Chapter IV

The Role of Women in the Plays of Pinero
The emancipation of women had become a burning problem in the social and political life of the Western World. In England the feminist question was raised by Mary Shelly and Jane Austen in their works. The freedom of love and liberty of marriage were recognized slowly and gradually in England. The Act of 1932 before Queen Victoria's accession gave political and educational rights to the women of England. In the Victorian era the greatest champion of women emancipation was John Stuart Mills (1806-1873). He wrote his famous treatise 'The Subjection of Women' and aroused wild and violent response and hostility. Defending the rights of women, he says:

"That the principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes-the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, no disability on the other."¹

This movement for women's freedom and the vindication of their rights assumed great proportion in the latter half of the 19th century. Many dramatists took up the cause of women's freedom and dignity in the last quarter of the 19th century. Between 1890-1893 there were many influences which were exerting their impact on the dramatists of England. These influences emanated from Ibsen, a movement of free theatre and the American copyright.

Under the impact of Ibsen's plays, feminism had come to the English theatre in the eighties and nineties of the nineteenth century. Pinero chose certain phases of the new woman and her emancipation in many of his early plays such as The Magistrate (1885), The School Mistress (1886), Dandy Dick (1887), Sweet Lavender (1889), and Amazons (1893). In these plays he has expressed his views about sex, marriage and divorce. All these plays feature the problems of women. In these plays he has portrayed the character of women directly connected with their social and sexual problems. What interests Pinero is character, especially woman character. He keenly portrays the relation of individual character to social environment. His primary concern is not to build up sensational plots but to create certain personalities and to show how they are
influenced by the social conditions in which they live. Arthur Wing Pinero seems to be more deeply interested in depicting women than in drawing men. His entire work, in fact, might almost be described—in a phrase made famous by a title-page of Thackeray's—as a theatre without a hero. When we think of his people quite apart from the specific plays in which they figure, it is his heroines that we most widely recall. Many of his major plays are named after the leading female character—Mrs. Tanqueray, Mrs. Ebbsmith, Iris, Letty and the like; and even when a piece takes its title from the leading male character—The Gay Lord Quex, for instance,—it is not at all unusual for the heroine to run away with the performance. Pinero's men are no less living than his women; but his women, on the whole, are more interesting in themselves and are more profoundly analysed.

Pinero is essentially a satirist; and the satiric artist naturally looks with greater interest on men who are satirical themselves than on men of the conventional heroic pattern. The faults of men—their very foibles,—are more attractive to the satirist than that respect for ordinary standards of behaviour which is commonly regarded as a virtue. But it is less easy to laugh lightly at the failings of women in a man-made world whose social
structure is admittedly unfair to them. Pinero satirizes erring men; but when he deals with erring women, his mood deepens from the satirical to the sardonic and sometimes passes further to the rarer realm of the pathetically tragic. It is Iris that he really cares about,—not Trenwith not even Maldonado: it is Letty that he really cares about,—not Nevill Letchmere. His women, though less eccentric than his men, are scarcely less unusual, in the sense that one does not meet them every day, in the theatre or in life itself; but they are obviously more important. In nearly all his major plays, the interest is focused on what ultimately happens to the leading woman, not the leading man.

In evincing a more profound preoccupation with women than with men, Pinero has followed in the footsteps of the great Norwegian who must always be revered as the standard-bearer of the modern social drama.

In the first play, *Saints and Sinners* in which he felt free to give expression to the feminist theme, there is a maiden girl who was betrayed by an aristocratic villain (1884). In this play he has shown his conscious reaction against the cheaper and coarser art of melodrama. The beauty of this play is that the theme of the exploitation of a poor woman by a rich
person has been shown in the most ordinary melodramatic fashion and the important aspect of the play lies in the picture of a poor priest exploited by the greedy and hypocritical businessman of his congregation. It is a novelty in the genre of melodrama in vogue at that time. About this play Matthew Arnold has observed, "You have remarkably the art so 'valuable in drama—of exciting interest and sustaining it".2

The earliest of his plays is The Magistrate (1885) in, which the Magistrate places Agatha—the heroine of the play in the most important role. Complications in the play arise from the indiscretion of Agatha, who on the death of her first husband did not discharge her consumer duties. This is clear from the following dialogue of 'Agatha and Charlotte'.

