SHAW'S "SHAKESPEAR"
THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE ON THE DRAMATURGY OF BERNARD SHAW

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) had a lifelong fascination with William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616). First as a student and critic, and then as a playwright, Shaw saw in Shakespeare both a dramatic idol and teacher – and a competing rival to be challenged, and overcome.

This feeling that Shakespeare was an opponent to be defeated is made most explicit in the miniature play Shaw originally intended to be his final dramatic statement, at the end of his professional life: *Shakes Versus Shav* (1949), a novelty marionette play, in which puppet figures of Shaw and Shakespeare literally fight, or spar, comparing their dramatic achievements, with puppets representing and quoting some of their iconic characters. The onstage fight is warm-hearted, the competition good-natured, and the respect mutual, between the two playwrights. Of course – Shaw himself wrote this text, and so was able to manipulate this brotherhood, according to his own needs, and assert his ownership of the competition on his own terms.

Shaw's pleas, in that and many other plays, to Shakespeare to clear out of the way and allow his own body of work to have its due credit, without suffering under Shakespeare's shadow, is the critical problem I am exploring, following his earlier boast of having taught Shakespeare's characters some reason, to go with their deep feeling. This chronological suspension and confusion illustrates a paradoxical attitude towards his dramatic predecessor – simultaneously resenting and revering him – that colored Shaw's

career. His words in his Preface to this puppet play express his paradox: “Enough too for my feeling that the real Shakespeare might have been myself, and for the shallow mistaking of [my interest in him] for mere professional jealousy.”

In my work, I am examining Shaw’s feelings of being a reincarnation of a playwright for whom he had both great regard, and of whom he wrote severe criticism.

And in the larger context, this interaction between the two playwrights could be seen as part of Shaw’s attempted mission to affect, or influence, early 20th-Century modernism, by asserting the possibility of theatre as an agent for political action.

Dedicated to my beloved wife, our pugs, and the Beatles, who have always been beside me while I study, write, and teach

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CHAPTER 1

SHAW'S "SHAKESPEAR": OWNING THE BARD

> Enough too for my feeling that the real Shakespear might have been myself, and for the shallow mistaking of it for mere professional jealousy.
>
> (Preface to *Shakes Versus Shav*, 1949)

"Shakespear might have been myself": a remarkable revelation from a writer in the second-to-last year of his long life, looking back over the many years of rivalry he created between himself and William Shakespeare, about whom he wrote both savagely derisive, and splendidly appreciative criticism – but always with both a comic attitude and a sincere intelligence.

> When I was twenty, I knew everybody in Shakespear, from Hamlet to Abhorson, much more intimately than I knew my living contemporaries.

That is a comment by George Bernard Shaw, taken from his review in London's *The Saturday Review* of the September 22, 1896 opening performance of William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* at the Lyceum Theatre in London, starring Sir Henry Irving and Dame Ellen Terry. Here is the longer passage, culminating in that statement:

> There are moments when one asks despairingly why our stage should ever have been cursed with this "immortal" pilferer of other men's stories and ideas, with his monstrous rhetorical fustian, his unbearable platitudes, his pretentious reduction of the subtlest problems of life to commonplaces against which a Polytechnic debating club would revolt, his incredible

unsuggestiveness, his sententious combination of ready reflection with complete intellectual sterility, and his consequent incapacity for getting out of the depth of even the most ignorant audience, except when he solemnly says something so transcendently platitudinous that his more humble-minded hearers cannot bring themselves to believe that so great a man really meant to talk like their grandmothers. With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespear when I measure my mind against his. The intensity of my impatience with him occasionally reaches such a pitch, that it would positively be a relief to me to dig him up and throw stones at him, knowing as I do how incapable he and his worshippers are of understanding any less obvious form of indignity. To read Cymbeline and to think of Goethe, of Wagner, of Ibsen, is, for me, to imperil the habit of studied moderation of statement which years of public responsibility as a journalist have made almost second nature to me.

And then, immediately after the impassioned music of that outburst, Shaw paradoxically voices a much more charitable view of the playwright he saw as his particular personal challenge – rival, mentor, opponent, secret sharer in the mirror, simultaneously target for satire as well as object of veneration.

> But I am bound to add that I pity the man who cannot enjoy Shakespear. He has outlasted thousands of abler thinkers, and will outlast a thousand more. His gift of telling a story (provided some one else told it to him first); his enormous power over language, as conspicuous in his senseless and silly abuse of it as in his miracles of expression; his humor; his sense of idiosyncratic character; and his prodigious fund of that vital energy which is, it seems, the true differentiating property behind the faculties, good, bad, or indifferent, of the man of genius, enable him to entertain us so effectively that the imaginary scenes and people he has created become more real to us than our actual life – at least, until our knowledge and grip of actual life begins to deepen and glow beyond the common.

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) had a complex lifelong fascination with William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Quoted above is one of his most notorious commentaries (or criticisms) of Shakespeare, but there were many others, as Shakespeare preoccupied Shaw throughout his long life, including Shaw's ten-plus years as a theatrical critic, and his fifty-plus years as a playwright. This sensitivity to Shakespeare's works made Shaw a better writer, either by challenging him to overcome his predecessor, or by opening new

veins of humanity for Shaw to activate in his own time. Shakespeare was indispensable to Shaw – but, he would have to have his Shakespeare his own way.

The Anxiety of Bardolatry

Throughout his career, Shaw mingled jokes and insults at Shakespeare's expense with passages of adoration. He also parodied Shakespeare, rewrote several of Shakespeare's plays (and realized them correctly, he thought), and even made Shakespeare a character in three dramatic pieces, including his penultimate theatrical statement. With his multitude of other interests and concerns – artistic, social, political, historical, and dozens of other categories – Shaw kept confronting Shakespeare (and the culture's reverence of Shakespeare, "bardolatry" as Shaw termed it) continuously. Seeing himself as following in the line of playwrights influenced by Shakespeare, he simultaneously celebrated the tradition while iconoclastically rebelling against that unavoidable influence. Harold Bloom's influential 1973 *The Anxiety of Influence* captures the strange tension Shaw felt about his predecessor:

> Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.

In his essay, Bloom questions what seems like a long-held idea borne of common sense that a writer's literary precursors would exercise an inspirational and empowering influence. Bloom disagrees, arguing that a writer's forerunners are anxious barriers to creativity, which must be overcome by deliberate "misreadings" and "misinterpretations"

through which they kill their poetic fathers (his favorite archetype for the confrontation is Laius and Oedipus), thus clearing the space for their own vision.

The methodology for enacting these misreadings and deviations manifests itself through six revolutionary techniques, which Bloom calls “Six Revisionary Ratios.” I believe these can apply variously and revealingly to Shaw’s specific dramatic answers to Shakespeare, but before examining the possibilities, there is one major challenge to using Shaw as a strong illustration of Bloom’s theory. Bloom asserts that

> The greatest poet in our language is excluded from the argument of this book for several reasons. One is necessarily historical; Shakespeare belongs to the giant age before the flood, before the anxiety of influence became central to poetic consciousness. Another has to do with the contrast between dramatic and lyric form. The main cause, though, is that Shakespeare’s prime precursor was Marlowe, a poet very much smaller than his inheritor … Shakespeare is the largest instance in the language of a phenomenon that stands outside the concern of this book: the absolute absorption of the precursor.

The paradigm, then, can be applied to the two playwrights as exemplars of the dramatic form, rather than the lyric. It’s the prose partner of Bloom’s examination of pure verse. Shaw would have agreed with the influence theory, whether or not he would have thought himself guilty of misinterpretations even while aggressively judging his contemporaries’. For his initial agenda was to correct the misreadings and misinterpretations of his contemporaries, but this will yield to a greater lifelong master plan, as he proceeds to perform his wilful revisionism, meeting Shakespeare at the crossroads as Oedipus did Laius. And perhaps his revisionism starts with his perverse insistence on respelling Shakespeare’s name.

Throughout his lifelong commentary, Shaw always spelled “Shakespeare” “Shakespear” (except for a very early lecture when he’s quoting antiquarians, considered below in

chapter two), without the final “e”. As if he’s iconoclastically correct, and the rest of the world is wrong, he ignored the standardized establishment spelling that we all use today, in favor of his own personal spelling. He used this spelling in the earliest manuscript extant in which he comments upon a Shakespearean performance, albeit pseudonymously – Irving’s 1880 *The Merchant of Venice* at the Lyceum Theatre – and continuously thereafter.

The erratic nature of Elizabethan spelling of proper names is well-known, and tolerated by scholars of the period, who are comfortable attributing the reason for this casual attitude towards the custom of the day, and the relative newness of print culture. And so most scholars accept the “notoriously loose spelling of names”, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it in his new biography, with equanimity. But with the proliferation of documents and printed records in their day, it is curious that there was an anxiety underneath many people’s reluctance to have their name set in stone by a permanent spelling, as if their identity would be solidified (and therefore constricting and limiting) as well.

“Shakespeare” is the most prevalent in the source documents, more so than such alternatives as “Shake-speare,” “Shaxberd,” “Shakspere,” “Shakespheare,” “Shaxper,” “Shakspere,” “Shackspeare,”and several other variants, including Shaw’s choice of “Shakespear”.

Many of the variants are quite inexplicable, occurring in the same document. Sonnets praising Shakespeare often spell it differently in the title than in the text, and most astonishingly, Shakespeare’s own will features two versions – “Shackspere” and “Shakespeare” – in its final paragraph within ten lines of each other. The First Folio of 1623, produced by Heminges and Condell, established the modern spelling, every time

it's printed there, and Gary Taylor in *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1989) adds that the new Cambridge edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works, published between 1863 and 1866, whose editors "represented the first serious intrusion of academics into the history of Shakespeare's reputation" with their full editorial apparatus, cemented the modern spelling.

> The editors did not explain their choices – why, for instance, they spelled their author's name "Shakespeare." By justifying such decisions, the editors would have advertised their own presence, their own personal standards of judgment.

It seems perfectly sensible to me that their choice might have been predicated on the First Folio model, knowing their era's reverence for historical precedent.

Shaw, then, had a long literary heritage if he needed precedent for his confident spelling choice, but it seems much more in keeping with his proprietary attitude towards Shakespeare that he would not claim those precedents. It was his Shakespear.

Shaw's idiosyncratic, or even eccentric, spelling policies, such as his dislike of apostrophes in contractions, could be determinedly enforced in his own texts – as could his revisionist spelling of Shakespeare as Shakespear. And he won't be the last to play with the spelling. Later, James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* would have some fun with Shakespeare's name "*Shakefork*" (274) and "Shapesphere" (295), among many other puns and allusions. But those are jokes. Shaw's spelling is so much more aggressive, repudiating all convention. I own his name, he seems to be saying, like I own my correct and inspired interpretations of his literary intentions … and my feeling that "the real Shakespear might have been myself."

One of his interpretations, another part of his appropriation of Shakespearean technique, lies in his consideration of titles. Shaw felt intuitively that Shakespeare was far more

interested in his tragic or historical plays than his comedies. But, he had responsibilities to his Company at the Globe, and so would write silly romantic crowd-pleasing comedies to make money. The vague, ambiguous titles he gave to these box-office bonanzas gave away his own dislike of such frivolous work. “When Shakespear was forced to write popular plays to save his theatre from ruin, he did it mutinously, calling the plays ‘As You Like It, and Much Ado About Nothing’” (Preface to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, 1910). He would later expand the list of Shakespeare’s throwaway titles, which in themselves tell nothing about the plot, to include *What You Will*, *All’s Well That Ends Well*, and *All Is True*. And yet, despite the frivolity, jokes, and vague titles, each of these plays is concerned with serious themes which always interested Shakespeare. Shaw felt Shakespeare was happier when he could confront issues of love, family, and politics, among others, in his plays of heavy tragedy and philosophy. Unlike Shaw, modern critics find such themes explored in these presumably more commercial plays as much as in the tragedies, with the obvious differences in tonality. Shaw was wrong to dismiss the comedies so glibly as throwaway “fluff,” but he understood the practicalities of keeping a live public theatre financially operative.

Vague Titles and Word Music

The economics of the day, as of any era, required popular successes. The titles, however, reveal the playwright’s ambivalence towards commercialism. This style was not limited to Shakespeare; playwrights following him provided such similarly vague titles as *When You See Me, You Know Me* (Rowley, 1605), *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (Heywood, 1605), *If It Be Not Good, the Devil Is In It* (Dekker, 1612), *The Devil is An*

Ass (Jonson, 1616), *A New Way to Please You* (Middleton, Rowley, and Massinger, 1618), *Anything For a Quiet Life* (Middleton, 1622), and *Believe What You Will; or As You List* (Massinger, 1631). Popular successes, for their respective theatres, with empty titles, mostly commonplace proverbs..

Shaw needed such a popular success in the late 1890s, and followed Shakespeare's and his successors of titular "mutiny" with *You Never Can Tell* (1896), a comedy he intended as an answer to Shakespeare's golden comedies, or a later play *Too True to Be Good* (1931) to keep extending the tradition. Shaw was also happy to impose himself into a direct lineage as well:

> Is literary genius a disease? Shakespear, Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, myself: are we all mental cases? Are we incorrigible liars? Are players impostors and hypocrites? Were the Bible Christians right when they disowned Bunyan because the incidents he described had never occurred nor the characters of whom he told such circumstantial tales never existed?
> (Preface to *Farfetched Fables*, 1950)

As well as being a member of that lineage, if we accept him as such, Shaw may also follow in the tradition of Shakespeare, and other dramatic poets between their eras, in one of the Shakespearean qualities that bothered Shaw the most, and which he criticized continuously: excessive "word-music" at the expense of ideas. Or rather, at the expense of a paucity of ideas in Shakespeare's case, and excessive in the exploration of tireless volumes of ideas in Shaw's.

Shaw felt that Shakespeare wrote commonplaces, platitudes, and clichés, but disguised them in deceptively beautiful language. He felt that the magic of Shakespeare's language owed more to the sheer sound of the words, the rhythm of the metre, the mixtures of his vowels, than to its philosophy. It's an extreme criticism, and central to an understanding

of Shaw's self-imposed competition with Shakespeare. He briefly defines "word-music" theoretically, but mostly applies it to specific speeches in specific plays.

> There is a great deal of feeling, highly poetic and highly dramatic, which cannot be expressed by mere words – because words are the counters of thinking, not of feeling – but which can be supremely expressed by 'word-music.' The poet tries to make his words serve his purpose by arranging them musically. And Shakespear's success lies in his enormous command of word-music.

In his 1898 review of a London production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shaw elaborates, beginning with a parallel to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* opera:

> Why is it that Mozart's opera, entitled *Don Giovanni*, a loathsome story of a coarse, witless, worthless libertine, who kills an old man in a duel and is finally dragged down through a trapdoor to Hell by his twaddling ghost, is still, after more than a century, as immortal as *Much Ado*? Simply because Mozart clothed it with wonderful music, which turned the worthless words of Da Ponte (the lyricist) into a magical human drama of moods and transitions of feeling. That is what happened in a smaller way with Much Ado. Shakespear shows himself in it a commonplace librettist working on a stolen plot, but a great musician. No matter how poor, coarse, cheap, and obvious the thought may be, the mood is charming, and the music of the words expresses the mood. Paraphrase the encounters of Benedick and Beatrice in the style of a bluebook, carefully preserving every idea they present, and it will become apparent to the most infatuated Shakespearean that they contain at best nothing out of the common in thought or wit, and at worst a good deal of vulgar naughtiness. Paraphrase Goethe, Wagner, or Ibsen in the same way, and you will find original observation, subtle thought, wide comprehension, far-reaching intuition, and serious psychological study in them. Give Shakespear a fairer chance in the comparison by paraphrasing even his best and maturest work, and you will still get nothing more than the platitudes of proverbial philosophy, with a very occasional curiosity in the shape of a rudiment of some modern idea, not followed up. Not until the Shakespearean music is added by replacing the paraphrase with the original lines does the enchantment begin.

It is possible to dismiss Shaw in passages such as this as writing more about himself than about Shakespeare, making a name for himself by attacking the revered writer, to establish himself as a supreme iconoclast, and by so dismissing Shaw's position by being annoyed by his egotism, missing a sensitive criticism Shaw's making. Here is another

specific example of his reductionism of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry to empty word-music. In 1898, he reviewed Herbert Beerbohm-Tree's production of Julius Caesar. Consider Shaw's opinion of Cassius's aria in Act 1, Scene 2, speaking to Brutus.

For once, upon a raw and gusty day,
The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
Caesar said to me "Darest thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood,
And swim to yonder point?" Upon the word,
Accoutred as I was, I plunged in,
And bade him follow. So indeed he did.
The torrent roared, and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews, throwing it aside
And stemming it with hearts of controversy.
But ere we could arrive the point proposed,
Caesar cried "Help me, Cassius, or I sink!"
I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Caesar. And this man
Is now become a God, and Cassius is
A wretched creature, and must bend his body
If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.
(1.2.102-120)

A paraphrase of this speech reducing it to its bare narrative – a swimming contest that leads to later resentment – would be easy. But to the actor playing Cassius, there's so much more going on inside him dramatically than that simple paraphrase, and the language reveals much more of Cassius's inner state than mere word eloquence. Here is Shaw commenting on that speech:

Cassius in the first act has a twaddling forty-line speech, base in its matter and mean in its measure, followed immediately by the magnificent torrent of rhetoric, the first burst of true Shakespearean music in the play, beginning –

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about

To find ourselves dishonorable graves.

No actor, and at best no audience, would consider the earlier portion of the speech "twaddling" or "base and mean" in its importance. Shaw's preference for those lines over the previous ones may presumably lie in a preference for epic imagery rather than mere narrative, and there are dozens of such examples in Shaw's criticism. We could dismiss his assaults on Shakespeare as a product of his own self-aggrandizing agenda, like his re-spelling of Shakespeare's name, his program to own Shakespeare. His preface to his play *Caesar and Cleopatra*, for instance, is entitled "Better than Shakespear?" And many scholars and critics have resented that arrogance.

Can the technique be fairly applied to Shaw, as well? Can I fairly paraphrase a burst of Shavian music, and reductively arrive at something from which the absence of the poetic effect, however clear and well-balanced, leaves (if so boiled down) a succinct and simple basic statement?

FATHER KEEGAN Every dream is a prophecy: every jest is an earnest in the womb of Time.
BROADBENT [*reflectively*] Once, when I was a small kid, I dreamt I was in heaven. [*They both stare at him*]. It was a sort of pale blue satin place, with all the pious old ladies in our congregation sitting as if they were at a service; and there was some awful person in the study at the other side of the hall. I didnt enjoy it, you know. What is it like in your dreams?
FATHER KEEGAN In my dreams it is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped: three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman. (*John Bull's Other Island*, 1904)

If I were the newspaper's theatre critic, I may well write:

In the play's climactic moments, Broadbent and Doyle desperately turn to the mystic Father Keegan for spiritual advice. After attempting to deflect them with

snappy yet mysterious proverbs (such as Molière's hypocrite Tartuffe might have employed), Doyle is put to the test by Broadbent's pedestrian, conventional schoolboy view of heaven. Needing to outwit the laymen, he resorts to a brief burst of Shavian music at its most mystic, the literal meaning of which is, if you paraphrase the rhetoric: "In heaven, everyone's equal" followed by the disingenuous "I must be mad." And yet, despite its ideological nonsense, the speech expresses a stillness and depth more steep and deep than its syntax and palliative rhythm.

It's reasonable criticism, I think; although the reader may perceive that the critic may have, for whatever reason, some personal axe to grind against the playwright. Or against the way the playwright is being performed. But if the reader will have it, there is surely more engaging and involving in the passage than the bare-bones paraphrase. To Shaw, Shakespeare at his best rose above his era to achieve that blend, in the plays Shaw liked, and acted the way Shaw thought they should be (which I'll consider below). Shakespeare at his worst dwelled with his contemporaries, whose "worst" plays Shaw dismissed with even more vehemence than Shakespeare's.

Marlowe is "childish in thought, vulgar and wooden in humour, and stupid in his attempts at invention . Nature can produce no murderer cruel enough for Webster, nor no hero bully enough for Chapman. Greene is amusing, Marston silly, Tourneur able to string together lines. Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher would be as invisible now as they are insufferable, if not for Shakespear's reflected light."

As a man of his times, Shaw claimed to dislike Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. Or, at least, his experience as a nightly theatre critic at a time when the London stage was excessively melodramatic and governed by the actor-managers Shaw disliked exasperated him with those playwrights (rarely performed though they were.).

As a Victorian, and an early Modernist, then, Shaw preferred to find a balance of word-music and serious philosophy. Of course, he exalted Goethe, Ibsen, and Wagner, whom he thought found the balance, and a great clue to his preferences comes in his 1910 play *Misalliance*. In it, we hear the protagonist Tarleton advising everyone to read, variously,

Darwin, Weismann, Solomon, Browning, Chesterton, Mill, Jefferson, Kipling, Shelley, Mrs Browning, Dickens – his letters, not his novels – Tennyson, Pepys's diary, and of course Ibsen. Also, "Shakespear" is advised twice: once advising a burglar that Shakespeare has a word for every occasion , and then saying he intends to read *King Lear* when he feels his children are disobedient. And while it must be said that that reading list should be ascribed to the character Tarleton, and not automatically to the playwright, one of the most common criticisms of Shaw is that all of his characters, whomever they are, are merely mouthpieces for Shaw himself. He parodies that criticism in his publicity material for his 1908 play *Getting Married*:

> "There will be nothing but talk, talk, talk, talk – Shaw talk. The characters will seem to the wretched critics to be simply a row of Shaws, all arguing with one another on totally uninteresting subjects. Shaw in a bishop's apron will argue with Shaw in a general's uniform. Shaw in an alderman's gown will argue with Shaw dressed as a beadle. Shaw dressed as a bridegroom will be wedded to Shaw in petticoats. The whole thing will be hideous, indescribable – an eternity of brain-racking dullness."

There's Shaw satirizing his critics, and his own reputation, but it certainly is possible to accuse much of Shaw as being the kind of "word-music" he attributes to Shakespeare. Here is a representative example, from the "Don Juan in Hell" dream sequence in the middle of his 1903 play *Man and Superman*, in which Don Juan tells the Devil about the characteristics of the Devil's minions, followers, and flatterers:

> Your friends are all the dullest dogs I know. They are not beautiful; they are only decorated. They are not clean; they are only shaved and starched. They are not dignified; they are only fashionably dressed. They are not educated; they are only college passmen. They are not religious; they are only pew-renters. They are not moral; they are only conventional. They are not virtuous; they are only cowardly. They are not even vicious; they are only frail. They are not artistic; they are only lascivious; They are not prosperous; they are only rich. They are not loyal; they are only servile; not dutiful, only sheepish; not public spirited, only patriotic; not

courageous, only quarrelsome; not determined, only obstinate; not masterful, only domineering; not self-controlled, only obtuse; not self-respecting, only vain; not kind, only sentimental; not social, only gregarious; not considerate, only polite; not intelligent, only opinionated; not progressive, only factious; not imaginative, only superstitious; not just, only vindictive; not generous, only propitiatory; not disciplined, only cowed; and not truthful at all: liars every one of them, to the very backbone of their souls.

And after that cascade, the next character replies "Your flow of words is simply amazing, Juan." And so it is. Shaw praises himself for that virtuoso display – and is that different from Shakespeare boasting about his poetry that "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." in Sonnet 18, a theme repeated in many sonnets, reaching its zenith in Sonnet 55 : "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme." You'll live forever, says Shakespeare to the recipient of his sonnets, and everyone should marvel at my effortless vocabulary, says Shaw's character, thanks to our word-music. The particular rhetorical rhythm of the *Man and Superman* speech has its roots in Shakespeare, with its obsessive and seesaw-balanced antitheses. For example, from *As You Like It*:

CORIN And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?
TOUCHSTONE Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?
CORIN No more but that I know the more one sickens, the worse at ease he is, and he that wants money, means, and content is without three good friends; that the property of rain is to wet, and fire to burn; that good pasture makes fat sheep; and that a great cause of the night is lack of the sun; that he that hath learned no wit by nature nor art may complain of good breeding or comes of a very dull kindred.
TOUCHSTONE Such a one is a natural philosopher.
(3.2.11-28)

But is there such a thing as too much word-music, at the expense of dramatic narrative, for an audience's taste? Here is another of Shaw's attacks, with criticisms that later critics have often leveled against Shaw himself.

> Shakespear *is* long, dull, tedious, wearisome, nonsensical, and everybody's enemy except his own. Hence Lyceum Shakespear, Daly Shakespear, Tree Shakespear, and now Archer Shakespear. You dont want to hear Romeo warbling verbal jazzes like "O single soled jest, solely singular for the singleness" because you dont care for Lewis Carrollism and word music. I dont want to hear the Seven Ages of Man because it is twaddle; and all the actors except Jaques will agree with me because it does not advance the action of the piece. The scientific members of the committee will cut out Beatrice's ridiculous statements that a star danced at her birth, because it is unsound obstetrically and astronomically. As to Romeo & Juliet, whenever I read it my fingers itch to cut out all the puns and the attorney's clerk's "conceits" and leave nothing but the bare and beautiful poetry. Not a man on the cutting committee but will have his knife in somewhere.
> (Letter to William Archer, April 19, 1919)

At least in one character, Shakespeare himself would agree, with this sudden renouncement of fancy speech by one of the fanciest speakers Shakespeare ever created:

Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

> O, never will I trust to speeches penned,
> Nor to the motion of a schoolboy's tongue,
> Nor never come in visor to my friend,
> Nor woo in rhyme, like a blind harper's song.
> Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
> Figures pedantical – these summer flies
> Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.
> I do forswear them …
> (5.2.402-410)

Criticising Shaw

The above speech from *Love's Labour's Lost* exists as if Shakespeare had experienced a vision of Shaw's criticism of his excess of emotionalism and verbal style over ideas, considered it, and finally conceded that Shaw was right. But before Shaw celebrates that

triumph, let us consider some criticism of Shaw himself in recent years, from the theatrical critics who have succeeded Shaw in the profession, and are equally comfortable expressing themselves. A representative sample:

> … but what actually really matters is whether the talk is good enough, whether the ideas expressed are genuinely stimulating as opposed to being superficially provocative and whether the reversal of the Don Juan story churns up anything more interesting than the thought that women chase men, and not vice versa.
>
> On all these counts, the answer must be 'no'. At best, *Man and Superman* reveals Shaw's magpie zest to pick up any idea which glittered around him … what lends the peculiar Shavian tattiness to this play is the way in which stale ideas have been grafted on to inadequately experienced emotions.
>
> (John Elsom, *The Listener*, January 22, 1981)

> The ideas, although they exist, hardly bear very much analysis and are not sufficient to explain a revival on this scale. Nor can the play's characterisation explain it either. Some might feel characterisation to be an absolutely crucial aspect of drama, but Shaw hardly understood it, even in those plays not avowedly about 'ideas'.
>
> (Christopher Edwards on *The Apple Cart*, March 1, 1986)

> By this stage in his career, Shaw had abandoned any attempt at psychological realism and listening to the charmless talking heads is like being trapped at an interminable dinner party in the company of a gang of babbling show-offs. An unconscionable number of words are expended in demonstrating the quite simple truths that some people have a stronger will than others and that the absence of both human feeling and a sense of humour are great advantages when it comes to getting your own way.
>
> (Charles Spencer on *The Millionairess*, October 12, 1988)

> Was there ever a more infuriating windbag than Bernard Shaw at his most exhaustingly loquacious? The thought occurred about half an hour into *Getting Married*, and recurred about every five minutes for the next two hours … He's a terrific juggler of ideas, but real emotion, real passion, is in pitifully short supply … you leave the theatre wondering what on earth persuaded director Patrick Garland to revive this deservedly neglected play.
>
> (Charles Spencer, *The Daily Telegraph*, March 7, 1993)

> Over the years, having seen several of our finest actresses willingly sacrifice their precious talent on the stake of George Bernard Shaw's bonfire of vanities, my irritation with this blatantly self-congratulatory play merely increases. Only such a self-publicising old windbag as he could turn this unique historical phenomenon into a tiresome, noisy upstart.
>
> (Jack Tinker on *Saint Joan*, *The Daily Mail*, July 22, 1994)

The ladies and gentlemen sometimes let it all out, offering animal wails and venting their pseudo-ritualised anger at the opposite sex, posed in occasional tableaux. By the end they are all wishing themselves dead, standing on the patio willing the suddenly appearing German bombers to blow them to kingdom come. After three hours of Bernard banging on, I wasn't averse to this idea myself.
(Kate Bassett on *Heartbreak House*, *The Times*, April 24, 1995)

It's a society, mind you, that needs the ghost of Shaw like they need a sexually transmitted disease. At first, the conceit of his presence is just a minor annoyance, and a whole roster of talent work their way around him. It starts out on a high note, with Carlson's delightful simpleton making some astute observations about the tedium of perfection. But it quickly degenerates into an orgy of Shavian pomposity, with richly developed characters suddenly transformed into ventriloquist's dummies for a playwright's incessant preaching.
(John Coulbourn on *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, The Toronto Sun*, July 11, 1996)

I don't especially want to be kind to a play that kept me trapped with the senescent George Bernard Shaw for four hours and ended with an enervating argument about the pointlessness of art between six actors swathed in what seemed to be bathroom refuse-bags and two who looked like Egyptians dipped in flour … But that's the least of it. *Back to Methusaleh* leaves you contemplating a universe filled with and organised by Shavian brainwaves, an eternity where any talk will consist of Shavian paradoxes. What are we to call this? Utopia? Heaven? Or a narcissistic variety of Hell?
(Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, August 30, 2000)

There are several theatre critics reviewing a variety of plays, with the overall theme of Shaw's excessive discussion of ideas being too devoid of feeling, and therefore, too boring. It's nearly the exact opposite of Shaw's pet criticism of Shakespeare – too much feeling, not enough debating of ideas (except in selected plays, mainly obscure ones). But those quoted above are theatre critics, which is fair ground as Shaw was one as well. Here, a legendary playwright weighs in, an opinion also fair ground for consideration of Shaw.

In 1977, Michael Billington, theatre critic for *The Guardian* in London, traveled to Canada to see the Shaw Festival for the first time. His review of its repertoire of plays concludes

> And as one wanders down the wide tree-lined main street of Niagara-on-the-Lake one can't help wondering why it is that one has to travel three thousand miles across the Atlantic to find a season devoted to the greatest British dramatist since Shakespeare.

This review inspired a furious letter to the Editor by playwright John Osborne, who began his career as an actor in the early 1950s, when Shaw was at his most popular, before becoming the playwright now credited with saving the moribund and reactionary British theatre with his play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), followed by a series of successes throughout the 1960s, including *The Entertainer*, *Luther*, *Inadmissible Evidence*, *A Patriot for Me*, and the film *Tom Jones*. Osborne replied

> Sir, - Michael Billington cannot have read the plays of George Bernard Shaw since his Oxford days. To call him 'the greatest British dramatist since Shakespeare' is close to having a critical brainstorm, as well as perpetuating an exam-crazy classroom myth. Having recently seen *St Joan* in London and *Caesar and Cleopatra* in Sydney, it is clearer to me than ever that Shaw is the most fraudulent, inept writer of Victorian melodramas ever to gull a timid critic or fool a dull public.
>
> He writes like a Pakistani who has learned English when he was twelve years old in order to become a chartered accountant.
>
> [*Osborne then lists the nine Shaw plays in which he had acted in the early days of his career, and his negative experiences with them, and concludes:*] Try *learning* them, Mr Billington; they are posturing wind and rubbish. In fact, just the sort of play you would expect a critic to write. The difference is simple: he did it.

Osborne's personal and explosive animus is as powerful as that with which Shaw wrote about Shakespeare. Osborne's plays themselves feature long, passionate monologues or arias or rants from their protagonists, in the Shakespearean/Shavian tradition, and are as concerned with social and political issues as Shaw's, a half century earlier. The lineage of

influence from Shaw through Osborne to today's "state-of-the-nation" playwrights (such as David Hare, David Edgar, and Tony Kushner) is a dramatic landmark, whatever anxiety it has produced for the playwrights themselves. But Osborne, unlike his successors who have ignored or at least taken a tolerant attitude towards Shaw, sets up a hypothetical face-to-face confrontation with his predecessor.

The Frogs, and Shakespeare versus Shaw

This confrontation between two playwrights who have opposing views about the use of the drama has a grand classical precedent, in Aristophanes, the ancient model for topical comedy. And one particular Aristophanes play, *The Frogs*, featuring a direct face-to-face debate between two playwrights, has recently been updated to replace the ancient oppositional playwrights (Aeschylus and Euripides) with Shakespeare and Shaw. The two versions present an arena in which two philosophies of drama's purpose are contested, with the Shakespearean side winning in both. Without explicitly acknowledging the heritage, Shaw replicates this arena in three short plays (*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, *Cymbeline Refinished*, and *Shakes Versus Shav*), in which he uses his obvious advantage of being the writer (and puppet-master) of the debate to essentially win, owning his creation of Shakespeare through that strategy. The idea of an arena as imagined in the classical model, and its modern recreation, may stand as a background for Shaw's playlets wherein the playwright competition is enacted.

In 405 BC, Aristophanes wrote *The Frogs*, in which Dionysus undertakes a journey into the underworld, into Hell – much as Jack Tanner in his dreams does in *Man and*

Superman – with an important mission. Athens is desperate, fearing the immanent destruction of their society as their war with arch enemy Sparta continues to go against them. What Dionysus seeks is a poet, a gifted writer, from the golden days, who could return to Earth and work as a master diplomat, to negotiate an end to the dreadful war. In consultation with Pluto, Dionysus organizes a face-to-face competition between two of Greece's leading playwrights, in which they'll argue the purpose of drama. Aeschylus, dead some fifty years, represents the supremacy of passion, of heroics, and magnificence of language in the drama. The heroes he creates promote virtue, and he believes he can inspire the Athenian military to win the war and save the city. His opponent is Euripides, who had died only that same year. Euripides feels he created real people, in real-life situations, and his dramas are clear, believable, and accessible to everyone. A determined pacifist, he doubts that the military can win the war, and favors diplomacy and a peace treaty.

The two opponents are allowed to criticize each other. To Aeschylus, Euripides's verse is monotonous and pedestrian, and he demeans the concept of "Tragedy" by lowering it to common people standards. To Euripides, Aeschylus's verse sounds tremendous, but beyond the grand word music it means very little. The parallels between Shakespeare (Aeschylus) and Shaw (Euripides) are striking. Here, in the translation by Arrowsmith, Lattimore, and Parker, the two poets argue in terms that could be imagined if Shakespeare and Shaw were to have their own competition in the underworld, their own *agon*:

AESCHYLUS But the poet should cover up scandal, and not
let anyone see it.
He shouldn't exhibit it out on the stage. For the little boys
have their teachers

to show them example, but when they grow up we poets
must act as their preachers,
and what we preach should be useful and good.
EURIPIDES But you, with your
massive construction,
huge words and mountainous phrases, is that what you
call useful instruction?
You ought to make people talk like people.
AESCHYLUS Your folksy style's for the birds.
For magnificent thoughts and magnificent fancies, we
must have magnificent words.

Shortly later, Aeschylus will complain of Euripides that "You've taught the young man to be disputatious. / Each argues as long as he wishes." That criticism could certainly be leveled against Shaw.

Finally, Dionysus chooses Aeschylus, and returns to Earth with him to save the city. The beauty of feeling is victorious over the logic of reason. If the symbolic representations of the literary forefathers of Shakespeare and Shaw aren't merely coincidental, the translators make it explicit when Euripides complains of Aeschylus that "His verse is fiercely made, all full of sound and fury."

Obviously, to label Shakespeare as "passion" and Shaw as "reason" establishes a binary that does not do fair justice to either of them, but this polarization might serve as a useful shortcut to Shaw's criticisms of Shakespeare and the extreme "bardolatry" of Shaw's age.

In 1974, at the Yale Drama School, composer Stephen Sondheim and playwright Burt Shevelove produced an updated musical version of *The Frogs*, replacing the classical playwrights with Shakespeare and Shaw. Their *agon* is primarily conducted through battling quotations, presenting a sort of cartoon version of Shaw's Shakespearean criticism.

SHAKESPEARE O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,

Which now shows all the glory of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away.
(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1.3.84-87)
SHAW You see! Strip that speech of its beauty of sound, and you have nothing left but a platitude that even an American professor of logic would blush to offer his students.

The final stage of their competition features their signature quotations on the subject of Life and Death, with Shaw performing the central trial speech from *Saint Joan*, and Shakespeare countering with excerpts from the Duke / Claudio prison scene in *Measure for Measure*, Hamlet's "fall of a sparrow" speech, and triumphantly, the funeral dirge from *Cymbeline*, in a musical setting by Sondheim (including an introductory verse quoting Caesar's "Cowards die many times before their deaths" speech), actual music underscoring the Shakespearean word music.

Dionysus chooses Shakespeare as the victor, as he had Aeschylus in the original, leaving Shaw with a parting declaration: "You can always count on me for two things. Not to faint, and not to cry. But I can hardly refrain from laughing at the spectacle of your honoring voluptuous reverie over intellectual interest, and romantic rhapsody over human concern."

This updated version is meant for entertainment purposes, and is thus glib and shallow, and it's easy to see why the 2004 revival of Sondheim's *The Frogs* (further updated with many contemporary allusions by leading actor Nathan Lane) would only succeed as a curiosity or rarity – targeted more for fans and students of Sondheim than for those of Shaw or even Shakespeare. But this playwright *agon* continues the tradition begun by Aristophanes, and featured in later theatrical eras with works such as Jonson's *The New Inn* (1629, which features a formal debate about the meaning of love presided over by a judge, Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779, in which an ambitious playwright watches a rehearsal

of his new play in the company of two surly critics), or Pinero's *Trelawney of the 'Wells'* (1898, enacting a backstage divide between the virtues of melodrama versus those of turn-of-the-century naturalism) among others. And specifically, the updated *Frogs* echoes Shaw's own valedictory statement on his self-imposed rivalry.

Apophrades : Shakespeare versus Shaw

In January 1949, ostensibly at the request of the master puppeteer Waldo Lanchester, Shaw wrote his little puppet play *Shakes Versus Shav*. Shaw explains the genesis of his playlet in his short preface:

> This in all actuarial probability is my last play and the climax of my eminence, such as it is. I thought my career as a playwright was finished when Waldo Lanchester of the Malvern Marionette Theatre, our chief living puppet master, sent me figures of two puppets, Shakespear and myself, with a request that I should supply one of my famous dramas for them, not to last longer than ten minutes or thereabouts. I accomplished this feat, and was gratified by Mr Lanchester's immediate approval.

In his preface, Shaw counters the anti-Shakespeareans, as prevalent in his day as in ours, who argue that somebody else wrote Shakespeare's plays. "No year passes without the arrival of a batch of books contending that Shakespear was somebody else." He defends the indisputable verity of Shakespeare's existence, even concluding with a reference to variant spellings:

> So much for Bacon-Shakespear and all the other fables founded on that entirely fictitious figure Shaxper or Shagsper the illiterate bumpkin.
> Enough too for my feeling that the real Shakespear might have been myself, and for the shallow mistaking of it for mere professional jealousy.

But as well as creating an *agon* where you yourself are one of the antagonists, and your opponent cannot write in response – a difference with Aristophanes, who as a writer can supply the voices to his two rivals, presumably objectively, but not with himself as one of

the combatants – how better to proclaim ownership of someone than by turning them into a puppet, a marionette, with you yourself manipulating the strings? This is a part of what Shaw does in *Shakes Versus Shav*; but he keeps it fair, writing with sincere admiration of his rival, and a mixture of self-caricature and even humility that the critics quoted above would find it difficult to believe he was capable of.

The play begins with the puppet Shakes seeking his enemy Shav, and even accusing Shav of daring to "reincarnate" him:

SHAKES. Hither I raging come
An infamous impostor to chastize,
Who in an ecstasy of self-conceit
Shortens my name to Shav, and dares pretend
Here to reincarnate my very self,
And in your stately playhouse to set up
A festival, and plant a mulberry
In most presumptuous mockery of mine.

Shav appears, and after a bit of cross-challenging, like any two combatants in the history plays (such as Hal and Hotspur or Clifford and York), they fight. The stage direction reads "*They spar. Shakes knocks Shav down with a straight left and begins counting him out, stooping over him and beating the seconds with his finger*." At the count of nine, Shav "*springs up and knocks Shakes down with a right to the chin*." This immediate descent into violence, a physical manifestation of their competition unused by Aeschylus and Euripides, is surprising. Shaw always (inexplicably) loved boxing, and no doubt part of his fun in this sequence was to watch the puppets spar, calling upon the skill of the puppeteers; but that these two playwrights legendary for their skill with language should so quickly revert to the battlefield of the playground seems bizarre.

However, following this skirmish, and a little interlude in which a puppet Rob Roy cuts off the head of a puppet Macbeth (who, after quoting his arch enemy Macduff, loses the

duel, and then picks up his own head, after the fashion of Gawain's Green Knight, and sets off for "Stratford" as "the hotels are cheaper there"), the duel of quotations and accomplishments begins. Its climax:

SHAKES. Where is thy Hamlet? Couldst thou write King Lear?
SHAV. Aye, with his daughters all complete. Couldst thou
Have written Heartbreak House? Behold my Lear.
A transparency is suddenly lit up, shewing Captain Shotover seated, as in Millais' picture called North-West Passage, with a young woman of virginal beauty.
SHOTOVER. [*raising his hand and intoning*] I builded a house
for my daughters and opened the door thereof
That men might come for their choosing, and their betters
spring from their love;
But one of them married a numskull: the other a liar wed;
And now she must lie beside him even as she made her bed.
THE VIRGIN. "Yes: this silly house, this strangely happy house,
this agonizing house, this house without foundations.
I shall call it Heartbreak House."
SHOTOVER. Enough. Enough. Let the heart break in silence.
The picture vanishes.

The positioning of Captain Shotover as Shav's recreation of Lear is very apt and very moving, though that choice of doggerel from the play does not seem like much of a threat to Shakes, in terms of poetic word-music. Shakes then attempts to reclaim the primacy of the dramatic moment.

SHAKES. You stole that word from me: did I not write
"The heartache and the thousand natural woes
That flesh is heir to"?
SHAV. You were not the first
To sing of broken hearts. I was the first
That taught your faithless Timons how to mend them.

There's the conceit that Shaw's critics would expect from him. Shakes, however, has a riposte, in which he invokes his traditional "farewell to the stage" speech, being joined by Shav, as the lifelong rivalry concludes in equality, even brotherhood:

SHAKES. Taught what you could not know. Sing if you can
My cloud capped towers, my gorgeous palaces,

My solemn temples. The great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve –
SHAV. – and like this foolish little show of ours
Leave not a wrack behind. So you have said.
I say the world will long outlast our day.
Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
We puppets shall replay our scene. Meanwhile,
Immortal William dead and turned to clay
May stop a hole to keep the wind away.
Oh that that earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!
SHAKES. These words are mine, not thine.
SHAV. Peace, jealous Bard.
We both are mortal. For a moment suffer
My glimmering light to shine.
A light appears between them.
SHAKES. Out, out, brief candle! [*He puffs it out*].
Darkness. The play ends.

Shaw intended this odd little piece to be his final dramatic statement (although in the end, he did leave one more fragment, *Why She Would Not,* a play left unfinished at his death late the following year). And so, is his intended ultimate statement a final peace offering to Shakespeare, after years of conflict? Is this puppet play really *Shakes Reconciles With Shav*? Or is it something a little darker and stranger, a microscopic example of Bloom's Revisionary Ratio *Apophrades* (he gave his ratios classical names), or the return of the dead.

> *Apophrades*, or the return of the dead; I take the word from the Athenian dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived. The latter poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had prewritten the precursor's characteristic work.

It is indeed an uncanny moment when one puppet quotes another as if he had prewritten it himself, and must be reminded “These words are mine, not thine.” Perhaps “Peace, jealous Bard. We both are mortal.” can be read as this return of the dead for purposes of reconciliation.

Acting Styles and Their Playwrights

An area of reconciliation, of agreement, which Shaw always shared with Shakespeare was his taste in acting style. Paradoxically, although Shaw felt his plays to be so much more current, and true to the times, and possessing more intellectual content than most of Shakespeare’s, when it came to the selection of actors to perform them, Shaw required the same qualities a good Shakespearean production would demand. In his 1931 introduction to Lillah McCarthy’s (one of his favorite actresses) autobiography, Shaw describes the paradox:

> In a generation which knew nothing of any sort of acting but drawing-room acting, and which considered a speech of more than twenty words impossibly long, I went back to the classical style and wrote long rhetorical speeches like operatic solos, regarding my plays as musical performances precisely as Shakespear did. As a producer I went back to the forgotten heroic stage business and the exciting or impressive declamation I had learnt from oldtimers like Ristori, Salvini, and Barry Sullivan. Yet so novel was my post-Marx post-Ibsen outlook on life that nobody suspected that my methods were as old as the stage itself. They would have seemed the merest routine to Kemble or Mrs. Siddons; but to the Victorian leading ladies they seemed to be unleadingladylike barnstorming.

Irish actor-manager Barry Sullivan was Shaw’s especial favorite, from Shaw’s boyhood. Sullivan exemplified the Victorian actor-manager, with a style that would no doubt seem risibly cartoonish and unrealistically corny today. Shaw’s biographer Michael Holroyd describes Shaw’s first experience of Sullivan, in Dublin in 1870.

> Of all the stars and travelling attractions, Sullivan seemed to him incomparably the grandest. A man of gigantic personality, then in his prime, he as the last of a dynasty of rhetorical and hyperbolical actors that had begun with Burbage and, in Shaw's opinion, he was 'among the greatest of them'.

Sullivan is not well-known in theatrical circles today, unlike many of his peers, and if he is known, it's probably for his leadership of the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespearean festival of 1879, where in Act Four of his production of *As You Like It*, he brought a real deer onstage for the shearing scene, a deer killed and stuffed in Charlecote Park, where Shakespeare was rumored to have poached. The stuffed deer became a tradition in Stratford until 1919. That sort of gesture delighted Shaw, who surprisingly favored these old-fashioned Victorian barnstorming actors for his subtle, Ibsen-influenced, early Modern plays. He wanted old-fashioned actors for his aggressively forward-looking plays. The ideas might be controversial and progressive, but he wanted his actors traditional, larger than life, even hammy. In his preface to his 1913 play *Great Catherine*, Shaw places his hero Sullivan in a grand tradition that most current historians would not:

> It is also to be considered that great plays live longer than great actors, though little plays do not live nearly so long as the worst of their exponents. The consequence is that the great actor, instead of putting pressure on contemporary authors to supply him with heroic parts, falls back on the Shakespearean repertory, and takes what he needs from a dead hand. In the nineteenth century, the careers of Kean, Macready, Barry Sullivan, and Irving, ought to have produced a group of heroic plays comparable in intensity to those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; but nothing of the kind happened: these actors played the works of dead authors, or, very occasionally, of live poets who were hardly regular professional playwrights … Tom Robertson, Ibsen, Pinero, and Barrie might as well have belonged to a different solar system as far as Irving was concerned; and the same was true of their respective predecessors.

Shaw, then, courted the leading classical actors of the 1890s, as the preceding century had produced no heroic drama, and very little memorable drama of any genre. When the breakthrough of the 1890s occurred, with Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg from the

continent and Wilde and Shaw himself in Britain, the plays were revolutionary in their conversational style concerning domestic and social themes. The drama of naturalism was changing the theatre – yet still Shaw preferred the actors of the old school trained in touring Shakespeare to serve as his mouthpieces. Unlike the other leading playwrights of the 1890s and the Edwardian era, Shaw continued to shape his plays under a classical style, which he saw as based on a musical model, but could also fairly be considered Shakespearean, with long rhetorical arias alternating with argument, banter, and comic dialogue. Shaw then was writing firmly in the tradition of Shakespeare's theatrical patterns; he would say that although he retained the gift of word music, his content however was much more deserving of the forum the live theatre provided.

As Shaw created leading roles for the top Shakespearean performers, even frequently delaying the production of some plays until the actor he had in mind was available, he gave credit for the genesis of these plays to the existence of the stars. He is surprisingly humble in giving that credit. From the *Great Catherine* preface:

> If Forbes Robertson had not been there to play Caesar, I should not have written Caesar and Cleopatra. If Ellen Terry had never been born, Captain Brassbound's Conversion would never have been effected. The Devil's Disciple, with which I won my *cordon bleu* in America as a potboiler, would have had a different sort of hero if Richard Mansfield had been a different sort of actor … For it must be said that the actor or actress who inspires or commissions a play as often as not regards it as a Frankenstein's monster, and will none of it. That does not make him or her any the less parental in the fecundity of the playwright.

Yet although Shaw here gives generous credit to these top London actors for the inspiration of his plays, his taste for the larger-than-life actor-manager has not completely held up over the next century in terms of theatrical history. Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson is considered an "immortal", certainly the Hamlet of his generation, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* is remembered as one of his great performances. And

Ellen Terry is remembered as the best actress of the Victorian stage, by far, as Irving's leading lady with a full legacy of success in Shakespeare's roles. But Richard Mansfield, and Barry Sullivan before him, are not revered today, being viewed by theatre historians as typical of the worst sort of barnstorming leading actors of their day, full of hammy cartoon acting with thundering voices and unrealistic gestures and movements, melodramatically playing their characters for the big moments (known as "points") rather than attempting to create a lifelike character throughout the whole play.

