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Social consciousness depicted in the drama of Eugene Brieux

Robert Walter Moran

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THE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS DEPICTED

IN THE DRAMA OF

ÉUGÈNE BRIEUX

by

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B.A., Montana State University, 1950

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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CHAPTER ONE

A SELF-ACKNOWLEDGED APOSTLE

The purpose of this discourse is to examine the social consciousness of Eugène Brieux as depicted in his drama. A confirmed writer in the pièce à thèse genre, Brieux delved deeply into the problems of his French milieu. An author of broad interests, he did not concentrate on a single aspect of his society, but concerned himself with sociological, political, economic, and medical conditions.

His ardor as a reformer and his efforts to show his people the faults of their society and to spur them to alter them made him the gadfly of French society. This earnest concern often preoccupied him in writing so that the intrinsic dramatic worth of his dramas suffered.

Throughout his drama he affirmed that he was a votary of utilitarianism rather than aestheticism. Consequently, he became the subject of diverse critical appraisal. Bernard Shaw, who was championing social justice in England concurrently, found a confère in Brieux. When Brieux was translated into English, he wrote a preface of typical Shavian length evaluating his Gallic friend and acclaimed to the world, including France who never knows she has a genius until the English reveal him to her1 that:

1 Brieux, Three Plays (preface by Bernard Shaw; New York: Brentano's, 1914), p. xxviii.
In that kind of comedy which is so true to life that we have to call it tragi-comedy and which is not only an entertainment but a history and a criticism of contemporary morals, Brieux is incomparably the greatest French writer France has produced since Molière.  

Another ardent admirer, his biographer Adrien Bertrand, reflected the character of the esteem in which Brieux was held in France among some of the critics and writers:

C'est la gloire d'Eugène Brieux—et l'avenir justifiera cette assertion—d'avoir écrit toutes les fois qu'il avait une idée à propager, une tâche sociale à mettre à jour, une injustice à réparer, un problème de conscience à résoudre. C'est sa gloire d'avoir exprimé ce qu'il croyait la Vérité,--et cela de toute la puissance de sa pensée, et de toute l'émotion de son cœur bien souvent angoissé. C'est sa gloire d'avoir connu l'incessant effort à accomplir, sans défaillance et sans trêve, pour diriger l'âme de ses contemporains vers de plus nobles conceptions.

Il a été un de ces bons soldats qui sont montés à l'assaut des rigoureuses barrières; il a été un de ces formidables bûcherons qui, lente ment, une à une, ont abattu les contraintes étroites et hypothèses de la bourgeoisie.

In addition to the adulation of enthusiastic reformers, Brieux was likewise the object of hearty hatred. A member of the Court of Cassation commented when La Robe rouge was crowned by the French Academy:

This piece is one of the cleverest and most systematic attacks which have been made by dramatic

\[2\] Ibid., p. vii.

literature against the French magistracy, and
the author shows it with a malevolence which
leaves nothing to be desired. I ask myself,
with respectful anxiety, if the French Academy
has not, in its long career, committed two er-
rors: the first, in censoring Le Cid of Pierre
Corneille; the second, in crowning La Robe rouge
of M. Brieux?  

An English critic bombasted Brieux in declaring that his
plays "have certain merits if judged by the standard of
the pamphleteer" and that "The stage is the stage, and
the debating hall the debating hall. They are better kept
apart."  

Just who was this man who has caused so much criti-
cal stir? The details of his life are sparse due to his
reticence, which Brieux expressed when he said, "My private
life does not concern the public."  

He was born in Paris
on January 19, 1858. His father was a carpenter and his
mother a hard-working woman, devoted to housekeeping. His
early days were spent in a carpenter's shop where he gained
an insight into the life and character of the industrial
classes and a sympathetic interest in them. His schooling,
begun under the Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne and fol-

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4 Temple Scott, "Brieux," The Forum, 47:405, April, 1912.  
6 Ibid., p. 859.  
lowed by attendance at the Ecole Primaire and the Ecole Primaire Supérieure, ended at the age of fourteen when his parents died.

With this rudimentary educational background and no financial assistance, his future loomed uncertain. He secured employment as a clerk and studied independently Latin and Greek, developing favorably in the former. An avid reader, he read the masterpieces of French literature as well as translations of other great works of other countries which he obtained in popular twenty-five centime editions. In order to save candles, he often read under the gas-jet in the stairway. Chateaubriand's Atala and René, Henri Murger's Scènes de la Vie Bohème, and Goethe's Faust were among his early favorites. In his late teens he considered being a missionary, probably after reading Chateaubriand's Génie de Christianisme, but, living in Paris as he did, surrounded by social injustices, suffering, and moral depravity, he realized there were as many heathens in Paris as in uncivilized territories. We may surmise that Brieux would have discovered it less arduous to convert natives than to attempt to rectify social abuses in France, which was what he chose to do in the literary medium.

The first play he had presented was Bernard Palissy, a one act drama in verse about a noted sixteenth century
glass painter, written in collaboration with Gaston Salandri. It was performed at the Théâtre Cluny on December 21, 1879, a month before his twenty-first birthday. The following year, the two wrote Le Bureau des Divorces, a vaudeville in one act satirizing a new divorce act. Though never played, it indicated Brieux's interest in social affairs.

Certain that he wished to devote his life to drama, the young dramatist resigned his clerkship to devote his time to journalism in order to acquire writing experience. Newspapers in Dieppe and then Rouen, where he became an editor, employed him. Working in the provinces broadened his experience and provided him with material for his plays in that it enabled him to observe characteristics of provincial folk and life and required him, in his position as editor, to treat problems of social interest. In addition it kept him from the literary fads and fancies of Paris and allowed him to see elemental life removed from the complex cosmopolitan scene.

He continued to write plays and sought producers. Once the developing dramatist sought the aid of Zola: "I can't succeed without Paris. Help me to get a hearing there."9

8 Mollière made a theatrical tour of the provinces that provided him with invaluable material for his plays.

The author of the Rougon-Macquart series realized the benefits to be derived from Brieux's circumstances and neglected the appeal. "Young man, poverty is an excellent teacher. To help you would be to hurt you." Recognition in Paris finally came to Brieux when his Ménages d'artistes was accepted by Antoine for performance at the Théâtre Libre on March 21, 1890. A comédie rosse, (cynical comedy), it satirized the decadence of the Symbolist poets and scorned the poses and snobbery effected by artists who wished to remain aloof from society.11

Antoine, an outstanding homme de théâtre, encouraged the playwright, who on March 25 of the same year saw a third play produced, Le Fille de Durand, a melodrama in five acts, at the Théâtre Français in Rouen.

His true success came two years later when Antoine presented his Blanchette, a comedy which treats the problems arising from the State's encouragement of its peasantry to rise above their social station through education. It reached a hundred performances at the Théâtre Libre and was later included in the repertoire of the Comédie Française. Cognizant of his debt to Antoine, Brieux dedi-

10 loc. cit.

11 According to René Doumic, the great defect in the majority of representations of social life presented in France and abroad is that they are created by men of letters, who, having voluntarily constituted of themselves an isolated class, see society only from the outside.
cated the play to Antoine:

Pendant dix ans, j'ai promené des manuscrits
dans tous les théâtres de Paris; le plus souvent,
ils n'étaient même pas lus.

Grâce à toi, grâce au Théâtre-Libre, je puis
enfin apprendre mon métier d'auteur dramatique, et
voici, en deux ans, la deuxième pièce que tu me
joues.

Je tiens à t'en remercier publiquement.12

The established dramatist returned to Paris in 1892
to concentrate on writing drama as well as to write social
and literary articles for the Patrie, the Gaulois, and the
Figaro and to serve as music and drama critic for La Vie
Contemporaine. His artistic creed, which served as the
basis for his efforts, he stated thus:

I know very well what the public likes to see on
the stage. Its choice is the spectacle of a human
will which evolves and asserts itself. It demands
(though without knowing very clearly what it demands)
that the dramatic author should be a Professor of
Energy. But it seems to me that the dramatic author
should be an intermediary between the public and
those great thinkers which are ordinarily inacces­
sible to the masses. He ought to offer to the pub­
ic, in an interesting shape, beautiful and gener­
ous ideas. Yes, that is the role appointed for us:
to seduce the public by placing the ideas of the
philosophers within its reach.

The theatre will be obliged, more and more as
time goes by, to devote itself to the study of the
great topics of the day. There is nothing more to
be made of the comedy of character—Molière has
seen to that. The comedy of manners? There is
plenty of that in the dramas of the day, but it
does not animate them with the breath of life. Let

12 Brieux, Blanchette (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1913),
Dedication.
us therefore put a thought into each of our works; and let us take it from the life around us, and from the sufferings of our fellow creatures. As Goethe said: 'Fill your heart and mind with the ideas and emotions of your period—the work will then write itself.'

His other works, which followed in rapid succession, exemplified this: *Monsieur de Reboval*, September, 1892, an attack on the bourgeois and a plea for lawful monogamy; *La Couvée*, 1893, a consideration of the social problems arising from the breaking down of the authority of the home; *L'Encremage*, 1894, a study of political corruption which was crowned by the Académie Française as was *L'Évasion*, 1896, an argument against the invulnerability of the stand taken by science in the matter of heredity; and *Les Bienfaiteurs*, 1896, a scathing indictment of the administration of charity, composed the first of three periods of his work as categorized by Barrett H. Clark,\(^\text{14}\) chief authority in English on the drama of the French.

This first period, 1890-1896, was marked by the predominance in his dramas of the comic element over the militant seriousness which distinguished those of his "storm and stress" second period, 1897-1903. It included *Les Trois Filles de Monsieur Dupont*, 1897, a presentation of the evils of the dot system of marriages; *Résultat des*

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\(^{13}\) Brieux, *Two Plays* (preface by H. L. Mencken; Boston: John W. Luce and Company, 1913), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

Courses, 1898, a depiction of suffering caused among the working classes, by gambling on the races; Le Bercceau, 1898, an exposition of the evils of divorce when children are involved; Le Robe rouge, 1900, an indictment on the miscarriage of justice due to the desire of advancement which was crowned by the Académie Française; Les Rempla-gantes, 1901, a criticism of the prevalent unwillingness of Parisians to accept the responsibilities of motherhood; Les Avaries, 1901, an expose of the effects of syphilis in marriage; La Petite Amie, 1902, a discussion of the relations between parents and children; and Maternité, 1903, a treatment of the hypocrisy of society in the different circumstances of motherhood.

The third period, 1904-1914, which was milder and more optimistic, included La Déserteuse, 1904, a consideration of the evil effects of divorce upon the child; L'Armature, 1905, an illustration of how money corrupts morals; Les Hannetons, 1905, an attack of the prevailing tendency to exalt free love on the stage by exposing the bondage of such relationships; La Française, 1907, an accusation of French novelists and dramatists for producing a misconception abroad of France and French women; Simone, 1908, a denial of the right of man to kill his wife for adultery; Suzette, 1909, a further discussion of the evils of divorce and its effects upon the welfare of the child;
La Foi, 1909, an illustration of the helpfulness of faith; La Femme seule, 1913, a plea for women in their attempts to earn a livelihood; and Le Bourgeois aux champs, 1914, a satire of a bourgeois effort to become a gentleman farmer by applying the science of books.

After World War I, during which he produced no dramatic works, Brieux wrote only four plays: Les Américains chez nous, 1919, an attempt to bring France and the United States closer together through better understanding of each other; L'Avocat, 1922, another criticism of the administration of justice, Pierrette et Galaor, 1923, a plea for parents' consideration of their children; and La Famille Lavolette, 1926, another family study.

These works, six of which were played at the Comédie Française and three crowned by the Académie Française, both coveted honors, treated the burning questions of the hour and attacked the abuses of authority and privilege.

In 1910 Brieux received a signal honor when he was selected to fill the seat in the Académie Française vacated by the death of Ludovic Halévy. Marquis de Ségur, in addressing the candidate on this occasion, described the Brieux type play of ideas as opposed to the drame of intrigue in this manner:

The hour had arrived when a long-indulgent public was beginning to weary of the poisonous bill of fare upon which it had for several years been exclusively nourished. Certain far-seeing indi-
viduals were asking themselves whether the world was entirely made up of scamps and crooks and bad women, and whether there might not exist here and there a few of those average people who lay no claim to perfection, but who are not altogether deserving of scorn and hatred—the people, in other words, who are commonly spoken of as 'decent folks.'

You arrived just in time to justify this discovery, and you saw at a glance what path you ought to follow. You conceived the idea of the 'useful play,' whose object is not merely to make people think, but to make them live more nobly. You limited your horizon the better to embrace it; you specialized your work, so as to make it the more effectual.15

Prior to World War I, Brieux traveled to the Orient while in November, 1914, he visited America to attend the annual joint session of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in New York City as the first representative of the Académie Française ever credited by that institution to any foreign academy. William Dean Howells, in presenting the foreign visitor, characterized his work as containing "a pervading awe of the tragedy of life, not less in its nature than in its conditioning; a tender compassion for suffering and helplessness; and a manly abhorrence of cruelty and a loathing of baseness."16 The topic of Brieux's address at the conference was "The Theatre as an Instrument of Social Amelioration."

During World War I, the humanitarianism of the author

15 Brieux, Two Plays; pp. xxxiii-xxxiv

expressed itself in his efforts to aid soldiers blinded in the armed struggle. As Director of the French Committee for the Blind, he lived with the men deprived of sight and encouraged them from their arrival at the hospital till their arrival home after a course at a training school of re-education and adjustment.17

In the twenties Brieux was interested in the campaign to combat sleeping sickness among the natives of Cameroun in Africa and in assisting young dramatists. To further this latter concern he sponsored a biennial prize of thirty thousand francs for the best drama of social and moralistic tendencies.

The precarious state of his health restricted the activity of his last years. He died of pleurisy complicated by uremia in Nice on December 6, 1932.

