

# Mrs. Warren's Profession



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin. His father was an alcoholic whom the family ridiculed, and Shaw never felt certain that his real father was not his mother's lover, the musician George John Lee. At twenty, Shaw left Dublin for London, where he spent his twenties struggling to find his calling, writing plays and novels that would not be published until much later, living with his mother, and getting occasional writing gigs with the help of Lee. In the mid-1880s, Shaw became a dedicated Socialist, writing the manifesto for the Fabian Society, a socialist group that advocated the gradual adoption of socialist principles, as opposed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In the late 1880s, Shaw lost his virginity to an older woman; he would go on to lead a mostly celibate life. He also began to see success during this period as a critic, playwright and novelist. Shaw's first popular play was *Arms and The Man*, staged in 1894. After a health scare in 1898, the period when his career was taking off, Shaw married the woman who nursed him back to health; it is thought that the marriage was never consummated. Shaw went on to write more than sixty plays and to become the preeminent moral authority of the first half of the 20th century. He weighed in on all the major issues of British politics. Shaw also had controversial opinions, however. He was a vegetarian, a eugenicist, and a denouncer of vaccines, who also advocated for scrapping the English alphabet in favor of one in which each sound was represented by its own letter.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Victorian England, prostitution was considered the most pressing social problem facing society. It was treated as a moral problem caused by sexually deviant women who failed to follow the prohibition on sex out of wedlock. At the same time, sex was largely seen as a legitimate activity only for reproductive purposes—yet most men, including happily married ones, frequented prostitutes. The economic conditions leading women to become sex workers were not usually considered by those who railed against prostitution as a social ill. Instead, poor women were believed to become prostitutes out of laziness or boredom. At the same time, outbreaks of sexually transmitted diseases crippled the armed forces and infected married women whose husbands frequented prostitutes. Starting in 1864, the Contagious Diseases Act allowed the police to force any woman suspected of prostitution to be examined by doctors. If a woman was found to have a sexually transmitted disease, she would be imprisoned until she was

cured, or for up to a year.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Shaw saw himself as writing in a tradition of plays about prostitutes. He wanted to counter the clichéd portrayal of prostitutes as immoral women who either repented of their immoral ways and became respectable or sank into poverty and disease, and killed themselves. He considered himself both positively and negatively inspired by the novella *Yvette* by Guy de Maupassant and the play *The Second Ms. Tanqueray* by Sir Arthur Wing Pinero. Shaw's own style is widely seen as combining two very different influences. Shaw was a deep admirer of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, whose characters were kept from leading fulfilling lives by the rigid dictates of a controlling society, and he wanted very much to follow in Ibsen's footsteps. At the same time, much of Shaw's dialogue adopted the light, satirical style of Oscar Wilde's modern comedies of manners. It was Shaw's ability to blend moral seriousness and light comedy that cemented his reputation as a brilliant playwright who brought popular attention to important societal issues.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Mrs. Warren's Profession
- **When Written:** 1893
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was first published in 1898, but it was not performed in England until 1902.
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Problem play, didactic drama, comedy of manners
- **Setting:** Haslemere, Surrey, England; London, England
- **Climax:** Angered by Vivie's attitude towards her, Mrs. Warren decides to tell her daughter the truth about her life story.
- **Antagonist:** Sir George Crofts

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Unlawful.** When *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was first performed in New York City in 1905, police arrested the actors from the stage and charged them with violating the anti-obscenity Comstock Laws.

**Diploma-less.** A university education first became available to women in England in the 1860s. Full degrees were not given to British women who passed the same courses as men at Cambridge University until 1948.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Act I is set in a garden outside of a country cottage, rented by the determined, self-confident, and well-educated recent college graduate Vivie Warren. Vivie is approached by Mr. Praed, an artistically inclined friend of her mother's. Vivie is a gifted mathematician and tells Praed she plans to live a practical life, going into business with her friend Honoria Fraser and working in law, insurance, and finance. Praed advocates for a life of aesthetic appreciation, but Vivie replies that she has spent time with artistic people at concerts and museums and was bored. She asks Praed if he thinks her mother will approve, explaining that she has always lived away from her mother and knows little about her. Praed refuses to tell Vivie much about her mother. Vivie predicts that her mother may try to control her life, but says that she will use her mother's secrecy about her own life against her in any argument they have about Vivie's future.

The loud and gaudily dressed Mrs. Kitty Warren and the rich, middle-aged playboy Sir George Crofts arrive. Vivie goes into the cottage. Praed tells Mrs. Warren that Vivie seems mature and that Mrs. Warren should treat her with respect. Mrs. Warren scoffs that she knows how to treat her own daughter. Mrs. Warren leaves the two men alone, and Crofts asks Praed if he knows who Vivie's father is. He says he feels attracted to Vivie, but can't be sure that he isn't her father. Praed says he knows nothing about that side of Mrs. Warren's life, but since Crofts is old enough to be Vivie's father he should treat her in a parental way.

Crofts goes inside and Praed is greeted by an old acquaintance, Frank Gardner. Frank is a handsome, clever man of twenty. He confides to Praed that he is broke and living at home to save money, and that Vivie loves him. Praed invites Frank to tea, but as Frank is entering the cottage his father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner calls to him. Reverend Gardner is a pompous loudmouth who is obsessed with respectability. He demands to know the social station of the people in the house before he will enter their garden. Frank tells him that the cottage is Vivie Warren's, and that he hopes to marry her. Vivie, he says, has both brains and money, while he has neither. Reverend Gardner says disapprovingly that it's hard to believe anyone has enough money to support Frank. Frank refers to a story Reverend Gardner told him about his own behavior as a young man: Reverend Gardner offered a lover fifty pounds to buy back his letters to her, so that he could destroy evidence of their affair. Vivie comes outside and is introduced to Frank's father, and then calls for Mrs. Warren to come outside. Mrs. Warren recognizes Reverend Gardner, who is shocked to see her. She says she still has the letters he wrote her.

Act II takes place inside the cottage that night. Mrs. Warren and Frank are the first to arrive back after a night stroll. Frank flirts with Mrs. Warren, and she kisses him, but then says she meant

it in a motherly way. Frank tells her he is courting Vivie. Crofts and Reverend Gardner enter, and Mrs. Warren impatiently asks where Praed is. Frank says he must be enjoying walking alone at night with Vivie. Crofts and Reverend Gardner both object to Frank courting Vivie. Mrs. Warren says she sees no reason why the two young people shouldn't marry, but when she hears that Frank has no fortune, she says it is out of the question that he marry her daughter. Frank says he will try to win Vivie's love despite the older generation's warnings not to. Vivie and Praed arrive and the older people go into the small kitchen to have dinner. Vivie and Frank mock the older generation. Vivie says she hopes never to live a lazy, aimless life like theirs, while Frank says he wants to be idle, but to do it in style. He tries to flirt with Vivie, but she rebuffs him. Vivie and Frank go into the kitchen to eat, and Mrs. Warren and Crofts enter the room. Mrs. Warren says she doesn't like how Crofts is looking at Vivie. He tells Mrs. Warren that he wants to marry Vivie and suggests that few other men would accept Mrs. Warren as a mother-in-law. Mrs. Warren is disgusted at the idea. Crofts offers to pay her a check on the day of the wedding and then to leave all his money to Vivie when he dies. Mrs. Warren insults him, and he storms out of the house. Soon after, the Gardners leave, taking Praed and Crofts to stay at their home as guests.

Left alone, Mrs. Warren tells Vivie that she thinks Frank is a good-for-nothing and Vivie shouldn't encourage him to court her. Vivie agrees, adding that Crofts also seems like a good-for-nothing. Mrs. Warren is shocked at Vivie's self-confidence; she says Vivie will have to see Crofts frequently because he is a friend of hers. Vivie asks whether her mother expects they will be together much going forward, saying she doubts Mrs. Warren will like her way of life. Angry at Vivie's independent attitude, Mrs. Warren proclaims that she will determine Vivie's lifestyle. Vivie demands to know her mother's identity and who her father is, saying she wonders what right her mother has to dictate her life. Mrs. Warren assures her Crofts is not her father, but will not say who is, nor will she say more about herself. Feeling they have reached a dead end, Vivie says they should go to bed. Mrs. Warren accuses Vivie of being heartless and a bad daughter. Vivie says she wants to be treated with respect and will respect her mother's own choices about her life in return. Mrs. Warren scoffs at the idea that she had any choices and decides to tell Vivie about her life.

Mrs. Warren tells Vivie that she was one of four daughters of an unmarried woman with four daughters who supported herself by taking lovers. Mrs. Warren's two half-sisters grew up to be respectable women: one died of lead poisoning from work in a factory, while the other married an alcoholic and lived in poverty. Her sister Liz ran away from their school. Years later, when Mrs. Warren was working long hours for low wages in a bar, the two sisters met again. Liz had become a prostitute and urged her sister to do the same. She lent Mrs. Warren money to

start work and they eventually set up a chain of brothels across Europe together. Liz now lives the life of a respectable, upper-class woman. Mrs. Warren defends her decision to go into sex work, saying it was the only opportunity a woman like her had to earn a reasonable living. She says that while upper-class women try to marry rich men, lower-class women can only hope to sell their bodies for sex—but marriage and sex work are ultimately very similar. Despite knowing she is supposed to be ashamed of her work, she expresses pride at having kept her self-respect and managed her brothels well. Vivie admires her mother's grit and truthfulness. Before they say goodnight, Vivie promises to treat her mother lovingly, Mrs. Warren blesses her daughter, and they embrace.

Act III takes place the next morning in the garden outside of the rectory where Reverend Gardner lives and works. Reverend Gardner comes outside and greets his son. He is hung over after staying up late telling scandalous stories with Crofts, and hardly remembers what happened the night before. Frank tells his father that he told Crofts to bring the Warrens over to the rectory, and Reverend Gardner is horrified to hear that people of questionable respectability will be coming to his home. Praed enters and he and Frank watch Crofts, Mrs. Warren, and Vivie approach. Frank is disgusted to see mother and daughter walking arm in arm. When the guests arrive, Frank suggests that his father show them the church. Once he is left alone with Vivie, he asks her why she was embracing her mother. Vivie says she now understands her mother. Frank says that, unlike Vivie, he can see that Mrs. Warren is an immoral person. He flirtatiously tells Vivie that she must not go live with her mother because it will ruin their time together. Vivie briefly falls under his spell.

Crofts approaches and asks to speak to Vivie alone. Frank leaves, but says he will return if Vivie rings a bell in the garden. Crofts makes a very unromantic proposal to Vivie, describing himself as a rich man who knows how to pay for what he wants and will leave her his fortune when he dies. When Vivie refuses him, he says that he was a good friend to her mother by lending her the money to start her business. Vivie is shocked and says she thought that her mother had wrapped up the business. Crofts scoffs at this, saying it would be stupid to wrap up a business that is doing so well. Crofts pretends that the business they are discussing is a chain of bars in **Brussels** and Ostend, but Vivie reveals that she knows what the business really consists of. Crofts curses Mrs. Warren for telling Vivie, then says that everyone in the upper class profits from exploitative businesses. He points out that Vivie has always lived on money earned in brothels. Vivie is conscience-stricken and tries to leave the garden, but Crofts stops her. She rings the bell, and Frank approaches with a rifle in hand. Out of spite, Crofts tells Vivie and Frank that they are both children of Reverend Gardner. Revolted, Vivie points Frank's gun at herself, and he drops it. Vivie runs away, telling Frank she is going to her friend

Honorina Fraser's chambers in London.

Act IV takes place in the London office of FRASER AND WARREN, where Vivie is now working. Frank comes to visit Vivie and define their relationship. Vivie says she wouldn't want to be anything more than a sister to him. Frank believes this means she has found a new boyfriend, which Vivie denies. Praed arrives to bid Vivie goodbye before going to Italy. He says he wishes he could convince her to travel and experience the world's beauty. At his mention of Brussels, however, Vivie becomes stricken. She reveals her mother's true profession to Praed and Frank, both of whom are shocked. Vivie goes into the next room to collect herself, and Frank tells Praed that he will no longer try to marry her: he cannot accept money earned from brothels.

Mrs. Warren arrives, looking very nervous. Praed and Frank depart, after Frank leaves a note for Vivie. Vivie has returned her allowance to her mother's bank and says that she intends to support herself from now on. Mrs. Warren tells Vivie how rich she is and how easily she can buy Vivie a place in fashionable, respectable society. She says she thought that she and Vivie had worked everything out. Vivie asks her mother why she didn't leave the profession once she had made enough money to live. Mrs. Warren says she needs work to keep busy and explains that since someone will always do what she does, she does no harm to anyone by continuing in her business. Vivie says she cannot respect the way her mother lives. Mrs. Warren curses Vivie, saying she stole her education and now refuses to do her duty as a daughter. She leaves, refusing to shake Vivie's hand. Vivie sits down at her desk and, with a sigh of relief, becomes engrossed in her work.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Vivie Warren** – A clever, well-educated, serious-minded, and ambitious woman – A clever, well-educated, serious-minded, and ambitious woman of twenty-two, Vivie Warren has been raised away from her mother in boarding schools and foster homes, while receiving the best education money can buy. Having recently finished college and earned distinction in mathematics, Vivie plans to go into business as an actuary with her friend Honorina. She has a brisk, no-nonsense manner towards men and women, young and old, which is typical of the “New Woman,” a cohort that emerged around the time the play was written. New Women were generally drawn from the upper-class. They had received good educations and were determined not to allow the conventional limitations placed on women to limit their opportunities. They were known for using bicycles to gain greater mobility, smoking despite this being frowned upon, and rejecting the sentimental view that women were meant to be dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters without ambitions of their own. Rejecting the normal expectations placed on women

is easier for Vivie than for most women, because she was not raised in a family and has no strong emotional or familial ties.

**Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren)** – A former prostitute and current brothel owner, Kitty Warren is Vivie’s mother. Now middle-aged, she dresses in flashy clothing and leads a sedentary life of luxury that has left her out-of-shape. Mrs. Warren grew up poor and with few opportunities to make a living, but eventually followed her sister Liz into sex work, finally earning enough money to create a small empire of brothels in cities across Europe. Unlike her sister, she comes across as a vulgar woman and is unwilling to quit her disreputable business. She has concealed everything about her life from her daughter Vivie, but cherishes a dream that Vivie will become a member of high society and express gratitude and love to her mother.

**Frank Gardner** – A handsome, clever, foppish man of twenty, Frank Gardner hopes to marry a rich woman and lead a life of luxury. He has already spent all the money given to him by his father, a pompous and hypocritical clergyman whom Frank doesn’t respect. Seeing that Vivie is rich, but without knowing the source of her income, Frank hopes to seduce her into marrying him. He has a teasing, flirtatious demeanor and a love of gambling.

**Praed** – A self-professed artist, the middle-aged Praed is an old friend of Mrs. Warren’s who claims to know nothing about her business. He believes that art and romance are the most important values in the world and urges Vivie to explore what art can do for her instead of focusing only on the practical elements of life. While he is a well-mannered, good-natured man, his claims to be innocent of his friend’s business and other facts of life seem disingenuous.

**Sir George Crofts** – A rich aristocrat and heavy-drinking playboy, Sir George Crofts sees that the world caters to people like him and feels no qualms about taking what he can get. He invested forty-thousand pounds in Mrs. Warren’s chain of brothels and is unashamed of where he earns his money. He used to be a lover of Mrs. Warren’s and is unsure whether Vivie is his daughter. Nevertheless, he hopes to marry Vivie.

**Reverend Sam Gardner** – A man unsuited for the church, the Reverend Sam Gardner was pushed into his profession by a father who saw that he was not going to excel at anything else. Because he lived a wild, promiscuous life as a young man, he is overly concerned with keeping up his reputation and remaining a respected clergyman. Reverend Gardner preaches sanctimoniously to his son Frank and is hurt when Frank refuses to take him seriously.

**Liz** – An attractive and practical woman, Liz left a life of poverty to become a prostitute, later setting up a chain of brothels with her sister, Kitty Warren. Unlike her sister, she has the manners and appearance of a respectable woman, and left the business once she had earned enough money to live comfortably without working.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Honorias Fraser** – Vivie’s friend from college and future business partner.

**Mrs. Gardner** – Reverend Sam Gardner’s wife and Frank’s mother, who is scandalized by her husband’s past association with Mrs. Warren.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

*Mrs. Warren’s Profession* forces its audience to consider the problem of the exploitation of women in British society. The play challenges the idea that working as a prostitute is immoral, suggesting instead that society is immoral because it limits opportunities for women, often making prostitution the safest and most lucrative work available to them. The play suggests that a variety of individuals share personal responsibility for women’s exploitation, ranging from those who invest in brothels, to those who own factories where women are underpaid, to those who accept the profits of any business that treats women unfairly.

The play pinpoints two factors that lead to exploitation of women: the limited number of professions open to women and the poor conditions in those professions. The play contends that prostitutes earn more money than women working in other professions, and also face fewer occupational dangers to their health. When Mrs. Warren reveals to her daughter Vivie that she has worked as a prostitute and brothel-owner, she gives a practical defense of why the conditions for working women forced her into this line of work. As a young woman without an education, she needed to earn a living. Certain professions were open only to women with talent, like acting, singing, or writing for newspapers. Other professions were open only to pretty women, like working as shopgirls or barmaids. But in these professions, the women earn very little money while allowing someone else to profit from their beauty. Women who are neither talented nor pretty have no choice but to work in factories, where they ruin their health and earn poverty wages.

Vivie’s perspective on her mother’s profession mirrors the play’s own complex verdict on the issue of prostitution. Though Vivie feels compassion for her mother’s choice when prostitution was the best job she could get, Vivie is less sympathetic to the fact that Mrs. Warren has continued to run a brothel even after becoming rich, since she is now part of the

organized system that exploits women's labor. Mrs. Warren's excuse for continuing in this profession is that if she doesn't do it, someone else will. Furthermore, she believes that because the underlying economic system is immoral, individuals can be absolved of any personal responsibility for their actions. Vivie has no tolerance for this defense. She believes that it is fair and understandable that her mother sought to escape exploitation, but unconscionable that her mother is now perpetuating the same system that exploited her.

But Vivie's own opportunities as a woman entering the workforce are portrayed as exceptionally lucky, which undercuts her moral authority. Vivie has been brought up in affluence with the money her mother earned as a brothel-keeper paying to give her a great education. She also lives at the very moment in history—the late 19th century—when new professions, previously closed to women, are being opened up to some well-off, well-educated, upper-class women in Great Britain. If she did not have money, an education, or live at that moment in history, Vivie could not pursue a career in business. When, at the end of the play, Vivie refuses to accept any more of the money her mother earned as a brothel-owner, it's not a straightforward moral statement, since Vivie can reject her mother's money (and the taint of immorality that comes with it) only because that money bought her a place in the educated upper class. Since Vivie has benefited from exploitation through her mother's money while not having personally struggled, her moralizing lacks the weight it might otherwise have.

Though Vivie's privileged self-righteousness is obviously powerless to free other British women from exploitation, the play does suggest that British society can take concrete steps to stop exploiting women. First, the taboo on talking about prostitution should be lifted, and citizens should be forced to think about the social and economic conditions that make prostitution the best choice for many women. Second, labor conditions for women should be improved, with women paid higher wages to work in safer conditions. Finally, educational opportunities like those afforded Vivie should be made more widely available.



### SEX, MONEY, MARRIAGE, PROSTITUTION, AND INCEST

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* depicts a society tainted by the sale of sex. A mother is portrayed as a madam who may try to sell her daughter, and a young woman's suitors might also be her father or brother. The play shows that this impure tangle of relationships is the natural result of the pervasive buying and selling of sex, whether through marriage or prostitution, and of the treatment of women as interchangeable, commodified sexual objects. It cynically concludes that the only sure way to escape incestuous or mercenary relationships is to renounce both familial and

romantic love.

