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# DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

28

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# DRAMA

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Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied  
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 28

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# DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

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# Preface

*Drama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

*DC* was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Thomson Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Thomson Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Thomson Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

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By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Thomson Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

## Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

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# *The Cocktail Party*

T. S. Eliot

The following entry presents criticism of Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party* (1949).

## INTRODUCTION

Eliot's drawing-room comedy *The Cocktail Party*, which centers around the troubled relationship between a married couple, was the poet-playwright's greatest popular success. The satirical verse drama skewers modern mores and scrutinizes human relations. It opened at the prestigious Edinburgh Festival in 1949, with Alec Guinness in the role of Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, and the New York production won the New York Drama Critics' Award for 1950. While modern in its tone and themes, the play is based partly on the ancient Greek play *Alcestris*, by Euripides. The plot involves Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne, who are separated after five years of marriage. The first and last acts of the play feature cocktail parties held at their home, where their marital problems are heightened because the couple must keep up appearances for their friends. Like many of Eliot's works, the play uses extreme situations and characters to point to the isolation of the human condition. When the play first appeared, it garnered mixed reviews, with some critics praising its combination of realism and supernatural elements and others faulting its use of free verse and mixing of comedy with earnest philosophizing. Since the 1950s its popularity with directors and theatergoers has declined, perhaps because the play's satire of the polite British comedy has become dated, making it less accessible to modern audiences. However, the philosophical implications of *The Cocktail Party* regarding the nature of human relations make it a continuing favorite of critics, who have discussed its moral message, its religious and supernatural dimensions, its treatment of language and meaning, and its conservative view of gender roles.

## PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The first of the three acts of *The Cocktail Party* opens with a cocktail party at the London flat of the Chamberlaynes. The atmosphere is strained because Lavinia, the hostess, is not there. Edward, her husband, fabricates an excuse about a sick aunt to explain her absence. The

partygoers banter and tell stories. They all seem to know each other well, save one "Unidentified Guest." Eventually most of the guests leave; only the stranger remains. He drinks gin with Edward for a while, and Edward confides in him that Lavinia is not really at her aunt's, but has left him. The stranger says this might be a blessing, but Edward is uneasy, without clearly knowing why he wants her back. The stranger promises that Lavinia will return within twenty-four hours if Edward asks for no explanations. But he warns him that they both might be greatly changed. The stranger, drunk, breaks into song as he leaves the apartment. Two guests, Julia Shuttlethwait and Peter Quilpe, return to retrieve Julia's glasses, which turn out to have been in her purse all along. Julia leaves and Peter remains. He confides to Edward that he has fallen in love with their mutual friend Celia Coplestone, and asks if Edward might intercede for him. Another guest, the outgoing world traveler Alex MacColgie Gibbs, returns, and Edward is irritated. He tells Peter and Alex to lock the door when they leave.

Edward settles down for the evening to play solitaire. The doorbell rings and Celia enters. It becomes clear that the two are lovers. Celia recognizes that Lavinia has left Edward and thinks it would be a good time for Edward to seek a divorce and be free to marry her instead. Edward tells her that the stranger at the party has promised to bring Lavinia back, and that he thinks he wants her back, although he does not know why. While Celia is in the kitchen, Julia shows up again, and asks Edward to dinner. When Julia is out of earshot, Edward tells Celia the relationship is over, and she says she realizes it is not what she wants either.

The following day the Unidentified Guest returns to Edward's house and asks if he still wants his wife to return. He warns again that if he does, he will set in motion forces beyond his control. When Lavinia returns, he explains, they will be strangers to one another. But since Edward has made his choice, he must abide by it. The stranger leaves by the back stairs, and Celia, Peter, Alex, and Julia arrive separately. Celia says she is there at Julia's request, apparently in response to a telegram from Lavinia. Celia studies Edward carefully and realizes he is a rather comic middle-aged man, and she laughs at her previous infatuation. Peter arrives in response to an invitation from Alex, who has also

received a telegram from Lavinia. He announces he is leaving for Hollywood. Lavinia then arrives. She is surprised to find Peter and Celia and says she knows nothing of any telegrams sent to Alex and Julia. The guests leave, and Edward reproaches Lavinia for being overbearing. She criticizes him for being indecisive. Edward regrets his decision to have his wife come back and thinks he might be having a nervous breakdown.