But Shaw believed he had a gift in seeing the sort of actors who would best realize his plays even in their Shakespearean identities. The *Great Catherine* Preface gives three more examples, with an actor thought highly of today as a respectable supporting performer (Louis Calvert), an actress now mostly forgotten (Mrs Gertrude Kingston), and an actress considered the greatest of her generation and Ellen Terry's successor (Mrs Patrick Campbell).

> When I snatched Mr Louis Calvert from Shakespear, and made him wear a frock coat and silk hat on the stage for perhaps the first time in his life, I do not think he expected in the least that his performance would enable me to boast of his Tom Broadbent as a genuine stage classic.

Calvert, a longtime Shakespearean character actor, created Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island* in the landmark residency at the Court Theatre (1904-1907) managed by Shaw and Harley Granville Barker, as well as delighting Court audiences as William the Waiter in the revival of Shaw's early play *You Never Can Tell*, and then reached the high peak of his career creating the role of Undershaft in *Major Barbara*. Theatre historians remember him well. Shaw's next example is a theatrical legend, famous for performances in both Shakespeare and Ibsen before creating Eliza in *Pygmalion* for Shaw: "Mrs Patrick Campbell as famous before I wrote for her, but not for playing illiterate cockney flower-

maidens." And then, in preparation for the première of his new play *Great Catherine*, Shaw credits his leading actress, who theatrical history has largely forgotten.

> And in the case which is provoking me to all these impertinences, I am quite sure that Miss Gertrude Kingston, who first made her reputation as an impersonator of the most delightfully feather-headed and inconsequent ingenues, thought me more than usually made when I persuaded her to play the Helen of Euripides, and then launched her on a queenly career as Catherine of Russia.

Not all playwrights have been so magnanimous to share their success with their actors and actresses. Many have seen performers as interchangeable, and that any certified professional could succeed in performance with their words due to the quality of those words. The best playwrights certainly followed Shaw in tailoring great roles to their performers of choice, as, for example, Beckett writing for actress Billie Whitelaw or Stoppard for actor John Wood. Shaw concludes his preface with an interesting angle on the relationship between playwright and actor:

> It is not the whole truth that if we take care of the actors the plays will take care of themselves; nor is it any truer that if we take care of the plays the actors will take care of themselves. There is both give and take in the business. I have seen plays written for actors that made me exclaim, "How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds makes deeds ill done!" But Burbage may have flourished the prompt copy of Hamlet under Shakespear's nose at the tenth rehearsal and cried, "How oft the sight of means to do great deeds makes playwrights great!" I say the tenth because I am convinced that at the first he denounced his part as a rotten one; thought the ghost's speech ridiculously long; and wanted to play the king. Anyhow, whether he had the wit to utter it or not, the boast would have been a valid one. The best conclusion is that every actor should say, "If I create the hero in myself, God will send an author to write his part." For in the long run the actors will get the authors, and the authors the actors, they deserve.

That is superb advice for any actor, even if Shaw's idea of what constitutes a "hero" might not be the same as ours some generations later.

In the early stage of his career, Shaw benefited from the name value of popular performers such as Forbes Robertson or Mrs. Campbell to establish himself; in his later years, the actors would come to him, with his leading roles in the late 1920s and 1930s being played by such up-and-coming actors as Cedric Hardwicke and Ralph Richardson, and emerging actresses such as Edith Evans and Wendy Hiller. The paradigm of courting a leading Shakespearean performer to create a Shavian leading character reached its zenith in 1922, with Shaw persuading Sybil Thorndike to play *Saint Joan*. Thorndike had years of success in Shakespeare, including a fascinating sequence of male roles during the War, when the Old Vic Theatre in London was depleted of its actors; and still, Joan is typically the leading credit in Thorndike's theatrical biography.

But in Shaw's gallery of the leading classical actors of his day creating the central roles in several of his plays, there is one notorious omission. The leading actor-manager of the generation, the first actor to be knighted for services to the theatre, had a peculiar and complex relationship with Shaw: Sir Henry Irving. Irving was, in most ways, Shaw's theatrical arch enemy during the 1890s, beginning with Shaw's days as a critic, and continuing through the one time Shaw offered him a new play.

In 1896, Shaw submitted his sixth play to Irving at the Lyceum Theatre. *The Man of Destiny*, a one act comedy, seemed perfectly tailored to Irving, who would play Napoleon, and his leading lady Ellen Terry, who would play opposite Irving as the mysterious lady visitor. Except for a few minor characters, the play is mostly a sustained comic duet, and in Napoleon, Shaw creates one of his first "superman" characters, an early sketch for Caesar, Jack Tanner, Undershaft, or Higgins. In Irving, he saw the ideal actor for Napoleon, combining stage presence, offstage ethos and authority, and the right

style of operatic acting that would suit his play. The manuscript sat unread on Irving's desk for seven months, before Shaw could reclaim it once the legal option Irving had purchased had expired. (It was finally produced much later, the following year, by another management in Aberdeen.) Irving's deliberate stalling of Shaw's play should have been foreseen by Shaw, who vainly thought the commercial prospects of his new play would encourage Irving, as a practical theatre manager, to set aside his normally ill-concealed animus towards Shaw in service of an enterprise that could be mutually successful.

But Irving was an actor of tremendous ego and pride, and his grudge against Shaw had its roots in fifteen years of Shaw's eloquent and often vicious criticism of Irving's acting, in the London papers for which Shaw wrote. Shaw attacked the mammoth figure of Irving like he attacked Shakespeare, frequently using a fidelity to Shakespeare which he felt Irving did not possess as a club with which to slight the actor-manager. And then, Shaw was frustrated when Irving quashed his play about Napoleon, after Irving, hyper-sensitive and as highly-strung as many star actors, had had to read commentary such as these:

> Possibly Mr Irving did not comprehend as a whole the image he based on Shylock until he had offered it to the public. Possibly he does not comprehend it yet. It is not unlikely that the fact of his having, most unfortunately for his progress as an actor, become an object of popular superstition as a Shakespearean scholar, may have influenced him to spare the text that violence which he has offered to the character.
> (Review of *The Merchant of Venice*, April 7, 1880)

> When a popular actor selects Mephistopheles as a show part, and engages a walking gentleman to speak as many of Faust's lines as cannot well be left out, he courts failure and shews that he is not the man to grapple with Goethe. Mr Irving is not the first actor-manager who has been seduced into this error by the fascination of the scarlet coat and cock's feather of the fiend, in spite of the verdict on such attempts having always been that Goethe's masterpiece is not interesting on stage.
> (Review of *Faust*, March 1886)

> I sometimes wonder where Mr Irving will go to when he dies: whether he will dare to claim, as a master artist, to walk where he may any day meet Shakespear whom he has mutilated, Goethe whom he has travestied, and the nameless creator of the hero-king out of whose mouth he has uttered jobbing verses.
> (Review of *King Arthur*, January 19, 1895)

> When he came before the curtain at the end, he informed us, with transparent good faith, that the little play practically covered the whole of Cervantes's novel, a statement which we listened to with respectful stupefaction. I get into trouble often enough by my ignorance of authors whom every literate person is expected to have at his fingers' end; but I believe Mr Irving can beat me in that respect. If I have not read Don Quixote all through, I have at least looked at the pictures; and I am prepared to swear that Mr Irving never got beyond the second chapter.
> (Review of *A Chapter from Don Quixote*, May 11, 1895)

That last review of the Don Quixote, from Shaw's column titled "Mr Irving Takes Paregoric", followed a savage personal attack on Irving for a lecture he gave at the Royal Academy of Arts earlier that year, in which Shaw complained of Irving's pretension to scholarship, saying "he does not know Arnolfo from Brunelleschi in architecture, nor Carpaccio from Guido in painting, nor Rossini from Rubenstein in music" and that "Mr Irving does not know fine literature from a penny-a-liner's fustian". And then, after these years of critical attacks not only on Irving's acting, but also Irving's personality, Shaw was surprised and offended when Irving stalled production of *The Man of Destiny*. Shaw's primary accusation was that the leading actor-manager of the London stage, with the most power and influence of the era, should so badly distort and misrepresent Shakespeare. When not criticising Shakespeare first hand, Shaw will then proceed to use his correct interpretation of Shakespeare to criticize Irving (as well as many other actors, but none with the venom he produced against Irving). Shaw seemed to be waging a battle with Irving over ownership of Shakespeare, accusing both Irving's "Lyceum acting version" of the texts, irresponsibly edited and bowdlerized, Shaw felt; and Irving's self-

serving performances of the leading roles. Irving's ennoblement of Shylock particularly annoyed Shaw. ("His huge and enduring success as Shylock was due to his absolutely refusing to allow Shylock to be the discomfited villain of the piece. The Merchant of Venice became the Martyrdom of Irving …") In his 1898 Preface to his published collection *Plays Unpleasant: Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer,* and *Mrs Warren's Profession,* Shaw voices his annoyance in a more formal way than in his journalism:

> But I have never found an acquaintance with a dramatist founded on the theatre alone, or with a composer founded on the concert room alone, a really intimate and accurate one. The very originality and genius of the performers conflicts with the originality and genius of the author. Imagine Shakespear confronted with Sir Henry Irving at a rehearsal of The Merchant of Venice, or Sheridan with Miss Ada Rehan at one of The School for Scandal. It is easy to imagine the speeches that might pass on such occasions. For example "As I look at your playing, Sir Henry, I seem to see Israel mourning the Captivity and crying, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' It is a little startling to see Shylock's strong feelings operating through a romantic intellect instead of through an entirely commercial one; but pray dont alter your conception, which will be abundantly profitable to us both.

"Of all Sir Henry Irving's manifold treasons against Shakespear, the most audacious was his virtually cutting Dogberry out of Much Ado" Shaw wrote in February 1898. And previously, in December 1896, in the aftermath of the *Man of Destiny* impasse, Shaw reviewed Irving's performance of *Richard III,* and wounded Irving personally, through his subtlety.

> As to Sir Henry Irving's own performance, I am not prepared to judge it, in point of execution, by what he did on the first night. He was best in the Court scenes. In the heavy singlehanded scenes which Cibber loved, he was not, as it seemed to me, answering his helm satisfactorily; and he was occasionally a little out of temper with his own nervous condition. He made some odd slips in the text, notably by repeatedly substituting "you" for "I": for instance, "Shine out, fair sun, till you have bought a glass." Once he inadvertently electrified the house by very unexpectedly asking Miss Milton to get further up the stage in the blank verse and penetrating tones of Richard. Finally, the worry of playing against the vein tired him. In the tent and battle scenes his exhaustion was too genuine to be quite acceptable as part of the play. The fight was, perhaps, a relief to his feelings; but to me the spectacle of Mr Cooper pretending to pass his sword three times

through Richard's body, as if a man could be run through as easily as a cuttlefish, was neither credible nor impressive. The attempt to make a stage combat look as imposing as Hazlitt's description of the death of Edmund Kean's Richard reads, is hopeless. If Kean were to return to life and do the combat for us, we should very likely find it as absurd as his habit of lying down on a sofa when he was too tired or too drunk to keep his feet during the final scenes.

Shaw's backhanded slyness in this criticism is an effective reclaiming of Shakespeare from the actor-manager, voicing the superiority of the writer over the barnstorming professional, however grand his knighthood. A final postscript to his anti-Irving vendetta deserves notice, in his obituary for Irving on October 25, 1905:

When I was asked, the day after his death, to pay a tribute to his memory, I wrote "He did nothing for the living drama; and he mutilated the remains of the dying Shakespear; but he won his lifelong fight to have the actor recognized as the peer of all other artists; and this was enough for one man to accomplish. *Requiescat in pace*." The truth is that Irving took no interest in anything except himself; and he was not interested even in himself except as an imaginary figure in an imaginary setting.

With his many political and literary enemies over the years, Shaw typically exhibited a great respect and courtesy, in diplomatic appreciation of his opponents' positions. But with Irving, Shaw cut loose with his attacks, typically eloquent and humorous, but undeniably personal. The catalyst was the battleground over Shakespeare.

The Critic Becomes a Playwright

Exhausted, Shaw finally gave up his career at a theatre critic in the late 1890s. His burgeoning success as a playwright, and his marriage to the wealthy heiress Charlotte Payne-Townshend, enabled him to do so. Freed from his nightly duties in the live public theatre, he was able to continue his campaign of ownership of Shakespeare, in his playwrighting. Shaw was very happy to retire from his years of a nightly journalistic treadmill of first art galleries and concert halls, and then London's theatres.

Paradoxically, he would attend rehearsals of his own plays, with proprietary attitude towards how they should be produced and performed, with detailed and explicit instructions to his actors (which are reproduced in his elaborate stage directions in the printed texts). And he was never shy about writing emphatic letters of advice to his actress friends such as Ellen Terry or Mrs Patrick Campbell, especially when they would be rehearsing Shakespeare in England. But with the advent of Harley Granville-Barker as his leading actor and executive producer of their landmark seasons at the Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907, Shaw could limit his personal involvement in the rehearsal hall, and continue his playwrighting (and other public commentaries) on his many social and political preoccupations and campaigns – including his interest in and usage of Shakespeare. And as the twentieth century proceeds, he can continue his employment of Shakespeare for his own objectives.

The first significant use of Shakespeare in Shaw's plays occurs in *You Never Can Tell* (1896), as a running joke when the hotel waiter, the wisest and warmest character in the play, is nicknamed "William" by the silly young lady Dolly, because she thinks he resembles the bust of Shakespeare in the Stratford-upon-Avon church. Two years later, Shaw confronts Shakespeare face to face for the first serious time, writing *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and a notorious preface entitled "Better than Shakespear?"

Caesar and Cleopatra featured two of London's most prominent Shakespearean actors, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in its copyright performance, and Shaw intended it as both a correction to Shakespeare's scant portrait of Caesar in *Julius Caesar*, and a prequel (and revision) of *Antony and Cleopatra*. An examination of the play, then, leads me back to an application of Bloom's Revisionary Ratios, but this

time involving the dramatic form, with “playwright” for “poet” and “play” for “poem” in my imagination. Shaw’s *Caesar* play enacts Bloom’s ratio entitled *Clinamen*, which means “swerve.”

> A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor’s poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.

Of all of Shaw’s major plays, *Caesar and Cleopatra* is perhaps his oddest. Deliberately and definitely not a love story in any sense (“Whoever, then, expects to find Cleopatra a Circe and Caesar a hog in these pages, had better lay down my book and be spared a disappointment”). Rather, it is about Caesar’s greatness as a ruler, and his education of Cleopatra to rise above Egypt’s internecine quarrels and become a true queen herself. In terms of stagecraft, it is a sprawling historical epic, but most of the action occurs offstage. (Even the murder of one of the principal characters, Cleopatra’s nurse Ftatateeta, is not enacted onstage, with only her body being revealed when a curtain is opened.) An inactive play, therefore, anti-theatrical, and designed as an antidote, a corrective swerve, to Shakespeare’s reduction of classical history to a soap opera love story in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and his “travesty” of Caesar in *Julius Caesar*:

> It is when we turn to Julius Caesar, the most splendidly written political melodrama we possess, that we realize the apparently immortal author of Hamlet as a man, not for all time, but for an age only, and that, too, in all solidly wise and heroic aspects, the most despicable of all the ages in our history. It is impossible for even the most judicially minded critic to look without a revulsion of indignant contempt at this travestying of a great man as a silly braggart, whilst the pitiful gang of mischief makers who destroyed him are lauded as statesmen and patriots. There is not a single sentence uttered by Shakespear’s Julius Caesar that is, I will not say worthy of him, but of an average Tammany boss.

Shaw's Caesar is no silly braggart, but an implacably cool, unemotional, and self-assured leader; and therefore, a little boring. In Caesar, we see the first anticipation of Shaw's concept of the Superman, which will flower in future plays, but with more humanity and humor. And in this authentically historical account, very faithful to Ernest Mommsen's five-volume history of Rome (Shaw wrote that he used Mommsen much as Shakespeare used Plutarch), Shaw injects the occasional anachronism, and slang from his own day, as if to deflate the museum atmosphere of the drama.

His Shakespearean echoes are also strong enough to remind an audience of his placement of his play in the theatrical canon. Cleopatra helps arm Caesar for battle, as Shakespeare's Cleopatra arms Antony, or Macbeth's servant dresses him before the final battle; and when Caesar says "Well, every dog has his day; and I have had mine: I cannot complain" the allusion to Hamlet is unmistakable. In the closing moments of the play, Shaw provides a prevision of Shakespeare's play, with Caesar perhaps seeing Cleopatra's tragic future, as well as his own:

CAESAR Come, Cleopatra: forgive me and bid me farewell; and I will send you a man, Roman from head to heel and Roman of the noblest; not old and ripe for the knife; not lean in the arms and cold in the heart; not hiding a bald head under his conqueror's laurels; not stooped with the weight of the world on his shoulders; but brisk and fresh, strong and young, hoping in the morning, fighting in the day, and revelling in the evening. Will you take such an one in exchange for Caesar?
CLEOPATRA [*palpitating*] His name, his name?
CAESAR Shall it be Mark Antony? [*She throws herself into his arms*].
RUFIO You are a bad hand at a bargain, mistress, if you will swap Caesar for Antony.
CAESAR So now you are satisfied.
CLEOPATRA You will not forget.
CAESAR I will not forget. Farewell: I do not think we shall meet again. Farewell.

In 1951, during the Festival of Britain celebration, another Shakespearean actor-manager, staged the two plays together in repertory. It is the only significant time this expensive double enterprise has been attempted. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh starred in the antiphonal leading roles, under Olivier's production company, and critics and audiences preferred Shakespeare's romantic love tragedy to Shaw's dry, business-like depiction of a great leader.

At the conclusion of his preface, Shaw answers his titular question. "Better than Shakespear?" is the question, and Shaw answers "No." He does not claim to write a better play than Shakespeare – just to have a better understanding of Caesar the man, due to the lucky benefits of three centuries more of research and knowledge than that which Shakespeare had available:

> Finally, I would point out that if life is crowned by its success and devotion in industrial organization and ingenuity, we had better worship the ant and the bee (as moralists urge us to do in our childhood), and humble ourselves before the arrogance of the birds of Aristophanes.
> My reason then for ignoring the popular conception of Progress in Caesar and Cleopatra is that there is no reason to suppose that any Progress has taken place since their time. But even if I shared the popular delusion, I do not see that I could have made any essential difference in the play. I can only imitate humanity as I know it. Nobody knows whether Shakespear thought that ancient Athenian joiners, weavers, or bellows menders were any different than Elizabethan ones; but it is quite certain that he could not have made them so, unless, indeed, he had played the literary man and made Quince say, not "Is all our company here?" but "Bottom: was that not Socrates that passed us at the Piraeus with Glaucon and Polemarchus on his way to the house of Kephalus?" And so on.

If Shaw sets himself against Shakespeare in the model of the frogs of Aristophanes (rather than the birds), at the end of his play he places it in direct lineage from Shakespeare, depending upon his audience's knowledge of the Shakespeare play more than their first-hand knowledge of ancient Roman history.

RUFIO Caesar: I am loath to let you go to Rome without your shield. There are too many daggers there.
CAESAR It matters not: I shall finish my life's work on my way back; and then I shall have lived long enough. Besides: I have always disliked the idea of dying: I had rather be killed. Farewell.

It's an easy sort of foreshadowing, but effective. The character and image of Caesar was very important to Shaw, and his differing view of the emperor from Shakespeare's was a point of contention I will explore in chapter three below.

Daemonization: Spoofing Blank Verse

Three years later, in 1901, Shaw attempted a full sketch-length spoof of the language of the Elizabethan theatre in *The Admirable Bashville; or Constancy Unrewarded*. He had half-heartedly counted on his audience's knowledge of Shakespeare and his contemporaries to fully appreciate the satire, but "My parodies of the Elizabethan mannerism, and funny echoes of pet lines from the Elizabethan playwrights were, as such, lost on them …" although "whenever the meaning of the words was clear, the listeners shewed unmistakably that they liked hyperbolical rhetoric and deliberately artificial language." That is from his Preface, published after the first performance, which begins

> It may be asked why I wrote The Admirable Bashville in blank verse. My answer is that the operation of the copyright law of that time (now happily superseded) left me only a week to write it in. Blank verse is so childishly easy and expeditious (hence, by the way, Shakespear's copious output), that by adopting it I was enabled to do within the week what would have cost me a month in prose … I like the melodious sing-song, the clear simple one-line and two-line sayings, and the occasional rhymed tags, like the half closes in an eighteenth century symphony, in Peele, Kyd, Greene, and the histories of Shakespear. Accordingly, I poetasted The Admirable Bashville in the primitive Elizabethan style. And lest the literary connoisseurs should declare that there was not a single correct line in all my three acts, I stole or paraphrased a few from Marlowe and Shakespear (not

to mention Henry Carey); so that if any man dared quote me derisively, he should do so in peril of inadvertently lighting on a purple patch from Hamlet or Faustus.

Shaw's description of the blank verse of the "primitive" Elizabethan style is important in that he, without saying so explicitly, draws a distinction between the plays of the late 1580s and early 1590s, and the verse of the later Shakespeare, in the Jacobean era. The inclusion of *Hamlet* in the primitive period seems incorrect, as the complexity of its blank verse is surely more mature than Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* written at least a decade earlier. In *The Admirable Bashville,* then, Shaw will challenge early Elizabethan dramatic verse; in *Cymbeline Refinished,* many years later, he'll take on the late Shakespearean style in his way. But it's a hyperbolical dismissal of the verse of the early 1590s, much of which has a quality in its own right that can be as sincerely moving or powerful as the more mature texts, if performed well in the theatre.

But to the parodist, the "primitive Elizabethan style" is an easy target. Its generalities are commonplace enough through early Shakespeare and the other Elizabethan playwrights mentioned in the above preface to make the style available for the application of Bloom's Ratio *Daemonization*:

> The later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent-poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor. He does this, in his poem, by so stationing its relation to the parent-poem as to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work.

Shaw's spoof will generalize away the uniqueness of the Elizabethan range, showing how easy it is to daemonize the style. It begins with a lamentation reminiscent of Shakespeare's early heroines such as Julia or Adriana – but deliberately far sillier:

LYDIA Ye leafy breasts and warm protecting wings
Of mother trees that hatch our tender souls,
And from the well of Nature in our hearts

Thaw the intolerable inch of ice
That bears the weight of all the stamping world,
Hear ye me sing to solitude that I,
Lydia Carew, the owner of these lands,
Albeit most rich, most learned, and most wise,
Am yet most lonely. ...
Oh, ye busy birds,
Engrossed with real needs, ye shameless trees
With arms outspread in welcome of the sun,
Your minds, bent singly to enlarge your lives,
Have given you wings and raised your delicate heads
High heavens above us crawlers.

The verse parody is pre-Shakespearean, more like Peele, Kyd, Greene, and early Marlowe than the *Henry VI* trilogy or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Here is an opening speech in a "primitive" Elizabethan comedy:

LACY Why looks my lord like to a troubled sky?
When heaven's bright shine is shadowed with a fog:
A late we ran the deer and through the lawns
Stripped with our nags the lofty frolic bucks
That scudded fore the teasers like the wind.
Ne'er was the deer of merry Fresingfield
So lustily pulled down by jolly mates,
Nor shared the farmers such fat venison,
So frankly dealt this hundred years before.
Nor have I seen my lord more frolic in the chase,
And now changed to a melancholy dump.
(Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, 1594)

With exceptions that could easily be found, it's not fair to attribute that early blank verse doggerel style to Shakespeare in a blanket way; in *Bashville*, Shaw relies on direct quotation (and deflation) of Shakespearean rhetoric, as when the boxer Cashel Byron scolds his disapproving trainer, and abruptly cuts off the *Hamlet* Player King quotation with a characterization of old-fashionedness.

But when thou playst the moralist, by Heaven,
My soul flies to my fist, my fist to thee!
And never did the Cyclops' hammer fall
On Mars' armor – but enough of that.

It does remind me of my mother.

The scene concludes with Shaw's most flagrant teasing of the blank verse ten-beat line, when the clock strikes ten o'clock, and Cashel marks them off with ten straight "Hark!"s, adding "It strikes in poetry. Tis ten o'clock."

The play will proceed to have fun with famous Shakespearean lines including "A consummation devoutly to be wished", "What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?", and "My occupation's gone" among others. The parody works best when more subtle, as in Cashel's echo of Lear on Dover beach.

Your duke, who condescends
Almost to the whole world, might for a Man
Pass in the eyes of those who never saw
The duke capped with a prince. See then, ye gods,
The duke turn footman, and his eager dame
Sink the great lady in the obsequious housemaid!

Or when the Englishman Lucian greets Cetewayo, the visiting Zulu chieftain, with a stylish reversal of the Prince of Morocco's entrance in *The Merchant of Venice*. Where Morocco excuses his dark skin to the Europeans by saying

Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.
(2.1.1-3)

Shaw's English nobleman Lucian appeals to Chief Cetewayo's question "Are these anaemic dogs the English people?" by saying

Mislike us not for our complexions,
The pallid liveries of the pall of smoke
Belched by the mighty chimneys of our factories,
And by the million patent kitchen ranges
Of happy English homes.

Shaw neatly borrows Shakespeare's passage to both flip the cultural difference, and satirize the industrial explosion of the new century. More doggerel verse parody characterizes the rest of Shaw's play, including a heartbroken soliloquy by the butler Bashville (in the manner of Viola in *Twelfth Night*), a surprise reunion between Cashel and his mother, and a *deus ex machina* messenger sent by the King to happily resolve the marriage hopes of Lydia and Cashel. Cashel ends the play in typical Elizabethan comedy conclusion style:

Now mount we on my backer's four-in-hand,
And to St George's Church, whose portico
Hanover Square shuts off from Conduit Street,
Repair we all. Strike up the wedding march;
And, Mellish, let they melodies trill forth
Broad o'er the world as fast we bowl along.
Give me the post-horn. Loose the flowing rein;
And up to London drive with might and main.

The spoof is entertaining to a Shakespearean fan, and *The Admirable Bashville* bears out Shaw's boast in his Preface that it only took him a week to write; but though it may prove that that sort of iambic pentameter is "childishly easy" to write, it also has the second-level effect of displaying how much more advanced Shakespeare's later blank verse becomes, in his Jacobean plays, with a uniqueness impossible to generalize. The same ten syllabic beats – but how different his usage of them, as his verse evolves.

Kenosis: The Dark Lady of the Sonnets

The Admirable Bashville did allow Shaw to recycle the basic plot of one of his unsuccessful novels from his early career, *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1883), centered around Shaw's unpredictable interest in boxing. His next explicitly Shakespeare-based play was written less as a commentary on, or parody of, or insult to Shakespeare, but

rather as an attempt to commodify Shakespeare, the Dark Lady, and Queen Elizabeth for a political agenda. (Although the Preface is Shaw's longest sustained essay about Shakespearean matters.) Shaw called *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910) an "interlude" – but the short one-act farce puts Shakespeare onstage as a character, and writing him in your own words may even be a more effective tool of ownership than respelling his name. When you do, it is possible to deflate and reduce the character you're creating, in the effect caused by Bloom's Ratio *Kenosis*:

> I take the word from St. Paul, where it means the humbling or emptying-out of Jesus by himself, where he accepts reduction from divine to human status. The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhead, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems.

That may give insight to Shaw's personal agenda, but the playlet was written as part of Shaw's campaign for a state-funded National Theatre. Playwright William Archer, actor-managers Frank Benson and Herbert Beerbohm Tree, producer William Poel, and socialite Lady Randolph Churchill were among those in the artistic community who supported Shaw's and Granville-Barker's petition to create a subsidized theatre. Lady Randolph Churchill was a passionate advocate, chairing a committee devoted to the cause of establishing what she intended to call the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre (Shaw would spell it his way in his letters concerning the campaign, which would take another fifty years to succeed), in aid of which she wrote a parlour play with Shakespeare as a character entitled *His Borrowed Plumes*. Inspired, Shaw wrote *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* in which he not only takes ownership through this deflation of Shakespeare's character, but he also solves one of the great mysteries of Shakespearean biography at the

time: the identities of the Dark Lady and the Rival Poet in the sonnets. It is not exactly a crucial critical pursuit today, but it fascinated the Victorians.

As well as those moves in his ownership strategy, Shaw then further utilizes Shakespeare as an agent in his political agenda, using England's National Poet as a champion for a state-funded theatre.

Shaw's preface begins by calling the play a "little *pièce d'occasion* written for a performance in aid of the funds of the project for establishing a National Theatre as a memorial to Shakespear" but does not mention the political event again until the closing paragraph, twenty-seven pages later:

> If I have carried the reader with me thus far, he will find that trivial as this little play of mine is, its sketch of Shakespear is more complete than its levity suggests. Alas! its appeal for a National Theatre as a monument to Shakespear failed to touch the very stupid people who cannot see that a National Theatre is worth having for the sake of the National Soul. I had unfortunately represented Shakespear as treasuring and using (as I do myself) the jewels of unconsciously musical speech which common people utter and throw away every day; and this was taken as a disparagement of Shakespear's "originality." Why was I born with such contemporaries? Why is Shakespear made ridiculous by such a posterity?

He is referring to his bad running joke throughout the play, in which Shakespear constantly hears other characters' phrases and jots them down on a tablet to use in his plays (the Queen says "All the perfumes of Arabia will not whiten this Tudor Hand" and "I am of all ladies most deject and wretched", for example, and even the Beefeater inspires "Frailty: thy name is woman!" and accuses Shakespear of being "a snapper-up of such unconsidered trifles", among many others). They scold him for stealing other people's words; while the preface is very complimentary to Shakespeare, in the play he is more or less a punching bag for the others, deflated and "ceasing to be a poet" in Bloom's words, except for his long aria championing a National Theatre to the Queen. She relents

enough to say “Master Shakespear: I will speak of this matter to the Lord Treasurer.” Shakespear is realistic, and Shaw cynically modern, about that.

> Then am I undone, madam; for there was never yet a Lord Treasurer that could find a penny for anything over and above the necessary expenses of your government, save for a war or a salary for his own nephew.

But the body of the preface is primarily biographical, justifying his identification of the Dark Lady with the Queen’s lady-in-waiting Mary Fitton, whom he sees not as dark-skinned (as some contemporary biographers did) but as fair-skinned with raven-black hair and eyes, for “Shakespear rubbed in the lady’s complexion in his sonnets mercilessly; for in his day black hair was as unpopular as red hair in the early days of Queen Victoria.” He details his provenance of the Fitton identification through the theories of Thomas Tyler and Frank Harris, and submits a long commentary on his contemporaries’ misreadings of Shakespeare’s life, education and social status. Even his understanding of Shakespeare the Man is superior to his literary rivals, he seems to be saying. He introduces the claim of being a sort of artistic reincarnation of Shakespeare, a theme to which he will return in later life:

> … Frank [Harris] conceives Shakespear to have been a broken-hearted, melancholy, enormously sentimental person; where I am convinced that he was very like myself: in fact, if I had been born in 1556 instead of 1856, I should have taken to blank verse and given Shakespear a harder run for his money than all the other Elizabethans put together.

The Dark Lady of the Sonnets is a fairly thin farce, but a safe move for Shaw in his appropriation campaign – too silly to be seriously attacked by his critics, and too topical not to be more regarded as propaganda than as drama. Then, there is an odd, obscure appendix to its history.

For the opening performance at the Haymarket Theatre in London on November 24, 1910, Shaw wrote a fantasy entertainment prose piece, inserted into the programme. Entitled " A Dressing Room Secret", it begins with Iago in his dressing room arguing with the costumier over what would be an appropriate costume for him for Lady Randolph Churchill's upcoming Shakespeare Ball. The costumier upsets Iago by asserting that he is not a fictional theatrical character deserving of a costume that feels correct to him– but rather a realistic psychological energy, as late Victorian critics (such as A. C. Bradley and others) believed. Offended, Iago wishes that the plaster bust of Shakespeare in the corner there could speak, and defend himself against the current misinterpretations of his characters, created as they were to exist as mere theatre.

> "If that bust of Shakespear could speak," said Iago, severely, "it would ask to be removed at once to a suitable niche in the façade of the Shakespear Memorial National Theatre, instead of being left here to be insulted."
> "Not a bit of it," said the bust of Shakespear. "As a matter of fact, I *can* speak. It is not easy for a bust to speak; but when I hear an honest man rebuked for talking common sense, even the stones would speak. And I am only plaster."

"Even the stones would speak." The echo of Christ in Luke 19:40 (…if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.") may be seen as Shaw light-heartedly exposing what he saw as Shakespeare's cocky self-confidence, both when in *The Dark Lady* he assures a dubious Queen Elizabeth that a National Theatre is well worth it because his plays will survive into posterity and legend; and in this little sketch when he undercuts Iago's pretensions towards autonomy by reprising his favorite tease of Shakespeare's "word-music" as a rhetorical cover for lack of depth ("I didnt bother about the sense – just flung about all the splendid words I could find."). He tells Iago he intended to create a truly abhorrent and despicable villain, but those bore him, and his

natural goodness and humour led him to make Iago a "rather pleasant sort of chap." *Othello* he regards as a farce, as the "misunderstandings are not natural but mechanical." Lady Macbeth enters, complaining to the costumier that she doesn't feel her costume suits her murderous character. The bust of Shakespeare deflates her as well, considering her another of his "failures."

> "I meant Lady Mac to be something really awful; but she turned into my wife, who never committed a murder in her life – at least not a quick one."
> "Your wife! Ann Hathaway!! Was she like Lady Macbeth?"
> "Very," said Shakespear, with conviction. "If you notice, Lady Macbeth has only one consistent characteristic, which is, that she thinks everything her husband does is wrong and that she can do it better. If I'd ever murdered anybody she'd have bullied me for making a mess of it and gone upstairs to improve on it herself. Whenever we gave a party, she apologized to the company for my behavior. Apart from that, I defy you to find any sort of sense in Lady Macbeth.

"I am disillusioned, disenchanted, disgusted" replies Lady Macbeth. Shaw concludes his vaudeville sketch, after undercutting Iago and Lady Macbeth, by saying that his natural humanity and sense of humor led him to write a play that "spoilt my best character." He had intended, says the bust, to write an extraordinary play about Conscience in the character of Prince Hal. But, inexorably, a "monumental comic part" arose, to hijack his serious intention. "I revelled in him; wallowed in him; made a delightful little circle of disreputable people for him to move and shine in." Embarrassed over his creation of Falstaff, he then "… went home and spoilt the end of the play. I didnt do it well; I couldnt do it right. But I had to make that old man perish miserably."

Having thus destroyed the long-beloved traditional views of Iago, Lady Macbeth, and Falstaff – as well as imagining a domestic relationship between Shakespeare and Ann – Shaw ends this curious text by destroying Shakespeare's voice. The bust suddenly sneezes, explodes, and lay in fragments. "It never spoke again."

Having, then, usurped the voice of Shakespeare himself in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* and this little "A Dressing Room Secret," Shaw would undertake one more step in his mission to own his rival (before the climactic puppet play showdown). It's an impertinent, audacious, supremely conceited step – actually rewriting Shakespeare's text in order to improve it.

Tessera: Completing, or Improving, the Bard

In 1936, Shaw attended a Governors' Board meeting of the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, to plan the following year's summer festival. Ben Iden Payne, the theatre's Artistic Director, wished to include *Cymbeline* in the repertory. When some of the Board worried that Shakespeare's late romance falls apart in the final act, Shaw facetiously suggested he solve the problem by writing a new one. The Board laughed and moved on, but the idea had struck Shaw as a fun and interesting challenge. And so he wrote *Cymbeline Refinished*, retaining 89 of Shakespeare's lines (though none of Imogen's, his favorite character), and eliminating the crazy coincidences, verbal extravagances, and the masque of the gods. He topicalizes in a 1930s political atmosphere the war between ancient Britain and its would-be colonizer ancient Rome; in fact, his working title was *Cymbeline Up to Date: A Happy Ending*. The changes he made primarily bring logic to a chaotic final movement in the play, and allow Imogen much more agency and self-determination than Shakespeare's lady, a pawn driven by events, is allowed. Bloom's Ratio is apt:

> *Tessera*, which is completion and antithesis; I take the word not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment say of a small pot which with the other fragments would re-constitute the vessel. A poet antithetically "completes" his

precursor, by so reading the parent poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.

And so, Shaw does Shakespeare the favor of rewriting the ending to complete *Cymbeline* correctly, taking it far enough. He submitted it in earnest to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, but they feared the possible cost to their tourist trade, and declined. It was, however, for three weeks in late 1937, performed at the fringe Embassy Theatre in London, billed as "By William Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw." I can find no records of the mixture of four acts by Shakespeare and the final act by Shaw being performed professionally since.

Holroyd wonders if this oddity doesn't simply make Shaw the latest in the many literary "optimistic saboteurs" who have shown the insufferable arrogance rewriting the Bard, such as Cibber, Tate, or Lee, or the actor-managers (especially Irving and Daly) who Shaw so viciously attacked in the 1890s for their textual distortions, in his theatre critic days. But the project has a different goal than that of simply making Shakespeare palatable for commercial popularity. Shaw, having claimed many parts of Shakespeare for his own, from the spelling of his name to the style of his verse, from the way he should be performed, to which plays should be rediscovered and which cast aside, and then having exposed Shakespeare's paucity of philosophy compared to Shaw's own philosophical depth – now, his goal is to bite off a slice of Shakespeare and insert himself alongside. Shaw knows the Shakespeare original will always be there; this is his claim for side-by-side shelf space.

To Shaw, all of Act Five is a sort of masque, including the literal masque of the Leonatii presenting themselves to Posthumus in prison, introduced, as he writes in his foreword, "like the Ceres scene in *The Tempest*, to please King Jamie, or else because an irresistible

fashion had set in, just as in all the great continental opera houses a ballet used to be *de rigeur*." Shaw acknowledges that, if performed in grand operatic style, "… with suitable music and enough pictorial splendor, it is not only entertaining on the stage, but with the very Shakespearean feature of a comic jailer that precedes it, just the same to save the last act."

Then, having given due credit to the Jupiter Masque for "saving" Shakespeare's otherwise botched final act, "a tedious string of unsurprising *dénouements* sugared with insincere sentimentality after a ludicrous stage battle," Shaw rewrites the last act correctly, dispensing with the now no longer needed masque. In a very tidy way, Shaw solves the romantic implausibilities of action, with the only extended Shakespeare verse left intact being Posthumus's long mournful soliloquy to the dead (as he mistakenly supposes) Imogen. But is there something lost with the removal of magic, of vision, even of implausibility and coincidence? Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is constantly shifting its mood and its ground, at any moment apt to mock itself, to make fun of its fantasies. Shaw's version flattens that element out and dampens it down, and the plot threads are solved with the clinical logic of a 1930s play by Priestley or Christie. Where Shakespeare's Cymbeline asks in dazed bewilderment: "Does the world go round?", Shaw's asks "Are there more plots to unravel?" like a Scotland Yard Inspector.

By this point in his career, Shaw had little taste for magic. Fifteen years earlier, in *Saint Joan*, he did create a character supremely based on vision and faith, but he surrounds her with skeptics and pragmatists. He prefers the common sense honesty of Posthumus, whom he sees as "Shakespear's anticipation of his Norwegian rival" and likening him to Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, a play from the central period of Ibsen's career when his

work was monumentally realistic, as far as possible from the fantastic mythology of Shakespeare's late romances.

As well as eliminating the masque, Shaw also cuts the Lord's long recap of the events of the battle, and Iachimo's long confession detailing his staged "rape" of Imogen. Iachimo's exposure is tidily streamlined, through Shaw's "curiosity" to explore how these characters would realistically behave in the aftermath of battle. "The only way to satisfy this curiosity was to rewrite the act as Shakespear might have written it if he had been post-Ibsen and post-Shaw instead of post-Marlowe." If he'd only known my work, Shaw declares, he would have been a better playwright.

Shaw's rewrite not only removes the far-fetched magical element from *Cymbeline*, but makes short work of the reunion between Imogen and Posthumus. To Shakespeare, their long-frustrated love establishes a center of purity and hope in a world of cynicism and brutality. To Shaw, they're a loose end in the plot to be resolved. And the removal of the Lord's and Iachimo's flashback speeches removes a crucial element in the original. Story-telling, the ways in which narratives can be told and their effect on their listeners is a prominent thematic concern, beginning with the Gentlemen in Act 1, Scene 1, establishing the background to the plot in a long exposition (a lot like a Shavian conversation play).

The ritual of forgiveness, central to Shakespeare's final plays, is deromanticized, but the political concord achieved in the treaty between Britain and Rome is foregrounded. Shaw places the diplomacy dialogue (concluding with Shakespeare's original final speech) in a late 1930s context, and winks to the reader with this joking allusion, as the two lost princes rebel at finding out their true royal and political destiny:

IACHIMO: There spake the future king of this rude island.
GUIDERIUS: With you, Sir Thief, to tutor me? No, no:
This kingly business has no charm for me.
When I lived in a cave methought a palace
Must be a glorious place, peopled with men
Renowned as councillors, mighty as soldiers,
As saints a pattern of holy living,
And all at my command were I a prince.
This was my dream. I am awake today.
I am to be, forsooth, another Cloten,
Plagued by the chatter of his train of flatterers,
Compelled to worship priest invented gods,
Not free to wed the woman of my choice,
Being stopped at every turn by some old fool
Crying "You must not", or still worse, "You must".
Oh no sir: give me back the dear old cave
And my unflattering four footed friends.
I abdicate, and pass the throne to Polydore.
ARVIRAGUS: Do you, by heavens? Thank you for nothing, brother.

This abdication speech seems to sympathize with Edward VIII's abdication radio address in December 1936, not free to wed the woman of his choice either. And in terms of 1930s topicality, Holroyd goes as far as to suggest that Shaw "… also uses the English victory over the Romans as a history lesson for Neville Chamberlain, advocating the preparedness of military training and rearmament." This unseating of Shakespeare from his own political moment, and transplanting him to Shaw's, is one of the final steps in Shaw's attempted colonization. All that will be needed in future will be the face-to-face confrontation in *Shakes Versus Shav*, culminating in the plea:

SHAV.Peace, jealous Bard.
We both are mortal. For a moment suffer
My glimmering light to shine.

It's a rare moment of humility for Shaw, mixed with respect, perhaps with the goal of reconciliation between him and his chosen antithesis.

The Bard: Antithesis and Double

Bloom writes “The strong poet peers in the mirror of his fallen precursor and beholds neither the precursor nor himself but a Gnostic double, the dark otherness or antithesis that both he and the precursor longed to be, yet feared to become.” In the end, the Revisionist Ratios may help us understand Shaw’s techniques, but they also expose the anxiety submerged under his outward self-confidence. Shaw was not content with existing as an other or an antithesis to Shakespeare. His lifelong campaign for ownership, through criticism, competition, revision, correction of shortcomings, updating, with respelling the most basic and fundamental badge of identity anyone can have – their name – has not been properly appreciated in the half century since Shaw’s death. Most critics dismiss Shaw’s self-created rivalry, wishing he would leave Shakespeare alone and concern himself with his own body of work.

But I think Shaw has a lot more to add to our spectrum of Shakespearean interpretation than his iconoclastic jokes and self-promotion. And furthermore, the world of Shakespeare’s imagination, his sensitivity and warmth as well as his intelligence and dramaturgy, inform and shape Shaw’s imagination in ways Shaw would be reluctant to admit, but would surely know. We began with “Shakespear might have been myself.” The following chapters will explore how in owning the Bard, Shaw was also owning himself.

Notes

Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare,* gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.

Quotations from Shaw's plays are taken from *Bernard Shaw: Complete Plays with Prefaces. Six Volumes.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963.

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CHAPTER 2

SHAW, SHAKESPEARE, AND THE NEW WOMAN

THE PARLORMAID: [plaintively] You speak so brutal to me, Miss Blanche; and I do love you so. I'm sure no one else would stay and put up with what I have to put up with.
BLANCHE: Then go. I dont want you. Do you hear. Go.
THE PARLORMAID: [*piteously, falling on her knees*] Oh no, Miss Blanche. Dont send me away from you: dont –
BLANCHE: [*with fierce disgust*] Agh! I hate the sight of you. [*the maid, wounded to the heart, cries bitterly*] Hold your tongue. Are those two gentlemen gone?
THE PARLORMAID: [*weeping*] Oh, how could you say such a thing to me, Miss Blanche: me that –
BLANCHE: [*seizing her by the hair and throat*] Stop that noise, I tell you, unless you want me to kill you.

(*Widowers' Houses*, 1892)

I had so little taste for the Victorian womanly woman that in my first play I made my heroine throttle the parlour maid. The scandal of that outrage shook the London theatre and its Press to their foundations: an easy feat; for their foundations were only an inch deep and very sandy at that.
(From Shaw's contribution to actress Lillah McCarthy's memoir *Myself and Some Friends*, 1933)[1]

The excerpt above is from Shaw's rarely performed first play, *Widowers' Houses*. As his later commentary on the scene between Blanche and the Parlormaid explains above, Shaw intended the action symbolically. Blanche, Shaw's first New Woman, attacks the Victorian woman servant, emblematic of what she considers outdated 19th Century attitudes. Blanche adumbrates a long line of passionate, self-assured, articulate ladies in Shaw's canon, striving for liberation as the new century begins.

George Bernard Shaw had many passionate causes and beliefs in his life, some of which are still very current and have advocates (and opponents) today, and others of which have been relegated to the outmoded pile, as increased knowledge and scientific progress have passed them by. His fanatical hatred of vaccination, for instance. He opposed it in its infancy, when it was still a fairly primitive work-in-progress, and even incorporated a giant onstage suffering germ into his 1931 play *Too True To Be Good*; but history has proven him wrong, and vaccination is in our eyes today a medical miracle. His eccentric belief that people should only wear wool, to allow the skin to breathe properly, now seems quaint. And so do the spelling reforms he advocated, and his support of the would-be universal language Esperanto. Vegetarianism, on the other hand, has many advocates, and seems to be on the rise. His anti-vivisection cause stands as a banner for animal rights activists today, as well. His great physical hobbies of boxing and bicycling may not be as universal today as they once were, but regular exercise is a universally-accepted health benefit.

The one cause he supported above all, that could be said to have completely changed our society forever, was feminism. From his earliest novels throughout his final post-WWII plays, Shaw relentlessly championed women's rights, both on specific issues such as suffrage, educational opportunities, and equality in the workplace, and less tangible concepts as well. Shaw believed in the woman's right to self-expression, and a personal identity independent of any masculine connections she may have – husband, lover, father, the male political establishment. His common sense observation was that women create nature, whereas men can only remake it, and our long disgraceful history shows the mess

men can make of the world when not availing themselves of the opposite gender's presence. Shaw saw our hope for a better future residing in the woman, and he wrote play after play to illustrate that idea.

Indeed, support for the feminist (or suffragette) movement that was so controversial around the turn of the century is central to many of his major plays. There are exceptions, as not every text is meant to be an advertisement for the movement, and dozens of Shaw's other preoccupations and concerns have plays built around them; but Shaw created an astonishing series of strong, creative, vivid women characters, most of whom can be listed under the nickname suffragettes had given them during this period: the New Woman. And as I discussed above, Shaw saw in his chosen dramatic father Shakespeare, always part-rival and part-mentor to Shaw, some very early manifestations of the New Woman impulse, some historic paradigms for the woman seeking her own identity in a society in which she's regarded as an outsider.

The Quintessence of Shavian Feminism

In his 1891 pamphlet *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*[2], in the chapter entitled "The Womanly Woman," Shaw succinctly states the foundation of his feminist mission at its most basic:

> The sum of the matter is that unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself. But her duty to herself is no duty at all, since a debt is cancelled when the debtor and creditor are the same person. Its payment is simply a fulfillment of the individual will, upon which all duty is a restriction, founded on the conception of the will as naturally malign and devilish. Therefore Woman has to repudiate duty altogether.

In the 1890s, along with working to build his plays around that concept (among other political ones), Shaw also actively supported the rise of the actress-manager, with actresses such as Janet Achurch and Florence Farr, or women playwrights such as Elizabeth Robins, producing plays at small theatres, in the face of opposition by the theatre establishment, led by Shaw's arch-enemy Sir Henry Irving. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, Shaw voiced a strong image in hopes of undercutting that opposition.

> If we have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot: because they have never seen one anywhere else … the only parrot a free-souled person can sympathize with is the one that insists on being let out as the first condition of making itself agreeable.[3]

The suffragette movement of the time welcomed Shaw's support, and certainly must have appreciated his lending his considerable rhetorical skills to their cause, especially as his fame grew during the Edwardian decade. But, there were some issues with his involvement (and other like-minded men, including his fellows in the Fabian Society), by no means as important as the value of his support, but problematic to many of the New Women nonetheless.

One was the label. Ann Ardis[4] argues that the term "New Woman", applied by men to these rebellious working women claiming their equality and their rights, was a way of assigning them an identity which, albeit different from their previous housewife identity, was still a male-designed pigeonhole into which they were exiled. Named, and thus controlled, or at least handled. Few individual women would lay claim to the label; it applied more readily to the group than the singular, and more constantly to literary creations, in the novel and the drama, than to living reality. Kerry Powell[5] points out that, quite quickly, the "New Woman" became less of an accurate description of the

suffragettes' stance, and more of a metonymic construction that also immediately became an easy target for lampoon. Popular 1890s novels such as Grundy's *The New Woman* or Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, as well as parodies in plays by writers such as Henry Arthur Jones[6] or Arthur Wing Pinero[7] were common during the decade.

