

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE
OF THE POWERFUL WOMAN IN SEVEN PLAYS:
GHOSTS, CANDIDA, THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA,
THE MAIDS, THE VISIT, THE AMERICAN DREAM,
THE HOMECOMING

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of a select group of women characters who appear prominently in several twentieth-century plays. It analyses the driving force which motivates the power-seeking woman, the methods by which she achieves her power, the type of power she acquires, and the effect it has on the other characters; it also attempts to clarify the specific concern of each playwright, ranging from exploitation of social questions to psychological analyses of role-playing. The characters examined are: Nora and Mrs. Alving in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879) and Ghosts (1881), Candida in Bernard Shaw's Candida (1895), Bernarda in Federico Garcia Lorca's The House of Bernarda Alba (1936), the three maids in Jean Genet's The Maids (1947), Claire Zachanassian in Friedrich Duerrenmatt's The Visit (1956), Mommy in Edward Albee's The American Dream (1959), and Flora and Ruth respectively in Harold Pinter's A Slight Ache (1959), and The Homecoming (1965).

The study centres on this specific group of plays because a pattern emerges from them which reveals a basic change in the authors' attitude to the women characters: in the earlier plays they are used as instruments for social criticism; in the later ones they appear in less concrete and more symbolic or archetypal roles. The pattern also reveals the nature of the society which molds the women into positions of power, and the weak personalities of their partners which in turn

forces them to adopt particularly aggressive roles.

A clear-cut development emerges when the plays are examined chronologically. Initially, the playwrights are concerned with criticism of social issues: the hypocrisy of moral values perpetuated in middle class communities such as the one inhabited by Mrs. Alving, the shallowness of the so-called sanctity of late Victorian marriage, the stagnating effect of a claustrophobic society such as Spain's where rigid tradition functions as a repressing force which prevents individuals from developing their human potential. By the mid-twentieth century, this social critique has changed. The clearly defined social issues (the wife's subservience to the breadwinner husband, the woman's accepted role as empty-headed figurine, the impact of social custom) has become on the one hand a psychological assessment of an innate and timeless power struggle among three women as in Genet's The Maids; on the other hand it has developed into an archetypal situation such as in Pinter's The Homecoming, where Ruth takes on the role of mother-whore and A Slight Ache, where Flora quickly identifies her primal sensuality in the matchseller.

Within eighty years the timebound criticism of woman's position in a particular society has given room to the exploration of a timeless mythical pattern unbound by social context.

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GHOSTS

Henrik Ibsen's play Ghosts (1881) is a drama about ethical debility. He stated that "it merely points to the fact that nihilism is fermenting beneath the surface in Norway as everywhere else. It is inevitable. A Pastor Manders will always incite some Mrs. Alving into being. And she, simply because she is a woman, will, once she has started, go to the ultimate extreme."¹

He also stated: "We sail with a corpse in the cargo."² He was referring to the past which is carefully concealed, a past which is full of experiences which while they sleep, haunt us like ghosts. Ghosts is such a play, dealing with a shameful past and its influence on the main character, Mrs. Alving. Ibsen presents her as one of the 'new women' of her age; educated, free-thinking, opinionated, and self-willed.

She is a woman who was adversely influenced by the mores of the society in which she lived. The reasons for Mrs. Alving developing the power she possessed, and the change she underwent by the acquisition of and the accretion of this power are clear.

First, she sought power in order to mask Captain Alving's real character and to hide the shame of the life she was living. Although she must submit to a set of hypocritical standards, and thus be governed by them, she does nonetheless assume an astonishing amount of power over her household in order to retain a false image to placate those who live by such standards. Second, she developed a

different type of power designed to extirpate the remorse which she had nurtured. Third, she assumed power over her son to eliminate his feelings of guilt, and finally to take his life.

The society in which Mrs. Alving lived was claustrophobic. There existed strict rules of conduct which stifled the individual's natural expression and which directed him to play a series of face-saving roles. The religious community, one of the strong institutions of this society, was a hypocritical sham. Such a false front was clearly exemplified in Pastor Manders' actions throughout the play. When Mrs. Alving needed him most, he rejected her, fearing the judgement of the community first and placing his inadequate concept of Christianity second.

Pastor Manders: "It was grossly inconsiderate of you to seek refuge with me."

Mrs. Alving: "With our priest? Our great friend?"

Pastor Manders: "For that reason above all. Yes, you can thank God that I had the necessary strength of mind to dissuade you from your outrageous plan; and that it was vouchsafed to me to lead you back to the path of duty - and home to your rightful husband." (p. 47)

When he noted that Mrs. Alving read books which stimulate free thought, he condemned them outright, having based his judgement on the opinions of others.

Pastor Manders: "I've read quite enough about such books to disapprove of them."

Mrs. Alving: "Yes, but your own opinion...."

Pastor Manders: "My dear lady, there are many occasions in life when one must rely upon the opinions of others. That is the way of this world. And rightly too - how else could society continue?" (p. 33)

This lack of conviction is startling in a person who is considered a cornerstone of society.

When he came to discuss the terms of the orphanage, he feared most the slanderous attacks which might have ensued were he to insure it. The idea that the buildings would be in "divine care" came as an after thought, and only to buttress his opinion. If public opinion was so bigoted and ready to criticize so adversely the insurance of a structure proposed by the good offices of the church, then it was as ready to conform to nonsensical social regulations as Pastor Manders was. Society reinforced his fears and relentless need to protect himself; he reinforced the peculiar mores of his society by condoning such standards, and responding with fear and blame-shifting.

It was this society which produced Mrs. Alving, and which Ibsen so strongly attacks. It was because of its coercion that she developed the power to protect herself, and her family name against the strident denunciations which would have resulted had she been discovered. The society, then, which had power over Mrs. Alving, had also given her the impetus to seek power to satisfy its requirements. It was only later in her life that she realized the futility of such a course of

action, and consequently directed her powerful energy against Pastor Manders. Subsequently, to satisfy her maternal instincts which had lain dormant since her son had been sent away, she attempted to gain complete control over him. She achieved the peak of her power when she gained absolute control over his life.

The Alving estate was a prison for Captain Alving. He was a vital individual, full of what Mrs. Alving called "the joy of living" (p. 92). This zest for life and for sensual expression was restricted by the puritan propriety prescribed by his community. His life was smothered within the confines of the country house. His need for self-expression did find release in an affair with the maid, and the child she had by him served only to imprison him further. Mrs. Alving felt compelled to protect his and her reputation, and therefore smothered the whole affair under a blanket of secrecy. She described her actions as a "desperate battle so that no one should know the sort of man my child's father was." (p. 50) She achieved this power over him by joining in his secret drinking bouts up in his room, listening to his lewd stories, and fighting physically with him to get him to bed. Part of her power stemmed from her unusual resilience. Pastor Manders said: "You had to endure all that?" to which she replied: "I had to endure it for my little boy's sake." (p. 51) It was not until he had the child by her own servant that she took over the control of the house, and she was able to do so because as he said, she "had a weapon against him." (p. 51)

Part of her method, then, was to emasculate her husband, and then adopt his role. She became the steward, the business woman, the farmer, ordering equipment, improving the estate, and developing the land to a surprising extent. This feverish activity had two purposes: to shield from the public the shame of her husband, and to retain her own sanity through positively motivated activity.

This obsession to hide what she considered shame extended beyond her husband's death, and took the form of an orphanage in his name. This monument was designed to efface what she considered to be his guilt and to placate her conscience - a sort of offering to the church and the children who were sired out of wedlock and abandoned (which is what could have happened to Regina). She recognized her motives: "There you see the power of a bad conscience." (p. 52)

The effect she achieved by the acquisition and utilization of such power was astonishing. She virtually kept her husband prisoner in the house, subdued his natural sensual instincts, and succeeded in hiding from the community the real nature of her existence. She became strong-willed, confident, and still remained a captive of her society. She also succeeded in sending her son into exile where he developed his separate life.

The power which Mrs. Alving first acquired underwent an unusual change for two reasons: she began to read books which confirmed what she had been thinking for some time; Pastor Manders, the

representative of that part of society of which Mrs. Alving was (mildly) suspicious, was revealed to her as a travesty of what religion should be. By living alone, and by reasoning without the pressure of others, she achieved a new independence. She attained a maturity which revealed to her the sham of the guilt-expiation circle. It was by this conscious disassociation from her society that she achieved a more adequate perception of what was real and consequently a more harmonious relationship with reality than she experienced previously. She finally detected the spurious and the false, and the dishonest in her society and in her own actions. She cast off the illusory and preferred to cope with unpleasant reality rather than retreat to pleasant fantasies. This was revealed in her confession to Pastor Manders that she had discovered his fraudulent nature, and that her own past had been a grotesque mockery of what could have been. She had learned to accept herself and the realities of human nature. In so doing, she achieved a high degree of autonomy and became true to herself even in the face of rejection or unpopularity. Finally, she developed a resistance to the acculturation process to which she formerly acquiesced. It was this transformation which permitted her to adopt a critical attitude toward her own cultural and personal inconsistencies. She stated quite clearly to Pastor Manders that she:

"... began to look closely at the stuff your (his) teaching was made of. I only wanted to unpick a single stitch, but once I'd got that undone, the whole thing unravelled. Then I realized that it was just chain stitch." (p. 62)

The effect of this powerful, newly found independence startled and frightened Pastor Manders. He was shocked by the books which she read: "Mrs. Alving, how did these books get here?" "Do you read that sort of thing?" (p. 32) The obsequious, helpless woman who ran to his arms for security had changed into a strong-minded individual with opinions that had not been forced on her, and which were diametrically opposed to his own. Her confession about her secret drinking bouts, and the realization that the orphanage was really a travesty of the good name it was designed to represent (or sustain) horrified him. He was only concerned that she not reveal the secret to anyone else, and was alarmed that she would tell her son and others:

Mrs. Alving: "Now I can tell the truth."

Pastor Manders: "No, no! You mustn't do that!" (p. 83)

But he was saved from the revelation by the fire.

The third turn which Mrs. Alving's striving for power underwent was almost grotesque. Certainly she had concealed for a long period of time the real nature of her son's background, but his anguished confession, and the comments of the doctor from abroad led to a full revelation on her part. Indeed, when her son mentioned leaving because the "joy of living" which he felt he required was absent from the house, Mrs. Alving immediately began her campaign to control her son by first plying him with champagne, and then promising to take his life if he did eventually suffer from dementia. The reader

does not know if she actually took Oswald's life, what he does know is that she had the power to do so - the ultimate form of power.

The effect on Oswald was enormous relief:

Mrs. Alving: "Do you feel easier now?"

Oswald: "Yes." (p. 101)

The effect on Mrs. Alving was even more dramatic. She realized the power she had so suddenly acquired, and ran screaming from the room, ostensibly to fetch the doctor. But it soon became apparent that she responded to his plea, and became the supremely powerful woman - having power over life and death. What is so ironic about this form of power is that if she allowed her son to live, she would have been burdened by a man-child, a vegetable; if she took his life with the drugs, she would have nothing. In consequence, her first assumption of power was pointless, since her having sent her son to France did not prevent his disease which in turn produced his mental condition. And the irony of her achieving an independent mind was that whatever decision she made with it she was faced by a dilemma: no matter which road she chose, she lost.

