

DRAMA OF IDEAS AND BERNARD SHAW

**A thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy to the
University of North Bengal**

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Jahar Kanti Sen

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the re-emergence of drama as an important literary force though the preparation for this re-emergence was started by the fourth quarter of the preceding century. Drama had been relegated to a comparatively insignificant position by the Victorian writers. As a matter of fact, during the greater part of the nineteenth century English drama was considered more as a part of the general industry of entertainment rather than a serious contribution to the world's art of the theatre. One could well protest that in the Victorian period there was no theatre. This does not mean, of course, that there were no stages, no actors and no audience, but that England was not taking a considerable or worthy part in the development of a dramatic form of expression. The lingering and rather futile efforts to protect the interests of the two historic theatres of London, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, by giving them a monopoly of "legitimate drama", were abandoned in 1843, when an Act of Parliament granted a comprehensive freedom to the stage. Drama was thus liberated like any article of commerce, and, as the population in England was growing rapidly in number and in wealth, there was a swift expansion of dramatic output. But what was offered to the new public must, unfortunately for the dramatic literature of England, be considered in terms of quantity rather than quality. Commercial standards became more frankly accepted and the

ideal of the "long run" supplanted the old conceptions of a classical repertory in which it was the function of the leading players to appear continually in order to display their powers and graces in a great variety of traditional and testing parts. The old policy, however, of a classical routine was maintained by Charles Kean who became the lessee of the Princess's in 1850 and by Samual Phelps at the Sadler's Wells. Kean, on the one hand, was endeavouring to sustain the best kind of dramatic appeal by throwing in costly embellishments which a later taste would have considered unnecessary and even absurd. Phelps, on the other, did splendid work, not only for the public that still wanted Shakespeare, but for the Shakespearean text itself by going back to the Folio for his matter instead of using the adaptations and versions which had been started during the Restoration with the authority of, surprisingly, Dryden and had continued to grow in numbers and stupidity throughout the eighteenth century. Even John Philip Kemble, who had been considered something of a purist in these matters played a musical version of The Tempest which contains lyrics in the style of an eighteenth century ballad opera. Against such what may be called, for want of a more appropriate term, barbarism, long taken for granted even by the cultured people, Phelps made a strong and splendid stand at the Sadler's Wells and during his management there which lasted from 1844 to 1862, he maintained a dignified level of dramatic art while the national theatre as a whole was only concerned with rhetoric and sensation and with reaping the

financial benefits of its newly earned freedom. The drama, of course, was still governed by the State Censor, for whose office Lord Chamberlaine was responsible, and by local licensing authorities who could restrict productions either on account of unsuitable premises or unsuitable matter such as might give moral offence or be a likely cause of riot and unrest. But in mid-Victorian times there was little interference with the industry and the players lived and worked in that companionable anarchy which is so picturesquely described in the Crummles episodes of Dickens's Nicholas Nickleby.

After the Act of 1843, there was a rapid growth of the theatres proper or Lord Chamberlaine's houses as they were known; they could increase and multiply according to popular demand; while the old saloon theatres, which had been outside the patent and had dealt mainly in imported romantic dramas and light operas, found that the new rivalry necessitated new measures. The saloon theatres accordingly relied more and more upon song and dance and became the parents of the music hall, while the orthodox houses were occupied by all that Victorian England could offer in the name of drama. Victorian theatre was dominated by the French tradition in farce and melodrama with the result that many English writers who might have been the "abstracts and brief chronicles" of their time, or who might at least have given to the actors opportunities for fulfilling the high function assigned by Hamlet to the players, remained mere hacks

engaged in adapting imported materials - that, too, of a very low standard.

A distinct change was made by T.W. Robertson (1829-71), whose comedies seem to a generation used to Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and other playwrights of the drama of ideas to be painfully stilted and artificial. Robertson, nonetheless, was the supposed rebel and realist of his times; he believed, not without reason, that he was bringing the drama back to life from the reign of anarchy to which it had been driven. He became dramatist to the Bancrofts management at the Prince of Wales's theatre. There in that theatre a new school of realistic staging and acting was begun in self-conscious revolt against the tawdry romanticism, the pomposities of rhetoric and spectacle, and the wild fustian of the general drama of the time. Robertson's most important contribution to the theatre of that period was his refusal to accept battered types which passed for figures of fun. To the play-goers of fifty years later Society (1865) and Castle (1867) seemed almost laughably artificial, but they were considered by contemporary critics as daring essays in naturalism and actuality. Before Robertson's time the writing and the acting of character-parts were limited by certain acknowledged formulae. There was a routine of the ridiculous character and situations in the theatre, as there was afterwards in the music halls; but the fun was stale and there was no stuff for thought. The Bancrofts working on Robertson's pieces abolished these traditional restrictions

upon truth and tried to substitute fresh and individual characters for the stale humours of the type. The whole policy was to let in the air of actuality into the dead stale atmosphere of the playhouse; and in the invigorating change they had important allies in two actors of consequence, Sothere and Hare. As naturalism - but naturalism in quite a loose sense - was the basis of his work, so Robertson sought to make actors understand that it should be theirs too. He, it should be admitted, established a school of natural acting which completely revolutionized the then existing method and, by so doing, did incalculable good to the stage. Unfortunately, Robertson lacked able successors. James Albery was credited with wit and imagination, but he found the job of the adapter easier than that of the creator and H.J. Byron altogether fell from the standards which Robertson endeavoured to institute. Adaptations went briskly on and it was significant that when Beerbohm Tree went into management at the Haymarket in 1887 he relied mainly upon plays of foreign origin. Until the eighties of the nineteenth century were well advanced, the practice of adaptations from the French and sometimes, as in the case of the popular farce The Private Secretary, from the German was held to be the legitimate as well as the customary occupation of a British playwright. To create episode or character was a rare thing. Among those who occasionally created and more often adapted were Albery, Gilbert, Godfrey and Tom Taylor.

But, while the mid-Victorian years were largely sterile in authorship, as is evident from the above, important changes

were being made in the organisation and social status of the English theatre. In early Victorian time the actor was usually expected to be, as most of them really were, a Bohemian and might even be an outcast. The playhouse itself might be rough and ready and the society to be met there only a shade better. The Bancrofts were responsible, not only for blowing fresh air in the quality of stage-writing and production, but for reintroducing the theatre to the attention of the prosperous middle class and of those who might previously have hesitated before being seen in such a place. Whether it was that they raised the tone by raising prices or were able to raise the prices because they had raised the tone is not easy to ascertain. But the fact remains that they gave to their theatre a "cachet" and a "clientile" which confirmed the place of drama among the arts of a civilized London community. A man visiting a theatre would no longer be taken as a man whose character was suspect. Their theatre was as attractively upholstered as their stage was attractively set. Play-going was made safe for the well-to-do; and respectability replaced the old notions of a rakish entertainment for a racketsy people. The half-guinea stall, which became a familiar London institution, was introduced and, what was more, it was sold and filled. It is interesting to notice that complaints made some sixty years later about the high prices of seats in London theatres were not based on any historical sense of comparative values. The half-guinea of 1880 was at least

equivalent in general purchasing power to the Pound of 1928. The return of wealthy people to the play-going class did not work altogether for the good; their taste might have been more limited than their purse, and they certainly did not demand a form of theatrical art which should be intellectually ambitious. The intellectually sluggish people took the theatre for a place of light entertainment and did not think that drama was a form of art. But it was, on the whole, an excellent thing that the English theatre should be rescued from its association with the street-corner melodramas. The Bancrofts may not have found the polite and cultivated society of play-goers which is postulated as essential to the production of good drama; but they rendered admirable service to the drama by restoring it to its place among exercises and adornments of a civilized community. The time of drama as art, the time of intellectually fertile theatre-goers, was, however, still to come.

Another of the achievements of the Bancrofts, which must not go unheeded in any discussion of the development of drama in the mid-nineteenth century, was the organisation of theatre throughout the country. Provincial production had hitherto been left to stock companies or to the travelling troupes working on local circuits. "Lovers of Vincent Crummies will know that the strolling players added more to the strange pleasures of life than to the attractions of the theatre as a recreation for educated and
1
adult people".

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 7 P 606.

The great alteration in the mid-Victorian era was noticed in the touring companies with casts efficiently chosen in London and trained under expert supervision. The national development of communications made travels far easier than it had been before. Moreover, it was made possible to carry scenery from place to place instead of relying upon the uncertain local provision. In 1867 the Bancrofts organised for tour an exact reproduction of the London presentation of Robertson's masterpiece Caste and the quality of the performance appears to have been greatly appreciated in the towns which were visited. Buckstone's Company from Haymarket followed suit and it soon became common for actor-managers to go on tour and thus bring to the various provincial towns a smoothness and a virtuosity of performance to which the local audiences were quite unused. By the end of the nineteenth century all the great London actors and important foreign visitors like Sarah Bernhardt habitually took their companies on tour and the centralisation of the theatrical activity in the capital was considerably diminished. There were obvious advantages in this, but the old stock companies which were replaced by the new touring combinations, had been very much valuable as training schools. A player brought up in them had to learn to play all kinds of parts at very short notice; he had therefore to be elastic enough in his technique and had to be versatile in his range. He might be king one day and begger the next. But with the touring companies from London the

players went on repeating one part and then was expected to continue in another role of the same kind. He became a specialist and was cast only for parts in which he was known to have specialized. The result was the elaboration of smoothness in certain types of work, but not the creation of actors with plastic masks and personalities who were ready to go anywhere and to do anything. Even those who least approve of the type of drama produced under the old conditions of the pre-Bancrofts stage would admit that those conditions were likely to evoke a rich and resourceful type of acting in which full command of movements and of direction were absolutely essential.

It is plain from what has been said of the early and mid-Victorian stage that the play was not the thing; it seemed that nobody thought seriously of the play as a form of art. The play-goer's motive was rarely literary, nor did he regard it as the function of the dramatic art to hold mirror up either to human nature, to current manners, or to the problems of the hour or of eternity. The period was one of intensely dramatic changes in the national life. The economic structure of the society was altering; science was coming up to challenge dogma; the strife of classes and generations was taking shape in conflicts whose natural artistic expression should surely have been dramatic. But to the student, who wishes to draw the picture of the social landscape of the time, the stage offers extremely little help. In no sense

were the actors the abstracts of their time. Both the pride in the new progress and the protests against it were made vocal in the novel and in poetry. Unfortunately, the English stage was so far divorced from the national culture that it totally failed to interpret in terms of drama the immensely important and immensely exciting development in the knowledge, wealth and power of the English people. If ever history was throwing material to the playwright, it was then; but the playwright was too busy with imported French trivialities or concocting the farces of the routine types to pay any attention to his great opportunities of doing for the theatre what Dickens and Thackeray were doing for the novel. It was only after Ibsen had revolutionized the European theatre by making his drama into a vivid criticism of actual social values that the English who had a similar artistic purpose came to use the dramatic medium for such a purpose.

But although there was an absence of a great school of playwrights in England, there was no dearth of good actors; there was both demand for and supply of great acting. There is the man who writes, the man who acts, and the man who makes the spectacle. That is a simple analysis that is capable of much refinement in one way or of expression in another. The history of the theatre shows that those three parties are continually engaged in rivalry as well as in co-operation. A struggle for the balance is even in progress. Accordingly, whereas one epoch or generation is particularly distinguished for the quality of its plays and of the authors whom it attracts to theatrical service,

another is the golden age of the actor who is admired for himself alone and not in relation to the splendours or the subtlety of the play in which he acts, while at another time emphasis centres on display of scene or on the mass-effects controlled by the producer and the pageant-master. The theatre of England in the nineteenth century, or at least until the renaissance of English dramatic composition in the 1880's was predominantly an actor's theatre. The play-goers thought in terms of the actor and his individual magnetism. It was the mark of the time that whereas the man of culture in 1920 would have considered whether to go and see the new Galsworthy or the new Shaw, his predecessors in polite playgoing society would have considered whether to go and see Kemble or Kean or Macready or Phelps or Irving. The primary interest was not in the thing written, but in the thing done. The great actors did not wish to be brief chroniclers appearing in the works of the moment but liked to take part in the histrionic tournament provided by rival appearances in the great historic roles. They appealed to connoisseurs who would match their Hamlet or Macbeth against another's. What mattered was neither the mind of the original Shakespeare nor the absence of a new one, but the arrival of a new virtuoso who would berattle the town with his rhetoric or conquer it with his grace in some grand Shakespearean part.

Henry Irving was possibly the most famous actor of that time. The sovereignty of Irving in the theatre of the time can best be understood if we remember to what extent

the theatre was under the domination of the actors. Irving carried on the social service of the Bancrofts in bringing honour to his art and rescuing his profession from squalor and disrepute. Yet of this one of the most eminent Victorians, whose name was almost synonymous with the national theatre of England of his time, many undeserving comments have been made. When we speak of Irving we do not speak much of his managerial career, which, for the living English drama, did not have much of significance. It is to be noticed that as a manager he seldom experimented with a new play, and of the few which he did produce, only The Cup and Becket by Lord Tennyson could expect to be remembered by the posterity. But even these productions were soon forgotten. Irving did not imprint his mark in the history of the English theatre as a manager; he is remembered, rightly, as an actor.

The problem of the drama became an economic one as soon as the middle classes started to visit the theatre. As the population of the city of London rose to the millions and among them quite a good number started visiting the theatre, the theatre paid. It was seemingly a favourable condition but the decadence was obviously apparent. The middle-classes were gregarious in the matters of tastes, habits and inclinations as they were individualists in religion, politics and economics. If a play succeeded with a hundred people, it would succeed with a thousand. Thus a formidable chain of commonplaces and established criticism was formed, which could keep an ordinary production on the

stage for twenty months and more. The business hastened to make money; they did not care a rap for a good varied repertory. The new managers -- great managers like Irving being no longer in the forefront -- wanted the profits of speculation, for which a long run was necessary: the works performed were assured, more or less, of popular success which had little connection with the greatness of a play, as play. The costs of production were distributed over a long period; the actors, as they were employed for a long time, were paid less.

The managers, led by the psychology of long run and endless success, grew rich at the cost of quality and variety of the theatrical performance. The actors, deprived of the chance of being tested in various roles by frequent change in performance, had little chance of learning and improving; they ended by each acquiring a "cachet", a limited type of acting of their own, which had a sure effect in a certain sort of part which they always had to play. Indeed, the writers often arranged the characters and the action in view of certain actors who would be able to present them the greatest popular success; a thing which has always occurred since the drama began but as a rule with great actors, who had to act and interpret first class roles. But now this system extended to all the numbers of the cast. The play was now deprived of the popular sap and vigour it had in the past.

Thus when the middle-class began to move towards the drama in mass, it became a middle-class business and its

development was stopped. It became an economic tool in their hands; it dropped into an unseemly depth to which it had never been before, not even in the worst times. What was good in the old repertories and conventions now gave place to mediocrity -- the petty social conventions and mediocre tastes of the then ruling class were imposed on the drama.

Such became the condition of drama, and at this point a rebellious group arose from among the middle-class itself. This rebellious group of the younger sons of the middle-class¹ rebelled against the prevailing condition of drama as against every other thing, particularly the middle-class attitude towards morality. Their rebellion against every other thing can be noticed in their dramas through which they proclaimed, scandalizing the typical Victorians, independence from the bounds of conventions and shallow moralities and respectabilities. The middle-class always has its younger sons who examine them, rise against them and betray them making them ridiculous. Through the sciences, the liberal professions, literature and art, these younger sons always end by acquiring a social and political supremacy; they bring a different spirit into the public and private life by altering relations and proportions, and their predomination signifies the end of the purely middle-class period. Sooner or later the economic system always feels the influence of this new social equilibrium. Norwegian

1. English Drama - Camillo Pellizzi P 71 (Trans. by Rowan Williams). Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1935.

playwright Henric Ibsen was a younger son of the middle-class who was actually the first source of revolt in nineteenth century drama; it was he who gave the substance and the precise tone to the revolt of the younger sons of the middle-class at the close of the last century. In Italy, as Camillo Pellizzi observed, Ibsen's dramatic work was recognized only by the intellectual few while the general Italian public only knew his work from a bad performance of Ghosts by the actors of half a century ago. To understand Ibsen's significance he must be looked at against his historical background, that of the Protestant middle-class in the northern European countries at the end of the last century -- a world with regard to which the Italy of the same period and successive periods might belong to another time and clime, so different was the historical and spiritual condition there from other European countries. England also belonged to the main stream to which Norway belonged; but whereas Norway was the path-finder, England was the follower.

Ibsen pierced his searching eyes through the Nordic middle-class conscience of the late nineteenth century; their sexual, sentimental, civic, political, economic, intellectual and family conventions were taken up by him for critical reassessment; he saw vast problems concrete in particular cases, among characters not photographically

1. English Drama - Camillo Pellizzi P 71 (Trans. by Rowan Williams). Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1935.

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realistic but having an essential reality which is historical and superhistorical at the same time; the characters have, not factual, but artistic truth. The society which Ibsen called on to answer his grave questions could not take refuge in a purely argumentative reply, nor could it launch a counter-attack by bringing up the peculiarities and individual defects of characters, for, behind Ibsen's attack there was his art and universality; his characters belong to all times and to all places -- not merely to Norway of the nineteenth century. It was said that Nora and Hedda Gabbler were isolated cases, that the deceased father in Ghosts was a degenerate libertine and that no one had ever pretended that similar cases did not exist even in the best society. This is true; but it is also true that in Nora and Hedda Gabbler exist those elements which are found more or less latent in all women; the father in Ghosts whose influence is felt through the play though he does not appear in person, was not necessarily a bad man, but a man of violent and exuberant impulses, who left behind a long train of ruin owing to the errors and baseness of the social mentality in the midst of which he lived. Ibsen's questions cannot be ignored or escaped, because they touch the living spring of those fundamental characteristics from which humanity cannot free itself without denying its own nature.

The conscience of the Protestant middle-class could not escape from Ibsen's criticism; they were accused on the basis of their own dogmas and moral criteria, and they could not defend themselves except by shutting the doors of their

theatres on Ibsen's face and by calling him and his plays filthy names. In England the censor prohibited the performance of Ibsen's plays. But the younger middle-class rebelled against the old and they were happy to have found such a powerful writer as Ibsen at the head of their campaign against the middle-class mentality and attitude. All the characteristic middle-class writers of the period felt the influence of Ibsen -- influence, quickly discernible or not. But the first of the dramatists of England coming from among the younger sons of the middle-class in the nineteenth century lacked the indignation and the sense of social remorse which are the fundamental sources of Ibsen's inspiration.

Of the English dramatists, Robertson partly freed himself from the conventional, empty types of the old drama, but he, as a rule, put nothing in their place but individuals. His realism is more photographic than artistic. He also acceded to the popular demand for a happy ending ; the lost officer unexpectedly returns in the midst of general reconciliation. Nor did Robertson hesitate to appeal to the sentimentality of the gallery whenever the plot offered an opportunity. He succeeded in asserting himself before a public used to melodramatic emotions, simply by exciting analogous emotions by means of contemporary subjects. The action is lively, showing the writer to have had expert knowledge of the needs and resources of the stage; but the dialogue falls very often into the

conventional and ingenuous. It remains a fact, however, as F.S. Boas points out, that Robertson had kept before him the ideal of a more natural and lifelike form of comedy.¹

Robertson preached, if anything, sympathy and charity between people of different castes ; he wanted to teach the people that admirable characters existed in all classes, capable of loving one another. But he was profoundly convinced, as a general rule, that people should stay with people, the middle-class with the middle-class, the nobility with the nobility. The middle-class for whom Caste was intended, and who applauded it for a generation and more, agreed to this species of compromise between a general rule and a particular fact. Evidently, the spirit of middle-class realism had not yet come to maturity in society, or in the public mind, and the middle-classes felt themselves one class among others; they liked to contemplate their own virtues and others' defects, in order to reassert their rights and aspirations. It is certain that Robertson was not the leader of the younger sons of the middle-class in the struggle against the conventional outlook and respectability of their own class.

Arthur Wing Pinero and Sir Arthur Jones, who have been discussed at some length in the chapter on the "Exponents" of the twentieth century drama of ideas, gave the modern English middle-classes a realistic and thoughtful

1. From Richardson to Pinero - F.S.Boas. P 251 - 252.

drama, sometimes also gently satirical and controversial. But the fact that appears to any reader or onlooker who understands the middle-class is that the drama of Pinero and Jones always kept itself within the main tendencies and middle-class mentality and convention. It should be noted, however, that they prompted the middle-classes to come to the theatre to think; sometimes they also accustomed them to contemplate without the veil of middle-class moralities; but they were not Ibsenites in the true sense. It fell upon the Ibsenites of England and on Bernard Shaw in particular -- though Shaw is not another Ibsen --- to challenge the middle-classes and their moralities with an aggressive, hostile, and fierce criticism and almost forced them to acknowledge their moral defeat.

The ground was being prepared for this. All the conditions operating against the blossoming of drama during the Victorian age were slowly and gradually removed. As time passed new trends were introduced in drama and every effort was made by the dramatist to make drama life-like, realistic and appealing to the common man; they made the drama a vehicle of ideas and conflicts of ideas. The moral taboos imposed on drama by the priggish Victorians were also removed and dramatists were at ease in producing once again dramas of really high standard. The vogue for comedies was once again introduced in the wake of the social changes and democratic freedom that came with the new century. The new social problems rising in the new set up of values cried for solution, and drama seemed to be a fitting medium in which

justice could be done in suggesting solutions to the social and other problems of the time. The modern dramatist took his task seriously and gave a new outlook to drama, which it had not seen in the preceding period.

The emergence of the new drama cannot be ascribed to any single cause; but we can discern a dozen or more contributing factors all of which seem significant. There had been a gradual but sure disappearance of the prejudice against theatre-going which was definitely due to the increasing spread of education. This spread of education gave the people a gift of broader outlook. A welcome relaxation of the censorship, a steady rise in the standards of judgement, which also may be to some extent ascribed to the spread of education, an increasing margin of leisure in the life of the ordinary men and women, a deepening conviction that a certain amount of recreation is the natural right of every human being, and the remarkable competence in the theatre are also among the factors that helped the drama emerge as a powerful genre of art. We have to recognize the influence of the new producer with his theories of drama as a composite art --- a synthesis of all arts. The arrival of the new scenic artist and the stage electrician revolutionized production. But the greatest factor of all was, undoubtedly, the change in the dramatist himself who was no longer content with the conventions and moralities of the Victorian age. The new dramatist belonged to the middle-class by birth, but was antagonistic towards this class in his mental make up.

The nineties of the nineteenth century was a period in which we witness a revolt against the Victorian ideas of morality and standards of conduct. This short period in English literature was not a merely irrelevant episode in literary history; it, too, had its importance. The importance of the "nineties" is that this decade seems to represent the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. So many things in Victorian life either declined or came to an end during this period; many things, most of which we associate with our times, began their career. The "nineties" should, of course, better be looked at as a state of mind --- a state in which everything orthodox and conventional is doubted and put to serious questions. This period saw the recession of the Gladstonian, Liberal peace, and the rise of the new commercial imperialism with all its sordid consequences; the end of the Aesthetic Movement, and the rapid rise, from small beginning in the eighties, of the Fabian Movement of informed social criticism; the passing of Victorian insularity, and the rising influence of Continental ideas; the decline of orthodox religion and morality --- all these things concern the "nineties". New social, political, religious ideas were in the air and various thinkers looked at these ideas and problems from various angles. Thus the time was ripe for the New Drama, which was known as the Drama of Ideas, to emerge. With the treatment of actual life in which ideas of all sorts conflicted with each other, drama became more and more a drama of ideas. These ideas for the most part were

revolutionary, and hence drama came to form an advanced battle-ground for the rising generation of young thinkers. Bernard Shaw, of course, was not satisfied merely by showing the "actual life" on the stage ; rather he went a step further and dramatised his version of the future. His dramas, indeed, are vehicles of various ideas and he explores every known problem --- social, political, moral and religious. But his ideas do not merely concern the "real life" as it generally understood ; they also concern man's aspiration for a higher and nobler life. His dramas are larger than life, also because they delve deep into the mystery of life.

To go back to the discussion of the background, the latter years of the nineteenth century saw the almost final breakdown, in the limited areas in which it still held its own, of a pre-industrial way of life and economy. The agricultural depression of those times (1870 - 1902) hit particularly hard the landed aristocracy and the agricultural labourer ; it was then that the change in the village denoted the end of rural England on any significant scale: even a countryman became a "town-bird" at heart. The decline of the rural way of life has been reflected in the barrenness of nature poetry in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries; it has also been reflected in the veering of interest towards urban themes. The implication of the loss of the rural way of life has been mourned by Thomas Hardy, Richard Jefferies and many others though this way of life also had its ugliness and vices. Still, the

idealization of rural values was accepted by many writers as something ennobling and they missed it. The pervasive feeling was that any material gain is always balanced against a perceptible spiritual loss and bankruptcy which received the attention of the litterateurs.

Increasing urbanisation had far-reaching impact. This impact was particularly noticeable in the altered social pattern. Of course, the change in the pattern was to be found over the greater part of England throughout the nineteenth century. Money attained a new importance unknown to the previous centuries. Money started playing increasingly large role in the new village economy and it struck at the root of human relationship. An ethics of competition, so long known in urban areas only, emerged with all its viciousness. "The effect of this had been to reduce man to the level of economic man, one whose community relationships were at the mercy of the cash-nexus, and whose psychological motivations were thought of mostly in the terms of self interest." In such circumstances the poor was regarded not as a term to describe a particular condition of society but to describe the character and psychology of a group of people. Private morality was mainly authoritarian and taboo-ridden and personal oddity was considered a sign of degeneracy. The outward show of family life and relationship was maintained in the name of respectability.

1. The Modern Age - Ed. B.Ford. The Social and Intellectual Background - G.H.Bantock. Penguin 1970. P 16.

From some points of view, in contrast especially with the eighteenth century, the victorian age might be regarded as an age of religion, an age in which Evangelicalism, the religion of the middle class, set the tone of manners, dress and taste which the lower orders in the English society adopted in their struggle towards respectability; it was an age in which public speakers including prime ministers, raised echoes of a submerged religious vocabulary in their speeches. Yet it might also be regarded as an age of religious decay and uncontrolled sectarianism. Partly because religious association was one of the few means of showing group solidarity, religion came more and more to reflect the interests of social classes. Many of the religious difficulties about which so much was heard in this period were not purely religious in character; they were often the expression of pain and disgust at social displacement as men outgrew some of the bleaker cults. They had found themselves no longer at home in the local tabernacles and chapels. Religious vagrancy became -- and has remained -- a permanent feature of English life. It was for such vagrants that various substitute religions of science such as Positivism and Spencerian Evolutionism had their attractions. A good deal of dissenting seriousness and zeal found outlet in science which opened up new roads to respectability. In a nutshell, confusion prevailed everywhere; this confusion was caused by the flow of various currents and cross-currents of ideas. Conventional and unconventional ideas came to a loggerhead. The conflict

between the viewpoints -- two sets of ideas - paved the way for the growth of the drama of ideas.

When Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, Britain was, on the whole, a discontented, poverty-stricken country. By 1887, when she attained the fiftieth year of her accession to the throne, poverty and distress still largely existed. But men could point out the immense strides which had been made to relieve them of such distress. The noticeable decrease in the number of criminals is explained partly by a decrease in lawlessness but mainly by the increasing humaneness of the penal code. But other sources of pride were there, the first and the most striking being increase in population -- then regarded as a source of pride in itself. But still more wonderful was the increase in trade. In 1887, for instance, British foreign trade considerably exceeded that of the next two European countries, France and Germany, put together. Even the United States of America was lagging far behind. Britain still kept the lead which the great inventions of the eighteenth century had given her. Her output of coal was still far ahead of that of all her competitors. She was still first in railway and ship building industries. British Capital and British iron and coal were used in factories all over the world. Numerous scientific inventions brightened the lives of the Victorians.

1. In 1836 there were 52,000 British convicts at home or in colonies. But in 1885 the number came down to 9,000. (A History of Britain. E.H.Carter and R.A.F. Mears - Second Edition. Oxford. 1948. P 893).

But, simultaneously, there is another and different story to tell. While iron and steel and coal trades were booming, and while science was adding remarkably to the material comforts, the oldest and most important of industries -- agriculture, which had been the mainstay of the life in Britain -- suffered a definite set-back. The farmers prospered till the seventies of the nineteenth century, but then the blows began to fall bringing this industry to almost a ruin by 1895. The main reason for this calamity was the import of cheap American corn in large quantities. Again frozen meat began to be imported to Britain from Australia, Newzealand, and Argentina. Cheap food benefited the consumer, but the British farmer suffered. Unlike other countries in Europe, Britain did not put up tariffs to protect the farmers. It was assumed that since industry was booming under Free Trade, agriculture could also take care of itself. The results were disastrous; the decline of British agriculture intensified in the nineties of the nineteenth century affecting the farming community very adversely. It struck a blow not only on the farmers but on the whole national life.

An important change came over the structure of British business during this period. Instead of the old family-owned concerns, industry passed more and more under the control of Limited Liability Companies. This system, unknown on a large scale to the previous decades, became typical of British business. The middle-class started increasingly to invest in industry as share holders in the Limited Companies. It became possible for a section of the

community to live on income derived from the profits. This class was not very interested in bettering the conditions under which industry was carried on so long as dividends were regularly paid.

The conflict between the employer and the employees continued. Trade union carried on the battle for better conditions of labour, higher wages and shorter hours of work; their demands were always resisted though sometimes compromises were effected. But in this conflict the State did not interfere, particularly in the ceaseless dispute over wages between the employers and the employess. But, it must be noticed that the State regarded the trade unions with less disfavour. Moreover, in such matters as Housing and Public Health some important laws were passed. Yet what was done by the State was considered too little and naturally there was demand for more state-control, in the industrial sphere in particular.

It was, in short, a time of confusion - confusion in all the departments of human activity, physical and moral. It was thus a ripe time for the emergence of what is known as the drama of ideas. In this drama the stage is employed by the dramatist to give expressions to certain ideas through the discussions between and among the characters. This drama, dealing particularly with the problems of life, has become far more intellectual than ever before.

Henrich Ibsen, the great Norwegian playwright, may be justifiably regarded as the greatest exponent of the drama of ideas and certainly his influence on the dramatic writings of

Bernard Shaw is not negligible. But the drama of ideas as a form of art is not just imported to England from Norway. The dramatists of England themselves did some work in the line which ensured the emergence of the drama of ideas there. These works done by Pinero and Jones and, before them, Robertson have been discussed in one chapter of this work. But it is seldom remembered and appreciated that the great novelist of the Victorian era, Charles Dickens, also paved the way for emergence of this type of play. It has been maintained elsewhere in the present work that Shaw's dramas are the nearest approach to novels. But any attempt to speak about the relation between the English drama and the English novel will remain incomplete without a reference to works of Dickens who is correctly looked upon as the most "dramatic" of the English novelists.¹

The literature of ideas of the twentieth century is mainly Dickensian. There is a tradition of comedy in English fiction which originally sprang from the drama. This tradition reached its zenith in Dickens and, in the twentieth century, is principally noticeable in the novel of ideas of Wells and Orwell and in the drama of ideas of Bernard Shaw.

It will not be out of place to say a few words about the world of Dickens's novels. Among the most important elements in the novels of Dickens are the general nature of the world in which the protagonist lives and his general

1. Charles Dickens (in From Dickens to Hardy. Ed. by Boris Ford.) - R.C.Churchill. Penguin. 1964. P 123.

situation at the beginning of the story. The protagonist finds himself in a world in which his inner life, the life of the other people, and the time have certain modes of existence. The protagonist begins in isolation, but then moves through successive adventures; he tries to understand the world and to find his real self. "In this interchange between mind and world there is in Dickens's characters a constant attempt to reach something transcendent, something more real than one's own consciousness or than the too solid every day material world."¹

Oliver Twist is the first of the heroes of Dickens to dramatise the plight of the orphan who is almost lost in an alien, and even hostile, world. The happy ending with which the novel ends is the standard for a large number of Victorian novels. The authenticity is nevertheless given to the plot by the intensity and depth of Dickens's imagination. Oliver, we find, does not take matters into his own hands and accepts a definition of his self which comes from the plot and not from within. In the novels that follow Oliver Twist we find that the central characters are isolated like Oliver; but in all of them, notably in The Old Curiosity Shop, there is an increasing awareness that the only escape from the dark, alien world is death. It seems that it is only evasion of facts and problems, not their solution. In Martin Chuzzlewit, however, Dickens faces the problem more squarely.

1. Charles Dickens (The World of his novels) -
J.Hillis Miller.
Harvard University Press. 1958. P 329.

Here he brings his hero into the open arena of the society, much as Bernard Shaw at a later date was to do, by minimising the help he can get from his relatives and ancestors. The theme of Dickens in this novel is the futility of dependence on a society which is full of impostures. In Dombey and Son and David Copperfield we notice the most important transformation of Dickens's imaginative vision. The solution to the problem of how to escape from the isolation is sought in romantic love. Florence Dombey achieves happiness through her love for Walter and his love for her; the centre in David Copperfield is the relation between David and Angus. In Bleak House the protagonist is the entire society. The people living in the society are imprisoned by the forces coming from the past. Instead of submitting to the forces of the past and waiting for a comfortable place in the existing society, one must change the world around through independent action. It may be mentioned that both Ibsen and Shaw dramatized this idea. This, of course, is not the last and final stage of Dickens's ideas. It is in the last novels of Dickens that we discover one more change which is a belief that human conditions cannot be completely changed, so long as life lasts. Dickens's heroes in the last novels come back to life, but they come back with the knowledge that value radiates not from any outside power, but from the human spirit; the past actually stands rejected.

Thus we find that the prevailing idea in the mature works of Charles Dickens is one of rejecting the past, much in the manner of the revolting sons of the middle class

like Ibsen and Shaw. When the playwrights of the drama of ideas started writing, their attention was focussed pointedly on Dickens. I have maintained that it was the revolting sons of the middle class who wrote the drama of ideas shattering the conventional outlook; the rejection of the past, in their case the rejection of Victorian attitudes, became their starting point. The idea of rejection of the past might well bring for Dickens the epithet of being "immoral" as Shaw and Ibsen were branded. It may be mentioned that it was not this idea of the rejection of the past only, but the manner of Dickens also largely influenced the drama of ideas as handled by Shaw. This aspect has been discussed in the chapter on Shaw's technique and treatment of theme. A reorientation toward the future and toward the free human spirit noticed in the last novels of Dickens also largely influenced Shaw.

The characteristics noted in the novels of Dickens are more or less the characteristics of the literature of ideas of the modern age, not excluding dramatic literature. Thus we may claim that in England it is Dickens from whom the drama of ideas particularly stems - even after we acknowledge the indebtedness to Ibsen. The highly unpopular, but widely publicized plays of Ibsen were not the sole factor in the English theatre which could be drawn upon in the interests of a drama critical of the conventional society.

In this connection a few words should be said of a latent strain of edification and didacticism in English drama even before the impact of Ibsen made itself evident. Shaw

maintained that the spectator would never support a merely voluptuous drama. "From the play of ideas - and the drama can never be anything more - he demands edification,¹ and will not pay for anything else in that arena". The mistake with the comedy and melodrama of the nineteenth century was that, however edifying the homily, its acceptability was guaranteed by the conventionality of the morality. Shaw, again, occasionally proclaimed that an audience might come to the theatre to be edified, but the more a play is unreasonable and morally fraudulent, the more they will like it. This often produces the result that the dramatic authors are induced to produce plays of great interest in order to force audiences to swallow the pill of unconventionality, which is, more often than not, bitter. In his own practice Shaw combines edification with a comedy in which the cherished conventions are the butt of the joke.

It is not without thought and calculation that Shaw accepted comedy as the medium of his dramatic expression. Shaw was essentially a man of ideas and the target of his criticism is society. He addresses the society and not the isolated individual. A drama is meant to catch an entire audience of diverse natures and likes and dislikes. In a drama of ideas there shall be debates and discussions; these debates and discussions "offend the intellectual nature of comedy less than the emotional nature of tragedy or

1. Preface to Three Plays for Puritans in The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn. London. 1965. P 737.

'serious' drama", as Ronald Peacock says. It is needless to mention that the drama of ideas appeals to the intellectual nature of man. Thus we find that Shaw's acceptance of comedy as the medium of expression reveals his penchant for cool judgement.

In search of the sources of the drama of ideas it is possible for us to go back to Shakespeare, or even to Euripedes. In the chapter on the dramatic technique of Shaw I have discussed his indebtedness to both these two dramatists. The native sources of the drama of ideas of England which flourished in the late nineteenth and in our century are primarily Dickens, Robertson, Pinero and Jones; the secondary sources may be found in the plays, particularly the last plays, of Shakespeare. The drama of ideas is a "problem play" and in that sense Hamlet is also a drama of ideas; and there is no dearth of ideas in Hamlet. This type of drama, however, found its full play in the last plays of Shakespeare in which the Christian doctrines of reconciliation and forgiveness make the main interest. The difference between the Shakespearean play of ideas and the modern play of ideas is, of course, great; the difference is noticeable mainly in the fact that there is no discussion and debate in the former whereas in the latter "action" is in the discussion.

A secondary foreign source of the drama of ideas of our times may be discovered in Euripedes. This younger

1. Shaw - Ronald Peacock in G.B. Shaw - a Critical Survey - ed. L. Kronenberger. The World Publishing Company. 1953. P 179.

contemporary of Aeschylus and Sophocles seems to belong to a different generation and to have lived in a different world of ideas - a world in which every principle, religious and moral, had to stand the test of public examination. It was Euripides who first examined the ideas of the society, attacked the attitudes and gave birth to a drama which was unknown before him. Discussion and debate are frequent in Greek drama, but neither of the other two dramatists ever made the stage so much like a philosophical debating-room or put into the mouths of characters arguments directed against the moral standards and religious beliefs of his countrymen and contemporaries. Many of the sophist thinkers of the day were attacking the conventional standards and advancing ideas subversive of the existing society. But they did not use the theatre for the purpose; neither did they put wicked and immoral words into the mouths of old legendary heroes. So while the sophists were allowed to argue and preach as they pleased, Euripides incurred a lot of displeasure of an influential section of the Athenian society. There is, however, much exaggeration in the reports of his unpopularity. The majority of citizens must have found the plays of Euripides novel and interesting even while they disapproved of the points of view expressed in them. "Euripides was a great teacher of rationalism and a daring critic of all established institutions and beliefs".¹

1. History of Greece (499 - 404 B.C.) - K.C. Chaudhuri. New Central Book Agency. Calcutta 1969. P 329-30.

Having dramatized the position of women in the Athenian Society of his day in Alcestis, Euripedes looked further afield in legend to find themes which should illustrate the fact that women too had feelings and intelligence. The Athenian women also, not to speak of men, had no other thought than their duty towards the male members of the family. Euripedes looked at this attitude to be wrong and psychologically inadequate. In Medea he shows that women are not inferior to men and they also have feelings and intelligence. The conflict in Medea is one between human desires or wills. In Hyppolytus, which follows Medea, the conflict is one between two ideals. In Hecuba Euripedes studies feminine psychology. In the character of Hecuba the love for children is turned into lust for vengeance. In Ion the dramatist attacks the morality of the gods. But it is not precisely with that purpose that the play is written. It is written above all to depict human life, human situation. It is life as Euripedes sees it though it is coloured strongly by his views. It required a lot of guts in those days to present Apollo as almost a villain in the piece as Euripedes did. A lot of emotion is surely mixed up here, but the particular appeal of Ion, as of almost all the plays of Euripedes, is to intellect. After he had left Athens his new surroundings gave new impulses to the intellect of the dramatist. The Bacchae is one of the most widely discussed plays of Euripedes. It is a baffling play, not to be summed up in one phrase at all. One thing that is clear is that this play is not directed towards suppression of wine. Dionysus

stands not for wine-drinking only and it is not possible to neglect the joys of life, excitement and emotion; man cannot live by reason and intellect alone. To have too much faith in wisdom is not only foolish but criminal. But from this play it is hard to see what particular view Euripedes took on moral questions. Being a dramatist of the first order, he sees both the sides of the problem and dramatizes the case with a fairness which is the mark of all great artists. It may be taken note of that when the two sides put forward their points of view with arguments, the stage resembles a debating-room. No particular view is taken for granted and all the views are expressed and tested. This attitude of testing before accepting makes Euripedes modern and we understand how his writings influenced the play of ideas of the modern times. It should be noted that discussion becomes inevitable in such plays where different characters put forward different views and "action" in such plays lies in the discussion. Naturally, Euripedes's practice of dramatizing both the sides of a question does prevent his plays from being "dramas". His plays may be regarded as the plays of ideas because he dramatizes ideas through discussions.

The modern drama of ideas is indebted to Aristophanes too who attacked the social absurdities in his comedies, particularly in those of the final period of his literary career. There is a subtle satire in the comedies of Aristophanes when he examines the methods of the sophists or

when he deals with the fondness of the Athenians for law courts. Attack against the individual, of course, is also there, say in Frogs in which Euripedes is taken to task. This comedy reminds us of Bernard Shaws' Fanny's First Play as it contains interesting contemporary literary and dramatic criticism. It may be mentioned, however, that satire and criticism by themselves do not make the drama of ideas.

It is primarily in the comedies of the final period that we find how Aristophanes attacks the generalites. Ecclesiazusae and Plutus could give little offence to the existing government or to any individual in it. The end of the comedies of Aristophanes is not to create laughter for its own sake, but to create a serious mood, and this shows their resemblance with the plays of Shaw. Aristophanes creates laughter by the exposure of the incongruities in life and this is what Shaw considers to be the real stuff of comedy.

The theme of Ecclesiazusae is developed in an unexpected way. The women in the city having stolen their husbands' clothes and usurped their place in the Assembly proceed to make revolutionary proposals -- the abolition of all distinction between rich and poor, common ownership of land and other forms of wealth, tickets for meals provided by the state, abolition of home-life and marriage etc. All this is parody not of any existing state but of Communism like that of the rulers in Plato's Republic.

The relation of Aristophanes' satire of communism to Plato's serious study in the Republic, of course, has

long been a problem. Since this work of Plato appeared, presumably, a few years after the play of Aristophanes, it is now usually assumed that speculation on socialism, Communism and other political and social theories was rife during the days of Aristophanes. Indeed, social and economic problems were very acute in the fourth century B.C. and Aristophanes took up for his themes what everyone was thinking and talking about. The mock communism in the Women in the Assembly and the redistribution of wealth in Plutus may be enjoyed by the audience because neither offends the individual. These are the distant kins of the plays of ideas of our times because in them we find political and social ideas running riot and there are conflicts between the established ideas and the new.

One of the strongest and the most significant features of Aristophanic comedy is its intermingling of serious political appeal and uproarious low-comedy which automatically reminds us of Bernard Shaw. Aristophanes' loathing of his age went deeper than mere external political events, for he hated the intellectual demagogues as bitterly as he hated the political ones. The purpose of an Aristophanic comedy is almost invariably serious, but the dramatist introduces anything that may produce a laugh. Hence it becomes difficult to determine whether he is playful or serious. His art is a brilliant gem with numerous facets apt to deceive the unwary.

No study of Aristophanes could be complete without any reference to the more social dramas, Nephelai and Sphekes. Aristophanes regarded Nephelai as his best work though, as

reports go, it could not, in contemporary popularity, compete successfully with a play of Kratinos.¹ In this play the playwright made pointed attacks against the system of education of the Sophists; attack is also directed against the protagonist of the play, Socrates. In Sphekes Aristophanes ridiculed the love of the Athenians for lawsuits. In all these plays as also in the so-called political plays of Aristophanes the interest lies in the treatment of themes as in their intellectuality.

Plato deserves special mention in the growth and development of the play of ideas. I would like to discuss at some length only two of Plato's dialogues, Symposium and Protagoras to show that his contribution to the genre is of great importance.

Plato showed remarkable talent as a poet, dramatist and sculptor. And although he later on turned away from professional work in the arts, he never ceased to be a poet and a dramatist. It is interesting to note that Plato completely altered the manner in which philosophical thought was presented. Before him (or even before Socrates) ancient Greek Philosophers would express their views in enigmatic aphoristic homily in prose or verse. Plato put dialogues in the mouths of a number of characters, and the conversations, in which different ideas are expressed, brings out one total idea. In itself dialogue is dramatic, but the elements of drama can differ. For example, there may be the drama of the

1. Prachain Viswa Sahitya (Bengali) - Dr. Narendranath Bhattacharjee. Sahitya Sansad. 1976. P 242.

plot, the drama of the situation, or the inner drama of conflicting ideas and opposing convictions passionately defended by the disputants.

In Plato's works we find all the nuances of outward and inner dramatic action. His Apology is a monologue in which the speaker, Socrates, fights a lie which seems to be groundless before the Athens court. Here the drama of situation is intense ; Socrates reflects aloud on the times in his life when he was faced with the choice whether to submit to the will of others or to go his own way, preserving his integrity and fighting for justice. But in Phaedo we listen to a slow-moving conversation about the immortal soul. Disciples of Socrates and his Pythagorean friends who share his views listen to their teacher's words.

Plato's Symposium is a genuine drama. Socrates is shown here as surrounded by his friends and disciples, and there is an unusual atmosphere of harmony. But this friendliness only serves to emphasize the special spirit of the discussion and the competition among those present. In Symposium only one theme is discussed - man's ascent to the highest Good, which is nothing but the embodiment of the highest love. Each of the participants in the discussion preserves the main melody but enriches it with his own variation. As the theme expands, the voices become stronger and more confident. Then Socrates begins to speak and the others listen in silence and reverence. But it turns out that Socrates only repeats the words of the wise priestess Diotima. His voice echoes hers

and later this theme is developed by Alcibiades, who portrays Socrates as the living embodiment of spiritual beauty.

In Symposium the participants in the discussion are Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades. But while the seven voices exhibit outer harmony there is inner turmoil, for frequently one voice contradicts another, only later to merge in the single choir. The contest between the participants in the discussion may be called an "agon" which in Greek means "a struggle". In a classical comedy "agon" is the struggle of ideas passionately defended by the rival sides. Plato's dialogues are often composed on the principle of stage "agon", but it differs in intensity depending on the nature of the rivalry between the characters in the dialogue. Sometimes the rivalry is friendly, at other times it is hostile. In Symposium the rivalry is of the former kind.

In Symposium we witness a dignified competition, an "agon" of like-minded individuals trying jointly to define the highest Good. The personages in Symposium, all quite real, were selected by Plato on the basis of their different characters. Thus, Phaedrus, who is eloquent and knowledgeable, is impractical, living in a world of poetic fancy ; Eryximachus is a true empiricist and materialist ; Aristophanes is amusing and Agathon somewhat nervous. The reflections of Socrates are a fitting end to the friendly competition at Agathon's home, and the image of the philosopher acquires additional symbolic traits. At the end, all but the host Agathon, Aristophanes and Socrates depart. But

Agathon and Aristophanes are overcome by sleep, while Socrates alone does not know fatigue ; he represents the ceaseless quest for newer and newer ideas.