Shaw considers marriage and prostitution to be two sides of the same coin; both institutions allow for sex to be bought and sold, but marriage is approved of in respectable society and prostitution is frowned upon. Vivie's two suitors, Sir George Crofts and Frank Gardner, have opposite motivations for courting her, but both see marrying her in economic terms. While Crofts hopes to buy Vivie as a wife, offering to add to her fortune and improve her standing in society by making her a baroness, Frank hopes to sell himself to her in marriage. As a woman, Vivie is naturally seen by the world and by Crofts as a commodity to be bought. But as an exceptionally rich woman, Vivie is also in the unusual position of being the potential buyer.

Although Vivie's wealth protects her from the need to sell herself either as a wife or a sex worker, she is still exposed to the fact that her society treats women as interchangeable sexual objects for sale. Like any object that can be bought, women can also be replaced: mother can be replaced with daughter, and vice versa, despite the possibility of incest that this swapping of woman for woman produces. Crofts courts Vivie even though he is Mrs. Warren's former lover (or customer) and thus could be Vivie's father. Frank courts Vivie and flirts with Mrs. Warren even though his father was once Mrs. Warren's lover (or customer), and Vivie may be his half-sister. The play never identifies Vivie's father, nor does it conclusively rule out the possibility that her father may be Crofts, or Frank's father, Reverend Gardner. By leaving Vivie's paternity ambiguous, the play leaves the viewer and Vivie with the uncomfortable feeling that it is impossible to determine who is a blood relation and who is not. Her mother's, aunt's, and grandmother's past as sex workers make it impossible for her to know to whom she is related.

The play shows how even non-incestuous parent-child relationships are tainted by the sale of sex. Mrs. Warren directly compares all relationships between mothers and daughters to the relationship between a madam and a prostitute, frankly telling Vivie that any mother with daughters looks to help them marry a rich man. Frank reports that, in an honest moment, his father told him he should find a smart, rich woman to marry, in effect telling his son to sell himself to the highest bidder. Through the mouths of characters like these, Shaw offers a frank and biting criticism of the hypocritical society he sees around him.

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* suggests that only by giving all women the opportunity to earn money without relying on their sexuality can society be freed from the tainted familial and romantic relationships the play portrays. In the end, the realization that her upbringing was paid for by her mother's work as a prostitute and brothel owner leaves Vivie with a realization of her own complicity in the sale of women's bodies. Conscience-stricken, she rejects her mother's money and love and the possibility of romantic love at any time in the future.

While this stance may seem extreme, it is the only way that Vivie sees to avoid being sold to a husband or bought as a wife, or from profiting from other women's sale as prostitutes. No matter what Vivie does, however, her ability to earn her own living remains tied to the expensive education her mother provided and paid for with profits from the sale of sex.



### CLASS, RESPECTABILITY, MORALITY, AND COMPLICITY

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* skewers the immorality and sentimentality of the values and norms of British society, suggesting that the hypocrisy, corruption, and injustice of the British social system infects everyone affiliated with it. Shaw's nuanced depiction of the different ways in which the poor, middle-class, and rich uphold oppressive social norms suggests that nobody is pure and, as such, the only way to fix the system is to be honest and straightforward about how it affects people, both positively and negatively.

The play exposes the hollowness and cynicism of a range of Victorian moral tenets. For example, Shaw suggests that the duty of children to respect their parents is a way of obligating children to excuse their parents' immorality, that valuing the power of art to elevate human life is actually a distraction from reality, and that concern for protecting young women's chastity is hypocritical in a world in which so many women are bought and sold.

Mrs. Warren seems only to respect Victorian convention when it benefits her. Though she has defied social expectations by working as a prostitute and brothel owner, she still believes in the convention that a daughter should respect her mother. This is blatantly hypocritical, as Vivie's refusal to respect Mrs. Warren is a direct result of Mrs. Warren's behavior. Praed plays the role of the artist and art-appreciator who is too concerned with beauty and romance to involve himself in the sordid details of Mrs. Warren's world. However, his claim not to know Mrs. Warren's profession seems false considering how many years he has known her. Thus, Shaw suggests that Praed's love of art allows him to escape any responsibility for the unpleasant realities around him. Shaw also satirizes the Victorian concern with protecting young girls from men's sexual advances. Mrs. Warren's sister Liz becomes respectable when she makes the transition from brothel owner to chaperone (a woman who accompanied unmarried young women to parties when a female family member was not available to do so, and provided a bar on sexual contact with men). Although this transformation is stark, it also suggests the complicity of those who parrot ideas about the sanctity of rich girls' bodies in a system that looks the other way when it is poor girls' bodies for sale.

The play also shows how the respectability guaranteed by a high social station allows the upper class to avoid scrutiny and benefit from the suffering of others. Sir George Crofts

personifies a corrupt upper class that profits from immorality. He makes money by investing in brothels, while other members of the upper class invest in unsafe factories or own slums. Croft's class-based respectability masks the immoral source of his money, and taboos on speaking about immoral topics further allow him and people like him to escape scrutiny of their immoral actions. Despite the fact that the rich are given unqualified respect, Shaw shows that the less-respected middle class has stronger—if still muddled—moral standards. Frank's response to the knowledge that Mrs. Warren runs brothels demonstrates this. Although Frank is cynical in his desire to marry a woman purely for her money and he has no respect for ideas about parental authority, he draws a firm moral line against marrying for money that is earned in brothels. His middle-class morality makes it impossible for him to stomach Mrs. Warren's upper-class immorality.

Ultimately, the play suggests that a society built on systemic injustice taints everyone affiliated with it, leaving nobody morally pure, even those who seek distance from immorality. When Vivie cuts off her mother and refuses to take any more of her money at the end of the play, she feels secure that she has done the right thing. However, her action recalls the foolish Reverend Gardner who inquires about people's social status before stepping into their gardens. Vivie, like the Reverend, is still inextricably linked to a world built on exploitation, especially the exploitation of women. Whatever work Vivie does in law and finance, she will be engaging with the same immorally organized society. If Vivie is honest with herself in the future, she will realize that, even after expelling her mother from her life, she is still complicit in a system which favors the Crofts of the world and exploits the labor of poor women.

In the play's last act, when Vivie tells Frank and Praed that Mrs. Warren is a prostitute and brothel owner, she says, "I am sure that if I had the courage I should spend the rest of my life in telling everybody—stamping and branding it into them until they all felt their part in its abomination as I feel mine." This suggests that, even if complicity in injustice can't be avoided, it can be mitigated by speaking openly and profusely about oppression and corruption. By writing *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Shaw himself is seeking to expose his audience to their complicity in an immoral system and to show them that their excuses for why they are not responsible hold no weight.



### INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* portrays two parent-child relationships in which the children reject sentimental ideas about familial duty. Frank and Vivie share a belief that they should judge their parents based on their parents' behavior and values, treating their parents only as well as they deserve to be treated. In keeping with Victorian views on the respect owed to parents, however, Mrs. Warren and Reverend Gardner expect Frank and Vivie to

respect them and take their advice no matter what, and they are hurt and stunned by the way their children dismiss them. Through the differences in these two parent-child relationships, Shaw reveals that, while personality traits are often passed from parent to child, love and loyalty must be earned.

Part of the bond between Frank and Vivie is their shared feeling of contempt for elders who wish to tell them what to do. After Frank and Vivie meet one another's parents for the first time, they share a laugh at both Reverend Gardner and Mrs. Warren's expense. However, even as Frank and Vivie defy their parents' advice about their futures, they are still following in their parents' footsteps. Frank's father, Reverend Samuel Gardner, lived a wild youth before becoming obsessed with respectability. While Reverend Gardner wants Frank to be respectable, Frank's desire to live a wild life is not an explicit rejection of his father, since it's actually emulating Reverend Gardner's own path. Similarly, Vivie commits herself to a life of hard work much like her mother's, despite her strong objections to the choices her mother has made. Mrs. Warren's goal in earning her fortune was to see Vivie installed in fashionable, respectable society, living a life of leisure. But despite having earned enough money to achieve this goal, Mrs. Warren cannot bring herself to stop working as a brothel owner because she needs work to give her life purpose. Vivie proves herself to be exactly the same when she rejects the life of leisure her mother has provided in favor of earning her own money by using her talents. Like Frank and Reverend Gardner, Vivie is too similar to her mother to take a different course. Just as Frank must seek to avoid work, although his father begs him to find a steady occupation, Vivie refuses a life of leisure, despite her mother's desire to give it to her.

While Frank and Vivie are both similar to and contemptuous of their parents, their relationships with their parents follow different trajectories, which can be attributed to their drastically different upbringings. Frank was raised in a happy home with a mother, a father, and several sisters. Although he sees his father as foolish, pompous, and hypocritical, Frank also admits that Reverend Gardner "means well." In general, Frank is affectionate, capable of forgiving weakness in others, and certain that others will forgive flaws in him. Although he looks down on Mrs. Warren, instantly sensing that she is "a wretch," he still teases and flirts with her, which shows that he's able to see both the good and the bad in people simultaneously. Vivie, however, who has seen her mother infrequently throughout her childhood, lacks Frank's capacity to balance criticism with sympathy and forgiveness. As the play unfolds, Vivie moves from a guarded and suspicious view of her mother, to a loving and understanding one, to an absolute rejection of her mother. Each of these views is somewhat simplistic, and it suggests that Vivie's mother's absence has rendered her incapable of accepting the complexity inherent to all people, which proves

toxic to her bond with her mother.

*Mrs. Warren's Profession* debunks the idea of an unbreakable bond between parents and children, showing that children do not inherently respect their parents and that their love is often conditional on their parents' behavior and values. At the same time, the play shows that, regardless of whether children respect their parents, they are likely to take after them—even if this resemblance defeats the parents' best-laid plans and cherished hopes for how their children will grow up.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### VIVIE'S CIGARS

Women who smoked broke with the conventions for young women of the Victorian era. Vivie's cigars, along with her fondness for whiskey, suggest that she wants to experience pleasure herself, not just provide it to others as a wife, mother, or daughter. Smoking, riding bicycles, and dressing in simple clothing were all outward symbols a cohort of early feminists used to signal their independence from society's expectations for women and their right to enter into spheres that used to be open only to men.



### BRUSSELS

Brussels is the base of operations for Mrs. Warren's small empire of brothels across Europe. She also has brothels in Vienna, Ostend, and Budapest. Early on in the play, these European cities represent the secret life Mrs. Warren leads away from her daughter. They are also places where men like Praed and Frank seek to go to experience beauty, romance, or fun. Later, after Vivie realizes what her mother's business consists of, these European cities come to represent the corrupt, exploitative world of the idle, worthless upper class. Although Vivie seeks to sequester herself in London from the unpleasantness she imagines exists out of sight on the European continent, as Crofts tells her, the profits of these businesses are all around her. In the end, then, as a far-off city with many ties to England, Brussels represents the illusion that one can ever separate oneself from prostitution and other forms of exploitation.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grindl Press edition of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* published in 2016.

## The Author's Apology Quotes

☞ The notion that prostitution is created by the wickedness of Mrs Warren is as silly as the notion—prevalent, nevertheless, to some extent in Temperance circles—that drunkenness is created by the wickedness of the publican. Mrs Warren is not a whit a worse woman than the reputable daughter who cannot endure her. Her indifference to the ultimate social consequences of her means of making money, and her discovery of that means by the ordinary method of taking the line of least resistance to getting it, are too common in English society to call for any special remark. Her vitality, her thrift, her energy, her outspokenness, her wise care of her daughter, and the managing capacity which has enabled her and her sister to climb from the fried fish shop down by the Mint to the establishments of which she boasts, are all high English social virtues. Her defence of herself is so overwhelming that it provokes the *St James Gazette* to declare that "the tendency of the play is wholly evil" because "it contains one of the boldest and most specious defences of an immoral life for poor women that has ever been penned." Happily the *St James Gazette* here speaks in its haste. Mrs Warren's defence of herself is not only bold and specious, but valid and unanswerable. But it is no defence at all of the vice which she organizes. It is no defence of an immoral life to say that the alternative offered by society collectively to poor women is a miserable life, starved, overworked, fetid, ailing, ugly. Though it is quite natural and right for Mrs Warren to choose what is, according to her lights, the least immoral alternative, it is none the less infamous of society to offer such alternatives. For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality.

**Related Characters:** Vivie Warren, Liz, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 27-28

### Explanation and Analysis

Shaw reacts to the prevailing idea that prostitution is caused by the immorality of individual women who decide to become prostitutes instead of pursuing "honorable" professions. He explains that his play does not seek to justify prostitution, but rather to point out that prostitution is the result of a lack of economic opportunity for women. He suggests that Mrs. Warren is no worse than her daughter; both women are shrewd, energetic, and far-thinking. Shaw suggests that, if Mrs. Warren had Vivie's opportunities, she might have a career just like Vivie's, while Vivie might have been no better able than her mother to find a way to prosper outside of sex work, if she had been

brought up in similar circumstances. Shaw is not defending prostitution; instead he is explaining how a person comes to the decision to enter this profession. He explains here that he has had the character of Mrs. Warren voice his own critique of economic opportunities for women.

☞ The dramatic reason for making the clergyman what Mrs Warren calls "an old stick-in-the-mud," whose son, in spite of much capacity and charm, is a cynically worthless member of society, is to set up a mordant contrast between him and the woman of infamous profession, with her well brought-up, straightforward, hardworking daughter.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Reverend Sam Gardner

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 29-30

### Explanation and Analysis

Shaw responds to critics who have suggested that he means to attack the church by making Reverend Gardner a buffoon who doesn't believe what he preaches but insists on setting himself up as a moral authority at every opportunity. Instead, he claims that he means to show that personal traits are more important than social class. While Reverend Gardner is a failure in a job he was only able to secure because of his social position, Mrs. Warren has been able to build a fortune out of nothing. The fates of Frank and Vivie are meant to highlight once again how much Mrs. Warren's fate is due to lack of opportunity and social barriers, while Reverend Gardner's is the result of unearned benefits and class prejudice.

●● The most vicious man in the play is not in the least a stage villain; indeed, he regards his own moral character with the sincere complacency of a hero of melodrama. The amiable devotee of romance and beauty is shewn at an age which brings out the futilization which these worships are apt to produce if they are made the staple of life instead of the sauce. The attitude of the clever young people to their elders is faithfully represented as one of pitiless ridicule and unsympathetic criticism, and forms a spectacle incredible to those who, when young, were not cleverer than their nearest elders, and painful to those sentimental parents who shrink from the cruelty of youth, which pardons nothing because it knows nothing. In short, the characters and their relations are of a kind that the routine critic has not yet learned to place; so that their misunderstanding was a foregone conclusion.

**Related Characters:** Reverend Sam Gardner, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren, Frank Gardner, Sir George Crofts, Praed

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

Shaw explains that each of his characters challenge the audience's expectations for how a person of that type should be represented on the stage. First, he addresses Crofts, who is uncritically immoral. Crofts is as unreflective as the hero of a melodrama, who never has to give any explanation of his motives because they are always those that society associates with virtue. Instead, Crofts believes he is entitled to every immoral action without ever considering why.

Next, Shaw explains that he means to challenge the idealized portrayal of the romantic art-lover through his portrayal of Praed. Praed is shown to be old and useless; because he has never done anything else in life besides appreciate art, he is a person without any moral compass or social purpose. He ignores all harsh realities and, in doing so, becomes complicit in them.

Finally, Shaw says that he means for the two parent-child relationships shown in the play to challenge prevailing ideas about youth, age, and the bond between parents and children. He suggests that parents are foolish to expect their children's respect, which smart children are bound to figure out. Shaw imagines that any young people sitting in the audience who have treated their parents respectfully and obediently will wonder if they have inferior intellects to Frank and Vivie. At the same time, he hopes to show the children to be cruel because they do not yet grasp how many compromises one makes in life.

## Act 1 Quotes

●● VIVIE. No: she won't talk about it either. [*Rising*] However, I daresay you have good reasons for telling me nothing. Only, mind this, Mr Praed, I expect there will be a battle royal when my mother hears of my Chancery Lane project.

PRAED [*ruefully*] I'm afraid there will.

VIVIE. Well, I shall win because I want nothing but my fare to London to start there to-morrow earning my own living by devilling for Honoria. Besides, I have no mysteries to keep up; and it seems she has. I shall use that advantage over her if necessary.

PRAED [*greatly shocked*] Oh no! No, pray. Youd not do such a thing.

VIVIE. Then tell me why not.

PRAED. I really cannot. I appeal to your good feeling. [*She smiles at his sentimentality*]. Besides, you may be too bold. Your mother is not to be trifled with when she's angry.

VIVIE. You can't frighten me, Mr Praed. In that month at Chancery Lane I had opportunities of taking the measure of one or two women very like my mother. You may back me to win. But if I hit harder in my ignorance than I need, remember it is you who refuse to enlighten me. Now, let us drop the subject. [*She takes her chair and replaces it near the hammock with the same vigorous swing as before*].

PRAED [*taking a desperate resolution*] One word, Miss Warren. I had better tell you. It's very difficult; but—

**Related Characters:** Praed, Vivie Warren (speaker), Honoria Fraser, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie was raised in boarding schools and knows very little about her mother. After great success at school, she plans to go and earn her own money by working with her friend Honoria as an actuary. Minutes after meeting her mother's friend Praed, she asks him if he thinks she will get along with her mother. Vivie is getting ready for a showdown with her mother, who she thinks will not want her to work and live independently. Praed is taken aback by the question and refuses to discuss Mrs. Warren's life with her daughter, but he admits that Mrs. Warren is unlikely to support Vivie's plan.

Vivie finds it odd that she knows so little about her mother's life, and she suspects that there is a secret being kept from her. She doesn't know what this secret is, but she suspects that it is something scandalous or unrespectable that her

mother would like to keep anyone from finding out about. She plans to use this as leverage when she is trying to win her mother over to the idea that she will work independently instead of living a life of leisure, supported by her mother, until she marries—as most women of her class would.

This is the first of many times during the play when Mrs. Warren's old friend Praed will be asked to comment on her life. After resisting Vivie's initial inquiries, he succumbs to her pressure, hoping to prevent an ugly argument between mother and daughter. But he never gets to finish speaking, so it is unclear what he really thinks Mrs. Warren's secret is.

☛ CROFTS. As to that, theres no resemblance between her and her mother that I can see. I suppose she's not *your* daughter, is she?

PRAED [*rising indignantly*] Really, Crofts—!

CROFTS. No offence, Praed. Quite allowable as between two men of the world.

PRAED [*recovering himself with an effort and speaking gently and gravely*] Now listen to me, my dear Crofts. [*He sits down again*]. I have nothing to do with that side of Mrs Warren's life, and never had. She has never spoken to me about it; and of course I have never spoken to her about it. Your delicacy will tell you that a handsome woman needs some friends who are not—well, not on that footing with her. The effect of her own beauty would become a torment to her if she could not escape from it occasionally. You are probably on much more confidential terms with Kitty than I am. Surely you can ask her the question yourself.

CROFTS. I have asked her, often enough. But she's so determined to keep the child all to herself that she would deny that it ever had a father if she could. [*Rising*] I'm thoroughly uncomfortable about it, Praed.

PRAED [*rising also*] Well, as you are, at all events, old enough to be her father, I don't mind agreeing that we both regard Miss Vivie in a parental way, as a young girl who we are bound to protect and help. What do you say?

CROFTS [*aggressively*] I'm no older than you, if you come to that.

PRAED. Yes you are, my dear fellow: you were born old. I was born a boy: I've never been able to feel the assurance of a grownup man in my life. [*He folds his chair and carries it to the porch*].