Even Shaw, of all people, included a subplot in his second play intended to highlight the movement, but which to this day is commonly misread as caricature. In his second play, *The Philanderer* (1893), the character Sylvia Craven is an aggressive New Woman, dressing in male clothes, insisting on being treated as just another member at the Ibsen Club, and addressing the men by their surnames.

The vogue for caricature passed, as the Edwardian decade saw the suffragettes intensifying their demand for the vote as general elections may have been nearing. Shaw helped actively for a time, helping Elizabeth Robins stage her propaganda play *Votes for Women!* (1907) at the Court Theatre, and contributing his own one-act play *Press Cuttings* (1909), his most explicit discussion of the question, featuring suffragettes chaining themselves to the fence in front of No. 10 Downing Street, and the Prime Minister forced to get through the picket line by disguising himself as a woman; but then, before and during the War, Shaw lowered his public profile, perceiving a sort of reluctance on the part of the movement's leaders (such as Mrs. Pankhurst) to trade on his help. There was something inconsistent, she felt (and Shaw agreed), in arguing that women could achieve their own goals without the magnanimous advocacy of men through the voice of a leading male activist.

Barbara Bellow Watson[8] presents a theory that may be very useful in examining Shaw's application of his feminist position to the creation of his women characters, and also cast

a backlight that may illuminate interpretation of the New Woman paradigm adumbrated by Shakespeare. Watson argues that the New Woman phenomenon led Shaw to create the "New Comedy," a diversion from traditional, classical comedy. Traditionally, the conflicts that constitute our culture's drama would be enacted between the needs of the individual and the requirements of social institutions, such as the family, the Church, or the law. If a woman is a central character to the drama, her conflict would generally entail struggling against those institutions' abuses, say a father who doesn't want her to marry. The difference between comedy and tragedy would often come down to whether she marries at the end of the play. Watson describes the essential shift in drama as an expression of the fragmenting social stability of the late Victorian era:

> And once a new consciousness had been shaped by the conditions of modern life, it was no longer possible to construct any comedy with real vitality upon the old pattern. In Shavian comedy the pattern has shifted radically. Instead of the conflict between the individual with state and church, specifically in comedy the conflict between the lover and the laws and mores of marriage, Shavian drama deals preeminently with the conflict between the individual woman's humanity and the rigidity of the sex role assigned to her. This shift in subject matter represents also a profound shift in the structure of the comedy, reflecting an essentially changed society.

"The war of the born self against the assigned self," Watson will go on to say, and with that war at the center of his comedy, Shaw becomes a revolutionary writer. In serious drama, Shaw's heroes Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg employ this thematic shift as well, where the journey the woman character undergoes becomes not simply plot, but also essential meaning. The concept has some roots in another prose tract by Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1927), in which he tracks in voluminous detail the process by which patriarchy has always treated women as outsiders. Our hope for the future lies with women, Shaw believed, because of their

traditional status as outsiders. From the outside, one receives a better training in realism, as understanding the reality of their identity is necessary for survival. Shaw's women, like Shakespeare's women before him, seek to survive approaching reality from their designated outsider status – and thus confront the conflict between the self with which they are born, and the self they have been assigned. The question would remain whether women would lose that outsider advantage if they became insiders.

Shaw's New Women

Shaw's re-invention of the comic form includes several women protagonists who succeed in this self-attainment by *avoiding* marriage (in plays such as *Captain Brassbound's Conversion, Getting Married,* or arguably *Pygmalion*). Marriage, which for generations had been the traditional comic goal to bring about a happy ending, is either escaped from, or re-imagined on non-traditional terms (as in *Man and Superman,* or several of the very late Shavian works (such as *The Millionairess* or *In Good King Charles' Golden Days*). Marriage is not the sole yardstick for the New Woman's quest for an independent self – Saint Joan's martyrdom, for instance, at least partially arises from her inability to conform to the role assigned her, and the authority-driven obstacles overtake her (at least, during her lifetime), though the marriage question is not involved. But it remains the central issue facing women characters in comedy, with its associated questions of financial ownership, the home and family, and ultimately identity. The Shakespearean model, with Shakespeare's plays featuiring women for whom marriage is the key to their happy ending, is so flexible as to include (within the period context) a sense of the conflict between born self and assigned self. Many of Shakespeare's women do, like

Shaw's, assert their right to decline marriage at times; for example, if Jack and Ann in *Man and Superman* might be read as a Modernist rewrite of Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the moment must also be acknowledged where Beatrice refuses the Prince's hint at a marriage proposal. She wants who she wants – not simply automatically the wealthiest or most powerful candidate:

BEATRICE: Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes everyone to the world but I, and I am sunburnt. I may sit in a corner and cry 'Heigh-ho for a husband'.
DON PEDRO: Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.
BEATRICE: I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands if a maid could come by them.
DON PEDRO: Will you have me, lady?
BEATRICE: No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days. Your grace is to costly to wear every day.
(2.1.278-288)

In *Getting Married* (1908), Shaw echoes Beatrice's wish to bifurcate husbands. The lady Leo Hotchkiss has divorced Reginald Bridgenorth in order to marry St. John Hotchkiss, and yet loves them both equally, in different ways:

LEO: Why do they want to marry us? Besides, Rejjy knows that I'm quite fond of him. I like him because he wants me; and I like Sinjon because I want him. I feel that I have a duty to Rejjy.
THE GENERAL: Precisely. You have.
LEO: And, of course, Sinjon has the same duty to me.
THE GENERAL: Tut, tut!
LEO: Oh, how silly the law is! Why cant I marry them both?
THE GENERAL: [*shocked*] Leo!
LEO: Well, I love them both. I should like to marry a lot of men. I should like to have Rejjy for every day, and Sinjon for concerts and theatres and going out in the evenings, and some great austere saint for about once a year at the end of the season, and some perfectly blithering idiot of a boy to be quite wicked with.

Marriage, then, is one component of a woman's assigned self, however much they may bridle against its traditional legal restraints, and one of the elements she must confront in

establishing her humanity. Most plays dramatize the journey – although one early play of Shaw's begins with a woman having ostensibly succeeded in that establishment before the drama begins, and then facing complications. The title character in the early play *Candida* (1895) is a very strong woman with a stable marriage, when a young poet falls in love with her, and asks her to leave her husband. "To whom shall I belong, do you mean?" she asks, and the poet understands. "She means that she belongs to herself." The play is less interesting because of Candida's unflinching self-confidence.

The Shavian women in the process of achieving such comfortable identity must usually emerge through a crisis of self such as Lina in *Misalliance* (1910), passionately defending her refusal to marry a pompous young man who has told her that her present position – a single, professional New Woman who wears male clothing – is "not a nice one":

> I am an honest woman: I earn my living. I am a free woman: I live in my own house. I am a woman of the world: I have thousands of friends … I am strong: I am skilful: I am brave: I am independent: I am unbought: I am all that a woman ought to be … And this Englishman! this linen draper! he dares to ask me to come and live with him in this rabbit hutch, and take my bread from his hand, and ask him for pocket money, and wear soft clothes, and be his woman! his wife! Sooner than that, I would stoop to the lowest depths of my profession. I would stuff lions with food and pretend to tame them. I would deceive honest people's eyes with conjuring tricks instead of real feats of strength and skill. I would be a clown and set bad examples of conduct to little children. I would sink yet lower and be an actress or opera singer, imperiling my soul by the wicked lie of pretending to be somebody else. All this I would do sooner than take my bread from the hand of a man and make him the master of my body and soul.

Remarkable, powerful eloquence, from the Polish lady aviator. But does this *defensio* veer over the border of protesting too much? Can we hear a nervousness beneath the ringing proclamations? The process for a woman to achieve the serenity of a Candida will unavoidably be a turbulent one, before she can say, with Shakespeare's Helena:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
(*All's Well that Ends Well*, 1.1.199-202)

But Shaw had identified an earlier Shakespearean model, who anticipates the Victorian New Woman, in both its aggressive self-assertion and its uncertain nervousness, in the face of an authoritative and patronizing male culture. His argument for this identification of his feminist forerunner came in a little-known lecture about a neglected Shakespearean masterpiece, virtually ignored by the late Victorians. Perhaps it offended or embarrassed them, or its eclectic style made it too difficult to be easily classified in genre terms for their taste; but *Troilus and Cressida* represented, for Shaw, both an interesting turning point in Shakespeare's development, and an important prevision of the New Woman.

Cressida: Shakespeare's New Woman

On February 29, 1884, Miss Grace Latham delivered a lecture Shaw had written about Shakespeare's play *Troilus and* Cressida on Shaw's behalf to the New Shakspere Society, in London[9]. Owing to his Fabian Society commitments, Shaw himself was unable to attend, but his choice of a woman to stand in for him as his reader may well be significant, in front of a Victorian academic club such as this. The New Shakspere Society [10] was founded in 1874 by F.J. Furnivall, and Shaw joined soon after his emigration from Dublin to London in1876. In February 1884, Shaw was 27 years old, and his prominence as an activist, then as a critic, and then ultimately a playwright lay before him still, as he spent the decade mainly failing as a novelist[11] . But his *Troilus and Cressida* essay exhibits a very fine level of critical thinking that anticipate future readings of a play that was virtually ignored by the 19th Century, but has been celebrated and embraced by the 20th Century through discovery of many of the play's themes that Shaw argues as imperative to a good reading of it. And after centuries of neglect, the play has deservedly become an important event in the live theatre, frequently performed in major productions[12].

But along with offering a better interpretation of a play then felt to be irrelevant to the Shakespearean community, Shaw pinpoints the composition of *Troilus* as the outward expression of an artistic crisis Shakespeare was undergoing in the early 1600s. He views it as the turning point in Shakespeare's career, before which he wrote ephemeral popular stage product with no philosophy or moral position behind them, and after this breakthrough, he can begin to develop a serious dramatic voice, seeing dramatic stories as personal and social problems – and not simply mass entertainment. Shaw will argue

that *Troilus* paves the way for Shakespeare's next play, *Hamlet*, which will open Shakespeare's imagination for the problem plays, great tragedies, and romances to follow. (Iconoclastically, and exclusively based on his internal reading, Shaw veers from the common chronology of the period, which asserted that *Troilus* followed, rather than preceded, *Hamlet*.[13]) Additionally, Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare's portrait of Cressida can be seen as Shaw's giving credit to Shakespeare for being a forerunner of the feminist movement of the day, with Cressida emerging as a prototype of the "New Woman". Thanks to a superb effort in bibliographical detection, we have the complete text of the lecture, which was previously thought lost. In Volume 14 of *The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* (1981), edited by Stanley Weintraub, two researchers at the University of Nebraska edited the manuscript they'd found in the Shaw collection at the British Museum. Dr. Louis Crompton and Professor Hilayne Cavanagh thus published "… by far the longest essay by Shaw on any Shakespearean play, far surpassing in scope anything he wrote afterward on any other single work."[14] Prior to this finding, it was generally thought that the only record of Shaw's submission existed in the published supplement to *The New Shakspere Society's Transactions, 1880-1885*[15]. Edwin Wilson's 1961 compendium of excerpts *Shaw on Shakespeare*[16] describes these minutes briefly, as Shaw's lone comment on *Troilus*. But even since Crompton and Cavanaugh's publication, there has been little commentary on Shaw's essay. Cohn alludes to it in passing during her assessment of Shaw's shortcomings[17], but Holroyd doesn't even mention it in his definitive biography of Shaw nor does Schoenbaum in his of Shakespeare's afterlife[18]. I believe it presents an original view of *Troilus*'s place in the Shakespearean canon, and of Shakespeare's polar shift in attitude toward Elizabethan

heroic verse-writing. Shaw feels that through the crisis manifested in *Troilus*, Shakespeare will be able to reject his early, immature, popular writing of rant and stock humor cartoons, and accept his deepening sense of human nature, even when flawed and pessimistic, and create a dramatic world that does more than play with words. *Troilus* itself is not completely satisfying, not in itself the new artistic incarnation; it is a bridge, and in Shaw's words from this lecture "Troilus and Cressida is the unsettled work of a transition period." Yet in Shaw's chronological ordering of the *oeuvre*, it crosses the atmospheric gulf between *Henry V* and *Hamlet*.

In dating *Troilus* as early as 1600, Shaw defies most scholars before and since, who base a 1602 dating on the 1603 Stationers' Register mention. Shaw mentions the Register, but still rounds the text's composition date back to round numbers, based on his interpretation of internal evidence, and how the play seems to operate as a lever between *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. It must be possible that Shaw deliberately chose to overlook the Stationers' Register evidence, perhaps with the standard justification regarding the unreliability of that era's documentation, in order to appropriate *Troilus* for his critical position. A post-*Hamlet* reading of *Troilus*, the common academic viewpoint today, generates many fascinating possibilities concerning the severe changes in Shakespeare's art; but they are not Shaw's possibilities. And I have not found any other historian who dates the two plays in Shaw's order.

And yet, if, putatively, Shaw did deliberately choose to ignore that copyright evidence – it would be a very aggressive move at appropriating Shakespearean biography for his own purposes. The confusion over Elizabethan calendars may render most chronological

evidence only partially reliable, but it is important to acknowledge Shaw's primary concentration on internal, instinctive evidence for his argument.

Shaw's lecture begins with a long and detailed plot summary, which illustrates the text's unfamiliarity in the 19th Century – if even devotées in the New Shakspere Society need a précis before they discuss the play, *Troilus and Cressida* must be indeed obscure. (To the outwardly confident Victorian world, with its military ideal and sexual propriety, one can see how *Troilus*'s tone would fit awkwardly with the prevalent attitudes of the era. Indeed, it would even be offensive, as its anti-military stance would be subversive to Victorian concepts of Empire, and its sexually aggressive stance to Victorian concepts of family propriety. The Victorian actor-managers Poel and Benson, and the young playwright Granville-Barker, were each independently warned by their tutors to avoid *Troilus*, as well as *Measure for Measure*, completely, as models of indecency.) Shaw concludes his summary with an acknowledgment of the play's anti-Victorian mood: "This unfinished story will not strike anyone as a congenial theme for a poet or a reader of refined tastes," and then asks the central question underlying his thesis:

> … how comes Troilus and Cressida to be one of the most interesting of his works? The answer is that Shakspere did not invent the story, but found it ready-made, and that its attraction for him was that which an idol has for an iconoclast, or a plausible fraud has for an ingenious detective.

Throughout his long career, of his many labels, Shaw perhaps saw himself above all as an iconoclast, smashing the idols of (first) Victorian, and then (in time) Modernist complacency. In *Troilus* and many of the later plays, he sees Shakespeare as a sort of revolutionary brother. This brotherhood is a widely overlooked aspect of Shaw's complex

relationship with Shakespeare, and part of Shaw's attempted appropriation of his predecessor might have as much to do with admiration as with opposition.

In *Troilus and Cressida,* Shaw sees Shakespeare challenging "the unapproachable father and master" who represented "certain mysterious writers possessing powers beyond the reach of 16th-Century man": Homer. In 1599, George Chapman provided the opportunity to make this challenge. Shaw posits Chapman as a major rival of Shakespeare's, even going so far as to suggest that Chapman (rather than Marlowe) is the "rival poet" of the sonnets, a notion unheard of today. But in 1599 Chapman's new translation of Homer's *Iliad* appeared, which he then spent the next 12 years revising and republishing until it culminated in his 1611 *The Whole Works of Homer* final version. On first looking into Chapman's Homer (according to Shaw's speculation), Shakespeare sees a glorification of martial values that he intensely dislikes, feeling Chapman's (Homer's) military fanfares to be a regurgitation of the very boasting-champion Marlovian verse with which Shakespeare had begun his career – and which he was now ready to abandon. Harold Bloom, without acknowledging Shaw, also asserts this reading of Shakespeare's reaction to Chapman:

> Shakespeare's language mocks the elaborate diction of George Chapman, who had compared Essex to Achilles … Homer's heroic men and suffering women, celebrated by Chapman in the commentary to his translation, are more savagely anatomized by Shakespeare than they are by Euripides, or by various satirists of our century.[19]

Troilus is the turning point, with Shakespeare enacting his primal rebellion against his poetic father Homer (as Shaw would do against his dramatic father Shakespeare).

> The Iliads came into Shakspere's[20] hands at last; and they found him in no mood to appreciate descriptions of ships and shields which were not at all superior to the descriptions in Romeo and Juliet or *Lucrece*, and accounts of brutal fights with the combatants Homerized and Chapmanized into

> heroes and demigods. All the human nature in it seemed spelt backwards. Shakspere spelt it forwards, and resolved to make a *correct* version of it for the edification of Chapman. (Italics by Shaw.)

Spelling human nature backwards, and now Shakespeare will spell it forwards. A remarkable, mythic image, seeing the popularity of the Homeric revival during the Elizabethan age as a glance down the wrong way, backwards, back to a medieval heritage of savagery and bloodshed. Looking forward, however, might lead one down a different path, toward a different journey – that of Pessimism.

Shaw himself built a life on Optimism – or long-term optimism, with his philosophy of Creative Evolution (wherein humanity improves because it *wants* to), but the process is tremendously slow and gradual. What he could not have known when criticizing Shakespeare's play was that, thirty years on with the advent of the first of the Wars and his descent into short-term pessimism (as Stanley Weintraub charts in *Journey to Heartbreak*)[21] would mirror Shakespeare's journey, in another parallel between the two playwrights' careers. But the young critic felt he was offering a revelatory interpretation of Shakespeare's career arc, by being the first to pinpoint this critical transition point in Shakespeare's career: the year 1600.

> In that year, Shakspere seemed to have exhausted the possibilities of his art. He had written tragedies, or plays in which the chief characters died; comedies, in which they got married; a fairy extravaganza; and a number of histories. In all of these he had surpassed every known author, and had nothing left to do except to surpass himself. To Shakspere this must have seemed impossible: he probably thought his career at an end.

In the journey through Shakespeare's early plays, Shaw detects a progressive "sinking estimate of human nature" after a decade of playwriting.

> Then his youth began to stale, and disillusion overtook him. He no longer believed in Romeo and Juliet. The windy energy of such exuberate bullies

as Petruchio, Richard III, and Falconbridge could no longer impose on the imagination of a man approaching 40, and on the verge of creating Hamlet.

In seeing the arc of Shakespeare's play sequence as a reflection of Shakespeare's own developing psychology, Shaw declares his belief that all writing, at least all good, honest writing, is a personal artifact inextricable from the personality of its creator – as certainly his own body of work would bear out. In other words, it is impossible to write a pessimistic play such as *Hamlet* without being a pessimist yourself, or a play exhibiting the despair of *King Lear* without feeling such despair yourself. The element of New Criticism which removes the author's biographical circumstances to consider the text in a vacuum would be grossly incorrect and misguided to Shaw, and he would never wish his own plays to be read without acknowledgment of his own personal philosophic state at the time. And Shaw accordingly believed the process can work backwards, so that a reader can infer the writer's nervous system status through his written product. Shaw's instinctive guess is that when Shakespeare's embarrassment over the hypocritical murderous hero he himself had created (Henry V), who begins an unnecessary war for politically devious reasons, meets up against Chapman's "prehistoric Jingo epic" about a "famous war waged under a claptrap pretext for nothing but pride, ambition, and love of fighting" complete with its own selfish hypocritical hero (Achilles) – this "glorification of two mean brigands" overwhelmed any hopefulness Shakespeare had left. "The book of Ecclesiastes must have seemed cheerfully optimistic in comparison with the reflections of Shakspere when he made this discovery." To avenge these frauds, Shaw believed, Shakespeare looked unflinchingly into himself to create *Troilus and Cressida*. The revenge is not directed against Homer, a straw man far beyond Shakespeare's reach. But

"towards the ass who had made a demigod of Henry V he bore no mercy." Shaw is certain that Shakespeare only found disappointment, looking back at his own creation, ceasing to believe his own hero's rhetoric. "Shakspere had not created a hero; he had only whitewashed a commonplace man very thickly" to create a hypocritical mercenary. (Here is one important area of Shavian criticism that the late 20th Century has overturned, and rendered obsolete. In both the study and the theatre, *Henry V* is read as a much more complex commentary on war, with an ambiguous, doubt-filled King alternating ferocity with introspection. Post WW-II theatrical productions, especially a long sequence by the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon[22], have carefully explored the text's subversive anti-war, anti-patriotism underpinning, which counterpoints the military areas. But Shaw sets aside the King's troubled spirituality, in his agenda that sets forth *Troilus* as the antidote to what he saw as *Henry*'s Jingo fanfares.)

Shakespeare's Crossroads

Simultaneously with valuing Shakespeare's ability to write plays from the center of his psychology, Shaw will always fault Shakespeare for giving in to pessimism so easily (Shaw remaining idiosyncratically optimistic either wholly or at least partly throughout his life), and not writing plays that attempt to change the world for the better. It will be a recurring difference between the two playwrights. Clifford Leech articulated the polar divide in a 1967 lecture at the Shaw Festival in Canada:

> One might put it this way: Shaw believed in argument, but Shakespeare did not. Shaw felt he could influence the development of things in his time, Shakespeare knew that he could only show men acting and speaking as they are and that all

history is already written. Not surprisingly, Shakespeare reached his highest level in tragedy, Shaw in argumentative comedy.[23]

That difference is certainly generally true, as a rule-of-thumb; but one Shakespearean play that can be described as primarily argumentative is *Troilus and Cressida*. Only in the final act is there any real action, on the battlefield. The rest of the play is comprised of a series of rhetorical debates, including the central "love" scene. The council scenes in each camp mirror one another; and the Greeks especially, with their leading spokesman Ulysses at the center, argue every decision – whether to continue the war, what to do about Achilles, how to enact their plan to embarrass Achilles, how to conduct the ambassadorial visit from Hector and Aeneas, and then how to select a warrior for the ceremonial duel. The oppositional ideas clash, in sophisticated and complex verse. And like classic Shaw, much of the debate is conducted on an abstract, ideal plane, especially Ulysses's virtuoso arias about order in the universe[24] and the diminution of Achilles's reputation[25]. Even Thersites's abusive railings seem more theoretical than personal, more imaginative than active.

And so, Shaw places Shakespeare at the crossroads of his career in 1600. A crisis would be needed to break the artistic stalemate, to propel him through these dark crossroads. Shaw finds it in *Troilus*, the work he feels immediately precedes *Hamlet*.

As his lecture continues, Shaw produces one of his most striking points, deflating in one instance Homer, Chapman, Marlowe, and "Walter Scott and other 19th-Century works of fiction" as well as Shakespeare's own comparable (or superior) battle writing, with a contemporary parallel to the technique he considers Shakespeare to be employing in the

sharp *Troilus* satire of warriors. Historical heroism? No, says Shaw – merely sports writing:

> Goodly Achilles lifted the Pelian ash; but the warrior Asteropaios hurled with boy spears together, for he could use both hands alike, and with the one spear smote the shield … Then in his turn Achilles hurled on Asteropaios his straight-flying ash, fain to have slain him, but missed the man and struck the high bank … (from Mr Ernest Myer's *Iliad* translation, 21st book)
>
> Bob came up looking very serious, and several times led off left and right, but quite out of distance. Tom then stepped in and tried his left, which Bob cleverly avoided, and then returned on the chest. They quickly fell to close quarters, and after a sharp exchange on the neck, Brettle fell forward on his hands in Tom's corner, Tom missing a terrific upper cut with his right as he fell. (25 September 1859, Bell's Life, London) [26].

In parodying the *Iliad's* heroic style, Shaw sets up a kind of deflationary feedback, wherein Shakespeare, in parodying Chapman's verse style, is parodying his own earlier battle-music, and undercutting an entire genre whose reality doesn't justify its poetic representation. When does it stop being good dramatic verse, and start being propaganda? When does a heroic presentation of violence serve to reinforce its existence?

Shaw's brief consideration of the characters in the play detects "the shadow of pessimism" in all of them. He provides thumbnail Shavian descriptions of Troilus ("the last young man drawn by Shakspere from a young man's point of view"), Ulysses ("one who, in our time, might be safely invited to take the chair at public meetings" [27]) and Achilles ("as selfish, witty, and wicked as a typical French marquis of the 18th century"). He does not take as much notice of Pandarus as the 20th Century has done, dismissing him as irrelevant comic relief probably designed to highlight a popular performer of the day (whereas modern theatres consider Pandarus a star rôle around whom a production

can be planned); but Shakespeare does provide longer commentary for his favorite characters.

> The most important character in the play is Thersites, 'a deformed and scurrilous Grecian,' who, knowing himself to be detestable, loves to find in the actions of the handsome heroes around him that it is not his humped back or his malicious humour that is detestable in him, but the humanity which he has in common with the handsomest and most heroic of them all. His cynicism is mistaken for envy by those whose follies he exposes; but it is none the less true cynicism, simply disbelieving in virtue … Thus he is the Falstaff of Troilus and Cressida, and he would be equally popular if his words had not such a sting in them for all of us.

It's no surprise that Shaw sees the energy with which Shakespeare created Thersites as indicative of Shakespeare's nascent anti-heroism stance. His next selection is less predictable, and much more revolutionary.

> Cressida is one of Shakspere's most captivating women. She has been blamed for inconstancy; but as we can forgive Romeo for jilting Rosaline, we may forgive Cressida for jilting Troilus. She is certainly not noble, like the heroine in Measure for Measure; but very few men would find Isabella's company agreeable, or be disposed to share Ulysses' objection to Cressida[28].

It's quite a progressive step for an 1884 writer to champion a different interpretation of a fictional woman whose name was generally seen as synonymous with infidelity and disloyalty. Those Victorians who knew Shakespeare's Cressida read her according to their own moral structure: Cressida as slut. Shaw sees a pawn lost in a powerful male autocracy, struggling to survive however she can: Cressida as victim. It is an interpretation which has gained primacy during the second half of the 20th Century[29], and it would be drastically archaic to judge her today without a sensitive relativistic appreciation of her difficult social situation in the Greek-Trojan patriarchy. Shaw is in the vanguard of this progressive reading. When he describes Cressida as "Shakspere's first scientific description of a real woman, all the previous ones being either generous fancies

or clever sketches" he anticipates proto-feminist writing of the 1880s and 90s (such as that by his friend Annie Besant), who were campaigning for women to be viewed scientifically, as real people, and not the "fancies" they had been seen as for generations. The "New Woman" became their nickname, as the new century approached. Richard Altick succinctly summarizes the counter-establishment movement away from Victorian values, for both the feminist and artistic movements:

> The very epithet "Victorian" had acquired a derogatory penumbra among the advanced. And the whole atmosphere of the short-lived Edwardian era was electric with an exultant and slightly self-conscious sense of liberation – liberation, that is, from the stuffiness, the obscurantism, the false verities, the repressions and taboos now attributed, fairly or not, to the Victorian mind. The Edwardian reaction took numerous forms: the "new woman" demanding social if not sexual emancipation as well as political equality; the "new drama" dedicated to the treatment of risky moral and social themes; the "new poetry" that rebelled against Tennysonian domesticity and mellifluousness; the "new art" impatient with the pallid domesticity of later Pre-Raphaelite painting.[30]

Cressida, amongst several other Shakespearean women, offers a pre-vision of that New Woman, as Shaw's women dwell as confidently within that rôle as Shaw's plays fit that definition of the "new drama."

Surrounded by an army camp full of males, constantly under their sight, Cressida resolves to retain agency for her own actions and choices within this masculine world – certainly a preoccupation of the feminists, demanding to be viewed as individuals, not simply reflections of the men in their lives. From her first moment alone, Cressida promises herself she'll cling to that agency. Admitting she's attracted to Troilus, she vows:

> Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing;
> Things won are done. Joy's soul lies in the doing.
> That she beloved knows naught that knows not this:
> Men price the thing ungained more than it is.

That she was never yet that never knew
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
Achievement is command; ungained, beseech.
Then though my heart's contents firm love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.
(1.3.264-273)

Cressida could be speaking for a whole line of Shavian New Women, taking their romantic destiny into their own hands. It works briefly, as she steers her uncle Pandarus into orchestrating her night with Troilus; and when she is victimized again by the Trojan patriarchy, and sent to the Greek camp in the prisoner exchange, she must rely on her own resources to survive in the face of a group of warriors who clearly view her as a new toy they've discovered. Like a Victorian woman, she is threatened with being prostitutionalized under the rhetorical guise of being pedastalized. In a desperate attempt at survival, she chooses one of them (Diomedes) to be her protector, and manipulates him into taking her on. Troilus, eavesdropping, dismisses her as having become "Diomed's Cressida" (5.2.137), and catalogs at length the differences between this new Cressida, and the one he knew that one night, that night that so overwhelmed his view of The Woman.

This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
If beauty have a soul, this is not she.
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
If there be rule in unity itself,
This is not she. O madness of discourse,
That cause sets up with and against thyself!
Bifold authority, where reason can revolt
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without result! This is and is not Cressid.
(5.2.137-146)

Troilus is seeking some form of self-expression, some answer to his feelings of betrayal and turmoil, but he can't reconcile his immature emotionalism with his obsessively

metaphysical intelligence. He assigns an extreme emblematic identity to Cressida, making her the abstract embodiment of beauty, soul, vows, sanctimony, and the hyperbole won't stop until she represents the avatar of "rule in unity itself." But he's wrong, seeing it through oppressive male eyes; she's now as much her own Cressida as ever, despite his projection of these responsibilities on her. In his denunciation of Cressida, with its strange leap from a perceived minor infidelity to a cosmic schism in such concepts as discourse, authority, and reason, Troilus tells us more about his own inner conflicted duality than that which he diagnoses in Cressida.

Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth
And yet the spacious breadth of this division
Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
As Ariachne's broken woof to enter. (5.2.147-152)

He continues his rant for another eight lines, raising the hyperbole until "The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved, and loosed" (5.2.156), causing his listener, the cynical Greek politician Ulysses, to question his exaggeration: "May worthy Troilus e'en be half attached / With that which here his passion doth express?" (5.2.161-62). Perhaps the Trojan protests too much.

Janet Adelman, in *Suffocating Mothers*[31], reads Troilus's above aria as "virtual rewriting" of Shakespeare's unusual poem "The Phoenix and the Turtle". Written around the same time as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* (c.1601[32]), the poem sees the two birds uniting in despite of the same sort of rifts and divisions in such abstracts as Reason, Love, Constancy, and Self, that Troilus feels Cressida's defection has made permanent. Where Shakespeare in the poem writes

So they loved as love in twain

Had the essence but in one,
Two distincts, division none,
Number there in love was slain

Hearts remote yet not asunder
Distance and no space was seen
'Twixt this turtle and his queen,
But in them it were a wonder. (25-32)

And later, thanks to the union between the Phoenix and the Turtle Dove, the existence of "Reason" which Troilus sees as a victim of "Bifold authority, where reason can revolt / Without perdition, and loss assume all reason / Without revolt!" (5.2.144-46) is triumphantly redeemed by Love:

Reason, in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together
To themselves, yet either neither,
Simple were so well compounded

That it cried 'How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts can so remain.' (41-48)

Adelman writes

> Troilus's discovery of the place where "reason can revolt / Without perdition" (5.2.143-44) replays the poem's confounding of reason in the register of tragic loss: looking at Cressida, he turns the poem's paradoxes of perfection inside out, finding in her duplicitious body both "distance, and no space" and the self that "was not the same." Hence, while the poem celebrates the mystery that something two – as two a phoenix and a turtle – could be one, Troilus laments that something one can be two, both Cressida and not Cressida, union and not union.[33]

The poem and the play present an abstract dialectic, showing both sides of conceptual argument in powerful language, that presents the sort of model Shaw employs routinely in his conversation plays. But Shaw would have focused less on the split within the

quality of Reason, and more on the double side of Cressida – the real identity she owns, and the identity assigned her by the men.

I have a kind of self resides with you –
But an unkind self, that itself will leave
To be another's fool. Where is my wit?
I would be gone. I speak I know not what. (3.2.135-38)

Adelman pinpoints the key moment when Cressida loses her "self" as the morning of the prisoner exchange, after her one night with Troilus, when the Greeks, led by her future protector Diomedes, arrive to take her away. Troilus and Diomedes have a brief and heated exchange of angry words about her – and Cressida says nothing throughout.

Cressida's Journey

What Adelman reads as a male usurpation of her voice, rendering her mute and powerless, I could read as Cressida's choice as she begins her survival journey. Earlier in the scene she is passionately voluble, and an actress could easily find her silence as an active choice, biding her time, sizing up her situation. For in the following scene of her arrival in the Greek camp, she has no trouble articulating her identity, more than holding her own with the Greek generals passing her around claiming their right to kiss her, including Ulysses, who she insists must beg for a kiss. Her flirting with these men, who think they know her as one of those "sluttish spoils of opportunity / And daughters of the game." (4.6.63-64), is a survival technique, and a mirror image of her opposite – the Greek woman Helen, known now as Helen of Troy, who, in her single appearance in *Troilus and Cressida*, demonstrates her particular survival ability and command by teasing and flirting with her lover Paris (who abducted her) and Cressida's uncle Pandarus. Helen capitalizes on her identity as a sexual object of the male eye, without

Cressida's natural rebellion to it or attempts to manipulate it for her desperate advantage. The only woman in this play who has any worth not connected (in the eyes of the men) to her sexual value is the prophetess Cassandra – and she is dismissed by her family, including Troilus, because she is considered "mad." The Shavian parallel to Cressida's manipulation of the Greek generals, using flirting as her survival tactic, would be Jennifer Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), who charms a quartet of doctors in hope of finding one to treat her ailing husband. But Jennifer is defensive and nervously sly with her feminine identity, unlike Helen and Cressida, with their self-confidence. And still, Cressida's story ends sadly.

Cressida's story may well end sadly, her final letter to Troilus torn and discarded (we never even hear what she wrote, as Troilus dismisses it as "Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart." [5.4.110]); but she maintains her independence to the last. Or, rather, that would be so, were it not for one troublesome speech, her final one in the play, that reverts to pre-feminist paradigms and overturns the New Woman, resigning her once more to a weak sensual "fancy" inferior to male strength:

Troilus, farewell. One eye yet looks on thee,
But with my heart the other eye doth see.
Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find:
The error of our eye directs our mind.
What error leads must err. O then conclude:
Minds swayed by eyes are swayed by turpitude.
(5.2.107-112)

That speech must be rationalized or justified somehow, if not downright ignored, if a critic is to completely posit Cressida as the first proto-feminist New Woman. It would be possible to attempt to rationalize it on grounds of theatrical tidiness – wrapping up Cressida's story-line before getting on to the battle scenes. But it doesn't seem that

tidiness would be important to Shakespeare, in a text with so many loose ends and untidy conclusions (an aspect of the play that is very interesting to our modern theatre). And it would be possible to attempt to justify it on the grounds that the oppressive male-driven society within which Shakespeare would write such lines, whether ironically or sincerely, contains within it the embryonic seeds of the feminist movement those centuries later, which Cressida prefigures. In that reading, an actress would perform the speech facetiously, or at least winkingly, in a direct succession from Katherine's submission speech in *The Taming of the Shrew*[34] a decade earlier, now typically performed as sarcasm, collusion, or parody (but never at face value). One actress, Juliet Stevenson with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1985, confronted with Cressida's speech, went so far as suggesting that the traumas of her situation had driven Cressida insane before that troublesome speech, so inconsistent with Cressida's character and behavior. Her solution to this textual crux was obvious in the performance I saw, and my impression was shared by the London theatre critics in their newspapers.

Shaw's championship of Cressida is still in the movement's early days, and it's difficult to see any high Victorian or Edwardian approving of Cressida's behavior. William Archer[35] and the anonymous *Times* critic as late as 1907[36] thought the play unstageable because of its representation of a faithless woman who (it could be said) exhibits no remorse, leaving Troilus without the slightest twinge of conscience. But Shaw sees a complex, mature woman making her own choices and taking control of her own sexual identity.

Cressida's status as victim might emerge in a subtle way through her choice of imagery in her duologue with Troilus on the eve of their single night together. As they swear their

truth and love, vows which will drive Troilus mad when he spies her breaking them with Diomedes, the language in which they frame their vows gives an insight into their emotional states. Troilus identifies himself as an exemplar of devotion and fidelity that will stand as an iconic model for generations to come. He speaks in terms of truth: "As true as Troilus" will be the crowning expression when all other examples of truth need topping.

True swains in love shall in the world to come
Approve their truth by Troilus. When their rhymes,
Full of protest, of oath and big compare,
Want similes, truth tired with iteration –
'As true as steel, and plantage to the moon,
As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
As iron to adamant, as earth to th' centre' –
Yet, after all comparisons of truth,
As truth's authentic author to be cited,
'As true as Troilus' shall crown up the verse,
And sanctify the numbers. (3.2.160-170)

His images are affirmative, clear, and ringing with self confidence. Cressida echoes his apotheosis – but couches it in the negative, with imagery evoking extreme landscapes of destruction.

Prophet may you be!
If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When water drops have worn the stones of Troy
And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,
And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing, yet let memory
From false to false among false maids in love
Upbraid my falsehood. When they've said, 'as false
As air, as water, wind or sandy earth,
As fox to lamb, or wolf to heifer's calf,
Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son',
Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
'As false as Cressid'. (3.2.170-184)

The antithetical differences between the two declarations – Troilus employs the words "true" or "truth" seven times, and implies it in his rhetorical model a further five, whereas Cressida says "false" or "falsehood" seven times, with seven further implications, over and over like a resounding bell – perhaps illustrate the social imperatives the different genders face. Troilus is in easy control of his own universe, whereas Cressida is at the mercy of outside circumstances. The male-driven circumstances that make her a commodity in Troy, to be pedaled by her uncle Pandarus to the best available prince, will further commodify her the morning after her romantic evening with Troilus when she is sent to the enemy Greek camp in the prisoner exchange. Shaw approves of her efforts to struggle to create her own identity, despite being a political pawn, and sees in her the New Woman paradigm, in embryo. (Except, he does not comment on that troublesome final speech, cited above. Its inconsistency with the rest of Cressida's character overthrows his championship of Cressida as victim of male patriarchy, and so, in a classic rhetorical strategy known to orators who are confident in their audience's lack of familiarity with the source text, he ignores it.)

If the choice of imagery can provide a glimpse into a character's emotional state, Cressida's pessimism may have its origin in the world of hollow warriors that surrounds her. Shaw will show many women striving to create their own imagery.

> Troilus and Cressida is the unsettled work of a transition period, and is unequal, like all works which are too long to be completed at one sitting, and which are by an author who does not choose or cannot afford to wait for the recurrence of the state of mind in which they were first conceived. The pessimistic state of mind is a particularly uncertain one. A creditor's knock at the door, a cool greeting from a valued friend, a chance encounter with some fresh evidence of human selfishness and suffering, or an attack of dyspepsia, may produce it at any moment. On the other hand, a good dinner or a bottle of wine may extinguish it completely.

In his conclusions, Shaw salutes the tonal variety of *Troilus*, particularly its 3rd Act, the eye of the storm, written, no doubt, when "Shakspere's digestion must have been perfect," and notes that this play does not yet feature the consistent masterly pessimism of such plays to come as *Timon of Athens*. But it is the forerunner:

> In finding out the vanity of the Trojan war, he found out, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, the vanity of all things, and with this discovery, he must have felt that instead of being at the end of his career he was only at the beginning of it. The access of power which ensued can only be imagined by considering carefully the great gap between Henry V and Hamlet. But Shakspere's growth did not progress by leaps and bounds. There must be a bridge across that great gap. And the only bridge which fits it is Troilus and Cressida, with its cynical history at one end and pessimistic tragedy at the other.

I feel the older Shaw would not have let a young critic get away with that final clincher to the argument, where plausible evidence[37] is circumvented to assert a causal chain of events on the basis of what the commentator feels ought to be, no more than he would hesitate to point out the inconsistency of Cressida's final capitulation to female weakness to her earlier self-assertion; but his imagination of Shakespeare's crisis is a convincing explanation for the stylistic shift in Shakespeare's playwrighting, midway through his career. With Shaw's work, three centuries later, there will be no composition or publication date confusion. Therefore, it should be possible to examine Shaw's version of the crisis of pessimism, and how to withstand it, with at least the assurance of correct chronology. As a rediscovery of *Troilus and Cressida*, as Shaw's most sustained single statement on a Shakespearean text, and as an early attempt to consider women characters through the eyes of the feminist movement, still then in its political infancy, Shaw's missing lecture is very valuable, if not indispensable.

In Cressida's journey, particularly her self-asserting handling of the men who would assume they can assign her her identity (until that odd final speech, above), I see a prevision of many Shavian heroines the Shavian New Woman, seeking her remedies in herself.

Vivie Warren

Mrs Warren's Profession (1894) was a controversial play when it appeared, banned from public performance for many years due to its scandalous subject matter (her profession being running an organized prostitution business, as her way to escape working-class poverty). At least, that's the subject matter of the play's narrative plot. Its real dramatic conflict occurs between two extraordinary women characters, one a groundbreaking late Victorian feminist, bohemian yet prosperous; the other, her daughter Vivie, a bona fide New Woman. Vivie, the New Woman, is independent, liberated, well-educated, unsentimental, a professional actuarial accountant, even masculine; when asked "Are you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?" she replies "I don't care for either … I like working and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it." Later, in the first of two raw confrontations with her mother, Vivie has suspicions about her paternity, and interrogates her mother about it. "My God, what sort of woman are you?" Mrs Warren asks, incredulously. Vivie's reply: "the sort the world is mostly made of, I should hope. Otherwise I don't understand how it gets its business done." And in their final confrontation, after Vivie has deserted her mother's home upon learning that her mother's financial empire is built on a chain of successful prostitution houses throughout continental Europe, Vivie takes a non-negotiable moral stand. Refusing to return to her

mother, Vivie dismisses her with a condemnation accusing Mrs Warren of being, deep down, a "conventional woman," despite her wealth accrued from organizing the best little whorehouses in Europe. The wealth earned from her immoral activities has been employed, among other pursuits, in funding Vivie's Cambridge education – and Vivie recoils against the hypocrisy of her mother's sending her to be accepted in the very establishment in subversion of which Mrs Warren has thrived. Vivie's final dismissal: "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."

As a proper New Woman, Vivie would certainly object to her mother's earlier argument that "The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her." Mrs Warren's way of being so good is to provide well-organized prostitution for her male benefactors. Caught in a transitional moment, bridging the Victorian angel in the home with the Edwardian New Woman, Mrs Kitty Warren does her best to retain her immense humanity while striving to escape male authority, which threatened to keep her in workhouse poverty. Thanks to male sexual hypocrisy, with Victorian gentlemen posing as austere and pious while providing custom to the four percent of the population who were prostitutes[38], Mrs Warren is able to provide her estranged daughter with the means for a first-rate education. Where Mrs. Warren thrives in subversive opposition to male authority, Vivie thrives by both joining that establishment, and then ignoring its traditional boundaries. Vivie succeeds by buying into the capitalist system that is the very villain that forced her mother into taking extraordinary measures to survive. In Shaw's dramatic analysis, it is economic pressure that drives working-class girls into the streets – not laziness or immorality. Mrs Warren

can't understand her daughter's aloof attitude toward the source of their wealth – being its benefactor, why should the New Woman complain about the oldest profession?

On the final page of the play, in its closing moments, Vivie dismisses her furious mother, and her would-be lover Frank. With Vivie left alone onstage, Shaw concludes his play with a detailed stage direction:

> (Mrs Warren goes out, slamming the door behind her. The strain on Vivie's face relaxes; her grave expression breaks up into one of joyous content; her breath goes out in a half sob, half laugh of intense relief. She goes buoyantly to her place at the writing-table; pushes the electric lamp out of the way; pulls over a great sheaf of papers; and is in the act of dipping her pen in the ink when she finds Frank's note. She opens it unconcernedly and reads it quickly, giving a little laugh at some quaint turn of expression in it.) And goodbye, Frank. (She tears the note up and tosses the pieces into the wastepaper basket without a second thought. Then she goes at her work with a plunge, and soon becomes absorbed in its figures.)

Her self-control and poise are admirable, indeed; but as a dramatic New Woman, Vivie Warren is so thoroughly unlikable that she (or Shaw, creating her) does no great favor to the movement. Is this the future of womanhood we should expect?, the gentlemen of the 1890s must have wondered. Humorless, joyless, sexless, all business and no fun? No balance between independence and personal connection? And Vivie has another critical problem – the hypocrisy of denouncing her mother's immoral fortune, while still reaping the benefits that fortune has provided for her. Her Cambridge education was paid for by her mother's enterprise, and through it, she is able to become completely independent. Like Claudius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, her repentance is rendered ineligible, as she will not refuse and forego the benefits her mother's sinful activity provided her. She continues to thrive on the fruit from the poisonous tree.

In *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Shaw's exploration of the changing status of the woman in society is one of his two central themes, the specific theme. The more general theme concerns the real evil at the heart of the narrative that has caused this family such turmoil. Here, the real villain is not prostitution, with its immorality; but the capitalistic social system that supports prostitution, with its own immorality, which forces Kitty Warren to flaunt the legal conventions of her society in order to succeed. Or, rather, to survive, and trade on male licentiousness to enable her to climb out of poverty. Her anxiety about her survival in her particular calling, which contributes to her edginess when confronting her daughter Vivie, had been voiced before, by a pair of Shakespearean brothel-mistresses.

MISTRESS OVERDONE But shall all our houses in the resort be pulled down?
POMPEY To the ground, mistress.
MISTRESS OVERDONE: Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth. What shall become of me?
POMPEY Come, fear not you. Good counsellors lack no clients. Though you change your place, you need not change your trade.
(*Measure for Measure*, 1.2.82-87)

The anxiety is not moral, but economic. Here is another pair of brothel-keepers, all business when presented by a procurer with a runaway girl who could be a good candidate for the brothel (which is always on the lookout for new talent):

BOULT Master, I have gone through for this piece you see. If you like her, so; if not, I have lost my earnest.
BAWD Boult, has she any qualities?
BOULT She has a good face, speaks well, and has excellent good clothes. There's no farther necessity of qualities can make her be refused.
BAWD What's her price, Boult?
BOULT I cannot be bated one doit of a hundred sesterces.
PANDER [*to* Pirates] Well, follow me, my masters. You shall have your money presently. [*to* Bawd] Wife, take her in, instruct her what she has to do, that she may not be raw in her entertainment. [*Exeuent* Pander *and* Pirates]
BAWD Boult, take you the marks of her, the colour of her hair, complexion, height, her age, with warrant of her virginity, and cry 'He that will give most shall have her first.' Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing if men were as they have been. Get this done as I command you.

(*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Sc. 16.38-54)

Here is sex as a business commodity, as men continue to be as they have been, and entrepreneurs like Mistress Overdone, the Bawd, as well as Shakespeare's other professionals: the Courtesan in *The Comedy of Errors*, Doll Tearsheet in *Henry IV Part Two*, Mistress Quickly in all three of the Falstaff plays, Phrynia and Timandra in *Timon of Athens;* and then with Shaw, Mrs Warren can flourish. But Vivie refuses to be controlled by the role she's been assigned. She rejects the temptations of marriage (from Frank), romance (from the artist Praed), and money (from her mother), while continuing to trade on the liberated identity her mother's dubious wealth allowed her to become. It might be argued that the play presents a positive ending, as something good and principled (Vivie) emerges from Mrs Warren's underground world. The problem in reading it that generously today lies in Vivie's distastefulness. She's cold and bitter. Her mother, at her best, is by contrast warm and life-affirming. Even in her breakdowns, she's bound to earn an audience's sympathy more than her daughter.

MRS WARREN: You think that people are what they pretend to be: that the way you were taught at school and college to think right and proper is the way things really are. But it's not: it's all a pretence, to keep the cowardly slavish common run of people quiet. Do you want to find that out, like other women, at forty, when youve thrown yourself away and lost your chances; or wont you take it in good time now from your own mother, that loves you and swears to you, that it's truth: gospel truth? [*Urgently*] Vivie: the big people, the clever people, the managing people, all know it. They do as I do, and think what I think. I know plenty of them. I know them to speak to, to introduce you to, to make friends for you. I dont mean anything wrong: thats what you dont understand: your head is full of ignorant ideas about me. What do the people that taught you know about life or about people like me? When did they ever meet me, or speak to me, or let anyone tell them anything about me? the fools! Would they have ever done anything for you if I hadnt paid them? Havnt I told you that I want you to be respectable? Havnt I brought you up to be respectable? And how can you keep it up without my money and my influence and Lizzie's friends? Cant you see that youre cutting your own throat as well as breaking my heart in turning your back on me?

The argument proceeds, with Vivie becoming more businesslike and Mrs Warren more upset, until the climax of separation:

VIVIE: It's no use, mother: I am not to be changed by a few cheap tears and entreaties any more than you are, I daresay.
MRS WARREN: [*wildly*] Oh, you call a mother's tears cheap.
VIVIE: They cost you nothing; and you ask me to give you the peace and quietness of my whole life in exchange for them. What use would my company be to you if you could get it? What have we two in common that could make either of us happy together?

Mrs Warren will conclude by describing her daughter as a "pious, canting, hard, selfish woman." Is the cost of being a fully-developed New Woman the alienation and unhappiness Vivie Warren and Blanche Sartorious, like Cressida before them, experience? With his subsequent dramatic creations, Shaw will attempt to find a better balance between New Woman principals and a normal human wish for happiness.

