

CHAPTER VII

SOCIAL PLAYS OF SHAW

Though often Shaw is represented merely as a playboy and a joker, he is actually a serious dramatist. He deals with the problems faced by the human being as they live in the society; turns the so-called idealists into ludicrous and hypocritical creatures by blasting their idealism. Social problems of various types and importance are dramatized, various cliches of the conventionally noble-minded people are demolished by an exposure of the source of the problems supported by overwhelming, disarming arguments. As a Fabian Socialist Shaw examined the maladies of the society without being blinded by idealism. His scientific study of the society and its problems made it clear to him that the greatest maladies of the society are Capitalism, sentimentalism, and sickliness of conscience. This may lead one to think that Shaw as a dramatist is a mere realist and his plays are merely theses for the solution of the problems. These points have been discussed in different chapters of this work, leading to the conclusion that Shaw's plays are plays and not merely tracts of social science; neither is he a realist in the sense generally people understand the term. Suffice it to say here that though like Zola and Gorky he exposes the social plague-spots of the day, he is unlike the Frenchman and the Russian in that he shows how the middle-class condones and even profits from these plague-spots while holding them in horror. The cool temper of

Shaw kept him from the besetting sin of the naturalists - the exploitation of sensational material for melodramatic or sentimental effects.

Shaw's sense of social justice was actually kindled by his reading of the American Henry George and the German-Jew Karl Marx. Shaw learnt that to the Victorian bourgeoisie private property and domestic hearth were the very foundation of social morality and they would not silently stand any attack on these, to them, sacred foundations. As a middle-class anti-middle-class i.e. as a rebellious son of the middle-class, Shaw maintains that the first of these institutions was inevitably anti-social. Private property, because of the capricious distribution of nature's bounty, leads to social inequality and ensures exploitation. The second institution is potentially evil, because devotion to the welfare of one's family may be at the expense of the society as a whole.

It is not that Marx's economics carried him away. He was actually fascinated by Marx's appeal to the passion of hatred in the more generous souls among the respectable and educated sections for the accursed middle-class institutions that starved, misled and corrupted them from the cradles. Shaw did not believe in Marx's theory of class war. The social struggle, he came to think, did not follow the class line. The people who really hate the capitalist system are, like Tolstoy and Hyndmann, themselves capitalists and it is the labourers, artisans and employees who are the fiercest defenders of this system.

Shaw frankly admits that he hates the poor and pities the rich; but one need not be a great intellect to see that it is poverty, not the poor,¹ that he hates. Like Samuel Butler he regards poverty as a crime from which all other maladies of the Capitalist system spring. Capitalism perpetuates poverty by throwing up giant unearned incomes. The owners exercise enormous purchasing power to which production responds; but the unpropertied people who form the majority can at best afford the barest necessities, the result being disastrous reversal of natural order of production in which needs come first and luxuries~~es~~ last.

But an exposition of Shaw's Socialism will give only a partial idea of the themes taken up by him in his "Social Plays". It is not that all the problems touched by him have retained their importance today; many of the things have become "dated". Society has moved forward and people's ideas have changed. Yet some of the problems-- the problem of poverty and riches, the problem of unearned money, in a word, the problem of Capitalism -- have not died out. But in the "Social Plays" Shaw takes up the institution of marriage and parenthood, the problems of education, spoken language, romantic idealism, war, love, and many more which we shall note while discussing the individual social plays.

1. Shaw writes "Such poverty as we have to day ... degrades the poor and infects with its degradation the whole neighbourhood in which they live. And whatever can degrade a neighbourhood can degrade a country and a continent and finally the whole civilised world, which is only a large neighbourhood". The intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism Socialism and Capitalism. Constable & Co. London. 1932 (Reprint), P - 42.

The above discussion on "Shavian Socialism", if such a term may be used, and the discussion on the "Social Plays" of Shaw which follows, point out that Shaw really is a Social Democrat. He would break down all the barriers that exist between classes and bring about a state of social equality. Shaw's biological argument for equality of income is based on the dysgenic effect of limiting sexual selection by consideration of rank and money. He contends that natural attraction is the only clue we have to evolutionally desirable mating and that every irrelevant consideration which reduces the number of persons from amongst whom we may choose our mates, is degenerative. He alleges that this argument acts powerfully on the audiences who are insensible to his political and economic propositions.¹

From the foregoing discussion it appears that Shaw is a social reformer. He makes a fetish of radicalism and image breaking, and in the name of uncommon sense holds that the unmasking of convention, the destruction of illusions and the basic reorganization of society are the prerogatives, rather than duties, of the true comic dramatist. But being an artist of the class of Euripedes and Moliere he made the plays commendable works of art whether or not one agrees to his ideas. In his "Social Plays" Shaw takes up various themes and treats them in a manner shocking to the Victorian moralists; but this he does always as an artist. The themes are

1. For a fuller explanation of this stand of Shaw one may see The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, Chapter XVI, Eugenics, P 53-56.

relations between men and women, parents and children, the problem of the individual and the society, the clash between the individual conscience and the customs and manners of the society. There is drama enough in all these. The current morality as to the economic and sexual relations was abhorrent to him and he attacked them right and left. But the construction of the plays, the beauty of the dialogue and the insight with which he penetrated into the individual character and the character of the society make it abundantly clear that it is the artist who appeals, not the so-called propagandist. "Idea" certainly is there; but it is doubtful whether, at least in the "Social Plays", Shaw was interested in the idea as idea. But in as much as in the "Social Plays" various ideas are there conflicting dramatically with one another, these plays may well be called dramas of ideas.

It is to be borne in mind that in the "Social Plays", too, political and philosophical themes are discernible; these themes certainly have social bearing and often mingle with the social themes. "Ideas" cannot easily be separated distinctly as only "Political", "Social" and "Philosophical" ideas. Naturally, in the so-called "Political" and "Philosophical" plays we come across social problems as in the "Social Plays" much politics and philosophy is discussed. Though it is rather misleading to classify the plays -- particularly if it is a Shaw-play -- into "Political", "Social" and "Philosophical" plays, still I have taken up a few of his plays under the heading of "Social Plays"; the basis of the choice is the main theme of the plays, Widowers'

Houses, The Philanderer, and Mrs. Warren's Profession have the clash between individual conscience and the conventional morality as the main theme. In The Doctor's Dilemma, Heart Break House, Candida, Getting Married and Pygmalion, the relation between men and women, between husband and wife, the institution of marriage and etc. are taken up. In The Devil's Disciple and Arms and the Man the themes are romance and sickliness of conscience. And running through most of these plays there is the castigation of the prevailing Capitalist system.

