

**THE  
SUPERMAN'S QUEST FOR COMEDY :  
THE SHAVIAN AMBIVALENCE**

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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THE SHAWAN AMBIGUANCE

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THE SHAWAN AMBIGUANCE

SUPERMAN'S DREAMS FOR COMEDY

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY LATE COLLEAGUE NARAYAN CHOUDHURY

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### A Note on Spelling and Punctuation

While quoting from Shaw's works, I have followed his spelling, punctuation and spacing of words. For example Shaw habitually spelt *Shakespeare* as *Shakespear*, used the archaic form *shew* for *show*, often spaced letters within a single word wide apart to indicate extra stress, followed phrases or clauses after an exclamation mark or a note of interrogation with small letters, wrote words like *don't* or *can't* as *dont* and *cant*. In all such cases, except where they seem confusing, I have reproduced Shaw's spelling and punctuation without parenthetically calling attention to the deviation from the normal practice.

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## Chapter 1

### Formulating the Problem : the Wood and the Trees

"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." *Acts*

"Fie, there is no such man ! It is impossible." *Othello*

If imitation is a form of compliment, then Shaw must have felt flattered at the treatment he received from his critics. The standard image of the dramatist has been popularised by patronizing historians of literature: thus we are told that Shaw was a "medicine man who would use the stage, as Wells used the novel to reform society", that the characters in his plays "are only puppets to voice his ideas",<sup>1</sup> that his plays "are really dialogues in which revolutionary views are developed."<sup>2</sup> Except for the faint snigger that the choice of words indicates, there is nothing in any of these descriptions that Shaw would not heartily endorse :

I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals... I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions

in these matters. I have no other effectual incentive to write plays, as I am not dependent on the theatre for my livelihood.<sup>3</sup>

He disdained to be a mere artist like Shakespeare and never tired of repeating his credo that "all great Art and Literature is propaganda"<sup>4</sup> at a time when the canons of drama, as laid down by the French school of Augier, Dumas fils and Sardou, were being religiously observed by their English disciples led by Pinero. At such a time the Snavian blasphemy was bound to make waves. The status of a thinker could not be denied to one who set down in writing his voluminous thoughts on subjects ranging from the evil of vaccination to the virtue of Guy Fawkes. His critics also had to concede that he could be intensely amusing even when he wrote about such disagreeable subjects as slum - landlording and prostitution.

Thus Shaw came to be recognised as a thinker, critic and philosopher rather than a dramatist. Of course the critics of the critic could and did point out that the Irishman's greatest success lay in making fault-finding a lucrative profession, for though everybody seemed to agree that he was a thinker, not a few contended that he could bear to have a look at reality only after making it stand on its head. His heterodoxy was seen, not always unjustly, as a self-conscious attempt to look unorthodox on as many subjects as possible. To his admirers, of course, he was a prophet of a new dispensation. Shaw succeeded in inspiring

strong adulation and aversion by becoming an institution like royalty or republicanism. While the plays of Shakespeare and Moliere generated different levels of understanding, those of Shaw produced Shavians and anti-Shavians.

We are told by Oscar Wilde that there is one thing which is worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about. Shaw must have agreed heartily with his fellow Irishman for his deliberately provocative statements on art gave rise to a lot of critical flutter, a comic version of which is to be found in *Fanny's First Play*, in which the lampooned drama critics discover in Shaw every quality ranging from his incomparable gift for rag chewing to a colossal intellectual power, but find no trace of dramatic talent. If there is some exaggeration in the lampoon, it is slight since the leading drama critics of his time, A.B.Walkley and William Archer, inspite of being Shaw's personal friends, set very little treasure by his plays.<sup>5</sup>

Shaw must have felt more acutely than most authors the need to be talked about because all that his five novels achieved, after burning the night oil for a few thousands hours, was the frustration of a man knocking his head against a stone wall. No publisher thought them worth publishing when they were written. In his new incarnation as a dramatist Shaw made a studied exploitation of the fact that controversy creates publicity and the latter ensures the journey from obscurity to the limelight. He himself had no delusions whatsoever about his manipulations to hog the limelight. In one of his vivid self-portraits he implicitly

pictures himself as a clown " who will undergo the most extraordinary ignominy, who will paint his nose red, who will allow people to kick him about, who will have the most disastrous falls if only he can make people laugh".<sup>6</sup> For Shaw clowning was more than a masochistic streak. The clown is easily the most conspicuous part of a circus and the obligation to be laughed at is easily offset by the privilege to laugh at everyone and everything. Every reader of *King Lear* knows that when the Fool earns his cap and bells he earns certain gladiatorial privileges along with it, but certainly this knowledge is not true of the world of *King Lear* alone. Probably the Fool caters less to his own masochism than to that of the audience. Without his motley Shaw would probably never be able to make his victims pay, willingly and handsomely, his fees, so to say, for savaging them. For Shaw was, as Nethercot says,<sup>7</sup> surely among the leading heretics of history, and yet the great majority of his millions of fans were, as they must be any society, thoroughly conventional people.

Shaw's success or failure, whichever way one looks at it, had united his admirers and detractors on a common platform: there was no agreement on the value of Shaw's philosophy, but both sides agreed that Shaw was a philosopher using the drama for purposes that were fundamentally non-aesthetic. The body and soul of Shaw's plays were severed from each other at an early stage of scholarship. Hamon<sup>8</sup> separated the body of Shaw's art from its soul as he detached the edifying thought from the brilliant manner, Collis<sup>9</sup> spoke of the philosopher under the garb of the poet,

Burton<sup>10</sup> discovered the mystic speaking through the vehicle of the drama. Joad<sup>11</sup> was more forthright in explicating his philosophical system by slight touch-ups where necessary; Chesterton,<sup>12</sup> freely treating the two terms as interchangeable, mourned the hardening of Shaw into a philosopher and fanatic since the time of writing *Major Barbara*. Even Eric Bentley,<sup>13</sup> full of fresh insight, made a spirited defence of Shaw against his detractors and the defence was not limited to the defence of the dramatist but that of the thinker as well. Perhaps the one flaw of the brilliant book was Bentley's unwillingness or inability — which he shared with other critics — to distinguish adequately between the dramatist and the philosopher: the significance of the artist was a little too dependent on the brilliance of the thinker.

The fact that Shaw's fame — or notoriety — was secured to a large extent by the wrong kind of self-advertisement became clear with the passage of time. At the time of his death Shaw was a legend but his stock with critics was disproportionately low. As the *Times* remarked in an anonymous article, in the age of *Waiting For Godot* his reputation was in danger.<sup>14</sup> In the same vein Raymond Williams argued: "Shaw's dynamic as a dramatist has largely weakened and it is difficult to believe that it ought, as a major force, to survive ..."<sup>15</sup> F.R. Leavis discovered in him only emptiness and irreverence and labelled him "boring and cheap".<sup>16</sup> Shaw's shrill denunciation of poetry had earlier provoked Eliot to comment: "Shaw is dramatically precocious, and poetically less than immature."<sup>17</sup>

It was not until the late sixties and early seventies that Shaw became the centre of critical attention that was both extensive and intensive. The scholarship of this period was more objective and more exhaustive. Shaw was no longer perceived as *sui generis* but as part of a tradition. Even earlier, towards the end of the fifties, Julian Kaye<sup>18</sup> attempted to dispel the mystique about Shaw by giving him a firm footing in the nineteenth century tradition. Similarly Martin Meisel<sup>19</sup> showed that Shaw was neither the great vandal that Archer and Walkely feared, nor a publicist fallen among dramatists as Shaw himself often claimed, but a professional continuing the tradition of the nineteenth century theatre. Louis Crompton<sup>20</sup> made a scholarly study of the intellectual background of his major plays, while critics such as Charles Berst,<sup>21</sup> Charles Carpenter,<sup>22</sup> Margery Morgan,<sup>23</sup> Maurice Valency<sup>24</sup> and J.L. Wisenthal<sup>25</sup> concentrated on the weakest area of Shawiana — the detailed study of individual plays. Meanwhile new biographies appeared, Shaw's diaries and letters became known to the public; the probing glare of the spotlight fell on particular areas — for instance, on Shaw's traumatic experience during the First World War,<sup>26</sup> or on the significance of his childhood experience.<sup>27</sup> Whole books were written on particular elements of Shaw's thought.<sup>28</sup> The process of specialization was pushed further by a corresponding narrowing down of the focus in Elsie Adams<sup>29</sup> and Keith May.<sup>30</sup>

Compared to the sophistication of contemporary research the early works seem impressionistic sketches: flush with

information, research has reached a stage when one is tempted to think that the intensiveness of present day research and the wealth of information it has brought to bear on the subject is an immense improvement on the past. Undoubtedly this confidence is not totally misplaced, for contemporary research has succeeded in bringing Shaw's art and his ideas under the microscope and critics have consequently begun to read him in fine print. And yet, after so much exhaustiveness, it is difficult to drive out the uncomfortable thought that while the trees can be seen in minute detail, the outline of the wood has all but vanished.

While Shaw is not the only writer to be the subject of critical confusion, few writers have projected such contradictory images, not only as a writer but also as a person. No one can read him without feeling the warm and good-natured quality of his laughter; the fact that he remains the best-loved playwright in England after Shakespeare<sup>31</sup> would seem to induce general agreement with G. Wilson Knight that Shaw's "humour is bright, kindly and exciting".<sup>32</sup> All his life Shaw stood against all forms of coarseness. With his vegetarianism, teetotalism and prolonged chastity he lived on the verge of asceticism; the ability to rise above all forms of pettiness and the strength to maintain his dignity in the face of provocation distinguished him from friends like Henry Arthur Jones and H.G.Wells. And while remaining uncommonly sensitive to the power of art and music, he was never allowed by his conscience to wallow like Pater or Wilde in aestheticism. The man who "never refused or broke an engagement to

“speak on socialism to pass a gallant evening”<sup>33</sup> always refused to enter the charmed circle of artistic privilege at the cost of the social obligation to his fellow human beings. With any other artist this would be a conspicuous case of self-denial, with Shaw it was a way of life. Few other dramatists have exposed with such deadly deftness the hypocrisy and the opportunism with which the privileges of his own class were bought. The aim of laughter was, for him, compelling truthfulness, a truthfulness that did not stop even when he himself and his class were its targets. It is perhaps this quality which prompted Bertolt Brecht to remark that “this unusual man seems to be of the opinion that there is nothing fearful in the world except the calm and incorruptible eye of the common man.”<sup>34</sup>

As a writer Shaw has often been accused of being a fanatic, of lacking in human sympathy, of creating puppets who voice his own views. Yet no other British dramatist since Shakespeare has succeeded, as he has, in making scallywags like Burgess and Doolittle, both of them embodiments of the antithesis of Shavianism, so intensely living that they, with all their immorality, run away with the affection of all but the most impossible of prigs. One has merely to compare Shaw's *Saint Joan* with Shakespeare's *Henry VI* to realise how absurd it is to argue that Shaw lacks sympathy. While Shakespeare sacrificed his dramatic sympathies to appease the contemporary English jingoism that loved to see Joan portrayed as a witch, Shaw refused to cater to the superstition of his age that wished to see Cauchon

portrayed as a devil. And speaking of the devil, who could give him a stronger brief than Shaw did in *Man and Superman* in spite of his intellectual identification with the devil's antagonist, Don Juan?

Just when one feels confident that one has cleared the fog to arrive at the proper understanding of the essential Shaw in whose plays "man's physical and cosmic instincts [are never] degraded",<sup>35</sup> one stumbles over the fact that the same Shaw almost hero-worshipped Stalin and championed Hitler and Mussolini. Shaw supported Mussolini's bombing of Abyssinia<sup>36</sup> and boasted that he had appreciated the value of gas chambers even before Hitler and claimed that the latter should be indebted to him for that.<sup>37</sup> In fact throughout the twenties, thirties and forties of this century he expressed his impatience for catastrophe, made light of the trampling of human rights and even went to the extent of arguing that the great majority of men had no right to live and unless they could prove otherwise, their lives should be presumed to be useless and pernicious and they should be expeditiously liquidated.

The fact that most of these pronouncements were made during the late years of Shaw's dramatic career has come in rather handy for scholars, who, instead of remoulding their responses, have by and large skirted the problem, choosing instead to focus on Shaw's positive side. The result has been curious. Whereas his biographers have marshalled extensive evidence of disquieting aspects of Shaw's personality, critics and scholars have largely

failed to recognise the significance of such evidence. As it is not possible to read Shaw's last plays without coming to terms with his dark vision, these plays have been dismissed rather summarily. A typical example is provided by Maurice Valency,<sup>38</sup> whose capacious tome makes a niggardly mention of the last dozen plays. S.C.Sengupta's work,<sup>39</sup> revised in 1974, takes almost no notice of these plays. While Margery Morgan's book<sup>40</sup> is one of the few works to pay adequate attention to Shaw's last plays, it generally ignores their ominous undertone. J.L. Wisenthal's study<sup>41</sup> of Shaw's middle plays is one of the most satisfying works on the subject insofar as it grasps the fact that Shaw aspires after a synthesis of opposing qualities, but by concentrating on the Shaw of the middle period, Wisenthal can afford to gloss over the most problematic area, since the nihilism of the later years completely denies the possibility of any such synthesis.<sup>42</sup>

When they find it impossible to ignore the evidence of Shaw's illiberalism, Shaw scholars seek to play down its significance. Few go as far as Louis Crompton<sup>43</sup> in arguing that Shaw's challenge to liberalism was the challenge of a bold mind to the shibboleths of the past, a more representative response is that of Julian Kaye,<sup>44</sup> who concludes that Shaw's support of dictators and his denunciation of democracy originated from his failure to understand the twentieth century. The Shaw portrayed by Kaye was a great humanitarian belonging to the nineteenth century. Martin Meisel,<sup>45</sup> taking his cue from Kaye, argues in a slightly different context that Shaw became disillusioned with liberalism

because he was betrayed by the forces representing liberalism. Similar attempts at rationalization are made by Richard Nickson<sup>46</sup> and H.M.Geduld,<sup>47</sup> who prefer to see Shaw not as pro-Fascist but as one who provided a corrective to the pro-British slant that passed for an objective view of the incidents leading to the Second World War.

Yet, to be the devil's advocate is one thing — it brings home to the public the salutary lesson that everyone has his reasons — and to belong to the devil's party is another. Apparently there is more merit in seeing through British righteousness than in giving a nod to organized massacres. Realising this difference Katherine Haynes Gatch<sup>48</sup> argues that Shaw's speeches supporting liquidation were not made in earnest; like Swift in *A Modest Proposal* Shaw merely resorted to irony while making the outrageous suggestion. She fails to see that nothing could be further from the truth, for not only did Shaw brush aside Mussolini's assassination of his critics as something unimportant, he welcomed Stalin's purges.

A notable exception is Arnold Silver,<sup>49</sup> who seeks out the complex man under the skin of the simple superman and pays more attention than most critics to the darker side of Shaw's personality; but apart from being fragmentary — he deals with just four plays and a novel — he uses Shaw's works as a launching pad for a plunge into his life; in spite of his disclaimer his interest is chiefly biographical for he uses the text to construct Shaw's life, though his stated purpose is just the opposite.

The upshot of all this has been the fragmentation of perception : criticism has produced a number of Shaws and the search is on for the real Shaw. Since critical integration of the different phases has been difficult, scholars have excluded the problematic areas of his plays from their field of study. A large part of his work has simply been overlooked as an aberration; critical insight has been illuminating but almost invariably the area lit up has been narrow.

The question that I have tried to address is whether this self-imposed restriction is necessary. Must our understanding of Shaw lead us to an "essential" Shaw, who has to be separated from the Shaw who is merely contingent? Apparently there is something to be said for such an approach. The most facile conclusion that one is led to by the glaring contradiction in Shaw is that like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde he is a single person only in the biological sense. Such a man's work, like his mind, must necessarily be disconnected; any attempt to synthesize a pattern out of the chaotic mass of his novels and plays inevitably entails extensive selection and exclusion, focusing and blurring. In refusing to understand the whole of Shaw, scholars have implicitly relegated the challenge facing them from literature to psycho-pathology. Even those who, like Knight or Wisenthal, have spoken of Shaw's integral vision, have concentrated on a limited area where integration poses few serious problems.

It is, indeed, possible to explain shaw's extreme self-contradiction by denying either continuity or stability of

human character. Behaviourists and structuralists, for example, have implicitly denied the concept of human essence by studying man as a system of stimulus-response bonding and a mere point of interaction of different systems. Writers from Virginia Woolf to Roland Barthes have successively chipped away at the foundation of the self. A representative example of this view-point is provided by Hélène Cixous, who says that the "I" is "always more than one, diverse, capable of being all those it will at one time be, a group acting together."<sup>50</sup>

However, the Shaw scholars who have overlooked Shaw's darker side are essentialists. Not only do they believe in the distinctive character of his art as well as of his personality, but also maintain that the former is essentially linked to the latter. It is this which makes their failure so conspicuous - if Shaw's work is an expression of his personality and if his personality has a single centre, then one must be able to explain how that centre holds together the centrifugal tendencies.

For my part, I have not found it necessary to abandon my faith either in the essence or the uniqueness of the self. While the 'I' may be a group acting together, a group not only of contradictory impulses but also of contradictory actions, the contradiction has to face up to the ego, which subdues this flux and by imposing its own order on the flux augments its own strength. The "I", so far as it is a trace of continuity in the human organism, is not the flux but the residuum surviving the flux.

My study has led me to the conclusion that those aspects of Shaw's plays as well as of his personality which our age finds so uncongenial were present in him from the beginning, but the process of transmutation of life into art varied greatly at different points of his career. For instance, the essential part of his personality permeated both *Pygmalion* and *Geneva*, but it was the difference in the mode of transmutation that gave these plays such different meanings. In other words, the 'meaning' of Shaw's plays change constantly, but the change takes place within a framework that can be recognised as unchanging.

It will be recognised that my study assumes an intimate relationship between Shaw's life and his plays. It is, therefore, useful to take into account a contrary point of view, that of T.S.Eliot. Eliot warns us against the temptation of looking for the artist's personality in his work, arguing that art is not the expression of the artist's self, but an escape from his personality. " The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality ".<sup>51</sup> He argues that the thought contained in Dante's poetry does not reveal Dante, nor does the philosophy behind Shakespeare's poetry reveal Shakespeare's personality because neither Dante nor Shakespeare did any real thinking :

Dante's poetry receives a boost...from the fact that the thought behind it is the thought of a man as great and lovely as Dante himself : St. Thomas. The thought behind

Shakespeare is of men far inferior to Shakespeare himself...The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time. Thus Dante, hardly knowing it, became the voice of the thirteenth century; Shakespeare, hardly knowing it, became the representative of the end of the sixteenth century, of a turning point in history.<sup>52</sup>

Eliot's generalization is valid only when the artist remains an organic part of his age. In a revolutionary age, when the forces of tradition are decaying, and in the case of an overtly revolutionary writer whose dominant attitude to his surrounding is one of opposition, the formula is more useful when it is reversed: the revolutionary writer, in writing his time, writes himself. Though as an avowed anti-romantic and a paladin of scientific morality Shaw claimed to be objective, few writers were so intensely subjective. It is not possible to understand Shaw's art without understanding his personality. Once this is understood, it is possible to understand all his novels and plays within a single framework without assuming either naivety or flippancy on Shaw's part and without resorting to the magic formula that provides psychologists instant exit routes whenever they come up against a blank wall.

Shaw seems to be baffling when his plays or novels are judged as self-contained units. The meaning of the earliest of his plays are carried over into the ones that follow. His last plays are, in a sense, the continuation of of the novels and early plays

~~SECRET~~  
~~Subversive Activity~~  
~~Act 1~~

— the vast architecture of Shavian comedy can be grasped only through the understanding of the Shavian dialectic . I have argued that comedy is the point of resolution of that dialectic . I have used the term "comedy" instead of the plural "comedies" because I believe that all his novels and plays add up to a single unfinished play. Comedy is in Shaw not merely a literary genre, it is the consummation towards which his whole artistic aspiration is directed. It is important to grasp this in order to realize that the unfinished *Passion Play* written by Shaw at the age of twenty is linked to *Farfetched Fables*, written when he was ninety-two, as two acts of a single unfinished play are linked to each other. Long-winded, often tortuous, the polemics of this incomplete play races to collide with its antithesis for a momentary poise in a temporary resolution. My attempt has been to unfold the dialectic and show that the plays radiating a "sense of well-being"<sup>53</sup> and those ending in a bottomless abyss of despair are not alien to each other — the arch-jester of Europe who regaled millions of people and the man who countenanced the possibility of the extermination of the race without a shudder are locked in an intimate embrace.

With Shaw, the theme of one play is the further elaboration of the theme of a previous play, the hero of one play is a mutant of the protagonist of another play that has preceded it. For instance, in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, the character of Julius Caesar has a tenuous link with the Caesar of history but there is a close relation between him and an apparently dissimilar character like

Sidney Irefusis. In this manner the meaning of one play overflows into another and together they constitute a dynamic that interacts with yet other plays. Thus the extravaganzas written in the last phase of his career, inspite of their seemingly shocking novelty, can be expected to bear more than superficial resemblance to the early plays.

The dialectic in Shaw's plays is generated by the conflict of two impulses or rather clusters of impulses that can roughly be denoted by the two terms -- the human and the superhuman. Though Shaw himself speaks of the superman in positive terms -- most notably in the non-dramatic section of *Man and Superman* -- I have come to the conclusion that in the context of the plays as well as the novels, it forcefully emerges as a negative concept. The positive content of the superman is extremely volatile, but the part of the Shavian superman which survives all changes and remains constant is the part conceived as the negation of the human. Quite often we can speak of the superman as the anti-man in the sense we speak of anti-matter or the positron in physics. One of the signal failures of Shaw criticism has been the inability of the scholars to go beyond the Shavian rhetoric in their understanding of the superman. Had the scholars paid greater attention to the novels they could not have missed the fact that the concept of the superman was not related to Shaw's religious conversion, it was the crystallisation of some of his earliest tendencies.

I have attempted to show that Shaw's comedy is

salvationist. Structurally it resembles neither classical comedy nor the modern secular comedy but the cycle of the Miracle Plays of the Middle Ages. His drama is structured as a cathedral, its movement being vertical. Like the steeple of a cathedral, the Life Force aspires to soar continually upwards. Just as the Mystery Cycle never allows the viewer to forget for a moment that Christ had to be born in order to redeem men who cannot save themselves without divine assistance, so also the underlying assumption of Shaw's salvationist comedy is that man cannot save himself unless he grows into a superman. What puts Shaw at a disadvantage, however, is the fact that the religion of the Middle Ages had a history which was over a thousand years old and a culture shared by millions of Christians. To be comparatively effective Shaw had to found singlehandedly not only a religion, which he did, but also a culture and a history. The superman aspired to be God, but the task of instantly creating a culture was something beyond the capability of even the Shavian God. Thus, while the hero of the Christian Comedy consolidated a common culture, Shaw's superman could only withdraw from the world into himself.

The corner into which Shaw's superman, disillusioned with the world, beats retreat exists not in the external world but in the darkness of the mind. Therefore, in tracing the journey of the redeemer we are led from Shaw's work to his person. We are led further to the inescapable conclusion that the great comedy of transcendence is actually the spiritual autobiography of the author. By contending that his plays are fictional autobiography,

I do not suggest that they necessarily represent actual incidents of Shaw's life : the plots and characters are fictitious, yet what they represent is Shaw's private conflict. The "outer" play which the audience see on stage has an exact correlative in the theatre of Shaw's soul.

Much as he would like to believe otherwise, Shaw's superman is not the child of the Life Force. I have tried to show that he was conceived in Shaw's childhood as a reaction against a lonely child's suffering. The deprivation haunted Shaw even in his youth and manhood, and the memory evoked so much bitterness and resentment that the resentment had to be deflected from the original target to the feeling of suffering itself. The persona was Shaw's impregnable defence against his own passion — it succeeded in obliterating the memory of unfulfilled human needs by publicly disowning those needs.

I may seem to contradict myself in resorting to the idea of the persona after criticising the division of Shaw into the real Shaw and Shaw the actor. I do not believe that there is any contradiction in this because my objection is not to the theory of masks *per se* but to the understanding of the nature of those masks. Critics like Katherine Gatch,<sup>54</sup> Edmund Fuller<sup>55</sup> and Robert Brustein<sup>56</sup> assume that only a fraction of Shaw as revealed in his works is the real Shaw and whatever contradicts the real Shaw is mere play-acting by the dramatist. I have argued, on the other hand, that the persona is the self constructed by Shaw himself and thus must be distinguished from his natural self, but neither of

the two selves is more real — or less so — than the other. In relation to each other they stand like nature and nurture. In this Shaw was like the Ancients of *Back to Methuselah*, who first willed a change and then became what they willed. Being a highly imaginative person, he was capable of creating for himself an idealised self. Being extremely sensitive to the power of suggestion, he could, to a certain extent, appropriate the persona by breaking down the difference between the natural self and the created self.

The tension between the two selves lies at the heart of Shavian dramaturgy, but sometimes the tension sought release in the form of apocalyptic fantasies that could be particularly disturbing when Shaw carried his destructive urges beyond the boundary of the plays, something that he did quite frequently while eulogising some of the most blood-curdling pogroms of his time.

I have tried to show that the idea of the superman is simultaneously problematic and the axle on which Shaw's salvationist comedy turns. I have also argued that the consummation of this comedy is prevented by its internal contradiction.

Shaw's plays succeed as plays only as long as the superman's aims are challenged and offset by human aspirations. The messiah became an important part of Shaw's make-up as early as in his twentieth year when the unfinished *Passion Play* was written. Yet Shaw's survival as an artist depended on his ability

to pose a challenge to his own messianism. The plays of the early and the middle periods reveal both the threat of messianism and the dramatist's success, sometimes qualified, in coping with that threat. While the persona is evident in his tracts and non-dramatic pieces, the depth of the unconscious mind demonstrated the continued vitality of the natural self. In other words, Shaw the dramatist was neither Long's medicine man nor the formidable evangelist that the world came to revere. The poet was pitiless in undermining his own evangelism.

If the poet in Shaw undermined his philosophical aspiration, the philosopher in him reciprocated the gesture. What we witness in the course of the plays is the hardening of the created self. The *Unsocial Socialist* anticipates for a moment the conclusion of *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, *Man and Superman* forebodes the crisis of *Too True to be Good* but while the earlier works are prevented from becoming apocalyptic by the restraining force of conservatism, the absence of this restraint makes some of his last plays works of pure negation.

Shaw claimed that the basis of his comedy was religious. While I am in basic agreement with him on the religious basis of comedy, I have attempted to examine the extent to which his own art satisfies the religious test. In the concluding chapter I have attempted to evaluate Shaw's transcendental comedy in terms of the perennial religion which I believe lies at the base of comedy.

I have obviously had no scope to deal separately with all his plays as that would have made the work unwieldy without

necessarily providing greater insight. I have chosen the nodal points of Shaw's career; the choice of plays does not always reflect my perception of their relative merit. For instance, the fact that *Saint Joan* has not been treated separately does not imply that I consider it a lesser play than, say, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* or *Geneva*; it simply means that the last two plays have, in my opinion, a greater bearing on the development of Shavian comedy.

I have put an extra stress on the text of the plays as I believe that the pervasive influence of Shaw as the guide to his plays has hypnotized critics into ignoring the evidence of the plays and reading into these the author's interpretation. It would be impossible for critics to be so completely misled on *Candida* or *Man and Superman*, for instance, without a naive willingness to trust Shaw's judgement instead of their own. Shaw, on the other hand, consistently misread his own plays because that reduced the gap between his messianic aspirations and artistic integrity.

I have attempted to show that the surface meaning of a number of plays is at odds with the subterranean meaning of these plays. Far from maintaining the pattern of the transcendental comedy, these plays challenge, at a deeper level, Shaw's comic vision with an alternative vision. At the superficial level these plays conform to the pattern of the transcendental comedy, but below the surface they pull the plays towards a different vision of comedy, or even tragedy — ends that were precluded by Shaw's ideology.

In accusing Shaw of misreading his plays, I do not suggest that a play has one correct meaning or that the same meaning can be deciphered. I have neither assumed the autonomy of the text nor subscribed to the opposite view that all interpretations are equally subjective. Literature has rightly been characterized by Roman Ingarden<sup>57</sup> as a heteronomous object, i.e. an object which is partly autonomous and partly penetrated by the reader's consciousness. It is an open structure that needs the interaction of the reader for closure. Every interaction is a unique event but since the text, even before it is met by the reader, has a structure, however open, the contours of that structure set a limit to the possibilities of the final reconstruction. It thereby protects the text from the eccentricity of extreme subjectivity.

I believe that the foregrounding of the text and extensive references to recurrent themes and leitmotifs are necessary to protect the prefabricated structure from depredation. Shaw's interpretation of his plays is misinterpretation not because it is subjective but because the subjectivity is not limited by adequate correspondence between the interpretation and the text. While I do not claim to have discovered the "actual meaning" of Shaw's plays, I hope that my subjectivity, operating within a framework of objective possibilities determined by the text, discovers a design which deviates sufficiently from Shaw's cherished pattern to show that Shaw the artist was not Shavian enough to complete his millennial comedy.

1. William J. Long, *English Literature : Its History and Significance*, p. 65, pp. 605 - 606.
2. Emile Legouis, *A Short History of English Literature*, p. 384.
3. The Bodley Head Edition of *The Collected Plays of Bernard Shaw*, vol.III. p. 698. In all future references the seven-volume Collected Plays will be referred to as CP I - CP VII.
4. CP VI, p. 611.
5. Archer bracketed his friend with Gilbert: to him Shaw was no more than the author of a new species of prose extravaganza. See T. F. Evans (ed.), *Shaw : The Critical Heritage*, p. 61. Walkley admired Shaw's wit and intellectual brilliance, but did not consider him a dramatist. Ibid., p. 4, pp. 55-58. Max Beerbohm, who, along with Archer and Walkley, constituted the triumvirate as arbiters of public taste, was only marginally less critical. Ibid. pp. 76-80.
6. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 194.
7. Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Schizophrenia of Bernard Shaw", *The American Scholar*, 21.4 (1952) : 456.
8. A.F. Hamon, *The Technique of Bernard Shaw's Plays*.
9. J.S. Collis, *Shaw*.
10. Richard Burton, *Bernard Shaw : the Man and the Mask*.
11. C.E.M. Joad, *Shaw*.

12. G.K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*.
13. Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*.
14. Evans, op. cit., p. 34.
15. Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, p. 290.
16. Evans, op. cit., p. 37.
17. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 51.
18. Julian Bertram Kaye, *Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Tradition*.
19. Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theater*.
20. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*.
21. Charles Berst, *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Drama*.
22. Charles A. Carpenter, *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Destroying Ideals*.
23. Margery Morgan, *The Shawian Playground : an Exploration of the Art of George Bernard Shaw*.
24. Maurice Valency. *The Cart and the Trumpet*.
25. J.L. Wisenthal, *The Marriage of Contraries : Bernard Shaw's Middle Plays*.
26. Stanley Weintraub, *Journey to Heartbreak : the Crucible Years of Bernard Shaw*.
27. Daniel Dervin, *Bernard Shaw : a Psychological Study*.
28. For example, Paul A. Hummert, *Bernard Shaw's Marxian Romance* and Rodelle Weintraub, *Fabian Feminist : Bernard Shaw and Women*.
29. Elsie Adams, *Bernard Shaw and the Aesthetes*.
30. Kieth May, *Ibsen and Shaw*.
31. A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p. 39. Gibbs has drawn his

readers' attention to the significant fact that in England Shaw's plays have been staged more frequently than those of any other dramatist except Shakespeare.

32. G. Wilson Knight, "Shaw's Integral Theatre", R.J. Kaufmann (ed.), *G. B. Shaw : a Collection of Critical Essays*. p. 126.

33. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 115.

34. Bertolt Brecht, "Ovation to Shaw" in Kaufmann, p. 15.

35. G. Wilson Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

36. Blanche Patch, *Thirty Years with G.B.S.*, p. 116.

37. Allan Chappelow, *Shaw : "the chucker-out"* p. 322. Chappelow's book is a valuable collection of Shaw's speeches and non-dramatic writings, most of which was not available to the general public before the publication of the book.

38. Valency, *op. cit.*

39. S.C. Sengupta, *The Art of Bernard Shaw*.

40. Morgan, *op. cit.*

41. Wisenthal, *op. cit.*

42. Wisenthal's book shows the unmistakable influence of G. Wilson Knight's essay. In spite of its brevity, Knight's essay, apart from being one of the best on the subject, is a pioneering one in opening up a new approach as he is one of the first critics to see that Shaw the dramatist generally goes beyond the philosopher in him in search of integration. However the merit of the excellent essay has been marred somewhat by the fact that Knight completely ignores the illiberalism inherent in much of Shaw's work.

43. Crompton, op. cit. Also see Louis Crompton, "Shaw's Challenge to Liberalism" in Kaufmann, pp. 88-99.
44. Kaye, op. cit.
45. Martin Meisel, "Shaw and Revolution" in Norman Rosenblood (ed.), *Shaw : Seven Critical Essays*. pp. 106-34. Meisel quotes a passage from Kaye where the latter argues that the labour victory of 1929 was "the most bitter disappointment of Shaw's life." Kaye, op. cit. p. 186. Ramsay MacDonald, a Fabian, became Prime Minister in a coalition government, formed with the help of Conservatives, only to betray every canon of socialism. Meisel suggests that Shaw came to pin his faith on a violent revolution only after the methods of the Fabians had proved futile. However, in my view, Meisel, in seeking to rationalize Shaw's behaviour, overlooks the fact that the violent alternative too failed to bring any sense of affirmation to Shaw's mind. Unlike Lenin, he did not believe that violence would be the midwife in the birth of a new age. To the author of *Man and Superman* both violence and non-violence were equally incapable of improving man's lot. I have tried to show that though Shaw frequently supported violence, the advocacy did not lead him out of his pessimism. Violent visions became a compensation for his frustration rather than the price for change.
46. Richard Nickson, "G.B.S. British Fascist ?" *The Shavian* 16 (1959): 9-15.
47. H.M. Geduld, "Bernard Shaw and Adlof Hitler". *The Shaw Review*, 4.1 (1961) : 11-20.
48. Katherine Haynes Gatch, "The Last Plays of Bernard Shaw :

Dialectic and Despair", in W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. (ed.), *English Stage Comedy*, pp. 126-47.

49. Arnold Jacques Silver, *Bernard Shaw : the Darker Side*.

50. Quoted in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction : Contemporary Poetics* p. 30.

51. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 17.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

53. G. Wilson Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

54. Katherine Gatch, *op. cit.*

55. Edmund Fuller, *George Bernard Shaw ; Critic of Western Morale*.

56. Robert Brustein, *The Theatre of Revolt*, pp. 183-227. While few critics grasp as clearly as Brustein the bitterness hiding behind Shaw's exuberance, he errs in going too far in the other direction and arguing that the real Shaw was completely nihilistic. The essay implicitly maintains that as a mainstream comic dramatist Shaw was the victim of self-deception.

57. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art : an Investigation on the Borderline of Ontology, Logic and Theory of Literature*.

## Chapter 2

### The Father of the Superman Shaw of Ireland

"In my beginning is my end."

T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

Biographical details have only a limited value in the understanding of an author's works. Sometimes such details even act as obstacles since an author's life consists chiefly of undisputed facts, whereas the import of his work is never beyond dispute: the meaning is never given, it has to be discovered, often created, by the reader. It is tempting to believe that a certain kind of man under certain circumstances produces a certain kind of work. Once we establish the kind of man the author is, and once the circumstances are brought into the open, the nature of his work is made to toe a predictable line, following the rules of rigid determinism. It is like being given two points and asked to draw a straight line in order to trace the path of the other points that are to be discovered. In such cases the 'discovery' and the accompanying wisdom come even before the line is drawn.

Even after such knowledge if one appears to follow the beaten path, it is because with some authors the technique is likely to yield better results than with others, provided one

discards the air of finality about both the facts and the circumstances, remembering that the facts are chosen from a jungle of other facts and the precise interaction between facts and circumstances is forever to be inferred, often very dimly. But then the important question remains to be answered : why does this technique promise to yield satisfactory results while studying Shaw ? The answer -- which again is more tentative than would seem appropriate in the first rush of confidence -- is that Shaw was a very autobiographical writer, that his life got into his plays very often, that his plays grappled with the same problems and themes that consumed much of his immense energy.<sup>1</sup>

The history of Ireland generally has a large role to play, either positively or negatively, in the making of an Anglo-Irish author. The cross currents of Irish history have ensured that the typical Irishman, even though he is a fascinating stage character, is non-existent outside the stage. One is left with in reality with Irishmen, rather than the Irishman. The plural is a useful number reminding us of the plurality, often antagonistic, of Irishmen's lives. Everytime the island has been invaded, and such occasions have been numerous, there has been an admixture of blood. The most important event in determining Anglo-Irish relations was perhaps Cromwell's expedition, which was almost an attempted extirpation of the original inhabitants. The land was grabbed by the invaders, some of whom stayed back as land-owners. The prosperous section of the Anglo-Irish Protestants, commonly known as the Ascendancy, had sprung from this alien class of

land-seizers: this class prospered at the cost of the natives, many of whom, driven by almost a visceral hunger for land and sticking to the only occupation about which they knew anything, dug up stone quarries and brought into existence tiny strips of land.

The relation between the Catholic natives and the parvenu Protestants was, needless to say, far from cordial. The dispossessed natives viewed the new class, which belonged to a different race and a different religion, with cold hatred that needed very little provocation to turn hot. The entrenchment of the new class of land owners resulted in the influx of more Protestants, whose bulwark against the hostility of the natives was the Royal Irish Constabulary. The Catholic peasantry smarted under existing disqualifications and the memory of past oppressions. Even in the eighteenth century the Irish were taxed for the maintenance of the Anglican Church, to which they did not belong. Until the Emancipation Act of 1829, no Catholic was allowed to hold any official position.

Ireland provided a typical colonial situation in which the chief instruments of power were the army and the police, the chief beneficiary oppressive landlords and the chief symbol was Dublin Castle.

The peasants of Victorian Ireland survived by rearing pigs and poultry and by living on potatoes. A sizeable portion of their meagre earnings went out of their pockets in the form of rent. On top of everything there were the notorious Irish famines. Famines

were almost a constant feature of Irish life. As St. John Ervine says :

Between 1727 and the year of the Union, 1800, there had been eight that were disastrous; and there were numerous failures of the potato crop between 1817 and 1839, some of them partial, some of them complete, each bringing with it sinister attendants of pestilence and death.<sup>2</sup>

The famine of the forties was ferocious and took a toll of thousands of lives. Such was the panic and frustration that it made a biographer remark that the "best thing that an Irish peasant could hope for in the eighteen-forties was to get out of Ireland."<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the Protestant landlords the Catholic tenants had no nest egg to fall back upon in such trying times. Those who did not die or migrate depended, like the group known as Moonlighters, on sporadic nocturnal raids on the Ascendancy. Thus natural calamity joined hands with history in intensifying the hostility between the Catholics and the Protestants. The battle between hungry, famine-stricken, ill-organised individuals and well-fed, well-heeled men patronised by the State was an unequal one.

It must not be assumed, however, that every Protestant Irishman's star was in the ascendant. There were some, like Shaw's father, who never did well. An irrational faith in their own destiny, coupled with a snobbish contempt for the Papists, as they

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derogatorily called the Roman Catholics, rather than hard economic facts led them to identify themselves with the Ascendancy. Living in genteel poverty, this class of Protestants consoled themselves by basking in the collective glory of their coreligionists.

Shaw's father was a minor civil servant who sold his pension and with that money bought himself a partnership in a corn mill. Being wholesale business, it was respectable enough to be fit for a Protestant gentleman. The business was a failure.

When Shaw relates the story of his family, his childhood and his upbringing, he makes no attempt merely to recount them drily. He gives the reader a clear picture of his own attitude. For example he says :

My father was an Irish Protestant gentleman of the downstart race of younger sons. He had no inheritance, no profession, no manual skill, no qualification of any sort for any definite social function... He had, however, been brought up to believe that there was an inborn virtue of gentility in all Shaws as partisans of William the Conqueror (the Dutch William of glorious pious and immortal memory, not the Norman adventurer) and owners of landed estates in Ireland or their relatives... Necessarily all the Shaws were Protestants and snobs. <sup>4</sup>

Is this merely the derisive contempt of an old man for the pathetic delusions of people who were not even convincing snobs ? Is this the judgement of a socialist and a Creative

Evolutionist, and not of a young man ? This is one problem one has to face while contemplating the judgement of a celebrity who has left his childhood far behind. Did Shaw have the same feeling in his formative years ? The picture of the child that we have in *Sixteen Self Sketches* is that of an immensely sane boy who takes very little time to see through the pretensions of his ancestors and rise above their irrational prejudices. Is Shaw guilty of reading his later self into his childhood and misleading his readers ?

It is easy to miss the similarity between George Carr Shaw and George Bernard Shaw because the gulf separating the two was not just a generation : the son consciously repudiated everything symbolized by his contemptible father, and outwardly no two persons could be more different. Yet the patented Shavian laughter, which later made G.B.S. the most famous jester in the world, was a direct result of his father's tutelage. As is natural in an unconventional home, Shaw often commented flippantly on the Bible and was pulled up by his father for his impiety. After insisting that "the Bible was universally recognized as a literary and historical masterpiece", the latter would add

with a perfect air of frankness, that even the worst enemy of religion could say no worse of the Bible than that it was the damnedest parcel of lies ever written. He would then rub his eyes and chuckle for quite a long time. It became an unacknowledged game between us that I should

provoke him to exhibitions of this kind. <sup>5</sup>

The father undermined the son's respect for authority not only through his fondness for blasphemous jokes, but also—and more powerfully, though unintentionally—through his own conduct. It is important to remember that the ineffectual father was not merely a wit, he was also a drunkard. The family was socially ostracized for George Carr Shaw's tippling habits and G.B.S. says that "the drunkenness was so humiliating that it would have been unendurable if we had not taken refuge in laughter."<sup>6</sup> Writing to Ellen Terry he describes the shock and the lasting effect of the humiliating discovery :

The first moral lesson I can remember as a tiny child was the lesson of teetotalism, instilled by my father, a futile person you would have thought him. One night, when I was still about as tall as his boots, he took me out for a walk. In the course of it I conceived a monstrous, incredible suspicion. When I got home I stole to my mother and in an awestruck whisper said to her, "Mamma, I think Papa's drunk." She turned away with impatient disgust and said, "When is he ever anything else?" I have never believed in anything since : then the scoffer began : then was sown the seed which so annoys Henry when it comes up in my articles. <sup>7</sup>

According to Shaw's biographer, from that moment "Sonny

began to see his father through his mother's eyes, as a man to imitate in as much detail as possible, but in the reverse."<sup>8</sup> Children are notorious for the lightheartedness with which they treat individual sensations as they playfully move from experience to experience. In fact it is the child's heedlessness to the seriousness of the moral world that parents find so frustrating. It is indeed uncommon for a child to be permanently transformed by a single experience. Yet when Shaw says that he has never since believed in "anything or anybody"<sup>9</sup> and carries the memory of the shame well into his nineties, it does not become difficult to see that behind the loss of faith in man lay more than a single incident. After all every child has to cope some day or other "with the wrench from [his] childhood faith in [his] father as perfect and omniscient",<sup>10</sup> and not a few learn to forgive the imperfection or even the little hypocrisies born of weakness. Possibly Shaw would have been able to do the same had he been helped in his effort by his family. The one person who could have helped the child to erase the traumatic experience from his memory played an important role in perpetuating the shock. Shaw's mother could not teach him to forgive and forget because she herself could neither forgive nor forget.

Shaw's mother was the daughter of a country gentleman who knew neither thrift nor scruples in matters relating to money. She had left her father's house to live with her aunt who had a considerable fortune and grew fond enough of her to name her an heiress in her will. The aunt was greatly disappointed when

Lucinda Elizabeth resolved to marry George Carr Shaw, and revoked her will to cut her niece out of the fortune. The discovery that her husband had lied to her in claiming to be a teetotaler could only have added to Lucinda Elizabeth's disillusionment and bitterness.

Shaw has terrible things to say about his mother : "From my mother I had learned that the wrath on which the sun goes down is negligible compared to the clear vision and criticism that is neither created by anger nor ended with it."<sup>11</sup> She never created scenes over her husband's drunkenness or futility but her cold and unwavering scorn, which withheld the slightest trace of sympathy or even pity from him, must have been more galling to the wretched man. Her son says that she was a bitterly disappointed person who felt that she had been let down by everybody and though she never retaliated she never forgave either. As the son began to look at the father with the mother's eyes, he experienced a swift erosion of both affection and respect for the father, but the influence of his mother permeated even deeper. Shaw's anguished confession that he could believe in nobody was a revelation of the extent to which the mother had penetrated the son's consciousness : she also could not believe in anything or anybody. From his mother Shaw inherited the general disapproval of the world as surely as he inherited his sense of anti-climax from his father.

Try as he may to talk about his mother with an air of detachment, Shaw's success in hiding his disappointment is far

from certain. No condemnation of one's mother can be harsher than the cryptic statement: "She did not hate anybody, nor love anybody."<sup>12</sup> Made miserable by their mother's neglect the children soon learnt to fend for themselves: "As we grew up and had to take care of ourselves unguided, we met life's difficulties by breaking our shins over them."<sup>13</sup> Missing the bitter undertone hidden beneath Shaw's habitual unflappability. Archibald Henderson, his American biographer, attempted to portray his mother sympathetically only to be snubbed by Shaw himself with uncharacteristic sharpness: "This sympathy with the mother is utterly false. Damn your American sentimentality."<sup>14</sup> How deeply Shaw nursed his grievance at being deprived of both maternal love and maternal care can be gauged from the harshness of his tone: "In short, my mother was...neither a mother nor a wife, and could be classed only as a Bohemian anarchist with lady like habits."<sup>15</sup>

Although he is generally tireless in ridiculing men's preference for love and happiness, in his more intimate moments Shaw is not quite incapable of suspending his hostility to human nature, and one of those rare moments of his life rings with the cry of the anguished child, a cry that could not be silenced even by the intervention of nearly three decades: "Oh, a devil of a childhood, Ellen, rich only in dreams, frightful and loveless in reality."<sup>16</sup>

Shaw was unhappy, yet since even the unhappiest child cannot spend all his time thinking of his unhappiness, Shaw found a substitute for happiness in amusement. He learnt to extract

amusement from unlikely situations, and in this his maternal uncle's tutelage was only marginally less important than his father's. Uncle Walter's Zest for profanity matched his brother-in-law's love of anticlimax. Shaw remarks that his uncle was "an artist in his obscenity and blasphemy."<sup>17</sup> In spite of himself Shaw warms up to his Rabelaisian uncle, who exhilarated the young boy with sheer exuberance :

...as to the maxima reverentia due to my tender years, he had rather less of it, if possible, than Falstaff had for Prince Hal. To the half dozen childish rhymes taught me by my mother he added a stock of unprintable limericks that constituted almost an education in geography. He was always in high spirits, and full of humour that, though barbarous<sup>2</sup> in its blasphemous indecency was Scriptural and Shakespearean in the elaboration and fantasy of its literary expression. Being full of the Bible, he quoted the sayings of Jesus as models of facetious repartee.<sup>18</sup>

One has merely to remove the "blasphemous indecency" and obscenity and the passage could be an accurate description of Shaw's own humour. No wonder that in such a house the child's transition from conventional piety to unconventional piety and from unconventional piety to atheism was swift. The family dropped churchgoing before Shaw was ten, and his father and uncle uprooted the traces of faith still left in his mind. The child began by composing his prayers and reciting them in bed, but soon dispensed with the

elaborate artistic exercise.<sup>19</sup> It was only to be expected that the boy-atheist who lost his faith in the Father in heaven would also lose faith in the father on earth. With his son George Carr Shaw did not fare better than God. Subversive humour was a shining spear that the father had forged and handed down to his son. It would be unreasonable to expect that after growing up young Sonny, toeing his father's line, would limit its use only to such harmless targets as unitarianism and leave untouched others like Protestant snobbery, Dublin Castle or even institutions such as marriage and the family. In the case of the last two he had the additional reason of generalising from his own experience.

The father had revealed to him the power of anti-climax, the uncle had sowed in him the seeds of boisterous and irreverent laughter. Both these qualities helped to disguise the emotional coldness and distrust of the world that Shaw had inherited from his mother. But there was another important influence on the child that reinforced the atmosphere of derision, aggressive non-conformity and general scepticism. Shaw himself draws the reader's attention to George John Vandaleur Lee, his mother's music teacher, a man whom Shaw calls one of his two supplementary fathers :

Those who know my play *Misalliance*, in which the lover has three fathers, will note that I also had a natural father and two supplementaries making three varieties for me to study. This widened my outlook very considerably. Natural

parents should bear in mind that the more supplementaries that their children find, the better they will know that it takes all sorts to make a world. Also that though there is always the risk of being corrupted by bad parents, the natural ones may be — probably ten per cent of them actually are the worst of the lot.<sup>20</sup>

Not only did Lee share the house with the Shaws, he was apparently a more important person there than George Carr Shaw, who had been reduced to a non-entity.<sup>21</sup> Compared to his eloquence on his uncle Shaw is almost reticent on Lee, yet the latter had left a greater mark on the child than the maternal uncle. As his biographer notes, "G.B.S. uses the entertaining figure of Uncle Walter as a comet, shimmering across the skies, to distract our attention from a more significant feature in the religious firmament of the Shaws."<sup>22</sup> With all his irreverence Uncle Walter, like George Carr Shaw, shared the typical snobbery of the Irish Protestants. Lee, on the other hand, was a Catholic. It is pertinent to state here that financially G.B.S.'s father was a beneficiary of the arrangement that made Lee a member of the Shavian household.

As a music teacher Lee was so unorthodox and original that he was disliked by other music teachers, whom he despised in his turn. The unorthodoxy was not limited to music only. He criticised doctors, ate brown bread and slept with the windows open. All these habits were picked up by Shaw: "His influence in our

household ...accustomed me to the scepticism as to academic authority which still persists in me ." <sup>23</sup> Quite casually Shaw drops here a few cues that can lead scholars to a treasure-trove. The brevity of the statement, contrasting with Shaw's habitual loquacity, and the casual manner that is so different from his usual sledgehammering rhetoric deflect the attention of the reader from the intimate connection between this candid remark and Shaw's subsequent heresy. For Shaw picked up from Lee much more than a couple of habits and a critical attitude to doctors. Eating brown bread instead of white is a harmless fad that tells us little except one's idiosyncrasy : there is a touch of exhibitionism and bravado in sleeping with the windows open, and if one is lucky enough to escape pneumonia after exposing oneself to the cold Irish nights, one earns the right to boo others for their cowardice and to lecture on stuffy rooms and polluted air; one also earns the right to scoff at existing hygienic practice and medical advice.

