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### Playwrights and Their Works of Modern Drama

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Sharon Hibbard

for

Honors Special Study

Advisor: Mr. Holt

Playwrights and their works of Modern Drama

Henrik Ibsen-Norwegian-Ghosts

Eugene O'Neill-American-The Iceman Cometh

William B. Yeats-Irish-At the Hawk's Well

August Strindberg-Swedish-Miss Julie

Tennessee Williams-American-The Glass Menagerie

Samuel Beckett-Irish-Endgame

John M. Synge-Irish-The Playboy of the Western World

Riders to the Sea

Anton Chekhov-Russian-The Seagull

Jean-Paul Sartre-French-No Exit

G. Bernard Shaw-Irish-Man and Superman

Playwrights are unique people, in that while they live they are often thought of as odd and never truly understood. May be it is because they have a greater appreciation of the beauty of life and nature, and are more sensitive concerning emotions and even death. As Shaw once said: "Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my kingdom was not of this world: I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at my ease only with the mighty dead." May be the reason most playwrights do not see success in their work while alive is because their imagination and dreams are too advanced for the present mind of the audiences of their day, therefore, the audiences can not cope or truly appreciate the beauty and worth of the work.

We all have drama in our lives and most of the modern drama playwrights have drawn their plays from personal experiences, which makes the plays better because you have to search and know yourself to write something that is relevant to your own time and yet have universality of thought and be meaningful. These playwrights and their plays have been successful because they have withstood the cruel test of time.

## The life of Henrik Ibsen (Father of Modern Drama)

Modern drama begins with Ibsen. The Norwegian was born <sup>in</sup> 1828 and died in 1906. At the time of his birth Norway had only recently acquired its independence from Denmark. Ibsen matured in an age of fervent patriotism; the romantic nationalism of Western Europe was a powerful influence on his early career. Ibsen was poor and largely self-educated. At fifteen he became a pharmacist's apprentice and lived in an attic on meager pay, and fed his imagination with romantic poetry, sagas and folk ballads, and histories of the struggles for Norse independence. He responded enthusiastically to the revolutions of 1848, and his vigorous participation in local politics often took the form of sharp attacks on the pettiness and hypocrisy of small town society.

Ibsen completed Ghosts at Rome in the summer and fall of 1881, but he had thought about the play and had begun working on it several months earlier. Its origins lie in the same intellectual ferment which gave rise to A Doll's House; despite Ibsen's disclaimer, Ghosts can be viewed as a sequel to the immediately preceding drama. It is unmistakably the playwright's answer to the orthodox moralists who condemned Nora for walking out on her husband and children....(the door slam that was heard around the world). Mrs. Alving is a Nora who stayed, and her misfortunes and those of Oswald are the consequence of her failure of nerve. Both plays examine in different ways the price a woman has to pay for the assertion of her individuality and freedom, but Ibsen

was no militant feminist; his concern is not with the enunciation of a thesis or a slogan, but with the examination and judgment of individual and social motives and values.

The sources of Ghosts are literary and personal as well as ideological. A short novel by Mauritz Hansen, The Daughter (1837), tells of the secret of the Hedelbrandt family. The head of the family, a dissolute colonel, has a child by the maid, Else. Before the birth occurs she is married off to a wooden-legged janitor. Else later goes mad and her daughter is raised in the household, in daily association with the janitor, whom she views with fear and disdain. Ibsen may have drawn Regine after one of his maids in Munich.

None of his other plays is so rigorously constructed. There is not a single line, not a single word, that fails to serve a vital organic purpose. Ghosts is a domestic play and his notes Ibsen remarked, "The play is to be like a picture of life."

Ghosts is unique among modern plays in its strict observance of the unities of time, place and action. Thirty years are compressed into twelve hours, and all events antecedent to the crucial action are set forth through exposition. Ibsen is a master of the art of informing the audience about the past while simultaneously sustaining and enhancing the interest of the immediate present. The revelation of the past bears directly on relationships in the present. Each act is marked by antagonism, suspense, and climax.

None of Ibsen's plays so infuriated his public. In England Ghosts was castigated as "An open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly." It would be altogether wrong to view the play as a medical or sociological tract. The "Ghosts" are not merely figures out of the past; they represent all the dead lumber of institutional and ideological forces that blunt the free expression of individuality and stifle "the joy of life". In his notes for the play, Ibsen declared, "Marriage for external reasons, even when these are religious or moral, brings a Nemesis upon the offspring". The grim fatality and cruel irony of Ghosts recaptures the implacable tragedy of the ancient Greeks in an intricate pattern of theme and image, idea and symbol. The rising sun casts its luminous rays on the dark drama of guilt and retribution.

Ghosts represent the past. When Regine and Oswald were making love it was this act that seemed to be the ghost of her unhappy marriage. Regine was Oswald's step-sister as a result of Captain Alving's escapade with the maid servant Joanna...And--Oswald wanted to marry Regine.

Mrs. Alving's ghost speech: Just now, when I heard Regine and Oswald in there-I felt hemmed in by ghosts- You know, Manders, the longer I live the more convinced I am that we're all haunted in this world-not only by the things we inherit from our parents-but by the ghosts of innumerable old prejudices and beliefs-half-forgotten cruelties and betrayals-we may not even be aware of them-but they're there just the same-and we can't get rid of them. The whole world is haunted by these ghosts of the dead past; you have only to pick up a newspaper to see them weaving in and out between the lines-Ah! if we only had the courage to sweep them all out and let in the light!

Mrs. Alving loved Pastor Manders and when the Captain was running around on her and getting drunk she went to him and wanted to run away with him, but instead he sent her back to him because it was her duty as a wife.

Manders: No one can be held responsible for the outcome--  
The fact remains, that your marriage in every way conformed to the strictest rules of law and order.

Mrs. Alving: All this talk about law and order!--I often think all the suffering in the world is due to that.

Captain Alving had a venereal disease which Oswald had inherited. Oswald remembered his father encouraging him to smoke a large meerschaum pipe (it made him sick but in a different sense). The premise of Ghosts is the sin's of the fathers are visited upon the children.

Mrs. Alving tells Oswald and Regine of their father.

Regine leaves and Oswald begs his mother to give him the morphia tablets (the only way to cure his illness--through death).



## The life of Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888 on the third floor of Barrett House, a hotel on Times Square in New York City. His father, James O'Neill was a well-known actor; and Eugene spent most of this youth touring the country with his father and attending different boarding schools.

O'Neill's personal life was as tumultuous, colorful, and tragedy-ridden as are his plays. He was married three times. He suffered from a rare disease of the nervous system which progressively robbed him of motor control. The initial symptom was a trembling of the hands, a particularly tragic affliction for a writer who was ineluctably wedded to writing in long hand. Thus the late plays were written under great physical stress and anguish -on some days he could not write at all- and at least by 1947 he had to give up writing altogether, except for a few successful and sporadic attempts. By his death in 1953 he was a mind encased in an almost helpless body.

But The Iceman Cometh, despite its somber themes, was written in joy, in the pure pleasure of recapturing a past that he had himself once known but that was not connected with his family. According to his own testimony, the play flowed from his pen. For he had found at the last that art for him was a species of autobiography: the remembrance of things past.

O'Neill died at the age of sixty-five in a hotel room in Boston. His last articulate words, uttered with clenched

fists, were: "Born in a hotel room---and Goddamn it---  
died in a hotel room."

O'Neill's plays deal with people who are down and out and only "hope" is left to see them through. He has a compassion for the people who are in the garbage can of humanity.

Nihilism or nothingness is the philosophy of O'Neill. Man is just here and there is nothing to help him (no God). Nihilism is the doctrine which denies any objective ground of moral principles. The Iceman Cometh has many themes, one is probably Larry's quizzical assertion in Act I:

I was born condemned to be one of those who has to see all sides of a question. When you're damned like that, the questions multiply for you until in the end it's all question and no answer.

Larry the philosopher also pronounces the play's comment upon TRUTH:

To hell with the truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It is irrelevant and immaterial, as the lawyers say.

So far as the play has an overall statable theme, it is concerned with two sets of distinct but connected antitheses: reality vs. illusion and commitment vs. noncommitment. The real province is the deep, tortuous, problematical territory of human nature where there are two final questions; how much guilt can a human being stand and how is he or she, no matter how degraded the circumstances, to preserve some shred or semblance or simulacrum of human dignity, however shabby? Their "dignity," their ability to carry on, lies precisely in "the pipe dream" and thus follows their hatred of the man who will rob them of it.