Act II opens in the office of the psychiatrist Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. He is the Unidentified Guest of the Chamberlaynes' cocktail party. Alex enters and tells Harcourt-Reilly that he has arranged for Edward's visit. Edward enters, and he is surprised to see that Sir Henry is his mysterious stranger. Edward explains during the session that he had wanted Lavinia back because she had dominated him for so long that he felt incapable of living without her. Sir Henry then brings in Lavinia, who reveals that she has been Sir Henry's patient and that she left because of Edward's affair with Celia. Edward is taken aback that she knew of the affair, and feels relieved when she confesses her own attraction to Peter. Sir Henry diagnoses their problem as mutual fear: Edward is afraid he cannot love anyone, and Lavinia is afraid she is unlovable. He tells them they have all they need for a successful marriage: mutual fear, hatred of each other, and an abiding mediocrity. They leave, feeling somewhat reconciled. Julia then arrives and asks Sir Henry how successful her scheme has been; she, with the help of Alex, had induced Sir Henry to step in. Julia, Alex, and Sir Henry have all thus been the "guardians" of Edward and Lavinia, conspiring to fix their marriage. Celia then comes in for a consultation. She tells Sir Henry she experiences solitude, guilt, and sin. Sir Henry declares her to be an outstanding person, whom destiny is calling. He tells her that she can either accept life as it is and ignore its extremes, or she can make her life a journey into an unidentified place. She chooses the latter.

The final act of the play takes place two years later, as the Chamberlaynes are preparing to throw another cocktail party. They have settled into a mediocre existence and are shown concerning themselves with domestic matters and worrying about the appearance of the flat. Julia arrives early, followed by Alex, who has been in an exotic island country called Kinkanja. Sir Henry enters, and then Peter arrives from Hollywood, where he has a career as a screenwriter. He is in London to ask Celia to do a screen test for his next movie. Alex breaks the news that Celia is dead. She was working as a nurse in Kinkanja when a plague broke out. She stayed with the infected inhabitants during a rebellion against their oppressors, only to be crucified and cannibalized by them. Harcourt-Reilly does not seem at all shocked at Celia's violent death, saying that she was destined to

be a martyr, and he recites a poem about life and death. Their friends leave one by one, and Edward and Lavinia resume preparations for their cocktail party.

## MAJOR THEMES

*The Cocktail Party* has been called a comedy of manners, a morality play, and a drama of salvation. On the one hand it reads and plays as a light satire, resembling the witty, urbane comedies of Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward. On the other, the dialogue and action explore questions of morality and psychology, of mundane existence and life's "destiny," and contains numerous gestures to the supernatural and to God. With this play Eliot was in fact parodying the popular drawing-room comedies of writers such as Coward, whose lighthearted plays centering on sex feature upper-class men and women exchanging witticisms about frivolous matters. Eliot added an undercurrent of social criticism and spiritual questioning to the popular drawing-room comedy, offering a dark philosophical commentary on human alienation and isolation.

The play opens and closes with cocktail parties, celebrations among friends who, as it turns out, know less about each other than they think. The cocktail party is an artificial gathering where people banter about inconsequential matters, try to impress each other, and concern themselves with superficialities and appearances. Edward deceives his friends about the whereabouts of his wife, opening up only to the mysterious stranger after they leave. He is closed off to his friends and isolated psychologically. He is isolated as well from his wife, to whom he has become accustomed but does not really know. And, most importantly, he is isolated from himself. As he says to Sir Henry when he visits the psychiatrist's office, "I have ceased to believe in my own personality." He is told by the doctor that it is a common malady. The other characters in *The Cocktail Party* are similarly alone, although they do not recognize it. Alex seeks adventure, Peter seeks success, and Julia and Lavinia seek love, but none understands that he or she is essentially alone. When Celia tells Sir Henry that she recognizes her solitude, sin, and guilt, he finds her to be remarkable for that self-awareness. She is not mediocre like the others because she recognizes the terrible isolation of being human, and instead of living a life of complacency chooses to journey into the unknown. Celia's journey is her salvation, but the other characters in the play seem not to be capable of saving themselves, because they continue until the end to be unaware of what it means to be human and to work out their salvation for themselves.