Agatha : Undervaluing Aenea's love, in a moment of, I hope not unjustifiable vanity, I took five years from total, which made me thirty-one on my wedding morning.

Charlotte : Well, dear, many a misguided woman has done that before you.

Agatha : Yes, Charley, but don't you see the consequences? It

has thrown everything out. As I am now thirty one, instead of thirty six as I ought to be, it stands to reason that I couldn’t have been married twenty years ago, which I was. So I have had to fib in proportion.

Charlotte: I see......making your first marriage occur only fifteen years ago.

Agatha: Exactly.

Charlotte: Well. Then, dear, why worry yourself further?

Agatha: Why, dear, don’t you see? If I am only 31 now, my boy couldn’t have been born 19 years ago, which he was..... and if he could, he oughtn’t to have been, because, on my own showing, I wasn’t married till four years later. Now you see the result.

Charlotte: Which is, that fine strapping young gentleman over there is only fourteen.

Agatha: Precisely, Isn’t it awkward! And his moustache is becoming more and more obvious everyday.\(^3\)

\(^3\) The Magistrate, A.W. Pinero, Act I.
The above dialogue shows that in *The Magistrate*, Pinero has portrayed the character of Agatha to show that she lacks discretion which is the cause of her trouble. The Magistrate is a comedy full of laughter and jokes. The faith of the heroine Agatha is an important under current. In the next play *The Amazons* Pinero develops the mannish woman idea. The quaint but pretty heroines in men's dress bring the far off echoes of the forest of Arden where Shakespeare had taken up the theme of love at first sight.

Pinero's next play, *The Profligate* was published in 1889, which is referred to as a milestone in the path of progress. It is the strongest piece of original drama that the stage had seen for many a long year. It dealt frankly with the problem of women. The heroine, Leslie Brudenell fresh from her boarding-school, has married a young man named Dunstan Renshaw, whom she believes to be the Sir Galahad of her dreams. She is shocked when she finds that Dunstan is an intimate friend of a certain Lord Dangars, a noble man of the most lurid reputation. At the Florentine Villa where Leslie and Dunstan are spending their honeymoon, there arrives, by what one of the character calls "an awful freak of fate", a certain Janet Preece who has been ruined by a heartless profligate. Just as
she has told Leslie her sad story, she looks down the garden walk and seeing Lord Dangars and Dunstan Renshaw approaching says: "It's the man-the man!" Leslie assumes that she is referring to Dangars, and when Dunstan introduces his friend, declines to take his hand or to have anything to say to him. Imagine, then, the collapse of all her ideas and her happiness, when it proves that Janet has never seen Dangars before, and that it is Dunstan who is her seducer. The situation though built on an improbable coincidence, is heightened by many skillfully devised circumstances which it would be tedious to relate, and remain some of the most powerful events ever conceived. For quite a long time, stage time is reckoned, we see the thunder-bolt hanging over poor Leslie's head, and we hold our breath as we wait for it to fall. The value of the situation is of course quite independent of any judgment as to the merits and demerits of Dunstan's conduct, or as to Leslie's right to expect of him an innocence equal to her own.

It must be admitted that the play is simple and depends on the validity of Leslie's ideals, her ignorance, and innocence and true to nature these are, characteristic of an immense number of women. That is all that is required to make the situation one of tragic poignancy.
The heroine of this play Leslie has certain ideals which Pinero portrays and develops in the play. They are positively ethical and, therefore, their validity is unchangeable. It is not a modern value but a Victorian assumption which is not realistic enough to be a part of the social life in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The shock that she suffers at the disclosure that it was her husband Renshaw who had been Janet's seducer leaves her stunned and she unable to react in any way but to ask him to deny it. When he confesses he was guilty all she can say is "Go".

She leaves him and hides her whereabouts from him. However, after a lapse of time the woman in her, the forgiver, makes her come back, but too late. Unable to bear the pain of his separation from Leslie, Renshaw drinks poison.

"Leslie enters softly and kneels by his side

Leslie: Dunstan, I am here (He partly opens his eyes, raises himself, and stares at her; then his head falls back quietly. Leslie's face averted) Dunstan, I have returned to you. We are one and we will make atonement for the past together. I will be you wife, not your Judge – let us from this
moment begin the new life you spoke of. Dunstan! (she sees the paper which has follow from his hand, and reads it) Dunstan! Dunstan! No, No! Look at me! Ah! (she catches him in her arms). Husband! Husband! Husband!  