The Shavian Journey

Mrs Warren's Profession was refused a license by the government censor, banned because of its immoral themes and language by the same Victorians who disliked *Troilus and Cressida* – and no doubt, by many of the Victorian gentlemen keeping London's prostitutes in business as a growth industry. With *Mrs Warren's Profession* unsuccessful as the third of his *Plays Unpleasant* trilogy[39], Shaw made the imaginative leap that would rescue him from the pro-socialist agitprop drama of the *fin de siècle*, and onto a larger stage. He began writing comedy, and blending his sense of humor with his political messages. Beginning with *Arms and the Man* (1894, his first popular success in the theatre), his *Plays Pleasant* collection features principal women characters who champion the feminist cause without making it seem too somber, too heavy for a London after-dinner audience. The old-fashioned housewives in these late 1890s plays are far less interesting than the assertive women characters, seeking to find their own identity. *Arms and the Man* (1894) presents Mrs Petkoff and her romantic daughter Raina, both pleasant, and both dwelling within the roles assigned them – fussy mother and pampered daughter; as an audience, we're more interested in the maid Louka, looking out for herself creatively and marrying above her assigned station. *Candida* lacks dramatic impulse due to its supremely self-confident woman at its center; the good wife half-heartedly targeted in the romantic triangle in *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) is an easy sort of melodramatic mannequin; but *You Never Can Tell* (1896) gives us both Mrs Clandon, a banner-waving slogan-quoting suffragette, and her daughter Gloria, a caricature of the New Woman, almost a parody of Shaw's own Vivie Warren. Gloria yields in the final scene to romantic pressure, yet in a lighthearted mood.

The one-act piece *The Man of Destiny* (1895), Shaw's portrait of Napoleon on the campaign trail, features a "Strange Lady" working as an enemy spy, bold and forthright. Fiercely nationalistic, her mission is to prevent Napoleon's France from overtaking Italy. Her unscrupulous attempts to steal important military documents from Napoleon are charming and funny, though in the end unsuccessful, as she is outwitted by Napoleon – if there was one thing Shaw liked even more than an independent woman, it would be a strong, charismatic political leader – but Shaw's women characters were developing his quick wit alongside of their feminist cause during the late 1890s.

After a few years considering the woman as historical centerpiece, perhaps intending them as models for the present day, Shaw returned to his own age, at least temporally. Having, in the late 1890s, created women in the ancient age (*Caesar and Cleopatra*), during the American Revolution (*The Devil's Disciple*), and during the Napoleonic wars, Shaw next looked at contemporary colonialism, and the emergent New Woman would fare outside of London, out in the Empire.

Lady Cicely

Captain Brassbound's Conversion (1899) features an English tourist in Morocco. Accompanying Sir Howard, her brother-in-law, a distinguished Attorney General in London's Old Bailey, Lady Cicely Waynflete will dominate British missionaries, renegade bandits and adventurers (led by Captain Brassbound, a renegade ex-soldier now leading his troop of mercenaries in the Atlas Mountains of north Africa), and a local Sheik fanatically devoted to Islam who captures the tourist party, and who has a ferocious hatred of Christians. Her domination of everyone else, through which she'll engineer a happy ending all around, comes from her cheerfulness, her efficiency and usefulness, her

common sense, and warm self-confidence. One of her favorite techniques for dominating the "cutthroats" is by telling them that they have nice faces. She wins over the brigand Brassbound, the bloodthirsty Arab Sheik (even cheerfully agreeing to join his harem if Sir Howard and the other Englishmen can go free), and then charms everyone in the final scene of the play, a trial scene conducted by an American Naval Commander, who arrives with his gunboats to sort out the real estate swindle Sir Howard was attempting to put over on Brassbound, who turns out to be the Howard's long-lost nephew, and heir to Howard's late brother's estate in the West Indies. Brassbound refuses to settle the issue, desiring revenge for the disgraceful way Sir Howard treated his parents while they were alive, and the American *deus ex machina* must arrange matters peacefully, under Lady Cicely's guidance, as she coolly and gracefully points out the unsatisfying stupidity of revenge. (Her common sense remains uppermost, as she observes that the West Indies estate is losing money every year, and therefore is not really worth squabbling over.)

In her behavior and comportment, Lady Cicely is an earnest, privileged, even naïve Victorian lady of the old school. She tames the non-European savages with good manners, without raising her voice, indeed without raising so much as a starched white handkerchief. She views and treats men as schoolboys, and has an easy-going attitude with which she creates the impression that although she may be the only white woman in a crowd of natives in some exotic location, they – not she – are the outsiders. Her condescending Victorian superiority emerges when warned by the local missionary about the danger of touring the mountains, where the Arab tribes live:

> I'm only talking commonsense. Why do people get killed by savages? Because instead of being polite to them, and saying Howdyedo? like me, people aim pistols at them. I've been among savages – cannibals and all sorts. Everybody said they'd kill me. But when I met them, I said

Howdyedo? and they were quite nice. The kings always wanted to marry me.

Lady Cicely is a sort of closet New Woman, masking her determination and independent self under a cover identity that succeeds by virtue of being palatable to all others. She is not an obvious, aggressive rebel like Vivie Warren – her superiority is subtle, as she overturns male authority while seemingly enjoying the patriarchal system. In the play's penultimate trial scene, she intervenes both unofficially (cutting through legal complexities with simple common sense, like Desdemona) and officially (appearing as Counsel for the Prosecution, similar to Portia). And like Portia, she manipulates the courtroom with charm and good-nature, ensuring the brigands' freedom, the assurance of no reprisal against the Sheik's tribe, and the resolution of the property dispute between Brassbound and his uncle, Sir Howard. At the trial's close:

SIR HOWARD: Cicely: in the course of my professional career I have met with unscrupulous witnesses, and I am sorry to say, unscrupulous counsel also. But the combination of unscrupulous witness and unscrupulous counsel I have met today has taken away my breath. You have made me your accomplice in defeating justice.
LADY CICELY: Yes: aren't you glad it's been defeated for once?

Above scruples, above the law, Lady Cicely charmingly arranges everything for the best, a Superwoman untouched by life's realities, content to meddle in others' lives to bring about a happy ending. Until, that is, the final scene, when her New-Woman-in-Disguise identity is tested, by that classic Shavian threat to emancipated women: a marriage offer. Captain Brassbound, the disreputable bandit, unexpectedly proposes marriage to Lady Cicely … and the New Woman nearly overthrows her proud isolated independence, and accepts. Hearing his ship signaling, Brassbound withdraws his offer and leaves. His

proposal was not based on anything as sentimental as love – but on his admiration for her ability to win at everything, to succeed:

LADY CICELY: I'm afraid you don't quite know how odd a match it would be for me according to the ideas of English society.
BRASSBOUND: I care nothing about English society: let it mind its own business.
LADY CICELY: Captain Paquito (*his nickname*): I am not in love with you …
BRASSBOUND: Come: are you in love with anybody else? That's the question.
LADY CICELY: I have never been in love with any real person; and I never shall. How could I manage people if I had that mad little bit of self left in me? That's my secret
BRASSBOUND: Then throw away the last bit of self. Marry me.

But we never hear her decision. His ship's salute brings Brassbound back to his reality, and he leaves, wishing rescue, safety, and freedom for her. The final line in the play summarizes the modern woman's dilemma, between her private "little bit of self" and the assigned societal role of wife and people-manager: "How glorious! How glorious! And what an escape!"

Lady Cicely barely escapes the limiting cage of marriage, and remains a free spirit, able to employ her gifts of personality and common sense to spread help amongst others. She has a devotion to setting other people's situations right, which this briefly-considered marriage would have curtailed. At least Shaw resolves the question mark, on his play's final page. A Shakespearean heroine with an equal devotion to a chosen cause, the Church, is similarly surprised by a sudden proposal, yet the outcome is left hanging, indeterminate (despite some theatre directors' interpolated silent stage business to settle the question, in either acceptance or denial[40]).

DUKE Dear Isabel,
I have a motion much imports your good,
Whereto, if you'll a willing ear incline,

What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.
(*Measure for Measure*, 5.1.527-30)

Isabella in Shakespeare's play is industrious, efficient, and self-assured, albeit a strict follower in her life as a Nun, rather than existing as a free being (like Lady Cicely) who has no-one to whom she must answer; but her dilemma, facing this dramatic proposal, presents the same crack in the ice: do I accept the role of wife being offered, with its advantages as well as drawbacks?; or do I remain true to my self's independence, with the potential loneliness and isolation that may result? It is a signal distinction between Shakespeare and Shaw, in that the dramatic poet is happy to leave the question unanswered, as he did with the unresolved and ambiguous ending to the story of Cressida, while the dramatic polemicist insists on resolving the dilemma.

Ann and Superman

Here have we literary and cultured persons been for years setting up a cry of the New Woman whenever some unusually old fashioned female comes along and never noticing the advent of the New Man. Straker's the New Man.

That is Jack Tanner, in *Man and Superman* (1903), describing Henry Straker, his chauffeur and car mechanic, upon whom he feels completely dependent, as Straker has the knowledge of operation, care, and maintenance of Jack's new fancy automobile. *Man and Superman* predicts that the New Man of the future will be the technocrat, and our future leaders will emerge from the pool of technical talent that can utilize machinery, rather than the pool of intellectual talent that can espouse philosophy (such as Jack himself). It is significant that, as early as 1903, a writer such as Shaw, an outspoken advocate for the women's movement, can have fun with (or make fun of) the concept.

The central woman in *Man and Superman*, Ann Whitefield, is an engaging, charming, and entertaining character – but except for her intense determination and self-sufficiency, she is not a New Woman in the sense we have come to understand it. Her single-minded, obsessive pursuit of Jack to be her husband is very old fashioned and Victorian, as she needs to define herself through her connection to (and dominance of) her outspoken, politically controversial husband. In conversation with Ann's mother, Jack describes Ann's tactics for getting her way in all situations in terms which would not be applied to Vivie Warren:

> In short – to put it as a husband would put it when exasperated to the point of speaking out – she is a liar. And since she has plunged Tavy head over ears in love with her without any intention of marrying him, she is a coquette, according to the standard definition of a coquette as a woman who rouses passions she has no intention of gratifying. And as she has now reduced you to the point of being willing to sacrifice me at the altar for the mere satisfaction of getting me to call her a liar to her face, I may conclude that she is a bully as well. She can't bully men as she bullies women; so she habitually and unscrupulously uses her personal fascination to make men give her whatever she wants. That makes her almost something for which I know no polite name.

It's not a very progressive portrait of a liberated woman, and Jack and Ann (in the social comedy aspect of the play) fall into the tradition of other wrangling lovers destined to quarrel happily ever after in their marriages such as Benedick and Beatrice (in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*) or Mirabell and Millamant (in Congreve's *The Way of the World*). In this tradition, marriage becomes a funny contract negotiation more than a romantic love story. The love is understated, and understood. *Man and Superman* is a very important play in the Shaw canon, but for reasons aligned with Shaw's philosophy of Creative Evolution and the Life Force (his heartfelt revision of Darwinian evolutionary theory). In the "Don Juan in Hell" dream sequence, Ann's climactic cry

wishing for “A father! A father for the Superman!” portrays her as the New Mother, perhaps the new Eve or Mary, more than the New Woman.

Many of Shaw’s next series of women characters continue his feminist campaign, while alternating with old fashioned ladies apparently comfortable with their assigned societal roles, such as Nora in *John Bull’s Other Island* (1904), “She” in *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904), Sarah in *Major Barbara* (1905), Jennifer in *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (1906), or Lavinia in *Androcles and the Lion* (1912). These characters are headstrong, self-reliant, and charismatic, but their main objective is their pursuit of the husband they want. Unlike the New Woman, they seek their personal identity through the man they acquire, rather than striving for a voice independent from that man.

Three Shavian women personify the struggle for self identity, in a less confident (and less arrogant) journey than that undertaken by Vivie Warren, Gloria Clandon, Lady Cicely, or Ann Whitefield. They are the most true descendants of Shakespeare’s Cressida or Helena (from *All’s Well that Ends Well*), in that we see the process by which they find their voice, a voice that is liberated, self-confident, idiosyncratic – and more interesting for our witnessing that voice’s birth, rather than seeing it pre-established and pre-ordained (such as with Vivie, Cicely, and Ann).

The Taming of Eliza

Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (1913) is a problematic Shavian heroine, in terms of the training of a nascent New Woman. Hugely likeable, she learns under the relentless tutorship of Henry Higgins, an overbearing totalitarian bully, ostensibly how to be a "lady" in the society sense – but actually how to express her own identity. In mainstreaming her clothes, manners, and behavior, and of course, above all, her spoken accent, by refining her lower-class Cockney dialect into the snobbish sound of the upper-class Mayfair society, Higgins achieves a transformation vastly different than his original objective. He does not create Galatea, in order to prove himself the New Pygmalion and win his private wager with Colonel Pickering; rather, he inadvertently helps Eliza to create Eliza, to create herself, and find her own voice in ways more profound than classy vowel sounds and phonetic stylings.

> LIZA: Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You cant take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That's done you, Henry Higgins, it has. Now I dont care that [*snapping her fingers*] for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.
> HIGGINS: [*wondering at her*] You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isnt it? [*Rising*] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.

Lisë Pederson, in her 1977 essay in *The Shaw Review* entitled "Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* vs. Shaw's *Pygmalion*: Male Chauvinism vs. Women's Lib?" established a current trend in interpretation of Eliza and Higgins that I believe is based on

a false comparison. Shaw did not intend *Pygmalion* to be a contemporary rewrite or correction of Shakespeare's play, in the way he did with several others. It's true that Shaw hated *The Taming of the Shrew*, describing it in 1888 as "a piece which is one vile insult to womanhood and manhood from the first word to the last. I think no woman should enter a theatre where that play is performed …" and adding "In the future I hope all men and women who respect one another will boycott The Taming of the Shrew until it is driven off the boards." and commenting in 1897 that "the last scene is altogether disgusting to modern sensibility. No man with any decency of feeling can sit it out in the company of a woman without being extremely ashamed of the lord-of-creation moral implied in the wager and the speech put into the woman's own mouth."[41] The last scene in Shakespeare's play, of course, features Katherine's astonishing aria of submission to her husband Petrucchio, overturning her furious independence throughout the play to proclaim to the other women that "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper" (5.2.150) and subverting "women's lib" when she says

I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war when they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey. (5.2.165-168)

Pederson, and other critics following her, read Eliza's climactic speech quoted above, in the final moments of *Pygmalion*, as being Shaw's overturning of Katherine's apparent surrender, and a century of modern, liberated actresses have gone to extreme lengths to justify her submission speech to themselves (similar to actresses confronted with Cressida's bizarre final soliloquy). Pederson writes

At the conclusion of *Pygmalion*, then, both Eliza and Higgins reject the concept of male dominance over women, a concept which is not only

supported but actually exalted by the conclusion of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In supporting this concept in *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare was, of course, supporting the conventional morality of his own day, and in rejecting this concept in *Pygmalion* Shaw was rejecting the conventional morality of his own day and substituting for it an original view of morality.

"His own day" is an outright exaggeration, as by 1913 attitudes about the Women's Movement were changing, and much more complex than they had been earlier in Shaw's career. But more essential, the putative parallel between Petrucchio and Katherine, and Higgins and Eliza, is based on a false romantic idea that *Pygmalion* is a love story, which Shaw expressly intended it not to be. If *The Taming of the Shrew* can succeed as a comedy today, it must have a dimension wherein Petrucchio and Katherine sincerely and genuinely fall in love. But Shaw's creation of Henry Higgins, irascible bully though he is, was conceived with a different agenda. It has to do with language and accent as expression of identity – not as a ploy for romantic gain or the overthrow of assumed gender morality. In learning a new voice, Eliza is learning herself, and Higgins (a true teacher, if a grouchy one) is a scientist, not a wooer, as even Petrucchio evolves into (from bounty hunter into lover).

The romantic fallacy of regarding *Pygmalion* as a courtship story has its roots in the 1938 film version, in which producer Gabriel Pascal pressed Shaw for a romantic angle to the relationship between Eliza and Higgins. Shaw dug in his heels and refused, attempting to compromise by enlarging the character of Freddy, Eliza's prospective love interest in the original text. But Pascal, and his director Anthony Asquith, got around Shaw's intention by adding a final scene, wordless to avoid copyright violations with Shaw's ownership of the spoken text, in which Eliza (Wendy Hiller) returns to Higgins (Leslie Howard) after

she had apparently temporarily walked out. This fairy-tale romantic, but non-Shavian, ending to the play was solidified after Shaw's death, in a reinvention of his *Pygmalion* in a way of which he certainly would have disapproved. In 1956, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe acquired the legal rights, and adapted *Pygmalion* into their musical version, *My Fair Lady*. Incorporating Shaw's dialogue with their own songs, Lerner and Loewe modulated the text into a sort of classic love triangle between Eliza, Higgins, and Freddy. With Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison starring, the new version was a great success, which was elevated into mythic status when it was filmed eight years later, and won several Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

This Hollywood transformation of a story of a poor girl's journey into her emergence as a New Woman through an aggressive education process becoming a traditional love story, in which a woman identifies herself through the man she marries (her assigned self), is an atrocity, in Shavian terms. Higgins may be an arrogant grump, but he is neither a misogynist with an anti-suffragette agenda, nor a shy lover using his position to surreptitiously court a flower girl. In his brief preface to the second edition of the original play, Shaw concludes

> I wish to boast that Pygmalion has been an extremely successful play all over Europe and North America as well as at home. It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else.
>
> Finally, and for the encouragement of people troubled with accents that cut them off from all high employment, I may add that the change wrought by Professor Higgins in the flower-girl is neither impossible nor uncommon. The modern concierge's daughter who fulfills her ambition by playing the Queen of Spain in Ruy Blas at the Théâtre Français is only one of many thousands of men and women who have sloughed off their native dialects and acquired a new tongue. But the thing has to be done scientifically, or the last state of the aspirant may be worse than the first. An honest and natural slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempt of a phonetically untaught person to imitate the vulgar dialect of the golf

club; and I am sorry to say that in spite of the efforts of our Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, there is still too much sham golfing English on our stage, and too little of the noble English of Forbes Robertson.

Pygmalion is about scientific education and the acquisition of a new language, with its awkward learning curve, and is no more a love story than *Caesar and Cleopatra*, which is about the education of a political leader and not about a May – November romance, despite the Hollywood adaptation's mainstreaming effect. In *Pygmalion*, an emergent New Woman strives to find her voice in an accent that her society will accept, and respect. The vowel sounds are more symbolic than aural, and Shaw's implied criticism of the hypocrisy of such a superficial standard for social acceptance is far more powerful than a garden-variety love story would be. And as the education of Eliza's vowel sounds and diction are symbolic, so is the process of naming, and the identity that one's name represents.

In her *Shaw Review* essay, Pederson points out that Eliza's "real beginning of her transformation" came when Colonel Pickering, Higgins's partner and Shaw's representative of Victorian gentlemanliness, politely addressed her as Miss Doolittle, from the first time they met.

> " your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me." This statement is a criticism of Higgins, who calls her "Eliza" from the first – that is, when he is not calling her "this baggage," "presumptuous insect" or the like – but it also recalls the fact that Petruchio, on first meeting Kate, calls her "Kate," though, except for her sister, her family and acquaintances all call her by the more formal "Katherina" or "Katherine." In addition, Kate herself rebukes Petruchio for calling her "Kate," asserting that "they call me Katherine that do talk of me," whereupon he replies with a speech in which he uses the name "Kate" eleven times in six lines:
>
> You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
> And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the Curst,
> But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,

Kate of Kate-Hall, my superdainty Kate,
For dainties all are Kates – and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation.

This perverse insistence on using the familiar, informal name which she has asked him not to use is paralleled by Higgins's reply to Eliza's request that he call her "Miss Doolittle": "I'll see you damned first."

But, no, the insistence is not "perverse" or inappropriate, as Petrucchio has been given allowance by her father Baptista to address her in such a familiar way, as a courting suitor would. "Signor Petrucchio, will you go with us, / Or shall I send my daughter Kate to you?" (2.1.164-65) "I pray you do" he replies, and greets her with the above speech. Pederson sees her opening foot-stamping "they call me Katherine" as a great assertion of identity and rebuke of her sudden suitor Petrucchio – and yet, a more generous way to read the exchange may be that her initial knee-jerk comeback to his "Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear" originates in self-defense, not self-assertion. There is a difference between Eliza's appreciation of being addressed as "Miss Doolittle" and Katherine's possible *wish* for someone to address her in a familiar, informal way. Maybe, privately, she welcomes it. I must wonder if the late-Victorian "New Woman" liked that label. Does their identity, their soul, reside in being addressed as "Miss" or "Katherine," or in honorifics such as "Major" or "Saint" before their names?

HIGGINS: I have my own soul: my own spark of divine fire. But [*with sudden humility*] I shall miss you, Eliza. [*He sits down near her on the ottoman*]. I have learnt something from your idiotic notions: I confess that humbly and gratefully. And I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance. I like them, rather.
LIZA: Well, you have both of them on your gramophone and in your book of photographs. When you feel lonely without me, you can turn the machine on. It's got no feelings to hurt.
HIGGINS: I cant turn your soul on. Leave me those feelings; and you can take away the voice and the face. They are not you.

Even without her Hollywood romantic ending, Eliza has certainly become worldly and practical through her experience with Higgins. Her process results in her liberation, in the passage quoted above: “Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.” Higgins’s reply proclaims the emergence of this new woman: “By George, Eliza, I said I’d make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.” Whether or not Eliza would agree with Higgins’s claim to take ownership for the creation of her new identity, he certainly deserves credit for helping her acquire her new language, even if it ends up being a different project than the original intention – freeing a soul, rather than simply correcting vowel sounds.

My Ducats and My Daughter Barbara

Barbara Undershaft, in Shaw’s *Major Barbara* (1905), undergoes a transformation of her own, through the revelation that the source of her family’s wealth, a prosperity that allows her the freedom to work in the Salvation Army shelter, lies in her mysterious father’s armaments factory. Her visit to this factory, a happy community where they build cannons and missiles and guns, shakes her to her core. The Victorian angel, with lofty goals of good deeds and utilitarian improvement, is confronted with the Modern Capitalist, her father Undershaft, with her soul on the line:

UNDERSHAFT: Come, come, my daughter! dont make too much of your little tinpot tragedy. What do we do here when we spend years of work and thought and thousands of pounds of solid cash on a new gun or an aerial battleship that turns out just a hairsbreadth wrong after? Scrap it. Scrap it without wasting another hour or another pound on it. Well, you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesnt fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it wont scrap its old

prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. Whats the result? In machinery it does very well; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it nearer bankruptcy every year. Dont persist in that folly. If your old religion broke down yesterday, get a new and a better one for tomorrow.
BARBARA: Oh how gladly I would take a better one to my soul! But you offer me a worse one.

The world's old prejudices and moralities, particularly concerning women, are embodied in Shaw's caricature portraits of Barbara's mother ("Barbara shall marry, not the man they [*society*] like, but the man *I* like.") and sister, who is described in the stage direction before her first appearance as "slender, bored, and mundane." Even her father, so progressive in his nonconformist views, warns her suitor Cusins that "Like all young men, you greatly exaggerate the difference between one young woman and another." That statement presents the view of the man, rather than the young women who, presumably, consider themselves unique, and not interchangeable. And unlike Eliza, so exultant in her chrysalis-emergence as a fully-fledged New Woman, Barbara accepts her new identity as a turn-of-the-century New Woman in both crisis ("Oh, if only I could get away from you [*Cusins*] and from father and from it all! if I could have the wings of a dove and fly away to heaven!") and resignation ("I want a house in the village to live in with Dolly.") in the inexorable force of a new century's energy for free young women, that Barbara may not want, but can't swim against its tide.

I was happy in the Salvation Army for a moment. I escaped from the world into a paradise of enthusiasm and prayer and soul saving; but the moment our money ran short, it all came back to Bodger [*Undershaft's partner, who has made a fortune from selling gin*]: it was he who saved our people: he, and the Prince of Darkness, my papa. Undershaft and Bodger: their hands stretch everywhere: when we feed a starving fellow creature, it is with their bread, because there is no other bread; when we tend to the sick, it is in the hospitals they endow; if we turn from the churches they build, we must kneel on the stones of the streets they pave. As long as that lasts, there is no getting away from them. Turning our backs on Bodger and Undershaft is turning our backs on life.

Major Barbara, in its total sense, is a visionary warning about the arms race and technological proliferation that will lead to the Great War, complete with a symbolic descent into Hell (the Salvation Army shelter) and an ascent into Paradise (the Undershaft factory village) – and in its personal sense, it captures a sadness and loss that Barbara feels, abandoning her idealism in the face of modernity. And yet the climax of *Major Barbara*, though, feels like a very happy ending, as Barbara's suitor Cusins invokes a quibbling legal loophole to establish himself as an orphan, and thus eligible to inherit Undershaft's factory and fortune. This is an interesting echo of the loophole Macduff seizes upon in *Macbeth*, to prove his eligibility as "none of woman born" who can therefore defeat the tyrant protagonist. Barbara's father Undershaft, a capitalist tyrant (rather than a medieval one), achieves his personal happy ending, with another echo from Shakespeare's play as the straw dummies laying everywhere in Undershaft's factory, used for target practice, call to mind the Birnam Woods trees-as-people pretence in *Macbeth*.

Barbara attempts to rationalize her defeat, to come to terms with her mercenary father's industrial community (which she now feels has "really all the human souls to be saved"), elevating it over the East End slums back in London, with its "weak souls in starved bodies, sobbing with gratitude for a scrap of bread and treacle". Barbara refuses accepting a sort of martyrdom for her cause – that of saving the souls of the unfortunate – and rather turns her back on the sort of New Woman independence Shaw brought to life earlier in Vivie, Lady Cicely, Gloria, and Ann, and would make so aggressive a few years later in *Misalliance*'s Lina and *Pygmalion*'s Eliza. At the end of her play, Major Barbara accepts the role assigned her, in a play that is less about her personal journey than the

eponymous title would suggest. Barbara's crisis, as she witnesses her robber baron – technocrat tycoon father buy her beloved Salvation Army, with his money earned by selling guns and gin, to the celebration of everyone as they leave the shelter, except herself:

MRS BAINES: Blood and fire!
JENNY: Glory Hallelujah!
UNDERSHAFT: "My ducats and my daughter!"
CUSINS: Money and gunpowder!
BARBARA: Drunkeness and murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?

Undershaft's appropriation of Shakespeare's Shylock in his victorious exit is a serious misreading of the original quotation. Whereas Shylock is lamenting the loss of both his ducats and his daughter, Undershaft is claiming the acquisition of both. And, the line Undershaft invokes is not in fact spoken by Shylock, but quoted by one of his enemies, Solanio, describing Shylock's reaction to his daughter's flight with the family money.

I never heard a passion so confused,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets.
'My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats!
Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!'
(2.8.12-17)

Setting aside the pronounced unreliability of this narrator, with his own vendetta against "the dog Jew" whom he targets for exaggerative satire, there is some later confirmation in Shakespeare's play when Shylock, in a moment of temper, wishes he could see his traitorous daughter in a coffin with the ducats piled at her feet. If Undershaft is making that connection, celebrating that he now possesses a symbolically "dead" Barbara as well as the money, it would help any actress motivate Barbara's Biblical outburst. She feels trapped in her assigned role, and therefore persecuted. You are the wayward daughter

Jessica, Undershaft / Shylock says, when you thought you were the heroine Portia – even going to the extent of affecting male dress in your Salvation Army uniform and title, as Portia assumes male dress in her triumphant courtroom scene. And still, in this moment of crisis mid-way through her play (before her acceptance of reality over idealism), Barbara's outcry foreshadows Shaw's final New Woman, albeit an unworldly one, unwaveringly idealistic in the face of threatening realism. (He will proceed to write extremely strong women characters in his late plays, but the climate of feminism in the years before World War II will be such a very different overall attitude of society towards strong women than that in the years before World War I, that Shaw's expression of those characters inhabits its own tradition, not directly rooted in the 1890s.) This final New Woman is Joan of Arc, a martyr by definition.

STEWARD: I have told her to go, sir. She wont.
ROBERT: I did not tell you to tell her to go: I told you to throw her out. You have fifty men-at-arms and a dozen lumps of ablebodied servants to carry out my orders. Are they afraid of her?
STEWARD: She is so positive, sir.
ROBERT: [*seizing him by the scruff of the neck*] Positive! Now see here. I am going to throw you downstairs.
STEWARD: No, sir. Please.
ROBERT: Well, stop me by being positive. It's quite easy: any slut of a girl can do it.
STEWARD: [*hanging limp in his hands*] Sir, sir: you cannot get rid of her by throwing me out. [*Robert has to let him drop. He squats on his knees on the floor, contemplating his master resignedly.*] You see, sir, you are much more positive than I am. But so is she.

Joan in *Saint Joan* (1923) is certainly positive, and she inspires miracles through that personality and energy – such as the French soldiers gaining courage through her leadership, or the cowardly Dauphin finding his backbone through her belief . Those are more convincing than the apparently supernatural ones – the hens suddenly laying eggs, or the crucial change in wind direction that occurs *before* she prays for it, though she's just announced her intention to so do – which could be considered lucky coincidences, without evidentiary connection to her. For as her early triumphs are achieved through a mixture of religious fervor, duplicity, and luck, her later tragedy comes about in a similarly indirect way, with Joan as an individual overwhelmed by a male establishment to which she represents both outsider-status and pawn-status. Perceived as a pawn, and used as such by politicians such as Warwick, Beauvais, Cauchon, and Joan's arch-enemy de Stogumber, Joan becomes decentered in the play, as the action stretches out around and beyond her. It's an interesting variation on the New Woman paradigm, as Joan's intangible beliefs are indirectly the agents for narrative development and conflict, more

than her direct actions. The audience view of Joan is thus far more mysterious than that for Shaw's earlier New Women, leaving many questions, which keep changing: who is she, country girl or political Machiavellian?; is she serious?; does she sincerely hear these voices?; is she a heretic, a saint, or simply an innocent?; or is she a madwoman?

For Shaw, Joan may have been more interesting for what she unwittingly represented than for a fully-drawn individual whose journey would suggest answers to those questions. In narrative terms, her journey is simple, if strange, but there is a remove between her and the audience. Her character becomes symbolic rather than dramatic, with the danger confronting actresses portraying her being that of theatrical monotony, helped by a few rhetorical highlights. Dunois says "I welcome you as a saint, not as a soldier" and thus places her on the stained glass window, not the siege ladder.

For Shaw, Joan represented the "evolutionary appetite" he desired for his time. As articulated in the long debate between Warwick, Cauchon, and de Stogumber, Joan's image embodies the struggle between Protestantism with religious orthodoxy (Warwick describes it as "the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God. I should call it Protestantism if I had to find a name for it"), and also Nationalism with both medieval feudalism and English imperialism (Cauchon describes it her view of France as a country and not just a geography of various villages by declaring "To her the French-speaking people are what the Holy Scriptures describe as a nation. Call this side of her heresy Nationalism if you will: I can find you no better name for it"). But as well as those two major concepts, she represented more to Shaw. She embodies the struggle between new military technology and old classic feudal styles of warfare, and that of the individual with the collective community, and that of

youth with age, and the free woman with common sexual stereotypes, the vital spiritual forward-thinker with the stagnant hidebound doctrinaire, and above all, perhaps, the struggle between the imagination and the myopic limitations of the cynical pragmatists through whose hoops of realistic worldliness she must travel.

JOAN: I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.
ROBERT: They come from your imagination.
JOAN: Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

It is difficult to argue with Joan's assertion, and also impossible for her to prove in self-defense against her accusers in her trial. Her fanaticism, bordering on the psychotic, is softened by her "positive" personality, and by the feeling of progress she projects against the background of the men's world of complacent stability. And at all times, her imagination awakens the imaginations of those around her, including her enemies, reminding me of Shakespeare's Falstaff, although Joan would not make such an explicit boast as he does:

The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men. (*2 Henry IV*, 1.2.5-8)

Joan's effect on those who encounter her is similar, if we substitute inspired imagination for Falstaff's comedy. And *Saint Joan* is organized as a chronicle play in the Marlovian-Shakespearean tradition, except for its unusual epilogue, but Joan's Shakespearean antecedent is not so much the version Shakespeare presents in his *Henry VI, Part One* (c. 1592). In Shaw's preface to his play, he briefly dispenses with Shakespeare's diabolical portrait of Joan "La Pucelle", reading her as a product of Shakespeare's political agenda rather than a sincere attempt to create a complex and real character.

It would therefore be waste of time now to prove that the Joan of the first part of the Elizabethan chronicle play of Henry VI (supposed to have been tinkered by

Shakespear) grossly libels her in deference to Jingo patriotism. The mud that was thrown at her has dropped off by this time so completely that there is no more need for any modern writer to wash up after it.

The supernatural "fiends" that visit this Joan, and then forsake her when she's captured by the English, are sinister and negative versions of Shaw's Joan's voices, and Shakespeare's Joan is arrested and taken to her trial screaming in her own voice ("I prithee give me leave to curse awhile.") (*1 Henry VI,* 5.4.14), and then panicking at the moment of judgment, with a preposterous claim of pregnancy, with the desperate hope of pardon that state may bring, although she weakens her plea and demonstrates her desperation by naming three possible fathers for the imaginary child. She is dragged to the stake with a final explosion of hatred.

RICHARD Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee.
Use no entreaty, for it is in vain.
JOAN Then lead me hence; with whom I leave my curse.
May never glorious sun reflex his beams
Upon the country where you make abode,
But darkness and the gloomy shade of death
Environ you till mischief and despair
Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves.
RICHARD Break thou in pieces, and consume to ashes,
Thou foul accursed minister of hell.
(5.6.84-93)

The contrast with Shaw's Joan, when her judgment is given and she learns that her recantation (which she'll tear up) means imprisonment, is obviously extreme.

In Shaw's Joan's trial aria:

But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep me from everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times. I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the

trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind.

If Joan has a Shakespearean predecessor, it may be Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, another religious zealot whose faith is challenged by her interaction with worldly, corrupt men outside of the protected island of the convent. Even Lucio, one of the most secular characters there could be, feels her unworldly quality when he greets her in terms that even Joan's enemies might apply to her:

I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,
And to be talked with in sincerity
As with a saint.
(1.4.33-36)

Another character in the same play, not so devoted as Isabella, voices a fear of a different kind of imprisonment whose rhythms Joan echoes in her trial speech above. Claudio says

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod, and the dilated spirit
To bath in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling – 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.
(3.1.118-32)

Claudio's virtuoso monologue features an accretion of thoughts as his imagination explores his potential destiny as Joan's does. The central antithesis opposing "sensible warm motion" to "a kneaded clod" parallels Joan's various antitheses such as "chain my

feet" versus "climb the hills"; the accumulation of images continues to "worse than worst", with "worst" becoming something quite positive, a definite stable state beyond which Claudio's plight will take him into the terror of "too horrible", as Joan's repeated "blessed blessed" describes the ultimate "too horrible" fate for her. The speech ends with an incomplete blank verse line, which is completed by Isabella's "Alas, alas" – such a short, inarticulate, unsatisfying response to his outburst, revealing her inability to enter into his mental state, or at least unable to find words sufficient to complement his eloquence. Perhaps Isabella's faith goes beyond the ability of words to express it, as does Joan's in the cathedral scene, describing the church bells in which she hears her heavenly voices:

> [*The cathedral clock chimes the quarter*] Hark! [*She becomes rapt*] Do you hear? "Dear-child-of-God": just what you said. At the half-hour they will say "Be-brave-go-on." At the three-quarters they will say "I-am-thy-Help." But it is at the hour, when the great bell goes after "God-will-save-France": it is then that St Margaret and St Catherine and sometimes even the blessed Michael will say things that I cannot tell beforehand. Then, oh then –

"Then, oh then –": her broken line remains unfinished, the thought incomplete and unexpressed, as Dunois, her best supporter, interrupts to doubt her "voices" (as a practical man would), wondering if she's "a bit cracked" even though her military strategy is sound. But "Then, oh then –" is far beyond practical. Dunois deflates and dismisses her "then what's next" question with "Then, Joan, we shall hear whatever we fancy in the booming of the bell. You make me uneasy when you talk about your voices."

But Joan's religious ecstasy contains a possibility with that unfinished line with which the worldly cynics confronting her will never be comfortable.

But yet that ecstasy carries with it Joan's loneliness. "Yes, I am alone on earth: I have always been alone." she says later in the same scene. On the eve of her trial, she declares

her isolation, another Shakespearean forerunner, in *Henry VIII (All is True)* (1613), at a similar trial conducted by the Church:

QUEEN KATHERINE: Alas, I am a woman friendless, hopeless.
CARDINAL WOLSEY: Madam, you wrong the King's love with these fears.
Your hopes and friends are infinite.
QUEEN KATHERINE: In England
But little for my profit. Can you think, lords,
That any Englishman dare give me counsel,
Or be a known friend 'gainst his highness' pleasure –
Though he be grown so desperate to be honest –
And live a subject? Nay, forsooth, my friends,
They that must weigh out my afflictions,
They that my trust must grow to, live not here.
They are, as all my other comforts, far hence,
In mine own country, lords.
(3.1.79-90)

The tone, less cosmic and more personal than Claudio's, leads to Joan at her trial, with that acceptance of isolation far removed from Joan La Pucelle many years earlier. Literally, Katherine means Spain when she says "mine own country", but it's not too fanciful to read her "own country" as her solitude.

Variations of Joan

The image extends beyond Shaw's play in dramatic lineage, with Celia Coplestone in T.S. Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party* (1950)[42], another troubled lady, a mid-century Joan-persona, being examined not in a formal courtroom, but in a living room. Celia says

I don't imagine that I am being persecuted.
I don't hear any voices, I have no delusions –
Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion!

Celia wishes she could "get back to normality", with Reilly, her inquisitor, pressing her on the question "What *is* normality." She explains, echoing Joan:

An awareness of solitude.
But that sounds so flat. I don't mean simply
That there's been a crash: though indeed there has been.
It isn't simply the end of an illusion
In the ordinary way, or being ditched.
Of course that's something that's always happening
To all sorts of people, and they get over it,
More or less, or at least they carry on.
No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware
That I've always been alone. That one is always alone.
Not simply the ending of one relationship,
Not even simply finding that it never existed –
But a revelation about my relationship
With *everybody*. Do you know –
It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone!

This getting rid of everything constitutes "normality", a definition Celia in Eliot's play may seem to worry about at a dispassionate remove, or even accept solitude as that definition, while Joan panics about it. The isolation of the New Woman, of Vivie Warren or Barbara Undershaft or Eliza Doolittle, is a triumph in self-sufficiency, but perhaps a great sadness in its loneliness.

Another late-Modernist playwright weighs in, a few years after Shaw's *Saint Joan*, with a full-length play and a sketch fragment[43]. In 1927, in Berlin, Bertolt Brecht saw Max

Reinhardt's production of Shaw's *Joan*, translated by Ernest Trebitsch, Shaw's longtime correspondent and German translator. It was a production Shaw disliked, with several textual distortions, cuts, and a version of Joan in which, through the translation and the performance, Joan emerged as far more petite and pathetic than Shaw intended. But it inspired Brecht to write *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*[44], completed in 1932, updating Joan to a meat-packing factory in Depression-era Chicago. Following Brecht's anti-capitalist mission, Joan inspires downtrodden workers (instead of French soldiers) to rise up against the cruel bosses and owners who exploit them. Brecht's Joan has a vision of being alone as well, but her modern image of it is not a prison of walls and bars, but rather a societal limbo.

I see the system. Its surface
Has long been known, but not
The inner workings. I see some people, a few, on top
And many down below, and those on top
Shout down to those below: Come up, then all
Of us will be on top. But if you look
Closely, you'll see a hidden something
Between the ones on top and those below. It
Looks like a path, but no, it's not a path.
More like a plank, and now you see it plainly, it's
A seesaw. That's it. This whole
System's a seesaw with two ends
Depending on each other. Those on top
Are where they are because the others
Are down below, and they will stay up on top
Only so long as the others stay down. They'd be
On top no longer if the others, leaving their
Old place, came up. And so it is that those
On top inevitably want those to
Stay there for all eternity and never rise.
And anyway, there have to be more people down below
Than up on top to keep the seesaw in position
For that's the way with seesaws.

This Joan's "awareness of solitude" and powerlessness on the seesaw describes a futility and nihilism she can't surmount. In her dying speech, Brecht's Joan realizes how she's been a pawn in the hands of the robber barons, and will actually be more effective as a martyr for her cause (of better working conditions for the impoverished), as all Joans ultimately are.

I was just what the oppressors wanted!
Oh inconsequential goodness! Oh negligible virtue!
I changed nothing.
Soon to vanish fruitlessly from this world
I say to you:
Take care that when you leave the world
You have not merely been good, but are leaving
A better world!

Brecht gives Joan a last word more positive than Shaw does, as Joan is led away (until her ghostly reappearance in the Epilogue) to her execution. Shaw's Joan snarls in fury, or panic, or superiority, as the soldiers seize her:

LADVENU: You wicked girl: if your counsel were of God would He not deliver you?
JOAN: His ways are not your ways. He wills that I go through the fire to his bosom; for I am His child, and you are not fit that I should live among you. That is my last word to you.

De Stogumber's last word to her is "Into the fire with the witch!" Her most fanatic enemy, de Stogumber, is paradoxically given the tragic reversal or *peripeteia* instead of Joan herself. And it may challenge Joan's potential status as Shaw's Tragic New Woman, as a response to his victorious pre-war New Women. De Stogumber's crisis is the most emotional moment in the play, when he returns from witnessing the burning at the stake:

I let them do it. If I had known, I would have torn her from their hands. You dont know: you havent seen: it is so easy to talk when you dont know. You madden yourself with words: you damn yourself because it feels grand to throw oil on the flaming hell of your own temper. But when it is brought home to you; when you see the thing you have done; when it is blinding your eyes, stifling your nostrils,

tearing your heart, then – then – [*Falling on his knees*] O God, take away this sight from me! O Christ, deliver me from this fire that is consuming me! She cried to Thee in the midst of it: Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! She is in Thy bosom, and I am in hell for evermore.

It's as passionate a passage as any in Shaw's plays, and Shaw gives it to a secondary character – indeed, one of the villains – rather than Joan. He, like Joan, yields to an incomplete, inarticulate "then – then" at the breaking point of his terror.

Joan's absoluteness, without both the politicians' malleability and the fanatic de Stogumber's epiphany, may deprive her of tragic movement, though it does not leave her bereft of the New Woman early-century movement, nor of Shaw's revolutionary stance, bridging the seesaw between the Victorian and the Modernist artist. Eliot's 1924 article in *The Criterion*[45] is explicit:

St Joan seems to illustrate Mr Shaw's mind more clearly than anything he has written before. No one can grasp more firmly an idea which he does not maintain, or expound it more with more cogency, than Mr Shaw. He manipulates every idea so brilliantly that he blinds us when we attempt to look for the ideas *with which he works*. And the ideas with which he works, are they more than the residue of the great Victorian labours of Darwin, and Huxley, and Cobden? We must not be deceived by the fact that he scanadlised many people of the type to which we say he belongs: he scandalised them, not because his first principles were fundamentally different, but because he was much cleverer, because his thought was more rapid, because he looked farther in the same direction. The animosity which he aroused was the animosity of the dull toward the intelligent. And we cannot forget on the other hand that Mr Shaw was the intellectual stimulant and the dramatic delight of twenty years which had little enough of either: London owes him a twenty years' debt. Yet his Joan of Arc is perhaps the greatest sacrilege of all Joans: for instead of the saint or the strumpet of the legends to which he objects, he has turned her into a great middle-class reformer, and her place is a little higher than Mrs Pankhurst. If Mr Shaw is an artist, he may contemplate his work with ecstasy.

"The greatest sacrilege" is a powerful criticism on the work Shaw intended as his Passion Play. Confronting the challenge of how to convincingly portray saintliness on stage, Shaw makes Joan the absolute center around which many other political imperatives

swirl. Shaw won't completely commit to mysticism and voices, feeling that the fertile hens and the changing wind may have possible rational explanations – nor will he rule out the possibility of a true miracle. His enthusiasm to see both sides of a conflict make Joan's enemies more interesting dramatically than Joan, as they experience change like de Stogumber above. As when, Shaw declares his redefinition of the idea of a "miracle" when the Archbishop endorses Joan's putative miracles as long as they create faith – whether lucky coincidences, outright confidence tricks, or indeed supernatural and heavenly voices.

LA TRÉMOUILLE: Well, come! What is a miracle?
THE ARCHBISHOP: A miracle, my friend, is an event which creates faith. That is the purpose and nature of miracles. They may seem very wonderful to the people who witness them, and very simple to those who perform them. That does not matter: if they confirm or create faith they are true miracles.
LA TRÉMOUILLE: Even when they are frauds, do you mean?
THE ARCHBISHOP: Frauds deceive. An event which creates faith does not deceive: therefore it is not a fraud, but a miracle.
LA TRÉMOUILLE: [*scratching his neck in his perplexity*] Well, I suppose as you are an archbishop you must be right. It seems a bit fishy to me.

Fittingly, as the New Woman dismissed Victorian ideas of propriety in female dress, Shaw also places his Joan of Arc in the tradition of Shakespeare's several women who find a freedom in their self-expression by dressing in male clothing, as Joan does. (Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Joan La Pucelle herself in *Henry VI Part One* begin this, and then of course the formula reaches its full flowering with Rosalind, Viola, Imogen, and all three women in *The Merchant of Venice* who do so.) Joan's Grand Inquisitor sees drastic danger in this:

Mark what I say: the woman who quarrels with her clothes, and puts on the dress of a man, is like the man who throws off his fur gown and dresses like John the Baptist: they are followed, as surely as the night follows the day, by bands of wild women and men who refuse to wear any clothes at all.

A rabid and desperate prophesy of doom, intended ironically by this most rhetorically strategic character.

In his preface, Shaw alludes to Romantic and Victorian feminists such as the painter Rosa Bonheur "painting in male blouse and trousers" and socialite George Sand, notorious for her male-style dress, wondering "Had Joan not been one of those 'unwomanly women,' she might have been canonized much sooner."

> But it is not necessary to wear trousers and smoke big cigars to live a man's life any more than it is necessary to wear petticoats to live a woman's. There are plenty of gowned and bodiced women in ordinary civil life who manage their own affairs and other people's, including those of their menfolk, and are entirely masculine in their tastes and pursuits. There always were such women, even in Victorian days when women had fewer legal rights than men, and our modern women magistrates, mayors, and members of Parliament were unknown.

And yet, as Shaw invests his play with 20th-Century doubts, and Brecht uproots the Joan icon for 20th-Century economic politics, I find it interesting that of the many dramatic versions of Joan's story – including Southey's closet drama, Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans*, Theodore Dreyer's silent film *The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc*, Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine* (filmed as *Joan of Arc* with Ingrid Bergman), Jean Anouilh's *Jeanne d'Arc* (translated by Christopher Fry as *The Lark*), and even as recent as the 1999 tv movie, and the current tv series *Joan of Arcadia* – only the agnostic Socialist Shaw and the atheist Communist Brecht entitle their texts "Saint". Two writers as worldly and cynical as any acknowledge her 1920 canonization.

Joan's Epilogue

It is a Gentleman from 1920 who carries the good news of her canonization to Joan herself, in the strange Epilogue. Here again, Joan is decentered, with King Charles the

recipient of a parade of visions from his past. In general, Charles himself, and his other ghostly visitors, are about as happy to see Joan return as Richard III is to see figures from his past reappear the night before Bosworth Field. The Epilogue has puzzled many critics, and some regard it as unnecessary or have even accused it of trivalizing the preceding story of Joan's drama. Shaw himself included this apology for the unusual scene in the program note to the first London production:

> The Epilogue is obviously not a representation of an actual scene, or even of a recorded dream; but it is none the less historical. Without it the play would be only a sensational tale of a girl who was burnt, leaving the spectators plunged in horror, despairing of humanity. The true tale of Saint Joan is a tale with a glorious ending; and any play that did not make this clear would be an insult to her memory.

And yet, the "glorious ending" of her canonization is complicated by the other ghosts who join her, Warwick, Dunois, the Archbishop, the Executioner, and the rest. They pop out of each available onstage entrance in quick succession, in the slamming-doors tradition of farce. They then joke about their own lives, post-Joan, who is curious to hear. There is a danger of undercutting the serious intention of claiming Joan's story to be a happy spiritual ending despite her death, as Shaw asserts his intention to be.

One recent production attempted a solution to this dilemma, which sounds successful. At the Shaw Festival production in 1981 in Canada, directed by Christopher Newton, the actors read the Epilogue from behind lecterns. Actress Nora McClellan, playing Joan, describes the experience[46].

> We originally cut the Epilogue, which Shaw's estate asked us not to do. Then Christopher said "All right. We'll read the epilogue." It was a lovely choice which came out of a moment of anger – "All right, we'll read the damn thing." He put a note in the program saying, "At the end of the play there will be a brief intermission and the actors will read the Epilogue."
> I would say that seventy percent of the audience stayed. Many of the people I've talked to said they just didn't want to stay. It wasn't for a bad reason. They

wanted to leave with what they were thinking about, which was Warwick's line "I wonder." A very, very large actor who must have been thirty feet up on the set was the Executioner, just walking away as Warwick spoke. It was absolutely stunning.
So we ended the play with "I wonder," took a curtain call, a ten-minute intermission, and then we stood at lecterns. Actually it was beautiful – twelve people, each with a candle and a little spotlight. We read the lines, and then one by one the others said "Oh, no, I'm not dealing with this," blew their candles out, and their spotlight would go out. Then "How long, oh Lord, how long," and it was gorgeous.