**Related Characters:** Sir George Crofts, Praed (speaker), Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 50-51

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren and Vivie have gone inside the cottage, leaving Praed and Crofts outside to discuss them. Crofts begins to ask Praed whether he knows who Vivie's father is. Praed has said he doesn't think Crofts could be Vivie's mother, because there is no resemblance between him and Vivie. Crofts is still uncomfortable about this, not because he wants to know if he has a daughter, but because he is interested in Vivie sexually. He makes it clear that he has slept with Mrs. Warren before and assumes that Praed has too. Praed acts scandalized by Crofts' questions, saying that he knows nothing about this side of Mrs. Warren's life. Although it has not yet been revealed what Mrs. Warren's secret is, earlier in the scene Praed almost agreed to tell Vivie about it. This will be one of the play's main unresolved questions: is Praed really as unaware of what is going on in Mrs. Warren's life as he claims to be? Either way, Praed seems to believe that by not knowing what is going on around him, he can claim to be totally innocent and uninvolved. Even though Praed is well-mannered, considerate, and a likable character, his ignorance of Mrs. Warren's life seems to be either a posture, or the result of willful blindness on his part.

Crofts, meanwhile, is Praed's opposite. Rather than knowing nothing, he assumes that everyone is like him and engages in all the scandalous, hard-partying behaviors he does. He has slept with Mrs. Warren, and so he assumes Praed has too. He is attracted to Vivie, even though he is old enough to be her father and cannot be sure that he is not, and he is angry at Praed's suggestion that his age, or the fact that he used to sleep with her mother, means he shouldn't think of her as a potential partner.

●● REV. S. [*severely*] Yes. I advised you to conquer your idleness and flippancy, and to work your way into an honorable profession and live on it and not upon me.  
 FRANK. No: that's what you thought of afterwards. What you actually said was that since I had neither brains nor money, I'd better turn my good looks to account by marrying someone with both. Well, look here. Miss Warren has brains: you can't deny that.  
 REV. S. Brains are not everything.  
 FRANK. No, of course not: there's the money—  
 REV. S. [*interrupting him austere*ly] I was not thinking of money, sir. I was speaking of higher things. Social position, for instance.  
 FRANK. I don't care a rap about that.  
 REV. S. But I do, sir.  
 FRANK. Well, nobody wants you to marry her. Anyhow, she has what amounts to a high Cambridge degree; and she seems to have as much money as she wants.

**Related Characters:** Reverend Sam Gardner, Frank Gardner (speaker), Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 54-55

### Explanation and Analysis

Reverend Gardner is a clergyman, even though he has no talent for preaching and often uses a pompous attitude to project the moral authority he lacks. Frank knows his father for who he truly is and refuses to play along with his father's moralizing and posturing about the importance of social status. Reverend Gardner has such a weak sense of morality that he thinks that social status and morality are one and the same: he assumes that respectable members of the upper class cannot be accused of immorality, although the play will show this to be a laughable idea.

At this moment, Frank reveals to his father his plan to court and marry the rich and accomplished Vivie Warren. Reverend Gardner seems to have few objections to this plan, so long as Vivie's position in society is good. Even though he pretends to believe Frank should find a profession and lead an industrious life, when Frank reminds Reverend Gardner of his initial advice to Frank, he shows that his father actually agrees with him. Father and son both believe that if Frank can secure a rich and socially well-positioned wife, he will have done well for himself. Although Frank wants to be an idle playboy and his father is a respectable clergyman, Reverend Gardner's values are actually identical to Frank's.

## Act 2 Quotes

●● MRS WARREN [*reflectively*] Well, Sam, I don't know. If the girl wants to get married, no good can come of keeping her unmarried.  
 REV. S. [*astounded*] But married to him!—your daughter to my son! Only think: it's impossible.  
 CROFTS. Of course it's impossible. Don't be a fool, Kitty.  
 MRS WARREN [*nettled*] Why not? Isn't my daughter good enough for your son?  
 REV. S. But surely, my dear Mrs Warren, you know the reasons—  
 MRS WARREN [*defiantly*] I know no reasons. If you know any, you can tell them to the lad, or to the girl, or to your congregation, if you like.  
 REV. S. [*collapsing helplessly into his chair*] You know very well that I couldn't tell anyone the reasons. But my boy will believe me when I tell him there are reasons.  
 FRANK. Quite right, Dad: he will. But has your boy's conduct ever been influenced by your reasons?

**Related Characters:** Sir George Crofts, Frank Gardner, Reverend Sam Gardner, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren) (speaker), Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 62-63

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie and Praed are out walking, and the other four characters discuss the possibility of Frank marrying Vivie. Reverend Gardner, who we learned at the end of Act I used to be Mrs. Warren's lover, is horrified at the idea. Crofts is himself interested in Vivie, so he wants to prevent Frank from pursuing her. Mrs. Warren worries that Reverend Gardner thinks that Vivie is not good enough for Frank, because she is her daughter. While this is a good assumption, considering how much emphasis Reverend Gardner places on social position and respectability, he suggests that there is some other issue at stake. Whether he believes that Vivie may be his daughter or not, he hates the idea of his son marrying his ex-lover's daughter. This would, of course, naturally lead to run-ins between his wife and his ex-lover. He may also fear the exposure of his behavior as a young man to those in his church, as Mrs. Warren hints when she says that he can tell his congregation his reasons for not wanting Frank to marry Vivie. Frank probably assumes that his father is only worried about his own reputation in discouraging him from pursuing Vivie. He will not allow his own future wealth to be compromised by his father's qualms about respectability.

☛ CROFTS. Mayn't a man take an interest in a girl?  
MRS WARREN. Not a man like you.  
CROFTS. How old is she?  
MRS WARREN. Never you mind how old she is.  
CROFTS. Why do you make such a secret of it?  
MRS WARREN. Because I choose.  
CROFTS. Well, I'm not fifty yet; and my property is as good as it ever was—  
MRS [interrupting him] Yes; because youre as stingy as youre vicious.  
CROFTS [continuing] And a baronet isn't to be picked up every day. No other man in my position would put up with you for a mother-in-law. Why shouldn't she marry me?  
MRS WARREN. You!  
CROFTS. We three could live together quite comfortably. I'd die before her and leave her a bouncing widow with plenty of money. Why not? It's been growing in my mind all the time I've been walking with that fool inside there.  
MRS WARREN [revolted] Yes; it's the sort of thing that would grow in your mind.  
[He halts in his prowling; and the two look at one another, she steadfastly, with a sort of awe behind her contemptuous disgust: he stealthily, with a carnal gleam in his eye and a loose grin.]  
CROFTS [suddenly becoming anxious and urgent as he sees no sign of sympathy in her] Look here, Kitty: youre a sensible woman: you needn't put on any moral airs. I'll ask no more questions; and you need answer none. I'll settle the whole property on her; and if you want a checque for yourself on the wedding day, you can name any figure you like—in reason.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Sir George Crofts (speaker), Frank Gardner, Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 68-69

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren has noticed Crofts looking at Vivie lustfully and is eager to protect her daughter from his advances. As his former lover, Mrs. Warren knows very well what kind of man Crofts is, and he is not who she would want Vivie to marry. Crofts believes that he has a solid case for why he should marry Vivie. All he wants is to be sure that she isn't his daughter, and he asks Vivie's age to try to calculate whether he was sleeping with her mother during the period when Vivie would have been conceived. Still, he is willing to pursue Vivie even without any reassurance from Mrs. Warren that she could not be his daughter.

Crofts's case for why he is an ideal husband rests on assumptions about the value of money and social status.

Even though Mrs. Warren has enough money to support herself and her daughter, Crofts is richer still. He believes that Mrs. Warren will encourage Vivie to marry him if she can become richer, especially since he will leave Vivie very rich when he dies. On top of his wealth, Crofts is an aristocrat. He knows that Mrs. Warren's social status is so low that she will be unable to marry Vivie to another aristocrat, and he believes that this is something any mother would want for her daughter.

Like Frank, Crofts believes marriage is a financial transaction. He hopes to buy Vivie as his wife, and he is willing to pay her mother a fee if she will broker the deal. He sees nothing out of the ordinary about the fact that he used to sleep with the mother and will now marry the daughter. Instead, he assumes that he should be able to purchase any young, beautiful woman he is interested in, because he believes that all women are objects that have a price.

☛ MRS WARREN. You! you've no heart. [She suddenly breaks out vehemently in her natural tongue—the dialect of a woman of the people—with all her affectations of maternal authority and conventional manners gone, and an overwhelming inspiration of true conviction and scorn in her] Oh, I wont bear it: I won't put up with the injustice of it. What right have you to set yourself up above me like this? You boast of what you are to me—to me, who gave you a chance of being what you are. What chance had I? Shame on you for a bad daughter and a stuck-up prude! VIVIE [sitting down with a shrug, no longer confident; for her replies, which have sounded sensible and strong to her so far, now begin to ring rather woodenly and even priggishly against the new tone of her mother] Don't think for a moment I set myself above you in any way. You attacked me with the conventional authority of a mother: I defended myself with the conventional superiority of a respectable woman. Frankly, I am not going to stand any of your nonsense; and when you drop it I shall not expect you to stand any of mine. I shall always respect your right to your own opinions and your own way of life.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 74-75

### Explanation and Analysis

After the other characters have left for the night, Vivie and her mother begin to argue. Vivie treats her mother coldly and demands proof that they are related. When Mrs.

Warren seems unable to say for certain who Vivie's father is, Vivie responds icily. Mrs. Warren is hurt by her daughter's treatment of her, which she believes is the result of ingratitude and snobbishness. Mrs. Warren thinks that Vivie is treating her unkindly and refusing to take orders from her mother because she thinks that she is better than her, not because she believes she shouldn't have to take orders from anyone. Vivie tries to explain this, saying that they should both be free to live as they choose. She does not really care about her mother's promiscuity, or any of her other secrets, but she is willing to use those secrets against her mother if that will keep Mrs. Warren from asserting authority over her. Vivie hopes to communicate that she is not looking down on her mother, only insisting that her mother treat her as an equal. But to Mrs. Warren's mind, a daughter would only refuse to follow her mother's orders if she thought she was superior to her mother.

To Mrs. Warren's mind, the idea of a young woman choosing her lifestyle is entirely alien. No poor woman, and few rich women of this time would have had the ability to support themselves without a guardian or husband. So, for Mrs. Warren, the idea that Vivie should be able to choose her path in life instead of following her mother's commands is another insult. She lashes out at Vivie for her naïve belief that people are able to choose what they do in life, since this idea runs entirely counter to Mrs. Warren's experience. From the way Mrs. Warren speaks when angry, Vivie understands that her mother grew up poor. But she doesn't yet understand anything about the difficulty of making a living amid the exploitative conditions that poor women face. She suggests that it is possible to make the best of any circumstance and to prosper in any profession.

☞ MRS WARREN. Why, of course. Everybody dislikes having to work and make money; but they have to do it all the same. I'm sure I've often pitied a poor girl, tired out and in low spirits, having to try to please some man that she doesn't care two straws for—some half-drunken fool that thinks he's making himself agreeable when he's teasing and worrying and disgusting a woman so that hardly any money could pay her for putting up with it. But she has to bear with disagreeables and take the rough with the smooth, just like a nurse in a hospital or anyone else. It's not work that any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows; though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses.

VIVIE. Still, you consider it worth while. It pays.

MRS WARREN. Of course it's worth while to a poor girl, if she can resist temptation and is good-looking and well conducted and sensible. It's far better than any other employment open to her.

I always thought that it oughtn't to be. It *can't* be right, Vivie, that there shouldn't be better opportunities for women. I stick to that: it's wrong. But it's so, right or wrong; and a girl must make the best of it. But of course it's not worth while for a lady. If you took to it you'd be a fool; but I should have been a fool if I'd taken to anything else.

**Related Characters:** Vivie Warren, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren) (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 77-78

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren has told Vivie her secret: she was a sex worker and then went into business as a brothel owner with her sister Liz. Now she explains how sex work is work like any other. She says it is difficult, tiring, and unpleasant sometimes, but those elements are present in any job. While many people in their society believe that promiscuity or a lack of morals lead poor women to become sex workers, Mrs. Warren roundly dismisses that idea. She says there is no danger of a woman becoming a sex worker who doesn't do it for economic reasons alone. There is nothing fun or sexy about being a sex worker, she claims, but it is the best opportunity to earn money available to poor women because one can earn enough money to build up savings. Mrs. Warren believes that only in sex work does a woman from a poor background have an opportunity to manage her money wisely and build a decent life for herself. She laments that this is the case, suggesting that there is something wrong with a society that doesn't provide other opportunities to earn a living wage to women.

●● MRS WARREN [*indignantly*] Of course not. What sort of mother do you take me for! How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery? And what's a woman worth? What's life worth? Without self-respect! Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first-rate education, when other women that had just as good opportunities are in the gutter? Because I always knew how to respect myself and control myself. Why is Liz looked up to in a cathedral town? The same reason. Where would we be now if we'd minded the clergyman's foolishness? Scrubbing floors for one and sixpence a day and nothing to look forward to but the workhouse infirmary.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren (speaker), Liz

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 79

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie has asked her mother if she really wouldn't recommend that Vivie work in a factory or as a maid, instead of becoming a sex worker, if they were still as poor as Mrs. Warren was when she was growing up. Mrs. Warren answers Vivie definitively in the negative. The conditions that prevail in other jobs available to poor women are so exploitative, she says, that they deprive women of self-respect, and are essentially slavery. Mrs. Warren is implicitly suggesting that self-respect is more important than the respect of others in society, or respectability. She thinks that the very low wages paid to many women turn them into victims without agency or control over their own lives. These women end their lives in poverty, and with no money to retire on, they have to depend on the sparse support provided to the poor and elderly at the end of their lives.

The idea that sex work allows a woman to keep her self-respect more than work as a maid or factory worker that is condoned by society was an extremely provocative one, which critics of Shaw's play attacked. Some critics believed that Shaw was advocating for sex work. In fact, he was trying to shed light on the terrible conditions in other jobs available to women, in order to explain why prostitution was so widespread.

●● MRS WARREN Don't you be led astray by people who don't know the world, my girl. The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she can't expect it: why should she? It wouldn't be for her own happiness. Ask any lady in London society that has daughters; and she'll tell you the same, except that I tell you straight and she'll tell you crooked. That's all the difference.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren) (speaker), Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 79

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren has revealed her profession to Vivie and she is now telling Vivie how she ought to question the conventional way things are presented, because many respectable women pretend the world is different from the way it is. Mrs. Warren suggests that many people, like the priest at the church school she attended, do not understand how the world is set up for women. Mrs. Warren disputes the prevailing idea that marriage is the best fate for a respectable woman, and sex work is the worst possible fate, by drawing parallels between the two. While a woman with a high social status can sell her body in exchange for a promise that a man will take care of her needs for the rest of their lives, poor women are only able to demand money in exchange for a specific sexual favor. All control over whether a woman prospers or not generally rests in the hands of men, and this is the case whether a woman is a respectable wife or a sex worker.

☛ MRS WARREN. Well, of course, dearie, it's only good manners to be ashamed of it: it's expected from a woman. Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel. Liz used to be angry with me for plumping out the truth about it. She used to say that when every woman could learn enough from what was going on in the world before her eyes, there was no need to talk about it to her. But then Liz was such a perfect lady! She had the true instinct of it; while I was always a bit of a vulgarian. I used to be so pleased when you sent me your photos to see that you were growing up like Liz: you've just her ladylike, determined way. But I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. Whats the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world that way for women, theres no good pretending it's arranged the other way. No: I never was a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador. But of course now I daren't talk about such things: whatever would they think of us! [*She yawns*]. Oh dear! I do believe I'm getting sleepy after all. [*She stretches herself lazily, thoroughly relieved by her explosion, and placidly ready for her night's rest*].

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren) (speaker), Vivie Warren

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 79-80

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie has asked her mother if she really never felt ashamed at her profession. Mrs. Warren first says, of course she has felt ashamed, because this is what polite society dictates she feel. But as she expands on the theme, she says she never really did feel personally ashamed, because she feels she did the best she could in life and took pride in doing her work to the best of her ability. She refers to her brothel as a classy place, where poor women could find opportunities unavailable to them elsewhere. For her, being ashamed has two meanings. She knows that society says she is supposed to be ashamed of what she does, so she says she is. But in her own experience, she feels she has always done her best. Even though society tells her to be ashamed of her job, she is not ashamed, because she feels the pride of a job well done.

Mrs. Warren sees herself as quite different from her daughter and her sister Liz. Liz was able to adopt the manners of the upper class and, with the money earned in brothels and this instinct for pretending to have always

lived a respectable life, she was able to transition into respectable society. Liz never spoke of the pride of a job well done, because the work she had done was work that respectable people would never talk about. As she worked her way into upper-class society, she discouraged her sister from even mentioning topics that were supposed to be unmentionable to respectable women. Because of Vivie's appearance and manners, Mrs. Warren believes that Vivie must value conformity to society's taboos in the same way her sister did. She thinks that Vivie, like Liz, looks down on her because she is vulgar.

☛ MRS WARREN [*with a perfunctory glance at the scene*] Yes, dear; but take care you don't catch your death of cold from the night air.

VIVIE [*contemptuously*] Nonsense.

MRS WARREN [*querulously*] Oh yes: everything I say is nonsense, according to you.

VIVIE [*turning to her quickly*] No: really that is not so, mother.

You have got completely the better of me tonight, though I intended it to be the other way. Let us be good friends now.

MRS WARREN [*shaking her head a little ruefully*] So it *has* been the other way. But I suppose I must give in to it. I always got the worst of it from Liz; and now I suppose it'll be the same with you.

VIVIE. Well, never mind. Come: good-night, dear old mother. [*She takes her mother in her arms*].

MRS WARREN [*fondly*] I brought you up well, didn't I, dearie?

VIVIE. You did.

MRS WARREN. And you'll be good to your poor old mother for it, won't you?

VIVIE. I will, dear. [*Kissing her*] Good-night.

MRS WARREN [*with unction*] Blessings on my own dearie darling! a mother's blessing! [*She embraces her daughter protectingly, instinctively looking upward for divine sanction.*]

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 80-81

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie opens the door to let in some fresh air, and Mrs. Warren protectively tells her to close the door to avoid getting sick. Vivie finds this silly, and she says so. Mrs. Warren says she sees that Vivie thinks everything she does is silly, but Vivie denies this. Mrs. Warren has revealed her life story to Vivie, who is impressed by her mother's

hardheaded understanding of the world and sympathetic to her for having had to struggle to get out of poverty. She tells her mother that she has gained in respect for her. Mrs. Warren doesn't understand the basis of Vivie's new respect. She thinks that Vivie previously refused her respect because she looked down on her as a vulgar woman, in the same way her sister Liz did. Mrs. Warren has actually won Vivie's respect by telling her about all she struggled through, but she doesn't understand what Vivie's respect means. She believes and hopes that Vivie will now play the traditional role of an obedient, loving daughter.

## Act 3 Quotes

☛ FRANK. I give him due credit for that. [*Rising and flinging down his paper*] But just imagine his telling Crofts to bring the Warrens over here! He must have been ever so drunk. You know, my dear Praddy, my mother wouldn't stand Mrs Warren for a moment. Vivie mustn't come here until she's gone back to town.

PRAED. But your mother doesn't know anything about Mrs Warren, does she? [*He picks up the paper and sits down to read it*].

FRANK. I don't know. Her journey to town looks as if she did. Not that my mother would mind in the ordinary way: she has stuck like a brick to lots of women who had got into trouble. But they were all nice women. That's what makes the real difference. Mrs Warren, no doubt, has her merits; but she's ever so rowdy; and my mother simply wouldn't put up with her. So—hallo! [*This exclamation is provoked by the reappearance of the clergyman, who comes out of the house in haste and dismay*].

REV. S. Frank: Mrs Warren and her daughter are coming across the heath with Crofts: I saw them from the study windows.

What *am* I to say about your mother?