There is yet another aspect of a woman's character, based to a certain extent upon her innocence, which is exhibited through the words of Hugh Murray. While confessing before Wilfred his secret love for his sister Leslie he remarks:

"Women love men whose natures are like bright colours—the homespun of life repels them. They delight to hear their fate in the cadence of a musical voice, thinking they are listening to an impromptu. It's too late when they learn that the melody has been composed by experience and scored by other women's tears."  

Thus in The Profligate Pinero had taken the cause of women and emphasized chastity and purity of character. The theme of the play, the problem of the difference between the standard and moral conduct

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4 Act IV, The Profligate, A.W. Pinero.
5 The Profligate, Act IV, A.W. Pinero.
imposed by society on men and women has been very analytically presented in the play, *The Profligate*.

*The Amazons* was written three years after *Dandy Dick* and produced on 7th March, 1893, in America. The play, between *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, is a farce along old lines; the playwright strikes a new note, and without attempting any criticism of life and morality, he strives at a sort of gentle satire.

Lady Castle Jordan who has no sons and so treats all her loving girls as boys, would say about Noel, "He will be at the Hall in half an hour". The girls are trained on Mannish lines; Sergeant Shuter teaches the girls boxing, fencing and athletics. The fact is Lady Castle Jordan and her husband have been disappointed in their hope of a boy and by that time "Jack and I had agreed to regard anything that was born to us as a boy and to treat it accordingly, and for the rest of his life. My husband taught our three children—there never was another—to ride, fish, shout, swim, fence, fight, wrestle, throw, run, jump." The girls therefore grow into young women—"there strapping young women, but in disposition, in

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mind, in muscle, they are three fine stalwart young fellows". One of the
daughters, Lady Wilhelmina, is very attractive. Her "Norfolk jacket
reaches almost to her knees and her lower limbs are encased in stout
leathern gaiters. She carries a fishing rod in its case." She gives the grey
mare a lesson over the hurdles.

Girls, however, are girls for all that. They become, of course,
effeminate and are 'proposed'. The 'Two Men' discuss the affair:

"Wilhelmina: Tom don't you ever feel like a girl?
Tom : I well, I should hope not.
Wilhemina : But how do you know you don't? I'm somehow afraid I
do".  

Noeline goes out, as a boy, she finds a man hitting a girl and her
'manliness' is aroused; she hits the man. "He" is admired and called
"guv'nor" by the "men and women" that "grew out of the pavement." She
runs lest they should discover she is a girl — runs into the arms of a
young man.

8. The Amazons, Act I.
9. The Amazons, Act I.
10. The Amazons, Act I.
The complications begin. The suitors, Andre de Grival, the good looking, Frenchman, and Lord Tweenwayes come in “crawling like alligators”. Lord Litterly is the third suitor; three gay suitors in a house where no trace of effeminacy is to be tolerated. The mother is off to London: De Grival “what fortune! The mother goes! We see them, talk with them, walk with them.”\(^\text{11}\)

The mother’s prejudice persists, “Why if you hair wasn’t quite so short—and if it was curly just there and it you were an inch taller and hadn’t such an odious town air–oh.”\(^\text{12}\) But the prejudice melts as soon as she grasps his arm impulsively; she falls back with an exclamation; she clasps his arms again and ’ejaculates’: ‘pardon me, Mercy! His muscles are like my Jacks.’\(^\text{13}\) And this fact finally unites him to his lady-love.

Here the author tries to portray the mannish woman, and the mannish woman idea springs out of the pathetic desire of Castle Jordon to have a son; it has its roots in the vagaries of human nature. In *The Amazons*, the playwright shows a real insight into the lives of his characters. The characters are endowed with intensely refined sensibility,

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and they possess the most delicate and the most uncertain human passions and volitions.