The importance of the first play of Bernard Shaw is that it proved to himself, who had so long been writing essays on economics, politics, drama, art, and music, that he was a playwright; all the rest followed. It has been reported that on a copy of the first edition he observed many years later, that Widowers' Houses (1885-92) was his first and worst play. As a first effort in the dramatic art, however, Widowers' Houses has remarkable qualities. The dialogue is lively and original, its construction is thoroughly workman-like and, though it may not be considered as a masterpiece, it holds the stage which is the acid test of a play.

It has already been observed that Shaw never satirizes or attacks the individual; he attacks the society and the Social type; and he attacks the various institutions. The theme of this play is the problem of conscience in a social set-up which does not allow individual conscience to go against the moral preachings of the established institutions.

But being an artist, Shaw even allows a slum landlord to justify himself. Shaw's attack, of course, is directed squarely against slum landlordism and not against any individual landlord of the slum. He wants us to understand the entire problem of slum landlordism and so, as in other plays dealing with other problems and ideas, he allows every speaker to speak for himself or for herself; this is the device by which Shaw shows that no individual is the villain of the piece. Of course, only where Sartorius turns from being a honest rogue into a conspirator intending to swindle the public, Shaw's tone of irony becomes infused with contempt.

The play is farcical-comedy --- farcical in conception and comedic in execution --- which presents a real problem that works like a canker in the body-politic of the society. For the conventionally moral people the play creates discomfiture. We do not come across any character in the play who is admirable; even the leading character Harry Tench fails to arouse any sympathy in us.

It is to be borne in mind that the Widowers' Houses is not directed at the socialists. It is directed rather at the sympathetic aristocratic conservatives who regard exploitation of the downtrodden with noble indignation. The nominal hero of the play, Tench, belongs to this class. He, when he learns that the wealth of his would-be father-in-law comes from slums, experiences a genuine shock. But Tench does not examine the economic questions. Sartorius advances the common middle-class arguments in favour of keeping the slums

neglected and decayed : "When people are very poor, you cannot help them, no matter how much you sympathize with them". To these arguments are added two other advanced by the individualists - that rents must be paid and that the people suffer due to an increase in population. Tench is completely overwhelmed when he comes to know that his own small income, which he considers untainted, actually comes from Sartorias; and Sartorias gets money by exploiting the wretched slum dwellers. In a Capitalist economy it is almost impossible that a man may earn untainted money. It is impossible again that a man may have genuine sympathy; we noticed how Lickcheese, who at first wanted Tench to have some feeling for the poor, himself becomes their exploiter.

Shaw does not write conventional domestic comedy flooded with sentimentalism. The conventional theatre-goer does not find the dramatization of sentimental love --- how the boy and the girl run into each other's arms to demonstrate their passionate love. But here the lovers' quarrel between Tench and Sartorias's daughter is patched up, not because the lovers are romantically in love with each other, but because economic relation between the two men makes such a match not only practicable but also desirable.

Though the playwright himself pronounced this play a "Propagandist Play - a Dialectic Play - a play with a purpose"², he pleads, at the same time, that this play is to be

1. Widowers' Houses - G.B. Shaw.

2. Preface to Widowers' Houses - The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Limited, 1965, P 70.

judged not as a pamphlet in dialogue, but as a work of art much as any comedy of Moliere is a work of art. Shaw's use of the name of Moliere, while referring to the very first of his plays, is quite significant. But Moliere sometimes vilifies which Shaw never does. Tench and Sartorius and the lot are not painted as villains; they are just the products of Capitalism which kills whatever good is there in a man. Shaw's attack is never against any individual. This play earned for Shaw a widely accepted and wild notoriety which was enhanced by the next play The Philanderer (1893), an extremely unpleasant play. The Philanderer, is a satirical comedy, but it is not to be treated naturalistically. The play is indeed an example of the new humour that came into the theatre --- the Shavian humour - the nature of which was to be disconcerting and too true to be good for everyone. Written at the height of the Ibsen controversy by one of the champions of Ibsen, this play made fun of the intelligentsia which is shown in quite an unfavourable light. The theme of the play is love and marriage which is treated as a game between the sexes. It was a time when the ideal of the womanly woman was still prevalent in the English society though some of the superior women were breaking loose from this ideal. Some women were, however, only aping the really advanced women. Both the types are present in The Philanderer --- the first type in the person of Grace Tranfield and second in Julia Craven. Between these two types stands a man, Leonard Charteris, who is hated by Grace because he allowed

himself to be seduced by Julia; but he tries to get himself rid of the frantic and jealous pursuit of Julia. The true Shavian qualities appear in dialogue, character and situation, yet here Shaw is not at his best. There is no novelty in the construction of the plot, the construction being strictly of the period. The ideology has shifted; it no longer champions the womanly woman. But the familiar rant of the romantic melodrama is easily discernible in the emotional quality and the phrases used in the various speeches. At first we find melodrama laughed out of court, but at the end once again it is brought in by the front door. Of course, the point of departure from the romantic sexology of the Victorian stage is the character of Charteris who can be tolerated only after discarding that sexology.

Mrs. Warren's Profession (1893) is one of the most "immoral" and "heretical" plays of Shaw; and though here, too, he appears before us as an artist, his avowed object "of converting the nation to my opinion on sexual and social matters" is obvious. This play is designed to draw the attention of the public to the facts relating to the use of brothels and to awaken its social conscience by their dramatic presentation. This "Unpleasant" play is about prostitution and naturally enough it caused much discomfort to and was sealed as absolutely immoral by the Victorian prudes. In England the play remained unlicensed for thirty one years i.e. until 1924 by which time the people of England learned, to some extent, to call a spade a spade particularly when the Archbishop of Canterbury called attention to the

danger of venereal diseases. The play was written, Shaw said, ". . . to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and maltreating women so shamefully that poorer of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together". Society and not any individual is the villain of the piece.

Shaw was entirely right when he observed to Ellen Terry that when he wrote Mrs. Warren's Profession he had some nerve, because by writing a play on such an unsavoury subject he flew into the face of convention and the Censor. The play was banned by the Censor. The conventional moralists were shocked when they found the playwright pointing his finger to accuse the Society and not the prostitute; its indictment was of every man as a citizen, not merely those engaged in the trade --- a contention which was too revolutionary for the time.

As in the first of the "Unpleasant Plays", so here the theme is Conscience; it is Vivie's conscience with which the dramatic action is concerned. Conscience is a very hard subject and the play is without sentiment. The artistic merit of the play lies in the fact that a cold-blooded subject is treated in a cold-blooded manner. Whatever passion is there is moral in nature. Romance and sentiment are driven out when they stand face to face with the stern realities of the

1. Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession. The complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 219.

social problems. Shaw let go the prostitute unblamed and unburdened, but in this there is no sentimentalization. Mrs. Warren's Profession is a cool-headed study of the social condition. The play has, however, some marks of the melodrama: Frank and the rifle and the old-fashioned "Curtain" of the First Act. A convention revived by Shaw from the classical drama is the objective self-consciousness with which the chief characters go about explaining conditions and themselves. Mrs. Warren analyses and describes her economic situation in a self-conscious manner.