The drama of Brieux was in the tradition inaugurated by Denis Diderot in his drames bourgeois of the eighteenth century. Diderot foresaw the thesis drama in his suggestion that the theater attempt moralistic plays; he forecast the social drama in suggesting the development of man's social status rather than his character.18 His success was mediocre, but later the genre of pièce à thèse

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was well illustrated by Alexandre Dumas fils who stated his conception of the theatre in his preface to Les Fils naturel, 1868:

Par la comédie, par la tragédie, par le drame, par la bouffonnerie, dans la forme qui nous conviendra le mieux, inaugurons donc le théâtre utile, au risque d'entendre crier les apôtres de l'art pour l'art, trois mots absolument vides de sens. Toute littérature qui n'a pas en vue la perfectibilité, la moralisation, l'idéal, l'utile, en un mot, est une littérature rachitique et malsaine, née morte. La reproduction pure et simple des faits et des hommes est un travail de greffier et de photographe, et je défie qu'on me cite un seul écrivain, consacré par le Temps, qui n'ait pas eu pour dessein la plus-value humaine.19

Dumas fils (1824-1895) and Emile Augier (1820-1889) who also believed the theatre to be an institution for pleasantly instructing the people, came to the fore following the decline of romanticism, which had dominated the first half of the nineteenth century. They employed the structure of the pièce bien faite, (the well-made play), perfected by the master craftsman, Eugène Scribe.20 Augier upheld the nobility of labor, the sanctity of the home, and the duty of patriotism but denounced pride of wealth and position, the scramble for money, the malign power of the press, and dangers of class conflict.21

This emphasis upon ideas was enlarged upon by Dumas fils, who established the vogue of the thesis play and the use of the *raisonneur* to promulgate his ideas. He upheld such ideals as love, marriage, work, country, and God and attacked seduction, adultery, abortion, corruption in women, luxury, and materialism.\(^{22}\)

In addition to the influence of Diderot, Dumas fils, and Augier, Brieux was guided by Antoine, who had discovered him and mounted his *Ménages d'artistes* at the Théâtre Libre in 1890. It was Antoine who had answered the demand of August Strindberg for a free theatre... where we can be shocked by what is horrible, where we can laugh at what is grotesque, where we can see life without shrinking back in terror if what has hitherto lain veiled behind theological and esthetic conceptions is revealed to us... Let us have a free theatre where there is room for everything but incompetence, hypocrisy, and stupidity.\(^{23}\)

Antoine, in establishing his Théâtre Libre in 1887, gave an opportunity to unknown writers to uproot the conventionalized drama and supplant it with naturalistic drama. Operating under a system of private subscriptions, he was able to produce plays free from censorship.\(^{24}\) He advocated realism in subject matter, simplicity, naturalness,

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and verisimilitude in the expression of the passions, in staging, and in acting. 25 In contrast to the plays of the preceding thirty years during which "France produced scarcely half a dozen first-rate plays in which adultery was not the leading motive," 26 the plays Antoine presented depicted life among the lower-middle and working classes, which up to that time had not been represented on the stage. In addition, he first introduced to France such foreign playwrights as Tolstoy, Turgenev, Hauptmann, Heijermann, Björnson, Strindberg, and Ibsen 27 and sponsored two new genres: the pièce mufle, or "tough play," and the comédie rosse, or "cynical comedy." 28

From these sources, Brieux developed his drama and his idea of the theatre, which he expressed on the occasion of his visit to America thus:

I have the profound conviction that the theatre may be a valuable means of instruction. I should not limit its ambition to amusing spectators. One must admit also that the theatre has the right from time to time, at any rate, to touch upon the most serious questions and the most vital topics.

I wish through the theatre not only to make people think, to modify habits and facts, but still more

25 An actor himself, he violated successfully the rule that prohibited an actor from turning his back to the audience.

26 Brieux, Two Plays (preface by Mencken), p. ii.

27 Chandler, op. cit., p. 68.

28 Rhodes, op. cit., p. 4.
to bring about laws which appear to me to be desirable. I have wished that the amount of suffering upon the earth might be diminished a little because I have lived... I was born with the soul of an apostle—again let me say, I have no vanity in this, I did not make myself—but the sight of suffering in others has always been unbearable to me.29

Brieux was thus a self-acknowledged apostle. Through an examination of his works we shall attempt to discern his social awareness, his criticism of French society, and his ideas of reform.

29 Thomas, The Plays of Eugene Brieux, p. 5.
CHAPTER TWO

THE FAMILY

That Brieux should be preoccupied with the status of the family is not surprising. More than half his plays treat this basic unit of society in its various aspects: marriage, love, the dowry system, parental care and responsibility, and child care, training, and welfare. La Couvé, La Petite Amie, Maternité, Les Remplaçantes, and Les Trois Filles de Monsieur Dupont illustrate this interest.

La Couvé,1 (The Offspring), is concerned with the importance of sound parental guidance. In this play the parents, the Grandors, are guilty of the faulty direction of their children, Auguste and Fifine. The father, a wealthy wine merchant, is too busy to be extremely interested in his children's development while the mother, possessed with extreme maternal affection, cannot but yield to their every whim. The young son, exempted from military duty through political connections, pursues a purposeless course. Eighteen yet childish, Fifine is unaware of the responsibilities of marriage into which she plans to enter. Her fiance, André Meillet, a serious young man who has fulfilled his military requirements and completed his medical studies, reflects the effect of

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sound parental direction.

Madame Graindor expresses her narrow conception of her role when Fifine marries André:

Les enfants devraient rester toujours petits... pour qu'ils aient toujours besoin de nous. Ça qui me désole, c'est de voir que maintenant ils peuvent se passer de moi; ça me vieillit, ça me fait voir que je ne suis plus bonne qu'à faire une morte. An immediate break from the nest is avoided since the couple live in an apartment above Fifine's mother. An interfering mother-in-law, she causes marital discord. Madame Graindor's ideas that her daughter should not blemish her youth by having children and that when she does, she should have a wet nurse are contrary to those of André. Soon the couple move to a home of their own and Auguste, abandoned by an actress with whom he had contracted a liaison, enters the army in Algeria. His children having sprouted their wings, M. Graindor comments to his wife: "Nous deux, ma pauvre vieille... nous restons tout seuls... la couvée a grandi; les petits s'envolent."

Whereas La Couverte illustrates the lack of enlightened supervision, La Petite Amie shows that persistence of the Roman paterfamilias in French law and custom by

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2 Ibid., p. 21.
3 Brieux treats this problem fully in Les Remplaçante.
4 Brieux, La Couverte, p. 112.
which parental control is supreme. M. Logerais will not permit his son to marry one of his clerks with whom the son is in love because she has a dowry of only ten thousand francs. The father believes he should make a marriage which will advance him in the bourgeois world and enhance their common respectability by means of the bride's dot, (dowry). A girl with a hundred thousand franc dowry with whom his father arranges a match does not interest the young man. Since his father will not relent and since the law does not permit marriage without his consent, the young couple live together unmarried. The father, angered by the usurpation of his just rights and powers, prevents his offspring from securing employment. Destitute and expecting a child, the unfortunate pair go out and drown themselves in despair, the victims of the abominable power and unreasonableness of the father.

With Maternité,6 Brieux turns to the foundation of the family, motherhood, and flays the social hypocrisy and social injustice which result from the attitude of society toward different conditions of maternity. He urges a respect for motherhood per se and protection of all mothers whether they be in or out of the marriage bond. He shows three types of maternity as represented by Annette, a

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young girl who has been seduced and is pregnant, her sister Lucie, a young married woman forced annually to bear degenerate children by an alcoholic husband whom she does not love, and the wives of workers, women who are prolific in poverty.

Annette, the central figure, lives with her sister and her husband, Brignac, a government official whose current project is to prevent depopulation in France. She is in love with a friend's brother, Jacques Bernin, who has promised to marry her. When his mother visits her sister, she believes it is to discuss the marriage. Unfortunately, the boy's mother announces that her son cannot marry Annette because she has no dowry. As they have to furnish a dot for a daughter, they will have nothing for the son who must therefore wed financially well. Madame Bernin regrets that society forces this action in the following scene with Lucie:

Hme Bernin. Vous voyez donc que j'ai raison. Je ne vous dis pas que je suis fière de vous parler ainsi et de faire partie d'une société qui m'impose, par ses préjugés, de pareilles décisions... Mais nous ne vivons pas avec des personnages de roman. Nous vivons avec des gens égoïstes, pratiques et vaniteux.

Lucie. Vous les méprisez et vous sacrifiez tout à leur opinion.

7 In Brieux's time, people thought alcoholism was an inherited condition and produced unhealthy offspring.
Mme. Bernin. C'est que le bonheur de chacun dépend beaucoup de l'opinion de ces gens-là. C'est elle qui décrète l'honorabilité. Il faut être une exception pour vivre en dehors de ces conventions ou pour les mépriser. Jacques est comme tout le monde.8

When Lucie reminds her that Monsieur Bernin had been poor and had established a business and asks her if they have not had a happy marriage, Madame Bernin's pathetic reply is:

En bien, non, nous n'avons pas eu le bonheur, parce que nous nous sommes usés à sa poursuite. Nous voulions "arriver" et nous sommes "arrivés". --Mais à quel prix! -- Employés d'abord, nous avons trainé une vie de misères, de mesquineries économiques et de rageuse avarice. Commerçants, nous avons vécu dans la peur de l'échec, dans la duperie, dans la féroce, dans le mensonge, et la flatterie aux clients. Je connais la route par où l'on va à la fortune. On y pleure, on y mente, on y envie et l'on y souffre et l'on y fait souffrir. J'y ai passé: nous avons résolu d'en épargner les tristesses à nos enfants. De ceux-ci nous avions limité le nombre; nous n'en avions eu que deux, et nous avions décidé de n'en avoir qu'un. Il nous a fallu alors redoubler de labeur et de sévérité pour nous-mêmes. Nous avons été, au lieu de deux époux qui s'entraident, deux associés qui se surveillent comme deux ennemis, se reprochant l'un à l'autre leurs dépenses ou leurs inabilités, et, sur l'oreiller même, disputant encore de leurs intérêts. --La route enfin parcourue, on ne jouit pas de la richesse parce qu'on ne sait pas s'en servir et l'on n'a pas de bonheur parce que la vieillesse qui vient est empoisonnée par les souvenirs et les rancunes des jours mauvais; parce qu'on a trop peiné et qu'on a trop hai. Non, je n'exposerai pas mes enfants à cette lutte puisque je ne l'ai endurée que pour les en préserver. Adieu, madame.9

8 Brieux, Maternité, pp. 68-69.
9 Ibid., pp. 70-71.
Her attitude, so clearly expressed, precludes Annette's marriage to Jacques.

In conferences with provincial mayors to promote his issue, Brignac finds little sympathy. They advise him to contact the middle classes who have the financial means to support more children and yet have smaller families. When Brignac points out that those with large families will be exempt from taxation, they counter that presently they pay little to the tax collectors but that they pay the real taxes, those upon bread, salt, wine, and tobacco. A larger family would therefore increase their taxes. Another expresses the belief that it is a crime to bring a child into the world if one cannot give it health and bring it up well and that the time to begin increasing the birth rate will be when everyone has adequate food, shelter, and clothing.

Meanwhile, Annette, learning of the unexpected nature of Mme. Bernin's visit, reveals her pregnancy to Lucie. In turn, the older sister informs her husband, confident of his understanding and compassion in view of his paramount interest at this time. Brignac, however, visualizes only a threat to his respectability and demands that Annette leave immediately. Astounded at his heartlessness, she takes this opportunity to break her bondage:

Allons donc! Le corps d'une femme, tout de même,
n'est pas une terre qu'on déchire et qu'on féconde sans trève pour en extraire jusqu'à l'épuisement d'incessantes moissons. Cet esclavage, je ne l'accepte pas et je te quitterai si tu chasses ma petite soeur.10

As Brignac remains adamant, Lucie leaves with her children and Annette for Paris where their hardships are so great that Annette resorts to a clandestine abortion and dies.

Lucie attends the consequent trial of the abortionist who testifies that she pursues her profession from a sense of pity created by the suicides and infanticides committed by girls whom she had refused to aid. Since her decision to perform abortions, she has prevented many suicides and crimes. The counsel for the defense, echoing the ideas of Brieux, proclaims that the responsible ones are not on trial - the seducers of whom the Code gives no mention and the people who demand citizens to have more children when the ones they have already are ill-cared for and often enter a life of prostitution or thieving as there are no other opportunities for them.

The counsel brings the action to a tumultuous conclusion in a searing invective of blunt and terrible veracity which the court audience applauds:

Les coupables, ce sont les moeurs qui infligent la honte à la fille-mère... ...Toute l'enceinte devrait être respectée quelles que soient les circonstances de la conception. ...Leur crime n'est pas un crime individuel, c'est un

10 Ibid., pp. 172-73.
crime social.\textsuperscript{11}

Declaring abortion is not a crime against but a revolt
against Nature and pleading for birth control, he continues:

C'est une révolte contre elle! Et de toutes
les forces de mon coeur transi de pitié, de toutes
les forces de ma raison indignée, j'appelle l'heure
libéraliste où, grâce à la découverte de quelque
savante, chacun pourra, sans hypocrisie contrainte,
comme sans profanation de l'amour, n'avoir que les
enfants qu'il aura désirés. Oui, ce sera une con-
quête sur la Nature, sur la Nature féroce qui ré-
pand avec une profusion coupable la vie qu'elle
voit disparaître avec indifférence.\textsuperscript{12}

Encouraged by the unanimous approbation of the audience
which becomes uproarious, the defendant shields herself
with this accusation as the red-robed judges march out: "Les
coupables, ce sont les hommes, les hommes! tous les hommes!"\textsuperscript{13}

Another aspect of motherhood, wet nursing,\textsuperscript{14} permeates \textit{Les Remplaçantes},\textsuperscript{15} (The Substitutes), a play rich
in description of peasant manners and morals. This play,
Brieux's most popular, rebukes \textit{les bourgeoises} of Paris

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 224.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 225-26.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 227.

\textsuperscript{14} The undesirability of this practice has been
expounded by such other French writers as Rousseau,
Sedaine, and Montaigne. Realizing its danger, the latter
wrote, "I am convinced that our worst vices begin to form
in our infancy, and that our destiny is largely in the
hands of our wet nurses."