What Hickey (who comes to save them) does not realize is that all the "pipe dreamers" know full well that their own "dreams" and those of their fellows are a sham but they have tactily agreed to a conspiracy of "keeping up appearances" and of somehow carrying on. Indeed it could be argued that society is held together, even in the highest circles, by some such mechanism of mutual forbearance for harmless delusions. The truth is terrible, says The Iceman Cometh: let us gloss it over, although we always know it is there.

The Iceman Cometh - The Idea of an American Tragedy

The Iceman Cometh was written in 1939, its composition coinciding with the outbreak of World War II. O'Neill was horrified by Hitler and had great sympathy for France, and some of the more pessimistic aspects of the play were no doubt inspired by the fact that Western civilization seemed to be on its way to holocaust and general destruction. He felt, too, later on, that the first production of the play should have a relationship to the War. Thus he told the Theatre Guild that The Iceman Cometh should not be produced immediately after the conclusion of the War. If the play were to be put on directly after the War was over, its pessimism would run counter to the public optimism consequent to the victory in the War. But he felt that in a year or so disillusionment would set in and that then the play would be properly appreciated. Accordingly, the play was not produced until 1946.

In an interview O'Neill said, "I knew 'em all. I've known 'em for years. All these people I have written about, I once knew. I do not think that you can write anything of

value or understanding about the present. You can only write about life if it is far enough in the past. The present is too much mixed up with superficial values; you can't know which thing is important and which is not. The past which I have chosen is one I knew. The man who owns this saloon, Harry Hope, and all the others are real. It's not just one place, perhaps, but it is several places that I lived in at one time or another----places I once knew put together in one. You ask, what is the significance, what do these people mean to us today? Well, all I can say is that it is a play about pipe dreams. And the philosophy is that there is always one dream left, one final dream, no matter how low you have fallen, down there at the bottom of the bottle. I know, because I saw it."

... Its philosophy is eternal and universal, O'Neill thinks: "It will take man a million years to grow up and obtain a soul." To him titles are a matter of great importance. "I always try to get into the title the surface meaning and at the same time the deeper significance." The surface meaning of The Iceman Cometh stems from a sardonic wisecrack, often repeated by one of the characters, who tells people he has left his wife safe at home with the iceman. The play revolves around this. But as it proceeds the "iceman," who started as a ribald joke, takes on a different, deeper and even terrifying meaning and before the end becomes Death itself.

O'Neill once said, "When one dream is punctured, when we are finally brought face to face with ourselves or with

'reality,' the mind jumps to another pipe dream and calls it truth---calls it facing reality!" O'Neill did not see the play as pessimistic or gloomy. He delighted in its laughter. He'd chuckle over the tarts and the others---he loved them all. He didn't feel that the fact that we live largely by illusion is sad. The important thing is to see that we do. The quality of a man is merely the quality of his illusions. We like illusioned people. No happy person lives in good terms with reality. No one has even penetrated what reality is.

## The life of William Butler Yeats

Yeats was born near Dublin in 1865 of a Protestant and Anglo-Irish family, He spent much of his youth in London and always remained close to the English literary scene. A genuine belief in magic and the occult pervades all of Yeats' writing, early and late. He shares with the continental symbolist poets and playwrights an intimate concern with dream-life, reverie, and private vision as reflections of an underlying spiritual reality. He is regarded as the greatest poet of the twentieth century. His great contribution to the modern theatre lies in his fusion of poetry and the drama. In the course of his long productive career, Yeats wrote over thirty plays. His drama makes unusual and at times even impossible demands on actors and spectators, and it is no wonder that few of his plays are performed. Nevertheless, they represent a fresh and vital effort to reshape the contemporary theatre. Yeats died in 1939.

At the Hawk's Well was the first play in our literature ever to be written on the Japanese Noh formula, and Yeats had therefore, to use all the space at his disposal to explain his new technique. The nature of the Noh synthesis, a blend of drama, music, choric song, dance and traditional symbolism; and with the ultimate intentions of the plays, which he saw as combining visual beauty, archetypal symbolic communication and metaphysical suggestion to convey spiritual truth.

Almost all Yeats's dance-plays conform to that genre of the Noh theatre known as the 'Noh of ghosts', the most

difficult as it is the most aesthetically beautiful of the Japanese modes, and though he simplified here and there, Yeats followed the strict Noh rules with considerable fidelity. The Japanese rules, as Yeats notes, require that the action itself should conform to a certain highly stylised pattern.

The Noh theory goes on to prescribe fixed laws for the adventure itself, which must be made dramatically exciting by some miraculous, supernatural happening, of a kind that will be perfectly intelligible to the audience, and which will serve to draw down god, goddess or ghost into the world of time. Yeats founds At the Hawk's Well on just such an incident: there is a woman guardian at the well, and the goddess of the locality possesses herself of this woman's body and distracts Cuchulain from the well-water by playing upon his sexual desire.

At the Hawk's Well is remarkable for a peculiar bitterness, and the atmosphere is one of consummate disillusion: the spiritual world is regarded with disaffection, and the phenomenal world with a certain settled distaste. In a sense, of course, all this has an autobiographical explanation, and the play reflects Yeats's sexual and spiritual unhappiness at the time he wrote: the well is in one sense a receptacle symbol, and the watcher at the well, never rewarded, is the symbol of amor courtois and of sexual despair.

The use and effect of masks is to isolate, with chill distinction and an entire absence of superfluous emotion, the salient characteristics of manhood and womanhood, youth

and age. Thus the following speeches are made to isolate salient characteristics of youth and age:

Young Man: My luck is strong,  
It will not leave me waiting, nor will they  
That dance among the stones put me asleep;  
If I grow drowsy I can pierce my foot.

Old Man: No, do not pierce it, for the foot is tender  
It feels pain much. But find your sail again,  
And leave the well to me, for it belongs  
To all that's old and withered.

Yeats's imagination caught fire from the Noh masks, and that is what largely accounts for the elaborate stylisation of his characters.

The religion of the Self was Yeats's own faith, he uses it as a symbolic representation of the sufferings attendant upon man's adoption of that philosophy, as Yeats himself had experienced them, or as Cuchulain. Soured pessimism is the play's general tone. The play is concerned with the theory of Self, and it is a profoundly disillusioned and pessimistic play, but this is not to say that the religion of the Self is disillusioned or pessimistic.

The well symbolizes immortality; the hawk that guards the well symbolizes life that keeps you from immortality or it can suggest a mingled aristocracy and savagery. In the play, the hawk-goddess possesses the guardian of the well---the old man has wasted his life looking for immortality---thus if a man is good only to get to heaven he is not actually good, he is doing it because he is afraid not to. The good man doesn't seek heaven, he lives a good life.

Cuchulain is not rejected as undeserving, and his failure to drink of the miraculous water can be blamed on no





Folly alone I cherish,  
I choose it for my share  
Being but a mouthful of air,  
I am content to perish;  
I am but a mouthful of sweet air.

O lamentable shadows,  
Obscurity of strife!  
I choose a pleasant life  
Among indolent meadows.  
Wisdom must live a bitter life.

The argument of these lines is used to make Yeats's point, that 'wisdom is the property of the dead' and that humanity should accept its own frailty and renounce the bitter struggle for spiritual knowledge.

At the Hawk's Well was no more than a first experiment, but it solved most of Yeats's initial problems in creating an indigenous form of Noh theatre. He discovered simply by writing it the correct ratio of dialogue to choric song-- a matter to which he had given much careful consideration-- and he learned how to construct his 'image', balancing narrative, music, dancing and metaphysical suggestion so as to achieve that archetypal communication that was his aim.

## The life of August Strindberg

Strindberg, born in Stockholm 1849-died 1912, of poor parents, he was raised in an atmosphere of moral and physical squalor. His mother had been his father's mistress and had given birth to three illegitimate children before their marriage. One of twelve children, Strindberg as a boy was treated with harshness and neglect.

Unconventional and reckless in his private life, Strindberg in 1875 had a passionate love affair with a married woman, Siri von Essen. She left her husband and, two years later, married Strindberg. He went to Paris and became familiar with the naturalism of Zola, whose doctrines he applied in modified form.

After his divorce in 1891, he went to Germany, then the promised land for Scandinavian authors. He moved in the circles of Berlin naturalists and there met a young journalist, Frida Uhl, whom he married in 1893. They separated the next year and Strindberg went to Paris, where he gave himself over to studies in chemistry and alchemy, hoping to achieve the transmutation of elements and convinced that the periodic table was a fraud. He also took up theosophy and occult speculation. Moody and depressed, he became increasingly suspicious of all around him and subject to violent hallucinations; while in Paris, he was hospitalized for several months. The suffering Strindberg experienced during this "Inferno Crisis" from 1894 to 1896 was positive proof to him of his guilt and depravity. He emerged a-broken, yet out of his inner torment came an almost incredible release of creative energy---twenty-nine more plays.