The immediate result of these factors was that on May 27, 1893, Arthur Pinero planted a milestone on the path of progress in the shape of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. This is a play with an idea; it is in conformity with the time. To call it 'Old fashioned' is to do it an injustice. Pinero always kept himself abreast of the fluctuations of popular taste and outlook. Timeliness of theme, character, and dialogue are important elements in the writing of a play that is intended for immediate success on the stage. In thought and subject, Pinero was courageous. In technique too, his task was to steer a middle course, not to write a mere theatrical piece and yet not to aim at the tightness of concentration found in Ibsen.

The death of Paula, which is the point of the highest emotional intensity, occurs at the end of the play. The climax is the result of the crisis, the point where a decision is made and action taken, which determines the outcome. In this play the crisis is not obvious to the audience; it arises at the point where Ellean returns to live with Paula and Aubrey. The 'Raisonneur' in the play is the middle-aged, cynical, crusty, Cayley who like the chorus in Greek drama stands as philosopher
or commentator. The Raisonneur is a stock figure in many of the plays of the nineteenth century. In Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *Midchannel* he is a link in the plot. Cayley serves as a link between Aubrey's past and the action that follows. He is a dramatic expedient, important to the plot; as foil and preacher. He is also a link between the audience and the author.

*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was a daring English play dealing with an idea. When it is borne in mind that Pinero drew the exact floor plans to indicate the shape and size of sets and the position of doors, windows, and furniture, we find how great the technical improvements were. He sketched for the scene, painted what he suggested by means of details within the play itself. He even outlined stage movement. His stage directions also indicated 'stage business', details with which an actor may busy himself. How realistic are Pinero's stage directions for the setting is proved by the fact that they are described at the beginning of each of the first three acts. Pinero directed everything. Even Patrick Campbell was asked to show "'anger' by sweeping away ornaments and photographs." 14

A play so conceived and directed was head and shoulders above its

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contemporaries. This praise is merited by *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. It was, more or less, a mature work of its author. It was the 28th play which he had produced in the theatre; he had written 27 farces and sentimental comedies before he attempted to write his first serious drama. In itself not perhaps a great work, it gave promise of the renaissance of the English drama. The end of the nineteenth century held out the hope that dramatic work as literature was a possibility. A comparison with what Goldsmith and Sheridan achieved at the beginning of the eighteenth century will not be out of place. These two writers were the isolated rear guards of the restoration 'school', but their contribution lay not in the initiation of a movement, but in its consumption. They were at best strugglers far behind the time. Living playwrights are those who turn their faces to the future, marching in the vanguard of a new movement, not bringing up the rear. It is here that the part played by *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is noteworthy. At a time when plays like The Prisoner of Zenda and Michael and His Lost Angel and such musical comedies as The New Barmaid, The Geisha, On The March and The Circus Girl filled the West End theatres; and when a Shakespearean revival—Henry IV, Cymbeline, As You Like It were the best the English stage could offer, Pinero sought
to end the extravagant popularity of the school-boy-and-girl romances by giving his first serious play.

As a tragedy, however, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is not great. At its best it is a vision of the heart of life; and the heart of life can only be laid bare in the agony and exaltation of dreadful acts. The vision of agony or spiritual conflict, pushed beyond the limits of mortal personality, is exalting and cleansing. It is only through such vision that the multitude can be brought to the passionate knowledge of things exalting and eternal. We do not find agony and exaltation of dreadful acts in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. There is no magnitude in Paula’s sufferings. About Paula’s suffering, we agree with Archer when he says that there were no tears anywhere near his eyes as he watched the play.

The suicide of Paula is not the departure of an agonized soul in a moment of calm contemplation. This is also the view held by Cunliff, who points out that in the working-out of the tragedy the long arm of coincidence plays a vital part. Says Archer, "the marriage of Paula and Tanqueray must show the moral and probable consequence and let them develop and culminate without interruption from the long arm of coincidence. Up to a certain point this is done. Aubrey Tanqueray’s
experiment breaks down on account of Paula's incurable instability of character and her acidity of temper. But then Pinero resorted, for his catastrophe, to nothing inherent in the situation that sprang out of character. It is pure chance, not likely in a thousand.....It is paradoxical which so frequently happens. If the play had worked out on its own basis it might have been an enduring masterpiece, instead of a milestone".15 The tragic close is not inevitable but is 'probable'.16