\textsuperscript{15} Brieux, \textit{Les Remplaçantes} (Paris: Calmann-Lévy,
1914), 187 pp.
who contract peasant mothers to nurse their children as well as the provincial substitutes who neglect their own children and husbands to suckle cosmopolitan infants. The action begins in a village in the province that has the unique industry of exporting wet nurses to Paris. Lazarette, wife of Planchot, comes from a province where this is not the custom and refuses to abandon her son. Le père Planchot, an interfering, avaricious father-in-law, demands her to go, taunting her with the fact that he allowed his son to wed her without a dowry and implying that she should take advantage of this opportunity to contribute financially to the family. Unable to resist the parental pressure, Planchot requests his wife to accede to the demand and receives her reluctant consent and her disillusioned comment:

...si j'avais su que tu ne m'épouserais que dans l'espoir que je te rapporterais de l'argent en me louant, en me cédant à d'autres, même si ça expose notre enfant à la mort, je t'aurais laissé où tu étais, toi et tes quinze cents francs!17

Dr. Richon, who examines her condition also laments the commercialization of maternity that is implicit in wet nursing:

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16 The famous Antoine portrayed this role when the play was performed at his theatre, le Théâtre Antoine.

17 Brieux, Les Remplaçantes, p. 50.
...Nos paysannes, à force de considérer l'enfant comme un gagne-pain, ont perdu pour la plupart l'instinct de la maternité. Hier, une de ces malheureuses, fatiguée de voir ses petits s'en aller, se disait en pleurant: 'Mais enfin, monsieur, les médecins ne pourraient donc pas trouver le moyen de donner du lait à une femme sans qu'elle ait besoin d'avoir un enfant?'

Flanchot's uncle, a middleman in this enterprise, secures a Parisian domicile in which the mother is active in society affairs. Lazarette's service allows her to maintain her attractiveness, retain her husband's attention, and engage in the usual round of dinners, balls, and entertainments.

The provincial doctor, Richon, drops in when she entertains a circle of friends. He is the spokesman for Brieux's ideas and criticizes their method of shrugging their maternal responsibility:

....Si je me trompe, et si, pouvant allaiter, vous ne l'avez point voulu, vous avez causé—sans le savoir—beaucoup de mal. A vous-mêmes, d'abord, en vous privant du premier sourire de votre enfant et en vous exposant à toutes les maladies qui sont la conséquence possible de votre abstinence. ...Le malheur, c'est qu'on n'ait pas un aussi grand souci de la race humaine que de la race chevaline. Vous riez, ....et cependant, ...vous faites sucer à votre enfant le lait d'une femme sur laquelle vous n'avez d'autre renseignement qu'un certificat de bonne vie et moeurs délivré par un maire qui peut n'être qu'un complaisant; le lait d'une femme dans le verre de laquelle vous n'auriez pas voulu boire!... ...Si vous saviez qu'en donnant votre enfant à une nourrice
vous augmentez les chances de le voir mourir, vous le garderiez. C'est la vérité, cependant, mais vous ne le savez pas. stirred by these words, the women, seeking to defend themselves, declare that their husbands are apt to be attracted elsewhere if they nurse. michon, however, demonstrates the selfishness of their attitude:

Vous avez peur pour votre foyer et vous prenez une nourrice. Mais elle est mariée, cette nourrice. Mais son mari sera exposé à ces mêmes tentations que vous redoutez pour le vôtre. Donc, afin de vous épargner un danger, vous exposez une autre femme à un danger identique. Je sais bien que c'est une paysanne. Mais avez-vous le droit de juger, vous, que votre bonheur mérite d'être payé au prix du sien? Avez-vous le droit de juger que la vie de votre enfant vaut le sacrifice possible de la vie de son enfant? Moi, je ne le pense pas.

Becoming vehement, he supplies them the figures of infant mortality among the children of the nurses whom they employ:

...La mortalité des enfants de nourrices sur lieu est effroyable: trois fois plus forte que la mortalité ordinaire; ce qui revient à dire, qu'en réalité, on tue un petit paysan pour que trois parisennes puissent se décolletter pendant un hiver.

Made aware of the unsavory condition, the women comment that a law should be enacted to prevent the system of remplaçantes. The doctor is able to point up the irony

19 Ibid., pp. 114-16.
20 Ibid., p. 118.
21 Ibid., pp. 119-20.
of the situation. There is a law, but the law enforcement officials refuse to comply with it "parce que cela aurait pour conséquence de jeter une perturbation profonde dans les habitudes de la population parisienne." 23

While Lazarette nurses le petit Guy, her husband spends her remuneration on cards, cognac, and another woman, this being the usual pattern of husband behavior while wives support them by their city work. Recalled home by her infant's illness, Lazarette rushes to the crib to nurture her son and does not leave him. In re-establishing domestic harmony, Planchot vows that he will never send his wife away again. Richon praises this decision and calls on the other men to work the land and keep the mothers of their children at the hearth so that every mother may nurse and care for her own infant.

The hypocrisies and conventions inherent in the dot system of marriage, which requires a girl to offer a dowry, are exposed in Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont (The Three Daughters of Mr. Dupont), 24 a play rich in observation of the provincial bourgeoisie and caustic in exposition of the

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22 The Roussel law required that no woman could obtain a position as wet nurse before her own child was eight months old.


mediocrity of middle-class ideals which lead parents to sacrifice their children to conventions. The youngest daughter of the Dupont family, Julie, becomes an example of the girl exploited by a domineering father. M. Dupont, a printer, hopes to arrange a match for her with Antonin Mairant because he believes that through that family's connections he can secure government printing contracts. When the Mairant family is to come to discuss dowry arrangements, the Dupont family's pretensions at respectability are superbly illustrated in their arranging the room in which they will receive the Mairants. Determined to make a good impression, they fill the bowl for visiting cards with cards Dupont has printed for well-to-do persons to show they have important guests; they place a Wagner score that someone has left to be bound on the piano to exhibit their cultural interests; they place a fashion magazine on the table as well as a box of cigars a deputy gave Dupont to demonstrate that other people besides deputies smoke expensive cigars; and, as the crowning point, M. Dupont gives Julie fifteen minutes to decide if she will marry Antonin, a man whom she has only casually met, and orders her to don her strapless gown in order to reveal her beauty and to suggest that she is about to depart for a party, thus indicating her popularity as well as the element of competition with others.
This elaborate preparation sets the stage for the important operation of "buying" a husband for Julie. M. Dupont and Mme. Mairant transact the negotiations with shrewd, firm, and business-like precision. They connive, barter, and deceive one another concerning their true financial status. In this mercenary conference, love has no place. Agreements concluded, Antonin and Julie are allowed to become better acquainted but only demonstrate their duplicity as each pretends to be what he is not in reality in order to attract and please the other.

The outcome of such a marriage is inevitable. Julie finds herself married to a man with whom she has nothing in common and to whom she submits in cowardice rather than in love. Their misunderstanding of each other leads to a quarrel in which Julie declares she wishes her freedom. Antonin quickly asserts:

...Tu es ma femme et tu resteras ma femme. Le divorce est impossible; je n'ai pas contre toi de torts légaux. Oui, tu peux fuir, mais tu sais la vie sans considération, sans avenir et sans respect que les moeurs d'aujourd'hui font à la femme en dehors du mariage.

Later, sincerely attempting to help Julie understand him, Antonin, in analyzing himself, finds himself the product of a materialistic society:

...Je suis ambitieux, je rêve la fortune. Est-ce ma faute si, aujourd'hui, elle est la seule mesure de la considération? Pour arriver, je cherche à flatter ceux qui peuvent m'aider, et je te demande de les flatter avec moi. Est-ce ma

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Ibid., p. 151.
Julie then realizes that he and she are both victims of circumstances and softens in her attitude toward him. However, she becomes a woman in revolt when Antonin, who wants the sensuous pleasures of marriage without assuming the responsibilities of parenthood, refuses her children. A woman with worthy maternal feelings, she is outraged by this denial:

...Et tu peux me le refuser! Être femme, être mère, c'est le développement naturel de mon existence... Et il me manquera quelque chose; et ma vie ne sera pas complète: et je n'aurai pas vécu, en un mot, si mes bras n'ont pas serré un enfant né de ma chair, si je ne l'ai pas allaité, si je n'ai pas pleuré, si je n'ai pas eu toutes les inquiétudes et toutes les joies maternelles. Et tu peux m'en priver! Et tu peux, simplement parce que tu es un averse, un égoïste, un ambitieux, tu peux me condamner à cet isolement! Quoi! tu peux avoir sur ma vie cette influence-là! Ah! Ah! on parle du despoticism des hommes, on s'insurge contre les lois; il y a des femmes qui demandent à voter, à être vos égales dans le mariage, et elles n'ont pas compris que c'est le mariage lui-même qu'il faut attaquer, attaquer avec fure, puisqu'il permet de semblables monstruosités!

A reconciliation appears impossible and a divorce imminent. Julie's father favors this because the dowry will be returned to him while Mme. Mairant, on the other hand, opposes it for that reason. Julie's two sisters,

26 Ibid., p. 156.
27 Ibid., p. 161.
neither of whom have husbands, urge her to remain with Antonin. Angèle, who had been forced by M. Dupont to leave home to have an illegitimate child and then, in desperation, had to turn to prostitution, pictures the pitfalls and shame that lie ahead if she severs the marital knot. Caroline, the spinster sister, depicts to Julie the loneliness, the emptiness, and uselessness of a solitary life like hers and the difficulty for a woman to secure acceptable employment. Still rebellious, Julie's vitriolic rejoinder is, "Puisque je suis condamnée à me vendre, j'aime encore mieux choisir l'acheteur."

She consents to accept her position only after Angèle's extreme pressure and insistence. "J'avais des idées de romans, je voyais le mariage comme il n'est pas. Maintenant, je le comprends. Je suis raisonnable. Il faut faire des concessions dans la vie. J'en ferai... à moi-même."29

28 Ibid., p. 185.
29 Ibid., pp. 186-87.
CHAPTER THREE

MARITAL DISHARMONY

Brieux saw the sanctity of the home violated by divorce, ménages à trois, and venereal disease. The breach spurred the dramatist to illustrate the social evils of these irregularities in Le Berceau, La Déserteuse, Suzette, Simone, Ménages d'artistes, Monsieur de Réboval, and Les Avariés.

In all these crusades, the welfare of the child is upheld to be of paramount importance. The title Le Berceau, (The Cradle), indicates the center of interest in this anti-divorce play which also disapproves of parental interference. The author's attitude toward divorce is immediately expressed by the family doctor, who serves as his mouthpiece:

Je voudrais qu'on le rendît plus difficile et presque impossible lorsqu'il y a des enfants.
...Je ne crois guère qu'il rouvre souvent la porte au bonheur. Pour moi, le divorce est comparable aux anesthésiques qui calment la douleur mais ne donnent pas la santé.2

The doctor explains a divorced woman will never love her second husband as she did her first simply

Parce que le premier... c'était le premier. Un jugement de divorce peut dire: 'Le mariage est dis-


2 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Laurence, the divorced, clearly substantiates this thesis. Having divorced unfaithful Raymond Chantrel at the behest of her parents who never did approve of him, she is induced to marry M. de Girieu by her parents, who like him. The family medical advisor, who suggests "les jeunes gens souffrent moins de leurs fautes que de la prudence de leurs parents," remonstrates with the parents for their promotion of divorce proceedings and for their lack of consideration for le petit and advocates that divorce only be permitted to the childless.

Pour sauvegarder le droit de l'enfant, le droit du plus faible. Entre deux époux, l'enfant est un lien que la loi ne devrait pas pouvoir briser, et que d'ailleurs elle ne brise pas. Mon opinion, c'est qu'd la rigueur, on peut rompre un mariage: on ne devrait pas pouvoir désunir une famille, laisser aller le père ici, la mère là, et abandonner l'enfant au milieu de ces ruines.

Girieu hates the child because he is a living re-

3 Ibid., p. 4.
4 Ibid., p. 8.
5 Ibid., p. 5.
minder of his wife's love for her first husband. After
the boy recovers from an illness during which Raymond and
Laurence keep constant vigil over his condition, Girieu
refuses to allow him to be brought back to his home be-
cause he is the cause of constant marital strife. When
Laurence informs Girieu that she and her child will remain
with her parents, he relents, but she maintains her deci-
sion.

During their child's illness, she and Raymond have
discovered that there remains a strong bond between them
in their common love for the child which makes it impos-
sible for their lives to be wholly separate. However, she
does not believe they could be happy if remarried and even
if they could be, she nobly states:

...Nous n'aurions pas le droit de le prendre, parce
qu'on n'a pas le droit d'édifier son bonheur sur les
souffrances imméritées d'un autre. Je vous demande
pardon, M. de Girieu. Partez, monsieur Chantrel.
Adieu. Laissez-moi seule ici avec mon père et ma
mère, et toute à mon enfant.  

She will care for the boy until he is twelve, at which time
Raymond will supervise his son's education and training.

Gabrielle Forjot in *La Déserteuse*, 7 (*The Deserter*),
represents the wife who seeks her own personal happiness

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7 Brioux and Jean Sigaux, *La Déserteuse* (Paris:
P. V. Stock, 1904), 218 pp.
and breaks the marital knot that binds her to her husband and child. Young and vivacious, she is praised for her voice and assured of an operatic career by Rametty, an impresario who attends concerts which her husband, a music publisher, sponsors. Forjot dislikes music and would regard it with contempt if it were not his lucrative source of income. A serious minded business man, he disapproves of her interest in singing because it prevents her from assisting him in the shop and from performing her domestic and maternal duties.

Her visits to a throat doctor in Paris are as Emma Bovary's and finally provoke Forjot, who knows she is Rametty's mistress, to demand a reckoning. He wishes to avoid divorce because

...je n'ai pas voulu faire de Pascalan la fille d'une divorcée ni l'exposer à apprendre plus tard qu'elle était la fille d'une femme... dégradée. C'est à cause d'elle que je te mets en demeure de choisir: ou tu redeviendras l'épouse et la mère que tu dois être, ou je demanderai le divorce; j'ai assez de preuves pour l'obtenir.

Up to this time Gabrielle has resisted the persistent entreaties of her admirer to accompany him on a tour because of her daughter Pascalan, but this outburst shatters the reluctance that has shackled her ambitions and she deserts the husband and the child, which should be the indestructible bond between parents.

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Ibid., p. 77.
To fill the mother's position, Forjot marries Hélène, Pascaline's governess. Difficulties soon arise because the daughter rebuffs the kindness and love of the step-mother, who, she feels, has usurped her mother's place. Ordered to withhold the truth from Pascaline, Hélène cannot overcome the barrier for, unaware of the desertion, the daughter would be unloyal to her mother if she accepted her.