In the dialogues in which the disputants are true antagonists or opponents, Plato uses the method of philosophical polemics. In these dialogues there is a feeling of inner conflict and mutual dislike ; here the "agon" between the rivals is real, for example, in Protagoras. In this dialogue, in which the question of virtue is discussed, Protagoras and Socrates are worthy opponents. Here is a wonderful example of a Platonic dialogue in which the dramatization of thought leads to a totally unexpected result due to the complex and contradictory development. Plato shows that he is extraordinarily inventive in dramatizing disputes; shows his ingenuity in the endless variety of conflicts he devises between the disputants. He masterfully brings out the resourcefulness of the disputants, Socrates and Protagoras, and the intricate twists of their thinking. In the end it would appear that Socrates and Protagoras have come to positions opposing their initial premises. Socrates denied that virtue could be learned and now he acknowledges that it can be; Protagoras initially proclaimed that virtue could be taught and now, having come to the conclusion that virtue itself is knowledge, he refutes this possibility.

But the opponents have not really exchanged positions. If we look more closely we see that both Socrates and Protagoras retain their initial opinions. Socrates always professed that virtue was something ideal and considered the

purely technical methods the Sophists used in their efforts to teach virtue to be unworthy. If at the end of the dispute he comes to the conclusion that virtue is the highest knowledge, then, naturally, he considers it possible to teach people this knowledge. He himself does nothing but teach others. Protagoras has also not betrayed his belief; he has simply refused to teach virtue as the highest form of knowledge; he does not know how it should be done.

After this discussion on the conditions in England in the late nineteenth century which favoured the growth of the drama of ideas, its sources, and the influences that worked on it, we may now attempt at a definition of the "drama of ideas". It may well be argued that there is no real distinction between the drama of ideas and the problem play or propaganda play. But every problem play may not necessarily become a drama of ideas. Actually there is a separate type of drama in which the pleasure and interest are almost entirely intellectual and in which our emotions are not as much affected as they are both by tragedy and comedy. The excitement of such a play lies in the play of currents and cross-currents of ideas and the interest of speculation. A drama of ideas sets people talking and puts, through talks, various points of view, some of which may be unusual. Problems raised in a drama of ideas need not be solved, but these issues excite the intellectual nature of man. Shaw's Back to Methuselah, Man and Superman, The Simpleton of Unexpected Isles do not give any solution, but these are dramas of ideas because there are discussions among

the characters who explain various points of view, conventional and unconventional, and the "idea" is not used for the sake of characterisation or story-telling. Mrs. Warren's Profession and Widowers' Houses are called ¹problem plays, but they are essentially plays of ideas because what is dramatized in them is not simply a problem, but currents and cross-currents of ideas with different characters upholding different views. A drama of ideas may have a problem of day-to-day life or a philosophical problem for its theme. The essential thing to be noticed is whether there is discussion between and among the characters in which contrary and contradictory view points are expressed and argued away or whether there is conflict of ideas. Somerset Maugham's Sheppys, in which a man suddenly becomes rich and interprets Christianity in a more literary way than usual, is really a drama of ideas, for it satisfies the aforementioned characteristics of this particular genre. Early examples in English are difficult to find though it may be said that considerable elements of the drama of ideas are present in Shakespeare's Coriolanus and Troilus and Cressida and in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus; there is a plethora of ideas in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in Hamlet. One may include the last plays of Shakespeare, in which one finds so much of philosophical speculations, among the plays of ideas. But in that case we will have to broaden the definition of the "play

1. "... Widowers' Houses and Mrs. Warren's Profession are true problems plays". The Anatomy of Drama - Marjorie Boulton. Kalyani Publishers. New Delhi. 1985. P 154.

of ideas" considerably because Shakespeare seldom used an "idea" for the sake of idea only and in his plays the clash between the individuals is of much more importance than the clash between ideas or ideals. Take the case of Coriolanus. In this play we find arguments for and against aristocracy and democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many, on liberty, slavery, power, on peace and war. In this play the individual men and women are passionately concerned with their rights as citizens in a community. Yet the overall impression is not that of a conflict between principles held dear by their qualified representatives. Shakespeare's imagination is concentrated more upon the individual men and women who play their parts in a public contention. In the best plays, too, inspite of the fact that there are philosophical speculations, Shakespeare's emphasis is on the individual men and women. There is no denying the fact, however, that the first stirrings of the play of ideas in England are to be felt in Shakespeare.

When we use the term "Play of Ideas" we think of those plays which do not consciously attempt at dramatization of situations and conflicts between personalities, but which consciously attempt at dramatization of ideas through discussions covering a wide field of human thought. Whatever situation there may be in a "play of ideas", it is unimportant, for it gives the feeling that the situation is used for the sake of explaining ideas. We see the characters in an unusual situation, and they go on talking, sometimes endlessly, about problems,

sometimes solving them, sometimes failing and sometimes not even trying to solve. In such plays the interest lies in the idea which is used for its own sake, not for the sake of exposition of the plot, or for portraying the characters. In this plays, naturally, action and characterisation are often sacrificed at the altar of the idea which is expounded, countered and explained. In the last plays of Shakespeare and in the plays of Aristophanes we find stories absorbingly told. The position of Euripedes, however, is somewhat different; not only does he dramatize ideas, but he turns the stage into a debating room. This observation remains valid even after granting that plays of Euripedes give us well-told stories. In the dialogues of Plato there are no stories; only discussions which continue for hours, each character explaining his view point, and, as in Sympposium, driving at one harmonious idea. We are in a different situation with the plays of Bernard Shaw. In his play we do not find any story worth the telling; his characters only talk ; his characterisation sometimes suffers because the characters seem to be the harbingers of one idea or the other. The reader of the "play of ideas" do not, of course, expect any plot or well-rounded character; rather he expects currents and cross-currents of ideas which are discussed by the "dramatis personae" between and among themselves; and whatever "action" is there in such plays, it lies in the conflict between one idea and another.

CHAPTER - II

Exponents

It has already been seen that the Drama of Ideas as genre has had a number of exponents. But it is Ibsen who remains the greatest exponent of this genre in the continent during the latter part of the nineteenth century while in England, before Bernard Shaw, Arthur Wing Pinero and Sir Arthur Jones did some work in this line. As noted in the Introductory chapter, this form of drama did not fall from the sky. But the full flowering of this form was achieved in the hands of Henrich Ibsen.

In England the Drama of Ideas stemmed particularly from the native source of Pinero and Jones and was enriched by an awareness of the works of Ibsen and his followers. It has been observed that the Drama of Ideas would have come into being if even Ibsen, its greatest exponent, had not been born to write. And yet Ibsen remains the first real exponent of this particular class of drama. Only in the modern times in England do we find a real effort not merely to adopt foreign materials, but also to explore foreign dramatic attitudes.¹ It is true that the Elizabethan dramatists knew a few of the foreign playwrights and often they dealt with foreign materials in their dramatic works.

It is true that the Restoration dramatists knew Moliere and

1. British Drama - Allardyce Nicoll. George G. Harrap & Co.

Ltd. London, 1952. P 249

Racine rather well. But the dramatist of the twentieth century is not content with the knowledge of the dramatic activities of one country only, and hence he goes to Norway, to Denmark, to Russia and associates himself not only with the materials but also with the dramatic attitudes of the writers of these countries. The modern Drama of Ideas is a phenomenon not peculiar to England; it is a phenomenon covering the whole of Europe. Gradually the genre came to cover the whole world and today the drama of the world is the Drama of Ideas. It is Ibsen who really started the battle of establishing the Drama of Ideas as the drama of the modern times.

Though the English drama of the century was to become the Drama of Ideas, it was not an easy matter for Ibsen to become accepted by the English theatre and, still more important, the English mind. Englishman is, almost as a rule, conservative; the English mind is very slow to accept anything that appears to it to be new; it is more slow to accept anything unconventional. Moreover, it was the Victorian age - an age when the people loved and expressed only the flattering truth and fought shy of the unpleasant, naked, and entire truth. They loved the idealistic world of romance and they were "moral". No wonder, then, that the unconventional Ibsen appeared to them utterly immoral and they earnestly wanted to keep him, to keep the Englishman uncontaminated, at an arm's length. According to William Archer, in 1880 there were probably not more than half-a-

dozen people in England to whom the name of Ibsen conveyed
any meaning.¹ Some people certainly knew Ibsen's name, but
did not care much for him. The "Well-made" play, the cheap
melodramas and adaptations from Scribe and Sardou suited the
moral world of the Victorian people.

But things could not continue in this way because
the younger sons of the middle class would not have them so
continued. As Camillo Pellizzi has nicely discussed, the
middle classes always have their younger sons who revolt
against the established conventions and moralities.²
Norwegian Ibsen was a rebel who started to break the moral
edifice of his time by thinking "immoral" things and putting
"immoral" things in the mouth of his characters. This
scandalised the convention-ridden middle class most.
Whatever the middle class considered moral has been rejected
by Ibsen. But steadily though slowly he attracted the
attention of the "middle-class anti-middle-class", as
Pellizzi calls them.³ Appreciation and acceptance of Ibsen
in England has been already noted. But despite the struggle
of William Archer, Bernard Shaw, Edmund Gosse, and Philip
Wicksteed to popularise Ibsen in England, few other

1. George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century. Vol I -
Archibald Henderson, Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956.
P 403.

2. English Drama - Camillo Pellizzi. Macmillan, London, 1935.
P 71

3. Ibid. P 79

champions appeared. However, the ceaseless struggle of Shaw and Archer - though they looked at the Norwegian dramatist from different, almost opposite angles - bore fruit. Ibsen was established in England as the pioneer of the modern Drama of Ideas. Now onwards he became the most powerful force in the English drama.

There were, we may say, four main phases in Ibsen's dramatic output, and it is by no means certain that the phase on which the English concentrated most was the most important. In the first phase Ibsen was a poet of high distinction and also a great poetic dramatist - as in Brand and Peer Gynt. Secondly, in his plays on legendary and historical themes, including The Pretenders, Lady Inger, Emperor and Galilean and The Vikings, he sometimes touches a majestic level. Thirdly, there are social dramas on which the tendency to regard Ibsen as the first exponent of the tendency to use the stage as the platform or the pulpit chiefly rests. Fourthly, there is Ibsen the symbolist, who may conceivably be the profoundest Ibsen of all, though his last plays hardly suggest as much to the English mind.

It would be interesting and worthwhile to see how William Archer and Bernard Shaw, both champions of Ibsen, looked at the great Norwegian from different angles. In 1890 Shaw read a paper on Ibsen in a meeting of the Fabian Society; this paper formed the basis of the famous work The Quintessence of Ibsenism. Shaw does not claim that his paper

on Ibsen "is an original work in the sense of being the result of a spontaneous internal impulse on my part"¹. However, Shaw's paper created a sensation. The question that was asked was - what did Ibsen have to do with Socialism? Shaw really proceeded to rank Ibsen among the socialists of the Shavian brand. The difference between Archer and Shaw as the popularisers of Ibsen is that Archer wanted to look at him as a purposive moralist, philosophic thinker and ethical teacher. Shaw, in his zeal, tried to portray Ibsen as a Shavian thinker and socialist which aggrieved the old Norwegian himself who wrote to his friend Hans Lieu Breackstad maintaining that he was never nor did he ever want to become a socialist². Shaw really went too far in that paper, but the final draft of The Quintessence of Ibsenism was far better even though it contained most of his original ideas about Ibsen.

Shaw and Archer carried on the campaign in favour of Ibsen with unabated vigour though they constantly got in each other's way. Archer mercilessly attacked those of Ibsen's admirers, meaning Shaw more than anyone else, who

1. Preface to the First Edition of The Quintessence of Ibsenism. The Complete Preface Of Bernard Shaw .Paul Hamlyn Ltd.London. 1965 P 829 . The meeting of the Fabian Society was held on the 18 th July 1890 under the Presidency of Mrs Annie Besant.

2. Ibsen - Michael Meyer.Pelican. 1974. P 666.(Letter from Ibsen to Brackstad.)

set him up as a prophet and often failed^{to} mention that the famous dramatist was a bit of a poet as well. People heard so much of the gospel according to Ibsen that most of them came to consider him as a mere hot-gospeller. Archer contended that Ibsen had no gospel at all to preach. For Shaw, Ibsen was a social polemist and an ethical philosopher. It has been pointed out, therefore, that The Quintessence of Ibsenism is more a quintessence of Shavianism. Actually Archer and Shaw are both right and wrong. There is no doubt that Ibsen primarily is a poet and a dramatist. And yet he remains an advocate of individual liberty - one who strives to awaken men to a real comprehension of themselves; he remains a moral reformer who shook the moral edifice of the nineteenth century dwelling with painful insistence on the seamy side of human character and social institutions. Again the interest and the method of his plays are almost entirely psychological. It is little wonder that Shaw found a lot of affinity between Ibsen and himself. But though a social reformer, Ibsen is not a socialist. Shaw in his zeal imposed socialism on the reformer. But the view that Ibsen is a social reformer should not be too much emphasized, for he was an artist in the first place.

Ibsen's contribution to the theatre was three-fold, and in each respect the drama owes more to him than to any other dramatist since Shakespeare. First, he broke down the social barrier which had previously bounded it. He was

the first man to show that high tragedy could be written about ordinary people and in ordinary everyday prose, and the importance of the seemingly simple achievement can hardly be exaggerated. Before Ibsen, tragedy had concerned itself with kings and queens, princes and princesses or, at the lowest, with Montagues and Capulets. Ibsen showed that high tragedy could and did take place at least as frequently in back parlours as in castles and palaces..

Ibsen's second great contribution was technical. He threw away the old artificialities of plot which are usually associated with the name of Scribe, but of which even Shakespeare and Schiller, one may assert, are also guilty ; mistaken identities, overheard conversations, intercepted letters, and the like. It was a slow and painful process to rid himself of these artificialities; something of the old machinery is still there as late as A Doll's House. But Ibsen's last plays are remarkably free from this. Equally important, he developed the art of prose dialogue to a degree of refinement which has never been surpassed ; not merely the different ways people talk, and the different languages they use under different circumstances, but that "double-density dialogue which is his peculiar legacy, the sub-text, the meaning behind the meaning". Through this he was able to create characters as complex as the most complex of Flaubert or Henry James without the aid of explanatory narrations or

1. Ibsen - Michael Meyer. Pelican. 1974. P 862.

monologues. And this demanded, and opened the way for, a new kind of acting, analytical, penetrating, self-effacing, and sensitive. There was no place in his plays for the old operatics.

What now-a-days seem technical limitations, such as the over exposition in the opening scenes, the excessive and sometimes repetitive planting of information needful to the audience, was dictated by the limitations of the audience. When Ibsen tried in Hedda Gabler to reduce his exposition to a modern minimum, the reaction of the audience was one of almost total bewilderment. It is no coincidence that this, the least popular of his mature plays in his own time, is the one most frequently performed today and for which fewest allowances have to be made.

But none of the technical contributions explains the continued life of Ibsen's plays on the stage today; and one regrets the tendency of the compilers of programme notes to stress his importance as an innovator. Ibsen's enduring greatness as a dramatist is due not so much to his technical innovations as to the depth and subtlety of his understanding of human character, espically feminine character and of human relationships.

None of the great novelists, not excluding Flaubert who created the immortal character of Madame Bovary, created more memorably observed women than Agnes, Nora, Mrs. Alving, Ellida Wangel, Rebecca West, Rita Allmers or Ella Renheim. And, at the same time, Ibsen created a succession of male characters of a size and strength that present a challenge to

any actor equal to that of Oedipus, Hamlet or Lear - Brand, Peer Gynt, Osvald Alving, Dr. Stockmann, Halvard Solness, John Gabriel Borkman, Arnold Rubek. These characters defy shallow or "clever" acting; but these are the characters which, when worthily represented, offer as rewarding experiences as it is possible to receive in a theatre. And yet so delicate was Ibsen's understanding of human character and relationships that a selfish actor can only partially succeed in these roles. Unless the relationships with the other characters are rightly interpreted the performance is bound to meet with failure.

Ibsen's uniqueness among the dramatists as a contributor to the drama of ideas and social debate has been noted, but one must underline an essential difference between him and his great contemporaries. Unlike Tolstoy or Zola, unlike, indeed, any other writer before him, he made his impact most powerfully on crowds gathered together not in a church or a market place, but in a theatre. And it is not the least of Ibsen's numerous contributions to the theatre that he turned the theatre from a place of mere entertainment into a place from which men emerged compelled to rethink basic principles which they had seldom seriously questioned. Euripedes had done this more than two thousand years ago, but no dramatist since on the same scale. There were no fewer social abuses in Shakespeare's England than in Ibsen's Norway, but Shakespeare never so obviously challenged any of them.

Moliere, whose contribution to the drama of the social debate is considerable, also believed in compromise. But whoever walked out of an Ibsen play, in his own time or since, felt compelled to reconsider their basic concepts of life and society. This is true of the plays of Bernard Shaw and even if Shaw has not borrowed this side of his workmanship from Ibsen, the close similarity in this respect between him and the great Norwegian can hardly be overlooked.

Ibsen, the key figure in the evolution of modern Scandinavian literature, is important in another respect - as an influence on the broader development of the European realistic and naturalistic movements. Though certainly he is not a model naturalist like Zola, as the term later came to be understood, his importance as a predecessor of later German, British, and American naturalists is great. In England and America, Ibsen's influence became noticeable in the period immediately before the First World War though he was introduced to the conscious students of literature in England during the eighties of the nineteenth century. In this era, thanks mainly to the zealous works of Shaw, William Archer, Edmund Gosse etc., Ibsen's drama excited a tremendous social, moral, and literary controversy. Today, of course, after so much of change in the society, many of Ibsen's dramas seem to have earned the seal of being "dated", and today he is viewed mainly as a master of dramatic psychology. Yet, granting that his social dramas

have become dated and that he is primarily an artist, it must be admitted that his attacks on Philistinism and hypocrisy are just as significant today.

In Brand we find the hero bringing misery to his family and himself through his fantastic quest for truth. It is true that Ibsen pleads for idealism and integrity. Here Ibsen implies that abstract truth is the natural enemy of illusory happiness and he speaks in favour of this kind of happiness. But the contradiction between idealistic search for truth and defence of illusory happiness is more apparent than real; it is only when idealism is carried to an excess that it becomes fanaticism and it is apt to destroy peace by destroying illusory happiness.

Ibsen's championship for individual's liberty to act according to one's conscience found its full expression in his championship of Feminism. Ibsen very strongly argues for the emancipation and liberation of women from the bondage of middle-class marriage although his position is by no means identical with that of the organised feminist movement of the modern times like the "Women's Lib". A Doll's House did more than any other single literary work to better the social position of woman wrecking the society and its morality to the roots. But though Ibsen battles to emancipate woman from the clutches of bourgeois morality, he fails to offer a convincing picture of a woman taking her desired place alongside man and achieving her proper intellectual and social fulfilment. So in Hedda Gabler

Ibsen shows the perils which await the emancipated woman in a society which is not ready to accept her. It is the "superior woman", the woman of intellect and imagination, for whom Ibsen battles, and none of his superior women like Nora Helmer and Hedda Gabler achieves perfect happiness through her revolt or attempted revolt. But the point to be borne in mind is that it is not the revolt itself which causes her miseries, but the then society which failed to accept this type of revolting woman. Bernard Shaw has created women characters who not only revolt but take their places alongside men.

Ibsen is the vowed antagonist to the middle-class morality, which in his plays often takes the form of malicious persecution of gifted individuals. Bourgeois society savagely attacks the individuals who by words and deeds seem to menace its own property. But the attack upon the individual is cleverly done under the pretence of defending the bourgeois ideals of justice, freedom and equality. The so-called pillars of the society are presented in Ibsen's plays as stuffed men whose wealth and power has been built upon the works of others; thus they subconsciously fear true creativity and idealism when they encounter it¹. He demonstrated, at the same time, that the ideas of the reformers are often as shallow and hypocritical

1. Continental European Literature - Donald Heiney and Lenthel H. Downs. Barron's Educational Series Inc. N.Y. 1974. P 39-40.

as those of the preservers of the established institutions. Criticism of the bourgeois society is present in almost all the dramatic works of Ibsen, particularly in A Doll's House, The Pillars of the Society, and An Enemy of the People. Though not a socialist of the Shavian or any other brand, the fact remains that Ibsen is in revolt against the middle-class to which he belongs by birth; he, not unlike Bernard Shaw, is a middle-class anti middle-class, as already noted.

Of all the works of Ibsen A Doll's House (1879) is undoubtedly a landmark. It has been said that when Nora walked out of her husband's house defying the canons of the bourgeois society, the new drama - the drama of ideas - was born and it was the beginning of the end of the "moral" dogmas of the nineteenth century. At the same time in this drama the woman understands that she has a soul of her own and she has the right to choose her own life and station. Upto that time, there had really been no play which startled so many people in so many widely separated places within so short a time. It is true that it took more than a decade for A Doll's House to reach English theatre-goers, though meanwhile it had shaken the Norwegian society to its very foundations. A thoughtful young person coming upon A Doll's House today would find it far from easy to understand why there was so much of fuss about it; what is there in the play that created so much of sensation. The discovery of Nora that a woman is not just a machine, rather she also has her own soul or personality or whatever we might call a

woman's awakened ego ; that a woman has or can have a personality of her own was an idea foreign to the moral world of the nineteenth century. It was not that only during the Tang and Sung dynasties of China women were accorded a very low position in the society; the picture of Europe of the nineteenth century was not less gloomy. Today after the victory of feminism every woman makes the discovery in her childhood; she even assumes it as a self evident fact and does not bother to discover it at all. Naturally this play does not seem to be startling to us; but in 1879 the discovery of the awakened ego, the personality, startled not the audience only, but also Nora herself. Ibsen had previously shocked all Norway with Love's Comedy , a play in rhymed verse expressing an anti-romantic view of the preliminaries of marriage. But it was many years before the great dramatist would come out of exile with any confidence that his countrymen would receive him. Introduction of any serious subjects, subjects that were considered immoral was completely at variance with the tastes of the people brought up under the tradition of the "Well-made play". Here we may well remember the flood of newspaper vituperation let loose when Ghosts was first produced in England in the eighteen nineties. Nonetheless, the tradition of the so called "Well-made" play disappeared and the new drama - the drama of ideas - came decidedly to take its place.

To come back to A Doll's House, when Nora told her husband to discuss what had passed between them like two rational human beings, a new thing entered the stage ; it is "discussion" which became the focus. When this new drama of idea, A Doll's House, appeared, it was judged simply as a contribution to the debate on the institution of marriage and middle-class morality, and not on its artistic merits. The play became the focus of heated arguments on social ethics in Northern Europe. But England, more "sophisticated" and "moral" as it was, remained unmoved though not for long, thanks to the pioneering works of Archer, Shaw and a few others.

The construction of A Doll's House is well-knit; a few machinery of the "well-made play" are employed. Where this play differs from the typical "well-made play" is the introduction of, as noted above, the machinery of "discussion". Again, in a "well-made play" Nora would have jumped into the bosom of her husband after sentimental confessions and love-talks from both . But in this play Nora bangs the door behind her and walks out to live her own life. The character of Nora Helmer is one of the most beautifully portrayed by Ibsen; she talks from her sub-conscious self which reveals the poetry in her soul. She is actually the first of the "superior" women. The conflict between the individual conscience and the rules of the conventional society is the main interest of the play - and all this was new in the theatre-world. Nevertheless, the similarity between A Doll's House and the plays of the

Parisian school cannot be ignored. The whole play is packed with incidents of secret meetings, forgery and the threatening of revelation, the fearful letter, the exposure of the secret - these are the machinery employed in the "Well-made play". Only the clearing out of the mess in the denouement in the spirit of the "well-made play" is absent. In this play Ibsen has shown that marriage, as an institution, is full of pitfalls, and middle-class sentiments make marriage unhappy.

To the reader who has enjoyed the subject matter of the social dramas but resented the banality of form, Love's comedy, which had shocked Norway before A Doll's House, should be highly congenial; it handles a kindred theme with radiant vivacity, and presents a picture not less dramatic and alive of the same society than in A Doll's House. In fact, here Ibsen had struck for the first time the vein which the last thirty years of his dramatic career have been devoted to working out. Love's Comedy may well claim to have begun the social drama of the modern times. It handles the theme of love and marriage and presents through a medium charged with eloquence and imagery, a new picture of the then society. The exhibition of philosophic reflection is rather crude, but in it one may see abounding youthful energy. The play has its own faults: the character-portrayal is not finished, the action is slight, and the climax, though not devoid of sensation, has little relation to human nature. But the play is biting and the sting lay in the portrayal of the pettiness of persons and classes who

are held in high esteem, not only by others, but by themselves. Here Ibsen came to hold up the satiric mirror to the suburban drawing-room of Norway and to the varied phenomena current there under the name of Love. This was not only the picture of the urbane people of Norway; it was the picture of the same urbane people everywhere in Europe. It may not be out of place to mention here that in our country today the picture of the so-called educated and progressive urban people is much the same. Many themes in Ibsen and Shaw may seem to have become "dated" in Europe, but they are quite living in the modern Indian and many other societies.

Ibsen did another serious thing in Love's comedy and he wanted it to be serious. Here we find a clergyman brought upon the stage --- an act which was regarded as high affrontery in those days.

But Love's Comedy is much more than a mere satire. Its exuberant humour has a bitter core. Ibsen's criticism of common-place love-making at first appears to be harmless enough. The ceremonial formalities of love-making and engagement, raptures over the engaged pair, hasty and thoughtless wooing, the effect of familiarity upon a shallow affection, and the efforts to save the appearance of romance when its zeal has departed -- all these yielded comedy here. But these things may be found in some other writers before Ibsen. But Ibsen parts company with all his predecessors in this that whereas they would say that for success of marriage only a deep and sincere love together with prudent good sense was necessary, Ibsen couples this

good sense with the startling paradox that the first condition of a happy marriage is the absence of love, and the first condition of enduring love is the absence of marriage.

The student of the latter-day Ibsen is somewhat taken aback to find the grim Poet of Doubt in him whose task seems to mercilessly criticise the institutions in general and the institution of marriage in particular if it is not one of convenience. The amazement of the student increases when he finds that the championing of loveless marriage or marriageless love comes from a poet who himself was happily married. The truth may be discerned in the fact that there were two faces of, or rather two persons in, Ibsen --- one was an idealist who would not drag idealism to the verge of fanaticism and, the other, a hard, remorseless critic. Love for the idealist Ibsen, is a passion which loses its virtue when it reaches its goal through matrimonial alliance. Marriage, for the critic Ibsen, is an institution beset with faults and those who enter it blinded with love are sure to be disillusioned and miserable. The failure and tragedy of marriage has been attributed to the childish innocence of Nora in A Doll's House. In another play, Ghosts, it has been ascribed to the maidenly ignorance of Helena Alving. It is to be noticed that neither Nora nor Helena Alving precisely married "for love". But in Love's Comedy it is blind love alone that plays the part of the canker to suck happiness out of the wedded life. But the play suffered from the vigour of its satire which influences speech and

action. Satirist and dramatist here entered upon a partnership that lasted throughout the life of Ibsen. Another weakness of the play is that its rhymed verse does not have the flexibility of Brand and Peer Gynt. In these plays the characters speak the dialogue, but here they deliver set speeches burdened with epigram.

Of all Ibsen's plays Emperor and Galilean (published in 1873) is one of the most underrated by the posterity though he himself often referred to it as his masterpiece. Despite the remoteness of its theme, Emperor and Galilean is one of Ibsen's most personal statements. The problem that baffled and finally destroyed Julian was one that was always at the back of Ibsen's mind - where to find a faith to replace the Christianity of his upbringing. The third quarter of the nineteenth century was, more than the preceding ages, a time of revolt against conventional religious thinking, with Bible-criticism and natural science going hand in hand. Emperor and Galilean in its search for a "third Kingdom" was as much a book of this era as The Origin of Species and Das Kapital. To find a religion which would combine and reconcile Christian ethics and "the joy of life" is a problem that troubled the souls of many a thoughtful man. It was a problem which Ibsen personally was never to solve and it is the central idea of not only Emperor and Galilean, but also of Ghosts and The Master Builder.

In 1877 was published The Pillars of the Society. Since it is an indictment of a particular right

wing leader, contemporary opinion naturally varied according to the political views of the reader. The liberals and the radicals hailed the play with the same delight and enthusiasm with which the conservatives had hailed The League of Youth.

The plot of The Pillars of the Society is set in a small port with Karsten Bernick, a wealthy ship-owner who has married a rich woman he does not love, as the chief character. His life has been a series of successes in double-dealing, often not above the law. Caught in an actress's bedroom while still engaged (fifteen years before the play opens), he allowed his fiance's brother Johan to take the blame. Planning a railway to the town, he secretly bought up all the land through which the proposed line will pass. When Johan returns from America and threatens to expose him, Bernick lets him go to sea in a ship he knows is rotten and must sink. But he finds, seemingly too late, that his own son has also boarded the very ship. In the ending, which is rather unconvincing, the ship is discovered not to have sailed, and Bernick in his relief confesses his crime and goes not only unpunished, but better off than he was before. Such a summary omits many of the important incidents and characters. The pettiness of provincial life, one of the things Ibsen hated most, is mercilessly detailed in the play.

The Pillars of the Society dealt with two problems of especial topicality for the 1870s. One was the question of women's rights, the other that of the so called "floating

coffins", that is, rotten ships sure to be sunk. The dramatic presentation of such topical problem is not unprecedented. But, it was the depth and subtlety of Ibsen's characterisation, his psychological insight and ability to strip respected people and institutions of their masks that made The Pillars of the Society a revelation to its contemporaries. These are precisely the reasons why this play appeals to the readers of today, too. One of the most important aspects of the play is the sharpness with which individual modes of speech are differentiated which helps distinguishing the characters. This was one of Ibsen's supreme strengths and one of his main contributions to the technique of prose drama. In The Pillars of the Society colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and tightness of plot -- requirements and characteristics of prose drama --- are beautifully combined. It is really the first of Ibsen's plays in which we may identify many of the elements which we instinctively associate with the playwright's name --- marriage founded on a lie, passionate women shocked and inhibited by the conventions of the society, an arrogant man of intellectual and practical gifts who becomes the cause of misery of his nearest ones. The concept of woman inhibited by the conventions of the society finds more elaborate and finished expression in the next play, Ghosts.

One of the greatest plays of Ibsen, Ghosts, which created a stir throughout Europe and which was condemned by most of the contemporaries of the dramatist, but which was to establish the fame of Ibsen as the greatest

living dramatist of the late nineteenth century, was written in 1881-82. It was in Norway, Ibsen's native country, itself that this play was most heavily and savagely attacked and the playwright taken to task for introducing immoral, obscene matters on the stage. It could be reasonably expected that the conservative papers would attack it, but the diatribes against the play and the playwright of the so-called liberal press was shocking. But a few critics boldly championed the play. In the face of almost insane attacks and stormy indignations labelling the play as the filthiest ever written, P.O.Schjott, Professor of Greek at the Christiania University, wrote : "For all the modern dramas we have read, Ghosts comes nearest to classical tragedy . . . When the dust of ignorant criticism has subsided, which we trust will happen soon, this play of Ibsen's, with its pure, bold contours, will stand not only as his noblest deed but as the greatest work of art which he or indeed our whole dramatic literature has produced." ¹ This observation proved to be prophetic.

Ibsen's contemporaries looked at Ghosts primarily as a play about physical illness, just as they had looked at A Doll's House primarily as a play about women's rights. With only a few exceptions they failed to realize that the true subject of this play is the devitalising effect of a dumb acceptance of convention. Osvold is branded with disease not because his father was almost a beast, but

1. Quoted from : Ibsen --- Michael Meyer, Pelicam 1974. P 510

because his mother, Mrs. Alving, had obeyed the ethics of the established institutions. In other words, Ghosts is a play about ethical, not physical illness. The importance of waging war against the past, the need for each individual to find his or her own freedom, the danger of renouncing love in the name of duty and middle-class morality --these are the real themes in Ghosts as they are the main themes of every play Ibsen wrote from A Doll's House onwards. And the targets are the same as those he had attacked in A Doll's House, and before that, in The Pillars of Society, and those he was to go on attacking until the end of his life --- the hollowness of great reputations, provincialism of outlook, the narrow and inhibiting effect of small-town life, the suppression of individual freedom from within and without, the neglect of the significance of heredity. The main theme of the play is the falseness of marriages of convenience ; the primal cause of the catastrophe is the marriage into which Mrs. Alving was forced and in which she was maintained by the hypocrisy of Pastor Manders. The title is symbolic : among the "ghosts" with which the play deals is the traditional idea that a woman's place is beside her husband, no matter even if he is a beast. The ghost of her husband's vice and her own vacillation pursues her down the years and actually breaks out in her son and in the burning of the Orphanage.

In one important technical respect Ghosts anticipates the later plays; it is the "double density dialogue" to which I have already referred. The Pillars of Society and A

Doll's House are both simply written, because for most of the part the characters do not indulge in this double-density dialogue in which more is meant than is uttered. But in Ghosts Mrs. Alving and Manders especially spend much of the time circling round a subject to which they dread to refer directly and at these moments the dialogue is oblique. This double-density dialogue, when the characters say one thing and mean another and in which the sub-text is more important than the text, was to be one of Ibsen's most important contributions to the technique of prose drama.

An Enemy of the People (1882) was written in the burst of indignation which swept over Ibsen following the savage attack on Ghosts. The theme here is the hypocrisy of middle-class "vested interests" which turn savagely on the exponent of truth -- truth that menaces their property. An Enemy of the People tells the story of the doctor at a small spa (country town) who has helped to develop the mineral baths which are to attract tourists to the place. When the baths were completed, the grateful city rewarded him with a well-paid job. The locals praise him as a public benefactor, but when they learn that the baths will have to be closed for several years affecting their income badly, they turn against him. When the doctor calls a meeting to put his views to them, the people brand him as the enemy of the people. The protagonist, Dr. Stockmann, only succeeded in making himself an enemy of the people through his honesty. But he, instead of succumbing, determines to carry on the fight for the truth even though the whole community goes

against him. He discovers that he has become a strong man because the strong man is he who is most alone. A Doll's House and Ghosts have women as protagonists, while in An Enemy of the People, the protagonist is a man, but the blasting of the vested interest is common to all these plays.

An Enemy of the People lacks the density and overtones of Ibsen's later works for which the play suffers in the hands of academic criticism. But there are few plays outside the ancient Greeks and Shakespeare and, possibly Tchekhov, with which the play need fear any comparison. So long as town councils and politicians exist there is no fear of its theme becoming dated even though in these days of universal adult suffrage the opinion expressed by Dr. Stockmann, "the minority is always right", for instance, seems very odd. On these points Ibsen was in fact, expressing a commonly shared attitude; Mill, Toqueville, Dickens and a host of liberal thinkers of the time had little faith on the wisdom of the majority. On the credit side, moreover, it must be noted that Dr. Stockmann is one of the half-score greatest male parts Ibsen wrote. The historical importance of The Enemy of the People is that it is the first political debate which remains, at the same time, a great play and reminds us of many "political plays" of Bernard Shaw.

To the end of his literary career, which spread over half-a-century, Ibsen was to keep moving forward relentlessly, never repeating the pattern of an earlier

success. Having exposed the hollowness of a certain kind of a left-wing politician in The League of Youth, he had gone on to expose the hollowness of their right-wing counterparts in The Pillars of Society; having questioned the sanctity of marriage in A Doll's House, he had questioned it further in Ghosts and simultaneously exposed the hollowness of many other "sacred" institutions. Then he had returned to the field of politics and included the common voters. An Enemy of the People is an attack, not merely on those self-seekers who lead people by the nose, but also on those who allow themselves to be thus led. This explains why the liberal press became so savage in attacking Ibsen --- an attack no less malicious than that waged by the conservative press.

In the next play The Wild Duck the social criticism went into the background, never to come to the forefront again. Apparently The Wild Duck is, not unlike A Doll's House, Ghosts, and An Enemy of the People, a realistic play about real people. But it is different from these preceding plays in the use of symbols. In Brand Ibsen had used symbolism; but in that play the symbols are incidental and not integrated to the total design. In The Wild Duck, on the other hand, there is a single and precise symbol, for far from being incidental, this symbol---that of the duck itself --- is the life-breath of the play. Ibsen was not to use this method in all his subsequent plays; we notice the use of symbolism in The Master Builder and Little Eyolf, but not in, say, Hedda Gabler, which has, so far as

symbolism is concerned, more in common with Ghosts than with The Wild Duck. The symbol represents the refusal of most people, once they have been wounded, to go on living and face the reality. In this play, Ibsen argues for illusory happiness and against fanatic idealism. Gregers, through his obsession to bare the truth to those about him, only causes misery through removing their consolatory illusions. Hjalmar and his father have sought to hide themselves in the deep sea of illusions, but Gregers hauls them back to the surface. The spokesman of Ibsen's ideas in this play is the sarcastic Relling. He knows that Hjalmar is just worthless, but argues to Gregers that it is a private illusion which makes the life of a man bearable; he need have a fantasy into which he can retreat when adversity overwhelms him. When Gregers, pursuing the truth, removes the veil of illusion, Hjalmar and his family are destroyed. This is something new which could not be found in the earlier plays like A Doll's House, Ghosts and An Enemy of the People.

The method of The Wild Duck seemed new in one important aspect and this is the mixing of categories --- the way tragedy and comedy tread on each other's heels. This method upset most of Ibsen's contemporaries, but it delighted such persons like Bernard Shaw to look on with pity and horror at a profound tragedy, shaking with laughter all the time at an irresistible comedy. This reminds us of The Heartbreak House, one of the artistic triumphs of Bernard Shaw, in which, too, we notice this method of mixing the

categories.

Rosmersholm (1885-86) in which Ibsen explored the realm of the unconscious is actually the most inexhaustible of all his dramatic works and it perplexed his contemporaries as impossibly obscure. To the modern reading public or audience this is a cause of admiration and fascination. The play marks Ibsen's final withdrawal as a playwright from the realm of politics ; in other words, it is the last of his plays which introduces national and local politics as a decisive factor in shaping the destinies of individuals and peoples. But this is not the only interesting feature of the play. The play is about two lovers as potentially passionate as Romeo and Juliet of Shakespeare, but Rosmer and Rebecca are the children of the nineteenth century --- a time when bourgeois moral values dominated the characters of individuals. The lovers never touch each other until the moment they clasped hands to walk out and drown themselves. Unless the passions are suggested, there seems no reason why they should commit suicide. This is the play in which Ibsen, for the first time in his works, overtly probed the unconscious mind. The problem of how one human being can gain control over the mind of another and persuade him or her to act according to inclination within them which they repress, being dominated by the moral values of the time, was much in the air. This problem interested Ibsen much, but it was a thing which the ordinary theatre-goer was not aware of. What was implied subtly in the dialogue naturally became incomprehensible to him.

Ibsen, through Rebecca, presented the predicament of the woman of intellect whose passions can find no outlet.

Rosmersholm provides a link between Ibsen's old method and his new so far as characterisation is concerned. Rosmer is the last of his characters who are caught up in the maze of politics and Rebecca is the first of his passionate but inhibited female characters. Almost as baffling as Rosmersholm is Hedda Gabler.

It is a curious thing that the European public who accepted characters like Madame Bovary and Ana Karenina, should be baffled by Rebecca West and Hedda Gabler. The drama, in the stage of the contemporary technical development, could only present simple characters. The secrets of thoughts, the development of soul, could no more than be merely indicated. It is obvious that a novel about Hedda Gabler could be as interesting to the then public as Madame Bovary but her presentation on the stage left them cold; they failed to understand her.

This play, Hedda Gabler, is the most universally admired and the most frequently performed of the plays of Ibsen. The play is immensely actable with short exchanges between characters. Here we notice Ibsen dispensing with long speeches; here we notice no explanation given by other characters and no self-characterisation in order to defend or excuse himself or herself. In this play Ibsen explored the difficult region of the psychology of a woman who is

still fundamentally a child of her particular past. She has not been able to disinherit the ethical nullity and the narrow traditions of a military caste to which she belongs. Freedom is inhibited by a dread of scandal, a theme which had been dealt with in Ghosts in a different context. As Hedda is a child fundamentally, so she is afraid of adult responsibility. The only outlet of her emotion is the fantasy of the self; in this she is much unlike Nora and Mrs. Alving. Whenever she faces any crisis, she fails to meet it fairly and squarely; she has, for her equipment, only her negative tradition which proves ultimately destructive. The pistol in her hand is the symbol of her negative tradition. We find that intelligence and temperament do not make her fit to live the passive life of a housewife. George Tesman, her husband, is a none-too-brilliant scholar; she has married him because she expected him to advance far in his profession. To her dismay she discovers that Tesman is not her soul's mate. She now regrets she did not accept the brilliant, though unstable, young man Lovborg. She learns from her friend Thea that Lovborg has written a book which bears the unmistakable mark of his genius. She learns further, to her frustration and anger, that Thea has abandoned her husband to become Lovborg's mistress. By chance the manuscript of the book of Lovborg, which was not yet published, falls to her hand and she imagines it to be the child of the love of Lovborg and Thea. This thought becomes too much for her and she throws

the manuscript into fire. At first her husband George Tesman is enraged with her for this, but at last agrees to sleep over the matter when Hedda points out that the publication of this brilliant book would rob him of the professorship for which both Tesman and Lovborg are trying. When Lovborg comes to know of his loss of the manuscript, he comes to Hedda and says that he contemplates suicide for he has lost his only child, meaning the manuscript. She lends him two pistols hoping he would die in a heroic manner. But she is denied her morbid triumph when Lovborg dies in a place of ill-fame, apparently accidentally, by shooting himself. When Brack, to whom Hedda had confided how boring her honeymoon with Tesman was, threatens to reveal the origin of the pistol with which Lovborg was killed, she refuses this ignominy and shame and shoots herself.

Hedda Gabler, from the standpoint of dramatic technique, is a great achievement. It is the double-density dialogue, through which the dramatist reveals the inner soul of the characters; and in this respect this play has a kinship with Ghosts. Self-realization, Ibsen realized, is the highest task and the greatest happiness of an individual. It may be said that in all the plays of Ibsen the dramatist hammers on this point. One of the tragedies of women, Ibsen seems to point out, is that their will-power tends to remain undeveloped. The theme of Hedda Gabler is this: her personal tragedy is that she has committed herself to the stolid and dull

middle-class married life which does not allow her any outlet to express her talent and individuality. Mrs. Alving in Ghosts has to submit to the conventional ideas about a woman's position ; has to return to her husband whom she can never love, only to become more miserable. Her submission to conventional attitude becomes the Nemesis for her son. It must be admitted that Mrs. Alving is not a woman of the superior type. Hedda Gabler demonstrates what a big burden of social censure is heaped on a superior woman if she tries to live according to the urges of her inner self. Side by side we notice in her character a fear of scandal when Brack threatens her to reveal the secret of the pistol. Hedda is a very complex character, but to call her malicious even when she burns the manuscript of Lovborg's book would be beside the mark. The complexity of the play is rooted particularly in the complexity of her character ; the play is complex also for the reason that, being a play, it does not have much scope for explanation. As noted already, in this play Ibsen depended more on short speeches than on long ones. Explanation and narration being absent, the play appears baffling.

The Master Builder (1892) is technically almost as faultless as Ghosts, as profound and precise in its symbolism as Wild Duck. Just after the publication of the play, great argument developed as to the meaning of the play, which bewildered many of the critics. Amazing theories have been advanced likening Solness to Ibsen himself

creating a cathedral with his dramatic works; the nine dolls of Mrs. Solness were taken to be the nine Muses; the dead twins were thought to be Scandinavianism and Ibsen's own happiness ; the tower of Solness was looked upon as symbolic of Man's revolt against God. Those theories about the meaning of the play baffled the dramatist himself.

Solness and his wife are worthy people, but they do not suit each other and this makes them both unhappy in their life together. They do not become, being the people they are, what they could and should have become --- and this despite the fact that they are not actually miserable and despite their consideration for each other and a kind of love and tenderness noticeable in both for each other. But each broods perpetually and each goes his or her way mentally making the gulf between them bigger and bigger. They are not, of course, portrayed as extraordinary persons ; it is just they feel spiritually akin, strongly attracted to each other; they feel that they belong to each other and their relation would ennoble rather than debase them. Then, when one still has what is called the joy of life, a need for happiness, and when one feels unable to live in subdued resignation without the joy of life, comes the collision. They decide to build, so to say, a castle in the air and live together in spirit. This lifts Solness higher than ever before to do things he had never ventured before. He stakes his life on it and is killed. It was not madness on his part to risk his life in building the tower ; it was

the expression of his eager longing to achieve happiness. Ibsen's interest in hypnosis, and the power that one human being can gain over the mind of another has already been noted. He carried it further in The Master Builder concentrating on how unexpressed wishes could sometimes be expressed in action, even at the cost of life. Ibsen pointed out that the struggle for the unattainable with zest for life is a high joy. The death of an individual in attaining this high joy does not destroy its sanctity.

Even a casual glance cannot but notice the resemblance between The Master Builder and Brand in the final catastrophe. But the difference between the two plays is great since whereas Solness meets his tragic end by his own act, Brand is overwhelmed by the forces of external agencies. In another and different point, The Master Builder bears relation with Ghosts and Hedda Gabler ; it is the use of fire as a symbol of a developing crisis. We readily recall the fire in Ghosts that breaks out to destroy the memorial to Captain Alving and Hedda's burning the manuscript of Lovborg's book.

The Master Builder also, like its predecessor Hedda Gabler, appears very unintelligible and hopeless to the critics. When the play was first published in 1893 in England, the critics in a chorus rejected it declaring that in it "dense mist enshrouds characters,

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words, actions, and motives" and that it was "blasphemous". It seems that the critics could little see the workings of the soul of the characters ; could little gauze the psychology of man and woman submerged in the joy of life. The play appeared "blasphemous" to the critics who saw the building of the tower as a revolt against God and an attempt to reach the high heavens. They could not see that the sky-high tower is the joy of life which Solness and Hilde in united heart wanted to obtain.

When We Dead Awaken is one of the most valuable testaments we have to Ibsen's extraordinary mind and vision. It seems that Ibsen had deliberately suppressed the poet in him while writing the "social" plays from The Pillars of the Society to The Wild Duck. There is no poetry in these plays save perhaps Mrs. Alving's speech about the ghosts that "lie as thick as the grains of sand". But in every play Ibsen had written since Rosmersholm, with the exception of Hedda Gabler there are moments when we are aware of the poet in him. Then in John Gabriel Borkman again the poet came to the fore. In When we Dead Awaken, which followed John Gabriel Borkman, the movement towards poetry was carried to a stage further.

There is no lack of ideas in the plays of Ibsen, the foremost being that conventional attitudes

1. Ibsen. M.Meyer. Pelican. 1974. P 738. The quotation is from the Daily Telegraph.

towards institutions is a veritable destroyer of happiness. But in When We Dead Awaken Ibsen seems to say that when the body dies the dead awaken. But there is much more than this in the play. Here is the story of an aged sculptor Arnold Rubek who is unhappily married to a much younger wife, Maja. He meets a former model, Irene, who had loved him but in whom he was interested only as a sculptor. After some dredging up of the past the two climb up a mountain ; the action of the play takes place as they go higher and higher. Near the top they meet Maja and a huntsman, Ulfheim, with whom she has been enamoured. As a storm rises Maja and Ulfheim go down to safety while Rubek and Irene continue towards the top where they are killed by an avalanche. Maja and her man return to what they think life but the other two regard as death ; Rubek and Irene climb upwards to what the others regard as death but they regard as life.