The manuscript of Miss Julie bears the notation in Strindberg's hand, "A naturalistic tragedy." The Darwinian principle of the survival of the fittest enters forcefully into Strindberg's view of social processes and personal relationships. He once said: "I find the joy of life in its violent and cruel struggles, and my pleasure lies in knowing something and learning something." He was not mistaken in proclaiming to a prospective publisher, "this play will be a milestone in history."

Miss Julie (1888) is much closer to our own day in its complex portrayal of personality. Strindberg's neurotic heroine yields to erotic compulsion and all but loses control over herself. In his "Foreword" Strindberg takes great pains to make her seduction probable; Perhaps not all of the causes are made explicit in the play itself, but it is clear that Julie actively collaborates in her fall. It is important to keep in mind the social background of the lovers' relationship. Jean is a servant, Julie an aristocrat, and in the Sweden of Strindberg's day, class lines constituted an impassable barrier. The consciousness of the gulf between the very poor and the very rich underlies and intensifies the central conflict. For the playwright, as he indicates in his "Foreword," this antagonism, and its resolution in the drama, was symbolic of changing social processes at the expense of their so-called betters, but the decline of "inferior" and degenerate types and the rise of "superior" beings to strengthen and power. It is characteristic of Strindberg's greatness as a playwright that despite his misogyny and his hatred for the social class to which his heroine belongs, he could por-

tray her suffering with understanding and compassion.

Regarding the cause for Miss Julie's tragic fate, Strindberg declares that there is a combination of causes that forces the issue of the drama, a combination that points to elements far back of the drama as well as circumstances within the dramatic frame. "Thus I have neither been one-sidedly physiological nor one-sidedly psychological in my procedure. Nor have I merely delivered a moral preachment. This multiplicity of motives I regard as praiseworthy because it is in keeping with the views of our own time."

"In regard to character-drawing I may say that I have tried to make my figures rather 'characterless,' and I have done so for the reasons that I shall now state." Strindberg objects to the term "character" because too often it has been applied on the stage to one single element of the soul, whereas souls are actually complex.

My souls (or characters) are conglomerates, made up of past and present stages of civilization, scraps of humanity, torn-off pieces of Sunday clothing turned into rags--all patched together as is the human soul itself. And I have furthermore offered a touch of evolutionary history by letting the weaker repeat words stolen from the stronger, and by letting different souls accent 'ideas'--or suggestions, as they are called from each other.

Miss Julie is a modern character, not because the man-hating half-woman may not have existed in all ages, but because now, after her discovery, she has stepped to the front and begun to make a noise. The half-woman is a type coming more and more into prominence, selling herself nowadays for power, decorations, distinctions, diplomas, as formerly for money, and the type indicates degeneration. But Miss Julia is also a remnant of the old military nobility which is now giving way to the new nobility of nerves and brain.

It is clear, then, that Strindberg intends Julia to be a type character. She is a representative of the upper class, and also of the "man-hating half-woman" group. Strindberg has

not given unvirality to this character, for he has qualified Julia by a particular social rating and a peculiar attitude toward the male. Jean is more of a type than Julia, for he comes from a larger class, the servants. Yet he, too, is limited to a specific minority among servants, to those aspiring to climb out of the lower class.

Death wish: Julie\*\*\* For that matter everything is strange. Life, human beings, everything, just scum drifting about on the water until it sinks-down and down. That reminds me of a dream I sometimes have, in which I'm on top of a pillar and can't see any way of getting down. When I look down I'm dizzy; I have to get down but I haven't the courage to jump. I can't stay there and I long to fall, but I don't fall. There can't be any peace at all for me until I'm down right down on the ground. And if I did get to the ground I'd want to be under the ground...Have you ever felt like that?

Need to succeed: Jean\*\*\* No. In my dream I'm lying under a great tree in a dark wood. I want to get up, up to the top of it, and look out over the bright landscape where the sun is shining and rob that high nest of its golden eggs. And I climb and climb but the trunk is so thick and smooth and it's so far to the first branch. I'll go to the top just as if I'm on a ladder. I haven't reached it yet, but I shall get there, even if only in my dreams.

In the end Julie's wish comes true and Jean crosses the class barriers by using Miss Julie as a ladder, from which he could climb on until may be someday he could reach the high nest with its golden eggs.



TENNESSEE WILLIAMS



**THE GLASS MENAGERIE**

## The life of Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams was born in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi. Thomas Lanier Williams was the son of a robustious traveling salesman for a shoe company and an Episcopalian clergyman's daughter schooled in the genteel graces. Williams' plays are set in the Deep South, where he spent the first eight years of his life. The disparity in his parents' natures is reflected in *Amanda Wingfield* and the father whose glowing photograph gives him the reality of a fifth character in *The Glass Menagerie*. Much of the characterization and incident in *The Glass Menagerie* is admittedly autobiographical. Thomas "Tennessee" Williams (the son in *Menagerie* is Tom Wingfield) moved from Columbus, Mississippi, to St. Louis when he was twelve years old. "But where we lived...in St. Louis were ugly rows of apartment buildings the color of dried blood and mustard. If I had been born to this situation, I might not have resented it deeply. But it was forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood. It produced a shock and a rebellion that has grown into an inherent part of my work." He had to drop college during the depression and found a clerical job in a shoe company. "The two years I spent in that corporation were indescribable torment to me as an individual but of immense value to me as a writer for they gave me firsthand knowledge of what it means to be a small wage-earner in a hopelessly routine job. I had been writing since childhood and I continued writing while I was employed by the shoe company."



Among the "not violent" plays, The Glass Menagerie is unquestionably his finest achievement. Williams has combined serious statement with comic insight in recreating the world in which he reached maturity. Violence, present both in the foreground--the explosive relationship between Amanda and Tom--and in the background, is subordinated to the reminiscent portrait of Laura, the peacemaker in a household ironically symbolic of the macrocosm. Tom has escaped from the tiny prison of the Wingfield apartment only to find himself in the larger prison of a world "lit by lightning" from which also there is no escape. Violence of the World War II "Now" is prefigured in the recollected "Then" through allusions to Guernica, labor troubles, Chamberlain's temporizing with the Master of Berchtesgaden, and especially by the World War I doughbody "smiling forever" in the blown-up photograph on the wall.

In the late 1940's Williams warned that, having put "all the nice things I have to say about people" in The Glass Menagerie, his future writings would be much harsher.

Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic.

In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings.

I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it.

The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister Laura, and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes.

He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from.

But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for.

There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantel.

This is our father who left us a long time ago.

He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town...

The last we heard of him was a picture post card from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of words---

"Hello---Goodbye!" and no address.

I think the rest of the play will explain itself...

And so, Tom Wingfield starts the play off in this way. Amanda, the mother, clings frantically to another time and place---Laura, her daughter, because of a childhood illness that left her crippled never established contact with reality so she lives in illusions along with her glass collection---Tom, her son, who is a poet with a job leading nowhere and he has to get out some way just like his father did---Jim O'Connor, a young man Laura had a crush on in school, he used to call her Blue Roses.

Because Tom's father deserted them he had to support not only himself but mother and sister as well. Amanda kept telling him he had a responsibility, he couldn't leave until Laura was provided for. She made the apartment like a coffin for him. His only escape from her was through his poetry and going to the movies.

Amanda: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?

Tom: I go to the movies because--I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much of at work, so I go to the movies.

Amanda: Most young men find adventure in their careers.

Tom: Then most young men are not employed in a warehouse.

Amanda: The world is full of young men employed in warehouses and offices and factories.

Tom: Do all of them find adventure in their careers?

Amanda: They do or they do without it! Not everybody has a craze for adventure.

Laura's gentlemen caller turns out to be Jim the boy she had a crush on in school but it turns out he already has a girlfriend. Jim accidentally breaks one of Laura's glass ornaments, her unicorn ---her favorite and the one she identifies with because it was so different. When Jim leaves Laura gives him the broken unicorn without a horn as a souvenir. Laura realizes that she is really not that different with Jim's aid and one thinks that may be she will gain confidence in herself.

Tom leaves but he can't forget the memory of Laura. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space--I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass-- Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! Blow out your candles, Laura--and so good-bye...(Laura blows out the candles, thus freeing Tom of her memory).

