

UPSTAGE

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HEARTBREAK HOUSE



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CHARACTER

the qualities that make somebody or something distinctive, especially somebody's qualities of mind and feeling.

“Heartbreak House is not merely the name of the play which follows... It is cultured, leisured Europe before the war.”

—George Bernard Shaw

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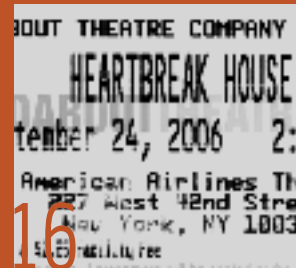
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COVER: Artwork for the Roundabout Theatre Company production of *Heartbreak House*

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HEARTBREAK HOUSE



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So given that, is Shaw's voice in all the characters?

Hector is the one who constantly brings us back and says it's our fault, we've lived too long. He is the one who kind of realizes the game is up. It's a metaphor to get your life in order. Through the play, it's Hector who's constantly saying the lives that we live are thoughtless. We don't produce anything. We constantly look down on people. That's not to say that he's a paragon of virtue, but at least he knows he's leading a useless life, at least he knows that he's treated like the house pet, the house puppy. It is a kind of revolutionary thought and that's also what will interest young people. Young people are so right down the line, that the point of your existence is to be happy. It's money, it's status, its celebrity. The number of people who want to be famous is frightening.


Do you think people will understand all the themes in the play?

No, they won't get it the first time, it's not possible. First of all, there are a lot of words in this play. But, we're going to get on with it. The humor is a kind of given. I'm assuming that will take care of itself. It's very funny, but it can't just be three hours or two and a half hours of heads rocking from gag to gag.

How do you approach a classic play? How many times do you read it?

Countless times, countless; just to get it in the DNA, just to get the text. Every time you read it something else pops in. But every play is done as if it's a new play, as if no one has ever seen it before. I suppose you refer back to notes and things about previous productions. We've all been through disasters, but good plays, classic plays will always survive. The production is *transient*. The text is still there. The humor is what will take us through the evening, but we have to mine and mine and mine for the pain and for the essence and for the meaning of the play.

What I love is that quote by Shaw, "If you're going to tell people the truth, you'd better make them laugh."

Absolutely. Always, always if you can do it through humor. It's much, much better to sit there with people whose glasses are half full than half empty. 'Cause at half full you want to fill it up, at half empty you just want it to go. Life's too short. 



Home front war damage in England.

The CHARACTER OF THE ACTOR

UPSTAGE DISCUSSES *HEARTBREAK HOUSE* WITH ACTOR PHILIP BOSCO



Philip Bosco

Is this the first time you have done this show?

I've done it twice, Circle in the Square and this. I have done a number of Shaw's plays twice. I've done *Major Barbara* twice. I've done *You Never Can Tell* several times. I've done *Misalliance*, I think only once. *Devil's Disciple* I've done three times, I think, and *St. Joan* twice.

So how do you feel about playing Captain Shotover? I know you're still probably finding who you are.

Yes I am. I love it. It's a wonderful character. I think it's a great role, just not the best role. (Laugh.)

Why do you say that?

Mangan, I played Mangan and Mangan is the best role. I really do think that. There's nothing wrong with that, I mean I don't resent not playing it because I love it and I loved it. Shotover is a brilliant, wonderful creation. But there are so many wonderful characters in this play.

Do you think Shotover is a stand in for Shaw? Or are they all?

They say that. I guess all, essentially all the major characters are in some way. Certainly the male characters do enunciate his spirit. I mean he created them. And he was so politically connected and so unashamed to speak out and let his feelings be known, either personally or through his creations. So I think a strong case can be made that yes, we're all stand-ins for Shaw.

This character is fascinating. He is married to a black woman, if we're to believe what he says.

Only for two years. I do, I buy it.

And he gives some great advice at the end. Hector says to him, "What are we to do?" He says, "You've gotta navigate." What do you think he means by that?

Well, you can dream as Hector does. Hector is a layabout. He dresses up mainly to appease his wife, but he's a romantic as well. Find a goal and do something useful and that's fulfilling, not dressing up like Rudolf Valentino, as his wife would say. Take life by the horns and live it fully.