Nevertheless, it is a courageous play, the first serious play in modern England whose author had the courage to create Aubrey Tanqueray, a middle-aged man, serious in purpose, seeking to right the wrong done to a woman. This courage was not motivated by passionate love of sex, but by logic howsoever sentimental. The complex psychological study of Paula—a woman torn between love and jealousy—is serious in intent and there are admirable touches here and there which seek to raise fundamental questions—What is good? Does goodness lie in women like Mrs. Cortelyon or in Paula? One is not evil because one once 'tripped'. More important for goodness is cessation from evil and Paula, by her very resolve not to betray the daughter, s atones for all her former

sins. Save for one or two acts of meanness and even these have their causes, Paula is fundamentally good, fair, aboveboard, even sacrificing in the discharge of her obligations. Ellean’s behaviour towards Paula and Ardale seeks to imply that there are two laws operating in the world—one for men and another for women. She cannot forgive Paula but she readily overlooks Ardale’s amours, which were not conducted with greater discretion. All this goes to show that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is intended as a serious play.

Pinero had come under the influence of Ibsen in the last decades of the nineteenth century but he was not as furious a militant Ibsenite as Shaw. In comparison with Shaw, Pinero was surely a soldier in rear guard who was quite lukewarm about Ibsenism. Pinero was the lover of middle class and most of his plays deal with the middle class women. He portrays middle class women and displays their errors, horror and contrast. The women characters have their own worries. His approach to women is to see them free from persecution, troubles and difficulties. Being a realistic he observes women’s suffering in their domestic and social life but he is not rebellious like Ibsen or revolutionary like Bernard Shaw. This attitude to women and their emancipation is quite clear in his plays *The Notorious*
Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895), Iris and Midchannel. The play, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith is also related to the position and status of a woman and the conflict between free love and the institution of marriage.

Although the play is darker than The Second Mrs. Tanqueray the conflict between free love and the institution of marriage is resolved in a timid way; it does not touch the metaphysical plane. The heroine of the play is a young widow who works hard as a socialist agitator, popularly known as the Mad Agnes. After many hardships, she enters a hospital as a patient where she trains herself as a nurse. Her work as a nurse comes so suddenly that people are surprised. She serves and saves Lucas Cleeve from serious illness. Lucas falls in love with the handsome nurse who is called Mad Agnes. The nurse and Lucas set up a house at Venice in Italy. When his former wife `Sybil' and her relations come to Venice they warn `Lucas that this type of faithless love might cost him his career. The rest of the play revolves around the efforts of Ebbsmith to defeat their attempt to detach her lover from her. For a moment she appears to have succeeded in defeating the Duke of St. Olperts but she is unable to maintain their high union based on platonic love. She wants intellectual companionship devoid of passion, so that she and her lover could work for the
regeneration of humanity. Lucas Cleeve, however, is not an intellectual; he wants to enjoy her personal charm and also have the benefit of her intellectual companionship.

At the end of the play Mrs. Ebbsmith is not her former self, strong and free, to hold on to her idea of free marriage. She sinks as a common place woman and consents to Lucas's proposal of marriage. The emancipation comes through the inconstancy of Lucas whom she ultimately recognizes and leaves.

Pointing out the feministic significance of this play William Archer says, "But whatever may be the intellectual shortcoming of Mrs. Ebbsmith, just think what it meant to us in 1895 to see a play which tried, even if it in some measure failed, to present the portrait of a rebel against moral and intellectual orthodoxies. It was technically masterly, and it touched on some of the most serious issues of modern life'.\(^{17}\) The play is a problem play because it deals with the problem of widows. The story is directly connected with the faith of the widow and the conception of

conjugal love but the playwright does not give a complete happy solution. Its theme involves the study of sex and love in the liberation of women.

After *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* comes a very charming comedy *Trelawny of the Wells* (1898). Trelawny is the most attractive figure. In this play Pinero has discussed the artificialities and unreality of drama at the close of the nineteenth century. The position of Rose as an actress is shown in this play. Rose comes back to the theatre after a failed attempt at genteel living with her suitor’s family. The result in that on her return to the “Well’s Theatre she is unable to act as before. Her salary is reduced and then finally she is asked to go for ‘She is no longer up to work, and in Tom’s protestations, we have a fling at the domineering actor manager’. “Tom cannot act, can’t she? No, she can no longer spout, she can no longer ladle the vapid trash.18

In 1901 and 1902 Pinero, produced two plays, *Iris* and *Letty*. The themes of these plays are complimentary to each other. *Iris* is the tragedy of a woman with the sweetest nature but no moral stamina, while *Letty* is the tragicomedy of a girl who has plenty of moral strength. *Iris* is endowed with a life of luxury but she loves a man who cannot marry her.

