

WITTY AMERICAN COMEDY ON MARRIAGE IN SHAW'S MANNER

But Jesse Lynch Williams Wrote "Why Marry?" Before "Getting Married" by Shaw Ever Was Acted Here or on the London Stage

By JESSE LYNCH WILLIAMS.

TWO snowballs start rolling down a mountain side. One strikes a snag and stops; the other happens to miss it by a few inches, rolls on, gathers more snow and momentum, and finally results in an avalanche.

"That is often the way with plays. The one may possess no more inherent merit than the other, but it happened to get by. Accordingly it is hailed as a good play and the other is forgotten."

That it was in respect to the difference between writing fiction and writing plays that I was asked to give my views. I should say that writing and play writing are about as much alike as are drawing pictures and designing houses. Both are done with pens or pencils.

In fiction one works alone. It is a one man job from conception to execution. The manuscript of a novel is practically the finished product as it comes to the consumer except that it is in typewriting instead of type. But the manuscript of a play is not a play. No more than an architect's blue print is a house for a family to live in.

It is all there potentially, or ought to be, just as the completed house is visualized by the architectural imagination, from waterlight garret to ratproof cellar, with the effect of shadows under the eaves, vines on the walls and the tone of time over all. The playwright can see in his mind's eye every syllable, feel the effect of every little pause and snigger far more charmingly in his mind, by the way, than he will ever realize in actuality. He can even hear a "storm" of applause.

But to achieve these concrete results in actuality the architect and the playwright have to take into account not only their own more or less unimpaired imaginations, like the artist and the novelist, but also, unlike the latter, who stands tall by the tower of his own unimpaired and untroubled imagination, take into account, whether it suits their artistic consciences or not, the mass or less human limitations of a number of other human beings, and the depravity of mankind's objects, bricks, mortar, prejudices, parsimony, recklessness, rooks, trades, unions, mortar mixers, managers, time tables, painters (scene and house), actresses, ambitions, solvency, stupidity, etc.

Here is where the trouble and the fun and the difference come in. A playwright has to work with and through other human beings.

Plays are not written to be read. If they were they would be written differently. They are written to be played, quite as much as music is written to be played. If you can really "get more out of a play by reading it" than by seeing it played, then it must be one of a bad play or bad players. In one of the late "Clyde" Fitch's comedies there was a nursery scene. The children are at supper. Their grandmother comes in. She is unpopular there, and the audience soon perceived it by their manner. Presently the grandmother recites charming randomisms of rhyming, shouting in their treble voices and beating upon the china with their knives and forks. It was very interesting and effective. The script reads something like this:

Exit Grandmother.

First Grandchild—(Grandmother's gone. (Sings out to be with kind.)

Second Grandchild—(Grandmother's gone. (Same business.)

Third Grandchild—(Grandmother's gone. (Same business.)

So some of the literary critics when this play of Fitch's was published said the dialogue was deadly. It was not deadly. It was delightful. But it was not written to be read.

That is one reason why it is so difficult even for managers with imagination to judge a play in manuscript. In the case of "Why Marry?" it was not surprising that so many managers declined it—with thanks (or without). It was a daring departure for the days when it was first published, namely three or four years ago. It was considered radical then. It will soon be old fashioned now. We are moving so fast in our social ideas.

And I had never written but one play before, a newspaper play called "The Stolen Story," which, it might be said, had been performed in Times Square in New York, so far as it was known at all, as "another Garden Theatre failure." It had lived only a fortnight in New York.

"Why Marry?" would never have been produced at all if it had not been my good old friend Ben Cooper Meigs who, in fact, it might never have been written, except for him; at least not as a play. I wanted to write it as a story, having sworn off the idea of playwrighting for fear of its becoming a fixed habit. But he would not let me. As I always do as he says, I sally went home and did as he said. I did it in three days and three acts, instead of three magazine installments in three months. And he, feeling responsible, did his best to get me a production. Even he might have failed if it had not been for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Mr. Sargent and Mr. Deostal were kind enough a year ago to select this play for one of the public performances annually given by the graduating class of their students. It was most intelligently staged by Mr. Charles Jellinger, and so skillfully acted by Miss Anne Morrison, Mr. Bryant and the rest of the clever young cast that even before the performance was over several representatives of managerial houses saw what Meigs had seen all along, namely that it was actually actable.

