

# HIS BEAUTIFUL WIFE

By Hermann Bahr

[Hermann Bahr was born in Linz, Austria, July 19th, 1863. He went to school in Linz and Salzburg, and as a young man studied in the universities of Vienna, Graz, Czernowitz and Berlin, finishing his education by long *Wanderjahre* which took him to Paris, Spain, Morocco and St. Petersburg, whence he returned, a true "citizen of the world."

1892 finds him in Vienna, on the editorial staff of the "*Neue Wiener Tageblatt*," and already a leader of the "*Jung Wien*" movement. A coffee house named "*Griensteidel*" was the rallying place for the band (like the "*Silberne Kaffeehaus*" of Lenau's time) and among the enthusiasts were "*Loris*"—Hugo von Hofmannsthal—Arthur Schnitzler, Richard Beer-Hoffmann, Felix Doermann, and Peter Altenberg . . . all of them aflame with the desire to create a national Austrian literature.

Bahr has been called the Austrian Shaw and, like Shaw, he has taken up with eagerness every rebellion, every movement, every fad of his time; no new note, no new undercurrent, no new thought which he did not sense and serve. Versatile, brilliant, the pathfinder for his talented young countrymen, Bahr dashed off work after work: "*feuilletons*," dramatic criticisms, essays, short stories, dramas and novels. The ease with which he produced was, perhaps, in part responsible for the label "*supremely clever—but nothing else*" which the sterner critics tried to tack on to him.

Only after his "*Conzert*" had appeared did the world realize his grip of vital human things, his depth and power of creation. This play immediately spread Bahr's fame abroad. In 1910 it was given in New York with Leo Dietrichstein (also an Austrian) in the leading rôle; and again last spring it was played at the *Bandbox*, after the *Washington Square Players* had moved elsewhere.

Although the "*Conzert*" is the best known, it is by no means the only great work of Bahr's. Three other plays must be mentioned: the brilliant historical drama "*Josephine*," the quaintly lovable "*Franzl*," and the gloomy tragedy "*A Poor Fool*"—besides this, his essays "*On Modernism*," "*The Overcoming of Naturalism*," "*Renaissance*," and the novels "*The Good School*," and the "*Theater*" show that Bahr is, as Heine proudly declared he was, on the topmost wave of the culture of his time.

In 1909 Bahr married the beautiful Anna von Mildenburg, singer at the *Vienese Opera*, and famous as *Clytemnestra* in the "*Elektra*" by Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss.

Since the war began we have had nothing new from Bahr; but he is one of the few living writers from whom much may still be expected.—THE EDITOR.]

THE other day I met my dear old friend Paul Dorn in the street.

"At last I see you again," I cried. "Is that the way to treat your best friend? Six whole months without seeing you. Let me look at you! How are you? How does matrimony agree with you? Paul, Paul, who would have thought it! I felt so

sure of you! But women—ah, women—"

Paul laughed, took my arm, and together we strolled down the Ringstrasse. I felt myself growing sentimental—Paul—a married man! I can scarcely believe it yet. Alas—whither has our youth flown? It seems but a day since we were boys together.

"Do you remember—that summer with Mizi—Paul?"

He is apparently not anxious to remember. . . . I drop Mizi. Silently we walk for a few minutes; he lights a cigar; I scrutinize him out of the corner of my eye: he seems more serious than formerly, more reposeful, dignified even. Ah, matrimony! I am almost ashamed of my frivolous remark. I try to excuse it.

"Look here, Paul, you know me, you understand how I meant what I said—and anyway, it's different with you—you have such a beautiful wife—"

Paul drops my arm, impatiently. He seems nervous. "For heaven's sake don't work that subject. I've had enough of it, I can assure you. . . ."

"Why, Paul—" I am startled, to say the least. But he resumes and his voice has an accusing ring:

"Always my beautiful wife, and again my beautiful wife, and once more my beautiful wife . . . it grows unbearably monotonous, I assure you. You must not imagine that I don't appreciate Agathe; but too much is too much! You can't imagine what it means to have a beautiful wife. I tell you, it takes patience to bear it." And grimly, he begins to whistle.