As a child Shaw consciously imitated Lee, as an adult he unconsciously continued to imitate his habits. To a boy unorthodoxy is tempting for the extra attention it fetches him, thereby giving him a chance to stand out in a crowd; from such a position the criticism of doctors is a predictable development, for do doctors not advise against sleeping in the open in winter? Perhaps the extra nutritional value of the brown bread was a necessary invention. That others ate white bread was sufficient reason for opting for the brown one, their amazement being the

necessary incentive. Shaw's devotion to the Jaegar suit and his championing of vegetarianism, in themselves oddity for the sake of oddity and oddity for the sake of higher ethical values respectively, can be traced to the indirect influence of Lee, even if Lee had no use for either.

As in Lee's case, the heady experience of being recognised as different from others must have prompted Shaw to continue with his practice. To be seen as the odd man out in a group is a frustrating experience only when one's attachment to one's group is strong; when it is otherwise, non-conformism is often the easiest way of achieving eminence. The gipsy strain in the physically handicapped Lee understandably chose unorthodox ways of self assertion. It is not unusual for heterodoxy to wear a brief halo in the eyes of a young convert, but such hero worship and conscious imitation are often discarded after a while. Such habits become intriguing only when they persist throughout one's life. The adult Shaw standing apart from others in motley and cap and standing above others on a high moral bench, lecturing to people having no higher place to stand on than the ground, is the continuation of the child eating brown bread and sleeping with the windows open. When the adult Shaw's inability to shed particular childhood habits is seen in conjunction with his fine sense of discrimination in other matters, one is led to suspect that there was something in him and his environment, something quite strange to the vast majority of mortals, that gave him satisfaction not in integration but in isolation.

"All autobiographies are lies...No man is bad enough to tell the truth about himself during his lifetime, involving, as it must, the truth about his family and his friends and colleagues."<sup>24</sup> Shaw made a valiant effort to be truthful about his own wounded snobbery and let out the truth — after having kept it locked in his heart for nearly eighty years — of his shame at attending Central Model Boys' School, a Roman Catholic institution. Yet he did not dare to reveal the truth about Lee's religion, since a Protestant and a Roman Catholic were expected to live in the same house only as master and servant. But there was something more, a terrible thought, that crossed his mind and he could not reveal that thought to anybody. Though Shaw put up a brave front regarding his mother's desertion of the family to go to London with Lee to pursue a career in music, privately he was quite disturbed. Publicly he claimed that "none of us dreamt of there being any unkindness in the arrangement",<sup>25</sup> but privately he must have felt devastated. It will probably never be known conclusively whether or not Lee was Lucinda Elizabeth's lover, but the important fact is that Shaw not only suspected so, but also thought that he might be Lee's natural son.<sup>26</sup>

It is not surprising that inspite of Shaw's strained efforts to sound impersonal, the memory of his father is shot through with a mixture of pity and disgust : in the eyes of his son George Carr Shaw was the ultimate symbol of wretchedness; he was a man who was not only made a cipher in his own house, he was even probably robbed of the right to be the father of his wife's

son. For G.B.S. it meant the loss of an anchorage of which even the most unfortunate are not deprived. The child who had no roots in the family or in society, who was even unsure of his identity in relation to the rest of the family and was left drifting by a family which itself drifted and disintegrated, was probably justified in pronouncing later that "the family ideal is a humbug and a nuisance."<sup>27</sup>

If in Shaw's world his home seems obscure through a haze, his country seems barely visible. This may seem to be a strange observation considering the number of times Ireland is counterpoised against England as the symbol of the ultimate Shavian virtue, realism; but we shall see in due course that Shaw's obsessive preoccupation with stereotype images of these two countries was merely the result of his reactive responses to objective reality threatening to erode his exaggerated self-confidence. A man who does not learn that blood is thicker than water is not likely to assert the superiority of his nation over another, because such aggressive nationalism is merely the glorification of blood-ties and tribal feelings at a higher level of political organization. The aggressive nationalism of an Irish Protestant is the nationalism of the Orangeman. In this respect Shaw had burnt his boats, believing neither in the chosen destiny of King William nor in the sacredness of Dublin Castle. In a country where Catholics and Protestants flew at each other's throats, what could be the nationalism of one who laughed at his putative father's assertion of Protestant superiority only to

prevent himself from crying, and doubted that his actual father was not only a Catholic, but partly gipsy as well ?

One kind of nationalism was still possible for such a man: an inclusive nationalism which had in it a place for every Irishman, a nationalism prompted by the love of Ireland, the love of the Irish soil, the love of Irish history. Such a nationalism could proceed only from a broader humanism - the love of Irishmen must follow from the love of actual men and women. That was impossible in his case because to Shaw Ireland was both the extension of the actual world, which the child recognised as hell, and the symbol of it. He detested Ireland because he detested his environment and his environment was the only Ireland he knew. In the preface to *Immaturity* he shares with his readers his unhappy encounter with his country. At the age of twenty he left his country permanently and we are told by him that he left it in disgust. Not surprisingly he agreed with the Germans when they derisively called him "a fatherlandless fellow."<sup>28</sup>

Shaw's unique situation quickly enabled him to see through other people's idealisation of popular institutions. He could spot the humbug before anyone else, and could see the tares in the wheatfield when others remained blind to them. But this advantage was neutralised by a misfortune : in the soil of his own mind the wheat was gone with the tares, he would be slow to recognise the wheat when he saw it. He knew that the family ideal was a humbug but he did not know the reality behind that ideal. He had reasons to be sceptical about his family but by the process of induction

he moved beyond his experience until he came to distrust man as a species.<sup>29</sup> He was sometimes candid enough to admit that his emotional deprivation had turned him into "a treacherous brute in matters of pure affection"<sup>30</sup> but in the same breath he argued that the overall influence had been beneficial, giving him a "fearful self-sufficiency".<sup>31</sup> He did not seem to realize that only the unfortunate boast of self-sufficiency.

A child who is deprived of those blessings which other children enjoy as a matter of course cannot be said to be fortunate. Instead of weeping over his misfortune Shaw quickly turned it to his advantage. His parents — the term includes the mother and the three fathers — instilled in him, without aiming to perform such admirable duty, the habit of not swallowing everything with which his young and growing mind was fed. In an atmosphere that would have caused confusion to a less agile mind, Shaw, instead of swallowing his lessons, began to dig his teeth into them. In a world of anarchy one has to be strong in order to survive. Randy laughter, thoroughly seasoned sarcasm, thoughtless bawdy expressions and blasphemous irreverence were freely being tossed about in that world. Severally or in combination they could have broken his spirits or could have turned him into another wit without moral concern. Instead, they made him open-eyed and led him to doubt, to ask fresh questions and reach new conclusions. Instead of making the world chaotic, the unsettled moral atmosphere forced him to work out a new order. Through conscious choice he rejected the people around him and decided to be

different from them.

Shaw calls himself a born iconoclast.<sup>32</sup> Iconoclasm comes easily to one who casts around for worthy ideals but finds only clay idols. There is a touch of pathos in his words when he boasts: "The institution of family, which is the centre of romance for carefully brought-up children, was just the opposite for me."<sup>33</sup> Shaw prides himself on making the skeletons in the family cupboard dance, but his flippancy barely succeeds in concealing his sadness at the fact that instead of a family he got a family cupboard full of skeletons. The things that one normally expects in a family were absent in his home. The things that he got — his father's humour, his mother's musical sense — are things one can get from friends, teachers or acquaintances. But what cannot be obtained adequately in a creche, a school, a club or a music-hall — affection and love, emotional protection and unconditional acceptance — were the very things Shaw never got. What is equally important is the fact that Shaw had no knowledge of his parents getting these things from their parents either. He comments adversely on his father's upbringing and is well aware that his maternal grandfather wanted to ruin his daughter — G.B.S.'s mother — for preventing his second marriage by getting him arrested for debt.<sup>34</sup>

The socialist in Shaw discovered in the family the spirit of *laissez-faire*, in which everyone is allowed to fend for himself and to blunder along according to his idiosyncrasies. To Shaw, as to Plato, the utility of the family lay in its ability to

produce good citizens, and like Plato he found it an inefficient agency to perform that task. The family in which he was born was bad enough, the family in which his father was born produced an incompetent drunkard, the family that produced his mother was unspeakable. His mind could travel back and forth for three generations without discovering a trace of parental care or filial affection. His own parents were hardly parents, he himself never had a chance to compensate for this deficiency because when he grew up and had his own home, it was more a house than a home : his wife never became a mother, he himself never became any child's father. Thus he was excluded from the most precious experiences of a man's life. No doubt he was able to claim: "Our indifference to oneanother's deaths marked us as a remarkably unsentimental family."<sup>35</sup>

The irony of Shaw's situation was that though he had consciously rejected his environment, he himself was shaped by it. His overall attitude to his parents and relatives was negative, yet far too much of these people had gone into his own making. He fashioned his rebellion against them with the equipments handed over to him by these very people. His revulsion against the values of his father and Uncle Walter was expressed in a style remarkably similar to theirs. His rejection of his mother took the shape of his mother's emotional response to her husband and children. Having been denied a secure tradition in which his talents could blossom he had no option but to become a heretic and his heresy took the form of denial. After moving to London he associated with

other heretics.<sup>36</sup> Having rejected his childhood, his relatives and his country, he had to find a new set of people with whom he could identify himself; he needed a new world where he could feel at home.

Shelley was one of those writers who could fill up<sup>o</sup> the vacuum left by his parents. At a meeting of the Shelley Society Shaw declared that he admired Shelley because the latter was "a socialist, an atheist and a vegetarian."<sup>37</sup> These words are significant. Shelley's profound humanity, his recognition of the supreme value of love had little effect on Shaw; he was attracted to the negative ideals, he was drawn to a man who did not believe in God, did not eat meat and did not believe in private property.<sup>38</sup> Thus he dedicated his energy to the creation of the new man who would not only be the antithesis of the men who deeply influenced his childhood, but would also be really worthy of his boast of "frightful self-sufficiency." His novels were founded on the imperfectly suppressed memory of pain and anger and were meant to be his revenge against a life of misery. Life had not given him his dues, he revenged himself on life as a young novelist by creating a world where the fundamental needs of a normal person were repudiated by the protagonists as redundant. But as he was an artist and not an apologist there was a considerable gap between his conscious intentions and his actual performance.

A brief recapitulation of Shaw's childhood is a useful starting point for a discussion his messianic comedy, for the

actual source to which the Shavian superman can be traced is Shaw's life or, more precisely, his childhood.

3

1. Speaking to his biographer, Hesketh Pearson, Shaw confessed: "All my plays are about myself...and my friends." Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw : His Life and Personality*, p.436. While some of his plays such as *The Philanderer* and *The Apple Cart* contain tell-tale biographical details, others like *Man and Superman*, *Pygmalion* and *Heartbreak House* are autobiographical in a deeper, if less obvious, sense : these plays dramatize Shaw's private doubts and his debates with himself.
2. St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw : His Life, Work and Friends*, p.3.
3. Ivor Brown, *Shaw in His Time*, p. 6.
4. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 44.
5. *Immaturity*, Preface, p. xxi.
6. *Ibid*, p. xxiv.
7. *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw : a Correspondence*, pp. 214-215. Heretofore referred to as *The Terry Letters*.
8. Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. I, p. 16.
9. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 12.
10. *Ibid*.
11. *Ibid*, p. 13.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Holroyd, *op. cit.* p. 16.
15. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 14.
16. *The Terry Letters*, p. 215.

17. *Immaturity*, Preface, p. xxii.
18. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 15.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
21. Holroyd, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 14.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
25. *Immaturity*, Preface p. xi.
26. Holroyd, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Beatrice Webb wrote in her diary for 12 May, 1911 : "The photograph published in the Henderson Biography makes it quite clear to me that he [G.B.S.] was the child of G.J.V. Lee, that vain, witty and distinguished musical genius who lived with them. The expression on Lee's face is quite amazingly like G.B.S. when I first knew him. One wonders whether G.B.S. meant this fact to be communicated to the public." Quoted in Holroyd, *Ibid.*
27. *Misalliance*, Preface, CP IV, p. 117.
28. *Immaturity*, Preface, p. xxxv.
29. A significant confession is made in the pages of *Sixteen Self Sketches*: "A critic has recently described me as having 'a kindly dislike of my fellow creatures.' Dread would have been nearer the mark than dislike, for man is the only animal of which I am thoroughly and cravenly afraid." *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 43. Numerous expressions of this fear and distrust are found in Shaw. The disillusionment with man, expressed so eloquently in *Man and*

*Superman*, becomes increasingly bitter in later years.

30. *The Terry Letters*, p. 116.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Immaturity*, Preface, p. xvii.

33. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

34. Shaw says that his mother had innocently let out to her uncle the news of her father's intended wedding. The uncle got Gurly arrested, but Lucinda Elizabeth's father believed that her daughter had betrayed her deliberately. As a revenge he made an unsuccessful attempt to cut his daughter out of his first-marriage settlement. See Holroyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

35. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 94.

36. See W. Sylvester Smith, "Bernard Shaw and the London Hetics", in Norman Rosenblood (ed.), *Shaw : Seven Critical Essays*, pp.51-69.

37. *Immaturity*, Preface, p. xvii.

38. Socialism was for Shelley a positive goal, necessary for man's liberation from the tyranny of social inequity. As we shall later see, Shaw did not proceed to socialism so much from his love of men as from his hatred of capitalism. Sympathy for the oppressed and anger at the oppressor may go hand in hand, but in Shaw's case the critical attitude to capitalism was far stronger than the sympathy for its victims.

## Chapter 3

## The Prehistory of the Superman : the Novels

" A novelist has one novel,his own."

Robert Lowell, *Ford Madox Ford*

The novels were the harvest of Shaw's generally lonely years in London from 1879 to 1884 . It is almost customary to look for autobiographical elements in an author's early works . In Shaw's case the tendency is more pronounced, especially because in these works one can easily trace many elements of his personal life. In *Immaturity* , written in 1879,one can easily see the correspondence between Smith , the shy young clerk ,and the diffident Shaw who just spent years in Dublin as a junior clerk in a landagent's office ; between Smith's resignation as a clerk and Shaw's giving up of the job under similar circumstances ; between Smith's shyness with Harriet and Shaw's with May Morris. As one reads this novel along with the ones that follow, one is immediately struck by the fact that *Immaturity* is the least Shavian of his novels. In every subsequent work except *Cashel Byron's Profession*,Shaw makes personal statements through his fiction inasmuch as his works are related to his effort to compensate though veiled self-apotheosis for his isolation and loneliness . In a way the later novels are

slanted statements, whereas *Immaturity* presents a straight panoramic view. Smith is a starry-eyed youth who, without resorting to a mask of either superiority or indifference, reveals himself as a gawky outsider eager to be accepted and willing to forge human bonds with all and sundry, scanning everything about him with curiosity, walking into the lives of a whole range of men and women, acting and reacting, changing them in the process and being changed by them. No part of his humanity has yet been frozen by that touch of unreality which is imparted to a number of Shavian characters as they surrender their human sympathies to their creator's notion of the superman.

In spite of his pretensions to scholarship, Smith is, apart from Cashel Byron, the least cerebral among the heroes of Shaw's novels. It is his refreshing normalcy that sets him apart from people like Conolly and Trefusis. Many years later this must have been evident to Shaw, who wrote :

There must be a certain quality of youth in it which I could not now recapture and which may even have charm as well as weakness and absurdity ... Also, there will be nothing of the voice of the public speaker in it : the voice that rings through so much of my later work. Not until *Immaturity* was finished, late in 1879, did I for the first time rise to my feet in a little debating club called the Zetetical Society, to make, in a condition of heartbreaking nervousness, my first

assault on an audience.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this deficiency was not as much of a disadvantage as Shaw thought. The public speaker must thrive by effacing the half tones of private conversation, by inventing for himself a pose and living up to it, by resorting, through exaggeration and distortion, to half-truths and even untruths. The face of a public speaker often ossifies into a mask, and the absence of the mask is the most remarkable thing about Shaw's first novel. Shaw remarked that as a novelist he had not yet achieved "a clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligible theory"<sup>2</sup> and thought that the absence of such a theory had handicapped him as a novelist. However, readers are apt to feel that the absence of a Shavian theory does not impoverish the novel but makes it refreshingly different from at least three of the novels that follow.

*Immaturity* is loosely constructed. Everything and everyone that Smith comes across is recorded with the enthusiastic attitude of an aficionado. Shaw achieves something like negative capability as he accommodates un-Shavian views in the novel. For instance, the preacher John Davis is ridiculous as far as his theology is concerned, and yet his attempt to overcome his loneliness through the love of women, though it is couched in the same ridiculous language, seems less despicable than similar attempts by Trefusis's wife in *An Unsocial Socialist*, or by

Julia Craven in *The Philanderer* or even by Octavius in *Man and Superman*. About his infatuation for Harriet Davis says :

I went mad over her. No man even loved like what I did, Mr Smith. Then as you read in the novel books and such could not love like earnest men, as I could. I was practised to throw my whole heart and soul into a thing when once I felt it. Other men had their souls to think of; but I hadnt. Mine was saved ; and I well knew it. I knew I was doing God's will when I fell in love. It's ordained in the Bible that we should. I didnt obey the Bible by halves, Mr Smith.<sup>3</sup>

What the reader acquainted with *Three Plays for Puritans* will find surprising is that the author is capable of sympathising with Davis's passion. In his later years Shaw shows an unusual sense of dialectic by being fair to contrary points of view — we have to remember *Major Barbara* and *Saint Joan* — but he rarely tries, as he does here, to get under the skin of a ridiculous character like Davis. In the later novels this expansiveness, this spontaneous sympathy with suffering inspite of the stupidity of the sufferer, this Chekhovian mixture of the comic and the pathetic give way to a flippant imperviousness to pain.

Shaw's subsequent uneasiness with this novel is understandable because a gulf separates *Immaturity* from the rest of his works: there is a greater difference between his

first novel and *An Unsocial Socialist* than between the latter and *Back to Methuselah*. Unlike the heroes of the subsequent plays and novels neither Robert Smith nor Cyril Scott has grown too big for the world around him. Smith is charmed by the Alhambra, Scott is cut to the quick by Lady Geraldine's coldness and Harriet's criticism. Both the characters fall in love and both would think — Scott actually says he does — the attitude of the Shavian Vessey cynical. In the novel we have a glimpse of the face of the young Shaw behind his mask as we encounter an anxious Smith reflecting on his meeting with Harriet: "Why should she not have been glad to see me? How stupidly I torment myself by supposing that the commonest human feelings are suspended when I am in question."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it is not without significance that in his later work, such observations come not from the stellar characters but from persons rejected by Shaw's heroes — from Conolly's wife, from Julia, from Cleopatra, and from Judith Anderson. These unfortunate characters learn to reconcile themselves to the suspension of "the commonest human feelings".

In the preface Shaw remarks that he was a complete outsider when he wrote *Immaturity*. Yet Smith and Scott are not outsiders in the sense that Edward Conolly, Owen Jack and Sidney Trefusis are outsiders. Smith and Scott are outsiders because of their circumstances, not by choice.

Each has the makings of an insider, if by an insider one means a person happily adjusted to society. Isabella is the only person with whom Smith behaves in a Shavian manner. It is by no means typical of his response to society in general. He has more than common respect for Isabella's father, reserves respectful admiration for Harriet and is charmed by the Alhambra. The insouciance of the dancer—the passion flower—overwhelms him. Not he but the painter Scott shows some independence of society. When Harriet has the misgiving that society may scoff at him for marrying a lowly dress-maker, Scott declares that he can afford to have society on his own terms. If we presume that Shaw split his self-image into two—into Smith and Scott—we are led to the conclusion that the fascination of the great London world for a callow youth far outweighed any possible contempt for it. It is because of this that the characters seem so convincing.

There is a fluidity in the narrative as the lens through which the characters are viewed shifts from moment to moment—mild caricature, the result of looking at people through Smith's prejudice, is offset by shifting the lens and looking at incidents through an insider's point of view.

In the preface to the novel Shaw hints with a touch of embarrassment that through Smith he has revealed his natural self: "At the time of which I am writing, however,

I had not yet learnt to act, nor come to understand that my natural character was impossible on the great stage of London".<sup>5</sup>

Curiously enough the deep strangeness which made Shaw, according to himself, a sojourner on the planet rather than its native is not to be found in the first novel. He says that he "had to become an actor and create for [himself] a fantastic personality fit and apt for dealing with men."<sup>6</sup> It is possible that the strangeness itself was a subsequent<sup>o</sup> mask that Shaw wore until the mask became the face. A similar hypothesis is hinted by a startling observation in the preface in which the well-known Shavian relation between life and art is reversed<sup>7</sup> :

Even when I was a good boy I was so only theatrically, because, as actors say, I saw myself in the character ; and this occurred very seldom, my taste running so strongly on stage villains and stage demons ( I painted the white-washed wall in my bedroom in Dalkey with watercolor frescos of Mephistopheles ) that I must have actually bewitched myself; for when Nature completed my countenance in 1880 or thereabouts ( I had only the tenderest sprouting of hair on my face until I was 24 ) I found myself equipped with the upgrowing moustache and eyebrows, and the sarcastic nostrils of the operatic fiend whose airs ( by Gunod ) I had sung as a child, and whose attitudes had affected

my boyhood. Later on, as the generations moved past me, I saw the fantasies of actors and painters come to life as living men and women and began to perceive that imaginative fiction is to life what the sketch is to the picture or the conception to the statue. The world is full of ugly little men who were taken to the theatre to see the Yellow Dwarf or Rumpelstiltskin when they were children ; and we shall soon have women in all directions with the features of Movie Vamps because in childhood they were taken to picture palaces and inspired with an ambition to be Serpents of Nile.<sup>8</sup>

This is one of the rare instances in which one finds Shaw speaking like his antithesis Oscar Wilde that life copies art.<sup>9</sup> But this is in keeping with his admission in the preface that he found his natural character impossible on the London stage and had, therefore, to invent a mask. In a flash of inspiration Shaw grasped the fact that if art generally imitates life, life too sometimes reciprocates by following art. Here we are concerned not with the general validity of the statement but with its applicability to Shaw's own life. The imitation of art did not stop with his childhood, for what one witnesses in the novels is the exact replication of the process through which " the fantasies of actors and painters come to life as living men and women ."

Shaw admits that when *Immaturity* was written he had not yet learnt the art of acting. Smith is Shaw's unmasked self

but the art of acting—— the art of devising an appropriate mask—— is not an art of deception, it is the art of creating a new self. In the preface Shaw compares himself with the hero of *Cool as a Cucumber*, a farce in which a hopelessly shy young man is transformed into an insufferably insolent person. What the hero achieves is an escape from a restrictive role into one affording greater manoeuvrability. The transformation of Smith into Trefusis, a transformation that takes place over a span of five novels, is not less dramatic than the change in *Cool as a Cucumber*, or the change in Shaw's physique brought about by his fascination for Gunod. *The Irrational Knot* marks the beginning of that dramatic transformation as the shy Smith makes way for the monstrously confident Conolly.

## II

Edward Conolly, the hero of *The Irrational Knot*, is an electrical engineer. In 1897 Shaw worked for the Edison Telephone Company. No doubt he drew upon his experience in creating the hero of his second novel. Conolly meets Marian Lind, they are attracted to each other and marry, but soon after marriage they discover that they have no compatibility. Conolly's coldness draws his wife away from him into the arms of Sholto Douglas, her rejected admirer, but if Conolly is cold and insensitive, Douglas is vain and mean. Thus the bond between him and Marian is no more

rational than the knot of marriage between Marian and Conolly. So the two separate after their elopement, which takes them to America, with Marian carrying the child of Douglas. In this novel all forms of cohabitation come a cropper, with the elopement faring as badly as the marriage. One would expect Shaw, a proclaimed rebel and heretic, to attack hollow institutions that are unsupported by natural affection, but the alliance between Marmaduke and Susanna belies that expectation. The two love each other and are sufficiently strong to cling to each other without the prop of marriage. Yet the two fall out and Susanna goes steeply downhill owing to her drunkenness and is left by Marmaduke to die in America as a wreck, and Marmaduke marries the brainless Constance. Shaw made tall claims for the novel, calling it "a fiction of the first order" because "the morality is original and not ready-made."<sup>10</sup> It is on the basis of this original morality that Shaw claimed that the novel had been "an early attempt on the part of the Life Force to write *A Doll's House* in English"<sup>11</sup> long before the name of Ibsen was known to him.

There is some confusion in maintaining that Marian's views are "hopelessly second hand"<sup>12</sup> and in insisting in the same breath that she is the Nora of Shaw's version of *A Doll's House*. The "original morality" may look a little shop-worn to readers familiar with Shaw's later works, but at the time when it was written, the novel must have been

mildly shocking even to the reader acquainted with the unorthodoxy of George Eliot or the hard-nosed cynicism of Thackeray, since it presents nothing short of a complete inversion of popular values. The reader is invited to see the world mainly through the eyes of Conolly and Elinor, and even though the two differ on a number of subjects they agree as outsiders that the world of the insiders is damned. Nothing escapes the broad sweep of condemnation—— not the family, nor the Church, nor the aristocracy . The frequent diatribe against parents, with which the readers of *Cashel Byron's profession* , *The Devil's Disciple*, *Man and Superman* , *Misalliance* and *Too True to be Good* are so familiar, begins with *The Irrational Knot*. Elinor considers sadism as an essential feature of parenthood. When accused of cynicism by Marian she retorts: " What is the use of straining after an amiable view of things, Marian, when a cynical view is most likely to be a true one ?"<sup>13</sup>

What is noteworthy is that as the novel develops and we have a more comprehensive view of the characters and events we are forced to agree with her judgement even though we may feel that the same judgement could have been expressed in less blistering terms. Much of the harshness is the result of Nelly's uncompromising truthfulness : "If amiability consists in maintaining that black is white, it is a quality which anyone can acquire at the expense of telling a lie and sticking to it,"<sup>14</sup>

Both her harshness and her truthfulness become Sybilline when set against the backdrop of the Countess's amiability. The latter takes an amiable view of things by refusing to break off her daughter's marriage with Marmaduke even after learning that he is living with another woman. She gives a demonstration of the same amiable view of things in rebuking her son for pointing out such unamiable truths. She knows that "such things are recognized though of course they are not spoken of. No lady would with common decency pretend to know that such connexions are possible."<sup>15</sup>

In a world where the Church is represented by Lind, the aristocracy by the Countess and lady-like decency by Constance, Elinor finds positive values in the fallen woman, Susanna :

I don't pity Marmaduke one bit : if the whole family cut him he will deserve it richly ; but I do sympathise with him. Can you wonder at his preference ? When we went to see that woman last June, I envied her. There she was, clever, independent, successful, holding her own in the world, fascinating a crowd of people, whilst we poor respectable nonentities sat pretending to despise her- as if we were not waiting until some man in want of female slave should offer us our board and privilege of his lordly name with "Misses" before it for our lifelong services. <sup>16</sup>

Nelly's revolt against society is more thoroughgoing than that of any other character in the novel except Conolly : she explodes Marian's delusions about family life by reminding her that she was welcome to be happy as long as she did nothing but that which had the approval of her father. She knows that for a woman with brains and self-respect the journey from the father's house to the husband's is a movement from the frying pan to the fire. Determined not to submit to that sanctified prostitution, marriage, she insists: " I would rather die than sell myself for ever to a man ..."<sup>17</sup>

Her revolt assumes almost Swiftian proportions when she tells Marian that the average person is more insufferable than a felon because one is allowed to shoot the latter but not the former.

The similarity between Nelly and her creator goes deeper than the proximity between their general attitudes towards society : their approach to reality seems to have been moulded by the same kind of parental influence and the same kind of education. We have seen that deep down in his soul the trauma of Shaw's childhood left as much bitterness as Nelly's. Being unable to vent that bitterness in similar terms in his own person , he chose a number of novels and plays from the *Irrational Knot* and *Cashel Byron's Profession* to *Misalliance* and *Too True to be Good* that stun us by the intensity of the animosity existing between parents and

children .

Elinor expresses the author's nihilism ; through her Shaw articulates his own revolt and denial. The world is simply monstrous in Elinor's eyes, the only person she can partially identify with is Susanna, who lives virtually outside the pale of society.

The Irish lad who was an outsider both in his own country and in England, who was shut out of his mother's love and father's protection, who was filled with bitter shame at the antics of a drunkard of a father and assailed with doubts as to the legitimacy of his own birth could not have been more amiably disposed towards the world than Nelly because as a young man he was not treated less harshly than Nelly by the world and was no less sensitive to pain. In fact Nelly is Shaw in skirts, or at least a very significant part of him that he could not reveal to the world without fictional disguise.

If Shaw expressed an aspect of his own rebellion through Elinor, he chose Conolly to articulate the other aspect. A man from the New World, Conolly is the natural aristocrat and the antithesis to the decadence of the artificial aristocracy created by the English class system. The gentlemen of the world have closed the doors of society on the face of this proletarian and workman. He, and not any of the characters of *Immaturity*, is the outsider Shaw spoke of in the preface to his first novel. But Conolly is an

outsider who is determined to break into society even at the cost of breaking society in the process.

As an outsider Shaw finds a suitable character in him to represent an important part of himself. The symbolic nature of Conolly's alienation blends completely with literal facts, because even literally Conolly is an outsider. He is an Irish American determined, like his Irish creator, to conquer England. Conolly is the sum total of the different aspects of revolt articulated through the other characters of the novel. Susanna and Marmaduke revolt against society's notion of propriety, Elinor revolts against the superstition that affection and consanguinity are closely related, even Marian revolts against the sacredness of marriage. Conolly represents, on the other hand, more than any particular aspect of revolt : he symbolises the negation of almost every norm of society. The basis of his revolt is the faith in the supremacy of reason, a faith that teaches him to despise almost everything in life because he believes that the world — and this includes social organisations as well as individual impulses — is monstrously irrational. Marian says about him :

I envy him sometimes myself. What would you give to be never without a purpose, to regard life as a succession of objects each to be accomplished by so many days' work ... to study love, family affection and friendship as a doctor studies breathing or digestion ; to look on

disinterestedness as either weakness or hypocrisy, and in death as a mere transfer of your social function to some member of the next generation ? <sup>18</sup>

In the preface to his first novel Shaw regrets that the author of *Immaturity* was not yet a philosopher. In the second novel he more than compensates for the deficiency of the first, for Conolly is not content to be a philosopher, he uses his philosophy with devastating effect. His attitude to common expressions of affection is embodied in such statements as : " Arm to arm is such an inconvenient and ridiculous mode of locomotion ...Our present mode of proceeding would be inexcusable if I were a traction-engine and you my tender." <sup>19</sup>

Conolly's impact on the other characters is nothing short of shattering. He is the type of superman that sucks life out of men and women around him in order to flourish, and does so unconsciously. Not aware of the impact of his superiority, he is like the huge banyan tree in the shadow of which no plant can live. There is one remarkable passage in the novel that reveals how common human feelings wilt in his presence. His impersonal observations on his wife had withered Marian so completely that she could never sing in his presence. The following passage describes how a party broke up as Conolly, who had gone out, returned home :

As [ Marian ] sang the last strain, the click of

the latch-key was heard from without. Instantly she rose ; closed the pianoforte softly; and sat down at some distance from it. Her action was reflected by a change in their behaviour. They remembered that they were not at home, and became more or less uneasily self-conscious. Elinor was the least disturbed. Conolly's first glance on entering was at the piano : he next went in search of his wife.

" Ah ! " he said surprised. " I thought somebody was singing. "

" Oh dear , no ! " said Elinor, " You must be mistaken. "

" Perhaps so, " he said smiling. " But I have been listening carefully at the window for ten minutes ; and I certainly dreamt that I heard " Auld Robin Gray. " <sup>20</sup>

Perhaps no other passage in the novel explains the extent of Conolly's alienation from life and society. He might as well have been a man from a different planet, as every aspect of his life seems outlandish to the ordinary man. Having made reason his guiding principle, he sees nothing odd in encouraging other men to make love to his wife. When Marian asks him whether he likes other men to be in love with her, he replies : " Yes it makes the house pleasant for them ; it makes them attentive to you ; and it gives you great power for good " <sup>21</sup>

Shaw's subsequent disapproval of the novel and its hero on the ground that they represent the soul-killing principle of rationalism <sup>22</sup> is thoroughly misleading as we shall see

later that Conolly is an unerring anticipation of the Shavian heroes who come into the world after their author has jettisoned his faith in the sovereignty of reason.

Conolly's confidence in his own superiority makes him act with godlike detachment. He changes himself from a person to an intellectual principle and confronts others, including his wife, not as a human being but as disembodied intelligence. As he plays to perfection the role of the disinterested spectator vis-à-vis things that vitally affect him and his wife he pushes her towards the inane and unscrupulous Sholto Douglas. His impersonality stretches to the point where he can show disinterested concern for Douglas catching cold after he has violated the sanctity of Conolly's marriage ; his commitment to his intellectual preoccupations makes his work at Glasgow more valuable to him than his wife ; his fidelity to a rational code of conduct makes him recoil from his wife's embrace when she wishes to cling to him during the greatest crisis of her life. Overall, Edward Conolly resembles the Ancients of *Back to Methuselah* much more than he resembles any living man in the actual world.

In Conolly Shaw mixes his craving for the superman with a modicum of satire directed at his own self. Shaw's attitude towards the superman has always been ambivalent, more ambivalent in the novels than in the plays of his last years. Comparing Conolly with Smith we realize

that the conception of the former was a mode of compensation for the pathetic shyness of the young Dubliner on the great London stage. Shaw himself gives us the clue to the transformation of Smith into Conolly :

In my boyhood I saw Charles Matthews act in a farce called *Cool as a Cucumber*. The hero was a young man just returned from a tour of the world, upon which he had been sent to cure him of an apparently hopeless bashfulness ; and the fun lay in the cure having overshot the mark and transformed him into a monster of outrageous impudence. I am not sure that something of the kind did not happen to me, for when my imposture was at last accomplished and I daily pulled the threads of the puppet who represented me in the public press, the applause that greeted it was not unlike that which Matthews drew in *Cool as a Cucumber*.<sup>23</sup>

One has to amend Shaw's remarks a little to understand the relationship between *Immaturity* and *The Irrational Knot*. Conolly is not a puppet on strings, both he and Smith lay hidden in Shaw's soul before being created, and however incompatible they may seem, they are the two faces of the same man ——— Smith is the author's naked self, his bridge to common humanity , and Conolly is the wounded man trying to forget the bitter memories by adopting the posture of superhuman indifference towards the world. Since Shaw's

self-dramatisation succeeds in changing the natural self into a fantastic figure, he can still maintain the necessary distance from his mask by offsetting Conolly's extremism with touches of human sanity. One such touch comes from Marian as she reproves Conolly for his apparent cynicism :

People do fall in love, fortunately for them. It may be injudicious ; and it may turn out badly ; but it fills up life in a way that all the barren philosophy and cynicism on earth cannot. Do you think I would not rather have to regret a lost love than to repine because I had been too cautious to love at all ? I verily believe that the disappointments of love warm the heart more than the triumphs of insensibility.<sup>24</sup>

She almost annihilates her husband's wisdom with one blasting sentence : "How much irreparable mischief, I wonder, did we do ourselves by letting our little wisdoms stifle all our big instincts."<sup>25</sup>

Applying the Shawian categories formulated in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* one may call Conolly a Realist and Marian an Idealist.<sup>26</sup> In this the two correspond roughly to Don Juan and the Devil in *Man and Superman*, but Shaw's attitude towards the characters is more ambivalent in the novel than in the play. In *Man and Superman* he can reconcile the philosophy to the comedy by constructing the comedy with average men and women, persons solidly entrenched in

humanity with all its ridiculousness and vulgarity, and accommodating the philosophy in a dream. The superhumanity of Juan does not therefore jar on the nerves of the audience ; but because of adopting the realistic mode in the novel, Shaw is not able to work out a resolution of his conflicting impulses. The impression that one gets is that of the author's schizophrenia : the alternate castigation and glorification of the main character owing to the indecisiveness of the author.<sup>27</sup>

*The Irrational Knot* depicts a world in which comedy is not possible. In *Immaturity* people are of various shades, one can isolate some characters without isolating all and without denying the world. Symptomatic of the difference between the two novels are the two endings. In *Immaturity* Scott's baby grows up, and we have the assurance that Smith will grow up one day : change leads to ripeness. In *The Irrational Knot* Conolly's marriage is fruitless. Elinor, the other Shavian persona, rejects her sexual role in choosing the career of a novelist. Society is uniformly banal, all relations end in sterility and at the end of the novel the reader is left guessing whether the hero is superhuman or subhuman. Every significant force in the novel is centrifugal and life is shown to be a junkyard. Marian's blasting criticism of Conolly shows that Shaw was probably aware that there is little to choose between his rationalist hero and the irrational and inane Sholto Douglas, but his

subjective need to articulate his own angst was so great that his hero is led to despise almost the entire world. As a result, a half-formed grotesque figure remains suspended in the air, above the rough and tumble of life, an unconvincing philosopher, an insufferable person, a complete automaton. Shaw indeed resembled the hero of *Cool as a Cucumber* in overshooting his mark.

### III

Written in 1881, *Love Among the Artists*, Shaw's third novel, takes up the problem of reconciling man's social life with the pursuit of art. All the major characters in the novel realize the difficulty in their own lives, each making a sacrifice according to his or her temperament in order to achieve one or the other. Owen Jack is a composer, Adrian Herbert and Mary Sutherland are painters, Aurelie Szczimplica a pianist and Madge Brailsford an actress.

From the beginning Shaw tries to make his hero an anathema to those whose notions of beauty and art hinge on prettiness. His description of Jack is of a piece with his attack on sentimental romance. Thus Jack is made physically repulsive. He is "a short, thick-chested young man, in an old creased frock coat...pitted by small pox", and "thick in the palm, with short fingers and nails bitten to the quick."<sup>28</sup> As Herbert says, "Nature does not seem to have formed Mr Jack for the pursuit of fine art."<sup>29</sup>

Shaw contrasts the true artist intent on mastering

reality with the dilettante using art as an excuse for an escape into unreality. As a representative of the latter type, Adrian Herbert chooses as his subject the legend of the Lady of Shalott. As the contrary type of artist, Jack cannot but despise such art : " A sudden setting of his mouth and derisive twinkle in his eye, showed that he found something half ludicrous, half contemptible in his work..."<sup>30</sup> The choice of these two types is not accidental in Shaw : the recurrent contrast between the artist and the respectable dilettante, between the rebel and the conventional man, between the outsider and the insider, between the happily adjusted and the contemptuously critical form one of the main patterns of his art.<sup>31</sup>

The two artistic types show the corresponding differences as individuals : Herbert, unsure, hobbling in self-esteem, needs to lean on Mary Sutherland. He says to her : " Has it occurred to you that if by accident... your sympathies come to be diverted from me, I should lose the only person whose belief in me has helped me to believe in myself ? How utterly desolate I should be !" <sup>32</sup> Jack, on the other hand, considers his proposal to Mary a folly. The two genuine artists in the novel, he and Aurelie, are totally self-sufficient, and to each of them love is a distraction, the lover or the beloved an unworthy rival of art, an impediment to further development. Jack says to Mary : "Henceforth I shall devote myself to the only mistress I am

fitted for, Music. She has not many such masters."<sup>33</sup> Likewise Aurelie says to Adrian : "I think you are very injudicious to care so much for love . To me it is the most stupid thing in the world. I prefer music " <sup>34</sup>

In the novel we learn much more about the artists than about their art. At the end of the novel we know much more about Jack's attitude to life and to men than about his art. The focal point of the author's attention is the attitude of the characters— even the aesthetic attitudes are reflections of social attitudes. Paradoxically, the hero, who wants to replace the passion for shamming with the passion for truth, and insists, through his revolt against tyranny of all forms, on the intimate relation between life and art ends up in a defensive posture by withdrawing from life and love in the name of art. The reader is thus forced into the conclusion that in Jack and Aurelie Shaw is studying Conolly and Elinor in a different set of circumstances; the differences between the heroes, owing to the difference in their vocations, are less significant than their similarity, and in this they are prompted by their author. In spite of the difference in their behaviour Conolly and Jack have an important underlying similarity— self-absorption and egoism.

Jack is ill-mannered, highly temperamental, uncaring about the impression he creates in others .A man of great energy, he is overbearing and even haughty, always managing

to convey the impression of suppressed violence. All that is a far cry from Conolly's suave self-possession but this difference is less important than the similarity in their motivation : both are driven by a scorn for the laws of society. Jack says to Madge's father : "I am as well versed in the usages of the world as you , and I have sworn not to comply with them when they demand a tacit tolerance of oppression. The laws of society, sir, are designed to make the world easy for cowards and liars." 35

If the novel gives a sketchy account of Jack's art and a detailed account of his nature it is because after completing *The Irrational Knot* Shaw had to find a different plot for the same theme that was racking his brains : the theme of revolt.

Adrian Herbert is the perfect bourgeois, the artist with unimpeachable manners. If Owen Jack is the perfect outsider, Adrian is the perfect insider: in his art, in his manners, in his love, in his absence of passion, in his regard for propriety, he is the incarnation of respectability. Not unexpectedly, he commits Jack to the Index expurgatorius. Jack is to him merely an execrable musician : he swears never to mention him again.

The title of the novel is slightly misleading because love is plainly held in contempt by Jack and Aurelie, the two people who are the only true artists in this novel. Since we learn much more about what the artist does outside

the world of art than what he or she does inside it, what we witness in the novel is the gradual alienation of the genuine artist from the world.

That Jack's perception of the world carries the endorsement of the author becomes clear when Mary Sutherland, the most sympathetic character in the novel, repeats Jack's feelings on a different chord and exclaims that the " world is not fit for any honest woman to live in " and that it has some base construction to put on every effort to be just and tell the truth. "36

Lady Geraldine's remark that the world does not tolerate heroism on the foundation of weakness is a minor amendment because Mary's bitterness springs from experience while Lady Geraldine's optimism is *a priori*.

The two persons endowed with genius view life and art in a remarkably similar manner and harden their hearts similarly to the lures of life. In spite of possessing a high civic sense that leads her to nurse an injured and drunken youth, Aurelie is, quite unconsciously, heartless to her mother and her husband. Her mother finds her " an ingrate, a heart of marble".<sup>37</sup> Aurelie is temperamental and unforgiving and soon discovers that her marriage was a mistake : "What madness possessed me, an artist to marry ? Did I not know that it is ever the end of an artist's career ? "38

After Shaw's discovery of the philosopher in himself, that is, after *Immaturity*, all the heroes and heroines of

his novels with the exception of Cashel Byron and Lydia Carew see love as a sign of weakness. To lose one's heart to someone else is to be weak. After honest self-analysis Aurelie says to Adrian Herbert, her husband: "I cannot love. I can feel it in the music—— in the romance —— in the poetry ; but in real life —— it is impossible."<sup>39</sup>

The only escape for these people from their claustrophobic egoism is their work. Aurelie unwittingly admits to Charlie that her heart is barren :

In my infancy I named a star after every one whom I liked. Only very particular persons were given a place in Charles Wain. It was the great chariot of honor ; and in the end I found no one worthy of it but my doll and myself. Behold how I am poetic ! I was a silly child ; for I forgot to give my mother a star —— I forgot all my family. When my mother found that out one day, she said I had no heart and , indeed I fear I have none.<sup>40</sup>

In Shaw the genius has to be heartless. Thus Jack almost repeats Aurelie's words : " ...it is marriage that kills the heart and keeps it dead. Better starve the heart than overfeed it. Better still to feed it only on fine food, like music "<sup>41</sup>

Edward Conolly, the leading character of *The Irrational Knot* makes a brief appearance in the novel. His veiled

references to his own life seem to indicate a dilemma shared by Shaw himself. Conolly says to Mary Sutherland :

You want a man that is not Passion's slave. I hope you may never get him. He would make an excellent God, but a most unpleasant man, and an unbearable husband. What would you be to a wholly self-sufficient man ? Affection would be a superfluity with which you would be ashamed to trouble him.<sup>42</sup>

These words are in keeping with Conolly's self-composure and his intellectual objectivity which enables him to understand other people's view points. But it is not real self-criticism. All that Conolly implies is that he should not have married, as he is too strong for marriage. Thus, Conolly merely complements Aurelie's views. Aurelie believes that it is only the weak who are capable of loving, Conolly adds that it is only the weak who need and get love :

But I know that [Marian] ceased to love him, whilst around her thousands of wives are clinging fondly to husbands who bullied and beat them, to fools, savages, drunkards, knaves, Passion's slaves of many patterns, but all weak enough to need caresses and forgiveness occasionally.<sup>43</sup>

Yet in the process of running down love Conolly quite unwittingly makes a confession that is also a significant

pointer to the source of Shaw's emerging superman. Conolly admits that he made a virtue of necessity, since the hard crust of his soul, his self-centredness, was at the beginning merely an adjustment to his circumstances for survival :

This lady met a man [i.e. Conolly] who had learned to stand alone in the world—a hard lesson, but one that is relentlessly forced on every sensitive but unlovable boy who has his own way to make, and who knows that outside himself, there is no God to help him .<sup>44</sup>

Such sane insight into their source of inspiration was not always to be granted to the supermen who followed Conolly, for the Life Force frequently stood between Shaw's heroes and honest introspection. However, every Shavian hero learns to stand alone. His supermen are connected to one another by their loneliness and self-sufficiency.

It is useful in this connexion to judge Jack in the light of Shaw's philosophy. Jack is not a Wagnerite or a Shavian artist because he finds salvation in art instead of life. This is because at the time of writing the novel Shaw was not yet a socialist.<sup>45</sup> In his later years Shaw would find Jack's views heretical as he himself would move closer to the view of Julius Caesar and the Ancients ( of *Back to Methuselah* ) who consider the art of living the only art worth cultivating.<sup>46</sup> For Jack art becomes a substitute for

life and the romance that is rebuffed in life blossoms in art.

Except in *Prometheus Unbound* there is no hint that Owen Jack is anything but a pattern designer, a type of musician Shaw loathed in later years. A la Oscar Wilde Jack seeks fulfilment in art and shuns life: "Where do you suppose I get the supplies of my music? And what passion there is in that! — what fire — what disregard of conventionality! In the music, you understand: not in my everyday life!"<sup>47</sup>

He is, according to himself, a very romantic person, but has not been able — nor does he care to — put the romance into practice. It is all used up by his art: "Yes: my art is enough for me, more than I have time and energy for occasionally."<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, though philosophically Owen Jack is at the other pole of the Don Juan of *Man and Superman*, their attitude to men and to the world is the same, only the argument to support that attitude makes a complete turn-around. In the novel life is repudiated because it interferes with the genius's commitment to art. In the plays, most notably in *Man and Superman*, love becomes a synonym for besotted concupiscence, and the hero must renounce love because he must correctly discern the direction of life's movement, for life, as it moves upwards, outgrows both love and art. The artist philosopher must therefore be prepared to discard art.<sup>49</sup> Thus the

self-centredness, the insularity and the alienation of the Shavian hero antedates the philosophical construction that is superimposed on them. Perhaps the greatest importance of a minor work like *Love Among the Artists* lies in the fact that it provides a context within which plays like *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah* can be understood. Once the plays are judged in this context their meaning changes dramatically.

#### IV

After the failure of his first three novels Shaw decided to try his hand at a popular mode of entertainment and he very nearly succeeded. Serialised in *Today*, a socialist magazine, it was well-received and its success encouraged Henry Hyde Champion, its printer, to bring out a shilling edition of the novel. The *Saturday Review* declared it the novel of the age. The reception of his work sired a *bon mot* from its author, who quipped many years later: "I never think of *Cashel Byron's Profession* without a shudder at the narrowness of my escape from becoming a successful novelist at the age of twenty-six."<sup>50</sup>

The first impression that the novel gives is that Shaw is in a holiday mood. The oppressive seriousness of his early novels, the grappling with the author's personal problem of identification and alienation, the use of masks to objectify a personal crisis, the strong autobiographical

element — all these seem to be absent to such an extent that critics generally see *Cashel Byron's Profession* as the odd man out in an otherwise neatly patterned series of novels. Woodbridge seems to voice the majority opinion in remarking that " there is no autobiographical element in the story. "51

Superficially there could not be two persons more different from each other than Shaw and Cashel Byron. The only trait they appeared to share was an interest in boxing.<sup>52</sup> Shaw himself said in a note :

Twenty years ago a poet friend of mine, who, like all poets, delighted in combats, insisted on my sharing his interest in pugilism, and took me about to all the boxing competitions of the day. I was nothing loth ; for my own share of original sin apart, anyone with a sense of comedy must find the arts of self defence delightful (for a time) through their pedantry, their quackery, and their action and reaction between amateur romantic illusion and professional eye to business .<sup>53</sup>

The writer who would later discover in thought a passion far more strong than sexual passion creates a hero whose genius lies in a highly developed physical prowess , for Cashel is a man who can act only instinctively. When Lydia asks Mrs Skene, the ex-champion's wife : " Does Mr Byron ever think ?", the old lady answers emphatically. " Never. There

isnt a more cheerful lad in existence, miss." <sup>54</sup>

Lydia, however, does enough thinking for two; she is one of the most well-read persons in all Europe, manages her estate better than any professional manager and has her wits about her not only in literary matters but also in "non-feminine" subjects like politics and government. The existence of such a mammoth brain in a woman was mildly disheartening to romantics like William Morris, but even a brilliant critic like Irvine chose, in his revulsion, to gloss over the basic difference between her and the hero of *The Irrational Knot* and complained that Shaw "allowed that superlogical electrical inventor Conolly, after nearly ruining one story, to don petticoats and scramble into the principal role of another." <sup>55</sup>

Shaw himself has contributed his share of the misunderstanding by remarking :

I must admit that, for a man of Morris's turn, [Lydia's] intellectual perfections are rather too obviously machine-made. If Babbage's calculator is ever finished, I believe it will be found quite possible, by putting an extra wheel or two in, to extend its use to the manufacture of heroines of the Lydia Carew type...At the same time it must be distinctly understood that this is no disparagement to her. There is nothing one gets so tired of in fiction as what is called 'flesh and blood' . <sup>56</sup>

One is well advised to trust one's own reading more than such isolated remarks by Shaw because as his letters testify, Shaw was notoriously changeable in his responses to his own works, but more important than this is the characteristic Shavian method of outdoing his critics in adverse remarks on his novels as a defensive strategy. Robert Hogan points out that Shaw was not sincere in his denunciation of his novels. He believes that Shaw's defensiveness about them stemmed from the unmitigated failure of these works with publishers and readers.<sup>57</sup>

In transferring to Lydia such traditional male attributes as erudition, managerial skill and an unusual degree of political intelligence, Shaw not only demonstrates his freedom from male chauvinism, he also makes Lydia the fore-runner — though on a much slighter scale and in a lighter vein — of characters as different from one another as Vivie Warren, Candida, Kittie Warren and Lady Cicely. It is true that she is too tightly packed with virtues and inclines towards abstraction, and it is possible to argue that Shaw errs in his sense of proportion, but considering the fact that *Cashel Byron's Profession* borders on extravaganza and hence sets Shaw free to disregard the norms of realism, the blemish, if at all it is a blemish, is a minor one. The comic action of the novel thrives on a pattern of behaviour rather than on a full development of character, and in the overall comic pattern Lydia is the

foil to the principal subject of Shaw's study— the genius of Cashel Byron.