Do you approach most roles in a similar fashion or are they all unique?

I don't talk much about it because it's not really a process; it's just kind of an accumulation of habits. And I used to think, when I was a lot younger and was able

The CHARACTER OF THE PLAY



World War I

They called it the war to end all wars. It was where the two rival alliances would meet with guns in hands and shells at the ready. The Great War, as it was romantically called, spanned four years, from 1914 to 1918, and involved the majority of nations spanning the entire Earth. The war ended an era and defined the modern world. To this day its origin is disputed and its events unrecognized. We still ask the same question that Shaw demanded of his people: Why did we go to war?

The war's effect on the British people was not just felt through economic and social change but through homeland attacks by German blimps called Zeppelins. By the end of the war the Germans launched 51 raids over England dropping more than 5,806 bombs.

Economics

The years leading up to the Great War saw England as one of the largest world powers. However, with the growing economies of both Germany and America, and Germany's new acquisition of colonies in Africa, England's imperial dominance was beginning to dwindle. The race for economic supremacy led to what is now called the Arms Race: the struggle to develop the most advanced and largest stockpile of weapons. Internally, Britain's economy was expanding along with an expansion of the population. London's slums grew just as fast as the city itself did.

Home Front images from top left (clockwise): Houses bombed; the Zeppelin; National Guard workers; and Zeppelin brought down.



“You are going to let the fear of poverty govern your life and your reward will be that you will eat, but you will not live.”

—George Bernard Shaw



Society

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century ushered in a new age of low-level employment. Conditions within factories became filthy and at times dangerous. These frustrating conditions along with the intensified growth of the working class led to the government's increased interest in social policy. Beginning in 1902, education was reformed to give children from all backgrounds an adequate education. Most working class children, however, were forced by their families to continue working in order to increase family revenue and were therefore denied this new chance at an education. This created a clearly split society of rich and poor as England entered the war.



Women and Men

England, like America, had specific roles for men and women at the turn of the century. Women did not work, vote, or participate in government, while men were not expected to cook, clean, or care for the young. The Great War forced society to alter these traditions when every eligible man had to enter the service. For the first time in history women became factory workers, farmers, "firewomen" and much more. These changes in the role of women in society eventually lead to the success of the women's suffrage movement following the war. ^{UP}

From top left (clockwise): Sisters in 1919; Women fruit pickers in Evesham; Homefront munitions workers; Women working a water pump; Children recruiting for war.

“Liberty means responsibility.
That is why most men dread it.”

—George Bernard Shaw

The CHARACTER OF THE ACTRESS

UPSTAGE CAUGHT UP WITH ACTRESS SWOOSIE KURTZ DURING REHEARSAL

Have you ever done Shaw before?

You know, I was trying to think back about that. I did *Misalliance*. Very badly, I think. I would love to do it again, but it's too late now; a little long in the tooth. I was in college, but it was summer theatre, outdoor theatre and I just loved it. Obviously great stuff for an actor to get their teeth into.

What do you think about your character?

Everyday I find out something new, it's wonderful. It's, you know, all about subtext. On the surface, she's fun, she's sexy, she's glamorous, she's in control, she's manipulative, she's flirtatious; she loves to stir up trouble. She doesn't like things to be dull. And I think she has a high activity level; a high requirement for intrigue and sort of match-making and stirring things up. And then we're discovering some deeper things; it's hard to say at this point.

When I was reading the play, I thought, "This is like a lot of people I know who may be of a certain class but are definitely keeping themselves from going crazy."

Exactly. Aren't we all? I mean, don't all men lead lives of quiet desperation? We all deal with that in our different ways and our insecurities and our pain. She definitely has pain in her life and she too has her heartbreak. She said to herself one point in her life, "Okay. I'm married to this man who is a compulsive womanizer and I can pull the covers over my head and cry about it and sink into the abyss or I can decide to have some fun with it and make the best of a bad pot." So I think she's proactive in that way. She not only accepts him for what he is, but she is now in control.