*The Cocktail Party* uses humor and farce to explore as well questions about love. Love is satirized in the play, as connections cannot be made and characters base their

decisions on emotions they later recognize to be not love but something else entirely. Peter loves Celia but does not approach her, asking his friend to do it for him instead, not knowing of course that his friend is her lover. Celia believes she is in love with Edward, only to see him with new eyes and find him to be an unimaginative and mediocre man with whom she was only briefly infatuated. Edward thinks he loves Lavinia and wants her back, but when she returns it becomes clear he finds her intolerable. As Sir Henry tells Edward, he is in fact incapable of love, but he adds that this is not a necessary ingredient for a "successful" relationship.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Eliot is best known today as a poet, even though he also produced a large volume of literary criticism and seven plays. His 1935 drama *Murder in the Cathedral*, about the 1170 murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury, is his best-known and most often performed work for the stage. During his lifetime, however, Eliot achieved his greatest popular success with *The Cocktail Party*. After the play opened at the Edinburgh Festival it began its run on Broadway in January 1950, continuing for over four hundred performances. Both the early London and New York productions earned mixed reviews, but it was quickly seen to be a work of immense power and a play that tackled serious issues of contemporary life. It baffled some audiences and critics, mainly because of its combination of humorous frivolity and earnest philosophizing. Audiences were taken aback as well by the use of Alex and Julia as the "guardians" who act as agents of Divine Providence for Edward and Lavinia, and were shocked by the distasteful description of Celia's gruesome death as a missionary. Some theatergoers complained too about Eliot's use of verse, although other critics defended the language used as being perfectly suited to the play as a type of idealized conversational speech.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the play was produced by companies large and small in Britain and the United States, but after the mid-1970s it was staged less and less, as audiences found the satire of the polite British comedy dated. However, critics' interest in the play has never waned, and scholars have paid considerable attention to the drama, in part because of its clear enunciation of various philosophical ideas explored in Eliot's other works. Scholars have discussed the play's religious message of spiritual death, renewal and rebirth, seen clearly in the character of Celia; its use of classical ideas and forms, including its use of Euripides' *Alcestis* as a source; its exploration of the supernatural; its view of gender roles and the relation between men and women; its depiction of human alienation; and its rumination on the isolating power of language, which fails to communicate to others one's private reality.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

### Plays

*Sweeney Agonistes: Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama* 1932  
*The Rock: A Pageant Play* 1934  
*Murder in the Cathedral* 1935  
*The Family Reunion* 1939  
*The Cocktail Party* 1949  
*The Confidential Clerk* 1953  
*The Elder Statesman* 1958  
*Collected Plays* 1962

### Other Major Works

*Prufrock, and Other Observations* (poetry) 1917  
*Poems* (poetry) 1919  
*Aras Vos Prec* (poetry) 1920; revised as *Poems*, 1920  
*The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (essays) 1920  
*The Waste Land* (poetry) 1922  
*Homage to John Dryden: Essays on Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (essays) 1924  
*Journey of the Magi* (poetry) 1927  
*A Song for Simeon* (poetry) 1928  
*Animula* (poetry) 1929  
*Ash-Wednesday* (poetry) 1930  
*Marina* (poetry) 1930  
*Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (essays) 1932  
*Collected Poems, 1909-1935* (poetry) 1936  
*Essays Ancient and Modern* (essays) 1936  
*East Coker* (poetry) 1940  
*The Dry Salvages* (poetry) 1941  
*Four Quartets* (poetry) 1943  
*Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (nonfiction) 1948  
*The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (poetry and plays) 1950  
*Selected Prose* (essays and criticism) 1953  
*On Poetry and Poets* (criticism) 1957  
*Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (poetry) 1963  
*To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* (criticism) 1965  
*The Complete Poems and Plays* (poetry and plays) 1969

## AUTHOR COMMENTARY

### T. S. Eliot (lecture date 1950)

SOURCE: Eliot, T. S. "The Cocktail Party." In *Playwrights on Playwriting*, edited by Toby Cole, pp. 257-60. New York: Hill and Wang, 1960.