Even in his first play the Shavian method of looking at a problem from an unconventional point of view was clear. The first play which squarely blamed the society --- the audience --- made him infamous. Shaw's conviction that any society which desires to found itself on a high standard of integrity of character in its units should organize itself in such a fashion as to make it possible for all men and women to maintain themselves in reasonable comfort without selling their affections and their convictions brings out his zeal as a world-betterer. The artist is seen in the presentation of an analysis of social problems. The "drama" is in the conflict between the conscience of the protagonist, Vivie, and the social condition that compels the poorer women to live a life of shame.

In his Fabian essays Shaw rejected Marx's labour theory of value in favour of Stanley Jevon's contention that prices are set by supply and demand of a given article and that an oversupply drives the price of that article towards zero.

Mrs. Warren's Profession asks what happens when human wages come under this law and community in excess happens to be women. The nineteenth century, which regarded the economically independent woman as morally suspect, went on the general assumption that when women worked in stores or factories, they did so to supplement the wages of their fathers and husbands and used this argument as an excuse for underpaying them.¹ But the plight of the family in which the woman was the sole earner can well be imagined. Since common wage for a salesgirl, waitress, or a woman factory worker at the turn of the century was only a penny an hour, the condition was definitely miserable. The Victorian society was not overly shocked by underpayment and poverty. Following the classical economists it regarded wages as the function of a free market with which it would be sacrilege to interfere.² But it did not affect the same indifference to sexual morality; it was shocked by prostitution. Shaw's idea was that large scale prostitution was the result of grinding poverty. Many points may be raised to counter Shaw's doctrine, but that is not my purpose. It may, however, be mentioned that many women who live a comfortable and financially sound life also live the life of shame though they are given the aristocratic name of "call girls".

1. Shaw discussed these things in his An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism (Women in the Labor Market). Constable & Co. Ltd. London. 1932. P 196-204.

2. Ibid.

Mrs. Warren is the product of her environment. Though able and energetic, she is not found struggling for a moment against the circumstances that led her to accept a life worse than death. In contrast, her daughter, Vivie reacts vigorously against her destiny as moneyed, young, idle lady. This contrast between following the line of least resistance --- to accept the circumstances and make the best of them --- and that of vigorous reaction against them, is an endless source of dramatic conflict in Shaw's plays. As a socialist of his own brand and economist, Shaw throws the blame for the condition not upon any individual, but upon the prevailing social order and the position accorded to woman in that order.

The excellence of Mrs. Warren's Profession as a play lies in this that it proceeds from the truthful exhibition of the motives which prompt the action, the intellectual and emotional crisis precipitated by the fierce clash of personalities and the unconscious self-condemnation of the character.

Vivie is a modern, unromantic, hard-working young woman who has devoted her time at Cambridge, not to acquire dilettante's appreciation of art and literature, but to prepare herself to earn her living as an actuary. Her life is not without some mystery, however; her mother is a loudly dressed rowdy of very different tastes from herself. She never divulged who Vivie's father is, but nevertheless behaves with the freedom and self-assurance of a woman of

wealth and power. But her freedom from convention breaks down just where affections are most deeply engaged --- her relations with her daughter. Mrs. Warren adopts a proprietary attitude towards Vivie and expects that she will do the daughter's duty. The coolness with which Vivie announces her decision of leading an independent life discomfits her so that she utters what is uttered by the parents often : "Do you know who you are speaking to ?" giving Vivie the chance to ask pointedly, "No. Who are you? What are you?" But despite this temporary discomfiture of the mother, it is the daughter who is, in the end, more shaken of the two. When Mrs. Warren reveals her long-hidden past : as a slum-girl whose only other choice was soul-destroying drudgery in conditions much worse than life in a brothel, she had turned to prostitution as the more self-respecting alternative.

Contrary to our expectations, Vivie is deeply touched by her mother's story, and for the first time in her life, is filled with affectionate regard for her mother. Later, however, when Sir George Crofts boasts of the large profits Mrs Warren and he make from a chain of private hotels in big cities, Vivie recoils with intense hatred. The unprepared reader may wonder why Vivie can accept one who lives a life of shame for earning money, but not a well-to-do and socially presentable lady. The answer, however, is clear; it lies in Vivie's central point of honour, her need for self-respect and freedom. Both Vivie and her mother agree on the need for self-respect and economic independence for themselves ; but here they part company. Vivie's conscience has grown

beyond merely her own self ; she demands self-respect for every woman. In her eyes her mother was justified in turning to prostitution to free herself from abject poverty, but she recoils with hatred when she finds that her mother has joined ranks with the exploiters of the poor by engaging poor girls in this trade.

As a piece of art Mrs. Warren's Profession is powerful and stimulating. It somewhat resembles Widowers' Houses, but the construction is more finished. We cannot help noticing that Mrs. Warren's Profession is no mere theorem, but a play of instincts and temperaments in conflict with each other.

Subtitled "an anti-romantic comedy", Arms and the Man (1894) is, in essence, a romantic comedy. The realistic details are really Shaw's comedic touches in the exposure of the illusions of warfare, of love, of romantic idealism. The romanticist Raina and the self-doubting Sergius are comically disillusioned by the realistic, hard-headed Bluntschli, who in turn falls a prey to love and romance. Serguis is perpetually mocked by the disparity between imaginative ideals and the disillusioné which constantly sting his sensitive nature. Shaw's aim is to destroy illusions, and to compel his audience to face realities. Shaw observed : ". . . the tragedy and comedy of life lie in the consequences, sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous, of our persistent attempts to found our institutions on the ideals suggested to our imaginations by our half-satisfied instincts, instead of

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a genuinely scientific natural history". Raina, when she comes to know Sergius and herself better, finds it possible to step down from her pedestal. Sergius cannot, and as he fails so he is not fortunate. He is everything a romantic could ask for - a devastatingly handsome man with the style of a Dumas musketeer, possessed of the loftiest conception of love and fighting. Psychologically, he is a special kind of aristocrat. He has every contempt for the bourgeoisie, but he cannot be sealed as an anti-plebeian or a snob. It is the lack of the aristocratic spirit in others that he despises, not the lack of aristocratic blood. This is the point where he differs from an ordinary aristocrat who is proud of his blue blood. This peculiar trait makes Sergius an aristocrat of the order of a Byron or a Shelley.