Mrs. Alving, then, appears to be an extension of Nora from A Doll's House (1879). Nora also underwent a complete change from a person who accepted what she was told. Her opinions, her religious beliefs, her concept of marriage were dictated to her. She was

programmed - in the same way Mrs. Alving was. It was not until her husband revealed that he did not respect her and that he considered her only a plaything (he calls her "squirrel," and "skylark"), and that he was concerned more for external appearances and his reputation than he was for her that she suddenly realized the hollowness of their existence:

Helmer: "The matter must be hushed up at any cost.
And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before - but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you....all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance-"³

She recognized that he was prepared to live a lie (the appearance of marriage) for the sake of honour - his honour. Mrs. Alving subscribed to the same principles. Just as Mrs. Alving awakened to the hypocrisy of Pastor Manders' concept of life, so Nora was jolted into the realization that Helmer was also living a life of double standard.

Nora: "Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly.
...You and Pappa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life. ...I must try and educate myself - you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now." (p. 196)

The motivation for her leaving was very real to Nora, but Helmer did not recognize why she was reacting as she did because he was too bound

by the network of local morality. She had to leave because she had first lost all respect for her husband. His reaction revealed his gross limitations. Second, her deeds were directed by her love for him, and in this sense were admirable. He could not see this salient fact, and in consequence she felt slighted as a wife, and as a human being. Nora, then, had just emerged like a butterfly from the confines of the cocoon. She had metamorphosed from a doll to a human being, and left the husk of the doll's house behind her. Although Helmer reiterated her statement: "The most wonderful thing of all..." (p. 202) he was not aware of what the most wonderful thing of which Nora spoke actually was. He could not, because he was still confined by his concept of society, just as Pastor Manders was still bound by his cassock. In Nora, there was the genesis of self-development; in Mrs. Alving the reader is aware of a cycle completed. The crashing damnation of the society which produced morally bound Helmers, and morally degenerate Pastor Manderses forced into startling profile the necessity for people to "...think over things for themselves and get to understand them."

(p. 197)

CANDIDA

Bernard Shaw's play Candida (1895) is different from Ghosts in the sense that Candida has already reached the degree of freedom for which Mrs. Alving was striving. Mrs. Alving's reasons for seeking the independence she achieved are to be admired. Because Candida has already reached that point, she can rest in the security of her independence, and consequently use it to her own ends - the manipulation of those around her. Unlike Mrs. Alving who approaches her quest with a sense of ethical responsibility, Candida is unscrupulous in her tactics. She is a mother image, and uses this source of her power to great advantage, reducing her men to children.

Henry Mencken states that:

"Candida is a latter day essay in feminine psychology after the fashion of A Doll's House, Monna Vanna, and Hedda Gabler. Candida Morell the heroine, is a clergyman's wife, who, lacking an acquaintance with the philosophies and face to face with the problem of earning her daily bread, might have gone the muddy way of Mrs. Warren. As it is, she exercises her fascinations upon a moony poet, arouses him to the verge of suicide - and then, with bland complacency and unanswerable logic, reads both an excellent lecture, turns the poet out of doors, and falls into her husband's arms, still chemically pure. It is an edifying example of the influence of mind over matter."⁴

Candida certainly did not go the way of Mrs. Warren, but the critic implies in his facetious way that her apostasy, although not

necessarily contrary to her time, was certainly reprehensible on an ethical plane.

Bernard Shaw concisely summarized the chief characteristics of *Candida* which gave her so much power when he called her "as immoral and as unscrupulous as Siegfried." He was commenting on her unscrupulous manipulation of her husband, and the use of an outsider to upset the placid Christian domesticity of their home. Candida is a play which deals with a woman who from the outset possessed some of the characteristics which Mrs. Alving had to develop consciously. Shaw conceives of *Candida* as a penetratingly truthful person, as her name implies. She was an independent spirit, self-confident, clear-headed, and emotionally controlled. She requires people about her so that she can execute these characteristics, and so that she can gratify the needs which are concomitant with them. *Candida's* power already exists; she draws it from herself, but it is maintained by the reaction of those around her. She is typical of a small female sector of Victorian society.

The reasons for her drawing on this reserve of power are direct and carefully calculated. It seems surprising that a person of her strength should marry someone as dependent as Morell. But, she chose this mode of life deliberately. First, she had a strong material need to satisfy, but not with respect to children. Her own children are in fact only referred to; we never see them. Her maternal attitude is directed toward Morell and Marchbanks, men who have

retained some of their child-like characteristics. She ensures their independence by controlling and intimidating them.

At the same time, she wishes to be constantly reassured that she is "needed", that Morell is dependent upon her.

Shaw clearly states her methods by which she wields this power:

"Her ways are those of a woman who has found that she can always manage people by engaging their affection, and who does so frankly and instinctively without the smallest scruple."

She requires this power of manipulation to satisfy a need to be needed. She achieves this gratification by creating a crisis which makes her husband (who is receiving the wild adulation of crowded halls) more dependent upon her than upon them. Morell's strength is rooted in her, but she must create the atmosphere which constantly reinforces this need. The technique is simple. She engages a housekeeper who is so dowdy that Morell will not give her a second thought. In this way, there is no domestic competition. At the same time, Candida makes sure it is the type of person who will worship Morell to the extent that she will work for low wages, and even engage in some of the household chores. Candida even admits this fact to her husband:

"Why does Prossy condescend to wash up the things, and to peel potatoes and abase herself in all manner

of ways for six shillings a week less than she used to get in a city office? She's in love with you, James; that's the reason. They're all in love with you." (p. 133)

In this way she classifies Prossy in the same category as the worshipping crowds in the halls where he gives his platitudinous lectures on Christian Socialism.

A second technique she utilizes is the "triangle", and although the plot of the play is a triangle situation, neither of the two men upholds Candida; it is she who sustains them as we shall see in the auction scene.

Unlike Mrs. Alving, who at the outset of Ghosts reveals a certain deference to Pastor Manders in spite of her gradually developing independence, Candida sweeps in like a gust of strength, emphasized by her first commanding words: "Say yes, James." (p. 107) Morell and Burgess are arguing, and Burgess supposedly wants to make amends: Candida's unexpected arrival immediately puts him at a disadvantage since he was supposed to meet her at the train station.

In addition to being the apex of the triangle, the position of the "desired object", she also assumes the role of matriarch. In response to Morell's startled expression, Candida "...looks at him with an amused smile and maternal indulgence." (p. 107) In addition, she refers to Marchbanks as "a good boy" and a "great baby" (p. 111), and plays with him by making him peel onions -- an ignominious domestic

chore which makes him cry: "Well Eugene; why are you so sad? Did the onions make you cry... Poor boy! Have I been so cruel? Did I make it slice nasty little red onions?" (p. 137)

She plays with Morell in a similarly hurtful manner when she discusses Marchbanks: "it seems unfair that all the love should go to you and none to him; although he needs it so much more than you do. (A convulsive movement shakes him in spite of himself). What's the matter? Am I worrying you?" (p. 134) and of course, she is. She augments this anxiety by utilizing Marchbanks' words when she describes Morell's sermons: "mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day." (p. 135) He recognizes that these are Marchbanks' words. In Marchbanks' case, she is exposing his discomfort at being asked to perform a domestic duty, and laughing at his physical discomfort. In Morell's case, she is attacking the basis of his self-respect, and disturbing the foundations of his trust in Candida.

While she generates in them this feeling of dependence, and childishness, she stimulates in them an artificial sense of strength by appearing weak to them. When she arrives at the station, she implies that she needs help with her luggage, yet when it comes to organizing the transfer of luggage she is clearly more capable than Marchbanks is. She supplements this sham physical weakness (she is far more robust than Marchbanks) by pretending to be misused. She relates to Marchbanks - a confidence which causes him to believe he is gratifying a need - that the marriage is not a happy one. He in

turn relates this confidence to Morell: "Happy! Your marriage! You think that! You believe that!" (p. 113) She implies that Morell has inundated her with 'religious cant' and meaningless phrases, and impresses on Marchbanks that she is a woman with a "great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom; and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale prerorations, mere rhetoric." (p. 116) It is true that Candida needs Marchbanks in this respect; she convinces him that it is he who can satisfy this parched soul, and rescue her from such a great deprivation. She arouses in him the belief that even in his weakness he has a strength which could sustain her poetic soul. It is true that she is deprived of the artistic side of a shared relationship, but this lack is not uppermost in her mind. She merely uses this ploy to give Marchbanks a certain strength in the triangle she develops.

In a similar way, she gives Morell the impression that he is the stronger of the two, that it is he who makes decisions in the household, and that she depends on his attention. After the argument between Morell and Marchbanks, although it is she who determines that Marchbanks should stay for lunch, she asks Morell in a placating manner: "Shall he stay, James, if he promises to be a good boy and helps me to lay the table?" (p. 119) She is aware from Marchbanks' appearance that there has been an altercation between him and Morell, and determines that he stay to contribute to the hostile atmosphere which is developing.

And later, when Morell is white with fear and anxiety because of

his conversation with Marchbanks, Candida reveals an intense concern for Morell's physical appearance, and at the same time insists that he show her attention. She petulantly complains that she is abandoned, and "...must be talked to." She tells him that she hardly has an evening a week with him. (p. 132) Moreover, she scandalizes him by inverting Morell's values when putting herself in a position of 'moral weakness' by declaring that Eugene may learn to love from a wicked woman, and then blame Candida for not having taught him herself. Yet at the same time, he reveals the falsity of his own morality:

Morell: "Candida: you are shocking me. I never thought of my attractions. I thought of your goodness of your purity. That is what I confide in."

Candida: "What a nasty uncomfortable thing to say to me."
(p. 134)

Morell says that when Marchbanks grows up, he trusts that he will think no evil of her, but her response reveals a conditional answer:

Candida: "...it will depend on what happens to him. Don't you see? It will depend on how he comes to learn what love really is. I mean the sort of woman who will teach it to him... If he learns it from a good woman, then it will be all right; he will forgive me... But suppose he learns it from a bad woman, as so many men do, especially poetic men, who imagine all women are angels!... Will he forgive me then, do you think?" (p. 135)

But Morell does not understand - even when she says she would throw to Eugene her goodness and purity as if she were throwing a cloak

to a cold beggar. She clearly states: "Put your trust in my love for you James; for if that went, I should care very little for your sermons: mere phrases that you cheat yourself and others with every day." (p. 135) But here, the threat is the greatest. She is willing to give freely to Marchbanks what Morell thinks is his love for Candida, yet Candida's concept of love is outside of this framework.

The auction scene is the climax of this triangle situation which Candida in her cunning (not intelligence) has so carefully set up. She cleverly implies that it is they who must choose her, rather than she who must choose between them.

Morell: "You must choose definitely."

