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**THE QUINTESSENCE OF IBSENISM AS A BACKGROUND FOR BERNARD SHAW'S PLAYS**

This paper deals with the complex and ambiguous admiration that Bernard Shaw professed for the Scandinavian playwright Henrik Ibsen. And I examine the influence of Ibsen on George Bernard Shaw especially in Drama and the concept of (new drama). Throughout Shaw's professional life as a critic, he devoted a great deal of his writings to analyze and decipher Ibsen's plays for British audiences. The article emphasizes not only the evolution in Shaw's criticism, but also the parallelism of that evolution with the confirmation of Shaw himself as a world renown playwright. In *The Quintessence* Shaw discusses Ibsen's plays superficially, since he himself was in the process of becoming a playwright of the sort of Ibsen. In Our Theatres Shaw orientates his criticism around the plays themselves—he does not need to hide Ibsen's achievements from the British audience any more, as he already claims to master drama creation as much as Ibsen did in his time.

Traditionally, Henrik Ibsen's influence on Bernard Shaw has been framed almost exclusively in what the British critic and playwright discussed in *The Quintessence* *of Ibsenism*. Although this can be taken as partially true, we must add some considerations about Ibsen, and more specifically about Shaw's interpretations of Ibsenism. Therefore, the goal of this essay is going to have a double scope. On the one hand, the analysis of how their contemporaries perceived Shaw's interpretations of Ibsenism will occupy the first stage. On the other one, it is essential to specify and clarify how Shaw developed his interpretation of Ibsenism, expressed not only in the Quintessence, but also in other pieces of criticism, and in most of his plays. In order to determine whether Shaw misunderstood and misinterpreted Ibsen, the author for whom he professed the greatest admiration, it is necessary to examine all his Ibsen criticism. It is true that Shaw was a novelist, journalist, critic, and dramatist; therefore, considering in which of these capacities he wrote about Ibsen is essential. On many occasions, Shaw tried to persuade his readers of what he considered a false and superficial influence of Ibsen on his plays. But he never went as far as when he said:

"What! I a follower of Ibsen! My good sir, as far as England is concerned, Ibsen is a follower of mine!" (Quintessence 25). This remark was made by Shaw in the first edition of the Quintessence, and it is characteristic of his treatment of the subject. Shaw frequently denied that he was influenced by Ibsen. Nevertheless, the similarities are so obvious in some cases that a reconsideration of them is not worth it. The starting point of the essay is based on the assumption that Shaw was in debt with the Scandinavian playwright. It has been widely accepted that Edmund Gosse introduced Ibsen to England, William Archer translated his plays, but it was Shaw who became the authentic exponent of Ibsen's message to the British public. Shaw started writing about Ibsen with the Quintessence of Ibsenism in 1891, and then he enlarged it in 1913. As early as 1890, Shaw made his first public mistake about Ibsen by calling him a "socialist" (Wisenthal 77) in a Fabian exposition. From that moment, some writers and critics (such as Archer, Archibald Henderson, Frank Harris, and Henry Arthur Jones) sprung to defend Ibsen from "Mr. Bernard Shaw's victimization of him" (Franc 34). The Quintessence of Ibsenism, which was Shaw's revision in book form of his original Fabian exposition of Ibsen, became the standard exponent of misguided Ibsen criticism. Even William Archer, one of Shaw's closest friends, warned against such misinterpretations: "A grave injustice has been Ibsen of late by those of his English admirers who have set him up as a social prophet, and sometimes omitted to mention that he was a bit of a poet as well" (Franc 35). Archer's point is crucial in the development of the discussion, but not as much as the commonly asserted affirmation that Shaw, rather than talking about Ibsen, is talking about himself in his criticism. Evidently, all these accusations were refuted by Shaw in two other sets of his critical work (Out Theatres in the Nineties and Prefaces). In The Quintessence Shaw was writing as a socialist novelist and a playwright-to-be. In Our Theatres of the Nineties, from 1895 to 1898, he continued in the form of weekly criticism contributed to the Sunday Review, where Shaw was working as a professional play reviewer and dramatist.

So obviously can be said that the main purpose here for Shaw to write the long critical essay on Henrik Ibsen’s is to achieve to and answer on different question. Criticizing Ibsen drama gave Shaw a free time to analyze Ibsen’s drama deeply and find the weak points in. And this gave him the chance not to repeat the mistakes committed by Ibsen, especially if we know that they shared in one concept of drama the (new drama) and they used this kind of drama for a long time in their works. Although Shaw imitated Ibsen deeply but he refused to confess this in. The concept of new drama was really fastly used by Ibsen in the *A Dolls*’ *house* Ibsen introduced to us a new kind of drama about the revolution of the woman who wanted to get free from the traditions and he presented us a new kind of woman who might get rid of everything for the sake of her freedom. Later came Shaw and also tried to repeat the same way, but by his tools, and he produced *Pygmalion* and there were the same goals that had been used by Ibsen. But here, with Shaw, it was not on by the idea to free the woman but to create a new kind of modern woman to take the woman from the Dark to the light *Liza* was his character.

Before continuing the analysis of Shaw's criticism on Ibsen, let me make and discuss this different dramatic conception of time that Shaw and Ibsen had, which I believe to be essential for the comprehension of both playwrights' works. Shaw observed in 1893 that there was no trace in *Widowers' Houses* of Ibsen's peculiar retrospective method. By this technique, Ibsen's plays were made to turn on events supposed to have happened before the rise of the curtain. This lack applies to most of Shaw's plays, though, of course, some references to the past can be found in *Mrs. Warren's Profession, Misalliance* or *Heartbreak House.* But in these examples, the past has little or no pressure on the present. For instance, Mrs. Warren's revelations about her past do not prevent Vivie from liberting herself from it. Also, in *Heartbreak House* Boss Mangan's confession about his exploitation of Mazzini Dunn, a past event which would have produced a chain of tragic results in an Ibsen’s play has no effect whatsoever on the present in Shaw's works.

In *The Quintessence* Shaw talks about Ibsen's characters as living human beings. As Shaw was a realist, he actually believed in Shakespeare when he said that the Literature is the life and the people are its characters.

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