FRANK. Stick on your hat and go out and say how delighted you are to see them; and that Frank's in the garden; and that mother and Bessie have been called to the bedside of a sick relative, and were ever so sorry they couldn't stop; and that you hope Mrs Warren slept well; and—and—say any blessed thing except the truth, and leave the rest to Providence.

**Related Characters:** Praed, Reverend Sam Gardner, Frank Gardner (speaker), Vivie Warren, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Mrs. Gardner

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 86

### Explanation and Analysis

During a drunken conversation with the hard-partying

Crofts, Reverend Gardner told him to bring Mrs. Warren over to his house the next day. Reverend Gardner is usually vigilant about who he is seen with; sober, he would never invite a sex worker into his house. Although Frank doesn't know the details about Mrs. Warren's life, he realizes that his father's drunken blunder has led his mother to flee the house. Without knowing what his mother knows about Mrs. Warren, he still feels sure that she would never want to be around someone like her. He divides unrespectable women into two groups: those who get pregnant out of wedlock, but otherwise project respectability, and other, "rowdy" women, like Mrs. Warren. Praed does not seem eager to discuss Mrs. Warren's lack of respectability; he dodges the question by suggesting that, because Mrs. Gardner probably knows nothing about Mrs. Warren, her trip away from the rectory might have nothing to do with Mrs. Warren's impending visit. But Reverend Gardner and Frank see Mrs. Gardner's unexpected absence as a snub to Mrs. Warren, and they are very worried that she will be offended.

FRANK. Viv: theres a freemasonry among thoroughly immoral people that you know nothing of. You've too much character. *That's* the bond between your mother and me: that's why I know her better than youll ever know her.

VIVIE. You are wrong: you know nothing about her. If you knew the circumstances against which my mother had to struggle— FRANK [*adroitly finishing the sentence for her*] I should know why she is what she is, shouldn't I? What difference would that make?

Circumstances or no circumstances, Viv, you won't be able to stand your mother.

VIVIE [*very angry*] Why not?

FRANK. Because she's an old wretch, Viv. If you ever put your arm around her waist in my presence again, I'll shoot myself there and then as a protest against an exhibition which revolts me.

VIVIE. Must I choose between dropping your acquaintance and dropping my mother's?

FRANK [*gracefully*] That would put the old lady at ever such a disadvantage. No, Viv: your infatuated little boy will have to stick to you in any case. But he's all the more anxious that you shouldn't make mistakes. It's no use, Viv: your mother's impossible. She may be a good sort; but she's a bad lot, a very bad lot.

VIVIE [*hotly*] Frank—! [*He stands his ground. She turns away and sits down on the bench under the yew tree, struggling to recover her self-command. Then she says*] Is she to be deserted by the world because she's what you call a bad lot? Has she no right to live?

FRANK. No fear of that, Viv: *she* won't ever be deserted. [*He sits on the bench beside her*].

**Related Characters:** Frank Gardner, Vivie Warren (speaker), Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 89-90

### Explanation and Analysis

The previous night, Frank and Vivie bonded over their shared sense of superiority to their parents. But today, after her conversation with her mother, Vivie showed her mother affection. Frank is disgusted by this, because he sees Mrs. Warren's vulgar manners and believes that contact with her will compromise Vivie's status as a respectable woman. When Frank says that Mrs. Warren is "a good sort, but a bad lot," he means that while she may not be a malicious person, she is a vulgar, badly behaved one. If he likes Mrs. Warren and thinks she is fun to flirt with, this makes her an even more inappropriate companion for Vivie. Frank, like other men of his class, see women as divided into the respectable

women they might marry and unrespectable ones who they can treat however they choose.

Vivie is still processing all that her mother told her and trying to determine what her attitude to her should be. While she has been taught all her life in the elite educational institutions she attended to shun a woman like her mother, she doesn't believe that conventional ideas should always be followed. She sympathizes with her mother's plight as an impoverished young woman and respects how she worked to make her life better. But this does not change the truth about Mrs. Warren: she is a flirt, she dresses flashily, she is gluttonous and greedy, she bosses people around and acts like a showboat. Her behavior gives her away not only as a member of another class, but as an unrespectable member of that class. Vivie, on the other hand, hates frivolity of any kind. Even if Vivie believes her mother was justified in entering sex work, she is someone the serious-minded Vivie would never choose to associate with.

VIVIE. I have shared profits with you: and I admitted you just now to the familiarity of knowing what I think of you. CROFTS [*with serious friendliness*] To be sure you did. You won't find me a bad sort: I don't go in for being superfine intellectually; but I've plenty of honest human feeling; and the old Crofts breed comes out in a sort of instinctive hatred of anything low, in which I'm sure youll sympathize with me. Believe me, Miss Vivie, the world isn't such a bad place as the croakers make out. As long as you don't fly openly in the face of society, society doesn't ask any inconvenient questions; and it makes precious short work of the cads who do. There are no secrets better kept than the secrets everybody guesses. In the class of people I can introduce you to, no lady or gentleman would so far forget themselves as to discuss my business affairs or your mothers. No man can offer you a safer position.

VIVIE [*studying him curiously*] I suppose you really think youre getting on famously with me. CROFTS. Well, I hope I may flatter myself that you think better of me than you did at first. VIVIE [*quietly*] I hardly find you worth thinking about at all now. When I think of the society that tolerates you, and the laws that protect you! when I think of how helpless nine out of ten young girls would be in the hands of you and my mother! the unmentionable woman and her capitalist bully—

**Related Characters:** Sir George Crofts, Vivie Warren (speaker), Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 96

### Explanation and Analysis

Crofts has proposed to Vivie and revealed to her that he is the main investor in Mrs. Warren's chain of brothels. Vivie had assumed her mother had earned a living in sex work and then gotten out of the business, but Crofts has revealed that this is not the case. Vivie refused Crofts's proposal from the start, but is even more full of outrage and hatred for him now that she understands his role in her mother's life.

Crofts describes his social class – the highest in England – as full of people who flout the moral codes that they claim to believe in and never ask questions about where their friends get their money. He says that the people on this high rung of the social ladder are quick to attack and silence anyone who tries to speak about the unjust, exploitative sources of their wealth. When he tells Vivie the world is not as bad a place as she thinks, he confirms that it is actually much worse. He means that people like them can get away with anything and everything, and no one will dare challenge them.

Vivie's sympathy for her mother has evaporated, while her hatred for Crofts is more intense than ever. She feels for the many women whose best option in life is to turn to sex work and who then must split the money they earn with people like Mrs. Warren and Crofts.

### Act 4 Quotes

☛☛ VIVIE. I am sure that if I had the courage I should spend the rest of my life in telling everybody—stamping and branding it into them until they all felt their part in its abomination as I feel mine. There is nothing I despise more than the wicked convention that protects these things by forbidding a woman to mention them. And yet I can't tell you. The two infamous words that describe what my mother is are ringing in my ears and struggling on my tongue; but I can't utter them: the shame of them is too horrible for me. [*She buries her face in her hands. The two men, astonished, stare at one another and then at her. She raises her head again desperately and snatches a sheet of paper and a pen*]. Here: let me draft you a prospectus.

FRANK. Oh, she's mad. Do you hear, Viv? mad. Come! pull yourself together.

VIVIE. You shall see. [*She writes*]. "Paid up capital: not less than forty thousand pounds standing in the name of Sir George Crofts, Baronet, the chief shareholder. Premises at Brussels, Ostend, Vienna, and Budapest. Managing director: Mrs Warren"; and now don't let us forget her qualifications: the two words. [*She writes the words and pushes the paper to them*]. There! Oh no: don't read it: don't! [*She snatches it back and tears it to pieces; then seizes her head in her hands and hides her face on the table*].

[*Frank, who has watched the writing over her shoulder, and opened his eyes very widely at it, takes a card from his pocket; scribbles the two words on it; and silently hands it to Praed, who reads it with amazement and hides it hastily in his pocket.*]

**Related Characters:** Vivie Warren, Frank Gardner (speaker), Sir George Crofts, Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Praed

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 109

### Explanation and Analysis

Vivie is now living in London and working to earn her own money. She is visited by Frank and Praed, and decides to tell them what she learned about her mother and Crofts. It is almost impossible for her to utter the two words (“prostitute and procuress” as Shaw later explained) that describe her mother's career, so strong is the taboo in her society on speaking about such things. This taboo is especially strong in the case of a young woman speaking to single men to whom she is not related, and Vivie struggles against all the training she has received all her life in how to

be a well-mannered, respectable woman. She feels that this silence is a kind of complicity, similar to the one that Crofts described, however, and so she makes an enormous effort to force herself to communicate what she learned about her mother to Frank and Praed. She cannot say the words, however, but instead lists the cities where her mother works, in this way preserving some of the illusion that there is distance between her and her mother's business.

●● MRS WARREN [*lapsing recklessly into her dialect*] We're mother and daughter. I want my daughter. I've a right to you. Who is to care for me when I'm old? Plenty of girls have taken to me like daughters and cried at leaving me; but I let them all go because I had you to look forward to. I kept myself lonely for you. You've no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter.

VIVIE [*jarred and antagonized by the echo of the slums in her mother's voice*] My duty as a daughter! I thought we should come to that presently. Now once for all, mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband. I have spared neither Frank nor myself in sending him about his business. Do you think I will spare you?

MRS WARREN [*violently*] Oh, I know the sort you are: no mercy for yourself or anyone else. I know. My experience has done that for me anyhow: I can tell the pious, canting, hard, selfish woman when I meet her. Well, keep yourself to yourself: I don't want you. But listen to this. Do you know what I would do with you if you were a baby again? aye, as sure as there's a Heaven above us.

VIVIE. Strangle me, perhaps.

MRS WARREN. No: I'd bring you up to be a real daughter to me, and not what you are now, with your pride and your prejudices and the college education you stole from me: yes, stole: deny it if you can: what was it but stealing? I'd bring you up in my own house, I would.

VIVIE [*quietly*] In one of your own houses.

speech patterns and considered it a sign of the difficulties her mother had to weather as a poor woman without opportunities, now Mrs. Warren's dialect strikes Vivie as a jarring sign of how irreconcilably different she and her mother really are.

Mrs. Warren still cannot understand Vivie's point of view. Vivie will never allow herself to be dominated by anyone; even if she respected all of her mother's life choices, she would still be unwilling to do her "duty as a daughter." She wants to live independently and make something of herself on her own terms. On top of that, she feels none of the natural closeness that she might have felt with her mother if she had been brought up by her. Mrs. Warren is angry that Vivie does not feel the affection for her that women who worked in her brothel once felt. She does not realize that it is the time spent living under a single roof that instilled a love for her in those women.

Mrs. Warren's dream for Vivie was that she should be able to enter upper class society and live a life of privileged luxury, under her mother's supervision and authority. She thought that if she brought Vivie up in a brothel, Vivie would never cultivate the manners necessary to fit in among the upper class. But she also assumed that Vivie would love her without being raised by her, and so set herself up to be alienated from her daughter. She is doubly alienated from Vivie, who disapproves of her continued work as a brothel owner and does not feel the bond that might exist between them if Vivie had grown up in her mother's care.

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren (speaker), Frank Gardner

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 118

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren is angrily railing against Vivie's decision to cut her out of her life. For the second time in the play, she drops the pretense of speaking genteelly. But whereas the first time, Vivie was impressed by her mother's lower-class

●● VIVIE. I wish you wouldn't rant, mother. It only hardens me. Come: I suppose I am the only young woman you ever had in your power that you did good to. Don't spoil it all now.

MRS WARREN. Yes, Heaven forgive me, it's true; and you are the only one that ever turned on me. Oh, the injustice of it! the injustice! the injustice! I always wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work; and I was slave-driven until I cursed the day I ever heard of honest work. I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I were a leper. Oh, if I only had my life to live over again! I'd talk to that lying clergyman in the school. From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I'll do wrong and nothing but wrong. And I'll prosper on it.

VIVIE. Yes: it's better to choose your line and go through with it. If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another. You are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you goodbye now. I am right, am I not?

MRS WARREN [*taken aback*] Right to throw away all my money!

VIVIE. No: right to get rid of you? I should be a fool not to. Isn't that so?

MRS WARREN [*sulkily*] Oh well, yes, if you come to that, I suppose you are. But Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing! And now I'd better go than stay where I'm not wanted. [*She turns to the door*].

**Related Characters:** Kitty Warren (Mrs. Warren), Vivie Warren (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 118-119

### Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Warren is still railing against Vivie's decision to cut off contact between them. Vivie says that she is the only girl for whom her mother has ever truly done a good deed, and Mrs. Warren responds that it is all the more unjust for Vivie to turn her away in this case. Mrs. Warren has justified running a brothel by explaining it as better, less exploitative work than the other opportunities open to young women. But, as Vivie points out, even if she was giving these women better opportunities than they would have had elsewhere, she was still a force for exploitation. Vivie is the only woman she has given the opportunity to escape exploitation altogether and to shape an independent life for herself.

Mrs. Warren clearly hoped to redeem herself by giving Vivie better opportunities, but now that Vivie has turned on her, she plans never to do anything selfless again. Mrs. Warren still believes that Vivie is rejecting her out of a conventional distaste for the poor and unrespectable. She cannot accept that Vivie is rejecting her because she wants to choose her own path without any intercession by an authority figure. Vivie's problem with her mother is that she believes in conventional, sentimental moral ideas, but has lived her life flouting those ideas by profiting from sex work. Vivie is rejecting her mother because her mother hates exploitation but is an exploiter, and because she wants to control Vivie, even though she gave her the upbringing and education that Vivie needed to become independent. For Vivie, this inconsistency means that she and her mother will never be able to see eye to eye. Mrs. Warren once again proves Vivie right when she misunderstands this.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY

In *The Author's Apology*, George Bernard Shaw responds to the critical response to the first performances of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, which occurred in 1902, eight years after the play's completion. Shaw says he knew when he wrote the play that it would be censored by the Lord Chamberlain because it indicts society and describes its complicity in the institution of prostitution.

Shaw contends that theater critics expect to see the subject of prostitution portrayed through a very specific lens and, when they saw it portrayed differently, accused him of advocating for prostitution. Shaw argues that, to the contrary, the standard portrayal of prostitutes as beautiful, tragic young girls who either kill themselves or repent of their ways makes prostitution as attractive as any other fate to poor women without other good options. His play, on the other hand, is a piece of moral propaganda meant to make people think about the real roots of prostitution.

Shaw continues to compare his play to other plays that pass muster with the censor and are more favorably viewed by theater critics. He says that the Lord Chamberlain allows plays to be staged that give a more positive portrayal of prostitution than his, because people like to be excited by tales of prostitution. Meanwhile, the Lord Chamberlain has no jurisdiction over classic plays that have been approved during other time periods, although these plays often contain very explicit references to sex. The censor also allows plays containing scenes of rape and incestuous lust, so long as they don't show scenes of adultery, prostitution, or incest. Shaw contends that any censorship will skew the way a topic can be portrayed. Censorship is meant to protect current prejudices and systemic inequities.

Shaw gives a tongue-in-cheek apology to members of the audience who saw *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in the hopes of being excited. He says that the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of the play set up the expectation that it would be sexually arousing. Shaw also says his play must have disappointed those looking for a thrilling drama. He says that dramas should leave the creation of sublime aesthetic sensations to musicians and should instead concern themselves with how different people will interact when confronted with social problems.

*Shaw's "apology" is nothing of the sort. Instead of apologizing for writing about the offensive topic of prostitution, he contends that the play sends society an unpleasant but necessary message: that prostitution is made possible by the false morality of a society that refuses to talk about it.*



*Shaw claims that the typical dramatic treatment of prostitution makes the profession seem attractive by featuring beautiful young people facing moral dilemmas. Instead of portraying prostitution as a problem of the inner struggle of sinful or immoral young women, Shaw wants to present it in an entirely new light, as a practical issue that affects the lives of many of his contemporaries.*



*Shaw now links his critique of the usual portrayal of prostitution to a critique of censorship. He believes that censorship is partially responsible for social injustices, because it keeps people from discussing problems frankly and coming up with solutions to those problems. In the play, respectable people censor themselves, because talking about issues like prostitution is taboo. But this taboo on discussing the problem of prostitution keeps people from seeing that outdated ideas about morality and lack of economic opportunity for women are the true roots of prostitution.*



*Shaw contends that censorship and taboos on discussing certain topics have set up the expectation that talking about forbidden topics will be either sexually arousing or very dramatic. Instead, he wants to force people like the audience members to confront the unsexy reality that lies behind the things they usually are too polite to talk about.*



Shaw says that those critics who criticize his characters as unrealistic are used to seeing characters behave predictably, instead of irrationally and based on temperament like real people do.

Shaw says that there are many critics who decided not to see *Mrs. Warren's Profession* on the grounds that it is indecent. To these reviewers, he says that the play was produced only because women believed it was an important play to have staged, which suggests that the play's perspective on issues impacting women resonated with them.

Next, Shaw takes on critics who contend that he didn't make Mrs. Warren enough of a villain. This, he says, is precisely the point of her character. He intended to indict British society at large, not brothel owners in particular. To that end, he had Mrs. Warren argue that she had not chosen an immoral life, but had chosen one form of immorality over another, by choosing to live comfortably as a prostitute instead of starving and diseased in another occupation.

Another critic saw Reverend Gardner's character as an attack on religion. Instead, Shaw explains, the depiction of the clergyman is an attack on the society that pushes men who aren't suited to be clergymen into that profession. Shaw also means to highlight that Reverend Gardner produces a good-for-nothing as a son, while Mrs. Warren produces a hardworking, moral daughter. In this way, he hopes to point attention to the fact that to succeed as a brothel owner one must be intelligent and a good manager, while clergymen are selected based only on their social status and often have no moral authority whatsoever.

Shaw finishes his "Apology" by thanking the actors and supporters who decided to buck the Censor and put on the play despite many difficulties. The play is full of difficult roles, because they go against the usual stereotypes. Both Vivie and Mrs. Warren are unusual as heroines because they are practical Englishwomen, not Italian prima donnas. The villain (Crofts) is completely indifferent to his own moral failings. The kind and romantic lover of art (Praed) is portrayed as a silly middle-aged man who has never confronted the world as it really is. And the clever children Vivie and Frank have no respect for their elders, which will make children who do respect their elders worry that they are not clever and older people uncomfortable at what the younger generation must think of them.

*Shaw identifies himself with the Realist tradition, which believed in showing life and people as they really are, instead of as romantic, exciting, or attractive figures.*



*Shaw reminds male critics, who said that the play explored the topic of prostitution in a way that would be bad for society, that he had female support for the play's production. To Shaw's mind, his society forbids discussion of the experiences of women (especially poor women), and critics who refuse to see his play are continuing that pattern.*



*Shaw spells out his purpose behind writing the play here: to show that it is not the immorality of individual women that leads to prostitution, but the conditions these women face in society. He plans to show that the way society itself is structured is immoral, and even villainous. A woman like Mrs. Warren is not a fine example of morality, but neither can she be blamed for the problem of prostitution.*



*Although Shaw's focus is on the lack of opportunity for poor women, he also critiques the other ways in which his society fails to be a real meritocracy. The play shows that barring talented, ambitious people like Liz and Kitty Warren from certain professions means they direct their energies in less socially useful ways. At the same time, the members of Reverend Gardner's church are deprived of a talented clergyman, and Reverend Gardner is forced to be a hypocrite because he has been pushed into a profession he has no talent for.*



*Shaw finishes his "Apology" by offering insight into how his characters should be interpreted. He hopes that these characters will make the audience squirm, because they are true to life and are all portrayed as having realistic weaknesses. Shaw hopes that the play will stir his audience members to think about their own place in society, about holding themselves accountable to moral standards, about kindness to those around them, and about being honest with themselves and others regarding the social problems they see.*



## ACT 1

The play begins with a detailed description of the stage scenery. A young woman is sitting in a hammock in the garden outside of a small cottage on a hill in Surrey. She is reading and taking notes next to a large pile of books piled on a chair. An unconventionally but neatly dressed man with nice manners and a friendly face approaches and looks into the garden. The man asks for directions to Mrs. Alison's house, and the young woman says that he is at Mrs. Allison's house. She returns to her reading, and he apologetically asks if she is Miss Vivie Warren. She answers that she is, but says no more. Apologetically, he explains that he is Praed. Vivie jumps up and goes to greet him, giving his hand a hard shake. She is 22 years old and is well-educated, competent, and very direct.

