is physically small and weak. He whines to get the attention of others, and Hypatia has only agreed to marry him for lack of a better suitor.

LORD SUMMERHAYS (played by *Remak Ramsay*):

Representing the prim and proper aristocracy, Lord Summerhays expresses his disdain for unconventional thought and liberal politics, which he refers to as “these democratic games.” He has recently returned to England after serving as ambassador in “Jinghiskahn,” a fictional Eastern nation.

JOSEPH PERCIVAL (played by *Sam Robards*):

Bentley refers to his college pal Joey as “a most awfully clever fellow, and so nice!” adding that the reason for this exceptional disposition is that he was raised by three

fathers. After unexpectedly arriving at the Tarleton home when his plane crashes, he remains respectful of social rules and tries to resist Hypatia’s inappropriate advances.

LINA SZCZEPANOWSKA (played by *Elizabeth Marvel*):

“I am strong: I am skillful: I am brave: I am independent: I am unbought: I am all that a woman ought to be.” With these words, Lina boldly serves as a beacon for the feminist cause. The Polish acrobat proves that women can be just as talented, powerful, and worldly as their male counterparts.

JULIUS BAKER (played by *Zak Orth*):

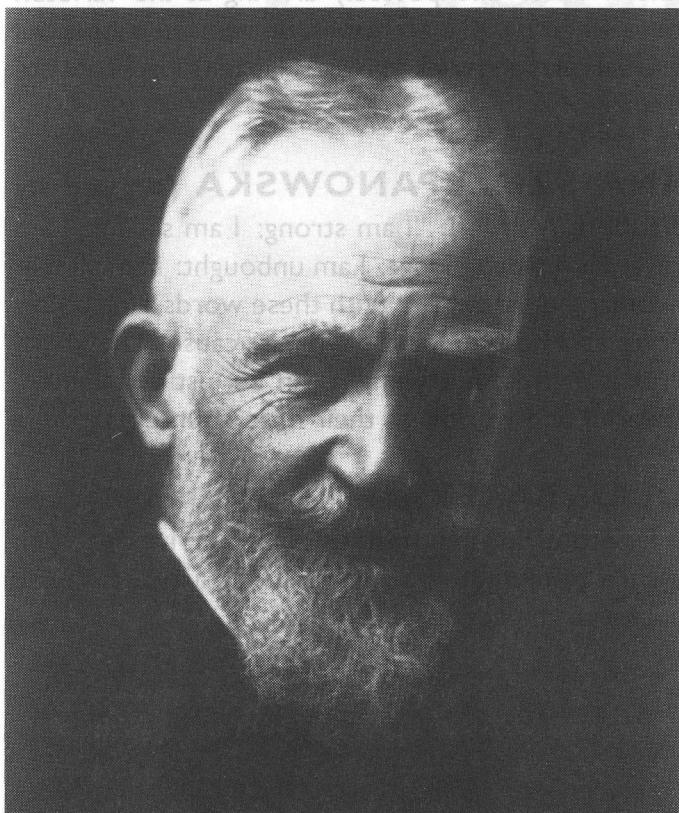
The son of Tarleton’s former mistress, Julius arrives to seek revenge for his mother’s wrongs, adding a melodramatic subplot to the action of the play.



Costume renderings of Bentley Summerhays and Hypatia Tarleton by Catherine Zuber

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)



George Bernard Shaw

I was driven to write because I could do nothing else. In an old novel of mine — Cashel Byron's Profession — the hero, a prizefighter, remarks that it's not what a man would like to do, but what he can do, that he must work at in this world. I wanted to be another Michaelangelo, but found that I could not draw. I wanted to be a musician, but found I could not play — to be a dramatic singer, but had no voice. I did not want to write: that came as a matter of course without any wanting...