Williams' philosophy expresses a despondent yet humane view of life:

"Life has a meaning if you're bucking for heaven. But if heaven is a fantasy, we are in this jungle with whatever we can work out for ourselves. It ~~seems~~ seems to me that the cards are stacked against us. The only victory is how we take it."

## The life of Samuel Beckett

Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906 and grew up a Protestant. He was from middle-class parents who gave him a good education. In 1927, Beckett received his baccalaureate in French and Italian from Dublin's Trinity College. Since 1932, except for occasional short visits to his family, Beckett has lived in France. Ireland seemed intolerable for Beckett because of the strict censorship of books and ideas and the clergy's power in Irish politics created an oppressive anti-intellectualism.

Endgame---the game of life, the end of life.

Endgame is Theatre of the Absurd, which rejects the concept that the theatre must be a mirror of real life (it is contrary to reason, common sense, and inconsistent with truth). The relationships in Endgame are ambiguous, and interpretation complex. Nagg and Nell are Hamm's parents and are in ash bins while Hamm is in his armchair. Clov is called Hamm's son, menial, creature, and dog. An offstage Mother Pegg is never revealed as the mother of anybody, and like the rest of the off-stage world, she is presumably dead when the play begins. After Clov sights a small boy on the beach, he prepares to leave Hamm. The boy, however, does not appear on scene, and Hamm, covering his face with the bloody handkerchief of the opening tableau, seems resigned to the death that has already overtaken--perhaps at his instigation--the remaining world.

"It is finished"---the last words of Christ on the Cross, according to the Gospel of St. John--are echoed in the first words of the English version of Endgame--Clov's "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished."

With characteristic irony, Beckett accents the cruel inhumanity of Endgame by frequent evocation of the Bible in the light of its delineation of man's role, particularly with respect to the superhuman. Thus, Hamm, son of Nagg, instantly recalls Ham, son of Noah. Maff, like Noah, has fathered the remnant of humanity, but rather than make a covenant with God, he tells a joke at God's expense. Biblical Noah faithfully follows God's command to perpetuate all species by thriftily introducing couples into the ark; but Beckett's Nagg is indifferent to, or unaware of, the universal death outside the shelter.

Although Noah's animals are absent from Endgame, the play abounds in animal associations: Hamm is an edible part of pig, and Clov either its spice accompaniment, or perhaps a reference to the cloven-hoofed animals which, pigs excepted, were the only permissible meat for biblical Jews. A nag is a small horse, and Nell a common name for a horse; Nagg-nagg and Nell-knell are puns as well. Hamm refers to Clov as his dog, and Clov makes a toy dog for Hamm. Clov feeds Nagg Spratt's medium animal biscuits. An off-stage rat and an on-stage flea are objects of Clov's murderous intent, for rather than propagate all species, Nagg's progeny, Hamm and (perhaps) Clov, seek to extinguish them.

The flea in Clov's trousers is fiercely and farcically destroyed lest a new evolutionary line lead to humanity again.

Similarly, the blindness, darkness, suffering, and above all death that fill Endgame comment ironically on a biblical context. The most frequently repeated line of the play is Hamm's "Is it not time for my pain-killer?" Although Hamm is literally asking Clov for a pill, it becomes increasingly evident that the only true pain-killer is death. When Clov asks Hamm whether he believes in the life to come, the sardonic answer is, "Mine was always that." The ring of the alarm clock is "Fit to wake the dead!"

On two separate occasions, Hamm cries out in anguish, "Father, Father!" Towards the end of the play, Hamm utters several phrases which derisively twist Scripture: "Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbor as yourself!...The end is in the beginning...Good...Good... Peace to our--arses."

Within the tight text of Endgame, the frequency and mockery of the biblical echoes cannot be ignored in any interpretation of the play, and the fourth Gospel is crucial for such interpretation. Not only does the English Endgame contain the fugal variations upon Christ's last words, "It is finished," but in this gospel particularly, Christ affirms that He is the light; He speaks of "my Father's house." Beckett's Hamm has dispensed and extinguished light;

he calls upon his father and insists that his house is the only asylum.

Only in St. John's Gospel does doubting Thomas say, after the crucifixion: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus then appears to Thomas, who then believes, and Jesus admonishes: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

In Endgame, there are apparently no believers---- neither those who see nor blind Hamm. The onstage prayer goes unanswered. The nails leave no print, or their print is perhaps no longer evidence for belief. Several critics have pointed out that Clov is clou is "nail," that Nell and Nagg derive from Germanic naegel, meaning "nail." To these might be added the offstage Mother Pegg, for a "peg" is also a nail. Latin hamus is hook, a kind of crooked nail, so that Hamm may be viewed as another nail. But Hamm is also contained in "hammer," which strikes at nails, and is thus an even more active agent in the crucifying. If Hamm is a Christ figure, he is also a crucifier. In this sense, every proper name in Endgame is a nail, and "nailhood" seems sardonically to symbolize humanity, whose role is to nail Christ to the Cross. All the characters are thus instruments working towards the play's paradoxical opening word, "Finished."



Since Endgame is unmistakably a play about an end of a world, there are many recollections of the Book of Revelations. In the vision of St. John the Divine, Christ says he has "the keys of hell and of death," in ironic contrast to Hamm, who knows the combination of a cupboard that presumably contains the wherewithal to keep them alive in their hell in the shelter.

There are, successively, incongruously, repetitively, "no more" bicycle wheels, pap, nature, sugarplums, tides, rugs, pain-killer, and finally, coffins. Clov kills a flea on stage and seeks to kill a rat off stage. Nell dies on stage, Nagg no longer answers from his ash bin, Hamm and Clov both remain "motionless" at the final curtain. The dramatic action presents the death of the stock props of Western civilization---family cohesion, filial devotion, parental and connubial love, faith in God, empirical knowledge, and artistic creation.

The plot is nakedly built on cruelty, suffering, and death. Beckett himself describes Endgame: "Rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than Godot." One analysis of Endgame reads it as a tragedy, but a tragedy that vacillates between terror and farce. In Endgame Hamm and Clov reiterate that they no longer feel like laughing. Nevertheless, Clov's five brief laughs are the first sounds in Endgame, and the play may be interpreted as a bitterly ironic version of creation and resurrection, making incidental use of comic devices, above all repetition.

## Life of John Millington Synge

Synge is Irish and was born 1871 died 1909. He was the youngest of five children, Synge grew up in an atmosphere of strict, unimaginative Protestantism and unquestioning adherence to the values of a landed gentry proud of English lineage. He received his college degree in 1892 from Dublin's Trinity College. From 1902 he started to write plays. During 1904 Synge participated from the sidelines in launching the theatre with which his name will always be linked. On Dublin's Abcey Street appeared a "people's theatre," the realization of a dream long held by Yeats and by the Fay brothers. Until it was destroyed by fire in 1951, the Abbey Theatre stood, embattled but indestructible in the face of forces only slightly less powerful than fire, as the headquarters of Ireland's vigorous drama.

The characteristic tension in Synge's plays is illustrated again: opposed to the "rooted" Synge who could despair over the number of Irish emigrants is the "inner" Synge, himself "a migrant, relishing the liberty and apotheoses of eternal tinkerdome." Nowhere did Synge articulate more brilliantly these contrary impulses than in the Mahons, father and son, the heroes-in-anite-of-themselves of The Playboy of the Western World.

The genesis of Synge's exploration of hero-worship began in Aran where he heard of a Connaught man who fled to the Islands after he had, in a fit of anger, killed his father with a spade. Musing on the Islanders' willingness

to hide the killer until he could sail for America, Synge conjectured that the impulse to protect the criminal is "universal in the west ... partly due to the association between justice and the hated English jurisdiction, but more directly to the primitive feeling of these people --- who are never criminals yet always capable of crime --- that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion which is as irresponsible as a storm on the sea." Synge began outlining the play in 1903, using such early working titles as "The Fool of Farnham" and "Murder Will Out." By the time Synge found the richly suggestive title which changes in meaning as the play unfolds, he had poured into the play the wisdom, language, and details reflective of his lifetime, all tempered in the fire of his sardonic view that, at least in the Ireland he knew, heroes are not born but made, in the magic of words and in the deeply human need for excitement.