The way she behaves and the things that she says are extraordinary for that time and I think she was one of those wonderful people who I wish I could be like. They say things that everyone else is afraid to say. "Oh, God I wish I could have said that out loud; how could she have the nerve to say that?" That's one thing I love about acting; it gives me the nerve to do all these things I'm too shy to do myself.

What should young people do if they want to act?

It is so different for each person. I wish there was a formula. Mine has been a very, very long, very, very slow road. And you know the business has changed so much in the last few years. When I say the business I guess I'm really referring to film and television. Theatre hasn't changed that much. I feel that the values in the theatre are the true values, you know, and film and television is another world. If you want to be a theatre actor, you just start where you can and work and play roles and see if it's really worth it to you. Because if you are not willing to truly sacrifice a whole lot of things in your life, and I really mean sacrifice, then go do something else because even when you're successful it is so hard. It is so hard because you know 80% of the time you feel like what you do is not really needed in the world. Of course it is, art is needed.

Is the challenge of this that it's a classical role? That it has so much language?

We did quite a lot of classic work at LAMDA [London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art]. I did *Tartuffe* a few years back and things like that, but I think the challenge is that it's the kind of thing I haven't really done before. Not just that it's a classic but to play this kind of woman. The woman on the page is the most important thing to me. Can I bring something to her? Can I bring her to life? And maybe make her real and have it be someone I haven't inhabited before. She's inside there somewhere but I have to bring her out.

I was wondering if you'd talk a little about your name.

My father was the most decorated Air Force pilot of World War II. He flew a plane in the Air Force which was called the Swoose and it was a B-17. It was made up of different parts because it was war time. It was a hybrid plane made up of different parts and original parts and there was a song about this strange looking bird. And it said, "half swan, half goose, Alexander is a swoose." So they called the plane Swoose, meaning that it was, you know, a strange looking bird. So when I was born this Associated Press reporter said, "The second Swoose

has landed!" My parents were going to name me Margo after my mother and it just sort of stuck, you know. They thought, "Oh well. Okay."

So even as a child, on your birth certificate it says...

Oh yeah, Swoosie. And it's Swoosie, rhymes with Lucy, not with a Z. Everybody wants to say Swoozie, to put a Z into it, but it's not. It's Swoosie, you know, it's sort of a wonderful name for this business because...

It's unforgettable.™

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**“The possibilities
are numerous once
we decide to act
and not react.”**

—George Bernard Shaw



Swoosie Kurtz

The CHARACTER OF THE SET DESIGNER

UPSTAGE DISCUSSES *HEARTBREAK HOUSE* WITH SET DESIGNER JOHN LEE BEATTY

You've designed this play before, so how did you prepare for this production?

I read it a few times and actually, our director, Robin Lefevre, was here and I got to do that thing that I love to do, to just sit down and ask the director: "Please explain this to me." He has a really clear vision of what the play is. In fact, he even had some ideas for cuts as we were talking. He distilled his ideas about what the play really needed to be. Because this is a revival, oddly I didn't go back and look at the designs I did in the 70's. In fact, I know where they are and I purposely am not going to look at them. But I did go to Lincoln Center and look at some very early productions of it. The first American production, I think, was in 1920 with the Theatre Guild. It was designed by a famous American designer, Lee Simonson. That was helpful to see, but time passes, and their priorities and our priorities today, visually, are different. By deciding to put the third act and the second act together it required a different solution, because to do a scene change in the middle of the act meant a huge commitment in terms of scenically providing a way to make a very quick and graceful shift, which they didn't have to do in the original production. The relationship between the outdoors and the indoors becomes more important when you're turning the set around and seeing the outside version immediately.

Where is the act break?

The act break is after Act One. Shaw did follow the classic rules of construction of a three-act play, a long first act and proportionally shorter second and third. Theoretically in a three-act play you should have a long first act, a medium second and a short third. So, taking advantage of that, Robin made a few cuts that made the second act and the first act sort of balance.

What else is a part of the set designer's job?

One important part is to make sure the play can be done on the furniture. When you have an actress in a period role, where they have longer clothing and her responsibility is not just the words and emotions but she's got to control her dresses as well and look wonderful. During rehearsal, when an actress is showing me how she is going to sit on the sofa I ask, "Is it hard enough, is

it soft enough, it is deep enough, is it tall enough?" I try to make sure everybody can present the play and their characters properly.