— George Bernard Shaw

And stumble into playwrighting Shaw did, for his first play was not produced until he was 36 years old. Born on July 26, 1856 in Dublin, Ireland, he was the third and youngest child in his family. His early readings of the Bible, Shakespeare, Dickens, and Bunyan were crucial to his education, and trips to the theatre and the National Gallery of Ireland, where he learned to idolize Michaelangelo, were great influences on his career.

The political environment that surrounded Shaw in his youth also had a profound effect on his writing. Growing up in an era of vast social and political upheaval and rapid technological advancement, Shaw was exposed to radical thought which would inspire much of his unconventional philosophy, including socialism, feminism, and criticism the church.

At the age of 23, Shaw began his writing career trying to publish novels, however he had little success. "As long as I kept sending my novels to the publishers," Shaw explained, "they were as safe from publicity as they would have been in the fire, where I had better, perhaps, have put them." However, once established as a playwright, Shaw turned out an impressive body of work including more than 50 plays, not to mention short stories and critical articles on figures such as Ibsen and Wagner. Some of his better known plays include *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1912) which would later be turned into the musical *My Fair Lady*, and *Saint Joan* (1923). *Misalliance* (1909) is one of his lesser known works.

By the time of his death in 1950, Shaw had received world fame unprecedented for a literary figure, surpassing that of even the religious and political leaders of his time. Winner of the Nobel Prize, George Bernard Shaw was hailed by worshipers as one of the greatest playwrights in the English language, second only to William Shakespeare.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Widower's Houses	1892
The Philanderer	1893
Arms and the Man	1894
Candida	1895
You Never Can Tell	1896
The Devil's Disciple	1897
Caesar and Cleopatra	1897
Man and Superman	1903
Major Barbara	1905
Getting Married	1908

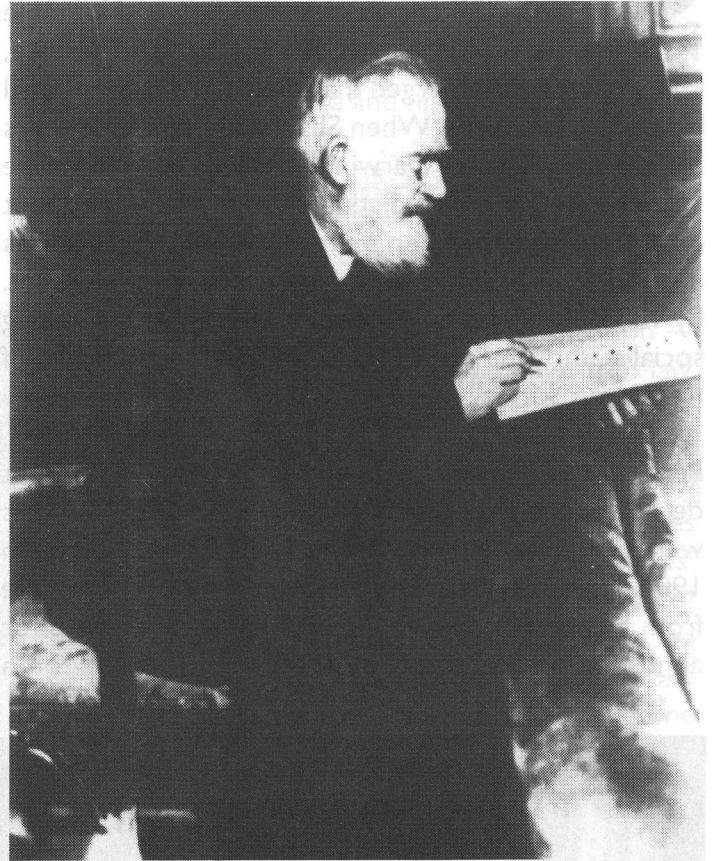
THE EDWARDIAN THEATRE

Shaw's Stagecraft

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

— George Bernard Shaw

Unlike the movement toward realism dominating the stages of the European continent at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, including the works of playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg, Edwardian Theatre in Great Britain kept its roots in the popular performance style of the previous century. Shaw and his contemporaries knew that in order to draw the British public to the box office, they would need to write for the grand style of acting that had become fashionable. Characters were robust and flamboyant in both gesture and speech, allowing for more freedom of expression and intonation. Performances on the British stage were more theatrical or "alive," as Shaw put it. Some Edwardian playwrights took their works into the realm of complete fantasy, including J. M. Barrie, who is best known for *Peter Pan*.