Stripped of its qualifying ironies, the Playboy presents a remarkable parabolic action. The shy and lonely farm-boy threatened by an Oedipal fate (a forced marriage with the widow who "did suckle men for six weeks when I came into the world") has erupted in panicky violence against the father whom he fears. Now, finding himself among those who shelter him and draw his story from him, he gradually lends himself to the role of glorious parricide---whereupon, he discovers his poetic power, his ability to love and be loved, his strength and

courage. After surviving the appropriate ordeals (exposure as a liar, confrontation with the repeatedly resurrected old Mahon, rejection by society as a murderer), Christy leaves the stage a new man, independent and reconciled with the father---indeed, having gaily swapped places with him. Though calling himself "master of all fights from now," he no longer seems tempted to maintain an insecure ego by violence and deceit. In fact, he now invokes blessings upon those (including his once-beloved Pegeen) who had seemed fools or worse a moment before: in their adulation and their rejection they have made him "a likely gaffer in the end of all." The "playboy" as genuine champion, beyond their understanding--- though not beyond Pegeen's belated longing.

Christy leaves and Pegeen's last words are:

Pegeen----Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've  
lost the only Playboy of the Western World.

In the end role-playing has led to authenticity; lies have led to truth.

The Playboy of the Western World is supposed to be a comedy. It is a comedy because the situation is so ridiculous --- Christy is the playboy and achieves fame and becomes a hero for killing his father. It is a comedy that might have ended with Pegeen winning her playboy and Old Mahon marrying the widow Quinn; comedy which at the end is edged, skilfully and unexpectedly, into semi-tragedy. The tragic implications of the play are the type represented by Pegeen---those who can perceive

greatness but cannot rise to it, who are weighed down by the "society" within them---can neither live in the lonesome west playing out their days, nor be happy in the little world of daily preoccupations. It is the Pegeens who suffer most from the radical incompatibility of Hero and society.

The play from another point of view may be called "free" comedy, in which moral issues are reversed, transcended or ignored in the desire for "energy," though this view will be only part of the truth.

It is helpful to quote Yeats:

In a country like Ireland, where personifications have taken the place of life, men have more hate than love, for the unhuman is nearly the same as the inhuman, but literature, which is a part of that charity that is the forgiveness of sins, will make us understand men however little they conform to our expectations. We will be more interested in heroic men than in heroic actions, and will have a little distrust for everything that can be called good or bad in itself with a very confident heart.

Synge's The Playboy of the Western World is a dramatic masterpiece. On this, it seems, there has been critical unanimity. Yeats, for example, called it "the strangest, the most beautiful expression in drama of that Irish fantasy which...is the unbroken character of Irish genius."

Riders To The Sea (a one-act) by Synge

The origins of Synge's conception can easily be traced in his Aran sketches: the apparitions of dead men; the discovery and identification of an Islander washed ashore (like Michael) in Donegal on the mainland; the Aran modes of keening and ritualized lamentation for the dead; the women's constant awareness of death as a living presence. To move from the sketches to the play is, however, to discover the superb orchestration of vividly recalled details into a unified prose-poem of extraordinary tragic beauty. The play can be performed in less than thirty minutes, but Synge was able to succeed in mirroring the large world in small: Maurya's complaint ("In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old") is placed against the Islanders' world of sea birds ("black hags") flying over churning surf, of the small boats (hookers and curaghs) at the mercy of tides and winds, of precious "fine white boards" brought from Connemara--and the nails Maurya forgot to order. Still without serious challenge as the perfect one-act play, Riders To The Sea shows Synge's mastery of the pattern of recurrences. As Maurya recalls the men and women bringing Patch home "in the half of a red sail" on a "dry day" long ago, the pattern begins to repeat itself as Bartley is brought home: "Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at

all?" In showing Maurya's grief over the loss of all her men fusing into a single experience, Synge has dramatized the universal experience of grief.

Meanings: Riders To The Sea---(crossing a body of water is sometimes thought of as dying)--- we are all riders to the sea, we are all dying from the moment of birth, we are riding to death

"Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?" ---white rocks is symbolic of tombstones.

The gray pony with Michael represents death; Bartley on the red mare represents violent death.

Maurya feels relief when Bartley dies because when he dies she has lost all she has to lose (all of her men) and the pain is finally over.

The universal experience of grief:

Maurya---They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn; and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.



*The last portrait  
Chekhov at his villa in Yalta, 1902*

"People must never be humiliated—  
that is the important thing."



## The life of Anton Chekhov

Chekhov was born on January 17, 1860, in South Russian town of Taganrog. He was a son of a store-keeper. Although in later years he spoke bitterly of his father, Chekhov enjoyed an easy companionship with his brothers and sister, and he received a sound education. His mother gave him the humane tolerance exemplified in his central belief, "People must never be humiliated--- that is the important thing." Chekhov's interest in the theatre began early in trips to the Taganrog Theatre, and especially in reenacting at home such plays as Gogol's The Inspector General and other popular, if less effectively satirical, plays of the period.

When Chekhov was sixteen, his father, facing bankruptcy, fled to Moscow in which most of his family soon joined him. Chekhov was left in Taganrog until 1879, to complete his preparatory studies. Before he could join his family in the Moscow slums where he found them living, Chekhov would send them money he could spare from his salary as a tutor. While at the University of Moscow, he studied medicine and helped with the family income by writing sketches and short stories. In December, 1884, he took up medical practice. Torn between medicine ("my lawful spouse") and writing ("my mistress"): Chekhov satisfied both sets of demands on his time: he treated thousands of patients while he wrote the more than three-hundred stories. At twenty-seven, he directed his attention

back to drama, his first love among the literary forms. Chekhov's drama falls into two periods: the first (from about 1881 until 1895) is marked chiefly by adaptations of his stories into the farcical "vaudevilles" extremely popular in the Russian theatre; the second period (from 1896 until his death in 1904) is notable for the full-length plays on which his world reputation rests.

#### The Seagull in Moscow

Nemirovich-Danchenko had been on terms of intimacy with Chekhov for some years before the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre, and took great interest in his friend's work for the stage---indeed The Seagull had been written partly at his suggestion. The failure of this play at its first performance in Petersburg had been yet one more proof to Nemirovich-Danchenko of the inadequacy of the existing theatre. He conceived a most extravagant admiration for The Seagull and was one of the few people who refused to join in the general chorus of condemnation in 1896. Now that he had a theatre of his own, one of the first things he wanted to do was to show that a fresh and intelligent approach could make a success of the play. However, a lot of persuasion was necessary before Chekhov would agree to release it, and Nemirovich-Danchenko had opposition to overcome the Art Theatre itself, for Stanislavsky and many of the actors were less appreciative than he of the new qualities which Chekhov brought to the

stage. Fortunately Nemirovich-Danchenko possessed a talent for communicating his enthusiasms, and was able to win his colleagues over.

The play was given adequate rehearsals---twenty-six in all---and Chekhov managed to attend one of them before leaving to spend the winter in Yalta. His visit seems to have been a slightly disappointing occasion for the actors. Perplexed by the novelty of the play they hoped for some hints from the author, but his answers to their questions tended to be obscure. To a request for guidance on the interpretation of his Trigorin he replied, 'Why, he wears check trousers!' as though that made everything clear, and when asked how to play another part, he replied, not very helpfully, 'As well as possible.' There was at first a feeling of awkwardness between him and the actors. He looked at them, sometimes with a smile, sometimes with an expression of unexpected seriousness, plucking his beard. Owing to his reticence he did not always create a good initial impression, and Stanislavsky has even recorded that Chekhov at first struck him as 'arrogant and insincere', owing to a way he had of throwing back his head when speaking to people. However, such impressions never lasted very long.

Chekhov's "five tons of love" provides the key to one important unifying theme. In constantly shifting romantic triangles, Chekhov diagrams the changing changelessness of his characters' lives. The exhausted affair of Arkadina

and Trigorin is counterpointed by the writer's passion for fishing, by the refreshing novelty of Nina's offerings, even by the complexly oedipal relationship of mother and son. Trepleff's schoolboyish love for Nina is enriched, with the passage of time. Weary of Trepleff's lack of interest in her, Masha weds a wearisome schoolmaster, and repeats the pattern of Pauline, married to one man but loving another. Each character trapped in unrequited love, builds a bastion to protect his ego. When she sees Trepleff, Arkadina's professional youthfulness, physical attractiveness, poise, and artistry temporarily vanish. In the presence of Arkadina and Trigorin, Trepleff's literary aspirations crumble into nagging fears that he is mediocre, a mere Kiev burgher's brat. In the arrivals, departures, and occasional stayings-put which separate one year from another, the characters find their fortresses under attack. Chekhov's finest achievement was to reveal the comedy of their pathetic attempts to guard themselves against their greatest enemy, time.