Shaw is here interested in critically analysing the responses to danger not only of Sergius and Bluntschli,² but also of Raina and her mother. Sergius's wild cavalry charge at first looks noble and brave, and Bluntschli's desperate bid for survival by fleeing the battlefield unheroic in the extreme. Yet reflection makes Bluntschli's act human and intelligible and Sergius's exploits a suicidal gesture. Shaw looked at the European aristocratic tradition with its code of "Death or honor" and its tradition of duelling and daring as

1. Prefaces to Plays Pleasant- Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 735.

2. A very interesting essay on this topic came from Robert Elliot - Shaw's Captain Bluntschli : A Latter-day Falstaff. Modern Language Notes LXVII. November, 1952.

an expression of a powerful death wish. Sergius, who is nobler than the average member of the aristocratic class, suffers from a special type of this psychological malady. It may be suggested that Sergius is both a latter-day Byron and Hamlet whose situation is made comical. Sergius's cavalry charge reminds one not only of Don Quixote's charging the wind-mills which is ludicrous, but also of Byron's courting of death at Missolonghi. On the other hand Sergius is Hamlet in his contempt for existence, in his cruel play with Louka, in his disgust with human nature itself. Sergius holds the world in contempt for its failure to appreciate his ideals of military value. His contempt for himself springs mainly from his inability to live up to his ideals of romantic love. The true tragedy of the idealist is embodied in Sergius's self-condemning soliloquy ; "Damnation ! mockery everywhere !
everything that I think is mocked by everything that I do"¹.

Sergius has made Raina the queen of an imaginary kingdom where lovers are perfectly truthful and constant without any sexual susceptibility to others. Yet he discovers that Raina's maid is more suitable to his taste. But to the degree he is shocked by his own behaviour towards Louka, he is desperately willing to believe that Raina belongs to a pure world where her worst thoughts are immensely nobler than her maid's best ones. When Louka reveals that Raina tells lies and has become interested in another man, Sergius recoils with horror and charges Louka for spying on her mistress. But the next moment he compromises himself by

1. Arms and the Man - Act III. --- Shaw.

asking, being led by jealousy, who his rival is. This amounts to condoning her act of spying, a fact which he is too candid to hide from himself. In the end Sergius discovers to his disillusionment the truth of Louka's assertions and challenges Bluntschli to a duel in an aristocratic spirit with the hope that Bluntschli also would accept it with the same spirit. But the Swiss Officer, who looks at fighting as a business, accepts the challenge with a matter-of-factness that disgusts Sergius who ejaculates : "What a man ! Is he a man !" meaning that Bluntschli is not a man with natural human spirit, but a machine.

But Sergius is not entirely right. Bluntschli is inherently a romantic character. Sergius's romantic idealism is only the outward garb which falls off again and again; Bluntschli's romanticism is genuine. That Shaw is not merely "playing Ventriloquist", but is a creator of distinct and individual characters, becomes clear from his portrayal of the subtle characters of Sergius and Bluntschli. Bluntschli's character is even more subtle than that of Sergius. He appears to be a rational being, sharp, intelligent, business-like for whom fighting is a trade which is not fascinating and which should be faced without any illusion and idealism. Yet he has, as he himself rightly points out, an "incurably romantic disposition" which prompts him to accept the uncertain life of a professional soldier though he might live a comfortable life by joining his father's business. The idea of going back to his father's business and look after the

hotels is very much disliked by him, for this would thwart his desire to live the life of a romantic soldier.

Arms and the Man is one of the artistic triumphs of Shaw. Many of Shaw's plays possess characteristics of light opera; in this respect Arms and the Man belongs to the group of musical plays like The Devil's Disciple, You Never Can Tell and The Apple Cart. It is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant comedies of Shaw in which we not only laugh wholeheartedly but are in a melting mood. It is a genuine comedy of character, theatrical in the true sense, and has had legitimate popular success in many parts of the world. The tendency to treat the play as self-conscious burlesque instead of a romantic comedy does it an injustice. Instead of trying to be original by inventing some new story, Shaw was content, in several of his plays at least, to take an old one; but he dealt with it in a new way that led the people to think of the whole situation or problem in a new perspective; Arms and the Man is a case in point. It is an old fashioned romance and has a theme far from original. But it is not devoid of ingenuity: the romanticist Raina and the self-doubting Sergius are disillusioned by the hard-headed Bluntschli, but it is seen that there is an incorrigible romanticist in him. In the figure of Bluntschli, however, we get a glimpse of the Shavian genius, the great man; we get

1. About the success of a comedy, Shaw writes, "when a comedy is performed, it is nothing to me that the spectators laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood". Preface to Faly's Pleasant. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn, London 1965. P 733.

the same impression when we examine the character of Andrew Undershaft in Major Barbara. The figure of the genius of Shaw's concept, of course, finds fullest expression in the character of Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra.

Candida has always been regarded as one of the most popular plays of Shaw; artistically, too, it is one of the masterpieces of Shaw. The main situation has nothing original about it; scores of plays have been written before and since Shaw on the eternal triangle - a situation or affair in which two men are in love with the same woman, usually a woman already married to one of them. Customary treatment of this theme would show the woman as secretly involved with the second man under the nose of her unsuspecting husband. A highly dramatic scene charged with emotion follows when the husband discovers the faithlessness of his wife and the wife either repents and is accepted back by the loving husband or she is cast off and left to continue her illicit relationship. The main theme may be reduced to a situation in which the honest and faithful husband is deceived by the unfaithful wife. In such cheap wares, Shaw would say, he does not deal. While a dramatic critic of the Saturday Review, Shaw saw many plays of this kind which convinced him that a bit too much attention was being paid to this kind of love affair, moral or immoral. Hence he treated this known situation in a new way turning the play, as he always does, into an intellectual stuff. Candida actually becomes the New Woman who does not allow herself to be

quarrelled over by two men; rather she takes the situation entirely under control, imposes her own will upon both men and brings the dispute to an immediate end.

Throughout the better part of the nineteenth century the great majority of women in Europe were content with the subordinate position accorded to them in society and family. It was Ibsen who protested against this in his A Doll's House awakening the women to a new consciousness of their equality with men. Agitation of women for their equality with men was started and the wave of this agitation reached the English soil towards the end of the nineteenth century. Shaw was one of the most outspoken supporters of the principle of equality of the sexes and most of his "heroines" have the characteristics of the New Woman. Candida is one of the early specimen of the New Woman. We find her spiritually independent, morally courageous, clear-headed and emotionally well-controlled. Shaw believed, however, that it was the duty of every woman to get married and bear children in order to fulfil the purpose of Life Force which uses her as its direct instrument in its upward striving to realize itself. For Shaw, naturally, woman is more important than man and she enjoys superior rank and ability to control him.