Rubek had rejected Irene. And now the ageing artist, restless in his married life, restless in the homeland to which he has returned after a long sojourn abroad, restless in his art, realizes that to reject love is to reject life. When Rubek and Irene meet and talk over old times, she learns, bit by bit, what has happened to the statue he had made and is about to kill him, when she realizes that the history of the destruction of the statue is his own history and that as he used her up and left her "dead", so with her death the life went out of him. But like Nora in A Doll's House, she sees the possibility of a

miracle. The dead may awaken if only they can find an honest and natural relation in which they shall no longer sacrifice and kill one another. Rubek had come to regard Irene not as an end in herself, but solely as a means of ministering to his needs. Thus he had denied Irene's right to live. But now he accepts her as a human being, as an end in herself and expiates his earlier renunciation of love. This does the miracle and both of them awaken to life. It is possible, as Bernard Shaw suggests, that the end of Rubek and Irene also signifies the end of the idols, domestic, moral, religious, and political "in whose name we have been twaddled into misery and confusion and hypocrisy unspeakable"¹. This play may be regarded as Ibsen's final account with himself.

A few words about Finero and Jones as the exponents of the drama of ideas must be said. About T.N. Robertson I have already said in the Introductory chapter and although references to Finero and Jones have also been made there, these two deserve more serious probing. It is today admitted, justifiably, that Finero and Jones did much commendable work to prepare the ground for the growth of the drama of ideas. More, they prepared the way for an appreciation of Ibsen's genius and accustomed the play-goers to a more faithful and intimate picture of contemporary life and its problems than to what they had been accustomed

1. Quintessence of Ibsenism -- George Bernard Shaw,

Constable & Co. Ltd. London 1913. P 157.

before ; in other words, they paved the way for the reception of the drama of ideas. It is true that as Robertson had failed to free himself completely from melodrama and sentimentalism, so also failed Pinero and Jones. It is also true that it was not until the nineties of the last century, when the influence of Ibsen was making itself felt strongly and Bernard Shaw produced his first plays, that the necessary impetus was there to carry the drama over to the field of social and philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, we cannot be oblivious of the importance of the two dramatists precisely because the change that came over the English drama by the last part of the last century cannot be attributed to Ibsen alone.

The reputation of Arther Wing Pinero rests on his social plays. Ever mindful of construction of his plays, Pinero built his plays according to a deliberate pattern, beginning with a situation that involved a group of people in some dramatically striking relationship with each other ; he developed the plot by means of subtle interplay between the characters and the careful invention of fresh material to some dramatic or hilarious denouement and rounded it off with a final act in which the complications and entanglements are resolved in as natural a manner as possible.

Pinero was, however, not much interested in giving a naturalistic representation of real life. Some critics in Pinero's days including Bernard Shaw who wrote

dramatic criticism were highly critical of the so-called "well-made play" on the ground that a story which was constructed so ingenuously was bound to present only a contrived and unrealistic view of life. As a playwright Pinero's job was to take a situation from real life and then to develop it in such a way as to create an effective piece of dramatic craftsmanship.

Pinero's serious social dramas are a testimony to his skill in story-telling. But he has not a considerable imaginative range. His characters are drawn almost without exception from the well-to-do class of late Victorian and Edwardian era of London living a rather comfortable life. Generally his characters are bankers or stock-brokers --- men of means who have little or no experience and idea about the sordid life of the downtrodden. The women in Pinero's plays are almost as a rule a beautiful, usually pampered, but unhappy lot ; maid-servants wait upon the ease-loving women in palatial buildings and palaces standing in beautiful natural surroundings.

Pinero's most famous play The Second Mrs. Tranqueray was published in 1893. Though Ibsen had been presented and though Shaw's Widowers' Houses had also been published before that date, The Second Mrs. Tranqueray was hailed as epoch-making particularly because the public was still unaware of the true nature of the drama of ideas. The plays of Pinero which went before The Second Mrs.

Tranqueray, for instance, the Dandy Duck, The Hobby Horse, and The Weaker Sex are of little literary or historical interest. Most of these early works are sentimental and even the craftsmanship, in which department Pinero is an adept, is also not upto the standard with the possible exception of the The Magistrate. The plays of Pinero marked as "problem plays" were written in the nineties and it was with The Second Mrs. Tranqueray that he drew the attention of the serious theatre-going public. Of course, today we can see the weakness of the play more clearly than the dramatist's contemporaries could ; even William Archer, otherwise a dependable critic, praised it almost in the superlative. But we discover in the play a certain sentimentalism ; also we discover in the dialogue a literary quality which does strike as genuine. It was, however, with this play that English drama found itself back after the time of Goldsmith and Sheridan. William Archer rightly recognised in this play the beginning of a period of creative activity.

The Second Mrs. Tranqueray is about a woman, Paula, who once lived a rather dishonest and immoral kind of existence, mixing with men without proper regard for the status of married life. She was what was called in those days a "scarlet woman". The play tells of Paula's marriage with Aubery Tranqueray, a highly respectable young man, and her failure to live down her past life; she fails to persuade her husband's friends too to live down that life. She has no other choice but to end her life with her own

hands. But even in this the most famous play of Pinero he does not strike us as a creator of characters. Paula seems to be a work of prejudiced observation instead of comprehension and the other characters owe their faint interest and humanity to the fact that they are the projections of the playwright's own beliefs. Thus whatever the merits of this play, Pinero does not appear to be an interpreter of characters, but only a describer of people as the ordinary man sees and judges them. Bernard Shaw discusses this point and says, "The moment the point is reached at which that comparatively common gift of "an eye for character" has to be supplanted by the higher dramatic gift of sympathy with character -- of the power of seeing the world from the point of view of others instead of merely describing or judging them from one's own point of view in terms of the conventional systems of morals, Mr. Pinero breaks down". This weakness is seen in all the other dramas of Pinero which makes him incapable of taking a place by the side of Ibsen and Shaw. Iris shows the tragic conflict between a luxurious and even pampered life as the wife or mistress of a wealthy but unattractive businessman and a life of poverty in a long-cabin in Canada with a dull criminal-looking young Englishman. Pinero's tragic theme is the destruction of the individual due to his failure to comply with the social code. In the plays of Pinero it is not the law of England that falls upon the unfortunate couples who fall out with each

1. Plays and Players - Bernard Shaw ed. A.C. Ward. O.U.P. 1952. P 23.

other, but the massive weight of the Victorian middle-class opinion. This opinion may have the appearance of a prejudice, but it remains just as cruel and evil a thing. The first ambition of many a man and woman was to get "accepted" by high society. If a man got too friendly with another man's wife, or cheated at cards or went around with an attractive young lady who once earned her bread by dancing in a night club, or even wore wrong clothes, he was not only chucked out of the society, but even spiritually destroyed which is certainly more dangerous. The play of Pinero in which we can see the working of this moral law most clearly is The Benefit of the Doubt (1896). In reading this play one gets the impression that a few words of explanation of Christian charity and forgiveness might clear up the situation and save the trouble; but one also knows that such explanation, given the existing moral code, would not have been accepted, if given at all. We feel that it is not the character portrayed by Pinero that are intrinsically tragic, but the world -- the moral world, particularly of the middle class -- in which these characters live.

Shortly before Pinero wrote The Profligate (1892), the plays of Ibsen began to be known in England and it is probable that they influenced Pinero quite considerably. Ibsen, as we have seen, was essentially a poet as well as a magnificent dramatic craftsman; he was a man who blazed inwardly at social injustice. Although he was as conscious as Pinero of the heartless social code, he thrust deep below it

to the very heart of his characters. Pinero does not thrust deep. He recognises injustice, but does not give the impression of resenting it. He does not mock the social code of the middle-class like Shaw or probe it like Ibsen. It is the middle class opinion that prevails at the end. The tragedy is accounted for by the failure of the characters to conform to the established, conventional moral code. The conflict of ideas is there in these plays, but the end is contrived according to conventional moral standards. He is thus not a revolting son of the bourgeoisie like an Ibsen or a Shaw.

The dramas of Pinero which were written after the start of the new century are His House in Order (1906). The Thunderbolt (1908), and Mid-Channel (1909). The first of these introduces a household which has been made dismal through the domination and presence of his wife's relatives. The man seems to be fascinated by the memory of his, as he thinks, saintly first wife. But this image of the first wife is shattered by his brother who is worldly-wise. Pinero has brought out all the drama that is there in this episode. In The Thunderbolt described as "An episode in the History of a Provincial Family" the dramatist focussed attention upon the familiar figure of an "artist" who at the same time has some of the qualities of an intruder and once more life is infused with the material which could easily have been nothing save tediously conventional and hackneyed. The tone of Mid-Channel is definitely darker. This is a play about a businessman and his wife whose marriage is doomed. The husband is always busy

with his business and even when he is indoors his thoughts are clearly elsewhere. The wife realizes that the relation between the two is false and that she cannot continue here. For a moment a reconciliation seems possible but the heroine ends as Iris had done.

Henry Arthur Jones, after writing some trifles, stepped into writing dramas of social criticism, the first serious attempt at which is seen in his Saints and Sinners (1884). The desire of the playwright was to introduce new dramatic materials and a sense of philosophic purpose -- and all these are indicated by him in his valuable preface to this play. The play presents realistically a slice of English life almost in the manner of Robertson, and the play remains, for its day, a severe attack on commercial philistinism the like of which has never been accomplished by Pinero; and here Jones has an edge over Pinero. The playwright stresses the unpalatable fact that there is a wide and hypocritical discrepancy between the religious professions and practices. The play is courageous, presenting a new thing in drama, and the conventionally religious and respectable people must have been scandalized by this. The play ends with the punishment of the stage-villains, but not with, significantly, the conventional happy ending of the so-called "well-made play". What may be regarded as an advance in dramatic realism is the presentation of the picture of the mercenary life and religious hypocrisy. This play could certainly rouse high hopes both for the playwright and the English drama which was surely standing at a turning point, Saints and Sinners shows

that Jones had not only the eye to discern the hypocrisy of the "moral" people, but also that he had great dreams to be the real great exponent of the drama of ideas in England. It is unfortunate that the mind of Jones was not strong enough to keep pace with its dream. He conceived, of course, the drama of ideas, but more theoretically than practically, for his practical performance did not go far on to new directions.

In The Masquerades Jones sharply questions and exposes the sham of marriage conventions and this definitely is a big leap forward. But, though in the preface to The Tempter he had spoken strongly against contemporary realism, in the The Masquerades Jones pursued that common path with a strong flavour of sentimentalism. Dulcie Larrondie is the heroine here. She is a girl of some breeding, but is forced to work as a barmaid having lost all her money. In the inn a kiss from her is auctioned and Sir Brice Skene wins it against her lover, David Ramon. Sir Brice marries her, but their domestic happiness is soon lost as Sir Brice runs through all his money through drinking and gambling. Ramon aids her and then gambles for her against her husband. He wins, but goes off on a scientific expedition, leaving her pure. In this play Jones attempted an imaginative treatment of life. But the attempt is not quite happy precisely because his "imagination is not of very distinguished quality" -- the

1. Pinero, Jones, and Wilde - (Extract from "The Old Drama and the New") : William Archer. Printed in "Essays in Modern Drama". ed. Morris Freeman. D.C. Health & Co. Boston. 1966. P 116.

same handicap from which Pinero also suffered.

In his masterpiece Michael and His Lost Angel (1895) Jones examines the subject of religion. This play was attacked in its own day as irreverent because it presented on the stage a clergyman in illicit passion which could not be endured by the Victorian moralists. The play shocked their conventional religious sentiments and the sense of delicacy. The Reverend Father Feversham compels a girl in the congregation to confess her shame, but soon himself commits the same sin and seems not to be sorry. At the end, however, we find the Reverend Feversham penitently confessing his sin. He then leaves the congregation in disgrace, goes to seclusion and never again sees the girl until she is brought to him in her last hours. In spite of the fact that Michael and His Lost Angel is an improvement on the customary treatment of illicit passion in the Victorian theatre, this play is a glaring illustration of Jones's compromise with conventional morality.

That Jones failed to make much advance in creating the real drama of ideas may be shown by the characteristic way he reacted against Ibsen and the Ibsenites. We know how the enemies of Ibsen in England continued to fulminate even after Ibsen had been played on the English stage several times. In the prologue to his play The Tempter Henry Jones exhorted his audience to :

Shun the crude present with vain problems rife
Nor join the bleak Norwegian's barren quest
For deathless beauty's self and holy zest

Of rapturous martyrdom, in some base strife
Of petty dullards, soused in native filth

This is a clear enough pointer to the fact that the drama of ideas which was struggling to be born in England did not have much to do with Jones. It was long after that Jones was to recant.

The Tempter, nevertheless, is a remarkable achievement. Published in 1893 the play is a courageous attempt at verse drama ; for its period it was surely a noble attempt. In the preface to this play Jones attacks "realism" which was a new thing. . But it seems that the playwright himself failed to grasp the implications of his own theme with the Devil in a physical embodiment drawing Prince Leon from the love of Lady Avis to that of Lady Asobel. The playwright strove to bring religion on to the stage, but as he did not have the necessary depth of mind required to handle such a vital and delicate subject, the effort ended in his contempt for religion. It is narrowness of outlook seen in his attack on Ibsen which worked as an obstacle for him in guiding the English drama.

As regards any conscious philosophy of life there is not much, if any, difference between Pinero and Jones. But in their fertile, live moments they are as unlike as two men in the same profession can be. At such time Pinero does not seem to have any views at all. The English novelists of the Thackeray-Trollope period have created a fictitious world for him and it is about this world that Pinero creates stage

stories. Jones, on the other hand, works passionately from the real ; by throwing himself sympathetically into his figures he gives them the stir of life. Jones is adept in playwrighting with a kindly and humourous observer's sense of contemporary manners and with a knowledge of spiritual history in which his nearest competitor, Pinero, seems so deficient.

Jone's comedies afford materials for the social essayist as well ; here we find an object-lesson in British lower middle-class hypocrisy. The attack is not the usual spurious, sham attack of the average stage-moralist ; very often it seems courageous and uncompromising. It is almost a truism that a play which is a criticism of contemporary life involves a certain struggle with the conventional people. In the case of the comedies of Jones, particularly, The Triumph of the Philistines, the result was obvious. As Shaw observes, "Accordingly Mr. Jones was not so unanimously applauded when the curtain fell on poor Mr. Jorgan's very mixed "Triumph" as Pinero was after Mrs. Ebbsmith pulled the Bible out of the ¹ fire".

Ibsen, one might say, stood in a sort of mysterious correspondence with the fermenting, germinating ideas of the day. As George Brandes is reported to have said, " Once or twice I have even had a distinct impression that new ideas, which were on the point of manifesting themselves publicly

1. Our Theatre in the Nineties - Bernard Shaw. Constable & Co. Ltd. St. Ed. 1932. P 123.

but were not received by others, had been preoccupying and indeed tormenting him¹". Brandes also noted Ibsen's ear for "the low rumble that tells of ideas undermining the ground ... for the throb of their pinions in the air"². Now this mysterious correspondence with the fermenting, germinating ideas of the late nineteenth century was foreign to both Pinero and Jones. The new revolutionary ideas which were not received or accepted by others, were not accepted by any one of them either. The playwright of the drama of ideas must be able to march with the progress of time and capable of receiving new ideas and dramatizing them in the face of public criticism. We feel that in the plays of Pinero and Jones the situation, the action, rather than the idea, is the important thing which is at variance with our conception of this type of play. The period of Pinero and Jones was rich with ideas floating in the air ; but both the dramatists failed to seize that raw-material to build dramas with. This failure is due not so much to their lack of intellect but to their fear of being called "immoral" because the floating and the germinating ideas of their days were mostly "immoral", that is, unconventional. They were reared by the bourgeois morality of the late Victorian era. The drama of ideas is the handmaid of the revolting sons of the middle class like Ibsen and Shaw ; Pinero and Jones were, if one may use such a term, the accepting sons.

1. Quoted from - Ibsen - Michael Meyer, Penguin, 1974. P 500
2. Ibid. P 500.

For the sake of justice it should be admitted that Pinero and Jones raised English drama from the mud and placed it in a position where it could command respect. "They made the way easy for those who were to follow them, and it is doubtful whether Bernard Shaw ... would have found his way on the stage at all ... if these two men had not preceded him"¹. This observation, while not essentially untrue, puts added emphasis on the importance of Pinero and Jones as the predecessors of Shaw. They seldom exercised any significant influence upon the latter but immensely greater dramatist ; their attitudes were fundamentally different from those of Shaw. But their importance lies in the fact that they carried on, after Robertson, the study of the problems of the day and to that extent paved the way for Bernard Shaw.

1. The Outline of Literature - ed. John Drinkwater. Revised by Horace Shipp. Dramatic Literature. 1950. P 718.

CHAPTER III

My Plays are "sui generis"

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When Shaw Claimed that his plays were "sui generis" and that his plays should not be called tragedies or comedies, he actually brought forth the most important characteristic of his art. Shaw is called a heretic because he flouted and scoffed at the conventional moral attitudes; this is his ethical heresy. But in one more respect his heresy is of no less importance. It is in his idea about Comedy that this heresy lies. To be more plain, this heresy is in the field of aesthetics where he mixed the apparently irreconcilable things - the serious and the ludicrous. In his hand Comedy became at once serious and trivial ; it is levity which marks and colours his serious discussions. This is something new in the history of literature, this mixing of the serious and the funny. We are to note that the serious and the trivial are not just put side by side, but they are mingled and made one giving rise to the problem which deserves to be considered and paid attention to. By putting the irreconcilables simultaneously and making them really one, Shaw has proved himself a problem to the critics - whether to take him as an earnest and serious thinker or just a buffoon who would make fun of serious thoughts.

It is necessary to know Shaw's views about Comedy - its nature and its functions. His views are, on the whole,

1. G.B.S. : Man of the Century Vol II - Archibald Henderson.

Appleton - Century - Crofts Inc. 1956. P 729.

classical when he maintains that a comedy must pass a sound moral judgement as it should provoke laughter. It is Shaw's idea about biology and economics that made him a comic genius. Comedy is a form of art which at its best addresses itself to the intellect rather than to the emotion. Laughter can be aroused by a buffoon and even by a fool; a Stephen or a Matthew can well provoke us to laughter. But laughter in a comedy is not just physical laughter; it is intellectual and, as such, comedy cannot be an instrument in the hands of a buffoon. Buffoonery and comedy are distinctly different from each other, the latter involving thought whereas the former has nothing to do with thought. It is obvious that the life of comedy depends not on buffoonery, but on serious thought.

Comedy arises, at bottom, out of the general predicament of mankind or from the particular predicament of an individual; it lies in the recognition of imperfections of man, but not in the violent indictment on these imperfections. It is now understood that a true comedy does not only move one to laughter, but also compels one to think of imperfections -- one's own imperfections and those of the society as a whole. This is precisely the views of Shaw. It is for this that we find in his plays serious discussions carried on in such a way as to arouse laughter.

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1. This idea has been developed by Dr. S.C.Sengupta in The Art of Bernard Shaw 4th. Edn. 1960. A Mukherjee & Co. P.Ltd.
 2. Stephen and Matthew belong to Every Man in His Humour of Ben Jonson.

Dr. S.C. Sengupta's observations is worthy of serious notice when he says that "Shaw's opinion on economics and art have combined to make him a serious comedian"¹. The qualification "serious" is not necessary, because, contrary to popular misconception, the stuff of a comedian is always serious. Again, the observation of Dr. Sengupta becomes relevant only when the nature of laughter in a true comedy - that it provokes laughter while passing sound moral judgement - is well understood. Shaw knows his economics well and his views are socialistic, with some qualifications and limitations though. He has found that Capitalism is the root of all our problems and troubles; and all our sentimental attachment to established institutions are the by-products of Capitalism. He discusses seriously the evils of Capitalism; attacks the conventional virtues, beating them hollow with unthought of arguments. As an economist he looks at poverty as a disease and a crime; he is not sentimental about poverty like the sentimental socialists. The reason he has advanced why Shakespeare has not taken the poor as the protagonist in his plays actually makes Shaw's own art clear. In the preface to The Dark Lady of the Sonnets Shaw writes, "Shakespeare's characters are mostly members of the leisured classes Industrial slavery is not compatible with that freedom of adventure, that personal refinement and intellectual culture, that scope of action,

1. The Art of Bernard Shaw - Dr. S.C.Sengupta. A.Mukherjee & Co. P.Ltd. 4th. Edn. 1960. P 59

which the higher and subtler drama demands".

The problem of poverty is surely a serious matter and Shaw knows it from the experience of his youth and struggle against poverty. He recognises that poverty would not allow the soul of a man to soar. But it should not be understood that Shaw has found any real stuff in the emotions and sentiments of the richer classes. The fact really is otherwise. Shaw has come to think that the emotions and sentiments of the richer classes are hollow almost as a rule; his dramas provide ample illustrations of this. Thus in his plays we find him beating the emotions of the leisured classes to expose their hollowness; but in so doing he never idolizes the poor or their poverty, for he has no sympathy with them. Now, Shaw, as noted in the quotation above, excludes the poor from the place of the protagonist because poverty hinders the freedom of the soul and the refinement and culture which is the essential quality of the "higher and subtler" forms of drama. Again, though the leisured classes always speak of morality, Shaw holds that morality cannot exist in a capitalistic society in which the poor do not enjoy any scope for action and the door of intellectual culture is shut out for them. These people in a capitalistic society speaking highly of morality are abnormal people who are fit subjects for comic treatment, for comedy deals with

1. Preface to The Dark Lady of the Sonnets. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 767.

abnormality and contradictions. This contradiction Shaw finds in another important field which he discovered with his knowledge of biology. Shaw finds out the internal dichotomy between Instinct and Intellect. The conflict between Instinct and Intellect is also a source of comedy. Shaw deals with the serious subject of the conflict between these two both of which are parts of life's continuous striving to attain perfection. The Life Force makes experiments, progresses through trials and errors; its experiments are sometimes comic, but it has a serious purpose in view. Even Comic experiments are undertaken with all seriousness ; and serious things are comically treated.

As shown in the Introductory Chapter, the London theatre of the late eighties and nineties of the Nineteenth Century was an uncertain theatre or complex theatre in which various traditions got mixed up. In that theatre melodrama jostled with fashionable comedies, "problem plays" and full scale productions of Ibsen, James Barrie, and Oscar Wilde. From the middle of the last century, however, it had been changing from a theatre of make-believe to a theatre of sophisticated versimilitude. Its dramatic traditions were not only multiple, they were even conflicting and, therefore, confusing . There was a growing strain of the fashionable, that is, drawing-room play with the ideal of presenting life truthfully ; simultaneously present was a strain of romantic-rhetorical drama devoted to an idea of impassioned flamboyance. The formal ideal of the so-called "well-made play" written after the manner of the French

playwrights, particularly Scribe and Sardou, was there ; and there was the ideal of social-didactic play of Ibsen. Those were the days when Ibsen was looked upon as a social reformer rather than an artist. Shaw's dramatic criticisms reveal these various strains prevalent in the London theatre in the last part of the nineteenth century. These were the traditions in dramatic writings and stage productions which provided the immediate context of Shaw's own dramatic works.

Shaw fought almost single-handed against the drawing-room drama, the rhetorical-romantic drama and the "well-made play". His advocacy of the Scandinavian realists reveals his attitude towards these types of plays. It should be noted, however, that it is not for Ibsen and Ibsenism only that Shaw launched his Campaign. He intended to bring into existence a critical-realistic drama in which dramatic situations or actions had no value except as instruments to test the cherished ideals and conventions and to reveal character. The rival traditions referred to above supported a "conventional" drama. In the "well-made play" in which a curious dramatic situation was the centre of interest around which the whole play revolved, ordinary social ideals and conventions formed a background and a basis which had to be taken for granted, or the situation would disappear and lose all importance. The "drawing-room drama" as the name itself suggests, aimed at creating a photographic image of life and manners in a fashionable drawing-room. It dealt with the genteel people, concerning itself with a realism of the

surface ; it tried to reproduce this fashionable life with no, or the least, offence. Naturally in these "drawing-room plays", as in the "well-made plays", ideals and conventions of the "moral" people had to be taken for granted.

Between the construction of the "well-made play" which I have discussed elsewhere in this work and the substance of the "drawing-room play" there was a historical link ; but this link was not necessitated by any internal demand. The line of the "drawing-room play" descended from Robertson to Arthur Pinero although , as William Archer pointed out, it had its effective beginnings in "the humble, bourgeois movement headed by Eugene Scribe and his innumerable¹ collaborators". The line of the "well-made plays" was also identified with Scribe. The most skilful playwright of the "well-made play", among the contemporaries of Shaw, was Arther Wing Pinero. In Pinero the "well-made play" and the "drawing-room play" met in one place. Shaw, not without reason, lumped together the "well-made" construction and the "drawing-room" substance in his attack on conventional drama; and he bombarded them heavily.

The romantic-rhetorical drama, which was violently romantic, was also conventional in its matter and manner. In spite of its conformity to the conventional, it was much less fashionable and, in Shaw's view, much less dangerous to his

1. Old Drama and the New - William Archer.

objectives than the superficially realistic dramas.

Shaw's main strategy, in his war against conventional drama and in his attempt to change the condition of the theatre, was to attack the enemy with its own critical assumption. He invoked the criterion of stage-realism and deliberately demonstrated "conventionality" everywhere. He derived immense delight in naming, dissecting and then putting to ridicule particular stage-conventions. "The subtle atmosphere of absurdity with which Shaw hoped," observes Martin Meisel, "to surround the French realist was the absurdity inherent in any lapse from advertised virtue and was achieved by exposing their theatrical artifice. Shaw's sleight of hand here, in criticism as in play writing, was to substitute particulars of stage conventions for moral conventionalism, which was the true antagonist of his philosophical realism and his drama of unsettled ideals".¹

Shaw recognised that moral conventionalism was something different from, or rather opposed to, moral realism. Moral conventionalism, which is the off-spring of romantic idealism, is self-blinding. Moral conventionalism means unquestioning acceptance of laws, customs, attitudes, and ideals as standards of judgement. To conform to established canons is the basis of this. Shaw was not the man to conform to the romantic idealism; he looked at it with an intolerant eye.

1. Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre - Martin Meisel.

Oxford University Press. 1963. P 68.

Robertson wrote the "drawing-room" play. And yet it was he who started a revolution in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century in the theatre-world of London. Shaw's critical contemporaries looked upon Robertson as the source of the movement, in the field of English drama, which was aimed at "elimination of exaggerative and rhetorical conventions which was the pre-destined line of progress"¹. Shaw's war against the traditions of the "well-made" play and the "drawing-room" play was so total that he, unlike Archer, looked on the Robertsonian drama as nothing but "a tailor's advertisement making sentimental remarks to a milliner's advertisement in the middle of an upholsterer's and decorator's advertisement" as he put it in his characteristic provocative manner.² Shaw found nothing to delight him in the absence of wit and rhetoric, and little to celebrate in the whole Robertsonian tradition which had led to the reduction of drama to sentimental and genteel conversation in a drawing-room. Shaw found, moreover, that the dramas of Robertson, Pinero and Jones were victims of conventionality -- moral conventionalities as well as conventionalities of character. Side by side his campaign against the "drawing-room" play, Shaw waged his war against the so-called "well-made" play by exposing its essential unreality. Like the "drawing-room" play the "well-made" play was also committed

1. Old Drama and the New - William Archer. Boston. 1923. P 228.

2. Our Theatre of the Nineties Vol III - G.B. Shaw. Constable & Co. Ltd. P 53.

to produce a show of reality. An ideal "well-made" play was built around single situation with a big amount of emotion or amusing piquancy. Shaw referred to the "well-made" play as a mechanical rabbit, clockwork mice and "a mere situation hung out on a gallows of plot"¹. The illusion of reality was identified with a visible and unbroken chain of circumstantial probability. In practice, however, to achieve a logic of events the "well-made" play developed a set of plot conventions suited to the conditions of the stage. Shaw ridiculed these conventions. Referring to the machinery of the exposition in Pinero's The Second Mrs Tranguery he pointed out sharply that in that play "Two whole characters are wasted on sham parts, and the hero, at his own dinner party, is compelled to get up and go ignominiously into the next room to write some letters when something has to be said behind the back"². Shaw noted the artifice of the play and declared that it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that what most of the critics of the time meant by mastery of stage-craft was nothing but recklessness in the substitution of dead machinery and lay figures for vital action and real characters. The final effect of Shaw's comment was to expose the artificial method of the "well-made" play; more, it also rejected the criterion of circumstantial plausibility altogether. But Shaw's chief objection to the "well-made" method was that any play which depends on an intriguing

1. Our Theatre of the Nineties Vol I. G.B. Shaw. Constable & Co. Ltd. P 8.

2. Ibid Vol I. P 45-46.

situation and circumstantial plausibility for ultimate dramatic values was likely to depend on conventional moral and social values which were very obnoxious to him and against which he fought his whole life. The "well-made" play depended, Shaw felt, on static attitude and moral commonplaces. It was conventional and mechanistic and hence incapable of producing vital drama which the play of ideas was to be. It is clear that Shaw found the drama of the late nineteenth century lamentably "dated" in ethics and philosophy. The dramatists conformed to the moral attitudes of their grandfathers. Shaw postulated, it seems, the drama as the agent for advanced ideas challenging the conventional outlook.

Shaw's attacks on the condition of the drama of the late nineteenth century did a great deal to bring the drama of ideas into existence. But there was more to be done.

In order to see the drama of ideas established, it was necessary, Shaw correctly foresaw, that Bardolatry must come to an end. When the struggle for the drama of ideas was brewing up in England under the leadership of Shaw, when the battle for establishing Ibsen in the English theatre was raging, the greatest obstacle to that end was "the most unassailed English institution" - Shakespeare¹. It was natural, therefore, that Shaw, the champion of the drama of ideas, took the cudgel against Shakespeare and used it in his peculiar calculated way.

1. George Bernard Shaw - G.K. Chesterton, the Bodley Head. London (1961) P 94.

Shaw, who introduced himself to Shakespeare quite early in life, knew his great predecessor well and always devoured attentively whatever came to his hand about Shakespeare. It seems at first surprising that Shaw who was so charmed by the music of Shakespeare and spoke to protest vehemently against any attempt to mutilate Shakespeare's texts, should also speak volumes against him whenever he found an opportunity --in columns of papers, in lectures and private utterances. But when we examine the situation in which Shaw found himself as the champion of the emerging drama of ideas, we see that this attack, often merciless, virulent, and unjust, was quite natural. Moreover, he found a lot of joy in demolishing the established idol. But this made him, understandably, quite infamous. His comments on Shakespeare startled all England; these appeared blasphemous to the Bardolators. But some people came to think that Shaw, in thus criticising Shakespeare, was trying to make himself appear great, which, it should be noted, is a completely wrong approach. Shaw's struggle was not to establish himself as greater than the great master, but to establish the new force in the dramatic literature - the drama of ideas. The Shavian "boutade" against Shakespeare was cool and calculated; but this was done not out of perversity or envy. It may be added that debunking is a characteristic feature of Shavian comedy and in debunking Shakespeare he seems to have tried to demolish an icon.

Shaw's main charge against Shakespeare was his

Philosophic incompetence. He complained again and again that Shakespeare's weakness lay in his complete deficiency in the highest form of thought. Ibsen's appearance in the European theatre had far-reaching impact because, so Shaw thought, he knocked out his predecessors, particularly Shakespeare. "Until then Shakespeare had been conventionally ranked as a giant among psychologists and philosophers. Ibsen dwarfed him so absurdly in those aspects that it became impossible for the moment to take him seriously as an intellectual force".¹ As a champion of the drama of ideas it was natural that Shaw would like the playwright to be an intellectual force and here he found Shakespeare wanting.

Another complaint of Shaw against Shakespeare, which he thought fundamental, was that Shakespeare's test of the worth of life was the hedonist's test; since life could not be justified by this or any other external test, Shakespeare came out of his reflective period, Shaw thought, a pessimist oppressed with a logical demonstration that life was not worth living.² Despite the enormous joyousness which Shaw attributed to Shakespeare, he, on the basis of tragic themes from Shakespeare's masterpieces, drew the illogical conclusion that Shakespeare himself was a pessimist beyond redemption. This type of criticism, of course, is quite fantastic and questionable, though Shaw made it seem plausible.

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1. Postscript to Our Theatre in Nineties- G.B. Shaw in the Complete Preface of Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 79.
 2. G.B. Shaw. : Man of the Century Vol II - Archibald Henderson. Appleton Century Crofts Inc 1956. P 700.

Shaw always maintained that Shakespeare was a gentleman with all the pretensions of the higher bourgeois; that the characteristics of the educated gentleman reared by the Public School and Universities were just those which he found Shakespeare's to be : "... the snobbishness, the naughtiness, the contempt for tradesmen and mechanics, the assumption that witty conversation can only mean smutty conversation, the flunkeyism ^{towards} social superiors and malice towards social inferiors "

The defects of Shaw's "boutade" against Shakespeare are numerous. In the first place Shaw committed the blunder of depreciating his predecessor because he was not a social reformer, as if the reformist zeal was the only mark of the artist. The other great blunder of Shaw was to depreciate Shakespeare for lacking any sustained and consistent philosophy of human life or society. It is true that Shakespeare is not a Kant or a Nietzsche ; but the dramatic works of Shakespeare are full of reflections on human life and destiny containing a body of thought which cannot be neglected. Moreover, Shaw could not see that one could become a great artist without having an articulated philosophy of life. Shaw is guilty of judging art by moral principles which led him to use harsh words about such an immortal character as Falstaff only because Falstaff appears to be a wretch.

1. Preface to The Dark Lady of The Sonnets- Shaw. The Complete Preface of Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 759.

But Shavian criticism has its own value. Shakespeare was deified by most of the romantic critics of the nineteenth century. The English-speaking people of the world started to look upon Shakespeare as an infallible god to say anything against whom was immoral and blasphemous. This was not a healthy condition because idolatry is always blinding and, in literature, destructive. Through his startling comments, replete with commonsense and often penetrating, Shaw exposed the hollowness of Bardolatry; he brought Shakespeare back to the human level and made people realize that he was a human being and a poet, not a god.

As already noted, Shaw took Shakespeare heavily to task with the singular aim of establishing Ibsen in the English soil which meant establishing the drama of ideas.

The fight for the new drama was not yet complete. It was a fight not only against the so-called "well-made" play and "drawing-room" play and against Bardolatry. It was a fight against a moral outlook; a fight which Shaw undertook with his characteristic zeal. As already noted the "well-made" play and the "drawing-room" play had their own audience who were upholders of Victorian ideas of morality and standard of conduct. But the nineties of the nineteenth Century witnessed a revolt against almost everything orthodox and conventional. In particular, this brief period saw the passing off of Victorian insularity and the rising influence of continental ideas. New social, political and religious ideas were in the air. Though the fight against Victorian

attitude was fought by many, it was particularly to Shaw that the defeat of Victorianism is due. Shaw wanted every man to think for himself without blindly accepting the Victorian standards of morality. In order to make the man conscious Shaw attacked the moral attitudes, customs and institutions and laughed at them. He satirised romantic idealism about love, war, and religion. Thus he prepared an audience who would accept the "drama of ideas" as the legitimate drama and the vital drama of the time. The shock given by Shaw to the people nourished by Victorian standard of morality and judgement was great though today they do not become shocked by his scathing remarks. In India of today the moral standard, compared to that in today's England, is rather Victorian and so when an Indian reads Shaw's dramas he still feels piously scandalized.

Shaw's Technique and Treatment of Theme

We will now deal with a very important aspect of Shaw as a dramatic artist - an aspect that made him famous throughout the world and ensured him a place in the history of dramatic literature almost equal to Euripedes. But this fame certainly was not forthcoming. As we have already seen, Shaw was not considered as a dramatist at all by the contemporary critics and theatre-goers. The Shavian technique appeared to them so wild that they failed to digest it, much less appreciate it. It is desirable to hear Bernard Shaw speak of this. He was quite aware that "the jigsaw-puzzle business, the working out of a plot, is necessary in detective stories, and helpful to the playwrights who have talent enough to put their clock-work mice through amusing tricks, and hold their audiences by jury-box suspenses"¹. With that set technique of the so-called "well-made play" Shaw had nothing to do, as the dramatist himself declared². Hence he spoke against the "well-made" technique in such sure and forceful language.

The myth that the drama of ideas is meant only for reading is baseless. Though in such a play "idea" comes in the first place, still it has to be a stage-play. Shaw did

1. As in G.B.S. : Man of the Century Vol II - Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Ltd. 1956. P 729 -30

2. Ibid P 730

not want just to preach his ideas through his plays; he wanted to make his plays immensely actable. He did not want to use his ideas only as a philosopher, but mainly as a dramatic artist.

Naturally Shaw had to find out his own technique; apparently new and original, his dramatic technique is not really so, which we will find out in course of our examination. The fact remains, nevertheless, that he used his knowledge as a socialist and an economist to give his plays a genuinely vertebrate structure. Even his first play Widowers' Houses, which has been announced by him as "a ¹ propagandist play - a didactic play - a play with a purpose", shows Shaw's dramatic technique at work. He maintains, "you will please judge it, not as a pamphlet in dialogue, but as in intention a work of art as much as any comedy of Moliere is a work of art"². The association of the name of Moliere in the very first play of Shaw is significant as we shall see afterwards. Before this he had written five unsuccessful novels. Now with his experience as a novelist of unsuccessful novels and a dramatist of a "propagandist play" Shaw formulated his own method of construction: "As a fictionist, my natural way is to imagine characters and spin out a story about them, whether I am writing a novel or a play"³. Naturally in his dramas characters assume more

1. Preface to Widowers' Houses. The Complete Prefaces of

Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 702.

2. Ibid. P 703.

3. Ibid. P 700.

importance; he never designed the plot of his plays in advance. Rather he gave his characters freedom and let them, through their interactions, work out the play. It is particularly due to this that we find what is called "ideosyncratically differentiated" characters in his plays. But though not pre-designed, the forms his plays take are inevitable. We are to bear in mind that his are dramas of ideas in which "discussion" is the most essential thing because it is through discussion only that the plots of the Shavian plays develop. We find his characters incessantly talking to explain and develop the "idea" and also to argue out the probable objections to these ideas. The works of Ibsen interested him profoundly as dramas of ideas. It may be said that it is Ibsen who started the "talk" on the stage and Shaw kept the stage ever "talking". This "discussion" in a drama of ideas, as Shaw pointed out in theory as well as in practice, is intertwined with plot and is, as it develops the plot, inevitable. If we accept the drama of ideas as a genuine genre of art, discussion must also be accepted as the legitimate instrument through which the dramatist lays bare the dramatic conflict. Ideas cannot be explained and developed without provoking debates

1. Shaw writes, "Now you have exposition, situation and discussion; and the discussion is the test of the playwright". The Quintessence of Ibsenism. Constable & Co. Ltd. 1913. P 187.

- even if there are only two persons on the stage with conflicting ideas.

In the old-fashioned plays written after the Parisian school of Scribe and Sardou there is an exposition in the first act, a situation in the second, and some sort of tidying up in the third or the last. Then Europe witnessed Ibsen's A Doll's House with a 'new' technique. In the last scene of the play, Nora, instead of falling into the arms of her husband, which should have assuredly happened in the old-fashioned plays, turns on him to say, "we must set down like two rational beings¹ and discuss all this that has been happening between us". Now onwards, when A Doll's House finished its conquest of Europe, audiences expect a rational discussion as well as a human situation. Shaw met the expectations by giving them both. But, it may be mentioned that it took a long time for the audience to accept this type of play because they had only the "well-made play" in their mind and eye.

But this technique is not "new"; it is new only on the modern stage where the audiences saw, before Ibsen and Shaw, only the "well-made play". This technique had been used by preachers and orators of old; more important, this technique had been seen in the rhetorical speeches in the primitive dramaturgy. As Shaw put it in his inimitable language, "Rhetoric, irony, argument, paradox, parable, the

1. A Doll's House - Henrich Ibsen.

re-arrangement of haphazard facts into orderly and intelligent situations : these are both the oldest and the newest art of the drama" ¹ . Shaw only revived the old technique.

Bernard Shaw began his career as a dramatist imbued with the new doctrine of Ibsenic realism. But he was never to follow Zolaesque naturalism. Again, he was not a "realist" in the ordinary sense and to call him a "realist" without any qualifying remark would lead to wrong conclusions. He was always in the classic tradition recognizing that stage characters must be endowed by the author with a conscious self-knowledge and power of expression and a freedom from inhibitions. It is this power that differentiates a Shaw or a Shakespeare from a gramophone or a camera. This method resulted in two things - first, far from being artificial, the characters became living and, secondly, the plays did not just resemble life, rather they became "larger than life". This last point is important. Shaw's characters are not gramophones; neither are his plays photographs of life as it is. The characters are indeed probable in their respective situations and the situations are not impossible. The characters expound and explain various philosophies trying to find out the meaning and essence of life; we find some of the characters guessing the future. Again, some of his characters, say in Back to

1. The Quintessence of Ibsenism. Constable & Co. Ltd. 1913.

P 204.

Methuselah, actually live in future when the forces of Creative Evolution would have wrought many changes in the physical as well as mental horizon of man; we find the Ancients trying ceaselessly to free themselves from the burden of the physique. Thus, after reading such plays, it is not possible to label him as a "realist" in the ordinary sense. The plays lack factual truth, but the presence of essential truth in them cannot be lost sight of. It is true that he dealt with economic and political problems of the day, but in them, too, we do not find only a photographic representation of the facts of life. Shaw did not write merely political or social tracts and pamphlets.

Shaw, of course, was not another Ibsen. Though there was some similarity between Shaw's class and early circumstances and Ibsen's and though Shaw's quarrel with the prevailing capitalist social order was much like Ibsen's, yet their plays are very much unlike, despite the superficial resemblances which is due to the fact that they wrote for the same type of theatre. Shaw, like Ibsen, sometimes enlarges his drama by a retrospective first act; but this device is an old one though no one before Ibsen carried it to masterly length. The really new feature which Ibsen introduced is the final discussion of the whole business by the characters. This device is not used by Shaw in the simple A Doll's House - form; he developed it to such an extent that it enabled him to taunt the critics by declaring that his plays were discussions or debates. In Too

True to be Good one of the characters declares at the end of the first act that the play is virtually over and in the remaining acts the characters will only discuss what passed in the first act. But the discussions are real and Shaw takes care to dramatize the debates. These discussions are not reminiscent of Ibsen. Ibsen, we must note, studied the Parisian school headed by Scribe and Sardou; he accepted the mechanical technique of construction. But being an artist and not an artisan, he takes his plays to a height which is beyond the artisans of the Parisian school.

Shaw maintained right from the beginning that the methods of Scribe and Sardou were the wrong methods. It would be evident from the following discussion what Shaw's ideas about construction was - a play should not be constructed, it should grow. Shaw lets his inspiration lead him to apparently impossible feats; for instance, the Epilogue in Saint Joan which solved the problem of presenting Joan's historical future and its significance. Ibsen's technique has little to do with Shavian technique, for whereas Ibsen's plays are "constructed", Shaw's are natural growth. Shaw, so far as technique is concerned, is as far removed from Ibsen, as he, so far as he is an artist, is removed from the Parisian school. We must bid adieu to the notion that Shaw is an Ibsenist. Only this much may be said that Ibsen raised nineteenth century drama to a level at which it could become a vehicle of expression for Shaw's inspired ideas.

What made Shaw's works seem so novel and wild to the uneducated readers and theatre-goers was that he revived

the classical technique of playwrighting, applying them to modern problems. Shaw adopted the method of the Greek dramatists in order to deal with the topics of the hour. While the essence of Shaw's plays may not be very original, their novelty lay in the fact that they are half-sermon, half-debate in which every conceivable subject is discussed - from love, marriage and family life to science, politics and religion, his laboriously acquired knowledge of social condition and his "philosophy" of Creative Evolution informing most of them. As he had little to do with the method of the "Well-made play", and as he was an artist, not the manufacturer of entertainment pieces, it must be interesting and necessary to hear him explain his own method.

In an interview on "How to Write a Play" with the Glasgow Evening Times ¹ Shaw threw some invaluable light on the mysterious riddle of creativity in drama -

"Plays begin in all sorts of ways. I can sit down without an idea in my head except that I must write a play, and a play comes"

"Most plays begin with a dramatic situation; the rest is only a device for bringing it about. The Devil's Disciple obviously grew round a situation. John Bull's Other Island began with a farcical fancy which developed into a big political situation.

1. Glasgow Evening Times. February 7, 1937. (George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century, Vol II, Archibald Henderson. Appleton - Century - Crofts Ltd. 1956. P 730.)

"As to Pygmalion, the scene in which Eliza makes her successful debut at the Ambassador's party was the root of the play at its inception"

"Then you have the thesis play. Back to Methuselah dramatizes the thesis that our conduct is influenced not only by our experience but by our expectations, and that life is not at present long enough for us to take it seriously.

"A theme may lie in a playwright's head for half an hour or half a life time before he uses it. The perception that Saint Joan was an early Protestant came to me from the report of her trial, but I never thought of writing a play about her until years later when my wife suggested it one day when I was at a loss."

Obviously Shaw used not one, but varied techniques in his plays; this variety of techniques make them seemingly wild. Yet, it should be observed that his earlier plays show no marked deviation from conventional standards of dramatic construction. They are problem plays, with the inevitable conflicts of interests. Indeed, as early as 1895, Shaw envisaged drama from a social point of view, maintaining that social questions are produced by the conflicts of human institutions with human feeling. And he makes the sweeping remark that the "material of the dramatist is always the conflict of human feeling with circumstances, so that, since institutions are circumstances, every social question¹ furnishes material for drama". Owing to enormous progress

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century Vol II Archibald Henderson. Appleton Century Crofts Ltd. 1956 P 731.

in the field of journalism, modes of transportation and communication, social questions have taken on greatly enhanced interest for a vast audience. But Shaw was too great an artist not to realize, granting all his concern for society and its reformations, that social questions are too sectional, too topical, and all too temporal to move a man to the mighty effort which is needed to produce great drama. But if contribution to the freedom, welfare and happiness of mankind is regarded as a criterion of value, a social drama of ideas may actually be more worthwhile than a work of purely imaginative art.

Shaw's comic genius, in conjunction with his revolutionary spirit, impelled him towards revolt against what were popularly but erroneously termed "rules" of the drama. The first of all rules was that our sympathies must be irrevocably attached to one side in the conflict. The spectator must always know where he is. With his love for surprises and anti-climax, Shaw refused to be restricted by any iron-clad rule. The secret of Shaw's strangeness is his unpredictability. He possessed extraordinary skill in all forms of stage-entertainments : comedy, farce-comedy, farce, extravaganza, burlesque. Again, Caesar and Cleopatra, The Doctor's Dilemma, and Saint Joan attest to his genius in chronicle, tragi-comedy, and even tragedy. Another secret of Shaw's technique is deliberate mixture of forms, the sudden transition from one to the other. "This perturbing dichotomy upset the spectator, who felt that Shaw had failed to supply

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a compass for the voyage into uncharted areas" . Actually Shaw's technique, more often than not, is to upset the spectator who thought that Shaw was aimlessly drifting towards an unknown destination. In The Quintessence of Ibsenism he declared, "Never mislead the audience was an old rule. But the new school will trick the spectator into forming a meanly false judgement, and then convict him in the next act, often to his grievous mortification"². The deliberate mixture of forms was the result of his own studied effort to mortify the spectator who could not understand what to think of the plays. This technique of misleading the audience is best illustrated in the Widowers' Houses. When one considers this play in generic terms, one recognizes at the outset its affinities to three conventional dramatic forms - melodrama, the well-made play, and romantic comedy. But no sooner does one recognize this than one also recognizes how different the play is from all the three forms. Shaw explicitly refused to turn the Widowers' Houses into a melodrama where one would get a conflict between unadulterated good and clearcut evil. In the Preface to his Play Pleasant Shaw emphatically declared, "In such cheap wares I do not deal"³ . Sartorius is not a villain and

1. George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century Vol II Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century Crofts Ltd. 1956. P 733.