People Must Not be Humiliated---that is the important thing.

Trepleff---My father, as you know, was a burgher of Kiev, though he was also a famous actor. So when these actors and writers of here bestowed on me their gracious attentions, it seemed to me their eyes were measuring my insignificance--- I guessed their thoughts and felt humiliated.

The seagull is the symbol of the Moscow Ark Theatre. Trepleff kills a seagull and lays it at Nina's feet. He was low enough that day to kill a seagull and tells her his life will soon end this way. (It all began that evening when my play failed so stupidly. Women will never forgive failure.)

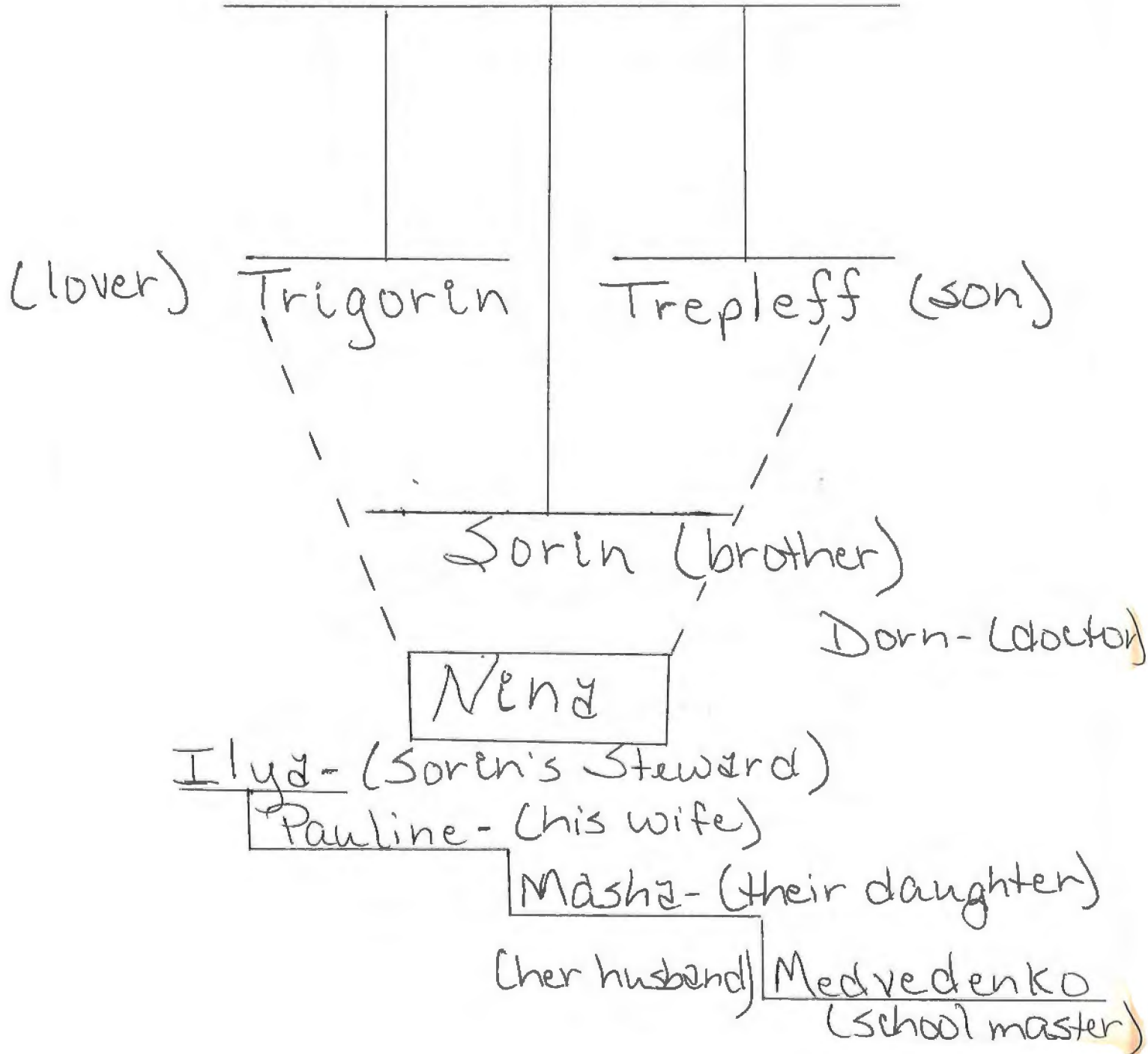
Trigorin----- (is really Chekhov speaking)

What success? I have never pleased myself. I don't like myself as a writer. The worst of it is that I am in a sort of daze and often don't understand what I write . . . I love this water here, the trees, the sky, I feel nature, it stirs in me a passion, an irresistible desire to write. But I am not only a landscape painter, I am a citizen too, I love my country, the people, I feel that if I am a writer I ought to speak also for the people, of their suffering, of their future, speak of science, of the rights of man, and so forth, and I speak of everything, I hurry up, on all sides they are after me, are annoyed at me, I dash from side to side like a fox the hounds are baiting, I see life and science getting always farther and farther ahead as I fall always more and more behind, like a peasant missing his train, and the upshot is I feel that I can write only landscape, and in all the rest I am false and false to the marrow of my bones.

# The Seagull by Chekhov

## Soren's Country Estate

Arkadina



# Sartre

No  
Exit

*"All the distinctions a writer receives lay his readers open to pressures that I do not judge desirable. It's not the same thing if I sign Jean-Paul Sartre or Jean-Paul Sartre, winner of the Nobel Prize."*

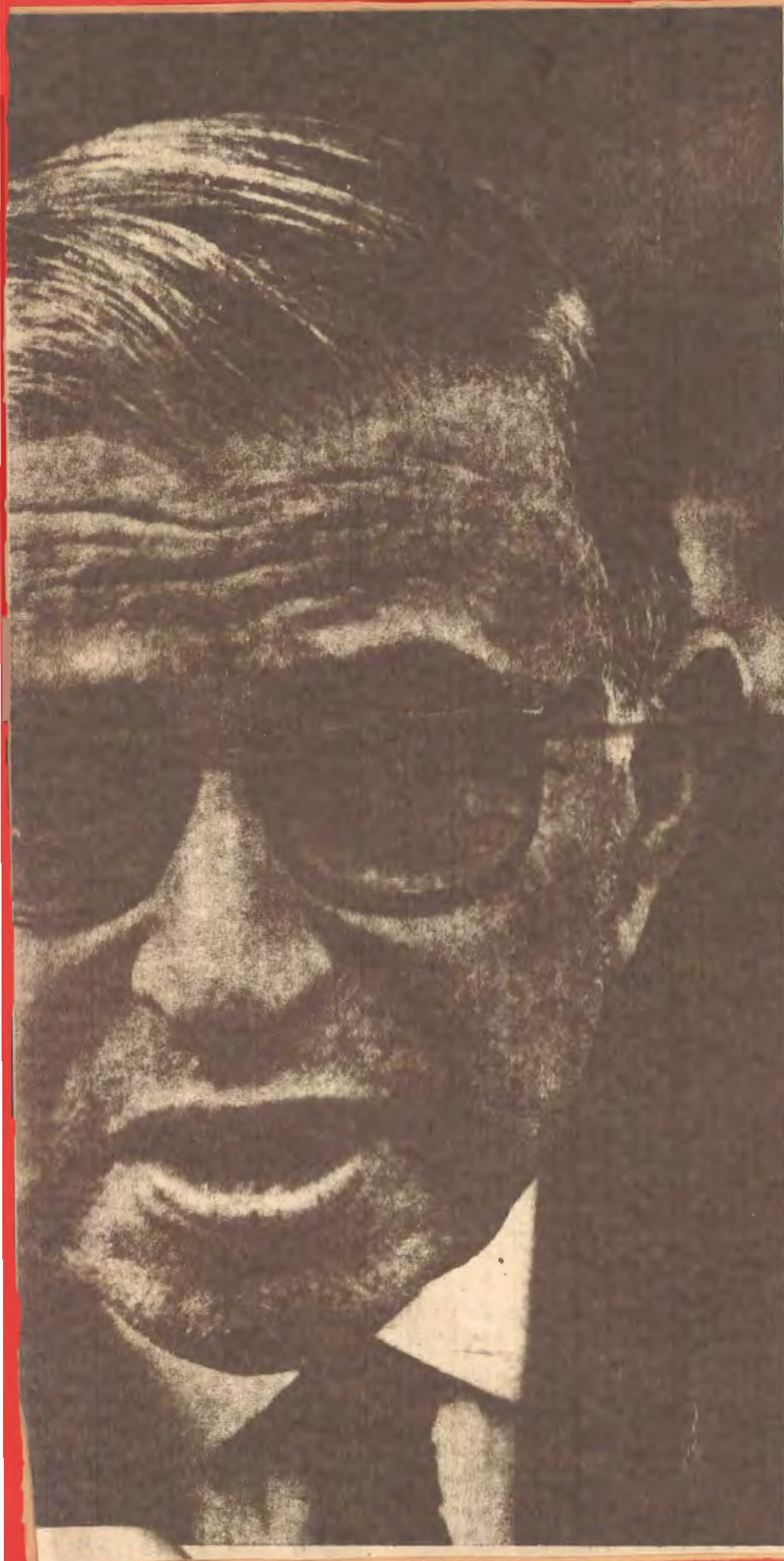
*"I was prepared at an early age to regard teaching as a priesthood and literature as a passion. Books were my birds and my nest, my household pets, my barn and my countryside and the library was the world caught in a mirror."*