Four years after her departure, Gabrielle returns with Remetty to set up a theatrical office. When Pascaline leaves home to stay with her, Hélène implores Gabrielle to send her home, but Gabrielle maintains:

...Tout ce que vous avez pu faire n'est rien, d'épousant mon mari vous avez rendu définitive une désunion qui est un outrage aux lois naturelles. Vous avez eu la complicité de son père, le secours de ma faute et de la loi: malgré elle, malgré moi, malgré le juge, ma fille reste ma fille et elle ne vous aime pas.

Believing she cannot counter this maternal attitude, Hélène plans to leave so that Gabrielle's jealousy will diminish and result in her sending Pascaline back to her father. Hélène conceives of her marriage as a moral error:

...Tu as fini par me persuader qu'une étrangère

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Ibid., pp. 191-92.
pouvait sans danger s'asseoir à ton foyer, entre ta fille et toi. Nous nous sommes trompés. Tu as laissé partir l'épouse infidèle, tu en avais le droit; mais devrais-tu remplacer la mère?... Ah! je sais bien que nous avions tort, que nous espérions l'impossible, que cette enfant pour qui nos deux mains s'unissaient les désuniraient un jour.  

Perceiving this sacrificial action and attempting to rectify the error she has made, Gabrielle withdraws her interference, informs her daughter that she is to marry another man, and asks her to accept Hélène.

The deserter is a man in Hélices d'artistes, 11 (Artists' Families), a play which scoffs at poets, the Symbolists in particular, and scorns their asserted rights to irresponsible living and neglect of wives and children. Symbolist Jacques Terveaux is in ecstasy over the reception of his new poem, Les Flavescences, at a private reading by his artist friends and particularly Emma Vervier, a girlhood friend of his wife Louise who is lodging with them while planning a literary magazine. He exclaims to his wife, "Si tu savais comme mademoiselle Vernier m'a applaudi! Il y a dans les Flavescences, des pièces qu'elle seule a pu comprendre." 12

Louise, though lacking literary background and ap-
precarious, esteems her husband and manages the household finances as best she can in order to allow Jacques to pursue his poetic inspirations. From the sale of jewelry and silverware and the three hundred franc check that she receives monthly from her mother, she maintains a struggling existence for her husband and daughter Gabrielle. Madame Legrand, her mother, who arrives from the provinces to attend the Paris exposition, disapproves of the burden relegated to her daughter. When she inquires of the amount he earns from his poetry, Jacques reveals his trivial disregard of the necessity of earning a living:

Madame, la poésie n'est pas un métier dont les recettes et les dépenses se chiffrent sur un livre de commerce comme celles d'un épicier. On est poète ou on ne l'est pas. Si on l'est, on suit la voie dans laquelle on est entré sans s'arrêter aux accidents du chemin et aux mesquineries de l'existence.13

A shrewd woman, Madame Legrand counters, "Et si on ne l'est pas et qu'on croie l'être? A-t-on le droit de forcer sa femme à souffrir? A-t-on le droit de ruiner son enfant?"14

Filled with the fire of poetry, he proclaims, "Le poète a sur terre une mission sacrée, et un devoir impérieux à remplir," to which she emphatically asserts, "Son premier devoir c'est d'apporter à la maison de quoi faire bouillir


14 *loc. cit.*
le pot-au-feu."\textsuperscript{15}

Madame Divuire, another distraught artist's wife, further illustrates the distress to which artistes subject their families. Mother of four, she stops at Louise's home in search of her husband who has not come home and explains:

Il n'est pas rentré cette nuit. Je suis restée à la fenêtre jusqu'au matin, guettant chacun des rares passants avec anxiété; croyant, à chaque voiture qui s'approchait, qu'il était dedans, et qu'on me le remenait mort. ...Ce matin à sept heures, j'ai été à la Préfecture de Police, croyant que tout le monde devait être ému du malheur qui m'arrivait... Les bureaux n'étaient pas ouverts... J'ai attendu... Les employés se sont retenus pour me pas me rire au nez. C'est si drôle, n'est-ce pas, une femme qui cherche son mari qui a découché... ...L'après-midi, mon fils a couru les cafés. ...J'ai attendu jusqu'à présent. Enfin! il est là!... je tombe de fatigue...\textsuperscript{16}

Louise understands well her feelings and compassionately exclaims, "Combien y en a-t-il de femmes qui passent des nuits comme celle-là!"\textsuperscript{17} Located at Louise's home, Divuire glibly apologizes and attempts to placate his wife:

Ma pauvre femme! M'en veux pas. Un artiste, tu sais, c'est un grand enfant... il faut être indulgente... Ça ne m'arrivera plus... Pardonne-moi... là... je suis un misérable... un animal, un cochon!... tout ce que tu voudras... C'est fini

\textsuperscript{15} loc. cit.

\textsuperscript{16} Brieux, \textit{Théâtre Complet}, Vol. 6, pp. 18-19

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 19.
Life becomes less bearable for Louise and her daughter as Jacques’ interest in Emma becomes infatuous. Madame Legrand, attempting to terminate his flagrant conduct, orders Emma’s trunks placed on the sidewalk. Enraged by this action, Jacques leaves his home and family and accompanies Emma.

She installs him as editor-in-chief of the “Journal des Poètes Mondains,” which is staffed by their coterie of artist friends. However, no one fares well. Jacques, though urged to return to his wife and child, remains loyal to his liaison. Emma, tiring of Jacques and seeing the journal fail, deserts him, but Jacques, rather than confront his family, commits suicide. Divuire, disillusioned with the life and outlook of artists, turns to alcohol.

His family destitute and his conscience forbidding him to go home because he has just squandered his last franc, he condemns the poets for their twisted values and their vain poses and judges them all failures in an impassioned raillery that sums up Brieux’s thesis:

Foutez-moi la paix, nom de Dieu! foutez-moi la paix!... Tas de ratés! c’est vous qui m’avez mené là... oui, vous, avec vos théories d’après minuit, avec vos principes à rebours, avec votre bourgeoisie à l’envers, plus étroite et plus bête que l’autre!... Je buvais vos paroles, idiot!... j’écoutais vos préceptes, imbécile!...
et j'étais seul à vous prendre au sérieux, parce que vous, vous posiez pour le scepticisme et l'étrange, comme d'autres posent pour la foi et le comme il faut! Avons-nous blagué les génies!... les grands, les Musset et les Victor Hugo! avons-nous bâvé sur les autres, sur tous ceux qui sont arrivés! Avons-nous ri!... non, mais avons-nous assez ri!... dès qu'un de nous-mêmes... oui, un de nous, s'élevait au-dessus de la moyenne, réussissait, il était voué à nos blagues, on le déchiquetait à belles dents, l'ami d'hier, le philistin d'aujourd'hui... Vous avez bafoué tout ce que je respectais, l'amour filial, l'amour paternel, l'honneur et l'amitié même!... Ah! blagueurs! blagueurs! Ah! c'était drôle, votre, fantaisie; seulement, vous auriez dû me prévenir que ce n'était qu'une fantaisie! Mais sans doute, ça ne vous suffisait plus, de vous mentir à vous-mêmes!... car vous n'êtes que des menteurs. Vous mentez quand vous formulez vos haïnes contre les autres, comme vous mentez, lorsque vous criez vos admirations mutuelles! vous n'êtes que des ratés. Maintenant je vous veux.¹⁹

Patriarchal grandparents are the malevolent influence in promoting divorce and separation of the child from its parents in Suzette.²⁰ M. and Mme. Chambert lavish affection on twelve year old Suzette, daughter of their son, Henri, but profess complete hate for the mother, Régine. They had disapproved of the marriage because Régine's family did not rank in as high a social category as they and because they consider her arrogant and irreligious. When Mme. Chambert and her spinster daughter, Monique, learn that Régine has been unfaithful (which is not true), they capitalize on this opportunity to secure control of

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

the child. Mme. defames her son's wife:

...Tu l'as épousée malgré ton père et malgré moi... Eh bien! Ecoute bien ce que te dit ta mère, mon enfant! Dieu ne bénit pas les unions qui sont fondées sur la révolte... Tout ce qui arrive, je l'ai prévu. Elle est coquette, elle est ambitieuse, elle ne croit à rien. ...Elle élève ta fille comme une païenne, elle t'aurait mené à une catastrophe. ...Rien de meilleur ne pouvait t'arriver, je te le répète... C'est la clef de ta prison que tu as trouvée, c'est ta liberté, ta dignité, ton indépendance, que tu peux reconquérir...21

Against his personal desire, they force Henri, who is weak-willed and extremely attentive to parental instruction, to seek a divorce.

Régine, determined to fight for her child, takes her to her father's home. Conferring with Henri, she declares her innocence and threatens to reveal his infidelity and forgery of government contracts if he presses the divorce action. She urges the family and Henri to cease proceedings for Suzette's benefit, but all her efforts are unsuccessful. The police take the child from her and place her in the Chambert home. Here, under the sinister grandmother's compulsion and machinations to alienate mother and daughter, Suzette writes her mother, "je suis très bien soignée dans ma famille... Grand'mère me charge de te dire... ...qu'elle me fera prier le bon Dieu... ...pour qu'il te pardonne le mal que tu nous fais".22

21 Ibid., p. 54.
22 Ibid., p. 164.
Disarmed by her letters, Régine decides to submit to the more powerful forces and to spare her child the emotional strain that is inherent in the bickering:

...C'est parce que j'ai vu ce qu'il en a coûté à sa jeune sensibilité. Je ne veux plus continuer à me battre avec vous puisque c'est elle qui reçoit les coups que nous nous portons. ...J'aime mieux vous donner mon enfant que de m'exposer à la voir tomber malade d'émotion si nous continuions à nous la disputer.23

Régine's self-abnegation for the interests of Suzette prompts Henri and his father to effect an immediate reconciliation. The families reunited, M. Chambert, echoing Brieux, declares: "le père, la mère et leur petit enfant, c'est une trinité sacrée. Il faut tout accepter plutôt que de la désunir... Venez, mes enfants, que nous nous embrassions tous."24

An irreparable separation of a child from one of the parents is treated in Simone. M. Sergeac commits a crime of passion when he discovers his wife and a friend in his home by shooting his wife and himself. The friend escapes and hangs himself, the wife dies, but he survives. Suffering temporary amnesia, he is unable to recount the events of the day of murder. Two months later, the physician, a judge, his father, and M. Loray, his wife's

23 Ibid., pp. 186-87.
24 Ibid., p. 190.
father, attempt to help him re-enact the activities of that day in an effort to solve the crime. With this assistance, he is able to recapitulate the happenings and discovers the crime he has committed. Though not sentenced since it is excusable in France for a man to murder a wife committing adultery in his home, Sergeac regrets his jealous deportment because of his six year old daughter, Simone.

He rears Simone in ignorance of her mother's conjugal infidelity, describing her in terms of praise and explaining her death as the result of a hunting accident. When she becomes engaged, the tragedy of the past is learned by her fiancé's parents, who consequently oppose the marriage. Simone submits her father to a searching interrogation, but he only sinks to his knees to beg her pardon and to request she cease her questioning. Seeking out the family servant, she learns the horrible truth. Sergeac understands her knowledge of the secret when she looks at his hands with horror and informs him she is leaving him. Asked for forgiveness, she hesitates, "Je ne suis imaginé que je devais te haïr, et je ne peux pas. Eclaire-moi." "25 Sergeac refuses to dictate his daughter's feelings. He requests his wife's father to pronounce the

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verdict. It is one of pardon:

Va embrasser ton père, mon enfant. Il y a ici quelqu’un qui a le droit d’imposer sa volonté. C’est moi, moi le père de celle que tu pleures... Allons! Tu peux aller dans ses bras puisque c’est moi qui t’y conduis.

Monsieur de Réboval\textsuperscript{27} presents the horrible effects of a \textit{ménage à trois} on the children concerned. Réboval is a senator respected by even his political enemies as being a sincere, honest man. A crusader against the evils in society, he expresses his lofty ideals in supreme oratory that impresses the public. But the true nature of his private life, known by two women, is hypocritical. Married and the father of a daughter, Béatrice, he spends three days a week with his family at the country chateau. The remainder of the week, spent in Paris, is occupied with professional and senatorial duties. Here he resides with Pauline Loindet, a girl whom he had seduced in his youth. Learning she was with child, he intended to marry her. However, his mother, to whose wishes he was subservient, wanted him to marry a girl with social prestige. He planned to work in public affairs and, realizing the advantages of this match, married his present wife.

Through the years he has maintained two households,

\footnotetext{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 127.

his legal one, and his extra-marital ménage, Pauline and their natural son, Paul. To his wife he has given his word of honor that he does not have a mistress, and to his son, whom he has carefully reared, he has given a chronicle of his mother's love for a soldier friend of his who was killed before they were married and who had asked Réboval to protect Pauline and their expected progeny in the event he did not return. Thus has he led a double life for twenty years, regulating two households with considerable finesse. However, as an act of retaliation, his wife reveals that she has not been unaware of his duplicity when on her death-bed she sends a servant to his Parisian quarters to inform him of her illness.

Within two years, the senator marries his mistress and establishes her in his home with his daughter, who is resentful and suspicious of the interloper. Her father sends Paul to Africa as a disciplinary measure for having incurred gambling debts. She reads his accounts of adventures there in "Rue deu des Deux Mondes," a Parisian literary magazine, and discovers from his writings that he is the heroic type of man she would choose to marry. On his return, they fall in love and wish to marry! Monsieur Réboval has never contemplated an incestuous situation and hastens to arrange a satisfactory marriage for his daughter.
Béatrice, declaring her love solely for Paul, refuses this arrangement and interrogates her father in a powerful scene similar to that one in which Simone searches to unearth the sin in her father's past which jeopardizes her future happiness. Unlike the action of Simone's parent, that of Béatrice's is irreparable. Réboval attempts to withhold his long guarded secret:

Tais-toi! Tais-toi! Béatrice!... Tu ne peux pas épouser Paul... Tu ne le peux pas... et je ne peux pas, moi, te dire pourquoi mais rien que d'y penser... Rien que cela, c'est une chose abominable... 28

Béatrice, surmising the import of the implication, immediately breaks her engagement. Unable to explain her sudden reversal to Paul, she suggests he ask his father:

Searching words to justify himself to his horrified and denouncing offspring, Réboval explains to Paul his reason for not wedding his mother:

Ma mère, qui serait morte de chagrin si je lui avais désobéi. J'ai sacrifié mon amour à mon devoir filial. Il faut que vous sachiez ceci. Je tremblais, rien qu'à la voix de mon père, et pour que ma mère ne souffrit pas, j'eusse consenti à tout. 29

To Béatrice, in accounting for his marriage to her mother, he relates:

Je n'avais pas de volonté. Toute ma vie, même, j'ai été faible. J'aurais voulu le contraire. Je mettais le masque de l'énergie, mais je n'ai jamais au vouloir, si ce n'est en politique. Je ne puis

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28 Ibid., pp. 326-27.
29 Ibid., p. 333.
No satisfactory dénouement possible for the lovers, Paul goes to seek solace in a life of action, Béatrice, in a life of prayer.