Praed asks Vivie if Mrs. Warren has arrived. Vivie says she was not expecting her mother. Praed is taken aback, but Vivie says that her mother may arrive without warning to see how Vivie acts when she is alone. Praed apologizes for intruding, and Vivie says it's not his fault and invites him in, saying he is the only one of her mother's friends she wanted to meet. They decide to sit outside and talk, but Praed asks if they should go to the station to pick up Mrs. Warren. Vivie says her mother knows the way. Praed is taken aback by this response, but he agrees and sits down.

Vivie says she hopes Praed will want to be her friend. Praed exclaims that he is very glad that her mother didn't raise her to be too conventional. He says it was charming of her to say she wanted to be his friend and that modern ladies are splendid. He explains that, when he was young, men and women never spoke about being friends. Instead, men acted chivalrous and women acted modest, while never saying what they meant. Vivie looks at him as if he may be less intelligent than she had thought, and says this sounds like a waste of time, "especially women's time."

Praed says that he was thrilled to hear that she tied with the third wrangler in the mathematical tripos. (The third wrangler was the male student at Cambridge University who got the third highest score on a math exam. Women were not given the title of wrangler, so Vivie is said to have tied with that student.) Vivie says that she wouldn't agree to study for the test again for the same amount of money. Praed doesn't understand, so Vivie explains that her mother paid her fifty pounds to try to tie with the fourth wrangler, but she should have demanded two hundred pounds considering how much work she put in.

*Shaw's audience would have instantly recognized a "New Woman" in his characterization of the industrious, self-possessed Vivie Warren. Vivie has the air of being unintimidated by a strange man or isn't eager to please or impress him. Instead, she is interested in her own pursuits, which appear to be serious and worldly, if the large pile of papers is evidence. At the same time, her resistance to following old ideas about decorum can make her come across as harsh or ill-mannered, especially when compared to the polite and personable Praed.*



*The unusual relationship between Vivie and her mother begins to emerge, as Vivie reveals that Praed is the first of her mother's friends that she has ever met. Vivie also seems irritated that her mother did not tell her she planned to visit and suspicious of her mother's motives. Vivie refuses to follow Praed's suggestion that they show Mrs. Warren a warm welcome at the station, once again showing little respect for social custom.*



*Vivie rejects the idea that, as a young woman, she needs gentle treatment and protection from the truth. She sees herself as being on equal footing with Praed, even though he is a man and older than she is. When Vivie dismisses the chivalry Praed describes, she shows that she considers many of the outward signs of respectability as foolish and meant to conceal reality.*



*While Praed is impressed by the status Vivie's academic achievement brings her, Vivie sees her work in purely practical terms. It is not inherently worth her while to do a great deal of work unless she can get something she values in return. While Praed assumes that Vivie is honored to be allowed to participate in the life of a university despite being a woman, Vivie sees her work as no different from anyone else's.*



Praed is shocked at Vivie's attitude. He says that he would imagine she gained a great deal of culture from all the hard work. Vivie disputes this, saying she knows about mathematics but nothing about how to apply it. Praed switches positions, saying he knew that the tripos exam was ruining "all that makes womanhood beautiful." Vivie disagrees, saying she will use what she learned to go into business doing actuarial (clerk) work in London. Praed asks Vivie if she doesn't want beauty and romance in her life. She says she doesn't, explaining that she likes working and then relaxing with whisky, a **cigar**, and a detective story.

Praed stands up indignantly, saying that Vivie must not have yet discovered the power of art. Vivie says that she spent six weeks in London, doing actuarial calculations with her friend Honoria Fraser, and had the best time of her life. She made enough money to support herself and learned about the business for free. During that trip, she visited a group of artistic friends from college who took her to museums and concerts. After three days, she couldn't stand any more of it and returned to Honoria in Chancery Lane. This is the kind of splendid modern young lady she is, she says.

Abruptly, Vivie asks Praed if he thinks she and her mother will get along. Praed is taken aback, but Vivie presses him for an answer. Very politely he says Vivie may be different from Mrs. Warren's ideal. He explains that those who are dissatisfied with their own upbringings often try to bring their children up differently. He says that he imagines Vivie knows about her mother's life, but she interrupts him and says that she has never lived with her mother. She has always lived at schools or with foster families. She is not complaining, because her mother always sent money and her life has been smooth, but she knows very little about her mother.

Praed says that Vivie and her mother will naturally get along well and changes the subject. Vivie asks why he won't tell her about her mother's life. Praed says it is natural that he doesn't want to talk behind his friend's back, but that Vivie and her mother will have a chance to talk when Mrs. Warren arrives. Vivie says she expects her mother will object to her plan to work for Honoria Fraser, but she plans to use her mother's secrecy about her life against her to win in any argument they may have. Praed says he is sure Vivie would not be so ruthless. Vivie demands that Praed explain why she shouldn't use that strategy. He says her mother is very formidable when she is angry. Vivie says confidently that she will win any fight between them. Praed decides to tell Vivie about her mother, but he is interrupted by Mrs. Kitty Warren's arrival.

*Vivie views her education as a practical path to a career, while Praed sees it as an activity meant to make Vivie a more refined person with a higher social status—or, in other words, to make her more appealing to men. When Vivie explains that her studies prepared her only for practical work and did not make her a more cultivated person, Praed rapidly changes his position on the recent move to allow women to receive a higher education previously only available to men, declaring that it ruins women.*



*Praed finds practical considerations like the need to earn an income to be boring and unrefined, while Vivie views attempts to enrich life with culture as pointless. Praed had not understood that Vivie viewed her academic achievements not only as a refinement, but also as a path to independence. She tells him this defiantly to see if he will stand by his earlier statement that her modern attitudes are far better than those of his youth once he understands that she means to enter the workforce and take on occupations generally reserved for men.*



*Vivie moves quickly from challenging Praed to either approve or disapprove of her practical view of the world, to questioning him about what her mother will think. Praed does not wish to comment on a personal topic like Vivie's relationship with her mother, but Vivie forcefully and rather rudely interrogates him about this even though she only met five minutes before. Praed subtly suggests that Mrs. Warren may not want her daughter to work as Vivie has said she intends to, but Vivie hardly seems to listen, instead explaining in stark terms how little she knows about her mother.*



*Praed tries to avoid Vivie's insinuation that there is something about Mrs. Warren's life that he refuses to talk about because it is scandalous, but Vivie presses him. Whether or not she is angry with her mother for spending so little time with her while she was growing up, she feels that the independence of her upbringing should entitle her to make her own decisions about how she will live her life. Notably, although Praed will claim throughout the rest of the play to know little about Mrs. Warren's life, Praed here prepares to concede and tell Vivie a hidden truth.*



Mrs. Kitty Warren approaches the garden. She is between forty and fifty, flashily dressed, bossy, and vulgar, but fun-loving and presentable. She is accompanied by Sir George Crofts, a solidly built man of fifty who is dressed like a fashionable young man. He looks like an upper-class man who invests in stocks and enjoys going out on the town to party. Vivie approaches, saying that Praed has been waiting for them. Mrs. Warren immediately says that Vivie should put a hat on to prevent getting sunburnt, then introduces Vivie to Crofts. Vivie says nothing to her mother's command then looks Crofts up and down and doesn't shake hands with him until he asks her to. After he asks if he can shake her hand, she shakes his hand hard. He looks surprised and says to Praed that she has a powerful fist.

Vivie gets more chairs, and Mrs. Warren tells her to let Crofts carry them. She tosses them to him carelessly, then offers her mother tea. Mrs. Warren says she wants a drink and Vivie goes inside to get her one. Crofts sits down sulkily and puts the handle of his cane in his mouth. Mrs. Warren remarks to Praed that Crofts has been pressing her to introduce him to her little girl for three years, and now he looks unhappy. She tells Crofts to take his cane out of his mouth, and he does.

Praed says he thinks that they should all stop thinking of Vivie as a little girl. He says she merits this treatment because of her academic achievements, but also because she strikes him as more mature than any of them. Mrs. Warren laughs this off, saying that Vivie must be acting self-important and needs to be brought down a notch. She says she knows how to treat her own daughter. Praed shakes his head and walks away to stroll through the garden.

Mrs. Warren pretends to laugh but looks concerned, and asks Crofts why Praed is acting this way. Crofts says that Mrs. Warren is afraid of Praed. Mrs. Warren denies this. Finding that Praed has strolled back towards her, Mrs. Warren asks him if he is concerned that she will bully Vivie. Praed says he often notices things that Mrs. Warren doesn't, and she sometimes regrets not taking his advice. Mrs. Warren asks what he has noticed. He explains that Vivie is a grown-up and should be treated with respect. Mrs. Warren scoffs at this.

*Immediately upon entering, Mrs. Warren begins to try to assert her parental authority over Vivie. Vivie ignores this order. It was considered unladylike and unattractive for a young woman to get sunburnt, and so Mrs. Warren's command may be related to her hope that Vivie will attract a husband and live a life of leisure, not work. Meanwhile Vivie immediately judges Crofts as someone who doesn't share her values. She perceives that he feels entitled to polite treatment and respect from her, but she doesn't see why she should give him that respect just because she can tell he is a rich aristocrat.*



*Mrs. Warren continues to speak with a proprietary tone about Vivie. Meanwhile Crofts is obviously unused to being treated with such little deference and interest. His social position usually guarantees that people will not judge him harshly, even if they do perceive from his clothes and the way he carries himself that he is a womanizer or a heavy drinker.*



*Like Praed, Mrs. Warren believes Vivie's achievements are meant to give her status, not to allow her to pursue a career of her own choosing. It is clear from her attitude that Mrs. Warren knows as little about her daughter as Vivie reported to Praed that she knew about her mother. Mrs. Warren expects that she will be able to impose her wishes on Vivie, but Praed is less sure.*



*Crofts' comment that Mrs. Warren is afraid of Praed raises the question of the nature of Praed and Mrs. Warren's relationship, a question which the play never resolves. Mrs. Warren's position is that she has the right to treat Vivie however she likes, because she is Vivie's mother. Clearly, mother and daughter are headed for a showdown.*



Vivie calls for her mother to come inside, and Mrs. Warren leaves Praed and Crofts alone. Crofts asks Praed if he knows who Vivie's father is. Praed says he doesn't, but Crofts presses him further, saying he feels attracted to Vivie but can't be sure she isn't his own daughter. Praed says Crofts certainly isn't Vivie's father, and Crofts asks him again what he knows about Vivie's paternity. Praed replies that there is no resemblance between Crofts and Vivie. Crofts asks Praed if he is Vivie's father. Praed explains that he and Mrs. Warren have always had a platonic relationship and have never talked about such things. Praed says that Crofts is old enough to be Vivie's father, so he should treat her parentally. Crofts says he is no older than Praed, but Praed denies this, saying he was born a boy, while Crofts was born old.

Mrs. Warren calls Crofts and Praed into tea. As they are going in, a clever, handsome, charming, well-dressed but audacious young man of twenty approaches the gate and calls out to Praed. This is Frank Gardner. He explains to Praed that he is living at home after spending all his money and getting into debt. He asks why Praed is in the area. Praed says he is visiting Vivie, and Frank exclaims that he is glad Vivie knows Praed. Praed explains that he is an old friend of Mrs. Warren. Frank is very curious about Mrs. Warren.

When Mrs. Warren calls loudly to Praed to come in for tea, Frank is surprised and amused by this unladylike behavior. Praed calls to Mrs. Warren that he has met a friend, and Mrs. Warren invites Frank to come in for tea. Frank says he wants to take Praed into his confidence and tells him that Vivie is an amazingly clever girl—and is in love with him. Crofts pokes his head out of the window and tells Praed to come in. Frank is surprised to see someone with Crofts's rakish appearance at Vivie's house.

As Praed and Frank are going into the house, an elderly clergyman approaches. Praed goes into tea, but Frank remains behind to talk to the man—his father, the Reverend Samuel Gardner. Reverend Gardner was pushed into a career in the church by his own father. He commands little respect, but is loud and pretentious. He refuses to enter the garden until he knows whose house he is visiting. Frank explains that it is Vivie's house. Reverend Gardner says he has not seen her in church. Frank says Vivie is more accomplished than his father, so she doesn't need to listen to him preach. Reverend Gardner tells Frank not to be disrespectful, but Frank says it is fine because no one can hear.

*Although it was already clear that there was something scandalous about Mrs. Warren based on Praed's reluctance to discuss her, this moment shows that she has been promiscuous enough that Vivie's paternity is in doubt. Crofts finds nothing unusual in pursuing the daughter of his former lover, only worrying that this could inadvertently be the pursuit of his own daughter. At the same time, Praed's denial that he knows nothing about this part of Mrs. Warren's life rings somewhat false, because he was ready to tell Vivie about her mother at the moment when Crofts and Mrs. Warren entered.*



*Frank's first statements show that he, unlike Vivie, does not want to work for a living. Having spent all his money, he moved home to live with his parents instead of looking for a job. Although he does not share her work ethic, Frank is obviously interested in Vivie's social standing, because he wants her to have cultured acquaintances like Praed and feels deeply interested in who her mother is.*



*Frank has great respect for Vivie's achievements and brags about his association with her. For this reason, he is surprised at the manners and look of Mrs. Warren and Crofts. Mrs. Warren's yelling would not be considered good behavior, while Crofts looks to Frank like the kind of man with whom the studious, serious Vivie would not associate.*



*Because Reverend Gardner is neither a deep thinker nor a man with strong morals, he tries to project authority by loudly asserting his respectability and shunning anyone who he feels lacks a high social standing. Even though Frank also cares about his acquaintances' pedigree, he finds his father's loud refusal to enter a garden until he knows who lives there to be an absurd display. Frank thinks he is intellectually superior to his father and does not pretend otherwise.*



Frank says that he is taking the advice his father gave him last July after he paid his debts. Reverend Gardner says this advice was to improve his attitude on life and get a job. Frank says that before his father said that, he told him that since he had neither brains, nor money, he should marry someone with both. Frank says that Vivie is this someone. Reverend Gardner asks about her social position; Frank says he doesn't care about this.

Frank says that he is much better than his father was at his age. He remembers that his father told him he offered a woman fifty pounds to return letters he had written her. Reverend Gardner fears that someone will overhear what Frank is saying. He says that he only told Frank about that woman so that Frank could learn from his experience, but Frank is now taking advantage of him by throwing it in his face. He continues that the woman had refused to give back his letters, saying that "knowledge is power" and she wouldn't sell power, but that she never bothered him about the letters. He says Frank is treating him with less consideration than she did. Frank says the woman never had to listen to his father preach at her. Reverend Gardner is hurt and turns to leave. Frank is indifferent to his father's hurt feelings.

As Reverend Gardner is leaving, and Frank is moving to enter the cottage, Praed and Vivie come outside. Vivie says she would like to meet Frank's father. Frank calls his father back, and Vivie shakes his hand. She calls for her mother to come outside. Mrs. Warren comes out and stands in the doorway, having recognized Reverend Gardner. Vivie begins to introduce the two parents, but Mrs. Warren interrupts her, saying she cannot believe that Sam Gardner went into the church. Reverend Gardner is embarrassed. Mrs. Warren says he must remember her; she has an entire collection of letters from him. Reverend Sam says hello to her, calling her "Miss Vavasour." Mrs. Warren corrects him, saying she is Mrs. Warren, mother to Vivie Warren.

## ACT 2

The next Act opens that night inside the cottage. Frank and Mrs. Warren enter after a walk. Mrs. Warren is tired and complains that she dislikes the boring life in the country and wishes she were in Vienna. Frank says he would like to take her to Vienna, and squeezes her shoulders flirtatiously as he helps her off with her shawl. Mrs. Warren says Frank is very like his father, but he is too young for Vienna. He makes a mocking face and continues to flirt with her.

*Frank's intention is revealed: he wants to make Vivie fall in love with him so that he can live on her money instead of living at home with his father. He thinks that her good sense, excellent education, and wealth suggest that she is a respectable enough wife for him.*



*The story Frank refers to is about a secret affair Reverend Gardner had when he was young. It seems likely that the woman was of a different class, and this was why the young Sam Gardner wanted to buy her silence, and thought he could do so with a mere fifty pounds. It is notable that the first time money and sex are linked in the play is as part of the necessity to keep sex that isn't considered respectable a secret. Reverend Gardner hopes to teach his son not to repeat his early mistakes, but Frank sees his father's story as evidence that he is a hypocrite in preaching to him now.*



*Vivie and Frank want to introduce their parents, but it turns out they already know one another from a scandalous context. The name "Miss Vavasour" sounds like an alias a sex worker would have taken on, so this is our first suggestion that Mrs. Warren was not only never married, but also worked as a prostitute. Mrs. Warren's response to Reverend Gardner further suggests that she cannot believe her former client/lover now works to promote traditional religious morality.*



*Frank has picked up on the fact that Mrs. Warren is not a respectable woman of his class. He flirts with her because he knows she is not bound by her class background and sense of propriety to refuse to flirt with a younger man, and perhaps out of curiosity about his father's past. Frank hopes to duplicate his father's life as a young playboy instead of reforming as his father suggests.*



Mrs. Warren pretends to box Frank's ears, then kisses him. She says she shouldn't have done that, adding that it was only a motherly kiss and he should flirt with Vivie instead. Frank says he already is flirting with Vivie. Alarmed, Mrs. Warren tells him not to trifle with her little girl. Frank says that his intentions are honorable and that Vivie can take care of herself. Mrs. Warren remarks that Frank is much more of a smart-aleck than his father was.

Crofts and Reverend Gardner enter, talking about politics. Mrs. Warren asks them where Praed and Vivie are. Crofts says that they walked further on, while he and the Reverend had a drink. Mrs. Warren complains that Vivie should not have gone off without telling her.

Mrs. Warren asks Crofts where he and Praed can stay that night. Crofts says he will stay with the Gardners, but is indifferent to where Praed stays. Mrs. Warren asks Reverend Gardner to host Praed. Reverend Gardner inquires about Praed's social position. Mrs. Warren says Praed is an architect, adding that Reverend Gardner is uptight. Frank tells his father that Praed built Caernarvon Castle for a duke, but winks at Mrs. Warren. Reverend Gardner agrees to host Praed.

Mrs. Warren is impatient for Vivie and Praed's return. Frank says they will be gone for a long time, because Praed will love being on a long walk on a summer night with Vivie. Crofts is offended. Reverend Gardner says that Frank must not think about Vivie romantically. He appeals for support to Mrs. Warren, but she says she knows no reason why Frank and Vivie should not marry. She asks if he thinks her daughter isn't good enough for his son. Reverend Gardner says that Mrs. Warren knows the reasons they cannot marry. She denies this, saying he can explain the reasons to his son if he wants to. Frank says his father's reasons will not influence what he does.