It sounds like good theatre, but also like a lot of work to salvage Shaw's "glorious ending" by softening his natural skepticism. In this lectern approach, the slapstick traffic is avoided, leaving the bare words, which are shaped in the form of a masque, in the ghosts' responses to the news of Joan's canonization:

JOAN: My sword shall conquer yet: the sword that never struck a blow. Though men destroyed my body, yet in my soul I have seen God.
CAUCHON: [*kneeling to her*] The girls in the field praise thee; for thou hast raised their eyes; and they see that there is nothing between them and heaven.
DUNOIS: [*kneeling to her*] The dying soldiers praise thee, because thou art a shield of glory between them and the judgment.
THE ARCHBISHOP: [*kneeling to her*] The princes of the Church praise thee, because thou has redeemed the faith their worldlinesses have dragged through the mire.
WARWICK: [*kneeling to her*] The cunning counsellors praise thee, because thou hast cut the knots in which they have tied their own souls.
DE STOGUMBER: [*kneeling to her*] The foolish old men on their deathbeds praise thee, because their sins against thee are turned into blessings.
THE INQUISITOR: [*kneeling to her*] The judges in the blindness and bondage of the law praise thee, because thou hast vindicated the vision and the freedom of the living soul.
THE SOLDIER: [*kneeling to her*] The wicked out of hell praise thee, because thou hast shewn them that the fire that is not quenched is a holy fire.
THE EXECUTIONER: [*kneeling to her*] The tormentors and executioners praise thee, because thou hast shewn that their hands are guiltless of the death of the soul.
CHARLES: [*kneeling to her*] The unpretending praise thee, because thou hast taken upon thyself the heroic burdens that are too heavy for them.

The Shakespearean representative of the masque tradition to which this paean of praise of Joan comes in *Cymbeline*, with the family of the Leonati praising Posthumus, or *The*

Tempest, where the goddesses bless Miranda's wedding. But then – it turns negative, and more resembles the parade of Banquo's heirs, or perhaps more appropriately, the disappointing "Fiend" visions that "forsake" Joan La Pucelle. For then, the concluding lines of the masque work against Shaw's "glorious ending" for his passion play which he claimed in his program note, above.

JOAN: Woe unto me when all men praise me! I bid you remember that I am a saint, and that saints can work miracles. And now tell me: shall I rise from the dead, and come back to you a living woman?

This amazing moment of *hubris*, bordering on extreme arrogance, is not met by the celebration Joan predicted, or at least desired. In the most recent major London production in 1994 at the Strand Theatre, as they "spring to their feet in consternation", the other ghost actors interpolated a unison cry of "No!" before resuming their masque rhythm:

A sudden darkness blots out the walls of the room as they all spring to their feet in consternation. Only the figures and the bed remain visible.
JOAN: What! Must I burn again? Are none of you ready to receive me?
CAUCHON: The heretic is always better dead. And mortal eyes cannot distinguish the saint from the heretic. Spare them. [*He goes out as he came*]
DUNOIS: Forgive us, Joan: we are not yet good enough for you. I shall go back to my bed. [*He also goes*]
WARWICK: We sincerely regret our little mistake, but political necessities, though occasionally erroneous, are still imperative; so if you will be good enough to excuse me- [*He steals discreetly away*]
THE ARCHBISHOP: Your return would not make me the man you once thought me. The utmost I can say is that though I dare not bless you, I hope I may one day enter into your blessedness. Meanwhile, however – [*He goes*]
THE INQUISITOR: I who am of the dead, testified that day that you were innocent. But I do not see how The Inquisition could be dispensed with under existing circumstances. Therefore – [*He goes*]
DE STOGUMBER: Oh, do not come back: you must not come back. I must die in peace. Give us peace in our time, O Lord! [*He goes*]
THE GENTLEMAN: The possibility of your resurrection was not contemplated in the recent proceedings for your canonization. I must return to Rome for fresh instructions. [*He bows formally, and withdraws*]

THE EXECUTIONER: As a master in my profession I have to consider its interests. And, after all, my first duty is to my wife and children. I must have time to think over this. [*He goes*]
CHARLES: Poor old Joan! They have all run away from you except this blackguard who has to go back to hell at twelve o'clock. And what can I do but follow Jack Dunois' example, and go back to bed too? [*He does so*]
JOAN: [*sadly*] Goodnight, Charlie.
CHARLES: [*Mumbling in his pillows*] Goo ni. [*He sleeps. The darkness envelops the bed*]
JOAN: [*To the soldier*] And you, my one faithful? What comfor have you for Saint Joan?
THE SOLDIER: Well, what do they all amount to, these kings anc captains and bishops and lawyers and such like? The just leave you in the ditch to bleed to death; and the next thing is, you meet them down there, for all the airs they give themselves. What I say is, you have as good a right to your notions as they have to theirs, and perhaps better. [*Settling himself for a lecture on that subject*] You see, it's like this. If – [*the first stroke of midnight is heard softly from a distant bell]*. Excuse me: a pressing appointment – [*He goes on tiptoe*].
The last remaining rays of light gather into a white radiance descending on Joan. The hour continues to strike.
JOAN: O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?

Unlike most of Shaw's preceding New Women, Joan's story ends unhappily for her personally, if however victorious as a martyr and an icon, and an image of a woman who creates faith. In an obscure text, never performed, Shaw adds his own sort of epilogue to this chapter of his playwriting canon. In 1936, the poet laureate John Drinkwater had been asked to write a film to celebrate the coronation of George VI. Drinkwater asked Shaw to contribute with a little scene between the two writers. Drinkwater died before his film, *The King's People*, could be fully produced, but Shaw published his duologue with Drinkwater in The New York Times, concluding:

G.B.S.: Why don't you read my books? I read your confounded poems.
J.D.: I do, occasionally. I suppose your plays have helped as much as anything to give women their place in public life. Do you think they've stood up to it?
G.B.S.: If you mean in a hostile sense, yes. They use their votes to keep women out of Parliament. Do you remember the 1918 election, when the women voted for the first time and carried everything before them? Result: One woman in Parliament: Lady Astor. One woman up against 614 men! Think of it! And she

got in only because no mortal power could keep her out of anywhere she wanted to go.

Perhaps Shaw felt the women deserted him, the way the ghosts deserted Joan. No mortal power could stop a Vivie Warren, or an Ann Whitefield, a Barbara or Lina or Eliza, or even Joan, from going where they want to go.

Notes

Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare,* gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997. *Troilus and Cressida,* ed. Walter Cohen.

Quotations from Shaw's plays are taken from *Bernard Shaw: Complete Plays with Prefaces. Six Volumes.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963.

Quotations from Shaw's 1884 lecture on *Troilus and Cressida* are taken from Crompton and Cavanaugh's publication in Volume 14 of *The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, ed. Stanley Weintraub. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981.

1 McCarthy, Lillah. *Myself and Some Friends*. London, T. Butterworth, Ltd.: 1933.

2 Shaw, George Bernard. "The Quintessence of Ibsenism." *Selected Prose of Bernard Shaw*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1952. 574.

3 Ibid, 573-74.

4 Ardis, Ann. *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

5 Powell, Kerry. "New Women, New Plays, and Shaw in the 1890s." *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw.* ed. Christopher Innes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

6 Such as *The Case of the Rebellious Susan, The Manoeuvres of Jane,* or *Mrs Dane's Defence.*

7 Such as *The Cabinet Minister, The Gay Lord Quex, The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith,* or *The Second Mrs Tanqueray.*

8 Watson, Barbara Bellow. *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman*. New York: Norton, 1963.

9 Crompton, Louis and Cavanaugh, Hilayne. "Shaw's 1884 Lecture on 'Troilus and Cressida.'" *The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, Volume 14,* ed. Stanley Weintraub. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981. 48-67. Crompton and Cavanaugh provide a brief history of Shaw's lecture, noting that Grace Latham delivered it to the New Shakspere Society in Shaw's absence. Latham was a Society Secretary; I can find no other mention of her in Shaw materials. Crompton and Cavanaugh's introduction points out, significantly, that "It is not known what edition or editions of Shakespeare Shaw used." The

standard 19th-Century editions most likely as candidates would be the 1866 Clark edition, the 1844 Collier edition, or the 1821 Malone edition. In the Crompton and Cavanaugh reprint, canceled passages in the MS by Shaw are footnoted.

10 Frederick James Furnivall founded the Society with a number of leading Shakespeareans of the day, including Dyce, Collier, Halliwell-Phipps, and Fleay. Robert Browning was the honorary President, and much of the Society's activity was concerned with the mysteries of Shakespeare's life, such as the identities of Mr. W.H. or the Dark Lady. Its mission was to apply contemporary advances in other fields to the study of Shakespeare. Its manifesto: "In this Victorian time, when our geniuses of Science are so wresting her secrets from Nature as to make our days memorable for ever, the faithful student of Shakspere need not fear that he will be unable to pierce through the crowds of forms that exhibit Shakspere's mind, to the mind itself, the man himself, and see him as he was."

11 Shaw's five unsuccessful novels are *Immaturity* (1879), *The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1883), and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1884).

12 Major 20th-Century productions include the groundbreaking Elizabethan-dress revival in 1912 (dir. William Poel), after which the play was neglected for another 25 years until a modern dress version in 1938. Stratford-upon-Avon succeeded with it in 1947 and 1954; in 1956, director Tyrone Guthrie produced it at the Old Vic in pre-WWI dress, drawing parallels between the Greeks and Trojans and the European alliances of 1914. The watershed year of 1960 (with the advent of the Royal Shakespeare Company and state-subsidy) began a serious rediscovery of the text for the post-modern era. The RSC set it in a giant sandbox in 1960 (dir. Peter Hall); the 1968 production (dir. John Barton) drew explicit parallels with Viet Nam; the 1976 production (dir. John Barton and Barry Kyle) was played for high camp, and the 1981 version (dir. Trevor Nunn) returned it to the WWI trenches. In 1984, director Howard Davies set it in mid-19th-Century at the time of the Crimean War; successful RSC versions in 1990 (dir. Sam Mendes) and 1995 (dir. Ian Judge) both saw the play as a post-modern parable, drawing direct parallels with current conflicts in the Middle East and Bosnia. The play yields readily to anti-war commentary on whatever conflict the theatre chooses to protest.

13 The Stationer's Register was the master document in which the London stationers (publishers) entered proof of copyright for printed books. *Hamlet* was entered in the Stationer's Register on July 26, 1602, *Troilus* on February 7, 1603, but composition dates for both are uncertain. *Troilus* remained unpublished until 1609; the seven-year delay remains a mystery. *Hamlet*'s textual history is very unsettled: an unreliable First Quarto was published in 1603, thought by many to have been pirated; a more authoritative Second Quarto was published the following year, which is much closer in text to the official First Folio text in 1623.

14 Crompton and Cavanaugh, op cit. (See note 9 above).

15 Rattray, R.F. *Bernard Shaw: A Chronicle.* London: Dobson, 1951. Rattray's summary of New Shakspere Society minutes (pre-dating the discovery of Shaw's full text) is quoted in full in Wilson below.

16 Wilson, Edwin. *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writing on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare.* New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1961. Wilson's valuable anthology of Shaw's written commentary on Shakespeare is a good overview of the relationship, but it is arbitrarily random, and features no analysis of Shaw's views (except for a brief introduction), and makes no attempt to place Shaw in the historical Shakespearean critical spectrum.

17 Cohn, Ruby. *Modern Shakespearean Offshoots.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. 321-339. Cohn considers Shaw's use of Shakespearean material, remaining comfortably within traditional (and superficial) views of Shaw's reputed assessment of Shakespeare. Whereas she notes "Shaw's power, once above the battle, of penetrating the world's bardolatries to arrive at a deeper appreciation of Shakespeare" (333), she dismisses Shaw's *Cymbeline Refinished* as "mutilation, travesty and misrepresentation" (334), and otherwise reprints Shaw's most well-known humorous comments about Shakespeare without searching them for deeper criticism. Cohn briefly alludes to the *Troilus* lecture (323-24), but disagrees with its central Shavian thesis: "Often Shaw attributes to Shakespeare the opinions of his characters, and he tries to penetrate Shakespeare's mind." Shaw's critical philosophy here is described as a shortcoming. Shaw, of course, would argue those attributions to be the best revelation of Shakespeare's mind and emotional state, and as the best way to proceed. Cohn usefully links the 1884 lecture to Shaw's restatement of his idea that *Troilus* is a vital step in Shakespeare's growing mid-career pessimism, in Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891).

18 Holroyd, Michael. *Bernard Shaw – A Biography in Four Volumes.* New York: Random House, 1992, and Schoenbaum, S. *Shakespeare's Lives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. (New Edition).

19 Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human.* New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. 327-344.

20 An early variant spelling of Shakespeare Shaw uses in this MS, before later adopting "Shakespear" as his constant spelling of choice.

21 Weintraub, Stanley. *Journey to Heartbreak: The Crucible Years of Bernard Shaw, 1914 – 1918.* New York: Weybright & Talley, 1971.

22 These include productions in 1951 with Richard Burton directed by Anthony Quayle, 1965 with Ian Holm directed by Peter Hall and John Barton, 1975 with Alan Howard directed by Terry Hands, 1984 with Kenneth Branagh directed by Adrian Noble, 1994 with Iain Glen directed by Matthew Warchus, 1998 with Michael Sheen directed by Stephen Pimlott, and 2002 with William Houston directed by Michael Attenborough. A strong anti-war message was a hallmark of all of these versions, with a conflicted, ambivalent King.

23 Leech, Clifford. "Shaw and Shakespeare." *Shaw: Seven Critical Essays.* ed. Norman Rosenblood. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

24 This speech begins:
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Infixture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order. (1.3.85-88)

And proceeds to describe the effects of a violation of the "line of order":

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe;
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead.
Force should be right – or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too. (1.3.109-18)

25 This speech begins:
Time hath, my lord,
A wallet at his back, wherein he puts
Alms for oblivion, a great-sized monster
Of ingratitudes. Those scraps are good deeds past,
Which are devoured as fast as they are made,
Forgot as soon as done. (3.3.139-44)

26 Shaw's love for boxing has always been a curiosity in his personality. As well as practicing it himself, he wrote a novel in which the main character is a boxer (*Cashel Byron's Profession*), which he later adapted into a one-act Shakespearean parody in blank verse (*The Admirable Bashville*). Another curiosity – in the 1920s, he formed a friendship with American heavyweight champion Gene Tunney, who was a great literature lover. In 1928, inspired by Shaw, Tunney lectured at Yale for forty-five minutes, comparing boxing coverage in the newspapers to Shakespeare's battle scenes in *Troilus and Cressida.* (Told by Gene Tunney's son Jay, in conversation with the author.)

27 See Bloom, op cit, 340-343, on Ulysses's character. Bloom, too, sees Ulysses as a Victorian statesman who would "take the chair" at political meetings, a politician who "says nothing that he believes, and believes nothing that he says."

28 Ulysses's description of Cressida:
Fie, fie upon her!
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip;
Nay, her foot speaks. Her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.
O these encounterers so glib or tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader, set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity
And daughters of the game. (4.6.53-64)

29 The Arden Shakespeare edition of *Troilus and Cressida* (Third Series, 1998) features an editorial introduction by David Bevington that expresses the pro-Cressida feminist reading in detail, with extensive bibliographic notes

documenting the rise of this interpretation (first championed by William Empson and Janet Adelman, among others). Bevington also notes those critics who prefer the pre-feminist reading of Cressida as archetypal of the Elizabethan "False Woman" image, and its link to Shakespeare's Dark Lady in his sonnet sequence. Bevington's thorough review of post-WWII theatrical productions describes the 1985 Royal Shakespeare Company version in detail, which featured the interpretation of Cressida as a victim of oppressive patriarchy at its center, as well as London theatre critic Michael Coveney's serious objection to what he saw as a "misguided" distortion of Shakespeare's Cressida in the name of "political correctness" – "They are unwilling to suggest that Cressida is either false or sluttish after the exchange with Antenor, and simply censor the play's meaning without re-writing the words." (*Financial Times*, June 27, 1985.)

30 Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas.* New York: Norton & Company, 1973. 301.

31 Adelman, Janet. *Suffering Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Play,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest. New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992.

32 "The Phoenix and the Turtle" was printed in 1601 by Robert Chester in his poetry collection *Loves Martyr: Or, Rosalins Complaint. Allegorically shadowing the truth of Love, in the constant Fate of the Phoenix and the Turtle.* Shakespeare's name is attributed to the poem, though it is untitled.

33 Adelman, op cit, 41.

34 Katherine's final speech in *The Taming of the Shrew* includes her admission to the other newlywed wives:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee …
(5.2.150-51)

35 Archer, William. *The Theatrical 'World' 1893-1897.* London: W. Scott, 1898.

36 Written after a performance at the Great Queen Street Theatre, June 7, 1907.

37 Along with the Stationer's Register entry dates for both plays, both the unpublished 1603 *Troilus* quarto, and the published 1609 reprint, proclaim on their title pages "As it was acted by the King's Majesties servants at the Globe." Shakespeare's company became the King's Men upon James I's accession in 1603. Technically circumstantial, as the performance need not have necessarily coincided with the Stationer's registration – but that would have been the norm.

38 Barzun, Jacques. *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Barzun quotes a London Times statistic claiming that by the mid-19th Century, greater London had a population of approximately 2 million, 80,000 of whom were prostitutes.

39 *Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, and *Mrs Warren's Profession* were published together in a volume titled *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* in 1898, as the "Unpleasant" plays. The "Pleasant" ones were *Candida, Arms and the Man, The Man of Destiny,* and *You Never Can Tell.*

40 Recent productions include an Isabella slapping the Duke's face (Royal Shakespeare Company 1992), remaining alone onstage in indecisive conflict

(Royal Shakespeare Company 1974), and embracing the Duke in worldly acceptance. (Royal National Theatre 1988).

41 Letters by Shaw to The Pall Mall Gazette, June 8, 1888, and to the Saturday Review, November 6, 1897.

42 Eliot, T. S. *The Cocktail Party*. London: Faber and Faber, 1958.

43 Brecht, Bertolt. *The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen, 1431*. *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays. Vol. 9.* Ed. Mannheim and Willett. New York: Random House, 1972. In 1952, Brecht collaborated with the director Benno Besson on an adaptation of Anna Seghers's radio play, the new version also designed for the radio, but tailored to the actors of the Berliner Ensemble. Like Shaw before him, Brecht and Besson closely follow the historical transcript of Joan's trial.

44 Brecht, Bertolt. *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays, Poetry and Prose*. *Vol. Three, Part One.* Ed. Mannheim and Willett. London: Methuen, 1991.

45 Eliot, T. S. "Commentary." (Signed as pseudonym "Crites".) *Criterion III*, London, October, 1924.

46 McClellan, Nora. Essay in *Playing Joan: Actresses on the Challenge of Shaw's Saint Joan.* Ed. Hill. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc: 1987.

CHAPTER 3

SHAW, SHAKESPEARE, AND THE STRONG MAN

Shaw and Shakespeare both had vivid ideas about what sort of person was best suited to lead the state. Whether King or Cardinal, Prime Minister or President, or indeed benevolent Dictator or Fascist tyrant, the two playwrights explored the possibilities and downfalls of leadership very seriously. Though Shaw, at least, was willing to joke about the political landscape of dictatorship about which he also liked to write with great gravity. But his sense of humor remained:

> Lillah McCarthy's secret was that she combined the executive art of the grand school with a natural impulse to murder the Victorian womanly woman; and this being just what I needed I blessed the day when I found her; and, if I become Dictator (which may happen to anybody nowadays), will most certainly engage and command her, for an enormous salary, to broadcast all the loveliest and splendidest pages of English literature everyday to them that have ears to hear her.
> (From Shaw's contribution to actress Lillah McCarthy's memoir *Myself and Some Friends*, 1933)[1]

It would, indeed, be a wonderful thing if a Dictator were to use his or her absolute power for such a noble and artistic purpose? Shaw's sly joke ("which may happen to anybody nowadays") is witty, but the idea that the accession to power could be so arbitrary and frivolous among the experience of twentieth-century dictatorships is much more frightening. The Strong Man, overcoming his rivals and opponents to lead his nation, is not automatically the Best Man, and they have not been especially concerned with the "loveliest and splendidest" language in their culture's literature – but they

certainly had their own concerns, which they've pursued with absolute and notorious zeal.

These concerns for which Dictators, Kings, Prime Ministers, and other Heads of State did have time and inclination were of great interest for Shaw, particularly in the twentieth century. In his earlier career, Shaw loved debating turn-of-the-century politics for his beloved Fabian Committee, and usually seemed as certain as ever about what qualities would constitute an ideal Statesman, or at least better ones than we have now.

But in those younger days, Shaw was still feeling that politics were a product of his time – and in his opinion, the most advanced, clearest-thinking political product, but back then he was one who was devoted to the idea of peaceful, gradual, reasonable social improvement through greater democracy. As the new century dawned and proceeded inexorably towards what Shaw called "the second Thirty Years War"[2] from 1914 to 1945, Shaw's belief in a democratic society faded, his faith sadly eroding. He looked back into a long history before the Victorian Era, and saw the Victorian ideals of progress and utilitarianism as a passing delusion, admirable but tragically unrealistic – tragic, in that the choices made by a generation of politicians pretending to be diplomatis led to destruction and suffering beyond description, beyond understanding, beyond beyond (as Shakespeare's Imogen would say).

Instead, Shaw expanded his long-term evolutionary view of the ultimate artistic emergence of the "Superman" to include the political necessity for a Strong Man to lead the country. Shaw recognized the danger: that the Strong Man might not necessarily be the Best Man, and that Benevolent Dictatorship has its mirror in Oppressive Tyranny.

Yet, whether leading to benevolence or oppression, Shaw theorized that certain individuals were born to Leadership. Someone would arise.

The Born Bosses and the Mob

In his Preface to *The Millionairess*, written in the final year of the Second War, Shaw wondered

> How does the captain of a pirate ship obtain his position and maintain his authority over a crew of scoundrels who are all, like himself, outside the law? How does an obscure village priest, the son of humble fisherfolk, come to wear the triple crown and sit in the papal chair? How do common soldiers become Kings, Shahs, and Dictators? Why does a hereditary peer find that he is a nonentity in a grand house organized and ruled by his butler?
> Questions like these force themselves on us so continually and ruthlessly that many turn in despair from Socialism and political reform on the ground that to abolish all the institutional tyrannies would only deliver the country helplessly into the hands of the born bosses.

It is bittersweet to see Shaw turn in despair from his once-beloved Socialism, in facing the facts of the new century's political imperatives. Later, in the same Preface, Shaw describes the democratic notion as a "phantom" soon surpassed by the born Strong Man, the natural Dictator:

> Neither Mussolini nor Hitler could have achieved their present personal supremacy when I was born in the middle of the nineteenth century, because the prevailing mentality of that deluded time was still hopefully parliamentary. Democracy was a dream, an idea. Everything would be well when all men had votes. Everything would be better than well when all women had votes. There was a great fear of public opinion because it was a dumb phantom which every statesman could identify with his own conscience and dread as the Nemesis of unscrupulous ambition. That was the golden age of democracy: the phantom was real and beneficent force. Many delusions are … The result was a colossal disappointment and disillusion. The phantom of Democracy, *alias* Public Opinion, which, acting as an artificial political conscience, had restrained Gladstone and Disraeli, vanished. The later parliamentary leaders soon learnt from experience that they might with perfect impunity tell the nation one thing on Tuesday and the opposite on Friday without anyone noticing the discrepancy.

In the first half of the twentieth century, to its great cost in Shaw's opinion, the parliamentarians did not easily give up their dream. In another 1945 Preface, written for his 1938 play *Geneva,* Shaw updated Gladstone and Disraeli to two twentieth century British Prime Ministers, emerging as strong men briefly during times of crisis, only to be ousted after success by the desperate last-hope clinging to the democratic Utopian phantom:

> The first four years of world war forced us to choose a man of action as leader [David Lloyd George]; but when the armistice came we got rid of him and had a succession of premiers who could be trusted to do nothing revolutionary … When Mr Winston Churchill, as a man of action, had to be substituted for the *fainéants* when the war was resumed, his big cigars and the genial romantic oratory in which he glorified the war maintained his popularity until the war was over and he opened the General Election campaign by announcing a domestic policy which was a hundred years out of fashion, and promised nothing to a war weary proletariat eager for a Utopia in which there should be no military controls and a New World inaugurated in which everybody was to be both employed and liberated.
> Mr Churchill at once shared the fate of Lloyd George; and the Utopians carried the day triumphantly.

And the zenith of Shaw's disillusionment comes in the Preface to his last completed play, in the final year of his life. Fifty years earlier, he had been a tireless champion for full suffrage in the cause of socialist democracy. His renunciation is characteristically savage in its hyperbole – but uncharacteristically vicious, even humorless.

> ADULT SUFFRAGE IS MOBOCRACY
> Adult Suffrage is supposed to be a substitute for civil war. The idea is that if two bodies of citizens differ on any public point they should not fight it out, but count heads and leave the decision to the majority. The snag in this is that as the majority is always against any change, and it takes at least thirty years to convert it, whilst only ten per cent or thereabouts of the population has sufficient mental capacity to foresee its necessity or desirability, a time lag is created during which the majority is always out-of-date. It would be more sensible to leave the decision to the minority if a qualified one could be selected and empanelled. Democratic government needs a Cabinet of Thinkers (Politbureau) as well as a Cabinet of Administrators (Commissars). Adult Suffrage can never supply this, especially in England, where intellect is hated and dreaded, not wholly without reason, as it is

dangerous unless disciplined and politically educated; whilst acting and oratory, professional and amateur, are popular, and are the keys to success in elections.

This snobbish denunciation of the majority, or "mob" as Shaw would apparently call the population, is surprising, since Shaw, however extreme his criticisms over the long decades of political commentary, had always been a long-term optimist. The facetious twinkle of comic form is gone, leaving only a nostalgic invocation of two long-abandoned Soviet terms from another political system for which he once had the highest hopes, only to see its corruption and futility, probably foreseeing its future collapse. His hatred of the mob here is unavoidably reminiscent of Shakespeare's Roman aristocrats, such as Coriolanus and Mark Antony, or even Flavius and Marullus. Shaw's long-held distrust of political committees had gradually developed into outright hatred, as illustrated in his statement in his 1933 play *On the Rocks* saying the only man with a proper understanding of Parliament was Guy Fawkes. Fifteen years later, the feeling has grown, only without the joke punch line.

Shaw places the twentieth-century Strong Men leaders as the latest in the long historical line of natural leaders extending far back into ancient history; but he also includes an exemplary positive example of a Born Boss who can address the exigent needs of the state without falling into panic through fear of the mob, or xenophobic paranoia, or neurotic personal phobia. Caesar, Shaw's ideal leader, comes from an antiquity that fascinated both Shaw and his chosen literary rival Shakespeare, and their different portraits of the first Roman dictator connect them once again.

In one of the scenes in Julius Caesar a conceited poet bursts into the tent of Brutus and Cassius, and exhorts them not to quarrel with one another. If Shakespear had been able to present his play to the ghost of the great Julius, he would probably have had much the same reception. He certainly would have deserved it.

(Shaw in the *Saturday Review*, January 29, 1898)

In the realm of politics, Shaw continued his one-way dialogue with his rival Shakespeare, citing a mixture of Shakespearean models and mistakes while formulating his own evolving views on government – particularly, government in crisis. Overall, Shaw did not have a high opinion of Shakespeare's portraits of Heads of State; the Kings in the History plays are frequently dismissed as obvious monsters (Richard III) or obvious weaklings (Henry VI), neurotics and paranoiacs (John and Henry IV), or worst of all, bloodthirsty patriots hiding behind jingo rhetoric (Henry V). With Shavian hyperbole, he made them iconic for his own purposes, and tended not to allow them the conflicted consciences that we appreciate in these characters today.

Yet, Shaw's readings of Shakespeare's leaders is focused through his favorite annoyance: Shakespeare's completely mistaken creation of Julius Caesar. Shaw contrasts the type of strong, unemotional, civic-minded Dictator his research taught him Caesar really was with the mercurial, hyperemotional Heads of State Shakespeare drew, beginning with Shakespeare's wrong-headed version of Caesar as a vain, superstitious, fragile and neurotic Roman. In the section of his Preface to *Caesar and Cleopatra*, the play in which he corrects Shakespeare's caricature, entitled "Better than Shakespear?", Shaw describes an aspect of the vicissitudes of Shakespeare's political instincts:

> But Shakespear, who knew human weakness so well, never knew human strength of the Caesarian type. His Caesar is an admitted failure; his Lear is a masterpiece. The tragedy of disillusion and doubt, of the agonized struggle for a foothold on the quicksand made by an acute observation striving to verify its vain attribution of morality and respectability to Nature, of the faithless will and the keen eyes that the faithless will is too weak to blind: all this will give you a Hamlet or a Macbeth, and win you great applause from literary gentlemen; but it will not give you a Julius Caesar.

King Lear, then, is a masterpiece of the "agonized struggle" riven by "disillusion and doubt." And certainly so – the one totalitarian political decision Lear makes in the play turns out disastrous for Lear himself, for most of the other individuals, and above all, for the nation as a whole. And even that decision does not go unchallenged, leading to a hysterical temper tantrum that ostensibly costs Lear his two most loyal supporters, Kent and the King of France. Shaw's ideal Head of State, his Caesar, would never allow hysteria and anger to get the best of his judgment.

The list of Shakespearean Dictators, Kings, Princes, Dukes, and other Statesmen who would illustrate Shaw's eloquent description of the Renaissance temper is long indeed. There are some striking exceptions, who exhibit the serious authority Shaw wishes. For example, three Italian Dukes, two in Venice (in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*) and one in Verona (in *Romeo and Juliet*) The first Venetian Duke calmly presides over a tense trial, and mercifully pardons the life of the outlaw Shylock, while resolutely enforcing a Venetian statute that, while seeming perfectly natural to an Elizabethan audience, seems appalling and tyrannical beyond the pale to us today: the enforced conversion of Shylock.

The other Venetian Duke efficiently convenes his council in the face of imminent war, commissions an alien to lead his army as the foreigner Othello is best qualified, and then finds himself having to preside without warning over a family scandal involving his general and a senior member of his senate. And the Duke of Verona intercedes in the blood feud between the Capulets and the Montagues, wisely using the tragic suicides of their children as symbols of the pointlessness and futility of that feud. These Dukes are

reasonable and respected, whether commanding religious intolerance, endorsing inter-racial marriage, or pleading for community harmony.

And then here's a King, capably performing important diplomacy between his country and a hostile neighbor with poise and style:

Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting,
Thus much the business is: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras –
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose – to suppress
His further gait herein, in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions are all made
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Valtemand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the King more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow.
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.
(*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2, 26-39)

This Head of State certainly sounds like he has this situation well planned, well organized, and well in hand. I hear no disillusion and doubt, no agonized struggle. I feel he's certainly the man I'd want on the throne. Later revelations about the politically Strong Man Claudius's private activities will, as with many Heads of State, undercut his well-intentioned governing intentions (assuming they're sincere) and become his legacy, overshadowing his diplomatic concord with Norway; indeed, his personal villainy will help provide the opportunity for the invasion of Fortinbras and the colonization of Denmark, as his personal family stresses (Hamlet's scandals, Gertrude's tension, Laertes's rebellion, and Ophelia's madness) interfere with his handling of the cold war with Norway – though, perhaps not as much as the distraction of his guilty conscience.

The pattern keeps repeating, with the Strong Man's vulnerabilities or obsessions surface to permit his overthrow. Shakespeare and Shaw both had their favorite classical archetype in Julius Caesar, and the world of ancient Rome.

Shakespeare's four Roman tragedies are not a cycle in the sense that the two English historical tetralogies are. If you except the semi-continuity of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, they deal with quite separate periods of Roman history. The three mature tragedies each feature a variety of political Strong Men (or would-be Strong Men). The early Roman play – *Titus Andronicus* – showcases Machiavellian villains in Tamora and Aaron, and a tyrannical despot in Saturninus, but it is more concerned with grief and revenge than power politics. But it seems remarkable that Shakespeare should, at four times in his life, explore the subject of Rome and create four such distinct poetic styles: primitive and ritualistic in *Titus Andronicus,* spare and bleak in *Julius Caesar,* rich and elaborate in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and harsh and dialectic in *Coriolanus*. The Roman world captured Shakespeare's political imagination, and are his most political plays, allowing him a freedom for an objective analysis of government in action that is not possible in his English chronicles.

To Dream Upon the Crown

The histories of the English Kings are certainly concerned with questions of leadership and justice under a nation's government, but their Tudor world dictates a religious element that complicates the power struggles. The primal sin of Richard II's murder hovers over the chronicle as a Biblical curse, only purged when another Richard's death leads to unity and Tudor legitimacy. Richard III is obviously a political Strong Man, but

his fascism is borne out of his personal psychology more than from a systematic political ideology, and his ambition is idiosyncratic more than it is administrative. The reasons he wants to be King have nothing to do with legislature and paperwork, and the play around him is as much about grief and superstition as it is about questions of leadership.

Richard's fanatic desire for the crown, in the pursuit of which he'll hew his way with a bloody axe, is that of another early Elizabethan throne-seeker, and one of the archetypal models for this ruthless sort of bloodthirsty adventurer: Tamburlaine the Great.

In Marlowe's two-part epic, Tamburlaine seeks the crown for his own personal megalomania, and not because he wants to govern. "Is it not passing brave to be a King / And ride in triumph through Persepolis?" (*Part 1,* 2.5.53-54) he famously asks, in the sort of lines later parodied by Shakespeare's Pistol, and is answered by his right-hand man Theridamas, voicing the central core to Tamburlaine's existence:

A god is not so glorious as a king.
I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven
Cannot compare with kingly joys in earth:
To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold,
Whose virtues carry with it life and death;
To ask, and have; command, and be obeyed;
When looks breed love, with looks to gain the prize –
Such power attractive shines in princes' eyes.
(*Part 1,* 2.5.57-64)[3]

This carnivorous obsession with the crown leads Tamburlaine, or "Jack the Giant Killer" as C. S. Lewis called him, to create ever more grotesque, obscene, and revolting acts of humiliation to torment his enemies. His cartoon egotism even extended long beyond his death, with his notorious tombstone epitaph "Whoever opens my tomb shall unleash an invader more terrible than I." (Workmen exhumed his body during a construction project in southeastern Russia on June 21, 1941. The next day, the Nazis invaded the Soviet

Union.) Shaw did not comment directly upon Tamburlaine, but he hated Marlowe's entire *oeuvre*, even going so far as to suggest that there should be a statue erected at Deptford to "the benefactor of the human species who exterminated Marlowe."[4]

Tamburlaine's successor is Richard III, also not a political Strong Man, but one whose ruthless ambition is perhaps unparalleled in Shakespeare (at least until Macbeth), and whose reckless and freewheeling behavior leads to a personal tyranny. A personal throne, but not the temporary establishment of a state dictatorship with a full bureaucratic apparatus. The "crown" fetishism is Marlovian:

> Then, since this earth affords no joy to me
> But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
> As are of better person than myself,
> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
> And whiles I live, t'account this world but hell,
> Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown.
> (*Henry VI, Part 3*, 3.2.165-171)

Childish swagger and boasting, and if Tamburlaine is Jack the Giant Killer, Richard is Punch of Punch and Judy (wrote Shaw):

> Richard is the prince of Punches: he delights Man by provoking God, and dies unrepentant and game to the last. His incongruous conventional appendages, such as the Punch hump, the conscience, the fear of ghosts, all impart a spice of outrageousness which leaves nothing lacking to the fun of the entertainment, except the solemnity of those spectators who feel bound to take the affair as a profound and subtle historic study.[5]

In a 1911 letter to Forbes Robertson Shaw does call Richard "Nietzschean" in his single-minded amoral ambition, but the pursuit of creating one's own personal Superman identity is not the same as emerging as a state-controlling Strong Man. Tamburlaine and Richard are cartoons; the Romans are quite real. They differed in at least one major

respect: Julius Caesar, whether through honest sincerity of strategic manipulation, refused a crown when it was offered him.

Shakespeare's Rome

And while the English history cycles delve into character psychology and recent social imperatives still under pressure in Shakespeare's day, his return visits to Rome let him discuss the management of civilization without religious preconceptions, in the interest of pure political theory. He could ask questions in the abstract: How should the state be governed? What is the individual citizen's place in society? How much power should the people as a body possess? What are the dangers of dictatorship, and the risks of world domination? And how much of a gulf can a people tolerate between private truth and public artifice in a statesman's pursuit of power? Underpinning all of these questions might be the most important of all, to Shakespeare's (and later, Shaw's) world of uncertainty and anxiety: How can our civilization avoid such a fall as that which destroyed Rome and plunged the world into darkness? What did the fall of the Roman Empire mean to the nascent Elizabethan Empire? Was it a warning? Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* in the year of Essex's aborted attempt at a *coup d'état*, and *Coriolanus* in a year when starving rural mobs were threatening revolt over the enclosures. Similarly, Shaw wrote his Roman plays around the turn of the century, with technological change and social unrest accelerating the slide towards world war.

And while in far off classical Rome, politics could be explored without the direct risk of causing offence to the living principals in government, and less likely to run the risk of state censorship. He would also be free from any pressure, overt or unspoken, to support

the Tudor dynasty. The vocabulary of the classical world would continue to translate into currency over the centuries. Shaw felt Lenin's promise of "justice and electricity" for the Russian people to be the modern version of Juvenal's "bread and circuses" prescription for keeping the Roman mob docile.

Rome, then, remained a constant image in Shakespeare's art, with approximately 16 years separating his first Roman exploration (*Titus Andronicus*, c. 1592) and his last (*Coriolanus*, c. 1608). The range widens even a little more if we include two plays with an ancillary Roman presence, *The Comedy of Errors* (c. 1591-92) and *Cymbeline* (c. 1609-10).

Reading *Titus Andronicus*, I was particularly struck by a speech given by the Roman ambassador Aemilius, who announces to the panicking Emperor Saturninus that Lucius is leading his army of Goths against Rome, and "Who threats in course of this revenge to do / As much as ever Coriolanus did." (4.4.66-67) And I wondered, how current was the Coriolanus myth? Who in the Elizabethan era was interested in that story? Was Aemilius's allusion merely a private place mark for an unwritten play Shakespeare will get around to later – or did the Coriolanus myth, that of the native son betraying his homeland in vengeance, hover over the still-fragile Elizabethan court as a constant worry?

A Broken Coriolanus

In historical chronology, Shakespeare's Roman explorations begin with a fable from the old Republic, c. 490 BC, long before the coming of the Caesars. Written a decade or so after *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus* looks at the early days of Roman power politics with a reluctant Strong Man candidate temperamentally unsuited to the role.

Caius Martius is the greatest soldier in Rome, happiest when on the battlefield, contemptuous and uneasy among the common citizens. His handlers push him into the political arena, even significantly changing his name in an attempt to reinvent his identity. Here, a potential Strong Man arises through military prowess – but unlike the mavericks Tamburlaine and Richard III, Martius is not a violent renegade, but operates within a strictly disciplined military system. His military success is his only qualification for being chosen as Consul. It's a stark contrast with Caesar and Antony, two great generals as well, but who also have many other qualities of personality, vision, and oratory to recommend them for statesmanship, unlike Martius. His monolithic resistance to political flexibility and compromise causes what appears to be, on the face of it, his personal downfall – but brief as it is, he seems much happier after his desertion of Rome and defection to Rome's enemy. Back again amongst soldiers, he rediscovers that natural leadership that the Roman crowd of citizens never believed and only accepted reluctantly, against their better judgments. But to his new army, the Volscians:

He is their god. He leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than nature,
That shapes man better, and they follow him
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies.
(4.6.94-99)

But those are the Volscian soldiers, trained and disciplined, like the Roman legion Martius commanded in his great triumph that led to his wrong-headed candidacy for Consul. The crowd of commoners, the mob and their collective anger over the dearth of government-sponsored corn, have a different response to Martius's contempt.

In a government system partly based on manipulating crowd hysteria, Shakespeare's concerns about the threat of "Mobocracy" is expressed by Martius with a savage, vicious scorn:

MARTIUS What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion Make yourselves scabs?
FIRST CITIZEN We have ever your good word.
MARTIUS He that will give good words to thee will flatter
Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs
That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions finds you hares,
Where foxes, geese. You are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstone in the sun.
(1.1.153-163)

Or expressed more coolly, still with superior, cynical contempt, as when the mob's elected representatives, two self-serving Tribunes who routinely manipulate the mob, are dismissed by the aristocratic snob Menenius: "Good e'en to your worships. More of your conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebeians." (2.1.83-85)

There are 29 scenes in *Coriolanus*, and in 25 of them, crowds are present, far more than in any other Shakespearean play. They dominate this tragedy. Yet the quality of the mob in this play differs from other Shakespearean gangs, such as the anarchists led by Jack Cade in *Henry VI, Part Two*, or the ignorant followers dispersed by More in Shakespeare's putative contribution to *Sir Thomas More* (primarily written by Munday

and others), or most significant of all, from the Roman crowd in *Julius Caesar*. Allan Bloom distills the difference between the two mobs in *Shakespeare's Politics*:

> In *Julius Caesar* there is a lazy, brutal populace, a real urban proletariat. They are accustomed to dominating, and they are insolent; they have the habit of being flattered. How different were those plebs who feared that they were being made fun of by Coriolanus from these, who are the imperious arbiters of the civil war to whom the whole rhetoric of the conspiracy is directed. They are accustomed to bread and circuses; they change heroes according to how much is done for them. In *Coriolanus*, they are afraid of oppression; in *Julius Caesar*, they are indifferent to tyranny and are the causes of it.[6]

Martius doesn't capitalize on the plebeians' fear of oppression, which he is in position to offer; he dreads them, and has to be begged by his mother and his advisors Menenius and Cominius to confront the multitude. "Mother, I am going to the market-place." (3.3.131) he relents, steeling himself for another descent into the dark, verminous slum of the common crowd, led by their two Tribunes. This pair of passive politicos are content to observe and subtly encourage, rather than actively create, the revolutionary processes the people seek, like Marxist opportunists exploiting the frustrations of the unfed masses in the face of the aristocracy without themselves having to personally resort to first-hand terrorism. They're busybodies, but aloof from the actual interaction among the principal contestants. An example of their passivity:

> Let's to the Capitol,
> And carry with us ears and eyes for th' time,
> But hearts for the event.
> (2.1.294-96)

In *Coriolanus*, the Tribunes don't make the mistake a later Emperor's right-hand man will make, by ambitiously overplaying the power enjoyed by a leader's sidekick and ending up as a fall guy. Sejanus, a classic imperial would-be political climber, greedy and overreaching, does Tiberius's dirty work in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus: His Fall* (1605), and

ends up overexposed, blamed, and executed. Jonson's Roman play, most famous for its failure with its first audience, provides a totalitarian version of Rome complete with a Dictator (Tiberius) who lets his assistant take the fall for his crimes, and advocates book-burning to discourage free thought among the masses like a 20th-century fascist. Coriolanus would never want a flunky to handle his enemies, so that he could remain aloof and distant. When Rome turns against him, he surges into the role of an avenging deity ("He is their god"), but ends up with the historical label of traitor.

The raw, muscular sort of action on which Coriolanus depends did not appeal to Shaw's modern idea of the Strong Man. His commentary about *Coriolanus* is sparse, but there is one enigmatic statement, in his Preface to *Man and Superman* that also aligns Coriolanus in a tradition beginning years earlier with Richard III:

> Richard III, too, is delightful as the whimsical comedian who stops a funeral to make love to the corpse's son's widow; but when, in the first act, he is replaced by a stage villain who smothers babies and offs with people's heads, we are revolted at the imposture and repudiate the changeling. Falconbridge, Coriolanus, Leontes are admirable descriptions of instinctive temperaments: indeed the play of Coriolanus is the greatest of Shakespear's comedies; but description is not philosophy; and comedy neither compromises the author nor reveals him. He must be judged by those characters into which he puts what he knows of himself, his Hamlets and Macbeths and Lears and Prosperos.

"The greatest of Shakespear's comedies"? Most audience members would not, I don't think, complain of excessive hilarity. By allying it with *Richard III*, Shaw breaks down *Coriolanus* from tragedy to melodrama. And if this broken Coriolanus, as a potential leader, is laughable, then Julius Caesar does it better, in Shaw's eyes. Shaw's early strong men succeed not through personal violence, but through political savvy (Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island*), or capitalist skill (Undershaft in *Major Barbara*), or single-minded purpose (Napoleon in *The Man of Destiny)*, or rhetorical *sprezzatura* (Jack in

Man and Superman). Caesar should be iconic in that Shavian tradition. For as Shaw evolves from his Fabian days of wishing to better organize society and ameliorate social conditions through progressive legislative campaigns and peaceful protests, towards his wish to achieve order and stability in a fragile world of world wars through the emergence of the Strong Man, he retains as his ideal archetype Caesar – except that the version Shakespeare created was so far wrong that Shaw's correction was required.

Two Caesars: Shakespeare's

Julius Caesar, in both Shakespeare's and Shaw's incarnations, exists both in the historical context of Classical Rome and also as a iconic model for later historical leaders. Caesar is a born leader. The born leader's rise is unstoppable, but temporary, containing within its success the inevitability of its future downfall. A few years after Shaw, critic Jan Kott theorized the wheel of political destiny in terms of Shakespeare's plays for both the Roman world and the world of the English History plays in what he called "the Grand Mechanism."[7] Kott frames a cyclical historical theory through the lenses of plays he fancifully thought Shakespeare wrote, not four centuries ago, but rather yesterday, as they describe our current times as surely as they do ancient Rome or medieval England:

> Shakespeare is like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see. A reader or spectator in the mid-twentieth century interprets *Richard III* through his own experiences. He cannot do otherwise. And that is why he is not terrified – or rather, not amazed – at Shakespeare's cruelty. He views the struggle for power and mutual slaughter of the characters far more calmly than did many generations of spectators and critics in the nineteenth century. More calmly, or, at any rate, more rationally.

Here he echoes Shaw, who writes in his Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* (*Caesar and Cleopatra* is one of them) "The playgoer may reasonably ask to have historical events

and persons presented to him in the light of his own time." And that time was clearly exhibiting the seesaw of political careers.

Kott saw that the reality of the Mechanism is that, one day, "the executioner will become the victim, and the victim the executioner."

> Emanating from the features of individual kings and usurpers in Shakespeare's History plays, there gradually emerges the image of history itself. The image of the Grand Mechanism … It is this image of history, repeated many times by Shakespeare, that forces itself on us in a most powerful manner. Feudal history is like a great staircase on which there treads a constant procession of kings. Every step upwards is marked by murder, perfidy, treachery. Every step brings the throne nearer. Another step and the crown will fall. One will soon be able to snatch it.

Shaw's Caesar has the prescience to see himself on that staircase, unlike Shakespeare's version, who seems to think he'll be Emperor forever, "… for always I am Caesar." (1.2.213) If Shakespeare was intending his creation to be a model for admirable political leaders everywhere, as Shaw was, he certainly had little hope for a sound and reasonable future society. Shaw's Caesar knows he'll inevitably be a victim of the historical Grand Mechanism, but rationally hopes he can leave society at least a little better than how he found it; Shakespeare's Caesar is a bundle of weaknesses and weirdnesses. His concern seems to be more with his personal status than with Rome's prosperity. He reveals his unstable neediness in his neurotic habit of referring to himself in the third person:

> Caesar should be a beast without a heart
> If he should stay at home today for fear.
> No, Caesar shall not. Danger knows full well
> That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
> We are two lions littered in one day,
> And I the elder and more terrible.
> And Caesar shall go forth.
> (2.2.42-48)

Or when, in the moments before Danger proves him wrong in his arrogant conceit on the steps of what he considers "his" Senate (3.1.32), Caesar speaks every Dictator's motto, in a line Ben Jonson thought "ridiculous"[8]: "Know Caesar doth not wrong but with just cause, / Nor without cause will he be satisfied." (3.1.47-48). To have the power to exempt, excuse, and forgive yourself for any mistakes you might make asserts a kind of god-like infallibility, that can only be topped – in the final moment before his crash – with a supreme identification with heavenly permanence. The identification, surprisingly spoken in the first person, is eloquent and powerful, but couldn't be more wrong, as Brutus and betrayal circle him:

But I am constant as the Northern Star,
Of whose true fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.
The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks;
They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
(3.1.60-65)

Perhaps I should say he couldn't be more wrong personally. In the larger historical sweep of the Grand Mechanism, the spirit of Caesar remains, even prospers. The idea of Caesar, soon to be embodied in a new Caesar (Octavius), haunts the rebels who attempted to vanquish the Dictator in an even more tangible way than the actual living man could. Caesar's ghost visits Brutus and adds to his pessimistic nervousness. Cassius's dying words after stabbing himself are addressed to the idea of Caesar: "Caesar, thou art revenged, / Even with the sword that killed thee." (5.3.44-45). Brutus discovers Cassius's body, with the faithful Titinius also self-slain on top of him, and reacts

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet.
Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails.
(5.3.94-96)

And like Cassius, his own final words after stabbing himself take the form of a sort of benediction to his doomed attempt to keep democracy alive in the face of an emergent political strong-armed will: “Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will. (5.5.50-51) Brutus fatalistically senses that his cause is lost, and that the Republican era is ending, a victim of the Grand Mechanism both historically and personally. “The last of all the Romans, fare the well.” (5.5.98) he says over the dead Cassius and Titinius. “It is impossible that ever Rome / Should breed thy fellow.” (5.5.99-100) “Impossible!” His repeated promise to properly mourn his friend – “I shall find time, Cassius, I shall find time.” (5.5.102) speaks for his passing era, as you know he never will find that time. A more cosmic epilogue to the Republican conspiracy to prevent the Dictatorship comes a little earlier, with Titinius, shortly before he kills himself in loyalty to Cassius. Titinius sees the death of Cassius as a symbol of their movement’s failure to the inexorable sweep of the Grand Mechanism:

But Cassius is no more. O setting sun,
As in thy red rays thou dost sink tonight,
So in his red blood Cassius’ day is set.
The sun of Rome is set. Our day is gone.
(5.3.59-62)

And as the sun of the Roman Republic sets, the star of Empire appears – the Northern Star, of whose true fixed and resting quality there is no fellow in the firmament.