Candida: "And pray, my lords and masters, what have you to offer for my choice? I am up for auction, it seems. What do you bid..." (p. 156)

But in this dramatic auction scene, Morell offered the usual conventional promises:

"I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defence, my honesty for your security, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer a woman."
(p. 156)

Having believed that Candida would choose Marchbanks, (in a suffocated voice: the appeal bursting from the depths of his anguish) "Candida!" (p. 157) he once more subjugated himself to her will, and confessed: "What I am you have made me with the labour of your hands and the love

of your heart. You are my wife, my mother, my sisters: you are the sum of all loving care to me." (p. 139)

The effect of Candida's wielding her power in the way she does is remarkable. Eugene was initially timid, frightened of Burgess: As he catches sight of a stranger on entering, he stops, and edges along the wall on the opposite side of the room. (p. 109), and Morell: (he glances quickly at Morell, but at once avoids his frank look...). (p. 112) Because of Candida's effect on him, he develops a remarkable sense of realism, and confidence:

Marchbanks: "I'm not afraid of you now. I disliked you before: that was why I shrank from your touch. But I saw today - when she tortured you - that you love her. Since then I have been your friend; you may strangle me if you like." (p. 147)

When Candida says: "how old are you, Eugene?" he answers: "As old as the world now." (p. 159) He has achieved an extraordinary independence, and has extricated himself from a net which he knew would inhibit his freedom when he says: "Let me go now. The night outside grows impatient." (p. 160)

The effect on Morell is devastating. She has humiliated him, brought to his attention with startling sharpness the fact that he relies on her for his strength, and has caused him to admit "it is she who wants somebody to protect, to help, to work for; somebody to give her children to protect, to help and work for." (p. 148)

Shaw exposes in the sharpest of terms the fallacies and travesty inherent in Victorian middle-class morality. He uses Candida as a pivot around which to reveal to his audience such nonsensical domesticity by giving her a cunningly powerful role.

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA .

In an introductory note to The House of Bernarda Alba (1936), Garcia Lorca states that "these three acts are intended to be a documentary photograph."⁶ If Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw traced the portrait of women who were antithetical to their times because of their bold power, Garcia Lorca is drawing a picture of woman who is part of her time, and part of an unbroken matriarchal tradition which characterizes Spain. The House of Bernarda Alba is a play about matriarchal tyranny, and a daughter in revolt.

Unlike Mrs. Alving, Bernarda does not have to undergo a series of psychological transformations to attain her power, it already exists in the tradition of which she is a branch. In this sense, woman is an impediment to progress: in Ibsen's and Shaw's plays, she is a part of the progressive element. Like Mrs. Alving, Bernarda wishes to exert her power to retain a specific image in the society which produced her, and is bound by its traditional laws to maintain this image. Bernarda does not develop as Mrs. Alving does outside of the milieu in which she lives. She is part of her own milieu, part of the hot sun and white buildings, part of the stifling Spanish tradition. And unlike Candida (who also does not have to undergo a transformation in order to be powerful in order to be needed, or to amuse herself) Bernarda wishes to maintain the status quo, and wants to protect what she believes to be her household's position in society. Bernarda's

methods of acquiring and using her power are curiously intertwined. First, she has power over the family as the traditional matriarch. To sustain this power, she uses both physical force (striking Angustias, dragging her girls by the hair), as well as exploits the power of class distinction to separate her household from the rest of the community, and even make a strong dividing line between herself and her servants - including Poncia who is both servant and confidante. Knowledge is directly related to power, and Bernarda uses it against the family and the community by spying directly and indirectly on both.

Bernarda asserts her authority the moment she enters the stage: "Silence!"⁷ This authority is clearly prefaced by her servant's remarks:

Poncia: "Tyrant over everyone around. She's perfectly capable of sitting on your heart and watching you die for a whole year without turning off that cold smile she wears on her wicked face. Scrub, scrub those dishes!" (p. 265)

Bernarda's power is autocratic in nature. She has derived it from a society which has fostered a matriarchal system.

Part of Bernarda's power derives from the physical and psychological prison she has created for her daughters. The house is like a coffin, lined with white silk, Garcia Lorca delineates the setting: A very white room in Bernarda Alba's House. (p. 263) As if to accentuate the coffin-like atmosphere of the house, a bell

is heard tolling outside, and a real coffin is brought into the house - the dead husband of Bernarda Alba. In addition, the insane grandmother is locked in a separate room within this prison. Poncia:

"There's the grandmother! Isn't she locked up tight?" (p. 264) It is within this prison that the sanctimonious Bernarda wields her power.

The prisons of house and tradition which Bernarda uses against her daughters are as strong as the society which generated (initially) the power in Mrs. Alving. As the townsfolk gather in Bernarda's drawing room to honour her dead husband, Bernarda orders one servant to be silent, and even asserts her control over a child who merely states a simple fact: "Eating is necessary for living." (p. 271)

Bernarda: "At your age, one doesn't talk in front of older people." (p. 271) Yet the child's comment is portentous if taken metaphorically, since it is Bernarda who is slowly causing the spiritual death of her daughters by depriving them of the ability to satisfy their hunger for love.

Bernarda does not confine her power to the unquestioned authority of age, she utilizes the device of contradiction. While the women discuss the men who are outside on the patio, Pepe el Romano's absence at the funeral is mentioned.

Bernarda: "His mother was there. She saw his mother.
Neither she nor I saw Pepe." (p. 273)

Bernarda does not limit her orders only to the boundaries of her house, she extends her authority and judgement to the interior of the Church.

She continues her attack by also shaming Adela by reference to her dead father:

"Is that a fan to give to a widow? Give me a black one and learn to respect your father's memory. (p. 278)

While Bernarda constructs this prison around her daughters, she also dictates the terms of the sentence-- eight years:

"For the eight years of mourning, not a breath of air will get in this house from the street. We'll act as if we'd sealed up doors and windows with bricks. That's what happened in my father's house--and in my grandfather's house. Meantime, you can all start embroidering your hope-chest linens. I have twenty bolts of linen in the chest from which to cut sheets and coverlets. Magdalena can embroider them." (p. 279)

Although Magdalena states: "I'd rather carry sacks to the mill. Anything except sit here day after day in this dark room." (p. 279), Bernarda declares that that is what women are for, and that since this is her obligation, and since she is in "this house" Magdalena must do what she is ordered. While she hands down the sentence, incarceration in a mausoleum for eight years, she refers to tradition to back her up. The penance which the girls must pay, however, is double-edged; they must embroider white sheets, the symbol of the prison of their own virginity, but in reality, they appear to be preparing not bed sheets but winding sheets. The hope for the future expressed in Bernarda's hope chest is ironic, since while she is alive, she refuses to allow any of her daughters to marry.

Within the complex of tradition nestles yet another source of authority - class. Bernarda is highly conscious of her class, and for this reason ties her daughters in the bonds of class strictures. She is suspicious that Angustias has been looking at a man from the village and shames her with:

"Is it decent for a woman of your class to be running after a man the day of her father's funeral? Answer me! Whom were you looking at?" (p. 282)

She underlines her authority by striking Angustias, who meekly submits to such treatment. It appears as if such physical attack is frequent, and that the daughters accede to it; all Angustias does is weep.

Bernarda, although she confides in Poncia, withdraws into herself when she feels the necessity and excludes the servant from her presence. Poncia suggests that Angustias is in her late thirties and should by now have a beau. Bernarda crushes the argument not only with the fury of her voice, but also with the logical fallacy of "what a person has never had, he will never desire": "none of them has ever had a beau and they've never needed one! They get along very well." (p. 285) She retreats from Poncia with: "You're a servant and I pay you. Nothing more." (p. 266)

The effect of Bernarda's power over her household is dramatically realized by the grandmother. Bernarda imprisons her, yet she achieves a peculiar sort of freedom in her madness. She pantomimes what the

daughters inwardly and among themselves moan about. She wants to "get away from here!... To get married by the shore of the sea...." (p. 302)

The reaction of the servants is quite different. Although they do Bernarda's bidding - spying on the neighbours and becoming silent at her orders, they attain the limited bounds of freedom within their own class. They discuss her in vituperative terms, hating and despising her. Poncia says: "may the 'pain of the piercing nail' strike her in the eyes." (p. 266) and "...I'll lock myself up in a room with her and spit in her face a whole year.. 'Bernarda, here's for this, that and the other' Till I leave her - just like a lizard the boys have squashed." (p. 267)

They also remark that because of her tyrannous power, her dead husband's relatives dislike her, and that her own are not drawn to her.

Servant: "Did all the relatives come?"

Poncia: "Just hers. His people hate her. They came to see him dead and make the sign of the cross over him; that's all." (p. 266)

The effect on the daughters is most pronounced. They bow to the power of Bernarda, and even the mildest of revolts is crushed.

Bernarda: "In this house you'll do what I order." (p. 279)

Angustias refers to their existence as "this hell" (p. 304) and Magdalena remarks that "even our eyes aren't our own." (p. 321) Adela refers to the situation as a "prison." (p. 374)

Yet it is Poncia who sums up the atmosphere when she refers to the house as a "nunnery," (p. 319) in which the daughters are the nuns - complete with vows of obedience and chastity. Bernarda is the mother superior, imposing penances, flagellations, and saying the prayers by the coffin. Poncia says to Bernarda: "Your daughters act and are as though stuck in a cupboard. But neither you nor anyone else can keep watch inside a person's heart." (p. 359) Poncia is completely accurate when she intimates that Bernarda can control the girls and lay them away in cupboards (or coffins), but she cannot control their hearts. She has contained their natural sensuality to such a degree that it is bound to burst out and find expression.

The combination of frustrated passion and the intrusion of a virile young man - precisely the sort described by Josefa - serve to disrupt the tight control which Bernarda exerts over the house. The physical needs of the daughters are exemplified in many ways: Adela's displaying her beauty to the chickens; the girls listening secretly to the men's conversation on the patio; their racing to the windows whenever a man passes by; Martirio's pathetic declaration that she is fortunate to be weak and ugly so that she cannot attract men; Adela's desire to free Libranda's daughter from the consequences of bearing an illegitimate child (projection, and identification) - all these clearly define the plight of a group of girls living in a cloistered, claustrophobic environment.

From the beginning, it is clear that Bernarda's purpose is to impose strict control over her daughters, ostensibly to prevent them from marrying outside of their class. She accomplishes this by restricting their movement, by spying on them, by conditioning them (Martirio does "things without any faith...like clockwork,") (p. 287) by instilling fear, by punishing them, by reference to authority, and by her stifling and powerful will. But her own pride of class, and pride of being a Spanish woman prevent Bernarda from understanding the sensual drive which compels her daughters to revolt. They recognize the unnaturalness of the liaison between Pepe and Angustias, but Bernarda does not. Magdalena states that it would be more natural for him "to be after you, Amelia, or our Adela who's twenty--not looking for the least likely one in this house, a woman who, like her father, talks through her nose." (p. 294)

The appearance of this virile young man, and the attendant desire breaks the steely grasp Bernada has over her daughters. Martirio becomes deeply attached to him, and Adela possesses him physically. Bernarda warns the audience and Prudencia that "A daughter who's disobedient stops being a daughter and becomes an enemy." (p. 346) Poncia recognizes the danger in Adela's yearning for Pepe, and suggests a prudent course of waiting, but the revolt has begun. Adela, once afraid of Poncia, declares: "Well you'll have to! I've been afraid of you. But now I'm stronger than you." (p. 316) Martirio also reacts to the stifling of her natural sensuality by stealing and hiding

Pepe's pictures between her sheets. The rivalry and the jealousy disintegrate the power which Bernarda once directed against her daughters. Adela snatches away her mother's cane and breaks it in two. "There'll be an end to prison voices here! This is what I do with the tyrant's cane. Not another step. No one but Pepe commands me!" (p. 374) Thus, the power of command leaves Bernarda and becomes Pepe's.