*The idea of Frank pursuing Vivie suggests to Mrs. Warren the danger that Vivie's life may resemble her own. Mrs. Warren had a scandalous, secret affair with Frank's father, and she wants nothing of the sort for Vivie. She wants to protect Vivie from sex, as upper-class girls were typically protected, and Frank's overtly flirtatious behavior seems to threaten that ideal.*



*Even though Mrs. Warren has been absent for most of her daughter's life, she hopes to assert her rights to control her daughter now. Yet Vivie continues to act independently without consulting her mother.*



*Clearly, when Reverend Gardner was young and had an affair with Mrs. Warren (then Miss Vavasour), he cared little for class distinctions, but he is now obsessed with respectability and status, as if to compensate for his earlier lax attitude. Ever ready to mock his father, Frank tells him that Praed was the architect for a castle which was built in the 13th century and undergoing an expensive and highly publicized restoration at the time of the play's production. The audience of Shaw's day would have shared in Frank's laughter at his father's obliviousness.*



*Crofts is considering Vivie as a potential romantic partner, so he doesn't like Frank's bold comment about her, which suggests that Frank and Vivie have spent time unchaperoned together at night. Reverend Gardner hints to Mrs. Warren that Frank and Vivie should not be a couple because he and she used to be lovers, although it is unclear whether he believes Vivie may be his daughter, which would make Frank and Vivie half-siblings. But Mrs. Warren, caught up in her plans for Vivie to be treated differently than she was, assumes that Reverend Gardner is prejudiced against Vivie because of her class background.*



Crofts stands up, frowning, and says that Frank cannot marry Vivie. Mrs. Warren and Frank both ask Crofts what say he has in the matter. Crofts says that Mrs. Warren surely won't want Vivie to marry a penniless younger man. To Crofts' satisfaction, Reverend Gardner confirms that his son has no money. Frank complains that Vivie should be allowed to marry for love, but Mrs. Warren says that he "can't have Vivie" if he has no money. Reverend Gardner agrees. Frank says he already knows what Crofts thinks. Crofts tells him not to be cheeky, but Frank replies that Crofts himself was rude to him. Frank says he will not give up his pursuit of Vivie. He says he will propose to her soon because he imagines her mother will try to marry her to someone else if he doesn't act quickly.

Vivie and Praed enter the cottage. Mrs. Warren becomes ill-at-ease around Vivie and resorts to being domineering. She demands to know where Vivie has been. Vivie answers her, but then moves onto another subject without waiting to listen to her mother's rebuke. Vivie says that only four people can fit at the kitchen table at once and decides that she and Frank should wait to eat second. Mrs. Warren advocates for someone else to wait to eat with Vivie, but Vivie prevails. After going into the kitchen, Mrs. Warren calls for Vivie to leave the door open. Craftily, Frank goes and opens the front door of the cottage, letting in cold air. Mrs. Warren calls out again for Vivie to close the door to the kitchen. Vivie looks with disgust at her mother's hat lying untidily on a table and puts it away.

Frank happily exclaims that they got rid of the older people, then asks Vivie her opinion of his father. Vivie says he doesn't seem very smart. Frank explains that he was pushed into the church, and in trying to seem like a good clergyman makes a fool of himself. He asks Vivie how she thinks she will get along with Reverend Gardner. Vivie says she doesn't think she will spend much time with any of her mother's old friends, except perhaps Praed.

*While Mrs. Warren feels she can decide her daughter's fate because she is her mother, Crofts feels entitled to some claim over Vivie because of his gender, fortune, and social position. He assumes that there is a price for Vivie, just as there was a price for her mother, although he bought sex with Mrs. Warren and wants to buy Vivie's hand in marriage. Frank seems to have a more modern attitude, contending that Vivie should marry out of love, but at the same time he also sees marrying her as an economic transaction, hoping to become rich in the process.*



*Although Vivie has been staying in the house and her mother is a guest, Mrs. Warren tries to dictate all the arrangements. She does this both because she wants to assert her own dominance over Vivie as a mother and because she hopes to keep Frank and Vivie apart. While Mrs. Warren worries about preserving Vivie's respectability and virginity by keeping her from unsupervised contact with the seductive, impoverished Frank, Vivie sees her mother's untidiness as a sign of bad manners.*



*Although Frank and Vivie both look down on their parents, Frank has a more understanding stance on his father's ridiculous personality, suggesting that because his father tries too hard to set a moral example, he seems pompous and cannot exhibit his good qualities. When Frank asks Vivie if she thinks she will get along with his father, he means to hint that she will spend time with Reverend Gardner once they are married and his father becomes her father-in-law. But Vivie either doesn't understand this hint, or she ignores it.*



Vivie asks Frank's opinion of Mrs. Warren. Frank says that Mrs. Warren's personality is a bit alarming and Crofts' is even worse. Vivie says she would kill herself if she thought she was going to live a life without any purpose or work like the older generation. Frank says there's nothing wrong with not working—the problem with the older generation is that they don't do it with style. Vivie says Frank will be just as bad when he gets to Crofts' age if he doesn't work. Frank begins to flirt with Vivie, saying she shouldn't lecture him because he is an incorrigible little boy. Vivie tells him to be serious, but he continues to flirt. She calls into the kitchen, asking if there is room now for Frank to eat, saying he is starving. Mrs. Warren says there is room for both Frank and Vivie, who go into the kitchen.

Mrs. Warren and Crofts exit the kitchen and come into the room alone together. Crofts had a drink and nothing to eat, and Mrs. Warren complains about the unappetizing food. Mrs. Warren demands to know why Crofts has been looking at her daughter and lectures him, posturing as an overprotective mother. Crofts sneers at her as if she does not live up to the role.

Crofts asks how old Vivie is, but Mrs. Warren refuses to answer. Crofts asks why Vivie shouldn't marry him: he's rich, a baronet, and the only man with his social status who would accept a mother-in-law like her. He says that the three of them could live comfortably together, Vivie would inherit everything when he dies, and he will even write Mrs. Warren a check on the day of the wedding. Mrs. Warren expresses disgust. Reverend Gardner, Vivie, and Frank return from the kitchen, and an angry Crofts rushes outside.

Mrs. Warren tells the others that Crofts went outside to smoke a pipe. In a tone of affected maternal concern, Mrs. Warren asks Vivie how her dinner was. Vivie says it was terrible, like all of Mrs. Alison's suppers, then turns to Frank, patting his arm and talking to him in a baby voice about how he didn't get enough to eat. In a more practical vein, she makes a note to herself to buy better butter than her landlady provides.

*Frank speaks euphemistically, but still expresses his disapproval for Crofts and Mrs. Warren. He blames them not for being libertines, however, but for seeming to lack style. Vivie has none of Frank's sympathy for members of the older generation. Instead, she looks down on the older generation for believing that the life of the idle rich is a sign of high class status. Vivie finds nothing charming about Frank's hope that he will also live a life of leisure, and bluntly refuses to flirt with him when he tries to tease her. Instead, Vivie hopes to put her education to good use and choose her own path in life.*



*Mrs. Warren's dissatisfaction with the food marks her as someone who loves luxurious and extravagant foods, while Crofts shows that he cares mostly about alcohol. When Mrs. Warren tries to project moral authority as a doting parent, Crofts scoffs, as if to remind her of their many shared experiences that are deemed forbidden by respectable society.*



*Crofts is fixated on learning Vivie's age because he wants to calculate whether she could be his daughter, based on the time period when he was sleeping with Mrs. Warren. But once Mrs. Warren refuses to tell him, he lets the issue drop, instead pressing her to let him marry her daughter because he is rich and has a title. His suggestion that he will pay Mrs. Warren on the day of his wedding with her daughter recalls the fee paid to a brothel's owner by a customer having sex with one of the prostitutes living in it.*



*In the previous scene, Vivie refused Frank's overtures to flirt with him as if he were "an incorrigible little boy." But now she, like her mother, has been somewhat won over by his charm. At the same time, Vivie remains cold to Mrs. Warren's attempts to seem maternal. Instead, she makes it clear that she can handle her own household, by making a note on a shopping list.*



Reverend Gardner says he and Frank should be going, because his wife doesn't know they have guests. Praed worries that he is causing the Gardners trouble, but Frank says his mother will be glad to meet Praed, because she never meets anyone intellectual or artistic—only his father. Frank says he will stay with the Warrens, but Praed reminds him that mother and daughter might want some time alone together. Frank says Praed is right, adding that he wishes the wise Praed had been his father. Reverend Gardner is offended, and Mrs. Warren laughs at him, saying he should make Frank behave better. Everyone bids one another goodnight, and Mrs. Warren walks Praed out.

Frank tries to get Vivie to kiss him, but she refuses and goes to sit by the fireplace with a book. Mrs. Warren reenters and Frank flirtatiously kisses her hand. She menaces him, but he runs out, laughing mischievously. Looking bored now that the men are gone, Mrs. Warren exclaims to Vivie that Frank is a tease. She says that Vivie should not encourage him, because he is a good-for-nothing. Vivie agrees, although she says she will feel bad for him when she breaks it off. She says that Crofts seems to her like a good-for-nothing too. Mrs. Warren is shocked; she says that Vivie is too young to know about men's characters, and she will have to see a lot of Crofts because he is her friend.

Keeping her composure, Vivie asks Mrs. Warren if she thinks that they will be spending much time together in the future. Mrs. Warren is surprised: she says that they will be together until Vivie is married. Vivie says she doubts her mother would enjoy her lifestyle. Mrs. Warren is shocked and angry, calling Vivie a fool. She says that Vivie has become very stuck up since she tied with the third wrangler, and that Vivie's way of life will be what her mother chooses.

Mrs. Warren continues her harangue, but Vivie stays silent until Mrs. Warren demands, "do you know who you're speaking to, Miss?" At that, Vivie replies that she doesn't know who her mother is; while everyone else knows her reputation and social standing, she knows nothing about her mother's life. Mrs. Warren says she will do something that they will both regret later if Vivie keeps talking in this challenging way. Vivie haughtily says that they can set the topic aside. She tells Mrs. Warren that she is out of shape and should exercise more. Mrs. Warren is hurt, but Vivie says if she begins to cry she will leave the room. Mrs. Warren asks Vivie how she can be so hard on her mother, and Vivie defiantly asks if she really is her mother. Mrs. Warren makes sorrowful exclamations.

*Frank continues to tease his father mercilessly. Although Reverend Gardner made the considerate suggestion that he and Frank return home to warn his wife that they will be having guests, Frank gives all the credit to Praed, who similarly suggests a way that he can be considerate. Mrs. Warren seems to find comfort in seeing another parent mistreated by a child, especially since she dislikes any suggestion that Reverend Gardner or Frank are superior to her and Vivie.*



*Mrs. Warren likes Frank, so when she calls him a "good-for-nothing" it is because she thinks of sex and romance in economic terms. Frank is not rich, so he is of no use as a potential mate for Vivie. Crofts, on the other hand, is the opposite of a good-for-nothing as far as Mrs. Warren is concerned, because he is wealthy and can pay for lovers or support a wife in comfort. Vivie sees things differently. To her mind, it is because Crofts is a member of the idle rich who lives off inherited wealth and investments that he is good for nothing.*



*Vivie's education – paid for by her mother – will provide her with opportunities to choose her profession that are unusual for a woman of her day. Her mother assumes that, despite her academic achievements, Vivie will act like many women at the time and obediently live with her mother until she marries.*



*Vivie wants to use Mrs. Warren's insistence on being secretive about her life against her mother. She suggests that Mrs. Warren must earn any authority she wields by letting Vivie know more about who she is. Mrs. Warren had apparently planned to raise her daughter into the upper class, but still exercise full parental authority over her. However, Vivie not only feels empowered by her education to choose her own path, but she also sees her mother's emotional outbursts and poor physical fitness as signs of bad manners and slovenliness associated with the lower class. To her mind, this is further evidence that her mother has no right to control her.*



Vivie says she knows nothing to prove that Mrs. Warren is her mother. She demands to be told her father's name and who their relatives are. She says she has no way of knowing that the sleazy Crofts isn't her father, but Mrs. Warren says that she is sure that Vivie's father isn't Crofts or anyone else Vivie has met. Looking at her mother sternly, Vivie says that she understands from the way her mother phrased her answer that this is all Mrs. Warren knows about who her father was.

Vivie abruptly says that they have talked enough and should go to bed. Mrs. Warren is shocked by Vivie's brusque treatment of her. She asks what kind of woman Vivie is. Vivie replies that she is the type who gets business done, then says again that they should go to bed.

Mrs. Warren suddenly drops all attempts to sound genteel and speaks with conviction and scorn for Vivie's pretensions, saying that Vivie has no right to look down on her, after she did everything to give Vivie the chance to become what she is. Vivie is taken aback. She explains that she doesn't think she is superior to her mother, but she had to defend herself against her mother's attempts to dictate her behavior. She says she won't stand for her mother's nonsense, and won't expect her mother to stand for hers, but will respect her mother's right to her own opinions and way of life.

Mrs. Warren scoffs at the idea that she had any choice about her way of life. Vivie replies that everyone has some choice. Even the poor, she says, can choose their profession, and if the circumstances are difficult, they can work to change their circumstances. Scoffing, Mrs. Warren asks if Vivie wants to know what her circumstances were. Vivie says yes. Her mother's vehemence and defiant attitude impresses her.

Mrs. Warren says that her own mother ran a fried fish shop and called herself a widow, but had four daughters from different husbands. Mrs. Warren and her sister Liz were good-looking, while their two sisters were ugly, but honest. One of her half-sisters, Jane, worked for low wages in a whitelead factory, where she handled dangerous materials used to make paint and died of lead poisoning. The other half-sister was seen as an example of morality, because she was an economical housewife with a husband who worked in a dockyard. They had three children and managed to live decently until he started drinking and stopped giving her money.

*At the time, when any sexual promiscuity for women was considered immoral, Mrs. Warren's inability to pinpoint who Vivie's father is would be a scandalous confession that she lacks the status of a respectable woman. Vivie does not yet realize that her mother worked as a prostitute, but she feels that her own status as a respectable woman is much more secure than her mother's.*



*Mrs. Warren expects Vivie to be easily dominated, like most women were expected to be. Yet Vivie plans to direct her own life and not to allow a woman she does not know well or respect to control her.*



*Mrs. Warren has been assuming manners and patterns of speech of the upper class, but now, in her anger, she reverts to her natural way of speaking, with less decorum and with the accent of lower-class neighborhoods. Vivie knows her mother is right when she says Vivie wouldn't have been able to become an educated member of the upper class if her mother hadn't provided for her. Defensively, Vivie says she doesn't look down on her mother out of snobbishness or the sense that Mrs. Warren is lower class. Instead, she rejects her mother's traditional idea that she can control her simply because she is her mother.*



*Vivie wants to defend her right to choose her path in life, but she does so by saying that everyone should have a choice about how they live. Angry at Vivie for trying to buck her attempts to exercise parental authority, Mrs. Warren prepares to show Vivie just how naïve she really is about the opportunities available to women and the poor.*



*Mrs. Warren's account gives a clear picture of the difficulties poor women faced in making a living without selling their bodies. Her mother augmented her small income as the owner of a restaurant by doing sexual favors for men in exchange for support, but she pretended to be a widow in order to escape society's disapproval for sex out of wedlock. Moreover, Mrs. Warren's two "moral" sisters met terrible fates. One tried to support herself without a man and died because of the working conditions she faced. The other linked her fortunes to a man by marrying, in keeping with society's ideas of what a respectable lower-class woman should do—but she ended up impoverished once he stopped supporting them.*



Mrs. Warren and Liz both went to a church school, until one night Liz ran away. The people at the school warned her that Liz would end up by jumping off a bridge, but Mrs. Warren felt more afraid of working in the whitelead factory than of what Liz was doing.

*When Liz runs away, the moral authorities at the church school assume that she has gone into sex work. They warn Mrs. Warren that this immoral choice will have terrible consequences and Liz will be driven to suicide. Yet Mrs. Warren fears the exploitative conditions that would face her in the workforce.*



Eventually Mrs. Warren went to work as a scullery maid and then as a waitress in Waterloo station, working long hours for low wages. One night when she was very tired, Liz came into the bar to buy Scotch, looking elegant and well-dressed and with lots of money.

*Mrs. Warren eventually finds exhausting work as a maid and waitress. This work is less dangerous than the work her sister Jane did and is available to her because she is pretty, but it is not nearly as well-paid as the sex work that allows Liz to afford luxuries.*



Vivie exclaims to hear about her aunt. Mrs. Warren says that Liz is a very good aunt to have: she lives respectably now and chaperones girls to dances. In the past, Liz always saved money, never let herself look like a sex worker, and always thought strategically.

*Liz has always been able to have the manners of a woman of the upper class. Because of this, she was able to pass for a respectable woman once she became rich, even though she earned her money in the least respectable way possible. Although she once sold her own body and the bodies of young poor girls, she now watches over rich girls, protecting their respectability from sexual advances and preserving their virginity until they marry. This transformation shows how well Liz understood the hypocrisy of “respectable” society.*



That night in the bar, Liz had told Mrs. Warren to come to work with her instead of wearing herself out for other people's profit. Liz lent her enough money to start out, then they both saved steadily and became partners. They set up a high-class brothel in **Brussels**, and treated the women well. Mrs. Warren says her brothel was a much better place for women to work than the lead factory.

*Mrs. Warren presents selling her body as a way to escape being exploited by others. Even once she sets up a brothel herself and profits from other poor women selling their bodies, she does not see herself as becoming another force of exploitation. Instead she sees herself as helping women avoid even more dangerous and exploitative conditions.*



With keen interest, Vivie asks why Mrs. Warren chose the business she did, saying that saving money is the way to succeed in any business. Mrs. Warren laughs at the idea that you can save money in most of the professions open to women. She says that it is different for women with talents in music, theater, or writing; they can get work that pays well. But if you lack those talents, she says, your best opportunity (if you are good-looking) is sex work. As a waitress or shopgirl, a woman lets someone else profit off her good looks instead of profiting from them herself.

*Mrs. Warren again attacks Vivie's naïve idea that everyone has a choice about their way of life. She says that economic opportunities are few and far between for poor women. Although pretty women can be hired for other jobs that are less dangerous, they will still make very little money. The only opportunity that will earn a poor woman enough to be able to save is sex work, while poor women who are not attractive are doomed to terrible conditions like those faced by Jane.*



Mrs. Warren contends that there is little difference between prostitution and the way most respectable mothers bring up their daughters to attract rich husbands. She says that a marriage ceremony does nothing to make it any better. She says that no one wants to work to make a living, but they must do it. She says she has often pitied a girl who was putting up with a drunken client groping her, but that everyone puts up with unpleasantness in their work. She says it is ridiculous that pious people pretend that anyone would be attracted to working as a prostitute; it is merely the best opportunity open to a poor girl.

Mrs. Warren says she has always felt it was wrong that there weren't other opportunities for women, but that is the way of the world, and she would have been a fool not to take the best opportunity open to her. Vivie asks her mother if she is sure she wouldn't have advised her daughter to work in a factory or as a barmaid, if they were poor now. Mrs. Warren scoffs at this idea, saying that those professions entail a life of starvation and slavery that wears away one's self-respect. She says the way to succeed is to respect and control yourself, not to listen to the foolish preaching of moral people.

Mrs. Warren continues, saying that only way for a woman to live well is "to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her." If the woman has the same social status as the man, then she can get him to marry her. Otherwise, sex work is her best option. Mrs. Warren says any respectable woman knows that this is true, but will not express it straightforwardly like Mrs. Warren just has.

Gazing admiringly at her mother, Vivie praises her for her strength. She asks if Mrs. Warren never had any doubts or felt ashamed. Mrs. Warren answers that it's expected by society to feel ashamed. She says Liz always got angry at her for talking about their work and society's hypocrisy. Liz was a perfect lady and Mrs. Warren is vulgar. Mrs. Warren says she was glad to see from Vivie's pictures that Vivie was growing up to be like Liz. But for herself, she was never ashamed, because she felt proud for having managed to become affluent and for having run a brothel where the women were well-treated. Of course, she would never talk about such things in public.