The Selwyns not only saw it but were generously willing to give it a production, the most lavish production and a cast to delight the eyes, the ear and the mind of even the most meticulous and experienced playwright. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the debt of gratitude to all these named and referred to.

Theodore—But, Uncle Everett, hasn't Aunt Julia always been a good wife to you?

Judge—Quite so. Theodore quite so, a good wife.

Lucy—And a devoted mother to your children.

Judge (nodding)—Devoted, Lucy, devoted. John—Hasn't she always obeyed you, Uncle Everett?

Judge—Yes, John, a true old-fashioned woman.

Theodore—She has been a great help in the parish work, Uncle Everett.

Judge—An earnest worker in the vineyard, Theodore. In fact I might say a model female.

All Three—Then why, why do you want a divorce?

Judge—(Alms)—Because, damn it, I don't like her.

Lucy—But think of poor Aunt Julia!

Judge—But, damn it, she doesn't like me.

Theodore (wringing head sadly)—Ah, yes, fault on both sides.

Judge—No fault on either side—both patterns of Christian fortitude to the point—we still are. Just listen to the telegram.

Reaches in pocket, brings out telegram and reads.

Lucy (quizzed)—From Aunt Julia?

Judge—(Unfolding telegram)—Yes, from Aunt Julia in Reno. Not used to travelling without me; knew I'd worry (puts on glasses). A night letter. Your Aunt Julia was always a fine wife, John—except, with words. She never could keep within ten words. (Reads.) "Arrived safely. Charming rooms with plenty of a good sunlight. Our case docketed for March 15. Wish you were here to see the women in Divorce Row overdressed and underdressed. (Looks up.) Rather neat, eh? (Overdressed and underdressed.) (Resumes reading.)

eyes. Theodore (nods). So has your Aunt Julia!

Theodore (terribly shocked)—No! No!

Lucy—Not Aunt Julia!

Judge—Yes! I solemnly promised to love each other until death did us part. I don't love her, she doesn't love me—not in the least.

John—Bah! A man of your age and common sense, a distinguished member of the bar, to break up his home for that? Ha!

Judge—Right again, John. That is not why I'm breaking up my home. I prefer my club. What does the modern home amount to? Merely a place to leave your wife.

Lucy (optimistic)—Oh, of course, it doesn't matter about the wife left at home.

Judge—Ah, but it does matter; that's why I stayed at home and was bored to death with her prattle about clothes and the opera, intellectual equals, picking up business there, getting after the you, John, surprise her with more clothes and a whole box at the opera. Like yours, Lucy.

Lucy—(Gleefully)—What's a glance at her husband—Oh, that's the way you men always talk. It never occurs to you that behind your business, business is just as much of a bore to us!

Judge—(Proudly)—Ah, but it did occur to me—staring the divorce! She couldn't stand seeing me bored. I couldn't stand seeing her bored. We used to be able to deceive each other, but now—we are too well acquainted—our happy home? A hollow mockery!



SHELLEY HULL, ESTELLE WINWOOD and NAT GOODWIN.

Ernest (recalls suddenly)—What's that?

Helen (misunderstands)—Why, Dr. Metchnikoff—he's promised me he'd invite you.

Ernest—Yes, but—

Helen—Don't miss the chance of a lifetime.

Ernest—But you—you can't come!

Helen—If you need me, I can. And you just said—

Ernest—But you mustn't come to Paris with me.

Helen—Don't you want me with you?

Ernest—I thought you would like to stay at home and run the department for me.

Helen—(Stepping back, horribly hurt)—Don't you want me?

Ernest—(Stepping forward with heart in voice)—Do I want you? But (stops). I am a man—you are a woman.

Helen—What of it? (Suspiciously.) Are you one of those small men who care what people say? No! That's not your reason? What is it? Tell me.

Ernest—(Hesitates)—It's only for your sake.

Helen—(Thinking and hesitating, with growing anxiety)—Think of all I've done for your sake. You wouldn't be going yourself for me? I was the one to see you needed it. I proposed it to Metchnikoff—I urged him—made him ask you—for your sake. And now you are to be left at home like a child? Because you don't care to be embarrassed with me?

Ernest—Oh, please! This is so unfair. But I simply can't take you now.