In the ensuing confusion produced by Adela's belief that Pepe has been shot dead, and her committing suicide, Bernarda once again assumes control.

Bernarda could only regain control by re-establishing balance in her family. The agent of change, Pepe, was the prime threat to her autocratic reign, yet her indomitable pride prevented her from perceiving this threat. During the crisis period, she was powerless; but as soon as Pepe left, and the enemy in her family, Adela, commits suicide, she immediately begins to exert her authority, calling on the voice of respectability to support her. She retains her proud display to the outside world by declaring Adela a virgin. She exhibits her power just as she did at the beginning of the play by commanding silence.

The power wielded by Bernarda is limited. The shock to her as a powerful person still retains residual effects. There are still four daughters, each with her own basic needs to be satisfied. Pepe still exists in the community, and in the memory of the girls. Bernarda

grows older. Although she appears to have re-established the balance which she requires to maintain her power, the audience is convinced that this power is decaying and the equilibrium is only a tenuous one.

THE MAIDS

Jean Genet is far less explicit in his denunciation of society than the playwrights discussed above. If Jean-Paul Sartre's assessment of Genet's writings is accurate, the reasons for the inception of The Maids are fairly straightforward. The maids represent the dualistic nature of Genet. His life was a deceptive image of self; externally, he conformed to the mores of his group, yet secretly he lived as another person. The Maids, then, is first a documented analysis of the split in Genet's existence, a duality exemplified in his life style. Second, it is a celebration of the heroic criminal whom Genet wished to emulate while he was trying to expiate himself. Third, it is a startling development in the writings concerning women - the concept of loss of identity through power struggle, through fantasy, and through abnormal indulgence.

Jean-Paul Sartre said that "the maids as Genet conceives them, are already fake. Pure products of artifice, their minds are inside out, and they are always other than themselves."⁸ The Maids (1947) is certainly a play about power within a household, but instead of one individual attempting to dominate a group with the intention of maintaining a status quo within the domain, such as Bernarda Alba attempted, Genet has established a triangle situation in which the power is peripatetic. The power of one person to dominate the other is readily handed from one to the other. They can only assume power when, as Sartre says, they are "other than themselves." Yet when one person has stepped out of

what the normal person would consider reality, the power is totally dependent on the other also entering the artifice world.

The Maids is a strange psycho-sexual drama about sado-masochism, role-playing, and ceremony, the latter being directed by its own moving force. The maids and Madame seem to have no control over the ceremonies once they are in progress.

This powerful situation already exists when the play begins. The three women love each other, hate each other, and are mutually dependent on each other for being. It is these three drives which caused their strange acquisition of power. The maids and Madame, although three separate entities on the stage, are fused into one identity. None of the three exists separately - they seem like the mutually inter-dependent trinity. As separate individuals, they are mere shadows. Their strength, then, lies in their acting as unit. Their power is a gripping reliance on each other for being. Yet, these characters seem to be illusory, not real. To emphasize their unreality, Genet has separated them from the real world and placed them into a dream world. Madame lives in a fantasy with Monsieur (who never appears), martyring herself as a quasi-romantic heroine. Solange and Claire, although maids in reality, live in their own make-believe world: Solange impersonates Claire, Claire impersonates Madame, and they both act out a detective magazine fantasy in which they are heroines receiving adulation from the crowds below the balcony in Claire's sense, or from Monsieur in Solange's case. Genet has thus made real on the stage the elusive portion of

our lives which consists of fantasy and daydream ceremony.

Their power stems from the love-hate relationship which exists among them. Without clearly realizing what they are doing, each adopts the personality of the other, and by doing this each extirpates what she hates in herself. The power then stems from the quality in the other which each wishes to emulate; it is a seductive power which draws the individual out of his or her own character, and almost mystically exchanges personalities. But in being lured by this power, they lose their own identities and thus become helpless as themselves, yet powerful in the role they adopt.

Unlike Mrs. Alving, or Bernarda, neither the maids nor the mistress fully realize the reasons for their seeking and utilizing the power which stems from their rather unnatural relationship. The maids certainly recognize their hatred of the subservient conditions under which they live. Claire (in the role of Madame) exclaims:

"Those gloves! Those eternal gloves! I've told you time and again to leave them in the kitchen... Everything, yes, everything that comes out of the kitchen is spit!" (including the maids) (p. 35)

It is more in their ceremonies that they understand the reasons for their hating and loving madame, their reasons for despising their position in life, and their love-hatred for each other.

Claire (as madame): "I can see in your eyes that you loathe me. You don't care what happens to me." (p. 39)

Solange: "I...follow you everywhere. I love you." (p. 39)

And it is both Madame and Claire whom Solange loves.

In the sinister game played by Claire and Solange there is an atavistic cumulation of power through ceremony. When Claire assumes the power of madame over Solange (who becomes Claire) she commands her to prepare her wardrobe for an exciting and sensual evening. Claire-madame exerts considerable power over Solange-Claire during the ceremony, and receives the adoration befitting a high-priestess. Solange-Claire appears to enjoy the obsequious nature of her task, since Claire-Madame's power is dependent on her acquiescing to the terms of the ceremony. The ceremony should terminate in the murder of Claire-madame (or Madame) in a paroxysm of hate and disgust, but the power struggle is disintegrated by the sounding of the clock which draws them not back to reality, but back to the other non-reality, the trinity of Madame and two maids. Formerly, Claire and Solange were united in Solange who became Claire, and Claire adopted the mask of Madame. The ceremonial slaying of Madame has not been realized, and consequently they must return to their first level of unreality.

The reader is not really aware of the validity of the Madame-Monsieur part of the tale. Ostensibly, they have denounced her lover to the police by means of anonymous letters. But the fantasy aspect of Madame fleeing with her lover is partially their own manufacture, partially Madame's. Whatever the case Madame relies on them so that she too can live out her own fantasy.

Claire exerts power over Solange, not only during the ritual, but also in the first level of their non-reality. She realizes that if she were to kill Madame (which they both wish and do not wish to do), Claire would denounce her. But it is not until they have received the telephone call that Monsieur has been released from prison, that Claire realizes to the fullest extent her dominion over Solange. Until this time, she has been the "spider, the umbrella case, and the sordid nun without a god, without a family," yet it is she who gave Madame the power to reduce her to such an ignominious position. Because of the release of Monsieur, Claire realizes she must kill Madame; the ceremony must be enacted. She feels the ultimate power over Madame, the power of life or death. Even in the preparation of the poison to kill Madame, the maids engage in a ceremony which is outside of the non-reality of gathering ten pellets of gardenol for the tea. But Madame does not drink the tea because she is drunk with the prospect of flying to her lover's arms to drink instead of death, champagne.

The maids have failed in reality to kill Madame in their first level of non-reality, and therefore must do so in ritual to expiate their dream failure. In Madame's absence, they put on the clothes of Solange-Claire and Claire-Madame. But Madame-Claire has lost her power, it is Solange-Claire who seems to dominate her, threaten her, engage in a frenzy of mixed emotions ranging from sadism to sexual delirium. And Claire-Madame, feeling out of her depth, and frightened

by the power of the ritual over her escapes to the kitchen in a state of nausea.

Claire: "Let's get out of here, Solange. I tell you we're in danger."... "I'm ill...I...I'm going to be sick..." (p. 90-91)

When she emerges, she implies that she has killed Claire-Madame, that she is now the embodiment of both Claire and Solange, that she is the queen of the underworld. But she has not killed Claire-Madame with the rubber gloves. Claire-Madame reappears, and in spite of Solange's cry: "Claire... we're raving!" (p. 95) a cry of spontaneous realization that ceremony, non-reality, daydream world is the domain of madness, Claire becomes the powerful dominating figure. In an antiphonal, hypnotic series of repetitions, Solange is once more drawn into the sado-masochistic ceremony which culminates not in Solange (Solange-Claire) taking Claire's (Claire-Madame's) life, but in Claire taking her own life as Madame by drinking the poisoned tea designed for Madame. (But gardenol is not a poison, so she is not really poisoned - another of Genet's artifices.)

The effects of the power struggle are much clearer than each character's lack of control over his own sense of power when role playing. Because they have entered the domain of fantasy so often, it exerts a power over them, just like the nick in the record; the phonograph needle automatically seeks out that flaw, and the more often it does so, the more readily it is directed to the nick. Similarly,

the group has become psychotic by their power over each other; fantasy and reality fuse into one so that neither fully exists. Fantasy and reality impinge on each other. Second, the world of fantasy has become so real, that in reality the maids condemn Monsieur by sending to the police a series of denunciatory letters. The power the maids have over Madame makes her their prisoner; she recognizes how poor they are as maids and is powerless over them:

Claire: "Isn't Madame satisfied with our work?"

Madame: "But I am, Claire. Delighted. In seventh heaven." (p. 76)

The effect on the maids is the most pronounced. They attempt to transfer their ceremonial killing of Madame into real life, and the influence of their role-playing power is so great that they totally lose their senses of identity and as a result, Claire (supposedly) commits suicide.

It is Solange who declares that through the powerful ceremony, the hate-loving killing of Madame, they have both been freed from her power, and the powerful trinity which was held together by the illusory game-playing has been broken. It is the maids who are free. Claire is dead. Madame is with her Monsieur, and Solange is alone - yet not alone, since in her madness she feels united with Claire. She has become Claire-Solange (or Solange-Claire).

The result, then, of a powerful relationship which results in people becoming something else can be highly destructive. Not only does

the person lose his sense of identity, he also loses touch with reality. Reality and illusion become fused, and his ability to function in the real world ceases.

THE VISIT

With the plays of Ibsen, Shaw, and Garcia Lorca which were discussed here, the audience is aware of a specific locale. In the case of Genet and Duerrenmatt, the plays could take place anywhere. Theoretically, The Visit (1956) takes place in a Swiss town, but the town could be almost anywhere in the Western world. The title is an apt one since it concerns the visitation of a plague on a small town. Claire Zachanassian is the initiator of the moral plague, and is the plague itself (although she arrives in the guise of a benefactor). She arrives like a goddess, with her escorts, her sedan chair, and her royal train.