In *Letty* the heroine is married to a rich and vulgar person whom she despises. There is a great charm in the painful story of Iris. Iris is left widow at a very early age, with a small fortune which she will have to relinquish if she re-marries. Round her are three men. Croker Harington, who perhaps does not count for he is a faithful dog-like creature; Laurence Trenwith, an impecunious young man with whom she is in love, and Frederick Maldonado, a hard, wealthy, masterly financier. Iris wavers between Trenwith and Maldonado and as she cannot face living in poverty abroad with Trenwith, so she drifts and drifts till she is caught up in the net cast by Maldonado. Confronted with poverty owing to the dishonesty of a solicitor, she readily draws on Maldonado's cheques until she is at his mercy. Trenwith returns and she tells him the whole story. He is immensely hurt and she is left to the wealthy financier, who discovers the intrigue between her and Trenwith and turns her out into the street. Iris is punished, and punished rightly: but the audience is sorry for her wondering if she was wicked or merely weak? Perhaps she was what Paula originally was before she commences her career; she is able to win our sympathy.
All this savours of the feminist movement initiated by Ibsen. Iris lives in our memory, as does Sophy Fullgarney. The latter becomes, in the sequel, a quite estimable character although she is in the beginning a mean and despicable spy. And Iris too lives in our memory although she is quite non-moral. Pinero was not a sincere feminist. This was also the view held by William Archer, who has written, "He was abreast of moderately enlightened political and philosophical thought." 19

Iris, his principal play may be reckoned as a milestone on the path of progress. However it does not imply that his progress stopped with Iris. On the contrary, his best work was still to come. With the new century, however, other men took up the running, and he no longer stood or rather ran alone. But he had smoothed the way and set the pace for other men, some of whom have shown him very scant gratitude. He was a brilliant and even daring pioneer of a great movement.

*Letty* was produced in 1903; it is not by any means his best. *The Thunderbolt, Midchannel*—that remorseless masterpiece—perhaps even *Iris* and *His House in Order* must be placed above it. But for purposes of illustration it has some peculiar advantages.

Letty should be seen in comparison with Iris. Both the plays deal with narrative material. Iris tells the story of a woman doomed to ruin, though living in luxury and ease; Letty is the story of a woman destined to salvation, though living in poverty and danger. The story may be regarded as a reversal of Iris.

"The range of Pinero's interest in women is indicated in the utter difference between the heroines of these two plays. Iris is a natural aristocrat, exquisite in taste, fine in feeling, generous in impulse, yet she ends up in the gutter because of her indolent habit of always following the line of least resistance. Letty is a shop-girl, vulgarly surrounded, though somewhat better-born than her immediate associates; and she shows the petty vices of her class. Yet, because she is a working girl inured to hardship she is better able to take care of herself when confronted with a crisis than that orchid of a woman whom adoring friends described as their Divinity."20

Letty presents a section through several strata of society. We have at the top the idle rich, represented by Nevill Letchmere, a man of the world, living what is known as a man's life, his sister, married to a vicious