At this period of his career Shaw was so morbidly autobiographical that he needed a stroke of luck to chance upon Cashel Byron. That luck was granted by his decision to relax his seriousness a little and to turn the focus outwards on some recognizably different kind of being. Even the treatment was dramatically different, for Shaw turned from novels of morbid introspection to a potboiler. His conscience was forever uneasy about it:

In novel-writing there are two trustworthy dodges for capturing the public. One is to slaughter a child and pathosticate over its deathbed over a whole chapter. The other is to describe either a fight or a murder. There is a fight in Cashel Byron's Profession ; that profession is itself fighting ; and here lay the whole schoolboy secret of the book's little vogue. I had the old grievance of the author : people will admire him for the feats that any fool can achieve, and bear malice against him for boring them with better work. Besides, my conscience was not quite clear in the matter. In spite of all my pains to present the prizefighter and his pursuits without any romantic glamour the only effect of such descriptions ... is to make people want to see something of the sort and take steps accordingly. This

tendency of the book was repugnant to me ; if prizefighting were a sleeping dog, I should certainly let it lie, inspite of the American editions. 58

In "Mr Bernard Shaw's Works of Fiction Reviewed by Himself" he is even more forthrightly self-critical in snatching away the rag of moral pretension from himself and in observing that the reader will not be deceived into believing that his relish for blood is the result of his sympathy for the virtuous underdog. He confesses with disarming frankness that he wrote the novel out of a fondness for savagery and his readers relished it for the same reason.

Shaw's consistent disapproval of the novel and his uneasiness about it lend a ring of sincerity to his much-publicised sense of relief at the narrow escape from success to which *Cashel Byron's Profession* nearly catapulted him. His misgivings were not entirely unjustified, for *Cashel Byron's Profession* is like a cocktail with no distinctive flavour. Shaw was trying to make a single novel do duty for a few distinctly different ones : having decided to take a day off he was trying to turn his holiday to profit by making the novel a penny-catcher, hence the long rope to public taste ; partly in deference to the moral tone of the magazine in which it was published and partly because he found the moral bias congenial, he was trying to give the novel a coat of socialism ; probably he even toyed with the

idea of laying out the plot in the manner of an allegory, for the hero's profession could easily be made into a symbol of man's struggle in an alien and often hostile world. Over and above these distinct aims was an attempt to weave into an ironic comedy the contrast between the glorious image of prizefighting and the reality of its unheroic, crude commercialism.

This is not to say that different objectives cannot be realised in a single work ; most great works and many of Shaw's own plays lend themselves to different levels of interpretation. The problem with *Cashel Byron's Profession* is that the different lines of interpretation come into one another's way. The difficulty is increased by the fact that Shaw generally planks his works on a sound theoretical scaffolding. The novel, however, cannot be seen both as socialistic and symbolic, because they involve two mutually incompatible outlooks on the central event—the fight. Shaw's equation of Cashel Byron with Mrs Warren hangs together incongruously with the savagery of his imagination that savours pugilism with frank delight. This makes the novel resemble a merry-go-round in which one approach is followed by another in quick succession, without any of them working itself out with the requisite thoroughness.

Both its brilliance and its fragmentary approach was noted by R.L. Stevenson when he declared that it was a mixture of one part of Charles Reade, one part of badly

assimilated Henry James, half a part of Disraeli, one part and a half of "struggling, overlaid, original talent" and one part of "blooming gaseous folly."<sup>59</sup> Surely Stevenson's discovery in the novel of "gifts of insane chivalry" was at least as valid as Shaw's hindsight that found in it a vicious world of prostitution. As a matter of fact inspite of Gene Tunney's adverse comments <sup>60</sup> and Shaw's occasional anti-romantic touches— Shaw insists that prizefighting does not require courage and makes Cashel afraid of burglars and large dogs —Cashel is the towering figure in the novel. Shaw's attempt to pin him down to his background is so half-hearted that the comparison with Mrs Warren sounds merely like a joke. As the figure of Cashel Byron becomes bigger and bigger , the background becomes more and more obscure until it is wiped out by his shadow, so that the final impact of the novel depends very little on the social background. Contrary to Shaw's pretensions regarding the relationship between the characters and their social background, the name of the hero could be changed from Cashel Byron to, say, George Foreman without making much difference and the scene shifted from Victorian England, where Cashel wins his fights only to enrich a loafer like Lord Worthington, to present-day America where a boxer lines his own pocket and fights because he loves to win and does not find getting rich an unpleasant experience.

Such a shift in focus brought about by the discrepancy

between Shaw's avowed purpose and his actual interest permits Cashel to break loose from the author's tight leash and throb with a life of his own. Escaping the constant scan of his creator Cashel chooses to be guided by his own vitality that offers him an alternative mode of life. He is the first of the many Shavian variations of the Siegfried figure, the first of Shaw's Protestant heroes in applying the doctrine of grace to genius and in believing in its unconscious, almost gratuitous, nature :

Now nothing can be what you might call artistically done, if it's done with an effort. If a thing cannot be done light and easy, steady and certain, let it not be done at all. Sounds strange, doesn't it ? But I'll tell you a strange thing. The more effort you make, the less effect you produce. A would-be artist is no artist at all... But in all professions any work that shows signs of labour, straining, yearning — an effort of any kind, is work beyond the man's strength that does it, and therefore not well done. <sup>61</sup>

Had detractors like Gene Tunney not confused Cashel's folksy idiom with stupidity they would not have found the attraction of Cashel's vitalism for Lydia unconvincing. The nature of Cashel's genius suddenly dawns on Lydia as she stumbles by sheer chance upon a few lines of her father's favourite poem : " What would I give for a heart of flesh to

warm me through / Instead of this heart of stone ice-cold whatever I do !/ Hard and cold and small, of all hearts the worst of all."

These lines constituted her father's comments on his own cloistered life. Lydia, who has so far been modelling her own life on her father's, is startled into a new realization :

If such doubt as that haunted by father, it will haunt me, unless I settle what is to be my heart's business now and for ever. If it be possible for a child of mine to escape this curse, it must inherit its immunity from its father, and not from me — from the man of impulse who never thinks, and not from the rationalizing woman, who cannot help thinking. Be it so.<sup>62</sup>

It is tempting to seize upon Lydia's conversion as a vindication of Shaw's remark to the Abbess of Stanbrock that he was through with rationalism by the time he had finished *The Irrational Knot* but the significance of the conversion lies deeper for it implies a kind of confession by Shaw himself. Quick to locate the autobiographical element in the novel Dietrich comments :

In the other novels he had fixed the autobiographical element mostly upon a single male person, but in this novel he experiments with a dialectic. Besides being

themselves, the hero and the heroine are the body and mind of Bernard Shaw, as the young man was working out their relationship.<sup>63</sup>

When Lydia feels sick " of the morbid introspection and ignorant self-consciousness of poets, novelists and the like "<sup>64</sup> she, and through her Shaw himself, directs the revulsion close to home. She knows that there can be a union, or at least a compromise, between intellect and intuition but intuition cannot unite with an ice-cold heart that shrinks and hardens and ultimately becomes a heart of stone. The difference between the life that Lydia rejects and the life she embraces is not merely the difference between her father's life and Cashel's, it is also the difference between Cashel's life and those of other Shavian heroes. What she rejects is more fundamental than the domination of intellect, for she rejects not only her cloistered intellectual life but also the spirit of Owen Jack and Sidney Trefusis besides, obviously, that of Conolly. Her rejection of 'morbid introspection' is an attempt by her creator to turn away from his own egoism which he found sickening. Unlike Lydia Shaw failed to break away permanently from the sickly self-consciousness that demanded the sacrifice of his animal spirits but *Cashel Byron's Profession* revealed for the first time that Shaw was not a dyed-in-the-wool Shavian, for the naked man in him attempted from time to time to peel off the mask of the

philosopher.

Cashel Byron is the rare Shavian hero who submits to love instead of conducting its chemical analysis to discover that it is a convenient term for a biological impulse accompanied by hormonal secretions. Being under no compulsion to be a superman he accepts his humanity for what it is worth.

It was possible for Shaw to introduce a severe internal criticism of his own tendency through *Cashel Byron's Profession* principally because unlike some other heroes of Shaw's novels, Cashel was not created as a Shavian persona. He was smuggled through, so to say, by taking advantage of the relaxation of the internal vigil. The perfect example of natural genius in the Shavian portrait-gallery, Cashel exposes the uncertain ground on which the other kind—the principal kind—of superman stands. In Cashel Shaw got more than he bargained for .

It was almost certain from the moment Cashel sprang into fictional existence that a hero of Cashel's kind would leave no successor, since such an event would threaten Shaw's sense of security. The man who had created Conolly and Jack was not going to disown them so easily. Cashel was allowed to be himself because he could dodge the censor's blue pencil. This he did rather successfully as neither the author nor the critics spotted this subversive act. They were content to talk in terms of complementarity.

The death of Lydia's father becomes a potent symbol since her father's way, embodied in the Shavian Lydia, had to die before she entered a new life. But such a thing was unlikely to happen again, because as an artist Shaw was what Keats had said about Wordsworth— an egotist sublime. "The morbid introspection...of poets, novelists, and their like" was his fate and the novel to follow would be a kind of recantation, for Sidney Trefusis is the antithesis of Cashel Byron.

v

*An Unsocial Socialist* was apparently the result of Shaw's conversion to Marxism. In his earlier novels his heroes had fired broadsides against society even before Shaw found his vantage ground of positive belief. In the second novel, Conolly could at least pretend that his opposition to society was the opposition of rationalism to unreason, but Conolly was very tentative in his faith, it never took the shape of a full-blown religion. Besides, Shaw's ambivalence towards Conolly indicated that he himself seemed far from convinced that Conolly was a sufficiently formidable receptacle of the author's impulses against society. In *Love Among the Artists* the inappropriateness of the protagonist as a Shavian war-horse was even more apparent because Jack forced Shaw into an embarrassing volte-face by changing the ground of opposition completely : the hero was

not in the service of life but of pure art and the ground between life and art was very unsatisfactorily mediated. In fact the conjunction of Conolly and Jack gives away the secret that the posture of opposition precedes any convincing basis of opposition.<sup>65</sup> Marxism stepped into the breach and Shaw at last found a comprehensive doctrine aimed at the destruction of existing social systems. What is more important is the fact that the doctrine could successfully externalise Shaw's subjective needs since it claimed to be a philosophy based on materialism and it propounded what it called Scientific Socialism : by siding with Marxism Shaw could side with necessity, with the inexorable laws governing society. Understandably, Shaw was fertile ground for a strong anti-establishment religion.

Shaw confessed that until September, 1882 , he "had been chiefly interested, as an atheist, in the conflict between science and religion".<sup>66</sup> It was Henry George who switched him over to economics, but from George he swiftly proceeded to Marx :

Marx was a revelation. His abstract economics, I discovered later, were wrong, but he rent the veil. He opened my eyes to the facts of history and civilization, gave me an entirely fresh conception of the universe, provided me with a purpose and a mission in life.<sup>67</sup>

There is little doubt that when he began to write the novel in 1883, Shaw needed a mission, for he must have felt the hollowness of criticism that was merely negative. At that time he was ready — too ready, in fact — for a conversion. The antecedent circumstances would prompt one to infer that the intensity of the conversion was not necessarily proportional to the merit of the cause.

Ostensibly, the novel was intended to be " a gigantic grapple with the whole social problem." <sup>68</sup> Sidney Trefusis, the son of a rich industrialist, marries Henrietta, the daughter of a rich capitalist. At Cambridge Trefusis begins to question the truth propagated by his teachers, becomes a Marxist and abandons his wife ; disguises himself as a labourer and takes up a cottage near Alton College. There he meets Agatha Wylie and her friends and briefly flirts with them. The disguised Trefusis persuades the Principal of the college to let him work on the tennis court. Incidentally Mr Jansenius, Henrietta's father , is Agatha's local guardian. He is summoned by the Principal to take Agatha away for breach of discipline. Hetty, who accompanies her father, recognises Trefusis in his strange disguise and Trefusis flees the place with her and takes her home, but he himself does not give up his cottage, nor the habit of flirting with the girls. Unaware of his actual identity, Agatha writes to Hetty about the affair. An infuriated Hetty braves the cold and rushes to her husband to demand an

explanation. He placates her and sends her home, where she dies shortly. On learning the news of his wife's death, Trefusis goes to London and bursts out against doctors and against the contrasting ways in which the rich and the poor die and admits that he is glad at his wife's death because it has set him free. He now pursues the career of a labour leader, preaches Marxism to capitalists and converts them with his silver-tongued oratory. Meanwhile a number of years have passed, and he meets Agatha again, gets engaged to her and marries Gertrude, who is in love with him, off to Erskine, a minor poet. The book comes to an abrupt end as Shaw admits to "breaking down in sheer ignorance and incapacity."<sup>69</sup>

The novel was originally called *The Heartless Man*.<sup>70</sup> The title was ironical because Trefusis's apparent heartlessness is sought to be portrayed as vastly superior to the kindheartedness of the average bourgeois. Shaw later claimed that Trefusis anticipated Lenin, who was one of Shaw's heroes.<sup>71</sup> By conventional standards Trefusis is not merely heartless but pathologically so and Henderson understandably calls the novel "a brutal burlesque, full of mad irresponsibility and cheap levity."<sup>72</sup>

Owen Jack is temperamental and the rationality of Conolly is almost inhuman, but self-willed as they are, they are not a patch on Trefusis, who pretends that he is leaving his wife for his work. He says to Henrietta: "When you are

with me I can do nothing but make love to you. You bewitch me. When I escape from you for a moment it is only to groan remorsefully over the hours you have tempted me to waste and the energy you have futilized."<sup>73</sup>

Though Shaw declared that he found Conolly insufferable even before he had finished *The Irrational Knot*,<sup>74</sup> Trefusis is a more insufferable avatar of Conolly. The latter's lack of regard for common human feelings forced his wife to leave him. Trefusis carries Conolly's behaviour to its logical limit : he abandons his wife on the plea that he is distracted by her presence. This underlying similarity between two such dissimilar men — Conolly being the portrait of the prophet as a thinking machine and Trefusis the portrait of a prophet as a clown — forces the attentive reader to suspect that Shaw is unconsciously revealing himself through his fiction, that his puritanic distrust of ordinariness has a harsh negative side that needs to be assuaged through radical denial. Though it will be gross oversimplification to overlook Shaw's ironical method and to equate Trefusis with Shaw, there is little doubt that overriding all Shavian ambiguities is the author's need to identify substantially with a brain child who is also the first prophet of a positive religion. Thus Shaw says :

The hero is remarkable because, without losing his pre-eminence as hero, he not only violates every canon

of propriety, like Tom Jones or Des Grieux, but every canon of sentiment as well. In an age when the average man's character is rotted at the core by the lust to be a true gentleman, the moral value of such an example as Trefusis is incalculable.<sup>75</sup>

One problem that Shaw may have had while writing the novel was the problem of blending two different roles — the role of the clown and that of the sullen prophet. It is as a doomsday prophet that Trefusis faces society and in portraying him Shaw drew only on that part of Marx that resembled the Old Testament prophets. Yet the plot at Shaw's disposal was too trivial for such a grim project. Besides, in his fourth novel Shaw had drawn on his resource of humour with very satisfactory results. He must have realized that clowning could absorb some of the shock waves that the prophet would generate. By making the work double-faced and ambiguous the author could prevent its falling apart from the staggering discrepancy between cause and effect.

Even in its present form the novel has attracted the laughter of critics at the "ponderous economic edifice [erected] on a foundation of whipped cream."<sup>76</sup> As if anticipating the charge that his behaviour is not congruous with the objective situation, Trefusis reminds the readers that he is fully aware of it, but instead of being the slave of social norms he has decided to be the master. He is the privileged clown : privileged to write his own script and

act it out, privileged to laugh the laws of nature out of court : " With my egoism, my charlatantry, my tongue and my habit of having my own way, I am fit for no calling but that of saviour of mankind — just of the sort they like."<sup>77</sup>

The charlatantry of an unemployed saviour of mankind does not square with Shaw's image of Lenin or the young writer's self-image. But while Trefusis likes to pose as a saviour he himself is not free from the suspicion that he is a destroyer. The sight of happy and carefree women-skating on the pond fills him with disgust and he blurts out to himself : " They remind me of Henrietta in a hundred ways. Would I laugh, now, if the whole sheet of ice were to burst into little bits under them ? "<sup>78</sup> He flinches with a shock from his thoughts as he adds with almost touching piety :

Make a note that wishes for the destruction of the human race, however rational and sincere are contrary to nature... Besides, what a precious fool I should be if I were working at an international association of creatures only fit for destruction !<sup>79</sup>

Yet, the contrition is no less curious than the wish. He half admits that the death-wish for the human race is sincere and rational. What holds him back is the knowledge that it is against nature. The man who wishes to save mankind is evidently not on the same wavelength as nature.

Smilash's mummery could have been dismissed as the inability of a callow novelist to summon a neat plot resulting in the cramming of the novel with improbable and often irrelevant incidents in which the various activities of the hero fly in the face of plain common sense, had it not been for the fact that Trefusis is fully aware that his antics are an insult to people who tread the straight and narrow path of virtue. His rage against the existing world provokes Trefusis to construct a parallel world in which the actual one is parodied without any constraint of dignity.

The farce that Trefusis enacts is savage in intention and execution. All social reformers wish to change existing systems, but unlike most of them he is not even prepared to recognize the basic dignity of such systems — the dignity of existence. The grotesque and illogical manner of his antics — the manner in which he switches from vulgar dialect to the accent of the gentleman, his irresponsible lies, his improbable disguise — is calculated to give away his show in minutes even to the most gullible of persons, and it cannot be seriously argued that these are adopted to pass him off as Smilash ; had that been the case then Trefusis would have been no more than an idiot. His provocative brazenness is actually his challenge to the world, his eloquent comment on its code of conduct. By purposely derecognizing each one of the world's canons through his rudimentary and ill-acted drama, Trefusis

symbolically annihilates the world.

Even Marxism is in a sense parodied. He mouths Marx in and out of season and makes the symbolic violence of his action the midwife of his bizarre revolution. The first person to be annihilated by this exterminating angel in the disguise of a buffoon is his wife. He has no qualms in offering Hettie "lover-like speeches and compliments" when he has made up his mind to abandon her. Hettie "felt that he intended to get rid of her, and he knew that it was useless to try to hide that design from her."<sup>80</sup>

There are few scenes in Shaw that can match the heartlessness of Trefusis's behaviour towards his wife. When he learns from Jansenius's telegram that Henrietta is dangerously ill he shows unmatched callousness as he folds the paper methodically and slips it into his pocket "as if quite done with it"<sup>81</sup> Then he indulges in elaborate and fanciful speech patterns. The irony is unmistakable. Not shaken in the least, he breaks into artificial expansiveness and fancifully compares his heart to the skating rink. In the carriage he resorts to the comfort of the foot-warmer. Since he is undisturbed by anxiety and apprehension, the journey to London seems to him short. These reactions should be seen in their proper background. Henrietta's long train journey undertaken in the bitter cold weather when she learnt that her husband had been flirting with her cousin after having forsaken her caused her death. Without the

indelnicacy of soiling his hands with such a grimy substance as blood, Trefusis manages to kill his wife. It is an instance of clean, non-violent murder.

After Henrietta's death Trefusis can rationalise it by taking a macroscopic view that enables him to mock his father-in-law's grief :

Jansenius can bear death and misery with perfect fortitude when it is on a large scale and hidden in a back slum. But when it breaks into his own house , and attacks his property — he is just the man to lose his head and quarrel with me for keeping mine.<sup>82</sup>

It is in passages like this that the suspicion that Shaw is making use of Marx to serve his own ends is hard to suppress. Trefusis's criticism of his father-in-law is perfectly just but completely out of place. Marx is used by him as a dodge to distract the attention of the reader from a grave deficiency in himself. And this diversionary tactic is something about which Shaw is ambivalent since his heroes find convenient alibi — Conolly finds it in rationality, Jack in art and Trefusis in socialism — for actions that are less than human.

Trefusis is the exterminating angel in the novel because it is clear that in a less pronounced form his feelings towards Henrietta resemble those of the Judgment Day angel operating from the background and wiping out man after man

in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*.<sup>83</sup> To make him almost as thoroughgoing, Shaw makes Trefusis accept his wife's death as a desirable incident :

This is a fraud of which I have never even dreamed ...Tears and no sorrow ! Here I am crying ! growing(sic) maudlin ! Whilst I am glad that she is gone and I free. I have the mechanism of grief in me somewhere ; it begins to turn at sight of her, though I have no sorrow; just as she used to start the mechanism of passion when I had no love....I hope the mechanism of grief will flag and stop in its spinning as soon as the other used to .It is stopping already, I think. What a mockery ! Whilst it lasts I suppose I am really sorry. And yet,would I restore her to life if I could ? Perhaps so; I am therefore thankful that I cannot.<sup>84</sup>

Inspite of his high mission the self-appointed saviour of mankind finds the average human being unredeemable.The mason who lost his job for working on Henrietta's tombstone and had to be supported financially by Trefusis saves sufficiently to become an employer only to start exploiting other workmen.He finally leaves the Association.<sup>85</sup> In him we have a cameo of Shaw's Everyman. Predictably, therefore, a member of the group that Trefusis leads to protest against the encroachment of the people's right to thoroughfare by Sir Charles Branden turns coat and speaks of his duty to Sir

Charles. The ordinary man in Shaw's works, even at such an early date, is the cause of his despair. Trefusis sharply turns on the renegade and calls him a cur. When the man objects Trefusis shoots back :

I am a rich man— one of your masters, and privileged to call you what I please. You are a grovelling famine-broken slave. Now go and seek redress against me from the law. I can buy law enough to ruin you for less money than it would cost me to shoot deer in Scotland or vermin here. <sup>B6</sup>

The invective is curiously double-edged. If it delineates accurately the relationship between the exploiter and the exploited in a grossly inegalitarian society, it also snidely turns Marx upside down in justifying the relationship, for Trefusis firmly believes that "slaves must be driven, and this fellow is a slave to the marrow."<sup>B7</sup> This is how Shaw's hero generally feels towards the very people he wishes to save. Trefusis himself gives a poor account of his flock to Sir Charles and Erskine :

This is the balance sheet of an attempt I made some years ago to carry out the ideas of an International Association of labourers— commonly known as the International— or union of all workmen throughout the world in defence of the interests of labour. You see the result. Expenditure, four thousand five hundred

pounds. Subscriptions received from working men twenty-two pounds seven and ten pence halfpenny - The British workmen showed their ...[gratitude] by accusing me of making a good thing out of the Association for my own pocket, and by mobbing and stoning me twice. <sup>88</sup>

It is in passages like this that one realizes how inauthentic Shaw's Marxism was. In his hands it became a convenient stick to beat society with. Whereas the proletariat was to Marx the pivot of radical social change, to Shaw it was a despicable entity. He alternated between wishing its extermination and its transformation. <sup>89</sup> Sidney Trefusis's urge to save these people springs more from the lure of the role of the saviour than the conviction that they need to be saved. His half-suppressed wish to wipe out the whole lot breaks out into the open in the form of an ill-masked hostility towards the very people whose cause he, as a socialist, is ostensibly championing. After all "slaves must be driven" is not a far cry from "curs must be shot", especially when the "slave" has already been addressed as a cur. Thus Trefusis's target-practice at Sallust House becomes a very obvious and crude example of symbolic execution : people made of marble stand in for actual men. Their "execution", apart from being Trefusis's war against tradition (in breaking statues he literally becomes an iconoclast), seems to be the reply to his own despair : "all rotten to the bone, oh, civilisation ! civilisation !

civilisation !" <sup>90</sup>

What Trefusis is opposed to is not this or that aspect of society, but the whole of society . This world, he says, has been made to suit his father, the symbol of exploitative capitalism :

Looking round at our buildings, our statues, our pictures, our newspapers, our domestic interiors, our books, our vehicles, our morals, our manners, our statutes, and our religion, I see his hand everywhere, for they were all made or modified to please him. <sup>91</sup>

In his total rejection of the values of society Trefusis resembles not only the other heroes of Shaw's novels, but Shaw himself. A few years after he had finished the novel, Shaw wrote :

I fully admit and vehemently urge that the state at present is simply a huge machine for robbing and slave-driving the poor by brute force. You may... think that the policeman at the corner is the guardian of law and order. But the primary function of the policeman ...is that you do not lie down to sleep in this country without paying an idler for the privilege...Your soldier, ostensibly heroic and patriotic defender of his country, is really an unfortunate man driven by destitution to offer himself as food for powder for the sake of regular ration, shelter and clothing...And his

primary function is to come to the rescue of the policeman when the latter is overpowered...Every institution, as Bakounine saw, religious, political, financial, judicial so on, is corrupted by the fact that the men in it either belong to the propertied class themselves or must sell themselves to it in order to live.<sup>92</sup>

One is led to suspect that the gross imperfection of the world came as a boon to Trefusis and to Shaw for it is highly probable that if the particular situations were wholly different, Trefusis would have to think of an entirely new set of sitting ducks.<sup>93</sup>

The comprehensive hostility to civilization is probably related to the narcissism of the protagonist as well as that of the author. The strain of narcissism is quite strong in most major characters in Shaw's novels : one has only to remember that Aurelie does not find anyone worth loving except herself and her doll, Jack makes his art an extension of his own life and a substitute for the world outside him and reverses the direction of his affection by drawing it back into himself through the enclosed world of art, Conolly's self-esteem prevents him from loving anyone else. Narcissism is a feature not only of Shaw's fictional characters, but also of himself. As Daniel Dervin has pointed out:

...Shavian narcissism is the opposite of Keat's (sic) negative capability, which enters emphatically into the objective world ; it is also antithetical to the strategy of great modern writers who, as Stephen Spender has pointed out, suffer the modern world to work on them forging their sensibilities. Shaw went to work on the world. He drew everything into himself.<sup>94</sup>

Trefusis— like Conolly, Jack and Aurelie— is so enamoured of himself that he cannot find anything valuable or lovable outside himself . But Shaw's narcissism is a secondary phenomenon, an attempt to erase the memory of withheld love by questioning the value of love. It is useful to remember that Conolly was speaking also for his creator when he said that the unlovable child had to be totally self-sufficient. Since in reality it is born of anxiety, such narcissism needs to be reassured by an exaggerated display of strength. Being afraid to love, Trefusis seeks reassurance in power. Thus he uses Sir Charles and Erskine to further his political aims, uses Henrietta to satisfy his momentary fancy, uses Agatha to test the strength of his will, uses Jane's silliness as a diversion, uses Gertrude to teach her a lesson in manners. Quite characteristically, when he learns that Gertrude loves him he makes her marry Erskine, and himself marries Agatha when he is satisfied that she does not love him.<sup>95</sup>

The intimate kinship between Trefusis and Shaw is

established most clearly in a letter of Alice Lockett. At the time of writing *An Unsocial Socialist* Shaw was having an *affaire de coeur* with Alice. The two quarrelled incessantly and the affair came to an abrupt end. Alice accused Shaw of paining her and deriving pleasure from such behaviour, but she was sharp enough to grasp the fact that such behaviour stemmed from weakness and said that "in spite of your cleverness I cannot help despising you."<sup>96</sup> In other words Alice accused Shaw of behaving exactly like Trefusis. In fact Agatha Wylie echoes Alice when she says to Trefusis : "you have a habit of bullying women who are weak enough to fear you."<sup>97</sup>

Trefusis savours the pleasure of holding sway over a weakling like Henrietta, but if his creator's behaviour occasionally matched his own, at other times it was close to that of Henrietta herself. "Am I a dancing bear or a learned pig," he asked indignantly, "that I should be insulted thus ?"<sup>98</sup> In another letter Shaw raved like Trefusis's wife: "I will be your slave no longer : you used me vilely when we met before, and you disappointed me horribly tonight."<sup>99</sup>

In the novel Trefusis utters the familiar rhetoric of the Shavian superman. After leaving Henrietta, he writes to her :

I am afraid that I cannot give you satisfactory and intelligible reasons for this step. You are a beautiful and luxurious creature : life is to you full and

complete only when it is a carnival of love. My case is just the reverse... Before a caress has had time to cool, a strenuous revulsion seizes me; I long to return to my old lonely ascetic hermit life; to my dry book.<sup>9</sup>. Love cannot keep possession of me : all my strongest powers rise up against it and will not endure it. 100

Years later the same words acquire a religious overtone. The Life Force teaches Juan that in hell " there is nothing but love and beauty."<sup>101</sup> However, this meaning changes completely in the context of Shaw's letter to Alice , " There is nothing human and real that is not pleased by the affection even of a dog or slave, much less of an equal."<sup>102</sup>

The gap between Shaw's sincere attitude to love and Trefusis's heartless tomfoolery is bridged by Shaw's letter to Alice : " If I had your heart, I know I should break it, and yet I wish I had it. Is not this monstrous ? "<sup>103</sup>

On the whole Shaw's letters to Alice, written at a time when he was writing the novel, are more successful than the novel in revealing the connection between his narcissism and his sadism, between superhumanity and inhumanity. But while the link can be reestablished in the novel with the help of Shaw's letters, it becomes overlaid with religious terminology in the plays. The reader who comes to the novel through Shaw's plays finds in Trefusis the makings of a true servant of the Life Force, the reader who arrives to the novel through the life of the author sees in him an actor

trying to build up the role of the prophet on a foundation of weakness.<sup>104</sup>

An *Unsocial Socialist* may be a slight work of art, but it is an invaluable guide to the plays, because it brings together the major themes of a number of Shaw's most important plays and reveals the true relationship between these themes in a manner the plays themselves cannot reveal as they tend to hide these relationships behind a screen of philosophy. We shall see that plays as different from one another as *The Philanderer*, *Candida*, *Man and Superman*, *Pygmalion*, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and parts of *Back to Methuselah* are built on the material of *An Unsocial Socialist*. In various degrees these plays deal with the themes of love and withdrawal, narcissism and attachment to a person other than one's own self, the sadistic pleasure of the hero or the heroine in paining the person who is in love with him or her and the internal criticism of such sadism, the messianic hostility to ordinary human experience and the human challenge to such messianism .

Quite early in his career Shaw discovered through Agatha Wylie that the clown reserves his vision of despair for his private self, hiding it diligently from the rest of the world:

Agatha, prompt to ridicule sentimentality in her companions, and gifted with the infectious spirit of farce, secretly turned for imaginative luxury to

visions of despair and death and often endured the mortification of the successful clown who believes, whilst the public roar with laughter at him, that he was born a tragedian. There was much in her nature, she felt, that did not find expression in her popular representation of the soldier in the chimney. 105

This unexpected flash of light, the inclusion of the definite article to make the reference applicable not only to Agatha but to all clowns —including the one who conceived Agatha and Trefusis —illuminates for a moment the heart of the Shavian darkness. For there was much in Trefusis— and Shaw— that did not find expression in *An Unsocial Socialist*. The art of the greater clown, being richer in texture and more intricate in design than Agatha's, did not have to be split into two parts— the extravaganza of the soldier in the chimney and the author's private despair. He could fuse the two split visions. A second look at the soldier emerging from Shaw's chimney would reveal a scarred and inscrutable face .

Chapter 3 : Notes and References

1. *Immaturity*. pp. xxxix-xl.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xliv.
3. *Ibid* , p. 128.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
5. *Ibid* .,p. xliv.
6. *Ibid.*, p. xliii.
7. This topic is taken up for detailed discussion in the concluding section of my study.
8. *Immaturity*. p. xx.
9. For an identical view on the relationship between art and reality see Oscar Wilde," The Decay of Lying ",*The Works of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 825-843.
10. *The Irrational Knot*, p.xvi.
11. *Ibid.*, p.xix.
12. *Ibid.*, p.xviii.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p.70.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.
17. *Ibid.*, p.95.
18. *Ibid.*, p.189.
19. *Ibid.*, p.194.
20. *Ibid.*, p.230.

21. Ibid., p. 234.
22. Shaw wrote to Dame Laurentia McLachlan : " I exhausted rationalism when I got to the end of my second novel at the age of 24, and should have come to a dead stop if I had not proceeded to purely mystical assumptions." *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 896.
23. *Immaturity*, pp. xliii — xliv.
24. *The Irrational Knot*, p. 252.
25. Ibid., p. 253.
26. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is taken up for discussion in the last chapter.
27. When Shaw later criticized Conolly's ethos he overlooked the fact that Conolly comes to the same conclusion about life with the help of reason as Juan does with his religious passion. The clue is given in a passage , deleted from the Standard Edition , in which Conolly speaks of himself as a philosopher and points to the irreconciliability between the lover and the philosopher, thus anticipating Juan. See *Selected Novels of G. Bernard Shaw*. p. 317.
28. *Love Among the Artists*, p. 4.
29. Ibid., p. 8.
30. Ibid., p. 17.
31. Elsie B.Adams's *Bernard Shaw and the Aesthetes* is the most exhaustive study of Shaw's aesthetics. The relationship between art and rebellion in Shaw is taken up for discussion

in the concluding chapter.

32. Ibid., p. 20.

33. Ibid., p. 201.

34. Ibid., p. 279.

35. Ibid., p. 46.

36. Ibid., p. 179.

37. Ibid., p. 285. This combination of egoism and high civic sense becomes, as we shall see, the hallmark of Shaw's superman. Even Aurelie's hidden animosity towards her mother is a common Shavian feature. It is significant that in four of the five novels of an author still in his twenties, an age when the experiences of boyhood were still fresh in his memory, parents and children are linked to each other by a feeling which is close to hatred. In *The Irrational Knot* it is Elinor who expresses the feeling, in *Love Among the Artists* it is left to Aurelie's mother to betray her emotion, in *Cashel Byron's Profession* both mother and son reveal their feelings though perhaps Cashel is a little more liberal in doing so. In *An Unsocial Socialist* Trefusis frankly sees his father as a scoundrel. Shaw's own childhood, discussed in the previous chapter, undoubtedly played an important part in shaping the responses of the characters of his novels. I believe that the hostility of Shaw's characters to their environment is to a large extent the spillover of Shaw's animosity against his parents. His distrust of society was largely a displacement of his

attitude to the primary symbols of authority in his life.

38. *Love Among the Artists*, p. 206.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

45. His conversion to socialism came about in 1882 after he had listened to Henry George and read Karl Marx. See Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw : His Life and Personality*, p. 68.

46. In his more mature years Shaw's attitude to art was unambiguously Puritanical. In every major critical pronouncement Shaw insisted that the justification of art lay in its impact on life. The Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman* is fairly representative of his views. The topic has been taken up separately in the last chapter and hence detailed discussion has been avoided here.

47. *Love Among the Artists*, p. 328.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

49. The rejection of art by the Life Force constitutes the theme of "As Far as Thought Can Reach", the last part of *Back to Methuselah*.

50. *Cashel Byron's Profession*, p. v.

51. Homer Woodbridge, *George Bernard Shaw, Creative Artist*, p. 15.

52. Irvine says that besides retaining a lifelong interest in boxing Shaw was in his time "a very passable boxer". William Irvine, *The Universe of G.B.S.*, p. 30.
53. *Cashel Byron's Profession*, p. 241.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
55. Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
56. "Mr Bernard Shaw's Works of Fiction Reviewed by Himself", *Novel Review* 33 (1892) : 238.
57. Robert Hogan. "The Novels of Bernard Shaw", *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 8 (1965) : 63-114.
58. *Cashel Byron's Profession*, p. xi.
59. *Ibid.*, p. xix.
60. Gene Tunney, the champion boxer, declined the offer to play Cashel Byron on the screen because according to him Shaw "understands neither the temperament nor the psychology of the professional boxer, with the result that Byron is made to appear no more than a blundering vulgarian. He scarcely is a character to excite the admiration of anyone and that the girl in the book, reared in an atmosphere of culture and refinement, should fall in love with a man whose only appeal was a magnificent body, is absurd." Quoted by Arthur Zeiger, "Introduction," *Selected Novels of G. Bernard Shaw*, p. ix.
61. *Cashel Byron's Profession*, pp. 91-92.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
63. R.F. Dietrich, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

*Superman*, p. 152. I disagree with Dietrich's view that Shaw was working at a union of the two modes represented by the hero and the heroine. In *Cashel Byron's Profession* there is no such union unless the domination of one by the other is described as union.

64. *Cashel Byron's Profession*, p. 221.

65. In his study of Shaw's non-dramatic prose Richard Ohmann reaches similar conclusions. Ohmann concentrates on Shaw's prose-style, not on his handling of themes in his novels and plays. The study of Shaw's fiction, however, bears out his conclusion that Shaw thinks himself besieged by enemies and displays symptoms of paranoia. See Richard Ohmann, *Shaw: the style and the Man*. p. 82, p. 164.

66. Hesketh Pearson, *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Personality*, p. 68.

67. Ibid.

68. Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century*, p. 106.

69. Ibid., p.107.

70. R.F. Rattray, *Bernard Shaw: a Chronicle* p. 45.

71. Blanche Patch, *Thirty years with G. B. S.*, p. 175.

72. Henderson, op. Cit., p. 107.

73. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 77.

74. "Mr Bernard Shaw's Works of Fiction Reviewed by Himself". *Novel Review* 33 (1892) : 239.

75. Stanley Weintraub (ed.), *Shaw: an Autobiography*

1056-1078, p. 100.

76. Stanley Weintraub, "Introduction" , *An Unfinished Novel* , p. 12.

77. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 104.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

83. I have tried to show in the following chapters that Shaw's attitude to the victims of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin cannot be understood if it is seen as the result of his ignorance of the real nature of these regimes. Just as his attitude to love in plays such as *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah* can be understood better if we go behind his philosophy of Creative Evolution to the works that precede the philosophy, so his response to Hitler or Stalin can be understood only if we pay sufficient attention to the fact that Trefusis was an important part of Shaw to the end of his life .

84. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 128.

85. Though an admirer of Tolstoy Shaw never had the Russian's faith in the common man. He wrote : "In England, at least, one cannot help believing that if Tolstoy were reincarnated as a peasant he would find that the proletarian morality in which he has so much faith is

nothing but the morality of his own class, modified, mostly for the worse, by ignorance, drudgery, insufficient food, and bad sanitary conditions of all kinds." *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, pp. 256-57.

86. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 148.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 206 It was not Trefusis but Shaw who said that adult suffrage kills democracy. *Everydody's Political Whast's What ?*, p. 40.

89. In 1928 Shaw wrote : "For my part I hate the poor and look forward to their extermination." *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, p. 456. In the following chapters I have shown that such remarks became more frequent in Shaw's old age.

90. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 180.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

92. *The Impossibilities of Anarchism*, pp. 24-25.

93. R.F. Dietrich, normally a reliable critic, is completely off the mark when he remarks that Trefusis is religiously motivated by Karl Marx and his blend of common sense and good humour qualifies his revolutionary zeal just enough to avoid fanaticism." R.F. Dietrich, *The Portrait of the Artist as a young Superman*, p. 152. o

From time to time Trefusis questions his own motives, but such honesty does not qualify his opposition to the world, it only makes him more conscious of his role as an

actor. He obviously relishes, as his relationship with his wife and the other girls shows, the art of histrionics.

94. Daniel Dervin, *Bernard Shaw : a Psychological Study*, p. 73.

95. Interestingly, in *The Philanderer* Grace Tranfield behaves exactly like Trefusis when she refuses to marry Charteris because she loves him . In *You Never can Tell* Gloria is filled with shame when it becomes clear to her that she is in love with Valentine . At the end of *Candida* we learn that the secret of Candida's success as a wife is that she does not love her husband.

96. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 66.

97. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 221.

98. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 72.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

101. CP II, p. 663.

102. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 66.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

104. Though the main characters in Shaw's novels are Shavian masks Trefusis is unique because he represents not a particular aspect of Shaw's life like Smith, Conolly or Jack, but the author's act of self-definition through fiction. While the other characters are more or less identified with their roles, Trefusis stands outside the various roles he plays. In this he is more of an actor than

a character. As is obvious from his sarcastic comments on his own charlatantry, he suffers occasionally from bad faith and is entitled to say, as Shaw said himself, that his roles are "about as real as a pantomime ostrich:" *Pen Portraits and reviews*, p. 73. Shaw himself realises that as an actor Trefusis overplays his part because in Chapter XVII the author tries to play down Trefusis's culpability by saying that he was insincere in love because he could not bring himself to believe that he could inspire love in women. This, I think, is not only Trefusis's confession but also Shaw's for it reveals the truth that Shaw's narcissism is intimately connected with his anxiety and sense of insecurity, as Trefusis is certainly not the only or the last Shavian hero to reject love out of fear.

105. *An Unsocial Socialist*, p. 44.

## Chapter 4

### Conversion through Condemnation : Plays Unpleasant

"I must be cruel only to be kind." *Hamlet*

*Widowers' Houses* was produced in 1892. Shaw had begun the play in collaboration with William Archer seven years before its eventual completion. The understanding was that Archer was to supply him with a plot and he would write the dialogue. This unlikely collaboration — almost incredible to anyone familiar with the two men's irreconcilable temperamental difference and their conflicting notions of drama — soon ran aground. In 1891 J.T.Grein inaugurated the Independent Theatre, financed almost entirely by himself. Willing to produce plays without commercial consideration, Grein was looking for original English plays dealing with real human emotion and real human life. Shaw, who was thinking along similar lines, felt that he could fit the bill, so he fetched the incomplete play from the cold storage and hastily completed it. The result was an explosion of terrible intensity. *The Era* commented on 24 December, 1892 :

Hardly any recent play has provoked so much newspaper and

other controversy as Mr Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*. At least two of the daily papers, on the day after its production, devoted leading articles to its consideration, besides special criticism of almost unprecedented length...Then all last week a controversy on its merits and demerits raged in a morning paper; and it was held up as an example of the kind of play the Lord Chamberlain did not object to by Mrs Aveling in her lecture to the playgoers.<sup>1</sup>

The intensity of the storm does not seem to be surprising today when one puts the play against the backdrop of the cup-and-saucer comedy that ruled the stage at that time, Shaw's departure from *Cointure Dorée*, the play by Augier on which Archer had based his plot, was nothing less than shocking. In Augier's play, Trehan seeks to marry Celeste, the daughter of Roussel. Behind Roussel's huge fortune is a questionable deal. When the idealistic Trehan learns of Roussel's ill-gotten wealth he refuses to taint himself with a dowry derived from such a source; and with Roussel declining to make amends, he gives up the idea of marrying Celeste. The sudden outbreak of war causes Roussel's ruin and sweeps away the hurdles across Trehan's path, thus enabling him to unite with Celeste in a disinterested marriage.

In Shaw's play Dr Harry Trench, travelling in a boat on the Rhine, meets Blanche Sartorius. They immediately fall in love, but Blanche's father, before giving his consent, wants to ensure

that his daughter will be welcomed by Trench's aristocratic relatives. Trench apparently gets round the difficulty by fetching from them favourable responses, but in the second act Trench discovers to his horror that Sartorius owes his wealth to slum landlordism. He unceremoniously dismisses his rent collector Lickcheese because the latter has spent a little sum on repairs of the slum tenement. Trench refuses to marry Blanche unless she agrees to forgo her dowry. So far there is a perfect correspondence between Augier's play and Shaw's. But the plot gets a sensational twist when Trench learns that his own affluence derives from the mortgage of the same slum. He soon learns to silence his conscience, sheds his moral posturing and joins Sartorius and the rejuvenated Lickcheese in a new scheme to make the most of his property.

There is a great deal of difference between the two endings and Shaw claimed that the difference lay between romanticism and realism. Amidst the din of controversy Shaw's defence of the play centred almost exclusively on the principle of realism. In the play he had shown "middle-class respectability and younger son gentility fattening on the poverty of the slum as flies fatten on the filth"<sup>2</sup> not because he enjoyed grubbing in muck but because as a dramatist with unflinching devotion to truth he owed it to himself to recreate the real world as opposed to the ersatz that usurps reality under the arc lamps. In a letter to *The Speaker* Shaw wrote :

We want a theatre for people who have lived, thought and felt, and who have some real sense. In such a theatre the merely literary man who has read and written instead of living until he has come to feel fiction as experience and to resent experience as fiction, would be as much out of place as the ideal British public itself. Well, let him sit out his first mistaken visit quietly and not come again; for it is clear that only by holding the mirror up to literature can the dramatist please him, whereas it is by holding it up to nature that good work is produced.<sup>3</sup>

In the same letter Shaw argued that the artistic quality of a play could not be independent of its scientific quality. In the same tenor he argued that the failure of his critics to appreciate the play was due to their failure to recognise reality :

I do not hesitate to say that many of my critics have been completely beaten by the play simply because they are ignorant of society...What I mean is that they do not know life well enough to recognise it in the glare of the footlights.<sup>4</sup>

To what extent was Shaw's contention valid ? How much of an improvement is it on Augier's play from the standpoint of realism? Charles H. Shattuck<sup>5</sup> has shown that the play published in 1893 was even more poorly constructed than the 1898 version. But even the present version is mechanically constructed and is too full of

*coup-de-theatre* to justify Shaw's rather tall claims for it. One of the first conditions that a life-like action must satisfy is that it must be probable. The manner in which Trench and Blanche meet on the Rhine and immediately fall in love might have been more credible if Trench had not turned out to be, on the strength of a very unlikely coincidence, the mortgagee of the slum from which Sartorius's income is derived. The consequence of the doctor's moral outrage and his subsequent discovery of the merit of self-interest are, therefore, foregone conclusions. Shaw does this to reduce the margin of individual choice. It becomes more difficult for Trench to escape the stigma of parasitism than it is for Trelan because unlike the latter, Trench is forced by the author's manipulation of the plot to choose between habitual aristocratic life and the life of the pauper. In the French play, by exercising his freedom of choice Trelan could rise above common cynicism. Undoubtedly, such an action has only limited value and cannot be a substitute for collective action. But at least the play sees man as a responsible individual whose action determines his own life as well as that of others. Of course the importance of such action can easily be overestimated as it can be used as a handy weapon by political reactionaries. But that does not demonstrate the superior realism of Shaw's play nor justify his stricture that his critics do not recognise life in the glare of the footlights, since the number of improbabilities in the two plots are almost equal.

If *Widowers' Houses* still conveys an impression of intense

realism, it is because the creaking joints of the plot are completely hidden by the confident realism of the details, and Shaw's boldness succeeds in transforming the subject of municipal debates and official bluebooks into stageable drama. This is both its strength and its weakness. If the freshness of the subject and the author's originality (compared to the prevailing theatrical fashion) is its strength, its weakness lies in its being too obviously a thesis play : for an author who set so much store by the organicness of the plot, the mechanical contraption manufactured to prove a point must be counted as a conspicuous failure. We need not hesitate in conceding that if Augier stresses one side of the truth about man's relation to society, Shaw provides the necessary correction in emphasizing the other side, namely, that individual responsibility cannot be a substitute for state intervention in the interests of the poor. The play thus becomes an argument for socialism.<sup>6</sup> But what has not been noticed — and in this respect the most glaring oversight is the playwright's — is that the argument is merely the inspiration behind the play, not the play itself. When we judge the play we must go not by abstract arguments but by the behaviour of the *dramatis personae* in actual situations, which means that they cannot be treated merely as social types — nor their behaviour as mere paradigms — but also as individuals with a subjective sense of freedom. This makes a crucial difference. When Shaw assumes the audience's culpability in the maintenance of a parasitic system, he is within his rights as a social observer, but when he deals

with his characters, one finds that he does not make them mere representatives of social classes; they are finely differentiated individuals, yet in his defence of his characters he seeks to focus entirely on social determinism. First he gives Sartorius enough individuality, then in his defence he seeks to discount that aspect completely. The attention of the reader is drawn away from the Sartorius of the play to the character of the social class of which Sartorius is a member.

This tendency is abetted by certain hints of the author. To discount the individualism of the character, Shaw makes use of the sartorial metaphor. A.M.Gibbs draws our attention to the name 'Sartorius', pointing out that sartorial surfaces hide the ruthless<sup>7</sup> nature of predatory capitalism. In the first act Cokane chides Trench for being seen in *négligé* : "How are they to know that you are well connected if you do not show it in your costume ?"<sup>8</sup> Cokane believes that a gentleman is his tailor's creation and he is supported in this by the transformation of Lickcheese, whose new status is summed up by sealskin. Viewed in this manner Sartorius becomes a class name. Carlyle says in *Sartor Resartus* :

Happy he who can look through the clothes of a man (the woollen, the fleshly, and official Bank-paper and state-paper clothes) into the Man Himself; and discern, it may be, in this or the other Dread Potentate, a more or less incompetent Digestive-apparatus; yet also an

inscrutable venerable Mystery, in the meanest Tinker that sees with eyes.<sup>9</sup>

Shaw is here moving in the opposite direction. Instead of penetrating the layers of clothes to reach to the soul, Shaw seems to maintain that the soul of a man becomes the social clothes it wears. In the preface, he drives home the point by arguing that everybody in Sartorius's position would have behaved as he did.

It is important to recognise the proper status of Sartorius and his relation to the author. In this regard, apparently plausible observations miss the mark because they fail to locate the hidden nexus between the dramatist and the main character. Margery Morgan, for instance, says that "the view of society that the play unfolds is of a conspiracy between the aristocracy of 'Birth' and the self-made middle class against the poorest section of community."<sup>10</sup>

Such a view would seem to be warranted by Shaw's florid use of imagery : he is supposed to have shown middle-class respectability and younger son gentility fattening on the poverty of the slum as flies fatten on filth.<sup>11</sup> But in another sentence — and there's the rub — he says :

Now the didactic object of my play is to bring conviction of sin — to make the Pharisee who repudiates Sartorius as either a Harpagon or a diseased dream of mine, and thanks God that such persons do not represent his class, recognise that Sartorius is his own photograph. In vain

will the virtuous critic tell me that he does not own slum property; all I want to see is the label on his matchbox or his last week's washing bill, to judge for myself whether he really ever gives a second thought to Sartorius's tenants, who make his matchboxes and wash his stockings so cheaply.<sup>12</sup>

Such a view excludes the conspiracy theory. The people who are indicted are not only Sartorius, Trench and Cokane, but the entire community.<sup>13</sup>

By giving exploitation the character of necessity, Shaw makes the exploiters victims of their circumstances rather than conspirators. The acquittal of Sartorius is important. The play is a comedy of evil in which the vulgar snob Cokane, with 'tact' as his watchword, the ne'er-do-well scoundrel Lickcheese finally making it with suave blackmail and the once-naïve Trench outgrowing his brief period of innocence forge an alliance with the clear-eyed and inexorable Sartorius. The tension of the play is created by the conflict between Trench and Sartorius and it is resolved in the appropriate manner of comedy — not in Trench's destruction but in his absorption by Sartorius's greater magnetism and firmer grasp of truth.