Tell me about all the nautical language in the stage directions. Did you ever figure out what he's talking about?

Well, embarrassingly, even though I have, quite frankly, done a little boating, I got really confused. But Robin [the director] knows all about it.

So did you follow that in the design?

Yes, you kind of have to. Shaw has taken care of making sure that there is a reason for movement. There are plot reasons and it also activates the actor's behavior. It makes it possible for them to do the scenes in the proper format. They have to see certain people at certain times and turn a certain way. The only thing that I did for the audience's modern taste was make the entrance up a few steps just to give [the actors] a better entrance. The way this theater is built, it's better to have them up a few steps. It also allows the actors to not have to play just in a straight line across the front of the stage, which would have been more to the 1920's, where actors basically hugged the downstage footlight trough.

What was the biggest challenge in designing for this play?

Well there were two challenges here, but that is typical of a scene designer's work. There is a practical challenge, which is that there is a big scene change and I have a boat on stage, a ship on stage. The real challenge is just trying to stay true to the script. It's just like acting, you can have all the problems in the world with your wig, but basically you're still at the service of the playwright. Finding out what his world is, what's true—finding the truth in it. In certain productions they make Shotover look like Shaw, that is the typical thing. But I've been more interested in just seeing that the house is Shotover's house and that it isn't sort of a generic, glamorous English country house. Basically the characters have no choice but to inhabit this house. I don't think anybody except Shotover would have chosen this house or the way it looks. But it clearly is driven by Shotover's situation and the situation of his

adult children being basically slaves to their own society. They have nowhere else to go. They're upper class but they're caught, they have to live Daddy's way. So there's a really interesting visual mismatch in that. And the more I do the play the more I see how funny it is. It's almost like they were coming from a different place and in their heads they would rather be in a different place, but here they are in this odd, ship-like house in the middle of the night; and it's a very interesting and subtle contrast Shaw has created. And the scenery, therefore, is the contrast. ^{UP}

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**“Imagination is
the beginning of
creation.
You imagine what
you desire, you
will what you
imagine and at
last you create
what you will.”**

—George Bernard Shaw



The CHARACTER OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW WAS BORN IN DUBLIN IN 1856. SHAW HAD A troubled childhood in Ireland with his drunken father. He began working at age fifteen as a junior clerk and eventually moved to London in 1877 to join his sister and mother. He did not return to Ireland for nearly thirty years. Shaw's literary career began with music and theatre criticisms. His first novel, a somewhat autobiographical novel titled *Immaturity*, did not do well. In the 1880s and 90s Shaw spent much of his time writing music, art and drama criticisms for various publications. During his life, Shaw wrote over 50 plays. He has been given the title of Irish dramatist, literary critic, socialist spokesman, and one of the leading figures in the 20th century theatre. Throughout his entire life he practiced and promoted socialism as well as equality of income and women's rights. Finally in 1925 Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature; though he accepted the honor he did not accept the money. He died at Ayot St. Lawrence, Hertfordshire, on November 2, 1950.

Shaw, Chekov and the Parallels of *Heartbreak House* and *The Cherry Orchard*

Anton Chekov's premiere of *The Cherry Orchard* transpired at The Moscow Art Theatre on January 17, 1904. George Bernard Shaw's play, *Heartbreak House*, did not evolve until 1919; fifteen years after Chekov's death. So what can these two works, one from Russia, one from Britain, have in common? How about the aftermath of war, the effects on society and the evolution of class for a start? Following the abolition of the feudal system in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, a middle class began to develop. Now without the help of serfs, the aristocracy was left with too much land, too many homes and too many duties to complete on their own. They were struggling in a futile effort to maintain their elevated status. On the other hand, the new bourgeoisie or middle class found themselves in the position of owning land, homes, possessions and responsibility. They struggled with the adjustment to their newfound wealth. Following World War I in Britain, society faced many of these same predicaments. The so-called upper class had the control, but not the social awareness of the world around them to effectively lead. The middle class's understanding of everyday needs made them a prime candidate for taking the country's political reigns, but they lacked the status and power to do so. In both plays, an eccentric country house is the foundation for a group of refined individuals to prattle rather than confront the impending social change inevitable to them. The subtitle of *Heartbreak House* reads "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner," which is a tribute to Chekov and his writing. ^{UP}



“I want to be all used up when I die.”