No fellow, indeed. Apart from a superficial confidence exchanged with his right-hand man Antony, and one joke about Antony’s reputation as a playboy, Shakespeare’s Caesar has no onstage personal connections. His wife Calpurnia dreams of blood emanating from Caesar’s statue – not from the man himself; and his mythical “son” Brutus barely speaks with him in the play, except to tell him the time, be asked “Et tu, Brute?” during

the assassination scene, and briefly confront Caesar's ghost when it visits Brutus's tent on the eve of the battle of Philippi. Caesar exists at a distance, like the Mount Olympus to which he compares himself even as he's seconds away from being stabbed. The absence of a Senate bodyguard during the assassination scene remains a puzzle; no 20th-century dictator would be caught out so isolated. Someone as neurotic as Shakespeare's Caesar, mistrusting everyone, would surely surround himself with his personal secret service, I would think. Or such is his overconfidence, his arrogant faith in his own invulnerability. Later Shakespearean references to Caesar, such as those by Horatio in *Hamlet*[9], attributing supernatural phenomena to Caesar's fate, or Caius Lucius in *Cymbeline*[10], boasting on Caesar's behalf, or those of many characters, of course, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, will perpetuate the statuesque impersonality of Caesar. The emotional impact of Shakespeare's direct story of Caesar will be left to Brutus and Cassius. Cassius's open emotionalism nicely balances Brutus's reserved depths of feeling – and Shakespeare remains open to these diametrical interpretations. Dante consigns Brutus to the bowels of hell, while Milton praises Brutus as a republican hero. As I'll describe below, Shaw's reading of the Caesar fable will be opposite to that of another gifted theatrical creator: Orson Welles.

Shakespeare's impartial balancing act is extraordinary. His neutrality, his gift for seeing both sides of the issue fairly, is articulated by James Shapiro in *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*[11]*:*

> One measure of Shakespeare's success in employing this balanced dramatic structure is that four centuries later critics continue to debate whether he sides with or against Brutus and his fellow conspirators. Shakespeare didn't conceive of his tragedy in Aristotelian terms – that is, as a tragedy of the fall of a flawed great man – but rather as a collision of deeply held and irreconcilable principles, embodied in characters who are destroyed when these principles collide.

Shaw realized that this "balanced dramatic structure" left Shakespeare open to appropriation by both the establishment, and those in rebellion against it. And so he performed his own appropriation, another movement in his ownership campaign, and wrote *Caesar and Cleopatra* to correct the mistakes Shakespeare made in his portrait of Caesar.

Two Caesars: Shaw's

From the opening of his improvement play, Shaw allows his Caesar a symbolic, almost other-worldly quality to this living, active, questing man. But an isolated man, chosen by History and set apart from the general population, for what he and his playwright feel to be greater things, in the governmental realm. Shaw's Caesar strolls through the Egyptian desert, lonely and lost in thought, and finds himself before the Sphinx:

> Hail, Sphinx: salutation from Julius Caesar! I have wandered in many lands, seeking the lost regions from which my birth into this world exiled me, and the company of creatures such as I myself. I have found flocks and pastures, men and cities, but no other Caesar, no air native to me, no man kindred to me, none who can do my day's deed, and think my night's thought. In the little world yonder, Sphinx, my place is as high as yours in this great desert; only I wander, and you sit still; I conquer, and you endure; I work and wonder, you watch and wait; I look up and am dazzled, look down and am darkened, look round and am puzzled, whilst your eyes never turn from looking out – out of the world – to the lost region – the home from which we have strayed.

Caesar voices the loneliness of the Dictator at the top, who, despite his triumphs, still senses the impending martyrdom in his destiny. The military champion, the executioner, has become, in his own eyes at least, the victim in exile.

It's the one and only time in Shaw's play that his Caesar approaches anything arguably poetic. The numinous quality with which Shakespeare's Caesar cloaks and haunts his play well after his death is, in Shaw, absent, replaced instead by the administrative,

diplomatic, realistic spirit. More concerned with tax collecting and bureaucracy than myths, dreams, and omens, Shaw's Caesar never wavers in his strength of command – but his self-confidence feels banal and mundane, certainly prosaic.

In contrast to Shakespeare's superstitious, mercurial Emperor, Shaw's Caesar is deliberately anti-mythological, such as when he deflates Egyptian theology by using a sacred tripod devoted to the god Ra as a chair, provoking cries of "Sacrilege!" among the Egyptian court. Even his knowing, winking prophecy of the effect Mark Antony's arrival will have on the starry-eyed Cleopatra, awaiting the handsome warrior prophesied for her, denies any sense of the supernatural. His matter-of-fact resignation has a fatalistic acceptance (and an interesting allusion to Hamlet) when he announces "Well, every dog has his day; and I have had mine: I cannot complain." And his greater historical quest, to conquer Rome's provinces in the name of universal peace and order through benign dictatorship yields pragmatically to priorities more useful than grandiose.

THE MAJOR-DOMO: What shall we serve to whet Caesar's appetite?
CAESAR: What have you got?
THE MAJOR-DOMO: Sea hedgehogs, black and white sea acorns, sea nettles, beccaficoes, purple shellfish –
CAESAR: Any oysters?
THE MAJOR-DOMO: Assuredly.
CAESAR: British oysters?
THE MAJOR-DOMO: [*assenting*] British oysters, Caesar
CAESAR: Oysters, then. [*The Major-Domo signs to a slave at each order; and the slave goes out to execute it*] I have been in Britain – that western land of romance – the last piece of earth on the edge of the ocean that surrounds the world. I went there in search of its famous pearls. The British pearl was a fable; but in searching for it I found the British oyster.
APOLLODORUS: All posterity will bless you for it.

As he takes his non-romantic, non-theatrical exit, Cleopatra is "much affected" and has tears in her eyes. Caesar simply embarks on his ship, and leaves, with no ghostly visitation to come. He heads back to Rome, where Antony – and Brutus – await him.

But unlike Shakespeare's Brutus sensing the end of the Republican epoch, Shaw's Caesar's premonition of his own personal tragedy does not make him doubt that his system of government will prosper. Indeed, he finds confidence in his certainty that the Roman structure he's designed can and will survive the loss of an individual. Cut me down, Caesar feels, yet there will still be an Antony to carry Rome forward. Lose Antony to his private flaws – yet there will then be an Octavius.

Shakespeare's play is frequently performed today, retaining its theatrical power in a good production, whereas Shaw's is an unwieldy curiosity telling us more about 1898 than about 44 BC. It is the beginning of a series of turning points in Shaw's personal philosophy concerning leadership. And while its theatrical attraction may be less marketable than Shakespeare's – though neither of them appear very frequently in the commercial theatre, rather usually depending upon the subsidized festival theatres for their venues – and the very natures of the two plays being so different, there is an overall sense in which they have an important political concept in common.

They share a strong dislike of the common people, when government decisions need to be made. Within that common principle, they differ. Shakespeare's fear of the mob is based on fear of chaos, of inflamed mob-mentality violence and anarchy. Shaw's dislike of "mobocracy" is founded in his life-long observation of the common population's ignorance and lack of thoughtfulness. Under that criteria, he reflects Coriolanus more than he does Shakespeare's Caesar or Ulysses. Distinctions without difference, perhaps, but the polar opposite separating the two political theorists lies in the two Caesars – in the solution to the danger of the mob.

Shakespeare, without leaving us the aggressive clarity of long prefaces explaining his politics in detail, detests the Dictator in the classical Roman model, and presents the doomed Antony and Cleopatra with much more warmth and life than the chilly, efficient technocrat Octavius. This presentation seems close to his heart: Antony as Tragic Lover, a Romantic rather than A Machiavellian manipulating the mob to cause a widespread riot to further his political ambition in the Ides of March crisis. That earlier Antony is more than a match for Octavius; the later, more likeable Antony is continually outmaneuvered by the Octavius soon to become Augustus. And Shaw would think this is rightfully so, as it should be. Octavius may be one of History's ultimate Strong Men, establishing his Empire through a combination of military strength and enlightened diplomacy, with his administrative system and his Pax Romana. The final speech in *Antony and Cleopatra* is Octavius's elegy for the tragic lovers. It is respectful and nostalgic, and is also spoken with the confident tone of one of History's winners:

She shall be buried by her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them, and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order in this great solemnity.
(5.2.347-356)

Octavius's tone recalls a previous Shakespearean winner, another military man who smoothly assumes leadership of a kingdom with easy self confidence. Fortinbras's elegy in *Hamlet* also displays the proper rhetoric of the victor:

Let four captains
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,

To have proved most royally; and for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the body. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.
(5.2.339-347)

Octavius remains standing, to be renamed (as Caius Martius was) as Augustus, and found his dynasty as the ultimate Roman Strong Man. It wouldn't last forever, of course; the Grand Mechanism will see to the decline and fall of Rome, graphically captured in Shakespeare's first tragedy *Titus Andronicus,* with its Roman Emperor nominally a Caesar, but really an hysterical maniac far away from Shaw's calm Caesar and Shakespeare's cold Octavius.

Citizen Caesar

An interesting commentary on Shaw's reading of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar,* and the serious flaws Shaw found in it, was created in America in 1937, the year of Shaw's rewrite of *Cymbeline*, and in the midst of the time when Shaw was modifying his approval of the theoretical Fascist solution to societal chaos, on his way to complete renunciation of such solutions. Orson Welles agreed with Shaw's judgment that *Julius Caesar* is "the most splendidly written political melodrama we possess" (as Shaw writes in his "Better than Shakespear?" Preface to *Caesar and Cleopatra*), and Welles will use the 1930s political vocabulary of Shaw's fascination with the surging Strong Men in his treatment of *Caesar* – but in a diametrically opposite vision. Shakespeare's mysterious neutrality, as described by Shapiro above, is so different from the polemicism of artists such as Shaw or Welles, permits such opposite interpretations of the same text.

Shakespeare's play can thus exist for any interpreter who has an axe to grind. Like Shaw, Welles thought Shakespeare's play should be reimagined for a current political stance, with the character of Caesar overhauled in the imagery of 1930s fascism. At the Mercury Theatre in New York, he produced his modern dress adaptation entitled *Julius Caesar: The Death of a Dictator*. Artistically, this was the major classical theatrical event on Broadway during the 1930s, a decade dominated by aggressive new writing and light entertainment. Welles refashioned *Caesar* to play to current American fears about the news from Europe, with the rise of the Fascist states preparing for a continental war. Caesar was a thorough monster of a Dictator, dressed in uniform, surrounded by black-shirted guards who repeatedly gave him the Fascist salute used by Hitler and Mussolini. Indeed, the actor playing Caesar (Joseph Holland) was employed because of his striking resemblance to Mussolini.

Under this enormous image of Caesar-as-Fascist, Welles focused on the relationship between Brutus and Cassius. David Thomson, in his biography of Welles [12], describes the theatrical emphasis:

> Welles had extracted and highlighted the story of Brutus and Cassius. His *Caesar* was the debate as to what could be done to keep the state from magnificent tyranny: Cassius was bitter, envious, resentful, while Brutus was intended to be a noble liberal. But the two were shown as friends who differ in outlook and sense of necessary action. Then, in their argument or hesitation, they are outflanked by a simple demagogue, Antony, who wins the crowd and becomes a more ruthless fascist than ever Caesar could have made.

Welles drastically cut and rearranged the text to suit his concept, his warning about the danger flourishing in Europe. All of the words were Shakespeare's, but newly organized to promote the contemporary parallels. There were no references to Caesar's weaknesses, his deafness and epilepsy and impending senility which are all present in the original text;

Octavius does not appear, Antony instead following Caesar as the next Dictator; there is no ghost of Caesar, nor any of the conspirators' suicides – they each apparently die in battle – and the mob is perhaps the most important factor, showing in their hysteria that the source of a dictator's strength lies in the manipulation of the people from whom he emerges.

In this reframing, Brutus (played by Welles himself) is central as (in Welles's words)

> the classical picture of the eternal, impotent, ineffectual, fumbling liberal; the reformer who wants to do something about things but doesn't know how and gets it in the neck in the end. He's dead right all the time, and dead at the final curtain. He's Shakespeare's favorite hero – the fellow who thinks the times are out of joint but who is really out of joint with his time. He's the bourgeois intellectual, who, under a modern dictatorship would be the first to be put up against a wall and shot.[12]

With Cassius as a pragmatic realist far less prominent than in Shakespeare's original, and the minor conspirators dressed as 30s racketeers and gangsters (like a Robinson, Bogart, or Cagney film, and anticipating Brecht's *Arturo Ui*), Brutus becomes the one sincere anti-fascist voice. Welles reconceives Brutus as well as Caesar, whereas Shaw only concerns himself with Caesar. But Shaw's Caesar is a noble superman, clear-sighted, broad-minded, and yet wryly aware of his place on the historical wheel of the Grand Mechanism. Welles's Caesar is no petty mob boss; he's a titanic Fascist, controlling his world through totalitarian terror. When he's assassinated, his spirit does not haunt the play as in Shakespeare, nor his wisdom work to educate and enlighten his followers (as in Shaw). Rather, a new, even more fanatic egocentric assumes his throne.

For Welles, Caesar is a real danger. He's not a sort of company chairman whose petty luxuries have annoyed a restive board of directors. He's an enemy to the state, who has taken total control of the army, can't be voted out, and has summary powers of execution.

What happens to the two tribunes? “Put to silence” for pulling images down off of statues of Caesar. The cult of the individual leader has arrived. Without that interpretation of Caesar, Welles thought, the assassination becomes nothing more than a bunch of bullies setting upon a harmless, defenseless old man, rather than the cataclysmic event it deserves to be.

In this production, the assassination scene was given majestic grandeur, with the conspirators slowly stabbing Caesar one at a time, culminating in Brutus, to effect “the death of a Dictator.” But two central scenes – the funeral oration and Cinna the Poet - especially shocked the original audiences, and focus Welles’s concept most strikingly. The funeral oration was modeled on Hitler’s Nuremburg arena, complete with enormous banners behind Antony, and ground-upward lighting, with Marc Blitzstein’s music (entitled “The Fascist March”) as his soundtrack. The effect was pulled right out of the newsreels, or a Leni Riefenstahl propaganda film.

Given even more prominence was the Cinna the Poet scene, which Welles directed as an epic commentary on mob hysteria, perhaps the most violent in its rabid thoughtlessness than any theatrical riot since Jack Cade’s in *Henry VI, Part Two*. The mob members were now wearing armbands, in the German or Italian style. Their dialogue with the hapless Cinna was amplified by several lines imported from a crowd scene in *Coriolanus*. Their climactic swarming to engulf him was the grandest thing in the production, with direct reference to newsreel footage of ghetto oppression in Poland and Germany. Also, in many ways, Welles’s version of the Cinna the Poet scene is a direct antecedent of Brecht’s heavily-adapted post-war version of *Coriolanus* (performed in 1952 by his

Berliner Ensemble), in which an innocent, well-meaning people are betrayed by a Fascist tyrant. After Welles's Cinna the Poet scene, the Battle of Philippi was an anti-climax. The Welles version thus emerged as a new version of the Caesarian grand narrative, which Shaw thought he had rescued from Shakespeare's fiasco. Welles portrayed Brutus as a liberator, and the play as a Marxist view of the historical destiny of social energy, with the people plotting their path to emancipation. Shaw portrayed Caesar as a Nietzschean Superman who would force the world to realize itself, in an apocalyptic moment, to a revaluation of all values.

To Welles, that apocalyptic moment was the attack of Cinna the Poet, the result of mobocracy; to Shaw, it was the murder of Caesar, the cause of mobocracy. And where Shaw wanted the Dictator Caesar to stand for his hope of a benevolent fascist (his ideal Mussolini), Welles read the Dictator Caesar as a warning of real danger (the actual Mussolini). Anthony Lane remarks that Welles, no less than his near contemporary Shaw, wished to claim an ownership of Shakespeare, as his trilogy of Shakespearean films would later demonstrate (*Macbeth, Othello,* and *The Chimes at Midnight*). Lane writes "Orson Welles made Shakespeare for everyone, but only because of his arrogant and justified faith in wanting Shakespeare all for himself. Culturemongers may believe that we need Shakespeare, but reason not the need: it is enough to want him."[13]

By 1937, the year of Welles's opening of *Julius Caesar: The Death of a Dictator,* Shaw had lost his earlier hope in the possibility of a benevolent sort of Fascism to solve a country's misery. And so, there was not really a Shavian paradox or irony in Welles's portrait of Caesar as just the sort of common man-natural leader that Shaw imagined, but who then turns out to be the worst sort of Strong Man: Thug as Dictator. But in the New

York Post, critic John Mason Brown, reviewing the opening of the Welles version, captures the sort of historical energy felt by the Romans of Caesar's time, the English of Elizabeth's time, and the current Europe on the verge of the Second War:

> Something deathless and dangerous in the world sweeps past you down the darkened aisles at the Mercury and takes possession of the proud, gaunt stage. It is something fearful and ominous, something turbulent and to be dreaded, which distends the drama to include the life of nations as well as of men.[14]

Shaw's Caesar play does not yield itself to such a turbulence and sweep, though he aspired to "include the life of nations" – but through intellectual turbulence, through Shavian discourse. Welles shows that Shakespeare's text is equally malleable, and available, for another reinvention of the Caesar model, that can be set against Shaw's.

A Shavian Caesar Postscript

Shaw created one other Roman Emperor, a few years after his Caesar play. In *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), an unnamed Caesar presides over the arena, where the early Christians will test their faith against the lions. He refers to an incident in the arena that happened "in Domitian's time," which would presumably place him in the 2nd Century AD, when the Antonines (who Gibbon called "the five good emperors") ruled in peace and prosperity, enabling the Christian sect to grow, before 180 AD when trouble began through the barbarian threat and a series of mentally unstable Emperors. Shaw's genial Caesar must be one of these benevolent Emperors, Hadrian, perhaps, or Marcus Aurelius; by leaving him non-specific, Shaw creates a general prototype.

In this charming nursery fable, best known for the scene in which the Christian Androcles waltzes with the lion from whose paw he removes a thorn, the Emperor is good-natured, tolerant towards the Christians, and eminently reasonable and Shavian. He is impressed

by their simple, unwavering faith, concluding “I can no longer doubt the truth of Christianity.” The play is Shaw’s last to be set in antiquity (except for his rewrite of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*), not counting his Biblical parables with the Garden of Eden in *Back to Methusaleh* and the Jesus-Pilate dialogue in the Preface to *On the Rocks*; and the rise to power it portrays, that of a faith that transcends the secular and the political, is a valuable parallel to the worldly ambitions of the born bosses, the totalitarian Caesars.

Press Cuttings

Shaw’s Julius Caesar play was written in the late 1890s, with subtle reference to the British Empire’s crises at the turn of the century. His late 1930s reaction to the corruption of the Fascist governments would take place inside the halls of government, not in the streets with the mob. In between the two eras, one Shaw one-act play blends the two, presenting Downing Street pressured by an offstage mob on the verge of hysterical riot. In *Press Cuttings* (1909), Shaw writes an entertaining polemic in aid of women’s suffrage. The Prime Minister, Balsquith (melding two Edwardian PMs, the Conservative Arthur Balfour and the Liberal Herbert Asquith), is forced to disguise himself as a woman in order to pass through a riotous mob of women chaining themselves to the railings in protest of their lack of the vote. Balsquith’s top military General Mitchener (a parody of the imperialist Kitchener), when not fretting in paranoia over the growing German threat, advises opening fire on the angry mob of suffragettes. But Balsquith evades the potential mob takeover by a combination of diplomacy and cynical resignation: “After all, I dont suppose votes for women will make much difference. It hasnt in the other countries in which it has been tried.”

And this farce, which includes General Mitchener falling in love with the militant head of the suffragettes, is Shaw's one exploration of the danger of mob rioting and rule in his theatre. A few years later, he will have a lot to say about politicians in the European arena, and the rise of the Strong Man as the Great War proceeds; but first, as well, a doomed attempt by an organized, secret group of private men to bring about their own political change for their own country (much like Brutus, Cassius, and friends). The fallout from the Great War will feature the rise of the Fascists, using their mixture of violence, doctrine, and personality to (for a time) become their country's Dictators, and would-be world conquerors. They will rise through their country's revolutionary chaos and, temporarily, thrive.

Shaw's Crisis: Common Sense About the War

During the Great War, Shaw suffered the most serious crisis in his public career. In the third month of the war, November 1914, Shaw published a long essay in the *New Statesman* entitled *Common Sense About the War*. In *Common Sense,* Shaw argues that the politicians and generals on both sides are badly mismanaging the war, through their outdated and self-righteous belief in patriotism and national pride. He argues that "Neither England nor Germany must claim any moral superiority in the negotiations … Both claimed to be "an Imperial race" ruling other races by divine right." Stating that Britain did not have a natural and automatic superiority over arch-enemy Germany, who the British popular press zealously portrayed as philistine militarism-mad savages and thugs, and even the literary elite contributed to the image (Shaw summarized H. G. Wells's attacks on the Kaiser as saying "There stands the monster all freedom-loving

men hate!"), made him extremely unpopular, as did his more extended criticisms of the London government. The Foreign Office was run by old-fashioned public school dinosaurs, still grasping their Victorian codes and attitudes.

> The general truth of the situation is, as I have spent so much of my life in trying to make the English understand, that we are cursed with a fatal intellectual laziness, an evil inheritance from the time when our monopoly of coal and iron made it possible for us to become rich and powerful without thinking or knowing how: a laziness which is becoming highly dangerous to us now that our monopoly is gone or superseded by new sources of mechanical energy … In the end we became fat-headed, and not only lost all intellectual consciousness of what we were doing, and with it all power of objective self-criticism, but stacked up a lumber of pious phrases for ourselves which not only satisfied our corrupted and half-atrophied consciences, but gave us a sense that there is something extraordinarily ungentlemanly and politically dangerous in bringing these pious phrases to the test of conduct.

Most of Shaw's *Common Sense* essay is thoroughly detailed and specific about the fine points of the pre-war attempts at negotiation, and British policies of preparation for the inevitable war. But his calm analysis was lost in these passages where he calls the British public dumb, lazy, and self-deluding, with their monstrously outdated attitudes of smug superiority. His insistence on seeing the conflict from both sides was widely and aggressively portrayed by his critics as revealing a pro-German stance – his appreciation of German "Kultur" with his heroes Goethe, Nietzsche, and above all Wagner had long been well known – and the anti-Shaw backlash was especially savage, including famous moments such as the cartoon showing him wearing a German Iron Cross, and Robert Lynd's comment in *The New Statesman* that the war was being spoken of as if it were between the allies on the one hand, and, on the other, Germany, Austria, Turkey, and Bernard Shaw[15].

The attacks against Shaw were widespread, including his expulsion from The Authors Society (whose members refused to attend any luncheon if Shaw was there), passionate

public letters by former friends Wells, Bennett, Chesterton, Cunninghame Graham, Arthur Jones, and newspaper editor J. C. Squire who recommended Shaw be tarred and feathered, and a private comment by Prime Minister Asquith that Shaw should be shot.

His most notorious joke in *Common Sense*, facetiously saying that

> No doubt the heroic remedy for this tragic misunderstanding is that both armies should shoot their officers and go home to gather in their harvests in the villages and make a revolution in the towns; and though this is not at present a practicable solution, it must be frankly mentioned …

caused outrage, but was dismissible as another typical instance of Shaw's exasperating mischief-making. More injurious to the public were his phrases that cut right to the heart of British pride, and patriotic belief in their superiority over the Hun.

> We did not stop to ask our consciences whether the Prussian assumption that the dominion of the civilized earth belongs to German culture is really more bumptious than the English assumption that the dominion of the sea belongs to British commerce.

Shaw's general commentary on the nation's attitudes was less important to him, overall, than his specific characterizations of government politicians, especially Sir Edward Grey, for whom Shaw invoked a Shakespearean dimension:

> In describing the course of the diplomatic negotiations by which our Foreign Office achieved its design of at last settling accounts with Germany at the most favourable moment from the Militarist point of view, I shall have to exhibit our Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as behaving almost exactly as we have accused the Kaiser of behaving. Yet I see him throughout as a honest gentleman, "perplexed in the extreme," meaning well, revolted at the last moment by the horror of war, clinging to the hope that in some vague way he could persuade everybody to be reasonable if they would only come an talk to him as they did when the big Powers were kept out of the Balkan war, but hopelessly destitute of a positive policy of any kind, and therefore unable to resist those who had positive business in hand. And do not for a moment imagine that I think that the conscious Sir Edward Grey was Othello, and the subconscious, Iago.

Shaw will satirize the Parliamentary bureaucrats and office-holders (such as Grey) in one of his upcoming quartet of Great War Playlets (*Augustus Does His Bit*), summing them

up as “well-meaning, brave, patriotic, but obstructively fussy, self-important, imbecile, and disastrous.” Shaw preferred Churchill, whom he saw as knowing what he wanted, unlike Grey. But he saved his most explosive criticism of the entire war culture for its foolishly romantic misunderstanding of the economic basis of the conflict:

> Will you now at last believe, O stupid British, German, and French patriots, what the Socialists have been telling you for so many years: that your Union Jacks and tricolors and Imperial Eagles (“where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered”) are only two real flags in the world henceforth: the red flag of Democratic Socialism and the black flag of Capitalism, the flag of God and the flag of Mammon?

Shaw’s tone rises to the Biblical there, like a minor prophet of the Old Testament castigating the sins of the people, appropriate for his astonishing apotheosis for the cause of Democratic Socialism. He himself had warned about the clash between the flags of God and Mammon a decade earlier in *Major Barbara*, and in his opinion, his warning went unheeded and Undershaft’s prophecy is fulfilled.

And after some frivolous but fascinating one-act reflections of the Great War experience at home – and a major, supreme reaction to it in *Heartbreak House*, considered below – Shaw will strive to turn his post-war disillusionment into a positive energy in pursuit of that Socialist ideal, and then see that energy reinvented in a transitory hope in the rise of the Strong Man as political salvation for a society in confusion. When the confusion will move on to chaos, Shaw will reach for yet another reinvention; but this journey, mirroring a similar one undertaken three centuries earlier by Shakespeare, begins near the end of the 1914-1918 war with some ordinary men.

> THE DEVIL: Beware of the pursuit of the Superhuman: it leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the Human. To a man, horses and dogs and cats are mere species, outside the moral world. Well, to the Superman, men and women are a mere species too, also outside the moral world.
> (*Man and Superman*, Act III)

BRUTUS As if that whatsoever god who leads him
Were slily crept into his human powers
And gave him graceful posture.
(*Coriolanus*, 2.1.205-207)

Ordinary Men

But those are the Supermen, the Strong Men, the extraordinary. Private Denny O'Flaherty, V.C., and Lord Augustus Highcastle are regular, normal, garden-variety ordinary men. O'Flaherty, in the playlet *O'Flaherty V.C.: A Reminiscence of 1915 (A Recruiting Pamphlet)*, is an Irish war hero, and stereotypical Irish stage rascal, returning home with his newly-won Victoria Cross. Employed by the Crown's representative as a recruitment gimmick to enlist Irishmen, O'Flaherty boasts of his exploits in the trenches to romanticize the adventure of war for his countrymen, exaggerating his bravery like Falstaff after the Gads Hill robbery or Shrewsbury ("I think that story about your fighting the Kaiser and the twelve giants of the Prussian guard single-handed would be the better for a little toning down." advises his British officer. "Dont you think it would fetch in almost as many recruits if you reduced the number of guardsmen to six?").

Privately, O'Flaherty is a disillusioned realist who speaks a comic preview of Shaw's frankness about the Irish Question (telling his fanatic anti-England mother that he's fighting for the German army), and his political stance in *Common Sense*.

O'FLAHERTY: It's like the patriotism of the English. They never thought of being patriotic until the war broke out; and now the patriotism has took them so sudden and come so strange to them that they run about like frightened chickens, uttering all manner of nonsense. But please God theyll forget all about it when the war's over … She's like the English: they think theres no one like themselves. It's the same with the Germans, though theyre educated and ought to know better. Youll never have a quiet world til you knock the patriotism out of the human race.

O’Flaherty is a twentieth century microcosmic rewrite of Falstaff, if the concept of “patriotism” can update the concept of “honour” which Falstaff finds equally not worth dying for. O’Flaherty echoes the questioning music of Falstaff’s battlefield speech.

FALSTAFF Well, ‘tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set-to a leg? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word ‘honour’? What is that ‘honour’? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o’ Wednesday.
(*Henry IV Part One*, 5.2.129-135)

O’FLAHERTY: Sure what’s the Cross to me, barring the little pension it carries? Do you think I dont know that theres hundreds of men as brave as me that never had the luck to get anything for their bravery but a curse from the sergeant, and the blame for the faults of them that ought to have been their betters? Ive learnt more than youd think, sir; for how would a gentleman like you know what a poor ignorant conceited creature I was when I went from here into the wide world as a soldier? What use is all the lying, and pretending, and humbugging, and letting on, when the day comes to you that your comrade is killed in the trench beside you, and you dont as much look round at him until you trip over his poor body, and then all you say is to ask why the hell the stretcher-bearers dont take it out of the way.

The realistic and anarchic spirit of Falstaff reappears in the Great War’s O’Flaherty. It also displays a carefree, callous opportunism, as Falstaff is happy to take credit for killing Hotspur, and O’Flaherty accepts the Victoria Cross for killing a platoon of Germans who he never actually saw with his own eyes. This spirit of opportunistic individuality is an obstacle to an ambitious would-be Fascist Strong Man, who needs to inspire and enforce conformity and allegiance amongst his nation’s commoner crowd to secure the popular groundswell on which he’ll rise to power. More welcome to the dictatorial aspirant is the government red-tape corner-cutting bureaucratic official, who, while in actuality a government flunky, doesn’t realize the ineffectiveness of his place in the political wheel. The “Augustus” of the parliamentary system, as Shaw labeled the type in the playlet *Augustus Does His Bit* (1916), choosing the name in vicious irony to pointedly contrast

with the classic Roman "Augustus" who was a model of strong purpose and clinical efficiency, unlike the modern politicians and paper-shufflers frivolously running the war. Using Falstaff as a prism through which he can create ordinary men, who can protest the nation's government with a freedom the statesmen lack, Shaw can both attack the rampant, unthinking patriotism that would end in World War, and create a character more colorful and accessible than the officially important (or self-important) rulers – we can know Falstaff, the critic of honor, much more than we can Henry V. Shaw's defense case for what he thought to be underappreciated Shakespearean comedy comes in his Preface to *Man and Superman* …

> … comedy neither compromises the author nor reveals him. He must be judged by those characters into which he puts what he knows of himself, his Hamlets and Macbeths and Lears and Prosperos. If these characters are agonizing in a void about factitious melodramatic murders and revenges and the like, whilst the comic characters walk with their feet on solid ground, vivid and amusing, you know that the author has much to shew and nothing to teach. The comparison between Falstaff and Prospero is like the comparison between Micawber and David Copperfield. At the end of the book you know Micawber, whereas you only know what has happened to David, and are not interested enough in him to wonder what his politics or religion might be if anything so stupendous as a religious or political idea, or a general idea of any sort, were to occur to him.

As with Falstaff and Micawber, I feel I know Denny O'Flaherty the empire-debunker more than I do Caesar, the empire builder. Shaw's admiration for the Strong Man in real life does not easily translate to the creation of a vivid, unique dramatic character. The political satirist (Falstaff) is more fun to write than the victorious political strategist and bully (Bolingbroke).

As the war finally neared its end, Shaw shared the disillusion of the Modernist community, and predicted (in both *Common Sense About the War* and *Joy Riding at the Front*) the wrongheaded failure the Versailles Peace Conference would be. He saw that

its terms would not be punitive enough to permanently prevent Germany from re-arming and seeking revenge, but instead, too disgracefully humiliating for Germany to accept and embrace a European peace movement. The nations renewing their rivalries between the wars will be generally lacking in what they surely need – a Falstaff, an O'Flaherty. Through the *Common Sense About the War* scandal, and the general darkening of the humor in his plays, Shaw's controversial reputation would not permit he himself to fill that absence, to serve effectively as the court jester who could, like Falstaff or Thersites or Lear's Fool, pierce the blinkered patriotism of the national war-mongers. And by 1918, Shaw was too famous to enjoy the freedom of the Ordinary Man to comment with charming impunity upon the Strong Man. He needed to grasp a cause for hope, to rediscover his optimism.

A Cause for Being Hopeful

Out of the post-war chaos, Shaw indeed grasped one great cause for hope, in a new political system that had the potential (after its initial explosion of violence) to overcome the depressing regularity and inevitability of the Grand Mechanism's wheel. The Russian Revolution provided Shaw with a vision of an orderly society based on a strong ideological foundation. Shaw's devotion to pure Socialism had not come to anything useful in the face of an ever-expanding Capitalism, and his hope was that Communism as an extreme (rather than Fabian and gradual) application of Marx's economic theory would restore sanity to the mess the world seemed to be in the aftermath of the War.
It fascinated Shaw that this progressive, radical political upheaval should occur in one of Europe's most backward countries, politically, with its rigid courtly system under a Czar

ruling a huge agrarian country. And while Lenin was not a Strong Man exactly in the Fascist model to come later in the 1920s – for instance, not depending on a popular groundswell of the mob to hoist him to power, but instead seizing power first before practicing the demagoguery vital to unite the workers, using the old Marxist slogans – he was ruthless in his overthrow of the Czar, maintaining a public position that the violent side of the revolution would be transitory (but necessary). Shaw understood the process, as a pro-Czarist general says in his playlet *Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress* (1917):

> STRAMMFEST: But what will the Revolution do for the people? Do not be deceived by the fine speeches of the revolutionary leaders and the pamphlets of the revolutionary writers. How much liberty is there where they have gained the upper hand? Are they not hanging, shooting, imprisoning as much as ever we did? Do they ever tell the people the truth? No: if the truth does not suit them they spread lies instead, and make it a crime to tell the truth.

Annajanska, the Czar's daughter with the title Grand Duchess, has defected to the Revolution party, scandalizing the loyal Strammfest. She justifies her renunciation of her royal birthright:

> THE GRAND DUCHESS: I say that if the people cannot govern themselves, they must be governed by somebody. If they will not do their duty without being half forced and half humbugged, somebody must force them and humbug them. Some energetic and capable minority must always be in power. Well, I am on the side of the energetic minority whose principles I agree with. The Revolution is as cruel as we were; but its aims are my aims. Therefore I stand for the Revolution.
> STRAMMFEST: You do not know what you are saying. This is pure Bolshevism. Are you, the daughter of a Panjandrum, a Bolshevist?
> THE GRAND DUCHESS: I am anything that will make the world less like a prison and more like a circus.

"Circus" is an unconventional image for Utopia. Most Utopian ideals employ less worldly, more ethereal imagery – as in a classic Shakespearean vision, based on Montaigne's essay "Of the Cannibals," and voiced here in *The Tempest* by Gonzalo, with cynical commentary from the two villains:

GONZALO I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit, no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women too – but innocent and pure,
No sovereignty –
SEBASTIAN And yet he would be king on't.
ANTONIO The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning.
GONZALO All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of it own kind all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.
SEBASTIAN No marrying 'mong his subject?
ANTONIO None, man, all idle; whores and knaves.
GONZALO I would with such perfection govern, sir,
T'excel the Golden Age.
(2.1.147-168)

That is no capitalist democracy, but a Socialist ideal. At the turn of the century, Shaw would have eagerly championed such a Golden Age, overseen and cared for by his wise, benevolent Caesar, looking out for the welfare of his commonwealth while possessing the military might to protect it as needed. By 1918, Shaw had moved on to a more aggressive, assertive ideal for a new twentieth-century commonwealth. Historian Eugen Weber summarizes the shift from Socialism to Communism very clearly:

> Socialist parties clung to the good old doctrine as they had done before the First World War and persuaded all who looked for fresh answers to their pressing problems that they would have to look elsewhere.
> Increasingly, such people looked to Communism, less for its similar doctrines than for its certitudes. Socialism had taken on too much of the pessimistic, timid coloring of the society to which it had adjusted. Zealous, active, fanatically persuaded that their cause was right, Communists attracted a good many people who were dissatisfied with things as they were and more interested in change and action than in the precise nature of either, so that a number of them eventually turned to Nazism or to Fascism …

> Socialism, as all could see, hampered the functioning of the profit system without doing anything to change it. Communism, even if unable to replace it with a better system, at least promised its destruction. Intellectuals and artists who had engaged in anarchic and detached rebellions during the postwar years – W. H. Auden, John Dos Passos, Louis Aragon, André Malraux, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, and many others – went over to commitment. In the Soviet Union, wrote Malraux in 1935, the writer was no longer alienated from industrial society; Soviet writers were one with their civilization.[16]

Shaw, who should be prominent on that list, certainly felt like those Soviet writers during his halcyon visit to the USSR in 1931 to meet Stalin. In a staged two hour meeting, in which Stalin was a genial, gentlemanly host, Shaw was convinced of the certainties Stalin ostensibly offered. What is more surprising than Shaw's successful audience with the Dictator Stalin is Shaw's need for some certainties, however illusory.

The great iconoclast of his time, who delighted in writing debate plays in which he thrived showing all sides of an argument with equal conviction, who saw in his lifetime the rise of relativism replacing the old, Victorian absolutes he vigorously attacked, and whose intellectual heroes – Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wagner, Ibsen, and later Einstein and Heisenberg – represented the beginning of the Modern age in which he seemed so comfortably energized, now needed something to be indisputably right more than he needed to explore both sides of the question. Shaw had seen enough to be frustrated at floating in a relativist limbo. He needed to attach his artistic sensibility to an economic and political ideology that allowed no half-measures of commitment.

In Shakespeare, formerly a reliable source of some sorts of consolation, Shaw was now only seeing half-measures, even a pre-relativist ideological hollowness. Wanting certainty, in Shakespeare he saw the anxiety of the turbulent Elizabethan age, and in his Preface to *Saint Joan* (1923) he attacks the absence of responsibility among Shakespeare's political leaders:

> Although he was a Catholic by family tradition, his figures are all intensely Protestant, individualist, sceptical, self-centred in everything but their love affairs, and completely personal and selfish even in them. His kings are not statesmen: his cardinals have no religion: a novice can read his plays from one end to the other without learning that the world is finally governed by forces expressing themselves in religions and laws which make epochs rather than by vulgarly ambitious individuals who make rows. The divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will, is mentioned fatalistically only to be forgotten immediately like a passing vague apprehension.

Impressed by his audience with Stalin, Shaw felt that the Soviet Union was moving towards a sort of Heaven in what he repeatedly called "the great Communist experiment." And as for Stalin personally, Shaw said in a magazine interview after he returned: "I expected to see a Russian working man and I found a Georgian gentleman. He was not only at ease himself, but he had the art of setting us at our ease. He was charmingly good humoured. There was no malice in him, but also no credulity.[17]

The Beginnings of Hopelessness

Shaw's newest biographer, A. M. Gibbs, writes

> By the time of Shaw's visit, the Stalinist reign of terror – which comprised forced labor camps for political prisoners, compulsory collectivization, and a ruthless process of suppression, which involved the murder of millions of people – was well under way.[18]

During the 1930s, Stalin consolidated his dictatorial power with his "purges," conducted by his secret police, the GPU (forerunners of the Cold War's KGB). His main targets were the Old Bolsheviks, with their associations to Stalin's predecessor Lenin and the events of the October Revolution, from which Stalin was disassociating his new Soviet party; and the Kulaks, Russian peasant farmers getting in the way of his collectivization movement. Historians estimate that approximately eight million people were arrested, and either executed outright or imprisoned in Siberian concentration camps; at least a

million were executed, and millions more died from hunger and ill-treatment in the camps.[19]

In the mid-1930s, some journalists were beginning to publicize Stalin's tyrannical activities in England. One important exposé came in an article by Malcolm Muggeridge in the London *Morning Post* on June 7, 1933. Muggeridge was a member of the Fabian Society, well known to Shaw, and the nephew of Shaw's great Fabian friend Beatrice Webb. Following his own visit to Moscow, Muggeridge wrote

> The GPU embodies all the fear, all the distrust, all the passion to be revenged on society, all the hatred of civilisation and of human happiness that lives in the soul of Bolshevism.
> It is the soul of Bolshevism; and as time goes on, as the trivial hypocrisies in which Bolshevism has dressed itself in order to deceive and flatter and use for its own purposes the frustrated intellectuals of civilised Europe and uncivilised America tend to get thrown aside, it emerges as the ultimate authority in Russia, the very dictatorship of the proletariat.
> UTTERLY EVIL
> No one who has not seen it for himself can understand the terror that this organisation inspires, not merely in avowed enemies of the Soviet regime ex-bourgeoisie, priests, people who were for any reason privileged under the old social order – but in the whole population.

I have found no direct evidence that Shaw knew about Muggeridge's article, or any others; but Shaw was always so well informed and aware that it seems impossible that he wouldn't know about the purges – even if he then chose to ignore them.

Then, in June 2003, an extraordinary document surfaced, which was auctioned at Sotheby's on July 10 of that year[20]. After the December 1934 "show trials" in which Stalin executed 200 senior communists and sent some ten thousand lesser-known veteran Bolsheviks to Siberia, journalist Dorothy Royal sent a questionnaire to many of the Soviet sympathizers among the British Intelligentsia, including Shaw. Apparently, the results were never published, but the Shaw response to the questionnaire has survived.

Her primary question was whether Stalin's charges against the veteran Bolsheviks were untrue – or had the Russian Revolution of 1917 had "degenerate" leaders. Had the revolution "attracted degenerate types" 17 years ago, she asked? Shaw replied

> On the contrary, it has attracted superior types all the world over to an extraordinary extent wherever it has been understood. But the top of the ladder is a very trying place for old revolutionists who have had no administrative experience, who have had no financial experience, who have been trained as penniless hunted fugitives with Karl Marx on the brain and not as statesmen. They often have to be pushed off the ladder with a rope around their necks.

Is this Shaw the Soviet apologist, attempting to justify Stalin's purges as an unhappy but necessary political imperative, as the old-thinkers were becoming an obstacle in the way of the political Life Force's greater agenda, under a far-sighted optimistic trust in the Grand Mechanism? Or is it a desperate loner shoving his head into the sand of wishful thinking, with his philosophical center lost? Can Shaw have really believed the hyperbole of the ideology? Two comments from his Preface to *Too True to Be Good* (1931) make me wonder at how gullible Shaw's need for this cause could lead him to be:

> The answer is that the Christian system failed, not because it was wrong in its psychology, its fundamental postulate of equality, or its anticipation of Lenin's principle that the rulers must be as poor as the ruled so that they can raise themselves only by raising their people, but because the old priests' ignorance of economics and political science blinded them to the mischief latent in the selfishness of private property in the physical earth … Stalin and Mussolini are the most responsible statesmen in Europe because they have no hold on their places except their efficiency; and their authority is consequently greater than that of any of the monarchs, presidents, and prime ministers who have to deal with them. Stalin is one of the higher functionaries with whom governing is necessarily a whole-time job. But he is no richer than his neighbours, and can "better himself" only by bettering them, not by bettering them like a British demagogue.

With the hindsight of history, it seems laughable to think that Stalin was "no richer" than the peasants he terrorized, or that efficiency alone kept these Dictators in their positions. A dethroned Richard II might come to some emerging self-knowledge by his dungeon

epiphany that “Nor I, nor any man that but man be, / With nothing shall be pleased to he be eased / With being nothing.” (5.5.39-41), or Lear might come to his revelations of humility on the heath; but we know that these Dictators lived a lot better than that, whether Fascists or Communists. Shaw believed in the principle; and perhaps he could separate the quality of the principle from the human weakness of the man. Trust in the concept, Shaw may be thinking: people will always let you down, but the principle will remain.

But then, in the first year of Stalin’s second Five Year Plan, whatever his ideological defenses of the fascists – the bottom falls out for Shaw.

On The Rocks: The Bottom Falls Out

The apparent discrepancy between Shaw’s instinctive humanism and his admiration for the Soviet Union is complicated by his 1933 “political comedy” *On the Rocks*, and its Preface. This despairing play is a real crisis for Shaw. It’s nihilistic and hopeless, pessimistic in its politics and invocative of the Book of Revelations in its offstage imagery. In the play’s action, the British Prime Minister (Sir Arthur Chavender) is besieged by mobs in the streets of London, protesting economic conditions and particularly unemployment. Chavender is a political animal, an orator and parliamentary wheeler-dealer who juggles committees and shifting alliances with the House of Commons as his playground. His Chief of Police, Sir Broadfoot Basham, is opposed to dispersing the mobs by force, as Chavender suggests; the better way is to distract them with oratory, speeches in the street corners from anyone in the “talking societies, the Ethical Societies, the Socialist Societies, the Communists, the Fascists, the Anarchists,

the Syndicalists, the official Labor Party, the Independent Labor Party, the Salvation Army, the Church Army and the Atheists, to send their best tub-thumpers …"

Best of all would be Chavender tub-thumping himself, with some MPs from that "rare lot of gasbags" the PM oversees in the House.

Within this confused, messy mix of trendy political causes, Chavender is tearing his hair out in frustration: "It's all so foolish – so ignorant, poor chaps! They think because I'm Prime Minister I'm Divine Providence and can find jobs for them before trade revives."

His wife has no such misidentification about her husband: "But you dont govern the country, Arthur. The country isnt governed: it just slummocks along anyhow." A voice of the people also debunks Chavender's parliamentary methods, in a fierce debate. Old Hipney, spokesman for a deputation from the East End protesting unemployment rates, with an anthem for the Common Man in the Great Depression that strikes at Chavender's conscience:

> Look at yourself. Look at your conferences! Look at your debates! They dont do no good. But you keep on holding them. It's a sort of satisfaction to you when you feel helpless. Well, sir, if you come to helplessness there isnt on God's earth a creature more helpless than what our factories and machines have made of an English working man when nobody will give him a job and pay him to do it. And when he gets it what does he understand of it? Just nothing. Where did the material that he does his little bit of a job on come from? He dont know. What will happen to it when it goes out of the factory after he and his like have done their little bits of jobs on it? He dont know. Where could he sell it if it was left on his hands? He dont know. He dont know nothing of the business that his life depends on. Turn a cat loose and itll feed itself. Turn an English working man loose and he'll starve.

Chavender's resigned, futile response: "Parliament, Mr Hipney, is what the people of England have made it. For good or evil we have committed ourselves to democracy."

Hipney encourages Chavender to read Marx, who "thought that when he'd explained the Capitalist System to the working classes of Europe theyd unite and overthrow it." In

reply, Chavender reaches the bottom of his blinkered complacency, with a position statement that will soon seem Faustian:

> Mr Hipney, when the Astronomer Royal tells me it is twelve o'clock by Greenwich time I do not ask him whether he has read the nonsense of the latest flat earth man. I have something better to do with my time than to read the ravings of a half-educated German Communist.

These words turn out to be prophetic of a cataclysmic turning point for Chavender, an epic reversal modeled on the classical dramatic paradigm, inspired by a visitor from another world, "a woman in grey robes contemplating him gravely and pityingly" who has "stolen in noiselessly through the masked door." She is an unnamed Lady Oracle, a Eumenides to lead him to a new fate, a ghost from the future, as he repeatedly addresses her. This strange lady, announcing herself as a "messenger" and a "healer" arrives to free Chavender from "the wheels of a merciless political machine" by teaching him that "unless you exercise your mind you will lose it. A brain underexercised is far more injurious to health than an underexercised body." Her prescription:

> THE LADY: You are suffering from that very common English complaint, an underworked brain. To put it in one word, a bad case of frivolity, possibly incurable.
> SIR ARTHUR: Frivolity! Did I understand you to say that frivolity is a common English failing?
> THE LADY: Yes. Terribly common. Almost a national characteristic.
> SIR ARTHUR: Do you realize that you are utterly mad?
> THE LADY: Is it you or I who have piloted England on to the rocks?
> SIR ARTHUR: Come come! No politics. What do you prescribe for me?
> THE LADY: I take my patients into my retreat in the Welsh mountains, formerly a monastery, now much stricter and perfectly sanitary. No newspapers, no letters, no idle ladies. No books except in the afternoon as a rest from thinking.

And he disappears into the Welsh mountains for three months, instructing his secretary to fulfill the Lady's required reading list.

> HILDA: Shall I pack your usual holiday books? Some detective stories and Wordsworth?

SIR ARTHUR: No. You will procure all the books you can find by a revolutionary German Jew named Harry Marks –
HILDA: Dont you mean Karl Marx?
SIR ARTHUR: Thats the man. Karl Marx. Get me every blessed book by Karl Marx that you can find translated into English, and have them packed for the retreat.
HILDA: There are much newer books by Marxists: Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin and people like that.
SIR ARTHUR: Get them all. Pack the lot.