The Shavian ambivalence about society that we have discovered in the novels will be evident in the play once we accept that Sartorius is not merely a helpless victim, not merely a fellow sinner but also the Shavian mask, and his relation to

Trench is in some respects similar to Undershaft's relation to Cusins in *Major Barbara*. Sartorius is the precursor of Undershaft, and embodies, like him, the conflicting tendencies of Shaw's immensely complex attitude towards man and society.

In what amounts to almost a parody of the well-made sentimental play, Shaw allows Lickcheese at the beginning of the second act to become pathetic, letting the play come close to being a tear-jerker. The discharged Lickcheese, wretched, shabby and struggling to keep the wolf from the door, leaves the scene as a wreck: Sartorius is an affectionate father, but in the role of a slum landlord he is hardened and impervious to sentimental appeals. His own house is on gravel and the hygienic environment keeps the death-rate of the locality very low. In his slums, when the returns dwindle a little because of welfare costs, he condemns Lickcheese and his four children to starvation. Thus a side of Sartorius's character is revealed which Shaw, in a flurry of rationalization, does not take stock of either in the preface or in his numerous remarks on the play.

Sartorius's money is extracted at the expense of hungry children crying for milk. It is true that Sartorius alone cannot change the system, it may also be true that the total overhaul of the system is necessary, but his sacking of Lickcheese because the latter spent a little sum in mending a staircase shows that as a member of his class, Sartorius is the most hardened of exploiters. When money is involved, he does not hesitate to create avoidable misery. The pettiness of Lickcheese's "crime"—

Lickcheese is tight-fisted and spends only when spending becomes unavoidable, and never to an extent that neutralises even a week's collection — and the enormity of the punishment exposes the weakest spot of Shaw's defence of Sartorius. Shaw's absolution of Sartorius depends on the unstated syllogism that since this is a very imperfect world, abounding in gross injustice, and as humanitarian gestures cannot be the substitute for collective decisions, we have no individual — as distinct from collective — obligation to our neighbours, and can skin them with a clear conscience and put the blame on society. Lickcheese has a point when he says that Sartorius is "no better than the worst I ever had to do with."<sup>14</sup> But the point is lost on Shaw, whose acute social conscience is accompanied by phlegmatism on the question of individual responsibility.

When Shaw says that his attacks are directed against his readers<sup>15</sup> and not against the stage characters, he must be taken seriously because Sartorius's acquittal depends, in Shaw's scheme, on the conviction of the reader. In accordance with this scheme Shaw turns *peripeteia* or reversal — a tragic device in Greek drama — to comic end. Before the crucial twist the play is allowed to develop as a stage melodrama with a lily-hearted hero, a sharp villain and an appropriately lugubrious proletarian in Trench, Sartorius and Lickcheese respectively. Lickcheese's exposé in the second act pitches Sartorius in the nadir of public estimation. Then the plot begins to wind in the opposite direction. Sartorius's innocent comment in the first act — "we are fellow

travellers, I believe, sir"<sup>16</sup> — becomes pungent irony as the truth begins to surface about Trench's property. The apparent villain turns out to be the only level-headed person in the play; with his clear-sightedness he takes Trench in hand and after destroying his naivety wins him over slowly but inexorably, forcing him to give up his half-hearted milking of the poor for full-blooded exploitation. When a half-indignant, half-dazed Trench asks: "Do you mean to say that I am just as bad as you?", he replies: "If, when you say you are just as bad as I am, you mean that you are just as powerless to alter the state of society, then you are unfortunately quite right."<sup>17</sup>

Shaw intends to show that the audience live, like Trench, in glass houses and have no business to throw stones at Sartorius. In fact he says something which is more depressing: as an individual one cannot come out of his glass house even if one wishes to. Sartorius closes the exit door when he says: "No, gentleman: when people are very poor you cannot help them, no matter how much you may sympathise with them."<sup>18</sup> It is not impossible to detect a sneaking satisfaction in the remark, and one suspects that the satisfaction is not Sartorius's alone. The reader of the novels recognises echoes of Sidney Trefusis in Sartorius. When one adds to it the fact that Sartorius, in his unflinching recognition of the evil of property and his unsentimental rejection of charity becomes a potent advocate of socialism even without once mentioning the word "socialism", it at once becomes clear that Sartorius is the mask through which Shaw

reveals himself in the play.

Blanche merely echoes her father with her gut-reaction :  
"Oh, I hate the poor. At least, I hate those dirty, drunken,  
disreputable people who live like pigs."<sup>19</sup> The transformation of  
Sartorius from an apparent vampire to a very affectionate father  
and a favourable human specimen is one of the marvels of the play.  
Upto the second act, Shaw keeps his cards close to his chest  
before revealing them through deft manipulation of the plot.

To expedite Sartorius's acquittal, Lickcheese's sudden  
resurrection through a *coup-de-theatre* is affected. Shaw touches  
the play up with farce to save the comedy from sentimentality, and  
the play successfully blows away the cloud of Sartorius's  
culpability. The Sartorius we are left with at the end of the play  
— the Sartorius whom Shaw chooses as his alter ego — is a  
helpless unit of an unjust society, a tender-hearted father who is  
both father and mother to his orphaned daughter. This would have  
been impossible if he had had the blood of Lickcheese's children  
on his hands. Therefore the prim theatrical device of a  
resurrected Lickcheese in a dazzling sealskin-coat smoothly going  
through one sleek deal after another is a necessity for  
Sartorius's moral rehabilitation. Shaw caps his acquittal by  
providing him with the final testimony of his innocence : "...if  
we made the houses any better, the rents would have to be raised  
so much that the poor people would be unable to pay, and would be  
thrown homeless on the streets."<sup>20</sup>

We need to modify radically Margery Morgan's conclusion and

insist that the vision of the world the play unfolds is bifocal, it sees the world through the scowling eyes of a Carlylean prophet from a distance and it sees it through the eyes of Sartorius inside the play. As a result the play preaches socialism but rejects brotherhood. The relation between the two can be diverse : at the hands of Chesterton and Belloc human brotherhood was the more effective substitute for soulless statism. For most socialists, one is the foundation of the other. But Shaw, who has often bewildered his readers with simultaneously viewing things from different points of view (the most notable examples are the debate in the interlude of *Man and Superman* and the exchange between Joan and Cauchon in *Saint Joan*) declines to probe the effect of Sartorius's refusal to make himself responsible for the fate of his tenants. Both Sartorius and his creator puts the question of individual liability out of court. If Sartorius sees man only as a small part of a big social machine, discounting the relevance of the margin of individual choice in an arrangement of impersonal forces, Shaw goes the whole distance with him by not taking the question up either in the preface or in his letters and by manipulating the plot in such a way that the importance of an individual decision becomes insignificant even to the individual who would normally have been affected by such a decision in life. Lickcheese's luck is actually Shaw's blind spot.

Returning to Augier's play for comparison we see that if the Shavian mind shows a better understanding of politics, a part of the mind also remains stunted in comparison. In the *Ceinture*

*Doree* the author makes us believe that the love between Trelan and Celeste will inspire them to attain a strength which neither of them is capable of by himself or herself alone. That strength teaches them that instead of being the victims of simple determinism, they will master their environment. The break with Augier's play is nowhere more pronounced in *Widowers' Houses* than in the manner in which the characters look at love. In Shaw's play love is shown to be a masochistic impulse; attachment brings in its wake injury and insult. Blanche, who savages the maid deeply attached to her and nearly throttles her to death, explains her conduct with cool nonchalance: "Nobody who really cares for me gives me up because of my temper. I never show my temper to any of the servants but that girl; and she is the only one that will stay with us."<sup>21</sup>

This vampirish exultation over turning love into servitude, and rewarding it with wanton cruelty returns with slight changes in the last act, where Blanche's sultry but unconventional expression of love takes the form of a spider-dance. Her last long speech, apart from reminding the reader of the erotic dance of the primitive animal in heat, is a massive assault on any illusory self-respect that Trench may still possess. In a short but deadly burst of nervous revulsion, the author of *Three Plays for Puritans* reveals the picture of his hell. That he is in violent disagreement with his critics over the name of this state of mind is a different matter.

## II

Shaw's next play, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, created even greater sensation than *Widowers' Houses*. For thirty-one years it remained unlicensed in England (it was licensed in 1924). In the United States, where there was no censor, the actors were arrested, to be later released on bail.

In his usual fashion Shaw derived the play from a romantic story about a prostitute and gave it a twist that completely changed and Shavianised it. In a letter, published in the *Daily Chronicle* on 30th April, 1898, he wrote :

As to "Mrs Warren's profession" it came about in this way. Miss Janet Achurch mentioned to me a novel by some French writer as having a dramatisable story in it. It being hopeless to get me to read anything, she told me the story, which was ultra-romantic. I said, "Oh, I will work out the real truth about the mother some day. In the following autumn I was the guest of a lady of a very distinguished ability — one whose knowledge of English social types is as remarkable as her command of industrial and political questions. She suggested that I should put on the stage a real modern lady of the governing class — not the sort of thing the theatrical and critical authorities imagine such a lady to be. I did so; and the result was Vivie Warren."<sup>22</sup>

The uproar that the play created was due as much to the theme of prostitution as to Shaw's thesis that prostitution was the least immoral course to be taken under the circumstances and that the members of the audience were no better than Mrs. Warren. As Maurice Colbourne points out :

Squarely on society's—that is the audience's—back he laid the burden of blame, while the prostitute herself, unburdened, escaped free. This was more than any audience bargained for and more than enough to make England evoke her censor, and America her police, in an effort to protect the public from being unmasked before Shaw's unshaking finger as the villain of the piece.<sup>23</sup>

The Shavian bomb explodes in the second act and its sound dies out before the play reaches the third act as the most revolutionary aspect of the play is both introduced and stamped out in a single act. Mrs Warren points out that we, who sell ourselves for other people's profits, are all prostitutes. She also teaches us that the immorality of her profession is nothing compared to the immorality of committing suicide or murder—depending on whether one is an employee or an employer—in a whitelead factory. About her virtuous half-sisters she says :

One of them worked in a whitelead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week until she died of lead poisoning ... The other ... married a government labourer

... and kept his room and the three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week until he took to drink.<sup>24</sup>

The hollowness of the so-called virtuous life was exposed by Liz, Kitty's sister. Kitty Warren was at that time employed as a barmaid and accidentally met Liz one day across the counter. Liz told her what Kitty was doing : she was wearing herself out "for other people's profit."<sup>25</sup> Mrs Warren remarks : "The house in Brussels was...a much better place for a woman to be in than the factory where Ann Jane got poisoned. None of our girls were ever treated as I was treated in the scullery of the temperance place, or at the Waterloo bar, or at home."<sup>26</sup> To the audience not yet accustomed to the Shavian inversion this ethical reorientation must have been stunning, not least because there was too much truth in her contention for the audience's comfort.

Mrs Warren makes this truth pierce the armour of the prudes and puritans present among the audience when she says to her daughter :

What sort of mother do you take me for ? How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery ? And what's a woman worth ? What's life worth ? Without self-respect ? Why am I independent and able to give my daughter a first-rate education, when other women that had just as good opportunities are in the gutter ? Because I always knew how to respect myself and control myself. Why is Liz looked up in a cathedral town ? The same reason.

Where should we be now if we'd minded the clergyman's foolishness ? Scrubbing floors for one and six pence a day and nothing to look forward to but the workhouse infirmary. Dont you be led astray by people who dont know the world, my girl. The only way for a woman to provide for herself decently is for her to be good to some man that can afford to be good to her. If she's in his own station of life, let her make him marry her; but if she's far beneath him she cant expect it. Ask any lady in London society that has daughters; and she'll tell you the same, except that I tell you straight and she'll tell you crooked.<sup>27</sup>

The impact of this speech is as shattering on the audience as it is on Vivie. With a vice-like grip on logic the disreputable woman demonstrates that she is not the only prostitute in society. Marriage—or most marriages at any rate—is nothing if not legal prostitution, since the compulsions behind most marriages are the same as the compulsions behind Mrs Warren's choice. What the censor and the police must have found unbearable is the evident truth that Kitty Warren retains more self-respect than most "honest" workers. She is definitely more moral if living is more moral than letting oneself be murdered in the white-lead factory. As for the sanctimonious pretensions of society Mrs Warren coolly shows everybody interested in seeing that the overwhelming majority of society is constituted of Mrs Warrens. Mrs Warren's profession is our profession.

Yet the play comes apart at the seams as the tonal incompatibility between the two halves of the play destroys its unity. The following note, written by Shaw, was a part of the programme accompanying the first production of the play at the Strand Theatre : "When a woman of bold character and commercial ability applies to herself the commercial principles that are ruthlessly applied to her in the labour market, the result is Kitty Warren, whom I accordingly present to you."<sup>28</sup>

Yet, *Mrs Warren's Profession* is not merely a sociological play. Kitty Warren is a woman whose individuality spreads beyond the social category of a brothel-madam in an amoral capitalist society, which is all that is strictly necessary to make *Mrs Warren's Profession* a socialist play. Yet in making her a powerful character and in arming her with drive, determination, self-respect and an unconventional humaneness — no girl in any of her brothels is treated as she was treated in the temperance place — Shaw puts himself into a dilemma. The detonative strength of his dynamite depends on his success in making Mrs Warren convincingly superior to the withered specimens of conventional piety as well as to the practitioners of 'clean' business who traditionally escape social odium. But at the same time the particular nature of *Mrs Warren's Profession*, which gives her character a certain turn, is extremely repulsive to Shaw, who shrinks from filth with treflon-like consistency.

The Shavian dilemma has not been happy for the play. The second half of the play negates its first half, and the sting of

Shaw's criticism is largely neutralised at the end when the new heroine — in the first two acts it is Kitty Warren who completely dominates the play — rejects her mother and her mother's world and Kitty Warren merely becomes a part of that world, thoroughly vicious and corrupt. After being allowed to grow as a person, she is made to fizzle out into a mere symbol. By the third act, when Crofts is rebuffed by Vivie, Mrs Warren has been equated with him by her daughter : "When I think of the society that tolerates you, and the laws that protect you ! When I think how helpless nine out of ten girls would be in the hands of you and my mother ! the unmentionable woman and her capitalist bully —"<sup>29</sup>

The reader has reasons to think that this change in attitude is Vivie's as well as Shaw's. Shaw's, because nothing puts him off like sexuality, especially when it is accompanied by emotional demands. The reverse tendency of the play is thus set into motion when Shaw inflates the second act with an exaggerated sentimentality of both the mother and the daughter, for neither of whom the bloated emotionality seems quite natural. The thematic and tonal turnabout is also facilitated by shifting the focus from prostitution to the suggestion of incest. A.M. Gibbs points out that a manuscript draft of the play shows that at one time Shaw wanted to show unambiguously that Samuel Gardner, Frank's father, was also Vivie's father.<sup>30</sup> A letter that he wrote to Archer also clearly states that the play "is enveloped in a web of possibilities of incest" and he chided Archer for being repelled

by the "comparatively rose-watery part of it"<sup>31</sup> :

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But the odd thing to me is that you should so dislike the Frank & Vivie courtship which does not shock me in the least and overlook the episode between Mrs Warren & Frank which is to me the most exquisitely atrocious passage of the play...Mrs Warren narrowly escaping an affair with the son of her old associate, Crofts wanting to have the daughter as her mother's successor even with the possibility of the daughter being his own, & Frank & Vivie making love to one another, is part of the situation. You really have not sounded the depths of the pitch or appreciated the blackness...<sup>32</sup>

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the play which the audience is promised in the programme note, the play that Shaw intended to use as a weapon in his counterblast to society, the play that "unmasked [the public] as the villain of the piece",<sup>33</sup> is not the same play that the audience is left with at the end. Like a chameleon it changes its colour and its meaning changes so completely that somewhere along the line it becomes a different play : Mrs Warren, who began as a symbol of levelheadedness in a society more corrupt than herself, is changed into a part of the *gestalt* that evokes the audience's strongest revulsion. Shaw must have felt that the theme of incest spoilt his original purpose, for he half-heartedly seeks to withdraw it near the end when Frank tells Vivie on the strength of the Reverend

Samuel Gardner's assurance that he is not her half-brother. But by then, it is already too late.

At the base of the play's sudden change of direction lies the issue of Vivie's rejection of her mother. Kitty Warren is a category-defying earthy and robust woman whose vulgarity, shot through with the aches of a hungry heart, constantly threatens to upset the intellectual poise of her daughter. Vivie can accept her mother's profession but when Mrs Warren insists on a mother's claims on her daughter's affection, Vivie, quick to perceive the danger to her passionless world of actuarial calculations, rejects her, saying: "you are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you goodbye now."<sup>34</sup> Kitty Warren's anguished cry — "listen to her ! listen to how she spits on her mother's grey hairs ! oh, may you live to have your own daughter tear and trample on you as you have trampled on me"<sup>35</sup> — brings disconcerting echoes of similar words from King Lear, whom she momentarily resembles when she says : "I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman she turns me out as if I was a leper."<sup>36</sup> It is here that we recognise that Vivie is not merely a prude,<sup>37</sup> she practises the extreme economy of an emotionally parsimonious woman whose chief objection to old world gallantry is that it is "a frightful waste of time."<sup>38</sup>

We are thus back to the familiar world of the Shavian protagonist who protects himself or herself from an overheated emotional atmosphere by retreating behind invisible walls. The withdrawal of the incest theme ironically adds to the similarity

between Vivie and characters like Conolly, Trefusis and Charteris, for the fear of incest would make Vivie's reaction only too natural, but when there is no such excuse, her unceremonious rejection of Frank after a brief period of flirtation, along with her callous indifference to her mother proves that any demand of emotional commitment habitually puts her in a state of funk and invites an immediate backlash.

While Shaw can evoke echoes of *King Lear* in depicting the forlornness of Mrs Warren, the last two acts are basically the justification of Vivie's decision because the bold social rebel has by then become a part of the nauseating viciousness that engulfs the play. The clear-eyed dissident has been enmeshed in a web of incestuous possibilities. This is the Shavian ambivalence. This ambivalence takes the play out of Mrs Warren's hands and puts it into those of her daughter, making it end on a note of negation.

### III

Charteris, the philandering hero of Shaw's third play, resembles the author more closely than any of the figures we have so far come across. For once the author has freed his imagination from the strain of creating a character in which Shaw's own self is blended with a purely fictional element or with an idealized mutant of some strain he perceives in himself. In *Widowers' Houses*

the bio-data of Sartorius, his circumstances and the incidents in his life were as different from Shaw's as chalk is from cheese — the identification was only partial, and that too only at the emotional level, and much of it was subterranean, taking place inspite of the author. Charteris, however, is more than a mask. The incidents of the play so closely resemble the actual incidents in Shaw's life, the characters are such thin disguises for actual persons, and the sexual exploits of Charteris are so unmistakably Shaw's own, that the play can be called autobiographical in the strictest sense.

The first act, in which Julia breaks in on Charteris and Grace, is taken from Shaw's own life. When Jenny Patterson, with whom Shaw had had an affair, came to know of Florence Farr Emery, the other woman in Shaw's life, she created a violent scene. On 4th December 1893, Shaw wrote in his diary :

. In the evening I went to F.E., & J.P. burst in on us very late in the evening. There was a most shocking scene; J.P. being violent and using atrocious language. At last I sent F.E. out of the room, having to restrain J.P. by force from attacking her... I made J.P. write a letter to me expressing her regret & promising not to annoy F.E. again. This was sent to F.E. to reassure her.<sup>39</sup>

Shaw's mercurial shifts in position regarding *The Philanderer* could not have been due to an unwonted tentativeness about its artistic merits : having once got out a confession of

such private nature, it would have been superhuman of him not to wince occasionally at such a delicate subject being broached — though by none other than himself—in full public view. Thus one can almost visualise the disapproving shake of the head as he wrote to Ellen Terry that the play "turned out to be a combination of mechanical farce with realistic filth which quite disgusted me."<sup>40</sup> 'Distress' would have been an apter word than 'disgust' : The Don Juan figure of the play, a figure that would later sing a rehearsed paean to narcissism, was yet to be rigged out in a glossy suit of philosophic jargon. Therefore the picture of the hero emerging from the play is rather unflattering — a fact that could not have escaped Shaw's notice. Mrs Patrick Campbell was quick to put her finger on the sore spot rather bluntly when she said : "I find it ugly — some mischievous personal experience."<sup>41</sup>

Yet the high-minded rhetoric of the play's preface appears to have sprung from an Olympian mind that is a complete stranger to such skittishness as shown by Shaw's private remarks :

In *The Philanderer* I have shown the grotesque sexual compacts made between men and women under marriage laws which represent to some of us a political necessity (especially for other people), to some a divine ordinance, to some a romantic ideal, to some a domestic profession for women, and to some the worst of blundering abominations, an institution which society has outgrown but not modified, and which "advanced" individuals are therefore forced to

evade.<sup>42</sup>

Equally self-assured was his letter to William Archer in which he claimed that though *The Philanderer* was as promising a failure as *Widowers' Houses* it was "a step nearer to something more than talk about what plays ought to be."<sup>43</sup> In another letter he called *Qit* "an extremely advanced farcical comedy."<sup>44</sup> He preened himself for the courage to write such a play and wrote to Richard Mansfield ; "Judging by the reception of 'Arms and the Man', I cannot doubt that if you were to play "The Philanderer", you would be lynched at the end of the first act. It exudes brimstone at every pore..."<sup>45</sup> He congratulated himself for writing such a "dangerous play".<sup>46</sup>

Shaw never got over the flip-flop between such self congratulatory exuberance and undissembled disgust at having washed dirty linen, that too his own, in public. Thus he could dismiss his own boast and write to Golding Bright that *The Philanderer* dealt with the "fashionable cult of Ibsenism and New Womanism on a real basis of clandestine sensuality."<sup>47</sup>

Shaw's uneasiness about the play proves rewarding to the probing scholar. *The Philanderer* is in a sense the prehistory of *Man and Superman*, and in this play Shaw does something he does not dare to do in the more celebrated play : he dares to show the shocking gap between people and their self-images. Whereas in *Man and Superman* Shaw accepts the self-image of Don Juan as his authentic profile, in *The Philanderer* the radical Ibsenist and

socialist can laugh at the discrepancy between Ibsenism as a cult and the real impulses of the people who use that cult merely as a screen. Charteris, for example, seasons the official view of the cult, a view that sanctions his own conduct, with a liberal dollop of irony as he points out to Julia that she has strayed from the narrow path of hallowed libertinism :

As a woman of advanced views, you were determined to be free. You regarded marriage as a degrading bargain, by which a woman sells herself to a man for the social status of a wife and the right to be supported and pensioned in old age out of his income. That is the advanced view : our view. Besides, if you had married me, I might have turned out a drunkard, a criminal, an imbecile, a horror to you, and you couldnt have released yourself...So I had to be content with a charming philanderer, which taught me a great deal and brought me some hours of exquisite happiness.<sup>48</sup>

Many a reader of *Mrs Warren's Profession* and of *Getting Married* will be a little surprised at the farcicality of the tone, suspecting the author to suffer from *mauvaise foi*, because Charteris's tongue-in-cheek remarks are preached with high, even gloomy, seriousness in Shaw's second play as well as in the preface to *Getting Married*. Is the acolyte of the author of *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* playing Judas to his master ? I do not think the question can be answered once for all. It can be argued

quite convincingly that Shaw kept the task of the publicist and that of the artist quite distinct from each other : in the preface to *Getting Married* he merely points the way to a more rational society, whereas in *The Philanderer*, he sees not from any neutral high ground, but through the eyes of actual, and by no means very extra-ordinary, men and women; and through their eyes he sees the absurdity of his — Bernard Shaw's — dream of a rational world. But on closer scrutiny this amounts to begging the question. In the first place, the rational world presented with such conviction in the preface to *Getting Married* is not a world for immortals, it is the best one can have for actual persons living in the world as we know it. Secondly, and this is more important, Shaw's deviation from Ibsen and his recourse to farce stems from a temperamental, and hence artistic, inability rather than from a greater sense of realism.

*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* shows even more clearly than *Getting Married* or its preface that no man was more alive than Shaw to the characteristic genius of Ibsen which had the courage to look steadfastly at our own cherished ideals and discover terrible truths therein. Shaw's themes are similar to Ibsen's — the sanctity of marriage, individual freedom and responsibility, and forms of revolt and evasion — but while the same theme compels Ibsen to probe pitilessly even if it exacts a terrible price (as in the case of Nora), and brings no message of hope (as in the case of Mrs Alving), Shaw, who is willing to go the whole distance with Ibsen at the abstract level of general criticism,

takes evasive action when it comes to realising it imaginatively in his own play. Nora and Mrs Alving are by no means very extraordinary persons, but their creator does not allow them to avoid their fate. In sharp contrast, final evasion after an initial show of courage is the characteristic Shawian reaction. To be true to one's colour under all circumstances implies a degree of commitment that makes every action final and inexorable, and it does not allow the luxury that the snail enjoys of conveniently withdrawing into its shell when the weather gets rough. Charteris, Shaw's alter-ego, seems ignominious not, as Shaw thinks, because of his philandering<sup>49</sup> but because he is mortally afraid to walk without his shell.

Shaw's ambivalence, his intellectual sympathy being at odds with his emotional lukewarmness, places his hero between wind and water, from which position he chooses to extricate himself through non-committal laughter. Farce becomes the natural favourite of a man who finds the burden of revolt, with its emotional complications, so heavy that he opts to stew in the juice of his own egoism instead.

The interpretation of the play as a socialist's critique of existing marriage laws accorded well with Shaw's crusading image, hence its grouping with two other socialist plays under the title, 'Plays Unpleasant'. But as his letter to Golding Bright<sup>50</sup> shows, Shaw himself diluted such a claim and saw it as a satire on clandestine sensuality under the garb of Ibsenism. Such puritanic backlash is not unexpected from a person of intensely antiseptic

taste, but as even a casual comparison with any of Wycherley's plays will show, sensuality, clandestine or otherwise, merely forms the background. Had we not been aware that the play had been modelled on Shaw's own sexual adventures, and had the title been changed and a couple of sentences deleted, we would have been totally unaware of the overt sexual liaison between Julia, Charteris and Grace without much loss of valuable insight. The play can be read as Shaw's comments on advanced morality or on marriage, it can also be read as a satire on philandering, but the most important aspect of the play is concerned with the exploration of human relationship. The play shows what a love story can turn out to be in Shaw's hands.

The non-committal method of Shaw induced an intelligent critic like Margery Morgan to misread the author's ambivalence and project her own humanitarian response into the play when she observed :

The true tension and conflict in the play...arise from the author's recognition that there is a negative and potentially dangerous side to the exercise of reason and its control of emotion... The love-enmity between Julia and Charteris is thus exposed as the effect of an unhappy polarisation of human nature into intellect and emotion.<sup>51</sup>

Morgan's error is caused by the false clues with which Shaw habitually misleads his critics. We have seen in the course of our analysis of the novels — and this will become even more evident

when we come to his last plays — that the method of every Shavian superman is transcendence rather than integration of emotion and intelligence.<sup>52</sup> Shaw's aspirations are closer to those of the saint rather than the modern artist. Yet he is enough of a dramatist to humanise a potentially anti-humanistic aspiration by undermining his own vision with irony. In this particular case his ambivalence is, as we have seen, partly due to some unpleasant personal associations, and partly due to the recognition of his own inability to integrate intellect and emotion : the reluctant compassion for Julia is akin to that of the priest leading the sacrificial goat to the altar. It is just a twinge of remorse for unavoidable suffering, the justice of which is not questioned.

At the centre of the play a man of ideas confronts a woman of feeling. Charteris, who feels at home when he plays with ideas ranging from Ibsenism to philandering, is ill at ease in the presence of Julia, who is an uncomfortable reality — a conventional woman. The insubstantiality of Charteris's world extends to his philandering, for it is a role he plays tentatively like an amateur actor having little faith in his vocation.

Predictably he suffers from a sense of guilt, as is obvious from his weary opening exchanges with Julia. He laughs at Julia's expense, but on the wrong side of his face as it becomes clear to him that he has neither Grace's dignity, nor Julia's human feelings. At this stage *The Philanderer* becomes an ambiguous comedy with two incompatible objects : the satire of Charteris-Shaw directed at himself and an intellectual

justification of Charteris's conduct. That emotionally the play is pulled in two opposite directions is also evident from Shaw's inability to make up his mind about the moral tone of the play.

The sharply unpleasant tone of *The Philanderer* is less due to the theme of philandering than to the ill-usage of Julia at the hands of Charteris. The matrix of farcical comedy is nearly broken when Julia discovers that behind Charteris's gay mask lies a warped mind that makes the most of its opportunity to hurt and humiliate. She says :

You made me pay dearly for every moment of happiness. You revenged yourself on me for the humiliation of being the slave of your passion for me. I was never sure of you for a moment. I trembled whenever a letter came from you, lest it should contain some stab for me. I dreaded your visits almost as much as I longed for them. I was your plaything not your companion.<sup>53</sup>

We have seen that Julia's bitter complaint is not only applicable to Charteris but to most Shavian masks through which the author reveals himself. One remembers the fate of Trefusis's wife, but one also remembers the words of Alice Lockett who discovered in Shaw the same willingness to hurt. The last stinging sentence of Julia's speech is almost an exact repetition of the words of Trefusis's unfortunate wife, the woman who was killed not by the bitter cold night, but by the indifference of a callous husband. The quintessential Shavian hero may have a consort, he is

forbidden to have a companion. The excuses proffered by the heroes differ from case to case, but whatever the pretext — frank charlatantry or the service of the Life Force — a woman is seldom more than a plaything to Conolly or Trefusis, to Charteris or Juan.

Shaw makes a parade of Charteris's power over Julia with almost sickening thoroughness. In confusion and pain, Julia lets out a piercing cry : "Oh, Leonard dont be cruel. I'm too miserable to argue — to think. I only know I love you."<sup>54</sup>

For his sake she sacrifices a woman's pride : "I know I have been wicked, odious, bad :I say nothing in defence of myself... I was distracted by the thought of losing you. I can't face life without you, Leonard."<sup>55</sup> But the snail living in his hard shell is a singularly insular creature. Though Charteris can get hold of a ready excuse for his callousness to Julia's suffering — she behaves like a spoilt child and talks like a sentimental novel<sup>56</sup> — it is only remotely connected with Julia's exasperating habits. Grace Tranfield, who furnishes him with none of these excuses, is treated with better manners, but not with much genuine difference. As Sylvia, Julia's sister, observes, "I dont think you care a bit more for one woman than for another."<sup>57</sup>

Oddly enough, this underdeveloped sensibility forms the basis of the supermanlike swank of Shaw's hero. To Grace, a model of self-control, yet full of love for him, Charteris boasts:"My happiness depends on nobody but myself, I can do without you."<sup>58</sup> Yet he will not give up his inauthentic existence, his habit of

treating his own life as a vaudeville and his women as playthings. To such a player it means very little if his words ring utterly false, since the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity has been completely erased by his constant itch for histrionics. Thus he can say to Grace, with a vulgar cacchination she does not hear : "you have my heart in your hands. Break it. Throw my happiness out of the window."<sup>59</sup>

The subject of Shaw's almost endless number of jokes, the physician, is obligingly present in the form of Dr Paramore. Yet that doughty votary of mind-boggling stupidity, choking with disappointment at the loss of science on hearing that Paramore's disease was a false discovery, is only slightly more ridiculous than the clever hero : one claims for medical science total independence of human welfare, the other, in his eagerness to remain an advanced individual, gladly renounces his humanity. They make a neat twosome. As Julia says about Charteris: "There is not in his whole nature one unselfish spot."<sup>60</sup> But Charteris does not depend on Julia to pronounce his bankruptcy, he does it out of his own mouth when he confesses that he was driven to propose to Grace only to escape from Julia. At the end Julia knows something Charteris does not know—that he is "a miserable little plaster saint."<sup>61</sup>

Shaw's studio contains many clay models of the finished colossal figure of the superman, and Charteris, though finally abandoned, or rather supplanted, is one of the early models. Though this thing is added and that subtracted, the final version

of the superman differs only in external details. Inside his bones, deep in his marrow—the region that is not touched by intellectual debate—he is the same material as Charteris. The genesis of Don Juan must be traced to in characters like Charteris in order to discover their fundamental similarity which overrides the difference. In this sense *The Philanderer* in the prehistory of *Man and Superman*, and even *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Since this similarity is not apparent to Shaw he lets the reader see the entrails of Charteris. In *Man and Superman* he takes much greater care to cover his base, to conceal the fact that his colossal figure, Don Juan, too, is a plaster saint.

#### Chapter 4 : Notes and References

1. Quoted in *Shaw : an Autobiography, 1856-1898*, pp. 268-269.
2. CP I, p. 33.
3. Letter to *The Speaker*, 31 December, 1892, quoted in *Shaw : an Autobiography, 1856-1898*, p. 275.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.
5. Charles H. Shattuck, "Bernard Shaw's Bad Quarto", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*<sup>54</sup> (1955) : 651-63.
6. In the Preface Shaw says that the play is "deliberately intended to induce people to vote in the Progressive side at the next Country Council election in London." CP I, p. 46.
7. A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p. 44.
8. CP I, p. 4.
9. *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. I, p. 65. My attention has been drawn by Gibbs's book to the connection between Shaw's protagonist and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. However it seems to me that Gibbs overlooks the fact that Shaw is reversing the Carlylean position in equating a man's soul with his clothes, i.e. his social position.
10. Margery Morgan, *The Shavian Playground*, p. 27.
11. CP I, p. 33.
12. *Shaw : an Autobiography, 1856-1898*, p. 27.
13. In the preface Shaw makes his intentions clear : "I must, however, warn my readers that my attacks are directed against themselves, not against my stage figures." CP I, p. 34.

14. CP I, p. 80.
15. Ibid., p. 34.
16. Ibid., p. 51.
17. Ibid., p. 94.
18. Ibid., p. 93.
19. Ibid., p. 110.
20. Ibid., p. 110.
21. Ibid., p. 98.
22. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, pp. 403-404.
23. Maurice Colbourne, *The Real Bernard Shaw*, p. 125.
24. CP I, pp. 310-11.
25. Ibid., p. 312.
26. Ibid., p. 312.
27. Ibid., pp. 314-15.
28. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Theatrical companion to Shaw*, p. 32.
29. CP I, p. 332.
30. A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and mind of Shaw*, p. 52.
31. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 277. c
32. Ibid.
33. Colbourne, op. cit., p. 125.
34. CP I, p. 355.
35. Ibid., p. 354-55.
36. Ibid., p. 355.
37. Maurice Valency remarks that Vivie's objection to her mother's profession is not so much a socialist's objection to profiteering

as a puritan's revulsion against sexuality. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet* pp. 97-98. There is little doubt that inspite of what they claim Vivie and her creator are revolted by sex but I think Valency misses the point that what Vivie finds even more revolting than sex is her mother's expectation that she reciprocate her feelings towards her.

38. CP I, p. 277.

39. Editorial note, *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 296.

40. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 644.

41. *Bernard Shaw and Mrs Patrick Campbell : Their Correspondence*, p. 86.

42. CP I, p. 33.

43. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 395.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 458.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 632.

48. CP I, p. 147.

49. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 486.

50. *Op. cit.*

51. Margery Morgan, *The Shawian Playground*, pp. 32-34.

52. The subject is discussed in detail in the last chapter of this study.

53. CP I, p. 148.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Ibid., p. 153.
57. Ibid., p. 180.
58. Ibid., p. 185.
59. Ibid., pp. 184-85.
60. Ibid., p. 211.
61. Ibid., p. 220.

## Chapter 5

### The Sugar and the Pill : Plays Pleasant

" 'Not by wrath but by laughter doth one kill' — Thus speakest thou once, O Zarathustra, thou hidden one, thou destroyer without wrath, thou dangerous saint — thou art a rogue."

Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Since idealism is the chief villain in Shaw's demonology, it can be relied upon to be deadly when it feeds like a parasite on war. The categories of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* have distinctly influenced Shaw's attitude to *Arms and the Man* and he takes great care to explain that he is in deep earnest regarding it not as a farcical comedy but as serious drama :

I claim that the dramatic effect produced by the shock which the realities give to the notion of romantic young ladies and fierce civilians is not burlesque, but legitimate comedy, none the less pungent because...the romantic young lady was on the stage and the fierce civilians in the stalls.<sup>1</sup>

Contemptuously refuting the charge that the character of Bluntschli is taken not from life but from popular extravaganza, he explains :

...the much criticised Swiss officer in *Arms and the Man* is not a conventional stage soldier. He suffers from want of food and sleep; his nerves go to pieces after three days under fire, ending in the horrors of a rout and pursuit; he has found by experience that it is more important to have a few bits of chocolate to eat in the field than cartridges for his revolver. When many of my critics rejected these circumstances as fantastically improbable and cynically unnatural, it was not necessary to argue them into common sense : all I had to do was to brain them, so to speak, with the first half dozen military authorities at hand, beginning with the present Commander-in-Chief.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Shaw had reasons to be disappointed when his critics threw his denunciation of farcical comedy back in his teeth, and the audience howled with laughter at what they thought was a first-rate burlesque on the code of chivalry. He did not conceive the play as the representation of a risible action: the author of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* wished to go beyond Ibsen by not only showing the perniciousness of Brand's code of conduct but also by presenting in his play a worthier code to replace that of Brand.

As an avowed realist he diagnosed that the chief obstacle to moral progress was idealism, which blocked the healthy impulses of the normal individual by putting outdated ideals in their way :

I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity...On the other hand, I see plenty of good in the world working itself out as fast as idealists will allow it, and if they would only let it alone and learn to respect reality...At all events, I do not see moral chaos and anarchy as the alternative to romantic convention...<sup>3</sup>

He was aware that the consequences of pursuing romantic ideals were "sometimes terrible, sometimes ludicrous",<sup>4</sup> and while Sergius's behaviour tends to make him appear ludicrous, Shaw takes care to stress his tragic potential in the stage directions :

By his brooding on the perpetual failure, not only of others, but of himself, to live up to his ideals, by his consequent cynical scorn for humanity; by his jejune credulity as to the absolute validity of his concepts and the unworthiness of the world in disregarding them...he has acquired the half tragic, half ironic air, the mysterious moodiness, the suggestion of a strange and terrible history that has left nothing but undying remorse, by which Childe Harold fascinated the grandmothers of his English contemporaries.<sup>5</sup>

For *Arms and the Man* to be serious drama, Sergius has to be

more than a Jack-in-the-box, he must be a worthy foil to Bluntschli, who is created to uphold the principle of realism that fills up the vacuum left by idealism. Thus Shaw attempts to humanise Sergius by making a clear distinction between his natural impulses, which Sergius distrusts, and his absurd romanticism, which he ridiculously attempts to live up to. It is his power of introspection and his continuous self-criticism that makes him the Hamlet of Shaw's attempted comedy. Though Bluntschli is the Shavian hero, it is Sergius who is the fulcrum of the play because the conflict in his soul reflects the central contest in the play, the contest between romanticism and realism over the conquest of Raina, who in the context of the play is the prize to be won by the victor. Sergius is conceived, therefore, not as a panjandrum but as Manfred. Ibsen's disciple knew well enough that to succeed where Brand and Rosmer had failed, Bluntschli had to be more than a Punchinello, and to be worthy of his steel, Sergius had to be more than a figure of burlesque. The weaning away of Raina from Sergius to Bluntschli can be worthwhile only if the action of the play can recreate some value that the audience recognise as precious.

Positive value is sought to be derived from the distinction between not only manner and substance, but also between overt action and the significance of that action. Bluntschli's manners are those of a commercial traveller but then it must be remembered that the creator of Julius Caesar (in *Caesar and Cleoptra*) disguised even true heroism behind a conspicuously anti-heroic

mask.

By making Bluntschli conspicuously anti-heroic Shaw seeks to create the perfect antithesis of Ibsen's heroes who, with all their sterling virtues, succeeded only in inviting disaster. Brand "caused more intense suffering by his saintliness than the most talented sinner could probably have done."<sup>6</sup> Rosmer was responsible for the "monstrous sequel of asking the woman to kill herself in order to restore the man's good opinion of himself."<sup>7</sup>

Shaw dispenses with the high nervous energy of tragedy because according to him the test of virtue does not lie in heroic defiance but in its friendliness to life. Thus quite early in the play Bluntschli presents the credo of the author when he tells Raina that it is one's duty to live as long as one can. Shaw's priorities are made clear when he attempts the transformation of an Ibsenite tragedy into a Shavian comedy by changing Hedda Gabler into Sergius. Hedda "is a typical nineteenth century figure, falling in the abyss between the ideals which do not impose on her and the realities she has not yet discovered."<sup>8</sup> In other words, she is the soul-mate of Sergius, who, with the climate of comedy to protect him, manages to avoid the former's end.

Not only is tragic potential made comic, but the scales of popular morality are also reversed. In popular estimation nothing can be more noble than patriotism or chivalry, nothing is more exalting than the higher love, conversely few things are looked down upon with as much contempt as the profession of the

mercenary. Yet as Bluntschli tightens his grip on the play and begins to re-educate both Raina and Sergius, one is reminded of Shaw's remarks on Ibsen :

He protests against the ordinary assumption that there are certain moral institutions which justify all means used to maintain them, and insists that the supreme end shall be inspired, eternal, ever growing one, not the external, unchanging, artificial one...And because the will to change our habits and thus defy morality arises before the intellect can reason any rationally beneficent purpose in change, there is always an interval during which the individual can say no more than that he wants to behave immorally because he likes and because he will feel constrained and unhappy if he acts otherwise.<sup>9</sup>

Bluntschli is the free spirit in comic disguise, the Shavian rebel who rides roughshod over institutions when they come in the way of his vital impulses. Yet his rebellion is not against life but against the romantic code that narrows and chokes life. Therefore though he scorns chivalry, the fiction of higher love and the romance of warfare, he surpasses Sergius in military skill and beats him in love. The weakness of Sergius is that he is not enough of a soldier and not much of a lover; he mistakes the gilt of the gingerbread for the gingerbread. The strength of Bluntschli is that he can augment the substance by cutting out the frills. At the end of the play when it is revealed that he is as much a

victim of illusion as any one else, a romantic who does not know a woman of twenty-three from a girl of eighteen, the shock of the revelation cannot nullify the qualitative difference between his illusion and that of Sergius, for Bluntschli is the victim of "necessary illusion," which is "the guise in which reality must be presented before it can rouse a man's interest."<sup>10</sup> The illusions of Sergius are not induced by nature, but by the conventions of the opera, thus they leave him ill-equipped to cope with the real world.

Bluntschli's romantic illusion, on the other hand, helps him to neutralize the deflationary tendency of objective knowledge and leads him to court Raina even after her pretensions have been torpedoed by him. To anticipate the language devised by Shaw some years later, Bluntschli's illusion makes him the servant of the Life Force. The difference between the healthy illusion of Bluntschli and the morbid illusion of Sergius is summed up by Shaw in a different context when he avers that "upto a certain point, illusion... is, more or less, precious and indispensable; but beyond that point it gives more trouble than it is worth..."<sup>11</sup>

Thus Shaw's acute disappointment, when critics dismissed the play as a farcical comedy, was understandable. Leading the pack was William Archer, who called it "a fantastic psychological extravaganza, in which drama, farce, and Gilbertian irony keep flashing past the bewildered eye..."<sup>12</sup> When Archer remarked that the play made him laugh hysterically, not soberly, he was articulating in a remarkably similar language Shaw's own

denunciation of farcial comedy :

The very dullest drama in five acts that ever attained for half a moment to some stir of feeling, leaves the spectator, however it may have bored him, happier and fresher than three acts of farcical comedy at which he has been worried into laughing incessantly with an empty heart...<sup>13</sup>

With such an unfavourable disposition to farce, Shaw found the comparison with Gilbert particularly offensive. He wrote to Archer that *Arms and the Man* was not a Gilbertian play :

Gilbert is simply a paradoxically humorous cynic. He accepts the conventional ideals implicitly but observes that people do not really live up to them. This he regards as a failure on their part at which he mocks bitterly. This position is precisely that of Sergius in the play...I do not accept the conventional ideals...Sergius is ridiculous through the breakdown of his ideals, not odious from his falling short of them. As Gilbert sees they dont work : but what Gilbert does not see is that there has been something else that does work, and in that something else there is a completely satisfactory asylum for the affections.<sup>14</sup>

The critical standard applied here is less controversial than the play itself and Shaw is absolutely right when he insists

that the play, to be satisfying, must provide a "satisfactory asylum for the affections." By the same token it was unnecessary for him to defend the reality of the play by vouching that many of the incidents, dismissed as implausible by critics, were taken from actual life; for dramatic truth is by no means dependent on its correspondence to statistical reality. To be perceived as serious, the seriousness of the dramatic action must be self-evident, not dependent on the author's intervention as commentator or on a detailed knowledge of the intellectual schemata behind the play. If a play deals with pure feeling, the feeling must have sufficient strength to be transmitted to the audience. A play lives or dies as a play in the theatre and not on the critic's desk.

Shaw hoped that *Arms and the Man* would radiate seriousness but his hopes were thoroughly belied by the nature of the play's success. The play could not convince the audience that it constituted a new Bible, or that it was a riposte to Ibsen's *Brand*. It was certainly enjoyable, but both the war, which formed the play's background, and the reality which *Arms and the Man* was supposed to uphold dissolved into a fantasy which was no more real than the operas that shaped Sergius's sensibility.

Shaw wished to change the nineteenth-century extravaganza into its opposite, the result showed that the conventions of the extravaganza defeated the purpose of the realist who chipped away at the illusion separating drama from reality. It is quite possible that some East European nobles considered it a luxury to

have a wash every day, it is not impossible either that veteran soldiers rely more on chocolate than on revolvers, that they feel as frightened as mice when they are at the end of their tether; it may even be conceded that a cavalry charge reminds some of them of the slinging of a handful of peas against the window-pane, but a dramatist who incorporates these things into the nucleus of his play cannot prevent his audience from believing that the world thus portrayed is not Bulgaria but Clouduckooland.

Did the controversy over *Arms and the Man* centre on mere misunderstanding and an error of judgment? Was Shaw's failure only an artistic lapse, the inability to capture the right emotional tone? I feel that the failure involved something more. The "plenty of good in the world working itself out"<sup>15</sup> is not quite evident in the play. If Sergius is Shaw's Hamlet, then the audience's feeling must be stirred by the conflict between his real self and his self-perception. The play is bound to crumble as serious drama the moment Sergius is perceived as a dunderhead. And surely a dramatic critique of romanticism, in order to be taken seriously, must go beyond burlesque. The biggest weakness of *Arms and the Man* lies in making Sergius not a romantic but a Trojan horse in the camp of romanticism. Shaw reminds the readers through his stage direction that Sergius's prototype is Byron, but would a Byron or a Pushkin ever behave as Sergius does—like a nincompoop? Burlesque is of course a legitimate weapon of the comedist but then who can hope to learn the truth about Hitler from Chaplin's *the Great Dictator* or claim that Aristophanes gives us a true picture of Socrates in

the *Clouds* ? Arms and the Man does not fail as extravaganza or farcical comedy, it only fails to live up to Shaw's claims about the play.

The fate of the play was indeed strange : Shaw had written a play which his audience did not understand, the audience went ecstatic over a play Shaw claimed he had not written. He said that he had written a "drama of pure feeling",<sup>16</sup> but regretted that there was no audience for the play. Shaw thought that through Bluntschli he presented the prophet of a new religion; the audience, on the other hand, thought that it got a clown who was intensely amusing and whose success it attributed to the climate of the circus, which enables the clown to perform the most difficult trick on the trapeze, and to the laws of farce, which make it possible for the little man to knock a hole into the stone wall with his head. A more classic example of mutual misunderstanding would be difficult to find.

Shaw was still the outsider struggling, without great success, to plant his foot on the ground trodden by the mass of the people. He blamed his audience for making it difficult for him to do so and railed at "the mass of people, too stupid to relish the wit, and too convention-ridden to sympathize with real as distinct from theatrical feeling."<sup>17</sup> When he lamented that the whole affair was a "ghastly failure"<sup>18</sup> he was letting out his frustration at not being able to establish a meaningful contact with his audience. As the failure of the audience to recognize the prophet in Bluntschli revealed, the outsider had a long way to go

before he could find his way to men's hearts. Meanwhile he would have to be content with the knowledge that his abilities were not equal to his aspirations. After all, what was a ghastly failure was the play he had intended to write, not the play he had actually written.

## II

We have seen that the dominant theme in Shawian drama is the protagonist's rejection of love. This eagerness to outgrow love is actually an attempt to rise above human community, to exist as a monad. Behind this anti-romanticism is intense, though warped, romanticism. In *Candida* we have a glimpse of the hidden adolescent mind exalting the Virgin Mother, a dramatisation of the crypto-romantic timidity that chooses the regressive joy of adolescence instead of the demanding relationship between two adults.

*Candida* is ostensibly Shaw's reply to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. In a letter to the *Evening Standard* Shaw claimed that the play was "a counterblast to Ibsen's *Doll's House*, showing that in the real typical doll's house it is the man who is the doll."<sup>19</sup> Yet the new equation between husband and wife is actually far less important than the author's fascination with *Candida*. Nora is the representative of the New Woman in a male-dominated society, *Candida* is a unique woman who satisfies the author's ambivalence

and contradictory cravings.

In rough and external details *Candida* conforms to the comic pattern. It can be read as a domestic comedy in which the love triangle dissolves to form a happy ending as the loving husband embraces his idealised wife at the end of the play and the outsider goes out into the night. Superficially, the same conservative spirit, the same vindication of hearth and home over bohemian abandon and unbridled romance is presented in the Shavian distillation of Pre-Raphaelitism because unlike Mary Bruin of Yeats's *The Land of the Heart's Desire*, the Pre-Raphaelite play whose theme and structure Shaw closely parallels in *Candida* before subverting the pattern decisively in the end,<sup>20</sup> *Candida* chooses the prosaic husband instead of the spritely spirit who comes to take her away.

Shaw's attitude towards Morell and *Candida* is far more ambiguous than his remarks about the play's relationship to *A Doll's House* indicate. Joseph Wood Krutch is less absurd than he sounds when he maintains that "the author's sympathies are principally on the side of the clergyman husband."<sup>21</sup> Shaw's description of Morell is instructive: "The Reverend James Mavor Morell is a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England, and an active member of the Guild of St. Matthew and the Christian Social Union. A vigorous, genial, popular man of forty, robust and goodlooking, full of energy, with pleasant, hearty considerate manners, and a sound unaffected voice...a wide range and perfect command of expression."<sup>22</sup> Stewart Headlam is the most

obvious model of Morell, though in his letter to *The Evening Standard* Shaw claims that Morell is modelled after Stopford Brooke with touches of Canon Shuttleworth and Fleming Williams.<sup>23</sup> But what Shaw does not say is that he himself closely resembles Morell. Maurice Valency discovers the essential kinship between Shaw and the clergyman. The action takes place in October 1894, the play is written in 1895. Shaw would be Morell's age in a year. Morell's description, his manners and talents suited Shaw almost to the ground. As Valency remarks: "The Shaw who wrote prefaces and lectured in workmen's Halls was unquestionably much more Morell than Marchbanks."<sup>24</sup>

When Morell's home turns out to be a doll's house, the audience is not presented with an expose' by an author soaring above the action, instead, the author reveals his own uneasiness, fears and secret cravings. With the knowledge of the author's own home that was not quite a home, his unsatisfied childhood cravings for maternal love, and his fear that his father's rights as a husband may have been infringed, one is able to see that the extraordinary tension of the play is generated, at least partly, by the reenactment of the drama of the author's life, a drama that the change of names and circumstances does not sufficiently disguise.<sup>25</sup>

The play is built around the change in the relationship among the three principal characters. The audience, accustomed to the paradigm of domestic comedy, receives a jolt as *Candida* moves from an atmosphere of pleasant satiety to sudden dreariness. The

almost lovable "great baby, pardonably vain of his powers and unconsciously pleased with himself"<sup>26</sup> is changed into a pitiable creature clinging to his wife's apron strings.