The Visit is definitely not as clear cut as Shaw's or Ibsen's plays, but it does not escape analysis. It is a play about power, and a woman who has her antecedent in the goddess of Fate. Yet she seems to represent far more than an area of power. She seems to be an archetypal force for Duerrenmatt through which he can express his aching concern for justice in society as opposed to revenge, the inability for law to see beyond the lie (as in the case of The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi), and the inability of groups of people to retain their values in the face of materialistic temptation.

The reasons for Claire seeking such power are twofold, and paradoxical. When she was only in her teens, she was made pregnant by Ill. There was a trial, but she was banished from the town since Ill bribed two individuals with a bottle of Schnapps to say that they had

slept with her. In the eyes of the town, he was exonerated; she was guilty. The trial was a travesty of justice. Consequently, Claire harboured for years a desire to rectify this error in justice by bringing Ill and the town to trial, exposing Ill to the townspeople as a fraud, and exposing themselves as accomplices. At the same time, she has buried within her a strange love-hate relationship to Ill, and in a pathologically oriented obsession wished him constantly by her side. To accomplish this, she had to remove him from the community where he lived, and transport him to Italy where she intended to make her own residence.

At the same time, she is a powerful force, and in being a force, is not easily psychologically explicable. She is more an allegorical extension of society than an individual.

The paradox mentioned earlier lies in the idea of justice: Claire's form of justice is not pure, it is vengeful and destructive. The second paradox is her love-hate obsession which drives her to seek power over Ill. But in acquiring the power over his life (and death), she extinguished his life so that she could have him near her, and also obliterated the reason for her own existence - revenge.

Claire Zachanassian's power, then, is that of a vengeful judge and a symbol of materialistic manipulation which drives people to seek their own ends to the extent that the unscrupulous means are ignored. It is this characteristic of society which Duerrenmatt wished to attack.

Claire's methods of acquiring such power are totally unscrupulous.

As the play opens, the directions regarding the scenery indicate that it is "as if a plague had passed." The town is stagnant:

Man Four: "The Wagner Factory gone crash."

Man One: "Beckman Bankrupt."

Man Tow: "Vegetating."

Man Three: "And rotting to death."

Man Four: "The entire township."⁹

The industry of the town has subsided into deserts of inactivity; the people are the grains of sand in the desert. And it is Claire who, one by one, has bought up the industries and business of this decrepit town, stopped production, and produced the desert which now exists - with its lethargy. It is clear, however, that the seeds of hypocrisy already existed there, and only the arrival of a Claire Zanachanassian was necessary to reveal them. (This hypocrisy is not very different from that exposed by Ibsen.) At the same time, Claire has developed an extraordinary reputation for public benevolence and altruistic generosity. She has constructed hospitals, libraries, and other valuable public institutions in areas which wanted such services. This reputation was important in the preparation of Guellen for her arrival. First, she had to reduce the people to overwhelming need, and then she had to appear as the provider - the cornucopia. She makes her power known as soon as she enters the stage with: "Is it Guellen? I recognize the wretched dump." (p. 17) She speaks with

the confidence of a ruler. In fact, her conversation and language throughout the play are characterized by incredible strength, straightforwardness, honesty, and pointedness. Such is her reputation, one of the cornerstones of her power, that when she arrives in Guellen earlier than expected, she creates general panic. She silences complaints with vast amounts of money... and her name. She achieves power by automatically assuming it. She exudes the impression that she owns everything, including the train she arrived on: "Will you and your express train get the hell out of here?" (p. 19) She might have been speaking of a vacuum cleaner. Indeed, people seem to be her possessions. She immediately commands Ill to call her by her childhood pet names, she requires Pedro's presence and even tells him not to "sulk" as if he were a child or a servant.

Her approach is at once enigmatic; she seems to be the benefactress, indicates that she finds the town (her town) picturesque, but at the same time drops sinister hints. She asks the policeman if he can "wink a blind eye to things from time to time," (p. 22) and asks the priest: "Do you comfort the dying?" (p. 73) She tells them that she has bought her sedan chair bearers, and that she talked the President of France into giving her the sedan chair from the Louvre. In addition, part of her luggage is a coffin - and a black panther, the nick-name she uses for Ill.

Her power is not only derived from her sweeping in like Cleopatra, her vast millions, her masculinity, her strange obsessions, she also

utilizes a technique used by Bernarda Alba - brazen contradiction of people's statements. (Bernarda denied the presence of Pepe at the funeral - and he was there). The reader does not know whether Ill's memory is at fault, or whether she is deliberately twisting the truth to make him sound silly, and his past gestures futile. But his understanding of events of the past is certainly in total contrast to hers.

During the banquet scene, the ritual is strange - almost like the Welsh ritual of eating a feast from the dead man's chest, which signifies the absorption of the dead man's sins. In this case, they consume the food in the presence of Ill whom they intend to kill to purge the town, together with him, as they hypocritically imply, from guilt. During the court scene at the table at which Claire declares: "Everything can be bought," (p. 36) Ill is tried by a magistrate who has been bought, witnessed by two blind men who have been bought, and sentenced by the town's people to death - who will be bought. Certainly the town's people at this point still stand up for Ill, but Claire says, "I'll wait," (p. 39) knowing full well that their decision to let rightness win over greed is as thin as Chinese rice paper.

Claire's power, then, also stems from knowledge of human nature. She realizes that to the town's folk what Ill has done is minimal, yet they will rationalize their own greed and blame their poverty and indolence on this one act of folly. They will use him as the scapegoat for their own petty crimes, and like ritualistic acts performed in primitive cultures, they will immolate him to rid the town of the

pestilence, and get their "just" reward - the million. And this time, it will work.

The effect of power is directly proportionate to the reaction of those against whom it is used. Claire would not be able to utilize her power to such a devastating extent were it not for the reactions of the people of Guellen. She interrupts train schedules; she buys people who have been condemned to death; she reduces a town to poverty. The effect of her power over the town's people is equally overwhelming:

School Teacher: "That old lady in black robes getting off the train was a gruesome vision... Her name shouldn't be Claire; it should be Clotho. I could suspect her of spinning destiny's webs herself." (p. 26)

In addition, when she is exploring the barn, she treats it as a church, and will not allow anyone to speak aloud; no one "dared speak above a whisper."

Directly following the court-room banquet scene, Claire was correct when she said: "I can wait." The effects of her form of justice (or retribution) were remarkable. The family as a unit began to split up, and the community seemed to splinter, but ironically became closely knit together in their new hope which coincided with her aims. The change begins gradually and with seemingly innocuous incidents.

Ill's wife refuses to come down to breakfast; his son refuses to eat with Ill, using the excuse that he has to work at the railroad.

His daughter leaves him with the excuse that she must find employment at the agency. And the town's folk begin to run up incredible bills on credit - not really knowing what is going to happen, but half realizing that prosperity is right around the corner. They are like cattle, moving in the direction of better fields. Even Pedro notices that Claire has given them a new "lease on life." Ill's reaction is perfunctory: "I demand the arrest of Madame Zachanassian," (p. 47) but even the law has succumbed: Schill is staggered by the fact that even the policeman is wearing new shoes. New shoes should be innocent enough, but they represent betrayal on the part of Ill's neighbours since they buy them on the credit of his death; if he cannot apply to the law for protection, he has no solace for his very real fear.

Only Ill seems to realize the significance of the panther hunt - that it is the ritual which foreshadows his own hunt and subsequent death. The Burgomaster must also be partially aware of its impending threat. When Schill visits him, and delineates his fears, the Burgomaster's "hands are trembling." Claire was perfectly correct when she predicted their reaction to her offer; it was only a matter of time. The town's folk did not change, only their surroundings did. They did not assume the guilt for their corporate act; they did not realize the reasons for their act were as corrupt as Claire's revenge was distorted. Only Ill underwent a transformation. Even when the teacher said he found himself "hardening into something that is not human - not beautiful" Ill merely says: "It can't be helped," and that he is

not afraid any more. In the admission of his own guilt, Ill has achieved a new dignity which permits him to refuse the Burgomaster's suggestion to commit suicide. He realizes that it is they who must execute him, since they have betrayed their humanity. He is forcing them to participate in the guilt of the community, and not permitting them slyly to escape from this responsibility.

Their greatest wrong is that the more definitely they decide to sacrifice him and get their million, the greater becomes their sense of moral righteousness. This characteristic certainly lay dormant in their characters, and it took only a Claire Zachanassian to release it.

Claire is really larger than life, a catalyst, and in this sense, hardly comparable to Mrs. Alving, Candida, or even the maids. But it is still significant that Duerrenmatt invests this power in a female character and that he merges in her in a grotesquely intensified and magnified way the characteristics of the women already discussed. It is through her that Duerrenmatt exposes the greed and capacity for betrayal and injustice which festers beneath so-called civilized society.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American image of apple pie and the American Mother (exemplified by Al Capp's Pansy) is a matriarchal one. This matriarchal image is quite different from the concept of matriarchy which presided in Spain. In the first place, the mother does not control the family unit with the intention of establishing and maintaining a status quo. Instead, she is a person who free-lances; she is determined to fulfill herself and thus competes with man. In many cases, she actually adopts the traditional role of man, which results in his emasculation. Edward Albee's play The American Dream (1959) deals with just such a subject. Albee states in his own preface: "The play is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation, and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen."¹⁰

It is evident from the outset of the play that Mommy does not consciously seek power. It already exists in the social system. As in Barnarda's case, people respond almost without question to a given pattern, but in Barnarda's society, the men retain their masculine role, and the women their feminine.

In Albee's play, Mommy has lost her traditional role of house-keeper and child-bearer. Grandma has taken over the first one,

polishing, cooking, and furniture moving. And the Bye Bye Adoption Service has taken over the second, supplying children to such "mothers". So what is left to such a woman? She is similar to the idle woman in part II of T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," having nothing to do but complain, nag, and be neurotic. Her world centres on complaining and getting satisfaction.

Mommy's power, then, already exists. She wields it for something to do, rather than for any positively motivated reason. She does not attempt any sort of development as in Mrs. Alving's case; she does not manipulate her husband into a more "needful" role as Candida does (Daddy already is such a vegetable that he grunts acquiescence to almost anything she says); she does not seek power for power's sake or to guide her class-conscious family as does Bernarda Alba. Instead, she dabbles in power play, by ridiculing Daddy and by threatening Grandma. Mommy lacks direction - she does not wish to change society nor to understand herself better.

Mommy represents an ever increasing sector of American society which scurries helter-skelter after what is called "The American Dream" - an empty, pretty, melmac something or other with little internal value, but an impressive exterior. The "American Dream" must also be a finished product, not one in the stages of development. And it is after this object that she directs her so-called power; a Raggedy-Anne doll with a well-built body.

The play is about Mommy and Daddy who are awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Barker, a representative of the Bye Bye Adoption Service. They want a child (which the Daddy is incapable of providing). The representative seems to be just as confused about her reason for visiting Mommy and Daddy as they are themselves, and it is Grandma as spokeswoman who hints at her true purpose. The accidental arrival of an attractive young man, the "All American Boy" solves the problem; Mrs. Barker will be paid, and Mommy and Daddy will receive satisfaction.