The greatest scourge to the home, venereal disease, is presented in detail in Les Avariés (The Damaged). The most didactic of all his plays, it is a frank discussion of syphilis. A diseased young man consults a doctor to secure an immediate cure. As the banns for his marriage have been announced and excellent dowry arrangements have been contracted, he wishes to avoid any delay. The doctor,


31 Henrik Ibsen had previously treated this "daring" subject in Ghosts.


33 At first it was barred because it treated a subject that was taboo. When the censors permitted it to be represented Brieux addressed the audience each night before the performance began:

"Je vous demande la permission de vous dédier cette pièce.

"La plupart des idées qu'elle cherche à vulgariser sont les vôtres.

"Je pense, avec vous, que la syphilis perdra considérablement de sa gravité lorsqu'on osera parler ouvertement d'un mal qui n'est ni une honte ni un châtiment et lorsque ceux qui en sont atteints, sachant quels malheurs ils peuvent propager, connaîtront mieux leurs devoirs envers les autres et envers eux-mêmes.

"Croyez, Monsieur, à ma respectueuse sympathie."
eloquently speaking for Brieux throughout, advises him that a cure is possible but "si vous vous mariez avant trois ou quatre ans, vous serez un criminel." 34 In commenting on the disease, he tells the man:

...il n'y a rien là que de très ordinaire, de très naturel, de très commun... c'est un accident qui peut arriver à tout le monde, ...il est un mal improprement appelé mal français. 35

When the diseased insists on marrying, the doctor implores him to consider his wife and children:

...Vous n'avez pas le droit d'exposer votre femme à de telles détresses. Mais il n'y a pas qu'elle que vous pouvez frapper, vous pourrez encore l'atteindre dans ses enfants, dans vos enfants... Et je vous exclue pour un moment de ma pensée, vous et elle; c'est au nom de ces innocents que je vous implore; c'est l'avenir, c'est la race que je défends!

...Visitez les hôpitaux d'enfants. Nous connaissons le type de l'enfant des syphilitiques. Ce type est classique et les médecins les désignent entre tous, ces petits vieux qui ont l'air d'avoir déjà vécu et d'avoir gardé le stigmate de toutes nos infirmités, de toutes nos déchéances. Ce sont des victimes de pères qui se sont mariés en ignorant ce que vous saviez maintenant, ce que je voudrais pouvoir aimer sur les places publiques!... Je vous ai tout dit sans rien dramatiser. ...Frenez garde d'être injuste. 36

Displeased with this interview, the man promises to wait no more than six months. He tells his fiancée that a

36 Ibid., pp. 27-28.
tubercular condition requires him to postpone the wedding
six months, during which period he consults a charlatan
who "cures" him.

The effect of his incontinence is revealed when
his first child is syphilitic. When the physician an-
nounces the wet nurse is endangering her life and those of
her family, the man's mother, certain her grandchild will
die if fed from a bottle, is completely indifferent to
the nurse's health and determines to retain the nurse:

...Ma pauvre petite! Il y aurait une chose--une
seule--qu'on pourrait faire pour la sauver, et je
la négligerais! Mais je serais une criminelle!
La nourrice! la nourrice!... nous saurons faire
notre devoir... on la soignera, on l'indemnisera,
mais notre enfant avant tout!37

The nurse is suspicious when offered five hundred francs
and immediately departs when she learns that the child
"était pourri parce que son père a une sale maladie qu'on
attrape avec les femmes des rues."38

Upon learning of the diseased child, the father-
in-law, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, consults the
doctor to obtain a certificate of the husband's condition
in order that his daughter may secure a divorce. Their
discussion together presents many challenging ideas. The
doctor surprises him by charging him partly responsible:

37 Ibid., p. 52.
38 Ibid., p. 74.
...Lorsqu'il a été question de ce mariage, vous vous êtes certainement informé de l'état de fortune de votre futur gendre; vous avez demandé qu'on établisse devant vous que son rapport était constitué par de bonnes valeurs, cotées à la Bourse, vous avez aussi pris des renseignements sur sa moralité; vous n'avez oublié qu'un point, le plus important, c'est de lui demander s'il était en bonne santé. Vous ne l'avez point fait. 39

When the father-in-law realizes the irony of the situation and suggests the necessity of a law requiring physical examinations, the doctor proposes the need of complete information on social diseases:

En non, monsieur! Ne faites pas une loi nouvelle, nous en avons déjà trop. Il n'en est pas besoin. Il suffirait qu'on sût un peu mieux ce qu'est la syphilis. La coutume s'établirait bien vite pour un fiancé de joindre à toutes les paperasses qu'on lui demande un certificat de médecin,... 40

In typical Brieux fashion, the doctor discourages divorce and gives him arguments to present to his daughter:

...Vous lui direz qu'une séparation serait un malheur pour tous, que son mari est le seul qui puisse avoir assez de dévouement pour l'aider à sauver son enfant. Vous lui direz qu'avec ces ruines de son premier bonheur, elle peut s'en édifier un autre fort enviable. Vous ajouterez à cela tout ce que votre cœur de brave homme vous inspirera et nous nous chargerons pour que le prochain enfant du couple réconcilié soit robuste et vigoureux. 41

The doctor emphasizes to him that the condition is curable:

...La syphilis est une impérieuse personne qui ne veut pas qu'on méconnaissse sa puissance. Elle est

39 Ibid., p. 82.
40 Ibid., p. 83.
41 Ibid., p. 85.
terrible pour qui la croit insignifissante et bénigne pour qui sait combien elle est dangereuse. Elle est comme certaines femmes, elle ne se fâche que si on la néglige.42

Considering the client's position, the doctor takes advantage of the opportunity to indicate the need for action from the Chamber to protect the public health against society's three greatest dangers, alcoholism, tuberculosis, and syphilis:

...L'alcoolisme! Il faudrait interdire la fabrication des poisons et restreindre le nombre des débitants, mais comme on a peur des gros distillateurs qui sont riches et puissants et des petits débitants qui sont les maîtres du suffrage universel, on s'endort la conscience en se lamentant sur l'immoralité de la classe ouvrière, et en faisant des petites brochures ou des sermons. Fumistes!... La tuberculose! on sait bien que le vrai remède, ce serait le salaire suffisant et la démolition des logements insalubres dans lesquels on entasse ceux qui travaillent, ceux qui sont à la fois les plus utiles et les plus malheureux. On m'en veut pas de ce remède, parbleu! Alors, on invite les ouvriers à ne pas cracher par terre. C'est admirable! Mais la syphilis, pourquoi ne vous en occupez-vous pas? Pourquoi donc, un jour, après avoir fait des ministres chargés de défendre toutes sortes de choses, n'en feriez-vous pas un chargé de défendre la santé publique?43

When the physician purports ignorance to be the greatest hindrance in safeguarding health and suggests instruction in school, the politician hesitates. Excited, the doctor rushes to prove his position:

Croyez-vous donc que vous les empêchez de naître,

42 loc. cit.

43 Brieux; Théâtre Complet, Vol. VI, pp. 86-87.
ces curiosités? Je fais appel à ceux et à celles qui ont passé par les collèges et les pensions... Ces curiosités, on ne les étouffe pas et elles se satisfont comme elles peuvent, vilainement, bassem-
ment. Il n'y a rien d'immoral dans l'acte qui perpétue la vie au moyen de l'amour... Mais nous organisons autour de lui, vis-à-vis de nos enfants, une gigantesque et rigoureuse conspiration du si-
lence. Un bon bourgeois conduira bien sa fille et son fils dans ces fameux 'music-halls' où s'entendent des refrains à faire rougir les singes, mais il n'ad-
mettra pas qu'on s'entretienne sérieusement, devant eux, de cet acte d'amour qu'ils ne doivent connaître, semble-t-il, que par des blasphèmes et des profana-
tions... Pas de milieu, en effet: ou c'est la chose dont on ne parle pas sans rougir, ou c'est celle sur laquelle s'exercent les sous-entendus de café-concert et des plaisanteries de corps de garde. La pornographie est admise; la science ne l'est pas. C'est cela qu'il faudrait changer! Il faudrait élever l'esprit du jeune homme en soustrayant ces faits au mystère et à la blague; il faudrait éveiller en lui l'orgueil de ce pouvoir créateur qui fait de chacun de nous l'égal d'un dieu; il faudrait lui faire comprendre qu'il est une sorte de temple où s'élaboré l'avenir de la race, et lui enseigner qu'il doit transmettre intact l'héritage dont il a le dépôt, héritage précieux que toutes les larmes, les misères et les souffrances d'une interminable lignée d'ancêtres ont constitué douloureusement.44

The doctor concludes his interview by introducing a number of victims of the ravages of syphilis who recount their case histories to the deputy. In the doctor's opinion, the young girl who has been infected by her employer and in turn deliberately infects everyone possible in a wanton act of revenge against men "est le symbole du Mal créé par nous ["the men"] et qui retombe sur nous."45

44 Ibid., pp. 93-94.

As the deputy departs, the medic, with a hope of social improvement, suggests he recall, as he sits in the Chamber, that which he has just seen and heard.
CHAPTER FOUR

FEMINISM

Pronounced sympathies of a feminist nature appear in many of Brieux's plays and are revealed in poignant scenes of sufferings inflicted on women by the viciousness and selfishness of men. Witness Julie in Les Trois Filles, who is deprived of children by her husband, and Lucie in Maternité, who is forced to bear children by her husband. Interest in the place of woman in the new industrial society comes to the fore in Blanchette, La Femme seule, and Pierrette et Galaor.

Blanchette attacks society for not giving girls the opportunity to earn an honest living by teaching. The protagonist is the daughter of a peasant cabaret owner who has received her teaching certificate and has been waiting at home for over six months for employment which the State had promised as forthcoming upon receipt of a diploma. Père Rousset is very proud of her and displays her diploma, which he has framed, her art work, and her knowledge on every possible occasion. However, he is piqued that she has not obtained a position and is unable


2 Antoine created this role in its performance at the Théâtre Libre.
to be earning a salary. He demands of a political figure an immediate placement for his daughter:

While awaiting a position, Blanchette dreams of marrying George Galoux, an upper class gentleman, of living in Paris, and of having a Louis XV boudoir. Madame Rousset is skeptical about her ideas and comments to her husband, "Rousset... j'ai peur que maintenant, ta fille ne soit trop instruite pour nous..." When Morillon seeks to match his son, Auguste, and Blanchette, Mme. Rousset indignantly replies, "Nous n'avons pas laissé notre enfant à l'école jusqu'à vingt ans pour la donner à un ouvrier comme nous." Thus, Blanchette, through

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3 Until 1914, teachers in France were selected by the State.
4 Brieux, Blanchette, pp. 10-11.
5 Ibid., p. 27.
6 Ibid., p. 56.
her education, has risen above her previous station and is uprooted from her milieu. She admits, "...ils me dégoûtent tous ces paysans."  

Intent on marrying George Galoux, the would-be instructor realizes she must improve her father's status and her own consequently. She plans to turn the cabaret into a café, which she would call Café de Cérès, and decorate it with allegorical paintings with Greek borders. This action will transfer Rousset from a barkeeper to a merchant. To increase her father's yield from his land, she draws on her knowledge of science and decides he must apply fertilizer. Her miscalculation of the amount to be used and the subsequent burning out of the soil anger Père Rousset. Always bored, Blanchette becomes especially annoyed when her father forces her to wait on a customer when the Galoux are present and when he saves in two an ultra-modern lamp with an ultra-long base which she gives him for a birthday present.

In analyzing the situation with her parents and finding herself misunderstood, a veritable stranger in her milieu, Blanchette addresses her father:

...Pour ta fête, je t'achète cette lampe, croyant bien faire. Tu la déformes méchamment... Oui, je sais bien, cela n'est rien, mais tous les jours, c'est un petit fait comme celui-là qui marque que

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7 Ibid., p. 44.
nous ne pouvons plus vivre ensemble. Tout ce que je trouve beau te paraît laid. Tout ce qui me paraît mauvais te paraît bon. Nous ne nous comprendrons plus jamais. Nous sommes devenus des étrangers. Tu es entêté dans ta routine et je ne conçois même pas l'honnêteté de la même façon que toi. J'ai d'abord flatté ta vanité, et tu me montras comme un chien savant. Maintenant, ça me te suffit plus. Mon orgueil te blesse, et tu cherches toutes les occasions de m'humilier. Tu m'as forcée ici à demander pardon au cantonnier parce que Lucie était là et quand M. Galoux a voulu intervenir, tu m'as encore froissée par une parole grossière. Tu ne sais plus qu'inventer pour me faire du mal... Ce que je te dis est vrai: nous sommes devenus des étrangers l'un pour l'autre. Aussi, il vaut mieux pour tout le monde que je m'en aille et je m'en irai.

Acting on her words, she is admonished by her father as she steps into the future alone, "Tu auras beau être dans la misère jusqu'au cou, et crever la faim, il n'y aura pas ici, pour toi, le morceau de pain qu'on donne aux mendients." Blanchette, unable to earn enough to support herself without turning to prostitution, humbly returns to the family foyer. She vividly describes the working conditions of women in Paris:

...Et si tu savais comment on est exploitées! Il y a des gens qui attendent qu'on en soit à la dernière misère pour vous proposer des choses abominables, et qui se moquent lorsqu'on refuse, et qui vous disent: 'Si vous aimaiez mieux crever dans la rue, ça vous régait.' J'ai vu tout ça, j'ai supporté tout ça. J'ai lutté tant que j'ai pu: mon orgueil me soutenait. À la fin, j'ai compris que c'était impossible, et je

8 Blanchette refers to her parents' system of overscharging bills due them. They do not believe you are stealing when you take from someone who is richer than you.