Morell's early advice to Lexy to "get married to a good woman and have a foretaste of what will be best in the Kingdom of Heaven we are trying to establish on earth"<sup>27</sup> sounds, on second reading, like a grotesque irony by a cynical misogynist.

Marchbanks too is equally effusive about love: "We all go about longing for love: it is the first need of our natures, the first prayer of our hearts."<sup>28</sup> Morell calls Beaumarchais a rotten cynic, and wholeheartedly agrees with Marchbanks on the value of love and happiness. The bone of contention is not love but their common object of love and adulation.

In no other play of Shaw is there such apparent unanimity about the ennobling quality of love and the worth of happiness. This elevation of love is necessary for the shattering disillusionment at the end. In the context of Shaw's larger design, the description of Marchbanks assumes significance. He is "a strange shy youth of eighteen, slight, effeminate, with a delicate childish voice, and a hunted tormented expression."<sup>29</sup> Marchbanks's immaturity gives us an early hint that he will soon outgrow his romantic faith in a feminine saviour. Morell's vivid expressions of uxoriousness for the first time bring the faint touch of decadence into the earthly paradise.

As the cocoon of false security bursts around him, Morell makes a pathetic attempt not to see it by trying to bribe

Marchbanks with a counterfeit token : "Some day I hope and trust, you will be a happy man like me."<sup>30</sup> Not to be taken in, the younger man contemptuously refuses the bribe : "Is it like this for her always? A woman with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom; and being fed on metaphors, sermons and perorations, mere rhetoric."<sup>31</sup> As the ground of his confidence is cut from under his feet, Morell speaks like a lost soul : "It is easy—terribly easy—to shake a man's faith in himself. To take advantage of that to break a man's spirit is devil's work."<sup>32</sup>

It is only natural that the central character of the play, the source of so much ambiguity, the catalyst of Morell's crisis as well as that of Marchbanks, should herself be the mystifying factor of a play subtitled "A Mystery." Expectedly enough, the heroine of a play that has been called "the Hamlet of Shaw criticism,"<sup>33</sup> has been the most debated character of the play. Shaw likens Candida to the Virgin of the Assumption.<sup>34</sup>

The Virgin Mother image is complicated by strong sexual undertones. Shaw's Virgin Mother is after all the result of the incomplete sublimation of his own ambivalence. This becomes clear from his letter to Ellin Terry :

You say I'd be sick of you in a week. But one does not get tired of adoring the Virgin Mother. Bless me ! you will say, the man is a Roman Catholic. Not at all : the man is the author of Candida; and Candida, between you and me is the Virgin Mother and nobody else.<sup>35</sup>

We have seen while discussing *An Unsocial Socialist* that Shaw's fear of disappointment in love was often translated into a nervous denial of love and a search for compensation through a sense of power over women. As his remarkable relationship with Ellen Terry showed, another method of compensation was an attempt to change a man-woman relationship into a mother-son relationship. This regressiveness released him from the obligation to participate in a love affair. It could thus not only remove his anxiety and obviate the fear of rejection, it could also provide him with a mother surrogate to compensate for the indifference of his actual mother. Bentley is therefore justified in remarking: "Into Morell Shaw can put that part of himself (a child) which Candida finds irresistible."<sup>36</sup> But Shaw's own attitude to Candida is far from simple. After all the reader feels uneasy mainly because of her. The Candida of the play, as distinct from the Candida of Shaw's letters, is dangerous and destructive.

The first thing that Candida destroys is her husband's faith in love. The other casualty is Morell's manhood. The change from wife to mother is accompanied by a definite suggestion of castration of the man. She systematically unmans her husband. In the second act she goes about her act of subversion by apparently universalising love when she tells Morell off: "It seems unfair that all the love should go to you and none to him."<sup>37</sup> She celebrates her facile victory by pulverising Morell with these words of protectiveness: "My boy shall not be worried: I will protect him."<sup>38</sup> As a result of her 'mothering' a pathetic and

unnerved Morell is not left with any chance of salvaging even a little of his lost self-respect. Marchbanks, with the poet's instinctive revulsion against coarseness and cruelty, protests against the shabby treatment of Morell: "I shudder when you torture him and laugh."<sup>39</sup>

The negative aspect of Candida's character was not hidden from Shaw's view. He wrote to Ellen Terry that Beatrice Webb had called Candida "a sentimental prostitute."<sup>40</sup> To James Huneker he wrote :

Candida is as unscrupulous as Siegfried : Morell himself sees that 'no law will bind her.' She seduces Eugene just exactly as far as it is worth her while to seduce him. She is a woman without 'character' in the conventional sense. Without brains and strength of mind she would be a wretched slattern or voluptuary.<sup>41</sup>

The conversion of Candida into the Virgin Mother, albeit with a pronounced sadistic undertone entirely foreign to Titian's painting, is not unexpected. For reasons we have already discussed Shaw needed to make Candida renounce, after coming perilously close to adultery, the role of the lover in favour of that of the mother. A clue to Candida's inexplicable behaviour is provided by Shaw in a letter to Ellen Terry that reveals the close kinship between Candida and Shaw :

My pockets are always full of the small change of

love-making, but it is magic money, not real money. Mrs. Webb, who is a remarkably shrewd woman, explains her freedom from the fascination to which she sees all the others succumb, by saying, "You cannot fall in love with a sprite; and Shaw is a sprite in such matters, not a real person."...It is certainly true; I am fond of women (or one in a thousand, say); but I am in earnest about quite other things...Doubtless, dear Ellen, You've observed that you can't act things perfectly until you have got beyond them, and so nothing to fear from them. That's why the women who fall in love with me worry me and torment me and make scenes (which they can't act) with me and suffer misery to destroy their health & beauty, whilst you, who could do without me as easily as I do without Julia (for instance) are my blessing and refuge and really care more for everybody (including myself) than Julia cared for me.<sup>41</sup>

Thus Shaw wanted to make Candida a forerunner of Julius Caesar and Don Juan by investing her with a higher kind of egoism. She could care for everybody because she did not love anyone. Obviously the author of *The Irrational Knot* and *An Unsocial Socialist* was not prepared to disown his past. It is understandable, therefore, that Candida's husband shares, to some extent, the fate of Trefusis's wife.

Candida completes the education of both Morell and Marchbanks. At the end of the play Morell is like a man broken

under the wheel and the education of the younger man is no less negative. Marchbanks learns to stand alone : the Virgin Mother teaches him her own secret, the ability to live without love. At the end of the play Candida and Morell embrace : tacitly accepting his impotence and regression, the latter embraces "with boyish ingenuousness."<sup>42</sup> Though Shaw says that "they do not know the secret in the poet's heart"<sup>43</sup> he is obviously wrong about Candida, who certainly does, and that is what makes her embrace so nauseating, for it becomes the embrace of a parasite sucking the life blood of the one locked in her embrace. By turning the Ibsenite parable upside down, she celebrates her triumph over one who has conclusively been exposed as the doll of the piece. About the so-called secret, Shaw said to the members of the play-reading club at Rugby :

The secret is very obvious after all provided you know what a poet is, what business has a man with the great destiny of a poet with the small beer of domestic conflict and cuddling and petting at the apron strings of some dear nice woman ? Morell cannot do without it...To Eugene, the stronger of the two, the daily routine of it is nursery slavery...When Candida brings him squarely face to face with it, his heart rolls up like a scroll; and he goes proudly into the majestic and beautiful kingdom of the starry night.<sup>44</sup>

Candida chooses Morell because she knows that Marchbanks's

education has been complete. "He has learnt to live without happiness"<sup>45</sup> and without love. At the end of the play the strong woman and the strong man behave similarly by redefining their roles and reasserting themselves. Each disentangles her or his self from the action : Marchbanks prefers his loneliness to Candida, and Candida shows that she has always been heart-whole, not losing the smallest part of it to either man. Her immutability and insensitivity to love is her strength. The embrace she offers her husband is an act of alms-giving. Morell is reduced to the level of a limpet clinging to Candida even after it is apparent to him that the clinging means the loss of self-respect, forfeiture of exaltation and permanent exclusion from the heaven he mentioned to Lexy.

Shaw delicately maps out his world, and delineates the status of love and human friendship in that world through the revealed fate of the apparently strong man regressing to the life of an infant. A few intelligent critics like Margery Morgan find out that this "pleasant" play affects us with "touches of unease and revulsion" and "works subversively"<sup>46</sup> but it subverts not merely Victorian values as Morgan supposes, but also the quest for companionship and happiness.

## Chapter 5 : Notes and References

1. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 34.
2. CP I, p. 383-84.
3. CP I, p. 385.
4. Ibid.
5. CP I, p. 419.
6. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 44.
7. Ibid., p. 82.
8. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 85.
9. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 122.
10. *The Illusion of Socialism*, p. 2.
11. Ibid, p. 21.
12. *Shaw : the Critical Heritage*, p. 61.
13. *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol. II. p. 230.
14. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 427.
15. CP I, p. 385.
16. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 462.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Reprinted in CP I, p. 603.
20. See Arnold Silver, *Shaw : the Darker Side*, pp. 79-115, also Elsie B. Adams, "Bernard Shaw's Pre-Raphaelite Drama", PMLA 81 (1966) : 428-38.
21. Joseph Wood Krutch, "A Review of *Candida*," *The Nation* 162 (1946) : 487. Reprinted in Stephen S. Stanton (ed.), *A Casebook on 'Candida'*, p. 213.

22. CP I, pp. 517-18.
23. Ibid., p. 602.
24. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet*, p. 126.
25. Arnold Silver argues that in the play Shaw recreates the incident of his mother's life and through the denouement exonerates his mother from the charge of adultery. Silver, op. cit., p. 102. This may be too facile an argument but it cannot be gainsaid that at several points the play and Shaw's life inter-penetrate to make *Candida* a kind of personal statement.
26. CP I, p. 518.
27. Ibid., p. 521.
28. Ibid., p. 548.
29. Ibid., p. 354.
30. Ibid., p. 542.
31. Ibid., p. 543.
32. Ibid., p. 542.
33. Arthur Nethercot, *Men and Supermen : the Shawian Portrait Gallery*, p. 8.
34. CP I, p. 532.
35. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 623.
36. Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p. 177. The controversy raised over the model of Eugene Marchbanks is not very helpful. Colin Wilson believes that Marchbanks is modelled after Yeats. It is true that at one level *Candida* is a parody of Yeats's *The Land of the Heart's Desire*. At the initial stage Yeats's fairy child is changed into the type of aesthete with whom Shaw has little

patience. Marchbanks, before his transformation, is such an aesthete. It is possible that a little of Yeats has crept into Marchbanks. See Colin Wilson, *Shaw: a Reassessment*, p. 138. But Yeats was not the only, possibly not even the main, model. Shaw himself said that he derived Marchbanks from De Quincey's account of his adolescence in his *Confessions*. See Raymond Mander and Jo Mitchenson, *Theatrical Companion to Shaw*, p. 43. In external details there is a great deal of similarity between the two, for both are imaginative, hypersensitive and nervous. But at a deeper level Marchbanks's complex attitude to Candida reflects Shaw's own complex attitude to romantic love. He creates both Morell and Marchbanks out of his own self. A comprehensive review of the models is found in Arthur Nethercot, "Who Was Eugene Marchbanks?" *The Shaw Review*, 15.1 (1972) : 2-20.

37. CP I, p. 563.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 567.

40. *The Terry Letters*, p. 108.

41. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, pp. 801-802.

42. CP I, p. 593.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 594.

44. George A. Riding, "The Candida Secret" *The Spectator*, 185 (1950) : 506. Riding's article is reprinted in Stephen S. Stanton (ed.), *A Casebook on 'Candida'*, pp. 166-69.

45. CP I, p. 593.

46. Margery Morgan, *The Shawian Playground*, p. 82.

Chapter 6

**Melodrama with a Difference : Three Plays for Puritans**

"Happiness is never my aim. Like Einstein I am not happy and do not want to be happy."           Shaw,     *Sixteen Self Sketches.*

Shaw's habit of subverting popular forms of the theatre did not end with *Widowers' Houses* and *Candida*. In *Plays for Puritans* he tried his hand at Shavianising melodrama. "As a superior person" he held melodrama in high esteem and thought that the form merely needed "elaboration to become a masterpiece"<sup>1</sup> :

It should be a simple and sincere drama of action and feeling, kept well within the vast tract of passion and motive which is common to the philosopher and laborer, relieved by plenty of fun, and depending for variety of human character not on the high comedy idiosyncrasies which individualize people...but on broad contrasts between types of youth and age, sympathy and selfishness, the masculine and the feminine, the sublime and the ridiculous, and so on. The whole character of the piece must be allegorical, idealistic, full of generalisations and moral lessons; and it must represent conduct as producing swiftly and certainly on the individual the results which in actual

life it only produces on the race in the course of many centuries. All of which, obviously, requires for its accomplishment rather greater heads and surer hands than we commonly find in the service of the playhouse.<sup>2</sup>

*The Devil's Disciple* was Shaw's first attempt to make melodrama conform to his formula. It has all the broad contrasts Shaw demanded of melodrama : the ritualistically pious woman, Mrs Dudgeon, is in reality the woman without religion, whereas Dick Dudgeon, who calls himself the Devil's Disciple, is the man with the higher religion; at the moment of reckoning it is revealed that the Presbyterian minister Anthony Anderson is by natural calling a soldier and the outcast Dick has the makings in him of an ideal minister. Virtue presents itself in the garb of vice and institutional religion, represented by ossified Puritanism, is actually the holy garb worn by wretched spitefulness. Characters are broad types : the self-sacrificing, the sanctimonious, the overtly masculine, the utterly feminine.

Yet the novelty of the play lies in the subversion of the rules of melodrama. The interest of the play centres on the nature of Dick's narrowly-missed martyrdom to save the husband of Judith Anderson. Shaw leads his audience up the garden path by first preparing it for a Sidney-Carton-like exercise in self sacrifice for the sake of a woman — a *sine qua non* of romantic melodrama — and then jolts it with a rude shock when Dick avers that Judith Anderson means nothing to him :

What I did last night, I did in cold blood caring not so

much for your husband or for you as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I could take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it...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.<sup>3</sup>

The Shavianization of Dick is the elaboration which Adelphi melodrama needed, according to Shaw, "to become a masterpiece." Shaw knew that the genuine novelty of the melodrama lay in the unexpected twist in the tail, and by staking everything on the play's ending he implicitly claimed for the play an allegorical structure in which the overt action was less important than the significance of that action. He clearly distinguished between the body and the soul of the play and argued that the play was ambitious only in the contemporary time-frame as it embodied the advanced thought of the day: "As such, it will assuredly lose its gloss with the lapse of time, and leave the Devil's Disciple exposed as the threadbare popular melodrama it technically is."<sup>4</sup> Shaw attempted to link the unrealistic "threadbare popular melodrama" to surrealism:

Why did Dick save Anderson? On the stage, it appears, people do things for reasons. Off the stage they don't...The saving of life at the risk of the saver's own is not a common thing; but modern populations are so vast

that even the most uncommon things are recorded once a week or oftener. Not one of my critics but has seen a hundred times in his paper how some policeman or a fireman or nursemaid has received a medal, or the compliments of a magistrate, or perhaps a public funeral, for risking his or her life to save another's. Has he ever seen it added that the saved was the husband of the woman the saver loved, or was the woman herself, or was even known to the saver as much as by sight ? <sup>5</sup>

As a critic points out, Shaw's comparison is more ingenious than apt, for "few instances are reported of policemen or firemen who, out of a sense of duty, offer their necks to the public executioner as does Dick Dudgeon, in order to save a convicted insurgent."<sup>6</sup> But though the crudeness of the genre made *The Devil's Disciple* a very unsatisfactory medium of Shaw's ideas, the author was trying to realize through Dick his idea of a truly liberated soul because what he was trying to convey, quite unsuccessfully as it turned out, was the fact that Dick Dudgeon was his version of Wagner's Siegfried. In *The Perfect Wagnerite* he Shavianised Wagner's hero sufficiently to make him conform to his idea of the superman and remarked :

The philosophically fertile element in the original project...was the conception of Siegfried himself as a type of the healthy man raised to perfect confidence in his own impulses by an intense and joyous vitality which is above fear, sickliness of conscience, malice, and the makeshifts

and moral crutches of law and order which accompany them.<sup>7</sup>

If one probed a little further one would discover in Siegfried — Shaw's Siegfried — the soul mate of Candida, perhaps the soul mate of Trefusis, for the Shavian distillation of Wagner's Siegfried was the perfectly self-sufficient, perfectly asocial being : "Siegfried ...is, in short, a totally unmoral person, a born anarchist, the ideal of Bakoonin, an anticipation of the 'overman' of Nietzsche."<sup>8</sup> Since he has no regard for morality, convention and society and is totally self-centred, he is "dangerous and destructive to what he dislikes" and "it is fortunate that his likes and dislikes are sane and healthy."<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that the Siegfried whom Shaw claims to have discovered in Wagner's *Ring* is more closely related to Shaw than to Wagner, at whom Shaw railed for prescribing "a romantic nostrum for all human ills."<sup>10</sup> It is equally clear that Dick Dudgeon, the hero of Shaw's pot-boiler, is too slight a figure, too skimpily sketched, to be able to carry the burden of the momentous thought Shaw placed on his shoulders. Shaw therefore turned to history for a more appropriate figure and found that figure in Julius Caesar.

## II

Shaw's Caesar, like his Richard Dudgeon, is Shaw's Siegfried, but then Shaw's Siegfried can be traced back to his novels and ultimately to himself. Siegfried, as Shaw sees him, is

incapable of relating himself to anyone outside himself, he lives in his soul and his soul is a huge island. Sidney Trefusis, too, knew no love, and he thought he knew no hatred. Propelled by his self-sufficiency and a code of conduct according to which nothing bound him to the outside world, he took turns at wishing man's destruction and being his saviour. The overman — Conolly, Trefusis, Richard, Caesar, Siegfried — is qualitatively different from man. He is a freak. The virtue of the overman is as freakish as the vice of Camus's Caligula. Both are free, both are unrelated to others and separated from the world by a moral vacuum.

Caesar resembles Dick Dudgeon as closely in the nature of his virtue as in the manner of disguising the virtue. Among Shaw's many slanted self-portraits, Caesar is the one that approaches the ideal most closely. The idealised Caesar being non-human at the core, Shaw took care to mask the inner strangeness with amusing touches of common humanity. Writing in *The Play Pictorial* he commented :

Our conception of heroism has changed of late years...It is no use now going on with heroes who are no longer really heroic with us. Besides, we want credible heroes. The old demand for the incredible, the impossible, the superhuman, which was supplied by bombast, inflation, and the piling of crimes on catastrophes and factitious raptures on artificial agonies, has fallen off; and the demand now is for heroes in whom we can recognise our own humanity, and who, instead of walking, talking, eating, drinking, making

love and fighting single combats in a momentous ecstasy of continuous heroism are heroic in the true human fashion : that is, touching the summits only at rare moments, and finding the proper level of all occasions, condescending with humour and good sense to the prosaic ones as well as rising to the noble ones, instead of ridiculously persisting in rising to them all on the principle that a hero must always soar, in season and out of season.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw claimed to have created in Caesar a hero "in whom we can recognise our own humanity." Accordingly, Caesar says almost mournfully that he is easily deceived by women, that women's eyes dazzle him. He smarts when Cleopatra addresses him as "old gentleman." Thus Shaw's Caesar wears an oak wreath to conceal his baldness, and shows a foppish sensitivity to any mention of his age. According to Shaw these are sufficient to humanise him, but these constitute no more than Caesar's human mask.

The appropriate analogy of a character that shows such an immense gap between a frivolous exterior and a god-like core takes us away from Western literature to the *Mahabharata* and the Hindu Puranas, in which Krishna steals butter-milk as a child and philanders heartily as a young man. Even as Arjuna's charioteer he seems merely human most of the time, but when it comes to the crunch he shows his dazzling luminousness, and reveals to Arjuna his divinity. By "condescending with humour and good sense" to the prosaic occasion Krishna makes himself bearable to the other personages of the epic. It is his method of preventing the epic

from degenerating into a divine soliloquy.

In Shaw's play even Cleopatra, not the brightest of persons, recognises that Caesar is essentially a god when she remarks to Pothinus: "Can one love a god?"<sup>12</sup> Shaw himself understood the difficulty of creating drama out of the encounter of a god with mere mortals when he wrote to William Archer that "there is no drama in it because Caesar was so completely superior to his adversaries that there was virtually no *conflict*, only a few adventures, chiefly the hairbreadth escape when he jumped into the harbour."<sup>13</sup> Shaw himself stressed the psychological inertness of Caesar when he differentiated between virtue and goodness, granting Caesar the former, but not the latter :

...in order to produce an impression of complete disinterestedness and magnanimity, he has only to act with entire selfishness; and that is perhaps the only sense in which a man can be said to be naturally great. Having virtue, he has no need of goodness.<sup>14</sup>

In other words Caesar is another Siegfried, a reincarnation of Dick Dudgeon, who tells Judith Anderson: "What I did last night, I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband or for you as I do for myself."<sup>15</sup>

It is surprising that Shaw makes his Siegfried anticipate Christ : When Cleopatra tries to justify the murder of Pothinus, Caesar says : "If one man in all the world can be found, now or forever, to know that you did wrong, that man will have either to conquer the world as I have, or be crucified by it."<sup>16</sup>

Yet the implicit comparison is not very apt, for no two men could be more different. Clemency, particularly when it is a policy that holds the enemy "baffled at the gates all these months"<sup>17</sup> is not the same thing as pity, nor are kind words to Cleopatra or Rufio the same as love. Christ died for others and the Caesar of the play is willing to risk his life for Cleopatra or anyone else but his action is not similar to that of Christ but to that of Dick, who was prepared to die for Judith Anderson though he did not care for her. Shaw's hero is capable of remarkable virtue but that virtue is totally unconnected to goodness. Christ's virtue was goodness on a divine scale.

Shaw's Caesar is truer to himself when he reminds Cleopatra : "My poor child : your life matters little here to anyone but yourself."<sup>18</sup> Towards the end a wiser Cleopatra has learnt her lesson :

Love me ! Pothinus : Caesar loves no one. Who are those we love ? Only those we do not hate ; all people are strangers and enemies to us except those we love. But it is not so with Caesar. He has no hatred in him : he makes friends with everyone as he does with dogs and children. <sup>19</sup>

To Shaw's superman everyone stands on the same footing as a stranger or a dog : he is equally friendly towards them in his impersonal way. Cleopatra despairingly calls him a god, and Caesar himself tells the sphinx in the prologue to the play that he is more like it than any living person : "part brute, part woman, and part god — nothing of man in me at all."<sup>20</sup> But if Shaw's Caesar is

a god he is neither like the Christian God nor like any of the pagan gods, he is something like the Brahman of the Vedanta — immutable and impersonal.

Comparison with the historical Caesar will show the difference between him and Shaw's hero. Instead of being a stranger to the race of men as the Caesar of the play claims to be in the prologue, the Caesar of history possessed the characteristics of the human race rather abundantly. Shaw's Caesar has virtue, therefore he is beyond good and evil, history's Caesar was not a stranger to either good or evil. Shaw believes that Caesar was driven to conquests not by his lust for fame but by the exploratory instinct, but Plutarch tells us that Caesar burst into tears of envy when he compared his career with that of Alexander.<sup>21</sup> The Caesar that emerges from Suetonius's chronicle is the Caesar who attacked the Senate House, killed Senators, usurped political power, and in order to be the chief Pontiff resorted to flagrant bribery. We also learn from Suetonius of Caesar's paranoia : not only did he have his statue sculpted but also had it installed in a temple. And a new college of Lupercals was built to celebrate his divinity. Caesar was a notorious lecher, every woman's husband and every man's wife. Yet the same Caesar was capable of great clemency and tolerance.<sup>22</sup>

The Caesar of history had conflicting passions of such great intensity that the poet who seeks to recreate him must be able to sympathise with every aspect of human life, he must be in love with life as it is lived in its various ramifications and must be able to plumb every depth and scale every height. Such a

Caesar was beyond the range of Shaw, who needed for his hero someone who was a stranger to the human race. Consequently he had to invent a Caesar, create one who would conform to his self image. His Caesar had to be a god who had merely pitched his tent on the earth that we know. The actual Caesar was bound with numerous men and women by bonds of passion, bonds of love and hatred, jealousy and craving. The Shavian Caesar is an inert benefactor of mankind.

### III

Shaw's next play, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, is another melodrama, and another Siegfried play. In a number of ways, it is the continuation of *Candida*, *The Devil's Disciple* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

Like *The Devil's Disciple*, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* is unashamed melodrama. In the notes that Shaw published along with the play he claimed that the locale was suggested by Cunningham Graham's Moghreb-al-Acksa. The play, which is subtitled 'An Adventure,' looks like being custom-made for the Aelephi. In our times it would be a godsend for a Hollywood scriptwriter. Besides the exotic setting, it has flashy Arabs, a Shaikh buying for blood and Black Paquito, the glamorous brigand. The action gallops from crisis to crisis, constantly accompanied by suspense, abduction, melodramatic encounters, the smell of gunpowder and the threat of impending death. Anyone interested in tracing the ancestry of the play must search for precedents not in high-brow theatre but in popular entertainments like *Freedom* by Rowe and

Harris.<sup>23</sup> As a critic remarks :

The co-incidences necessary to enable the characters to assemble in one place at one time, the recognitions and reversals which advance, complicate and resolve the intrigue are all frankly theatrical. Despite some pleasant realistic touches, the minor characters — among them Drinkwater, Marzo, and the Reverend Mr Rankin — are all stock types.<sup>24</sup>

Yet as one approaches the play at a level deeper than that of the props and the overt action, one finds weaved into it those tensions that Shaw could never resolve conclusively. At the level where Shaw is more than the stage carpenter's mascot his play is deeply Shavian insofar as it examines the same subject that he has dealt with in his novels and earlier plays.

The subject of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, like the subject of most of his plays, is the conflict between freedom and commitment. In the novels and in his earlier plays the self-absorption of Shaw's heroes and heroines draw them so completely away from society that there are hardly any points of contact left between the protagonist's inner world and the outside world. *The Devil's Disciple* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* differ from *An Unsocial Socialist* and *The Philanderer* since Dick and Caesar are able to come to a better adjustment with society in spite of remaining fundamentally as insular as Trefusis and Charteris. Shaw's Siegfried is as independent of society as Trefusis but accidentally his impulses are such that they help instead of

hinder social cohesion.

After reading the play *Ellen Terry*, for whom Shaw had written the part of Lady Cicely, grasped the fact that the heroine is completely self-centred and her interaction with society is merely accidental and expressed her dissatisfaction with the play. Shaw replied :

Listen to me, woman with no religion. Send...for two books of travel in Africa : One Miss Kingsley's ...and the other H.M.Stanley's. Compare the brave woman, with her commonsense and goodwill, with the wild-beast man, with his elephant rifle, and his atmosphere of dread and murder, breaking his way by mad selfish assassination out of the difficulties created by his own cowardice. Think of all that has been rising up under your eyes in Europe for years past, Bismarck worship, Stanley worship, Dr Jim worship, and now at last Kitchener worship with dead enemies dug up and mutilated. Think also on the law — the gallows, penal servitude, hysterical clamouring for the lash, mere cowardice masquerading as "resolute government," "law and order" and the like. Well, how have you felt about these things ? Have you had any real belief in the heroism of the filibuster ? Have you had any sympathy with the punishments of the judge ?...I...thought the distinction of *Ellen Terry* was that she had this heart wisdom, and managed her own little world as Tolstoy would have our Chamberlains & Balfours & German Emperors & Kitcheners & Lord Chief

Justices and other slaves of false ideas & imaginary fears manage Europe. I accordingly give you a play in which you stand where Imperialism is most believed to be necessary, on the border line where the European meets the fanatical African...I try to shew you fearing nobody and managing them all as Daniel managed the lions, not by cunning — above all, not by even a momentary appeal to Cleopatra's stand-by, their passion, but by simple moral superiority.<sup>25</sup>

Shaw's letter would make it appear that *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* is a radical critique of the civilization of domination. A world governed as Tolstoy would have it governed, by goodwill rather than the gun, by Lady Cicely's heart wisdom rather than the "wild-beast man with his elephant rifle," would need not only a different kind of ruler from Bismarck or Kitchener but also from Candida or Caesar. The higher selfishness of a Siegfried may superficially resemble the wisdom of the heart but is very different from it. The common point that Caesar and Dick Dudgeon make is that virtue is something very different from goodness. In *The Perfect Wagnerite* Shaw warns us that Siegfried can be very destructive regarding the things he does not like, in *Candida* we realize how destructive Shaw's female Siegfried, his Virgin Mother, can be towards men who are emotionally dependent on her. Candida is not averse to Cleopatra's stand-by — we need only to recall Mrs Webb's description of her as a prostitute — her methods are different from Bismarck's and Kitchener's only in being less overt. In her little world she uses violence and

domination just as Bismarck used them in his big world; only, as is appropriate to her scale of operation, her violence is psychological and her domination subtle.

Yet Shaw's letter to Ellen Terry is more than smooth sales talk, because until we come to the very end of the play, we find Lady Cicely refreshingly humane, her courage appears to be the courage of a woman rather than the virtue of a superwoman, a virtue as much genetically determined as a knee-jerk reflex. She succeeds in showing, in a way neither Candida nor Dick Dudgeon could, that the tribal's sword is superseded not by the empire's gun but by the needle that stitches the torn coat-sleeves of an avowed enemy.

It is difficult not to feel that Ellen Terry, the model for Lady Cicely, captivated the author sufficiently to hold her own against Shaw's settled idea of the superior being. Had the bloodless piety of the Virgin Mother gained unquestionable victory in Shaw's mind, there would have been no need to resuscitate her after finishing *Candida*, because no one needs to exorcise a ghost unless there is a ghostly danger to ward off. As a result there is an incongruity in the way the play ends. The natural vitalism of Ellen Terry, whose fearlessness, if one goes by the evidence of the many men in her life, certainly extended to the fearlessness of love, was conspicuously built into the character of Lady Cicely. And yet that woman is sought to be disowned at the end by the legerdemain of Shaw's intellect. The fact that in seeking to create the Virgin Mother in *Candida* he merely succeeded in creating another *la belle dame sans merci* explains why Shaw had to write another play about the Virgin Mother, and yet his own

uneasiness and nervousness on the subject show why *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* had to end the way it did.

Perhaps there is nothing in the whole range of Shaw's plays that articulates his dilemma so sharply as *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. Near the very end the play is engulfed in a Strindbergian shadow as Brassbound and Cicely engage in a brief, silent but deadly battle for survival. And that is Shaw's dilemma. He can see that the aggressiveness of the wild beast man and his mode of domination can be defeated only by the wisdom of the heart and yet he believes that when the heart's wisdom becomes love it reintroduces the consequences of the rule of the elephant gun at a different level.

Before he met Lady Cicely Brassbound was not unhappy because then he was steering a course. The minute she destroys his delusions about the supposedly wicked uncle and the wronged mother he loses his bearings. Brassbound tears his mother's portrait, and discards the memory of a face made repulsive with drink and despair : "Now everything is gone. You have taken the old meaning out of my life; but you have put no new meaning into it."<sup>26</sup> He thinks of marriage with Cicely as an escape from this void. By surrendering his independence, he consigns himself to a life of submission. Marriage is for him a frank acceptance of the loss of self-esteem : "I want a commander, Dont undervalue me : I am a good man when I have a good leader."<sup>27</sup> Thus to Brassbound love is the consequence of the disintegration of the self and its consummation in marriage is a ritualised act of the surrender of freedom. It is the final act of the defeated man. Thus the

encounter between Captain Brassbound and Lady Cicely ironically ends in the duplication of the relationship that Lady Cicely's methods seek to destroy. The difference between her method and the methods employed by the empire is the difference between psychological domination and physical domination, a difference far less substantial than the difference between a Bismarck and a Tolstoy.

Lady Cicely refuses to marry Brassbound not because she feels that he is mistaken in interpreting love as abject surrender but because she shares his attitude. Shelley's Witch of Atlas refused to fall in love with men because she could not bear their death. Shaw's Witch of Atlas does not fall in love because she knows that when one is in love one cannot dominate and rule, and when she has to choose between love and power she unhesitatingly chooses the latter : "I have never been in love with any real person; and I never shall. How could I manage people if I had that mad little bit of self left in me ? That's my secret."<sup>28</sup>

It is the secret of Siegfried. This secret may have robbed the play of its natural conclusion by artificially imposing Shaw's intellectual aspiration on a character that seemed to grow naturally like a flower, but by doing so it ensured that she was at one with Candida, Dick Dudgeon and Caesar. And insofar as it is Shaw's secret as well as Lady Cicely's, it proves to be an invaluable guide to the understanding of Shaw's most famous comedy — *Man and Superman*.

## Chapter 6 : Notes and References

1. *Our Theatre in the Nineties* vol. I, p. 93.
2. Ibid.
3. CP II, p. 113.
4. Ibid., p. 32.
5. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
6. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet : the Plays of George Bernard Shaw*, p. 159.
7. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 213.
8. Ibid., p. 200.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 218.
11. *The Play Pictorial*, vol. X, No. 62, reprinted in CP II, p. 307.
12. CP II, p. 257.
13. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 94.
14. CP II, p. 303.
15. Ibid., p 113. In Shaw's philosophical anarchism Maurice Valency discovers his faith in the natural goodness of man. Valency, pp. 160-63. Surely it is a mistake to orient Shaw to a philosophy which sees man's natural goodness impeded by social structures. The stress in Shaw — as is obvious if one grasps the fact that the author of *An Unsocial Socialist* is also the man who wrote *The Devil's Disciple* — is not on man's goodness but the superman's self-sufficiency and unsocial nature. It is here that Dick Dudgeon is different from Anouilh's *Antigone* — the stress is

more on isolation than on virtue. Every saint has known the dual nature of sainthood : to love and to act disinterestedly, to be tied and to be free. What is likely to be overlooked when the plays are judged without reference to their ancestry and evolution is that the autarchy of the superman, his self-sufficiency and the non-recognition of the outside world as a determinant of human action are certainly as important in Shaw's works as the exploration of virtue.

16. CP II, p. 277.

17. Ibid., p. 278.

18. Ibid., p. 247.

19. Ibid., p. 257.

20. Ibid., p. 182.

21. Plutarch's *Lives*, translated by John and William Langhorne, p. 235.

22. These facts are mentioned in Gaius Suetonius Tranquiallus, *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves.

23. See Martin Meisel, *Shaw and the Nineteenth Century Theatre*, p. 209.

24. Maurice Valency, op. cit. p. 188.

25. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, pp. 98-99.

26. Ibid., p. 282.

27. CP II., p. 415.

28. Ibid., p. 416.

## Chapter 7

### The Platonic Paradise : Man and Superman

" (In hell) there is nothing but love and beauty."

Don Juan in *Man and Superman*

" If excitement is a mechanism our Creator uses for His own amusement, love is something that belongs to us alone and enables us to flee the Creator. Love is our freedom. Love lies beyond 'Es muss sein' "

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

As an artist Shaw was pulled in opposite directions. His ideological commitment to comedy, which precluded every other genre, constantly foundered on a stronger, if unrecognised, drive towards isolationism.<sup>1</sup> He often slid over this gap with an intellectual legerdemain. The result has often been unsatisfactory — marriage leaves a bitter taste in *Widowers' Houses*; in *Arms and the Man* it becomes almost Gilbertian; in *John Bull's other Island* the marriage is itself the profoundest symbol of despair, and in *Major Barbara* it is more disturbing than Shaw's dialectic is willing to admit. The 'happy' ending in *Candida* is like a bandage on a festering sore : it does not attempt to cure the sore, but merely to hide it. The one exception, *You Never Can Tell*, the author himself could hardly tolerate.<sup>2</sup> In his novels and

plays Shaw identifies himself with those characters who, like Trefusis, Caesar, Lady Cicely and Dick Dudgeon, repudiate either love or marriage or both and thus tend to pull his works not in the direction of comedy, but in the reverse direction. Thus biological sterility remains implicitly associated with Shaw's superman, and there is no greater foe of comedy, born of fertility cults, than unmarried or unmarriageable men and women. *Man and Superman*, generally regarded as his greatest achievement in the field of comedy, was conceived as a play that could face and overcome these difficulties without compromising the hardened Shavian attitudes.

Shaw calls *Man and Superman* "A Comedy and a Philosophy". During performance the comedy can be neatly detached from the philosophy as the latter is contained mainly in the Hell Scene of the third act. Without the interlude, the comedy would lose not only the *raison d'être* of the title, but would also be a very different play. Generally the two parts are staged separately and Shaw said to Lewis Carson that the play without the Hell Scene "was all that [was] meant to be presented on the stage."<sup>3</sup> In the Stage Society News, No 11 (March 30, 1905) a note, probably written by Shaw himself, read :

The play, in fact, was made with two detachable sections : the third act, and a section of the first, in which the hero gives an account of his early growth and moral development. These portions could be performed under the conditions which

prevail at Bayreuth and Oberammergau, but not under the conditions to which the Stage Society is subject. They will, therefore, be omitted at the forthcoming performance, leaving the main comedy untouched and unspoiled. There will be no violation of the author's intention, as the necessities of the case were foreseen by him from the first, and provided for in just this way.<sup>4</sup>

The plot of the comedy resembles the most innocuous well-made play. Octavius is in love with Ann, who is in love with Tanner. Tanner does not want to marry Ann but the latter is determined not to let him go. When he learns about her intentions, Tanner dashes off to Spain on his motor car to avoid Ann, but equally doggedly she chases him across the continent. In the sub-plot, Octavius's sister Violet supposedly creates a scandal as the other characters think that she is shortly going to become an unwed mother. Amidst general consternation Tanner congratulates her for courageously following the promptings of the Life Force, only to be snubbed and told by her that she is legally married but is keeping the name of her husband secret for tactical reasons. We later learn that her immensely rich father-in-law is unwilling to accept her but unlike her foolishly idealistic husband, she has no intentions of doing without his money. The two plots are resolved in the fourth act when both women break through the barricades put across their path; Ann gets Tanner and Violet gets Malone Sr.'s purse. To add spice to this lived-happily-ever-after

formula, the characters are never allowed to cut loose from comic stereotypes. Ramsden is a stick-in-the-mud who prides himself on his liberalism, Octavius is an embodiment of the decadent aestheticism of the 1890's, Henry Straker, the new man, is an exercise in extravaganza, Ann is Shaw's idea of Everywoman, Mendoza is too extravagantly comic to be even a type character, he is an example of what Shaw can do when his comic imagination flares up : he is a highwayman who lives by robbing the rich, on closer examination he turns out to be a poet whose one sample of versification is not exactly Miltonic. He reveals that he is not only a brigand and poet but also a former cook and an ex-waiter. This armed leader of social democrats and anarchists is also one of the most sentimental lovers that human civilization has ever produced. It is not surprising that with such *dramatis personae* the comedy should rip along in a riotous spirit of gaiety.

It is true that Tanner says some nasty things about women, love and marriage, but it is made evident at the very beginning that Tanner is an odd mixture of the ridiculous and the sublime. Described by his creator as "possibly a little mad," he is "a sensitive, susceptible, exaggerative, earnest man : a megalomaniac, who would be lost without a sense of humour."<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that Tanner is something of a great man, as it is he who propounds the theory of Creative Evolution in the play. But if he is his creator's mouthpiece as a thinker, his passion for blowing things up gives truth a bizarre shape in his hands. Thus, in effect, he often becomes a windbag : the

philosopher lecturing Octavius on the net closing in on him is ridiculously unaware that the trap is laid not for Octavius but for himself. Besides, he often needs to be sternly ticked off by a pragmatic woman like Violet to be brought down a peg or two from the cloudy realm of theories. Indeed, Shaw's main political opponent H.M. Hyndman, was one of the persons who provided Shaw with a model for Tanner.<sup>6</sup> This has a sobering effect on the comedy; Tanner's natural exaggerativeness robs his pointed criticism of much of its sting. Remarks that would make the play bitter become additional spurs to exhilaration; and the uncivil prophet is admired as a jester wearing a scowling mask.

Thus while *Man and Superman* can undoubtedly be read as a conventional comedy, such a reading glosses over things of vital importance. First, though Tanner is occasionally deflated, nay, "beaten — smashed — nonentitized"<sup>7</sup> by Violet and Ann, it is he who is the vehicle of the dramatist's heightened feeling and intelligence. It is the clown who is the prophet in Shaw, because Shaw utters profound truths through extravagant jests. Besides, the maddening mixture of insight and frivolity is more than a dramatic ploy; it prevents the most subversive elements in the author's *weltanschauung* from surfacing openly: a necessity for the dramatist who is reluctant to recognize them in himself and can face them only when they are mixed with contrary feelings so that more sympathetic constructions can be put on them. We should pay more attention to the darker side of the play because it is this side that unites *Man and Superman* with his earlier

works and shows that the fountain-head of his creativity remains the same. Such probing allows us to see that the creator of Trefusis and the creator of Tanner are steering the same course.

Tanner is the exponent of the philosophy of Creative Evolution in the comedy and Don Juan in the Hell Scene. According to this theory life continuously aspires to reach higher and higher organisation, but it is only men of genius who are conscious of Nature's purpose. They dedicate themselves to the task of helping Nature to reach its aim. The highest organization is achieved when Nature creates beings who have no limit to power and knowledge. But the man of genius is a bad husband, and a bad father because he cares for nothing except knowledge, at the altar of which he is prepared to sacrifice everything and everybody. The woman, on the other hand, is selected by Nature to replenish the earth; her glory is motherhood. Thus, though both are selected by the Life Force to serve its cause, the artist-philosopher and mother-woman have conflicting purposes. In the Epistle Dedicatory Shaw himself says:

Accordingly we observe in the man of genius all the the unscrupulousness and all the "self-sacrifice" (the two things are the same) of Woman. He will risk the stake and the cross; starve, when necessary, in a garret all his life; study women and live on their work and care as Darwin studied worms and lived upon sheep...Here Woman meets a purpose as impersonal, as irresistible as her own; and the

clash is sometimes tragic.<sup>8</sup>

Tanner echoes his creator when he says :

Perish the race and wither a thousand women if only the sacrifice of them enable him to act Hamlet better, to paint a finer picture, to write a deeper poem, a greater play, a profounder philosophy : For mark you Tavy, the artist's work is to show us ourselves as we really are. Our minds are nothing but this knowledge of ourselves; and he who adds a jot to such knowledge creates new mind as surely as any woman creates new man. In the rage of that creation he is as ruthless as the woman, as dangerous to her as she to him, and as horribly fascinating, of all human struggles there is none such treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman.<sup>9</sup>

Shaw has created some such men of genius. Owen Jack, the composer in *Love Among the Artists*, maintained that he owed no allegiance to anything except his music, but Louis Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion* are probably the only men of genius in Shaw's plays who have sacrificed social conscience for the sake of art or knowledge. The Ancients in *Back to Methuselah* have explicitly rejected this parasitic relationship. In *Man and Superman* itself, Don Juan, the highly evolved human being, and Dona Ana, the archetypal mother woman, do not in the least interact in the manner indicated by Shaw and Tanner. Women

no doubt sought to capture Juan, but the source of the conflict lay in his refusal to commit himself to marriage or a permanent relationship :

I did not object to the conditions because they were exorbitant and inhuman : it was their extraordinary irrelevance that prostrated me. I invariably replied with perfect frankness that I had never dreamt of any of these things; that unless the lady's character and intellect were superior to my own, her conversation must degrade and her counsel mislead me; and her constant companionship might, for all I knew, become intolerably tedious to me; that I could not answer for my feelings for a week in advance, much less to the end of my life; that to cut me off from all natural and unconstrained relations with the rest of my fellow creatures would narrow and warp me if I submitted to it; and if not, would bring me under the curse of clandestinity; that, finally my proposals to her were wholly unconnected with any of these matters, and were the outcome of a perfectly simple impulse of my manhood towards her womanhood.<sup>10</sup>

Tanner, however, wants to escape from Ann for a different reason. Though Don Juan is supposed to be the prototype of John Tanner — Ann calls Juan Tanner's ancestor and in the Hell Scene the similarity between their faces as well as their names is stressed — in the comedy Tanner does not resemble Juan; he has

nothing to do with philandering — the quintessence of Don Juanism. He runs away from Ann because he feels that he will be swallowed up by her, that his career as a philosopher will be finished by the role of the husband. In one case the husband-wife relationship is shunned because of its irrelevance, in the other it is feared because the hero thinks that intellectual activity can be carried on only by a bachelor. Also neither of them explains why, if men and women are equally in the grip of the Life Force, and if the preservation of life is the *sine qua non* of its development, the philosopher should not be prompted by the urge to attain fatherhood, especially when, as Juan explains in the Hell Scene, "the process of fatherhood takes up only a tiny fraction of a man's energy, leaving the rest of it free for intellectual pursuits."<sup>11</sup>

The inconsistencies and contradictions in the argument show that the battle of the sexes does not form an integral part of the philosophy of Creative Evolution. If it shows anything it shows Shaw's own abhorrence, almost a neurotic fear, of love. Commenting on *Man and Superman*, Maurice Valency remarks: "Shaw's feminism seems both complex and confusing. Ostensibly he made no social distinction on sexual grounds. But from *Widowers' Houses* to *Back to Methuselah* his plays clearly reveal his mistrust of woman as woman."<sup>12</sup> We have seen, however, that this mistrust is the mistrust of love rather than the mistrust of woman. In most of Shaw's plays the hero's point of view provides the vantage point, but when the eyepiece shifts, as it does with characters such as Candida, Lady

Cicely, Joan or Aurelie, the women show exactly the same kind of aversion to marriage or love.

A reader willing and able to cross the hurdles of droll dialogue and the apparently facetious behaviour of the hero is likely to discover a shockingly different world in *Man and Superman*. Tanner warns Octavius that falling in love with Ann is like putting one's head in the lioness's mouth<sup>13</sup>; the fear of losing one's bearings, even the loss of self, is indicated in such superficially funny remarks as "my own opinion is that she means to eat you,"<sup>14</sup> and "[a woman] makes you will your own destruction."<sup>15</sup>

The relationship between man and woman is not of love but of antagonism, similar to the kind of relationship existing between a hunter and his quarry or a predator and its prey. Ann is a lioness, a boa-constrictor. Denying that women's fellow-feeling at the suffering of men is an expression of love, Tanner gives a functional explanation: "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."<sup>16</sup>

Shaw's metaphysics of love owes a great deal to Schopenhauer's *The World As Will and Idea*.<sup>17</sup> As a monist, Schopenhauer sees in individuals the collective aspirations of the human race; to him human love is at bottom the manifestation of the human will to survival. However, as Shaw is not a professional philosopher, his eclecticism seizes upon that aspect of Schopenhauer which can serve his own scheme. Shaw uses the

German's philosophy to penetrate love and to put sexual attraction outside the human world. Schopenhauer uses his metaphysics, like the Hindu philosophers of the Upanishads, by whom he was profoundly influenced, to stress monism instead of pluralism as the ultimate truth. Shaw uses it to prove that love is an illusion, that it is the name of the intoxicant that men share with all other animals when they are sexually aroused. Shaw undermines its subjective and phenomenological aspect. The hiatus between body and mind creates a tension that is almost tragic. To the woman who has an irresistible sexual attraction for him, Tanner confides with a mixture of hostility and helplessness: "You seem to me to have absolutely no conscience — only hypocrisy ;and you cant see the difference — yet there is a sort of fascination about you."<sup>18</sup> Significantly, that part of him that is exclusively human — the part that is concerned with his moral sense — feels the repulsion, but the stronger and more primitive part, the animal in him, feels the fascination.

In the Epistle Dedicatory and in the play there is a lot of glorification of animality but its close association with moral repulsion shows that there is more to it than meets the eye; the Puritan in Shaw does not surrender to the Life Force without a shudder though the context is made to look sufficiently comic to divert the reader's attention from the deep ambivalence of the protagonist and the author. Tanner sings paeans to sexuality because he believes that the "need of the present hour is a happy mother and a healthy baby"<sup>19</sup> and is impatient with all morality

that retards this process. However his praise of sexuality is merely academic, only a concession to the intellect because he, who has nothing in common with the amoral and anti-social artist that robs the child of its mother's milk to mix paint, or with the philandering genius who responds to the Life Force by impregnating one woman after another, gives none of the reasons provided in the *Epistle Dedicatory* or the Hell Scene for running away from the woman who is after him. It is sheer gut feeling. Significantly he sees his final capitulation as defeat. Shortly before surrendering, he calls Ann a liar, a coquette and a bully.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Epistle Dedicatory* Shaw pretends to remain unperturbed by such implications :

Among the friends to whom I have read this play in manuscript are some of our own sex who are shocked at the "unscrupulousness," meaning the total disregard of masculine fastidiousness, with which the woman pursues her purpose. It does not occur to them that if women were as fastidious as men, morally or physically, there would be an end of the race.<sup>21</sup>

Shaw believes that in depicting Ann he is in the august company of Shakespeare : "I find in my plays that Woman...behaves just as Woman did in the plays of Shakespear."<sup>22</sup> The Ann whom we see in the play, however, is not like Rosalind or Portia or Mariana : the only thing that she shares with Shakespeare's women is that she is free from the devitalized effeteness that passed

for femininity in nineteenth-century English literature. But there is a line, and not too fine at that, between robustness and unscrupulousness. In every respect other than vitality, Ann is a disagreeable woman. In her inexorable determination to get the man she wants she rides roughshod over every human quality valued by mankind : she seems to be a habitual liar and spreads libellous slander about Tanner to dissuade Rhoda from accompanying him; she does not hesitate to wrench Octavius's heart and coquettishly enjoy the exercise; she treats her mother shabbily and exploits every person in the play when it suits her to do so. What is more important, alternative strategies were not unavailable to her. Her double-dealing with Octavius, her hostility to her mother, her irresponsible lies about one thing or another were not strictly necessary for the conquest of Tanner.