Mommy exerts her power almost immediately by demanding that Daddy "pay attention" (p. 59) and by requiring him to restate what she has just said to prove that he is paying attention: "What did I say? What did I just say?" (p. 59) She is discussing the purchase of a beige hat, which seems to represent the ritual of buying a baby at the Bye Bye Adoption Service. She exerted a childish power over the shopkeepers by railing at them when she thought she was receiving something other than what she had expected, but she "got satisfaction" (p. 61) -- or so she says. She did satisfy her need to be noisy and obnoxious. Similarly, some years earlier, she had arranged to adopt a child, but because it was not the finished product, they sought reasons to destroy it. It is grotesquely clear that Mommy butchered the child, bit by bit, when she reacted to specific values imposed by society, but which she was incapable of understanding. She cut off its wrists and genitals because it masturbated. She cut out its tongue because it swore; and they gouged out its eyes because it had a father fixation.

The child died. But, she considers such children more like five-and-ten-cent store trinkets which break so easily when dropped, and which are to be treated on the "no satisfaction-money back" basis. She had not received value for her money, and as in the case of the hat, she has complained bitterly and wants "satisfaction." Compared with the droll humour of *Grandma*, Albee's imagery here is a little forced, and more than bizarre. And in this case, his satire of the manner in which many North American women treat their children becomes rather heavy-handed.

In a similar way, Mommy butchers her husband psychologically. She has driven him into a semi-somnambulistic state into which he escapes to avoid her incessant chatter. He has no role as a father; he is sterile. Mommy: "Daddy had an operation, you know." (p. 82) Yet the reader wonders if he was this way before they were married. Why has he had an operation? He does retain the role as provider, but this is reduced to insignificance when the reader learns that Mommy is a parasite, and does not admire him for his ability to provide. She is exposed by her own mother who relates Mommy's childhood aspirations - to marry a rich person who can provide her with all of the Material necessities. (p. 69) She maintains her dominance over him by relentless criticism, and by ironic reference to his non-masculine state. Daddy fears the arrival of Mrs. Barker, and is reluctant to open the door. Mommy: "WHAT a masculine Daddy! Isn't he a masculine Daddy?" And of course, he is not a masculine Daddy,

as she says a little later: "Oh look at you! You're turning into jelly; you're a woman." (p. 75)

If he is a woman, what then is Mommy? Certainly not a woman. She is a parasite. When the finished product, "The American Dream", does arrive, Grandma recognizes that this is what the house needs, and she can leave; and the reader is suddenly aware that this is precisely what Mommy wanted - the finished product, and the exodus of Grandma. Michael Rutenberg states that Mommy would love to get rid of Grandma who represents the antithesis of Mommy's degenerate character, but she is reluctant to lose a hardworking maid. Grandma poses a threat: "Mommy mustn't allow anyone in the house to read because anything that might enlighten them intellectually because the act is threatening to Mommy's dictatorship."¹¹

Mommy becomes exasperated by Grandma's constant interruptions, and tells Daddy "to break Grandma's television set -- the last remaining link with the outside world."¹²

Mommy has the material security which she required from childhood, and she has the superbly handsome lover in her apartment -- the counterpart of the first adopted child, only in its mature stages -- in the guise of a son. He was precisely what she made him -- sterile and unfeeling. Moreover, the reader has the sinister feeling that he will multiply his sterility by sleeping with his new mother:

Mommy: "Maybe... maybe later tonight."

Man: "Why yes, that would be very nice." (p. 127)

Mommy's power, then, is destructive. She is part of an evolution of woman in the United States of America, a development which has resulted in the rejection of the role of woman (baking apple pies in the oven). She has become part of the steel girders and concrete sidewalks of the large metropolis. Similarly, Daddy seems to be at the tail end of his evolution, vegetating because of the frenetic power of the type of woman just discussed.

Mommy is part of the general criticism Albee levels at society, and in that respect, she is closer to Ibsen's and Lorca's women. All three tackle society, and the role of the woman is used as the agent.

THE HOMECOMING

The Homecoming (1965) contains elements which are very similar to certain aspects of The American Dream. The environment in which Ruth and Teddy live in the U.S.A. is almost as sterile as that occupied by Mommy and Daddy. It is a world which is pristinely clean, containing the endless round of cocktail parties, "Greyhound buses, and tons of iced water."¹⁴ But for Ruth and Teddy, there is no naturalness, no sensuality, no thought, just the ritual of boring artificiality. Theirs is a world at the other end of the social ladder from Mommy and Daddy's - the environment of the university world, yet it produces the same stagnation from which Ruth flees.

This is the principal reason for Ruth's need to acquire such power over Teddy's family. Ruth gives ample evidence that before she met Teddy, she was a person who lived a "free life" when she discusses her past with Lenny: "I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body. Not always indoors." (p. 57) And if the manner in which she attacked Teddy's brothers is an indication of her normal activity (and she does tantalize and embrace them with total equanimity), then she is clearly starved for sensual gratification. Such a strong drive - already witnessed in The House of Bernarda Alba must either have been stifled in the narrow community of the university milieu, or if it found an outlet must have been embarrassing to Teddy. Perhaps the European trip, particularly to Venice, was an attempt to salvage

an already shaky marriage -- an attempt which failed. If this is the case, and if Teddy was aware during their six years of marriage that his wife did not really belong to his sterilized existence, then it is easy to understand why he left her in England with such relief and ease.

Part of the motive for her power, then, lies in a need to express herself in sensual terms, and a necessity to escape from an environment which stifles such an excess of energy. In addition, she has a need to be in an atmosphere which is earthy - even unclean; an environment which is "human", and almost primitive.

She certainly achieves a modicum of power over Teddy, and after somehow producing three children by him (and even Max asks if they are all his), manages to extricate herself from a situation which is incompatible with her nature. She is aware as soon as she enters the house that she is drawn to it and its inhabitants, and wishes to avoid that which lures her. The moment they arrive, she suggests that they leave: Ruth: "Do you want to stay?" (p. 21) "I think... the children... might be missing us." (p. 22) is really a pathetic excuse not to stay. She seems to foresee that she will be attracted to this den.

Ruth is extremely fortunate in having placed before her a setting which is ripe for her entrance, conquest, and dominion. Max's wife was apparently a whore: "I've never had a whore under this roof before. Ever since your mother died. My word of honour." (p. 42) In addition,

Jessie "taught (the boys) all the morality they know... every single bit of the moral code they live by." (p. 46); hence they would be accustomed to the talk of whores and prostitution. In addition, it is not certain that Max was the children's father: "A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slutbitch of a wife...." (p. 47) The family is a cluster of sexually maladjusted males. Max has turned into a mother figure, cooking for the family, even declaring that he gave birth to his sons: Lenny, although suave and crude, at the same time attains sexual pleasure vicariously by operating a call girl establishment and their respective apartments; Sam's sexuality is in question when Max suggests that: "(he'd) bend over for half a dollar on Blackfriar's Bridge..." (p. 48) and that he is above doing "that kind of thing in the car." (p. 15)

When Lenny encounters Ruth in the middle of the night, he seems to be aware of her identity. He asks to "hold your (her) hand... Just a touch... Just a tickle." (p. 30) And when Ruth asks why, he tells her two horrible tales about what he did with a whore under a bridge and with a woman in her own house. These brutal attacks leave Ruth unmoved, which substantiates Lenny's association. But he also identifies her with his mother:

Ruth: "Not in mine, Leonard."

Lenny: "Don't call me that, please."

Ruth: "Why not?"

Lenny: "That's the name my mother gave me." (p. 33)

But she continues with her provocative approach. He wants to take away her glass of water, an escape gesture, but she says: "If you take the glass...I'll take you." (p. 34) She offers him a sip, to pour it down his throat, to have him lie on the floor so that she can do so. He remarks: "What are you doing, making me some kind of proposal." (p. 34) And when she says: "Oh, I was so thirsty...", (p. 35) the ambiguity is clear.

The following morning, when she meets Max, he is equally aware of her personality. He says to Teddy: "Who asked you to bring tarts in here? Who asked you to bring dirty tarts into this house? We've had a smelly scrubber in my house all night. We've had a stinking pox-ridden slut in my house all night." (p. 41) But, at the end of the play, he is on his knees, begging for attention.

Later, when Lenny and Teddy engage in philosophical discussion, Ruth neatly turns it into a sensual discussion. The table loses its identity as a table, and becomes legs-- her legs-- her sensual legs.

Ruth: "Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something. Look at me. I... move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear... underwear... which moves with me... it... captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret. The action is simple. It's a leg... moving. My lips move. Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant... than the words which come through them. You must bear that... possibility... in mind."

When Teddy goes upstairs to pack, Ruth (alone with Lenny) reveals

to him that she was a nude model, and just when she should leave, agrees to dance with Lenny... slowly. They embrace and kiss; Joey enters and declares: "Christ, she's wide open. She's a tart." (p. 59) Her identity is now in the open, and both Lenny and Joey take advantage of the situation. But Ruth asserts herself: "I'd like something to eat. I'd like a drink." (p. 60) When the discussion of scotch on the rocks comes up, Lenny admits that "We've got rocks. But they're frozen stiff in the fridge." The ambivalence once again is clear. Eventually, she goes to Joey's room and spends two hours with him, but they do not attain the climax of sexual activity. What then are they looking for -- clearly a mother, and she is willing to provide this service, but on her terms. There is something strangely oedipal about their relationship with her, as if they identify her with their own mother. Max does. The mating rite certainly takes place, each person jockeying for position, but it is never fully realized. The ceremony turns into a business proposition which has Ruth laying down the terms with astonishing precision: a flat with three rooms and a bathroom, a wardrobe, a signed contract with witnesses, and a home which generates a primitive, earthy warmth. She has agreed to become their mother, their woman, and the prostitute, but on her own terms. It is their desire which turns them into objects manipulated by her, although she is the desired object.

The effects are at once dramatic: Teddy returns home to America, probably with a sense of relief, since he acquiesced to the terms

with startling alacrity. Max, the leader of the family, has been supplanted by another mother, and is reduced to an old man grovelling on his knees for her favours. The boys have attained a mother, and make room for her in the family, probably in the same capacity as that formerly held by their own mother. And Ruth has achieved her goal. She has, through her own power, escaped from the desert of marriage with Teddy in America to the rich ground of prostitution and home life.

A similar sequence takes place in Pinter's A Slight Ache. (1959) Flora is starved for an outlet for her sensuality. The breakfast scene on the Terrace is like a sexual ritual, but devoid of the reality it should represent. Flora discusses avidly the flowers of her garden; she is like the honeysuckle, and Edward the convolvulus, the solanaceous plant which chokes flowers to death. Yet unlike Flora he is unable to identify the plants correctly with Flora's facility. He is more interested in protecting himself from the life-giving sun by constructing a shade. The main point of interest afforded by the breakfast is the arrival of a bee which enters the jam pot. When Edward attempts to suffocate it by placing the lid on the pot, he appears to be enacting what he is doing to Flora - stifling her. When the bee attempts to emerge through the spout, the quintessence of sexual imagery, Edward pours boiling water down the spout to kill the insect - in the same manner in which he has sterilized the existence between himself and his wife.

