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the incident of a wound received as a direct result of fear, unnoticed as such, and taken by others as a symbol of courage.

Rather than seek another "source" for Crane's work, it is better to define Kirkland's novel as an "analogue," a work employing some similar devices and, since it appeared before *The Red Badge of Courage* was started, providing a possible inspiration or suggestion. In any case, a study of *The Captain of Company K* with its inclusion of the same themes and contrivances as those of the greater novel, yet overlaid with the genteel absurdities of an unsure writer, helps to indicate the remarkable artistic achievement reached by Crane through his manipulation of these materials.

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ERIC SOLOMON

IBSEN'S "DOLL'S HOUSE" METAPHOR FORESHADOWED
IN VICTORIAN FICTION

Ibsen's Nora Helmer, insisting upon her emancipation, broke loose from a "Doll's House" already anticipated in the Victorian novel. The metaphor appears in a famous one by Dickens and a forgotten apprentice novel by George Bernard Shaw. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Bella Rokesmith pleads to her husband, "I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house."¹ G. M. Young in his massive history, *Early Victorian England*, notes, "In the profusion of Dickens the phrase might go unnoticed. Twelve years later Ibsen made it the watchword of a revolution."²

The phrase is supplemented several pages later by the description of Bella's extracurricular housewifely tasks, several of them not doll-like by Victorian standards:

Another branch of study claimed the attention of Mrs. John Rokesmith for a regular period every day. This was the mastering of the newspaper, so that she might be close up with John on general topics when John came home. In her desire to be in all things his companion, she would have set

¹ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* ("Carleton's New Illustrated Edition"), p. 659.

² G. M. Young, *Early Victorian England*, II, 493, quoted by Edgar Johnson in *Charles Dickens*, II, 1038. Young's addition and/or subtraction is incorrect, however. The serialized *Our Mutual Friend* began in 1862, seventeen years before *A Doll's House* was produced.

herself with equal zeal to master Algebra, or Euclid, if he had divided his soul between her and either. Wonderful was the way she would store up the City Intelligence, and beamingly shed it upon John in the course of the evening; incidentally mentioning the commodities that were looking up in the markets, and how much gold had been taken to the bank . . .³

By the time that translations of Ibsen first appeared in the 'eighties—particularly the popular but plodding version by Henrietta Frances Lord, *Nora* (1882)⁴—an unsuccessful early novel by Bernard Shaw had anticipated not only the metaphor but some of the action. In Shaw's second novel (*The Irrational Knot*, written in 1880) the marital tie between Edward Conolly, an electrical engineer, and his socially prominent wife, is a strained one. In a scene where Marian admits her marital disillusionments to Elinor McQuinch, one can almost hear Nora Helmer:

"Nelly, if there is one subject on which girls are more idiotically ignorant than on any other, it is happiness in marriage. A courtier, a lover, a man who will not let the winds of heaven visit your face too harshly, is very nice, no doubt; but he is not a husband. I want to be a wife and not a fragile ornament kept in a glass case. He would as soon think of submitting any project of his to the judgment of a doll as to mine. If he has to explain or discuss any serious matter of business with me, he does so apologetically, as if he were treating me roughly."⁵

Shaw, possibly unaware of his own use of the doll metaphor, examined a different parallel to *A Doll's House* in a critique of his own fiction, concluding that

Conolly decided, like Nora in *A Doll's House*, that the matrimonial relation between them [Marian and him] had no prospect of success under the circumstances, and walked out of the house, his exit ending the book. This anticipation of Ibsen, of whom at that time I had never heard, seems to me to prove that he is a representative writer, marching with the world, and not against it, or by himself, as some people suppose.⁶

³ *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 663.

⁴ Miriam Franc, *Ibsen in England*, p. 59.

⁵ G. B. Shaw, *The Irrational Knot* (New York: Brentano, 1905), p. 254.

⁶ Shaw, "Mr. Shaw's Works of Fiction. Reviewed by Himself," *The Novel Review* (incorporated with *Tinsley's Magazine*), XXXIII (February, 1892), 239.

Shaw apparently had not reread his novel prior to writing the article, for just as in Ibsen, it is the “doll” who makes this decision. Conolly walks out of the house because he has been rebuffed in his reconciliation attempt, and further remonstrance with his adamant wife would have been useless. Marian is the Nora of the novel, not Conolly. Still, there was just reason for Shaw to confess himself little staggered by the furor over Ibsen which continued for a generation afterwards. “I seriously suggest,” he wrote later, “that *The Irrational Knot* may be regarded as an early attempt on the part of the Life Force to write *A Doll’s House* in English by the instrumentality of a very immature writer, aged 24.”

Possibly even Dickens and Shaw were anticipated in their use of the “doll’s house” metaphor; certainly it was present in nineteenth-century fiction before the great Norwegian’s drama became an influence on English writers.

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IRONY AS THEME: CONRAD’S “SECRET AGENT”

In his discussion of Conrad’s *Secret Agent*, F. R. Leavis comments accurately upon the amazing unity of the work. At the same time, he recognizes that Conrad’s irony “is not a matter of an insistent and obvious ‘significance’ of tone . . .”¹ What the critic fails to note is that the basic structure of the novel is dependent upon its theme of irony, and his failure is a result of a misconception of the terms of irony that Conrad has brought to the *Secret Agent*.

Conrad himself speaks of his “ironic treatment” of the subject.² In this instance, the proper function of the critic is to determine where the irony lies and what its significance is to the tale. Simply stated, the *Secret Agent* presents a perfect illustration of the ironic theme, cast in the characters of the story, and manifested in the plot.

¹ Shaw, Preface (1905) to *The Irrational Knot*, p. xxv.

² *The Great Tradition* (New York, 1954), pp. 253–264.

³ *The Secret Agent* (New York, 1953), p. 12.