2. The Quintessence of Ibsenism - G.B. Shaw. Constable & Co. Ltd. 1913. P 203.

3. Preface to Play Pleasant . The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hainlyn Ltd. 1965. P 729.

Trench is not a hero; Sartorius does not repent and Trench does not become a socialist. More, the happy denouement of the "well-made play" is mocked even as the characters celebrate it; and Shaw's characters are considerably different from those of the "well-made plays". But chiefly the generic basis of the structure of the Widowers' Houses and its point of departure is romantic comedy, in the conventional formula of boy getting girl after successively meeting and losing her. But the hero - hero, because he is young leading man of the play and also because he becomes engaged to the young pretty heiress - is not the typical hero of a romantic comedy. Trench's betrothal and the end of the Widowers' Houses seems a grim parody of the ending of a romantic comedy. One more clearly recognizes that the ending of the Widowers' Houses is tragi-comic rather than comic when one considers what the play might have been if Shaw (or William Archer, the initial collaborator) had turned it into something more conventionally happy or comic. Eric Bentley has observed that the Widowers' Houses consists of "inversions of accepted patterns" ¹. Just as Shaw inverts the conventions of the "well-made play", so he inverts the pattern of conventional comedy and with bitter irony thrusts comedy in the direction of tragi-comedy.

With Shaw matters are rarely simple or simple-dimensioned. The perception of Kierkegaard may be quite relevant ; "The comical is present in every stage of life for wherever there is life there is contradiction, and

1. Bernard Shaw - 1856-1950 - Eric Bentley. 1957. P 101.

wherever there is contradiction, the comical is present. The Tragic and the Comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction ; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical the painful contradiction The comic apprehension evokes the contradiction or makes it manifest by having in mind the way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic apprehension sees the contradiction and despairs of a way out; . . . wherever there exists a contradiction and the way out is not known . . .there the contradiction is not painless"¹. In the Widowers' Houses Shaw evokes both types of contradiction. Although they themselves achieve a state without pain, nevertheless, in the slums, off stage, suffering persists. Shaw described the Ibsenite theatre as a place where we "are not flattered spectators killing an idle hour with an ingenious and amusing entertainment : we are guilty 'creatures sitting at a play:'. . ." ². The Widowers' Houses both flatters the spectators with an apparently amusing entertainment and at the same time turns them into guilty creatures. The play delights, but it is a disturbing delight, Shaw's first play is discussed at length because even in his first play his technique of construction, particularly his method of misleading the audience, is manifest.

1. Quoted from "The Comical". Trans David F. Swanson and Walter Lowrie : "Dramatic Theory and Criticism" ed.

Bernard F. Dukore. N. Y. 1974. P 556.

2. The Quintessence of Ibsenism -G. B. Shaw. Constable & Co.Ltd. 1913 P 205.

It is Opera which was Shaw's true medium where imaginative fancy supplants scientific fact, singing replaces talking, and the scene is laid in a wonderland where miracles are natural and where anything may happen. For Shaw music cast the spell and opera transcended comedy. As a boy Shaw acquired a thorough knowledge of Don Giovanni, its entrancing strains, and the perfection of its structure. The lesson he learnt from Mozart of the value of fine craftsmanship was the most important feature of his education. From that educational experience stemmed Shaw's possibly the most original contribution to dramatic technique which has been termed "Operatic play of ideas"¹ by Prof. R. A. Brower and "Operatic ideological play"² by Archibald Henderson. With the use of rhythmic dialogue and characters distinguished by voice-tones as in opera, Shaw creates a new type of drama. His comedy of this type --- compactly presented in the Hell Scene in Man and Superman --- is not an opera or musical drama perfect, but a play, comic in character, presenting the clash of ideologies in rhythmic prose at different levels of tonality. Anna and the Man, Caesar and Cleopatra and The Apple Cart also have the qualities of an opera. We shall discuss this point again while discussing the artist Shaw in a different chapter.

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1. In his essay on Shaw in "Major British Writers" Vol II 1904 Brower uses the term.
 2. G. B. Shaw : Man of the Century Vol II - A. Henderson. Appleton - Century Crofts Inc. 1956. P 733.

Shaw was a master in different types of the laughter-provoking plays --- comedy, farce, burlesque, extravaganza. It is possible to distinguish the devices, artifices, and techniques he employed, even though the very form of the play itself is changing under the eyes of the reader. A comedy of emotions treated wittily, such as Arms and the Man is transformed almost magically into a satiric farce; the glory of war is turned into a satiric farce; Sergius wins the battle because the enemy does not have the right ammunition. The glamour of romantic love only seems to illumine the hero and the heroine, but it turns out that the lovers, following a code of artificial convention, prove untrue to each other in response to natural instincts.

Shaw is an expert in making use of ironic comedy. This is most beautifully illustrated in The Philanderer in which there is the picture of the young doctor who has discovered a new disease and is delighted to find the people suffering from this disease, but then is despaired to find that the disease does not really exist. Dr. Paramore does not become happy to find that the disease does not exist; rather he becomes sad because he now cannot fight for a cause. The doctor becomes more concerned about the sickness than about the sick. Shaw possibly suggests that the idealist is more concerned about the sin than about the sinner. Thus the business of Dr. Paramore's discovery of the disease and his despair that there is no such disease is

not only farcial, but also has philosophical import.

In his roles as humourist, wit, and farceur Shaw uses various techniques, none of which is either original or new. First comes what may be described as the character wearing an air of entire seriousness, but his language is madly funny. Shaw's description of this device is precise as well as penetrating : "I take the greatest pains to find the right thing to say and then say it with utmost levity"¹. This is really the technique of Oscar Wilde in The Importance of Being Earnest. This is the technique of bringing sharp contrast - gravity alternating with levity in a way irresistibly amusing. In farce-comedy Shaw uses the device of turning the climax of comedy into the anti-climax of farce. This is the very essence of humour -- this lightning transformation from the normal to the abnormal. The familiar cliches, too, emanate humour - from the sublime to the ludicrous. One of the best and representative examples of this technique may be found at the conclusion of the First Act of Man and Superman where Tanner, who has been exercising his eloquence to defend Violet's supposed carrying without being married, collapses on hearing that Violet is actually married and the child she bears is legitimate. Shaw has something to say about this technique of transforming the normal to the abnormal, the serious to the funny; " Just when I am really rising to the height of

1. As in G.B.S. Man of the Century. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 727,

my power that I may become really tragic and great, some absurd joke occurs to me, and the anti-climax is irresistible I cannot deny that I have the tragedian and I have the clown in me; and clown trips me up in the most dreadful way" ¹ .

The problem raised by Shaw is a serious one, because it involves the aesthetic problem of mixing the categories. It is assumed that comedy aims at clearing the air after rebuking the guilty in a good natured manner. Anti-climax is somewhat harsh in nature, for the deflation may be not only humorous but even humiliating. Shaw means that to pass suddenly from the climax of tragedy to the comic anti-climax is to pass from the sublime to the ridiculous, which, of course, does not necessarily prevent the author from becoming a great author. Scenes and acts in Shaw's plays are often carefully built anti-climaxes; even whole plays like Arms and the Man, Candida and The Devil's Disciple stand on the anti-climax. As G.K. Chesterton says, Vergil's "Arma Virumque" is a mounting and ascending phrase and suggests that man is more than his weapons. The Latin line also suggests a superb procession of warriors and arms. In Shaw's play, there is the din and bustle of war, a great cavalry charge, but the warrior is completely debunked and

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1. The N. Y. Times. January 6, 1929. Quoted in G.B.S. : Man of the Century - Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century Crofts Inc. 1956. P 727
 2. George Bernard Shaw - G.K.Chesterton. The Bodly Head. London.1965. P 111.

humiliated. In Candida when everybody is mentally prepared to hear Candida's preference for Marchbanks, comes her declaration that she gives herself to the weak man. It takes some time for the audience to realise that the man who appears to be strong is really the weak man.

In The Doctor's Dilemma Shaw developed his peculiar mixture of tragedy and comedy, so that people scarcely know whether to laugh or cry. We may notice that in the old religious Mystery and Miracle Plays, which Shaw studied with great attention, the most solemn scenes alternate with the most laughable ones. The secular drama kept up this characteristic British tradition: The porter in Macbeth, the clown in Antony and Cleopatra, the grave digger in Hamlet defy classical decorum by introducing laughter into deepest tragedy. In King Lear the alternation of the tragic and the comic is dropped and there is one interweaving of the two, each heightening the other. Shaw calls The Doctor's Dilemma a tragedy, but it is really a tragi-comedy. The loss of the gifted husband of Jennifer is hardly in itself a tragedy. Shaw started the play with Jennifer as the protagonist, possibly with the idea of tragedy, but discovered that his concern is not with her or her husband, but with the doctor whose dilemma is whether to treat the artist Dubedat who, however, is a depraved individual, or the sick, poor general practitioner. But then Dubedat dies a beautiful death with the swan song: "I'm perfectly happy." Shaw does not suggest that Dubedat should

be preserved, a good painter though he is, at all costs. The judgement of the doctor is confused because the artist's wife fascinates him. The doctor's judgement to let the artist die is clouded by personal feelings and puts him in an absurd situation. He is the tragic protagonist, but his tragedy is presided over by the comic spirit.

Shaw sometimes uses the conventions of melodrama; but the conventional melodramatic situations suddenly take unconventional turns. The point may be illustrated from The Devil's Disciple : just where the melodramatic clergyman would show courage he appears to show cowardice; just where the melodramatic sinner would confess his love he confesses his indifference. The melodramatic playwrights have so often made a man face death for the woman he loves, but Shaw makes him face death for the woman he does not love --- only to put the woman in her place. Shaw gives a twist to the trite episodes and the stock situations of the conventional melodrama; in Act III of the play, the melodramatic formula requires Dick to avow his love for the priest's wife, for whom he is ready to sacrifice his life. But when Judith visits him in prison and asks him if he is not taking her husband's place out of love for her, he replies : "If I said - to please you - that I did what I did ever so little for your sake, I lied as men always lie to women . . . I had no motive and no interest . . . I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it; gallows or no gallows. I should have done the

same thing for any other man in the town or any other man's wife". Here, again, Shaw succeeds in humanizing the stock figure of melodrama, revealing in him a credible mixture of good and evil. Dick may scoff at religion and break the social code, but he is not naturally vicious or depraved. In the stern asceticism of his nature, he is a more genuine Puritan than his mother. He is not a conventional stage-hero, but one who obeys the law of his own nature under every trial; he pities the devil, takes his side and champions him against the world.

Another technique of Shaw is that he made the worse appear the better and he carried this technique farther than any other ancient or modern playwright. This is the technique of the Wit. Shaw went as far as imagination can reach in his climactic feat of cynicism in "Don Joan in Hell" in Man and Superman by intellectual fireworks, by the most vertiginously witty exhibition of epigrammatic sophistries, transforming the Seven Cardinal Virtues into Seven Deadly Sins, interchanging Heaven and Hell itself. This is the exaggeration and diabolic ingenuity of wit - a field in which Gilbert, Wilde and Butler excelled. They possibly excelled Shaw in social suavity and stylistic elegance, but Shaw far excelled them in intellectual range, breadth of view, artistic perspective, and philosophic content and vision.

By the second decade of the present century some of the more acute students of English literature among French

critics were clearly recognizing the close affinities¹ between Moliere and Bernard Shaw. Regis Michaud has noted that Shaw bade fair to become a fashionable Moliere --- a Moliere who wrote his plays to "usher in the golden age according to Karl Marx". This observation is misleading because Shaw did not refer to Marx earlier than in The Apple Cart. Michaud, however, comments on some resemblances between Moliere and Shaw and concludes that if social comedy was a mere germ in Moliere, it receives an arresting extension in Shaw. The findings of Michaud cannot be lightly dismissed even though to portray Shaw as a replica of Moliere would be a gross mistake.

Moliere's plays were called "conversation pieces" and when Shaw labelled his own plays as "disquisitory" pieces, the resemblance between the two playwrights became unmistakable and obvious. It may not be out of place to mention here that Shaw considered not Shakespeare but Moliere as the greatest dramatist that ever lived. Moliere, in the preface to his masterpiece Tartuffe categorically stated that the principal end of comedy was to correct the vices of men who were more likely to be laughed, and not scolded, out of their sins. It was his belief that as a comic poet he could do no better than attack the vices of his time

1. As referred to by A. Henderson in G.B.S. : Man of the Century . Vol II P 737. Appleton Century Crofts Inc. 1956. Michaud's work is in French.

with ridiculous likenesses. The voice of Moliere, in this respect, is unmistakably the voice of Shaw. When we remember how Shaw associated his first dramatic work, Widowers' Houses with the art of Moliere, we again find the resemblance between the two in the technique and the treatment of theme.

But, still, Shaw is not Moliere; neither did he intend to be. We may, after examining the resemblances between them, say that Shaw has picked up the torch of Moliere and carried it to the future. Actually Shaw began where Moliere had ended¹. There are unmistakable differences between the art of the two masters. Moliere was not a social reformer of the Shavian brand; he accepted the French society as he found it. Further, Moliere was not, conventionally speaking, immoral or heretical; but Shaw was both and found not much in the then English society worthy of preservation. The task before Shaw was colossal - to present a new philosophy of life and to create a new audience; but this was not the task of Moliere. Shaw's technique of characterisation has little, if anything, to do with that of Moliere. The central character with Shaw is no longer, as with the French dramatist, some extraordinary and exceptional individual, but a whole social class, an institution, national traits, or even an entire civilization. The central character in Moliere is replaced in Shaw by a code of conduct, often unconventional, a

1. G.B.Shaw : Man of the Century Vol II. Archibald Henderson Appleton-Century-Croft Inc. 1956. P 739.

philosophy of life, incorporated in an individual. The characters in Shaw's plays who do not incorporate these qualities are made ridiculous through the satiric exposure of the fallacious views and shallow codes of conduct, sentimental, romantic, conventional. Shaw's characters are not pathological as Moliere's are; Shaw portrays class types. He does not portray the coxcomb, the miser, the pedant, the bore, or the coquette; he portrays the cockney, the manufacturer of armaments, the professional soldier, the brigand, the saint, the politician, the dictator, the king - all class-types. It is in this sense that Shaw's plays are twentieth century morality plays. Every Shaw-play is a twentieth century Pilgrim's Progress with the great army of individual pioneers striving for ever onwards towards a new social Utopia.

In the correspondence between Henry James and H. G. Wells¹ we have the classic case of the literary artist and the professed journalist. To Henry James literature, like painting, is an end; to Wells, on the other hand, it is a means which has a use. Wells would rather be called a journalist than an artist. Bernard Shaw in retrospect may be connected with Wells. We see them as embattled Socialists and Evolutionists debating endlessly with the Distributism and the Christian Liberalism of Hillaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton. Shaw, further, would have echoed many of Wells's

1. Henry James and H.G.Wells. ed. L.Edel and G.N. Ray. 1958.

remarks in his controversy with Henry James. But behind the outward resemblance between Wells and Shaw there is a great inner distinction. Wells was a teacher of Science and a writer of scientific textbooks before he became a novelist; Shaw was a music critic and a theatre critic before he won his fame as a playwright. We are apt to think of him merely as the propagator of Ibsen and Samuel Butler; we forget his love for music and the fact that his writings were profoundly influenced by the four masters of his youth - Bunyan, Blake, Dickens, and Ruskin. Wells in his novels would rather be called a journalist than an artist; in his dramatic criticism Shaw would have queried the distinction. The fact, of course, is that both Shaw and Wells are first rate artists.

Shaw was convinced, when he mournfully noticed the deplorable condition of the English drama in the nineteenth century, that the "new drama" must compete with the contemporary novel; that the "new drama" must also be immensely readable. He was, to that end, writing plays with enormous stage directions because he was convinced that the time when the playwright could say, like the Elizabethans, "a street" or "another part of the battle field" and leave it at that, had gone by. Shaw not only set his scene in utmost detail, but gave his actors an overwhelming amount of help by detailing the person and personality of his characters.

The massive detail of the stage as well as the characters, to say nothing about the lengthy but interesting prefaces, makes his plays something of a cross between dramatic literature and the novel. These novel-plays are, naturally, meant to be read, and, needless to say, to read them is a delightful experience. Shaw's indebtedness to, or rather his affinity with, the Dickensian technique has already been noted. It may further be noted, in this connection, that Shaw was, like Dickens, a literary cartoonist in his method of characterisation and invention of plots. Shaw exaggerates; he magnifies and does not minify; yet this exaggeration does not destroy the sense of reality. This is actually Dickens all over again.

I have already said that Shaw's plays are twentieth century morality plays. This demands a bit more elaboration. Certain features of the Morality Plays and the Interludes appealed strongly to Shaw's comic instinct and controversial disposition : loose jests over solemn subjects, didactic arguments, and prolonged debates. He was a natural rebel, with an irresistible tendency a la Nietzsche, to transvalue value, to turn things upside down and inside out. The Seven Deadly Sins or Mortal Vices, integrally embedded in the morality plays, afforded him the perfect opportunity for inverting conventional standards. In their place he set the seven illuminant good qualities and wittily renamed them "The Seven Deadly Virtues". Long before

becoming a dramatist, he was delighting William Morris and his circle of congenial intimates with his witty and caustic lectures on those Seven Deadly Virtues, much to the discomfort of the moralists. In the morality play a struggle, episodic and yet continuous, takes place between the forces of good and evil, for the possession of human soul. Shaw designed quite seriously a new table of ethical values though we find him rather capricious in his choice of these Deadly Virtues. We find him giving varying lists depending upon the circumstances depicted in the individual plays. In the Hell Scene in Man and Superman, the most detailed study of ethical traits and moral values found anywhere in Shaw's writings, we are told that Hell is "the home of honour, duty, justice, and the rest of the seven deadly virtues". Elsewhere he catalogues eight with others unspecified. Don Joan tells the Devil : "Your friends are not moral, they are only conventional . . . to the very backbones of their souls. Beauty, purity, respectability, religion, morality, art, patriotism, bravery, and the rest are nothing but words which I or anyone can turn inside out like a glove".

The great flexibility in dealing with the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Deadly Virtues is illustrated by another example in Shaw's allegory of the Christian religion under the pressure of social, financial, and economic forces. In Major Barbara we are offered a new list of Seven Deadly Sins in the conflict between Wealth and Poverty -

food, clothing, firing, rent, taxes, respectability, and children. Be this as it may, Shaw surely is the master morality playwright of the twentieth century. His plays, most of them, are moralities voicing the clashing ideas and conflicting ideologies of our time. Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah, Major Barbara, Androcles and the Lion, Heartbreak House, On the Rocks are all twentieth century morality plays.

The distinguishing characteristics of the cartoonist are exaggerations and distortions. This distortion is not a deviation from, rather a heightening of, reality. To exaggerate some feature --- a nose, a chin, a brow --- is not to destroy likeness; it is a stroke of perspective in order to accentuate a dominating and determining feature of character. Shaw was a literary cartoonist; and as a literary cartoonist his aim was humorous, exaggerative portraiture, and not caustic or malicious satire. Shaw's crucial innovation was, in abandoning raw realism and photographic representation, to develop a new form of "Ultra-realism" or "supra-naturalism". It was necessary to create characters, in order to achieve this, in a strictly realistic setting, giving in their mouths truths as naked thoughts from the sub-conscious. This expression from the sub-conscious is as truly self-expressive as the soliloquies of Hamlet, Iago, Macbeth and many other Shakespearean self-revealers. This view is explicitly set forth by Shaw: "My sort of play would be

impossible unless I endowed my characters with powers of self-consciousness and self-expression which they would not possess in real life. You could not have Esop's fables unless the animals talked"¹. O'Neill's concept of bringing the inner life into parallel with the outer life interested Shaw deeply, because that achievement of the American dramatist, in whom Shaw saw the "only" contemporary American dramatist, strongly resembled what he himself had long been attempting to do. He realised the essential unreality of each person with two voices distinguished by different keys; one the natural language of daily life, insincere and artificial; the other, the speech from the sub-conscious. "But the schizophrenia, he felt, was too glaring for the stage, forbidding even that classic remission of incredulity expressed so ingeniously by Hazlitt"². Shaw felt that there was but one solution to this problem; to have the individual, in the realm of the Conscious and on the plane of daily living, speak with but a single tone and voice the uninhibited impulse to truth of the Sub-conscious. Shaw illuminates the whole matter in a passage of a letter written to Prof. Allardyce Nicoll, referring to his practice of making characters "say not what in real life they could never bring themselves to say, even if they understood themselves clearly enough, but the naked soul truth, quite

1. Sixteen Self-sketches - G. B. Shaw. N. Y. 1949. P 157.

2. G.B.S. : Man of the Century. A. Henderson. Vol II
Appleton-Century Crofts Inc. 1956. P 755.

objectively and scientifically presented, thus combining the extreme of unnaturalness"¹. This Shaw divined in Shakespeare at his greatest moments. The Shakespearean soliloquy, in so far as it was not merely an "aside" for the information of the audience, was an attempt at this. According to Shaw the highest drama is nothing but a striving towards this feat of interpretation².

No study of the dramatic technique of Shaw could be complete without a reference to the puppetal semblance noticeable in many of his plays, especially those which are labelled as moralities. All his morality plays - and in a broad sense all the plays of Shaw are morality plays - are termed indiscriminately by him as allegory, parable and fable. There was a childlike mood of wonder in Shaw that responded to that philosophic spirit of Bergson, who found the basic meaning of humour emerging from consideration of man as a puppet, a mechanical toy. All the allegorised characters of Shaw, in particular those presenting a single trait or characteristic, have something of the rigidity of the marionette.

No one who has studied with care the Shavian drama, the settings, and the handling of characters, which often appear to be "thought-marionettes" skilfully designed

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1. Cited by Prof. Allardyce Nicoll in A History of Late Nineteenth century Drama 1850-1900 (Cambridge, 1949) Vol I. P 201-202.
 2. Ibid.

and often only thinly disguised, can fail to trace their origin back to the old church pageants and shows. Punch and Judy shows in which Shaw revelled as a youth certainly had deep-seated influence in his plays. In the Shaw drama chest we find both the staged marionette-shows with human puppets and the modernised Punch and Judy Play. The Dark Lady of the Sonnets and Great Catherine are illustrations of the former type while The Devil's Disciple and The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet are of the latter. It is quite interesting and appropriate to note that the last work Shaw wrote for production should have been a puppet play - Shakes versus Shav (1949) - produced by the ¹Walds Lanchester Marionette Theatre at the Lyceum Hall, Malvern. The note of Shaw on the Programme beginning "This in all actuarial probability is my last play and the climax of my eminence, such as it is", is quite significant. It would be wrong, of course, to discover the puppet-master Shaw in all his plays and in the same degree. Certain critics have gone up so far as to assert that to Shaw had occurred the notion of relieving the British drama from the burden of human beings and substituting a procession of puppets. To this Shaw retorted, "You must not let yourself be overwhelmed by my style All my plays were written . . . as plays of life, character, and human

1. This note is printed as Preface to Shakes versus Shav in The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 916-917.

destiny; like those of Shakespeare and Euripedes". It must be admitted, however, that the relation of Shaw's plays to marionette shows and Punch and Judy Plays, and through the latter to the old Moralities has not been given any serious study.

When a playwright uses so many and so varied techniques, as does Shaw, we feel really disturbed and at a loss; no wonder the Victorian play-goers did not know what to think after seeing a Shaw-play. Shaw at the same time and to the bewilderment of the critic, claims that he is an inspired artist and wants us to understand that his plays are not "constructed plays"; rather they grow naturally. Shaw, we all surely agree, is never dull and there is a lot of truth in the observation that if a playwright "constructs" a play, he will find himself in the position of a person putting together a jig-saw huzzle, absorbed and intensely interested in an operation which becomes unbearably dull. A good play constructs with a subtlety, and often with a mechanical ingenuity that deludes the critics who hold the playwright as a crafty artificer when, in fact, he has never thought of what one character would say until another gave the cue. This is not the technique of an artisan, but of an inspired artist. When after the production of Saint Joan, which gave Shaw a towering position in the theatre, the playwright was called upon by the Modern Historic Records

1. As in G.B.S. : Man of the Century Vol II A. Handerson
Appleton Century Crofts Inc. 1956. p 718

Association to define the principles that govern the dramatist in his selection of themes and methods of treatment, he sent a lengthy reply in which are to be found some specific statements which illuminate how he works and why, at least in his later works, there is a mystic spirit. In view of the significance of Shaw's observation, I venture to quote him at length :

"I am not governed by principles; I am inspired; how and why I cannot explain because I do not know. But inspiration it must be; for it comes to me without any reference to my own ends and interests."¹

This is a fair description of a dramatic author; it also shows that the inspired artist works without being inhibited by his own aims and interests - social, political or philosophical. That Shaw can write like an inspired artist is amply demonstrated in that scene in Candida where Candida declares her purpose of remaining with the strong man because he is the weak man. She is asked to choose between two men, one, a self-confident preacher, her husband, and the other, a wild and weak young romantic poet, her lover. She chooses the former because she understands that he requires her help more and he has more weakness. Here we see one of the best reversals that Shaw ever effected. But there is more than this in Candida. Marriage is an actual human relation which has some emotional results. The wife regards

1. As in European Theories of the Drama - Barrett H.

Clark. Cincinnati. 1918. P 475.

her husband at once as the strongest and the weakest man depending squarely on her. It may be said that this relationship is not one based on love or fear, but one based strictly on marriage. The man has the incurable sense of the mother in his wife. This fact about the marriage relationship has been brought out by Shaw in the play.

The "principles" guide only the lesser writers who try to construct their plays, but Shaw's plays, being pieces of inspiration, cannot be thought of in terms of being "constructed". But the inspired artist gives his work a total design; how it happens is without his knowledge. Shaw writes,¹ "I find myself possessed of a theme in the following manner. I am pushed by a natural need to set to work, to write down conversations that come into my head unaccountably. At first I hardly know the speakers, and cannot find names for them. Then they become more and more familiar; and I learn their names. Finally I come to know them very well, and discover what it is they are driving at and why they have said and done things I have been moved to set down.

"This is not being "guided by principles"; it is hallucination; and sane hallucination is what we call play or dramaI do not select my methods; they are imposed on me by a hundred considerations . . . by the nature and limits of the art of acting, by the capacity of the spectators for understanding what they see and hear

1. As in *European Theories of Drama*. Barrett H. Clark Cincinnati. 1918. P 475.

"I have to consider . . . the extent to which the magic of art can break through commercial prudence, the limits set by honour and humanity to the tasks I may set to my fellow-artist the actor".

It appears from the foregoing discussion that Shaw was not an innovator in dramatic technique. He was at bottom a classicist in dramatic construction who constantly fell back upon Moliere and Euripedes as well as other great dramatists and story tellers. Certain it is that he modelled a number of his plays upon the almost plotless conversation pieces of Moliere. But, in addition, he may well be credited with having created the so-called "debated drama". He labouriously carried the debated drama through the several phases of the disquisitory, discursive, and digressive dramas. These last are plays in which Shaw seemingly capriciously, but in fact deliberately, digresses from the central theme of the play, and makes a personal tour of his brain with all its prejudices and eccentricities. Such plays are entertainments, no less delightful because they do not conform to the orthodox canons of dramatic art. So far as possible he eliminated plot, frequently discarded the technique of the "Well-made Play", shunned the romantic dramas of love and intrigue and, in later phases, devoted himself entirely to the expression of general philosophical ideas in conversational pieces.

When I say that Shaw, at bottom, is a classicist, I mean that his execution is classical. But the source of

his plays is always romantic in so far as they are the result of his inspiration. All great art is romantic in inspiration and classical in execution.

It is Shaw, more than anybody else, who kept the world laughing for over half a century. He was almost like a prankish boy - with a fundamental difference, nevertheless - playing with a huge but stupid animal, the Public. An analysis of his predicaments and the way he handled them may be given in this way : Waggery as a medium is invaluable. Shaw's case greatly is the case of Rabelais over again. When he began to promulgate his opinions, he found that they appeared to the unthinking people extravagant and even insane. In order to get a hearing it was necessary, Shaw understood, to attain the footing of a privileged lunatic with the licence of a jester¹. He found that he had only to say with perfect simplicity what he meant seriously just as it struck him, to make everybody laugh; the real joke is that all the time he is in perfect earnest.

All this is said to bring home the point that the technique of the Shavian drama and the treatment of theme in that drama are not air-tight compartments which could be studied independent of each other. Much has already been said about the treatment of theme in a Shaw-play, but a little more discussion is deemed necessary.

1. George Bernard Shaw - Clarence Rook. The Chap-Book. 1896. P 539.

So long the critics and the theatre-goers had the notion that drama must be written with "dramatic" themes. But it was Shaw who showed that a drama may include, as its theme, anything and everything; after him it has become impossible to say which themes should be branded as non-dramatic. Shaw takes up love, marriage, family life, money, poverty, capitalism, socialism, critics, ministers, future life, simpleton, conscience, the League of Nations, Ireland, England --- to name them haphazardly --- in his "Social", "Political", "Philosophical" plays and treats them in his own way.

The phrase "in his own way" makes it necessary to have a glimpse, however quick, into the mind of Bernard Shaw; this would help us understand why he dealt with his themes in the way he did. Granting the artist, a man obviously deals with a subject in a manner that best suits and fits in his mental make-up. Shaw's was a gigantic intellect and it is quite a difficult job to separate the chaff from the grain. Still an attempt may be made. Though we do not completely agree with G.K. Chesterton's analysis of the mind of Bernard Shaw, Shaw's mind can be studied in the very three broad different aspects analysed by Chesterton - Irishman, Puritan, and Progressive. All these aspects have to be understood in order to examine how the playwright dealt with his themes.

1. George Bernard Shaw - G. K. Chesterton, The Bodley Head. London. 1961. P 6 - 80

Shaw had the rare quality of being a saint of a strictly ascetic type, for he was actually unwordly and innocent; this unworldliness and innocence - the qualities of saints - are typical Irish qualities. Nothing can be truer than this that Ireland has a quality which made it the land of saints and virgins. Elsewhere in this chapter it has been noted that Shaw had a childlike mood of wonder. He is often audacious in theory, but is always comparatively clean in thought¹. This is owing to his childlike innocence which made him courageous enough to give voice to unpalatable truths. A queer clearness of the intellect is an Irish gift and from behind the seemingly jumbled-up thoughts of Shaw this clearness radiates. It has been noted by C.E.M. Joad that Shaw's thought is coherent: ". . .his thought . . . is remarkably coherent, and the doctrine of Creative Evolution informs and unifies his teaching on every other topics"². This consistency, this coherence, would be impossible had he not have a clear intellect. He seemed to the English, as he seems to some people even now, wild and unreasonable because he was really much too reasonable to be anything but fierce when he is fighting. Personally one of the kindest of men, Shaw sometimes has written to hurt, not because he hated a particular man, but because he could not stand calmly certain ideas and would slay them if he could.

1. Ibid.

2. Shaw - C.E.M. Joad. Victor Gollancz Ltd. London. 1949. (Distributor : Allied Publishers Ltd. Bombay and Calcutta). P 198.

The English are always led to the fallacy that the Irish are weak and emotional and this fallacy springs from the fact that the Irish are lucid and very emotional. An Irishman may like romance, but, like Shaw, will not fail to point out that it is "only romance". But here we must grant the individual oddities and eccentricities of Shaw which are many and varied.

As a growing boy, Shaw developed an attitude of criticism, of scepticism, towards religion - an attitude which begot many wrong and misleading conclusions. His father had a devastating sense of anti-climax which was transmitted to the son. The father, while reproving the son for his irreverence, ended the reproof with even a more outrageous irreverence. Shaw's irreverence towards religion, it should be noted, was actually his irreverence towards the conventions of religions. An overwhelming contempt towards the conventions of religion and society was absorbed by Shaw in his impressionable years. The spirit of comic irreverence to which he was exposed in his childhood spent in the company of his father and his uncle Walter, had been highly beneficial to him throughout his life. It set upon him the seal of a satirist; but, may it be noted, he never satirised the truth of religion; he satirised only he sham, the hypocrisy. As a small boy he, like many other children, conceived a positive hatred for religious practices because of compulsory church attendance. I feel irresistibly tempted to quote Shaw to give an idea of his

hatred for congregation in the church which appeared to him, not the house of God, but the house of Satan.

". . . To this day, my flesh creeps when I recall that genteel suburban Irish Protestant Church, built by Roman Catholic workmen who would have considered themselves damned had they crossed its threshold afterwards. Every separate stone, every pane of glass, every fillet of ornamental iron work - half dog-collar, half coronet - in that building must have showed a separate evil passion in my young heart"¹.

The unnaturally motionless figures of the congregation in their Sunday clothes and bonnets, and their set faces, pale with malignant rigidity produced by the suppression of all expression produced a positive impression of intolerance on young Shaw - an impression that lasted throughout his life.

The adjective used by G.K. Chesterton to the home of the Shaws as "narrow, Puritan"² is very much misleading. It is true that Shaw was a Puritan, but to call the house where he was born and where he spent his young

1. Quoted from Geogre Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century Vol I. Appleon-Century Croft Inc. 1956. P 45. The essay "On Going to Churce", was Published in The Savoy, January, 1896. This essay has been frequently reprinted, particularly in The Philistine.

2. G.B. Shaw - G.K. Chesterton. The Bodly Head. London.1961.

days as just Puritan and also narrow is capable of drawing us to wrong conclusions. From all we know of their home with the elder Shaw and Walter discussing religion in the most comic and outrageous tone gives us the impression that it was not an average "narrow, Puritan" home. In later life Shaw reached the unalterable conclusion that, so far as Protestant gentry was concerned, Ireland was the most irreligious country in the world. The letter written by Shaw, when he was only nineteen, to "Public Opinion" brought the charge of atheism against him. True it is that Shaw was not religious in the conventional sense and certainly it was outrageously blasphemous of him to liken the church to the house of Satan. But Shaw was religious in a deeper sense. He, at bottom, was a spiritualist and a mystic for whom the formalities of religious practices had little value. That he was a Puritan is beyond dispute. In one of his numerous prefaces Shaw declared, "I have always been a Puritan in my attitude towards art". Exhibiting all that is purest in the Puritan, Shaw, a closer study will reveal, was on the side of the Puritan in almost everything. He had unflinching devotion to truth and the deep desire to see truth face to face. He was highly impatient with irrelevant sentiment or destructive symbols and was gifted with the rare quality of

1. The whole letter is quoted by Archibald Henderson in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century Vol I. Appleton - Century - Crofts Inc. 1956. P 48-49.

2. Preface to Three Plays for Puritans. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 743.

constant effort to keep the soul at his highest pressure and speed. We may here note that Shaw found in Bunyan, a Puritan, a Kindred soul, Bunyan was Shaw's favourite author and went so far as to place him above Shakespeare as a writer and philosopher¹. But here again, a note of caution must be sounded. Whatever is sentimental and deliquescent in Puritanism was rejected by Shaw. To look at Shaw as an orthodox Puritan also will be misleading because he never supported any repression. Instead of calling him a Puritan it would be more fitting to call him a biologist. Shaw's condemnation of such highly respected institutions as marriage and family led many to brand him as obscene and immoral. As he said and wrote unpalatable, discomfoting facts, he was looked upon as immoral by the "moral" Victorians. But the fact is that he was opposed to repression, the greatest good for a Puritan, of pleasures. The "Puritan" Shaw would feel out of water in the England of Cromwell. Sex experience, for Shaw, was not a taboo; rather it was a part of human growth and about this subject he thought and thought like a true biologist. But Shaw did not indulge, and he did not want the good man to indulge in feminine charm. Shakespeare's Caesar may thus indulge, but not Shaw's Caesar.

1. It may be noted that Shaw called John Bunyan "Greatest English dramatizer of life" in the Preface to Three Plays for Puritans. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 746.

Shaw was born in an epoch, or rather at the end of an epoch, which was in many ways unique in history. There had been other periods of reform which had swiftness as the main characteristic, for example, the period of the French Revolution which changed the colour of all Europe and brought about a change in the mental horizon of the people. The nineteenth century was, too, a period of reform; but now the ideas of reform dwindled into the feeble idea of mere progress as had never happened before, not certainly in the period of the French Revolution. The Republican energy failed to plant real hope in the mind of the people. By the fag end of the nineteenth century two distinct figures arose in the society - the pure Conservative and the pure Progressive¹. These two figures would have been laughed out of existence in any other epoch of history because there is something comically foolish in the idea of mere progress or going forward as in the idea of mere conservation without judgement. Whereas there have been ages of Conservation and Progress, only the last part of the nineteenth century remained content only with these two words.

History, the wise say, repeats itself. We know how the wave of the Renaissance froze into mere form of classicism. So also the ideas of democratic rights and freedoms of the nineteenth century stiffened into mere scepticism, destructive of everything, including democracy

1. George Bernard Shaw - G.K. Chesterton. The Bodley Head.
London. P 50.

itself. The destroyers were always talking, possibly without understanding the implications of all their talks, of going ceaselessly forward. The result was as it should be: the moral world was completely in a chaos. For all their talks of morality, it had no solid land beneath its feet when Bernard Shaw arrived on the scene. The Progressive of the time was always discontented and this discontentment led him to some futile speculations; his was an almost mad search for institutions which he could break or alter and then thank himself for becoming a progressive. Thus the mind of the Progressive was a veritable riot. Shaw was also a Progressive, but with a difference; and he could beat all the progressives of the time comfortably in this great game of being a progressive. The secret of his victory was that his was not a mental riot; he was completely clean-headed who could always find the most unthought of arguments to counter the views of his opposition. Whereas most of the progressives had no idea about their destination or aim, Shaw had the knack not only for producing a new and surprising argument, but also had a new philosophy. It is greatly his credit to have brightened the "modern movements" with suggestive thoughts, even though his thoughts are not entirely original.

The romantic rationalists were struck dumb by the Shavian trick of exposing their sentimental views; he turned their own rationalism against their sentimentalism. The romantic rationalists would hold that women were equal to men and then look at them as goddesses. Shaw contended that

if she was his equal it would be foolish and illogical to romanticise her as a goddess and to place her on the altar as a charming, flawless creature. Whereas for the women equality meant the emancipation of women making them equal to men, for Shaw it meant primarily the emancipation of men from the bondage of woman-worship, allowing them to be rude to women. In almost every play of Shaw we find a man and a woman pitted against each other in arguments, in which the woman is out-witted and out-manoevred until she admits that she is no better than, but equal to, his male victor. It is an illustration of Shaw's undisputed ability to throw a newer light on every aspect of life. He out-manoevred the progressives and caught the revolutionists napping when he pointed out that the Home Rule for Ireland, with which the revolutionists and the progressives fell in instinctively, was a bad thing because it started with the word "Home" which could not have any good influence on a man. In thus arguing Shaw exposed the sentimentalism of the romantic rationalists. Whereas most of the people including the romantic rationalists looked at Love and War and the British Party System with awe and reverence, Shaw took care to scrap the romance out of these things and showed point-blank that neither Love nor War had any romantic charm and that the British Party System was unworkable. The romantic idealist's view of Love and War and the romantic idealists themselves were intolerable to Shaw; he threw cold water upon them by using the term "idealist" always as a reproach. It must,

however, be borne in mind that, far from being a sceptic, Shaw's dogma was not one of hopelessness and unbelief. For a man to whom Life was glorious, nothing could be more foreign than the dogma of futility and hopelessness.

Shaw was a profound humanitarian which meant for him an identification of human life with the life of nature. But he was careful lest people should mistake him for being a sentimentally compassionate man. So he claimed that he was an economist who hated to see life wasted by carelessness and cruelty. He became a vegetarian and claimed that he became a vegetarian not because he felt sentimental about animals, but because it was his "duty" not to devour animals and also because he disliked dead animals. He was not a sentimental socialist and any suggestion that he became a socialist because he was sentimental enough to take poverty as cruel, would not be entertained by him. He announced that he became a socialist because poverty was wasteful and the greatest of all crimes from which all other crimes emanate. It is true that he felt bitter to see the oppressed poor, but he would not admit that his view-point was that of a sentimentalist; rather it was that of an economist. He would say that he hated the poor and so would not have even a single man remain poor. Thus Shaw was the arch-progressive of his time, the difference between him and other progressives being very great. His arch-progressivism antagonised even some of his friends and progressive contemporaries. In every age the world demands some passionate protestant, to compel us to justify our

beliefs and to evaluate our lives. Through the ages we have seen the births and works and messages of Moliere, Swift, Voltaire, Ibsen, Carlyle. To this bright galaxy we may safely add the name of George Bernard Shaw - a destroyer no doubt, but not a destroyer who destroys for its own sake, but for creating something greater and nobler. Here was a man who stood against all sham and hypocrisy, against ugliness in life and society; in short, a man who carried on the war of Jesus Christ --- to unmask imposture, to overthrow tyrannies, falsehoods, and superstitions.

With this idea of the mental horizon of Shaw we may proceed to ask what the themes of his plays are and how did the dramatist deal with these themes. It is impossible to answer this question in a sentence or two because his themes are as varied as the moods of Nature; and because he does not treat his themes in the fashion of a conventional man.

Shaw was not a socialist dramatist in the same sense that Upton Sinclair was a socialist novelist. His knowledge of economic systems and their bearing on the life of the people certainly stood him in good stead as a dramatist. But to say this is to give as little idea of what kinds of characters he creates, what situations they find them in, and what the plays are about as may be given of the figures of Michelangelo by asserting that they are the works of a man who understood the skeleton and the muscles --- one who had the knowledge of anatomy. It is quite wrong and misleading to assume or even suggest, as has

sometimes been done, that the possession of socio-economic intelligence must imply that the writer who possesses it writes tracts for social reform without bothering for art.

Shaw has to thank himself for playing into the hands of the critics. In his early days he wrote books on Wagner and Ibsen which introduced their subjects to the English-speaking public wrongfully as primarily social reformers. Though the reformist zeal in Wagner and Ibsen cannot and should not be completely ignored, Shaw, in his zeal, emphasized this aspect in them to such an extent that they appear before us, if we accept Shaw's views about them, as nothing but social reformers of the Shavian brand. Shaw's views about them are nothing but a misinterpretation, for Wagner and Ibsen were artists in the first place. Ibsen's theme, although characteristic of the nineteenth century European society, is not a doctrine of social revolution; it is rather the dramatization of the tremendous conflict between one's duty to the established institutions and moral dogmas and one's duty to one's own conscience. Ibsen treats this theme over and over again in a number of ways in different settings. The conflict in The Pillars of the Society and that in A Doll's House or Hedda Gabler is fundamentally the same, the difference lying in the situations the characters find themselves thrown into. The conflict between the nineteenth century moral world and the dictates of one's conscience is the basic theme of Ibsen. It is a big question whether Bernard Shaw has any such basic

theme. Shaw really deals with subjects of unthinkable variety and it is Shaw who has shown that any subject could be a subject for treatment in a drama provided the dramatist has the technique of dramaturgy at his finger-tips. Shaw was certainly conscious of the importance of his themes. This becomes obvious from his declaration that he regarded much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong and that he regarded with abhorrence certain doctrines of Christian religion as understood in England. It is a fact that Shaw is important as a dramatist for his dramatic technique as well as for his themes.

But to classify the themes of any dramatist, of Shaw most of all, is a task beset with difficulties ; and although I have made an attempt to do this, it is wellnigh impossible to ascribe one particular theme to one drama ; that would be a serious mistake and any such attempt is bound to end in futility. The colourful, artistic and, one might add, the philosophic mind of Shaw worked into all the plays and we may well discover in one single play of Shaw themes more than one. In a play of ideas the playwright deals with ideas and dramatizes them. It is only commonplace observation that political, economic and social problems cannot be thought of independent of each other ; even philosophic systems may be regarded as by-products of socio-economic conditions. It is obvious, therefore, that in a play of ideas we cannot expect only one theme, but a whole set of them cutting across each other frequently. A

"political" play of ideas can naturally have "philosophical" bearings; a play dealing with the moral atmosphere of a given period or place cannot be thought of without relating it to the political and economic situation of the period or the place. Still an attempt at classification of themes of Shavian plays is not useless --- even though all the themes of his plays and even of one single play may not be covered -- in as much as it would help us to understand these plays. While making such an attempt we can at best speak of the major theme and the minor theme in a play, always bearing in mind that such a classification is not quite satisfactory and may sometimes be misleading; the so-called major and minor themes may, playing into each other, become really one. Again it must be noted that in the purely "disquisitory" plays of the last period of Shaw's dramatic career one does not find "theme" as such because in them one finds "talks" about various interests leading to no specific idea, thus keeping one askance for a precise theme or themes.

The theme which recurs in Bernard Shaw is the polar opposition between the type of the saint and the type of the successful practical man. We find the clearest presentation of this type of opposition in the conflict between Father Keegan and Tom Broadbent in John Bull's Other Island and between Barbara and Andrew Undershaft in Major Barbara. There the moral scales are pretty evenly weighted and the

1. Bernard Shaw at Eighty --- Edmund Wilson in G.B.S : A Critical Survey --- Ed. Louis Kronenberger. The World Publishing Co. N.Y. 1953. P 143.

predominance of the practical man produces an effect of satisfactory reassurance without carrying any evil implications. But these opposites --- the saintly and the practical --- also have the tendency to dissociate themselves from one another and to feature themselves alternatively in successive plays. Thus in The Devil's Disciple the hero is a dashing fellow who has flashes, though somewhat melodramatic, of saintliness and his opponents are made comic or base. The same is true of The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet. Caesar and Cleopatra is a play glorifying the practical man of business; Androcles and the Lion glorifies the saintly and so does Saint Joan. In Saint Joan the protagonist and the antagonist are shown alike effective.

But this theme of the conflict between the saintly and the practical is not, though a recurrent theme in the plays of Shaw, the only theme that he treats. His themes are amazingly various covering a big area of human thought --- relation between man and woman, between husband and wife, parents and children; War; the problem of conscience, of Education and creation, character and disposition; the problems of the individual and society; high politics ; religion; and running through almost all the plays, the theme of Creative Evolution. He presents the classic themes in drama; the clash within the mind of the individual, between institutions, and between the individual and the forces that govern or try to govern the society. Shaw's themes are traditional, but where he differed from the

earlier playwrights is the way he looked at the themes. As a "younger son of the middle class" he discarded the morality of the Victorian bourgeoisie and turned his themes inside out to discover the sham and the shallow in the Victorian morality. It is not that all the themes of Bernard Shaw are modern. Most of the "modern" themes and "ideas" are a hundred years old when they are not as old as the world. But these themes appear so fresh when expressed by Shaw; in the hands of most of the others the same themes would turn quite dull. The reason may be that he seldom deals with the conventions or convictions from the same ground as another man would do. An excellent example of this may be found in Saint Joan. There is no dearth of dull wearisome books on the ordinary anti-clerical theme. In these books clericalism is denounced; the clerics are denounced because they condemn the heroine. But Shaw does not denounce the clerics; rather he defends them and shows that Cauchon really tried to save Joan. Again Shaw does not portray Joan as a romantic heroine; his Joan is a soldier who has not lost her feminine nature; she is immature and ignorant, for she has no notion that her words and actions definitely go against the interests of the Catholic Church and the Feudal System. While dealing with the theme of war, for instance, in Arms and the Man he shows that the romantic attitude towards war is sham; that it is more important to have a few bits of chocolate to eat in the field than cartridges for revolver. In this play romantic love has been ridiculed for neither Sergius nor Raina, who appears so romantic in the beginning, is satisfied with romantic love.