The play is thus one of the rare examples of comedy in which the impending marriage can be called a union only in a very narrow sense : more authentically, it is the story of Tanner's defeat. Borrowing the metaphor of the lioness used by him, one can justly say that Tanner has been devoured by Ann. He can therefore say with all earnestness : "Ramsden : it is very easy for you to call me a happy man : You are only a spectator. I am one of the principals; and I know better."<sup>23</sup> He knows that he has "renounce[d] happiness, renounce[d] freedom, renounce[d] tranquillity, above all, renounce[d] the romantic possibilities of the unknown future, for the cares of a household and family."<sup>24</sup> Among the "possibilities of the unknown future" is also the

possibility of Tanner developing into a superman.

The Hell Scene was a necessity for Shaw, because try as he would, he could not satisfactorily reconcile his idea of a superman with the playgoers' idea of a comedy. His superman is far too self-absorbed to be accommodated by a genre of literature which owes its existence to the gregarious instinct of mankind. Yet it is this impossible task, the closing of this breach, that Shaw's artistic energy is directed at. As a writer of comedies, sooner or later he had to come to terms with the perennial subjects of comedy : courtship, marriage and fertility. In some of Shaw's plays these themes form a part of the subject, but before he wrote *Man and Superman* he had written only one play, *You Never Can Tell*, in which these subjects are centrally important. In order to grasp Shaw's ambivalence to the central subject of comedy, it is important to review the play briefly. The review will reveal the intimate, though not necessarily obvious, connection between *You Never Can Tell* and *Man and Superman*.

We have already seen that Shaw was willing to go more than half way to welcome stage conventions provided that the exercise gave him a chance to put across a strain that was subversive of those very conventions. Sometimes the strategy did not work; instead of being Shavianised, traditional forms assimilated the Shavian element. That is what happened in *You Never Can Tell*. The mood of festivity created by Renaissance Comedy almost obliterated Shaw's modification of the genre.

Shaw takes a conventional plot in which a father and his

children, long separated from each other, are accidentally reunited. A young man meets a beautiful young woman, immediately falls in love and finally has his love rewarded with marriage. The twins, who are the brother and the sister of the heroine, are slightly modified versions of Harlequin and Columbine of *Commedia dell' Arte*. Then there is the suave and unflappable trouble-shooter, the Shavian counterpart of Barrie's Crichton and Wodehouse's Jeeves, who takes charge as things hot up. Shaw lays on every formula of conventional success — lavish feasting in a sea-side hotel, the duel of sex, masked ball with Chinese lanterns, the wizardry of the waiter — who happens to be the father of a barrister — and a barrister enlivening the ball with his false nose and domino. The curtain comes down on an ending that sees the reconciliation between estranged husband and wife, and between father and children. The play gives the impression of such overwhelming gaiety that one of the finest writers on Shaw says :

It is not easy to write soberly about *You Never Can Tell* without giving a false impression of the kind of play it is: as serious as it is light-hearted; and with nothing melancholy about it...It is a festive play, a celebration of the perennial recurrence of summer; and through its action the characters move towards reconciliation with each other and with life itself.<sup>25</sup>

The spirit of the play is too close to Renaissance romantic

comedy to be to Shaw's liking. His most characteristic comedies do not move in the direction of *The Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*. Instead of being gradually changed by society the Shavian hero reveals his essential character, which resists pressure and change.

Shaw's purpose was evidently defeated by his play since the gay and romantic elements were designed to decorate the surface of a play at the heart of which lay the familiar Shavian conflict between love and egoism. That part of *You Never Can Tell* which is Shavian is completely different in spirit from the rest of the play : Gloria is overcome with shame when she recognizes love in herself and Valentine says : "It's surprising how little difference there is between the two [i.e. between love and hate],"<sup>26</sup> the reader suddenly recognizes the voice of the Shavian hero who cannot love without despising himself for loving. If Valentine is the Shavian hero in feeling that Gloria's rejection of him will come as a relief to him,<sup>27</sup> Gloria is the Shavian heroine in being "driven almost mad with shame by the feeling that all her power over herself had broken down."<sup>28</sup> Gloria is ashamed because in spite of herself she has fallen in love, she despises herself for not being able to be a *Candida* or a *Lady Cicely*.

Shaw knew that his own little play had been smothered by a larger one that he had failed to subvert from within : the anti-romanticism of Shavian comedy had been defeated by the generic strength of romantic comedy. Like the heroine of his play Shaw was disgusted with himself and made no attempt to hide that

disgust when he wrote to Ellen Terry : "Oh, Ellen Ellen, did you really read *You Never Can Tell* ? Could anyone read it ? It maddens me."<sup>29</sup> To Florence Farr he wrote that the play was "the dullest trash I ever revised."<sup>30</sup>

Shaw's strong aversion to the play can be understood only if it is seen in the context of his entire opus. *You Never Can Tell* was not the play he wanted to write, it merely contained the seeds of the play he wished to pen. The gut reactions of Gloria and Valentine were smothered by dramatic conventions: the writer of *Widowers' Houses*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Candida* and *Pygmalion* for once failed to impose his victory over the conventions of the genre. It was inevitable for Shaw to write another play that would dispense with inessentials and concentrate its energies entirely on the central theme by exploring further the situations which make love shameful to Gloria and prompt Valentine not only to sense his own defeat in marriage (it is interesting that Valentine, who has not yet discovered the philosophy of the Life Force, behaves like Tanner when he learns that Gloria is in love with him) but also to recognize that love and hatred are almost indistinguishable from each other. In a way, therefore, *Man and Superman* is Shaw's penance for the missed opportunity in *You Never Can Tell*.

Shaw had to rewrite *You Never Can Tell* and *Man and Superman* is the play in the rewritten form, the form in which it is authentically Shavian and autobiographical, the form in which it deals with all the diverse elements Shaw had so far unsuccessfully

tried to fuse into a single play. *Man and Superman* is a notable success because it succeeds in fusing the traditional subject of marriage and fecundity with Shaw's personal ambivalence towards that subject. Yet the comedy — without the interlude, that is — has its limitations, for the one thing that Shaw has not succeeded in doing is that he has not been able to accommodate the superman in the comedy. Thus the comedy survives at the expense of the idea.

In the comedy Tanner merely manages to tell others that the Life Force does not care for respectability, in the *Revolutionist's Handbook* he argues that civilization will be destroyed unless men are transformed into supermen. It is the Hell Scene that alone portrays the type of person that the Life Force cares for. The kind of person who exists in the comedy only in Tanner's mind comes alive in the interlude as Don Juan.

Once Tanner fizzles out as a superman *manque*, it is necessary for Shaw to portray a genuine superman,<sup>31</sup> a Siegfried-like Nietzschean *ubermensch*, who is beyond good and evil. Such a person would be a far more appropriate mirror of Shaw's soul than Tanner, who, being a figure of comedy, is hemmed in by stage conventions, comic tradition, and public taste.

The superman thus has to be different from Tanner, he has to be the kindred spirit of Owen Jack and Dick Dudgeon, of Caesar and Lady Cicely. The superman is Shaw's magnificent obsession, and almost every Shavian hero is, as we have seen, an attempt at incarnating the idea of the superman. Shaw's *Don Juan*, expectedly,

is like Siegfried. Like Siegfried he has "repudiated all duty, trampled honor underfoot, and laughed at justice."<sup>32</sup> Rising above the world's conventions he has, like all Shavian supermen, risen above the world's values. After all, honour and duty are obligations determined by social values. To one who refuses to recognize every obligation arising from outside one's own self, love must go the way of duty and honour because love is a relationship, the strongest possible relationship, between two individuals. A relationship involving love is based on the recognition of the value of the "other" with whom the self forges a bond. Where the "other" is not recognized as co-equal with the self, there can be no love, though there can be desire, because in desire the "other" merely becomes an object sought by the self. Love is an exclusively human relationship. A dog cannot love a bitch, nor can it love its master. A superman cannot love an inferior creature just as a man cannot "love" his dog. Desire is far more impersonal, akin, in some ways, to instinct. Don Juan, being a Siegfried-like superman, cannot love although he can respond to sexual stimuli. Understandably, therefore, when Juan hears of sympathy and love he says: "You are making me ill."<sup>33</sup>

Shaw attempts to make the Hell Scene an integral part of the play by making Juan take over from Tanner. The comedy examines the relationship between sex, love and marriage — the relationship between man and woman. The interlude takes up the same subject. Juan is the first superman in Shaw who hails motherhood and sexuality. The supermen preceding him are by and large too

inward-looking to appreciate the need of marriage and children. Owen Jack, Edward Conolly, Sidney Trefusis, Park Belgrave, and Julius Caesar (not of history but of Shaw's play) either do not marry or repent their marriage. Creating an autistic universe within themselves, they show complete indifference to women and refuse to be fathers. The superwomen (when we use the term about Aurelie the pianist, or Candida or Lady Cicely we use it in the relative sense, indicating that they are superior women who are not swayed helter-skelter by their passions, that they control themselves and often others, that they are natural leaders having some mission in life) are loveless women like Aurelie, Candida, and Cicely, who subvert marriage in one way or another.

Traits that are muted in Tanner are fully blown up in Juan. Thus Juan believes like Tanner that "sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance of perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way."<sup>34</sup> But he goes further than Tanner in accepting its corollary. Whereas Tanner is satisfied merely to note that Nature does not care for love, Juan, by totally identifying his purpose with that of Nature, rejects love outright: "It was the supremacy of this purpose that reduced love for me to the mere exercise for laziness..."<sup>35</sup> One suspects that Juan can glorify the sexual instinct only because he knows that "the sex relation is not a personal or friendly relation at all",<sup>36</sup> that love and romance are "unbearable frivolities"<sup>37</sup> and that the attachment of woman to man is like "the policeman's attachment to the prisoner."<sup>38</sup>

Cleopatra felt that the absence of love in Caesar was an essential part of his god-like nature and Lady Cicely confided that she had never been in love with any real person at a time when the philosophy of Creative Evolution<sup>39</sup> had not yet been developed by Shaw. The invocation of Nature and its purpose by Juan, then, is merely a justification for an attitude which is independent of the much-vaunted purpose of Nature. It is therefore difficult to see eye to eye with Fredrick P.W.McDowell when he argues that Shaw attacks sentimentality and not love and beauty in *Man and Superman*.<sup>39</sup> There is not a single sentence in the Hell Scene to suggest that Juan is against mushy sentimentality and not love, against dilettantism and not against art and beauty. He rejects not only cheap forms of art and sentimental expressions of love, but love and art in general. He seeks knowledge and power at the expense of beauty and love and feels that the bird, which he feels is the symbol of beauty, is an unsuccessful experiment of Nature since Nature later scrapped it and developed along a different line to produce the hideous ape, the grandfather of man. Thus he explicitly rejects beauty and love because they are inferior to knowledge and power. However neither Juan nor the Devil sees the fallacy of the argument because Juan does not explain how the bird is associated with love — he merely assumes the association — and how Nature deems love inferior to power. Strangely enough, the Devil fails to ask the one question that would take the wind out of Juan's sails : he does not ask Juan why beauty and intelligence must be mutually

exclusive.

Juan's vision of divinity presupposes an ideal being who soars above the human condition, and this vision Juan shares with the other Shavian supermen. Thus nature as conceived by him must exclude love and beauty from its list of objectives. When one links *Man and Superman* to the plays that precede it as well as to the ones that follow — plays like *Back to Methuselah* and *Farfetched Fables* — one is in no doubt that the artist philosopher's own sympathies are with Juan, and in his eyes, Juan is the victor in the debate.<sup>40</sup>

Ironically, the Hell Scene, written with the intention of transforming a sexual comedy into a spiritual one, succeeds in almost destroying the comic structure. The comedy taking place on earth ends with marriage, a subject with which the genre is most familiar; the cosmic comedy, of which Juan's choice constitutes only the first link — the chain stretching to an infinite length that would witness the transformation of man into God — moves in the direction of contemplation and the renunciation of human relationship. Thus Shaw fails to fuse his earthly comedy with his vision of the cosmic comedy. Those who argue like J.L. Wisenthal that the dream interlude is an integral part of the play stress the fact that it is "in the Hell Scene, where the real world no longer exists, that Tanner's qualities of thought and intelligence are of value."<sup>41</sup> By doing so they implicitly accept that Juan's values, taken seriously, cannot co-exist with the values of comedy. The unique form of the play, the fact that Don Juan and

the Devil exist only in a dream, can sustain the view that the interlude does not threaten the comedy. But such an interpretation can only maintain tamely, as Wisenthal does, that the interlude keeps alive the hope that some day intelligence will be a highly-valued quality. We have seen, on the other hand, that the Hell Scene is much more important to Shaw than that. To him the dream is not an unreality but a superreality, the crystallization of his deepest aspirations. Years later Tanner's dream is allowed to triumph completely over ordinary reality, and the result is the last part of *Back to Methuselah*. And though the conquest of the desire to be loved or to love can co-exist in theory with the conquest of despair, so far as an artistic experience is more than a theoretical activity the marriage of contraries fails in *Man and Superman* as Shaw's earth and Shaw's heaven remain unconnected with each other.

Shaw himself appears not be unaware of the failure. As the debate in the interlude proceeds towards its conclusion, the Devil seems to gain the ascendancy, exposing the hollowness of a philosophy that seeks to keep despair at bay by pinning its faith on a millenium that in all probability lies beyond human history. Juan's reply is empty, almost despairing, defiance :

Granted that the great Life Force has hit on the device of the clock-maker's pendulum, and uses the earth for its bob; that the history of each oscillation, which seems so novel to us the actors, is but the history of the last oscillation.

repeated; nay more, that in the unthinkable infinitude of time the sun throws off the earth and catches it again a thousand times as a circus rider throws up a ball, and that the total of all our epochs is but the moment between the toss and the catch, has the colossal mechanism no purpose?<sup>42</sup>

Instead of countering the Devil's argument that the universe has no purpose, Juan only buttresses his adversary's opinion with additional metaphors, so that the incredibly weak note of hope at the end of his speech rings hollow in his own ears. Yet the entire edifice of Juan's world-view is built on the premise that the universe has a purpose which is being realised through evolution. Expectedly, therefore, as the vulnerability of Juan's intellectual position is exposed in the debate, his elegant ratiocination is blown away like a puff of smoke by the Devil :

Beware of the pursuit of the Superhuman : it leads to an indiscriminate contempt of the Human. To a man, horses and dogs and cats are mere species, outside the moral world. Well, to the Superman, men and women are a mere species too, also outside the moral world.<sup>43</sup>

At this point it becomes clear that the debate between Juan and the Devil is actually Shaw's own debate with himself, it is the ancient quarrel between the creator of Trefusis and that of Cashel Dyrton, between Sonny and G.B.S., between the man who saw the consummation of the race in Juan's dream and the man who

discovered only despair in it.<sup>44</sup>

The Devil's warning did not succeed in drawing away from Juan's camp the philosopher who knew like Schopenhauer that human attitudes are formed not by rational arguments but by irrational drives, nonetheless it gave splendid articulation to an intellectual honesty that dourly resisted the seduction of auto-hypnotism. Shaw had marshalled all his resources, artistic as well as intellectual, to blend the human comedy with the cosmic one. His success was less than spectacular since even in the eyes of his sympathetic critics the former thrived at the expense of the latter, robbing it of its reality. His first attempt at cosmic comedy ended by forcing an "either/or" choice. When Tanner's dream and Juan's hope come true, when the first batch of supermen appear on the Shavian scene in *Back to Methuselah*, they are, significantly, not produced by the sexual union of Tanner and Ann, but born parthenogenetically. What light such a future arrangement throws on *Man and Superman*, which unmistakably carries the seeds of *Back to Methuselah*, is not very difficult to guess. About the marriage of the two types of comedy, one can only say that the shotgun marriage ended in immediate divorce.

## Chapter 7 : Notes and References

1. The relation between comedy and Shaw's ideology is discussed in the last chapter of this study.
2. Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry that *You Never Can Tell* was "a frightful example of the result of trying to write for *theatre de nos jours*." *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 801.
3. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Theatrical Companion to Shaw*, p. 290.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
5. CP II, p. 541.
6. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p. 82.
7. CP II, p. 555.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 509.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 558.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 676-77.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 660.
12. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and The Trumpet*, p. 234.
13. CP II, p. 556.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 557.
17. For Schopenhauer's influence on Shaw see Maurice Valency, pp. 200-236. Valency, however, does not seem to be aware that Shaw uses the German philosopher for his own purpose, and fits

Schopenhauer into a world-view that is very different from the German's.

18. CP II, p. 567.

19. Ibid., p. 565.

20. Ibid., p. 721.

21. Ibid., p. 507.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 732.

24. Ibid.

25. Margery M. Morgan, *The Shavian Playground*, p. 84.

26. CP I, p. 751.

27. Ibid., p. 792.

28. Ibid., p. 790.

29. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 801.

30. Ibid., p. 799.

31. The use of the word "superman" can be confusing. At the end of the Hell Scene the Devil tells Ana that the superman is not yet created, CP II, p. 689. Yet Shaw habitually speaks of people like Caesar, Shakespeare, Goethe and Shelley as supermen. In the *Revolutionist's Handbook*, Tanner refers to "our few accidental superman, our Shakespeares, Goethes, Shelleys, and their like." Ibid., p. 772. Sometimes by that term Shaw meant people with very superior faculties, sometimes he meant an ideal individual who, in the words of Don Juan, is "omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly, self-conscious :

in short, a god." CP II, p.662. In Shaw there is an infinite scope for improvement : the superman can improve further and further until he is almost a god. Don Juan is a superman in the first sense, i.e. not an absolute one, but like Caesar and Goethe, a superman in relation to the available specimens of humanity.

32. CP II, p. 636.

33. Ibid., p. 644.

34. Ibid., p. 659.

35. Ibid., p. 680.

36. Ibid., p. 675.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 676.

39. Fredrick P.W. McDowell, "Heaven, Hell and turn-of-the-Century London", *Drama Survey* 2 (1963) : 245-67.

40. In his letter to Julie Moore, Shaw calls the third act "a statement of my creed." *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 873.

41. J.L. Wisenthal, *The Marriage of Contraries*, p. 41.

42. Alfred Turco Jr. is more forthright in recognising that there has been a complete turn-around in the position of the author of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, who is championing idealism against pragmatism in *Man and Superman*. See Alfred Turco Jr., *Shaw's Moral Vision : the Self and Salvation*, p. 155.

42. CP II, p. 684.

43. Ibid., p. 687.

44. Turco observes : "*Man and Superman* aspires towards synthesis

and remains a comedy; but the subversive utterances of Satan (expressing Shaw's inner self-doubts) remind us that the drama may not after all be taking place in a universe where tragedy is impossible." Turco, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

*The Earth as Hell : John Bull's Other Island*

" Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd  
In one self place; for where we are is hell  
And where hell is, must we ever be. "

Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*

If we are to believe Shaw's public pronouncements on the play then *John Bull's Other Island* was written to remove mutual misunderstanding between the English and the Irish. Shaw had no doubt that it was an ambitious task and that he was equal to his aspirations :

Just consider my subject—the destiny of nations ! Consider my characters—personages who stalk on the stage incarnating millions of real, living, suffering men and women. Good heavens ! I have had to get all England and Ireland into 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.<sup>1</sup>

Comedy traditionally deals with type characters, and Shaw claims that his characters typify historical forces, so his comedy is not about a fragmentary plot but is an attempt to capture the essence of history. Yet, since his subject is not merely a record of facts but the destiny of nations, he is not merely a historian but an oracle as well. It did not

occur to him that he was singularly unsuited to the role because the teacher, the disinterested historian and the orator stand outside their subject, at a certain distance from it, without which they would be deprived of the necessary perspective. Shaw, on the other hand, was himself one of the very Irishmen he wanted to "show" to the Englishman, he was an actor and a sufferer; his spatial detachment from the theatre of events was more than neutralised by his emotional proximity. His own bias and involvement would never allow him the detachment without which an ironic comedy is not possible.

The very contrast between the tone of confident detachment evident in the preface and the anguished partisanship revealed in the play could itself be a capital subject of irony. The public posture of amused superiority vis-à-vis the Englishman is perhaps one of the most fundamental Shavian characteristics. The most ubiquitous Shavian stereotype is the foolish Englishman, the most representative Englishman is the insanely chivalrous Nelson, the archetypal Irishman is the no-nonsense Duke of Wellington. The Irishman is necessarily an adult, the quintessential Englishman, like Peter Pan, for ever refuses to grow up : "I take care to live in England , and on the whole I think I like Englishmen better than Irishmen. But I recognize that an Irishman is a grown-up person ; I do not consider an Englishman that. I cannot."<sup>2</sup>

The Englishman's material success , too evident to be wished away, is explained as the result of his stupidity :

The stupidity peculiar to the Englishman , which prevents him from knowing what he is doing , is really a stroke of genius on his part....Cromwell said no man goes further than the man who doesn't know where he is going ; and in that you have the whole secret of English success.<sup>3</sup>

So assiduously did Shaw foist upon the public consciousness the picture of his funny bone being constantly tickled by the amiable idiot known to the rest of the world as the Englishman that few suspected the possibility of the existence of restless nervousness behind such elegant panache , few at any rate, were ready to have their attention diverted from the familiar refrain of his utterances to tell-tale occasional revelations that nearly gave the show away. On rare occasions Shaw would admit that he himself was the deluded victim of the myth perpetuated by himself. He would even confess that Irishmen were greater racists than Hitler , and while admitting that they suffered from delusions of racial grandeur he maintained : " I can only say that [such illusion] exists, and I share it in spite of reason and commonsense."<sup>4</sup> In the same article he pooh-poohed the hope of England assimilating the Irish, asserting that culturally the Irish were invariably separatists. In an

article written in 1913 Shaw took a position that was very different from Larry Doyle's cosmopolitanism and revealed that the pain and shame arising out of national humiliation was the common inheritance of every Irishman :

The world seems to have made up its mind that self-consciousness is a very undesirable thing and Nationalism a very fine thing. This is not a very intelligent conclusion ; for obviously Nationalism is nothing but a mode of self-consciousness , and a very aggressive one at that. It is , I think altogether to Ireland's credit that she is extremely tired of the subject of herself. Even patriotism , which in England is drunken jollity when it is not a Jewish rhapsody, is in Ireland like the genius of Jeremiah, a burning fire shut up in the bones , a pain, a protest against shame and defeat, a morbid condition which a healthy man must shake off if he is to keep sane. If you want to bore an Irishman play him an Irish melody or introduce him to another Irishman. Abroad , however , it is a distinction to be an Irishman and accordingly the Irish in England flaunt their nationality.<sup>5</sup>

In the passage quoted above one can find the clue to the character of the man who, at the age of twenty , had had enough of his country : " Thus when I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart) no society that did not disgust me."<sup>6</sup> He was reluctant to pay another visit to it

and yet remained fiercely Irish outside Ireland. He had to leave his country to retain his regard for it. Irishness for Shaw was not a feeling of affection for Ireland, it was a means of retaining his separateness in England, and of gratifying his illusions and fantasies. It satisfied his need for the feeling of superiority and deflected the feeling of mistrust and hostility that he felt in an uncongenial world. Thus the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde, a paradigmatic example of the conflict between extreme individualism and conformist social order became transformed in Shaw's eyes into the conflict between a tyrannical England and an oppressed Ireland: "Wilde shouldered every disgrace and every torment with which England burdened him...From the grave Wilde still makes fools of them, these enemies of his country and of his originality."<sup>7</sup>

During the First World War, in a letter to the Freeman's Journal, Dublin, Shaw urged Irishmen to support the War as friends of France, not of England. He mentioned "the old injuries we have suffered from England" and hoped that the Home Rule Act would liberate Irishmen from the "political tyranny" of England:

It is France that is holding the West against Potsdam and all that Potsdam means to Western liberty; and it is French soil, on which so many famous Irishmen found refuge from British tyranny, that is being drenched in

French blood in our defence.<sup>8</sup>

In an unsigned review of Robert Oliver's *Unnoticed Analogies : a Talk on the Irish Question* Shaw ruled out as early as in 1888 the possibility of the kind of internationalism that Larry Doyle ostensibly represents in *John Bull's Other Island*. He ridiculed the idea of internationalism without prior national independence. In Shaw's play Doyle tells Broadbent that metallurgical chemistry and civil engineering are nothing if not international and that he believes that national flags and national frontiers are a nuisance.<sup>9</sup> Shaw knows that Doyle is evasive : nationalism is not a national solution , it may cause more harm than good, but it is the dogmatic faith of every self-respecting man that to be a free proletarian is better than to be a comfortable slave. For Shaw nationalism is the necessary rung of the ladder of international federation :

[Man] knows by instinct that if his foot missed that one rung of the ladder , he would not reach the higher rung , but would rather be precipitated into the abyss....And as the slave destroyed great hierarchies in his fight for freedom , so the conquered subject races will destroy great empires when their time comes, if the empires persist in opposing them.<sup>10</sup>

All too predictably then , Roger Casement, prosecuted and

hanged as a traitor for working for the defeat of Great Britain in the First World War , became a rebel instead of a traitor in the eyes of Shaw. In a letter that the *Times* refused to publish Shaw observed :

The word traitor as applied to the rebel has always been a mere vituperation from the days of Wallace to those of Edward Carson and Sir Fredrick Smith....Certainly no one outside Great Britain will have any desire to apply it , even for vituperative purpose to Casement.<sup>11</sup>

Once the surface is scratched , the seemingly immutable plaster colossus gives away the secret that he has, not only human flesh and human blood but also human bones ——— bones that have a burning fire shut up in them.

It is extremely important to indicate the nature of the relationship between Shaw and the world he creates in *John Bull's other Island*. The play is the work of a man whose attempt to study the relationship between the two countries as the interaction between a blundering baby in the guise of an adult and an impish adult ever willing to supply an extra yard to the sanguine fool's long rope is sternly rebuffed by the genius of Jeremiah, by the burning fire shut up in the bones; by the "feeling of pain, shame and defeat." The play is something which almost all critical observation has failed to notice— it is the work of a man who feels

defeated and tries hard not to recognize the defeat. The prospect of a comedy by Jeremiah is a bold imaginative feat, bolder even than what the Shavian imagination would permit. Consequently the writer of the preface professing strong affection for John Bull<sup>12</sup> and the Jeremiah in Shaw refuse to recognise each other. This pathetic dissociation of sensibility is fully reflected in Thomas Broadbent, who becomes the symbol of the conquering Englishman.

How reluctant Shaw was to probe his own mind becomes evident from a remark in the preface that the combination of Broadbent and Doyle has been very fruitful : "I should say, myself, that the combination was probably much more effective than either of the partners would have been alone ".<sup>13</sup>

Shaw wants his readers to believe that a happy end can be attained when Ireland and England understand each other:left to himself Broadbent is bound to waste his vitality and energy, left to themselves the Irish farmers with all their intelligence and wit cannot prevent themselves from being swallowed up by the Syndicate. In the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman* Shaw argues that the efficiency of John Bull is far from absolute:

...there is no future for men, however brimming with crude vitality, who are neither intelligent nor politically educated enough to be Socialists. So do not misunderstand me in the other direction either : if I

appreciate the vital qualities of the Englishman as I appreciate the vital qualities of the bee, I do not guarantee the Englishman against being, like the bee (or the Cananite) smoked out and unloaded of his honey by a being inferior to himself in simple acquisitiveness, combativeness, and fecundity, but superior to him in imagination and cunning.<sup>14</sup>

In *John Bull's other Island* Shaw supposedly shows three patterns : the pattern of the bee-like efficiency of Broadbent, the pattern of futile imagination and cunning in people like Barney Doran and Tim Haffigan, and the pattern of successful interaction in the combination of Doyle and Broadbent. Peter Keegan as the *raisonneur* cuts across the divisions, but even he, the embodiment of the genius of Ireland, underscores the pathetic isolation of vision without power. The reading of the play as a Shavian comedy rests on the validity of such patterns, and inevitably Shaw pressed for their acceptance when he trumpeted the effectiveness of the Broadbent-Doyle combination as a union of complementary forces.

Perhaps Shaw's own attempt to rise above the sense of national defeat with the aid of national stereotypes is mainly responsible for the disruption of the pattern. He attempted to superimpose another pattern over the one just mentioned. In the new scheme Broadbent and Doyle are to represent Nelson and the Duke of Wellington respectively—

the archetypal Englishman and the archetypal Irishman in the eyes of Shaw. <sup>15</sup>

The important thing about Broadbent and Doyle is that they do not complement each other ; in possessing certain qualities they overlap, as to the rest they diverge completely. Broadbent and Doyle are both modernisers as civil engineers, and capitalists as share-holders of the Syndicate. They do not contrast in efficiency of action, but like Nelson and Wellington (in Shaw's version ) are temperamentally poles apart : one is deliriously sentimental, the other is unperturbably sane. The polarisation of efficiency and intelligence cannot be said to have constituted the *leitmotif* of *John Bull's Other Island* because in that case the encounter between the Syndicate of Broadbent and Doyle on the one hand and the people of Rosscullen on the other would run counter to the pattern revealed through the encounter of Broadbent with Rosscullen.

As a successful civil engineer and member of the Syndicate, Doyle epitomises, like Broadbent, the strength of modernism and capitalism, yet the play leaves us in no doubt that Doyle must be included in the list of men thwarted and defeated by Broadbent. If that is true then critics such as McDowell and Wisenthal,<sup>16</sup> who have discovered in the play not only comic technique but also a comic denouement in the synthesis of the so-called English and Irish qualities are

mistaken because for the play to be a comedy in this sense the alliance between Broadbent and Doyle must be able to demonstrate its fruitfulness.

When Shaw speaks of Doyle's loyalty to and affection for Broadbent and when Doyle mentions that as civil engineers their business "is to join countries not to separate them,"<sup>17</sup> Shaw and Doyle hope that the Syndicate is the bridge that Broadbent and Doyle have built across St. George's channel. Doyle thinks that metallurgical chemistry, civil engineering and the Syndicate — modern technology and modern organisation— have brought the world on their doorstep. It is inevitable therefore that the small world of Rosscullen — the world of the eighteenth century — will lose out to their world and be swallowed by it. In this sense the defeat of Rosscullen is the victory of the dream of integration and progress : the twentieth century is an advance on the eighteenth. A process which is the vehicle of this progress must bode well inspite of the sundry pin-pricks and sighs.

It is probable that this is how Shaw consciously viewed the play in which he claimed to have packed the history of England and Ireland, for the ground plan, the prefatory remarks, and even the exposition of the play point to that direction, but the fire in the bones of Jeremiah consumed the pattern and threw up, as the play progressed, a different vision in which Doyle had to bear, like the other

Irishmen in the play, the burden of pain and defeat. Viewed through the eyes of Jeremiah the union of Broadbent and Doyle — the union of England and Ireland — is merely the annexation of the latter by the former.

Perhaps the equation is best exemplified by the outcome of the Doyle-Nora-Broadbent relationship. The conquest of Nora Reilly by Broadbent is as paradigmatic as Matthew Haffigan's piece of land being swallowed up by him. The identical significance of the two acts is driven home by Doyle himself when, after losing Nora to Broadbent, he confesses to her: "Nora, dear, dont you understand that I'm an Irishmen and he's an Englishman. He wants you; and he grabs you. I want you ;and I quarrel with you and have to go on wanting you."<sup>18</sup> Broadbent grabs Nora from Larry Doyle, just as he plans to grab Larry Doyle's father's land by lending him more money than he can repay.

That the relation between Broadbent and Doyle is not equal is evident in the resolution of matters regarding which the two differ — Doyle does not wish to foreclose the mortgage of Nick Lestrangle and drive the latter out of his hearth and home ; he does not want his father to fall into the debt trap of the Syndicate; when he cannot prevent the pauperisation of Matthew Haffigan, he wishes to find a situation for him in the Syndicate. In all these instances he is thwarted and in every case it is Broadbent who has things his own way.

The incidents in Rosscullen explain why Doyle was reluctant in the first place to return to Ireland : he was reluctant to leave the haven of illusion. In London, he could pretend to forget the pain of defeat since the partnership with Broadbent invested him with a false sense of victory. In London he could pretend that he and Broadbent belonged to the same world, a world that had passed Rosscullen by. He has such convulsive aversion to Rosscullen because it rubs salt into his wounded heart, it reminds him everything he would like to forget. His diatribe against Ireland is delivered "with fierce shivering self-contempt"<sup>19</sup>; when he calls the people of Ireland "poor slovenly useless devils" he drops "his voice like a man making some shameful confidence."<sup>20</sup> Like the people who fill him with shuddering disgust, he too cannot bear reality. Consequently he cannot bear Rosscullen, the geographical expression of that naked reality.

To discover an almost similar situation of a man running away from the painful memory of national defeat into a self-created world of illusory victory, one has to go to Doyle's creator, who has this to say about Dublin :

In 1876, I had had enough of Dublin. James Joyce in his Ulysses has described, with a fidelity so ruthless that the book is hardly bearable, the life that Dublin offers to its young men, or, if you prefer to put it the other way, that its young men offer to Dublin...

Thus when I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart ) no society that did not disgust me. To this day my sentimental regard for Ireland does not include its capital.<sup>21</sup>

Doyle , like his creator, is disgusted by Ireland because in Ireland he is reminded that his place is with Doran and Haffigan, not with Broadbent. He reacts to Peter Keegan with the same violence, and for the same reasons. Keegan forces Doyle to face the truth. The outward difference between the two men and the fact that they reveal less than their best manners to each other obscures the fact that they come to the same conclusion about their motherland. Keegan calls it hell but his vision is prefigured by Doyle when he tells Broadbent in a confessional tone that an Irishman cannot be religious : "The inspired Churchman ... is sent away empty, while the poor village priest that gives him a miracle or a sentimental story of a saint has cathedrals built for him out of the pennies of the poor."<sup>22</sup> Doyle knows that the envy, the cynical laughter and the faithlessness of the Irishmen brutalise them until they are left with nothing but drunken orgiastic laughter, which they use as an armour against reality and as an expression of universal hatred. All that Keegan adds to Doyle's findings is that he uses a religious term to describe Rosscullen, he calls it hell. .

I have said that under the strain of two sets of attitudes which were diametrically opposite, certain parts of Shaw's consciousness became dissociated from others. This split is most acutely reflected in Broadbent. I have also argued that the real nature of Broadbent's relationship with Ireland, of which his relationship with Doyle is an integral component, rules out the possibility of a comic resolution. This has to be explained because Broadbent is traditionally seen as a sanguine, bumptious nonsense-crammed romantic fool overflowing with friendliness towards all and sundry, from Tim Haffgan to Peter Keegan. For instance, Sengupta finds in Broadbent credulity and "cheerful bumptiousness",<sup>23</sup> McDowell finds his hypocrisy unintentional,<sup>24</sup> Valency sees him as a "likeable man of unusual obtuseness, a romantic idealist."<sup>25</sup> Even A.M. Gibbs, who is willing to take cognizance of his harmful activities, finds an appropriate metaphor for him in the pig accompanying him in the disastrous journey. To him Broadbent, in spite of his instinctive greed, is piggishly simple.<sup>26</sup> Shaw does not draw Broadbent, as he does Doyle or Keegan, by getting under his skin. But if his character is a broad caricature it is not sketched by blowing up just one overwhelming trait—— asininity. It is true that Doyle says that an ordinarily intelligent donkey is brighter than Broadbent,<sup>27</sup> and even in this Doyle is seconded by Keegan<sup>28</sup>

but both men clearly see the other side of his character : one likens him to the caterpillar <sup>29</sup> and the other to the devil.<sup>30</sup> The difference lies not so much in their perceptions as in their idioms. Doyle, a friend of Broadbent, and prone to finding more indulgent metaphors, nevertheless finds his equivalent in a greedy parasitical insect. The jesting manner of Doyle and the grotesqueness of the simile tends to obscure the fact that this ugly creature is a killer insect. Doyle is fully alive to Broadbent's predatory nature :

Well the Englishman does what the caterpillar does. He instinctively makes himself look like a fool, and eats up all the real fools at his ease while his enemies let him alone and laugh at him for being a fool like the rest. Oh, nature is cunning ! cunning !<sup>31</sup>

Thus, according to the man who knows him better than any one else does, Broadbent is only superficially foolish, he is instinctively cunning.

When we remember that in Shaw's plays the instinctive or unconscious self of a character is the real self and not the conscious one — a truth revealed to Dick Dudgeon, to Anderson, to Lavinia, to Margaret Knox, to Blanco Posnet among others — it becomes clear that the superficial image of Broadbent hides his unprincipled rapacity as the superficial image of Julius Caesar as a middle-aged dandy hides his real greatness, or the ruffianly exterior of

Blanco Posnet hides his instinctive goodness.

The separation of the two layers of Broadbent's character is not carried through. By the time the play enters the last act, Broadbent is changed into a consciously cunning schemer. He proves far shrewder than Larry Doyle, who forbids him to drive through Rosscullen with Haffigan's pig, thinking that that would make Broadbent the laughing stock of all Rosscullen. He has not reckoned with the fact that the proposed drive is a conscious ploy. Broadbent can afford to reply that he will enjoy the joke more than anyone else because he is confident that he will have the last laugh while converting the laughter of Rosscullen into votes. He does not mind being a fool about Tim Haffigan's phoney brogue because he has nothing to lose from it, nor does he mind being bilked of five pounds in a show of generosity that finally works to his own advantage. But once the net closes in on his prey he shows no mercy, neither to Nick Lestrangle nor to Matthew Haffigan. When Doyle assures an agonized Keegan that Haffigan will be absorbed in the Syndicate in some capacity or other, Broadbent hurriedly intervenes to observe that nothing of that sort will happen because a man above forty is not worth keeping. He is content to let Haffigan migrate to America or to die. Of course he does not like the mention of death, though his fastidiousness reaches as far as the word, not the fact.

Shaw's reference to Cromwell's words <sup>32</sup> as the clue to

Broadbent's success is singularly inappropriate because Cromwell said that no man goes as far as the one who does not know where he is going whereas Broadbent carries the route map of his destination with him. He lends Matthew Haffigan and Cornelius Doyle large sums of money in a sinisterly calculative manner; worse still, he has a master plan of ruining the share-holders of the proposed hotel and transferring their shares to himself for a song. Broadbent is, therefore, far from an innocent bumpkin.

After comparing the Englishman's vitality to that of the bee in the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman*, Shaw says in his habitually superior tone that he does not "guarantee the Englishman against being... smoked out and unloaded of his honey."<sup>33</sup> Yet the play which he has dedicated exclusively to the study of Anglo-Irish relations shows one Irishman after another being smoked out by the Englishman until he has the entire honeycomb— or Rosscullen— safely in his bag.

It is clear that the superficial and the deeper layers of Shaw's consciousness both played their parts in the making of Broadbent but the reluctance of the two levels to recognize each other led to the strange incongruity in Broadbent's character. Shaw probably did not realize the ironical significance of Doyle's words when the latter expressed his impatience with the head of Broadbent "with all its ideas in watertight compartments, and all the compartments warranted impervious to anything it does not

suit you to understand."<sup>34</sup> He did not probably realize that the observation was as valid of himself as of Broadbent, for the imperviousness of Broadbent's compartments reflected that of his creator. It was the imperviousness of a man who, inspite of his instinctive knowledge that the genius of Jeremiah was not suited to comedy attempted to write a comedy of manners on Anglo-Irish relations on the untenable assumption that twenty-eight years of residence and a few years of fame in London could turn the Jeremiah in him into Punch.

### III

Shaw considered the idea of including *Man and Superman*, *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* in a single volume for the German edition under the title "Comedies of Religion and Science".<sup>35</sup> He probably saw the three plays as a trilogy when he spoke of "a group of three plays of exceptional weight and magnitude on which the reputation of the author as a serious dramatist was first established and still mainly rests."<sup>36</sup>

*Man and Superman* gives an exposition of the religion of the Life Force, *Major Barbara* presents the gospel of St. Andrew Undershaft, but the prophet of the religion that can be discovered in *John Bull's other Island* is a very different kind of man from Shaw's Don Juan and Andrew Undershaft.

Don Juan uses words as a champion fencer uses his foil, he does not let the Devil draw blood even once; with a terrifying display of power Undershaft bulldozes through his opponents and installs his twin idols — blood and iron — in the sanctum sanctorum. Compared with them Keegan is a defeated man : he has been unfrocked and is pitied as a madman. Having none of the invincible qualities of the other two, he has walked the path of suffering in the course of his religious quest. Therefore the heaven and the hell that he discovers is significantly different from the picture of heaven and hell painted in *Man and Superman*. The heaven of *Man and Superman* is a state of mind and hence a purely subjective and closed world. Closed, that is, to men and women who cannot bear an eternity of contemplation, though a Plato or a Pascal or a Shaw can, when he is dissatisfied with the actual world, find comfortable refuge in that heaven. A necessary condition for residence permit in that heaven is that the applicant must be above appetites and yearnings. He must be free from the infection of love and beauty. If he satisfies these conditions he can always find open season there, for that heaven is not in the least dependent on the condition of other men.

Peter Keegan's heaven is very different. Unlike Don Juan's, which can be realized in isolation in the realm of the intellect, Keegan's heaven, existing in his dreams, is a country. The very fact that it has a geographical

dimension means that it can be realised only in communion with others :

In my dreams it is a country where the state is the Church and the Church the people : three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped : three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in whom all life is human and all humanity divine : three in one and one in three. It is, in short, the dream of a madman. <sup>37</sup>

Tanner and Juan would probably agree with Keegan that his heaven is the dream of a madman, because to anyone believing in the heaven of *Man and Superman*, Keegan's heaven would appear to be an impossible synthesis of Roman Catholic idolatry, Comtean sentimentality and woolly Brahmanic mysticism. To the worshipper of the Life Force the worship of life would seem ridiculous. And it is here that the uniqueness of Keegan as a *raisonneur* lies. Tanner and Juan belong to the mainstream of Shavian thought ; their religion has its origin in the novels and its most 'spectacular expression in *Back to Methuselah*. We hardly come across another Shavian protagonist of such immense importance who carries his bleeding wound about him and is so frankly a defeated man. The consciousness that he is living in hell

is the price he has to pay for unashamedly loving his country and its people.

There is one important similarity between the heaven of *Man and Superman* and that of *John Bull's Other Island* : both exist only in dreams. The disillusionment on waking up is greater in *John Bull's other Island*, for once the dream is broken the distance between earth and hell vanishes. The reality of hell is reinforced by the fact that both the Shavian personae in the play, Doyle and Keegan, have convergent views on the subject. It is Doyle who first sounds the note that Ireland is hell:

Oh, the dreaming ' the dreaming ' the torturing heart-scalding, never satisfying dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming ... An Irishman's imagination never lets him alone ... but it makes him that he cannot face reality nor deal with it, nor handle it nor conquer it : he can only sneer at them that do, and [ bitterly, at Broadbent ] be "agreeable to strangers," like a good-for-nothing woman on the streets... And all the while there goes on a horrible, mischievous laughter. When you are young, You exchange vile stories with them; and so youre too futile to be able to help or cheer them, you chaff and sneer and taunt for not doing the thing you darent do yourself. And all the time you laugh ! laugh ! laugh ! eternal derision, eternal envy, eternal folly, eternal fouling and staining and

Don Juan says in *Man and Superman* that "hell is the home of the unreal", the place where "there are no hard facts to contradict you."<sup>39</sup> The wall separating hell from earth, not very strong in *Man and Superman*, has caved in in *John Bull's other Island*, for there is no doubt that Doyle mentions hell without naming it and Keegan merely confirms his findings when, responding to the obscene mirth of the Irish peasants at the accident involving Broadbent and the pig, he remarks: "It is hell: it is hell. Nowhere else could such a scene be a burst of happiness for the people."<sup>40</sup> A little later he elaborates his point:

This world, Sir, is very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes and the good and wise are hated and persecuted, a place where men and women torture one another in the name of love ... Now, Sir, there is one place of horror and torment known to my religion; and that place is hell. Therefore it is plain to me that this earth of ours must be hell...<sup>41</sup>

The paradox of *John Bull's other Island* is that its hell is built on laughter. This is a paradox because Shaw is the modern St. George who uses laughter as his sword to slay the dragon of ignorance and stupidity. Trefusis, Bluntschli, Caesar and Undershaft use laughter to overcome their adversaries or to convert them. "My way of joking is to tell

the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world," says Keegan.<sup>42</sup> But everyone else uses the joke to evade the truth. Barney Doran and company cannot bear truth and resort to laughter. Doyle knows that he cannot bear truth and seeks consolation in sarcasm. Even Shaw, the professed champion of unbeglamoured truth, laughs as a canny Irishman at the gullible Englishman in the preface though the play points to the opposite direction; Keegan is the only person who can bear the truth, and even he has to pretend to be a madman.

Broadbent, the *alazon*, the butt of everyone's ridicule, turns the tables on everyone, including his creator. It is he who makes the taste of every joke so sour. The laughter that makes the play so funny is the same laughter that makes its hell so vivid. Those who laugh at Broadbent, both inside the play as characters, and outside it as members of the audience, have no suspicion that he is the deadly caterpillar. Those who laugh insanely with Barney Doran and others at the accident do not realise that their laughter is the sign of their impotence, and the sign of their lack of moral discrimination: it is the sign of their damnation. Doyle knows that the laughter is of derision in the land of eternal derision, he knows it is foul and stained. The other man who does not laugh is Keegan, who knows that he is standing in hell.

#### IV

Doyle and Keegan are easily recognisable Shavian

personae, Barney Doran is a far more unlikely candidate. In the *Tallor* piece Shaw says : "I have shown the Irish saint shuddering at the humour of the Irish blackguard— only to find that the average critic thought the blackguard very funny and the saint very unpractical. "<sup>43</sup> This is a little disingenuous because the average critic did what he was intended by the dramatist to do , for as a dramatist Shaw manipulates the audience's laughter as a puppeteer manipulates his puppets. The incongruity between the preface and the heart of the play leads one to infer that Shaw probably never thought before writing the play, nor did he recognise the fact after writing it, that his imaginative journey to Ireland would take him to hell. Hell was particularly uncongenial to his temperament. In his earlier works he had been able to sidestep it the moment he had got wind of it. Having failed to prevent the vision of hell in *John Bull's other Island* he wanted to work off the shock of its recognition through the escapist laughter of Barney Doran. In this he achieved handsome success. The play went down as one of the funniest— possibly the funniest— of all his plays. He had to write a personal appeal to the audience not to hold up the performance of the play with uncontrolled laughter. <sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the most spectacular symbol of the play's success was the most irrefutable evidence that Keegan's bitterness was fully justified. King Edward VII and Arthur

Balfour, two of the most high-profile personages to embody the spirit of John Bull, represented in the play by Tom Broadbent, enjoyed the play immensely. Edward VII laughed so heartily that he broke a chair.<sup>45</sup>

It was an incredible example of life not only imitating art but aping it :the laughter-choked king thought that Shaw was mad,<sup>46</sup> just as a laughter-choked Broadbent thinks that Keegan is mad. Both inside the play, and outside it, the triumph of Broadbent is made complete by the marginalization of Keegan's vision. In *Man and Superman* Don Juan tells Ana that those who are damned feel no pain in hell.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore quite in order that Keegan should be the only person to feel the pain.

Shaw once said that he was mad if the rest of the world was sane.<sup>48</sup> When he encouraged his audience to enjoy *John Bull's other Island* as a comedy, he seemed to have changed his mind and come round to the view, like the hero of Pirandello's *Henry IV*, that the pretence of madness is the only shelter from the agony of sanity. In a world governed by Broadbent, one must speak his language in order to be heard. Shaw was not only heard but also greeted with encores. The "comedy" was a success.

Chapter B : Notes and References

1. "George Bernard Shaw : a Conversation", *The Tatler* 177 (1904) : 204 , quoted in Fredrick P. W. McDowell, "Politics,Comedy,Character and Dialectic : The Shavian World of John Bull's Other Island", *PMLA* 82 (1967) : 545.
2. "Socialism and Ireland ", *Shaw on Ireland* , p. 215.
3. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 394.
4. "Ireland Eternal and External", *Shaw on Ireland*, p.296.
5. " A Note on Aggressive Nationalism ", *Ibid.*, p. 81.
6. Preface to *Immaturity*, p. xxxiii.
7. " Oscar Wilde, " *Shaw on Ireland*, pp. 29-30
8. " Ireland and the First World War ",*Ibid.*, p. 87, p. 88.
9. CP II , p. 914.
10. " A Crib for Home Rulers", *Shaw on Ireland*, pp. 22-23.
11. " Roger Casement", *Ibid.*, p. 128
12. CP II , p. 809, p. 811.
13. CP II, p. 810. J.L.Wisenthal reveals at his own expense the danger of taking Shaw at his word when he argues that the play is intended to show each of the two nations its faults and the other's virtues. Wisenthal, *The Marriage of Contraries: Bernard Shaw's Middle plays*,p.88. Fredrick P. W. McDowell comes to a similar conclusion: " Shaw...proposed to use the efficiencies of Capitalism in the service of a new Socialism and a new religious awakening. This I believe is the direction of the play." McDowell, "Politics, Comedy, ~~Character and Dialectic: the Shavian world of John Bull's~~

Character and Dialectic: the Shavian world of John Bull's  
Other Island." *PMLA* 82 (1967) : 553.

14. CP II, p. 505.
15. Ibid., p. 815.
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17. CP II, p. 914.
18. Ibid., p. 1008.
19. Ibid., p. 910.
20. Ibid.
21. Preface to *Immaturity* , p. xxxiii.
22. CP II , p. 910.
23. S.C. Sengupta, *The Art of Bernard Shaw*, p. 85.
24. McDowell, op.cit.
25. Maurice Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet*. p. 259.
26. A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p. 146.
27. CP II, p. 912.
28. Ibid., p. 1015.
29. Ibid., p. 916.
30. Ibid., p. 1015.
31. Ibid., p. 916-917.
32. See *supra*.
33. CP II, p. 505.
34. Ibid., p. 913.
35. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p. 237.
36. *Shaw on Theatre* ,p. 118.
37. CP II , p. 1021.

38. Ibid., pp. 909-10.
39. Ibid., pp. 103,104.
40. Ibid., p. 983.
41. Ibid., pp. 990-91.
42. Ibid., p. 930.
43. Op. cit., p. 242.
44. See CP II, pp. 1023-25.
45. Maurice Valeney, *The Cart and the Trumpet*, p. 238.
46. St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw ; His Life Work and Friends*, p. 110.
47. CP II , p. 90.
48. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, pp. 43-44.