Helen—(Interrupting more scornously)—Oh! You are all office. You pale upon me until I nearly drop you plus upon my trousers, my sympathy, my condition. You see, I

face in her hands). Oh, do you know how I love you? No!—you're only—

Ernest—(Kisses her). Every day there in the laboratory, when you're in your apron—the apron I stole from your locker after you left—when you asked me for orders did you never guess that I wanted to say "Love me"? Every day when you told me your work did you never feel that I wanted to take you up in my arms?

Helen—(eyes down, nods). Why didn't you?

Ernest—Thank God, I didn't. The while we worked, those together I came to know and value you as few men can ever know and value the women they merely desire and marry and own.

Helen—Marry? Ernest? What have we done? (Wrenches herself away, grasps her cheeks). This is all moonlight and madness. (A knock comes from a side door. Tomorrow comes a clear light of day. (The music has stopped.)

Ernest (choking out his name)—A, but well wait each other tomorrow—and always!

Helen—(continuously)—But we can't marry, then or ever.

Ernest—(Don't marry. Why can't we marry?)

Helen—I have stayed for you all these months, not to win you from your work, but to help you in it.

Ernest—(interrupting)—I love you. You love me. Nothing else matters.

Helen—(Everything else matters. I haven't played with you. I've worked with you, and I know.)

Ernest—(My dear, my dear!)

Helen—(My dear, my dear!)

Ernest—(With a snap of his fingers. Then that for my dear, my dear, my dear. You have been in my arms, my dear, and I can never forget it.)



LEFT TO RIGHT: EDUM ROBB, EDWARD BREESE and HAROLD WEST.

John—You ought to be ashamed! Every man should love his home.

Judge—Quite right, John; every man should love his wife too. But a promise can't make you love—it only makes you lie. (A thoughtful silence.)

Theodore—I love my home.

John—So do I. (He glances sternly at Lucy.)

Lucy—(Nervously)—So do I!

Judge—All right, stick to it, if you love it! Only don't claim credit for doing what you enjoy. Now, I detest my other man, what's it all about?

John—(Falls up indignantly)—I detest it all the same for a quarter of a century, and at last I'm free to tell you the truth about it! Just think of it, Lucy, free to utter those things about marriage we all know but don't dare to say! Free to be honest, John! So, enter a high price, Theodore, a soul set free—two souls in fact—Two souls with but a single thought—

Theodore (raises hand with authority of the Church)—Stop! You have children to consider! Not merely your own selfish happiness!

Lucy—Yes, think of Tom and little Julia!

Judge—(Was still receding in undertone during the above, now stops)—We did—we did—for a quarter of a century, sacrifice everything to them—even the truth, even our self-respect, but now we are childless now. (Resumes reciting to self.) Two partners without a single child!

Lucy—Without a single child?

Judge—(Nodding)—Both married, both left us for "little homes" of their own to love. (In undertone.) Two hearts that beat as one.

Theodore—Ah, but don't you want them to have the dear old home to come back to?

Judge—No place like home? For children, you're right—can't have too much of it. Most children only too much of it home. Ours will have two dear old homes.

Theodore—(Seriously)—Uncle Everett! Whom God hath joined together?

Judge—(Seeing through her bluff)—I see, Lucy, I see, but your Aunt Julia and I were joined together by a pink parasol made in Paris.

Lucy—A pink parasol?

John—(Exasperated)—Oh, stop your fooling and speak the truth, man!

Judge—The truth? Just what I'm doing, John, but nobody wants or expects the truth about marriage; that's why you think I'm fooling. A very pretty parasol—but it wasn't made in heaven, Lucy, you see, God made your dear Julia pale, but on that fatal day twenty-five years ago the pink parasol, not God, made her rosy and irresistible. I did the rest—the evil of a clergyman, whom I tipped even more liberally than the waiter who served us that fruit. Blame me for it, blame her—the parasol—the person—but do not, my dear Theodore,

blame the devil for our own mistakes. It's so blasphemous.

Theodore—See here, John, if that's why you asked me here Ernest Hamilton is the finest fellow in the world and if you expect me, why did you ask me, anyway?

Judge—(Lighting cigar)—Far as I can make out, we're here to help one of the girls marry a man she doesn't love and prevent the other from marrying the man she does.