It is not a question of whether Shaw's ideas are right or wrong. The point is how he dramatizes his ideas as he deals with his themes. For instance, the theme of education and creation has been dealt with in Pygmalion, in which the creator gives birth to certain problems by imparting education to Eliza. The flower-girl could earn her daily bread when she could not talk correctly and properly. Prof. Higgins teaches her how to talk properly and Pickering gives her lessons in deportment and now she finds herself completely helpless. Formerly she was independent and could depend upon herself, but now she must depend upon somebody, preferably a man. Unlike Pinero and Jones, Shaw did not seek any compromise between the society and the individual. There was every fear that the upholders of morality would brand him as immoral for having exposed the naked, discomforting facts about the Victorian society. Shaw himself declared that he was a specialist in "immoral" and "heretical" plays and thought that such plays were essential to the welfare of the nation. By "immoral" Shaw did not mean what was not proper, but what was contrary to conventional standards of manners and moralities. Taking the risk of being called "obscene" he asked pointedly the validity of the manners and moralities of the convention-bound people making the protagonists of his plays unconventional; he asked the use of the established institutions and beliefs which, he thought, the people had already outgrown. In this respect, however, he was not the first playwright in European literature, for the plays of

Ibsen have also been labelled "immoral"; Ghosts has been called "an open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirty act done publicly"¹ and The Master Builder, ". . . unwholesome . . . simply blasphemous"². It may be pointed out that Shaw made an open confession of his "immorality" : "I had . . . no respect for popular morality, no belief in popular religion"³

We must not fail to note that Shaw never makes adultery a theme. In one of his earliest prefaces he wrote : "I have a technical objection to making sexual infatuation a tragic theme. Experience proves that it is only effective in the comic spiritLet realism have its demonstration, comedy its criticism, or even bawdy its horse-laugh at the expense of sexual infatuation, if it must, but to ask us to subject our souls to its ruinous glamour, to worship it, to deify it, as if it alone makes our life worth living, is nothing but folly gone mad erotically"⁴ Shaw was interested in sexuality in its intellectual and comic aspects, but his works seldom indicate a simple sexual attitude. He does not ignore love which he finds unaccountable and mysterious and irrational. He, therefore, is deliberately anti-romantic, laughing at the illusions of the

1. As quoted in Ibsen. Michael Meyer. Penguin. 1974. P 686.

2. As quoted in Ibsen. Michael Meyer. Penguin. 1974. P 739.

3. Preface to Plays Unpleasant. The complete Prefaces of B. Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 716.

4. Preface to Three Plays for Puritans. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 749.

play between the sexes. He treats love with the respect of one who realises its importance, but without false sentiments or exaggerations so that he never glamourizes love or the lovers. The beloveds in his plays are not paragons of virtues; his is not the cult of woman-worship. Shaw is chiefly concerned with what may be called conscious love --- love without false sentiments and trivialities. It would be wrong, however, to suppose that Shaw regarded love simply as a mechanical attraction. You Never Can Tell contains a characteristic love-episode where Valentine has fallen hopelessly in love with Gloria and has to reveal himself to her though he hated himself all the while for his helplessness. As the play advances he is shown to be a man of imagination in whom love becomes an ecstasy. Valentine tries, not with complete success, to bring the ecstasy on to the level of conscious love. In Arms and the Man romance is blasted, the romantic hero and the heroine are thrown off their pedestal of higher love, and conscious love replaces romantic love and its pretences and illusions. One of the most distinguished works of Shaw, The Heartbreak House which is generally produced and read without its love theme in mind, shows the attainment of conscious love in a girl who passes through emotional love and love of convenience. If one desires to see Caesar and Cleopatra in Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra as sexually infatuated, one must be utterly disappointed. Shaw's Caesar never worships woman, never allows them to fascinate him; Cleopatra understands that Caesar is above the human weakness of eroticism.

Whereas politicians generally have a short view and whereas their activities are guided by expediency, Shaw's is a long one and, as his interests went far beyond party politics, he is not guided by expediency. These become evident from such plays as The Apple Cart, Too True to be Good, On the Rocks, The Millionairess, Geneva etc. which deal with "high politics". In these plays he shows the inadequacy of political education, uselessness of political institutions that exist without purpose, lack of leadership and the challenge of false leadership; he shows the necessity of attaining consciousness and the need for political philosophy. Shaw writes : "Until there is an England in which every man is a Cromwell, a Rome in which every man is a Caesar, a Germany in which every man is a Luther plus a Goethe, the world will be no more improved by its heroes than a Brixton villa is improved by the pyramids of Cheops¹". It should be understood that Shaw's praise of Fascist leaders and Soviet leaders was not the outcome of his blind partiality for dictators; it was rather the outcome of his impatience with pretended democracy.

In The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet, Androcles and the Lion, Saint Joan, and Major Barbara religion is the theme together with individual conscience. We must not expect a systematic body of thought in the plays of Shaw who is primarily an artist ; it is often forgotten that the function of the artist and the academic philosopher is not the same.

1. Quoted by C.B.Purdom in A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw. Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1963. P 110.

Shaw is a comic genius from whom a workable philosophical system should not be expected ; but he has philosophical ideas which are essentially religious. I have maintained in another place of the present work that Shaw's philosophy and his religion are essentially one and he has given dramatic expression to it. Saint Joan is possibly the most religious of Shaw's plays followed by Androcles and the Lion. It may be noted that a religious content is discernible throughout his works from John Bull's Other Island to In Good King Charles's Golden Days.

Creative Evolution and Life Force is the dominant theme in a number of Shaw's plays ; they may be called the Philosophical Plays of Shaw. We may name, Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah and the short piece, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles in which Creative Evolution is the main theme. In the first play the Neitzschean idea of the Superman becomes the eternal purpose to which man must give himself ; in the voluminous Back to Methuselah the idea that human life is the expression of the will to create, through which man could make himself anew, has been dealt with. The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles suggests that every day should be treated as a Judgement Day. In Major Barbara, Caesar and Cleopatra, Misalliance, Androcles and the Lion and many other plays "Life Force", "Will of God", or "Evolutionary Appetite" is present as leading idea. The themes of religion and Creative Evolution are of eternal interest and so the plays of Shaw dealing with such themes go beyond merely temporal and comic.

CHAPTER - V

Artist or Thinker

When the earliest plays of Bernard Shaw began to see the light of day, the theatre-manager, the actors and actresses, and the audience were at a loss. The critics, burdened with the knowledge of the "well-made play", did not know what to say. But they did say that Shaw was not an artist, that his play were "not plays". The theatre managers did not like these plays, drunk completely as they were with the cheap entertainment pieces. The actors and actresses as well as the critics thought, while granting that Shaw was a thinker, that these plays lacked good "acting" parts. The audience was completely at a loss and laughed incessantly not knowing what to do ; they regarded the playwright as a jester who would sacrifice all for the sake of good joke - a few of our contemporaries still hold such a view. The views that Shaw's plays have no good "acting" parts and that they are "not plays" are tantamount to condemning him as "not an artist". The fact is, he was always, and often is, looked upon as a thinker, a philosopher and a prophet. It is also often observed - and this observation is quite correct - that as a thinker Shaw cannot be regarded as belonging to the first rank because most of his ideas are only second-hand, Marx, Neitzsche, and William Butler informing them. But these critics also did not regard Shaw primarily as an artist. Shaw actually was a victim of what he said about Shakespeare- lack

of philosophic competence. It is certainly true that his ideas are not original ; he himself made no claim to the name of a creative or original thinker who derives new cosmic theories ; he denied that such an original "monster" had ever existed. He was definitely influenced by the ideas of Nietzsche and Butler and Lamarck and borrowed from them not illiberally, but borrowing was not his sole business ; he contributed to and enriched the borrowed ideas. All the piercing ideas of his own time and of the past have been studied by him, but he co-ordinated these ideas with the vast mass of advance thought. It is natural, therefore, that many critics look upon him as a thinker in the first place.²

Without entering into a lengthy discussion I maintain that all great art has two-fold activities - it gives us pictures, and, at the same time, a lesson. It not only gives us a picture but finds a meaning in it and tries to evaluate it. It is because of this that Hamlet is decidedly a greater work of art, despite Elliot's scathing remarks,³ than even a masterpiece like King Lear with all its beauty and power because in Hamlet we find a problem, which defies precise

1. Shaw in the Postscript, dated 1931 to Our Theatre in the Nineties, writes, "Until than Shakespeare had been conventionally ranked as a giant among psychologists and philosophers. Ibsen dwarfed him so absurdly in those aspects that it became impossible for the moment to regard him seriously as an intellectual force". Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn. 1965. P 779.

2. Both Archer and Walkley, Shaw's friends, also held this view.

3. Hamlet and his Problems in Sacred Wood - J.S. Eliot.

explanation, discussed. All real and great art has some philosophical and moral import. Philosophy is a commentary on life, and in art we find events which, inspite of magnification or minification, are very much like what happens in real life. The artist may not always be, of course, conscious of the deeper signification of the "commentary on life" present in his work. Later generations may well discover newer significance of a work of art. Hence the greatness of Hamlet and even of "To be or not to be".

Shaw held that discussion was the real test of a playwright. If he meant by this that it is discussion only which puts the seal of art on a play or a novel, then he was entirely in the wrong. Again, a piece of art does not become inartistic if discussion is relevently and interestingly present there. In the plays of Shaw, as in other plays of ideas, we find that art has become highly intellectualised; drama has become a medium of intellectual discussion and the characters have become self-conscious. It may so happen, as it often happened in the case of Shaw, that the characters express the ideas of their creator. It is difficult to get an impersonal artist of the type of Shakespeare regularly. The protagonists of a number of plays of Rabindranath Tagore - Govindamanikya in Bisarjan, Malini in Malini and the

1. In The Quintessence of Ibsenism Shaw writes "... and now serious playwright recognizes in the discussion not only the main test of his highest powers, but also the real centre of his play's interest". Constable & Co. 1913. P 188.

poet in Rather Rashi express Tagore's own views; but these plays are, nevertheless, acknowledged as works of art. In all great works of art and particularly in a modern work of art which is intellectual before anything else, discussion becomes inevitable - if it cares to interpret life. In Shakespeare, say in Hamlet, there is a lot of intellectual discussion, but far from making the play inartistic, it adds to its greatness as a work of art. The important thing is that discussion must become an integral part of the whole design and an adequate medium to express the character and also life. Discussion is the instrument in the hands of the playwright, particularly of the playwright of the drama of ideas, to present before us the ideas and to enable us to look at them from different angles. The use of discussion may become inevitable to bring out the significance of life and to expound and explain an idea or ideas. All the dramatic works of Shaw are commentaries on life, and hence discussion, far from branding them as inartistic, shows that these are art-pieces. Discussion may be regarded as a part and parcel of the art of Bernard Shaw. The modern play is essentially a problem play. The playwright has to admit that there is not just one correct point of view. There are several points of views and the characters are "all right from their several points of view"¹. Each character is to be allowed to put forward his point of view; discussion,

1. Preface to Man and Superman. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 160.

naturally, becomes inevitable. About the several points of view held by several characters and the dramatist's relation with them Shaw writes : "... and their points of view are for the dramatic moment, mine also. This may puzzle the people who believe that there is such a thing as an absolutely right point of view. ... However that may be, it is certainly true that nobody who ¹agrees with them can possibly be a dramatist"

It is rather ironical that Shaw as a critic has made it impossible, or at least difficult, for those who accept his criticism to own that Shaw as a dramatic artist has any right to be really famous. Bernard Shaw as a critic repeatedly fell into the grave error of separating the stuff he was criticising into matter and manner as if they were watertight compartments. Thus when he confronted the Elizabethan dramatists he maintained that they had nothing to say and that they were only tolerable because they had an incomparably wonderful way of saying things. Comparing Shakespeare with Ibsen he would point out that if one paraphrased Ibsen's Peer Gynt it would still remain good intellectual stuff, whereas if one paraphrased Shakespeare's "Life's is but a walking Shadow", it would become mere commonplace. Hence Shaw arrived at the conclusion that Ibsen was the greater and more penetrating dramatist than Shakespeare. But this type of criticism is not only false in

1. Preface to Man and Superman. That Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 160.

fact, but also non-sensical in theory. It is absurd to paraphrase Shakespeare because he is of genius all compact; and as it is true of Ibsen so it is of Shakespeare that, so far as he is an artist, it is absurd to separate what he says from his manner of saying it. Shaw's own reputation as a dramatist would suffer very much if such a distinction between matter and manner is made in his case, for the reason that Shaw's matter is in no sense original. A paraphrase of Shaw is as absurd as a paraphrase of Shakespeare; this would relegate him to a very ordinary position as a dramatic artist. If Shaw is an artist, it is precisely in the sense that Shakespeare is an artist; and so any distinction between the theme and the style in a Shaw-play would only lead us to wrong conclusions. The first critics of Shaw who thought that he was a philosopher and not an artist actually committed this mistake. The fact is, the "ideas" of Bernard Shaw are no more than commonplaces, but his way of presenting these ideas makes him a master-artist the like of whom England has not seen very often.

Shaw has won the attention of the present generation as an artist, and quite rightly too. Shaw's comments about himself in which he claimed the honour of being a thinker and a philosopher are not very safe guides. This, however, in no way suggests that he is not a thinker at all. But he is much more an artist than a thinker. His ideas - his philosophy, one may say - are not original; but his manner of presentation of these ideas thrills us with a conviction that nothing quite like it has ever come within our experience. In

a separate chapter I have dealt with Shaw's dramatic technique which shows what a great dramatic artist he is. I may, however, add one or two things more in support of my contention. The great role of Shaw in the theatre has been to exploit the full possibilities of a style of English comedy which had first been given its characteristic form during the seventies of the nineteenth century by W.S. Gilbert. The Comedy of Manners of the Restoration Period, which had reached its culmination in Congreve, had been the product of an aristocratic society which depended for its ironic effects on the contrast between the artificial social conventions and natural animal instincts; between fine manners and fine intelligence on the one hand, and the crudest carnal appetites on the other. The comedy of the nineteenth century - setting aside those of Oscar Wilde - depended on the contrast between the respectable conventions of a pious middle-class society and the mean, practical realities behind them; between the pretensions of high moral principles and the cold complacency which underlay such pretensions. As with the dramatists of the Restoration Period it was always the pursuit of pleasure that emerged from behind the formalities, so in the comedies of Gilbert, which preceded his Savoy operas and of which the most famous and successful was Engaged (1877), it is always the greed for money that emerges from behind the screen of noble words and discreet behaviour. The characters of Gilbert's comedies who talk the language of the Victorian fiction, are never for a moment

betrayed by emotion into allowing themselves to be diverted from the first chance; and the young men are perfectly ready, not from appetite but from sheer indifference, to make equally passionate professions to any number of young ladies at the same time. It is not far from the Symperson family and Cheviot Hill of Engaged to Shaw's The Philanderer and Widowers' Houses.

But neither Gilbert nor Dickens nor Samuel Butler - these two other great satirists of the money-minded English, to whom also Shaw was indebted - could teach Shaw how to analyse society in terms of economic motivation or to understand and criticise the capitalist system. This he learned to do from Karl Marx, whose work during his English residence - the period in which Das Kapital was written - was itself, of course, a product of an ironical protest against the nineteenth century English civilization. Shaw's study of Economics had served him, as he himself said, for his plays as the study of Anatomy had served Michaelangelo for his sculptures. Shaw thus brought something new into English imaginative literature. And with economic insight and training he joined literary qualities of a kind that had never yet appeared in combination with them - qualities that, in fact, had been absent from English literature since the century before.

In the field of literature the Irish of Bernard Shaw's period enjoyed certain special advantages over the English,

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century - Archibald Henderson. Appleton - Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 731

due to the fact that, since Irish society was still mainly in the pre-industrial stage, they were closer to the eighteenth-century standardss. The Irish have preserved for English literature classical qualities of hardness and elegance. Shaw has had, as Edmend Wilson points out, the further advantage¹ of musical education.

Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, is a writer of the same kind as Plato.² There are not many such writers in literature; and often they puzzle the critics. Shaw, like Plato, repudiates as a dangerous form of drunkenness the indulgence in literature for its own sake; but, again like Plato, he then proceeds, not simply to expound a useful morality, but himself to indulge in an art in which moralities are used as the motifs. It is partly on this account certainly that Bernard Shaw has been underrated as an artist. Whether people admire or dislike him, whether they find his plays didactically boring or morally stimulating, they, more often than not, fail to take account of the fact that it is the enchantment of a highly accomplished art that brings them to and keeps them in the playhouses. So far from being relentlessly didactic, Shaw's mind has reflected in all its complexity the intellectual life of his time; and his great achievement is that he has reflected it with remarkable fidelity. He has not imposed a cogent system; but he has

1. Bernard Shaw at Eighty - Edmund Wilson (in George Bernard Shaw : a critical survey. Ed. L. Kronenberger. The World Publishing Company. 1953. P 140).

2. Shaw - C.E.M. Joad. Victor Gollanez Ltd. London. 1949. P 149.

worked out a vivid picture of life. It is, to be sure, not a passive picture; it is a picture in which action plays a prominent part.

Shaw's diatribes against Shakespeare made him infamous. It must be borne in mind, however, that Shaw had a good ear for Shakespeare's word-music. He is primarily not a poet, but coupled with his advantage of receiving a musical education, he had the advantage of - and this is even more important - having a musical ear. He wrote : "Do not suppose for a moment that I learnt my art from English men of letters. True, they showed me how to handle English words; but if I had known no more than that, my works would never have crossed the Channel. My masters were the masters of universal language; they were, to go from summit to summit, Bach, Handel, Haydon, Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner" . When Stella Campbell² said that Shaw had a "thrush in his throat", she meant that Shaw, like Shakespeare, was, above all, musical. We can see in the dramatic works of Shaw a logic, a grace, and a formal precision. Of the influence of Mozart on Shaw there can hardly be two opinions. When his indebtedness to Congreve and Sheridan was hinted at, Shaw replied : "They had no part whatever in forming my habits. On the other hand, the fact that I was brought up on Italian and German opera must have

1. As in Bernard Shaw at Eighty - Edmund Wilson (In George Bernard Shaw : A Critical Survey - Ed. L. Kronenberger. The World Publishing Company. 1953. P 140).

2. George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century. Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century Crofts Inc. 1956. P 734.

influenced me a good deal; there is much more of Il Trovatore and Don Giovanni in my style than of The Mourning Bride or The School for Scandal¹". Shaw has time and again dwelt on this aspect of his art: he told Archibald Henderson, "Arms and the Man is a light opera in comedy form"²; again in his essay "The Drama of Ideas" published in The New Statesman and Nation, he wrote "The truth was that I was going back atavistically to Aristotle . . . to the word music of Shakespeare, to the form of my idol Mozart . . ."³.

We may take the example of The Apple Cart to bring the point home. The artistic and musical quality of this play has not been properly appreciated possibly because here Shaw worked with economic and political material; possibly because it was thought that Shaw had given up his socialist faith and turned a Monarchist. And yet, when carefully examined, the art of the playwright comes out quite clearly. The first act of The Apple Cart is an exercise in the scoring for small orchestra at which Shaw is particularly skilful. After the overture before the curtain of the conversation between the two secretaries, in which the music of King Magnus is foreshadowed, the urbane and intelligent king and the "bull-roarer Boanerges" play a duet against each other. Then the king plays a single instrument against all the nine of the Cabinet. From this the themes emerge : the King's disinterestedness and the Labour Government's sordid self-

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1. "Mr. Shaw on Mr. Shaw". The New York Times, June 12, 1927. (As in Archibald Henderson's Vol II Page 734).
 2. As in G.B.S : Man of the Century Vol.I P 134
 3. Ibid Vol II P 735.

interest. The development is very lively; the music is tossed from one instrument to the other. Finally the King's theme gets a full and splendend statement in the long speech in which he declares his principles : "I stand for the great abstractions : for conscience and virtue : for the eternal against the expedient; for the evolutionary appetite against the gluttony" etc. etc. The deep, ringing voice of the King lifts the movements to a poignant and fitting climax; and then a dramatic reversal carries the climax further and rounds off and balances the harmony. Candida, Androcles and the Lion, and Saint Joan may also be analyzed in this way. The Epilogue of Saint Joan, far from being inartistic, is a symphonic treatment of Joan's history, which is without a par. Music is here in the masterly blending between what Professor S.C. Sengupta calls "the comedy of impersonal evolution and the tragedy of personal death".

To say that Bernard Shaw is not an artist is to ignorantly discredit his technique and substance. The technical complaint is easily disposed of; I have already discussed it in the chapter on Shaw's technique and treatment of theme. Leaving aside the technique of construction of his plays, which is classical, there is such a thing as Shavian prose. The Shavian sentence, by obliterating all connectives, becomes a short of lash made up of fused ideas, written for ear and mind - "music of ideas" it may be called - and barbed

1. The Art of Bernard Shaw. S.C.Sengupta. A. Mukherjee & Co. 1965. P 102.

to suit the occasion. Such an achievement is quite enough to stamp a man as an artist, whether he uses it for drafting a resolution or writing a letter to his friend or composing dialogue for a play. If Shaw can claim immortality, it will not be by virtue of his so called original, novel or startling ideas, but by virtue of his artistic presentation of them.

Of the music in the plays of Shaw, Edmund Wilson observes, "This music is a music of ideas - or rather, perhaps, it is a music of moralities"². People may find his plays didactically boring or morally wicked; but it is the enchantment of an accomplished art which makes them revisit a Shaw-play. It is an art that has the power to preserve such a piece as Getting Married, which, so far as the theme is concerned, may be regarded as "dated", and which consists only discussion; but this play remains brilliant and fresh because of its symphonic development and the music of ideas. It is the music of ideas which makes the fantastical Too True to be Good a great work of art.

The critics who regarded Shaw as a philosopher in the first place rather than an artist did it, obviously, for the reason that they had no ear for music; also for the reason that they looked upon him as a promulgator of certain ideas.

1. Dixon Scott has very admirably dwelt on this aspect of Shaw's art in "The Innocence of Bernard Shaw", George Bernard Shaw : a Critical Survey - Ed. Louis Kronenberger. The World Publishing Co. 1953. P 72-104.

2. Bernard Shaw at Eighty - Edmund Wilson (Ibid. P 141).

A third reason may be added; they knew little of Bulter and Lamarck. The consequence of the third reason was that when Shaw took up the Life Force, they thought that it was an original idea. These critics failed to listen to the music of ideas in Shavian plays; their incurable deafness prevented them from entering into the secrets of the art of Shaw. I would maintain that Shaw is not a competent philosopher. Though it is not my declared intention to put the Shavian philosophy to cross-examination, I may point out some of its obvious defects that will bring out his philosophic incompetence. Among its defects, both as a philosophy and a cosmic dream, one may enumerate these - the unconvincing attempt to solve the problem of evil by depriving the Deity of omnipotence, the failure to ascribe convincing reasons for faith in the perfectibility of man and belief in the spiritual progress of mankind, the low place accorded to woman, and the scientific etherealization of mankind by redemption from the burden of flesh. To this list a few more defects could be added. But this list is enough to prove that Shaw was not a philosopher worthy of serious consideration.

To come back to Shaw's art, the artist Shaw is present not only in his classical dramatic technique, in his constructive skill, and in the music of ideas; he is present particularly in his art of characterisation. The idea that in drawing the characters Shaw is "playing ¹ ventriloquist" is ridiculous and misleading because the

1. George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century. Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 601.

characters of Shaw are wholly themselves. His sort of play would be impossible unless he endowed his characters with powers of self-consciousness and self-expression. The exceptional variety and vividness of his characters reminds one of Shakespeare's artistic genius. Shaw's characters speak for themselves; they are the living people in their hidden selves. Each character belongs to the play in which he or she appears. As it is ridiculous to suppose Othello in Hamlet or Hamlet in Othello, so it is ridiculous to have Broadbent in the place of, say, Undershaft or Tarleton. Broadbent, Undershaft and Tarleton are, it may be noted, like characters; so are Marchbanks, Cusins and Dubedat. But none of them could be mistaken for the other; they have their own peculiar existence in the dramas. A character like Jack Tanner in Man and Superman may be regarded as animated thought, but he is made a human being as when he is made awkward at the declaration of Juliet that the child she bears is conceived not outside the wedlock or when he discovers that he, and not Octavius, is dwindled to be the husband of Ann. The impression that Tanner is just animated thought gets another jolt when, just before the curtain finally falls, he is made a laughing stock as a mere talker. Shaw's minor characters are also individuals and not just men in a mob. In Major Barbara there are a number of characters who belong to the lowest class - Bill Walker, Peter Shirley and the rest; but each of them is his own self and one cannot help noticing that each has dramatic existence. Thus in Shaw's plays not

only the protagonists, but also the minor characters are distinctly drawn and differentiated from each other.

Shaw discovered that Shakespeare, who borrowed his plots from different sources, made from them plays peopled with characters which are masterly creations in human portraiture. As a dramatist, Shaw created "living pictures" in human form which have characters of their own. Shaw significantly says, concerning Shakespeare and himself, "We have no souls. We understand all the souls and all the faiths and can dramatize them because they are to us wholly objective : we hold none of them"¹. It may be noted that the number of the secondary characters in the plays of Shaw exceeds those in the plays of Shakespeare. The women characters in his plays are also highly individualized; no amount of absurdity could put Ann in the place of Joan. Candida and Cleopatra, Eliza, Raina and Lady Undershaft - all appear before us as highly individualized characters. The male and the female characters, at least the major characters, in Shaw's plays demand first class actors and actresses on the stage for their reconstruction and interpretation. To say that Shaw has not created actable characters is to betray ignorance. These characters are lively and are immensely actable because they speak from the sub-conscious level of the mind. A speech delivered from the conscious level of the mind is somewhat untrue in as much as the real character, his intents and private thoughts, remains

1. Bernard Shaw - Frank Harris. 1931. P 228.
(Shaw's letter to Harris. London. June 10, 1930).

concealed behind the speeches, but when a man speaks from the sub-conscious level, he reveals himself more truthfully and more poetically. The poetical outbursts of Father Keegan and Joan, of Caesar, Marchbanks and Lilith may be cited as examples. Moreover, the "double-density dialogue"¹, of which Ibsen was the master, found not a bad practitioner in Shaw, who employs this device to bring out the inner thoughts and even the inner conflict of the speaker. In other words, the essential nature of the speaker as well as the nature of the conflict that rages within him or her comes out through this device.

Eminent writers including C.E.M. Joad and G.K. Chesterton have examined and re-examined Shaw's philosophy of "Life Force" and have ably pointed out its weaknesses as a "philosophy" or a body of systematic thought. These, coupled with the fact that his ideas are mostly borrowed casts not a favourable light on the philosophic competence of Shaw. I would like to point out one more thing : in his later dramas Shaw seems to be a puzzled man - a man who fails to keep faith in anything and to advance any system, philosophical or political, worth the name. Sometimes I have a lurking doubt whether Shaw had any philosophy at all. Creative Evolution and Life Force certainly attracted him, but he reacted to it not as a philosopher, but rather as an artist. He really exploited the great dramatic possibility of the theory

1. The phrase has been used and explained by Michael Meyer in "Ibsen". Penguin 1974.

of Creative Evolution and wrote "plays of ideas" with them. The long speeches in Man and Superman are not prompted by a faith on the part of the playwright in Creative Evolution as a satisfactory body of thoughts; they are prompted by his inspiration as a poet. The outburst of Joan and the last dithyramb of Lilith are also the outcome of poetic inspiration. Nothing else can explain the beauty of these speeches in which Shaw reached highest realm of poetry. Shaw may be regarded, as the Germans regard him, primarily as a poet, who used prose as the medium of expression.

Shaw is a great stylist whose prose ranks next in style to that of Jonathan Swift; it is limpid, passionate and tireless, never falling much below its standard of perfection. Shaw himself has told us, Archibald Henderson reports, that his style - Shaw, of course, makes a statement of general application for the nature of all styles that really are styles -- is an instrument of assertion. "A true, original style", Shaw wrote, "is never achieved for its own sake Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style. He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none; he who has something to assert will go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him. Disprove his assertion after it is made, yet its style remains".

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1. G.B.S. : Man of the Century - Archibald Henderson. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 734.
 2. Preface to Man and Superman : The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn, 1965. P 165

This description applies admirably to the writings of Bernard Shaw himself who is a master of effective assertion; and the style remains even after one disproves Shaw's assertions. The reader catches the writer's enormous self-confidence, as he finds himself assisted along dry paths of assertion and argument by the administration of carefully calculated doses of amusement and shock. The Shavian theme may sometimes seem dull and dated, but the medium is invariably a polished work of art. The Shavian style has affinities with that of Dickens at his best, exhibiting the same rapid variation of purpose and device, from colloquialism to a high abstraction which by some miracle makes itself concrete as it goes. Shaw balances his periods in a unique way, picks up the inevitable word and places it in the most effective place in a sentence that rolls on as one idea rapidly follows the other. I would, by way of citing examples, take up only two instances from two of his plays. It would be seen that there is a smoothness in the sentences -- smoothness that springs from the careful placing of the words and balancing of the periods. The first example occurs in Saint Joan. The following comes from the mouth of Joan in the Trial Scene.

"I could do without my warhorses; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and the 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".

This is home-spun language coming from the deepest recess of the heart of one who is an innocent rustic; it is not the language manufactured in the study of an Oxford scholar. With the most common words - but not the vulgar - used by the rustics Shaw has created music. He has reached real poetic height vindicating his claim that he is an inspired artist. For comparison the following coming from the mouth of Cauchon may be cited :

"The mighty structure of Catholic Christendom will never be shaken by naked madmen or by the sins of Moab and Ammon. But it may be betrayed from within, and brought to barbarous ruin and desolation, by this arch-heresy which the English Commander calls Protestantism".

Here is classical precision; how the entire edifice of the Catholic Church is endangered by the works and actions of Joan is brought out through the most neat and precise terms. The words issue from the intellect of Cauchon; but eloquence is pronounced in the studied manner of the use of words. If Joan's speech reveals a surcharged child of nature uninitiated to the history of subtle philosophical thoughts who has nevertheless, instinctively learnt the essence of mysticism, Cauchon's speech reveals a cool and calculated man who understands where the real danger lies.

The vigour, the force that we find in Shaw's prose style may to some extent be accounted for by the fact that he generally strikes at the pillars of society; his satire is directed at such able opponents as the medical science, conventional theism and the system of free enterprise. There is something of the authoritarian in his intellectual make up; the attitude of the authoritarian comes out often through the language he uses - vigorous and unambiguous, sometimes satiric and ironic, always emphatic. The result of his authoritarian attitude and his striking the able opponent may be seen in the following that comes from the mouth of Don Juan in Man and Superman : "Here you call your appearance beauty, your emotions love, your sentiments heroism, your aspirations virtue, just as you did on earth; but here there are no hard facts to contradict you, no ironic contrast of your needs with your pretensions, no human comedy, nothing but a perpetual romance, a universal melodrama". Don Juan's invective catalogues the hypocrisies of the Devil's subjects and ends with those who are "liars every one of them, to the very backbone of their souls". No prose style can be more pointed and forceful than this.

The poet in Shaw comes out in the mystic utterance of Mrs. George in Getting Married and in the last speech of Lilith in Back To Methuselah. Once again we get a glimpse of the poet in Shaw in the speech of Father Keegan in John

1. Man and Superman (Don Joan in Hell) - Shaw

Bull's Other Island : "In my dreams, heaven is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people : 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". This is the language of a mystic, of an inspired soul that has mystical experience; and such experiences can scarcely be communicated through very intelligible language as C.E.M. Joad seems to demand.¹

We have so often been told that the Shavian Comedy lacks form and is unlikelike. If we start by asking what the "form" of the comedy is, tradition will not give any single answer. Shaw himself did not use any unvarying "form". It is a fact too clear to be missed that he teased his critics by calling his plays "Discussions", "Conversation pieces" and the like, but when the acid test of production on the stage came, the plays did always well.

We may take up Candida to see how Shaw gives his play a form. To say that Candida Shows how its author could have written "real plays" had he wanted to, is nothing but an irritating commonplace. "Candida appeals to the anti-Shavian not because its form is more playlike, but because its subject is more like that of other plays : the woman choosing between two men". For a Kindred reason Saint Joan earned²

1. Shaw - C.E.M. Joad. Victor Gollancz Ltd. London. 1949. P 49-50.

2. Bernard Shaw in Twilight - Jacques Barzun (In George Bernard Shaw. A Critical Survey. Ed. L. Kronenberger. The World Publishing Company. 1953. P 166.

general approval, not by virtue of superior form, but because of general familiarity with the story. When it is said that Candida is more like other plays, it is meant that Candida is more like other contemporary plays. If the range of comparison is extended to take in Aristophanes and Moliere, we find that Shaw is often closer to his great forerunners than even to his imitators like Harry Johnstone, Gwladys Evan Morris and even Granville-Barker of the early career. To come back to Candida, if we change the Shavian vocabulary and attitude the play will become a purely conventional comedy. It has been noted that Candida is a "well-made play"; so is "Arms and the Man". In the First Act of Candida there is a situation which gets complicated in the Second; the resolution comes in a conventional manner with the wife accepting the husband. But the reason she advances for accepting the husband is rather novel - he is weaker than Candida's young lover who does not require her help. The Auction Scene in the play is also conventional; the only difference is, here a woman is to judge the fates of the two bidders.

One of the principal features of the comedy of Aristophanes is the "parabasis" an address to the audience conveying the author's sentiments upon the theme. Shaw should be praised rather than abused for reviving this device in the long didactic speech. The Frenchman's tirade in Fanny's First Play, the monologue in Too True to be Good, the opening speech of Ra in Caesar and Cleopatra are quite classical. I

is also to be noted that in ancient comedy and in the comedies of Moliere to a marked extent, the abstract form is never allowed to choke off a good opportunity for laughter, for horseplay, music and dancing. There are indeed limits to the advisable distension of any framework, but each has to be judged on its own merit. In plays like Getting Married, Misalliance, and Heartbreak House which seem formless, the virtuosity with which Shaw digresses while maintaining the classic unities¹ deserves due recognition.

The next question - and a very important one - to be tackled is whether Shaw, as a dramatic artist, is objective; whether he displays human feelings in their fullness and variety. The debate is whether Shaw creates characters --real and lifelike. The notion that Shaw is "playing ventriloquist" has been already discussed and found not tenable. We may add that a character in a play stands or falls on whether he fits in the purpose and environment provided by his creator and not on any particular substance or mode of presentation. We would see that neither Dickens nor Walter Scott depicted any "real" character, if the latter view was accepted as the standard of judgement. We cannot be sure whether "real life" furnishes Rabelaisian or Shavian or Swiftian characters. The point which is often maintained but is forgotten at the first

1. Bernard Shaw in Twilight - Jacques Barzun (In G.B. Shaw : A Critical Survey, Ed. L. Kronenberger. The World Publishing Company, 1953). Barzun writes that Shaw's virtuosity "should have earned him medals from all academics in the universe instead of the ignorant scorn of play going critics of the school of Mr. Curdle", P 167.

opportunity is that literature is larger than life. A character in a fiction is real in so far as he fits in, as already noted, the purpose and environment created in the fiction. Life in literature is so hard a thing to live that to live the life of Don Quixote or Tertuffe or Mr. Pickwick is impossible; it would be only a mad idea. But these characters are nonetheless "real"; they are real because they fit in the atmosphere created for them - atmosphere into which they are put. A Shavian character is real precisely in that sense. Shaw is a master, not only of writing brilliant dialogue, but of creating situations -- human situations -- and in this sphere he has hardly any peer save Shakespeare and Moliere and Dickens. The characters of a Shaw-play live under that situation or atmosphere, and they would be unreal in a different situation. This means that as a dramatist Shaw followed Shakespeare in attempting to create "living pictures" in human forms which have characters of their own quite independent of their creator's. Shaw's comment on this aspect of his art is significant: "We (meaning Shakespeare and himself) have no souls. We understand all the souls and all the faiths and can dramatize them because they are to us wholly objective"¹. Again he writes, "I am of the true Shakespearean type: I understand everything and everyone, and am nobody and nothing"².

1. Bernard Shaw - Frank Harris. Victor Gallanez Ltd. London. 1931. P 228. XIII.

2. Ibid. (G.B. Shaw to Frank Harris. London. June 20, 1930). P 228.

One important and interesting aspect of the art of Bernard Shaw has not as yet received deserving attention from the scholars. Shaw was immensely interested in visual arts, and exploited his familiarity with English as well as continental art in his plays. The so-called prophet and propagandist Shaw is completely non-existent here; he appears before us as an artist who himself is deeply in love with art. It may be legitimately surmised that Shaw as an artist was influenced not only by Mozart and Wagner, but also by Titian, Rambrandt, and a much less known painter, Frederick Bernard. Dick Dudgeon's mounting the scaffold in The Devil's Disciple is possibly suggested by Frederick Bernard's popular painting "Sidney Carton : A Tale of Two Cities". Candida is "the Virgin Mother and nobody else"². Titian's "Assumption of the Virgin" which decorates the wall of the house of Morell, Candida's husband, has more than a mechanical purpose. Candida is a Shavian mystery play about Madonna and Child with the heroine of the title as the Holy Mother. From Candida to Buoyant Billions it is a long road; to both the plays and to many another that went between, Shaw's love for visual art added a unique dimension which would remain absent if Shaw were a mere propagandist rather than an artist. Those who claim that Shaw's book on Ibsen The Quintessence of Ibsenism is more a quintessence of Shavianism commit the

1. Exploiting Art : The Pictures in Bernard Shaw's plays - Stanley Weintraub. Modern Drama Vol XIII. Sept. 1975. No. 3.

2. Shaw to Ellen Terry, 6th April, 1896. Collected Letters I.

mistake of looking at Shaw primarily as an ethical teacher, a moral reformer. The Quintessence of Ibsenism is neither a quintessence of Ibsenism nor of Shavianism. The real Bernard Shaw is much more than a thinker; he is a considerable artist who has ideas, but whose ideas are often borrowed, uncertain and confused. All great art is interpretation and evaluation of life and, simultaneously, greater than life. Shaw is an artist precisely in this sense.

CHAPTER -VI

Political Plays of Shaw

It is only natural that the critical insight of a revolting son of the middle class should fall on politics and that he should ransack the whole field. Shaw's critical genius was attracted to politics in a very large sense of the term and he took immense interest in the political problems of his day - problems that include economics and finance. A vast amount of his writings - actually the majority of them - concern themselves with the study of social classes, wealth and poverty, rent, wages, and interest and, at the same time, with international relations, the World War, the Irish Question, Labour party etc. He wrote so much on politics and spoke so much on it that it seemed to some of his critics and biographers including such an erudite one as Archibald Henderson that "art played a very secondary part in the life of this international publicist"¹. This view is erroneous in spite of the zeal shown by Shaw in the politics of his time -- national as well as international. His interest in politics is expressed in many of his plays; but he remains an artist all the same for he dramatized his views and ideas through the action in the play or rather through "discussion" which is the "action" in a Shavian play; and secondly, his expression of political ideas is seldom allowed to work like just propaganda. Some of the political problems dealt with

1. G.B.S. : Man of the Century. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. p. 618.

by him in these plays have already become completely dated, yet the dramatic interest of the plays still remains. He dealt with the problems in the plays like an artist; he did not write mere political tracts.

Shaw's interests were varied as his mind was gigantic. He was a progressive who was much ahead of the progressives of his time --- a fact which made him inconceivable to the people of his day. His intellect was piercing and he could expose the hollowness of an idea or a system with unanswerable arguments: this turned him into an enemy of the establishment and the common, conventionally brought up and educated people. He is quite often misinterpreted; the critics who misunderstand and misinterpret him often forget very conveniently that they are criticising the plays and not simply the views expressed in them. The artist is taken to task for whatever is said and done by his characters. Of all his plays The Apple cart and Too True to be Good are possibly the most maligned and misunderstood, and yet in them we find the indelible mark of a great dramatist. Shaw proclaimed himself a socialist who never forsook his belief in Socialism as a system. But it has been pointed out by his critics that he turned his back upon his own faith in The Apple Cart in which, actually, the cart of democracy has been thrown by the wayside. The critics were quick to point out further, that Shaw's comments on the Fascist and the Nazi marauders proved that he had lost all faith in socialism. His praise for Stalin, who hunted down the counter-revolutionary voices, is pointed out by them as a proof that Shaw wanted a

system in which people not dittoing the ruler would be mercilessly liquidated.

It should be pointed out that Shaw had little or no faith in democracy which is proclaimed as the best form of government. In his book An Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, which is sometimes hailed as the best work on the subject, shaw says in his characteristic way, "The naked truth is that democracy or government by the people through votes for everybody, has never been a complete reality; and to the very limited extent to which it has been a reality, it has not been a success. The extravagant hopes which have been attached to every extension of it have been disappointed" He continues, "If there were any disfranchised class left for our democrats to pin their repeatedly disappointed hopes on, no doubt they would still clamour for a fresh set of Votes to jump the last ditch into their Utopia; and the vogue of democracy might last a while yet. Possibly there may be here and there lunatics looking forward to votes for children, or for animals, to complete the democratic structure. But the majority shows signs of having had enough of it."¹

Shaw argued that Capitalism was the greatest evil because it only produced ignorance. It was the disuse of mental faculties which led the people under capitalism to fill their heads with "romantic nonsense out of illustrated newspapers and novels and plays and films"². Such stuff, Shaw

1. A Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism.
G.Bernard Shaw. Constable & Co.Ltd.London.1928. P 452-53
2. Ibid. P 164.

held, falsified everything for us so absurdly that it left us more or less dangerous lunatics in the real world. It is this which led Shaw to pin his faith on some super-power. The more power given to the people made it necessary and urgent that some rational and well-informed super-power should come to dominate them.

Shaw's association with Fabianism is of great importance, for he was the leading theoretician together with Sidney Webb of Fabian Socialism. In some respects Shaw possibly was the most clean-headed among the Fabians. The earlier Fabians had, as Shaw complained, shared many of the prejudices of the so-called advanced people of the Victorian era and they had neglected to study trade unionism, foreign affairs, and much of the machinery of government. Shaw studied them all from close quarters, examined them, and successfully made many of his gentle and patriotic countrymen angry with him.

Shaw has heavily been taken to task for having blatantly flouting democracy. It is always remembered that democracy is a form of government and may even be the best form so far invented; it is seldom remembered that it is a way of life. When democracy is accepted and practised as a form of government without being accepted and practised as a way of life, it becomes, so to say, half-democracy which is worse than no democracy. Shaw found that democracy is used by some people in blatant ignorance of its workability as a philosophy of life. Democracy may be regarded as an ideal,

and like all other ideals it can never be fully realized. When Shaw discovered how the slogans of democratic rights ended in empty slogans only, without any effort on the part of the slogan-makers to realize these rights for everybody; when he saw that democracy was understood and interpreted in terms of political equality only without any reference to the more urgent economic equality; when he painfully found that the democratically elected leaders of the people had no qualities becoming of leaders, and they only served only their own selfish ends, he came to think that the dictatorship of a Mussolini or a Stalin was better than this misnomer of democracy.

Shaw had another arrow to shoot at democracy. He thought that it could never be a government by the people, for there was no method which could ensure the election of the best qualified persons to the helm of affairs. He thought that in order to make democracy a success, it was necessary for every citizen to be an intellectual giant, or he would be led by the nose by the self-seeking and clever politicians, as so often happens, by dint of their gift of the gab. Shaw himself did not practise the politicians' art, but knew their way. Though his view about the pre-condition of democracy may not be completely right, the essential and unpalatable truth in his view is too important to be ignored. Shaw had nothing to do with democracy as it was being practised in Europe and the other side of the Atlantic. Shaw's praise for the

1. C.E.M. Joad discusses this point admirably in his "Shaw" Victor Gollancz Ltd. London, 1949. P 169-171.

dictators cannot surely go unblamed, but it has to be borne in mind that it was the behaviour of the democratically elected leaders and the fact that democracy is not accepted as a philosophy of life which led him to praise them.

It would be wrong to suppose, however, on the strength of this that Shaw became a Fascist or a Nazi, though he sometimes thanked a Hitler or a Mussolini in public. But most of his readers did not notice Shaw's clear opinion about Fascism which he looked upon as dangerous to human kind. In Everybody's Political What's What Shaw states, "Now-a-days Capitalist's cry is : 'Nationalize what you like; municipalise what you can; turn the Courts of Justice into Courts martial and your Parliaments and Corporations into boards of directors with your most popular mob orators in the chair, provided the rent, the interest, and the profits come to us as before, and the proletariat still gets nothing but its keep,"¹ According to Shaw this cry signifies Fascism which he calls State Capitalism. He holds that "This is the great Corruptor of Socialism. It calls itself Fascism in Italy, National Socialism (Nazi for short) in Germany, New Deal in the United States, and is clever enough to remain nameless in England, but every where it means the same thing; Socialist production, but Unsocialist distribution -- "so far, out of the frying pan into the fire ".

The above makes it abundantly clear that Shaw was against Fascism; nor could he, an avowed socialist, be in

1. Everybody's Political What's What - G.B. Shaw.

favour of it. He was against nineteenth-century Liberalism, too, which appeared to him to be anti-social. He divined the nature of the nineteenth century liberalism as Free Enterprise. Shaw believed that Liberalism and Fascism, apparently so far away from each other, are but different names given to Capitalism. None of these systems, he held, ensured freedom from want for the masses.

But Shaw was not a political philosopher, for he did not propound a systematic body of political thought; there is no 'ism' in Political Science which might be called "Shavianism". That is, I believe only natural for the artist. And if Shaw sometimes contradicted himself and as alleged, wrongly, betrayed his loss of faith in Socialism, it makes scarcely any harm so long as we view him as an artist. Whatever Shaw had to say about politics and political theories, he dramatized, and it is his dramas with which I am primarily concerned. It may, however, be contended that the opinions expressed by his characters should not be reduced to a Shavian doctrine of political thought. Another point which need be stressed is that inspite of his putting the ideas in a challenging manner, he did not say anything original about politics and political thoughts. His contribution to the whole body of political thought, thus, is not considerable. Even his denunciation of democracy has nothing really new in it; it only makes him a kin of Mill and Carlyle. But he was a politically conscious man who refused to be carried away by popular beliefs and thus he belonged to the minority. The interesting thing is the manner in which he sets down ideas.

As Shaw's public utterances were often misinterpreted and denounced, so also were his dramas. It is difficult to judge "political plays" because in matters of politics it is very difficult for the critic to attain a scientific, that is, objective outlook and to give a dispassionate judgement. Naturally, people react to the "political plays" of Shaw according to their political leanings and interests. Shaw made himself insecure by uttering unpalatable things. It is always unsafe to speak the truth, particularly when patriotism is regarded as one of the greatest virtues.