Although Shaw turned the "eternal triangle" upside down by making the woman morally stronger who could sustain the two men instead of being upheld by them, the popularity of Candida is particularly due to the familiarity of the basic situation and also to the fact that one of the

men is a romantic young poet, shy by nature and almost an imbecile in practical matters. Candida actually mothers him. This romantic young poet of only eighteen is spiritually lonely and this assures for him an emotional sympathy of the audience and the reader. The intellectual stuff of the play is there in the final scene of the play where the poet Marchbanks speaks of the secret of his heart. When the play was first written its full title ran Candida : A Mystery. What is this "mystery" and what is that "secret" ? - herein lies the claim of Candida to be regarded as a play of ideas.

The secret and the mystery in the play are really one. The secret is that the apparently weak and dependent romantic poet is spiritually far stronger than Candida's physically robust and self-assured husband, Morell. It is true that Morell offers in the famous "auction scene", his strength for her defence. But the fact is, as Candida herself points out clearly, all his strength is rooted in her affection, love, and devotion. Morell understands his inherent weakness and says: "It's all true, every word. What I am you have made me with the labour of your hand and the love of your heart. You are my wife, my mother, my sisters.¹ You are the sum of all loving care to me".

The romantic poet, on the other hand, has spent his life in spiritual loneliness and this has given him a self-confidence which will sustain him through sufferings and miseries; he has the capacity to live quite well without the

1. Candida- Shaw.

loving care of Candida or any one else; he has learnt the art of living without happiness and hope. For sometime --- and for sometime only -- he became emotional and illusioned to think that the romantic love for a woman could satisfy his deepest needs. The long speech of Candida in the last scene convinces him that as he is spiritually stronger and lonely, a life of domestic contentment would make him miserable and would ruin his independent spirit. Marchbanks now understands that only by abandoning hope of happiness can he enjoy perfect freedom; a poet's life is in poetry and not in domestic love and drudgery. Here we may well remember what Jack Tanner says in Man and Superman: "The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for him at seventy, sooner than work at anything but his art"¹. We observe almost a similar situation in the case of Tonio Kroger in Thomas Mann's Tonio Kroger. Tonio realizes that he has to live like an "unhuman", "extra-human" artist. He loves Ingeborg Holm, but they are not united in wedlock because his life is also not in domestic drudgery. An artist of the nature of Tonio or Marchbanks or of Tanner's conception is certainly not a "marrying sort". and is utterly unfit to live a life of domestic happiness. Marchbanks was strong when he entered Morell's house---though he was not conscious of his inherent spiritual strength--and is stronger when he leaves it fully convinced of the strength of his soul. This inherent strength of his soul makes him an immensely stronger man than the physically strong Morell. When Candida puts to

1. Man and Superman - Shaw

Marchbanks the common sense fact of the differences between their ages, he finds that he has awakened : "I have a better secret than that in my heart". He discovers that he is no longer to be identified with woman or love or himself as the lover. He has become a free man, a man for poetry only where lies his strength. We recall the famous words put into the mouth of Dr. Stockmann in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People: "The strongest man is he who is most alone".

Candida is possibly the most classically built play of Shaw. Its observance of the unities of Time and Place and its economy lends it a classical dignity. It is a play built upon anti-climax in which respect it is almost revolutionary. The play is poetic comedy on the emotional level. Though there is contrast between Morell and Marchbanks, the real conflict is between candida and Marchbanks -- between commonsense and poetry.

The Devil's Disciple (1896-97) is a melodrama with the conventional apparatus of situations and episodes like the reading of the will, the trial, the sacrifice, the return of the husband. But the play has, as Shaw observes in the Preface to Three Plays for Puritans, a novelty -- "the novelty of the advanced thought of my day" -- a thing which is not generally expected in a melodrama. To the situations and episodes Shaw gives a Shavian twist, particularly by turning the romantic hero inside out and by discarding the obvious

1. Preface to Three Plays for Puritans: (On Diabolonian Ethics). The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. (Paul Hamlyn Ltd. , 1965), P 746.

obligatory scene showing the tumult of passion when the husband returns. Again, a conventional melodrama would show Dick Dudgeon, the hero, avowing his love for the minister's wife. The hero risks his life on behalf of the clergyman husband, Anthony Anderdon, but when Judith asks whether Dick has not done it for the sake of her love, he replies: "I had no motive and no interest; all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a tool, for my pains; but I could not and I cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows".¹

We find in these sentences Shaw's fundamental idea that there is something in the nature of every man, which, when put to the real test, responds spontaneously to the demands made upon it. Shaw does not allow the hero a romantic or even a maral motive. It is not a mater of reason, or morality, or even selfish interest; it is rather a matter of human nature which would come out in extreme circumstances.

Shaw succeeds in humanising the stock figures of melodramas in his plays revealing them as credible mixtures of good and evil. Dick Dudgeon, who laughs at religion and is inevitably sealed as blasphemous and immoral for breaking the social code, is not a vicious character or even a depraved one. He is really a more genuine Puritan than his self-righteous mother, for he does not have her pretensions. He is

1. The Devil's Disciples - Shaw.

not a conventional hero of a melodrama but is one who ". . . is brought up in a household where the Puritan religion has died, and has become, in its corruption, an excuse for cruelty and envy In such a home he finds himself starved of religion which is the most clamorous need of his nature He thus becomes, like all genuinely religious men, a reprobate and an outcast".¹

One of the novelties of the play is the fine ironical touch given to it through the utterances of one of the minor characters, General Borgoyne. Even Sheridan could not have penned Borgoyne's "Martyrdom is what these people like, sir, it is the only way in which a man can become famous without ability". He is a distinctly drawn dramatic character and is the high comedian in his bantering repartee with Dick. Shaw sometimes gives us unforgettable minor characters like Borgoyne here and Alfred Doolittle in Pygmalion who are always successful on the stage.

Shaw has demonstrated a rare insight into the ideosyncracies and subtleties of the feminine heart in the character of the wife of the minister. Judith is delicate, sentimental and charming. She has conflicting emotions in her between duty towards the husband and love for Dick Dudgeon. She considers the former a coward and the latter an outcast. But when she finds that her husband is not the coward she took him for, her love for him comes back. She, however, extorts from Dick that he will never disclose to anyone her

1. Preface to Three Plays for Puritans ; On Diabolonian Ethics, The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw (Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965). P 746.

confession of love for him, for fear of breaking her home. She is not Shaw's New Woman who could defy conventional morality to stand by her conscience.