9 Brieux, Blanchette, pp. 107-08.

10 Ibid., p. 111.
Rousset's acceptance of her proposal is not immediate and she proceeds to tell her father of the many girls who prepare for teaching who become prostitutes because they are unable to secure honest employment. Almost taking that course, Blanchette explains:

...L'instruction ne donne pas la vertu... Il n'en manque pas des malheureuses qui peuvent envelopper leur carte de fille soumise dans leur brevet d'institutrice. 

Rousset quickly responds, "Alors, on a tort de donner de l'instruction à ses enfants?"; "Non. Mais," Blanchette suggests, "il faudrait aussi leur donner la manière de s'en servir et ne pas vouloir en faire des fonctionnaires."  

Finally succumbing to his daughter's plea, Rousset welcomes her back. Once again in harmony with her environ-

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11 There are two third acts for Blanchette. In the original, composed for presentation at the Théâtre Libre, Blanchette goes to the Galoux home to help her friend, Lucie Galoux study for her teacher examinations. Lucie's brother George succeeds in making her his mistress since she has no dowry or social position to sanction a marriage. Several years later she returns home to save her father from losing all his property. Auguste offers her marriage, regardless of her past, but Blanchette regards him too highly to allow him to wed her.  

12 Brieux, Blanchette, p. 137  
13 Ibid., p. 140.  
14 loc. cit.
ment and her situation, Blanchette weds Auguste, the peasant boy she had previously rebuffed.

*La Femme seule,* 15 (Woman on Her Own), depicts a woman's struggle for independence in the professional world and in the laboring world. Thérèse, an intelligent and capable young woman of twenty-three, lives with the Guérets since her parents are dead and is engaged to René Charton. When her lawyer absconds with her money, René's parents forbid a marriage sans dot. Thérèse, confident that she is capable of self-support, plans to go to Paris. The idea of a young lady going to Paris alone to work appalls Madame Guéret, but Thérèse insists on seeking this independence:

...Ma résistance, ma volonté vous choquent. Excusez-moi, ce n'est pas ma faute si je suis ainsi, et différente de vous. Je ne dis pas que vous n'ayez pas raison. Mais, que voulez-vous, je pense autrement. Toute l'instruction que j'ai reçue au lycée, tous les livres qu'on m'a fait lire ont développé en moi certaines idées... Je me crois de force à gagner ma vie, et par conséquent, je considère comme un devoir de ne pas continuer à vivre de votre charité. 16

Thérèse believes she will have no difficulty because she has written articles which were well received, for a feminist magazine, "La Femme Libre," and is certain she can secure a position on the writing staff. Discovering her


services are of less value since she is no longer a society lady, Thérèse works for sweat shop wages. As the review does not flourish, the directors announce that expenses must be pared and start by reducing wages. This cut causes consternation among the other women workers who cannot survive on less pay. Madame Chanteuil surveys the situation thus: "Nos parents ne nous ont préparé qu'une carrière: l'homme... J'ai été folle en ne le comprenant pas, maintenant je vois clair." She feels unable to go through the rigors of searching for another job:

Chercher un autre emploi? Jamais! Alors, il faudrait que je recommence à faire tout ce que j'ai fait avant d'entrer ici et que je gravisse le même calvaire! Ah! non! Ah! certainement non! Chercher de l'ouvrage, c'est-à-dire marcher, trotter dans la boue, monter des escaliers, tirer des sonnettes, revenir, revenir encore, recevoir encore des rebuf-fades et, lorsqu'on croit avoir réussi, se heurter à une porte barrée par un homme qui vous guette, et dont il faut satisfaire la fantaisie avant de pénétrer dans l'atelier, le bureau ou le magasin! Et recommencer avec d'autres pour ne pas être renvoyée! Ah! non! Ah! non! Et puisque c'est fatal, impossible à éviter, puisque c'est une chose entendue, acceptée, que la seule carrière d'une femme, c'est de servir au plaisir de l'homme, j'aime mieux servir au plaisir de celui qui ne me dégoûte pas!18

The editor, enamoured with Thérèse, secures a concession that allows her to be retained at full pay, but, comprehending the circumstances, Thérèse refuses. Unable to earn a decent living in Paris, she secures a position

17 Ibid., p. 159.
18 Ibid., p. 161.
as forewoman in a book bindery in the provinces. She forms a women's union as a self-defense measure to counter the common injustices and insults inflicted by the male proletarians, who fear the female competition. When the men arrange for union headquarters to order the manager to release the women factory workers, they sabotage the women's quarters when the manager stands by Thérèse.

Again deprived of employment, Thérèse leaves the scene forecasting the end of the period marked by man's inhumanity to woman and the rise of the period in which woman will take her place by man and receive the same payment for the same work:

Je tiens à prendre ce soir le train pour Paris. Mais que vos ouvriers ne se réjouissent pas. Dans cette nouvelle guerre des sexes c'est eux, eux les hommes qui seront vaincus, parce que la femme travaille à meilleur marché, n'ayant pas besoin comme eux d'un surcroît de salaire à porter au cabaret... Et il n'y aura pas que les ouvriers qui connaîtront ces défaites, entendez-vous, monsieur Féliat! Les fils des bourgeois qui n'ont pas l'énergie d'épouser les filles sans dot les trouveront plus tard sur leur chemin, ces malheureuses qu'ils auront eux-mêmes contraintes au travail... Il faut en prendre votre parti... Des temps nouveaux sont venus. Dans tous les pays, dans les villes, dans les campagnes, chez les pauvres et les demi-pauvres, de chaque foyer déserté pour l'alcool ou laissé vide par ceux qui n'ont pas le courage du mariage, se lèvera une femme qui l'abandonnera et qui viendra s'asseoir à côté de vous, à l'usine, à l'atelier, au bureau, au comptoir. Vous ne l'aurez pas voulu ménagère, et comme elle ne se voudra pas courtisane, elle sera l'ouvrière, la concurrente... et la concurrente victorieuse...! Adieu!19

The considerable progress in the struggle for

19 Ibid., pp. 239-240.
feminine independence following pre-World War I La Femme seule is evidenced in the opening lines of post-war Pierrette et Galaor20 spoken at the opening of a hydro-electric plant designed by Pierrette Nizier, "Et c'est ainsi que les femmes de France, après avoir secondé leurs frères et leurs maris pendant la guerre, les remplaceront dans les travaux de la paix."21

The women may very well do so for "il y a en ce moment deux millions de filles de plus que de garçons en âge de se marier."22 This unbalanced sexual equilibrium indicates that many women cannot expect homes and children and must seek professional employment. Pierrette, well-educated and trained, has secured this economic independence, but is still restrained by Galaor which

...a ceci de particulier qu'il n'existe pas, mais qu'il nous gouverne tous! ...La routine, l'obstacle, le frein, l'ennemi de tout ce qui est jeune, de tout ce qui est nouveau!23

Her brother-in-law describes this influential tyrant thus:

...il n'existe que par nous, mais nous l'aimons parce que nos grands-parents, mon père et les miens l'ont créé, et nous le vénérions, je crois bien, parce que, représentant notre conception de la morale, il a fini par nous inspirer le respect qu'on doit aux

20 Brieux, Pierrette et Galaor (Paris: P. V. Stock, 1924), 150 pp. This play is also called L'Enfant.
21 Ibid., p. 5.
22 Ibid., p. 27.
23 Ibid., pp. 31-32.
sentiments qui durent. Il est la tradition, dans la famille, et nous sommes de ceux pour qui la tradition et la famille sont une forme de religion.  

A modern woman, Pierrette is actively engaged in combating this force of tradition which she considers an enemy of progress:

J'ai passé ma vie à lutter contre lui! C'est malgré Galaor que je suis allée à l'école d'électricité: une jeune fille qui apprend autre chose que la broderie et le piano! Galaor ne l'admet pas! Et que je suis ingénieur! Une jeune fille ingénieur! Galaor en étoffe d'un rire de mépris! Et que je gagne ma vie! Galaor en a été tellement suffoqué qu'il en est mort!  

But her assumption of a masculine role tends to preclude the expression of her femininity. Her sister analyzes her clearly:

Tu es une âme exquise, mais fantasque... Tu ressembles à une chatte. Quand on vient t'embrasser, on risque un coup de griffe. Le curieux est que tu désiras la caresse et qu'elle te fait plaisir. ...Tu te crois déchue et tu laisses voir ta sensibilité. Tu es farouche et impulsive. Tu as une âme ardente, une âme qui brûle, mais, au lieu d'en montrer la flamme au foyer de famille, tu la caches au plus profond de toi, dans la cave, comme un calorifère. Ça n'en brûle pas moins, mais c'est souvent surloutemment dangereux.  

Pierrette confesses that she desires a superior man who is worthy of her. Once interested in Henri de Chalvet, she finds him changed since the war:

24 Ibid., p. 33.
25 Ibid., p. 35.
26 Ibid., p. 48.
Brassol, a man who has amassed huge war profits wishes her hand and offers to finance any engineering projects she would like to develop. In pressing his suit, he suggests there is more than professional achievement for a woman and shrewdly mentions the happiness of the woman who exclaims, "Ce matin, mon petit enfant a fait son premier pas." 28 Her family urges her to marry Brassol, who can provide financial assistance that will save them from having to sell part of the ancestral estate. (Galaor would lament that action.) The woman engineer, who has given her youth to the care of her domineering mother, who, still regarding her as a child of fifteen, chooses her clothes and her books, refuses to accept this family responsibility. Instead she plans to emancipate herself from filial duty and accept employment in Scandinavia. Galaor shakes his head and prevents her acceptance.

In her consequent disillusion, Pierrette is pervaded by a feeling of loneliness and rebellion. Championing

27 Ibid., p. 52.
28 Ibid., p. 61.
the cause of unmarried girls who devote themselves to maternal love and care of their children and deploring those respectable married people who refrain from having children, she desires maternity per se without marriage. To conceive a child, she visits Henri’s room the night before he departs for Brazil.

When explanations are required, she explains her longing for a child and affection:

...J’ai eu peur de la solitude qui m’était promise. Je n’ai pas voulu d’une vie sans amour et sans responsabilités. Je n’ai pas voulu que personne n’ait besoin de moi... Je n’ai pas voulu vieillir sans avoir à serrer contre moi un être à moi, un être pour qui je compte, un être qui me doive quelque chose: Les bras vides, c’est effroyable! Je n’ai pas voulu vivre les bras vides!... Et lui, Henri, était là, lui, que j’aurais voulu pour mari, lui que j’aimais et qui allait partir...Jamais il ne serait devant moi pour me reprocher mon action.29

Henri returns from Brazil, eager to marry Pierrette. Her brother-in-law attempts to secure her consent. He explains Henri’s listless attitude, which had disgusted

Pierrette on his return from combat:

...On leur avait promis, au bout de leur chemin de douleur, une France rayonnante de bonheur et de gloire dans une humanité à jamais délivrée de la guerre. Ils avaient élevé leurs espérances à la hauteur de leurs sacrifices. Ils sont tombés de haut. ...Ils ont vu la ruée à l’argent et aux plaisirs, ils ont vu l’exploitation de leurs misères par ceux qui avaient su y échapper. ...On leur reproche de se dérober devant le mariage: l’attitude des femmes

29 Ibid., p. 137.
et des jeunes filles n'est pas pour les y encourager.\textsuperscript{30}

But now he claims Henri is adjusted and bids her marry him in order to preserve "la famille, la tradition, la continuité, Galaor."\textsuperscript{31} Yielding to the best interests of the child's future, she accepts.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 143.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 146.
CHAPTER FIVE

GAMBLING, CHARITY AND SCIENCE

The plays of Brieux are notable for the diversification to be noted in their subject matter. A keen observer of society, he discovered its many foibles. The evils of gambling, fashionable philanthropy, and pseudo-science appear in Résultat des Courses, Les Bienfaiteurs and L'Evasion.

Résultat des Courses,¹ (Outcome of the Races), a sympathetic picture of life among the artisan class rich in local color, crusades against gambling among workers. Arsène Chantraud, a bronze worker in the shop of Monsieur Lesterel, has the habit of betting on the horses money that is needed at home. His wife reprimands him and reminds him of the time he lost all his pay:

...Tu te rappelles, le samedi où tu es rentré sans un sou... Tout le travail de quinze jours que tu avais perdu... Si nous n'avions pas eu nos enfants qui travaillaient... comment aurions-nous fait?... Toutes nos économies avaient filé pendant la maladie de Grand'Mère... nous n'avions plus un sou...²

This threat to their security is a constant source of fear to her. She approves of his casual drinking

...Mais jouer de l'argent... l'argent du ménage...

² Ibid., pp. 56-57.
mon homme!... Vrai, j'ai eu peur... je te le dis...
j'ai eu peur que nous finissions dans le malheur... Je voyais déjà toutes nos affaires au Mont-de-Piété...
Je t'en prie, Arsène, ne joue plus jamais, jamais!
Tu sais que nous n'avons rien de côté... Il va falloir payer le vin... et la morte-saison va venir...
Ne joue plus, n'est-ce pas? 

Arsène cannot resist betting after once winning

and upon receipt of a tip for a sure winner he even bets

the 1200 francs that he is supposed to deposit for his em-

ployer. Unfortunately, the horse loses the race and he

loses his job. Lesterel, rather than send him to prison,

makes him sign a statement saying he stole the money

and files it. Arsène sums up his plight in this manner:

"Mon vrai crime, alors, c'est pas de vous avoir volé; mon

vrai crime, c'est d'être un pauvre, c'est d'être un

ouvrier." 

Unable to find work because Lesterel would be un-

able to give him a commendable reference, Arsène remains

unemployed. The result of his gambling fever is painful

for all. His daughter gives him the money she has earned

for a dowry in order that he may pay back what he stole.

His wife takes in sewing in an effort to support the

family and his son makes a payment when they are about to

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3 Ibid., p. 58.

4 This role was played by Antoine at the Théâtre

Antoine.

5 Brieux, Résultat des Courses, p. 127.
be evicted. While Arsène's deserving fortunes continue on the down grade, his son, Victor, becomes co-partner in Lesterel's business and fiancé of his daughter. In this manner the sins of the father are rectified.