My concern in this chapter being mainly with the "political plays" of Shaw, I shall not discuss Everybody's Political What is What, or An Intellectual Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism, or Common Sense About the War, though these books, particularly the second, are a vast fund of practical knowledge about politics. In many of his earlier plays, particularly in the so called "social plays", Shaw discussed politics, in John Bull's Other Island, for example. He discussed politics in some of his "philosophical plays" too, for instance, in Major Barbara. But it is particularly in the plays written after the thirties of the twentieth century that politics became the primary themes in Shaw's plays. These plays include The Apple Cart (1929), Too True to be Good (1931), On the Rocks (1933), The Millionairess (1935-36), Geneva (1938), and In Good King Charles' Golden Days. But political ideas cannot be kept in compartments completely separated from social ideas and so in these so

called "political plays" we shall find the admirable sense and knowledge of the playwright of Sociology.

As a man of affairs Shaw's interest in politics was intense and fortunately for literature he cast his sight definitely upon political issues of national and international import. It has already been noted that a great many of his speeches and writings concern with economics and finance; it is further to be noted that with it politics is so mingled that one cannot be thought of without a reference to the other. Political systems and economic systems are really one.

In John Bull's Other Island, which was published in 1904 when the Irish Question was burning the whole of England and the whole of Ireland, the entire Anglo-Irish question with its social, political, economic and religious implications, is dramatised. We cannot fail to notice the beautiful structure of this play which earned the praise of W.B. Yeats, who is not a great appreciator of Shaw and his dramas, as the "first play of Bernard Shaw's that has a geography"¹. The conflict between the racial types has been dramatized here in a masterly manner that reminds the method of Moliere. Though the subject is taken from the contemporary political arena, the appeal of the play is international; the play reaches a poetic height in the last lines. It would not be out of place to quote Shaw at length from The Tatler of November 16, 1904 : "I never achieved such a feat of

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century. Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 619.

construction in my life. Just consider my subject - the destiny of nations! Consider my characters - personages who stalk on the stage impersonating millions of real, living, suffering men and women. I have had to get all England and all Ireland in three hours and a quarter. I have shown the Englishman to the Irishman and the Irishman to the Englishman, the Protestant to the Catholic and the Catholic to the Protestant".

Shaw surpassed his countrymen in objectivity; he possessed the essential dramatic quality of abstraction, the ability to rise above the limitations and weakness of mere patriotism. It was possible for him, by virtue of that quality, to see through the Irish no less capably than through the English preserving a remarkably even balance in his portrayal and criticism of the two peoples.

John Bull's Other Island is uncompromising in its presentation of the real old Ireland. The age-long conflict between the English and the Irish is displayed by the easily prosperous, short-sighted, thick-skinned and yet admirable Englishman and the poor, suffering, struggling, imaginative and no less admirable Irishman. Rosscullen, the scene of action in the play, is a segment of the living Ireland. Here are encountered all those conflicting elements which have been made a hopeless enigma of the Irish Question for so many generations. The root of the trouble was that Ireland was a conquered country. John Bull's Other Island was written when Ireland was still ruled by English folly instead of its own

1. Quoted in G.B.S. : Man of the Century - Archibald Henderson. Vol II. Apleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 619.

and when talk about the Home Rule for Ireland grew high. The preface to the play is a strong plea for Home Rule. Shaw spoke of the "clumsy thumb" of English rule and declared : "If you would be good enough, ladies and gentlemen of England, to take your thumb away and leave us to do something else than bite it", there would be the end of discord¹ between the two peoples. Since then the Irish Question has been settled but, as Shaw said in 1929, making an addition to the Preface, ". . . . not as civilized and reasonable men should have settled it but as dogs settled a dispute over a bone"²

In Rosscullen, the miniature Ireland, we find the dreamer and the bigot, the superstitious and the unilluminated, jostling. Instead of the great land-owner, there is a group of small proprietors, who treat their employees and tenants with a harshness and thoughtless cruelty which only results in the ruin of the latter. Religion actually rules the community, and the clergy, who are held in high esteem, show profound political sagacity and unscrupulousness when they play upon the superstition and credulity of the peasants. But the sense of oppression has not destroyed the sense of humour of Ireland; neither are destroyed her passion for mysticism and her native charm.

Much of the interest and brilliance of John Bull's Other Island lies in the contrast between the English and the Irish characters. The Englishman is unmistakable. Broadbent

1. Preface of John Bull's Other Island. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1956. P 449.

2. Ibid. P 473.

is a true character of a classic comedy. He has the exaggerated confidence of the typical Englishman. He resolves to study the Irish Question, which has been nagging both Ireland and England, on the spot. But he is incurably ignorant of the nature of Ireland's plight and so comes to think that "the great principles of the great Liberal Party" will be able to put an end to Ireland's misery and solve the Irish Question. The Celtic melancholy, the Irish voice and the poetic language have an irresistible appeal to him. When Father Keegan speaks of the various evils, he says that some of these evils are "absolutely necessary for the preservation of society and others are encouraged only when the Tories are in office"¹. Shaw describes Broadbent as "a robust full-blooded, energetic man in the prime of life, sometimes eager and credulous, sometimes shrewd and roguish, sometimes portentously solemn, sometimes, jolly and impetuous, always buoyant and irresistible, most likeable, and enormously absurd in his most earnest moments"². This shrewd, roguish, and enormously absurd man announces himself as a candidate for the parliamentary seat on the ground that he is a Home Ruler, a Nationalist, and the truest friend of the Irish.

Larry Doyle, Broadbent's foil, is a grown-up man compared with his English friend, but much less practical and less adaptable. This is a subtle portrait, a character of great significance in the Shavian drama. This self-expatriated Irishman has become a victim of disillusionment - a terrible

1. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw.

2. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw.

disease. He realizes the charm of Ireland's dreams and the brutality of the hard facts of England; and in his heart kindless a longing for a country to live in where facts are not brutal and dreams are not unreal.

In this play there is no Shavian character in the strict sense of the term. Yet in the character of Father Keegan we get a glimpse of the poet and mystic in Shaw. The poet and the mystic Bernard Shaw, who is known only to a few, reveals himself in various degrees in Marchbanks, in Caesar in his apostrophe to Sphinx; the artistic creed of Shaw is revealed in the character of Dubedat. The tragic despair of Barbara in Major Barbara and the mystic utterance of Mrs. George in Getting Married reveal the poet and the mystic. Shaw possibly is at his noblest in the last speech of Lilith in Rack to Methuselah and in the adoration of Saint Joan. Once again he is revealed in the speech of Father Keegan where he reaches poetic height.

"In my dreams heaven 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". The "Preface for Politicians" is a masterly

1. John Bull's Other Island - Shaw. A portion of this speech appears also in another place of this work.

performance whether read as a literary essay or a political pamphlet. Shaw studied some of the greatest pamphleteers England has ever produced - Swift, Cobett, Carlyle. Shaw's analysis of the Irish Question is tinged with an insight which is found in the prophetic utterances of Carlyle. John Bull's Other Island, in which a political-social question is dramatized, has solidity of workmanship; and the characters are firmly set upon solid ground. The interest of the play has not diminished in as much as behind the topicality of the theme dealt with in it, the real theme is the destiny of nations.

From the question of Home Rule for Ireland in John Bull's Other Island we are transported to the question of democracy in The Apple Cart. Thomas Mann was correct when he included The Apple Cart, "the stunningly clairvoyant political satire",¹ among the best of the plays of Bernard Shaw. Yet it is open to doubt whether Mann looked at The Apple Cart as a play, for he praises only its wit and poetic idiom. It is true - and I have pointed it out in the chapter on the dramatic technique of Shaw - that The Apple Cart is a piece of music; and in this respect only a few of Shaw's plays can rival this play. But the play has not been fully appreciated as a work of dramatic art. Here the drama lies in the imaginary conflict between the King of England and his Labour Cabinet in the year 1962. Subtitled "A Political

1. He was Mankind's Friend - Thomas Mann in G.B.S. : A Critical Survey - Ed. L. Kronenberger. P 254. The World Publishing Company. 1953.

Extravaganza", it has two Acts and an Interlude. The popularly elected Prime Minister makes an attempt to deprive the King of almost the only real power left him, namely, the right to influence and guide public opinion through the two media of expression, the press and the platform. King Magnus is exceedingly clever and he outwits the Prime Minister not only by declining to play the role of cipher offered him but also by threatening to abdicate to run for Prime Ministership by winning a Parliamentary seat. This solution the Prime Minister dares not accept, for that would rally the royalist votes against himself and impose on him a rival of whose ability he has everything to fear. The comic paradox of the situation is that the King wins, not by exercising his royal authority, but by threatening to resign and to go to the democratic poll.

Politically The Apple Cart was rashly misunderstood. Shaw was roundly denounced as a traitor to Socialism and a convert to Monarchy. The play is a terrific blast at democracy as it is practised to-day; the system ensures the victory of the man who most glibly promises the people what they desire. By implication Shaw asserts that the people who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the makers of promises are also to be blamed; that men and women must be educated to make democracy, as a form of government, meaningful. But it is not the apple-cart of democracy only that the playwright upsets here; he upsets the apple-cart of royalty too, exposing "the unreality of both democracy and royalty as our

idealists conceive them¹. As a matter of fact, Shaw says more about royalty than about democracy in this play arguing in favour of men who have a good and genuine training for ruling the country. In the play the clever King gets the better of his ministers, but is left in a worse plight than they. The King wins by making a desperate bid for dictatorship which is nothing more than a personal victory destined to collapse with the death of the dictator; the play does not dramatize the unquestionable success of dictatorship. The solution, given by Shaw in the preface, is to construct a political system for rapid, positive work made to fit into the twentieth-century conditions. What that new system should be depends on the people who are trained for government and citizenship and are controlled and guided by conscience and reason, not by emotion.

In The Apple Cart there is an inner and a deeper conflict which does not make itself obvious to everybody. It is the conflict between royalty and democracy in one camp and Capitalism in the other. Capitalism, according to Shaw, has brought the world to its present pass; all the evils of western civilization of today have Capitalism as their source. Shaw's solution, here, is men and women of character, politicians and statesmen of efficiency; the elimination of private property, equitable distribution of national wealth; in other words, the very essence of Socialism. Those who

1. Preface to The Apple Cart. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. London. 1965. P 325.

maintain that Shaw turned himself into a traitor to Socialism in The Apple Cart do not see deep enough.

But the play is not a tract on Political Science. The charm of the plot lies in the conflict and in its comedy. The play consists in two long discussions in which the characters sit in a semi-circle; the conflicts are dramatized through these discussions in which we find the witty Prime Minister outwitted by the King. The discussion is suspended in the middle to make room for amatory episode in which, as it is often seen in a Shaw-play, the woman takes the lead. This little episode is a brilliant piece of dramatic relief. The stage is arranged in a masterful manner which confounds the academic critic. There is no pretence of physical action in the play, but the dialogue is fresh and alive with movement. The theme of the play has become quite dated, but The Apple Cart as a comedy is still alive. The play is not easy to act, for it seems that a few characters from political arena assembled and talked. But the success of acting this high comedy with a satirical vein in it depends largely on the realization that it is a musical composition. The devoted student of Wagner is almost at his best in The Apple Cart. The theme of the conflict between democracy and monarchy or between democracy and monarchy and Capitalism has little appeal to a modern theatre-goer; we have had enough of it. But the music of The Apple Cart is always a source of joy; it signifies the success of Shaw as an artist.

Shaw is a master of composing political fantasia and Too True to be Good stands among the best-known of this type.

This play is a dream in which nothing rational but everything absurd happens. The characters are bodily transported, in the dream, to the wilds of Northern India from their habitat in England. Here once again Shaw takes up the Capitalist system to show that its effect upon the rich is no less terrible than its effect upon the poor; in Major Barbara Shaw shows the effects of the capitalist system upon the poor and here he shows its effect upon the rich. And then he takes up the condition of the post-war generation which is all but lost, morally that is. This theme, of course, is familiar, but the treatment transports the familiar theme to the realm of the absurd. When considered purely as a drama, however, Too True to be Good shows itself to be one of the weakest plays of Shaw. The mechanism of the plot is a dream much like that of Heartbreak House. The opening of the play is farcical and only now and then there is a slap-stick comedy; the contrast in every character between profession and pretence is satiric; the setting and the incident are those of an opera. In a characteristic stroke of satire the Monster announces at the end of the First Act that the play is virtually over, but the characters shall discuss what has happened in the play for two more Acts and that the exit doors are in order. Obviously nobody leaves. This is only an exposure of the moral bankruptcy of the lost generation. Into the fantastic frame of this play the playwright introduces a burglar who is a professional preacher, a private soldier who is more efficient than his Colonel, a sergeant who is a student

of Bunyan and is well-versed in the Bible, and the father of the burglar who is a disillusioned secularist. These characters discuss between and among themselves subjects like health, riches, idleness, the army and, above all, the meaning of life. The Patient is actually the central figure, for the play is her dream. It is she who has found out that she has something sensible to do. The main idea of the play - everyman must have something worthwhile to do and he can discover for himself the way to good life by finding the work -- is expressed through her. This idea is again exploited by Shaw in The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles in which it is maintained that he who fails to find something worthwhile to do shall be regarded as a social nuisance to be liquidated. It is evident that Too True to be Good may not be regarded as a purely political play precisely because the undertone of philosophy runs through it. It is discussed under the heading "political plays of Shaw" only because it has been shown in this play how the post-war generation has outgrown the prevailing political system.

It, however, seems that Shaw's ideas are in a chaos in this play. What the clergyman-burglar says seems to be his own words when he seemingly suffers from a loss of faith : "we have outgrown our religion; outgrown our political system; outgrown our strength of mind and character". But it would be incorrect to say that Shaw has become pessimistic here. If we have outgrown our religion and political system, the cry of the burglar-clergyman urges upon us to strive to

find a newer and better religion and political system, and not to yeild. We do not get the picture of a discouraged Shaw here. He never lost his faith, but rather steadfastly celebrated the forces of life set against the forces of death; as the existing situation is one of doubt and disorientation, he calls upon men to find a new faith and religion. The spiritual longings of the new generation find expression in the final monologue in which once again we see a Shaw who is primarily a poet. The post-war situation is described in the poetic monologue put into the mouth of the Elder : " 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.... The fatal word NDT has been miraculously inserted into our creeds". But the Elder continues to say that NDT is not enough and we will have to find a new religion, a new way to life. In this monologue we listen to the unmistakable voice of Shaw who preaches the gospel of will, of life.

Though weak, Too True to be Good as a play is not an absolute failure. The mechanism of dream has been used skilfully and the characters are sharply differentiated as social types. It is true, of course, that none of the characters is outstanding. They are more typical expressing various prevailing modes of thought than individuals. The discussions in the play are long and too monotonous to be dramatic. Yet the skill of the dramatist is unmistakable,

particularly in deftly managing the knock-about fun, Shaw strings together a multitude of observations, often pungent, upon the post-war generation which has become bankrupt and disillusioned. Though the overall impression remains what Archibald Henderson says "Too talkative to be dramatic",¹ there is enough of theatricality in the play which depends on the character of Private Meek and, more particularly, on the Burglar who is young, lively and an accomplished talker of the Shavian brand. But neither Meek with all his energy nor the Burglar with his niceties of expression is the leading character. The leading character is the patient who comes out to be quite fit physically. The play is her dream; the characters are the creation of her dream.

Wealth is discussed in Too True to be Good. The question of what is to be done with the fabulously wealthy millionaires under democratic capitalism, that is, what is to be done with the bosses, is the problem in the fantastic play The Millionairess. Shaw, who from time to time tinkered with situation, sent his secretary a play called The Millionairess, completed in 1935. Preface to Bosses which created a sensation was written in 1936 at Malvern and is immensely readable.

It has been recorded by Henderson that "when the Shaws sailed for South Africa toward end of December, 1931, he was working on the play, the embryo of the The Millionairess which in the original draft, ended with the volcanically

1. G.B.S : Man of the century. Vol II. Appleton-Century-Croft Inc. 1936 P 632.

erupted shout of the ungovernable Epifania : "In Moscow I shall not be a millionariess; but I shall be in the Sovnarkom within six months and in the Politbureau before the end of the year"¹, The main problem, thus, is the irresistible power of the able man who governs but is ungovernable. The solution found by shaw to the problem echoes Too True to be Good which deals with vast personal wealth.

But the problem is too big to be easily solved, even if the attempt at finding a solution is made by a Shaw. The solution found by the dramatist is not satisfactory, though we do not demand a solution from an artist. That he has dramatized a problem of great bearing on the conditions of our time is something which must not be mixed up with the unsatisfactory solution to the problem given by him. The problem was not solved by a devastating world war which destroyed two great political bosses--Hitler and Mussolini. The bosses, the talented individuals with commanding ability in money making, in politics, in church, and in everything, cannot be liquidated. But something has to be done for our deliverance from the tyranny of these talented individuals. The abolition of private property would not solve the problem, as Shaw writes in the Preface, for even then we shall remain at the mercy of "the decider, the dominator, the organiser, the tactician and the mesmerizer"². The remedy found by Shaw was manifold increase in the number of

1. Ibid. P 635.

2. Preface to The Millionairess - Preface to Bosses - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Preface of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 490.

talented persons. In the Preface to the play Shaw maintains that talented persons should be multiplied "to what may be called their natural majority limit, which will destroy their present scarcity value. But we must also eliminate the mass of ignorance, weakness and timidity which force them to treat them according to their folly"¹. In other words, the masses must be adequately educated and made enough intelligent to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy; they have to be sufficiently powerful to prevent the rulers, who have ceased to be efficient, from ruling over them. Shaw sees the success of his solution in the creed of Creative Evolution. He says : "Only a creed of Creative Evolution can set the souls of people free"².

The Millionaire is in four Acts and it "does not pretend to be anything more than a comedy of humorous and curious contemporary characters" ³ This play is actually a "well-made" play for here we find the dramatist having recourse to the "mechanical rabbits" and "clock-work mice" which he himself attacked so often. Shaw used a female boss with exceptional talent for making money and lording over others in this comedy which lapses now and then into slapstick farce. The plot, which is filled up with pugilist, judo expert, conscienceless crook, clown, and sexless doctor, is not important . Various elements of the so called "well-made" play are here with the difference that in Shaw's play there is a bit too much of discussion covering a wide field

1. Ibid. P 490.

2. Ibid. P 493.

3. Ibid. P 479.

of interest. The situation is fantastic, but the discussions are lively and entertaining, as always in a Shaw-play.

The Millionairess opens with the scene introducing the millionairess, Epifania Ognisanti di Farerga, interviewing a solicitor in his office at Lincoln's Inn Fields. She gives out her intention of making a will and tells the story of her husband. As they talk, the husband of Epifonia, Alastair Fitzfassenden, arrives with his girl friend. In the discussion that ensues the conditions of the millionairess' marriage with the champion boxer and tennis player are brought out elaborately. He had discovered that she was not the woman who could be his soul's mate and so deserted her. She too has a male friend with whom she discusses things beyond the capacity of perception of her husband. This gentleman also arrives after a lot of discussion which is interesting in its own way, but not very necessary for the play. In the Second Act at the river-side inn we discover that Epifania herself is a good boxer; she boxes her friend out. Then arrives an Egyptian doctor, very much cultivated, who speaks English well. A romance develops between the doctor and the millionairess. It seems that both of them had made promise --- the doctor to his mother and the millionairess to her father --- about their marriage. In the Third Act, in the East End of London, the millionairess is found earning her livelihood in an ugly den where, by virtue of her merits, she automatically becomes the controller. It has been shown how talent can never fail and how the talented

individual will have the affairs in his or her hand. In the Fourth, that is, the Final Act in a river-side hotel, the former inn, the millionairess is discovered at the helm of affairs. The husband of the millionairess, his girl friend, the solicitor of the opening Act and the male friend of Epifania all assemble in the hotel. The Egyptian doctor also arrives to complete the denouement; he is found to have fulfilled the conditions of the millionairess. The millionairess has also fulfilled the doctor's conditions. Then Epifania gives the solicitor instructions to proceed to prepare the will.

We find that there is very slight action; what is there in the name of action is only slapstick fun. It is purely a discussion play, a play of ideas. Though ideas run riot, the main discussion centres round the question : who is the able man, the great man? Shaw's conception of the great man has some novelty because he made him "immoral" in the Shavian sense of the term. This great man is unconventional and has self-confidence to wield the power and remain at the centre of power, be it management of a hotel or earning money or governing a state. It is impossible to govern such an individual because he submits to no established authority. The Millionairess, like Geneva and In good King Charles's Golden Days which follow, deals with the problem of leadership; in the play the problem is how to choose the leader. The answer is that the leader will choose himself; the average men lack the necessary ability to choose the leader for themselves. I have already maintained that Shaw

lacked the art of the politician and his incursions into practical politics were, more often than not, unhappy. The burden of all "political plays" of Shaw is elimination of ignorance. The state will go on the rocks without a leader, but there is the possibility that the self-chosen leader shall become a dictator. Shaw was not in favour of dictators and heroes as such and his praise of the dictators is nothing but an expression of his intolerance with the pretensions of democracy. Shaw's "political plays" really deal with the prevailing state of human civilization and his answer always is to educate men --- to break the shackles of ignorance --- and to make them capable of self-leadership. Shaw wanted politics to be a means, the end being the alround development of man and human culture. The redeeming creed, thus, has to be Creative Evolution. All his life Shaw was preoccupied with the problem of the quality of the people and how to get them rightly governed. These preoccupations appear in The Millionairess. Only with a little understanding we realize that a large number of men and women are no better than children moving about in the bodies of adults. It was absurd, Shaw thought, that the fate of mankind should depend on the whims of half-educated and ill-educated mob of children. Shaw's main idea is reasonable enough --- a disciplined democracy can be achieved only by the labour of exceptional people.

The Millionairess is a farce with a considerable difference. Here a woman has been presented who has never been subjected to any discipline. Yet she finds herself

frustrated by her uncontrolled authority; she herself declares that her life has been completely sorrowful because she finds none on whom she can trust; she finds none who is selfless. Only when she meets the Egyptian doctor who is completely disinterested about himself but interested in leaving the world a better place, does she find any hope of fulfilling her function in the world. The attack on the conventional idea of happy marriage is no less interesting in the play. Epifania is taken aback by the complete indifference of the doctor about her money and finds her husband in him. In a lengthy passage the conventional idea about happiness in conjugal life is demolished : "And I tell you that in the happiest of marriages not a day passes without a thousand moments of unfaithfulness What do the unmarried know of this infinitely dangerous, heart-tearing, ever changing life of adventure we call marriage?"

Geneva is a fancied page from history like the political play which follows it, that is, In Good King Charles's Golden Days. It was a rough time for the world, particularly for Europe with Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy making preparations for a holocaust that was to engulf all the continents shortly. The time was out of joint and even the efforts of a Bernard Shaw could not have set it right. When Shaw treated this boiling condition with his characteristic levity, he was upbraided. Shaw replied that it was beyond his power to alleviate the tragedy of Europe and so he would exercise the rights of the comedian to extract

what comedy he could out of the serious, blasting atmosphere. In "A Note on Geneva" Shaw explained how the play began. He began with the Intellectual Co-operation Committee, set up with good intentions but dying within a month of its birth, and said ". . . it came about that I found it growing on me that there was some fun to be got on the stage out of the ¹ Committee".

When we look at the theme of the play we find that it is completely "dated", for both Hitler and Mussolini were thrown away from their seats of power within a few years of the publication of the play. But it is worthwhile to note that dictators of this type have not become an extinct species with the defeat of the two war-lords; this type may arise again and so the interest of the theme of Geneva is not quite dead. When the hysteria of war-time -- a time in which people talk hysterically --- is over, we can look at the dramatic representations of Hitler, Mussolini and General Franco more objectively. The play presents the war-lords as objectively as possible, for Shaw as a dramatist has the power to see both the sides of a case. Moreover, he does not believe that there can be a man who is hundred percent evil or that there is a human *deus ex machina*. So the much-hated dictators have been given fair play; they are allowed to put forward their own case.

The play is not a "Well-made" one; it is disquisitory

1. A Note on Geneva - G.B. Shaw. Malvern Festival Book. 1938. P 8-9. (Quoted in G.B.S. Man of the Century Vol II. Archibald Henderson. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 653.

in nature and fits well in the canon of the drama of ideas. Here, too, we find that nothing happens; the characters only talk giving voice to ideas which cut across one another. It is Begonia Brown, the secretary of the Intellectual Co-operation Committee, who sets the ball rolling though she herself is unaware of what is going to happen or of the significance of the Committee. The play only reveals a situation, but does not try to solve the problem of how to negotiate the dictators. When Shaw was charged with failure to solve all the political problems, he retorted that he was not Omniscient or Omnipotent and that as a playwright he could only "extract comedy and tragedy from the existing situation"¹. When he allowed the dictators fair play it was further said that Shaw had converted his political faith. This was not the case; he was simply drawing attention to the situation, posing the problem of leadership. More, he had the dramatist's objective view to see the worth of the dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. We may have many things to say against them as the destroyers of half of the world, but one would do well to remember that they might also have had their say; also we cannot help acknowledging, even grudgingly, that they dragged out their father-lands from a position of degradation to that of the dreaded--and even respected--countries in Europe. It is the artist's capacity to look at things dispassionately which is to be seen in Shaw's

1. A Note on Geneva. G.B. Shaw. Malvern Festival Book. 1938 P 8 (As in G.B.S: Man of the Century Vol II.A. Henderson. Appleton Century-Crofts Inc. 1956. P 653.

portrayal of the Nazi and the Fascist dictators.

It is to be noticed that Shaw had a peculiar partiality for anybody who was in possession of power over his fellows; such persons appeared to him to be particular experiments of Life Force to reach higher and higher; they have a claim for the name of Superman or at least for the role of a superman. It is not once only that Shaw took up his pen in support of such men, to praise them and to commend their actions. Shaw, it seems, was constantly in search of the sign of the superman in the great and powerful rulers, in the philosophers and in the artists. This possibly is the reason why he gave the rulers like Mussolini and Hitler their due, even more than their due, which compelled him to live through many embarrassing years before, during, and after the second world War.

The theme of this play had become dated even in 1940, because in the play Mussolini refers to Hitler as "my understudy". But the play Geneva as a play of ideas evokes some emotions which cannot be lightly dismissed. It is the emotion of the marvellous which keeps the interest of the play when the Fascist and Nazi dictators are dead. There is no "action" but there is music--the music of words. The whole long last Act is composed with a mastery which shows the symphonic quality of the Shavian drama. There is an orchestral design in this play which reminds us of the playwright's marvellous achievement in the Apple Cart; here once more we see the perfect Wagnerite at work.

It is only a useless conjecture what shaw would have done if he had taken the very dramatic reign and situation of King Charles II in his sixties when he was at his best, as evident from his handling of Saint John. As it is, the political play In Good King Charles's Golden Days is not among the best dramatic achievements of Shaw. He did not dramatize the romantic, passionate love-episodes of king Charles; neither did he dramatize the intrigues of the time though in this sphere the Restoration period is at least as dramatic, if not more, as the Elizabethan period. Dramatization of passionate love affairs and intrigues are completely beyond Shaw. Here lies the difference between Shaw and Congreve and between the drama of ideas of the twentieth century and the Restoration drama of manners.

King Charles II, if we are to depend upon the chroniclers, was a witty, wise, and ungovernable King who had himself as his sole adviser. He knew that the time was rough and that he had been beset with enemies to monarchy as well as to the person of the monarch. But with almost unerring judgement and courage he wielded the power of the sovereign and at the same time multiplied the number of illegitimate children. Shaw, in the Preface to In Good King Charles's Golden Days dwelt on the first part of this observation; about the second part, we already know his attitude. There are historians who have already done the job of portraying the polygamous King and his art of government nicely enough. Shaw did not write a chronicle play with king Charles II, and when he called the play "a true history that never happened" he

knew what he was saying. If the play were a chronicle drama Shaw would have presented us the Mechiavellian qualities of King Charles in addition to his championship of science and art.

The play remains what it really is : a fancied page from history with some historical personages presented at the height of their powers; they assemble in the house of Newton. We find on the stage a bright constellation of luminaries from various fields -- art, science, and religion. Above all there is the figure of King Charles himself who takes active interest in the high intellectual discussion. We find Newton, Kneller, George Fox, James, the Duke of York, and the King discussing almost endlessly to the bewilderment of the critics. This is a perfect discussion play in which ideas about various things are argued and examined by the characters. The result is that the play, as Maurice Colbourne points out, "... may resemble a Platonic symposium"¹. But there is this difference : Plato allows all the characters in Symposium freedom to express their own opinion without taking sides, but Shaw may take side as he really does in this play; here he sides with the champion of art, Kneller.

At least for once, Shaw in this play lays aside Creative Evolution, Socialism and all the others of his favourite ideas; neither does he bring in questions of philosophic speculations and great abstractions that defy definitions. Unencumbered by his own ideas, Shaw considered

1. The Real Bernard Shaw - Maurice Colbourne J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London. 1949. P 217.

the mysteries; it is the curious mind of Shaw that particularly attracts us here.

This play is, save a little bit of fun, all talk. Being a dramatist and an artist, here Shaw allows all the characters to explain themselves. He arranges the characters with skill and so we find a variety of combinations : Louise, the Duchess of Portsmouth, the only one intellectual among the women characters in the play, Newton and Kneller discuss science and art, and the King and the Duke of York discuss Kingship. In the talk between Newton and Kneller we get a glimpse of the real Bernard Shaw. Though the dramatist seems to be fair enough to Newton, the scientist, he holds him to ridicule, for Shaw always sides with the artist and has little faith in Science. Kneller expresses the artist's view and expounds the conflict between the man of science and the man of art. The artist, Kneller declares, is the hand of God. In a passage of high poetic beauty Kneller says : ". . . the hand that can draw the image of God and reveal the soul in them, and is inspired to do this and nothing else even if he starves and is cast off by his father and all his family for it : is not his hand the hand used by God, who, being a spirit without body, parts and passions, has no hands?" In this passage we hear the true voice of Shaw who set a very high ideal and standard for the work of the true artist.

In In Good King Charles's Golden Days once again we find the mind of Shaw turning towards the question of leadership, which is a recurring theme in his political

plays, and the inadequacy of the methods of finding out the true leader. The characters in the play, save women characters, are leaders in their own spheres. Of course, the women are also presented as the mistresses in their own arts; we find them, except the Duchess of Portsmouth, interrupting the intellectual talks of the men; they would not allow the men of intellect to forget them. It is possible that here Shaw once again points out, as he does in Man and Superman through the mouth of Tanner, that the woman would try to drag the man of intellect and the man of art down to the mundane level and that the truly great ones have to be indifferent about women. To go back to the problem of leadership, Shaw states the problem through the mouth of King Charles without trying to give a solution. The problem is stated thus: "No beloved, the riddle of how to choose a ruler is still unanswered; and it is the riddle of civilization". This question of leadership is the main theme in the three last political plays of Shaw and may be studied as a trilogy. The fact that the methods employed today are very inadequate to find out and elect the popular leader is the dominant note in each of those plays.

In Good King Charles's Golden Days inspite of its weakness, is a work of high distinction. The First Act is too long and, though there are sparkling dialogues throughout this Act, it appears to be beyond an audience to maintain intellectual alertness for so long a time. As a sort of comic relief, therefore, Shaw introduces a little fun where we find Newton and James, the Duke of York, having a scrap on the

floor. The short Second Act is a sort of an epilogue. But the play has its design which cannot be understood if we constantly remind ourselves that the play is only full of talks. As in the previous play Geneva we noted the orchestral design, so also in this play we have an orchestra with the great ones of arts, science, and religion, and kingship playing the various tunes; but often it is something like a duet that we hear being played when the different combinations of characters discuss various ideas. But the musical design of Geneva seems to be more mature. In I, Good King Charles's Golden Days the dialogue is maintained at a very high level which cannot easily be equalled. In a Shavian play of ideas we do not expect "action"; the dramatist rather ridicules the critic who demand "action" by introducing funny, nonsensical incidents in the name of action. The academic critics feel irritated to see the characters discussing for hours, even though absorbingly, doing nothing and causing nothing to happen.

The play dramatizes not any historical incident, though the time of the Merry Monarch Charles was nothing if not dramatic. But it dramatizes current ideas and ideologies through discussion which at times reaches poetic height. The drama rehabilitates the character of a monarch who is always shown, by historian no less than by dramatists and novelists, as lustful, faithless, and polygamous. The characters in the play are distinctly drawn. The women characters have, always excluding Louise, little or nothing to do with the

intellectual discussion; yet they are also differentiated from each other skilfully.

A spiritual likeness between Shakespeare's The Tempest and Shaw's In Good King Charles's Golden Days has been noticed by Maurice Colbourne and one cannot dismiss his views lightly. Shakespeare is said to have climbed to the towers of philosophic calm after surviving the tumult and passion of his great tragedies. So, we may say, did Shaw in this play climb the towers of calm. Shaw's towers are marked with serenity and curiosity. The functions of art, the laws of mathematics, the ethics of government, the great secrets of the universe are treated with a humility by the author which is quite surprising for him. Here we get a glimpse into a curious playwright advancing great questions of universal application, but without insisting on the answers. In this sense In Good King Charles's Golden Days is a typical play of ideas.

1. The Real Bernard Shaw - Maurice Colbourne. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London. 1949. P 218.

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"¹. 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 most³ 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 ² conspiracy exhibiting men's "specific lust for cruelty".

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 Shavian, 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. Higgin'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 stage¹". 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 music² than the work of any of the so-called pure writers." 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 - Archhibald 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.

CHAPTER - VIII

Philosophical Plays of Shaw

Before we start discussing the philosophical plays of Shaw it is necessary once again to say it very clearly that Shaw is not a great and original philosopher. It is to be noted, further, that the present author does not aspire either to establish or to refute the validity of Shaw's "philosophy" though the defects of that "philosophy" may be pointed out. A few words, nevertheless, may be said about Shavian philosophy in order to clear up the heavy fog of misunderstanding that shrouds Shaw's doctrine and faith.

No view could be more erroneous than the one often held; Shaw was irreligious. This view springs from the fact that he disliked and actually refused, even as a boy, to visit the church on Sundays and liked to call himself an atheist. He obviously is not conventionally religious; does not believe in the existence of God who has parts and passions. But he has his own religion in which he pins his faith and which he has dramatized again and again. He has faith in a spiritual power which governs the entire universe; this power is called Life Force - a term translated by Shaw from Bergson's "elan Vital" and popularised by him. We do not know the source of this Life Force which is neither all-powerful nor all-knowing, but is ever striving to be both. It moves towards its desired goal of becoming Omnipotent and Omniscient through a process of

trial and error. Man is, so far, the last experiment of Life Force in its upward struggle. May be that man is also an error, but man is not a base accident of nature.

Charles Darwin, or rather those philosophers who followed Darwin's findings in natural history, reached the conclusion that man is a base accident; they found no purpose behind evolution. The surprising fact is that these philosophers sought and found relief in this conclusion. It is necessary, in order to see the reason of this attitude of these philosophers and also to know how Shaw, who called himself an atheist, came to accept Creative Evolution as his faith, to make a survey, however brief, of the history of the general idea of evolution.

It became a fashion, when Shaw was a young man bubbling with energy, among the more serious free-thinkers of the day to challenge God to strike them dead to prove His existence, Shaw belonged to this blasphemous band, however small the band was; he also, to the horror of the ordinary and less serious and less confident free-thinkers, challenged God in this fashion. This portrayed Shaw as irreligious to the conventional mind. But in thus challenging God Shaw challenged a particular conception of God; and it does not prove him to be irreligious. Religion, after all, is a passionate desire to relate oneself to the universe; it is, again, an urge to discover one's spiritual roots. It is only the essentially religious people who want to feel that they are the children of one eternal Father. As

said above, Shaw challenged a particular conception of God, and consciously too; but he did not challenge the real essence of God. God is, as religious teachers often suggest, beyond our feeble perception; and often the conception of God that we create with our limited senses is absolutely different from what God really is. With the changes in the outside world our conception of God also changes, but, as they suggest, God remains unchanged. We create Him to suit our own purposes; we create God after our own image.

The particular conception of God against which Shaw revolted is an anthropomorphic God who has numerous parts and passions. This God has been described by Shaw as a "thundering, earthquaking, famine striking, pestilence launching, blinding, deafening, killing, destructively omnipotent Bogey Man"¹. Another inert idea that worked in the mind of the people was that all the sorrows and sufferings of men and all their poverty, cruelty and hypocrisy proved God's bounty. The Church and Industry shook friendly hands with each other on the faith that all was best in the best of all possible worlds². Not that this kind of attitude has become completely extinct; rather, most of the people, the majority still have faith in this

1. Preface to The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 651.

2. Shaw deals with this aspect in his An Intellectual Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism.

anthromorphic God. But a few persons, who may make only a microscopic minority, cannot attain mental peace until they can satisfy their intellect and conscience by constantly endeavouring to find out His real being, if at all He exists. In this realm of thought Shaw belongs to the minority and he has become conspicuous by his "blasphemous", "irreligious" and "immoral" utterances. To Shaw, as to Shelley, another perfectly religious soul, God with all the parts and passions attributed to him and all his destructive omnipotence appeared to be an Almighty Fiend. It is precisely against this Almighty Fiend that Shaw and the other free-thinkers of his time revolted.

It goes to the credit of Darwin that he saved the free-thinkers from the hands of the Almighty Fiend by his analysis that life can survive and grow without God. C.E.M Joad has done a good service by discussing these thought-provoking things in his book on Shaw. The theory of natural selection - that the earth sustains only those beings, that is, those forms of life which happen to suit it- is indeed a grim theory. But this theory could attract the free-thinkers by banishing the destructively omnipotent God with his parts and passions and bounty. After Darwin's discovery it was no longer necessary to depend upon the caprice and cruelty of the fiend. Thus Darwin's theory of Evolution gave a welcome relief to the intellectual free-thinkers.

Then William Butler, the great English philosopher,

1. Shaw -- C.E.M. Joad, Victor Gollancz Ltd. London 1949.

arrived with his searching intellect and questioned whether this relief of the free-thinkers was not premature. If Darwin's theory banished the Almighty Fiend, it, on the other hand, enthroned a blind force which acted whimsically without any purpose. Darwin, as Butler pointed out, had banished Mind from the universe and the sober people found that it was so. Man became relieved intellectually, but he discovered to his dismay and horror that Darwin's theory has made him morally and spiritually bankrupt and placed him on a precipice. Man was at a loss as to whither to go to seek solace; the dilemma that confronted him was whether to accept a life more futile than death or to recall and restore the Fiend. The question that Shaw confronted was - could there be no second alternative to these equally dangerous theories - one, that there is a cruel, vindictive, and capricious God and, the other, that there is no God and no purpose behind creation ?

Shaw's philosophy and religion made an attempt, adapting the philosophic systems of Lamarck and Butler, to give an answer to this question; and he dramatized his ideas in a number of his plays.

The concept of evolution was not, however, invented by Darwin; it was Aristotle, who spoke of it, without using the term "evolution". Aristotle hinted at this concept when he classed together all animals with backbones as blood relations. But it was only by the end of the eighteenth century that evolution became incontrovertible as

a scientific fact. In the nineteenth century metaphysicians found their philosophy in it and the free-thinkers discovered in it a religion and a faith.

Goethe claimed that all living beings had proceeded from a common stock and had been differentiated by their differing environments. Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, wrote that the world had arisen little by little from a small beginning and had increased through the activity of the elemental forces embodied in itself and had grown rather than come into being at an almighty word. Goethe, Erasmus Darwin, and his grandson Charles Darwin discussed how the world had been created. But they did not discuss why. In other words, they did not find any purpose behind evolution. It was Lamarck who, even before Darwin, explained that living organisms changed because they wanted to. Old organs had been discarded when they were found useless or inefficient; new organs had been developed because they were found necessary. All that was necessary to accomplish this was a passionate desire for the change and a continuous willing for it until it happened. Thus instead of banishing Mind from the universe, as was done by Darwin, Lamarck invested it with Life. When Darwinism threatened to extinguish the torch of Life by propounding the Purposeless and Mindless theory of Creation, it was Lamarckian theory of Creative Evolution which gave the Vitalists the hope, because Lamarckianism had invested every process of life and every tissue of life with will,

purpose, and design. The battle between Lamarckianism and Darwinism, between the neo-Lamarckians and neo-Darwinians grew high; but the latter were chased away from the battlefield. Shaw belonged to the rank of the neo-Lamarckians who call themselves Creative Evolutionists. Shaw dramatized this idea of Creative Evolution, but seldom sacrificed his trade as an artist.

It has already been noted that nothing can be more remote from truth than the observation that Bernard Shaw was irreligious. He was essentially a religious man on whose desk the Bible was always kept and who had the teachings of Christ in his heart. True, he spoke against church-going on many occasions, but it was because for most of the church-goers the Mass was merely a rite when they pretended seriousness, and not a real Communion which would make them feel ennobled. Shaw certainly had no faith in an all-perfect God. It was his want of faith in such a God that made him appear to the conventional people to be an irreligious man. In the Preface to Immaturity published in 1921 Shaw says :

" . . . my conception of God was that insisted on the first Article of the Church of England, then as now vehemently repudiated by all pious persons, who will have it that God is a substantial gentleman of uncertain and occasionally savage temper, and a spirit only in the sense in which an archbishop is a spirit"¹ . He continues " . . . it seems

1. Preface to Immaturity - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 664.

providential that I was driven to the essentials of religion by the reduction of every factitious and fictitious element in it to the most irreverent absurdity¹". Those who fail to notice the essentials of religion in the mind and works of Bernard Shaw will no doubt bring the charge of blasphemy and atheism against him, but such a charge cannot be borne out by facts. We may assert that he who has been driven to the essentials of religion must be a perfectly religious man. The essentials of religion consist of fighting against all sham, ugliness and corruption. Shaw wanted that every church should be a church of All Saints, and every cathedral a place for pure contemplation by the greatest minds of all races, creeds and colours. But Shaw's image of God is quite different from the anthropomorphic God whom the free-thinkers of the day were out to destroy. But, while most of the free-thinkers were satisfied with the Darwinian theory of evolution which made God unnecessary, Shaw was not contented by only rejecting this anthropomorphic God with parts and passions.

As hinted above, Shaw continued with great zeal the war of Jesus Christ against ugliness and dishonesty and hypocrisy; he was humanity's friend. He was a man to whom, above all, Life was glorious which should not be tinkered with. The public utterances of Shaw were sometimes

1. Preface to Immaturity - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 667.

misleading which gave birth to the wrong idea about his attitude towards religion. This man who spoke so much against the particular image of God imprinted in the mind of the average, conventional man, against the church and the priests and their services, was found "sitting in one of the pews deep in meditation" in a church by Mrs. Laden, as R.J.Minney reports. One can go on quoting instances from Shaw's works to reveal his essentially religious mind. He was a real Christian, though it may be difficult to classify him as one because he disregarded the prevailing moral codes and ideas about God and adjusted the codes and ideas to his way of thinking and his own personal beliefs. It is not difficult to see the perfect Christian in Shaw, possibly the only perfect Christian after Voltaire, who continued the fight of God and his Son.

Shaw recognises that at present the human mind is sadly crippled in its religious thinking. Man has come to believe that truth has been found, embodied, and standardised, and so we have nothing to do except to reproduce some precious features of an immutable perfection. Religion, for Shaw, is an experience in which every aspect of his being is raised to its highest extent. What is needed is a change of consciousness, an inner evolution. But man's evolution is inextricably bound up with his conscious

1. The Bogus Image of Bernard Shaw -- R.J.Minney. Leslie Frewin. London 1969

efforts. This is the belief of Shaw and this is the teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us what to be and be by inner contemplation. Shaw accepts this teaching of Christ and reveals it quite often.

With this brief introduction we may start discussing the particular plays of Bernard Shaw which are here classed as "philosophical plays". Caesar and Cleopatra which was written as early as 1898, portrays a man taken from Roman history; but the portrayal of Caesar is not historical. Here we find Shaw grappling with the idea of a truly great man or a genius, who is, according to the playwright, a serious and important experiment of Life Force. Shaw had, however, taken up this idea earlier in his characterisation of Napoleon in The Man of Destiny, but in Caesar and Cleopatra he distinguishes the great man of his conception much more clearly; and we may say, he goes into the problem as to who is a great man or genius more deeply. The qualities which mark Caesar out and place him on a higher plane than human beings --- magnanimity, rationality and impartiality -- are, for Shaw, the marks of a genius. Caesar of this play hates cruelty and slaughter; nothing is more foreign to his mind than being malicious and revengeful. He finds it impossible for him to stoop to vengeance because vengeance will beget vengeance with serious consequences for the whole human race. As he himself

1. Religion and Culture -- Dr. S.Radhakrishnan. Orient Paperback. 1968. P 13.

explains ". . . to the end of history murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honour and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand." It may be said, however --- though it may not be the most satisfactory explanation -- that this hatred for vengeance and slaughter and also Caesar's impartiality and benevolence are rooted in his realism -- in his expediency. Caesar sees through and sees better. If he refuses to read the letters containing the names of his enemies, if he condemns the murder of Pothinus and yet defends the murder of Flatateeta, these may well be ascribed to his superb sense and analysis of the real situation. As Caesar is the supreme realist, so he understands that the magnanimity shown by him in refusing to know the names of his enemies would conquer the hearts of the people. So far as his reaction to the twin murders of Pothinus and Flatateeta, the denunciation of the first murder and the upholding of the second only vindicate his sense of the real condition because "the murder of Pothinus rouses the Egyptians to vengeance, but Flatateeta's death can do nothing more than make the helpless queen wear mourning", in the words of Dr. S.C. Sengupta. Caesar's army is hopelessly outnumbered by the Egyptians and so realistically Caesar decides to be magnanimous lest the Egyptians should be infuriated to destroy his army.

1. Shaw put the words in the mouth of Caesar.

2. The Art of Bernard Shaw - Dr. S.C.Sengupta. A.Mukherjee & Co. Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta 1960. P 118.

But to argue in this line is not to put Caesar under the correct light. To say that Caesar's magnanimity is nothing more than a realist's reaction to the happenings around him -- that he is only expedient -- is not only to misunderstand him, but also to misinterpret the playwright's aim. This apparently historical play may be accepted as a philosophical play when the character of Caesar and the aim of Shaw are analysed. What Shaw wanted to emphasize in the character of Caesar is his natural virtue or natural goodness which does not know jealousy and malice to which ordinary human mind is heir. In that sense Caesar, as portrayed by Shaw, is above and beyond simple human passions. What Shaw underlines in Caesar's character is that as Caesar has no human passions, so it is not necessary for him to control himself -- and that is the real cause of his magnanimity and impartial benevolence. This makes the character of Caesar rather unhistorical -- despite the fact that Shaw borrowed his material from Mommsen -- but makes him a representative of the Shavian concept of the great man, the genius; and this idea is dramatized in the play Caesar and Cleopatra. When Maurice Colbourne calls Shaw's Caesar "Shavius Caesar" he actually catches the problem right in its nose¹. The main, actually the only, characteristic of this Shavius Caesar is his natural goodness from which spring all his other qualities. Caesar

1. The Real Bernard Shaw -- Maurice Colbourne. Dent & Sons. London 1949. P 134.

is a vital experiment of the Life Force in its upward struggle and in him we get a glimpse of the superman who is portrayed in a more complete manner in Back to Methuselah in the characters of the Ancients. When Caesar says that the gods may become tired with the pettiness of man and "create a race that can understand", he actually speaks of the race of the supermen. But Caesar knows that he himself is above the pettiness of man and that in him the qualities of the superman find body and form. It is his natural goodness that makes Caesar a kin of the Ancients though he, unlike them, does not speak of becoming pure thought. Natural goodness is a Christ-like virtue which makes Shaw's Caesar an immensely greater hero than the Shakespearean Christian hero, Henry V. Whether Shaw's Caesar is an improvement upon Shakespeare's, as obliquely claimed by him,¹ may be a point of heated controversy. It is true that whereas Shakespeare's Caesar is quite historical, Shaw's Caesar is not; and from that point of view Shaw's claim is unjustified. Shakespeare's Caesar with all his grandeur, power and weakness is a human being; Shaw's Caesar is much above human being; Shaw's play with its "variety and splendour of mounting"² has its grandeur too. But in a Shavian play the

1. Preface to The Three Plays for Puritans - G.B. Shaw.

The Complete Prefaces of B. Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965.
P 748.