*"My hours are made of leather and cardboard, my parchment is inned flesh smells of glue and mushrooms. I sit in state through 130 pounds of paper, thoroughly at ease. I am reborn, I at last become a whole man, thinking, talking, singing, thundering, a man who asserts himself with the peremptory inertia of matter. Hands take me down, open me, spread me flat on the table, smooth me and sometimes make me creak."*

*"I am not, as has been said, a pessimist: I am a person who tries to make people more lucid vis-a-vis themselves, and it is for this that I am disliked. I frighten people. I would say that the majority of people have always been afraid to think. Stendhal, in his time, wrote 'all good reasoning is offensive' — that is still very much true."*

*"I see no reason why the family as such should not continue, although whether or not the parents are married has little importance to me. Even in what we now consider retarded portions of the globe, I think that in the future fathers will not be so incontestably dominant nor women so unequal as they have been. The important thing is that the relationship between the parents and the children not suffer."*





Sartre -  
figured it all  
out + says:  
"I frighten  
people."

"There is no good father, that's the rule. Don't lay the blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten. To beget children, nothing better; to have them, what iniquity!"

"In my mother's eye I was a 10-month child, better baked than the others, more glazed, crispier as a result of staying in the oven longer."

"I have seen an enormous difference between Simone de Beauvoir's and my generation when we were students and the 20-year-olds of today. We were soft and unconscious, weak and undecided; today they are much more open and they know many things we did not."

\* "We have lost religion, but we have gained humanism. The ideal now is to liberate and to help emancipate mankind, with the result that man becomes really an absolute for man."

"I admire the will to welcome everything—the stupid violence of chance, the menacing order of causes suddenly unmasked. If one likes surprises, one must even like the rare flashes which reveal to the devotees that the earth is not made for them."

\* "Never in my life have I given an order without laughing, without making others laugh. It is because I am not consumed with the canker of power: I was not taught obedience."

"De Gaulle is very tall; I am very short. Neither in height nor in any other respect do we share anything whatever in common."

"I don't mind if my fellow men forget about me the day after I am buried. As long as they're alive I'll haunt them, unnamed, imperceptible, present in every one of them just as the billions of dead who are unknown to me and whom I preserve from annihilation are present in me."



## The life of Jean-Paul Sartre

Sartre is a French and was born in 1905. He is probably the most widely discussed and most controversial writer of our time. He is a philosopher and has published nine plays. Sartre's notoriety is due mainly to his role as spokesman and popularizer of existentialism. Sartre's existentialism is above all a philosophy of responsible freedom: "To do and while doing to make oneself and to be nothing but the self which one has made."

Everyone, according to Sartre, is responsible for everything. Freedom carries with it the anguish of this responsibility. Thought is never abstract; it affirms itself in action. Consciousness acquires meaning through choice; aims are judged not by intentions but by acts and accomplishments. Man's total responsibility imposes an analysis of the possibilities of choice and an acceptance of its consequences. Evasion of the claims of consciousness results in inauthentic action or "bad faith." Through his acts the individual shapes his own destiny and asserts the meaning of his existence, not only for himself, but as it will be judged by others. Each moment, every action, can mark a decisive choice in which the value of a whole life is summed up. This philosophy of crisis was particularly applicable to the daily conditions of life during the French Occupation and the Resistance. Although Sartre sees commitment or engagement as a universal condition, his particular expression of existentialism is closely

tioned to the bitter but also heroic events of the early 1940's.

Sartre began his career as a playwright in 1940 with a Christmas play based on a biblical theme and addressed to his fellow prisoners of war in a German internment camp. No Exit was his second play written in 1944. No Exit takes place in a hell markedly analogous to the real world. The history of the three damned souls is sordid and macabre, yet their past matters only insofar as it affects the choices made in the present. Garcin, Inez and Estelle each become aware of their need for the others; the gradual emergence of this interdependence leads to a circular pattern of relationships that defines the action of the play. All three are bound indissolubly together. Still, they are distinguished not only by class differences but by sharply varying degrees of insight into their own existence. Inez represents the fullest degree of inner clarity and authenticity, while Garcin is in the process of discovering the meaning of his life: his refusal to abandon Inez is an act of courage that will make it possible for him to pursue his relentless if painful self-examination. His climactic assertion, "Hell is--- other people!" carries with it his recognition of the subjective evaluations of others. Neither in life nor in hell is evasion or indifference possible. No Exit is an intense and moving restatement of the primacy of personal authenticity and engagement. In its fitting together of imaginative and ideological values, it is

probably Sartre's best play.

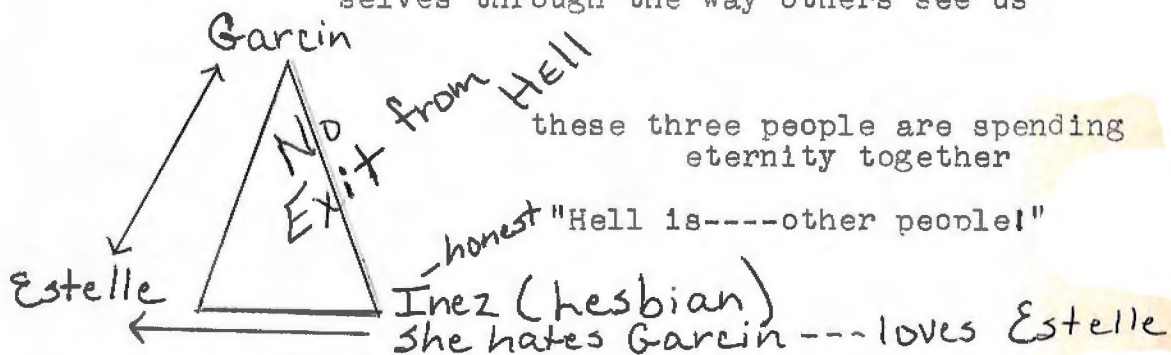
Existentialism---a kind of atheism and humanism

loneliness and despair

man is alone

(death is the overpowering absurdity)

This is Hell---hell is on earth, by making bad choices  
in life---no life after death---we can  
blame no one but ourselves---we see our-  
selves through the way others see us