The situations of the play have nothing of actuality in them. The plot is inconsiderable, but The Devil's Disciple is always successful on the stage; it is due to the dramatic situation created and the apparatus of melodrama engaged in the play. Again, much of the success of the play depends, at least to the intellectual audience, upon Shaw's ability to elevate the plane of the play into an atmosphere of fine satire on militarism and its code of honour. Shaw's love for the visual art can also be seen in the play, particularly in the first scene where a will is read out and in the last scene where Dick was to be hanged.

Shaw is a comic dramatist and to expect him to deal with death as a tragic dramatist would, is absurd. The anecdote how William Archer challenged Shaw to treat death is too well-known to be repeated. Shaw's reaction (the paragraph published in the Tribune unmistakably came from Shaw's pen) to this challenge was characteristic : "Stung by this reproach from his old friend, Mr. Shaw is writing a play all about Death, which he declares will be the most¹ amusing play he has ever written The death scene will be unlike any ever presented; and the consultations of the doctors will give full scope for the author's knowledge of modern¹ therapeutics and for his view on medical profession". Shaw's

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century, Vol II - Archibald. Henderson, Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. N.Y. 1956. P 606-607.

views as expressed in The Doctor's Dilemma (1906) is that the medical profession has an infamous character and most of its members have no conscience. It would be wrong, on strength of this, to suggest that he had no belief in doctors. But he felt the necessity of a national staff of doctors who would depend for their prosperity not on the sickness, but on the wealth, of the nation. The words of Sir Patrick Cullen to Sir Colenso is enlightening because it echoes Shaw's regard for the medical profession when properly handled : "Colly, when you live in an age that runs to pictures and statues and plays on brass bands because its men and women are not good enough to comfort its poor aching soul you should thank Providence that you belong to a profession which is a high and great profession because its business is to heal and mend ¹ men and women". But Shaw finds that the doctors, most of them, have abused this sacred profession turning it into a conspiracy exhibiting men's "specific lust for cruelty".²

Though Shaw's attack which is so pointed is something new, he thought that the guilt and responsibility was to be shouldered by everybody and this attitude makes the attack less bitter. In spite of the affinities between Moliere and Shaw, the differences are quite fundamental. For instance, Shaw actually attacks classes and institutions; in the play the institution of medical profession is attacked, not a few doctors. Moliere ridicules doctors, Shaw satirizes the

1. The Doctors Dilemma - Shaw.

2. Preface to The Doctor's Dilemma : The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw (Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965), P 257.

medical profession. Moreover, as the play is written in the comic vein, so the attack has become quite tolerable and even the doctors have enough here to enjoy without malice. The play is not a tragedy, for the death of a worthless man does not make a tragedy. For all his merits, Dubedat cannot be treated as a tragic hero. He is charming and clever; but he is utterly unscrupulous about woman and money. He raises the question as to how far genius is a morbid symptom.

The title of the play is suggestive; the dilemma of the doctor here is the choice between the life of a great artist who is shamelessly unscrupulous and that of a thoroughly honourable but quite uninteresting colleague. The several doctors are beautifully and sharply distinguished by their social and class characteristics. When Dubedat is found capable of blackmail and declares : "All your moralizings have no value for me. I don't believe in morality. I'm a disciple of Bernard Shaw", Sir Colense calls him a reptile and decides to treat the uninteresting colleague, Blenkinshop, leaving the artist to Bloomfield Bonington and to sure death.

Dubedat makes a beautiful death; when he finds that he has nothing more to live for, he finds no reason to hate anybody. Shaw is always on the side of the artists and poets against the rest of the world. Though in real life Dubedat has not been able to live up to his ideal, he is intended to be agreeable in his death. The life of the artist is in his art, that is his real world; there "I have never

1. The Doctor's Dilemma - Shaw.

done anything wrong, never denied my faith, never been untrue
1
to myself".

In The Doctor's Dilemma Shaw developed his peculiar mixture of tragedy and comedy - his art of producing the state of mind that people describe by saying that they don't know whether to laugh or cry - to lengths which then seemed scandalous. In the old religious Mystery and Miracle plays, however, which Shaw attentively studied and contrasted them with the dramas of the Parisian school, the solemn scenes alternate with the most laughable ones. Shaw here went a step further; he did not simply put the solemn scene and the laughable one alternately, he mixed them together and this makes the death of Duddet not tragic, but rather tragi-comic.

This play is as able in treatment and solid in workmanship as any Shaw has ever achieved. In the first act the then latest discovery in bacteriology is explained with the accuracy of a text book; yet it is one of the most amusing first acts of Shaw. The reaction of the doctors to the discovery and the death of the patient through the leading physician's missing the point make both comedy and tragedy in abundance.

After dramatizing the institution of medical profession in The Doctor's Dilemma Shaw went ahead in Getting Married (1908) to dramatize another institution - the institution of marriage which is popularly held sacred. But

1. The Doctor's Dilemma - Shaw.

here there is no plot worth the telling. In The Doctor's Dilemma there is a romantic --- even a melodramatic --- plot: the doctor kills the patient and declares he has done a disinterested murder, but he has the subconscious intention of marrying the patient's widow. In Getting Married there is no plot; there is only talk. The play is an attempt at finding out the loopholes in the British marriage law then prevalent. We find a number of guests, invited or uninvited, waiting for the bride and the bridegroom. The two arrive at last after finishing an anonymous pamphlet "Do you know what you are going to do? By One who has Done it" and declares flatly that they refuse to face the honours of marriage, which, they find, is a "wicked contract". All the characters then discuss the existing marriage law and try to draw up a form of private contract, as was the custom in old Rome, without success. The stock figure of the old theatre, the greengrocer, suggests that his sister-in-law the Mayoress, should be consulted. She, in a long important speech in a trance, reveals the feminine soul of Shaw --- the soul which is really all men's. The speech of Mrs. George Collins takes the play into mystical realms; but, then, it is dragged back to the realm of hilarious fun.

The entire play is a single conversation without any division into acts. The technical novelty lies in the fact that though the curtain falls at least twice, there is no indication of any interruption in the play. It is true that it is all talk, but the play is an excellent piece of dramatic work. The discussion is brilliantly witty with an

element of surprise here and there. In their discussion about marriage in which conventional and unconventional, religious and secular views are expressed, the characters display themselves. We get interested not only in what the characters say and in the way they say it, but also in the characters themselves. The ending of the play is characteristically Shawian, where the play is brought back to the realm of fun from the realm of mystical trance. Getting Married is an example of what Shaw can do without a "plot". A man expecting a "plot" in a play shall find this fine play a "not-play". The fact is, the endeavours of Shaw to dramatize admirably a public institution could be accomplished only through this scheme of entertaining conversation; the playwright has accomplished this much to the dissatisfaction of the romantic plot-loving critics and theatre-goers.