2. Shaw's letter to Golding Bright quoted in George Bernard Shaw's Historical Plays- R.N. Roy. Macmillan Co. of India Ltd. 1976. P 25.

interest lies not in the story or in the spectacle though the spectacle may be useful to explain the idea. In Caesar and Cleopatra the idea is nothing but an exposition of the qualities of a genius, a great man who is a vital experiment of Life Force and so it does not matter if Shaw's Caesar is not the real Caesar of history.

Caesar has followers with him and he is the conqueror of a quarter of the world, but he is essentially a lonely man. It is because there is nothing of man in him; Cleopatra refers to him as a god. He himself says in his address to the Sphinx: "Hail, Sphinx: Salutation from Julius Caesar! I have wandered in many lands, seeking the lost horizons from which my birth into this world exiled me, and the company of creatures such as 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 the desert . . ."

Caesar finds himself a stranger in the world of men. It would be only bootless labour to try to find human passions in him who is also conscious of his superiority to humanity. It is his natural goodness - he is virtuous by nature - that keeps him above and beyond the human passions of love, jealousy, hatred, and malice. The doctrine of natural goodness implies that the man who does good unhesitatingly without having to fight against temptation is the perfectly good man. From this point of view the

prevalent notion in the Anglo-Saxon world that a man is good who can resist temptation is quite unsatisfactory. Shaw implies that the naturally good man does not feel any temptation and so he is not required to fight it. And this idea of natural goodness is explained through the magnanimity of Caesar. Caesar is immune from the desires which human flesh and human mind are subject to. Shaw is correct in his implied assertion that the popular good men of the British stage are good in so far as they resist temptation, but are not immune from it. Caesar is made of completely different stuff - stuff that goes to make the Shavian Superman. In the character of Caesar - and to some extent in the characters of Shaw's Napoleon, Bluntschli and Undershaft - we find the application of the principles of the theory of Creative Evolution. Great man like Caesar is an evolutionary "Sport" in whom life expresses itself at a higher level than ordinary human beings exemplify. As C.E.M. Joad puts it : "To be a great man is, then, to be a harbinger of what our species , if Life Force continues to develop in and through us, may one day become ¹" .

The concept of Creative Evolution and Life Force has been elaborated in great detail in Man and Superman. This play subtitled "a Comedy and Philosophy" really ushers in a significant period in the history of English theatre -- the period in which was first dramatized

1. Shaw - C. E. M. Joad. Victor Gollancz Ltd. London. 1949.

philosophic thoughts in a large way. The observation of St. John Ervine that ". . . if G.B.S. had never written anything else than Man and Superman , his value to the theatre would still have been immense" ¹ seems a little inflated, but the observation is substantially correct. An audience, however small that audience might be, was found, for the first time in the long history of English theatre, for the play of ideas. The multitude, of course, still preferred wild and spectacular pieces. But the sign that the drama of ideas was advancing to conquer the time was unmistakably evident with the performance of Man and Superman.

In the lengthy Preface to the play Bernard Shaw first enunciated the doctrine of Life Force, as he called it --- a doctrine derived from Bergson's "elan vital". It is not possible that every body will share Bergson's or Shaw's views about it; but here is a passage from the Preface which has left a mark on every reader : "This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one : the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on a scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish clod of ailments complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy" ² . It should be mentioned that it is not easy to know what Shaw

1. Bernard Shaw : His Life, Works and Friends - St. John Ervine. William Morrow & Co. N.Y. 1956. P 389.

2. Preface to Man and Superman - G. B. Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 163.

precisely meant by Life Force; neither is it possible to know for certain what the function and purpose of man in the scheme of Nature is. Life Force, it seems, does not itself have any clear understanding of its own function. It, as we are given to understand, acts on the principle of trial and error; but in no sense can it be regarded as an evil force. It is rather an inefficient, imperfect force seeking perfection. It started by using mindless creatures which were not aware of their functions and of the intentions of the Life Force. The moment these mindless creatures were found to be useless because they could not consciously assist the Life Force in the realization of its intentions, they were scrapped without any ado; or they were made servile to the better creatures, for instance, Man.

In various respects man differs from other creatures, the main difference being the supreme fact that he has a mind and that he can not only understand, but also can help or frustrate the purpose of the Life Force; the choice is his. The creation of a thinking instrument established freedom, primarily the freedom to choose. Man, being a thinking instrument, can choose either to help Life Force realize its intentions or frustrate it. But if he does anything to frustrate it, he will do it at his own peril, for Life Force will not tolerate a being which is useless from its own point of view. Man, in that case, shall also be scrapped.

In Shaw's play the purpose of Life Force is explained by Don Juan as the evolution of Man into Superman; and here lies the greatest difference between Shaw's idea of Creative Evolution and Darwin's scientific explanation of evolution. Shaw, it should also be mentioned, did not accept Nietzsche's idea of the Superman. Nietzsche's Superman is a ruthless, thundering, quarrelling soldier who would cast out the human impulses of mercy, tenderness, and love in order to be the embodiment of Might. Shaw thought that Life is a force using mankind for a purpose greater than Man himself, and Man's function is to assist Life in its upward struggle. Don Joan, in the Hell Scene in Man and Superman analyses the purpose of Life thus : "Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organising itself; . . . the mammoth and the man, the mouse and the megatherium, the flies and the fleas and the Fathers of the church, are all more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, infallible, . . . in short, a god".

This Life Force has woman as its direct instrument to accomplish that purpose. This concept, it should be noted, stultifies the conventional idea of boy running after girl. That John Tanner should, far from running after Ann Whitefield, run away from her, with her pursuing him with fixed determination, seemed improbable and improper to the early audience of the play. Shaw maintains

that it is not only probable and proper, it is actually natural. Woman pursues the marked-down victim with subtlety and determination. But the victims are not the victims of sex simply or of any individual woman simply, but of Life Force which uses the pursuing woman as the direct instrument for perpetuating creation. Man is important, no doubt; he is the means through which woman carries out the purpose of Life Force. But the importance of man is only in so far as he is the impregnator of woman.

But man, being a creative artist in one way or the other, is less interested in the production of progeny than he is in expressing himself. But if he is to be diverted from his own purpose to that of Life Force, that is, if he is to answer the call of the woman to fertilise her, it can be done only by some exceptional excitement. It is for this that the sexual act has been made so much pleasing; and woman uses all her arts, prompted by the powerful urgency of Nature, to seduce man to her purpose, or rather to the purpose of Life Force. Woman certainly values her husband, but his value to her is not the value of the divine lover, but the value of the bread-earner for her and her children.

The sentimental woman without will or purpose of her own and blind of her significance in the scheme of Nature might assert that Shaw was ignorant of the feminine nature. Shaw's contention that woman is the huntress and man

the game gave a rude shock to the conventional attitude towards woman. Woman, animated by an irresistible impulse to perpetuate the species, marks her man down and then allures him away to her bed. That is the sole purpose of his existence from her point of view. The male matters so little to the female that some creatures, as Shaw points out in the Preface to Man and Superman, kill him when he has performed his function of fertilising her. When Ann pursues Tanner, she becomes Everywoman.

The duel of sex is dramatized in Man and Superman; the artist-man and the mother-woman are shown here in a state of war. It denotes a difference between the purpose of man and that of woman - a difference so deep that, if it is true, there can be no cooperation between sexes. Tanner tells Octavius that the woman is determined to create children and that Octavius is the marked victim of Ann. He, however, fails to realize that he, and not the romantic poet Octavius, is the marked victim. The dramatic irony of Tanner's warning to Octavius that Ann means to marry him cannot escape attention. The following conversation between Tanner and Octavius illustrates the former's viewpoint about woman and her relation with and attitude towards man.

Octavius : Don't be ungenerous, Jack. They take the tenderest care of us.

Tanner : Yes, as a soldier takes care of his rifle or a musician of his violin. But do they allow us

any purpose or freedom of our own ? Will they lend us to one another ? Can the strongest man escape from them when once he is appropriated ? They tremble when we are in danger and weep when we die; but the tears are not for us, but for a father wasted, a son's breeding thrown away".

Now this theory is full of loopholes. Woman is also, as the theory makes clear, as much a victim as the man she seeks to enslave because she herself is only an instrument, a slave of Life Force. Prompted by the purpose of Life Force she becomes unscrupulous and uses every art to seduce man. The artist-man is not less unscrupulous than the mother-woman. He also is ruthless in his determination to fulfil a purpose. Though he claims that it is his own purpose, yet he cannot surely know that it is not Nature's. If the mother-woman's purpose to perpetuate the species is Nature's, the artist-man's purpose may well be Nature's too. If this were not true, the artist-man is guilty of his refusal to be "a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish clod of ailments complaining that the world will not devote itself to making him happy", as quoted earlier. If, again, the creation of life is the supreme form of art, there can be scarcely any conflict between the artist-man and the mother-woman. The passion for posterity, so far as we can determine, is as strong in man as it is in woman.

Shaw's prominent Don Juan play is a kind of epic in which the playwright adopts a cosmic range, possibly to have for himself a berth among the philosophers. "I sing, not arms and the hero, but the philosophic man", Juan announces in the Hell Scene, and this might come from the mouth of Shaw himself. But the great artist that he was, he could take an objective stand. Tanner appears as a revolutionary and a man of ideas, but the Hell Scene emphasizes what the comedy plot demonstrates : that the play turns on the fact of his sexuality and the relation to woman that sets up, and that he cannot break with all his ideas. The comedy the play offers turns on the clownishness of this "philosophic man". It does not escape notice that the happy ending --- the girl gets the boy, which reverses the common formula --- is a vindication of the popular taste. Tanner protests loudly even when he accepts Ann and proclaims that he loses his freedom, being dwindled into a husband; he talks of his philosophy of Life Force which has prompted Ann to catch her impregnator. But the ending of the play is quite conventional and the hero is turned into a conventional man. The practical judgement of this philosopher is quite untrustworthy and this is evident even

1. Marjory M. Morgan in *The Shawian Play* ground : An exploration of the Art of Bernard Shaw writes : "Though still protesting, still playing his familiar role, Tanner is assimilated in high good-humour into the conventional group". Methuen. 1972. P 102.

in Act I. Tanner's revolutionary idealism rushes him into a chivalrous defence of Violet when a moment's reflection on her actual character would have helped him to see the absurdities of his suppositions. This is the first time when the protesting iconoclast and philosopher tumbles to provoke laughter; but the biggest tumble is when he is trapped by Ann and his cynical idea about woman fails to protect him. It is to be understood, however, that it is not just sexual passion that traps Tanner into marriage; it is rather the social discipline that prompts him to accept marriage.

It is by virtue of Act III that Man and Superman must be classified as the real first contribution of Bernard Shaw to the play of ideas. Shaw conceived and wrote the play with the idea; there is no sign that Act III is an afterthought as The Revolutionist's Handbook is. In its general structure this play does not anticipate the strong dialectical pattering to be found in Major Barbara; it is actually away from clear organic unity and the self-containment of art. The interrupted plot, the proliferation of ideas, the shifting of the locale --- all play their parts in taking the play away from any predetermined form and order. Though the ideas commonly associated with the name of Shaw, particularly the theory of Life Force or Creative Evolution, are expounded here, yet it seems that the playwright makes game of them. As I have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, we cannot help noticing a certain scepticism on the part of the dramatist about the

validity of his theory. Shaw has actually demonstrated that ideas are enjoyable to play with, without subscribing to any particular one; and in this he is more an artist than a philosopher. It would be impossible for the serious philosopher to show his philosophic man tumble to provoke laughter. The broad mind of the artist Shaw saw the limitations of the theory of Life Force. But it is enough that he has ideas, and quite dramatic ideas at that.

It was sometime at the beginning of the twentieth century that Shaw ceased to believe that progress in any actual sense could be achieved through democratic machinery. He came to recognise that the common man was not wise enough to choose for himself such rulers as will bring about an equal distribution of national wealth, thus eradicating poverty and all its associated evils. This attitude of Shaw was presumably the result of his reading of Plato's "Republic". Plato postulated that it was possible by appropriate education to elevate the soul of man to a level of insight at which it could achieve a knowledge of the ideal form. Thus the "philosophic mind" or rather "the philosopher King" would be created to govern the rest who are stupid and irrational. Though he agreed with Plato that the common man was frail and irrational, Shaw did not accept Plato's view that the philosophic man, the Superman, could be created merely through education. Shaw rather maintained that the superman could be produced through selective breeding.

Neitzsche's contention that Life or God would ultimately evolve somebody greater than man who would, by virtue of his superior qualities, rule over the ordinary men,¹ - is open to two serious objections. If the Superman is the result of the natural process of evolution, then man has only to wait and allow the process to take its own course. If, on the other hand, he is the result of man's conscious efforts, what set of virtues should he have? More, one cannot be sure that the set of virtues would be really superior to bring betterment and greater happiness for the human race. Neitzsche's theory fails to give any convincing answer to these objections and questions. Shaw's Life Force is a force immanent and, working within man, it impels him to move upward. The purpose of Life Force is to create a super race of men, the Supermen, who are not the embodiment of greater physical beauty or physical prowess, but of superior brain. Don Juan says in the Hell Scene that the Superman would be an ideal individual, a higher individual, being "omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, completely self-conscious -- in short, a god". He would seek "in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means". In Back to Methuselah we get a glimpse of

1. G.K. Chesterton deals with these objections in his book
George Bernard Shaw. The Bodley Head. 1961.

the Superman in the Ancients. They are long-livers, but chiefly they have more evolved brains, striving incessantly to be "pure thought"rescued from the burden of the flesh.

Major Barbara with which I intend to deal next is one of the best plays of Shaw; it attracts our attention as a philosophical play in which, through the mouth of the protagonist, Andrew Underrshaft, the playwright enunciates "the religion" of "money and gun powder" which should replace the old religious creed. Undershaft is not another Caesar, but even in him we may see some of the attributes of the Shavian genius. The Preface to Major Barbara, a magnificent piece by itself, has the object to make the people realize that poverty is the root of all crimes. Shaw observes : "In the millionaire Undershaft I have represented a man who has become intellectually conscious of the irresistible natural truth which we all abhor and repudiate : to wit, that the greatest of our evils, and the worst of our crimes is poverty, and that our first duty, to which every other consideration should be sacrificed, is not to be poor"¹.

It was inevitable that the genteel people brought up under the "moral" atmosphere of the Victorian period should find the play and the new religion wicked and immoral. Naturally,when the play was first produced it was

1. Preface to Major Barbara - G.B.Shaw. The Complete

Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 118

thought by the critics and the audience alike that it treated the serious subject of Christian ethics and the preachings of the Salvation Army rather lightly; it was also thought that the play was a merciless satire on the Salvation Army. It must be borne in mind that Shaw's business as a dramatist is not simply to treat the serious as trivial and the trivial as serious. He openly challenged his critics who attacked him on that hackneyed formula to try their hands in this manner and see whether anything resembling one of his plays would reward them.

Shaw came to believe that poverty was the root of all evils and hence it was the greatest of all crimes. Shaw never became sentimental where poverty and the poor were concerned. He maintained emphatically that he hated poverty and that not a single nation or a single individual should be allowed to remain poor. He characteristically made issue with the traditional "religious" belief that "blessed are the poor", and almost with a missionary zeal took upon himself the task of pointing out to the people that so far from being blessed the poor are great criminals. Shaw, at the same time, said that religion was the most vital, the most necessary thing, but the trouble was that there was not a single credible religious creed to depend upon.¹ I believe that Shaw had the conventional religious belief with an

1. Preface to Major Barbara - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 137

anthromorphic God at the centre in the mind when he spoke of the lack of "credible religious creed". Again he found out that Capitalism, which makes the rich richer and condemns the bigger section of the community to languish in poverty, would not facilitate the cultivation of religion and salvation of soul, because under capitalist economy the religious organisations themselves would be compelled to sell themselves to the Have-and-Holders. It is Capitalism that creates poverty ; it is poverty that is the breeding ground of all social and even moral diseases. But Capitalism cleverly tries to remedy these diseases by founding hospitals and endowing religious and educational institutions that lulls rebellions and helps perpetuate inequity. As Capitalism increases and ensures poverty, so the upholders of Capitalist economy loudly declare that poverty is a virtue and that the poor are the chosen seed of God. Religious and charitable institutions like the Salvation Army, thus, are only the "almoners of the rich"; the rich manufacturer keeps his workmen comfortable, which is an invaluable, almost an unfailing safeguard against discontent and consequent revolution.

Shaw believes that one of the greatest defects of Capitalism is that it kills the hunger of the soul of the poor; but this hunger of the soul is the pre-condition for attaining salvation. It is due to the fact that the overwhelming majority, the poor, spend their time and

energy, under Capitalism, to earn their bread that they never feel the greater hunger of the soul. Again this vast majority of poor men and women are hoodwinked into the belief that as poverty is a godly virtue, they need not bother for salvation, for it would come to them naturally enough. The new religion of money and gunpowder is a loud protest against this line of conventional thought and it declares that so long as an individual remains poor, he cannot attain salvation. A poor nation, like a poor man, also cannot attain salvation. Major Barbara shows how society is dependent on the charity of the rich and how absurd it is to talk of salvation and independence until it can shake off the chains of poverty; in other words, until it can break off the shackles of Capitalism. If there is any "tosh", as Charles Lomax uses the term, in the Salvation Army, other religious sects are not above it; it lies in the fact that they exist under the capitalist system which makes them sell their souls to Bodger, Lazarus and Undershaft. It is not, therefore, only the Salvation Army that is the object of Shawian shell, but Capitalism itself. What satire is there in Major Barbara is squarely directed against Capitalism, the greatest obstacle on the way of the upward flight of man.

Shaw often takes up the theme of the conflict between the saintly and the practical. Saint Joan, The Devil's Disciple, John Bull's other Island, Major Barbara etc. dramatize this conflict, sometimes making the

saintly triumphant and sometimes the practical. Major Barbara dramatizes the conflict between the saintly Barbara, a Major in the Salvation Army and her father, Andrew Undershaft, a manufacturer of weapons and the richest man in Europe. It is Undershaft who enunciates the new religion of money and gun power and very intelligently shows to his daughter that the Salvation Army, and as a matter of fact all religious institutions, can at best pretend to save the souls of others whereas it itself loses its independence by selling itself to the money of the rich.

At first, of course, Barbara is convinced of the superiority of the conventional religion of the Salvation Army to her father's gospel and invites him to the Westham Shelter of the Army with the pious hope of converting him. Undershaft, convinced of the inherent strength of his religion and weakness of the Salvation Army, promptly accepts the invitation on condition that Barbara shall also pay a visit to his gun-cotton factory. Undershaft takes upon himself the charge to open Barbara's eyes to the weakness of the Salvation Army. He knows that in order to win her over it is necessary that her illusion of the worth of the Salvation Army must be shattered .

Like many other plays of Shaw Major Barbara is a play of conversion --- mental and spiritual. Barbara's illusion is shattered in the Second Act of the play, and in the Third Act, that follows naturally, she is convinced of

the superiority of the gospel of Undershaft. In the Shavian play of ideas the action is in the discussion; in Major Barbara the discussion primarily takes place in the Third and the Final Act. The conflict between the saintly woman and the practical man of the world is quite short but decisive. Undershaft quite easily brings it home to Barbara that though the Salvation Army wants to fight against drinking and blood-shed, it has to depend upon the money of the distiller and the munition manufacturer. She discovers to her utter dismay that her own life and education, too, depend upon her father's money which she considers as tainted. She is now completely disillusioned and becomes almost a tragic figure when she feels herself let down and forsaken by God; the Army in which she pinned her faith turns out to be a hypocritical institution depending for its very existence upon the tainted money she so much hates.

But to Shaw life is something glorious and so death --- spiritual death in particular ---- is something abhorrent. Barbara's faith, therefore, has to be restored; but it is not the restoration of the old faith in the Salvation Army. The new religion of Undershaft must be shown as triumphant and Barbara must be converted to it. The conversion to the new religion and the restoration of faith take place in the Third Act where through discussion Undershaft proves to the visitors to the factory that the new religion of money and gunpowder makes people independent

and strong as they become free from the threat of starvation. This freedom from hunger sharpens the hunger of their soul without which salvation shall remain a far cry. This gospel of money as the pre-condition for attaining salvation of soul is quite "immoral" in so far as it is unconventional. But Undershaft makes it clear to Barbara as well as to Cusins that this is the only credible religion in the present world-situation. Undershaft strongly believes and asserts that souls can be saved only by saving them from the crime of poverty; this crime does not allow the soul to soar. The hands of the munition factory of Undershaft are quite satisfied so far as their material wants are concerned, and so there is little or no possibility of their succumbing to temptation to which the poor readily yield. "It is cheap work converting starving man with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread on the other", says Undershaft. When he proposes to his daughter to try her hand "on my men : their souls are hungry because their bodies are full," she realizes the truth of the statement and accepts the new religion without hesitation and her conversion is complete. Her faith is restored : she again becomes a happy soul.

Naturally the conventional moralist with his cant of divineness and ennobling spirit of poverty is shocked at Undershaft's assertion that money paves the way to salvation, and that he would not have conventional morality and conscience. Major Barbara is the twentieth

century morality play in which, as in many of Shaw's philosophical plays, an idealistic liberal is first satirized in the person of Lady Britomart. By family tradition and personal conviction she is an avowed believer in freedom of speech and democratic franchise, and yet she betrays her natural masterfulness whenever she opens her mouth. But she is not a tyrant; rather an amiable lady and well-intentioned mother. But this amiability of vision of Lady Britomart is enveloped by conventional morality of the governing class and she thinks herself morally superior to Undershaft as by birth she belongs to the aristocratic class. When Stephen, her son, betrays embarrassment thinking that his mother is going to reveal some weakness of his father, she gives him a piece of advice befitting her class; "It is only in the middle classes, Stephen, that people get into a state of dumb helpless horror when they find out that there are wicked people in the world. In our class, we have to decide what is to be done with the wicked people; and nothing should disturb our self-possession." She is, again, so used to thinking of the Stevanages as the governors by natural right that when Undershaft refuses to sacrifice the Undershaft tradition of inheritance for the sake of Stephen, a big quarrel ensues between the husband and the wife. She finds, correctly, that there is a fundamental moral disagreement between her and Undershaft which nothing can bridge up. As for Stephen, he is a well-

intentioned imbecile and at least as conventional as his mother.

While reviewing Major Barbara in the Time, the reviewer accused Shaw of making a "complete about-face" and firing on his own socialist ranks.¹ Again, Francis Fergusson² denounces the play as an "undersolved paradox". It is not difficult to see how the play and the character of Undershaft baffled the critics. It is one of the biggest paradoxes in the entire gamut of Shavian plays that a manufacturer of lethal weapons plays the role of the Savior of souls in a religious play; that a fabulously rich entrepreneur speaks against the capitalist system of economy. To solve the paradox we have to examine Undershaft's background. Undershaft, as he himself informs us, is an East End slum boy, reared in the busy locality of East London in the middle of the nineteenth century. He has, like all the predecessors of his "dynasty", taken the name of the firm's founder, an abandoned orphan reared in the parish of St. Andrew Undershaft. He has taken, in order to save himself from the humiliation of poverty, the stern slogan "Thou shalt starve ere I starve".

It is here that the second paradox of the play appears. Contrary to our expectation we notice Shaw condoning

1. Time LXVIII November 12, 1956.

2. The Idea of a Theatre - Francis Fergusson. P 183.

and even insisting that for a poor man the only manly attitude is the attitude of Undershaft which would foster the sense of self-respect. One of the cardinal virtues, for Shaw, is self-respect absence of which is mainly due to poverty. Naturally, a man must be rich in order to gain self-respect which will breed courage, another cardinal virtue, in him. This courage is moral courage to stand up against conventional morality.

Undershaft drives home the ~~that~~ ^{that} point ^{to speak of} of honour, justice, and truth to show off moral superiority is only the trade of the conventionally moral people. Justice, truth, and honour indeed have their place in the religion of Undershaft, but he maintains that these are the "graces and luxuries of a rich, strong, and safe life". Any man who preaches these virtues to the poor without taking into account the economic realities may be a well-intentioned man, but he hoodwinks the poor and himself alike. Money is the solid ground on which these virtues can rest their feet safely. It is an idle notion that moral virtue can become a significant force by its own right.

Now I come to the charge of Shaw's making a "complete about-face" in Major Barbara. Those who find Undershaft unintelligible, misconceive Shaw's Fabianism. Shaw's gradualism was not based on any moral objection to force ; he thought that a bloody revolution achieved through

catastrophe would collapse for the lack of administrative experience of the revolutionists. Shaw thought that if socialism could be instituted by a few days' fighting it would have been well worth the cost in bloodshed.

Shaw made the triumph of Undershaft over Barbara and her would-be husband, Cusins, complete. Shaw suggests that this victory of Undershaft is inevitable. Barbara can no more turn away from life than can Cusins. After her conversion to the gospel of Undershaft she will be able to preach to the well-fed, self-respecting men and women who cannot be bribed by bread. After her conversion she regains her faith and courage and goes "right up into the skies" saved from the boredom and shallowness of "the drawing room's civilized cry".

The Preface to Major Barbara distinguishes between true Christianity and Crosstianity, the religion of negation, suffering and death, of sin and guilt. Within the play, a process of redemption is enacted through a bargaining for souls and a vicarious sacrifice. It is a redemption of Christianity itself. Undershaft does not destroy the Salvation Army; he is ready, rather, to identify himself partly with it ; he is more ready to identify it with himself. So we find him, in order to win Barbara, "buying" the Salvation Army with his cheque to Mrs. Baines. Barbara's spiritual pilgrimage takes her through disillusion

and despair to a rebirth of hope and a new vision. Her private experiences enforce the recognition that "the way of life lies through the factory of death", that destruction has its proper place in a healthy scheme of things. We may refer to Undershaft's words: ". . . you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It does not fit the facts. Well, scrap it, scrap it and get one that does". Barbara's spiritual death and resurrection contain the promise of a new social order. Barbara, as Marjory M. Morgan puts it, is " . . . the Christ ¹ figure~~s~~ of the play".

It is true that Shaw's plays are of uneven weight like those of his great predecessor, Shakespeare, but the plays which are sure to stand the onslaught of time include Androcles and the Lion. That Bernard Shaw should be regarded as a fierce enemy of morals in the face of the fact that he, after Voltaire, is possibly the only man fighting for Christ, is a big irony. The fact is, Shaw has pointed out that most of the Christians by profession and birth are not Christians by faith, and this inevitably caused a lot of irritation. That Mars proves to be more powerful than Jesus in the hour of test is the idea in Androcles and the Lion -- an idea strengthened and vindicated by the First World War, as Shaw pointed out at a later date in his Preface to the ² play. In this respect the play is rather prophetic, for here

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1. The Shavian Play Ground : An Exploration of the Art of G.B.Shaw - Marjory M.Morgan. Methuen. P 144
 2. Preface to Androcles and the Lion - G.B.Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965.

Shaw foresaw how the professed believers in Christianity would behave in times of crisis. Another underlying idea of the play, as that of The Devil's Disciple or any of the plays of Ibsen, is that man must have something great and worthy to live and die for. Human existence becomes decent and meaningful when it has an end outside simple existence of the self.

The play is not historical ;in a play with a lion as an important character we must not expect factual truth. But it creates a faithful picture of how the first of the Christians were persecuted by the Romans professing the old faith. For the Romans, the followers of the new faith were heretics because they disregarded the authority of old religion as well as that of the Emperor and put the new religion and Jesus much above them. No wonder that the Christians were regarded as dangerous by the followers of the established religion. This has always been a fact in human history -- the old always regards the new as heretical and hence fit to be persecuted and, if possible, liquidated. The persecuting Romans, in Shaw's play, are no more villains, as the danger to their religion was definite and clear, than Cauchon in Saint Joan is a villain. My intention is not, however, to place the Romans and Couchon on the same berth; whereas the Romans enjoy the killing and the bloodshed, Cauchon hates them and he knows that Joan is innocent. Similarity lies in the fact that the Romans and Couchon alike believe in the infallibility of their

respective faiths. As Joan might save herself by making a declaration to the effect that her "voices" were wrong, so might the Christians by burning the incense as a sign of acceptance of the old faith. In both the cases, the battle really is not between the right idea and the wrong, but between the established authority and the spirit of revolt.

But all the Christians were not true to their professed belief. The most glaring example in Androcles and the Lion is Spintho, who, the moment the hour of crisis comes, shows himself as the disbeliever in Jesus and runs to burn the incense to go back to the old fold. Of course, Spintho goes straight into the mouth of a hungry lion. Ferrovius, whose character is nicely drawn, knows the bitter truth that people cannot easily become true Christians in words and deeds. Ferrovius fights with himself ; tries to defeat the Mars in him, but fails. He is sensitive enough to bewail his failure to follow the doctrines of Christianity. When the hour comes he surrenders to the god of war, fails to love the gladiators and kills six of them. The Emperor becomes glad not simply because in his land there is such a great fighter who could kill six expert gladiators, but because he finds that Jesus is after all not accepted by at least some of the Christians. The established authority feels elated at the failure of the followers of the new doctrine. The growth of Christianity was a threat to the authority of the Emperor because the Christians did not accept him as the divine being. In the play it is Androcles, the meek, who conquers

hatred and comes out triumphant ; even a hungry lion is subdued by his love and faith. He shows that a loving and faithful heart, that is, the heart of a true Christian, can conquer what the mightiest sword-bearer cannot. The god of War gets defeated in the hands of the true follower of God Who is Love.

It is Lavinia, rather than Androcles, who is the central figure in the play, for it is she who discusses with the Roman Captain the central idea of the play. Shaw, who did not believe in God in the conventional fashion, puts into the mouth of Lavinia some words which bring out his idea of the Christian God and the worth of living and dying for a cause greater than one's self ; the connection with what is held in Man and Superman cannot be missed. The talk of Lavinia with the Roman Captain runs as follows :

The Captain : Are you then going to die for nothing ?

Lavinia : Yes; that is the wonderful thing. It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I have now no doubt at all that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories.

The Captain : But for what ?

Lavinia : I don't know. If it were for anything small enough to know, it would be small enough to die for.

I think I'm going to die for God.
Nothing else is real enough to die
for.

The Captain : What is God ?

Lavinia : When we know that, Captain, we
shall be gods ourselves.

Afterwards Ferrovius, when he realises how Mars had overwhelmed him, says : "The Christian God is not yet. He will come when Mars and I are dust, but meanwhile I must serve the gods that are, not the God that will be". The Captain asks Lavinia whether she would be prudent to which she replies : "No : I'll strive for the coming of the God Who is not yet". We at once see that Androcles and the Lion cannot be understood without a reference to Shaw's philosophy of Life Force. Man's supreme duty is to strive for a brain which would help the Life Force to realize itself. When Lavinia says "we shall be gods ourselves" we remind ourselves what Don Juan says of the creation of the race of Superman.

What Shaw writes in the Preface to Androcles and the Lion generalises the teachings of Jesus Christ.¹

1. The kingdom of heaven is within you. You are the son of God; and God is the son of man God is your father: you are here to do God's work; and you and your father are one.

1. Preface to Androcles and the Lion - G.B. Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of B.Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965 P 574.

2. Get rid of property by throwing it into the the Common stock. Dissociate your work entirely from money payments ... you cannot serve two masters God and Mammon.

3. Get rid of judges and punishment and revenge. Love your neighbour as yourself, he being a part of yourself. And love your enemies ; they are your neighbors.

4. Get rid of your family entanglements . . . attend to life,not to death.In the kingdom of heaven . . .there is no marriage nor giving in marriage, because you cannot devote your life to two divinities ; God and the person you are married to.

It must be obvious that according to Shaw it is not possible under Capitalism to put Christianity to practice. In Androcles and the Lion Shaw has expressed the varying phases of Christian faith upto the very highest form of religious fidelity. The familiar old fable is used by the dramatist who informs it with subtle overtones of meaning.We must not expect the play to fall into any of the classifications to which we are accustomed. Here fun and seriousness, history and satire are mixed up to the point of bewilderment. But Shaw never plays fun with the truths of religion. Only when the truths of religion become associated in the mind of the reader with mere ceremonials, he may then come to think of Androcles and the Lion as a satire on religion. Ferrovius retains his faith that though he betrays himself as the disciple of Mars,the Christian God shall have the last word when the disciples of Mars and the pseudo-Christians are dust. No other dramatist could have evoked

laughter from such a serious theme. The English do not like levity in religion and light laughter in philosophy. But Shaw served them both in the same dish. It is to be noted that Shaw is free from religious snobbery; this is eminently demonstrated in Androcles and the Lion.

Undershaft has some of the attributes of a Shavian genius: he is unconventional, rational, but not a slave of reality; Caesar is a perfect Shavian genius: he is, as Cleopatra says, a god; Lavinia says we shall be gods ourselves; Don Juan speaks of how the Superman shall be created. Back to Methuselah brings the superman on the stage in the last Act.

The general critical opinion about Back to Methuselah, which is the most ambitious and voluminous dramatic project of Bernard Shaw and which is offered by him as a Bible of Creative Evolution, is, on the whole, a correct one. Generally this play is very strongly disliked, and in this respect the critical observations of such eminent critics as G.K.Chesterton, Eric Bentley, and Edmund Wilson are strikingly similar, none finding the play worth considering. Even on the most superficial acquaintance the play invites the arch-charge that it is untheatrical. Again the play quite legitimately invites the teasing question as to whether Shaw really means what he conveys through the play. In the lengthy Preface to the play Shaw invites us to see the play as a fable. He writes: "I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic association . . . I exploit the

external interest of the philosopher's stone which enables men to live for ever". But one may legitimately suspect that the fantasy of an ageing man has, when he came to writing Back to Methuselah, now supplanted the fantasy of the middle-aged man bubbling with vigour which helped him to write Man and Superman.

Shaw's play in its entirety derives its power from the conflict which is inherent in the human situation and which Plato expressed for later ages in terms of rational and appetitive faculties, being and becoming, guardian and subject. Shaw took from the Republic some of the principal symbols and concepts on which Back to Methuselah is based. In the Chapter "Artist or Thinker" I have touched upon the method and attitude of Shaw vis a vis Plato. The symbols are the more meaningful and forceful in their new context because Shaw was able to identify them with the warring faces of his own personality; accessibility to emotion and fear of it ; deprivation of family affection which is taken revenge upon by an attack on the Family ; revolutionist's principles in conflict with inclinations associated with the principles of authoritarianism.

It would be wrong to assert that Shaw had lost dramatic gift when he came to writing Back to Methuselah; his Saint Joan was still to come. It would not do to say that, despite some obvious defects with the defect of untheatricality on the top of all, there is no organic

1. Preface to Back to Methuselah - G.B.Shaw The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 546.

unity in the play. The antithesis between reason and the sensual soul is clearly represented in part V, in the relations between the Ancients and the Youths. This has appeared in varying forms in the Longlivers and the Shortlivers of part III and IV, and in part II in the counter-balancing of the Chauvinism of Lubin and Burge with the philosophical foresight of the Brothers Barnabas. Shaw uses the repetition of similar elements in different parts as device for unifying the Pentateuch. I mean to emphasize the point that Back to Methuselah should be acted whole and not in parts, as sometimes done.

Though the charge of untheatricality of the play cannot be refuted and though the construction of the play appears to be loose, a closer look may bring out the merits of the play as play. It is part III, "The Thing Happens", that raises the severest doubts about the capacity of Shaw's dramatic technique to hold the stage. This section is a disquisitory play in which action is actually non-existent, and the situation appears to be a mere excuse for the characters to discuss various topics. But three divisions are clearly discernible. They are a general exposition, the revelation of a situation through the debate and a conversion of the central characters. This lends part III action enough. And the longer and more expository passages of parts IV and V are artistically superior to those of part III. In part IV Shaw is less concerned than in part III to maintain the pretence of writing a play and not a prose dialouge in the

tradition of Plato. Yet his writing is dramatic to the extent it is a vehicle of expression of profound thought and strong feeling. The intensity of the author's engagement with his subject gives much of the latter part of the text a poetic quality. It is indeed difficult to judge a work of art when the idea it tries to expound is very much suspect; it is a difficulty, which every reader of Milton's Paradise Lost also faces. It needs be mentioned that like the form and texture of The Apple Cart those of Back to Methuselah are genuinely musical¹. Though not one of the finest plays of Shaw, Back to Methuselah is a considerable achievement. But it may be considered as another form of Art not confined to theatrical necessities; the like of this is not found in the history of drama. It is possibly the only play of Shaw that can be called "sui generis".

The thesis of the play is that the term of human existence is not long enough for man to profit by his experience. When he learns enough through experience to be able to cope with the problems of existence, he dies. To become effective, therefore, he must extend the term of his existence. And man can assuredly do it if he wills hard enough -- an idea borrowed by Shaw largely from Lamarck and Samuel Butler, from the latter's Life and Habit in particular. Shaw's complaint against Darwin's theory of

1. This aspect of Back to Methuselah has been dealt with by Majory M. Morgan in The Shavian Playground: An exploration of the Art of G.B. Shaw (Back to Methuselah. The poet and the City). Methuen, 1972. P 231-32.

Evolution, as I have shown at the beginning of the present chapter, was that it banished Mind from the universe, leaving in its place a mindless machine; while dethroning God it enthroned this machine whose cause we do not now. Shaw accepts Lamarck and Butler because they discovered a purpose behind creation.

The problem of evil is sufficient to cause confusion in every mind. Why does God, if he be omnipotent, allow poverty and pain and the deadly sins to exist? Why did he create the world at all when he knew, as He is omniscient, that evil would appear? Shaw did not get the answers in Darwin's theory, for the answers are not there; and Darwin is not required to answer these questions. Shaw answered the question, taking the cue from Lamarck and Butler, by denying that the Universe is a mindless machine. Shaw has no faith in an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-perfect God; he rather thinks that an imperfect God is trying to become perfect; he is just trying to gain the qualities which are generally supposed to be possessed by him. Shaw, of course, uses the term "Life Force" in place of "God"; the use of the term "God" would lead to all sorts of confusions and misunderstandings. When Life Force finds that an instrument is either useless or no longer sufficiently efficient, it replaces it by a better one much as a fighter discards his instruments of fighting which have lost their sharpness or effectiveness.

Simultaneously Shaw holds that man could take decisions and shape things for the better if he willed hard.

The arguments of Shaw, it will be noticed, are more mystical than scientific; this is the reason why the theme cannot be fully and satisfactorily expressed in language. Of course, Shaw would claim a good deal of science on his side. Lamarck's contention that living organisms change because they want to, is accepted by Shaw. Back to Methuselah dramatizes the idea that man not only can, but must develop himself. Man is called to conscious purpose and effort and firm decision. Much as the giraffe, as Lamarck pointed out, attained its long neck by willing to have it so, so a living organism, say, man, need only wish hard to become whatever it wants to. "If you have no eyes, and want to see, and keep trying to see, you will finally get eyes. If like a mole or a subterranean fish, you have eyes and don't want to see, you will lose your eyes. If you like eating the tender tops of trees enough to make you concentrate your energies on the stretching of your neck, you will finally get a long neck, like the giraffe"¹. Thus Back to Mathuselah advances the theory that man has the ability to choose his own destiny and make himself whatever he might desire to. But this ability is painfully and severely limited by the brevity of human life. The discovery of the idea that man has not the time at his disposal to do all he wishes to do or is capable of doing is, of course, as old as the author of "Ecclesiasts". It is necessary, therefore, that man should live longer; man must will to live longer and then he will become a long-liver.

1. Preface to Back to Methuselah- G.B. The Complete Prefaces of B. Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 509.

Shaw had always been an anti-Darwinian. When the First World War broke out with all its horrors exposing the vulgarity of man, the doubt was confirmed in the mind of Shaw as to whether the human being was capable of solving, as he existed then, the social problems raised by his own aggregation, or, as man called it, his civilization¹. The only hope for man is that he should surpass himself and create a new man which means conscious evolution. Man must decide his own destiny and will hard to realize it, for "Nature holds no brief for the human experiment; it must stand or fall by its results"².

The play, thus, is a biological treatise urging upon us to live longer. The play expounds a belief in the future ~~and the~~ ~~future~~. If the brevity of human life is sad and if it is insufficient, then longer life is necessary for the preservation of the human race and an increase in the expectation of life would at once produce more serious and responsible conduct which cannot be expected of man with his present short life.

In Back of Methuselah at the beginning we find Adam driven almost mad to see the intolerable prospect of immortality. To escape from the burden of deathlessness he resolves to die at the end of a thousand years as soon as he learns that Eve and he can reproduce themselves. The knowledge imparted by Serpent comes to him as a great

1. Ibid. P 502.

2. Ibid. P 506.

relief. But before that happens Cain invents murder and war reducing the span of human life to his present brevity. But Cain declares that he does not know what he wants "except that I want to be something higher and nobler than this stupid old digger". Eve says : "Man need not always live by bread alone". Here we come to the end of the first of the Pentateuch.

We then jump across a few centuries and are in the first years after the First World War .Lubin and Burge, who have learnt nothing from the global catastrophe, discuss their election policies. Conrad Barnabas makes the discovery that man would live as long as he pleased if he were to will it strongly enough. Conard and his brother Franklyn Barnabas have an interview with Lubin and Burge and expound their theory in order to get it taken up as a national programme aimed at extending the span of human life to three hundred years. They make it clear to the politicians what they mean by "willing" : "Do not mistake mere idle fancies for the tremendous miracle working force of Will nerved to creation by a conviction of Necessity. I tell you men capable of such willing , and realizing its necessity , will do it reluctantly , under inner compulsion , as all great efforts are made . They will hide what they are doing from themselves : they will take care not to know what they are doing . They will live three hundred years , not because they would like to , but because the soul deep down in them will know what they must , if the world is to

be saved" . It seems that Lubin and Burge are not very keen to save the world from the destruction caused by the short sightedness of man --- short-sighted because short-lived. Naturally the former looks at the discovery of Conrad Barnabas as only moonshine while the latter is ready to adopt it as an electioneering cry which makes the two brothers disgusted . Here Shaw introduces living persons because the introduction of fictitious characters would not carry conviction; he wanted to exhibit and expose the short-sighted statesmanship in a manner the audience would recognize as a living instance: this is done at the risk of breaking the fantasy for the time being. But the audience did recognize Asquith in Lubin and Lloyd George in Burge.

In "The Thing Happens" the fantasy is being realized. An Archbishop has lived to nearly three hundred years and other human beings are also increasing their life span. It is 2170 A.D. when Saint Henrik Ibsen has been canonized and family bonds together with all other bonds are dissolving. Man is free from "Childish passions" and has lost interest in everything but moral and intellectual pursuits. There is consciousness that our wisdom comes "not by recollecting our past but by the responsibilities of our future". In the fourth Playlet of the Pentateuch which is called "The tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman" human beings are divided into two classes - the long-lived and the short lived. The long-livers have a greater consciousness of the responsibilities of the future. The purpose of this playlet is to bring out the wide intellectual and moral disparity

between the long-livers and the short-livers. The tragedy of the elderly gentleman, who has come from the land of the short-livers to the land of the long-livers, is that he cannot live among people "to whom nothing is real".

In the final playout "As Far as Thought Can Reach" the prophecy of Creative Evolution has been fulfilled; the Superman has evolved; Hatched from eggs, fully grown at the age of seventeen, the Youths indulge themselves in adolescent amusements of mankind --- love, music, sex, art -- for a period of four years. Then they experience a metamorphosis into Ancients who are the Shavian Superman. They are a band of ageless, charmless, sexless being who devote themselves to pure contemplation. But this is not the culmination of man's future; another stage of evolution has Yet to be completed before, as Lilith in her last speech says, mind conquers matter completely.

The general view to which Shaw also subscribes is that "matter" is the enemy of "life". At the end of Back to Methuselah we hear Lilith explaining the relation between "life" and "matter" thus : "I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul". Life, according to Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution, seeks to subdue and then to do away with matter. But first life enters into matter and animates it, and this is done as an essential part of the design --- to do away with matter altogether. Shaw seems to suggest that "life" can only evolve and develop by entering into "matter". Life

created organisms which are indispensable to promote its own development. It is possible because by entering into "matter", "life" gets greater scope to make experiments in order to achieve more faculties and superior intelligence. Though "matter" is the enemy of "life", the latter uses the former to make possible its further development and advance. Matter by its very nature is limited; the very limitations of "matter" force "life" to overcome the limitations and thus rise higher in the evolutionary process. The ultimate object of "life" is to pass beyond "matter"; to pass beyond the necessity of using "matter" as a stepping stone to achieve the "destiny". "Matter" limits "life" and hence "matter" is to be done away with, abolished. When this is reached, "destiny" is achieved. This is the suggestion that we get from the talks between the Newly Born and the Ancients:

The He Ancient : For whilst are tied to this tyrannous body we are subject to its death, and our destiny is not achieved.

The Newly Born : What is your destiny ?

The He-Ancient : To be immortal.

The She-Ancient : The day will come when there will be no people, only thought.

The He-Ancient : And that will be life eternal.

There is music in this. But considered purely as a play, Back to Methuselah appears to be really "dry"¹. It is a play of ideas in which "ideas" are everything.

1. The Theatre of Revolt - Robert Brustein. Methuen & Co. Ltd. (University Paperback). 1970. P 201-202.

The famous science-fiction writer Kurt Vonegat wants a science-fiction to be the carrier of new thought and he classed Back to Methuselah as a perfect specimen of that form. By science-fiction we do not mean fantastic Old Wives' Tale, but a fiction which tries to scientifically portray the future and gives ample scope for serious thought. It may be noted that the portrayal of the future given in a science-fiction may not come true, but this sort of accuracy is not demanded of a science-fiction.

From the fantasy world of Back to Methuselah we move back to the real world of Medieval period. Written in the background of history, Saint Joan is primarily a religious play in which is dramatized the conflict between the established tenets of Roman Catholicism, and the growing spirit of revolt, called Protestantism though the term "Protestant" was then unknown. The notion of the established Church that only the Church had authority to deal with God forms the basis of the trouble and the conflict. It was the dominant medieval notion and few dared to go against the authority of the Church, though the spirit of revolt against the dogmatic attitude of the Church was lurking here and there. It was Joan who had given a deadly blow to the established thought by declaring without hesitation her communion with God and the angels which enraged the Church authority beyond all bounds. Simultaneously, Joan antagonised the temporal authority by upholding the spirit of Nationalism

1. Science Fictioner Sekal Abong Ekal (Bengali) - Akshay Choudhury. Aajkaal (Sunday Number) June 21, 1981.

which was completely apposed to the vested interests of the feudal lords. Thus we find feudalism and the authority of the Church at the back of the trial of Joan. The spirit of the trial betrays the inner fury of the spiritual and secular authorities inspite of the obvious impartiality of the former, represented by Cauchon. The core of the play is the conflict between the traditional force and the new ideology -- a conflict which crushed an innocent and essentially religious soul.