Edward leads a borrowed life, writing essays about subject matter he has never seen. The intrusion of an outsider - the matchseller - into this protected garden is a threat to Edward, since he represents "real" life, and an agent of change. Flora has seen him standing outside of the gate on numerous occasions, and is fascinated by him. Edward fears what he represents - an earthiness which he himself does not possess. So great is his power that Edward feels compelled not to use that gate when he wishes to leave his own grounds. His security lies in his study to which he invites the matchseller, hopefully to intimidate him. But no communication takes place within the confines of the study. Edward trundles out the usual plethora of semi-aristocratic clichés, but returns to the garden with relief and puzzlement, not realizing that the old man is mute. He does not believe Flora when she says she has the power to send him away: "He'll move on. I can... make him. I promise you."¹⁴ She identifies him with someone who raped her (or in her fantasies raped her) years ago, and approaches him with the boldness of a Ruth. "Tell me, have you a woman? Do you like women? Do you ever... think about women? Have you ever... stopped a woman?" (p. 31-32) She asks him to "speak to me of love." (p. 32), and then proceeds to undress him, and invite him to take a bath. The next encounter with Edward is unnerving; there is recognition - Barnabas is Edward's alter ego, he sees himself. And Barnabas seems to draw from him Edward's youth. Flora's attention has given him the power to undergo such a metamorphosis which is complete only when Flora removes from him his tray of matches and

deposits them onto Edward. Flora, like Ruth, has escaped the ghastly sterility of a non-sexual life, and has cleaved to what is to her far more important than essays on the Belgian Congo - an earthy reality.

Pinter, since he says his characters are "real" is clearly criticizing the dehumanization of members of society, and in so doing reveals a developing trend in sexual aberration which constitutes a futile antidote.

CONCLUSION

The examination of these plays distinctly reveals each playwright as a severe social critic. It is equally apparent that each of them uses the role of the powerful woman either to attack social institutions which are grounded in hypocrisy, or to reveal the powerful woman as emerging from the prisons of social structure, and realizing in part her potential as a human being. In each case, the playwright uses the female role as an agent for his criticism.

Ibsen's exposé was particularly virulent in his religiously dour society. He tells the audience that the motivation behind Mrs. Alving's and Nora Helmer's quest for power is the realization that marriage is not sacrosanct, that man's authority in his home should not go unchallenged, and that the prime duty of anyone was to become himself. Nora was made to attain this understanding in spite of local convention; she extricated herself from her husband's command, and banged the door not only in her husband's face, but also in the face of the audience. Similarly, the conditions were ripe for Mrs. Alving to emerge from her shell; she recognized the materialism which was hypocritically concealed, yet still malignant under the social surface of Norway. Pastor Manders was merely an exemplar of this condition. Mrs. Alving became aware, as did Nora, of the ability of such a social state to hinder the individual from both self-development and self-expression. When the play appeared in Norway and Denmark just before Christmas 1881,

it caused a tremendous uproar. Ibsen called the reaction "insane attacks," but nonetheless, these criticisms did effect the sales of the book and the production of the play. One critic in Stockholm called the play "one of the filthiest things ever written in Scandinavia." In Germany, one anecdote has it that students read the play with great interest, passing around a clandestine copy while watching another of Ibsen's plays. The press in England was also vituperative: "Ibsen's positively abominable play entitled Ghosts... This disgusting representation... Reprobation due to such as aim at infecting the modern theatre with poison after desperately inoculating themselves and others... An open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly; a lazaret with all its doors and windows open... Candid foulness"¹⁵ and so on. It is rather astonishing that the first production had to take place in Chicago where it was presented in Norwegian before an audience of Scandinavian immigrants. It was not to be performed in Europe until a year later, and it was thirteen years before a new edition was printed. If the reaction was so strong, it must have been because the play touched some mainspring of fear in the audience. A playwright with Ibsen's consciousness of the destructive nature of a static society based on hypocrisy was bound to shatter the security of people's non-involvement - and his play made the audience become involved with the lies which constituted the sham of their existence. The play is concerned with exposing the destructive nature of petty custom and mores which

stultify the lives of so many people. It reveals a woman who through sheer dint of her intellectual power, extricates herself from the quagmire of Norwegian propriety, and becomes an independent, clear-thinking human being.

Bernard Shaw's approach to the "powerful woman" concept is far more witty and tongue in cheek than Ibsen's. Yet his denunciation of Morell because of the blindness which is concurrent with the role he adopted is equal to Ibsen's exposure of Pastor Manders. Candida is representative of a type of strong-willed woman who flourished at the turn of the century. Shaw compared her to Siegfried whom he considered "a type of the healthy man raised to perfect confidence in his own impulses," representative of "the unfettered action of Humanity doing exactly what it likes."¹⁶ Shaw did not find female domination of the male contemptible, but "rather the natural state of affairs, necessary for the propagation of the race."¹⁷

Candida is not revealed by the playwright as a woman in conflict with her society, challenging it, and unfolding its negative characteristics. He reveals her as a powerful woman who exists in society, and tells the audience that such woman may have a clearer understanding of human nature than the men in the audience wish to recognize. Beatrice Webb viewed Candida as a "sentimental prostitute."¹⁸ But really, she transcends conventional morality, and tells her husband point blank what human relationship should be.

Candida's maternal role is reiterated by several critics, and indeed by Shaw himself. In a letter to Ellen Terry, Shaw says that Candida "is the Virgin Mother and nobody else."¹⁹ He called it "THE Mother Play," but not referring to the sickly Madonna so often seen in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, but a healthy and vigorous life force.²⁰

She does not undergo the transformation experienced by Nora or Mrs. Alving - she has already reached that point. In consequence, Shaw can use her to expose the sham (exemplified in Morell's pontifications) of Victorian domesticity.

Candida was well received when it first appeared although there was some puzzlement displayed by French critics.²¹ The social criticism is not so harshly realistic as Ibsen's portrayal of the Alving situation. Shaw uses strong satire, stabs at individuals and society as a whole, but does so with a marked sense of humour. In this play, Shaw exposes and represents certain foibles he has recorded from his own times; Ibsen does the same, but sharpens the edge by warning and revealing the social inconsistencies which are dangerous to his society. Shaw is certainly more interested in Candida's character than in exposing the ills of his society. Ibsen uses Mrs. Alving's character to reveal the nature of his society by showing his audience that Mrs. Alving developed her honest approach to life in spite of society. By contrast, Shaw pits Candida against man as formed by society.

Garcia Lorca's desire to arouse his audiences was just as great as Ibsen's and Shaw's, but what distinguishes him from the other two

is that he is preoccupied with one aspect of his society -- the stagnation of Spain because of the stultifying nature of tradition. Bernarda, rather than fighting the social structure, is an integral part of it, and uses it as the source of her power. She represents the prison of localism and narrow traditional intolerance which Garcia Lorca himself experienced. Bernarda Alba consciously controls the members of the family group because of the Spanish tradition of which she is a part and from which she cannot extricate herself. While Nora and Mrs. Alving reacted against society to find their own "being," Bernarda acted with society to maintain a sense of stability in the family of which she was the head. Garcia Lorca wanted to disturb his complacent audiences just as much as Ibsen did. The fact that the play was not produced until nine years after its author had been murdered strongly hints at the potentially subversive nature of his plays.

Candida, Bernarda, and Mrs. Alving are credible characters. The playwrights have portrayed them as persons who are real to life. Because of this fact, it is relatively simple to trace the social criticism exemplified in each play. Jean Genet, on the other hand, had produced a series of plays which by their style and their subject matter escape analysis in terms of the clearly etched realism of the plays discussed above. Genet has gone beyond the "freedom from stultifying environment" theme, and has lodged the struggle inside his characters by switching identities. Genet is working out the power which develops through loss of identity and the lack of control an individual has over it once she becomes enmeshed in the net of fantasy. The maids do not

know why they are caught in their own network of power, nor why they feel compelled to act out their ritual over and over again. Although critics imply that Genet is trying to work out his own distorted psyche in his plays, one highly important and frightening criticism emerges from the plays (and Genet does not tell us that this is his intention); man has an alarming capacity to slip unconsciously into a semi-somnambulant state which becomes for him the reality which is more hallucinatory than a product of conscious interpretation of external stimuli by the senses. This oscillation between the dream world and the real world - a world of artifice which is only too common to many people who wish to escape the responsibility and challenge of the real world - is depicted in alarming terms. The real and the non-real become indistinguishable from each other. The maids lose their identity in the corporate identity of fantasy.

The play was well received when it was first produced, although the audience had difficulty resolving who was who. Genet had originally wanted men to play the roles of women so that the problem of self-identification and artifice could be complete, but he was dissuaded from this. Those producing the play believed Genet could portray circular sophistry in the dream-world of illusion, betrayal and failure without further confusing the reciprocal derealization by having men play the roles of women.

Friedrich Duerrenmatt combines both recognizable individuals, and a character who is more a force than a person when he introduces

Claire Zachannasian. She is as unreal as the dream-like characters of Genet's plays, yet appears as an embodiment of power such as would be found in mediaeval plays. Duerrenmatt uses The Visit to expose the fact that civilization is really a thin and fragile shell covering man's greed, his prime motivator. He blasts the village with a judgement which does not only apply to the tiny settlement of Guellen, but to villages per se.

It is mainly the approach and technique which separate Duerrenmatt from Ibsen. Duerrenmatt's play is a scathing criticism of people and society in the sense that Ibsen's is, yet he also seems to state that man is entangled in his inability to sort out the just and truthful. Ibsen's, Shaw's and Garcia Lorca's women are psychologically explicable (although in The House of Bernarda Alba, the women do not come across as convincingly separate entities as Mrs. Alving and Candida); Genet's and Duerrenmatt's women become embodiments of inner conflicts on one hand and super human forces on the other hand.²²

Like Genet and Duerrenmatt, Edward Albee separates his approach from Ibsen's stark realism, but in this case, the theatre of the absurd technique is utilized. Edward Albee's approach to his woman character is quite different from the other playwrights. He is preoccupied with the fact that America is now a human desert where services are provided by the dollar, and the pursuit of the dollar bill is the prime preoccupation of Americans. His exposé is indeed a bleak picture of semi-humans. Daddy and Mommy represent Mr. and Mrs. anybody who both

live in a "how town." The role of woman in his play has changed because she has lost her defining characteristics: mother, lover, femininity, housekeeper. These too are absent in Genet's and Duerrenmatt's plays, but they used women as symbolic representations and hence did not have to retain such characteristics. Albee appeared to be more interested in society than in the woman per se. Ibsen pitched Mrs. Alving against society, and Garcia Lorca made her the perpetuator of society. Albee envisioned his women as plastic ribs in a melmac society which exists now. Mommy is an allegory of the American woman (or the American scene), and it is an important factor that she possesses none of the traditionally prescribed feminine roles. In a way, she is like the whore of Babylon, because the audience suspects that she will perpetuate the sterility of her environment by sexual union with sterility.