Shaw takes notes at rehearsal

In spite of the abundance of successful Edwardian playwrights, Shaw remains unique among his peers in that he merged his religious and social philosophies with this popular performance style. Others were making social commentary in their plays, but it was Shaw, more than anyone else, who made politics the cornerstone of his works. From feminism to socialism, Shaw used his plays as a vehicle for his ideas while never losing sight of popular theatre conventions.

Critics varied greatly in their opinion of Shaw's unique writing style. Some critics, such as the *Illustrated London News*, said that his writing was "Not tragedy at all but something like a farcical melodrama. It is a travesty in rather hideous taste." On the other hand, E.A. Baughan of the *Daily News* wrote, "This is not the play of a hard, cynical realist but of a man who sees life as it is and sees it with sympathy." Regardless of critical reception, Shaw redefined the theatre by integrating his radical intellectual convictions with mainstream theatricality.

Misalliance	1909
Androcles and the Lion	1912
Pygmalion	1912
Heartbreak House	1919
Back to Methuselah	1920
Saint Joan	1923
Too True to Be Good	1931
On the Rocks	1933
The Millionairess	1936
Buoyant Billions	1946

AN ERA OF INNOVATION

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

Shaw grew up in an era of vast political and technological change that had an immeasurable impact on his playwrighting. Early in his life, important works emerged that challenged conventional beliefs and practices. When Shaw was only three years old, biologist Charles Darwin published *The Origin of the Species*, directly contradicting church teachings about evolution; less than ten years later, *Das Kapital* was distributed by Karl Marx, similarly attacking government. By 1884, Shaw was outspoken on these issues, molding socialist thought as one of the founding members of the Fabian Society.

Perhaps the greatest influence on Shaw was the first decade of the Twentieth Century, when British politics were turned upside down. The Edwardian Era began in 1901 when King Edward VII took control of the empire from his mother, Queen Victoria, who had reigned for almost 60 years. Then, in 1906, the Liberals won a

decisive victory in the British Parliament, seizing control from the Conservative Party and ushering in an era of long overdue social reform. This attack on political and religious convention is a constant undertone of *Misalliance*, originally produced in 1910.

Technology progressed even faster than politics in the early 1900s, with the development of the automobile and the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903, inspiring Shaw to include an airplane in the play. The same decade would also usher in the wireless telegraph and the telephone, not to mention the cinematograph, changing the entertainment world by presenting an alternative to live theatre. By the turn of the century, the Industrial Revolution was in full force, and the masses were migrating from the slow-paced country to bustling cities. In short, technology was changing people's lives, and Shaw's plays reflected the new inventions and ideas of his era.



The bustle of Edwardian London

EDWARDIAN SOCIAL LIFE

Due to the thriving Industrial Revolution, the beginning of the Twentieth Century ushered in a period of opulent living for the British. As new technology spread, the middle and upper classes became wealthy from business profits, and machinery like the automobile gave them more leisure time and opportunity to get away from urban centers for a weekend in the country.

The aristocracy was especially comfortable under King Edward VII, and members of the elite were able to lead a life of leisure without worrying about any financial support. Every man of rank concerned himself with striving to become the ideal gentleman, and each aspect of their lives were guided by a "gentlemanly code." Most aristocrats became political leaders, because this was perhaps the only career wholly endorsed by their code. Economist John Maynard Keynes commented that for the upper classes, "life offered, at a low cost and with the least trouble, conveniences, comforts and amenities beyond the compass of the richest and most powerful monarchs of other ages."