*Mrs. Warren compares the way mothers prepare young women to attract a husband who will pay for her daughter's care to the way a brothel owner prepares a prostitute to attract a client who will pay for sex. To her mind, the religious ceremony of marriage does nothing to change the economic nature of the transaction. In both cases, a woman is being sold to a man. Mrs. Warren contends that prostitution is work like any other, and no one would choose to put up with the unpleasantness of work if they didn't have to, but both wives and prostitutes put up with unpleasant men, because that is their "work."*



*Mrs. Warren sees a society that forces women to work for low wages in dangerous conditions or suffer the stigma of working as sex workers. She rejects the idea that prostitutes should be looked down upon and stigmatized. Instead of a lifetime worrying about making enough money to live on, prostitutes choose the best option available to them. Even if society declares sex work immoral and unrespectable, it pays enough to allow prostitutes to preserve their self-respect.*



*Mrs. Warren suggests that marriage, like prostitution, is only worthwhile if it guarantees a comfortable life, and marrying a poor man gives little security. So, while marriage is a good option for a woman in the upper classes, a lower-class woman is better off as a sex worker getting paid by rich men than she is as the wife of a poor man.*



*In a society that considers sex workers immoral, it is expected that sex workers will be ashamed. Liz saw that by failing to pretend to believe in society's ideas about sex workers, Mrs. Warren was marking herself as someone unrespectable and thus dangerous for Liz's own respectable self to be seen with. Mrs. Warren assumes that her daughter is similarly eager to play by society's rules, because she sees that Vivie does not dress flashily and carries herself like a woman of the upper class.*



Mrs. Warren yawns and says she is ready to go to sleep. Saying she will not be able to sleep, Vivie goes to the door and opens it. She exclaims at the beauty of the night. Mrs. Warren tells her not to catch a cold, and Vivie replies that this is nonsense. Mrs. Warren says that everything she says is nonsense according to Vivie, but Vivie replies that their conversation has completely changed the way she looks at her mother. Mrs. Warren shakes her head, saying that she sees that Vivie had thought her full of nonsense before. Mrs. Warren continues, saying that Liz always thought her full of nonsense too, and now she imagines Vivie will treat her the way Liz used to. Vivie and Mrs. Warren embrace. Mrs. Warren asks if she brought Vivie up well, and if she will be kind to her from now on. Vivie agrees, and Mrs. Warren says she gives her daughter a mother's blessing.

*Vivie has changed her attitude towards her mother because she respects her for bucking traditional ideas about morality to make a living and admires her for not being ashamed of her past. But Vivie has not given up her opposition to her mother's authority over her. Mrs. Warren assumes that Vivie, like Liz, looks down on her because she is vulgar and does not pretend to be ashamed to conform to society's expectations. In fact, Vivie admires opposition to a hypocritical status quo, and she sees the belief that parents can tell their children what to do as just another one of society's unfounded prejudices.*



### ACT 3

Act III opens in the garden outside of the Rectory where Reverend Gardner is the clergyman. Frank is there reading a newspaper, when his father comes out looking red-eyed. Frank says his father is getting up at an unusual hour for a pastor. Reverend Gardner tells Frank not to mock him, then asks where Mrs. Gardner is. Frank tells him that she went to town, but left him several messages. Reverend Gardner says that their guests will find it odd that she left, but Frank counters that she may have left because of their guests.

*Reverend Gardner presents himself as an example of upstanding virtue and good living, but Frank cannot respect his father because he sees his hypocrisy. Frank feels, correctly, that he is a much better judge of the people in the world. He understands that his mother left because his father has invited people into their home who she considers to be unrespectable.*



Frank says that, although his mother and Praed got along very well, Reverend Gardner and Crofts sat up late drinking and telling shocking stories from their youths. Defending himself, Reverend Gardner says he must talk to Crofts about something and Crofts talks only about one thing. Frank guesses that his father remembers little from the night before, but reports that Crofts is not hung over at all. Reverend Gardner is shocked to learn from Frank that he told Crofts to invite the Warrens over, and that it was after hearing about this invitation that Mrs. Gardner took the train to town.

*Because Crofts is wealthy and has a title, Reverend Gardner let himself drink and tell salacious stories with him. The Reverend let go of all his ideas about what constitutes appropriate behavior for a middle-aged pastor, deciding that anything he did to please Crofts was justified. And, since Reverend Gardner does not really believe what he usually preaches, he easily exposed his true self when drunk. He would never have invited a woman like Mrs. Warren to his house had he been sober, and he is now left wondering how much his wife knows about Mrs. Warren.*



Praed enters the garden. Reverend Gardner excuses himself to work on a sermon. After he is gone, Praed remarks how interesting it must be to write a sermon every week. Dismissively, Frank says that his father buys his sermons. Praed tells Frank that he ought to treat his father with more respect, but Frank counters that it is impossible to treat those you live with and understand with respect, especially a pompous and aggressive man like his father.

*Just as Praed says he knows nothing about Mrs. Warren's business even after many years as her friend, he acts as though he does not understand that Reverend Gardner is not serious about his career as a clergyman after seeing him drink and tell bawdy stories the night before. When Praed chides Frank to show his father more respect, he may actually be asking Frank to pretend along with him that they still believe in the fiction of Reverend Gardner as an admirable moral example. Praed finds it uncomfortable to acknowledge the social issues around him, and so he tries to convince his friends not to talk about them.*



Frank continues, saying that his father must have been terribly drunk to tell Crofts to bring the Warrens over, and that Mrs. Gardner's sudden decision to go to town indicates that she knows something about what kind of woman Mrs. Warren is. Frank says his mother has stuck by women who have gotten into trouble (i.e., gotten pregnant out of wedlock), but only respectable women. Mrs. Warren, he says, is not the kind of woman his mother would associate with.

Reverend Gardner rushes out of the house in a panic to say that he sees Mrs. Warren, Vivie, and Crofts approaching. He asks Frank what he should tell them about where Mrs. Gardner is. Frank says to say anything but the truth, and suggests saying that she had to go to see a sick relative. Reverend Gardner asks how they will get rid of them after, but Frank says there is no time to think that through now. Reverend Gardner rushes off to follow Frank's orders.

Frank says to Praed that they must get rid of Mrs. Warren somehow. He sees Vivie and her mother approach. Vivie has her hand around her mother's waist, and Frank says it disgusts him to see her touching such a "wicked old devil."

Mrs. Warren and Vivie enter the garden. Frank tells Mrs. Warren that the quiet rectory garden suits her, and she is charmed. Frank says everyone should go see the church, and Crofts, Mrs. Warren, and Praed leave with Reverend Gardner to do so. Reverend Gardner insists that they go in through the church's back entrance.

Vivie stays behind and tells Frank that she knew he was mocking her mother when he said the garden suited her, and that she won't tolerate that in the future. Frank asks in surprise what happened overnight to make Vivie sentimental about her mother, when before they were in agreement. Vivie says she didn't know her mother the night before, but now she understands her as Frank does not. Frank says he understands her mother better than Vivie does because thoroughly immoral people like himself and Mrs. Warren can spot one another. Vivie says Frank doesn't understand her mother's circumstances, but Frank counters that there is no way Vivie will be able to stand her mother.

*Frank sees his mother as open-minded because she does not shun women who have sex out of wedlock. Although Frank doesn't know Mrs. Warren's profession, he can tell that she is not respectable and that there is no way his mother would tolerate being around her. This may be partially because Mrs. Warren does not have the manners and sense of what is proper that are required to pass among respectable people.*



*The Gardners are worried that Mrs. Warren will realize that Mrs. Gardner left home to avoid hosting a woman like her. In fact, Frank believes this is exactly why his mother left that morning. This kind of ostracization of women who were "not-nice" was common among members of the middle class who prided themselves on their respectability.*



*Frank agrees with his mother's decision to avoid Mrs. Warren as an unrespectable woman. Although Frank flirts with Mrs. Warren in her presence, behind her back, he looks down on her and sees her as unfit company for women he cares for, like Vivie.*



*Frank is being sarcastic when he says the garden suits Mrs. Warren. He means that she sticks out like a sore thumb in this space meant for respectable people of his class. Reverend Gardner is also concerned that he will be seen by one of his congregants with a person of Mrs. Warren's social status.*



*While Vivie has gained an understanding of her mother's struggle to escape poverty and exploitation and finds her story sympathetic, Frank points out that Vivie will still find her mother's manners unappealingly crass and embarrassing to a member of their class. Frank thinks that Vivie should keep her mother at a distance. To his mind, Reverend Gardner can seem like a buffoon, but at least he knows how a respectable man of his class is supposed to behave. Mrs. Warren's manners, on the other hand, make her unfit to be a companion for a respectable woman like Vivie.*



Vivie is angry. Frank says that it revolted him when Vivie put her hand around Mrs. Warren's waist. Vivie asks if Frank wants her to choose between himself and her mother. Frank says he will stick by her no matter what, but that's why he doesn't want her to make mistakes. Vivie's confidence is shaken. Sitting down on a bench, she asks if the world is supposed to ostracize her mother. Frank sits down next to her and seductively says that Vivie shouldn't go to live with her mother, because it will ruin their little group: the two babes in the wood. Vivie gets carried away by his sweet talk and they rock in one another's arms, until Vivie comes to herself and says they are acting like fools.

Frank sees Crofts approaching and, swearing, moves away from Vivie. Crofts asks to speak to Vivie alone. Frank leaves, but tells Vivie to ring a bell in the garden if she needs him. Crofts assumes a familiar tone with Vivie, saying that Frank is a pleasant fellow and it's a pity he has no money and no profession. Vivie hardly conceals her contempt for Crofts, but he doesn't understand her attitude towards him. When she is sarcastic he takes her seriously, and when she is disdainful he thinks she is being strong-willed and plucky.

Crofts sits down on the bench next to Vivie. He tells her that he knows he may not be attractive to a young woman, but he is straightforward and pays money for the things he values. He says he knows he has faults, but he lives by a simple code. He is rich because he hasn't wasted his money and makes investments in ways other men have overlooked. Vivie thanks him for sharing all this with her. Crofts says Vivie must know he means he hopes to marry. Vivie says she does not want to be his wife and stands. Crofts is undiscouraged. He says there is no hurry, but he wanted her to know he was interested, so she wouldn't get engaged to Frank first. Vivie says her no is final. With a crafty look, Crofts says he will die before she does and leave her rich. Vivie says this does not tempt her.

Crofts says that there are things he could tell her that would change her mind, but he won't. He says that he was a great friend to her mother and advanced her the money she needed to get started in business. Vivie is startled, and asks if he was her mother's partner. He says he was, and that this is another reason why Vivie should marry him: to save her mother having to explain her business to anyone. Vivie says her mother won't have to explain this, since she has sold the business. Crofts scoffs at this, asking in amazement who would be crazy enough to sell a business that pays so well. Vivie is shocked and feels faint, putting a hand on the garden's sundial to support herself.

*For all her toughness and independence, Vivie has been carried away by the experience of feeling love and closeness to her mother for the first time. Frank bursts this bubble, because Vivie realizes that he is right: she is turned off by her mother's vulgarity and the way it identifies her as someone "unrespectable." At this vulnerable moment, when Vivie's first feeling of love for her absent mother has been compromised, Vivie is particularly carried away by Frank's seductive charm.*



*Crofts believes that money is all-powerful. He brings up the fact that Frank doesn't have money, because he assumes that this will be damning in Vivie's eyes. In one way he is right: Vivie is not seriously interested in marrying Frank because Frank is not serious about having a career and purpose in life. But Vivie nevertheless finds Crofts repulsive, despite his money, and she treats him with barely concealed hostility. This is such an uncommon experience for the rich aristocrat that he doesn't comprehend Vivie's attitude.*



*Crofts is unabashed in his belief he can buy anything, or anyone. His brief, superficial mention of his values makes it even clearer that he thinks money and social position are the only thing that matters. He doesn't even bother to pretend that he has anything else to offer, or try to tell Vivie what he likes about her. This is straightforward: he is sexually attracted to her and wants to buy her hand in marriage. He thinks there is no way Vivie would be interested in Frank once she knows that Crofts wants to marry her, especially since he will eventually die and leave her a rich widow.*



*Crofts makes two disclosures to Vivie, while also hinting that he could tell her much more. He doesn't realize that Vivie knows the nature of her mother's business, so he tells Vivie that he was Mrs. Warren's original investor: the investment opportunity that he seized but others have overlooked is investing in brothels. Vivie also learns that her mother has not ended her business. Mrs. Warren never suggested she had gotten out of her business, but Vivie had assumed that this was the case. But Crofts is right: to have a brothel owner for a mother would certainly count against Vivie with any potential husband who considers himself respectable.*



Vivie sits down and asks which business Crofts is talking about. Crofts says it's not considered a very respectable business. He tells Vivie that her mother runs a set of comfortable private hotels throughout Europe. He says Mrs. Warren has a genius for managing the hotels and would never be associated with anything improper, but that they cannot mention their business to anyone, because people would think that they run a chain of bars. Vivie asks if this is the business Crofts asks her to join, but he says his wife will have nothing to do with it: Vivie will be no more involved in the business than she always has been, living on the money that it earned.

Vivie stands up, enraged, and tells Crofts that her mother told her the true nature of her business. Crofts swears in anger, then collects himself. He acts sympathetically towards Vivie, saying he never would scandalized her by telling her about the business if they had married. Vivie says that she will never see him again after today. Crofts asks why she is so angry that he helped Mrs. Warren. Vivie says her mother was a poor woman who had to do what she did, while Crofts was already rich and wanted to be richer.

Crofts is emboldened to make his case. He says he does exactly what everyone else does; he invests in exploitative businesses and profits from them without being involved in any of the sordid details of management. He lists other members of the aristocracy who also profit from similar businesses, saying that his brother, who is a parliamentary politician, profits from a factory where six hundred girls get paid wages that are not enough to live on, and founded the scholarship that Vivie received at college.

Vivie feels guilty for never having asked where the money she received from her mother came from. She says she is just as bad as Crofts. Crofts takes this as a sign of friendliness from her. He says that as long as one doesn't fly in the face of society or ask inconvenient questions, one can live happily in high society where no one would question where anyone gets their money.

*Crofts easily comes up with a plausible lie: it is true that owning bars would have been viewed unfavorably among members of his class. He also inadvertently forces Vivie to realize that his offer to support her with money earned in brothels is no different from her life so far. She has always lived on money earned through the sale of sex. If Vivie marries him, she will just be selling her own body too, in order to get more direct access to the same money.*



*Crofts sees women of his own class like Vivie as needing protection from the harsh truths of the world, especially the ugly, immoral things that involve people close to them. Vivie's closeness to her mother was based on the idea that her mother had clawed her way out of poverty against the odds. By the time Crofts invested in Mrs. Warren's business, she had, most likely, already earned enough money to avoid poverty. Vivie is now being forced to look at the parts of her mother's story that she would rather ignore and acknowledge that her mother has long since ceased being a victim of exploitation and become an exploiter herself.*



*Crofts is unashamed of the source of his wealth, but nevertheless presents a damning picture of the members of his social class. He explains how the exploitation of the very poor often benefits the richest in society, people like his brother, who is in the government and gives money to philanthropic causes, but also pays his female workers so little that they likely also turn to sex work to make ends meet.*



*While Vivie feels guilty for her ignorance, Crofts explains that ignorance is something members of the upper class try to preserve. By never talking about where they get their money, the upper class preserves its façade of respectability and morality, while enjoying wealth earned in exploitative industries.*



Vivie says she can see that Crofts thinks he is winning her over. Crofts agrees. Vivie bemoans the society that tolerates the way people like him and her mother take advantage of young girls and calls him a “capitalist bully.” Enraged, Crofts curses her. Vivie moves to leave the garden, but Crofts puts a hand on the gate to stop her. Vivie rings the bell and Frank appears with his rifle. He asks Vivie if he should shoot Crofts. Vivie asks if he has been listening, and Frank says he has only been awaiting the bell because he knew what to expect from Crofts. Vivie tells Frank to put the gun away, but Crofts and Frank continue menacing one another.

Crofts says he will go, but he has one final thing to tell Frank and Vivie. He says he wants to introduce Vivie to her half-brother Frank—Vivie is Reverend Gardner’s oldest daughter and thus Frank’s half-sister. Crofts leaves. Frank raises the gun again to aim at Crofts, but Vivie grabs it and says he can fire at her breast. The gun falls on the ground, and Frank sits down in shock, saying the gun could have gone off. Vivie says the pain of being shot would be a relief to her. Frank says it doesn’t matter whether Crofts told the truth: they are still two babes in the woods.

Vivie is revolted and turns to leave. Frank asks where she is going. She yells to him that she is going to Honoria’s chambers in Chancery Lane and leaves. Frank runs after her.

*It is only once Vivie calls Crofts a name that he understands that she is seriously appalled by his immoral view of the world and will not consider marrying him. Vivie explicitly says that she identifies with the women Crofts exploits, and not with Crofts. He is shocked and enraged to be insulted by a young woman, especially the daughter of a prostitute whom he made wealthy.*



*In the previous scenes, Crofts claimed not to know who Vivie’s father was, wondering if he himself is the father. It is left ambiguous here whether he is telling the truth: did Mrs. Warren confess the secret to him during some moment off-stage? Or, is he just lashing out at Vivie and trying to spoil her romance with Frank? The play leaves this question unanswered, leaving the audience and Vivie without any sense of who is her brother, her father, or her lover.*



*When Vivie runs away to Honoria’s, she is not only avoiding Frank and the news that he may be her brother. She is also reacting to her new knowledge that her mother still works as a brothel owner. Vivie leaves right away, both to avoid another encounter with Mrs. Warren and to immediately set about starting to earn her own living working with Honoria.*



## ACT 4

Act IV takes place in Chancery Lane, the legal center of London, in an office with a sign that says FRASER AND WARREN on it. The office desk is cluttered with papers. Frank is pacing around, waiting for Vivie. She arrives and sternly asks what he is doing there. He says he is waiting for her and wants to take her on a date. She refuses, saying she can’t afford it and must work another six hours. Frank shows her gold he won gambling, but she says that is no way to earn money and that she will not come. She sits down and begins looking at her work.

*Vivie has put her plan into motion to start earning her own living using her education. She has also become very scrupulous about where money comes from after learning how the money she received all her life was earned. She now only wants to spend money that she earns herself, and she refuses to go on a date with Frank when she needs to spend her time earning that money.*



In a pitiable tone, Frank says he wants to talk to her. Vivie says to sit down and they can talk there. She asks him to pass her the **cigar** box. He remarks that cigars are so bad smelling that men don't even smoke them anymore. Vivie says he's right: men have complained and so she and Honoria have had to switch to smoking cigarettes. She begins to smoke and tells him to say what he came to say. He says he wants to know what became of her after she ran off. Vivie says it was easily settled: Vivie showed up and told Honoria she was broke, and Honoria, who had too much work to handle herself, offered her a partnership.

Vivie asks what happened in Haslemere when she ran off. Frank says he told the others that she had gone to town, and they must have been too flabbergasted to ask for details, or maybe Crofts explained what had happened to Mrs. Warren. Frank asks Vivie if she really means to stay in Chancery Lane. She says she feels much stronger and more like herself now that she has come to work here, and she will never take a vacation again. Frank is put off by her hardness, but Vivie says that it is good that she is tough.

Frank tells Vivie that they should talk about what Crofts said. He says that he knows that Crofts meant to alter their relationship and make them feel that they are brother and sister. He continues, saying that he has many sisters and understands what fraternal feelings are. He feels that his sisters and he will go their separate ways in the world and will not care if they never see each other again, but he cannot go a week without seeing Vivie without anxiety, which is love.

With sarcasm, Vivie asks if this is the same love that Reverend Gardner felt for Mrs. Warren when they were young. Revolted at the comparison, Frank says that they are far superior to their parents and shouldn't be compared with them. Frank says that he asked his father if they could be brother and sister, and his father denied it, although a bit weakly.

Vivie asks Frank if he believes his father, and he says he believes him over Crofts. Vivie says it makes no real difference. Frank is surprised. He says he thought that Vivie's feelings about him changed completely when Crofts said that they were half-siblings. Vivie says she wishes she could believe Crofts, because she feels that the relationship of brother and sister is the only one that suits them, even if they had enough money to support one another. Frank says he understands: Vivie must have a new love interest. Vivie laughs at this, but Frank says that is the only way a woman ever breaks it off with a man.