Giving unto Caesar What is Caesar's : Major Barbara

" The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Controversy and Shaw courted each other. But even those who, raised on the Shavian diet, ceased to be shocked by his provocative nudges that consisted chiefly of calculated distortion of perspective were stunned by *Major Barbara*. Here the choice was not between prostitution and suicide, as in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, nor between cruelty masked as religion and pity in the garb of blasphemy, as in *The Devil's Disciple*, but between Christianity and anti-Christianity, between Christ and Dionysus. And Shaw seemed to have discovered greater morality in the arms-manufacturer than in the Salvation Army. The denunciation of poverty seemingly ended up in a litany to blackguardism. Taking note of the fact that the most compelling figure in the play is an earnest advocate of the cannons-for-salvation doctrine, William Archer wrote :

I cannot help thinking that there are two main lines, which eventually cross each other, so that the trains of thought which run on them collide, to their mutual destruction. We have on the one hand Mr Shaw's favourite idea (in which I heartily concur) that

poverty is the greatest evil in the world, and its extirpation our first duty. Following Samuel\*Butler Mr Shaw prefers to call it a crime, and I am not disposed to quarrel about words. On that score then, he has me with him; but when he proceeds to lay down the Nietzschean doctrine of the Superman, and preach the gospel of high explosives, I cannot harmonize the two ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly G.K. Chesterton thought that *Major Barbara* stood for everything that Shaw had fought against all his life, it was "not only apart from his faith, but against his faith."<sup>2</sup> In the preface to the play Shaw added to the confusion of his critics by pretending to lionize Undershaft :

Undershaft, the hero of *Major Barbara*, is simply a man who, having grasped the fact that poverty is a crime, knows that when society offered him the alternative of poverty or a lucrative trade in death and destruction, it offered him, not a choice between opulent villainy and humble virtue, but between energetic enterprise and cowardly infamy.<sup>3</sup>

However this teasing preface should not be taken at face value. It is not a little strange that critics who have made much of the preface have chosen to disregard the following lines which gives a clearer picture of Shaw's frame of mind:

Like Froissart's medieval hero, who saw that "to rob and pill was a good life" he is not the dupe of that public sentiment against killing which is propagated and endowed by people who would otherwise be killed themselves, or of the mouth-honor paid to poverty and obedience by rich and insubordinate do nothings ... Froissart's Knight, in placing the achievement of a good life before all the other duties... behaved bravely, admirably. Medieval society, on the other hand, behaved very badly indeed in organizing itself so stupidly that a good life could be achieved by robbing and pilling. If the Knight's contemporaries had been all as resolute as he, robbing and pilling would have been the shortest way to the gallows, just as, if we were all as resolute and clearsighted as Undershaft an attempt to live by means of what is called "an independent income" would be the shortest way to the lethal chamber.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that the doctrine propagated by Andrew Undershaft is not a Shavian doctrine. Undershaft can thrive only because society, in convincing itself that the meek shall inherit the earth, makes things that much easier for him who, not being the dupe of piety, makes hay while the sun shines; one who is not governed by Christian values finds these values indispensable in the maintenance of the status quo that works in his favour.<sup>5</sup>

Shaw believes Undershaft's choice to be moral because Undershaft satisfies the Kantian test of virtuous action: if everyone were to act like him, then Undershaft would soon be superseded. From the Shavian point of view the doctrine of Undershaft is a necessary step for its eventual abolition.

If one were to look for a model of *Major Barbara*, one would find it in Ibsen. Thematically *Major Barbara* is a mutant of the *Emperor and Galilean*. If the amount of space dedicated to a play is any indication of the critic's attention, then the reader of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is justified in supposing that no other play of Ibsen moved Shaw as much as the *Emperor and Galilean* since the discussion of this play takes up more space in Shaw's study of the Norwegian dramatist than any other of the latter's works. Shaw quotes a significant section of the play while commenting on Julian's persecution of the Christians :

Once on the throne Julian becomes a mere pedant-tyrant, trying to revive paganism ecumenically by cruel enforcement of external conformity to its rites... In this frame of mind Christ appears to him, not as the prototype of himself as Maximus would have him feel, but as a rival God over whom he must prevail at all costs. It galls him to think that the Galilean still reigns in the hearts of men whilst the emperor can only extort lip honour from them by brute force; for in his wildest excesses of egotism he never loses his saving

sense of the realities of things as to mistake the trophies of persecution for the fruits of faith."Tell me who shall conquer" he demands of Maximus : "the emperor or the Galilean ?"

"Both the emperor and the Galilean shall succumb... but you shall not therefore perish. Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man : yet neither child nor youth perishes. You know I have never approved of your policy as emperor. You have tried to make the youth a child again. The empire of the flesh is fallen a prey to the empire of the spirit. But the empire of the spirit is not final, any more than the youth is, you have tried to hinder the youth from growing : from becoming a man. Oh fool, who have drawn your sword against that which is to be : against the third empire, in which the twin-natured shall reign..."<sup>6</sup>

*Major Barbara's* resemblance to Ibsen's play becomes evident when one grasps the fact that in the changed circumstances of capitalistic democracy Julian's mantle is carried by the military-industrial complex. As the ablest representative of this class Undershaft clears any possible misapprehension about his role :

I am the government of your country : I and Lazarus. Do you suppose that you and half a dozen amateurs like

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you, sitting in a row in the foolish gabble shop, can govern Undershaft and Lazarus ? No, my friend : you will do what pays u s (sic). You will make war when it suits us, and keep peace when it doesnt.<sup>7</sup>

Undershaft is thus not merely an arms manufacturer but the wielder of the power that comes from the barrel of the gun. He is the new Julian, the lord of the first empire. The Galilean, who is Julian's antithesis, is represented in this allegory by Barbara, who resembles Christ so closely that to the reader who misses the allegory, her anguished cry, "My God : why hast thou forsaken me ? "<sup>8</sup> sounds confusing and blasphemous. Barbara's army, the Salvation Army, is described by Cusins as "the army of joy, of love, of courage..."<sup>9</sup> At the end of the second act when the Army deserts her, the play becomes a symbolic reenactment of Jesus's loneliness and his betrayal by Judas.<sup>10</sup>

Undershaft's intuition is more acute than Julian's in the anticipation of the third empire; while Julian failed to grasp the fact that his will was a part of the world will and by his persecution of the Christians he delayed historical progress, Undershaft is akin to Wotan, the god in Wagner's *Niblung's Ring*, in having an instinctive understanding of dialectics.

In *The Perfect Wagnerite* Shaw makes a distinction between Wotan's conscious intentions and his true will. The destruction of Wotan's spear by Siegfried's sword signals

the victory of Wotan's real will: "...the god, since his desire is toward a higher and fuller life, must long in his inmost soul for the advent of the greater power whose first work, though he does not see as yet, must be his own undoing ."<sup>11</sup>

As Undershaft is the equivalent of Wotan in Shaw's play, *Major Barbara* is not an apotheosis of Undershaftism. The play merely insists that Undershaft is the catalyst of the supersession of the first empire. Just as the third empire cannot come into existence without a synthesis of the first and the second empires, so the Christian virtue of Barbara cannot bring about the transformation of the world governed by Undershaft's guns without appropriating Undershaft's power. In other words the author who insists in all his plays that love is not enough here avers that Christian love is not enough. Perhaps in no other play does Shaw show such acute awareness of the nature of political power. Every reader of the play sees for himself that power, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and that without temporal power spiritual power is impotent. As the Salvation Army has nothing but spiritual power, it must either wind up its shelter or tolerate the existence of Undershaft and Lazarus. Under the existing circumstances, it can only further degrade Peter Shirley, thrown out of his job at the age of forty-six, by making him a beggar living on alms. Under the present circumstances temporal power can only be tyrannical and

spiritual authority a pathetic rag-tag like Mrs Baines and the Salvation girls. Undershaft can update the technology of mass murder but Barbara can only offer prayer and admonition. The most telling symbol of the powerlessness of the Salvation Army is Jenny being dragged by the hair and hit across the face by Bill Walker.

Shaw finds Undershaft's methods more civilised than the Army's because his industry at least turns out well fed and well groomed men ; the Salvation Army's shelter produces wretched decrepits cursing themselves for having to beg. The Army can exist only by collaborating with Undershaft, its renunciation of power leads to the perpetuation of his oppressive power. Since the people the Army needs to convert, people like Lazarus and Undershaft, are precisely the people it fails to convert, by haranguing the powerless to abjure violence it unwittingly plays into the hands of Undershaft and Lazarus. An unashamed Undershaft, on the other hand, by preaching the gospel that poverty is a crime and killing for prosperity is an honourable profession, tolls the death knell of Undershaftism ; for the singleminded hatred of poverty by every living person is bound to abolish poverty. Though the way to heaven may lie through hell, the end of iniquity must come after a bloody civil war. Undershaft knows that "religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich."<sup>12</sup> By pretending that poverty is a blessing and humility a virtue,

they breed cowardice, and they breed, at least in practice, political conformism.

As a man of business, it is enough for Undershaft to know that the Salvation Army draws people's teeth. The following exchange between Undershaft and Cusins amply demonstrates why Shaw the pragmatist who, like Ibsen, protested "against the ordinary assumption that there are certain moral institutions which justify all means to maintain them"<sup>13</sup> and measured the value of an idea by its effect on conduct, considered Undershaft's effect on society more beneficial than the Salvation Army's :

CUSINS I dont think you quite know what the Army does for the poor .

UNDERSHAFT Oh yes I do. It draws their teeth: that is enough for me— as a man of business—

CUSINS Nonsense ! It makes them sober —

UNDERSHAFT I prefer sober workmen. The profits are larger.

CUSINS — honest—

UNDERSHAFT Honest workmen are the most economical.

CUSINS — attached to their homes —

UNDERSHAFT So much the better : they will put up with anything sooner than change their shop.

CUSINS— happy—

UNDERSHAFT An invaluable safeguard against revolution.

CUSINS— Unselfish—

UNDERSHAFT Indifferent to their own interests, which suits me exactly.

CUSINS — With their thoughts on heavenly things.

UNDERSHAFT [RISING] And not on Trade Unionism nor Socialism. Excellent.<sup>14</sup>

It is evident that Shaw praises the revolutionary role of Undershaft just as Marx praised the revolutionary role of the bourgeois for tearing apart the fabric of human relationships existing under feudalism, though he knew that capitalism gives birth to a more impersonal, and hence more dehumanized, form of exploitation than feudalism. *Major Barbara* cannot be understood without keeping in mind Shaw's sense of dialectic.

Undershaft, then, cannot liberate the people. As an industrialist who manufactures weapons he can only be the catalyst of violence and warfare. Like Froissart's hero, with whom he has been compared by Shaw in the preface, he believes that to rob and to pill is a good life, and like Monsieur Verdoux in Chaplin's film he suffers from no illusions and knows that he has ushered in death for his own profit, but he also knows like him that those who are hailed as heroes by history went about their task of murder and plunder with similar thoroughness and singlemindedness.

It is not his action but the clarity of his vision that sets Undershaft apart from an ordinary death-merchant. He knows that if everyone did as he does his trade will be the

first casualty. In a society consisting exclusively of people who would sooner kill than be poor there can be no killing because such a society will organize itself to abolish poverty. Such a society will be forced to do away with exploitation and offer prosperity to each of its members merely for the sake of social equilibrium.

Shaw's play is sustained by an iron chain of dialectic from which it is not allowed to deviate. Here again he is not unlike Marx, whose predictions about political revolution were belied in reality because the categories of discourse did not always correspond to conditions on the ground. Shaw's generalisation about human nature forms the play's premise. For the dialectic to be a successful interpretation of the social process the premise must reflect reality. The logic of the play rules out the liberal solution in which humble piety of the Salvation Army can co-exist with egalitarianism, because in his dialectical scheme Shaw has simplified the immense complexity of nature: the world in which the action of *Major Barbara* takes place is essentially the Hobbesian world of the *Leviathan*. In *Man and Superman*, both in the Epistle Dedicatory and in the Revolutionist's Handbook, the great majority of men are considered to be political failures. In *Major Barbara* too, the average person is a selfish brute. Undershaft's employees help him to perpetuate his exploitation:

Practically, every man of them keeps the man just below

him in his place. I never meddle with them. I never bully them...The men snub the boys and order them about; the carmen snub the sweepers; the artisans snub the unskilled labourers; the foremen drive and bully both the laborers and artisans; the assistant engineers find fault with the foremen; the chief engineers drop on the assistants; the departmental managers worry the chiefs;and the clerks have tall hats and hymnbooks and keep up the social tone by refusing to associate on equal terms with anybody.<sup>15</sup>

It must be understood that Undershaft's factory is the microcosm of society, faithfully reflecting its character, to see why Shaw insists that Undershaft's religion of blood and iron is a necessary step for its eventual obsolescence.

Democratic methods of change are not feasible because conciliation and harmony between different classes of interest are not possible. Men cannot choose their good voluntarily, they change only when they are forced to change under duress. Thus a sane society cannot be chosen by the people, it will come only when each man is forced to behave with sanity because all other options are exhausted .

Kant thought that men are prompted by the irresistible voice of conscience, by what he called "the Categorical Imperative." If he made man's innate sense of morality the religious basis of society, Shaw reaches society from the other end. If man is the creature described in the

*Leviathan*, his wilfulness and single-minded pursuit of self-interest will one day force him to found a just society. When everyone becomes as ruthlessly self-centred as Undershaft and as clear-sighted, everyone will be forced to realize that the only society that can save the Undershafts from mutual destruction is a society that does not resort to the methods of Undershaft to suppress a section of the population. Here Shaw anticipates on a national scale a favourite doctrine of international relations--- the balance of terror. In the society anticipated by Shaw every person will behave like the nuclear superpowers of our times : each one's ability and preparedness to destroy the rest and the recognition by each of the ability and the intention of the others will be the surest guarantee of peace and justice. To pursue the analogy, no nuclear power dares to take liberties with another. In *Man and Superman* Shaw hoped that the world would be saved by a race of supermen, in *Major Barbara* he hopes that it will be saved by a community of Machiavellians. Since he has no faith in the common man's goodness and in the ability of goodness to deliver the goods, he now hopes that one day the majority of men will be terribly self-willed. Here Shaw seems to be in agreement with Nietzsche, who said that "the evillest is necessary for the Superman's best."<sup>16</sup>

The Shavian dialectic is of course as much of an abstraction as the dialectic of Hegel or of Marx. It would

be as difficult to make reality accord with Shaw's description as to expect the Prussian State of Fredrick William II to embody the virtue Hegel discovered in it or to find in Soviet Russia the Marxist dictatorship of the proleteriat. Thus when Shaw foresees in *Major Barbara* that the way to heaven lies through hell, we realize that in following the iron law of logic, Shaw is concerned with the purity of his terms rather than with reality, which is always muddled and mixed. I think that the play is a parlour-game, though not in the sense Francis Fergusson uses the term.<sup>17</sup> The play is a perfect construction of dialectical logic though it is obvious to any reader of the play that every moment social change is taking place all over the world without conforming to the play's formula.

If Undershaft is the harbinger of misery and death, if he lives by thuggery, he is also Shaw's Wotan, the most clear-eyed critic of his role. In terms of the play's dialectics, he is his own antithesis, and thus not only the biological father of Barbara but also her—— and Adolphus Cusins's—— spiritual father: he lives in the present as a robber baron, but only a part of him lives in the present, the part that lives in the future wills, like Wotan, the supersession of his empire by something higher. When Shaw says of him that "there are the makings of ten Hamlets and six Othellos in his mere leavings"<sup>18</sup> he probably wishes to draw the audience's attention to Undershaft's ability to

live simultaneously at two levels. A mere paranoid with his head filled with dreams of power and glory would not be arousing, nor would the simple soul that, more than two thousand years after Plato, rediscovers that the world cannot be saved unless philosophers are kings and kings philosophers be interesting. A person in whose leavings there are ten Hamlets has to be able to combine in himself two contrary roles : he has to be an actor and the critic of his part, he has to be in the midst of the action and yet must stand at a distance from himself. Over and above everything he must be convinced of the historical necessity of his role. He must know that the third empire cannot come by merely combining the first empire with the second. The first empire must succumb to the second as the second to the third. The beauty of Shaw's comedy is the beauty of its artifice. To ask whether the world cannot be changed by any other method except that of Undershaft, or to doubt the feasibility of Undershaftism as an instrument of change ——— to question the validity of Shaw's premise ——— is to deviate from the artifice to reality. As a description of the process of real change, the play is unconvincing because a world where everyone is an Undershaft is not the world of Nature but an artificial construct. But to appreciate the play one must accept the artifice and must not try to relate it to anything beyond it. The premises of Shaw are the rules of the game: one must accept the rules to judge how well

Shaw plays the game.

*Major Barbara* was Shaw's artificial comedy par excellence, before Adolphus Cusins broke the rules of the game and destroyed the beauty of the dialectics. The dialectics of the play, in closely following Ibsen's *the Emperor and Galilean*, leads to the third empire. Ibsen's—and Shaw's——— third empire is understood by Undershaft but not by Cusins.

Adolphus Cusins's notion of the third empire is as optimistic as it is unconvincing. He agrees to inherit Undershaft's empire but thinks that he can cut corners by selling arms to the underdog. In other words, he hopes to initiate an armorer's revolution by throwing economic prudence to the winds.

Such a solution is based on total ignorance of the laws of industrial organization ; unlike him Undershaft knows, for he laughs at Cusins's proposal, that the surest way of putting a sophisticated and capital-intensive industry in the red is to disregard the laws of the market and choose customers who are resourceless and therefore least likely to buy sophisticated arms. Besides, Cusins's simplistic faith destroys the dialectic structure of the play. If Undershaft cannot bring in social change now it is not because he lacks the will to do so and his replacement by Cusins will usher in the millenium ; it is because the people are not ready for a change. If power goes to the underdog he will merely

change his place with the person in power, because Lazarus and the sweeper of his factory have the same contempt for the powerless. The problem is more difficult than that of finding the right man in the right place.

It is obvious that Shaw did not share Cusins's faith in the common man. In *John Bull's Other Island* too the relation between one proletarian and another is one of animosity. In *Man and Superman* Shaw ( in the Epistle Dedicatory ) and Tanner (in the Revolutionist's Handbook) despair while talking of the possibility of progress in man as he is constituted.<sup>19</sup> Cusins's ignorant wishfulness is contradicted even by himself when he wonders if " the way of life lies through the factory of death ".<sup>20</sup>

These words become almost meaningless if they signify nothing more than the platitude that power must be wielded in defence of righteousness. The actual implication of his doubt is that the phoenix must die to be reborn and men must experience the ultimate limits of misery before they are forced to change. Cusins speaks of an ideal of brotherhood which is emphatically non-existent in Shaw's world, and Shaw can only hope for an ethically correct behaviour of one strong man when confronted with another.

Men can be strong only when, like Undershaft's master, they believe that "NOTHING IS EVER DONE IN THIS WORLD UNTIL MEN ARE PREPARED TO KILL ONE ANOTHER IF IT IS NOT DONE ."<sup>21</sup>

In the context of the conditions on the ground as

depicted in the play. Cusins's brave words about selling arms to the person of his choice is nothing but rhetoric and meet the contempt they deserve from Undershaft, who says: "From the moment when you become Andrew Undershaft you will never do as you please again."<sup>22</sup> Yet Shaw finally allows Cusins to get away with his simplistic optimism and surprisingly, and somewhat incongruously, Undershaft thinks that Cusins will be able to make war on war, and the Professor of Greek, by making gunpowder, leaps into the final synthesis that culminates in the third empire. The dialogue glosses over the fact that Cusins has been appropriated by Undershaftism. Even if Cusins— Professor of Greek, collector of religions and Barbara's future husband— is seen as a part of her spiritual world, one is forced to admit that the marriage between temporal power and spiritual power is merely symbolic in this case, because Undershaft and Cusins as the next Undershaft must succumb before the end comes. The fact that both Undershaft and Cusins choose to overlook the fact and agree that Cusins ——— who by the terms of the contract is to lose his name and become the next Undershaft ——— can make war on war and can "make power for the world "<sup>23</sup> destroys the dialectic structure of the play.<sup>24</sup>

It is a pity that Shaw allowed the play to be marred by Gilbert Murray's optimism. Murray, whose idea of art was as steeped in ethical considerations as Shaw's, suggested some

changes after reading the first draft because it suggested the triumph of Undershaft's principles over Barbara's, which he found undesirable.<sup>25</sup> The ethical judgments of the two men were different, Murray's mind being less convoluted and having fewer conflicts. In hindsight it is clear that Shaw harmed his play by letting Murray's abstract notions of right and wrong triumph over the mode in which reality presented itself to his own experience. What Shaw actually felt as an artist was different from the final version. He wrote to Murray :

As to the triumph of Undershaft, that is inevitable because I am in the mind that Undershaft is in the right, and that Barbara and Adolphus, with a great deal of his natural insight and cleverness, are very young, very romantic, very academic, very ignorant of the world, I think it would be unnatural if they were able to cope with him.<sup>26</sup>

Yet it is this romantic and academic vision that he exchanged for his own vision that was presented in the first draft, according to which Cusins frankly sold his soul to Undershaft for his daughter and did not delude himself that his marriage with Barbara would succeed in restoring to health a sick and divided world.<sup>27</sup>

The pseudo-comic ending, in which the apparent villain turns out to be a latter-day saint, the heroine, after

overcoming her initial despair, returns to her fold , the separated father is reconciled to the family and the romantic hero, when he seems certain to lose her, wins the heroine along with her father's millions by passing the foundling test almost miraculously , does not nullify the grim vision that sees that blood is to be shed and life is to be lost for an indefinite length of time before history turns the corner. The authentic vision of Shaw's third empire has no place for the shallow hope that with Cousins donning Undershaft's mantle, the conflict between Peter Shirley and Rummy Mitchens on the one hand and Bodger, Lazarus and Undershaft on the other will come to a happy resolution.

It is difficult, therefore, to agree with Joseph Frank that the three acts of *Major Barbara* constitute hell, purgatory and paradise.<sup>28</sup> The so-called paradise at the end of the play is a phoney synthesis that merely hides Shaw's inability to confront his own terrible vision. The happy resolution is possible only after hell is raised to heaven. We are, therefore, led to agree with Alfred J. Turco, who sees in the ending a forced sentimentality and argues that Shaw was not willing to recognize that "the breach between heaven and earth is absolute, that the resulting separation is the human condition."<sup>29</sup>

## Chapter 9: Notes and References

1. William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New*, pp.353-54.
2. G.K Chesterton. *George Bernard Shaw*, p.194.
3. CP III , p.27.
4. Ibid., pp.27-28.
5. For Indians it is probably easier to recognise the fact that the Shavian position is more than intellectual sophistry, because an analogous debate raged in India prior to Independence. Those who were opposed to the Gandhian method of Satyagraha, notably the Communists and other extremist groups, maintained that the Mahatma's unwavering commitment to non-violence and insistence on spiritual transformation of the adversary would come in handy for the rulers who would make use of the movement for their own end — the perpetuation of the British empire. Indeed, the cruder elements among his detractors accused Gandhi of working hand in glove with British imperialism. When India finally became Independent at the end of a virtual civil war and a blood-bathed partition, Gandhi was very close to the tragic realization that even in India Undershaftism had been defeated not by spiritual powers but by counter-Undershaftism. See, for instance, Pyarelal, *The Last Phase* and Sibnarayan Roy (ed.), *Gandhi. India and the World*.

6. *Major Critical Essays* , pp.55-56.
7. CP III , p.151.
8. Ibid., p.136.
9. CP III , p.116.
10. Though Margery Morgan does not notice the parallel between *Major Barbara* and the *Emperor and Galilean* she grasps the similarity between Christ and Barbara. See Margery Morgan, *The Shawian Playground*, pp.134 - 57.
11. *Major Critical Essays*, p.190.
12. CP III, p.121.
13. *Major Critical Essays* , p.122.
14. CP III, p.122.
15. Ibid., p. 155. The similarity between Trefusis's observation and Undershaft's is remarkable and shows that the picture of the common man remains essentially unchanged in Shaw's novels and plays.
16. " Thus Spake Zarathustra ", *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p.322.
17. Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, p.191. Fergusson believes that the play is full of paradoxes that are actually semantic tricks. I believe that the play is like a parlour game because Shaw allows logical constructs to simulate reality and then uses the logical terms, which do not attempt to describe reality but merely to replace it, rigorously to build up the argument of the play.
18. *Collected Letters* , vol. II , p. 542.

19. The subject is discussed more fully in the last chapter.
20. CP II , p.184.
21. Ibid., p.168.
22. Ibid., p.169.
23. Ibid., pp.178 , 181.
24. J.L.Wisenthal comments : " *Major Barbara* asserts the necessity of accepting and combining good and evil, heaven and hell ; and the best brief statement of its central idea is the aphorism from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* : "Without Contrariness is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" Wisenthal, *The Marriage of Contraries*, p. 86.

I think this is a slightly mistaken reading of the play, induced partly by the happy ending, in which the Professor of Greek becomes the arms manufacturer. Shaw asserts the necessity not of combining good and evil, but of transcending evil through evil, which is a different matter altogether. There can be no genuine dialectics through a simple combination of opposite qualities. In 1907 Shaw added a chapter to *The Perfect Wagnerite* , in which he argued that the heroic Siegfried could not save the world unless he appropriated the temporal power of Alberic : "The end cannot come until Siegfried learns Alberic's trade, and shoulders Alberic's burden." *Major Critical Essays*, p.242. At that time he must have had in mind the example of the alliance

between Undershaft and Cusins : the latter decides to learn the former's trade and shoulder his responsibility, but when the essay is translated into the play, it tends to subvert the synthesis. In the play Cusins converts to Undershaftism. The end — the rule of Siegfried in the spirit of siegfried — lies in the future, outside the region of experience.

25. Sidney P. Albert , " In More Ways than One : *Major Barbara's* Debt to Gilbert Murray " , *Educational Theatre Journal* 20 (1968) : 123-140.

26. *Collected Letters*, vol. II , p.566.

27. See Bernad F. Dukore , " Revising *Major Barbara*" , *Shaw Review* 16 (1973) : 2-10.

28. Joseph Frank, "*Major Barbara* : Shaw's Divine Comedy," *PMLA* 71 (1956) : 61-74

29. Alfred J. Turco Jr., *Shaw's Moral Vision* , p. 228.

Confessions of an Artist : Pygmalion

" And the cow crunching with depress'd head  
Surpasses any statue."

Whitman, *Song of Myself*

The perennial popularity of *Pygmalion* is a revelation for it demonstrates yet again the success of the superficial elements of the play in disguising its disturbing — even tragic — heart. The subtitle of the play calls it "A Romance in Five Acts," and appropriately enough the plot is modelled on two extremely well-known romances, one a legend and the other a fairy-tale. In the Shavian reconstruction of the legend Higgins is Pygmalion and Eliza is Galatea : the flower-girl at Covent Gardens is a statue without a soul, the successful self-assured woman born at the ambassador's garden party is, or is supposed to be, Higgins's creation.

The similarity with the Cinderella story is equally obvious. A frowzy girl in rags, living in ignorance, poverty and filth is changed, as if by magic, into a duchess and enthralls everybody at the party. If the play were to end in the third act, the fragment would be little more than the recasting of a fairy-tale in a modern garb.

The two stories have one thing in common — both gorge the common man's appetite for a perfect ending, since the

natural ending of a legend or a fairy-tale is, " And they lived happily ever after." It is not surprising, therefore, that the form should try to impose its natural conclusion on the play. The persistent attempts by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who threw a flower at Eliza before the fall of the curtain ; by Gabriel Pascal, whose film, made in Shaw's life-time, ended with hints of an imminent union between Higgins and Eliza ; and by Alan Jay Lerner, whose musical outdid every previous attempt by recapturing " one of the most beautiful love stories the world has ever taken to heart " <sup>1</sup> show how resistant the power of legend is to ironical tinkering. Thus Maurice Valency says :

It is indispensable that Cinderella have her prince at the end of the story and any other culmination is in the nature of a betrayal. Happily Shaw had the good sense to leave the way open in his play for an inference of fulfilment according to the rules of romance and *Pygmalion* has always been played in this manner...The epilogue may therefore be dismissed as an unfortunate irrelevancy....<sup>2</sup>

Similarly Milton Crane believes that Higgins's marriage with Eliza should be the natural denouement of *Pygmalion* and that the epilogue is a piece of Shavian perversity, for the play is nothing else but a piece of orthodox comedy<sup>3</sup>.

Does the structure of the play permit such a happy

ending ? Parallels with the structure of myth or the fairy-tale are misleading. A careful reading will show that *Pygmalion* is a very different kind of play from what it has been assumed to be by Tree<sup>4</sup>, Pascal, Lerner, Crane and Valency. It is an intentional subversion of the 'original romantic models. As Bentley observes :

Actually *Pygmalion* : a Romance stands related to Romance precisely as *The Devil's Disciple* stands to Melodrama or *Candida* to Domestic Drama. It is a serious parody, a translation into the language of "natural history"<sup>5</sup>

The sense of magic and vital regeneration associated with myth and the fairy-tale is the cradle of comedy<sup>6</sup> and from its birth comedy has been nourished by such themes. The contrary process, the one unfolded by Shaw in his parody strikes at the root of comedy because it creates a new pattern according to which *Pygmalion* is not the life-giver but the life-taker. To quote Bentley again : " The *Pygmalion* of Romance turns a statue into a human being. The *Pygmalion* of 'natural history' tries to ... make of Eliza Doolittle a mechanical doll in the role of the duchess."<sup>7</sup>

When in his stage direction Shaw seeks to explain away Higgins's rudeness as mere eccentricity and his bullying of Eliza as the result of incomplete socialisation<sup>8</sup> he actually refuses to venture beyond the sunny facade of the play, for

under the skin Higgins is not Pygmalion but Frankenstein, and what is most remarkable in the play is Shaw's savage criticism — not necessarily conscious criticism, — of the cult of the superman.<sup>9</sup>

This is indeed remarkable because many of Shaw's earlier heroes and heroines are mutations of the Pygmalion figure. Owen Jack and Julius Caesar are the most obvious examples, but among his heroines too, Candida and Lady Cicely, particularly the latter, are nothing if not teachers who mould their 'pupils' into completely different beings. Yet in the preface to *Misalliance* Shaw completely reverses his position when he argues:

A child is a fresh attempt to produce the just man made perfect : that is, to make humanity divine. And you will vitiate the experiment if you make the slightest attempt to abort it into some fancy figure of your own: for example, your notion of a good man or a womanly woman. If you ... begin with its own holiest aspirations, and suborn them for your own purposes, then there is hardly any limit to the mischief you may do.<sup>10</sup>

In *Pygmalion* we see Shaw's reaction against the superman, who, in seeking to make light of the holiest aspirations of a normal woman and in attempting to tamper with Nature's designs, is presented as an abortionist.

Higgins's assessment of Eliza at the portico of St. Paul's does not change substantially in the course of the play: to him she is a squashed cabbage leaf; and an "incarnate insult to the English language."<sup>11</sup> He boasts that in three months he "could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party."<sup>12</sup> Higgins speaks the language of the green-grocer and the cheap Jack, and the change that he hopes to bring about is neither real nor fundamental. He does not hope to change the cabbage into a duchess. The great difference between the fairy tale from which the play is derived and *Pygmalion* is that there is no element of magic in the latter, therefore no magical transformation.

How different Higgins is from the Pygmalion of the legend can be judged if we realize how inconsequential his boast is. He can only "pass her off" as a duchess. He can change a natural object— a vegetable — into an ersatz material— a simulated duchess. In his mind she is a thing, not a person; to create a duchess is beyond his power, so she remains fixed in his consciousness as a thing. Throughout the play his reactions show that Eliza has become for him an object, and her status is unchangeable. In the second act, when a helpless Eliza looks up to Pickering for help against a bullying Higgins, the following conversation takes place:

PICKERING [ in good-humored remonstrance ] Does it occur to you Higgins, that the girl has some feelings ?

HIGGINS [looking critically at her ] Oh no, I dont think so. Not any feelings that we need bother about.<sup>13</sup>

Since in his eyes Eliza is not a real person but a sham duchess, a cleverly designed puppet with which he has fooled the people assembling at the garden party, Higgins's interest flags the moment he is confident that Eliza will not be found out. He can think only of himself and his boredom: "I tell you, Pickering, never again for me. No more artificial duchesses."<sup>14</sup> He is very disagreeably surprised when Eliza insists that there is a second person in the story and another point of view as well, and is outraged when Eliza, a mere puppet in his eyes, claims to be a living person, the actual winner of the bet: "You won my bet ' You ' Presumptuous insect ! I won it. "<sup>15</sup>

The importance of this utterance, in which Higgins calls Eliza an insect, can be gauged if we make the proper distinction between such ejaculations and Higgins's normal habit of mixing highhandedness and cajolery. Among the Maxims for Revolutionists in *Man and Superman* is the cardinal maxim that "the unconscious self is the real genius."<sup>16</sup> How firmly Shaw himself subscribes to this view can be grasped if we realize that in play after play the climactic scene is also the moment of revelation in which the real but hidden nature of the characters flashes out. When Higgins calls Eliza an insect he reveals his essential nature hidden from his conscious self as surely as

Marchbanks , Morell, Dick Dudgeon and Anderson, Lady Cicely and Brassbound reveal their real and undiscovered selves in one sudden flash. We are made to realize that the image of Higgins as a great genial baby is a bogus image like the image of Marchbanks as a weakling or of Candida as the virgin Mother.

In *Pygmalion* the encounter between Higgins and Eliza in the fourth act is the moment of reckoning that the three preceding acts lead up to. It is the supreme dramatic moment of the play, the moment that decides the final configuration of relationships. True, Higgins regains self-control after a while and tells Eliza that he has made a woman of her, but by then Eliza is strong enough to despise his empty conciliatory signals, she knows that Higgins tries to metamorphose a human being into something less than human, that he thinks nothing of sacrificing a woman to his egotistic obsession.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth act shows the rebirth of Eliza through her cathartic experience. It also determines the ending of the play, putting a happy union between Higgins and Eliza beyond its pale.<sup>18</sup> Besides, it also shows the irrelevance of Shaw's remarks on the ending of the play. In the epilogue Shaw thinks, or pretends to think, that Eliza ruled out marriage with Higgins because that is what every young woman being free to choose would do.<sup>19</sup> He also speaks of " Higgins's formidable powers of resistance to the charm that prostrated

Freddy at the first glance...<sup>20</sup> Shaw argues that Eliza chose the way she did because "she was instinctively aware that she could never obtain a complete grip on him, or come between him and his mother (the first necessity of the married woman)."<sup>21</sup>

Shaw's explanation puts the reader on a false trail, because Eliza would never have thrown the slippers at Higgins's face had she not nurtured a secret love for him. That is the moment when she learns that what is wrong with Higgins is not merely his manners for she realises that in his eyes she will never be more than an attractive puppet. She realises, in other words, that there is something in Higgins that is dead and inhibits germination, and to be reborn as a living woman she must cut herself away from him. At this point we realize how little the story of Higgins and Eliza has in common with the story of Pygmalion and Galatea or with the story of Cinderella and her prince and how profoundly it resembles Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken*.

*Pygmalion* is the record of Shaw's revolt against himself, the revolt of the artist against the egotism of the artist just as *When We Dead Awaken* is Ibsen's most scathing self-criticism. Both plays reveal that the artist, when he is not also human, is not superhuman but subhuman, a sick monomaniac. Higgins is ostensibly very different from Rubek in the choice of his vocation ——— as a phonetician with

elaborate instruments in a well-fitted laboratory, he is an example of the scientist rather than the artist. Yet, though phonetics does play a part in the plot, the dramatic tension is created by the relationship between a man of genius — a creator — and the human being whom he uses as his medium. In this Higgins resembles Pygmalion, the mythical artist. Higgins himself speaks of his Miltonic mind,<sup>22</sup> he also compares himself with the maker of the world.<sup>23</sup> Shaw undoubtedly wanted to seize on that part of Higgins which resembled the Shavian artist.<sup>24</sup>

To Rubek and Higgins what counts is their work — the quality of the sculpture or the extent of change in Eliza's speech — and not the woman who serves as medium or model. In each case the human point of view is retained not by the artist but by the woman used by him.

The climactic fourth act brings out the vacuousness of Higgins's soul. Far from being able to understand Eliza's sudden burst of temper when she throws his slippers at him, he smugly attributes it to mere nervousness. Standing on the brink of a precipice and realising suddenly that she has wasted her affection on a soulless machine, she cries out in anguish : " Whats to become of me ? Whats to become of me ? " An unruffled Higgins shoots back: " How the devil do I know whats to become of you ? What does it matter what becomes of you ? " <sup>25</sup>

Ibsen treats the same relationship, makes the same

indictment of the artist's egotism in *When We Dead Awaken*. The fact that Ibsen's denunciation is more undisguised can be explained by the major difference between the two dramatists: the elder playwright was not pulled in opposite directions by the conflict between his philosophy and the truth felt in his bones. With the younger man, what he wanted to see often stood in the way of what he actually saw. What Irene says to Rubek may well be, with minor modifications, the substance of Eliza's unspoken words when she throws the slippers at Higgins :

IRENE ( Coldly as before ) I want to tell you something. Arnold.

RUBEK Well ?

IRENE I never loved your art before I met you. Nor afterward, either.

RUBEK But the artist Irene ?

IRENE I detest the artist.

RUBGEK The artist in me, too ?

IRENE Most of all, in you. Whenever I undressed myself and stood there naked for you, I hated you, Arnold ———

RUBEK ( INTENSELY ) Irene, you didn't. That isn't true !

IRENE I hated you because you could stand there so unmoved ———

RUBEK ( laughs ) Unmoved ? You believe that ?

IRENE So infuriatingly self-controlled, then. And

because you were an artist. Not a man <sup>26</sup>

Both Rubek and Higgins are essentially similar in their attitudes to the women who love them or once loved them, but Ibsen is more pitiless in grasping the similarity between the artist and the killer. Ulfhejm, the bear-hunter in Ibsen's play, drives home a point which just as appropriately applies to Higgins. He says to Maja :

We both like working with hard material, ma'am—both I and your husband. He likes wrestling with blocks of marble, I imagine—— and I wrestle with the hard sinews of bears. And both of us force our material down under control at last. Become lord and master over it. We never give up till we've overcome it, no matter how much it fights back.<sup>27</sup>

In dominating and killing the artist is not very dissimilar from the bear-hunter. A number of times Irene reminds Rubek that he has killed her: "I gave you my young living soul. And that left me empty inside. Soulless. (*Her eyes fixed on him*) That's why I died, Arnold."<sup>28</sup>

Higgins conforms to Ulfhejm's description even more perfectly than Rubek because he tries to force his "material down under control" much more savagely, he unsuccessfully tries to kill Eliza, so to say, but he tries so because he himself is spiritually a dead man and pretends to see in such death a higher principle than Eliza's life. He has

endless disdain for Eliza's life, for he feels that she wants to be governed by a thick pair of lips and a thick pair of boots. Throughout the play the physical aspect of Eliza's life elicits from Higgins both contempt and disgust for it is associated in his mind with the squashed cabbage leaf, with the gutter and with gross sensuality. His Miltonic mind has at least the Miltonic contempt for the earthiness of a woman's life. Rubek is more sensitive and he realises that it is he who had driven Irene on to the turntable where she exposed her naked body to hundreds of men. Irene ruefully remarks: "That love that belongs to the life on earth— this lovely, miraculously earthly life — this life full of mysteries — that love is dead in us both."<sup>29</sup>

It is curious that while Higgins, in line with other Shavian supermen, refuses to recognise any loveliness in the "love that belongs to life on earth," Shaw himself, in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, judges and condemns Rubek by Irene's values, the values which Shaw's heroes so conspicuously reject :

Take a man and a woman at the highest pitch of natural ability and charm yet attained, and enjoying all the culture that modern art and literature can offer them ; and what does it all come to ? Contrast them with an essentially uncivilized pair, with a man who lives for hunting and eating and ravishing and whose morals are those of the bully with the strong hand : in short a

man from the stone age as we conceive it... and couple him with a woman who has no interest or ambition in life except to be captured by such a man (and of these we have certainly no lack). Then \*face this question. What is there to choose between the two pairs ? Is the cultured gifted man less hardened, less selfish towards the woman, than the paleolithic man ? Is the woman less sacrificed, less enslaved, less dead spiritually in the one case than in the other ? Modern culture...shrieks at the question as an insult...Ibsen's reply is that the sacrifice of the woman of the stone age to fruitful passions which she herself shares is as nothing compared to the wresting of the modern woman's soul to gratify the imagination and stimulate the genius of the modern artist, poet, and philosopher. He shews us that no degradation ever devised or permitted is as disastrous as this degradation; and through it women die into luxuries for men, and yet can kill them... and... what remains to be seen as perhaps the most interesting of all imminent social developments is what will happen "when we dead awaken. "30

The stark contrast between the implicit value system adopted in the essay and the one in *Pygmalion* is astonishing :<sup>3</sup> in the play Higgins adopts the famous Shavian posture of the superman who transcends the all-too-human. In the epilogue

Shaw seems to justify the decision of both Higgins and Eliza in rejecting each other and seems to accept Higgins's behaviour as normal.

Yet when Higgins is presented with a different name in a play that has a different authorial signature, he immediately grasps the fact the Higgins is less than human, that he is dead and induces death. Underlying his criticism of *When We Dead Awaken* is the recognition "that love that belongs to life on earth "is miraculous and its absence makes the most accomplished artist a living corpse.

There can be no doubt about the intimate relationship between the two plays. Not only do the plays subject the artist to the demanding test of humanity and find him wanting, even single incidents----- incidents that are seminally important ----- found in Ibsen are echoed in Shaw. In *When We Dead Awaken* Irene can never forgive Rubek for regarding those beautiful days in which they came into close contact with each other as a mere episode; for those days alone gave a meaning to her life, made the flower of love----- earthly love----- blossom and fill her with yearning. In the *Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw remarks :

And the reward [of Irene] is that when the work is finished and the statue achieved, he says "Thank you for a priceless EPISODE ", at which significant word, revealing as it does that she has, after all, been nothing to him but a means to an end, she leaves him

and drops out of his life. <sup>31</sup>

Yet that is exactly how Higgins sees Eliza. He sees the experiment as a tiring episode : " I tell you Pickering never again for me. No more artificial duchesses. The whole thing has been simple purgatory. " <sup>32</sup> Even Pickering shares his perspective when he congratulates Higgins saying that the success is " a triumph for you ". <sup>33</sup>

How does one account for the fact that Shaw seems so eager to endow Higgins with generosity and high-mindedness while he clearly sees the analogous figure in Ibsen's play for what he is — a consuming egotist ?

I have tried to show in my analysis of Shaw's novels and the plays preceding *Pygmalion* that through his work Shaw presents his own self-conflict. One of the most enduring Shavian masks is that of the superman. Shaw's drama is enriched by the conflict between his cultivated self-image and that which in the language of psychoanalysis is known as the id. The conflict between the urge to be a Nietzschean superman and the demands of the all-too-human is the wellspring of Shaw's plays. That the central conflict needed to be enacted almost endlessly in so many novels and plays bears testimony both to the personal origin of the conflict and to the brittleness of the victory of the persona. For such a man it would be only natural to read *When We Dead Awaken* as Ibsen's confession. Thus, though he himself stoutly resists any such interpretation in his plays —

tracing the key figures to De Quincey or Henry Sweet but never to himself — he unerringly sees Rubek as Ibsen's self-portrait. Ibsen "knew quite well that he was one of the greatest men living ; so he simply said " Suppose Me to be a sculptor instead of a playwright " and the thing was done.<sup>34</sup>

This unexpected observation holds the key to almost all of Shaw's plays but when he transposes Ibsen's play into the Shavian key, and in the epilogue plays Higgins's advocate, it is difficult not to suspect that the personal element in the play is responsible for the volte-face. Shaw can see like any normal man that Higgins, when he appears under the guise of Rubek, is inimical to the spontaneity of life, but if his critical apparatus deserts him when he studies his own play it is because all his life Shaw sought to escape the pain of being Eliza; the condition of Higgins presented him with a poise that he always consciously yearned for : it was the star to which he had hitched his philosophical wagon.

Ibsen does not allow his play to end in despair. Rubek and Irene have two choices left to them : either to accept their spiritual death and to return to their cold tombs or to raise themselves from the dead by a miraculous effort. They choose the way of the miracle. Rubek responds to Irene's call and the two go up the hazardous snow fields. Rubek once killed Irene's soul and died through her death, now the two walk out of their graves to climb the dangerous

play thus affirms a great paradox, perhaps the greatest paradox in life, that the final test of life is death, which thus becomes the most important fact of life.

Such an ending is beyond Shaw. He cannot allow himself to recognise any value in tragedy since that would militate against the utilitarian ethics on which his philosophy is founded.<sup>36</sup> Thus *Pygmalion* could have ended in only two ways : it could have ended where *When We Dead Awaken* would have ended if Rubek had not rallied to the call of Irene, which means that it could have ended in the awareness and acceptance of spiritual death, in bitter hopelessness; or it could have ended in a sudden artistic apostasy with the author superimposing a different play on the one already written. Shaw took the second course and through the epilogue he made a vain attempt to shift the dramatic focus from the study of dehumanization to the depiction of an unconvincing transformation. Higgins becomes the fairy who changes the girl in rags into a duchess. Shaw also takes care to show that the Cinderella of the play is merely a product of magic, she is the rabbit who can at any time be changed back into a handkerchief ; for Higgins's rabbit, like his handkerchief, is merely the product of his sleight of hand. The Eliza who pits herself against the might of Higgins and shows that it is Higgins who is the doll — it is he who cannot wake from the dead — suddenly relapses into her old self, marries the empty-headed Freddy, displays

no acumen for business or any constructive activity other than love-making, and constantly borrows from Higgins to let her husband live like a dandy.

Higgins actually becomes an indulgent god who chuckles at the reflexes of his duchess. The Eliza of the epilogue merely confirms Higgins's predictions about her. We remember that Higgins never claimed to be able to change her into a real duchess, he only said he would make her "pass off as a duchess." The Eliza of the epilogue is a triumph of Higgins, the triumph of fine speech, fine manners and fine gestures. The emptiness of her soul takes away from her the despair that Ibsen's Irene is capable of, it also excludes once for all a belated leap into humanity by Higgins --- the final version of Eliza is not only unsuited to the awakening of the dead, her inanity is enough to remove from Higgins's mind the uncomfortable suspicion that in spite of his thundering manners he may not be living after all.

It would be absurd even to entertain the idea that a superior person like Higgins can stoop to the level of marrying a dim-witted pretty woman like Eliza Doolittle, who dotes on Freddie and smothers him with kisses. In the play Higgins justifies to his mother his decision of not marrying Eliza, in the epilogue Shaw justifies the same decision. He seems to have succeeded in rewriting his play, making it a nice didactic comedy in which a girl thwarted by her socio-economic status cannot realize her ambition until

she meets a generous magician who feeds her and clothes her and makes her utter decent noises, takes her to the ambassador's garden party, makes her the cynosure of all eyes, and caps her success by removing the impediments to her union with her prince charming. All of a sudden Higgins's similarity with Rubek vanishes and he becomes a Prospero ; Freddy may be the only fly in the ointment but the reader soon learns to get over the initial uneasiness as he realises that *Pygmalion* is not Shakespeare's *Tempest* and that Freddy is the appropriate prince of a bourgeois romance.

I have tried to show in my study that such inversions are Shaw's *métier*, though perhaps nowhere is it so conspicuous as in *Pygmalion*. This is not the pattern of tragi-comedy, it is the pattern of pseudo-comedy grafted on an action that is not comic. It is the fruit of an ethical vision that time and again sacrifices the truth of art at the altar of the author's explicit moral concerns.

What is remarkable about *Pygmalion* is that the two facets of Shaw's personality — the world-betterer and the all-too-human do not fight it out on equal terms, the artistically false ending (much of which is carried beyond the play proper into the narrated epilogue) stands out like a sore thumb. *Pygmalion* stands out as a play that is denied its proper ending. Until Shaw rushes through with the inept tinkering, it gives the unmistakable impression that the

author's savage satire is directed against his own messianism. As Arnold Silver remarks:

[The] understanding [Shaw] now shows of a world-betterer , and his ridicule of him, contrast totally with the laudatory treatment of Don Juan and of Don Juan's desire to promote a better world . The later play [Pygmalion] thus rejects the "idealism" of *Man and Superman*...And when we also recall how in a late play like *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* Shaw ignores the moral turpitude of his supposedly idealistic protagonists then we are forced to conclude that he was unwilling to retain the disquieting knowledge of evil he had momentarily grasped in *Pygmalion*.<sup>37</sup>

How did the strange thing happen ? How did the demand of earthly love suddenly become so strong that it swept away like a whirlwind the philosophy of the higher self ? Borrowing from the language of *Too True to be Good* we may ask how did Shaw permit the lower centres to gain such ascendancy over the higher centres ? To find out how the play so movingly became Eliza's play rather than Higgins's, we must look briefly into the genesis of the play. Eliza was a part written for Patrick Campbell. Mrs Pat was also the original model of the character.<sup>38</sup> If the reality of Eliza's insulted womanhood is far more moving than the airiness of Higgins's philosophical aspirations, it is

because Shaw's half-suppressed fantasies regarding Mrs Campbell got the better of the invulnerable persona that assumes in this play the character of Henry Higgins.

Shaw's judgment had always been paralysed by this extra-ordinary woman. He realised this as early as in the 1890s when he frankly admitted that the critic's judgement collapsed before this enthralling woman. Reviewing Sardou's *Fedora* Shaw remarked that if Sardou's play was not very tragic, the critic's condition was :

It is greatly to Mrs Patrick Campbell's credit that bad as the play was, her acting was worse. It was a masterpiece of failure. Not, pray observe, that Mrs Campbell herself did not succeed. The moment she was seen, our reason collapsed and our judgment failed. Every time the curtain fell there was a delirious roar. If the play was not tragic our infatuation was . I solemnly warn all and sundry that no common man's opinion of the artistic merits of that performance was worth a farthing, after the first flash of the heroine's eyes. It was not *Fedora*, but it was *Circe*; and I as sworn critic must make the best attempt to be Ulysses. 39

Shaw did not want to throw up the sponge without a fight with his infatuation. The struggle was not of much avail because Mrs Campbell "creates all sorts of illusions, and

gives one all sorts of searching sensations."<sup>40</sup>

It is conceivable that in *Pygmalion* Shaw wanted to give his intellect a better chance against the more elemental passion, for Henry Higgins's astringent personality has a built-in immunity against the *Odor di femina*. The excessive self control and the repression of the vital instincts produced results that were far from intended. The male figure in the play became a pitilessly satirised version of the *superman*. Shaw's own intellectual challenge to his passion crumbled. However, Shaw could not muster up enough courage to bring *Pygmalion* to its logical conclusion. In his review of *Fedora* he testified that the conflict between judgment and passion was tragic. It is a pity that the acute critic of the eighteen nineties kept the tragedy out of the play at the cost of its integrity, but it is interesting that what could have formed a legitimate part of the drama was enacted outside the play after it had been written.

During the rehearsals of *Pygmalion* the prolonged contact with Mrs Campbell turned Shaw's old infatuation into a violent passion. Not the one to submit easily to such impulses he projected himself as the amoral artist castigated in *When We Dead Awaken* and *Pygmalion* :

Shut your ears tight against this blarneying Irish liar and actor. Read no more of his letters. He will fill his fountain pen with your heart's blood, and sell your

most sacred emotions on the stage. He is a mass of imagination with no heart. He is a writing and talking machine that has worked for nearly forty years until its skill is devilish... He cares for nothing really but his mission, as he calls it, and his work. <sup>41</sup>

The similarity between his projected self and Higgins is too obvious to need further elaboration. But were he nothing more than Henry Higgins, Shaw would be safe for he could then rest in the certainty that cruel and heartless as he and his heroes might seem, as a select breed of supermen they were above the common clay of humanity. Had he been the writing machine and the relentless champion of his mission, he could have escaped such an agonising suspicion that Higgins and Rubek (before his redemption) are less than human and he, Bernard Shaw, had been deceiving himself in not recognising the fact.