Joan herself was unconscious of the implications of what she did or said ; innocence is written large on her character. Shaw in the Preface to Saint Joan compares Joan with Socrates and Galileo. The great Greek philosopher became a prey to the accumulated fury of the people who mattered for his failure to compromise with the accepted notions; Galileo's failure was also the same. Joan, like them, became "unbearable" to her age, to the people who wielded power. Shaw writes : "If Socrates was as innocent at the age of seventy, it may be imagined how innocent Joan was at the age of seventeen"¹. It is this innocence of Joan that makes her triumphant in the long run. She survives spiritually though she perishes physically. She kneels down before Cauchon to kiss his fingers as a sign of pious submission and at the next moment asserts that her voices and visions are correct and that she has personal communion with God who sends her messages without realizing that by making such claims she is treading on dangerous ground. Everybody

1. Preface to Saint Joan --- G.B.Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 604.

innocent. The words of Ladvenu are significant : "I firmly believe that her Savior appeared before her This is not the end of her, but the beginning". Even the Inquisitor appears perturbed over the case of Joan : "But it is a terrible thing to see a young and innocent creature crushed . . . ". But Joan, caught up by the two mighty forces --- the spiritual and the temporal authorities --- had no hope to escape. Shaw was himself an essentially religious character who understood religious characters better than any other type; this is probably the secret of his success in portraying religious characters.

Of the two mighty forces, the stand taken by the Church seems less fiery, at least when we listen to the righteous speeches of Cauchon; but the inner fury certainly persists. The ecclesiastical authority had really no other alternative but to act in the manner it did. It saw in Joan a big menace directed against what it thought the considered wisdom of the Church; it acted according to its wisdom and according to its own notion of what is just.

One is intensely moved by the religious emotion of Saint Joan ; it is the emotion which Shaw understands thoroughly. And yet, surprisingly, the play was banned in the United States on religious grounds as well as temporal ; it was condemned as "a satire against Church and States which are made to appear stupid and inept"¹. Shaw as well as his

1. Shaw's letter to the New York Times, 14 Sept. 1936. Cited in Shaw on Theatre - ed.E.J.west. 1968. P 245.

Saint Joan was here thoroughly misinterpreted. The misinterpretation was largely due to the fact that Shaw successfully irritated and antagonised many by his heretical utterances on political, moral and religious questions. In fact, however, Saint Joan does not satirise the established Church; rather it shows the Roman Catholic Church as great.

The body of thought, which may be called a religion, known as Creative Evolution, affirms the individual will as the motive power in the world. An essential tenet of this religion is that the will must not be suppressed or kept in bondage, it must rather be freed; a divine deed consists not in destroying the self, but in liberating it. The doctrine goes against the tenets of Catholicism which is opposed to free-thinking. Shaw looked upon Joan as a vital genius, a great experiment of the Life Force in its upward struggle. Joan obeyed her conscience, because conscience is the voice of God; and this doctrine also goes against the tenet of the established Church that an individual who claims divine revelation even conscientiously is guilty of offence against the Church. Naturally the Roman Catholic Church excommunicated Joan as a heretic and a blasphemer. It could not admit, without compromising its position and faith, the validity of private judgement as the true interpreter of the will of God. Joan is crushed in the conflict between private judgement and individual relation with God in one Camp and the beliefs of the established Church in the other.

Shaw is mainly concerned with the sad lot of all vital geniuses who are the special experiments of Life Force and not simply with particular tragedy of Joan. While the Church could not accept anybody's claim as a saint without putting him or her to test, it might commit the mistake of taking a saint^{to} be an imposter or a lunatic. The clash between the faith of an individual and that of the established authority is the true tragedy of life. This clash had many a victim from Jesus to Galileo. That the problem of this conflict cannot be easily solved is sadly true. The dilemma in Saint Joan is the "human dilemma" that has been present¹ all through history.

The deep anguish of the heart of Shaw is expressed through the words of Cauchon : "Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?" Shaw finds that the short-sightedness of man puts great obstacles in the way of the Will. Man by his foolish acts jeopardises ennobling efforts of the vital geniuses to rise higher and higher in the scale of evolution. "As in other religious teachers Shaw's optimism is sicklied over with cast² of sadness."

1. A.C. Ward writes, "Liberty breeds Anarchy ; Authority breeds tyranny. The only way of escape from Anarchy is into Authority the only cure for Tyranny is in Liberty. This, to the end of time, is the human dilemma, the dilemma pronounced in Saint Joan. Bernard Shaw -- A.C. Ward. Longmans, Green & Co. 1951. P 157 - 158.

2. George Bernard Shaw's Historical Plays - R.N. Roy. The Macmillan Co. of India Ltd. 1976. P 46.

The anguish and sadness of Shaw's inmost heart is revealed in the last famous cry of Joan: "O God, that madest this beautiful earth, when shall it be ready to receive they Saints ? How long, O Lord, how long". But this sadness and anguish should not be interpreted as despair, for Shaw does never despair. Great experiments of Life Force are ridiculed and put to death by the short-sighted man, but the ultimate victory is always theirs. Joan is certainly bodily perished. but her will survives and this is the elevating fact revealed in the play. Like Samson's, Joan's power to stand up against the odds is, at bottom, God's.

Saint Joan is written under the background of history which makes a discussion on the growth of Nationalism and its clash with the feudal system quite pertinent. Shaw claims that Saint Joan is quite historical. But this claim has been contested by a number of critics including David Daiches and Dr. S.C.Sengupta. Dr. Sengupta, of course, rather mildly says that the picture of John "is not in all respects true to history". Of course, Shaw's claim has also been upheld by eminent critic-biographers like St.Joan Ervine and Archibald Henderson. The not very old study of Dr. R.N.Roy has thrown ample light on the entire problem; he upholds,

1. Prefaces to Saint Joan - G.B.Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. Shaw writes " I write in full view of the Middle Ages . . . and I have taken care to let the medieval atmosphere blow through my play freely". P 630.

2. The Art of Bernard Shaw -- Dr.S.C.Sengupta. A.Mukherjee & Co. Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta. 1960. P 102.

quoting valuable documents, the view of Bernard Shaw. While the details may not be true to history at all points, Shaw has not missed the main facts of the life of Joan. It would be wrong to suppose that the atmosphere of the Middle Ages has not been caught up in the play. Joan herself was possibly unconscious of the implications of her words and deeds, but that she became the centre of the conflict of ideologies in her time is historical.

Joan is presented in the play as the harbinger of Nationalism. The condition of the French nation at the time was not at all happy. The lack of the national sentiment was due partly to the weakness of the Dauphin and the utter failure of the French commanders to contend the attacking force from England; it was largely due to the manoeuvrings of the feudal lords who looked upon Nationalism as their greatest enemy which might endanger their very existence. In the play the "voices and visions" of Joan serve the purpose of rousing national sentiments. For her it is not a Burgundian soldier fighting a soldier from Lancashire, but the French soldiers fighting the English soldiers who shall be driven out -- for that is God's message to her --- from the French soil. This spirit of Nationalism, unheard of before, is looked upon with suspicion, distaste and fear both by the secular and spiritual authorities who determine to crush Joan with the hope that with her defeat and death the ideals she stands for also shall be crushed. Cauchon, of

1. George Bernard Shaw's Historical Plays -- Dr. R.N.Roy. Macmillan Co. of India Ltd. 1976.

course, is much too sensible and judicious, but the temporal authority is quite aggressive. The clergy thinks that Nationalism as propagated by Joan portends the erosion of clerical sanctity and power and strengthening of the hands of the King. Nationalism, the Church authorities realize, will make the monarch invincible in the conflict between the Church and the State: this conflict between the Church and the State grew high in the Middle Age.

The stand of the temporal authority is much more fiery. The impact of Nationalism is felt keenly by the feudals and their fear is nicely expressed by Warwick in his discussion with Cauchon : " . . . have you noticed that in these letters of hers, she proposes to the Kings of Europe, as she has already pressed on Charles, a transaction which would wreck the whole structure of Christendom ? " This is the question of their survival. If the King became powerful, his lords would become servants in his eyes and "the King could break us across his knee one by one ; and then what should we be but liveried courtiers in his halls ?" The King would become an absolute autocrat ; he would become the master of the feudal lords instead of remaining merely the first among the peers.

In the first part of the play the Earl of Warwick appears to be very important. But in the trial scene we find that the emphasis has been laid only on the charge of heresy and thus Warwick is relegated to a position of no great importance. It is the spiritual authority that tries Joan and excommunicates her and only then hands her over to the

secular authority. It is apparent that here the secular authority plays only the second fiddle. We feel, therefore, that the conflict between Nationalism and the Feudal System has not been dramatically realized; this cannot be said of the other conflict between Protestantism and the established Church.

Though Saint Joan proved to be a tremendous success on the stage, Shaw's intention was not to write a "stage play". It would have become a typical stage play if all the lengthy discussions regarding the established Church, the feudal System, Nationalism, Protestantism, the Inquisition were omitted and the Epilogue, so much relevant for this play of ideas, cut off. As it is, the conflict between the individual will and the established authorities has been brought out through discussion. In the Epilogue Shaw reviews the situation winding up the various threads in the play. The Epilogue does not represent actual happenings. But Shaw does not care so much for actual happenings as for the spirit of history. The history of Joan did not end with her execution, rather her history began with it. Further, Joan's canonisation recognises the triumph of the Life Force of which she is one of the very highest exemplifications. Without the Epilogue the play would have become not a play of ideas, but only a tale of a girl full of sensations. The whole play rests upon its thought-substance. It is not difficult to see how the different threads of the thought-substance are interwoven running into each other. In the play

the contending parties -- rather, the contending ideologies -- strive for their respective survival and the ensuing clash has been handled nicely by the playwright. The events that lead to the catastrophe are arranged logically ; the play universalises the story of an individual.

In the Preface to Saint Joan Shaw analyses his conception of tragedy and says what he intends to make with the Maid. To him Shakespearean tragedy is nothing but melodrama in which the characters make a lot of row before going down ; in which the villain is nothing but a convenient and mechanistic "diabolus ex machina". But Shaw, whose ideal of tragedy is quite different, is interested in "what normally innocent people do"¹. He maintains : "If Joan had not been burnt by normally innocent people in the energy of their righteousness her death in their hands would ave no more significance than the Tokyo earthquake wh^{ch} burnt a great many maidens."² He continues "The tragedy of such murders is that they are no committed by murderers. They are judicial murders, pious murders; and this contradiction at once brings an element of comedy into the tragedy: the angels may weep at the murder but the gods laugh at the murderers". Shaw, thus, distinguishes his work from the tragedies with which we are familiar. It is obvious that his conception of tragedy did not make his task easier; we realize rather that it is extremely difficult to evoke the attendant feelings of

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1. Preface to Saint Joan -- G.B.Shaw. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw, Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 631.
 2. Ibid. P 631.

tragedy without having recourse to its normal and familiar pattern. But Shaw reinforces the tragedy of Joan by pointing out that her fate was inevitable. There was nothing wrong in what Joan believed, yet the established Church could not be expected to accept her views. Given the circumstances she could not avoid the catastrophe.

Joan has, through the centuries, been sentimentalised; actually it is the picture of a sentimental romantic Joan which appeals to the popular imagination. As Shaw points out in the Preface to the play, Mark Twaine and Voltaire also subscribed to this popular view. It was difficult for Shaw to shatter the popular view of Joan as dashingly beautiful, romantic and sentimental country lass. Shaw finds that the reconstructions of Joan in the hands of Mark Twaine, Voltaire and even Shakespeare were all distortions of history. One must not however think that Joan talked exactly in the manner Shaw makes her talk. But the Shavian interpretation is based on probability. Shaw makes Joan a force in history by making her the unconscious voice of Protestantism. It may be supposed that Joan would have talked in the manner Shaw makes her talk if only she could understand what she was talking. But Shaw's Joan, despite Shaw's making her a force in history, is not a flat character. Even before we start scrutinising and analysing the concept she stands for, Joan appeals to us as a human being. Shaw had emotionally experienced the figure of Joan and then made her the conveyor of ideas.

CONCLUSION

England was the last country, so to say, in Europe to produce the modern "Drama of Ideas". It was due not so much to the lack of native tradition, but particularly to the failure of the theatre-going public as well as the readers and the critics to appreciate the modern tendency. They were brought up under the tradition of the so called "Well made Play" and the plays of Shakespeare - as Henry Irving interpreted them - and this made it difficult for them to appreciate and accept the "Drama of Ideas" which was struggling to be born. The Victorian people for all their love for truth, could not accept the unpalatable truth, shrinking with pious horror from anything that shocked their traditional beliefs and attitudes. The new ideas which were in the air were most unconventional and so the Victorian votaries of truth and beauty failed to accord welcome to the plays which used these ideas as their themes. It is true, as I have maintained, that the modern "Drama of Ideas" developed in England as much out of Ibsen's influence as of the native source of Robertson, Pinero and Jones. But the pace of development was slow, England falling behind Norway or Sweden. It was not until the publication of The Widowers' Houses that the "Drama of Ideas" as an art form had the real beginning in England.

This point has to be further clarified. Shaw

claimed to have written his first play before he learnt of Ibsen. Still we can hardly deny the fact that the real impetus for the growth and development of the genre came from Ibsen. Shaw's claim in no way minimises the importance of the influence of the Norwegian dramatist. Again, the obvious influence of Ibsen does not materially alter the fact that, as noted already, The Widowers' Houses marks the real beginning of the "Drama of Ideas" in England; neither does it change the fact that in Bernard Shaw the type found its first champion in England. This may be asserted even after granting the deserving credit to Robertson and Pinero, and particularly to Jones. I have discussed quite at length how Shaw had to struggle ceaselessly to banish the "Well-made Play" in order to have the "Drama of Ideas" established with all its unconventional moral attitudes; how he fought, with the same end in view, to break - not successfully, though - the idol that is Shakespeare. From this point of view Shaw is to be regarded not simply as a man and a dramatist but as a phenomenon of historical importance.

Before Bernard Shaw the "Play of Ideas" had received no firm footing in the soil of England. The commendable efforts, of which we cannot be oblivious, of Robertson, Peniro and Jones could not establish this genre as an art form. It was because none of them could dramatize like Ibsen the ideas which were inwardly reverberating all

1. Masters of the Drama- John Gassner. Dover Publications Inc. P 616.

around; they remained, in the ultimate analysis, the followers of the drawing room melodramas. They could not come out of or ignore the influence of Scribe and Sardou. The credit should, therefore, go to Bernard Shaw for establishing the genre in a conservative England and, in so doing, for ransacking almost the whole field of current thoughts. He fought in his capacity both as a dramatist and a dramatic critic. He was, like Ibsen, a man of varied ideas on man and society, on man as he is and as he , according to his notion, ought to be. It would not be correct to claim that Shaw was always ahead of his time; more often than not he dramatized the ideas flowing like an undercurrent in his own time. The difference between Shaw and most of his contemporaries was that while he had the eyes to "see" those ideas, they had not; and even if they had, they did not dare antagonize the popular taste. This comment does not put Shaw and Ibsen, as dramatists, at par. The difference, among the rest, between the two is that while Ibsen is content to pose a question and enunciate his ideas by giving them dramatic body and form, Shaw is prone to giving a solution to the problems according to his own judgement.

Our concern is not, however, with the truth and validity or otherwise of Shaw's ideas, but with the fact that, first, he was a man of ideas some of whose ideas may be antipathetic to us and, secondly, he dramatized these ideas. It is not sufficient to say that the idea itself does not matter if its expression is moving and impressive,

because it is difficult to separate ideas from their expression. In the hands of the great artists ideas are often transformed and may lose their identity; an idea changes into a poetic statement which we can appreciate and even accept whatever our ideas and beliefs may be. Shaw is a playwright with a sense of purpose, but as an artist he does not always allow the purpose to become too obvious. He allows the characters to speak out their opposing views, for he knows that each of them has something worthwhile to say which is at the same time dramatically important. The "idea" that comes out at the end of a Shavian play, the "idea" which is examined and tested by the different characters, appears as a poetic statement before the theatre-goer or the reader. Sometimes the ideas in a Shaw-play lose their identities, for instance, in Saint Joan, Heartbreak House and Candida because neither Joan nor Captain Shotover nor Candida appears only as animated ideas.

The overall picture of Bernard Shaw that emerges from his plays, as discussed earlier under different heads, is that of a revolting son of the middle class attacking the moralities and conventions of that class - a quality which was rather absent in Pinero and Jones, but was conspicuously present in Ibsen. Thus inspite of the differences between Ibsen and Shaw, the latter obviously discovered his soul's mate in the former and so championed him as the pioneer of the modern "Drama of Ideas". While this is essentially true, we must not, however, let pass by what Shaw must have learnt

from the questioning and doubting spirit of Charles Dickens, who, after passing through the various stages of mental growth, finally came to reject the past and never hesitated to use the novel as the vehicle of ideas.

It is essential to put Shaw in the correct place through a more clear understanding of his connection or relation with Ibsen. Bernard Shaw recognized and even enjoyed the relation between Ibsen and the aesthetic ideals of the "Well-made Play" and its surface which is claimed to be true-to-life. It is Ibsen, so found Shaw, who converted these ideals to the purposes of a drama that is essentially critical of the social and moral conventions. This recognition and finding of Shaw made him a staunch champion of Ibsen; it helped him to discover in Ibsen the greatest exponent of the "Play of Ideas" and a dramatist of tremendous power.

In Ibsen's A Doll's House the tension depends on the attitudes of the audience and the characters; in this play these attitudes are the very things that are brought under searching questions. In the construction of the play Ibsen deliberately uses the machinery of the "Well-made Play". This he does cleverly to implicate the audience and then exploits the expectations of this conventionally tutored audience in the shock of the last scene when Nora goes out with a bang, not with a whimper. The audience then finds itself at a loss discovering that there can be no reconciliation between the husband and the wife - sentimental reconciliation generally found in the denouement

of the "Well-made Play" -- though there is nothing in the construction of the plot to work as a hindrance to such an end. Thus in A Doll's House the machinery of the "Well-made Play" breaks down with all its artificiality of plot and conventional morality. Conventional morality in particular stands fully exposed; the audience recognizes it to be sentimental and unnatural. A Doll's House offended its first audience. But the offence it gave was not simply moral; the aesthetic offence it gave to the theatre-goers and critics was of equal importance and was not less deep. In his earlier plays Bernard Shaw also gave similar offence and it may legitimately be asserted that the effectiveness of the shock achieved in A Doll's House gave Shaw the cue. These plays of Shaw -- with the possible exception of The Widowers' Houses -- may be looked upon as direct imitations of the technique of the Norwegian dramatist. Take, for instance, Arms and the Man. Technically it imitates the machinery of the "Well-made Play", but the play is a continuous exploitation and exposure of the conventions of romance. The man who seems to be the hero from the conventional point of view is ultimately only laughed at; the grandeur of the hero of Slivnitza is paled into insignificance and is rendered ridiculous and he is likened to Don Quixote. That Raina and Sergius are not reconciled and united through some sentimental scene is almost as shocking as the failure of Nora and her husband to embrace each other in sentimental reconciliation at the end. The

audience, here too, recognizes that there could be no reconciliation between Raina and Sergius though the construction of the play was not an obstacle. The union between Sergius and Louka is also not less shocking to the conventionally educated audience.

William Archer wrote, "If I were asked to lay my hand on a single English play which was obviously imitated from or directly influenced by Ibsen, I should not know where to turn. Mr. Bernard Shaw was, of course, his doughtiest champion and in some sense his disciple; but as for imitating him - well, I can only say I wish he had¹". The relation between Ibsen and Shaw is not readily apparent, as this comment of William Archer demonstrates. In general methods no less in particular qualities the two dramatists seem to be very much distinct. In the dramatic method of Shaw we can see the influence of Aristophanes, Moliere, and Dickens; it would be completely wrong to maintain that Bernard Shaw was an exact replica of Henrich Ibsen, inspite of the former's unbounded praise for the latter. And yet the relationship between Ibsen and Shaw seems to be fundamental. It is not in the question of dramaturgy simply that this kinship is seen. The drama which was current in the late nineteenth century - drama written in the naturalistic tradition, and in line of the so called "Well-made Play" - was the conventional drama in Shaw's definition. This type of drama was written with popularly accepted, conventional

1. Old Drama and the New - William Archer. P 307

attitudes about man and society and man in society as its background. However, in some of the "new plays" which were inspired by Ibsen, "the drama arises", as Bernard Shaw noted, "through a conflict of unsettled ideals rather than through vulgar attachments, rapacities, generosities, resentments, ambitions, misunderstandings, oddities and so forth as to which no moral question is raised. The conflict is not between clear right and wrong; the villain is as conscientious as the hero, if not more so; in fact, the question which makes the play interesting (when it is interesting) is which is the villain and which the hero. Or, to put it in another way, there are no villains and no heroes".¹ This is Shaw's characterisation of the essential quality of the "new play", of the plays of Ibsen; and this characterisation suits his own plays not the less.

But the plays of Ibsen, which were very much unpopular and yet widely publicized, were not the only things which could be drawn upon in the interests, in the English theatre, of a drama that was so much critical of the conventional attitudes. Much of what is there in the conventionality of the drawing-room melodrama and the "Well-made Play" of the nineties of the last century, stemmed from the simplicity of its desire to amuse and entertain the audience. But as Shaw observed in the Preface to The Plays for Puritans, "the rich purchasing-powerful Englishman

1. The Quintessence of Ibsenism - Bernard Shaw. Constable & Co. Ltd. 1913, P 194.

prefers politics and church-going¹. It may be said, therefore, that such a spectator will scarcely support a drama which is merely voluptuous precisely because pleasures derived from voluptuousness is not enough for this man. "From the plays of ideas - and the drama can never be anything more - he demands edification and will not pay for anything else in that arena"². While the assertion made in this line is characteristically Shavian, the fact behind it cannot be just overlooked. The fact is long before the impact of Ibsen made itself felt and distinct, there was an almost latent strain of edification and didacticism in the English drama. Comedy and melodrama of the nineteenth century were likely to give vent to didactic tendencies, and this too, openly. The simple formulae of innocence which is unjustly burdened with calumny and the ultimate vindication and triumph of this innocence; virtue which is thrown overboard by wickedness, but wickedness which is at long last defeated and exposed brought the conventional drawing-room melodrama quite close to the old morality play. But a play which only dramatized the eternal fight between right and wrong, good and evil or a play which urged a spectator to reform himself, could not make itself endeared. Edification might be there, but it had to be only in the second place; the seal of success with the audience and the acceptability of the play depended primarily on whether the play upheld

1. Preface to The Plays for Puritans - The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw'. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P 737.

2. Ibid. p 737.

conventional morality. The surest guarantee of popular success was to accept the popular canons of the society. Something about what Shaw called the "blue-book play" needs also be said here. In these plays the edifying, didactic strain is mixed up with critical analysis. These plays dealt with social conditions and established convictions. But in these plays, too, it is evident that the dramatic value is not dependent on the depth or otherwise of the critical analysis of social problems; rather it depended on their compatibility with conventional outlook. There was surely an audience who might come to the theatre to be edified and taught. But the fact remains that the ordinary play-goers liked - and still like - the play which was unnatural and morally fraudulent. Shaw says, "This, however, produces the happy result that the dramatic poets, who are all incorrigible moralists and preachers, are forced to produce plays of extra-ordinary interest in order to induce our audiences of shirkers, and dreamers to swallow the pill" ¹. Shaw's own practice is to combine edification with a comedy in which the conventional institutions and attitudes are the butt of the joke. The result is a play "in which the fun relieves the spectator of an immediate obligation to damn or say 'Amen'" ².

1. Music in London III - Bernard Shaw P 139 (as in George Bernard Shaw ; Man of the Century Vol I- A. Henderson. Appleton- Century-Crofts Inc. 1956.)

2. Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre - Martin Meisel. Oxford University Press, 1963. P 91.

It is to be borne in mind, however, that the arrival of G.B.S., as he is popularly known, in the field of drama would have become difficult and even almost impossible had the condition of the then English society been different. All the influences of Ibsen and Dickens would have gone unused and unrealized if Shaw had not been taught in the school of the then society with all its disturbing and uncomfortable currents of thoughts. It would not indeed be impossible to ape Ibsen, but to create anything great by aping the methods and attitudes of another writer without experiencing personally the like feelings and without knowing the truth about the society is an impossibility. Shaw did not have what Jacques Barzun calls the "routine mind"¹. He was, at bottom, an observer always looking askance at the established canons of the society with which was happily coupled his highly imaginative mind. He understood correctly that Pinero and Jones, whatever their merits as dramatists might be, were not essentially men of ideas and neither of them could stand up to dramatize the ideas current in the society; neither could they reject the moral standard of the Victorian Period. Shaw was in the midst of the intellectual whirlpool of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, always responding to the ideas current among the intellectual few. While Pinero and Jones always belonged to

1. Bernard Shaw in Twilight - Jacques Barzun. G.B.S. : A Critical Survey. Ed. Louis Kronenberger. The World Publishing Co. 1953. P 161.

the majority, Shaw always belonged to the minority. He read Ibsen with a spirit of rejection of the Victorian moral world and naturally found in Ibsen a near kin. He had his ideas about the society - and this is affirmed by his novels - even before he had been formally introduced to Ibsen. The protesting and doubting spirit of Ibsen of course strengthened Shaw's own spirit of protesting and doubting. He upheld admiringly what he thought to be the views of Ibsen, and in so doing upheld his own views.

That Shaw did not have a "routine mind" is at once vindicated by his method of work and rich imaginative faculty. Shaw's plays give the impression of his great creative powers working in a spontaneous unity. We can well believe that when he told Ellen Terry that "Art is one and indivisible"¹ he was expressing a general truth about the method of his work. The component elements of a Shavian play viz. the theme, characterisation, stagecraft, dialogue etc. grew into one natural whole which has no mark upon it of being created deliberately. Shaw himself declared, "A play grows in my mind and I put it on paper. I do not know how or why. The funny thing is that it sometimes strikes me, when I see an early play of my own, that it looks as if I had elaborately constructed it."² This observation of Shaw

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1. George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century, Vol II - A Henderson Appleton Century Croft. 1956, P 682
 2. "How Shaw Writes his Plays", Sheffield Daily Telegraph, August 15, 1934. (As in G.B.S.: Man of the Century -- A Henderson Vol II. Appleton Century Croft. 1956, P 748).

counters his declared intention of deliberately writing to make the people accept his opinions. This intention, if put to real practice, would only retard and adversely affect his creative mind and would not allow him to let the plays shape themselves. True it is that his opinions about politics, economics, religion etc., that is, his ideas never cease to form an important part of his dramatic works; true it is, also, that in a "Play of Ideas" the ideas are used chiefly for their own sakes, but they in no way distract our attention from the dramatic artist that is Bernard Shaw.

The plays of Shaw, like those of Ibsen, but unlike those of Pinero and Jones, are works of highly developed imagination. But the early critics of Shaw tried to persuade themselves that Shaw was merely a realist taking raw slices of life for his dramas, and so they failed to discover any "imagination" in his dramatic works. By and large the "realists" of the time were obsessed with the sordid and painful aspects of life. They were not creative artists; the "real life" did not serve the realists of the nineties of the last century as the starting point for "imagination". In the Preface to Plays Unpleasant Shaw says, "Not that I lacked the dramatist's gift. As far as that is concerned I have encountered no limit but my laziness to my power of conjuring up imaginary people in imaginary places and finding pretexts for theatrical scenes between them. But to obtain a livelihood by this insane gift, I must have conjured so as to interest not only my

imagination but that of at least seventy or a hundred thousand contemporary London playgoers¹". The difficulty in doing this was great, but Shaw overcame it by stimulating the imagination of the public to enjoy what he gave them in terms of his own imagination. His method was not the "schooling his imagination"² to supply the public what they demanded. The result of the efforts of Shaw was that within a matter of years he got a public with an enlarged mind and improved taste, not satisfied only with the conventional artificiality of construction and morality. A Bernard Shaw who would put together serious stuff and laughter and fun did not appear repugnant to the new theatre-goers.

Right from the beginning of his literary career Shaw started attacking the popular "Well-made Play" and Shakespeare simultaneously and in both the cases the attack, though ruthless, was well-thought out and loaded with ore. This attack was directed, neither against the former nor against the latter, with malice or without calculation. The sole aim in both the cases as I have shown was to have the ground prepared for the "Play of Ideas" to be accepted by the public. Both the "Well-made Play" and Shakespeare - particularly Shakespeare - were two very powerful institutions; bardolatry was almost the run of the day. These two institutions had to be demolished in order to

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1. Preface to Plays Unpleasant. The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn Ltd. 1965. P. 716
 2. Bernard Shaw - A.C.Ward. Longmans, Greene & Co. Ltd. 1951. P 53

usher in the era of the "Play of Ideas". This attack directed against the "Well-made Play" and Shakespeare naturally faced strong opposition from the critics and the practising playwrights alike, but the opposition could scarcely dampen the zeal of Shaw. Almost single handed, in the figure of a dramatic critic and a playwright, he carried on the fight for the "Drama of Ideas". It is to be borne in mind, however, that he himself sometimes used the tricks - I have shown it in the chapter on Shaw's dramatic technique and treatment of theme - of the "Well-made Play" with the difference that his aim was not to construct a play skilfully. The plays of Shaw save for a few exceptions, are, nevertheless, nicely constructed; there is the sign of an effortlessness in the construction. Again, despite his attempt to demolish the idol that was Shakespeare, Shaw was not all against Shakespeare. There was none in his own time who had a better ear for Shakespeare's word-music, the influence of which is all too obvious in the dramatic works of Shaw himself. Shaw was well aware of the dramatic genius of Shakespeare and was all against any "cut" in Shakespeare-production.

Whatever the depth of his ideas may be, Bernard Shaw is always serious. But being a comic artist in the first place, he does not fight shy of making jokes even with his serious stuff. This is evident from his technique of putting the anti-climax almost on the head of the climax as in that famous scene in Man and Superman where Tanner congratulates Violet for having responded to the call of

the Life Force to bear child without being legitimately wedded only to be told that Violet is already lawfully married to Victor Malone according to the notions of middle-class respectability. Shaw puts the serious and the ordinary not alternately but simultaneously, mixing the two and leading the public to doubt whether he is serious at all. This difficulty we face in Aristophanes too. The techniques of the two playwrights, who are separated from each other by over two thousand years, seem to be quite close to each other's - it is the technique of writing comedy with a spirit of protesting and attacking, always with a serious purpose. But both the playwrights are witty and their tremendous wit often stood as obstacles on their way to reaching poetic heights. The lengthy discussion in which the "action" in a Shavian play lies remind us of the primitive dramaturgy and the debates in the plays of Euripides. The plays of Euripides, more than those of his contemporaries and rivals, Sophocles and Aeschylus, abound in debates which tend to turn the stage into a debating room. The same thing is said of the plays of Bernard Shaw in which two or more characters discuss various problems and express conflicting ideas, sometimes endlessly. Here we may remind ourselves of the dialogues of Plato.

Bernard Shaw was serious about the social problems and philosophical speculations current in his own days and he found them good subjects to write his plays with. Though

highly imaginative, his imagination did not dwindle into sentimentalism. His plays only have a semblance of reality; the situations are rather fantastic. The aim of the playwright, it seems to me, was not to expound a body of systematic thought, but to create plays with ideas rather than with characters and situations. It is for this that his plays appeared to be "not plays" to the critics and readers who were brought up under the influence of Shakespeare and the "Well-made Play". The solutions Shaw has given to various problems, social, political, or philosophical, are, more often than not, untenable; his ideas about Creative Evolution cannot stand the test of scientific queries or analyses. This at once blasts the popularly held view that Shaw is primarily a philosopher. But the credit of Shaw lies in the fact that he dramatized almost all sorts of ideas current in his day without taking any theory or body of thought to be the final and infallible answer to social, political, or philosophical problems. It is true that in play after play he dealt with the concept of Creative Evolution, but it was primarily because he found it to be an enchanting "idea", worthy to be dramatized. Further, his own faith - if at all it is admitted that he has such a faith - in Creative Evolution may also have seen a decline as it becomes evident from what he put in the mouth of the preacher-burglar at the end of Too True to be Good. Shaw, who knew that there was always a "beyond" (the last speech of Lilith at the end of Back to Methuselah) could not have accepted any particular system of thought as infallible.

Though as a young man Shaw was enchanted by Karl Marx, he never actually became a Marxist or a Scientific Socialist. Though he was all praise for the Soviet Union and Lenin, he did not cut himself off from the fold of the Fabian Socialists. His praise for the great Soviet leader as well as for the fascist leaders like Hitler and Mussolini may be interpreted as a unique expression of his praise for the "great man" on whom, he thought, the hope for mankind depended. It may be said that if Shaw had written a play on Stalin or Hitler he would have turned him into another Caesar - strong because free from human passions and sentiments. Shaw had little faith in Democracy as it is practised in the West. But the greatest enemy of man, the greatest obstacle on his way to happiness and peace, according to Shaw, is Capitalism which makes some people grow from rich to richer condemning the vast majority to a life of poverty and degradation. But he was never sentimental about poverty and the poor and considered poverty as the supreme crime because it fathers forth all other crimes; and so poverty has to be eradicated. But we may legitimately say, even after discovering the socialist bent of Shaw's mind, that his mental development was not caused by his reading of Marx only, but by his reading of Wagner, Shakespeare, and Dickens. He was at bottom a mixture of Moliere, Dickens, and Euripedes with Marx colouring his intellect and Wagner and William Butler his imagination.

Shaw is a satirist, possibly the greatest satirist

of the twentieth century, always attacking the sham and the low and the ugly without compromise. The spirit of his satire is intellectual slum-clearance. In almost all his plays he launches attacks on and exposes hypocrisy of the so-called moral people who fight shy of discomforting and inconvenient truth. But the prime subject of his satire is Capitalism which makes truly moral life impossible. According to him, even religion, which he takes to be one of the most essential things in life, becomes impossible under the heavy weight of Capitalism, in as much as religious institutions, as shown in Major Barbara also have to depend for their very existence on the money of the have-and-holders. Capitalism condemns the larger section of the society to live in abject poverty, which, in its turn, begets all sorts of corruption and ugliness. This means that, according to Shaw, poverty has to be eradicated, that is, Capitalism as a system has to go to make life worth living. When Shaw found that the Soviet Union under the communist leaders was taking positive steps towards eradication of poverty and exploitation, he became very enthusiastic about the Soviet system.

It does not need explanation that Shaw had a clear knowledge of the degraded condition of modern life; all his dramas testify to this. The condition of man in the modern world with all his hypocrisies is most beautifully discussed by the Devil in the famous hell-scene in Man and Superman. Whether it is The Widowers' Houses or On the

Rocks or Too True to be Good - all the plays of Shaw draw our attention pointedly to what man and his environment have come to be, and how man, through his folly and ignorance, has brought the human race to the edge of a precipice. But this knowledge of the facts of life has not turned Shaw into a hater of Life. Shaw is not a shirker; he faced life, like Shakespeare, squarely, and instead of rejecting it, he glorified it with the hope that only man could change the present killing condition. Shaw pinned his faith in the power of the will, not in the power of some supernatural and external being to bring about desired changes in human life. Through the pictures of the "great man" of his conception, he voiced the hope for the whole mankind - what man could well become if he would only will and will hard. The Ancients of the last play of the pentateuch Back to Methuselah are the developed and matured versions of his Caesar. In spite of his acute sense of the horrors of the present condition of human life, rejection of life remains a thing entirely out of the mental ken of Shaw who would never put "Out, out. brief Candle" or any such utterance in the mouth of any of his characters which might signify rejection of life. Barbara's "My God, why hast thou forsaken me" has been turned ultimately into an acceptance of life when she finds a new faith; Joan's agonised last cry only speaks of her anguish, but she also obliquely expresses her faith that the earth shall one day be ready to receive God's saints, Shaw tries to find whatever hope he can even in the present condition. All his

chief characters pin their faith in acceptance of Life and in the upward struggle of Life to reach higher levels of existence and consciousness.

Shaw has come to look at man as he is - a miserable failure and a pot-boiler, but he never gives the impression of hating man. Being a man of ideas, Shaw used various themes in his plays - political, social, and philosophical - all important to man under the background of his present situation. This shows that man was never out of his mind though he did not write dramas with characters and situations. While attacking the established institutions he particularly pointed out that these institutions do not allow a man to understand his real self; rather condemn him to conventional do's and dont's. While attacking the social customs he laid emphasis on human conscience which is the theme of many of his plays of both the earlier and the later phases. The theme of conscience is seen in the "social", "political" as well as "philosophical" plays of Shaw. In the plays like The Widowers' Houses, Major Barbara, and Too True to be Good it is Conscience which is the guiding force. This is even more so in the case of Saint Joan in which the voices and visions are nothing but the Conscience of Joan speaking to her and directing her actions; it gives her an inner strength with which she can defy the power of the churchmen'. Shaw's concern for Socialism is yet another illustration of his love and concern for man. For Shaw, the end of all endeavour is "good life", a perfectly humane

way of living, thinking and behaving which Capitalism can only thwart.

Shaw is primarily and essentially a religious man, if religion means to carry on the war against ugliness, injustice, and sham, and to sing the glory of life - precisely the works of Jesus Christ. Shaw had little faith in conventional religious practices and would fain attack, as he actually did, the established religious institutions. He painfully realized that the wave of religion was often thwarted by the established religious institutions headed by conventionally tutored priests. But as an artist Shaw was objective enough to understand that the priests also might have their own say and they could not go against the accepted beliefs and canons. Cauchon in Saint Joan is not a villain because he acted according to his own light and the bidding of the faith of his own Church which could not tolerate an individual's direct relation with God. The mind of Shaw was surprisingly free from the popular delusions, superstitions, and prejudices. It is for this that none of his characters is loathsome; there is no villain in the plays of Shaw. We laugh at the weaknesses and follies of the characters, but we do not look down upon them with contempt. It is because Shaw believes in the essential goodness of man that he does not portray the character of a villain. Being essentially a religious man Shaw understands the religious characters well and his portrayal of religious characters is unrivalled in the twentieth century literature.

It would be wrong to presume that there is no excitement in a Shavian 'Play of Ideas'. While judging a Shaw-play we would do well to notice that the dramatist transferred the conflict in the play from the physical to the mental level. If conflict necessarily implies a clash involving violent physical action, it cannot certainly be found in a Shavian play. But the mental action, which is the life-breath of a Shavian play- and also of the "Play of Ideas" - may be intensely exciting. The discovery of the way to happiness made by Marchbanks in Candida and the loss of faith and the eventual return of faith of Barbara in Major Barbara are the striking illustrations of mental excitement. It is to be borne in mind that in a "Play of Ideas" there is an inwardness wherein there is little room for physical conflict. There is moral passion in Shaw's plays - moral passion which is a substitute for physical and sensual passion. A Tanner or a Father Kegaan is quite passionate, but this passion is moral and intellectual and spiritual having nothing to do with physical and sensual passions.

William Archer is reported to have said to Archibald Henderson that Shaw's "method is individual and unique, and will die with him His influence on the drama has been nil".¹ Though we have noted that Shaw's] methods are not entirely original, the overall impression is of a uniqueness which cannot be achieved by simply putting

1. As in George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century . Vol II. Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc. N.Y.1956. P 854.

the serious and the ludicrous simultaneously or by being⁵ brilliantly witty. It is for this that Shaw, like Shakespeare, is an unsafe model¹. The comic bent of Shaw's mind, which is rich with ideas, coupled with his capacity for cool calculation begot a form of drama the exact like of which has not been seen before or since. All his plays are delightful and this delight issues forth from intellectual passion as well as slapstick fun. But it is not possible to create the same effect of delight by merely putting some funny incidents in a play dealing with social, political, or philosophical ideas. It is natural, therefore, that though dramas of the particular genre have been written after Shaw, there is no real follower of Shaw; there is no Shavian school of dramatists. Only Granville-Barker and St. John Hankin tried their hands in the "Play of Ideas" in the Shavian manner, but the result is not always very Shavian. It is true that St. John Hankin has a mind which is quite akin to Shaw's and he has been able to make a nearer approach to a Shavian play than any one else in The Last of the De Mullins. In this play the mother of an illegitimate child refuses to marry its father because he wants to live up to the code of "honour"; it reminds us of the case of Alfred Doolittle in Pygmalion who, much against his will, has to marry the woman he lives with to live up to the standard of middle class morality. But The Last of the De Mullins does not have the same delight and the same solidity

1. The view that Shakespeare is an unsafe model has been held by Matthew Arnold.

of thought that sustain a typical Shavian play. More, St. John Hankin has a cynicism which is absent in Shaw. He, like Granville-Barker, fails in the qualities which go together to give life to a Shavian play: artistic temperament and classical execution. When all their dramatic works are taken together, it seems, however, that not St. John Hankin but Granville-Barker who is the most devoted disciple of Shaw. This view is vindicated by what he has accomplished in Waste and The Madras House. All these plays are Shavian; particularly the last named one with its lightness of treatment and weight of thought is an important play of ideas written in the Shavian manner. But it seems that Barker's appeal to the intellect is quite cool and that the plots of his plays are contrived rather than natural growth. Other than Barker and St. John Hankin we do not have any other dramatist in England who might be called 'Shavian' and the simple reason is that Shaw as a model is unsafe. The Shavian "Play of Ideas" began with Bernard Shaw and virtually ended with him.

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APPENDIX

FIRST PRODUCTION OF SHAW'S PLAYS

1. *Widower's Houses* : Performed on 9 December, 1892 by Independent Theatre Society at the Royal Theatre, London.
2. *The Philanderer* : First performance by the New Stage Club at the Cripplegate Institute on 20 February, 1905.
3. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* : First production by the Stage Society at the New Lyric Club, London, January 6, 1902.
4. *Arms and the Man* : First production on April 20, 1894 at the Avenue Theatre. Producer was Florence Farr.
5. *Candida* : First produced by Independent Theatre Society at the Theatre Royal, Durham on March 30, 1895.
6. *The Man of Destiny* : Produced first by Murray Carson at the Grand Theatre, Croydon, on April 1, 1897.
7. *You Never Can Tell* : First produced at the Royal Theatre, London, on November 26, 1899 by the Stage Society.
8. *The Devil's Disciple* : First production by Richard Mansfield at the Harmanus Bleecker Hall, Albany on October 1, 1897.
9. *Caesar and Cleopatra* : First production (amateur) by Anna Morgan at the Fine Arts Building, Chicago, on May 1, 1901.
10. *Captain Breassbound's Conversion* : First production at the Strand Theatre, London, by the Stage Society on December 16, 1900.
11. *The Admirable Bashville* : First production by the Stage Society at the Imperial Theatre, London, on June 7, 1903.
12. *Man and Superman* : First production by the Stage Society at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on May 21, 1905.
13. *John Bull's Other Island* : First production by Vedrenne and Barker at the Royal Court Theatre, London on November 1, 1904.

14. How He Lied To Her Husband : Produced first by Arnold Daly at the Berkeley Liceum, N.Y. on September 1904. On the same date performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, by Barker, Kingstone and Poulton.
15. Major Barbara : First produced by Vedrenne and Barker at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on November 28, 1905.
16. Passion, Poison, and Petrification: First production by Cyril Maude and Others at the Theatrical Garden Party, Regent's Park, London, on July 14, 1905.
17. The Doctor's Dilemma : First production by Vedrenne and Barker at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on November 20, 1906.
18. Interlude at the Playhouse : First performance at the Playhouse Theatre, London, on January 28, 1907, by Cyril Maude.
19. Getting Married : First production by Vedrenne and Barker on May 12, 1908 at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London.
20. The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet : First production by Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on August 25, 1909.
21. Press-Cuttings : First produced by Civic and Dramatic Guild at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on July 9, 1909.
22. The Fascinating Foundling : First production (amateur) by Princess Bibesco, daughter of Prime Minister Asquith. Date of performance unknown.
23. A Glimpse of Reality : First production by the Glasgow Clarion Players at the Fellowship Hall, Glasgow, on October 8, 1927.
24. Misalliance : First production by Charles Frohman at the Duke of Yorks Theatre, London, on January 23, 1910.
25. The Dark Lady of the Sonnets : First production by the committee of Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London, on 24 November, 1910.
26. Fanny's First Play: First production by Lollah McCarthy at the Little Theatre, London, on 19 April, 1911.
27. Androcles and the Lion : First production by the Kleines Theatre, Berlin, on 25 November, 1912.

28. Overruled : First production at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on 14 October, 1912.
29. Pygmalion : First production by and at Hofburg Theatre, Vienna on 16 October, 1913.
30. Great Catherine : First production at the Vandeville Theatre, London, by Norman Mekinell on 18 November 1913.
31. The Music Cure : First production by Kenelm Foss at the Little Theatre, London on 28 January, 1914.
32. O'Flaherty, V.C. : First performed by Robert Lorain in France in the month of February (date not available), 1917.
33. The Inca of Perusalem : First production by Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on 7th october, 1916.
34. Augustus does his Bit : First produced by the Stage Society at the Royal Court Theatre on 21 January, 1917.
35. Annajanska, The Bolshevik Empress : First production by Lilah McCarthy on 21 January, 1918 at the London Coliseum.
36. Heartbreak House : First production on 10 November, 1920 by the New York Theatre Guild at the Garric Theatre, N.Y.
37. Back to Methuselah : First production on 27 February, 1922 by the New York Theatre Guild at the Garric Theatre, N.Y.
38. Jitta's Atonement: First production at the Comedy Theatre, New York, by Lee Shubert on 17 January, 1923.
39. Saint Joan: First production by the New York Theatre Guild at the Garric Theatre, New York, on 28 December, 1923.
40. The Apple Cart: First production by Arnold Szyfman at the Polish Theatre, Warsaw on 14 June, 1929.
41. Too True to be Good: First production by the New York Theatre Guild at the Colonial Theatre, Boston on 29 February, 1932.
42. A Village Wooing : First production by and at the Little Theatre, Dallas, USA, on 16 April, 1934.
43. On the Rocks : First production by Charles Macdona at the Winter Garden Theatre, London, on 25 November, 1933.
44. The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles : First production by the New York Theatre Guild at the Guild Theatre, New York, on 18 February, 1935.

45. The Six of Calais : First production by Sidney Carroll at the Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park, London, on 17 July, 1934.
46. The Millionairess : First production by the Vienna Burgtheater at the Academy Theatre, Vienna on 4 January, 1936.
47. Cymbeline Re-finished : First production by Ronald Adam at the Embassy Theatre, London, on 16 November, 1937.
48. Geneva : First production by Roy Limbert at the Malvern Festival on 1 August, 1938.
49. In Good King Charles' Golden Days : First production by Roy Limbert at the Malvern Festival on 12 August, 1939.
50. Buoyant Billions : First production as 'Zu Viel Gold' at Schauspielhaus Zurich, on 21 October, 1948.
51. Farfetched Fables' : First production (Private) at the Watergate Theatre, London, on 6 September, 1950.
52. Shakes Versus Shav : First performed by the Waldo Lanchester Marionette Theatre at Malvern on 9 August, 1949.
53. Why She Would Not : Not yet performed.