The futility of patronizing, fashionable charity is illustrated in *Les Bienfaiteurs* (The Philanthropists), with shrewd and satirical observation. Robert and Pauline Landreoy are the protagonists in the action. Their philanthropic attitude pervades all their life. They have an extremely inefficient servant whom they keep because she would be unable to secure work elsewhere and she must eat. They ask themselves, "Et si nous n'appliquons pas ici nos théories sur la bonté, où les appliquerons-nous?"7

Distressed by "ce malentendu qui sépare les pauvres de ceux qui voudraient les soulager," they are given an opportunity to remedy their charge, "Ceux qui font la charité ne savent pas la faire,"8 when Pauline's brother, Valentin Salviat, returns from Africa and turns over to their philanthropic projects the millions that he has earned from gold mines. Landreoy convinces him of the benefits they can provide for the deserving working men:

...En bien, ne sentez-vous pas que vous l'excuserez, cette fortune, en en consacrant une partie à l'œuvre que je dis: aider ceux qui travaillent? Faire que

7 Ibid., p. 22.
8 Ibid., p. 19.
l'homme qui a peiné dix heures rapporte au moins chez lui de quoi nourrir les siens; faire que l'homme qui a peiné toute sa vie ne soit pas réduit, lors de sa vieillesse, à subir l'humiliation de la charité...

Oui, l'humiliation... car ce que la société donne à cet homme qui s'est usé à son service, ce n'est pas un cadeau qu'elle lui fait, c'est une dette qu'elle lui paie, et qu'elle paie avec rapacité... lorsqu'elle la paie. Alors, monsieur Valentin Salviat, laissez-vous convaincre... essayez... Et si vous ne deviez pas réussir, il faudrait essayer cependant, parce que vous auriez tout de même fait un peu de bien... et que c'est là le seul but et la vraie joie de la vie.9

Interested in organized charity, Pauline thinks she can work miracles with adequate funds. Valentin is skeptical because of his observances of such charity:

...J'ai connu aussi la charité des œuvres: trop souvent, elle n'oblige que des aigrefins; j'ai connu la charité des religions, celle qui choisit, celle qui a fait un Tartuffe de Voltaire lui-même. Oui, j'ai vu tout cela, et j'en ai gardé une inquiétante rancœur... Vois-tu, Pauline, entre ceux qui possèdent et ceux qui méritent d'être secourus, il y a un mur, un mur énorme et que rien ne peut renverser. Plains-les, ah! plains-les, ceux qui ont bon coeur; plains-les aussi, ceux qui souffrent. Les uns et les autres se cherchent mutuellement avec avidité, mais ils sont condamnés à ne se rencontrer jamais;10

However, he agrees to allow his sister the funds to pursue her aims.

Landrecy starts a factory to manufacture his new invention conducted on two principles: "pas d'autre discipline que la dignité même des ouvriers..."11 and "le salaire des ouvriers sera proportionné à leurs charges et

9 Ibid., p. 39.
10 Ibid., p. 49.
11 Ibid., p. 56.
Reporting his progress to Valentin, he enthusiastically details his projects:

...j'ai institué pour eux un service médical gratuit, un économe; une crèche et une école d'apprentissage pour leurs enfants... J'oubliais... des maisons ouvrières. 13

Unfortunately, Landrecy is not cognizant of the fact that money does not cure all problems. The following scene poignantly expresses the value of human understanding and advice in times of crisis:

L'employé: ...Pluvinahe, un des ouvriers de la chaufferie, veut à toute force vous parler.

Landrecy: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

L'employé: Je ne sais pas... sa femme est très malade, et son père...

Landrecy: Qu'il s'adresse au médecin. Le médecin est gratuit, les médicaments sont gratuits... Qu'est-ce qu'il veut de plus?

L'employé: Il veut vous parler

Landrecy: Je n'ai pas le temps.

Valentin Salvist: Bah! recevez-le...

Landrecy: Comme vous voudrez. Seulement, si on écoutait toutes leurs jérémiades, on n'en finirait pas.

Pluvinahe: Bonjour, la société.

Landrecy: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a, mon ami?

12 Ibid., p. 57.

13 loc. cit.
Pluvinage: Ben, patron, j'ai ma pauvre femme qui est très bas...

Landrecy: Vous avez fait venir le médecin?

Pluvinage: Oui. Seulement, j'aurais voulu vous raconter, vous demander un conseil.

Landrecy: Je ne suis pas médecin. Vous a-t-on délivré les médicaments?

Pluvinage: Oui, patron.

Landrecy: GRATUITEMENT?

Pluvinage: Oui, patron.

Landrecy: Alors?

Pluvinage: C'est à cause de mon père... qui est vieux... Il y a eu une histoire avec ma belle-soeur, à propos de...

Landrecy: Oui... Eh bien, mais je n'ai pas le temps. Tenez, prenez ça... et laissez-nous. (Il lui donne de l'argent.)

Pluvinage: Mais non, patron, c'est pas ça que j'aurais voulu... Je suis dans la peine. Mon père a eu une histoire avec ma belle-soeur...

Landrecy: Allons, prenez ça et laissez-nous.

Pluvinage: Enfin... (Très décontenancé.) Alors, je m'en vais, je m'en vais. (À part.) C'est pas ça que j'étais venu chercher !

Pauline's efforts are in the realm of regenerating the unfortunates of society. Organizing a complex system of charitable relief, she has numerous chairmen for different aspects of the program. These leaders are women who believe, "On ne serait pas une vraie femme du monde, maintenant, si l'on ne faisait partie d'une œuvre de

The administration becomes complicated by conflicts in authority, rivalries between the department heads, and improper doling. Former criminals, drunks, prostitutes, and unmarried women with children, a group inclined to dupe them, merit most of their attention. These vagrants discover they can secure more from charity than from honest work. Meanwhile, deserving people in financial straits find little assistance. The women conveniently burn a letter they have received from a woman, whose plea for assistance they have ignored, when they learn that she has committed infanticide and suicide.

When Pauline realizes that her organization is being swindled by specious applicants, she summons Escaudin, a professional administrator of charity whose ten years of experience have made his dispensing of aid mechanical. Of her system and his, he comments:

Je ne sais pas... c'est une question de flair... Vous autres femmes, vous vous laissez apitoyer... Il faut apporter dans l'exercice de la charité le même sens pratique et le même sang-froid que dans les affaires. Moi qui ai fait ma fortune dans le commerce... Tenez, vous avez encore des clients--je les appelle mes clients--vous avez encore des clients dans votre antichambre. Voulez-vous que je les reçoive devant vous? Vous allez voir.16

In Escaudin's subsequent interviews, he reverses the bountifulness of Pauline and refuses aid to every one.

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15 Ibid., p. 43.
16 Ibid., pp. 124-25.
Valentin disapproves of these extreme measures and dismisses Escudin.

Landreoy encounters difficulties in his well-intentioned government of the factory. When he dismisses an inexperienced worker, the industrial workers storm his office. They resent the employer's action which has deprived a man of employment because they claim: "On a tous le droit au travail. Le travail, c'est la dignité du peuple. Si vous enlevez à un ouvrier le droit au travail, vous lui enlevez sa dignité."17 Summarizing the situation in the following manner—"C'est toujours la lutte entre le capital et le travail. Le travail, qui est sacré, ne doit jamais céder."18 they decide to strike. Disillusioned by their extreme decision and unappreciatives of his endeavors in their behalf, he refuses to be intimidated and to relent to their demands. He decides to close the factory and in dejection declares, "Décidément, le peuple ne mérite pas qu'on s'occupe de lui!"19

In revealing his decision to his wife, Landreoy admits the difficulty in understanding the workers:

...Valentin Salviat avait raison: entre eux et nous, il y a un mur infranchissable. Ils ne nous compren- nent pas et ils suspectent nos meilleures intentions.

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17 Ibid., p. 147.
18 Ibid., p. 155.
19 Ibid., p. 156.
Ils échappent à notre jugement autant qu'à notre bonté. Nous ne serons jamais ce qu'il y a derrière leurs fronts étroits, ni dans leurs coeurs rebelles à cette pitié dont ils restent dignes, cependant. Rien n'est navrant, vois-tu, comme de voir repousser la main qu'on tend avec loyauté.

Valentin evaluates the charity organization cogently:

...Je dis que ta charité, aveugle, maladroite, brouillon, a fait plus de mal que de bien... ...Cette charité-là augmente le nombre des mendiantes sans diminuer celui des pauvres.

Of their philanthropy, he unsparingly remarks when they term their solicitors as ingrates:

...Alors, quand vous croyez avoir été bons, à votre avis, on vous doit de la reconnaissance? Ah! vous donnez dix sous, cent sous, et il faut qu'on vous rembourse cette dette par des années de dévouement et d'admiration; vous donnez du métal et vous voulez qu'on vous rende de l'amour! Vous n'êtes pas dégoûtés, mes gaillards, et vous ne perdriez pas au change! Pour vous, pour vous tous, les bienfaiteurs, la reconnaissance est une dette; si on ne vous l'acquitte pas, il vous semble qu'on vous vole quelque chose. Mais, alors! vous n'avez donc donné que pour recevoir? Et s'il en est ainsi, je me demande où est votre bonté! — Adieu!

The awakening of a truly charitable spirit comes to Landrecy when the worker whom he had attempted to solace with coin appears and announces that his wife has just passed away. Landrecy exhibits a true compassion which astonishes the worker and marks the commencement of a veritable understanding that will demolish the previously insurmountable wall.

20 Ibid., p. 160.
21 Ibid., p. 165.
22 Ibid., p. 166.
In the final scene the millionaire finally impresses on them the vast difference between alma and charity:

Valentin Salviat: Malgré tous vos efforts, vous, Landrecy, vous n'aviez, jusqu'à présent, rien éveillé au cœur du peuple, parce que le cœur ne comprend que le langage de l'amour, et, ce langage-là, vous ne l'aviez point parlé... mais au premier mouvement de vraie charité que vous avez eu, vous avez désarmé la haine.

Landrecy: Il faut aimer ceux qu'on veut soulager!

Pauline: Il faut les aimer et il faut les connaître!

Valentin Salviat: Le devoir, c'est donc d'enfermer l'aumône dans une poignée de main. Il faut faire la charité avec discernement, Pauline; sinon elle est malaisante; il faut la faire avec amour, Landrecy; sinon, elle est inefficace.

In L'Evasion,²⁴ (The Escape), Brieux satirizes the fringe of the medical world populated by charlatans and the serious consequences of their counsels.²⁵ Dr. Bertry bears the brunt of the attack. Dr. Belleuse, his aide, describes his accomplishments in the field of heredity eloquently in the biography he is writing for Bertry's

²³ Ibid., pp. 177-78.


²⁵ Jules Lamaître, prominent French critic, considered L'Evasion, which was crowned by the French Academy, as the best satire on the medical profession since the plays of Molière. "Ce qui est excellent dans la pièce de M. Brieux, c'est ce cadre, c'est la partie satirique. Je ne dis pas que cela vaille du Molière, attendu que je n'en sais rien; mais je crois que c'est la plus franche et la plus vivante satire qu'on ait faite de la médecine et des médecins, depuis Molière." Jules Lamaître, Impressions de Théâtre. Vol. 10, p. 52.
candidacy for the Legion of Honor:

Le docteur Bertry a fait de l'hérédité sa chose propre; il a recueilli, sur ce sujet, les observations les plus nombreuses et les plus probantes... Là où ses illustres prédécesseurs n'avaient produit que de timides suppositions, il a, lui, formulé des principes, établi des certitudes.

However, these pseudo-scientific principles have darkened the lives of his step-son, Jean, and his niece, Lucienne. Because Jean's father committed suicide, he makes the young man believe hypochondria and suicide are hereditary in his family. Similarly, because Lucienne's mother was a courtisan, the doctor assures her she is doomed to an evil life too. The young people fall in love, but Dr. Bertry prohibits the marriage in the name of science. They de cry the injustice of these "laws":

...Mais, vraiment, Jean, vraiment, ne sentez-vous pas que c'est malheureux, bien malheureux, qu'il y ait des êtres voués avant leur naissance à toutes les tristesses, à toutes les chutes... N'est-ce pas injuste, cela, n'est-ce pas souverainement injuste?

The doctor's younger brother disagrees with his interpretation of science and is convinced that, "si ces deux enfants doivent être malheureux, ils seront non pas des victimes de l'hérédité, mais celles du docteur Bertry."

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27 Ibid., p. 205.
He is troubled that society, in its materialistic order, disregards God and enthrones men like his brother and Science:

"...Votre règne n'est pas près de la fin. Vous êtes les bons dieux d'un peuple athée qui n'a plus d'autre idéal que le parfait fonctionnement de son tube digestif... Vous êtes la dernière ressource de la crédulité dans cette époque de prétendu scepticisme. ...Autrefois, les malades prêtaient Dieu de les guérir; maintenant qu'ils ne croient plus à Dieu, ils croient à la science, plus que vous n'y croyez vous-mêmes, et c'est vous qui avez hérité de la puissance des prêtres." 29

The younger Bertry sees that a client becomes completely dependent upon the counsel of a doctor:

"...Il vous consulte pour savoir quand et comment il doit manger, boire, dormir et même aimer... Vous avez inventé la peur des microbes... qui n'a jamais servi qu'à multiplier les égoïstes et les poltrons." 30

Despairing this science which offers them no hope, Jean and Lucienne decide to attempt to break the chains of the past which shackle them to a prison of doom with the power of their youth and their love for each other. Dr. Bertry assents when Jean threatens to fulfill his destiny according to the laws of heredity, i.e., to commit suicide. They go to the family estate where Jean becomes a country gentleman and Lucienne a housewife. When the Bertry brothers visit their happy household, the younger ridicules his doctor brother's formulations:

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29 Ibid., pp. 213-14.
30 Ibid., p. 215.
Rit-il d’assez bon coeur, notre ami Jean que tu
avais condamné à la mélanolgie perpétuelle? Il lui
a suffi, pour guérir, de ne plus endurer tes som-
bres prédictions, de s’emplir les poumons de grand
air et de s’intéresser à la vie. Hein! Ta fameuse
science... ta science infaillible... elle est en
defaut!... Voilà six mois que Lucienne et Jean sont
mariés, et ils sont parfaitement heureux!31

During their visit Lucienne confides to Dr. Ber-
try that she is becoming bored, fears her mother’s char-
acter will appear in her, and wonders if her will power
will be able to surmount this moral crisis. Delighted
to detect any opportunity to chastise her for her defi-
ance of his hereditary principles, he lectures her:

La volonté!... Alors, tu en es encore à écrire
que nous avons en nous un petit ressort que nous
pouvons pousser à notre gré et qui nous permet de
nous modifier?... Non, non... nous n’avons aucun
empire sur nous-mêmes. Nous ne sommes que des ré-
sultats, et, lorsque nous croyons agir de notre
propre chef, nous ne faisons que céder à une impul-
sion plus forte que les autres... Rentre à Paris
et tu te porteras mieux.32

Convinced that she cannot be a virtuous woman
after being attracted by the attentions of a former suitor
who visits the estate, Lucienne heeds the medical advice
and departs for Paris. Here she discovers that the
doctor himself is ill but has not admitted it, for it would
lessen his prestige and divulge that his knowledge of med-
cine was limited. Ashamed to seek medical consultation with

31 Ibid., p. 222.
32 Ibid., p. 253.
another member of the profession, he denounces science in his moment of need:

...Ah! si je croyais en Dieu, je me mettrais a genoux pour lui demander un miracle! Mais je n'y crois pas! Je ne crois même plus à la science... depuis longtemps...