The play was enthusiastically received, and the press was equally alert to Albee's biting satire. Howard Taubman writes: "It is agreed that Edward Albee has talent... Mr. Albee handles his chosen technique with a disarmingly childlike and sardonic freshness;"²³ and Richard Watts Jr. commented on "Albee's untamed imagination, wild humour, gleefully sardonic satirical implications, and overtones of strangely touching sadness."²⁴

American audiences seemed far more amenable to being roundly criticized than the European, but it could be that by the time Albee's play came out, Americans were already immune to a type of social

criticism which had been worked over years before the first production of the play. Albee clearly echoed the Zeitgeist of America, whereas Ibsen was well ahead of his time.

Harold Pinter surprised his critics when he said of his characters in The Homecoming:

I was only concerned with this particular family. I didn't relate them to any other possible or concrete family. I didn't distort them in any way from any other kind of reality... The whole play happens on a quite realistic level from my point of view.²⁵

Yet Pinter's point of view must have been partially dream-oriented, and the individuality of this family which he "didn't relate... to any other possible or concrete family" clearly exemplifies this strangeness. If to Pinter the almost pathological obsession for depraved sexuality is "reality", then he is exposing this facet of society in a very cynical way. Flora and Ruth from A Slight Ache and The Homecoming are not governed by social custom or unwritten law, they are motivated by primal need. Ruth readily accepts the position of mother-whore; and Flora quickly identifies her real mate in the animal sensuality of the matchseller. Pinter has his characters act out rituals, mating rituals, in which the female is the goddess. His men tend to be weak representatives of men, whose sexual identity is often in doubt. Teddy and Edward are as much bound by their intellectualism which leads to parched sensuality as Daddy is by his emasculation.

Pinter's concept and use of woman seems to be a combination of Genet's and Duerrenmatt's. At times, the audience is aware of normal conversation in a world which can be explained; and then it is suddenly plunged into the kaleidoscopic dream world where ritual should be consistent, but which in actual fact is topsyturvy.

We can say, then, that there is a curious development in the treatment of women from a position of intellectual dominance to sexual dominance. But what binds the group of plays together is the playwrights' virulent criticism of society or segments of society.

Ruth and Flora in Pinter's plays almost escape analysis when it comes to explaining why they act, and really, the motivation is both highly obscured and of little interest to the writer (except, perhaps the concept of escape from a sterile environment). It is for this reason that why Ruth and Flora do what they do is less important than what they do.

If the motivation becomes less clear and less relevant in the examination of the chronology of these plays, there must be distinct reasons for such a development. It lies in the presentation of each woman. Mrs. Alving, Nora, Candida, and Bernarda are believable people, whose lives could be projected beyond their existence as stage characters. Their actions may have been shocking to audiences contemporary to the playwrights, but nonetheless, the actors portrayed types which existed, and still do. The maids, Mommy, Claire, Ruth and

Flora become psychologically inexplicable. The maids are part of a dream world, a fantasy in which all actions - even though seemingly illogical - are perfectly explicable in terms of the dream. The maids are not conceived of as "real people," and consequently escape motivational analysis. Mommy, Claire Zachanassian, Ruth and Flora also fit into the category of "powerful force," and hence slip away from human analysis and human motivation.

Concomitant with the dissolution of character is the playwright's concept of the woman. In Ibsen's, Shaw's and Lorca's cases, they depict the woman as an individual with carefully defined boundaries. These women are definite figures of the playwright's time. But Genet, Pinter, Duerrenmatt and Albee are not concerned with the woman as an individual, but as a larger concept. In Ibsen's, Shaw's, and Garcia Lorca's plays, the women are persons from a distinct locale, product of their own society, and represent distinct facets of that society. In the other playwrights' cases, the plays could take place almost anywhere, and hence can only be interpreted in larger terms. The maids and Madame could enact their ritual in any part of the western world; Claire Zachannassian's stage does not have to be a little village in Switzerland - it could have been in the southern United States, or in the Cariboo; and Ruth and Flora's actions need not take place in England. This dissolving of national boundaries gives the women in the later plays a significance which transcends localized trends and permits them to assume proportions described not by their indi-

viduality but by the imagination of the playwright.

Candida, Nora, and Bernarda, then, are psychologically explicable women with clearly delineated motives for assuming power, definite means by which they achieve it, and consciously defined effects on the persons and situations around them. Mommy is a representative of a female type who loses her identity as a woman, and becomes a force of destruction. Claire Zachanassian is also a force - of justice out of balance (or of Fate). Duerrenmatt's preoccupation with justice, guilt, and their relation to micro and macro society produced this image which sweeps from one to the other with equal facility. Ruth and Flora are representatives of vital sensuality, yet at the same time are destructive forces. They lure and entrap their victims with no knowledge of why they are doing what they do. Their victims are usually unaware of the danger implicit in the network of power flung out by such women, and even Max in his moment of insight: "She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it!" is reduced to a grovelling, whimpering individual who begs for a kiss in the last line of the play.

The novelty of the women in the earlier plays is their boldness and shocking conduct when they flaunt society and declare an independence and an individuality. They were real people who prodded away at the audience, revealing what they separately knew to be their own secrets. But as a group, the audiences refused to accept such secrets as true as revealed by their roundly criticizing the play.

Garcia Lorca's woman was novel in her symbolic representation of Mother Spain, the traditional stultifying of the life force by entrenched localism.

The maids' novelty lies in their startlingly schizophrenic capacity to oscillate between two worlds, neither of which is completely explicable. Indeed, so adept are they at this dissolution of consciousness that they lose their identity completely as individuals, and only attain a sense of mobility in their corporate identity.

Albee's play is less satisfying than the others simply because it lacks that novelty which characterizes the crests of artistic work. He tries, but he tries too hard. The theatre of the absurd is an excellent vehicle with which to expound on social inconsistencies, but Albee's preoccupation with Freudian psychology, and the startling humour of the Grandmother make his play more ludicrous than shocking. The novelty may lie, then, in the use of a woman as a symbolic representation of a decadent society, the embodiment of the defeminized individual who clatters brashly after the beautiful white golf ball to find that inside it contains only smelling, nasty bits of rubber. But that individual is only concerned with externals, hence the inability to discover the unpleasant interior - an interior which is really a token representation of that person's exterior.

The novelty in Claire Zachanassian is her terrifying and warped

sense of justice. She awakens a sleepy town from its complacency and changes its inhabitants into a mob ready to sacrifice a virtually innocent victim for its own material advancement. Had she merely swept in and wreaked the havoc she did, with the town's folk equally unaware of their own complicity, then the play would have been merely a nihilistic outburst. Instead, Ill, the victim, the person who theoretically should have been crushed by his expulsion from the society which he formerly loved, develops into a character of moral awareness and dignity. Indeed, he recognizes the fragility of the so-called value-conscious veneer so thinly painted over the residents of Guellen. Claire's novelty, then, is in her power as a primitive and destructive goddess of fate who arouses greed in a down-trodden people.

Ruth and Flora are like quick silver, easy to recognize, but difficult to hold down for any period of time. Their novelty implicit in their symbolic role is their wholesale sensual destructiveness which traps persons like flies in a web. This type of woman seeks out her victims, unconsciously, but somehow knowing that they will succumb.

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This analysis has revealed an interesting pattern of development with regard to how each woman arrives at her form of power. Mrs. Alving and Candida achieve and manipulate their power as an intellectual process, combined with strong will. Bernarda Alba derives her power

not cerebrally, but from social tradition; the maids are lifted out of any form of tradition, and are intellectually helpless, their power comes from an involuntary slipping into change of identity, but by using human nature in its basic drives. Claire Zachanassian achieves her power through an intimate knowledge of materialism and greed, combined with a relentless vengeance. Ruth and Flora draw their power from sexual hunger. Thus, there exists an evolution in reverse: intellectualism to atavism.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Michael Meyer. Ibsen, A Biography. Doubleday and Co. Inc., New York, 1971, p. 486.
- ²Henrik Ibsen. Ghosts and Other Plays. Penguin, Middlesex, 1966, p. 10.
This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ³Henrik Ibsen. Three Plays. Dell, New York, 1967, p. 191.
This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ⁴Henry L. Mencken. George Bernard Shaw, His Plays. Edwin V. Glaser, New Rochelle, New York, 1969, p. 53.
- ⁵Bernard Shaw. Plays Pleasant. Penguin, Middlesex, England, 1966, p. 107.
This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ⁶Edwin Honig. Garcia Lorca. New Directions, New York, 1963, p. 219.
- ⁷Frederico Garcia Lorca. Three Tragedies. Colonial Press, Mass., 1959, p. 271. This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ⁸Jean Genet. The Maids. Grove Press Inc. New York, 1958, p. 18. This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ⁹Friedrich Duerrenmatt. The Visit. Grove Press, New York, 1962, p. 11-12. This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ¹⁰Edward Albee. The American Dream. Signet, New York, 1961, p. 54. This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.

- ¹¹Michael E. Rutenberg. Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest. DBS Pub., Inc. New York, 1969, p. 68.
- ¹²Ibid. p. 71.
- ¹³Harold Pinter. The Homecoming. Grove Press Inc., New York, 1966, p. 64. This and all subsequent quotations come from this edition.
- ¹⁴Harold Pinter. Three Plays. Grove Press Inc., New York, 1962, p. 29.
- ¹⁵Bernard Shaw. The Quintessence of Ibsenism. Hill and Wang, New York, 1963, p. 91, quoted in The Daily Telegraph.
- ¹⁶Elsie B. Adams. Bernard Shaw and the Aesthetes. Ohio State U. Press, Columbus, 1971, p. 25, quoting G.B. Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite, London, G. Richards, 1898, pp. 213-16.
- ¹⁷Ibid. p. 27.
- ¹⁸Ibid. p. 25.
- ¹⁹Bernard Shaw. Collected Letters 1874-1897. Ed. Dan H. Laurence, Reinhardt, London, 1965, p. 623.
- ²⁰Ibid. p. 641.
- ²¹Daniel C. Gerould. The Critical Reception of Shaw's Plays in France: 1908 - 1950. Ph.D. Thesis in Comparative Literature, Chicago Ill., Aug. 1959, p. 40. Mr. Gerould states: "Dans la foule des femmes révoltées qui encombrant le drame contemporain, le personnage de Candida se distingue avec bonheur. La littérature féministe n'a rien produit de comparable à cette exquise figure. C'est une revanche tardive, mais éclatante, de l'idéal traditionnel sur l'idéal nouveau, cette victoire de la femme selon Titien sur la virago scandinave, ce triomphe de Candida sur Nora."

²²Murray B. Peppard.

Friedrich Duerrenmatt. Twas 87, Twayne
Pub. Inc., New York, 1969, p. 67.

²³Gilbert Debusscher.

Edward Albee, Tradition and Renewal.
American Studies Centre, Brussels, 1967,
p. 35.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Arlene Sykes.

Harold Pinter. Humanities Press,
New York, 1970, p. 119.

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