[In the following excerpt of a lecture delivered in 1950, Eliot reflects on what he has learned about writing

plays while composing *The Cocktail Party*, and he talks about what he thinks is the ideal toward which poetic drama should strive.]

Well, I had made some progress in learning how to write the first act of a play, and I had—the one thing of which I felt sure—made a good deal of progress in finding a form of versification and an idiom which would serve all my purposes, without recourse to prose, and be capable of unbroken transition between the most intense speech and the most relaxed dialogue. You will understand, after my making these criticisms of *The Family Reunion*, some of the errors that I endeavored to avoid in designing *The Cocktail Party*. To begin with, no chorus, and no ghosts. I was still inclined to go to a Greek dramatist for my theme, but I was determined to take this merely as a point of departure, and to conceal the origins so well that nobody would identify them until I pointed them out myself. In this at least I have been successful; for no one of my acquaintance (and no dramatic critics) recognized the source of my story in the *Alcestis* of Euripides. In fact, I have had to go into detailed explanation to convince them—I mean, of course, those who were familiar with the plot of that play—of the genuineness of the inspiration. But those who were at first disturbed by the eccentric behavior of my unknown guest, and his apparently intemperate habits and tendency to burst into song, have found some consolation after I have called their attention to the behavior of Heracles in Euripides' play. In the second place, I laid down for myself the ascetic rule to avoid poetry which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility: with such success, indeed, that it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all. And finally, I tried to keep in mind that in a play, from time to time, something should happen; that the audience should be kept in constant expectation that something is going to happen; and that, when it does happen, it should be different, but not too different, from what the audience has been led to expect.

I have not yet got to the end of my investigation of the weaknesses of this play, but I hope and expect to find more than those of which I am yet aware. I say "hope" because while one can never repeat a success, and therefore must always try to find something different, even if less popular, to do, the desire to write something which will be free of the defects of one's last work is a very powerful and useful incentive. I am aware that the last act of my play only just escapes, if indeed it does escape, the accusation of being not a last act but an epilogue; and I am determined to do something different, if I can, in this respect. I also believe that while the self-education of a poet trying to write for the theatre seems to require a long period of disciplining his poetry, and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of the drama, there may be a later stage, when (and if) the understanding of theatrical

technique has become second nature, at which he can dare to make more liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties with ordinary colloquial speech. I base that belief on the evolution of Shakespeare, and on some study of the language in his late plays. But to give reason for this belief involves an examination and defense of Shakespeare's late plays as plays; and this obviously is the subject for a separate essay.

In devoting so much time to an examination of my own plays, I have, I believe, been animated by a better motive than egotism. It seems to me that if we are to have a poetic drama, it is more likely to come from poets learning how to write plays, than from skillful prose dramatists learning to write poetry. That some poets can learn how to write plays, and write good ones, may be only a hope, but I believe a not unreasonable hope; but that a man who has started by writing successful prose plays should then learn how to write good poetry seems to me extremely unlikely. And, under present-day conditions, and until the verse play is recognized by the larger public as a possible source of entertainment, the poet is likely to get his first opportunity to work for the stage only after making some sort of reputation for himself as the author of other kinds of verse. I have therefore wished to put on record, for what it may be worth to others, some account of the difficulties I have encountered, and the weaknesses I have had to try to overcome, and the mistakes into which I have fallen.