*It was considered unladylike to smoke either cigars or cigarettes, so the audience of the time would have found Vivie's substitution of cigarettes for cigars funny. Vivie and Honoria seem to have easily broken into a male-dominated profession. Contemporary audiences might have found this a bit unrealistic, and it would have emphasized how much Vivie's expensive education set her apart from most women in terms of opportunities to work.*



*Vivie is determined to earn her own living through hard work. She was shaken by everything she learned about her mother, and now she is even more determined to earn her own money. In burying herself in her work, she also seems to hope to avoid any future brushes with the sordid economy of sex, in which people are bought and sold either in marriage or prostitution.*



*Frank turns conventional, sentimental ideas about love between family members on their head. Mrs. Warren believes it is only natural for Vivie to love her even though she did not raise her daughter; Frank, on the other hand, says he knows that brothers and sisters are naturally indifferent to one another.*



*When Vivie compares herself and Frank to their parents, she means to disparage their parents' affair. Frank heartily agrees about this. But the other similarity between the romance between Frank and Vivie and the one between their young parents is that both were economic transactions. Whereas Reverend Gardner paid Mrs. Warren for sex, Frank hopes to become rich by marrying (and sleeping with) Vivie.*



*Vivie has never been serious about Frank, and she tells him that now. He doesn't understand that she has never wanted more than a casual flirtation. The unemotional way that Frank processes being told that Vivie is not interested in him romantically indicates that his attachment to her was much more about her money than about her as a person. Frank cannot imagine that a woman would ever really want to give up on romance, as Vivie says she intends to do.*



At that moment, Praed knocks on the door. Vivie tells Frank that Praed is going to Italy and has come to say goodbye. Frank says he will wait until Praed leaves to finish talking to her. Vivie greets Praed, who says that he wishes he could convince her to visit Italy. Vivie asks what for, and Praed says so that she can experience beauty and romance. Vivie shudders and turns towards her work. Frank says Vivie is indifferent to romance and beauty, and Vivie says that life is what it is, and she will accept it that way. Praed says he knows he will cry again when he sees the beauties these cities have to offer.

Praed says Vivie would change her mind if she went to these European cities, or experienced the fun in **Brussels**. Vivie gasps in loathing and jumps to her feet. Praed is confused and alarmed at Vivie's strong reaction. Vivie asks if Praed really has nothing better to talk to her about than the beauty of Brussels. Praed is at a loss. Frank explains that Vivie finds Praed frivolous, but Vivie snaps that he shouldn't joke. Vivie says that if she is going to remain friends with Frank and Praed, she wants to hear no more about love from one, or about the beauty of life from the other, especially when that beauty is in Brussels. She says she has no illusions left about either subject and plans to remain single and uninterested in beauty for the rest of her life.

Frank says he will remain single too until Vivie changes her mind. He tells Praed to continue speaking eloquently about something else. Praed says that he can only preach the Gospel of Art, while Vivie preaches the Gospel of Getting On, or a practical attitude towards life, that clashes with Frank's determinedly impractical outlook. Frank says he is happy to listen to Vivie try to convince him to turn over a new leaf. Vivie is disgusted. She says that if the Gospel of Art and the Gospel of Getting On are the only two gospels, they should all commit suicide, because both gospels are hypocritical and tainted. Frank says Vivie is being poetic. Praed chides him for teasing her, but Vivie says it is good to tease her and keep her from being sentimental.

Vivie says she was only sentimental once in her life, by moonlight. Frank cuts her off, reminding her not to say too much to Praed.

*Praed's love of beauty is a sensual pleasure, even if it may be an aesthetic one without overt sexual overtones. A love of beauty was considered an admirable trait and even a sign of morality to many. But to Vivie's mind, this attitude is a way of avoiding thinking about the way life really is, another topic for polite conversation among respectable people that allows them to hide from ugly truths about reality.*



*Brussels is the headquarters of Mrs. Warren's chain of brothels. Even though Vivie knows Praed is not talking about visiting brothels, she is disgusted by his mention of the city, and wants to forget that such a city exists. For Vivie, mentions of these things are not merely frivolous, but sinister: Brussels seems to her like a place where people say they are going to experience beauty but are actually going to purchase sex. Similarly, she doesn't believe that love can be separated from money, and doesn't want to talk about romance.*



*Vivie is deeply disturbed by all she has learned about her own complicity in exploitative businesses and she has an emotional reaction to Frank and Praed's casual banter. Vivie takes the "Gospel of Art" to be a way for members of the upper class like Praed to seek out beauty and ignore ugly truths and the practical facts of life. She understands the "Gospel of Getting On" to be the need to make a living. This is what she believes in, but she also sees how the need or desire to make money can be used to justify acts of exploitation and injustice. Both Crofts and Mrs. Warren see their involvement in the sex trade as justified under this "Gospel."*



*The conversation that made Vivie sentimental was when her mother revealed her life story to her and Vivie felt love and understanding towards her mother. Even though Frank doesn't know the full truth about Mrs. Warren's work, he knows enough to try to stop Vivie from talking about what she learned about her mother's experience. He can guess that the things Vivie learned are ones that respectable people would hesitate to discuss.*



Vivie tells Frank that she is sure that Praed knows all about her mother. Turning to him, she says he ought to have told her about her mother's profession the first morning that they met, but he was too old-fashioned to do so. Praed says that perhaps Vivie is the old-fashioned one. He says he does not respect Mrs. Warren any less just because she had Vivie out of wedlock; in fact, he respects her more. Vivie stares at him in incredulity and asks if that is all he knows. Praed is very alarmed and says that perhaps Vivie shouldn't tell them if there is anything worse.

Vivie says that she would spend her entire life telling the world about her mother if she had the courage. She says she hates the convention that makes it shameful to even mention what her mother does. She takes a pen and paper and begins to dictate what she is writing: there was a forty-thousand pound investment by Crofts, and there were premises in **Brussels**, Ostend, Vienna and Budapest. Vivie stops reading her words aloud then, and writes her mother's profession. She slides the paper towards Frank, then grabs it back and buries her face in her hands.

Frank sees the words, however, and rewrites them on a paper he shows to Praed, who looks at it with amazement. Frank says that they will remain Vivie's friends, and Praed says that Vivie is very courageous. Vivie is put off by this compliment. She says she needs a minute to collect herself and goes into the other room.

Praed tells Frank he is very disappointed in Crofts. Frank replies that now Crofts makes perfect sense to him, but he can't marry Vivie now. Praed says that it would be wrong for Frank to turn away from Vivie, but Frank explains that he wouldn't be able to accept her money now that he knows where it comes from. Praed asks if Frank really can't earn enough money on his own. Frank says that he earned a bit of money gambling, but he will never make enough to support Vivie. Praed asks Frank if he will ever see Vivie again. Frank scoffs at Praed for being melodramatic, and answers that he will of course see Vivie again. He will treat her as a brother.

*Whether or not Praed really knows what Mrs. Warren's true profession is, he claims that what he wanted to hide from Vivie is that her mother and father were not married. Vivie feels shocked that this is all Praed knows after so many years of friendship with Mrs. Warren. And his plea that she say no more shows that, regardless of whether he knows the truth or not, he believes strongly in his class's taboo against talking about anything unrespectable.*



*Young, upper-class women like Vivie would never have talked about prostitution (and Shaw's play might not have run at all had the characters explicitly discussed it). It requires a strong effort on Vivie's part to bring up this topic, given all the pressures to be silent in her society. Vivie lists the cities where her mother set up businesses, instead of saying the business itself. By mentioning these far away places, she hopes to put space between herself and her exploitative mother's business.*



*Vivie is concerned with the fate of poor women who are systematically exploited. She finds it inappropriate that Praed would compliment her courage, since she has had so much less to face than others.*



*Frank's interest in Vivie was always based on the idea that by marrying her he could make himself wealthy. He has been rejected by her, but refused to definitively give up hope. But now that he knows the unrespectable source of Mrs. Warren's money, and knows that Vivie is likely to reject that money and become much less rich, he easily gives up the idea of a romance with her. He plans to treat her like she is his sister, which, of course, he has no way of definitely knowing she isn't.*



There is a knock at the door. Praed goes and lets in Mrs. Warren, while Frank sits down and writes a note. Mrs. Warren is dressed in conservative garb and looks around anxiously for Vivie. She is surprised to see Frank, who indicates that Vivie is in the next room. Mrs. Warren asks Praed if he thinks Vivie will see her. Frank tells her that she might be better off leaving instead of waiting to hear what Vivie has to say. He puts the note he wrote where Vivie will find it. Mrs. Warren asks if he means she should leave and never see Vivie again. Frank says that is what he means. Mrs. Warren begins to cry. Frank asks Praed if he thinks that Mrs. Warren ought to wait to see Vivie. Praed equivocates, but is ready to say that Mrs. Warren should leave.

Vivie enters and looks at her mother seriously. Mrs. Warren greets her with forced cheerfulness. Vivie says she is glad Mrs. Warren came because she wants to speak to her. Mrs. Warren looks scared and says perhaps she should leave Vivie to do her work. Vivie firmly tells Frank and Praed to leave her alone with her mother. They all bid one another goodbye and the two men leave. Mrs. Warren anxiously asks Vivie why she ran away so suddenly. Mrs. Warren says that she wanted Crofts to accompany her to come see Vivie, but he said that she should avoid Vivie.

Trembling, Mrs. Warren pulls out an envelope and asks Vivie why she received it from the bank. Vivie says it is her allowance, but she will be supporting herself from now on. Mrs. Warren refuses to understand Vivie's meaning. With a cunning look, she tells Vivie that she had planned to double Vivie's allowance.

Vivie tells Mrs. Warren that she means that they should cut off contact with one another. She stands and bids her mother goodbye. Mrs. Warren is shocked. Vivie explains that Crofts told her everything. Mrs. Warren swears in anger at Crofts, but says she thought that Vivie didn't mind her profession after their conversation. Vivie says she understood how her mother got into the business, but not that she was still working as a brothel owner.

*Mrs. Warren has changed her usual flamboyant style of dress because she hopes that Vivie will not refuse to be a part of her life anymore. She tries to dress the part of a more conservative, respectable woman. She still firmly believes that she and Vivie can have a relationship, because she thinks it is only natural for a mother and daughter to love one another unconditionally and forgive each other. Frank and Praed, however, are sure that she has no chance of winning Vivie over.*



*Mrs. Warren pretends that Vivie's sudden departure from the countryside and decision to immediately go into business with Honoria is nothing out of the ordinary. She acts the part of a completely normal mother, but when she sees Vivie's reaction she becomes afraid that Vivie will tell her that she wants nothing more to do with her.*



*Because of her exceptional education and academic achievements, Vivie is in an unusual position for a single woman of her time: she can refuse financial support because she doesn't want to be complicit in something she finds immoral. Mrs. Warren has probably never encountered a woman with Vivie's earning power and refusal to bend to the temptation of wealth. She thinks she can bribe her daughter by offering her more money, when Vivie is saying she wants none of Mrs. Warren's money at all.*



*Mrs. Warren never told Vivie that she had left her business, but she also never intended to mention her active operations to Vivie. Vivie once again showed naivete when she assumed her mother had quit her work. So, although Mrs. Warren sees that Vivie is angry, she doesn't understand why Vivie can't accept that she is only doing her best in a corrupt and exploitative world.*



Vivie hopes that this is enough of an explanation for her mother for why they should end their relationship. But instead Mrs. Warren looks cunning again. She tells Vivie that she is fabulously wealthy: Vivie will have every luxury and many suitors, instead of toiling in an office. She says that she is sure if Vivie thinks it over she will come around to accepting her mother and her money.

Vivie says she is sure Mrs. Warren has said something similar to many young women. Mrs. Warren says that Vivie has been deceived about the way the world works and now she is throwing away her opportunity to be prominent. She says that all the most powerful people understand how the world really works, and that ideas about what makes someone respectable are a pretense. The people who educated Vivie understand nothing about life or people like herself.

Vivie says she recognizes that her mother is preaching Crofts's philosophy of life. Mrs. Warren says that she promises she won't try to make Vivie marry Crofts, but Vivie says her mother could never force her to do that. Mrs. Warren is hurt that Vivie doesn't seem to value her saying that she doesn't mean to marry her to someone she doesn't like. Vivie doesn't respond to her mother's look of hurt, but goes on.

Vivie tells Mrs. Warren that she is the type of person who admires straightforward, unsentimental people. She thinks Crofts is better than many men like him because he is not ashamed of his behavior.

Vivie says she doesn't want to spend her life being rich and fashionable because this will turn her into a worthless, vicious person. She asks Mrs. Warren why she didn't leave her business once she had made enough money to do so, like her sister Liz. Mrs. Warren says it was easy for Liz because she has the air of being a lady. No one would take Mrs. Warren for a lady, though. More importantly, though, she would go crazy out of boredom without work, and the work she does suits her. If she didn't do it, someone else would, so it doesn't hurt Mrs. Warren says she can't give up her work for anyone, but she will never mention it to Vivie again and never force her to see Crofts again. Vivie says that she is her mother's daughter: she intends to work and spend the money she makes. anyone.

*Mrs. Warren believes that a daughter owes her mother love and affection. She also believes that everyone has a price, because she doesn't understand Vivie's desire to earn her own money and escape any type of exploitation.*



*Vivie compares her mother's attempts to buy her love to her convincing women to work for her as sex workers in her brothel. Vivie is coming to realize that even familial love has an economic basis that she finds corrupt and unjust. Mrs. Warren believes that Vivie is being snobbish; she doesn't understand that Vivie is not only embarrassed by her unrespectable profession, but also abhors her as a force for exploitation of the weak.*



*Crofts' philosophy is that morality is just something people pretend to believe in so they will be considered respectable. But Mrs. Warren doesn't understand Vivie's point. Instead, she believes Vivie is bringing up Crofts because she fears Mrs. Warren will try to force her to marry him. Many mothers would try to force their daughters into unwanted marriages, so Mrs. Warren feels Vivie should appreciate that she wouldn't.*



*Even though Vivie sees Crofts' beliefs as deplorable, she respects the fact that he admitted to her what he really thinks and that he lives a life that is consistent with his beliefs.*



*Mrs. Warren believes that an ideal life is spent in leisure, spending money and being fashionable. She looks up to her sister Liz, who was able to fit into upper class society once she had earned enough money. But Vivie disagrees, thinking that idleness ruins a person's character. And even though Mrs. Warren accepts society's ideal of a rich, idle aristocracy, her life shows that she shares Vivie's feelings deep down. Even though she is now rich, Mrs. Warren needs to work to give her life structure and purpose. She justifies continuing to work as a brothel owner who exploits poor women for her own profit by saying that the injustice is systematic, and her participation in it has no effect either way.*



Vivie says their relationship going forward will not be that different from their relationship up to this point: instead of seeing each other for scarce visits, they will never see each other. Mrs. Warren begins to cry. She says she had meant to spend more time with Vivie when she was younger. Vivie says her mother's cheap tears won't change her mind. Mrs. Warren angrily objects, but Vivie says that her mother wants her to give up her happiness to make her feel better. Vivie says they have nothing in common that would make them happy in each other's company.

Mrs. Warren angrily begins to talk in the dialect of a poor woman. She says that she has a right to her daughter and that plenty of girls have cared for her like they were her daughters, but she let them go because she knew she would have Vivie. Vivie is put off by the lower-class sound of her mother's speech. She says that she has just finished telling Frank she doesn't want a husband, and she now tells her mother she doesn't want a mother.

Mrs. Warren says she understands Vivie's personality: she is merciless, pious, hard, and selfish. Mrs. Warren says that if she could do life over again, she would bring Vivie up to be a good daughter to her. She says that Vivie stole her education and she wishes she had never paid for it, but had instead brought her up in her own house. Vivie says that Mrs. Warren means brought her up "in one" of her houses.

Enraged, Mrs. Warren screams that she curses Vivie and hopes she grows up to have a daughter who treats her terribly. Vivie says her mother's rage only makes her more determined that they should go their separate ways. But, she says, her mother shouldn't regret giving her an education; probably, she says, she is the only woman Mrs. Warren controlled who she did something good for. Mrs. Warren says that this is true, and Vivie is also the only one who has turned on her. Mrs. Warren says she always tried to be good: she tried honest work and found that it was really exploitation, she tried to be a good mother and finds that her daughter turns against her. She says she will never try to do anything good again.

*Vivie sees her mother's demand that they spend time together as a conventional, sentimental notion. Vivie dislikes any unthinking acceptance of sentimental, conventional ideas; she sees herself as a New Woman who will make a life for herself using her own skills, outside of society's ideas for what a woman should be. She also feels that since her mother spent so little time with her when she was growing up, they have little in common and no deep attachment to one another.*



*In her anger, Mrs. Warren takes a position that will be even less persuasive to Vivie. She acts as if she owns Vivie, and as if she has given up other girls she could have owned and controlled because she assumed she would be able to do that to Vivie. The independent-minded Vivie finds her mother's belief that she can control other women abhorrent. She thinks Mrs. Warren was deluding herself with a belief in the sentimental notion that a daughter owes her mother love; since Mrs. Warren never took care of her, she does not feel bonded to her mother.*



*Mrs. Warren believes that Vivie looks down on her because her profession is not respectable. She doesn't understand Vivie's rejection of conventional ideas: Vivie objects to her mother's belief that some people can control and exploit others, whether they are sex workers in a brothel, or their daughter. Mrs. Warren is angry that she invested so much money in Vivie's education and is receiving nothing in return. This is also similar to the way a brothel owner would invest in the clothes and makeup of a sex worker, in expectation of profits and loyalty. At the same time, if Mrs. Warren had been more involved in Vivie's upbringing, her daughter might "be a good daughter to her," because she might feel a genuine connection to her mother. Either way there is something disturbingly transactional about the relationship.*



*The angrier Mrs. Warren gets at being kept from controlling Vivie, the more repulsed Vivie is. Their ideas are completely mismatched. Mrs. Warren believes that even though she worked in an exploitative business, she would be redeemed by bringing her daughter up to a different life and would reap the reward of her daughter's gratitude and love. But Vivie believes in her own independence more than she believes she owes her mother gratitude, and she can tell that Mrs. Warren wants to control her.*



Vivie says it is better to live as you believe you should, instead of living one way and believing in a different system of morality. She says that it is because her mother is so conventional that she must part with her. Mrs. Warren reluctantly agrees that Vivie is right to get rid of her, but she says the world would fall apart if everyone did the right thing in this way. She turns to leave, and Vivie asks if she will shake hands goodbye. Mrs. Warren looks at Vivie as if she wants to hit her. She says she doesn't want to shake hands and leaves, slamming the door.

*Vivie is not against sex work because it is unrespectable; she is against what her mother does now: exploit other women for her own profit. She thinks that if Mrs. Warren really believes that there should be better opportunities for women, she should not be a part of the system by which sex work is the best work a poor woman can find. Mrs. Warren cannot understand that her daughter is not rejecting her out of conventional ideas about morality and class; she believes Vivie wants nothing to do with her because she is an ungrateful snob.*



Vivie's face relaxes and she breathes a sigh of relief. She goes to her desk and finds Frank's note. She laughs at something clever he wrote, and says, "goodbye, Frank" aloud. Then she tears the note up and immediately begins to work, quickly becoming engrossed.

*Vivie hopes to escape complicity in a corrupt world by focusing on her work, supporting herself financially and avoiding the complications that come with romantic and family relationships. Of course, this is impossible in her society, and she only has the independence she has because of her education paid for by sex work and exploitation. Furthermore, in rejecting anyone associated with exploitation, Vivie has turned away from all the family and close relationships she had. The play then ends on this ambiguous note, as it's unclear whether or not Vivie will find any long-lasting happiness in her single-minded devotion to her work.*





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