I imagine that I understand and—I am delighted. "Say, Paul, that's Nemesis! Serves you right! You've made so many husbands jealous—only fair that now you should have your turn."

Paul looks at me pityingly:

"You idiot! Who speaks of jealousy? What do you mean anyway?"

"You are not jealous?" I am almost disappointed.

"Of course not—in fact—on the contrary— But that's not so easy to explain. You see, it would be beautiful indeed to have a beautiful wife, if only she were not quite so beautiful. . . ."

"Dark is the meaning of thy speech—"

"Well, now, listen. I can't explain it, so I must tell you the whole story, just as

it happened to me: then only will you be able to understand."

He re-lights his cigar. "I'll begin at the beginning," says he. Then proceeds:

"Well, the wedding's over. We're off. I am delighted, for a wedding, you know, that's enough to upset the strongest man. We get to Munich. I want to show her the city, call on a few old friends, and then visit the Bavarian Alps. The first few days I needn't describe: I'm swimming in bliss, she's swimming in bliss, and so forth. But soon I notice something is wrong, something doesn't suit her. What can it be? I take no end of trouble to find out.

I ask and ask. But she insists I am mistaken. No, nothing's amiss, she is perfectly happy, absolutely content, she thinks Munich very pretty—only—only—What? She won't tell. But finally and ultimately: 'the people here are so brutal!'

"I can't understand this at all. Good heavens! the people of Munich are a bit slow, a bit heavy, to be sure—but brutal?"

"Yes," she insists, 'absolutely brutal. Just watch them. Why, one can parade the streets by the hour, and not a man turns

his head to give you a second look. That betrays a brutal nature. I of course don't care. It's immaterial to me. I only state the fact that the people here are brutal. . . .'

"Are you beginning to catch on, my dear friend? The lady was offended. She didn't get the admiration she was used to, ergo, the people lacked refinement, they were brutal. Ah, you laugh! Just laugh! Your time will come.

"This, of course, was only the beginning.

"The next morning I sit in the dining-room of the Hotel Maximilian. We expect to go to some function, I forget what. My wife is still upstairs, dressing. That's another thing I never knew before, never knew the meaning of the term: she's dressing! A woman is dressing! You have to be married before you can understand that! Well, to resume, I'm



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sitting there since nine o'clock, and I wait. . . I've had breakfast. I've read every newspaper, including the advertisements. I've called for the second *bock*, because I'm positively embarrassed through sitting so long at the table. I stare out of the window, simulating deep thought. Absentmindedly I let my eyes rove about the almost empty dining-room, the group of waitresses gossiping with the lady-cashier, the half dozen university students playing Skat at a large table in the center of the room, those same students' jaunty green fraternity caps, hanging along the dark wall like vivid splashes of color in an impressionistic picture. The minutes pass. The half-hours do likewise. It is ten. It is ten thirty. It is eleven. In utter desperation I am beginning to study my Baedeker, one eye fixed on the door through which she must enter. At last! the door opens. Agathe sweeps in. She looks radiant, very stylishly gowned, in an English tailor-made, her little Girardi-hat perched at a fascinating angle. Graciously, she smiles at the lady-cashier, asks one of the waitresses as to my whereabouts, and follows her through the whole length of the dining-room. As she passes the table of the university students, her parasol slips from her hand. I jump up, but am too far away. The waitress bends and returns it to her. The students seem greatly interested in their game. . . .

"Agathe sits down beside me. I notice a frown between her magnificent eyebrows. Alas, she is offended again! I ask what she wants for breakfast. In response, 'Heavens,' she cries, 'I cannot sit here at the window in this glaring light! Impossible! Let us find another table.'

"She rises. I follow her. She selects a table right beside that of the students. And as she sits down, she upsets a chair littered with newspapers. . . .

"The students apparently are as much engrossed with their game as ever. I rise, pick up the chair, pick up the newspapers, and once more ask her what she wants for breakfast. I am very patient, very gentle—I am anxious finally to get started! Agathe orders a cup of chocolate, then takes her lorgnon, and deliberately fixes her gaze upon the card players. Turning to me, with the full resonance of her rich, melodious voice, she remarks:

"I wonder if these young men have no other aim in life besides card playing and beer drinking?"