Jean and Lucienne, who are now at his side, hear this denial, which encourages them as he continues:

La science! La science! la science!... Ah! ah!... On s'imagine savoir des millions de choses!... On veut formuler les lois de la vie... et l'on assiste, impuissant, à sa propre agonie!... Nous ne comprenons rien à tout ce qui se passe autour de nous, rien à ce qui se passe en nous... Pourquoi est-ce que je meurs? La sclérose envahit les artères... Pourquoi? Comment? Qu'est-ce que la sclérose? Voulez-vous que je vous dise? Nous ne savons rien, rien, rien!... Nous n'avons rien trouvé... que des mots!

The young couple now feel completely free from the atavistic maxims and re-unite as the doctor, himself still resolved to promulgate his doctrines, leaves to address the Legion of Honor on *La Souveraineté de la Science*.

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34 *loc. cit.*
CHAPTER SIX

POLITICS AND JUSTICE

That politics and justice should be involved in the realm of a reformer's interest is essential. This should be especially true in a Frenchman for the French are a nation of individualists who delight in discussing these two vital issues. L'Engrenage and La Robe rouge are notable examples of Brieux's interest and concern about them.

L'Engrenage,\(^1\) (The Cog), presents Monsieur Remoussin, a manufacturer from the provinces who becomes embroiled and corrupted in politics. An honest man whose interest in politics centers around the suffering he could reduce if elected, he is induced by Senator Morin to run against an adversary whom the senator does not wish to be re-elected. Remoussin insists on an honest campaign, but Morin, realizing that would not insure victory, promotes propaganda and mudslinging. When asked by a constituent if he will obtain an exemption from the army for his son, Remoussin denounces favoritism in politics and no doubt loses votes:

Mais vous ne comprenez donc pas que mon élection a pour but de protester contre tous ces abus, contre ce favoritisme qui fait que la moitié du pays, achète la conscience de l'autre moitié. Toutes ces corruptions, je veux les denoncer à la tribune; je veux que chacun ait selon ses mérites, et non selon ses intrigues.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 38.
Nevertheless, he is elected and, despite his platform, receives many letters and requests for favors. His staunch stand weakens as he becomes a cog in the political machine. He comes to believe he has been too provincial in his ideas:

...Nous avons des préjugés qui sont d'un autre âge...
A mesure qu'on s'élève, vois-tu, toutes les choses s'expliquent et, malgré ce qu'on peut dire, on saperçoit bien que la morale n'est pas la même pour un petit usinier ou pour un homme de gouvernement.

Loss of his former charitable attitude is evidenced when, consulted about conditions of workers in his factory, he announces that he is too occupied with his own affairs to be annoyed by those of others.

His newly accepted idea that there is a different set of standards for a government man is destroyed when he becomes involved in a political scandal. He chastizes himself and examines why he failed to uphold his tenets:

...Tenez, savez-vous ce qui a tué toutes mes susceptibilites, le savez-vous? Vous vous rappelez Balbigny, c'était mon idole... d'ici, je le voyais semblable à un preux, à un Bayard; il personnifiait à mes yeux toutes les noblesses et tous les courages... lorsque je l'ai vu serrer la main de ce même ministre qu'il insultait chaque matin, la notion du juste et de l'injuste, du bien et du mal, s'est effacée en moi et de ce jour-là, j'étais bon pour toutes les besognes... Et en effet, j'ai descendu toute la pente, et j'ai passé tout entier dans l'engrenage.

Though his fears that his name will be publicized are

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3 Ibid., p. 76.
not realized because so many legislators are involved that no charges are made, he himself announces it publicly. Ironically, his self-confession only earns the contempt of his constituents.

The mal-administration of justice is arraigned in the powerful drama, *La Robe rouge*,5 (*The Red Robe*). A victim of it is Vagret, a scrupulous attorney in the provinces who has never played politics. When a murder is committed in his district, he hopes to convict the murderer and receive a red robe, the mark of a judge. Located in a third class court, he has little opportunity to display his ability. His wife laments the fate of the magistracy if the able and independent magistrates like her husband continue to be superceded by the less principled ones who promise to support the ministry in order to get promoted.

Vagret has working with him on the case as examining magistrate, Mouzon, a shrewd and unscrupulous barrister. He chooses as a suspect a poor peasant, Etchepare, whose indebtedness to the deceased supplies a motive for the killing.

Mouzon then begins his cat and mouse technique of interrogation. He pounces on Etchepare and attempts to

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wrench a confession from the man who truly seems innocent
by ruses which lead him to make contradictory statements
and confuse him. Mouzon next interviews Yanetta, the wife
of the accused, and in an effort to force her to incrimi-
nate her husband, informs her that he knows of her youth-
ful escapade with her employer's son ten years ago. He
tricks her into saying that her husband was not home on
the night of the murder. Then, questioning them together,
he reveals to Etchepare his wife's past indiscretion, thus
confusing the tortured man more.

Indignant at the divulgence of her secret, Yanetta
condemns his techniques and treatment of people and com-
ares them to those of the Inquisition:

"Ah! vous êtes furieux, hein? de ne pas être arrivé
e votre but!... Oh! vous avez tout fait, tout ce qui
était possible, pourtant, à moins de nous brûler à
petit feu!... Vous avez fait semblant d'être bon...
Vous parliez avec douceur!... Vous vouliez me faire
envoyer mon mari à l'échaud... C'est votre métier
de fournir des têtes à couper... Il vous faut des
coupables, il vous en faut à tout prix. Quand un
homme est tombé entre vos griffes, c'est un homme
perdu... On entre ici innocent, il faut qu'on en
sorte criminel. C'est votre métier, c'est votre
glorie d'y arriver! Vous posez des questions qui
n'ont l'air de rien et qui peuvent envoyer un homme
dans l'autre monde, et quand vous avez forcé le mal-
heureux à se condamner lui-même, vous en éprouvez
une joie sauvage... Oui, de sauvage. Ça, de la
justice! C'est ça que vous appelez de la justice...
Vous êtes un bourreau... Vous êtes aussi féroce que
ceux de dans le temps, qui vous broyaient les os pour
vous faire avouer!"
Becoming violent, she denounces the quality of justice meted to the poor as she is forcibly removed from Mouzon's office: "Bourreau!... Lâche! Judas!... Sans pitié! Oui, sans pitié... et plus faux et plus cruel quand vous avez affaire à des pauvres gens comme nous! Oui, plus on est pauvre, plus vous êtes mauvais!"  

La Bouzule, a lawyer himself, also criticizes the magistracy. About to retire, he speaks without qualms and pronounces the fever for promotion an enemy of justice:

...Cette maladie, c'est la fièvre de l'avancement. Regardez ceux qui sont là. S'ils n'étaient infectés par ce microbe, ils seraient des hommes justes et deux, au lieu d'être des magistrats serviles et cruels.

The elder barrister also charges universal suffrage with contributing to the swaying of justice:

Parmi nos quatre mille magistrats, on n'en trouverait peut-être pas un, -- vous entendez, pas un! -- même parmi les plus humbles et les plus pauvres, -- surtout parmi les plus humbles et les plus pauvres, -- qui acceptat de l'argent pour modifier son jugement. Ça, c'est la gloire et le monopole de la magistrature de notre pays. Saluons. Mais un grand nombre d'entre eux sont prêts à des complaisances et à des capitulations s'il s'agit d'être agréable soit à l'électeur influent, soit au député, soit au ministre qui distribue des places et des faveurs. Le suffrage universel est le dieu et le tyran des magistrats.

When the case is brought to trial, the defense pre-

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7 Ibid., p. 392.
8 Ibid., p. 330.
9 loc. cit.
sents a brilliant plea that seems to insure acquittal. The attorney general then appears on the scene and asks Mouzon to resign because of immoral conduct which a newspaperman threatens to expose if he is not replaced. The attorney wishes to avoid a scandal in the ranks, but Mouzon refuses to resign. Mondoubleau, an influential friend of Mouzon, appears to advise the attorney general that the higher echelon would be pleased if he promoted Mouzon instead of Vagret and that they would demonstrate their satisfaction by promoting him to Orleans. The attorney general succumbs to the scheme.

Concurrently, Vagret delivers a speech that explodes the case of the defense. The jury is visibly swayed and a death sentence is virtually assured. But Vagret begins to doubt the guilt of the peasant. He admits he has been prejudiced against the man in his presentation:

...en étudiant ce dossier, je m'étais tellement mis dans la tête, d'avance, qu'Etchepare était un criminel que lorsqu'un argument en sa faveur se présentait à mon esprit, je le rejetais loin de moi, en haussant les épaules... Sur les faits dont je te parle et d'où est né mon doute... j'ai d'abord cherché uniquement à me prouver que ces faits étaient faux, prenant dans les dépositions des témoins seulement ce qui pouvait en combattre l'exactitude, repoussant tout le reste, avec une effroyable naïveté dans la mauvaise foi... Et à la fin, pour dissiper mes derniers scrupules, je me suis dit comme toi: "C'est l'affaire de la défense et mon la mienne!..."

He therefore insists on telling the jury his doubts, con-

vinced that it is his duty as an honest man and that it is better to release ten guilty men than to punish one innocent man. This admission to the court secures the acquittal of the accused but loses for him the red robe.

Though Etchepare is released, his life has been ruined. In addition to being ostracized in his own community, his newly-acquired knowledge of his wife’s error shatters his love for her. Yanetta’s life is likewise wrecked. Scorned by her husband for a mistake that she has already atoned, she faces life without her husband or her children. When Mouzon, in Pontius Pilate-like fashion, declares he is not responsible, the anguished woman shouts wrathfully:

Ah! vous n’êtes pas responsable!... Alors, vous pourriez, à votre fantaisie, arrêter les gens, sur un soupçon, sans soupçon même, vous pourriez jeter la honte et le déshonneur dans les familles, torturer les malheureux, fouiller leur existence, étaler leurs misères, faire renaitre des fautes oubliées, expiées, des fautes qui remontent à dix ans; vous pourriez par vos habiletés, vos ruses, vos mensonges et votre férocité, envoyer un homme au pied de l’échafaud et — plus encore! — faire, qu’à une mère, on lui arrache ses petits!... et, après cela, vous diriez comme Ponce-Pilate et vous ne vous croiriez responsable de rien!... Pas responsable!... Devant votre loi, peut-être n’êtes-vous pas responsable, comme vous le dites, mais devant la justice toute simple, devant la justice des honnêtes gens, devant la justice du bon Dieu, je vous jure bien, moi, que vous l’êtes, et c’est pourquoi je viens vous demander des comptes!

Her frenzy culminates when she draws a knife and in a final

II Ibid., p. 452.
denunciation declares, as she takes the law into her own hands, "Voilà votre œuvre, à vous, les mauvais juges: d'un innocent vous avez failli faire un forçat, et d'une honnête femme, d'une mère, vous faites un criminelle!"\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{p. 453.}\)
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The diverse areas of social concern as depicted in the foregoing chapters demonstrate that Brieux conscientiously adhered to his dramatic theory. Defining the role of the dramatist to be the presentation of ideas, he vigorously considered the important social and moral issues of his day. In fact, they became the framework of his drama. His characters were puppets which he maneuvered to illustrate ideas in his crusade to criticize and to arouse French society.

An honest, sympathetic observer of life, he declared himself an avowed enemy of the flaws in the social organism and a champion of social amelioration. His concern for the integrity of the family became paramount because he saw it to be the basis for his future hope in society. He believed that marriage was sacred, motherhood an obligation, and children a link that should not be broken. Divorce, which had not been treated in the French theatre for several decades as it was less dramatic than adultery, and ménages à trois he boldly attacked since they threatened the stability of the family. Dominating parents he chastized for crippling a child's development.

In exposing the evils of the French system of middle-
class marriage based on money and position, he arrayed the sham, the mercenary aspect, the pretentiousness, and hypocrisy involved to form a scathing denunciation of a custom which had become oppressive and needed to be replaced.

An examination of the position of women in the changing social order revealed to Brieux that they were entitled to greater consideration. A numerically larger sex-group by two million members, many of them were automatically doomed to be deprived of marriage. They were bound to a system that sanctioned no marriage without a dowry and no maternity without marriage. He saw that they must seek consolation in work, which society must provide or be guilty of condemning them to prostitution.

With great moral earnestness, he trampled the conspiracy of silence enshrouding venereal disease. He pleaded for health certificates designating one's physical fitness for marriage and parenthood and for sex education to combat the widespread ignorance of the care and treatment of the social disease. Always under the banner of truth, he challenged the superstitions and misconceptions in medical, pseudo-scientific formulations on heredity which were in vogue. He showed will power to be an important instrument in overcoming supposedly hereditary maladies.

His conviction also made him speak against gambling,
which degraded those who succumbed to it; politics, which corrupted men in its political machinery; philanthropy, which, when organized, was given without any personal, charitable feeling; and the magistracy, who, motivated by promotion and consequent increased material success, weighed injudiciously the fates of men.

Throughout his apostolate, Brieux showed that the abuses exhibited in his drama were the result of specific malpractices of men. Consequently, the humanitarian endeavored to lead them to attain the solutions by reforming those practices. When Bernard Shaw said of his drama:

You come away with a very disquieting sense that you are involved in the affair and must find the way out of it for yourself and everybody else if civilization is to be tolerable to your sense of honor. This was an accolade denoting great achievement for Brieux. It indicated the effectiveness of the apostle's mission.

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1 Brieux, Three Plays (preface by Bernard Shaw; New York: Brentano's, 1914), p. xvi.
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