The retreat into Wales is revelatory for Sir Arthur Chavender on a colossal scale. Act One concludes with his disappearance; Act Two presents his re-emergence, in a resurrection that brings a new man to London's Parliament. Holroyd likens his rebirth in the Welsh mountains to another Arthur, Malory's in *Morte D'Arthur*, with "Avalon (the Celtic Isle of the Blest) transposed into the Welsh sanatorium and the legendary Round Table remodeled as an imposing Cabinet table. Sir Arthur himself is a Once and Future Prime Minister and the second act his promised second coming in the hour of England's need."[21] This convincing reading recasts the Lady from a modern Orestean Eumenides to a modern Lady of the Lake.

Shaw enhances the mythic quality of Sir Arthur's return to London with an unexpected Christian parallel. In his Preface to the play, he writes a brief dialogue expanding Jesus's trial before Pilate, as the Gospel representations (in his opinion) don't represent Jesus's participation fairly. He would have had more to say, Shaw feels, and he has been "asked repeatedly to dramatize the Gospel story, mostly by admirers of my dramatization of the trial of St Joan." Jesus brings a new system of thought to the world, as does Marx, Shaw argues; and like Jesus, Marx (represented dramatically by Chavender) finds great resistance to a public acceptance of his ideas, which are viewed by most in the Western world as seditious. Jesus explains the Shavian-desired mixture of ideological faith and

evolutionary progress to Pilate, in response to Pilate's challenge that "sedition concerns me and my office very closely; and when you undertook to supersede the Roman Empire by a kingdom in which you and not Caesar are to occupy the throne, you were guilty of the utmost sedition."

JESUS: Without sedition and blasphemy the world would stand still and the Kingdom of God never a stage nearer. The Roman Empire began with a wolf suckling two human infants. If these infants had not been wiser than their fostermother your empire would be a pack of wolves. It is by children who are wiser than their fathers, subjects who are wiser than their emperors, beggars and vagrants who are wiser than their priests, that men rise from being beasts of prey to believing in me and being saved.
PILATE: What do you mean by believing in you?
JESUS: Seeing the world as I do. What else could it mean?
PILATE: And you are the Christ, the Messiah, eh?
JESUS: Were I Satan, my argument would still hold.
PILATE: And I am to spare and encourage every heretic, every rebel, every lawbreaker, every rapscallion lest he should turn out to be wiser than all the generations who made the Roman law and built up the Roman Empire on it?
JESUS: By their fruits ye shall know them. Beware how you kill a thought that is new to you. For that thought may be the foundation of the kingdom of God on earth.
PILATE: It may also be the ruin of all kingdoms, all law, and all human society. It may be the thought of the beast of prey striving to return.

Thirty-five years after creating his Roman Caesar as a model for all leaders, Shaw invokes a potential political savior, as Chavender (perhaps accurately read as "Shaviander") presents a new thought to England, a resurrection of a kind, supporting the Soviet application of his ideological hero Marx to the real world.

But, the support feels desperate, almost last-gasp or at least Cassandra-like. The opposition to his socialist policies will be fierce, except in the limited self-interests of each faction happy to accept any aspect of the new British Communism that gives them an advantage, while still rejecting the package entire. And the mob does not immediately reap these theoretical benefits. The play will conclude with the disenfranchised mob facetiously singing Carpenter's "England Arise!" as they riot, smashing the windows of London in their own sort of Crystal Night, as Chavender's reforms are no more successful than those attempted back in 1916 by that well-intentioned mob taking control of the Dublin Post Office in their Easter Uprising.

Chavender has arrived, and he brings to London a Marxist program that includes many of Shaw's pet policy suggestions: extreme restrictions of private property; the nationalization of banks, collieries, the construction trade, and the transport systems; urban land becoming municipal property; abolishing overseas tariffs, and a total prohibition of private foreign trade in protected industries in favor of State imports only sold at State regulated prices; compulsory public service for all, irrespective of income; doubling the surtax on unearned income; abolishing death duties; collective farming under a nationalized fertilizer industry; even power drawn from the tides. "Britain self-supporting and blockade proof" is the goal.

It's the full Marxist program, and it upsets the rest of the Cabinet terribly. Chavender spends the rest of the play defending himself from his angry colleagues, but he does have one ally: old Hipney, the voice of the common man from Act One, who blames the decline of England on full adult suffrage (an old cause of Shaw's). "My God!" he cries. "It delivered us into the hands of our spoilers and oppressors, bound hand and foot by our own folly and ignorance." Hipney wishes Chavender would take the final step and abolish elections, as well, in favor of an honest, unapologetic Strong Man Leader. Full adult suffrage, through which the uneducated short-sighted masses can make ignorant mistakes, took the wind out of Hipney's public activism.

HIPNEY: It took the heart out of old Hipney; and now I'm for any Napoleon or Mussolini or Lenin or Chavender that has the stuff in him to take both the people and the spoilers and oppressors by the scruffs of their silly necks and just sling them into the way they should go with as many kicks as may be needful to make a thorough job of it.
SIR ARTHUR: A dictator, eh? Thats what you want.
HIPNEY: Better one dictator standing up responsible before the world for the good and evil he does than a dirty little dictator in every street responsible to nobody, to turn you out of your house if you dont pay him for the right to exist on

the earth, or to fire you out of your job if you stand up to him as a man and an equal. You cant frighten me with a word like dictator.

Hipney is given a final word on government, more moderate than his above outburst. "… all this country or any country has to stand between it and blue hell is the consciences of them that are capable of governing it." And if there's anything sinister in his approval of a dictator responsible for the good "and evil" he does, as the word "dictator" doesn't frighten him, another word briefly appears in this play in a sort of tangent unrelated to the Marxist program of Chavender's rebirth that brings the play to its lowest, most unhappy point. We won't see the outcome of Chavender's attempts at sweeping reform, though the parliamentary opposition and mob riots in the streets forecast an unlikely victory for the PM. But, the tangential moment certainly has a clear prevision of the post-Second-War loss of Empire that will lead to racial discord for years to come. And it's based on a word even more offensive than "dictator."

The Disastrous Words

Cabinet member Sir Dexter "Dexy" Rightside is a savage parody of an ultra-conservative right-wing old-boy out-of-date reactionary (and paranoid) dinosaur. Specifically a parody of would-be British fascist Sir Oswald Mosley, with his private militia of "black shirts," Rightside repeatedly advocates martial law to dispel the protesting mob outside with his private following of "Union Jack shirts." No one takes him seriously about that – but his resignation from the Cabinet in protest over Chavender's socialist agenda, promising to take the right-wing side of Parliament with him, breaks the back of Chavender's efforts. On his way out, Rightside goes around the room insulting the Cabinet members one by one – but crosses a line with Sir Jafna Pandranath, the Ambassador from India:

"Pandranath: you are only a silly nigger pretending to be an English gentleman: you are found out. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

He goes out, leaving an atmosphere of awe behind him, in which the Indian is choking with indignation, and for the moment inarticulate.
SIR BEMROSE: This is awful. We cannot do without him.
SIR JAFNA: [*finding his tongue*] I am despised. I am called nigger by this dirty faced barbarian whose forefathers were naked savages worshipping acorns and mistletoe in the woods whilst my people were spreading the highest enlightenment yet reached by the human race from the temples of Brahma the thousandfold who is all the gods in one … You call me nigger, sneering at my color because you have none. The jackdaw has lost his tail and would persuade the world his defect is a quality. You have all cringed to me, not for my greater nearness to God, but for my money and my power of making money and ever more money. But today your hatred, your envy, your insolence has betrayed itself. I am nigger. I am bad imitation of that eater of unclean foods, never sufficiently washed in his person or his garments, a British islander. I will no longer bear it … But now I cast you off. I return to India to detach it wholly from England, and leave you to perish in your ignorance, your vain conceit, and your abominable manners. Good morning, gentlemen. To hell with the lot of you. [*He goes out and slams the door*].
SIR ARTHUR: That one word nigger will cost us India. How could Dexy be such a fool as to let it slip!

Chavender's arguments with the Cabinet and the public deputation seem comical and light-hearted in their Shavian word-music, despite their serious and pungent political comment. At this moment, as well as in the fairly vague mentions of the threatening mob outside, the play withdraws from slightly-edgy comic charm, and presents a bitterness and anger sure to give ammunition to Shaw's critics. But the ammunition provided by Shaw's Preface was the most extreme of Shaw's life, even greater than the outrage *Common Sense About the War* had caused almost twenty years earlier, and leading to a rabid hatred of his elderly politics that exists today. It begins with another frightening word:

EXTERMINATION
In this play a reference is made by a Chief of Police to the political necessity for killing people: a necessity so distressing to the statesmen and so terrifying to the

common citizen that nobody except myself (as far as I know) has ventured to examine it directly on its own merits, although every Government is obliged to practise it on a scale varying from the execution of a single murderer to the slaughter of millions of quite innocent persons. Whilst assenting to these proceedings, and even acclaiming and celebrating them, we dare not tell ourselves what we are doing or why we are doing it; and so we call it justice or capital punishment or our duty to king and country or any other convenient verbal whitewash for what we instinctively recoil from as from a dirty job. These childish evasions are revolting. We must strip of the whitewash and find out what is really beneath it. Extermination must be put on a scientific basis if it is ever to be carried out humanely and apologetically as well as thoroughly.

KILLING AS A POLITICAL FUNCTION

That killing is a necessity is beyond question by any thoughtful person. Unless rabbits and deer and rats and foxes are killed, or "kept down" as we put it, mankind must perish; and that section of mankind which lives in the country and is directly and personally engaged in the struggle with Nature for a living has no sentimental doubts that they must be killed. As to tigers and poisonous snakes, their incompatibility with human civilization is unquestionable. This does not excuse the use of cruel steel traps, agonizing poisons, or packs of hounds as methods of extermination. Killing can be cruelly or kindly done; and the deliberate choice of cruel ways, and their organization as popular pleasures, is sinful; but the sin is in the cruelty and the enjoyment of it, not the killing.

It's a facile plea for humane, apologetic, even kindly extermination (or "liquidation") of the people who are the metaphorical rabbits, deer, rats, and foxes who so threaten mankind. Even allowing for Shavian rhetoric and hyperbole, the passage has (among its many distasteful elements) one central, very dangerous problem for me. Who is to decide who are the human vermin, the human rats, foxes, and snakes, who must be exterminated in the greater interest of mankind's survival? Who decides? Shaw? A Dictator? You? Me? Even in the full wordy context of Shaw's Preface, from which the above passage is arguably excerpted unfairly, those questions linger. Shaw's answer to these questions would have nothing to do with race or class – but rather with his old notions of usefulness and productiveness, and even outlook and attitude. Reviewing the Broadway opening of *On the Rocks* in *The New Yorker,* on June 25, 1938, Walcott Gibbs captured Shaw's position succinctly:

> He also says, with a certain grim pleasure, that any system can survive only by exterminating those who are hostile to it. It was necessary for royalty to exterminate a rebellious peasantry; it is necessary for capital to exterminate rebellious labor.

And still, the explanations of the Bolshevik governments tactics in the Soviet Union in his Preface (including his passage entitled "The Incompatibility of Peasantry with Modern Civilization" in which he explains Lenin's annoyance with the Russian peasants because they want to own their own land) are as chilling as his extended section where he looks at the execution of Christ from the Roman point of view. Before fleshing out the trial before Pilate, to give Christ a full voice in his own defense, Shaw admits he sees how the society Christ enters would view him as a heretic, an impostor, a rioter, a Communist, a traitor, a dangerous madman, a penniless vagrant, a beggar, a medical quack, and a friend of prostitutes who also blocks traffic in the roads. Shaw doesn't see, or sees but doesn't care, about how much this might upset his British audience any more than the impassioned attack by the Indian Sir Jafna in the play. On the other hand, he is critical of Rome for the cruelty of their torture and extermination of Christ, who he feels was entitled to the same painless deaths as history's other iconic victims of incomplete and sloppy trials, Socrates and Galileo.

The Critical Response

The second half of the twentieth century has not taken Shaw's work very seriously, with the exceptions of some anthologized quotations (usually wrenched from their context and diametrically distorted from what they really mean, such as "Those that can, do. Those that can't, teach" or "I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'") or harmless

theatrical treatments (such as *My Fair Lady*). But when he is considered, his support of the rise of the Fascists, and qualified endorsement of eugenic purification for the greater good of society's evolution, outweigh the rest of his world view, with its optimism and warmth. As recently as August 29, 2000, on the eve of a new production of his five-play cycle *Back to Methusaleh* (which deals with evolution and fantasy, and not very much with contemporary political issues) by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Benedict Nightingale, influential theatre critic for London's The Times, launched an extremely vicious attack on Shaw, summarizing in detail why Shaw should be despised. Nightingale begins

> Not long ago the world's pundits were energetically deciding who had been the best and worst, the most virtuous and most despicable, of 20th-century people. It became a mini-industry in moral discrimination. But one name was conspicuously missing from a blacklist that invariably included Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini: that of the dramatist and garrulous guru who admired all three and promoted their causes. I mean George Bernard Shaw.
> The RSC's revival in Stratford tomorrow of one of his barmiest yet most sinister plays gives me my excuse to repair the omission.

Nightingale succinctly lists the most notorious of Shaw's ruthless socio-political positions, insisting they be taken for their *prima facie* meaning without the ameliorating slack given Shaw by his few remaining apologists of "Shavian hyperbole" or "Shavian exaggeration for shock value – he doesn't *really* mean these things literally."

Using Shaw's 1922 *Methusaleh* cycle as his springboard, with its Utopian final play (after four plays that "travesty the modern world") set in AD 31,920, when "By then people leap full-grown from eggs and, provided that they are deemed mentally and physically fit enough not to be killed" escape from their bodies into pure thought, Nightingale catalogues Shaw's pro-fascist slogans.

So human evil, however horrific, was a sad necessity or a temporary setback – and seemed evil only to the conventional minds that Shaw spent his career mocking.

[According to Shaw] We must either "breed political capacity or be ruined by democracy". Indeed, what is needed is "a human stud farm" to help to "eliminate the Yahoo whose vote will wreck the commonwealth"[22]. Moreover, society must acquire a new ruthlessness. It must refuse to waste the lives of honest men restraining dishonest men. It must treat the incorrigibly antisocial like untamable dogs. "With many apologies and expressions of sympathy and some generosity in complying with their last wishes," wrote Shaw, "we should place them in the lethal chamber and get rid of them."[23]

His attacks on democracy became increasingly contemptuous, until we find him lecturing "in praise of Fawkes" in 1932. It was, he said, much to be regretted that Guy failed to blow up Parliament, because its whole history, which was happily about to end, "has been a triumphant vindication of his grasp of the situation."[24]

But it is the play's [*On the Rocks*] preface that really appalls. In it, Shaw uses the word "exterminate" as often as the Dalek[25] he increasingly resembled. His victims would run from the mentally disabled (why "waste the lives of capable people in preserving the lives of monsters?") to those guilty of "incorrigible social incompatibility". Indeed, to kill murderers but not to kill social criminals is, he argues, to privilege social crime. We should follow the example of Stalin's secret police, who shoot those who take bribes, speculate in the ruble, hoard money or exploit labour: a "weeding of the garden" made safe because the Cheka (the secret police) "has no interest in liquidating anybody who can be made publicly useful"[26].

But they [the Cheka] have learnt, as we must, that a citizen whose life "costs more than it is worth to the community" should have his brains blown out.[27]

But it was Lenin's successor who finally won what remained of the ageing Shaw's heart. By 1933 he was calling Stalin and Mussolini "the most responsible statesmen in Europe"[28] , and, if he moderated his enthusiasm for the Duce, his faith in Uncle Joe remained intact. He applauded his annexation of Finland, recommended him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and continued to feel that English statesmen were "morally abysmally inferior"[29] to their Soviet counterparts, especially Stalin. Here was the superman, the eugenic engineer, benevolently using willing citizens as putty.

The problem, implied rather than explicitly stated by Nightingale, still remains for me

that of who is given the power to establish the definitive scale of what constitutes "value"

or "usefulness." Shaw trusts his idea of Caesar, is risen above the rest of us with some

divine gift of social judgment. The boundary between inspired genius and playground bully doesn't trouble Shaw, as Nightingale concludes his excoriating exposé:

> Here is why Back to Methusaleh, first staged in 1922, is such a troubling piece. It is tempting to turn Shaw's own logic against him and say he should have been exterminated after Heartbreak House, for then he would be remembered primarily for the major plays he wrote between 1892 and 1917; but let's not descend to his stygian level.
> The excuses just won't do. Yes, Shaw was the emotionally crippled result of a rejecting mother and an alcoholic father, and doomed to find fulfillment only in the mind. Yes, he was personally genial, in his own words too "old-maidish"*** to practise what he preached. But is it so much worse to perpetrate violence than to present the world with blueprints for violence at a particularly perilous moment in its history? In my view there is only one word for the elderly Shaw and his armchair bloodthirstiness: evil.

Before that intense conclusion, Nightingale argues that Shaw's "eager Stalinism" influenced many, including "Edgar Snow, the apologist for Mao." Chairman Mao is one Communist Strong Man about whom Shaw makes surprisingly little comment. But that does leave one fascist who can't be avoided in the 1930s between-war political arena. One who, in the eyes of the twentieth century, invented the word "evil" as it was invented for him. Nightingale summarizes:

> Shaw preferred communism to fascism, which he thought too tolerant of capitalism, and therefore Stalin to Hitler. But as an admirer of men with "iron nerve and fanatical convictions", he was saying as late as 1942 that the Führer was "a remarkable fellow" who had taken "the courage of his convictions to a sublime height." And before then he had declared that the Nazis had his warm sympathy, because Hitler had "repudiated Karl Marx under the banner of Bernard Shaw." … Even in 1940 Shaw could declare Hitler, like Mosley, "nine-tenths right". The one "hitch in his statesmanship" was his "bee in the bonnet" about the Jews.
> Worse was to come. As late as 1938 Shaw wrote to Beatrice Webb: "I think we ought to tackle the Jewish question by admitting the right of the State to make eugenic experiments by weeding out any strains they think undesirable." The result of those experiments was, of course, the Holocaust, in which Shaw always refused to believe. How could the British complain of concentration camps when they had invented them in the Boer War? And were Auschwitz and Dachau death camps? Of course not.

In his preface to Geneva, published in 1945, Shaw argued that any deaths in the camps were caused simply by overcrowding and lack of food. Any atrocities were the result of the "natural percentage of callous toughs" among the guards and occur "in every war".
As for Hitler, he was "a poor devil", and the defendants at Nuremberg, a tribunal Shaw opposed, as ordinary a bunch of men as you and me.

Everything Nightingale reports is accurate, significant, and frightening. It's a fair response to Shaw's public pronouncements; Shaw's private letters complicate his position with more Shavian paradoxes, as in this September 1939 letter to his friend (and member of the House) Lady Astor:

> We should have warned the Poles that we could do nothing to stop the German steamroller, and that they must take it lying down as Czechoslovakia had to, until we had brought Hitler to his senses.
> Fortunately, our old pal Stalin stepped in at the right moment and took Hitler by the scruff of the neck; a masterstroke of foreign policy with six million red soldiers at its back.
> What we have to do now is at once to give the order Cease firing, and light up the streets: in short, call off the war and urge on Hitler that Poland will be a greater trouble to him than half a dozen Irelands if he oppresses it unbearably …
> We should, I think, at once announce our intention of lodging a complaint with the International Court against Hitler as being unfitted for State control, as he is obsessed by a Jewish complex: that of the Chosen Race, which has led him into wholesale persecution and robbery. Nothing should be said about concentration camps, because it was we who invented them.

"We who invented them." Over forty years later, the behavior of British statesmen back in the South African Boer War still angers Shaw, although history will show the Nazi concentration camps as having a much grander and more pervasive place in twentieth-century culture than the prison camps of 1899-1902.

A New Genre: Apocalyptic Comedy

In *On the Rocks,* presenting his nihilistic and multi-layered landscape showing Western society disintegrating as it tumbles toward another war, Shaw creates a nightmare from

which there is nowhere to go but up. Unable to find any hope in diplomacy and politics, and privately less blindly and fanatically a champion of the Fascist Dictators than Nightingale's summation asserts, Shaw will confront the eve of approaching World War with the favored weapon of his younger self: satire. And in 1971, in *The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, critic Richard Nickson suggested a new definition of late Shaw, that might help repudiate Nightingale's criticisms:

> Shaw's concentration during his last decades on what he regarded as man's central problem, how to govern himself, led even this master of comedy to sober reflections and eventually to a new genre – apocalyptic comedy, as it might be called. Beside focusing on political predicaments and the failure of society to extricate itself from them, the later plays often proceed to show, or to hint at, the catastrophes to which the failure is leading. By evoking a fantastic, nightmarish atmosphere within the extravaganza medium that he fashioned for this sobering purpose, he was able to record, despite warning powers, the turbulent flux of contemporary life, the social restlessness, the political quandary.

Shakespeare, too, at the very end of his career, created an apocalyptic comedy with just such a nightmarish atmosphere within an extravaganza of ritual, pageantry, visions, masques, and spectacle, in order to investigate the turbulent flux and contemporary political quandary. In *Henry VIII* (c. 1613, probably with John Fletcher), also known by its sarcastic alternate title *All Is True*, Shakespeare presents one last look at English royal history, with a Strong Man victor who is the most capable politician, with the built-in advantage of being born the hereditary monarch. Three Strong Men pretenders fail in their quests for power against Henry, along the way: two fatally (Buckingham and Wolsey), and one who manages to salvage a temporary safe career (Cranmer, who will run later into troubles after the action of Shakespeare's play), and even presides over its transparently flattering (even nearly embarrassing) happy ending ritual with the baby Elizabeth. Buckingham's, Wolsey's, even Katherine's, elegiac farewell scenes

focus more on their personal falls than the nation's unrest; the apocalyptic comedy of the play comes in its final scene, the manufactured happy ending baptism of Elizabeth. Henry VIII is thus Shakespeare's final Strong Man, surging politically through his opponents to control the state apparatus. Shaw's next apocalyptic comedy will both call his era's Dictators to trial, and also proclaim his split with the fascist fantasy.

Geneva

Geneva (1938) is subtitled "A Fancied Page of History (Another Political Extravaganza)" and is a sprawling, epic play, taking on the Geneva International Court, forerunner of the United Nations, that promised to do what the old League of Nations failed to do: bring order to a tense, chaotic, and confused Europe. Shaw's Programme Note, printed for the first production of the play in London, sets out his theatrical goals.

> Geneva is a title that speaks for itself. The critics are sure to complain that I have not solved all the burning political problems of the present and future in it, and restored peace to Europe and Asia. They always do. I am flattered by the implied attribution to me of Omniscience and Omnipotence; but I am also infuriated by the unreasonableness of the demand. I am neither Omniscient nor Omnipotent; and the utmost I or any other playwright can do is to extract comedy and tragedy from the existing situation and wait to see what will become of it …
> That was how the play began. How it will finish – for in the theatre it only stops: it does not finish – nobody knows. I call your attention, however, to one novelty. Instead of making the worst of all the dictators, which only drives them out of the League, I have made the best of them, and may even challenge them to live up to their portraits if they can. I hope they will like it. Also I hope that you will.

The dictators who Shaw hopes will like his new satiric comedy are represented in his play as Bombardone from Italy, Battler from Germany, and Generalissimo Flanco de Fortinbras from Spain. Sir Orpheus Midlander represents Great Britain, and Commissar Posky the USSR; an unnamed Judge presides, on behalf of this International Court, the

"Committee for Intellectual Co-operation" which replaces the obsolete League of Nations.

At the Committee's invitation, the dictators arrive, to present their cases for why they're mobilizing for another European war. The Secretary of the Committee is a cynic throughout, feeling the Court won't help the world. "Internationalism is nonsense. Pushing all the nations into Geneva is like throwing all the fishes into the same pond: they just begin eating oneanother." he says, and the posturing of the dictators, when they arrive, bears out his pessimistic image, a twentieth-century rediscovery of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* presenting the same warning with a different animal:

Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.
(1.3.119-124)

In Shaw's trial scene, Bombardone arrives first, proclaiming the egotism of the despots of the between-wars era.

I consolidated my country as a nation: a white nation. I then added a black nation to it and made an empire. When the empires federate, its leaders will govern the world; and these leaders will have a superleader who will be the ablest man in the world: that is my vision.

The egotism is extreme, as the Mussolini-parody Bombardone views the addition of Ethiopia as the lynch-pin of an empire. He sees himself as the ablest man, the Strong Man, the Caesar, who then continues Shaw's criticism of democracy, because "When there is no leader, no king, or priest, nor any body of law established by dead kings and priests, you have mob law, lynching law, gangster law: in short, American democracy."

Ernest Battler arrives from Germany, and the two dictators squabble over who's the greater leader:

BATTLER: I have never concealed my admiration for you, Bardo. But you have a failing that may ruin you unless you learn to keep it in check.
BBDE: And what is that, pray?
BATTLER: Self-conceit. You think yourself the only great man in the world.
BBDE: Can you name a greater?
BATTLER: There are rivals in Russia, Arabia, and Iran.
BBDE: And there is Ernest the Great. Why omit him?
BATTLER: We shall see. History, not I, must award the palm.

Battler feels that "power is mystical, not rational." He and Bombardone make fun of the British Prime Minister's oratorical style, as Sir Orpheus's suave and gentle coolness lacks the kind of "battle cry" to which modern crowds – the mobs – respond:

BBDE: But may I say that your technique is out of date? It would seem amusingly quaint in a museum, say in the rooms devoted to the eighteenth century; but of what use is it for impressing a modern crowd? And your slogans are hopelessly obsolete.
SIR O: I do not quite follow. What, exactly, do you mean by my technique?
BBDE: Your style, your gestures, the modulations of your voice. Public oratory is a fine art. Like other fine arts, it cannot be practised effectively without a laboriously acquired technique.
SIR O: But I am an experienced public speaker. My elocution has never been complained of. Like other public speakers I have taken pains to acquire a distinct articulation; and I have had the best parliamentary models before me all through my public life. I suppose – now that you put it in that way – that this constitutes a technique; but I should be sorry to think that there is anything professional about it.
BATTLER: Yes; but what a technique! I contemplated it at first with amazement, then with a curiosity which obliged me to study it – to find out what it could possibly mean. To me the object of public speaking is to propagate a burning conviction of truth and importance, and thus produce immediate action and enthusiastic faith and obedience. My technique, like that of my forerunner opposite, was invented and perfected with that object. You must admit that it has been wonderfully successful: your parliaments have been swept away by the mere breath of it; and we ourselves exercise a personal authority unattainable by any king, president, or minister.

The existence of the Strong Man, then, comes down to rhetorical technique. The efficacy of Mark Antony, with his fiery verse, overcomes Brutus whose dry, reasoned prose fails

to win over the mob. Flanco de Fortinbras briefly joins the debate in Geneva, from Spain, with his surname borrowed from a Shakespearean champion invader Shaw always liked, and whose omission from most Victorian productions Shaw deplored. Shaw championed Forbes Robertson's groundbreaking rediscovery of Fortinbras in his production of *Hamlet* in 1897, the man of action to contrast Hamlet's inaction and indecisiveness. Late twentieth-century productions of *Hamlet* have seen Fortinbras as a marauding bully, destroying the kind of benevolent Denmark Hamlet (and maybe even Claudius) wanted and turning it into a police state. In Shaw's dramatic satire, Flanco wins, answering the Judge, who asks, referring to Bombardone and Battler, "You know these gentlemen, I think." by saying "No. But I have seen many caricatures of them. No introduction is necessary."

Shaw's generally easy-going portraits of the dictators does sharpen into a sort of hatred at two points, however. With an eerie prevision of the Holocaust that Nightingale and Shaw's other critics claim he ignored and overlooked, his parody Battler has words with a witness at the Geneva court only named as "The Jew."

BATTLER: Do I stand accused? Of what, pray?
THE JEW: Of murder. Of an attempt to exterminate the flower of the human race.
BATTLER: What do you mean?
THE JEW: I am a Jew.
BATTLER: Then what right have you in my country? … In every country the foreigner is a trespasser. On every coast he is confronted by officers who say you shall not land without your passport, your visa. If you are of a certain race or color you shall not land at all. Sooner than let German soldiers march through Belgium England plunged Europe into war. Every State chooses its population and selects its blood. We say that ours shall be Nordic, not Hittite: that is all.
THE JEW: A Jew is a human being. Has he not a right of way and settlement everywhere upon the earth?
BATTLER: Nowhere without a passport. That is the law of nations.
THE JEW: I have been beaten and robbed. Is that the law of nations?
BATTLER: I am sorry. I cannot be everywhere; and all my agents are not angels.

THE JEW: [*triumphantly*] Ah! Then you are NOT God Almighty, as you pretend to be. [*To the Judge*] Your honor: I am satisfied. He has admitted his guilt.
BATTLER: Liar. No Jew is ever satisfied. Enough. You have your warning. Keep away; and you will be neither beaten nor robbed. Keep away, I tell you. The world is wide enough for both of us. My country is not.

Keep away, Battler insists. But Hitler wouldn't let the Jewish people keep away; he rounded them up, and made them stay. In Shaw's drama, the dictators are finally dispersed by a hoax perpetrated by the Committee's Secretary, who breaks up their squabbling by bringing in a bogus end-of-the-world scientific report that the Earth has jumped out of its orbit, and the Polar ice-caps are melting as a result. The three Dictators, and the various others, flee home to preside over their respective country's last days, in the face of this natural disaster. The Secretary admits his charade to the Judge:

THE JUDGE: No one can hear us now. Can this thing be true?
THE SECRETARY: No. It is utter nonsense. If the earth made a spring to a wider orbit half a minute would carry us to regions of space where we could not breathe and our blood would freeze in our veins.
THE JUDGE: Yet we all believed it for the moment.
THE SECRETARY: You have nothing to do but mention the quantum theory, and people will take your voice for the voice of Science and believe anything. It broke up this farce of a trial, at all events.
THE JUDGE: Not a farce, my friend. They came, these fellows. They blustered: they defied us. But they came. They came.

Shaw's last gasp of optimism soars through *Geneva*, and it disappointed his critics, who had hoped to see the tyrants more savagely attacked. But Shaw's hopes that one of these Dictators will turn out to be the new coming of his icon Caesar are frustrated, as the Second World War frustrates many political dreams. The Dictators die, in turn, and Shaw witnesses the end of the War through the voice of Science – but for real, not the hoax his Geneva Secretary fabricates.

Something Not Worth Mentioning

The nineteenth century, which believed itself to be the climax of civilization, of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, was convicted by Karl Marx of being the worst and wickedest on record; and the twentieth, not yet half through, has been ravaged by two so-called world wars culminating in the atrocity of the atomic bomb. As long as atomic bomb manufacture remains a trade secret known to only one State, it will be the mainstay of Peace because all the States (including the one) will be afraid of it. When the secret is out atomic warfare will be barred as poison gas was in 1938-45; and war will be possible as before.
(Preface to *Farfetched Fables*, 1949-50)

Shaw's final completed play, *Farfetched Fables*, includes a character who suggests that atomic bombs aren't satisfying or feasible because "There is no satisfaction in seeing the world lit up by a blinding flash, and being burnt before you have time to think about it …" The Bomb destroys the cities, and kills the women, and therefore the human race, so through the ultimate deterrent factor war will be obsolete. His companion muses "That wont stop war. Somebody will discover a poison gas lighter than air! It may kill the inhabitants of a city; but it will leave the city standing and in working order."
"That is an idea." the young man says, struck with the commercial possibilities. The Strong Man is obsolete; the Scientific Man is arriving. And there's no place anymore for the magic man, for the artist, and so the Shakespearean echo of *The Tempest* is unmistakable: except where Prospero breaks his magic staff accompanied by "heavenly music" – Shaw breaks his, metaphorically, under the threat of a "dread rattling thunder" that would shake the "strong-based promontory" in roaring war. An atomic farewell, updating Prospero's mythic farewell.

At the end of the First War, long before he knew about the Second, Shaw sensed that the future would be shaped by science, and not by political supermen, the Strong Men who

ultimately all are defeated. He valiantly clung to his ideals for another twenty years after writing *Heartbreak House,* in which his disillusioned prophet Shotover dreams of a solution to militarism – "I will discover a ray mightier than any X-ray: a mind ray that will explode the ammunition in the belt of my adversary before he can point his gun at me. And I must hurry." – before resigning himself to the wheel of history, the Grand Mechanism, the inevitability symbolized by the sea.

> At sea nothing happens to the sea. Nothing happens to the sky. The sun comes up from the east and goes down to the west. The moon grows from a sickle to an arc lamp, and comes later and later until she is lost in the light as other things are lost in the darkness. After the typhoon, the flying-fish glitter in the sunshine like birds. It's amazing how they get along, all things considered. Nothing happens, except something not worth mentioning.

Something not worth mentioning. Shaw used to love to mention everything. In my final chapter, I'd like to speculate, and explore why the worth of mentioning went away.

Notes

Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare,* gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.

Quotations from Shaw's plays are taken from *Bernard Shaw: Complete Plays with Prefaces. Six Volumes.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963.

1 McCarthy, Lillah. *Myself and Some Friends*. London: T. Butterworth, Ltd., 1933.

2 The reference is in the "Joy Riding at the Front" chapter in *What I Really Wrote About the War*. Shaw, George Bernard. New York: Brentano's, 1932.

3 Marlowe, Christopher. *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One.* Edition: *World's Classics: Doctor Faustus and Other Plays.* Ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

4 From Shaw's essay "Beaumont and Fletcher" written for the *Saturday Review*, February 19, 1898.

5 Shaw, George Bernard. Review of Sir Henry Irving's production in *The Saturday Review*, December 26, 1896.

6 Bloom, Allan and Jaffa, Harry. *Shakespeare's Politics.* New York: Basic Books, 1964.

7 Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974.

8 Quoted in The Norton Shakespeare. Original text from Herford and Simpson, vol. 8. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

9 HORATIO: In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantles, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in th eroman streets
At stars with trains of fire, and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
(*Hamlet*, 1.1.106.6-106.13)

10 LUCIUS: When Julius Caesar – whose remembrance yet
Lives in men's eyes, and will to ears and tongues
Be theme and hearing ever – was in this Britain
And conquered it, Cassigelan, thine uncle,
Famous in Caesar's praises no whit less
Thank in his feats deserving it, for him
And his succession granted Rome a tribute …
(*Cymbeline*, 3.1.2-8)
But the Briton Cloten has a reply, to undercut the Caesar myth:
CLOTEN Why should we pay tribute? If Caesar can hide the sun from us with a blanket, or put the moon in his pocket, we will pay him tribute for light; else, sir, no more tribute, pray you now. (3.1.41-43)

11 Shapiro, James. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599.* New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

12 Quoted in Ripley, John. *Julius Caesar onstage in England and America, 1599-1973.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

13 Lane, Anthony. *Nobody's Perfect: Writings from The New Yorker*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. 588.

14 Brown, John Mason. New York Post, November 12, 1937.

15 Quoted in Shaw's *Sixteen Self Sketches*. London: Constable, 1949.

16 Weber, Eugen. *Europe Since 1715: A Modern History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971. 471-72.

17 Dana, H. W. L. "Shaw in Moscow." *American Mercury*, March 1932.

18 Gibbs, A. M. *Bernard Shaw: A Life.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.

19 Including Rayfield, Donald. *Stalin and His Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed For Him*. New York: Random House, 2004. Service, Robert. *Stalin: A Biography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

20 Reported by Bennett, Will. "How Shaw defended Stalin's mass killings." *The Daily Telegraph*, June 18, 2003.

21 Holroyd, Michael. *Bernard Shaw – A Biography in Four Volumes.* New York: Random House, 1992. Vol. 3, 244.

22 From Preface to *Man and Superman*, "Handbook for Revolutionaries."

23 From Preface to *Major Barbara*.

24 From *Fabian Tracts 220-226*. London: Fabian Publications, 1946.

25 The science-fiction television series *Dr. Who* was very popular in England from 1963 to 1989. (It has since reappeared in some revival specials, before returning to series television in 2005.) The fantasy featured a time-travelling hero and his adventures throughout the galaxy. A "Time Lord," Dr. Who had the ability to regenerate himself after being killed; a total of ten different actors played the character during its run. Dr. Who had many adversaries, but the most popular were a race of mutant robots called the Daleks, who mercilessly fought to conquer the galaxy with their signature cry of "Exterminate!" One rumor is that their creator intended them to be based on the Nazis. Being robots, their mobility was limited, and Dr. Who would routinely evade them by going upstairs. Nightingale's point that Shaw increasingly resembled the Daleks is an extreme condemnation, labeling Shaw at once a monster and a sort of silly cartoon.

26 From Preface to *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*.

27 From Preface to *Too True To Be Good*.

28 From Preface to *Major Barbara*.

29 From Preface to *The Millionairess*.

CHAPTER 4

SHAW, SHAKESPEARE, CHEKHOV, AND THE BREAKING HEART

TUSENBACH: The time has come, something tremendous is hovering over us all, a vast, healing storm is gathering: it's coming, it's near already, and will soon clear our society of the laziness, the indifference, the prejudice against work and in another twenty-five or thirty years every man will be working. Every one!
TCHEBUTYKIN: I shan't work.
TUSENBACH: You don't count.
SOLYONY: Twenty-five years from now you won't even be on earth, thank God! In two or three years you'll die of distemper, or I'll forget myself and put a bullet in your forehead, my angel.
(Anton Chekhov, *The Three Sisters*, trans. Stark Young)[1]

Shaw's love for Ibsen, and his championship of Ibsen in the 1890s[2] when Ibsen's plays were first appearing in English translation, were certainly very important to Shaw's developing dramaturgy. But in Chekhov, Shaw found his favorite playwrighting model. Chekhov's quartet of major plays (*The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard*) followed Shaw around throughout his career, balancing the way he felt he was chasing Ibsen. And Shaw's play *Heartbreak House*, like Chekhov's, was originally conceived as a visionary warning of the misery that the political and social worlds seemed to be hurtling toward. Subtitled "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes", *Heartbreak House* began as a prophecy about the looming world tension that seemed to make war inevitable, as Chekhov's plays foresaw the Russian Revolution. *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* display the end of the 19th-century way of life – aristocratic, traditional, old-fashioned – as it is swept away under

turn-of-the-century modernity. Shaw wanted his play to proclaim him as the English Chekhov, foreseeing those same changes in England.

The English Chekhov

Shaw began his early ideas of the play that would become *Heartbreak House* in 1913, after visiting one of his favorite actresses, Lena Ashwell, and hearing stories of her seafaring father, Captain Pocock. (Biographer A. M. Gibbs records that Shaw's early working title for his nascent play was "Lena's Father."[1]) The Captain sailed the world, and upon his retirement in England, built his house in the shape of his beloved ship. Though Pocock was a fanatic Christian, and not the roaring "Pagan" anarchist that is Shaw's Captain Shotover, Shaw found the glimmers of his play in Lena's father.

But that was only the starting point for his new play. He had great ambitions for it, to do for England what Chekhov symbolically and prophetically accomplished for Russia in *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). Shaw loved this play, describing it in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891, revised 1913 as Shaw was beginning *Heartbreak House*) as "exquisite, touching, delicate" in its portrayal of the "attack all along the front of refined society" by the forces of modernism. Chekhov's dramatic contrast between the old world and the attackers can be illustrated with two speeches, one sentimental, one aggressive:

> TROFIMOFF: With us in Russia so far only a very few work. The great majority of the intelligentsia that I know are looking for nothing, doing nothing, and as yet have no capacity for work. They call themselves intelligentsia, are free and easy with the servants, treat the peasants like animals, educate themselves poorly, read nothing seriously, do absolutely nothing; about science they just talk and about art they understand very little. Every one of them is serious, all have stern faces … I am afraid of very serious faces and dislike them. I'm afraid of serious conversations. Rather than that let's just keep still.

Shaw's backwards-looking characters in *Heartbreak House* (Ellie, Hector, Hesione, Randall, the Nurse, intermittently Shotover) echo that speech. But his aggressive modern invaders (Ariadne, Mangan, Mazzini, even the upwardly-mobile Burglar) are not just keeping still. Rather, they echo the ambitious attitude of the character who buys the estate from the aristocratic Ranevskaya family:

> LOPAHIN: If only my father and grandfather could rise from their graves and see this whole business, see how their Yermolay, beaten, half-illiterate Yermolay, who used to run around barefoot in winter, how that very Yermolay has bought an estate that nothing in the world can beat. I bought the estate where grandfather and father were slaves, where you wouldn't even let me in the kitchen … Come on, everybody, and see how Yermolay Lopahin will swing the ax in the cherry orchard, how the trees will fall to the ground!

The axes chopping down the beloved family cherry orchard are a prevision of the upstarts chopping down the old guard. Shaw wanted his heartbreak play to achieve that, in an English context. He wanted to create what historian Richard Worton felt to be the overriding meaning of Chekhov's major quartet of plays:

> Everything hallowed by tradition now had to be judged anew, in the scathing light of reason and justice. Not only political institutions but the whole complex of established relationships came into question. The most sensitive and best educated members of society began to re-evaluate their attitudes towards themselves, their families and society at large. They perceived the marks of the old order on everything – the deep scars of suspicion and fear left by the dehumanizing tyranny of Nicholas' reign. Once tradition lost its air of sanctity, the youth began to look upon the ways of older generation with new eyes. To them, both past and present appeared tainted with injustice. Only the future held out hope of dignity and virtue.[2]

Shaw believed in that future hope, while knowing he represented the older generation. Perhaps he hoped his work could bridge the old order and the new youth, and that *Heartbreak House*, a state-of-the-nation parable, could make a statement towards that bridge. It was not to be, exactly, in accordance with Shaw's hopes. The Great War came too soon, and Shaw became preoccupied with his journalism concerning it, the scandal

over *Common Sense About the War*, and his quartet of war-theme playlets, and so *Heartbreak House* emerges in 1919 after delays and revisions as a very different product. It became an elegy, rather than a warning.

In 2005, a hundred years after the composition of *The Cherry Orchard*, historian A. N. Wilson describes his opinion of how history has come to interpret Shaw and his generation:

> From the perspective of over one hundred years, we look back to the early years of the twentieth century and see the Edwardian world through the mayhem of slaughters and revolutions which followed. Knowing what is to come will influence two quite different approaches. Some will look back on the period before the First World War as a Golden Age of peace and prosperity, of long afternoons and country house parties. Others will see in the troubled situation in the Empire, the terrible living conditions of the urban poor, the twin growth of nationalism and military technology, a terrifying howl of ancestral voices prophesying war.[3]

Shaw would have preferred the second approach, and would feel misunderstood if his plays were read as a relic of that "Golden Age" before the war.

Four Quartets

The delayed completion and first performances of *Heartbreak House* disappointed Shaw. He'd wanted it to exist before the war, and thought it would be his masterpiece. It wasn't exactly his theatrical expectations that had been disappointed, in its original productions in 1919 on the continent and 1920 in New York, causing him to delay the London premiere; it was his distaste for the Congress of Vienna treaty that unsatisfactorily concluded the war, and his sense that the play he hoped would be his supreme statement of the times hadn't completely captured the mood of those times.

He wanted *Heartbreak House* to envelop the era's mood as Chekhov's quartet had in the 1890s. He created a mystic visionary (Shotover), a trio of women to reflect Lear's daughters, a mercenary capitalist (Boss Mangan) to exemplify the 20th century's commercialism, a romantic idealist (Hector) to represent the now-outdated class snobbery of the previous century, and even a socialist-communist (Mazzini) to introduce the political possibilities of the 1920s. He hoped his appropriation of Lena's father's idiosyncrasy of designing a house in the imitation of a ship would symbolize the state of the nation – a ship of state. And this ship would be the center for the dissolution of society, or at least of British society, set in the heart of Sussex in the green English countryside. When asked about the ship of state, Captain Shotover, who Shaw describes as "My Lear" in his puppet play *Shakes Versus Shav* the year before his death, puts it into words similar to many of Lear's curses: "She will strike and split. Do you think the laws of God will be suspended in favor of England because you were born in it?" And when Hector asks what is he then to do – Shotover's, Shaw's advice: "Navigation. Learn it and live, or leave it and be damned."

Navigation through life. Shaw's own navigation through life, in the late 1930s and 1940s after the War, did not lead him to serenity, or at least calm resignation, that four of his favorite playwrighting models did in their final quartets of plays. The Chekhov quartet (*The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, The Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard*) is partnered by Ibsen's powerful final four: *The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). The Ibsen plays are prose tragedies that Shaw thought achieved poetic status, but though tragic, their ultimate effect can be cathartic more than depressing.

Shakespeare had his final quartet of fantasy plays (setting aside his presumably postscript collaborations with John Fletcher, *Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and possibly *Cardenio*) in which he's traditionally seen to have found a calm wisdom, following the fury of his major tragedies: *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. Shaw had always accused Shakespeare of descending into pessimism in later life – these plays contradict that, as they portray reconciliation and forgiveness. A decade after Shakespeare's death, his rival playwright and friend Ben Jonson, who had made a career out of scathing social satire, returned to the theatre (after retiring for several years to write masques for the King's court) with a fascinating quartet of little-known plays: *The Staple of News* (1626), *The New Inn* (1628), *The Magnetic Lady* (1631), and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633). This quartet does not lack Jonson's satirical bite, but they are romances that mirror Shakespeare's. *The New Inn*, for example, features a Prospero figure in Goodstock, the Inn's host, who even compares his inn to the stage, "Where, I imagine, all the world's a Play." The obvious Shakespearean echoes – Jacques, Prospero, even Macbeth – are surely deliberate. All of these four quartets have at least an element of optimism, even if there's sadness present, in Ibsen and Chekhov.

Shaw's post-*Heartbreak* journey did not lead to serenity, to optimism. His final quartet of plays – *Buoyant Billions* (1948), *Shakes Versus Shav* (1949), *Farfetched Fables* (1950), and the unfinished *Why She Would Not* (1950), do not present the stable peace of mind that Shakespeare, Jonson, Ibsen, and Chekhov do in their quartets, even Ibsen's tragedies and Chekhov's warnings. Shaw's are nervous, downhearted, above all pessimistic – and that descent, from a writer who embodied optimism in his first four decades of work, begins with *Heartbreak House*, in which the Life Force, so imperative in his great plays

of the early 1900s, seems drained away. In it, we can find not only his Lear, but many other Shakespearean allusions and appropriations. And also Jonsonian ones. Shaw revives the Jacobean technique of emblematic character names: Shotover (the ship's bow), Hushabye (baby), Darnley (Hector's alias, recalling the doomed lover of Mary, Queen of Scots), Utterword (empty rhetoric), "Boss" Mangan (like a Hollywood gangster), Nurse Guinness (the comic maid, named after the Irish beer). These could fit in easily with Jonsonian names such as Brainworm, Wellbred, Quarlous, Wasp, Fly, Subtle, and Dame Pliant. (There are dozens more.) Shaw the critic hated the Jacobean playwrights, and this was a rare use of one of their conventions. But he wanted this play to be an epic modern poem, and so a reinvention of a classical theatre convention would be appropriate, hypothetically. And his epic poem explores that twilight realm between realism and self-conscious theatricality.

Epic poems don't always have easy morals, facile warnings, and political arguments, as Shaw's attempt has. *Heartbreak House* is about people who fail or triumph because of individual personalities so idiosyncratic as to seem like vivid illustrations of everyone's fantasies, and frailties. The whole notion of trying to create something epic on the stage is inherently problematic, when the playwright generalizes too broadly on his epic canvas. When the ancient Greeks, for example, turned to the Trojan War for their dramatic material, they chose an isolated incident to represent the great picture – incidents such as the death of Iphigenia, or the story of Philoctetes' bow. Shaw's state-of-the-nation epic understands that lesson to a point, attempting to isolate a few specific incidents – the reunion of two sisters after 23 years, the entry of a burglar, finally a bombing raid overhead – foregrounded against the larger backdrop, in his play. It is a play in which the

leisured classes confront various kinds of personal power in the shadow of global catastrophe.

And it begins with a guest arriving to visit the ship of state.

Heartbreak Hotel

The young and romantic Ellie Dunn arrives at the ship-house at the invitation of Hesione, Captain Shotover's daughter. She'll be followed by more ill-assorted characters, bottled up together in a strange house facing an immense change in life (a direct echo of *The Cherry Orchard*). Ellie lets herself in, and sits alone, reading *Othello* (in the Temple Shakespear edition, Shaw specifies), before she is met by old Nurse Guinness, a classic family retainer and conscience. Ellie is mystified by the odd house at which she's arrived, and the Nurse warns her that "… this house is full of surprises for them that dont know our ways." When Shotover meets her, Ellie becomes a symbol, as he assigns her an idyllic identity: "Youth! Beauty! Novelty! They are badly wanted in this house." Ellie's youthful idealism is established in her identification with one of Shakespeare's innocent victims: Desdemona. And Shotover's daughter Hesione debunks and doubts the romance between Desdemona and Othello just as Iago did.

MRS HUSHABYE This is yours, isnt it? Why else should you be reading Othello?
ELLIE My father taught me to love Shakespear.
MRS HUSHABYE [*flinging the book down on the table*] Really! Your father does seem to be about the limit.
ELLIE [*naïvely]* Do you never read Shakespear, Hesione? That seems to me so extraordinary. I like Othello.
MRS HUSHABYE Do you indeed? He was jealous, wasnt he?
ELLIE Oh, not that. I think all the part about jealousy is horrible. But dont you think it must have been a wonderful experience for Desdemona, brought up so quietly at home, to meet a man who had been out in the world doing all sorts of

brave things and having terrible adventures, and yet finding something in her that made him love to sit and talk with her and tell her about them?
MRS HUSHABYE Thats your idea of romance, is it?
ELLIE Not romance, exactly. It might really happen.