Sylvia Pankhurst, leader of the Suffragettes, addressing a crowd

But the business class also benefited in the era, as the Industrial Revolution fueled a boom in sales of technology. Suddenly a new group of people found themselves quite wealthy, and their ultimate goal was to attain the same standard of luxury and

opulence upheld by the aristocracy. However, members of the middle class usually did not come from the "right" families or attend the "right" schools, and even when they succeeded in eclipsing the wealth of aristocrats, deference for family name and history still dominated the social hierarchy.

Regardless of social class, etiquette was the basis of all human interaction in the Edwardian Era. Every detail of life — from the clothing worn to the topics of conversation — was guided by an unwritten law. It was considered disrespectful for women of a wealthy family to work; instead, life consisted of changing clothes up to four times a day and hosting tea parties. According to the Countess of Warwick, "Conversation at tea was slumberous. Nobody woke up to be witty until dinner time with its accompanying good wines. The men discussed the bags of the day and the women did the admiring."

Although the Edwardian woman had few political rights, by 1910 the roots of the suffrage movement were firmly planted, and some women had become increasingly vocal for the cause of equality. Shaw was a visionary, voicing his

support for the developing feminist cause years before it would become a political reality. With *Misalliance*, he clearly advocates the feminist cause through characters like Lina and Hypatia.

SOURCES

Adams, Elsie B. *Critical Essays on George Bernard Shaw*. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1991.

Ganz, Arthur. *George Bernard Shaw*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1983.

Gibbs, A. M., ed. *Shaw: Interviews and Recollections*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990.

Halliday, F. E. *A Concise History of England from Stonehenge to the Microchip*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1989.

Henderson, Archibald. *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956.

Leary, Daniel. *Shaw's Plays in Performance*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

Leslie, Anita. *The Marlborough House Set*. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973.

Meisel, Martin. *Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Popular Theater*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1984.

Middlemas, Keith. *Pursuit of Pleasure: High Society in the 1900s*. London: Gordon & Cremonesi, 1977.

Weintraub, Stanley. *Shaw: An Autobiography*. Vols. 1-2. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970.

Wilson, A. E. *Edwardian Theatre*. London: Arthur Barker, Ltd., 1951.

Woodbridge, Homer E. *George Bernard Shaw: Creative Artist*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

What To Look For

The upper lobby of the Roundabout Theatre has a number of resources for your convenience. There is a refreshment counter where you can buy soda or a snack, but please remember that you will not be permitted to take these items into the theatre with you. Roundabout's lobby is also an art gallery, so you might want to have a look at the paintings we have on display. Also, take the time to review the display about the show.

Ticket Policy

As a student participant in *From Page To Stage*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off.

*Thank You For Your Cooperation
And Enjoy The Show!*

THE ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING FOR
THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF **FROM PAGE TO STAGE**:

Axe-Houghton Foundation • BankAmerica Foundation • Bank of New York
The Chase Manhattan Bank • Citibank, N.A. • Liz Claiborne Foundation
Colgate-Palmolive Corporation • Charles E. Culpeper Foundation
The Samuel and Rae Eckman Charitable Foundation
The Educational Foundation of America • Fleet Bank, N.A.
Dale Frost • The Heckscher Foundation for Children
IBM Corporation • Charles E. Komar • Lauren and Associates Personnel, Inc.
Hale Matthews Foundation • Merrill Lynch & Co. Foundation, Inc.
Kenneth Natori • New York State Council on the Arts • Prime Time Staffing
Mr. and Mrs. Elliot K. Slade • Seth Sprague Educational and Charitable Foundation
The Travelers Foundation • The Michael Tuch Foundation, Inc.

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY
1530 Broadway, New York, NY 10036 (212) 719-9393 • Fax (212) 869-8817