In the sounds of words as well as their sense and meaning Shaw was deeply interested. He learned shorthand and wrote his plays in it and left them to his secretary to type them out. He was always for precision and exactness and was delightfully surprised to know that his name could be spelt in Bengali only with one letter of the alphabet. His love for the shorthand and exactness was due both to its time-saving advantage and to its being based upon phonetics using the same symbol for the same spoken sound. English is hard to learn and use because it is extremely illogical in spelling

1. George Bernard Shaw - Bhabani Mukhopadhaya (1960), (Bengali).

and confusing in sounds. Shaw spent a good deal of his precious time fighting to persuade the English to adopt an enlarged alphabet and directed that after his death a large part of his considerable fortune should be used to finance any serious and sincere scheme for bringing into common use his enlarged alphabet and reformed spelling, but in vain.

In Pygmalion (1912) Shaw dealt with the problem of scientific speech and his most impressive achievement in this play was that he made, what might become difficult and dull and might dwindle into just a lecture, an interesting, amusing, and artistic play out of this subject. Shaw's success is particularly due to the fact that he was successful in transforming the science of speech into an entertaining drama and also to the fact that the characters have a human interest. Coupled with these is Shaw's sparkling fun which plays no mean part in the play. To make the audience laugh was not, however, the sole or the chief purpose of Shaw, for he wanted to see whether the audience "laughing or grave, is in a melting mood"¹. This play creates a lot of laughter, but as it is a play of ideas, it at the same time sends the audience back to their homes thinking not only of the problem of scientific speech, but also of --- and this is even more important --- the twin problems of Education and Creation.

Shaw was the greatest modern master of paradox who took immense delight to take familiar situation and then turn

1. Preface to Play Pleasant, The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw (Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965), P 733.

them upside down and insight out so that they might be examined from a different angle. That is what he really does in the present play. In the legend, when the statue is turned into Galatea, King Pygmalion marries her. But in the play when Eliza-Galatea comes alive as a new woman, conscious of her own soul, Higgins-Pygmalion takes no interest in her; the passing off of Eliza as a duchess in the garden party is no more than a professional experiment to Prof. Higgins. He is concerned with her only as a human talking machine, not a living woman of flesh and blood, spirit and heart to make love with.

Idealism and Romance were possibly the greatest enemies to Shaw; and with them go gallantry, chivalry, gentility and respectability. Idealistic and romantic attitude towards war, which is beastly and wasteful, towards science, which introduces a new set of superstitions, and towards romantic love and marriage are the things he attacks most vehemently. It is with an intentional irony that Shaw called his play Pygmalion : A Romance In Five Acts. The play is not a romance as it could rightly have been called if Higgins and Eliza loved each other and married.

Pygmalion is actually a problem play - a play of ideas - and the problem goes much deeper than the bare story. It is the world-problem of Education and Creation; through education new man and new woman can be created, but then the educator and the creator must cast off the created man and woman who yearn for a different kind of world. They do not

find it; and social and personal unrest results. As a flower-girl Eliza could at least earn her daily bread, but now when she has become a fashionable lady with the gift of articulate speech, she finds her nowhere and naturally she cries out : "What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go, what am I to do? What is to become of me?"¹ All the teachers and the world-betterers find themselves in the same position as Prof. Higgins does after the creation is complete. But the fact remains that the Creator is undaunted and goes on creating though he is conscious of the problems that would crop up in the life of the created. He leads them towards a new way of life and is compelled to leave them at its threshold to go on all by themselves.

But the story is not absolutely bereft of the elements of romance. If by romance we understand only romantic love and wedded bliss, then, of course, Pygmalion is not a romance. But there is another side. When Higgins meets the flower-girl crooning like a bilious pigeon instead of talking like a human being, her mind and emotions are absolutely undeveloped so much so that she is little more than a statue with the only difference that a statue has no tongue at all. Higgins changes her into a living human being conscious of her own self, and this change is surprising and thrilling --- in other words, romantic. Shaw, of course maintains that the change brought by Prof. Higgins in the flower-girl is neither impossible nor uncommon. He says "The modern concierge's daughter who fulfils her ambitions by

1. Pygmalion - Shaw.

playing the Queen of Spain . . . is only one of many thousands of men and women who have sloughed off their native dialects and acquired a new tongue".¹

Pygmalion is neither a conventional farce nor a conventional romance. In the first case the play would have ended with the ludicrous performance of Eliza at Mrs. Higgins's "at home"; in the second it would have ended in a love-match between Prof. Higgins and Eliza. It was one of Shaw's favourite theories that people of culture appear to the savages and even to the average man as cold, cruel and unfeeling because they are not accessible to the common emotions and weaknesses and are free from ordinary affectionateness and jealousy. The development of Eliza's relations to Prof. Higgins in the last two acts of the play illustrates this point.

Prof. Higgins is a bully and a charmer ; he is at once an impish school-boy and a flamboyant wooer of souls. He is a scientist with a wild imagination, and yet he is a man so blind to the nature of his own personality that he thinks of himself as timid and diffident and maintains that anger is a thing foreign to his temperament. These qualities impart a distinct and dramatic individuality to this Professor of Phonetics. He and Colonel Pickering - the two who have no more sense, as Mrs. Higgins points out, than two

1. Preface to Pygmalion. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw (Paul Hamlyn Ltd.), 1965. P 809.

children - have both failed to grasp the value of Eliza's contributions to Prof. Higgins' success in the experiments. They failed to pat her and admire her and Prof. Higgins goes a step further to thank God that the tiresome experiment is all over. The thwarted feelings of Eliza are now turned to rage, and to provoke emotional feelings from Prof. Higgins, she needles him so she may enjoy the spectacle of a God in vulgar human fancy. Here, once again, Shaw has demonstrated a rare insight into feminine soul. Though Prof. Higgins cannot boast that he has "nothing of man" in him, he is, like Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra, part God and part brute.

Eliza of the scene in which she hurls slippers into the face of Prof. Higgins is very far from the Eliza of the Covent Garden street corners. There is a new dignity and even calculation in her emotional outburst. She has now mastered more than the pronunciation of the educated classes. She is a model of poised reserve; even cold in her manners when she meets the Professor the next morning at his mother's. Eliza's development is marked, but it is limited in this that she never gets past the stage of judging the world in relation to her self. The impersonality of the world betterer has been lost upon her and she has nothing of Prof. Higgins' scientific passion for reform. Naturally, all her irritations are purely subjective, as the Professor rightly points out. To Eliza, Prof. Higgins appears to be completely selfish who does not care a rap for what would happen to her now that her

education is complete; who takes no personal interest in her. On hearing that she is going to marry Freddy, Clara's brainless brother, Prof. Higgins objects and says, "Can he make anything of You?" Eliza, in her turn finds such a question unintelligible: "I never thought of us making anything of one another; and you never think of anything else. I only want to be natural". It is clear that she considers Prof. Higgins unnatural. The fact is that the "situation" is a conflict between the superhuman and the all-too-human. And this conflict appears again and again in the plays of Shaw.