—George Bernard Shaw

The CHARACTER OF THE AUDIENCE

BEFORE THE PLAY

Consider the following questions:

- ◆ How is class identified in our society?
- ◆ How are male and female roles defined in our society?
- ◆ Who usually has the most power in terms of money?
- ◆ What do you think the impact of major corporations is on how we live and think in contemporary society?
- ◆ How do they affect your idea of the future?

Observe and identify the most frequent stories in the media.

- ◆ What are those stories usually about?
- ◆ How do the topics of those stories affect you?

DURING THE PLAY

The word perspective is defined as the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance.

Notice the perspectives of the different characters in the play.

- ◆ What are their opinions regarding love, money, business and power?
- ◆ Who has the most power in the relationships of the various characters?

Listen to the language the characters use to argue and prove their perspectives.

- ◆ Which character's perspective do you agree with the most?

AFTER THE PLAY

Write a letter to the character whose perspective you most disagree with and present your argument to them.

First think about whether society has changed very much since this play was published in 1919 and then write a monologue that addresses a contemporary perspective on love, money, power or war.

When you get to the theatre...

BELOW ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE.

TICKET POLICY

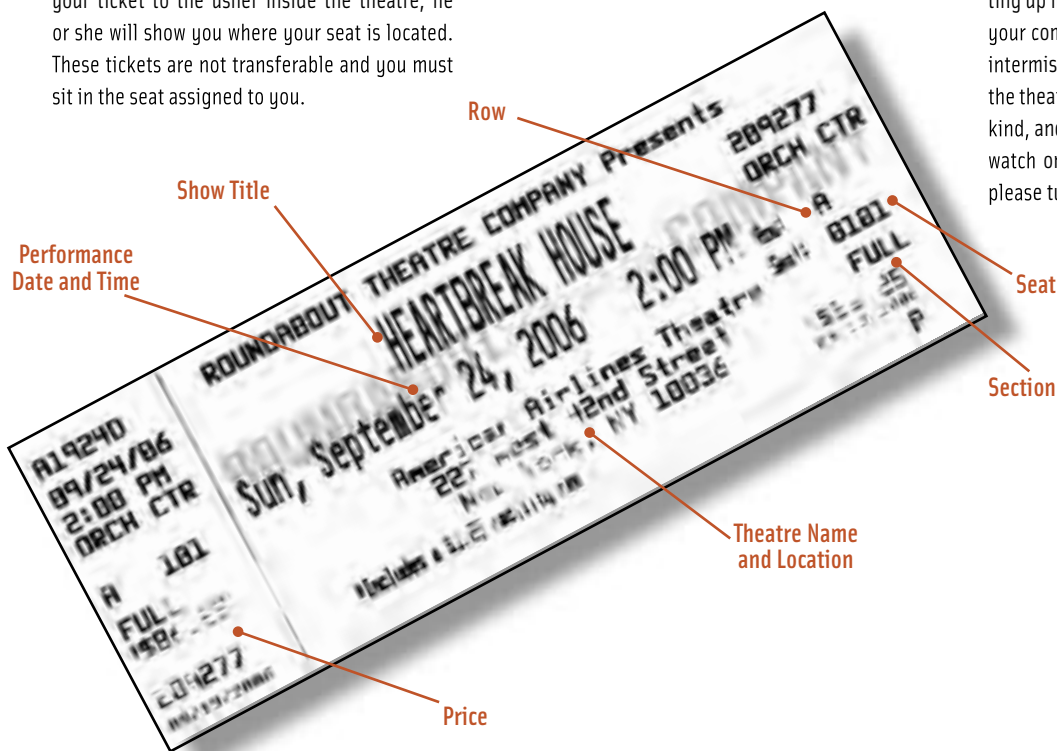
As a student participant in *Producing Partners*, *Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket 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.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

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 cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



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