John—But he gets just two thousand dollars a year. Lucy, send for Helen. This is a practical world, Theodore.

(Exit Lucy.)

Judge—Well, you're one of the trustees of the Baker Institute. Why not give the young man a raise?

John—(Takes out a small box, hands in pocket, fingering coins)—Oh, that's not a bad salary for a scientist, college professors and that sort of thing. Why, even Dr. Carmen, the head of the institute, gets less than the superintendent of my mill. (To Theodore)—No future in science. Got to look at these things practically, Theodore.

Judge—Yes, look at it practically, Theodore. The superintendent of John's mill gives the company thousands of dollars. This bacteriologist merely saves the nation thousands of babies. All our laws, written and unwritten, value private property above human life—I'm a distinguished jurist and I always render my decisions accordingly. I'd be reversed by United States Supreme Court if I didn't! We're all rewarded in inverse ratio to our usefulness to society, Theodore. That's what business men call "practical."

John—(Goodnaturedly)—You muck-raker!

Judge—(Crosses to John, who assumes boredom)—I've all eyes sliding scales. John, for keeping up the cost of living and old man Baker get (stretches arms out full length). My wife give you away, John. For saving the constitution I get, well, I get a good deal myself. (Hands three feet apart.) For saving in wages and operating expenses your superintendent gets so much (hands two feet apart). For saving human life Ernest Hamilton (hands six inches apart). For saving immortal souls, Theodore (holds up two forefingers an inch apart). Now, if any one came along and saved the world—

Theodore—(Interrupting)—They crucified him.

Helen—You oughtn't to have dropped the Palm experiments.

Ernest—You oughtn't to have dropped me—right in the midst of the

experiments. These other plates you were incubating all dried up and spoiled. You played the very devil with my data.

Judge—(Recoils, perplexity during above)—God bless my soul, what are you coming to?

Helen—It's perfectly proper for your little ears, uncle, and you can't understand a word of it. Would any one play billiards with you?

Judge—But I'm fascinated. It's so hygienic. Makes me feel young again. (Xes away, but stops.)

Helen—(To Ernest)—Oh, you have plenty of men assistants who can estimate antitoxin units.

Judge—Estimate what?

Ernest—(Shakes head)—Helen! Men assistants have interest. They are all so confoundingly ambitious to do original work. Why is it women can stand monotonous details better than men? (The fumes of the specios is more faithful than the male.)

Helen—(Because men have always made them tend the home?)

Judge—(Comedy gesture)—Ah, nothing like a good old fashioned love scene—in the scientific spirit.

Helen—(To Judge)—Uncle dear! Can't you see that he is paying me wonderful compliments? Haven't you any tact? Go and play (handful in the library).

Judge—(Lighting cigar and comes)—Very well, I'll leave you to your own devices—and don't forget the scientific spirit. (He keeps lingering and looking back.)

Helen—(With admiration and camaraderie—she thinks they are alone at last)—Now I must tell you what Metchnikoff said about you and your great theory. He said that if you will only let nothing interfere with your career—absolutely nothing—(she stops, looks at him in silence for a second, can't stand it, averts her gaze and sees the Judge, loud and bristly.) He advises you to confine your original research with the ultra microscope to bacteriologic differentials and variations in the Mendelian theory.

Judge—(Help! Help! (Rounding off—turns at exit.) God your God, have mercy on your scientific souls. (Exit Judge.)

Helen—I told you I could get rid of them!

Ernest—(Different note, now they are alone)—I wonder why they all take for granted that I want to make love to you?

Helen—(Avoids his eye)—Well, you took for granted that I wanted you to. You are about the most conceited man I ever knew, and that's saying a good deal.

Ernest—How can I help it when you admire me so?

Helen—(Aroused)—I admire you? Ernest—You're always telling me what great things I'm going to do;

stimulating me, pushing me along. Why, if it hadn't been for you, the so-called "Hamilton Antitoxin" would never have been discovered. And after you left, everything went blank! Why, you have a mind like a man! (Claps hand to mouth humorously.)

Helen—(Like a man? If you had a mind like a woman you'd know "letter" than I do to that!)

Ernest—(Laughs)—then straight)—Tell me, why did you leave? Was I rude to you? Did I hurt your feelings?

Helen—Not in the least. It was entirely out of respect for your feelings.