It is only natural that Prof. Higgins does not marry Eliza. It is not simply because the Professor has set a very high standard of a woman in his mind, seeing his mother. Nothing could be farther from Shaw's conception of Prof. Higgins and Eliza than a matrimonial tie between the two. Prof. Higgins lacks completely the personal tenderness and attachment Eliza craves and hurts her repeatedly by words and deeds. He explains to her that he has been accustomed to her face and voice and likes the furniture in his room and makes it clear brutally that he can get on without them and does not really need her. These words certainly does not endear him to her and Eliza prefers the simple-hearted, love-

1. In a cancelled passage, on page 72, of the typescript in the Henley Collection, University of Texas, Louis Crompton reports, Mrs. Higgins calls Henry selfish to which he retorts: "O very well, very well, very well. Have it your own way. I have devoted my life to the regeneration of the human race through the most difficult science in the world; and then I am told I am selfish. Go on, Go on." - Shaw the Dramatist - L. Crompton, PF 249.

born young man Freddy Hill. In the sequel of the play Shaw tells us: "Galatea never does quite like Pygmalion: her relation to her is too god-like to be altogether agreeable". Prof. Higgins can in no way be Eliza's husband; the all-too-human Eliza has rightly found her mate in the all-too-human Freddy.

The theme of the play is human relations and, in particular, love. The modern Pygmalion, Prof. Higgins, discovers to his surprise that he has not merely given the cockney Galatea a superficial polish, but has awakened a human soul. The plot of the play is simplicity itself, but its theme is the creative element, and the bones of the plot are well clothed by intelligence.

Heartbreak House (1913-16), considered by Shaw as one of his greatest works and correctly too, is rather a long work written as "a Fantasia on English themes in the Russian Manner". In this comedy we get the first expression of Shaw's increasing loss of faith in the world's progress. We are to notice the time of the play - 1913 - a time which was out of joint being threatened by the outbreak of a global war. England which steadily heading towards a rocky hill to be wrecked. Hector says to Captain Shotover: "And this ship we are all in, this soul's prison we call England?" But the soul's prison, the heart-break house is not just England; it is the whole world which was writhing under the danger of the global war with nobody coming forward to avert the disaster.

1. Sequel : Pygmalion -- Shaw

2. Heartbreak House -- Shaw

The play is an artistic triumph and the Preface one of the best that came from the pen of Shaw. In the preface of the play, the playwright, with an insight peculiar to him, said: "You cannot make war on war and your neighbour at the same time. War cannot bear the terrible castigation of comedy, the ruthless light of laughter that glares on the stage"¹. The fitting dialogue and the musical rhythm of the play are an added beauty to its apparently loose construction. Music has a prominent part in the mature works of Shaw and it has been rightly observed by W.H. Auden, himself a poet of note, that: "For all his theatre about propaganda, his writing has an effect nearer to that of music than the work of any of the so-called pure writers."² This in a single stroke brings out the essential difference between Shaw and other playwrights of the "Social Plays" and "Drama of Ideas". The music in a Shavian play cannot be separated from the theme or the idea.

Heartbreak House, to a great extent, is written in the manner of Tchekov and this is owned by Shaw in the clearest possible terms. The characters presented belong to the decaying aristocratic class; they are a genteel people and they, characteristically, are all idlers. The setting is a country house in Victorian England. But the manner of Tchekov is more seeming than real; the play is essentially

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1. Preface to Heartbreak House. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw, (Paul Hamlyn Ltd, London), 1965, P 399.
 2. The Shavian Farrago - W.H. Auden (G.B.S. : A Critical Survey, Ed. L. Kroneberger, The World Publishing Co., P 156).

Shavian. It is said that Shaw tried to follow the manner of Tolstoy in The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet, but the fact is, in the play the playwright followed the manner of his own The Devil's Disciple. Similarly, though looked upon by himself and a large number of critics as the English Tchekov, in Heartbreak House Shaw merely repeated his own Getting Married and Misalliance. The three plays may be looked upon as a trilogy. I do not, therefore, agree with Maurice Colbourne that "had Tchekov never lived, Heartbreak House would have taken a different shape", because, as mentioned already, the indebtedness of Shaw to Tchekov is only nominal and because Getting Married and Misalliance paved the way for the writing of this play.

Heartbreak House is a picture of the "cultured, leisured Europe before the War", and the picture is presented with subtlety of art and deep poetic feelings. It is surprising that Stark Young should find the play, when he reviewed its performance in 1938, "garrulous, unfelt, and tiresome". This very critic had earlier agreed with Edmund Wilson that Heartbreak House was probably the best of Shaw's plays. One is apt to suspect that the shifting of the opinion from extremely favourable to extremely unfavourable was due to the consciousness of social responsibility and guilt awakened by the play.

1. The Real Bernard Shaw—Maurice Colbourne, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, PP 193-194.

2. Immoral Shadows — Stark Young, P 206 — 207

As play of ideas, nevertheless, Heartbreak House cannot claim the intellectual whirlpool of Man and Superman and the depth of Major Barbara. The characters are the leisured upper-class people; politics they did not like; they did not wish to realise Utopia for the common people and lived without a morsel of scruples on incomes they did not earn. Shaw did not merely attack the idlers who did not know how to live; but particularly he attacked the lack of purpose in these people which reminds us of the theme of Man and Superman. though here the context is different.

Archibald Henderson reports how, when asked by the "official biographer", Shaw significantly observed that Heartbreak House "... began with an atmosphere and does not contain a word that was foreseen before ...".¹ This means that the play worked itself out; it is the work of an inspired artist and cannot be easily explained away as written after the manner of Tchekov. This play defies any definition and is almost an inexplicable phenomenon.

The atmosphere of the play is one of aimlessness, futility and frustration. At first of course we do not get a sense of impending disaster. We do not have a premonition that we are to witness an allegory of the contemporary time--one of the most remarkable allegories of life ever put upon the stage. This play testifies to the great dramatic gift of Shaw, who, here, dramatizes an atmosphere--a task very

1. B.B.S. : Man of the Century - Archibald Headson (Appleton Century Crofts Inc, 1956), P 625.

difficult to perform. Heartbrak House, though too cryptic for immediate apprehension, is a modern morality play of tremendous impact which still awaits full understanding and appreciation. It promises to rank in dramatic history as one of the most significant tragedies of the Shavian age.