"Imagine my embarrassment. I plunge into the largest-sized newspaper within reach, and begin to read convulsively. But Agathe is not to be discouraged. She has sipped some of her chocolate, and now pauses, gracefully balancing the spoon between her slender white fingers. Allowing her voice to develop more and more volume, she urges:

"If their poor parents only had an idea of this! No doubt they economize and worry at home, while their sons squander time and money in this shameful way. Ah, they deserve the rod!"

"To all appearances I am deaf and dumb behind my *Neue Freie Presse*. Still she continues:

"And those green caps! Do look, darling, green caps for such blockheads! I say, they look like common day-laborers, every one of them. . . ."

"Perhaps you have enough imagination to dimly realize how I felt. I'm not a coward. But a duel, in midsummer, on my wedding-trip—no, thank you.

"So I put a stopper on the whole business. I address her authoritatively: 'You do not like Munich, so much is clear. In two hours a train leaves for Schliersee in the Bavarian Alps. My friend Drescher lives there, and anyway, it is a beautiful place. . . . Let's pack, and in two hours we are off!'—She knows that I mean it, when I talk in that tone of voice—there's nothing to do but comply.

"At four o'clock we arrive in Schliersee. I had telegraphed to Drescher, and he received us at the station and accompanied us to the Hotel Seehaus, where we engaged a large, beautiful room with magnificent view of the lake and the whole valley. Agathe, being a bit tired, laid down to rest, while I took my wheel and started off on a long ride. When I returned, I found my wife in the hotel garden, reading a book. At another table sat a few peasants, at yet another the priest with the old forester. The peace of the place gripped my heart. Here I should love to remain! I leaned my wheel against a tree and stepped up to her. How adorable she looked, in her lacy white dress, her big Madonna eyes dreaming far away into the distance. Ah, it was a charming picture—only—only—the peasants, the priest, the old forester—the picture lacked a public!

"I approached her, full of misgivings. 'How are you, Girlie?'

"She looked at me. . . . Never shall I

forget that look! Then she said: 'So this is Schliersee, the famous! Well, my dear, let me tell you, not two days will I remain here. This is no place for me!'

"'But, darling, don't you think it's beautiful? The lovely lake——'

"'Oh, that lake is too small——'

"'The peaceful valley——'

"'Valleys are unhealthy, every physician will tell you that!'

"'And the majestic mountains? . . .'

"'Mountains always have bored me!'

"A pause. Then she resumes and concludes: 'Besides, the food is bad, this Bavarian beer makes one fat, and I have no wish to degenerate; if that had been my intention I would have entered a convent, instead of matrimony. But it is clear that you never loved me. . . .'

"'All right,' say I, 'very well, if you don't like it—we'll leave again to-morrow.'

"To tell you the truth, I was depressed. This constant wandering about, always packing, always on the train, daily at another hotel, among strange faces—I dislike it intensely! I wanted to settle down somewhere and enjoy myself in peace. Still, there seemed no prospect. Evidently Agathe needs admiration like the smoker needs tobacco. She simply can't do without it—she isn't agreeable without it! When she goes out here in Vienna, people turn and stare and admire—she has been used to it since childhood—she takes it as her due. No use arguing. If you don't like this state of affairs, you must never marry a beautiful wife. . . .

"All this I repeated to myself the next morning, as, early, I strolled through the woods alone. Agathe was still asleep at the hotel. Mournfully I looked at the shimmering lake, the sunny valley, the whole glad country with its ever-singing people. How I would have loved to stay!

"Suddenly an idea flashed through my mind, and I ran more than I walked over to Drescher's. You know Drescher, the famous comic actor, and you have seen his charming summer-home at Schliersee. Well, you remember the kind of chap he is—always in high spirits, his head filled with great schemes, a bit distraught, but the dearest fellow on earth.

"'Drescher,' say I, 'you must do me a favor.'