numskull, but trying nevertheless to `run straight’ and the well-groomed `nice boy’ who has fallen desperately in love with her. Then Mrs. Bernard Mandeville, of Hammerstein, Cohen and Mandeville, “bucket-shop” proprietaries. And next there are three young women in business: Letty Shell, pretty, pleasure-loving, honest, not ill-bred, but poor, anaemic and inevitably beset by temptations to escape at almost any cost from her life of drudgery; her friend, Marion Allardyce, the prudent, practical, unattractive girl of the same class; and Hilda Gunning, a much lower type than the other two, crassly common, bouncing, self-satisfied, without disaster, because she is incapable of passion, of generosity, or of any delicacy of feeling. This, by the way, is the most brilliantly drawn type in the play; every word placed in her mouth is a jewel of vulgarity. Nevill Letchmere’s sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Ivor Crosbie, show that the Crosbie Mingle is in serious danger, and gives us a glimpse of the undesirable moral heredity of the Letchmere family. This Crosbie affair, be it noted, is not an Elizabethan under plot, but an essential thread in the main fabric of the play. Then arrives Letty Shell, with her friends, Marion and Hilda, the guests at a little tea-party which Nevill is giving in honour of Letty’s birthday. That Nevill is strongly attracted to Letty is very
evident, and she is a girl of great refinement whom he might quite well marry without making any obvious misalliance. It is equally evident that her two friends and Letty herself have very little doubt that this is his intention. Then at the end of the act, when the girls have left the stage, Nevill is surprised to receive the card of Mr. Bernard Mandeville, whom he knows to be one of Letty's employers. The words put in the mouth of this character are at once characteristic. He is a loudly dressed, coarse-featured man with a heavy moustache and uneasy swagger. He has learnt through an office tale bearer that Letty has struck up an acquaintance with "a young swell living in rooms here", but he says, "It was not till yesterday that I moved in affairs personally." 21

Nevill : Moved?
Mandeville : Made a few enquiries.
Nevill : As to the (with a wry face) swell?
Mandeville : I looked upon it-how-my duty to sift the rumour.
Nevill : I see.
Mandeville : But I have not breathed a word to her on the subject. I preferred to come to you direct, sir—man to man, gentlemen to gentleman, Mr. Letchmere. 22

21. Letty, Act I.
22. Letty, Act I.
Throughout the Act there is no suggestion that Nevill is married. The girls have no knowledge of it; in the earlier scene between Nevill and his sister there has been no mention of the fact. With deliberate and novel art, Pinero achieves a thrilling effect in that one line from Mandeville......I 'am a single man, you ain't, bear in mind". In Act II, the irony of Letty's position is brought home to us dramatically again in a concentrated manner.

Letty has been starving herself to dress well. The doctor says she must have a long holiday to recuperate. She has not really the means to afford that luxury, the more so because she has already borrowed small sums of money from various acquaintances. She is, however, sustained in her confidence by Nevill's love for her and in his intention of making her his wife. When Nevill arrives, it is not to ask her to marry him, but to recommend her, as a friend, to accept the impending proposal of Mandeville.

Letty : (Faintly) I-I thought you were interested in me.

Nevil : I am ....so interested in you am I that I find myself—I admit, to my intense surprise—counselling you to balance carefully the

23. Letty. Act I.
claims of this eligible bucket-shop proprietor against the
dubious advantages of a continued friendship with an individual
who is a bachelor only in his mode of living.

Letty:  (starting at him). Why, are you married?

Nevill:  Yes, as Mr. Mandeville, who has been examining my credentials,
is brutal enough to remind me—Yes, I am married.

Letty:  (In a low voice) You might have mentioned it before, you might
have mentioned it.24

These simple words convey the essence of pure distilled drama in
the fewest words. It gives us a new insight into the life problem of girls of
the class of Letty. It is not didactic, but it is relevant. It is not like
Elizabethan comedy, a reckless, roistering carnival of vice, rascality and
folly, nor like Elizabethan tragedy, a compound of villainy, crime and
carnage.

The two unimportant plays; *A Wife without a Smile* and *Preserving
Mr. Panmure*, have nothing, except that in the latter, from the title
onwards, Sir Arthur seems to have been imitating Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.
It is a very good play. In *His House in Order* (1906) the relatives of the late

wife were an amusing group, but so much caricatured as to be somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the play. In the words of Archer, “If this is a work of the second class, when are we coming to the first class?” Sir Arthur Pinero wrote two plays which were above criticism and belong to the new woman, their names are *The Thunder Bolt* and *Midchannel* and they were produced in 1908 and 1909.