I should not like to close, however, without attempting to set before myself, and, if I can, before you, though only in dim outline, the ideal toward which it seems to me that poetic drama should strive. It is an unattainable ideal: and that is why it interests me, for it provides an incentive toward further experiment and exploration, beyond any goal which there is prospect of attaining. It is a function of all art to give us some perception of an order in life, by imposing an order upon it. The painter works by selection, combination, and emphasis among the elements of the visible world; the musicians, in the world of sound. It seems to me that beyond the namable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed toward action—the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express—there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action. There are great prose dramatists—such as Ibsen and Chekhov—who have at times done things of which I would not otherwise have supposed prose to be capable, but who seem to me, in spite of their success, to have been hampered in expression by writing in prose. This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity. At such moments, we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express. We can never emulate



music, because to arrive at the condition of music would be the annihilation of poetry, and especially of dramatic poetry. Nevertheless, I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order. It seems to me that Shakespeare achieved this at least in certain scenes—even rather early, for there is the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*—and that this was what he was striving toward in his late plays. To go as far in this direction as it is possible to go, without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms, seems to me the proper aim of dramatic poetry. For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no further.

## PRODUCTION REVIEWS

**Desmond Shawe-Taylor (review date 3 September 1949)**

SOURCE: Shawe-Taylor, Desmond. Review of *The Cocktail Party* by T. S. Eliot. In *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, Volume 2, edited by Michael Grant, pp. 594-96. Boston: Routledge, 1982.

[In the following review, originally published in the *New Statesman* in 1949, Shawe-Taylor calls *The Cocktail Party* “a tract for the times” and a “fascinating play.”]

A masked ball and a cocktail party, with Verdi and Mr. Eliot, respectively, as our hosts: these have been the outstanding diversions of the first week at Edinburgh. They were not so dissimilar as you might suppose: one culminated in murder, the other in martyrdom, and both contrived to introduce a good deal of light relief along the tragic path.

*The Cocktail Party*, unlike Mr. Eliot's two earlier plays, is on the surface a specimen of contemporary dramatic style, as it is understood in Shaftesbury Avenue. The curtain rises on the usual stylish flat, with a white telephone, a Marie Laurencin, and a group of rather exasperated people determined to make the party go. The host, we begin to perceive, is also anxious to make the party go—in another sense; but when at last they depart, he persuades one of them to stay, a stranger to

whom he can blurt out the embarrassing truth which he has tried to conceal from the rest: his wife has left him, and the guests we have seen are merely those who couldn't be reached and put off. A first-rate situation, and what follows is better still. The hitherto obscure and taciturn guest comes to life with a bang, takes command of the situation, and pours out a stream of sardonic and paradoxical home-truths to the egotistical husband; finally, like Mr. Bridie's lady, he bursts into song. The spirit of early Shaw hovers deliciously in the air; the wit sparkles and we begin to feel pleasantly sure that everything will be turned inside out and upside down in the second act.

So it is. The obscure guest is revealed as the eminent Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, of Harley Street; the two most tiresome of the guests turn out to be his assistants, almost his spies. The party-givers (the husband who is incapable of loving, and the wife who can never inspire love) are shown the truth about themselves, and persuaded to make the best of it. Making the best of it, says Sir Henry (and here for the first time we detect the accents of the lay preacher), making the best of a bad job is what we all have to do—all except the very few who are potential saints. One of these also comes to his consulting room: a girl who has just seen the bottom fall out of her ideal of romantic love. It is she who chooses the *via crucis* which leads from Sir Henry's mysterious ‘sanatorium’ to literal crucifixion, accompanied by revolting details, at the hands of fanatical natives. When the news reaches another cocktail party, two years after the first, everyone shudders, except Sir Henry, who smiles his inscrutable smile. It was an issue which he had more or less foreseen.

No less inscrutable must be the author's smile. He has written a dazzling light comedy which is also a tract for the times; and the audience, who lap up the surface cream, don't know what to make of the depths, while suspecting that they must be more interesting than milk. Will the author help them? Only, a very, very little. When Sir Henry, accustomed to pronounce a priest-like benediction on his departing patients, remarks, ‘I do not understand what I myself am saying,’ a slight ripple of mirth went round the audience. Pressed by one of the characters for an explanation of his philosophy, he quotes Shelley:

Ere Babylon was dust,  
The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,  
Met his own image walking in the garden,  
That apparition, sole of men, he saw.

In short, know yourself; choose; come to terms with your insignificance, or—if you happen to be one of the saintly few—face the full consequences of your choice.

If the moral, as I attempt to put it, sounds rather thin and milky, it is doubtless my fault—one which deeper acquaintance with this fascinating play might mend.