Ernest—My feelings? Burst out laughing—stops—(Laughs again, looks up, I see? You got it into your head that I wanted to marry you? Well!)

Helen—Men sometimes do.

Ernest—(Looks away)—I suppose they do.

Helen—It's been known to happen.

Ernest—I suppose it has—but talk about conceits—well, you needn't be afraid! I'll never ask you to marry me.

Helen—(Startling and looking at him. Moon spot on—You can't imagine what a weight this takes off my mind.)

Ernest—(Enthusiastically)—Yes! I feel as if a veil between us had been lifted.

Helen—(Off stage "Tristan and Isolde" on piano. Down lights. Moonlight gradually.)

Helen—(Slightly nervous)—What were you saying about those agar plates?

Ernest—(What agar plates? Oh, yes—let's talk about Anterior Polymyositis. Look at the moon. (The music and the moonlight is flooding them.)

Helen—(Rising nervously)—Seriously, you promise never to mention the absurd subject again?

Ernest—(Overwhelmed)—You—love me? (He takes her in his arms, silent embrace with moonlight and music flooding them.)

Helen—(Because I loved you that I didn't want you to see I only did it because I loved you that I would stand up to stay—only I couldn't— couldn't stay away. (She holds up

you can out of me—my youth, my strength, my best! And then, just as I too have a chance to arrive in my profession, you of all men throw me over! I hate you! I hate you!

Ernest—And I love you! (They stare at each other in silence. Moonlight flooding Helen's face. (Music comes out clear.)

Helen—(Awd) whispers, stepping back slowly) I've done it! I've done it! I knew you'd do it!

Ernest—No, I did it. Forgive me, I had to do it.

Helen—(To self, more than to him.) Oh, this spoils everything!

Ernest—No! It glorifies everything! (It takes a step forward and breaks loose.) I have loved you from the first day you came to my dreary old workshop. I didn't want you there. I didn't want any woman there. I tried to tire you out with overwork, but couldn't. I tried to drive you out by rudeness, but you stayed. And that only made me love you more. Oh, I love you! I love you!

Helen—Do you? Oh, don't love me—ah, say it just once more!

Ernest—(Taking her hands) I love you! I love you! I love you! I love everything about you—those wonderful hair waves that face the naked facts of life and are not ashamed; those beautiful hands that have worked so hard, so long, so close to mine and not afraid, not afraid. Why, I never dreamed there could be women like you. I thought women were merely something that we wanted and worshipped, petted, patronized. But you!

Helen—(Oh, don't! Don't! I am afraid now. I made you say this. (She smiles, though near to tears.) I have always wanted to make you say that. I have always sworn you shouldn't!

Ernest—Because you can't care enough?

Helen—(Enough? Too much?)

Ernest—(Overwhelmed)—You—love me? (He takes her in his arms, silent embrace with moonlight and music flooding them.)

Helen—(Because I loved you that I didn't want you to see I only did it because I loved you that I would stand up to stay—only I couldn't— couldn't stay away. (She holds up

now. There's no turning back, all or nothing. Come to me!

Helen—(She darts into the arms of a gasp of joy, her head striking on his shoulder)—But, Ernest, I know you don't believe in marriage.

Ernest—(Realizing her strength, he holds her fast)—What now?

CHRISTMAS TREES

THE custom of placing a green tree in the home at Christmas Eve is believed to have come from the East and hung with gifts is of ancient date. The custom of standing a tree in its modern form as practiced in the United States is a comparatively young and had its origin in New York City. Mark Carr is the man who introduced the Christmas tree to New York City as New York, known at that time as a Catskill woodman. He had traveled a bit and got acquainted with the Christmas customs of the various countries. He thus came to know of the possibilities of the evergreen, the Catskills.

The more thought he gave to the little tree the more confident he became that they would make a fine Christmas decoration. He decided to try them and came to New York City. Christmas in 1811 with a lot of evergreens. He took up his stand at St. Mark's place, which was then a little tree in a shopping center. He had placed his tree in a shop which had sold out his cargo and was sending back to the Catskills as a conveyance could take him home. He returned the day before Christmas with a larger load and had a very successful business. He had placed his tree in a shop which had sold out his cargo and was sending back to the Catskills as a conveyance could take him home. He returned the day before Christmas with a larger load and had a very successful business.