*Midchannel* adds a touch of social interest to the tragedy of a woman whose marriage was, according to her own reckoning, doomed from the moment she and her husband agreed that they would not be encumbered in their career with any ‘brats of children’. It is the story of a disaster in the married life of a couple who have no concern in life. The pity is that they did not lack love, but, as the woman says to a friend of the family, they get on each other’s nerves at the end of their tether, each is impatient of the other, and when their friend suggests a tour on the continent to tide over Midchannel, the middle period of married life, which is dangerous but has to be crossed at all costs to ensure a safe and happy voyage through the rest of life, both husband and wife agree, but differences break out again, in the choice by the husband of a non-

fashionable hotel. Hot words are exchanged and as a result they leave home. Zoe leaves London alone for the continent and is joined by a young friend, Leonard Feris, one of her tame Robins', while the husband tries to console himself with a society girl and a flat in London. But neither of them finds much pleasure in the new life and through the mediation of Peter, they come together again. Zoe forgives him for his lapses but his jealousy is aroused at Zoe's confession that pity does not sway her. The play ends with Zoe's suicide.

So the Midchannel is a study of feminine types; or of the emancipation of women. The playwright throws the search light inward and builds, with great psychological insight, the woman character. Zoe has no concern with anything in heaven above or the earth beneath save having a good time. "What is the matter? asks Peter Mottran, "Life, dear old chum! She whispers, Ain't much in it."\(^{26}\) Not the talk of a real living woman! Her end, though made inevitable, is equally odd; she has already given up her love; she does not really care for her husband, she has independent means.....and yet she dies of a broken heart.

\(^{26}\) *Midchannel*, Act I
Another play, The Mind-the-Paint Girl, ranks among Sir Arthur's best works. In this play Pinero has portrayed the character of Litty Paradell as one of the most charming figures that he ever drew. She seems to be a worthy sister to Rose Trelawny. The character of the hero has been drawn in a satirical manner. There are other women characters in the play also. There is Miss Gabrielle Kato who has a sharp dialogue with her admirer Same'De Castro. For better understanding, the dialogue between Gabrielle Kato and her admirer, Same De Castro is significant:

Gabrielle : If I am rude, it is owing to my low spirits. I am so shockingly low-spirited.

Gabrielle : I know you are, and I make allowanthes for you I repeated? All I think—

Gabrielle : (Gazing at vacancy) Mine's a strange nature on the stage I am liveliness itself—!

De Castro : A perfect little lamp O' talent ! I have been telling' Carleton tho—perthuing for you in Act two.

Gabrielle : You have?

De Castro : Yeth.

Gabrielle : Did he promise to think it over?
De Castro: Hith extract wordth!

Gabrielle: (with a hollow laugh) Ha, ha Ha! As I was re-marking, I am a mass of inconsistency. On the stage the embodiment of selfish fun—

De Castro: That wath in the mail.

Gabrielle: (Nodding) in the mail off the stage, I am a sufferer from what is called the artistic temperature—no temperament—

De Castro: (uncomfortably patting her shoulder) Po’ little girl Po little girl!

Gabrielle: (Her melancholy increasing) sometimes I have an idea that if I had a motor car of my own I should feel easier and happier

De Castro: (with a change of tone) What d’ye mean—motor-car of your own? Mineth alwayth at your dithpothal inth’t it?

Gabrielle: (Shaking her head) that’s not the same thing; whenever I have your aid, I am weighted down by a sense of borrowing.
The above dialogue shows that it is one of the most brilliant and attractive comedies of our time. This play also relates to the question of betterment of women. This piece, the critics feel shows a touch of idealization. It is remarkable more for banter and satire s than for the feminist cause.

Thus the plays that we have discussed in this chapter show that Pinero tried to portray women in the context of the condition of the time and an understanding of their personality. A great dramatist Bernard Shaw has pointed out very reasonably by referring to the heroine of `Iris' in the following terms: "Pinero is in no way bound to suppress the fact that his Iris is a person to be envied by millions of better women. If he made his play false to life by inventing fictitious disadvantages for her, he would be acting as unscrupulously as any tract writer. If society chooses to provide for its Irises better than for its working women, it must not expect honest playwrights to manufacture spurious evidence to save its credit".27

Most of the plays dealt with in this chapter prove that Sir Arthur Pinero has taken up the cause of freedom and empowerment of women.

They are masterpieces for the cause of the emancipation of women. They defend themselves and need nobody's support to fight for their existence. William Archer has rightly observed about the plays of Pinero, "If we had a rational system of repertory theatres, there are at least half-a-dozen of Sir Arthur's works that would be constantly in the public eye. As it is, when their first-run, be it long or short, is over, they have no chance to rear their heads against critical prejudice. For a play which is unjustly treated at the outset, there is no court of appeal."  