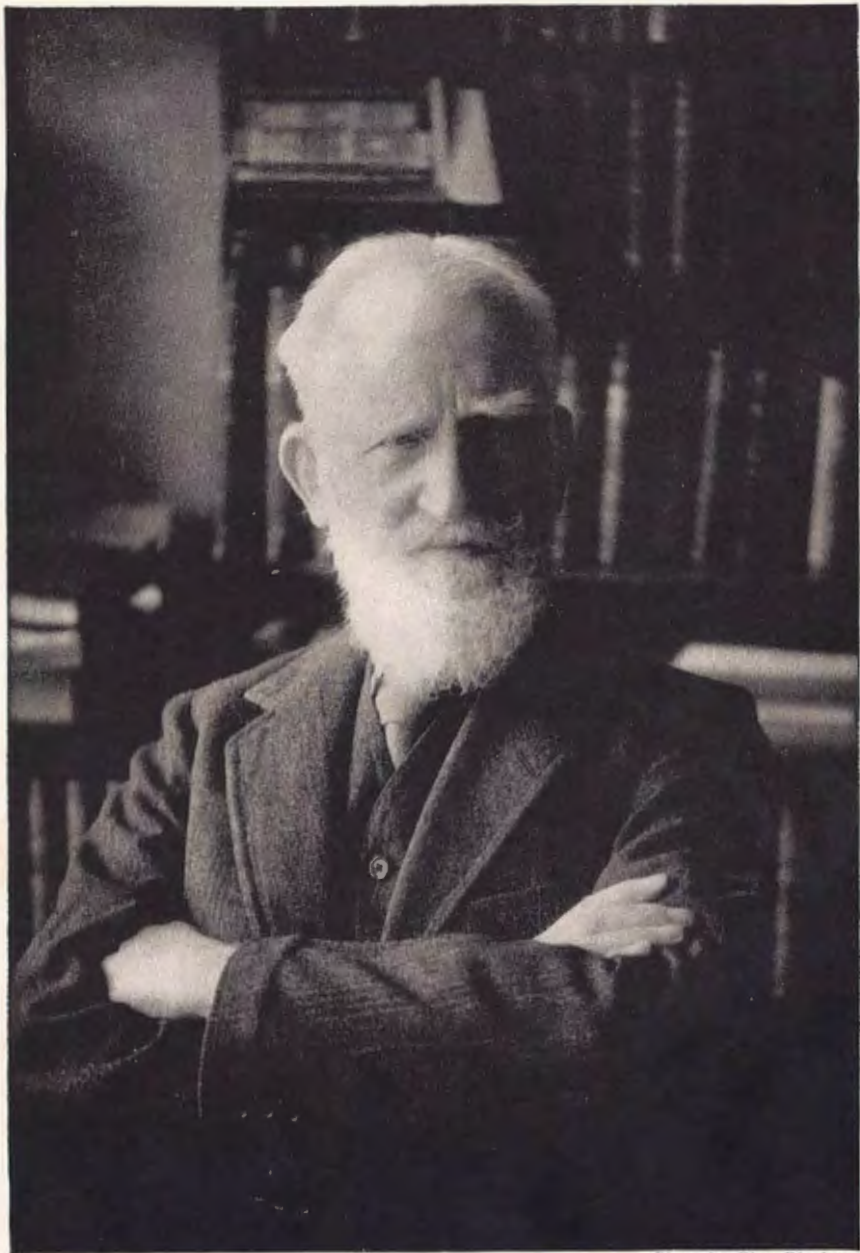


Inez-only one who really knows herself, she has no  
regrets, she knows she is a bitch and faces it  
Estelle-makes excuses, married an old man she didn't  
love, had an illegal child and killed it  
Garcin-trying to prove he is not a coward, and he  
has to win Inez's respect

Humanism gave way to religion-----

Humanism-the glorification of man, man is on top of  
everything, man gets credit for what he achieves  
(the more perfect I become, the more God-like  
I am)

Our being precedes our essence---a person when born is  
nothing until he decides what he is to become--and becomes it



*Photo by Elva Blacker*

G. BERNARD SHAW  
(aged 82)

"Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my ~~king~~ kingdom was not of this world: I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at my ease only with the mighty dead."

G.B.S.

## Life of George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw, the only son and youngest of the three children of George Carr Shaw and his wife, Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly, was born at 3 Upper Synge Street, now numbered and renamed 33, Synge Street, Dublin, on Saturday, July 26, 1856. He died at Shaw's Corner, Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire, on Thursday, November 2, 1950, at a minute to five in the morning. His age was ninety-four years and fourteen weeks.

Man and Superman was written between 1901 and 1903; it is a comedy and a philosophy. It was the preface to this play, the Shaw first definitely enunciated his belief in the Life Force, as he called it, which was derived from Bergson's Creative Evolution. There is a passage in this preface which has left a mark on the mind of every person who read it, whether or not he shares G.B.S.'s creed:

'This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purposed recognised by yourself as a might one: the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy'

In this statement, we have the focal point of his religion. But it is a statement which disturbs as much as it impresses the mind. Shaw never came to a decision about the function and purpose of man that is clear and explicit. Did he believe in God? He certainly believed in something that can be compared with the general faith in a Supreme Spirit, but the Life Force must always seem insufficient to those who cannot exist without the hope

of a God who knows what he is doing and why he is doing it. There is no assurance in Shaw's doctrine that the Life Force has a clear understanding of its intention or that it can perform what it wishes to do.

The Life Force acts on the principle of trial and error. It tries to do universally what Sidney Webb tried to do terrestrially: establish a neat order of existence in which there will be a place for everything, and everything will be in its place.

Man and Superman was the first play Shaw wrote that had no reference whatever to the conventional theatrical requirements of his age; and it contains, in the long third act known as Don Juan in Hell, "a careful attempt to write a new Book of Genesis for the Bible of the Evolutionists" The essence of Shaw's religious philosophy is given by Don Juan: "I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser, self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding. It was the supremacy of this purpose that reduced love for me to the mere pleasure of a moment, art for me to the mere schooling of my faculties, religion for me to a mere laziness, since it had set up a God who looked at the world and saw that it was good, against the instinct in me that looked through my eyes at the world and saw that it could be improved."

Shaw's belief was in a God who achieves his purpose by Trial and Error. God, as the Church of England puts it, has neither body, parts, nor passions. God is a Creative Purpose; and all living creatures are experiments in the production of instruments of that purpose, which is the attainment of power over matter and circumstance with the necessary accompanying knowledge and comprehension. The Purpose, alias the Life Force, alias the Evolutionary Appetite, alias God, may make frightful mistakes, which its creatures have to remedy. This constitutes the Problem of Evil, which the hypothesis of an Omnipotent God does not solve. Creation never stops: therefore the current view of Causation which regards the present as an inevitable consequence of the past, and the future of the present, is a deadly error: the living cause is always in the future: hence there is always hope and always a sense of the miraculous.

The interesting thing about this belief is the light it casts on Shaw as the sort of man such beliefs (which can be summed up as Creative Evolution) produce. It was as an instrument of the Life Force that he spent all his energy in preaching and fighting for his conception of social betterment. His belief in a power working through man towards perfection is not only the explanation of his belief that his works are inspired, but a confession of his own deep dissatisfaction with human beings as they are.

The hedonistic "Art for Art" doctrines held no appeal for Shaw, whose dedication to the arts was closely bound up with his development as a moral philosopher. As a play for the "pit of philosophers" Shaw always dreamed of entering, it is the most searching conversation on philosophy and religion in modern English.

#### Don Juan in Hell

D.J.-"No more real devils...nothing is real here. That is the honor of damnation"

D.J.-"Heaven is the home of the masters of reality: that is why I am going thither."

D.J.-"Hell is the home of the unreal and of the seekers for happiness. It is the only refuge from heaven which is masters of reality, and from earth which is the home of slaves of reality."

D.J.-"In Heaven...helping life in its struggle upward."

Devil-"...force of Life of which you boast is a force of death: Man measures his strength by his destructiveness"

D.J.-"...it is not death that matters, but the fear of death "

D.J.-"Why, to be able to choose the line of greatest advantage instead of yielding in the direction of least resistance. Does a ship sail to its destination no better than a log drifts nowhither? The philosopher is Nature's violet."

Difference: to be in Hell is to drift  
to be in Heaven is to steer

Life Force-man's obligation to use his brain to make the world a better place to live.

With the production of Man and Superman Shaw became the idol of the rising generation of intellectuals, retaining that position for a decade. His influence over the more serious young men and women in the early years of the century, and indeed in the years following the war



of 1914-18, was far greater than that exercised by Wells, Chesterton, Belloc, Galsworthy, Bennett, or any other writer. The qualities in him that specially appealed to youth were his irreverence for tradition and office, his indifference to vested interests and inflated reputations, his contempt for current morality, his championship of unpopular causes and persecuted people, his vitality and humour, and above all his inability to take solemn people seriously.

These playwrights never really worried about lasting fame. They wrote what they felt and if it stirs your emotions don't feel ashamed and try to suppress your feelings. If you feel like crying or laughing out loud do so. If the people around you look at you oddly and make comments it is because they do not understand, and since they are not capable of understanding --- let them accept what they can't understand. Tears are not a disgrace, for in the Greek theatres the audiences wept openly. So the next time you attend a production of any kind don't be afraid to FEEL!

All material taken from the following  
sources:

Chekhov by Ronald Hingley

Bernard Shaw by St. John Ervine

Ibsen by Janko Lavrin

Ibsen & his Creation by Janko Lavrin

Masters of Modern Drama by Block & Shedd

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Twentieth Century Interpretations of  
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Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut by Ruby Cohn

Strindberg's Dramatic Expression by Dahlstrom

Yeats's Iconography by F.A.C. Wilson