Othello's adventures, to which she is alluding, that provided Desdemona with "a

wonderful experience" include:

> Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
> Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> Of hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach,
> Of being taken by the insolent foe
> And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence,
> And portance in my traveller's history,
> Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
> Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
> It was my hint to speak. Such was my process,
> And of the cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders.
> (1.3.132-144)

But the Heartbreak House Hotel will not allow such frivolous fables. Like Iago, who tells

Roderigo

Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. To love him still for prating? – let not thy discreet heart think it.
(2.1.217-220)

Similarly, Captain Shotover's daughter Hesione will voice some skepticism:

MRS HUSHABYE Ellie darling: have you noticed that some of those stories that Othello told Desdemona couldnt have happened?
ELLIE Oh no. Shakespear thought they could have happened.
MRS HUSHABYE Hm! Desdemona thought they could have happened. But they didnt.
ELLIE Why do you look so enigmatic about it? You are such a sphinx: I never know what you mean.
MRS HUSHABYE Desdemona would have found him out if she had lived, you know. I wonder was that why he strangled her!
ELLIE Othello was not telling lies.
MRS HUSHABYE How do you know?
ELLIE Shakespear would have said if he was.

Ellie's naïveté in believing Shakespeare would say everything explicitly is very funny to Shaw, who writes this about Iago in a March 1898 *Saturday Review* article:

> Iago is also a true villain; but he is English to the backbone. That is why English commentators are so careful to expatiate on his Italianateness. Having no motive in the world except sheer love of evil, he is for ever explaining that Othello has probably made love to his wife; that Cassio is lowering the standard of practical soldiership by arithmetic pedantry; that Roderigo is a fool who deserves to lose his money, and the like transparently flimsy pretexts. Further, he has a steady eye to the main chance, and tries to combine money-gain and promotion with the luxury of mischief. Thus he is English in the mode of his villainy. It is so effective a mode that it is rather fortunate for humanity that the English as a nation are not particularly villainous: villainy for villainy's sake attracts them as little as art for art's sake.

Hesione Hushabye is not Iago, but she, like her husband Hector (who masquerades as Darnley as a prank to misleadingly court women such as Ellie) and her father Captain Shotover do certainly indulge in "the luxury of mischief." And if that's particularly English, as Shaw describes it, *Heartbreak House* exists as an exposé of that English luxury.

The Subject is England and A Bigger Bang

The subject is England, and exploring what sort of England do we think we have. What values in it are worth sustaining and improving, or need change. More analytically, who runs it, and for whose benefit? Is the country to be run by Boss Mangan, the captain of industry, or Shotover, the captain of dreams? Shaw's conclusion might not be relentlessly pessimistic – the Zeppelin raid at the play's conclusion is unspecific and symbolic, without naming a specific enemy. (Literally, it's Germany, obviously, but Shaw seems to want it more vague, more like a fable, than something specific.) What Shaw wants is the image of an apocalyptic cleansing, a purgation. The image is meant to be shocking, and

Shaw wanted the official first English production, in 1924, to be even more shocking. In his memoirs, Sir Cedric Hardwicke (who played Shotover), writes

> Shaw found fault at rehearsal with the last act explosion, and demanded a bigger bang. The state manager assured him that on opening night there would be a bang to remember and accordingly warned the cast to that effect. When the cue came up, Edith Evans spoke the line, then prudently covered her face with her hands. Nothing happened. The audience was halfway out of the theatre when a sudden, thunderous crash brought the ceiling down and sent two playgoers to the hospital. Shaw, for once, seemed satisfied.[4]

Even if the ceiling doesn't come down, the play becomes very active, after an extended period of stasis, of conversation. The Zeppelin-dropped bombs begin falling, and Hector, in a wild mood, disobeys the police order and rushes about the Heartbreak House turning *on* all of the lights. Shotover pronounces doomsday; the three ladies refuse to leave and join the servants down in the cellar. Here is the climactic stage direction and some dialogue where Shaw wanted his bigger bang:

A terrific explosion shakes the earth. They reel back into their seats, or clutch the nearest support. They hear the falling of the shattered glass from the windows.
MAZZINI Is anyone hurt?
HECTOR Where did it fall?
NURSE GUINNESS [*in hideous triumph*] Right in the gravel pit: I seen it. Serve un right! I seen it. [*She runs away towards the gravel pit, laughing harshly.*]
HECTOR One husband gone.
SHOTOVER Thirty pounds of good dynamite wasted.
MAZZINI Oh, poor Mangan!
HECTOR Are you immortal that you need pity him? Our turn next
They wait in silence and intense expectation. Hesione and Ellie hold each other's hand tight.
A distant explosion is heard.
HESIONE [*relaxing her grip*] Oh! They have passed us.

And the danger is over, to everyone's disappointment. They were enjoying the adrenaline, and the realization has dawned that if you don't live your life facing the possibility that it may end at any time, a self-satisfied inertia may set in, and you feel no real sense of responsibility. Ellie's journey from the innocent of scene one to becoming

Shotover's confidant and counselor, his missing daughter – his Cordelia – is completed as the bombs fall. Hers is the most extreme learning process, as Shaw had identified her as "the next generation." Will this new Ellie leave the Heartbreak Hotel settling for the status quo? The captain of industry (Mangan) to whom she was engaged to marry was killed in the big bang, hiding in the gravel pit (where Shotover stores his dynamite) along with the Burglar, two victims like the two playgoers in the Hardwicke anecdote above, the bombs ending the Heartbreak Hotel like the thudding of the axes destroying the Ranevskaya estate in *The Cherry Orchard*. Ellie speaks the last line of the play:

SHOTOVER Turn in, all hands. The ship is safe. [*He sits down and goes asleep.*]
ELLIE [*disappointedly*] Safe!
HECTOR [*disgustedly*] Yes, safe. And how damnably dull the world has become again suddenly! [*He sits down*]
MAZZINI [*sitting down*] I was quite wrong, after all. It is we who have survived; and Mangan and the burglar –
HECTOR – the two burglars –
ARIADNE – the two practical men of business –
MAZZINI – both gone. And the poor clergyman will have to get a new house.
HESIONE But what a glorious experience! I hope theyll come again tomorrow night.
ELLIE [*radiant at the prospect*] Oh, I hope so.
[*Randall succeeds at last in keeping the home fires burning on his flute.*]
CURTAIN

"Oh, I hope so" Ellie says, wishing for the modern equivalent of Othello's adventure stories again. But it's not that she wants it all to come to an end, but rather that she wants to live in a world stripped of illusion, demanding more courage and imagination. The play's message is rigorous, but its ostensible optimism feels hollow. Ellie's journey may end in hope, but Shaw's swerves into heartbreak.

Shotover voices Shaw's emergent pessimism, but its targets are not only the idle upper class, Hesione, Hector, and Randall; but also the two burglars, and the Goneril-figure daughter who reframes the burglars as practical men of business.

The Boss

Shaw, the erstwhile Fabian Socialist, came through the War writing this play in which he yields to the inevitable triumph of the capitalist, kill him off as he may in a futile gesture. Where fifteen years earlier, Don Juan had his rhetorical victory over the Devil (in *Man and Superman*), a devil promoting increased weaponry; and the Philosophy Professor had his moral victory, arguably, over the man responsible for creating increasing weaponry (in *Major Barbara*), from *Heartbreak House* on into the twenties, the money-winners dominate the spiritual, apotheosized in late plays such as *The Millionairess* and *Buoyant Billions*. His resignation to this inevitability begins with Boss Mangan.

HECTOR What is the dynamite for?
SHOTOVER To kill fellows like Mangan.
HECTOR No use. They will always be able to buy more dynamite than you.

Mangan is an early twentieth-century financier, who makes money out of making money, and not by the sweat of his own back. He describes his method succinctly, to Ellie, and in it I hear Shaw's disapproval, or disappointment, yet also resignation. It's at once Machiavellian and boring, but there's no stopping it, in the new century:

> What do you know about business? You just listen and learn. Your father's business was a new business; and I dont start new businesses: I let other fellows start them. They put all their money and their friends' money into starting them. They wear out their souls and bodies trying to make a success of them. Theyre what you call enthusiasts. But the first dead lift of the thing is too much for them; and they havnt enough financial experience. In a year or so they have either to let the whole show go bust, or sell out to a new lot of fellows for a few deferred ordinary shares: that is, if theyre lucky enough to get anything at all. As likely as

not the very same thing happens to the new lot. They put in more money and a couple of years more work; and then perhaps they have to sell out to a third lot. If it's really a big thing the third lot will have to sell out too, and leave their work and their money behind them. And thats where the real business man comes in: where I come in. But I'm cleverer than some: I dont mind dropping a little money to start the process. I took your father's measure. I saw that he had a sound idea, and that he would work himself silly for it if he got the chance. I saw that he was a child in business, and was dead certain to outrun his expenses and be in too great a hurry to wait for his market. I knew that the surest way to ruin a man who doesnt know how to handle money is to give him some.

This predatory philosophy signals for Shaw the loss of the Victorian sense of purpose and unselfish amelioration of society. That old narrow world of Samuel Smiles and the Benthamites has had to yield to sophistication, skepticism, and hedonism.

And Shaw makes Mangan an easy, slow-moving target for the wit of the others, of Hesione, Ariadne, Hector, Ellie, even Captain Shotover. But at the end of the day, Mangan the capitalist wins, or at least his type does. Even his attraction to Hesione can't break his heart, though she asks him if it has, assuming, in her vanity, that it has.

But though his heart doesn't break, Mangan still has a breaking point. In the final scene, before his death in the gravel pit (which is either Lear's hovel, or Timon's cave), he snaps into a tantrum in his impatience with the eccentric Shotover family house, and strips:

Shame! What shame is there in this house? Let's all strip stark naked. We may as well do the thing thoroughly when we're about it. Weve stripped ourselves morally naked: well, let us strip ourselves physically naked as well, and see how we like it. I tell you I cant bear this. I was brought up to be respectable. I dont mind the women dyeing their hair and the men drinking: it's human nature. But it's not human nature to tell everybody about it. Every time one of you opens your mouth I go like this [*he cowers as if to avoid a missile*] afraid of what will come next. How are we to have any self-respect if we dont keep it up that we're better than we are?

In *Shakes Versus Shav* and in several other prefaces and letters, Shaw describes Captain Shotover as his "Lear." But here, Mangan channels for Lear, with this obvious modern echo of Lear's famous speech on the heath when he encounters the naked Poor Tom:

Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings! come unbutton here.
Tearing off his clothes (3.4.94-101)

Mangan's Sister

When Lear has his stripping tantrum, his Fool tries to persuade him to keep his clothes on, saying "Prithee, nuncle, be contented; 'tis a naughty night to swim in." (3.4.102-03). Boss Mangan's parallel comes from Ariadne, Lady Utterword, Shotover's estranged daughter who returns after 23 years of living abroad in the colonies with her husband Sir Hastings Utterword, a government diplomat. She returns to England voicing the values of Empire, and Victorian culture; she is likeable and charming, but represents the past. She dislikes this new century Bohemian world, which has lost the old Victorian sense of purpose and given way to savvy, cynicism, and hedonism. Ariadne judges the quality of a house on the quality of its stables – in a world of motor cars.

Her immediate response to Mangan's breakdown establishes her as his symbolic sister. It's no handshake between the Utterword's colonial past and Mangan's capitalist future – her tone is patronizing and snobby, but sincere:

ARIADNE I quite sympathize with you, Mr Mangan. I have been through it all; and I know by experience that men and women are delicate plants and must be cultivated under glass. Our family habit of throwing stones in all directions and letting the air in is not only unbearably rude, but positively dangerous. Still, there is no use catching physical colds as well as moral one; so please keep your clothes on.
MANGAN I'll do as I like: not what you tell me. Am I a child or a grown man? I wont stand this mothering tyranny. I'll go back to the city, where I'm respected and made much of.

Ariadne Utterword is as unsuccessful with Mangan as Lear's Fool is with Lear. But of her, she is the one character whose heart (in Shotover's words) will not break. She's Mangan's sister in terms of haughtiness and power; but where Mangan feels he deserves his respect in the city because he earned it, through his business skill articulated above – Ariadne feels her status should be natural, entitled. Offered her old childhood room to stay in, she puts her foot down: "Indeed I shall do nothing of the sort. That little hole! I am entitled to the best spare room." Entitled – the exact attitude the bombs of the final scene in *Heartbreak House,* or the storm in *King Lear*, are attacking from the skies.

Shaw's Albany

Hector Hushabye, whose alias is Marcus Darnley, sees himself as a romantic hero, as Ellie initially does. But he's more unusual than the average romantic hero: His favorite leisure dress is an Arab sheiks robes and headdress, in a prevision of T. E. Lawrence after his return from the War, who would dress in the Arab fashion, and was a great friend of the Shaws (especially Charlotte Shaw, with whom he carried on a long correspondence about mysticism.)

In another echo of *King Lear*, more subtle and thus more interesting than Mangan's undressing tantrum, Hector surprises everyone with a sudden burst of mysticism and poetry:

HESIONE I was listening for something else. There was a sort of splendid drumming in the sky. Did none of you hear it? It came from a distance and then died away.
MANGAN I tell you it was a train.
HESIONE And *I* tell you, Alf, there is no train at this hour. The last is nine fortyfive.
MANGAN But a goods train.

HESIONE Not on our little line. They tack a truck on to the passenger train. What can it have been, Hector?

What Hesione has heard is the early warning of the coming of the Zeppelin bombers, in contrast to Boss Mangan's pragmatic explanation of the noise they've heard. Hector sees in it something grander, something more fanciful, and something more epic:

HECTOR Heaven's threatening growl of disgust at us useless futile creatures.[*Fiercely*] I tell you, one of two things must happen. Either out of that darkness some new creation will come to supplant us as we have supplanted the animals, or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us.

This is a modern version of the Duke of Albany, in *King Lear*, angry at his wife Goneril and her sister Regan, Lear's daughters:

Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugged bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded? …
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offenses,
It will come.
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.
(4.2.41-51)

Ariadne and Hesione could be described as tigers, not daughters, though it would be a hard stretch to describe their father Shotover as a gracious aged man. But Hector restates Albany's anger in a 20th century voice, just as prophetic, and just as futile.

What a Lark!

When Hector first enters, having masqueraded as "Marcus Darnley" to impress Ellie, his wife Hesione exposes his masquerade to Ellie, saying "What a lark! He is my husband."

"What a lark!" is an interesting prevision of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, who begins

the third paragraph of her novel thinking "What a lark! What a plunge!"[5] The phrase captures an aspect of the time's frivolity, possibly masking its nervousness. And Mrs. Dalloway's "plunge," a plunge into life, foreshadows Septimus's suicide plunge later in the novel. (On hearing of it from the Doctor, Mrs. Dalloway recalls thinking of Othello's "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy"[6]) *Heartbreak House* also predicts this plunge out of idealism into real garden-variety everyday life, when Hesione consoles Ellie, who is despondent over Hector's deception:

HESIONE [*laying Ellie down at the end of the* sofa] Now, pettikins, he is gone. Theres nobody but me. You can let yourself go. Dont try to control yourself. Have a good cry.
ELLIE [*raising her head*] Damn!
HESIONE Splendid! Oh, what a relief! I thought you were going to be broken-hearted. Never mind me. Damn him again.
ELLIE I am not damning him: I am damning myself for being such a fool. [*Rising*] How could I let myself be taken in so? [*She begins prowling to and fro, her bloom gone, looking curiously older and harder*].
HESIONE [*cheerfully*] Why not, pettikins? Very few young women can resist Hector. I couldnt when I was your age. He is really rather splendid, you know.
ELLIE [*turning on her*] Splendid! Yes: splendid looking, of course. But how can you love a liar?
HESIONE I dont know. But you can, fortunately. Otherwise there wouldnt be much love in the world.

Ellie's swift one-page loss of innocence and naiveté is more symbolic than realistic. But Shaw in *Heartbreak House*, arguably Shaw's most emotional play, demonstrates the most important dramatic lesson he learned from his idols Chekhov and Ibsen – not to pass moral judgments on his characters. The innocents, the rascals, the sophisticates, are all presented in neutrality, leaving us, the readers or audience, to judge for ourselves. It's a very Shakespearean attitude in its forgiving fairness and equanimity.

The dialogue continues with Hesione's defense (or, on the other hand, rationalization) of her eccentric husband's behavior, and culminates in a turning point for Ellie that will open for her the relationship she will create with Captain Shotover.

ELLIE But to lie like that! To be a boaster! a coward!
HESIONE [*rising in alarm*] Pettikins: None of that, if you please. If you hint the slightest doubt of Hector's courage, he will go straight off and do the most horribly dangerous things to convince himself that he isnt a coward. He has a dreadful trick of getting out of one third-floor window and coming in at another, just to test his nerve. He has a whole drawerful of Albert Medals for saving people's lives.
ELLIE He never told me that.
HESIONE He never boasts of anything he really did: he cant bear it; and it makes him shy if anyone else does. All his stories are made-up stories.
ELLIE [*coming to her*] Do you mean that he is really brave, and really has adventures, and yet tells lies about things that he never did and that never happened?
HESIONE Yes, pettikins, I do. People dont have their virtues and vices in sets: they have them anyhow: all mixed.
ELLIE [*staring at her thoughtfully*] Theres something odd about this house, Hesione, and even about you. I dont know why I'm talking to you so calmly. I have a horrible fear that my heart is broken, but that heartbreak is not like what I thought it must be.

Hector's dichotomous instability makes it hard for Ellie (and us) to consider him critically, and Hesione's championing of him does not solve Ellie's dilemma, as she loses her innocent hero-worship to a surprising heartbreak – nor does it solve Hector's identity crisis. Hesione represents a post-Victorian world in which the cultivation of private feeling has superseded any interest in public life, politics, or the feelings of newcomers to the Heartbreak Hotel.

Hector's heart, presumably broken long ago, has left him without a fixed sense of self, and his little games don't ultimately make him any happier. His embracing of the German bombers in the final scene is a sort of escape, but an irresponsible one. The madness of

the war parallels the personal madness of not embracing who you are, perhaps, and hiding in a secret life.

A Fifth Quartet – To go with Shakespeare, Jonson, Ibsen, and Chekhov

A response to *Heartbreak House*, and a correction to what Harley Granville Barker judged to be its unsatisfactory meaning, came in Granville Barker's great quartet of plays – and specifically in *The Secret Life* (1922). Granville Barker was Shaw's favorite actor, who first performed many of Shaw's most important characters (such as Jack in *Man and Superman*, and several others), but he preferred writing to acting, and his major quartet of plays present a dialogue with Shaw, who he regarded as both a mentor and opponent. (A bizarre, if romantic, rumor emerged at the time that Barker was Shaw's illegitimate son.) Barker's quartet: *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), *Waste* (1907), *The Madras House* (1910, a tandem project with Shaw's *Misalliance*), and *The Secret Life* – complete the quintet of Shaw's dramatic influences for *Heartbreak House*, joining with Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw's favorite composer, Wagner. *The Secret Life* is set in a "house that faces the sea" – unlike Shotover's ship-house that faces the countryside. And it begins with its characters at a house-party singing Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, in a response to Hesione consoling Boss Mangan at the garden door saying "There is a moon: it's like the night in Tristan and Isolde." But when the bombers come at the end of the play, *Tristan* devolves into the drumbeats of *Götterdämmerung*, and in the words of Barker's protagonist in *The Secret Life*: "The life of the mind is a prison in which we go melancholy mad. Better turn dangerous … and be done away with."[7] If Shotover or Hector had said that, as it echoes both of their feelings when the bombers come, there

may be amusement, of an uneasy kind. But spoken by Barker's character Evan Strowde, within a dramatic world as melancholy as that of *Heartbreak House,* but far less playful and far more chilling, the words present despair.

In his Preface to *The Secret Life*, Barker requests that readers of his complex and dense play "read it as you would read – if you could – an orchestral symphony." Reading *Heartbreak House* presents that feeling, that there's no succinct sentence to easily summarize the plot, but a symphonic totality. As Shaw wrote in a 1907 letter to playwright John Galsworthy, addressing plays by Galsworthy, Barker, and of course Ibsen: "A first-rate play seems nowadays to have no situation, just as Wagner's music seemed to our grandfathers to have no melody, because it was all melody from beginning to end."

The exchanges in *Heartbreak House* have that cumulative melody, but not the interactive discourse we see in earlier Shaw plays, such as the final debates in *Man and Superman* or *Major Barbara*. The principal characters are not exactly listening to one another, as much as they are thinking about what they'll say next. The prose can be very poetic, if simultaneously very cold.

HECTOR I tell you I have often thought of this killing of human vermin. Many men have thought of it. Decent men are like Daniel in the lion's den: their survival is a miracle; and they do not always survive. We live among the Mangans and Randalls and Billie Dunns as they, poor devils, live among the disease germs and the doctors and the lawyers and the parsons and the restaurant chefs and the tradesmen and the servants and all the rest of the parasites and blackmailers. What are our terrors to theirs? Give me the power to kill them; and I'll spare them in sheer –
SHOTOVER [*cutting in sharply*] Fellow feeling?
HECTOR No. I should kill myself if I believed that. I must believe that my spark, small as it is, is divine, and that the red light over their door is hell fire. I should spare them in simple magnanimous pity.
SHOTOVER You cant spare them until you have the power to kill them. At present they have the power to kill you. There are millions of blacks over the

water for them to train and let loose on us. Theyre going to do it. Theyre doing it already.
HECTOR They are too stupid to use their power.
SHOTOVER Do not deceive yourself: they do use it. We kill the better half of ourselves everyday to propitiate them. The knowledge that these people are there to render all our aspirations barren prevents us having the aspirations. And when we are tempted to seek their destruction they bring forth demons to delude us, disguised as pretty daughters, and singers and poets and the like, for whose sake we spare them.

This dialogue is a Modernist era version of a sonnet Shakespeare wrote over 300 years earlier, sonnet 94:

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who moving others are themselves as stone,
Unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow –
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet
The basest weed outlives his dignity;
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds:
Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

Hector's and Shotover's views on having the power to hurt but not using it do not sound like people in touch with themselves. It sounds like frustrated, nervous people in an anxious world they can't improve – only retreat from it into their ship-shaped cocoon of frivolity and fantasy.

Natasha's Fork

Shaw's play, his " Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes", is at its most Chekhovian in its requirement that its actors must work against their training, and not listen raptly to each other, as they're asked to do in plays by, say, Shakespeare or

Congreve. The lack of communication in plays from the second half of the century in plays by such writers as Beckett and Pinter is prefigured here, much as the roots of the Absurdist theatre lie in later Shakespeare, particularly Lear staging an imaginary trial in his hovel, Timon in Beckettian isolation in his cave, and Imogen in *Cymbeline* waking up next to a headless corpse she thinks is her husband.

Shaw's characters in his plays from *Heartbreak House* on, like Chekhov's, must listen with a careless disregard for the speaker, concerning themselves with their own thoughts, be those thoughts silly or gravely serious. For that is how people listen in real life, and Chekhov's theatrical revolution was in realizing that every day people say astonishing things, and they can afford to say them, because they're usually only half heard and half understood. The characters aren't really interested in sharing themselves, and shedding light on their souls' private darknesses; self-absorbed, they struggle to remain in isolation. In Chekhov's great quartet, terrible heart cries are wailed, and one would think these personal revelations would affect the listeners, as well as the speaker, deeply. But, no – the emotional cry is immediately deflated by some mundane, banal inanity about the weather or some petty household issue. For example, from *The Three Sisters:*

> NATASHA And so tomorrow I'll be all alone here. (*Sighing*) First of all, I'll give orders to chop down this alley of fir trees, then this maple here … In the evening it looks so ugly … (*To* IRINA) Dear, that belt doesn't suit you at all …It's in very poor taste. You need something light … And I'll order flowers planted, everywhere, flowers, and there'll be a fragrance … (*Severely*) What's a fork doing here on the bench? (*She goes into the house, to the maid.*) What's a fork doing here on the bench, I'd like to know? (*Shouting*) Shut up!

The three sisters, Olga, Masha, and Irina, are not tuning in to their sister-in-law Natasha, whose melancholy and neediness dissolves into desperate banality about the fork. When she's gone, they resume talking about their clothes, and the soldiers leaving, and the

offstage music that is playing. Even the tragic news which soon arrives of Tusenbach's (Irina's lover) death in the duel is deflected into a parachute justification for how they'll never realize their great dream of going to live in Moscow. The family, like the Shotovers, preserve themselves by a calculated deafness, with a pose of incomprehension. Like all families, perhaps. "I understand perfectly" they say to one another, but you feel that isn't so. Losing the dream of Moscow is quickly replaced by another, less concrete, more vague quest: "Oh, dear sisters, our life isn't over yet. We shall live! The music plays so gaily, so joyously, and it looks as if a little more and we shall know why we live, why we suffer … If we only knew, if we only knew!" Chekhov's characters speak in ellipses, as Shaw's speak in semi-colons. It's a punctuation of hesitancy, of uncertainty. The three sisters' wish to someday know what the purpose of all their suffering is may be a placebo, as it's an inexhaustible subject, safe because it's unable to answer and therefore not readily listened to. Shaw's late-play characters speak torrents of words, largely unheard by their fellow characters.
His theme, like Chekhov's, perhaps like Shakespeare's, is the gulf between his characters' hope for happiness, that arises unbidden in most of us, and the difficulty of knowing where that happiness lies.

Timon of Ayot St Lawrence

In *Shakes Versus Shav*, the character Shaw presents the puppet version of Captain Shotover by announcing "Behold my Lear!", and it would be easy to substitute the post-war Shaw for his sense of identification with Shakespeare's Lear. Frustrated by the lack of success of his socialism, and pacifism, his spelling reform ambitions, even his doctrine

of Creative Evolution, Shaw began to lean toward the cynicism – and after the second war, extreme pessimism – that he decried in late Shakespeare. But I don't think he's Lear, raging against the dying of the light and even having a brief moment of joy in his reconciliation with Cordelia (before the final tragedy); I think he's Timon of Athens, raging against humanity, and society, and fantasizing about their destruction, hiding in a cave. But for Shaw, not in a cave; rather, in his Ayot St Lawrence home in Hertfordshire. A country retreat, like the Shotovers had in Sussex. A different sort of cave.

From his particular cave, Timon rants verbally around what he sees as an apocalyptic abyss, in Shakespeare's most intemperate assault on human nature. His earlier belief in human values such as friendship and generosity have been destroyed, and his tremendous anger is vented in virtuoso arias, such as:

Let me look back upon thee. O thou wall,
That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent.
Obedience fail in children! Slaves and fools,
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
And minister in their steads! To general filths
Convert o'th'instant, green virginity!
Do't in your parents' eyes. Bankrupts, hold fast!
Rather than render back, out with your knives,
And cut your trusters' throats. Bound servants, steal!
Large-handed robbers your grave masters are,
And pill by law. Maid, to thy master's bed!
Thy mistress is o'th'brothel. Son of sixteen,
Pluck the lined crutch from thy limping sire;
With it beat out his brains! Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night rest, and neighbourhood,
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And let confusion live! Plagues incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens, ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica,
Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt

As lamely as their manners! Lust and liberty,
Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
That ‘gainst the stream of virtue they may strive
And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
Sow all th’Athenian bosoms, and their crop
Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath,
That their society, as their friendship, may
Be merely poison!
He tears off his clothing
Nothing, I’ll bear from thee
But nakedness, thou detestable town;
Take thou that too, with multiplying bans,
Timon will to the woods, where he shall find
Th’unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.
The gods confound – hear me you good gods all –
Th’Athenians, both within and out that wall;
And grant, as Timon grows, his hate may grow
To the whole race of mankind, high and low.
Amen. (4.1.1-41)

Timon “tears off his clothing” as do King Lear when inspired by his new role model Poor Tom of Bedlam and Boss Mangan in frustration over the frivolity of the Shotover heartbreak-household. Timon strips in nihilistic despair, but it’s not simply an angry image for retreating from worldly matters and putting away those childish things. This is not a soliloquy, even though he’s alone onstage – it’s a dialogue with the walls of Athens, and beyond that, with Mankind, with the world. It’s an attack, and reading it, one might feel Timon’s terrible benediction is so angry that it’s almost inarticulate, as if the denunciations are half-stuck in his throat, as if he’s seeking a world that finally lies beyond language.

Timon’s furious and epic prayer, and his monotonously demented curses, from the vantage point of his beach front cave which will also be his grave, are recreated in modern language on a beach in an unspecified “mountainous country,” in Shaw’s *Too True to Be Good* (1931). In the final, climactic moment of the play, Aubrey, who like

Timon, evolves from a worldly possession-focused profession – burglar – to become an apocalyptic prophet with a private sermon:

> I stand midway between youth and age like a man who has missed his train: too late for the last and too early for the next. What am I to do? What am I? A soldier who has lost his nerve, a thief who at his first great theft has found honesty the best policy and restored his booty to its owner. Nature never intended me for soldiering or thieving: I am by nature and destiny a preacher. I am the new Ecclesiastes. But I have no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both out of my hands. The war has been a fiery forcing house in which we have grown with a rush like flowers in a late spring following a terrible winter. And with what result? This: that we have outgrown our religion, outgrown our political system, outgrown our own strength of mind and character. The fatal word NOT has been miraculously inserted into all our creeds: in the desecrated temples where we knelt murmuring "I believe" we stand with stiff knees and stiffer necks shouting "Up, all! the erect posture is the mark of man: let lesser creatures kneel and crawl: we will not kneel and we do not believe." But what next? Is NO enough? For a boy, yes: ford a man, never. Are we any the less obsessed with a belief when we are denying it than when we were affirming it? No: I must have affirmations to preach.

Timon too lacks such affirmations, and a difference might be that he doesn't crave them as Shaw's Aubrey does. But the desperation in his curses feel needy, and Timon seems empty inside. "I am the new Ecclesiastes" preaches Shaw's Aubrey. "I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind." (4.3.53) asserts Shakespeare's Timon. The hatred of mankind, and the pessimism Shaw decried in late Shakespeare plays, would soon permeate Shaw's own late plays. He describes his view of Timon in this regard in the Preface to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, responding to critic Frank Harris's biography of Shakespeare that Shaw considered an example of the current trend in idolatry of Shakespeare, or "Bardolatry" as Shaw called it.

SHAKESPEAR'S PESSIMISM

> I submit to Mr Harris that by ruling out this idolatry, and its possible effect in making Shakespear think that his public would stand anything from him, he has ruled out a far more plausible explanation of the faults of such a play as Timon of Athens than his theory that Shakespear's passion for the Dark Lady "cankered and took on proud flesh in him, and tortured him to nervous breakdown and

madness." In Timon the intellectual bankruptcy is obvious enough: Shakespear tried once too often to make a play out of the cheap pessimism which is thrown into despair by a comparison of actual human nature with theoretical morality, actual law and administration with abstract justice, and so forth. But Shakespear's perception of the fact that all men, judged by the moral standard which they apply to others and by which they justify their punishment of others, are fools and scoundrels, does not date from the Dark Lady complication: he seems to have been born with it.

The Last Supper

If he was indeed "born with" this pessimism, this despair, Shakespeare surely reveals it in *Timon of Athens* with his appropriation of the Biblical Last Supper as an image for Timon's feeling of martyrdom. It is foreshadowed early in the play, at one of Timon's sumptuous feasts, by the cynical philosopher Apemantus:

TIMON Prithee, let my meat make thee silent.
APEMANTUS I scorn thy meat. 'Twould choke me, for I should ne'er flatter thee. O you gods, what a number of men eats Timon, and he sees 'em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man's blood; and all the madness is, he cheers them up, too.
(1.2.36-41)

Apemantus's speech is a warning, that will go unheeded. Christ's Last Supper speech is, by contrast, an elegy, even a sort of eulogy. In Matthew 26, in the King James Version:

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.
25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.
26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.
27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it.
28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

At the turning point, in the middle of the play, Timon conducts a bizarre reverse Last Supper, just before he retreats into his cave. He invites a room full of guests, including

"Lucullus, Lucius, Sempronius, and other Lords and senators." It would be most appropriate if there were 12 total guests, expecting a grand dinner party, but only to be surprised by Timon:

TIMON Each man to his stool with that spur as he would to the lip of his mistress. Your diet shall be in all places alike. Make not a city feast of it, to let the meat cool ere we can agree upon the first place. Sit, sit. The Gods require our thanks.
They sit
You great benefactors, sprinkle our society with thankfulness. For your own gifts make yourselves praised; but reserve still to give, lest your deities be despised. Lend to each man enough that one need not lend to another; for were your godheads to borrow of men, men would forsake the gods. Make the meat be beloved more than the man that gives it. Let no assembly of twenty be without a score of villains. If there sit twelve women at the table, let a dozen of them be as they are. The rest of your foes, O gods – the senators of Athens, together with the common tag of people – what is amiss in them, you gods, make suitable for destruction. For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them; and to nothing are they welcome. – Uncover, dogs, and lap.
[*The dishes are uncovered, and seen to be full of steaming water and stones*]
(3.7.61-78)

Timon's body is stones, not bread, and his blood water, not wine. Shakespeare's anti-Last Supper here presents Timon expressing himself in a voice that could be considered blasphemous. Shaw, too, has a sort of Last Supper, with a gentle man foreseeing his own self-sacrifice, in *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906). At a fancy hotel in Richmond, six doctors are dining. Five of them are prosperous Harley Street specialists, while the sixth, their friend Dr Blenkinsop, is in public practice and not so successful.

RIDGEON Do you realize, you chaps, that we have promised Mrs Dubedat to save this fellow's life?
BLENKINSOP Whats the matter with him?
RIDGEON Tuberculosis.
BLENKINSOP [*interested*] And can you cure that?
RIDGEON I believe so.
BLENKINSOP Then I wish youd cure me. My right lung is touched, I'm sorry to say.
RIDGEON What! Your lung is going!
B. B. My dear Blenkinsop, what do you tell me?

SIR PATRICK Eh? Eh? What's that?
WALPOLE Hullo! you musnt neglect this, you know.
BLENKINSOP [*putting his fingers in his ears*] No, no: it's no use. I know what youre going to say: Ive said it often to others. I cant afford to take care of myself; and there's an end of it. If a fortnight's holiday would save my life, I'd have to die. I shall get on as others have to get on. We cant all go to St Moritz or to Egypt, you know, Sir Ralph. Dont talk about it.
Embarrassed silence.

Blenkinsop is a sad, gentle man, with no ambition for material things. For reasons in the play that require a very willing suspension of disbelief, Dr Ridgeon is only able to save one of his two candidates for cure: the good Blenkinsop, and the artist Dubedat, considered a potential genius in the art world. That is his dilemma – whether to save the good, honest, poor man, or the great artist, whom he describes in bitter terms to his wife. Except she's now his widow, as Ridgeon chooses the good Blenkinsop to cure rather than the shallow, frivolous, and vain artist:

RIDGEON No matter. I have saved you. I have been the best friend you ever had. You are happy. You are well. His works are an imperishable joy and pride for you.
JENNIFER And you think that is your doing. Oh, doctor, doctor! Sir Patrick is right: you do think you are a little god. How can you be so silly? You did not paint those picture which are my imperishable joy and pride: you did not speak the works that will always be heavenly music in my ears. I listen to them now whenever I am tired or sad. That is why I am always happy.
RIDGEON Yes, now that he is dead. Were you always happy when he was alive?
JENNIFER [*wounded*] Oh, you are cruel, cruel. When he was alive I did not know the greatness of my blessing. I worried meanly about little things. I was unkind to him. I was unworthy of him.
RIDGEON [*laughing bitterly*] Ha!
JENNIFER Dont insult me: dont blaspheme. [*She snatches up the book and presses it to her heart in a paroxysm of remorse, exclaiming*] Oh, my King of Men!
RIDGEON King of Men! Oh, this is too monstrous, too grotesque. We cruel doctors have kept the secret from you faithfully; but it is like all secrets: it will not keep itself. The buried truth germinates and breaks through to the light.
JENNIFER What truth?

RIDGEON What truth! Why, that Louis Dubedat, King of Men, was the most entire and perfect scoundrel, the most miraculously mean rascal, the most callously selfish blackguard that ever made a man miserable.
JENNIFER [*unshaken: calm and lovely*] He made his wife the happiest woman in the world, doctor.
RIDGEON No: by all thats true on earth, he made his widow the happiest woman in the world; but it is I who made her a widow.

The religious imagery of this exchange is powerful, as in Jennifer's eyes, Dr Ridgeon is Judas, who blindly kills her hero of whom she says "When he was alive I did not know the greatness of my blessing." The disciples felt that way about Christ; but the Shavian paradox is that this King of Men is a scoundrel and a rascal, not a savior. And in this scene, Dr Ridgeon's heart can be heard breaking.

And yet, Shakespeare's Timon has another aria, in which he vents a furious sermon to the disgraced Athenian soldier Alcibiades, that dooms most of the inhabitants of Heartbreak House, if it were carried out. It's not a Last Supper, which, though tragically sad, carries at least its vision of forgiveness; rather, it's a death order, a condemnation, complete with the same sort of gold Judas received. Timon speaks to Alcibiades, who, like Lucius Andronicus and Coriolanus before him, is preparing to attack his own ungrateful city:

[*He give* ALCIBIADES *gold*]
Go on; here's gold; go on.
Be as a planetary plague when Jove
Will o'er some high-viced city hang his poison
In the sick air. Let not the sword skip one.
Pity not humoured age for his white beard;
He is an usurer. Strike me the counterfeit matron;
It is her habit only that is honest,
Herself's a bawd. Let not the virgin's cheek
Make soft thy trenchant sword; for those milk paps
That through the window-bars bore at men's eyes
Are not within the leaf of pity writ;
But set them down horrible traitors. Spare not the babe
Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy.
Think it a bastard whom the oracle
Hath doubtfully pronounced thy throat shall cut,

And mince it sans remorse.
(4.3.108-122)

The “white beard” could be Shotover, the “counterfeit matron” both Ariadne and Hesione, and the “virgin’s cheek” belongs to Ellie, in Shaw’s Heartbreak House. The “horrible traitors” might even include Boss Mangan and the Burglar, perhaps. I think it is in stark, angry speeches such as this, that the furious invective of late Shakespeare meets the calm (but equally frustrated) despair of late Shaw.

Shakespear’s Angry Ape

In his 1948 play *Buoyant Billions*, in which he directly and of course despairingly reacts to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Shaw creates a mythic dialogue between a “Father” and “Son” – unnamed, like the emblematic “Father who has killed his son” and “Son who has killed his father” far back in Act 2, Scene 5 of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 3*, c. 1591, among Shakespeare’s earliest flurry of plays. From Shaw’s final quartet:

FATHER Well, my boy, you are keeping alive pretty comfortably. Why should you saw through the branch you are sitting on?
SON Because it is cracking; and it seems to me prudent to arrange a soft place to drop when it snaps.
FATHER The softest place now is where you are. Listen to me, my boy. You are cleverer than I am. You know more. You know too much. You talk too well. I have thought a good deal over this. I have tried to imagine what old John Shakespear of Stratford-upon-Avon, mayor and alderman and leading citizen of his town, must have felt when he declined into bankruptcy and realized that his good-for-nothing son, who had run away to London after his conviction as a poacher, and being forced to marry a girl he had compromised, was a much greater man than his father had ever been or could hope to be. That is what may happen to me. But there is a difference. Shakespear had a lucrative talent by which he prospered and returned to his native town as a rich man, and bought a property there. You have no such talent. I cannot start you in life with a gift of capital as I started your brothers, because the war taxation has left me barely enough to pay my own way. I can do nothing for you: if you want to better the world you must begin by bettering yourself.

SON And until I better the world I cannot better myself; for nobody will employ a world betterer as long as there are enough selfseekers for all the paying jobs. Still, some of the world betterers manage to survive. Why not I?
FATHER They survive because they fit themselves into the world of today. They marry rich women. They take commercial jobs. They spunge on disciples from whom they beg or borrow. What else can they do except starve or commit suicide? A hundred years ago there were kings to spunge on. Nowadays there are republics everywhere; and their governments are irresistible, because they alone can afford to make atomic bombs, and wipe out a city and all its inhabitants in a thousandth of a second.
SON What does that matter if they can build it again in ten minutes? All the scientists in the world are at work finding out how to dilute and control and cheapen atomic power until it can be used to boil an egg or sharpen a lead pencil as easily as to destroy a city. Already they tell us that the bomb stuff will make itself for nothing.
FATHER I hope not. For if every man Jack of us can blow the world to pieces there will be an end of everything. Shakespear's angry ape will see to that.
SON Will he? He hasnt done so yet.

The "angry ape" allusion is to *Measure for Measure*, to a cosmically-conceived speech of warning, that Shaw here applies to the post-World War Two world. The words of warning are spoken by the novice nun Isabella:

Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would never be quiet,
For every pelting petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder, nothing but thunder.
Merciful heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle. But man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep, who, with out spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.
(2.2.113-126)

The 1997 Norton Shakespeare edition of this text, edited by Katharine Eisaman Maus, footnotes the "angry ape" image as "a figure of grotesque mimicry." But I don't think Shaw's application of the "ape" is in the sense of "aping," of mimicry. I think it's an

invocation of a mythic and dangerous gorilla ape, a monster, who enacts Hector's wish in *Heartbreak House* quoted above, where "Either out of that darkness some new creation will come to supplant us as we have supplanted the animals, or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us." And in the Isabella speech, the short verse line "Merciful heaven" (117), unfinished poetically but eloquent in its brevity, seems to me to make the same warning, or threat.

The New Ecclesiastes

In his final dramatic movement, Shaw is his character's Aubrey's new Ecclesiastes, as well as having a touch of being Timon's new "Misanthropos," who hates mankind. Along with *Buoyant Billions* and *Shakes Versus Shav*, Shaw's *Farfetched Fables* and the short *Why She Would Not* create his final quartet, written between 1948 and 1950. They come nine years after his most recent full-length play (his Restoration comedy '*In Good King Charles's Golden Days*', 1939), and their world presents a bleak panoply of warnings for the world from a man in his nineties. An old prophet, like Ecclesiastes. Shaw himself said that though he was by trade a playwright, he was by vocation a prophet. And a lifetime of accruing knowledge seems, in his final quartet, to bear out the words of the Preacher, in Ecclesiastes 1:16-18, in the King James version:

16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.
17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

Thus speaketh the Preacher. Shaw's final play *Why She Would Not*, with its in-built negative title, presents a Christian allegory in the figure of Henry Bossborn, another of Shaw's emblematic Jonsonian names. Michael Holroyd succinctly summarizes Bossborn's symbolic journey in this five-scene play in his biography:

> In the first scene the man appears as a chivalrous 'newcomer', in the second he is revealed as a 'carpenter of sorts', in the third he acts an apparently 'unemployable walking gentleman', in the fourth he becomes 'a very smart city man' dealing in real estate, and I the fifth he is finally 'a wonder', admired but alone. Shaw's hero is like a miniature of Los in Blake's Symbolic poems: the voice of eternal prophecy, the spectre of reasoning, the creator of alphabets, divorced from the Female Principle and hammering out the future in his creator's shade.[8]

Shaw does not achieve the putative serenity of Shakespeare's final quartet, not as a Prospero saying his farewell to the stage, leaving not a wrack behind, nor as a Lear (despite his claim for Shotover as a Lear figure in *Shakes Versus Shav*} whose tragedy is ameliorated by his reconciliation with Cordelia. He is Timon, lamenting his disappointments, as in this speech from his penultimate play *Farfetched Fables*:

> THE TRAMP Ha! ha! ha! You suspect me of being a heaven-born genius! Very well: test me til you are black in the face. Youll only be wasting your time; but that wont hurt me, because time is of no value to me: it's my profession to waste it. Youll find I can do nothing. Mind: I'm not a fool: youre quite right there; but I'm a duffer, a hopeless duffer. I can always see what the other fellows ought to do, but I cant do it. Ive tried my hand at everything: no use: Ive failed every time. Ive tastes but no talents. I'd like to be a Shakespear; but I cant write plays. I'd like to be a Michael Angelo or a Raphael; but I can neither draw nor paint. I'd love to be a Mozart or a Beethoven; but I can neither compose a symphony nor play a concerto. I envy Einstein his mathematical genius; but beyond the pence table I cant add two and two together. I know a lot, and can do nothing. When I tell the clever chaps what to do, they wont do it, and tell me I'm ignorant and crazy. And so I am: I know it only too well. Youd better give me a meal or the price of one, and let me jog on the footpath way. My name's not Prospero: it's Autolycus.

And that brings me back to Chekhov, and another mouthpiece image for Shaw. The Second War ends, and the century moves into a new era; the twin shocks of Hiroshima

and the Holocaust depressed Shaw, to judge by reading his final quartet – and without possibly knowing how he felt about the world personally near the end of his long lifetime, reading that final quartet, with its despairing politics, unnamed symbolic characters, and self-eulogies (such as *Shakes Versus Shav* or the above "Tramp" speech, makes Shaw for me not only Shakespeare's Timon, raging from his cave, but also Chekhov's Fiers in *The Cherry Orchard*. Fiers, the elderly servant who has devoted his life to the Ranevskaya family, is forgotten and left behind when the family has to leave the 19th century as the axes are heard chopping down the orchard in the interest of industrial progress.

The Snapped String

From *The Cherry Orchard,* in its final moments, which are possibly reflective of how Shaw felt after 1945:

(*The stage is empty. You hear the keys locking all the doors, then the carriages drive off. It grows quiet. In the silence you hear the dull thud of an ax on a tree, a lonely, mournful sound. Footsteps are heard. From the door on the right* FIERS *appears. He is dressed as usual, in a jacket and a white waistcoat, slippers on his feet. He is sick.)*
FIERS *(Going to the door and trying the knob*) Locked. They've gone. *(Sitting down on the sofa.)* They forgot about me – No matter – I'll sit here awhile – And Leonid Andreevich, for sure, didn't put on his fur coat, he went off with his topcoat – *(Sighing anxiously)* And I didn't see to it – The young saplings! *(He mutters something that cannot be understood)* Life has gone by, as if I hadn't lived at all – *(Lying down)* I'll lie down awhile – You haven't got any strength, nothing is left, nothing – Ach, you – good-for-nothing – *(He lies still.)*
(There is a far-off sound as if out of the sky, the sound of a snapped string, dying away, sad. A stillness falls, and there is only the thud of an ax on a tree, far away in the orchard.)
Curtain.

Shaw's heart seems broken, like that snapped string, in his final dramatic offerings. And like the forgotten Fiers, with several prominent exceptions, the late 20th-century theatre largely kept Shaw's plays locked away. Chekhov's major plays, on the other hand, are constantly revived. And yet, plays are like planets – their orbits come and go, depending on the climate of the day. In his Preface to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, Shaw discusses the same predicament with Shakespeare's plays in the late 19th-century:

> The history of Shakespear's tragedies has thus been the history of a long line of famous actors, from Burbage and Betterton to Forbes Robertson; and the man of whom we are told that "when he would have said that Richard died, and cried A horse! A horse! he Burbage cried" was the father of nine generations of Shakespearean playgoers, all speaking of Garrick's Richard, and Kean's Othello, and Irving's Shylock, and Forbes Robertson's Hamlet without knowing or caring how much these had to do with Shakespear's Richard and Othello and so forth. And the plays which were written without great and predominant parts, such as Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well, and Measure for Measure, have dropped on our stage as dead as the second part of Goethe's Faust or Ibsen's Emperor or Galilean.

That was true of *Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well,* and *Measure for Measure* in Shaw's Edwardian era; but social imperatives and concerns changed as the century proceeded, and these planets' orbits returned. Now, those three plays are frequently produced. Their themes – anti-war, nostalgia for lost youth, sexual scandals in politics, and many others – are interesting to us now in a way they weren't a century ago. The orbits of Shaw's plays may yet come around again.

The Broken Heart

Shaw's Lear, Captain Shotover, deserves the last word of expression on these subjects. His following aria, a sort of updating of 1 Corinthians: 13, sees Shotover telling of his own heartbreak, through a glass, darkly:

> A man's interest in the world is only the overflow from his interest in himself. When you are a child your vessel is not yet full; so you care for nothing but your own affairs. When you grow up, your vessel overflows; and you are a politician, a philosopher, or an explorer and adventurer. In old age the vessel dries up: there is no overflow: you are a child again. I can give you the memories of my ancient wisdom: mere scraps and leaving; but I no longer really care for anything but my own little wants and hobbies. I sit here working out my old ideas as a means of destroying my fellow-creatures. I see my daughters and their men living foolish lives of romance and sentiment and snobbery. I see you, the younger generation, turning from their romance and sentiment and snobbery to money and comfort and hard common sense. I was ten times happier on the bridge in the typhoon, or frozen into Arctic ice for months in the darkness, than you or they have ever been.

Chekov's Uncle Vanya tells Doctor Astrov "You're not mad – it's the world that's mad to put up with you." I think Shaw felt like Vanya could have been saying that to him, at the end of his long career. But he may also have felt that there's something to be gained by having your heart broken: it gives it more room to be repaired. Shakespeare does not end up as Lear, or Timon. He creates Prospero, saying farewell to the great Globe itself in

a spirit of forgiveness to the world that wronged him. I would like to think that Shaw ended up like Shotover, on the bridge in the typhoon or frozen into the Arctic ice, ten times happier than the world that disappointed him.

Notes

Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997.

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