

Analysis Of "R.U.R."

Robert Bowles

(The analysis of **RUR** by Robert Bowles is printed as an example of what is being done in Freshman Composition classes in the form of analysis. We believe that this is a superior illustration of a review of the important work by Capek.)

R. U. R. is a drama of ideas, and it contains a great amount of symbolism together with the conflicts between its ideas.

To begin with, there is a conflict between Domin, who believed in progress despite its effects on the individual, and Helena, who believed that the rights of human personality are more important than progress. I do not believe that Helena symbolizes the social worker who is interested in correcting something without knowing exactly what she wants to do. Helena, in my opinion, symbolizes the individual personality. Everything connected with this idea is vague and uncertain. No one knows what to do, even today, to protect the individual. It is a complicated process which has no clear-cut path. What is good for one man is bad for another. No wonder that Helena was confused. She agreed, as do we, that technological progress in its pure sense is desirable and beneficial to man. And yet she questioned progress when it crushed the individual to meet its ends, just as thinkers today question the exploitation of labor by business while agreeing that this exploitation benefits, in one sense, the human race as a whole. Helena was merely trying to weigh in her mind the effects of Domin's ideas, and to put across to him why she considered them wrong. She could not deny that his robots would reduce labor or make it agree that violating the human personality was wrong. Hence she was confused.

Domin symbolized progress. He was an idealist in that his belief in progress never wavered. However, I do not believe that Domin symbolized progress in the true sense of the word, and I do not believe that Capek was against the true idea of progress when he wrote this play. True progress is not only the subjugation of the material world so that all of man's physical wants are supplied. It is also a step forward or the improvement in man's moral and cultural outlook so that his mental wants are supplied. And of the two, mental happiness and satisfaction is much more important in my opinion than the mere satisfaction of material wants.

Domin was interested only in materialistic or technological progress and the extension of its benefits to all of society. While this was a very noble ambition, it still left unsolved progress in man's moral and cultured outlook. This never occurred to Domin as he evidently thought that man could and would be happy once he had satisfied all of his material wants. He thought that man could then spend all his time on improving his moral and cultural outlook.

From this idea comes the conflict between Domin, who wanted to remove man from the degradation of work, and Alquist, who believed in the dignity and usefulness of labor. Both in their way were right. Domin's conception of labor was the monotonous, dull, routine-like work of the common factory or office worker. A job such as this adds nothing to a man's life other than supplying him

with the money to keep alive. So reasoned Domin.

On the other hand, Alquist took pleasure in his work and would have been lost without it. This is a problem faced by the world today as it gradually reduces the hours of the working man.

The fact remains that removing the necessity of work does not solve the problem unless another interest or goal is substituted to fill the vacuum created. Here was the fallacy in Domin's plan. You must educate man in the ways of self-improvement before turning him loose to devote all of his time to it. Experience is also necessary for a correct understanding and interpretation of life. Without work and the contacts it affords, experience would be drastically curtailed; and theory or speculation would take its place.

I thought that in a way big business was satirized in R. U. R. The idea of the robot corresponds very nearly with the idea that big business had, and to a certain extent still has, of its employees. To them, their employees are merely for the purpose of doing a job in the most efficient way and in the quickest time. They are not thought of as individual people, but more or less as the robots were thought of by Domin.

In the same vein of thought, Domin arbitrarily decided that the robots would solve man's problem. Therefore, he proceeded on his own accord to introduce them into the world. The consequences were of no interest to him. Immediate results of the invention, horrible as they were, made no difference. What mattered was that his idea in the long run was accomplished regardless of the immediate consequences. Domin reasoned that although the masses were injured badly in the process, the goal justified his actions.

This I believe is not true progress, as it results in a backward step in the present for a doubtful and unsure advance in the future.

Now, if you substitute money in place of Domin's goal, you will have a picture of the reasoning used in many instances by big business, especially in the field of munitions. To these firms, as to Domin, the goal is all that counts; and this goal to them is profit. Take too the idea of sending the robot to the stamping mill when he wore out or something went wrong with him. Then look at past actions of business in regard to its employees' old age or occupational injuries. The employees were laid off — sent to the stamping mill — when they were no longer of use.

Now the above, I realize, are very broad statements and not applicable in many instances. However, the point is that in both the case of Domin and of big business, one man or a small group of men make decisions which affect the lives of millions, and they are accountable to no one.

One of the most important conflicts in the play is that between the materialistic point of view and the spiritual interpretation of life. The former is self-explanatory. The latter does not necessarily mean the presence of a Divine Being; but it means that there is a purpose or meaning to life for every individual over and above the satisfaction of certain wants. This conflict has already been discussed to a certain extent. Man since the beginning of time has felt that there is some reason for his being on this earth. If then, there is a purpose to life, it most certainly is not the mere satisfaction of material wants. After you have attained your goal, you still have nothing but an empty physical satisfaction. So

the purpose or meaning of life must lie in the field of education. Here the satisfaction comes from the mind, which more nearly than anything else approaches man's earthly conception of the Soul. These two ideas were in direct conflict throughout the play. Domin, in his complete disregard for the individual personality, allied himself with the materialistic point of view, while Helena and Alquist fought for the individual and were allied with the opposite side.

The robots to me also symbolized man at his lowest state. With no ideas and merely working at a given job, they seemed to represent the masses of many countries today. They, like man, were not free from the rebellion of mere work. They began to think, and hence became dissatisfied with their lot. True, the robots were free of all the passions of man, even man at the lowest levels, but the symbol still seems valid.

I believe that Capek in writing *R. U. R.* wanted to show that technological progress can be harmful if carried too far. In the end, technological progress, without accompanying progress in moral and cultural insights, could cancel itself out. In the epilogue of the play, the human race is completely destroyed by the robots. The robots themselves are unable to reproduce so their end is merely a matter of time. However, two robots suddenly become aware of each other and

of human reactions and feelings. Two robots have developed a Soul, or a mind, whichever you want to call it, and are human. In the end you have these two transformed robots whom Alquist symbolically calls Adam and Eve. You feel that although the other robots will die out, man in the form of these two transformed robots will survive. Everything is wiped out except man himself, and man must begin all over again as he did from the Garden of Eden. And yet you do not feel an overwhelming sorrow at the loss of all the knowledge or so called progress in the world. Man is left, and that is all that matters.

Progress then in its technological sense is of no use unless man can grow with it in his outlook and interpretation of life. Along the above lines, the play also suggests the immortality of man without necessarily advocating the presence of a Divine Being. Despite everything, the human race lives on.

I believe Capek was trying to say that technological progress is not as important as we may think and that it most certainly does not justify the destruction of any individual or human personality. He felt that the individual counted for as much as society as a whole, and that true progress realized this. Capek, in his way, was merely trying to make clear the idea of true progress.

PURPLE PATCH

The shell of clouds was tinted with
mother of pearl.

In *Clouds* by Francis E. Donahue.