"'Why, of course, of course, with the greatest pleasure. By the way, to-night I go hunting. There's a devil of a buck

has been fooling me for weeks. But I'll get him yet, I'll get him!'

"'Now, my dear Drescher, just a moment. I want to tell you——'

"'But, I say, I'll never again accept an engagement in Vienna. Just refused another offer. No, sir. Don't want to hear them criticize my "dry humor" any more. Oh, have I told you: Stuck is coming next week! You'll go wild over him. Great fellow, Stuck! Have you seen my new horses yet?'

"I resign myself to patience. First I admire his new horses, then we scold about Vienna's dramatic critics, and praise the art and personality of Stuck, finally I have to hear the story about that devil of a buck. . . . At last he's ready to listen to me.

"'My dear Drescher,' says I, 'you must do me a great favor. You know everybody in the neighborhood—can't you direct me to some nice, simple young man, a peasant or community clerk, who would, for appropriate wages, admire my wife?'

"'What should he do?'

"'Admire, nothing but admire. My wife is used to it, she must have some one to admire her. This is my plan. I pay the young man a certain sum, say three marks a day, and something extra for his meals, and all I ask of him is that he admire my wife, sit in the hotel garden three or four hours a day and look at her with mute admiration, or, let us say, adoration.'

"'Adoration!' approves Drescher, 'it's a go.'

"I then relate my Munich experiences, and conclude with the statement that Agathe certainly won't stay here, unless she's admired. . . .

"'Perfectly fine,' says Drescher. 'Just leave it to me. I'll manage the whole affair. Let me see—who could take that part? My actors are all busy—but, great! There's our sexton—I tell you, he's ambitious—just the man for you: . . . he even owns a cut-away! Now, don't worry at all. I'll send for him immediately, he shall begin this very afternoon. He'll admire. . . .'

"'Adore,' I correct.

"'Adore,' consents Drescher, 'turn up his eyes, press his hand to his heart—eh? Very well, rely on me. Am I not known as one of the foremost theatrical managers in Germany?'

"'Dear Drescher, how can I thank you?'

But—er—a sexton—is he at all good-looking?’

“‘Nonsense, what should he be good-looking for? Women don’t care who admires them, just so they are admired. You wait and watch!’

“He was right. I tell you: that sexton! indescribable! and a cut-away! But that man certainly knew how to admire! I always told you that Drescher was the greatest of managers.

“After luncheon that day I went out on my wheel. Agathe remained in the hotel garden . . . not far from her I noticed the sexton installing himself. On my return, an hour later, I said: ‘I’ve been to the station and looked at the time tables. It will be best if we take the ten-ten to-morrow morning.’

“‘But why?’ asks Agathe with pained surprise. ‘Really, I don’t understand you. Can’t you be satisfied anywhere? It’s so lovely here! Look, that dear lake—’

“‘That lake is somewhat small,’ say I.

“‘Oh, but just its smallness gives it an added charm. It is so intimate!’

“‘The valley seems smothered among mountains—really one feels oppressed,’ I complain.

“‘Nothing is healthier than this location, ask any physician,’ asserts Agathe. ‘And anyway, this constant wandering about, always packing, always on the train, daily at another hotel, among strange faces—I dislike it intensely! I want to settle down somewhere and enjoy myself in peace. . . . Come, darling, be reasonable; we are so happy, let’s stay here!’

“We stayed three weeks. Every Sunday the sexton presented his bill: 21 marks salary; 10 to 12 marks for beer, some 3 marks for white sausage. As farewell present I had a new cut-away made for him—his old one had become worn from so much strenuous admiration. . . .

“‘Next summer,’ concluded Paul, “we’ll go again to Schliersee!”

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## THE RUIN

By Edith Willis Linn

A blow to love is like a scathing shell  
Hurled at an ivy-covered citadel.  
A sudden crash, a low, unheeded moan—  
And falls the ancient fortress, stone on stone.

Still round the ruined walls the ivies twine,  
Still through the gaps the quiet planets shine.  
And in the cranies, at the touch of Spring,  
The cranesbill flowers and the mavis sing.