In his novels and earlier plays the lover and the rhapsodist were the invariable targets of the author's ridicule. In *Man and Superman* "happiness" is the dirtiest word Tanner and Juan can bring themselves to utter. Yet Shaw was waking up to its value as he wrote to Mrs Campbell: "When I am dead let them put an inscription on 12 Hinde St. HERE A GREAT MAN FOUND HAPPINESS." <sup>42</sup>

A rhapsody that would, only a decade ago, have been used to underline the blooming folly of someone, like the sentimental poetaster Octavius sprang from his own pen :

I want my plaything that I am to throw away. I want my Virgin Mother enthroned in heaven. I want my Italian peasant woman. I want my rapscaillionly fellow vagabond. I want my dark lady. I want my angel-- I want my tempter. I want my inspiration, my folly, my happiness, my divinity, my madness...my day's wage, my night's dream, my darling and my star. <sup>43</sup>

Here were the unmistakable signs of a new consciousness. For once Shaw admitted implicitly that the artist's business is not to levitate above the world of a million human experiences, but to wade through them all : the richest life is the fullest life, and in that fullness the dark lady and the lighter of the seven lamps, divinity and madness, the angel and the tempter have equal roles.

This new awareness had no lasting effect on his art but at least once his blood and his bone marrow revealed to him the barrenness of his conscious artistic faith : "He is a writing and talking machine."<sup>44</sup>

He fetched his Eliza from the dream of his boyhood. In her was "an anticipation of the fulfilment of the destiny of the race",<sup>45</sup> but realising how disastrous the result would be for Shavianism he set up Higgins to wage his intellectual war for him. Shaw compensated for the forcible arrest of his vision by completing the play away from the text and away from the stage-wings. As a man he was learning things which

he previously understood only dimly and so he could now say, as he never did before : "I dare say it is good for us all to suffer."<sup>46</sup> When his dream ended and the affair with Mrs Campbell ended in a heartbreak, Shaw was definitely a changed man, impregnated with a knowledge of tragedy that is rarely evident in his works:

New years eve...Do you remember last years Eve? I am actually asking you do you remember it? Was it anything to you except that you were ill, and were determined to prevent me from seeing the new year in with Lillah and Barrie? I remember it: it tears me all to pieces... On that last New Years Eve... there was Fiercely and Beauty; infinite boundless loveliness and content. I think of it with a frightful yearning, with a tragic despair; for you have wakened the latent tragedy in me, broken through my proud overbearing gaiety that carried all the tragedies of the world like feathers & stuck them in my cap and laughed. <sup>47</sup>

There was latent tragedy in *Pygmalion*, possibly there was latent despair. *Pygmalion* was the tragedy that was crying out to be written but was not written. Shaw's revolt against himself shook the foundation of his gaiety. Higgins did not carry his tragedy like a feather, nor did he laugh gaily. The curtain rang down on *Pygmalion* with Higgins's laughter, but it was mirthless raucous laughter. In his

letter to Patrick Campbell Shaw wrongly coupled despair with tragedy, but both ends were open in *Pygmalion*. With the epilogue Shaw avoided both and returned to his familiar posture of superiority. He probably hoped that a change in the ending would change the meaning of the entire play.

As if to atone for this violence on his art Shaw decided to act out in life the authentic scene that he had taken out of his play, for no criticism indicts the ending of *Pygmalion* more strongly than the life of its author.

1. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p.141.
2. Maurice Valency. *The cart and the Trumpet*, pp.318-19.
3. Milton Crane, "Pygmalion : Bernard Shaw's Dramatic Theory and Practice," *PMLA* 66 (1951):879-885.
4. About Beerbohm Tree throwing bouquets at Eliza during the play's first production, and thus generating Shaw's disgust, see Myron Matlow, "Will Higgins Marry Eliza?", *Shavian* 12(1958):14-19.
5. Eric Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p.143.
6. A theoretical discussion of the topic is taken up in the concluding chapter of the present study.
7. Eric Bentley, *op. cit.*, 143.
8. Shaw calls Higgins "a very impetuous baby who needs constant watching." CP IV, p.685. Higgins himself says like an inspired preacher : "The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls : in short, behaving as if you are in Heaven, where there are no third class carriages and one soul is as good as another. " CP IV, p.774.
9. A.M. Gibbs points out that in the last part of *Back to Methuselah* the Pygmalion image has completely dissolved into that of Frankenstein. See A.M. Gibbs, *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p.171. Burton also sees Higgins as a Frankenstein. Richard Burton, *Bernard Shaw : the Man and the Mask*, p.181.

10. CP IV p.20.
11. Ibid., p.680.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., pp.694-95.
14. Ibid., p. 746.
15. Ibid.,p. 747.
16. CP II, p. 791.
17. Desmond Maccarthy notes the similarity between Owen Jack and Higgins, but I think Maccarthy is seriously mistaken in viewing Higgins as a most humane person. Desmond Maccarthy, *Shaw*, p.111.
18. In his article, "On the Unpleasantness of Pygmalion", Norbert F. O' Donnell exposes the folly of sentimentalising *Pygmalion* into a romantic comedy. See *Shaw Bulletin* 2(1955):7-10.
19. CP IV, p.783.
20. Ibid., p. 784.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 776.
23. Ibid.
24. Desmond Maccarthy and Arnold Silver note the basic similarity between Higgins and Owen Jack of *Love Among the Artists*. Maccarthy, op.cit., p. 110., Arnold Silver, *Bernard Shaw : the Darker Side*, p.195.
25. CP IV, p. 748.
26. Henrik Ibsen, *The complete Major Prose Plays*, Tr. Rolf

Fjelde, p.1070.

27. Ibid., p. 1044.

28. Ibid.,p. 1055.

29. Ibid., p. 1090.

30. *Major Critical Essays*, pp. 110-11.

31. Ibid., p. 114.

32. CP IV, p. 746.

33. Ibid., p. 742.

34. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 111.

35. Ibid., p. 111.

36. The relationship between Shaw's ethics and tragedy is discussed in the last chapter.

37. Arnold Silver, op. cit., pp. 222-23.

38. Shaw wrote to Ellen Terry, "Well, I read it [Pygmalion] to a good friend of mine...and contrived that she [Mrs patrick Campbell] should be there. And she was there, reeking from Bella Donna. She saw through it like a shot. 'You beast, you wrote it for me, every line of it : I can hear you mimicking my voice in it etc etc.' And she rose to the occasion... And then-- and then - oh Ellen; and then? Why, then I went calmly to her house to discuss business with her, hard as nails, and as I am a living man, fell head over ears in love with her in thirty seconds." *The Terry Letters* , pp. 448-49.

39. *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol.I , pp. 134-35.

40. Ibid., p. 61.

41. *Collected Letters*, vol III, p. 126.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

## Chapter 11

### *Yeats and His Daughters : Heartbreak House*

"The years to come seemed waste of breath  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life , this death."

Yeats , *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*

Shaw called *Heartbreak House* "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes. " The term 'fantasia' is significant. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Music, a fantasia is

Fantasy or Fancy. Generally a composition in which form is of secondary importance...Such compositions were usually contrapuntal and...often with a common theme... Sweelinck and Bach used the term fantasia...in which the character of the music suggested an improvisational character or the play of free fancy. In the 19th century the term was applied by Schumann, Chopin and others to short mood pieces.<sup>1</sup>

The play has the quality of a fantasy or dream, a quality not very common in Shaw's plays, especially his early ones, which are as neatly crafted as well-made plays. *Heartbreak House* strongly produces the impression that it is

Shaw's *Kubla Khan*, a self-procreating dream that used the dramatist merely as its medium.

The atmosphere itself is conducive to a dream : the play begins in the evening and with every act moves further into the night so that when the third act begins it is " a fine still night, moonless " <sup>2</sup> and the last night train has left. Almost every character is wrapped in his or her dream even when nominally awake. When the play begins Ellie Dunn is dreaming of romance and impossible adventures. The stage direction observes that she is " in a day dream " <sup>3</sup>, Hector Hushabye, the Marcus Darnley of Ellie's romance, snatches at the slightest chance and "falls into a daydream " <sup>4</sup> and like a somnambulist fights an imaginary duel with an adversary who has no existence outside his dream. Ellie says to the Captain: " I like you to dream. You must never be in the real world when we talk together <sup>5</sup> " Hypnotised by Ellie, Boss Mangan spends a considerable time on the stage in a state of trance, unable to move his limbs. When the last act begins, Ariadne is lying in a hammock, Shotover is asleep on the stage and we learn from Hector that Randall and Mazzini Dunn are already in bed. Captain Shotover is the only person who attempts to fight his dreams and remain awake, but he knows that the battle has been lost :

To be drunk means to have dreams ; to go soft ; to be easily pleased and deceived, to fall into the clutches of women. Drink does that for you when you are young.

And when you are old... the dreams come by themselves... I drink now to keep sober, but the dreams are conquering.<sup>6</sup>

Not only is the atmosphere suggestive of a dream, the play itself has the structure of a fantasy. Captain Shotover's house is described by Ellie as a "house without foundations."<sup>7</sup> The behaviour of the characters would be very inappropriate in a realistic setting : the father does not recognize his daughter and says : "You should grow out of kissing strange men".<sup>8</sup> When she insists on being kissed by Hesioné, Ariadne is asked to come without make-up. Ellie is invited to Shotover's house but finds no one to receive her.

Shaw makes no attempt at verisimilitude. The incongruity between normal behaviour and actual behavior would seem strange and unconvincing, the lack of what Eliot calls objective correlative would seem an artistic failure unless one grasps the fact that the action is presented in the mode of a dream ; not explicitly as in the interlude of *Man and Superman*, but implicitly. Once this is granted, the action ceases to be confusing. For example, though the play is about the war, it seems at first baffling that it does not even once mention it. Indeed the presence of the bomber planes can be inferred by the audience, but to the characters the bombing is either 'the Judgment' or Beethoven's music :

MRS HUSHABYE [ emerging panting from the darkness ]

Who was that running away ? [ She comes to Ellie ] Did you hear the explosions ? And the sound in the sky : it is splendid : it's like an orchestra : it's like Beethoven.

ELLIE By thunder, it i s [ sic ] Beethoven. <sup>9</sup>

The sound of the bomb becomes transmuted in the consciousness of the characters into an orchestra. The Captain treats his house as a ship, behaves like a captain and speaks the language of the navigator. In the play symbols occupy the place of things symbolized. No doubt, a dream itself is a symbolic vision, but the discrepancy between an objective situation and the subjective response points to a dreamwork rather than an ordinary allegory. The possibility that the *dramatis personae* may exist only in the author's dream is hinted by Mazzini Dunn :

I sometimes dream that I am in very distinguished society, and suddenly I have nothing on but my pyjamas ! Sometimes I havent even pyjamas. And I always feel overwhelmed with confusion. But here I dont mind in the least : it is quite natural. <sup>10</sup>

What Mazzini Dunn's words probably mean is that he is now participating in a purer dream than the one he finds in his sleep : in an ideal dream there should be no confusion since the incompatibility between distinguished society and pyjamas belong to mundane reality which, by infiltrating his

dream, disturbs the fantastic possibilities of an uninhibited vision. In *Heartbreak House* the dream is not broken by any such outside influence.

The visionary quality of the play is responsible for an authenticity not always found in Shaw. In very few of his plays did he surrender so completely his proneness to polemics to a vision that 'occurred' to him. Consequently the density and ambiguity of the play is as much a mystery to his strained optimism as to the ordinary reader. Asked to explain the play Shaw replied, " How should I know ? I am only the author. "<sup>11</sup>

Here at last there was a play about which Shaw could claim that it wrote itself, he merely held the pen. It was a " real play " and " real plays...are no more constructed than a carrot is constructed. They grow naturally."<sup>12</sup> Shaw insisted that the play did not contain a word that had been foreseen before being written.<sup>13</sup> The result of such automatic writing was that Shaw wrote a play in which many of the themes of *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Man and Superman*, *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* returned, but for the first time he faced himself without an intellectual dodge. In a sense *Heartbreak House* was the rewriting of the old plays with greater integrity.

The war years were the most fateful years in Shaw's life. The First World War was a European calamity, but to very few people was the magnitude of the disaster as great

as it was to Shaw. Many writers lost their sons—— Shaw had none—— but to them the personal bereavement had the gloss of tragedy : they lost their children in a great patriotic war in which Englishmen were called upon to sacrifice their all for national honour, freedom and civilization. To them it was a war for the defence of the motherland, a war against the Huns, a war for the highest ideals of the human race.

For Shaw it was different. In an unprecedented show of spiritual debauchery millions were killing one another, but the temerity to question the reasonableness of the war was deemed treason. Once the battle-lines were drawn, patriotism took very little time to go over to the side of Xenophobia. Anyone who declined to join the chorus hailing the English effort was shouted down as a traitor. This was one of those moments in history when no misfortune is greater than the misfortune of being a fatherlandless fellow. To Shaw the war was no Judgment Day separating the English sheep from the German goats, it revealed no angels with luminous wings casting away Satan from the shores of Albion. He had foreseen its possibility long ago and attributed it to the abdication of responsibility on all quarters.

Before the war Shaw had proposed a triple alliance between England, France and Germany so that if France attacked Germany, England would combine with Germany to crush France, and if Germany attacked France, England would

combine with France to crush Germany. The Foreign Office, of course, paid no heed to his advice. When history exacted the price of folly and the war broke out and everybody seemed to have lost his head and compounded the stupidity with lies, distortions and hysteric hallelujah to England, Shaw took upon himself the task of setting the record straight. He cooped himself up in a hotel at Torquay and spent two months penning a pamphlet that became famous as *Common Sense About the War*.

This put the fat in the fire. If Shaw had expected to educate the public, he could not have been more disappointed. According to Robert Lynd, from the moment of publication of *Common Sense About the War*, "the war was spoken of and written about as a war between the Allies on the one hand, and, on the other, Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bernard Shaw."<sup>14</sup>

Instead of bringing sobriety, the article sowed dragon's teeth in the minds of men he had valued as friends. R.B. Cunningham Graham declared that through the article Shaw had attacked "his hereditary enemy, England."<sup>15</sup> Arnold Bennet discovered in it "disingenuous, dialectical bravura",<sup>16</sup> Henry James accused Shaw of "deliberately descending into the arena and playing the clown".<sup>17</sup> Henry Arthur Jones denounced Shaw's "mischievous treason" and declared that Shaw "kicked and defamed [Englishmen's] mother when she was on a sickbed."<sup>18</sup>

The indignation was not confined to England . Theodore Roosevelt, in his letter to an English friend, denounced "the unhung traitor Keir Hardie, the blue-rumped ape Bernard Shaw, and the assemblage of clever and venomous but essentially foolish and physically timid creatures".<sup>19</sup> The *New York Sun* editorially reprimanded him for choosing "their days of tribulation for sticking pins into his own people".<sup>20</sup>

For Shaw the war was a preventable horror that had no tragic dignity. He was staggered by its wickedness and its mindlessness. About Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, he wrote to Gilbert Murray :

Will he never realize that he could have stopped the war, probably by a shake of his fist and that he was too nice and cautious to do it? Do the ghosts of the million slain never come to his bed and point to the mangled entrails and Edipusted (sic) eyes and say "Thus didst thou"? I hope not. The only consolation one has in thinking of him is that he will never know.<sup>21</sup>

Shaw's was a lonely voice in the war. And that voice was answered with intense hostility, the strength of which he could not have suspected before the war. He was insulted, reviled, ostracized and called a traitor.<sup>22</sup> And those who had lost their children or their close friends found a strange fulfilment in the war. As the editor of Shaw's

collected letters points out :

For Shaw the shockingly exorbitant toll was intolerable, and as news filtered through of the slaughter of the sons of William Archer, Carlos Blacker, William Maxwell, J.M. Barrie, Mrs Patrick Campbell, Richard Mansfield, Lady Gregory and other close friends and colleagues, he cursed and he wept. There had been little compensation in knowing he had been right...and...had nothing to withdraw.<sup>23</sup>

Beatrice Webb wrote in her diary on 28th July, 1916 : "[Shaw] is really frightened that civilization, as we know it, is going bankrupt and not so sure that he knows how to prevent it, even if the stupid fools and naughty children would take his advice. "<sup>24</sup> There was, of course, little possibility of the naughty children taking his advice when a sedate middle-aged intellectual like Henry Arthur Jones doubted his ancestry and called him a "freakish homunculus, germinated outside lawful procreation"<sup>25</sup> for daring to air his views.

This was the atmosphere in which *Heartbreak House* was written and this is the reality that lies behind the pretty elegance of *Hesione* and *Ariadne*. The meaning of the play cannot be understood unless one keeps in mind the circumstances in which the play was written.<sup>26</sup>

Although Shaw calls *Heartbreak House* a phantasia in the Russian manner on English themes, the similarity with

Chekhov is not very obvious except for the fact that both *Heartbreak House* and Chekhov's plays are constructed like musical pieces. In the Russian's plays the authorial presence is much more subdued; with a tone of nostalgic pity Chekhov sympathises with all his characters even as he knows that they are bootless. *The Cherry Orchard* or *Uncle Vanya* is shot through with a smile tinged with suffering, for the compassion of the author makes no distinction between the deserving and the undeserving. In *Heartbreak House* the author's voice is stentorian, it is the voice of Ecclesiastes and Micah, of Swift, Carlyle and the later Tolstoy. 27

In Shaw's plays love and happiness are the ultimate symbols of corruption, these two things symbolize softness, rottenness and surrender of spiritual activity. They symbolize drift and the soul's decay. We have seen that in *Man and Superman* Octavius and the Devil (in the interlude) are the exponents of these qualities. The Shavian hero's abhorrence of love and happiness is not less strong than his abhorrence of hell, in fact the two become synonymous in *Man and Superman*, in which hell is not the place of eternal torment in the conventional sense, it is the place of eternal torment in the Shavian sense— it is the place of eternal love and eternal happiness. The true hero in his plays resists love; his Caesar is godlike precisely because to him Cleopatra does not mean anything more than her

kitten, his Candida is the Virgin Mother because she gives a lie to the Morrisian formula that love is enough, his Lady Cicely is intensely vital because she has not been corrupted by sexuality, his Joan is a saint because she is androgynous. In the most symbolic of his plays, it is therefore natural that the ultimate corruption should manifest itself in the form of *dolce vita* : in *Heartbreak House* the characters show almost tape-wormish amorousness. In *Man and Superman* the debate between Don Juan and the Devil is brought to an end by Juan when he leaves hell, which he compares to a confectioner's shop, for an austere heaven in which the joy of contemplation replaces the pleasure of fornication.

In the years intervening between the two plays the gloom descending upon Shaw's consciousness thickened considerably and this is evident from the fact that almost all the characters other than the Captain — even the hard-boiled Boss Mangan — are slave-driven by the two sirens, Hesione and Ariadne. When she realises that her projected romance with Marcus Darnley has ended in her chasing a crooked shadow, Ellie suffers a heartbreak. However the guidance of the octogenarian Captain ensures that her broken heart does not impair her sound soul ; in all other cases the soul breaks with the heart. When, as in the case of Ariadne, the heart does not break, serious doubts are raised about the existence of her soul. Ellie's

fate is just one silver lining in a mass of dark clouds, and the ambiguity of the ending almost obliterates the silver lining. The mitigating factor in the overall corruption is so weak that we are reminded of Hector's words: "Decent men are like Daniel in the lion's den : their survival is a miracle, and they do not always survive."<sup>28</sup>

Not unexpectedly the chief occupation of the men and women in *Heartbreak House* is love-making. Hesione, the high priestess of Eros, reminds the men that women have found for them the land of the Lotos Eaters: "Open your eyes : Addy and Ellie look beautiful enough to please the most fastidious man : we live and love and have not a care in the world. We women have managed all that for you."<sup>29</sup>

Only Shotover, whose voice approximates that of the author, knows that the happiness is "accursed happiness", that it is " the sweetness of the fruit that is going rotten."<sup>30</sup> Yet unlike Tennyson's Ulysses he is too weak and too old to resist. He has only memories of "resisting and doing", of standing on the bridge in a typhoon. He has nothing to look forward to and cannot prevent his ship from being driven to the rocks.

The world of *Heartbreak House* is not purgatory, it is hell ; the residents are human only in shape and show close affinity with animals. Reference to hell and comparison with animals form a recurrent motif : Randall is a "poor devil" who "howls" when Ariadne twists his heart, Managan "howls"

when Hesione twists his,<sup>31</sup> Hector believes that the "devil gave him [Shotover] a black witch for a wife ; and these two demon daughters are their mystical progeny."<sup>32</sup> To Randall Ariadne is "a maddening devil,"<sup>33</sup> more hateful than the most hateful animal. Hector says that they are all "useless futile creatures."<sup>34</sup> A desperate Shotover wonders: "Are we to be kept for ever in the mud by these hogs" <sup>35</sup> Hector sees hell in Ariadne's fascination for him<sup>36</sup>, the red light over their door is a sure sign to Hector that Mangan and Randall are hellish creatures<sup>37</sup>, the two sisters are "vampire women, demon women",<sup>38</sup> Hector himself is to his father-in-law "like a damned soul in hell."<sup>39</sup> Mangan's soul lives on pig's food<sup>40</sup>, Ariadne is as strong as a horse<sup>41</sup>, Hector compares himself to Hesione's lap dog<sup>42</sup>, he says he does not wish to be drowned like a rat in a trap,<sup>43</sup> that he has contemplated the killing of human vermin.<sup>44</sup>

In *Man and Superman* hell is inhabited by the sensual man; the commander who burns incense at the altar of love and happiness is attracted to hell even as Juan steps out of the bliss-hawking fleshpots into a heaven that is conducive to his intellectual passion. The hell of *Heartbreak House* is more than a state of mind, it permits no easy exit. Don Juan can move with aplomb from hell to heaven, Captain Shotover must float or sink with his crew.

The play is pervaded by Hecotr's terrifying realization that decent men do not always survive. The hell of *Heartbreak*

*House* is far more terrifying than that of *Man and Superman*, which is founded on brilliant witticism. The hell of *Heartbreak House* radiates intense horror simply because it is the vision of a writer living in the shadow of death — death not only or even primarily of himself but of millions like him, of humanity at large: "We are members of one another," Shaw said in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.<sup>45</sup> When such a man sees the human race as a race of vermin as Gulliver did at the height of his existential horror, the chill that moves down the spine of the audience is an entirely new experience.

In the heartbreak years — the years in which Shaw's play germinated—he learnt the bitter truth about the power of illusions and lies. Lost souls have no use for truth. In *Man and Superman* Juan knows that to live in hell is to be surrounded by lies and illusions. In his private hell a battered Shaw had a taste of intense hatred whenever he attempted to dispel the lies that became a convenient shield of jingoes against the truth of the war. The doomed creatures in Shotover's house similarly batten on illusions. Ellie is drawn not to Hector but to the fictitious Marcus Darnley. The incredible romance of this non-existent character would not impose on a sane child, it imposes on Ellie. She decides to marry Mangan because she thinks Mangan is a captain of industry when he actually lives on commission. Hesione is almost an Aphrodite in the temple of

eroticism and love into which Captain Shotover's house has been transformed, yet her hair comes off at night. That wretched idealist, Mazzini Dunn, who is incapable of bringing his daughter up on a decent budget, thinks he is a soldier of liberty. Captain Shotover, who in his more realistic moments sees himself as a rotting fruit and needs rum to keep his wits together, aspires to what he calls the seventh degree of concentration, a state that will enable him to destroy human vermin like Mangan and Randall :

ELLIE      There seems to be nothing real in the world except my father and Shakespear. Marcus's tigers are false ; Mr. Mangan's millions are false ; there is nothing really strong and true about Hesione but her beautiful black hair ; and Lady Utterwood's is too pretty to be real. The one thing that was left to me was the Captain's seventh degree of concentration ; and that turns out to be -----

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER      Rum.<sup>46</sup>

All the characters are idealists in the sense Shaw used the term in the *Quintessence of Ibsenism*.<sup>47</sup> None of them has the courage or the ability to look reality in the face and orient his or her action according to its demands. They are all enemies, therefore, of the Life Force ; driven by fixed illusions and fantastic ideas they drift along. Yet there is an important difference between the *Quintessence of Ibsenism*

and *Heartbreak House*. In the earlier work the idealists are in a minority, the world is composed primarily of philistines who do not help the evolutionary process but provide it with the much-needed ballast. Their instincts are earthy but healthy, they are well-adjusted to life and do not endanger or threaten it. The men and women who have assembled in *Heartbreak House*, like the people who called the shots during the war years, are dangerous animals precisely because all — or almost all — of them are idealists in the Shavian sense.

There is no saviour figure in *Heartbreak House*. The Captain, who knows that the happiness induced by love is like the euphoria of a drug addict, cannot stem the rot. The rot has got him instead, for he admits: "You can be happy when you are only half alive. I am happier now I am half dead than ever I was in my prime. But there is no blessing in my happiness."<sup>48</sup>

Such impotence in the face of certain doom permeates the atmosphere of the play. Not for a moment is the reader allowed to forget that Europe is on the powder keg and the fuse has been lit. It is against this background that the reader is invited to judge the characters. Randall is the representative of the entire group in having his heart broken to have a change from having his head shampooed.<sup>49</sup>

One is thus provided with a knowledge of the etiology of the disease that affects civilization. It would not matter

if these people were nobodies or atypical freaks, what makes the play frightening is that they are the cream of society. Objecting to Hector's denunciation of them as heartbroken imbeciles, Mazzini Dunn makes an important amendment :

MAZZINI Oh no. Surely...rather a favourable specimen of what is best in our own English culture. You are very charming people, most advanced, unprejudicial, frank, humane, unconventional, democratic, free-thinking and everything that is delightful to thoughtful people.<sup>50</sup>

As Bernard Dukore points out that like Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society*. *Heartbreak House* exposes "the social deficiencies of what is best in that society."<sup>51</sup>

That the house in which people live like pigs in clover represents the whole of England, nay, perhaps the whole of civilization, is emphasized by Hector :

HECTOR We sit here talking, and leave everything to Mangan and to chance and to the devil. Think of the powers of destruction that Mangan and his mutual admiration gang wield ! It's madness : it's like giving a torpedo to a badly brought up child to play at earthquakes with.<sup>52</sup>

Here *Heartbreak House* takes up the most important theme of

*John Bull's other Island* and *Major Barbara*. To Broadbent, Undershaft and Magan the world is a machine to grease their bristles",<sup>53</sup> and those who should have led in the fight against them have withdrawn into romance or idealism, into the world of senseless empty talk. What then is to be done? How is the world to be saved?

In *John Bull* and *Major Barbara* Shaw came up with an answer but that answer is no longer serviceable in *Heartbreak House*. He believed or liked to believe—for I think that in both cases there was an evasion resulting from his reluctance to probe his mind deep enough—that Broadbent and Undershaft could be appropriated by Doyle and Cusins. The conclusion was dramatically unsatisfactory in each case as it sought to substitute intellectual dogma—unverified and unverifiable at any given moment of history—for artistic intuition. In *Heartbreak House* Shaw is no longer prepared to prostrate himself before a tailored utopia. Ellie argues with Captain Shotover as Larry Doyle argued with Peter Keegan or Undershaft with Barbara, but her argument is drowned by the moving power of Shotover's conviction: "Riches will damn you ten times deeper. Riches wont save even your body."<sup>54</sup> The Shavian hero can no longer be consoled by facile optimism. Shotover's last words draw our attention to the fact that an alliance with Mangan, far from saving Ellie's soul, cannot hold off even her physical destruction. Not for a moment does Shaw allow the dilution

of his belief that Mangan and company are presiding over the liquidation of the human race. In *Major Barbara* lack of money was almost a sin. In *Heartbreak House* Shaw's hero faces the fact that money "is not made in the light."<sup>55</sup>

Two conflicting points of view — one of the Captain, the other of Hector — compete to gain the upper hand in the play : the first seeks purgation of the world through the extermination of the human vermin, the other insists that no purgation is possible because the human race — at least that part of it which is on view and which is represented by the upper crust — is composed solely of vermin. The Captain pins his hopes on a mysterious power that will enable him to kill people like Mangan:

HECTOR What is the dynamite for ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER To kill fellows like Mangan.

HECTOR No use. They will always be able to buy more dynamite than you.

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER I will make a dynamite that he cannot explode.

HECTOR And you can, eh ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER Yes : When I have attained the seventh degree of concentration.

HECTOR Whats the use of that ? You never do attain it.

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER What then is to be done ? Are we to be kept for ever in the mud by these hogs to whom the

universe is nothing but a machine for greasing their  
bristles and filling their snouts ?

HECTOR Are Mangan's bristles worse than Randall's  
lovelocks ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER We must win powers of life and death  
over them both. I refuse to die until I have invented  
the means.

HECTOR Who are we that we should judge them ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER What are they that they should judge  
us ? Yet they do, unhesitatingly. There is enmity  
between our seed and their seed. They know it and act  
on it, strangling our souls. They believe in  
themselves. When we believe in ourselves we shall kill  
them.<sup>56</sup>

Hector's answer that it is the same seed becomes a paradigm  
of black irony as he later invokes the heavens to destroy  
the entire race. This is the first explicit plea for  
liquidation in any of Shaw's plays. This, as we shall later  
see,<sup>57</sup> is the common thread running through Shaw's later  
plays and pamphlets. Shaw's growing sympathy with dictators  
and his insistence on liquidation as an act analogous to the  
weeding of the garden can be explained, I think, by his  
belief that the liberal atmosphere of *Heartbreak House*,  
spoken of in such glowing terms by Mazzini Dunn, is the  
liberalism that tolerates the spread of rabies but not the  
shooting of a rabid dog.

The gap between the two perceptions, the perception of the Captain and that of Hector, at one stage becomes too narrow to be visible. The divine judgement that falls from the sky in the form of a bomb at the end of the play bears out Hector rather than the Captain. The Captain's seventh degree of concentration and the search for power proves as elusive as his daughters' search for redemption through the primrose path of dalliance. Unable to stop the drift, he admits that his dream was a pipe dream: "the last shot was fired years ago."<sup>5B</sup> This, virtually, is the end of all hopes of purgation :

HECTOR And this ship we are all in ? This soul's prison we call England ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER The captain is in his bunk, drinking bottled ditch-water ; and the crew is gambling in the forecastle. She will strike and sink and split. Do you think the laws of God will be suspended in favour of England because you were born in it ?

HECTOR Well, I dont mean to be drowned like a rat in a trap. I still have the will to live. What am I to do ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER Do ? Nothing simpler. Learn your business as an Englishman.

HECTOR And what may my business as an Englishman be, pray ?

CAPTAIN SHOTOVER Navigation. Learn it and live, or leave it and be damned.

ELLIE Quiet, Quiet : youll tire yourself

MAZZINI I thought all that once, Captain ; but I assure you nothing will happen.<sup>59</sup>

Heaven chooses that very moment —— the moment Mazzini Dunn lets the warning go unheeded —— to vent its ire on man. The new element in Shaw's pessimism is seen not in the character of Mazzini Dunn or Mangan, but in that of Hector. The obtuseness of the impossible idealist and the unscrupulousness of the capitalist we have seen in Ramsden, Octavius, Croft and Undershaft, the combination of the two we have seen in Broadbent. But what is unprecedented is the erosion, almost complete, of the will to fight these forces ; the pusillanimous surrender to moneybags and gasbags. Shotover is too old and too weak, but Hector, the winner of many Albert medals, and the possessor of sound moral judgment at the theoretical level, behaves as abjectly as Mazzini Dunn and Randall, and instead of doing something to prevent the catastrophe, he invites, in grand operatic style, the heavens to fall and destroy the futile creatures. Bar Captain Shotover he alone knows that those who have gathered in Heartbreak House do not deserve to live, and yet he allows himself to hang by the petticoat of a wife who has "used [him] up and left [him] nothing but dreams, as some women do" so that he can do nothing "but tell lies to women"<sup>60</sup>

Though only Mangan and the burglar are killed by the bomb, heaven seems to be in agreement with Shotover's prophecy that the next one will get the rest of them, and with Hector when he damns the whole lot : "There is no sense in us. We are useless, dangerous and ought to be abolished"<sup>61</sup>

In his puppet play, *Shakes vs Shav* Shaw claims that *Heartbreak House* is his *King Lear* :

SHAKES Where is thy Hamlet ? Couldst thou write King Lear ?

SHAV Aye, with his daughters all complete. Coulds(Sic) thou  
Have written Heartbreak House ? Behold my Lear.<sup>62</sup>

Yet the similarity between the two plays lies only at the superficial level. *King Lear* is Shakespeare's most terrible vision, yet the play ends with the tragic joy of acceptance. Shaw's play does not end with nature regaining its harmony : it depicts a world in which almost every character turns, like Lot's wife, into a pillar of salt. A play of complete negation, it shows God's dissatisfaction with His own work and vindicates "Heaven's threatening growl of disgust at us useless futile creatures."<sup>63</sup>

In the dark sky Hector reads two possibilities : "Either out of that darkness some new creation will come to supplant us... or the heavens will fall in thunder and destroy us."<sup>64</sup> The play confirms the second possibility and J.I.M Stewart

is justified in remarking that "what lies just beneath the play's surface is despair."<sup>65</sup> It is this despair which makes the play a work of existential horror rather than a tragedy.

It is true that *Heartbreak House* was written when the whole world was sick and Shaw himself was briefly laid up with the attack of the same virus. There is no doubt that the war acted as a catalyst and certain tendencies that lay dormant in Shaw suddenly flared up. Without the war Shaw's vision of the Judgment would probably be less disturbing but it is equally true that the war brought out nothing in Shaw that was not already there. The same war gave to Rupert Brooke's poems that rare combination of patriotism without xenophobia : his poems became a fragrant bouquet of love and sacrifice. Even Wilfred Owen, who was much more like Shaw in feeling that the futility of the bloodbath made a mockery of heroism had as his characteristic tone pity rather than despair. The soldiers who had to kill each other because of the folly of politicians were always human enough to feel the tragedy of their situation, and two soldiers who fought each other could meet in the world of the dead where all hatred was washed away. The most terrible thing about *Heartbreak House*, on the other hand, is not pity at the butchery of millions but despair mixed with the sadistic satisfaction that the race of human vermin is fulfilling heaven's design. Such despair and fury as we find in the

play was also evident in Shaw's reply to Mrs Patrick Campbell who wrote to him of her son's death and remarked that the letter the company Chaplain had sent her was "full of tragic gentleness and praise for my brave son" :

It is no use : I cant be sympathetic : these things simply make me furious. I want to swear. I do swear. Killed just because people are blasted fools. A chaplain , too, to say nice things about it. It is not his business to say nice thing about it, but to shout that "the voice of thy son's blood crieth unto God from the ground."

To hell with your chaplain and his tragic gentleness ! The next shell will perhaps blow him to bits ; and some other chaplain will write such a nice letter to his mother. Such nice letters ! Such nice little notices in papers ,<sup>66</sup>

Shaw's pent-up fury and his remoteness from the spirit of tragic acceptance<sup>67</sup> robs Hector's act of switching on the lights and setting the house ablaze to attract the attention of the bombers of all ambiguity. Hector has prayed to the heavens for the destruction of Heartbreak House, and the blazing light, surely the nearest thing to ritualistic fire under the circumstances, is his votive offering accompanying the prayer. He is not carrying out Captain Shotover's doctrine of living dangerously. Standing on the bridge

Shotover was fighting the storm, fighting the blindness of chance ; he was fighting to save the ship from sinking. Hector is not fighting, nor is he trying to save the ship, he is surrendering to fate and hastening the destruction. Captain Shotover's house, built in the shape of a ship, is the central symbol of the play, and the symbolic meaning of Hector's action should be judged by its potential impact on that symbol. At a more literal level Hector's courage is the courage of the gambler playing Russian roulette, it is in tune with his walking out of a third floor window and getting in through another to test his nerves.

Since *Heartbreak House* is not primarily a study of leisured Europe before the war but a dream that telescopes the etiology as well as the manifestation of civilization's cancer, Hector's courage represents the daring that drew from Shaw's benighted soul curse after frightful curse: "Oh damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, DAMN DAMN !" 68

The stupidity of Ariadne, who almost composes a litany to the virtues of the bamboo and the horse and sees her husband's methods as the only answer to the world's ills could not have induced the unbroken darkness into which Shaw found his soul plunging. The fact that people like Mrs Campbell's son and Hector Hyshabye, people far superior to jingoistic blockheads, surrendered their will to live and found fulfilment in death makes *Heartbreak House* so despairing. Thus though in the *Common Sense About the War*

and in his letter to Gilbert Murray<sup>69</sup> Shaw held Edward Grey and the British foreign policy responsible for the war, in the play he goes far beyond such superficial conclusions and realizes that the human race, the best of the human race, is gripped by death-wish. His sarcasm was tinged with a great deal of sadness when he wrote to Lady Gregory, who had just lost her son in the war :

Only the other day Mrs Patrick Campbell's son... got promoted to the staff and was immediately killed in his dugout by the blast shell from a German battery... Like Robert he was a very good looking man of a refined type, who left the Navy because they are all drunken philistines there and took to art. Like Robert he never seemed able to find any full expression of himself in art or society. Like Robert he seemed to find himself in doing dangerous things. His mother thinks he got all the life he wanted out of the war and nothing else could have given it to him.<sup>70</sup>

Here then, was the clue to Hector's courage, and Shaw's comments on that courage. However, it should be added that neither Lady Gregory, nor Mrs Campbell, inspite of their irreparable loss and great sorrow, despaired as Shaw did. They accepted their suffering with tragic calmness. It was not the pain, but the method of responding to that pain that made the difference and the method was certainly not the

result of the war. This difference was memorably summed up by G.K. Chesterton : "Shaw has never had Piety... The cult of the land, the cult of the dead, the cult of that most living memory by which the dead are alive... the permanence of all that has made us, that is what the Latins meant by Pietas."<sup>71</sup>

.What is intriguing in *Heartbreak House* is that Ellie should join Hector and Hesione in hoping for the return of the bombers. She is one character who seeks life and when she realizes that Mangan cannot give her that life she makes Shotover her spiritual husband. About her Shaw wrote : " I took the greatest care that... she should be in the sharpest contrast to all the heartbreakers."<sup>72</sup> If Hector and Hesione make a travesty of Shotover's art of living dangerously, Ellie acts as a true disciple of her master, for whoever else may have invited the bombers, it was not she ; but in the event of their coming she responds with adequate courage. As the Captain says : "Courage will not save you ; but it will show that your souls are still alive."<sup>73</sup> While Hector has to destroy the world to show that his soul is still alive, Ellie, who has not sought that destruction can evince that possibility with an undaunted soul that is still alive. If that is so, then inspite of rejecting tragedy Shaw succeeds in accommodating one tragic strain in a work that otherwise belongs to a very different genre. Ellie may be expressing a very ambiguous and unexpected feeling of Shaw,

who reacted in much the same way in similar circumstances. In a letter to the Webbs during the war he expressed that strange feeling while narrating the fate of a Zeppelin that had been shot down shortly after flying over Ayot St. Lawrence, where Shaw lived :

A Zeppelin flew over Ayot St. Lawrence with the nicest precision over our house straight along our ridge tiles. It made a magnificent noise the whole time... And not a shot was fired at it... [Shaw says it was subsequently brought down]. I went to see the wreck on my motor bicycle... What is hardly credible but true, is that the sound of the Zepp's engine was so fine, and its voyage through the stars so enchanting, that I positively caught myself hoping next night that there would be another raid.<sup>74</sup>

Did Shaw find himself for a brief while in the company of Robert Gregory and Mrs Campbell's son and discover, like them, a perfect beauty in the great act of daring regardless of the consequences ? Or was Shaw, touching the nadir of negation, giving expression, like Hector, to his repressed death wish ? Whatever the case, it is clear that while composing *Heartbreak House*, inspite of what he thought and wrote about the war, Shaw had more in common with Hector and Ellie than he dared to acknowledge. As the dream of John Tanner lay shattered, Shaw instinctively availed himself of

Hector's choice. If he had to sacrifice the hope of eternal life, he saw no reason why death should not compensate for the loss by being as beautiful and thrilling as possible. Probably the beauty of the bomber plane that Shaw welcomed was more than aesthetic. At a moment when life had let him down he probably felt a moral justice in the Zeppelin, and like Robert Gregory felt — though he could never admit it — a fulfilment in the imminence of beautiful death. In a play in which he had relaxed the internal regimentation that allowed him to pursue nothing but comedy, the close association of beauty with death at last made death a positive goal.

Chapter 11 : Notes and Reference

1. Michael Kennedy, *The oxford Dictionary of Music*, p. 240
2. CP V, p. 158.
3. Ibid., p. 79.
4. Ibid., p. 99.
5. Ibid., p. 148.
6. Ibid., p. 147.
7. Ibid., p. 134.
8. Ibid., p. 67.
9. Ibid., p. 178.
10. Ibid., p. 173.
11. Hesketh Pearson, *George Bernad Shaw : His Life and Personality*, p. 363. Also see CP V, p. 189.
12. Archibald Henderson. *The Table Talk of G.B.S.*, pp.62-63.
13. Archibald Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw : Man of the Century*, p. 625.
14. Quoted in *Sixteen SelfSketches*, p. 118.
15. Quoted in Stanley Weintraub, *The Journey to Heartbreak : the Crucible Years of Bernard Shaw, 1914-1918*, p. 61.
16. Ibid., p. 62.
17. Ibid., p. 63.
18. Shaw, *Collected Letters* vol. III, p. 320.
19. Weintraub, op.cit., p. 64.
20. Ibid., p. 69.
21. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 301.
22. Henry Arthur Jones took the initiative to expel Shaw

from the Dramatists' Club. Shaw had to marshal evidence to prove to his erstwhile friends that he was not a traitor. See, for instance, his letter to Jones, *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 322.

23. Dan H. Laurence, editorial comment. *Collected letters*<sup>3</sup> vol III, p. 240.

24. *Beatrice Webb's Diaries*, p. 228.

25. Allan Chappelow, *Shaw : The "Chucker-out"*, p. 349.

26. Though Shaw maintains in the preface that the play was written before the war, the editors of The Bodley Head Edition state that it actually began on 4th March 1916 and ended in May, 1917, i.e. at the height of the war. See CP V, p. 10.

27. Crompton says : "There is more of Carlyle and, indeed, of the old Testament in *Heartbreak house* than in any other of Shaw's plays." Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p.135. Charles Berst remarks that the aesthetic direction in Shaw is "away from a sad tone poem of nostalgia toward a cacophonous fantasia which forebodes apocalypse." Charles Berst, *Bernard Shaw and the Art of Drama*, p. 223.

28. CP V , p. 101.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

34. Ibid., p. 159.
35. Ibid., p. 100.
36. Ibid., p. 99.
37. Ibid., p. 101.
38. Ibid., p. 102.
39. Ibid., p. 142.
40. Ibid., p. 143.
41. Ibid., p. 99.
42. Ibid., p. 103.
43. Ibid., p. 177.
44. Ibid., p. 101.
45. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 57.
46. CP V , pp. 165-66.
47. The terms are discussed in the last chapter of this study.
48. CP V , p. 169.
49. Ibid., p. 174.
50. Ibid., p. 173.
51. Bernard Dukore, *Money and Politics in Ibsen Shaw and Brecht*, pp. 82-83. However, I feel that Dukore underestimates Shaw's pessimism in arguing that Shaw's tirade is against capitalism, not against the ingrained deficiency in human nature.
52. CP V , p 175.
53. Ibid., p.100.
54. Ibid., p.145.

55. Ibid., p.105.
56. Ibid., pp. 100-101.
57. On numerous occasions Shaw supported the extermination of unsuitables. For a few samples see chapters 13 and 14.
58. CP V, p. 176.
59. Ibid., p. 177.
60. Ibid., p. 102, P. 103.
61. Ibid., p. 159.
62. Ibid., p. 475.
63. Ibid., p. 159.
64. Ibid.
65. J.I.M Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* , p. 171.
66. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 525.
67. Shaw advertised *Heartbreak House* as a comedy. see CP V, p.58.
68. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 525.
69. Op. cit.
70. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 527.
71. G.K.Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, p. 269.
72. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 744.
73. CP V , p. 179.
74. *Collected Letters*, vol. III , pp. 425-26

From Mother's Womb to Egg-Shell : Back to Methuselah

" Not in Utopia — Subterranean fields —  
Or some secreted Island, Heaven Knows where  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us — the place where, in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all ! "

Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

" Give us back, oh give us back  
Our bodies before we die "

D.H. Lawrence, *Cry of the Masses*

Shaw's views have often been at variance with those of the mainstream, but the divergence has never been so pronounced as in *Back to Methuselah*. The revulsion that the play generates is largely dependent on the belief that the Ancients embody Shaw's ideal. Thus Chesterton says that Shaw is wedded to "the notion of a world governed by ghostly Tertiaries, of bloodless Struldbrugs who kill people for purely sociological considerations."<sup>1</sup> In other words *Back to Methuselah* is Shaw's *Brave New World* written with the opposite value premise : Huxley's hell is Shaw's Paradise. Shaw himself compared the work with the masterpieces of Dante, Michael Angelo and Bunyan and in the postscript of the play, written in 1944, claimed that "Back to Methuselah is a world classic or it is nothing."<sup>2</sup>

When he called the play a world classic, Shaw did not pretend that its artistic merit equalled that of *The Divine*

*Comedy*; what he maintained was that it was, like the Italian's poem, a cosmic comedy, and succeeded in articulating, through a new religious idiom, the possibility of man's salvation. According to him, world classics

try to solve, or at least to formulate, riddles of creation. In them the Life Force is struggling towards its goal of godhead by incarnating itself in creatures with knowledge and power enough to control nature and circumstances. <sup>3</sup>

Thus Shaw himself appears to endorse the belief of his critics that the Ancients in Part V are godly creatures and almost as superior to us as we are to the amoeba. Yet if that is the thesis of the play then the critics are entirely justified in pointing out that Shaw's paradise is the product of a cowardly flight from human emotions.<sup>4</sup> The unconvincingness of the Ancients' claim that one moment of the ecstasy of their lives would strike the infants—who in their mental make-up are almost identical with a normal human being of our times—dead has been exposed by Chesterton: "It consists in first inventing an unknown figure, about which nobody can even imagine anything...and then saying arbitrarily that he will not need something which everybody needs very much indeed."<sup>5</sup>

Shaw has often stood in the way of the proper appreciation of his plays and nowhere has he been a greater stumbling block than in *Back to Methuselah*. A word must

first be said about the axe that Shaw had to grind while making his pronouncements on the play. It is true that he often enjoyed the perversity with which he unsettled his critics, but the seriousness of the preface and the postscript of *Back to Methuselah* shows that Shaw was not being impish. The writer of the preface sincerely believed the play to be a world classic because he wholeheartedly wished to believe so. During the war he had written *Heartbreak House*, the nihilism of which had left no room for hope: the meaning of that play was so painful to Shaw that he consistently refused to recognize it, avoiding all questions by simply asserting that he was merely the author and could not be expected to know the meaning of the play. But this was an uncharacteristic reply because Shaw generally strained every nerve to discover optimism in his own work. The wasteland created by the war had parched every soul, including his own, yet it was not something he could bear to contemplate.

Shaw's search for hope began with his assault on Darwinism. He blamed Darwinism for the prevailing moral imbecility and naked animalism. Whereas religion proclaimed

fellowship in which we are all equal and members of one another... Darwinism proclaimed that our true relation is that of competitors and combatants in a struggle for mere survival and that every act of pity or loyalty ... is a vain and mischievous attempt to lessen the

severity of the struggle.<sup>6</sup>

Shaw found Neo-Darwinism even more villainous than Darwinism because it "produced a European catastrophe of a magnitude so appalling that...it is still far from certain whether our civilization will survive it."<sup>7</sup> In this context *Back to Methuselah* is Shaw's contribution to the modern Bible and he offers the play "as an alternative to the scrapping of our species as a political failure, and its replacement by a new experiment in creative evolution."<sup>8</sup>

In the play he tries to show how the world can be changed if people can be persuaded to pin their faith on creative evolution. In spite of his much-publicized disillusion with progress, Shaw was a Victorian in his faith in teleology. The world revealed by Darwin is a world dominated by chance, a world in which God--- by whatever name He is called --- has gone into retirement, a world in which "human improvement can come only through some senseless accident."<sup>9</sup> This world left Shaw deeply shaken. He sounded pathetic as he remarked that "when its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you."<sup>10</sup> Shaw claimed that he had written the play to bring back hope into the world. He had so far been a mere artist, with this play he became a religious prophet as well : "Indeed art has never been great when it was not providing an iconography for a live religion."<sup>11</sup>

It is obvious that in its bare outlines *Back to*

*Methuselah* is the vindication of Shaw's religious faith but he himself (in his comments on *Heartbreak House*) drew the readers' attention to the autonomy of his imagination. His religious conversion did not succeed in completely subordinating his dramatic genius. The antagonism between the hidden roots of his poetic life and his lucid philosophic conviction is the most remarkable feature of the dramatist. At places— as in the last speech of Lilith — where he succeeds in pressing his art into the service of his philosophical aim the play becomes unconvincing and mawkish, but except at such places it is not at all conducive to the Shavian interpretation we find in the preface.

Shaw's Bible begins in the Garden of Eden and ends in 31,920 A.D. This vast stretch of time is divided into five parts. The leitmotif, which runs through all the parts, is the conflict between two kinds of imagination— an imagination that sees a thing as it really is and an imagination that shares the quality of cheap drama and can grasp only the distortion of the realistic imagination. In Part I the Serpent and Eve possess the genuine article and Cain the distortion (Cain's case, however, as we shall see, is problematic). Thus the Serpent says: "You imagine what you desire ; you will what you imagine ; and at last you create what you will."<sup>12</sup> (The inherent idealism and the faith in the primacy of idea and its domination of matter is, needless to

say, deeply influenced by the *Republic* of Plato.) Cain, on the other hand, has another kind of imagination. Being diseased and distorted, it can only be destructive :

I have imagined a glorious poem of many men, of more men than there are leaves on a thousand trees. I will divide them into two great hosts. One of them I will lead; and the other will be led by the man I fear most and desire to fight and kill most. Think of that ! all(sic) those multitudes of men fighting , fighting , killing, killing ! The four rivers running with blood ! The shouts of triumph ! the(sic) howls of rage ! the curses of despair ! the(sic) shrieks of torment ! That will be life indeed : life lived to the very marrow : burning, overwhelming life. Every man who has not seen it, heard it, felt it, risked it, will feel a humbled fool in the presence of the man who has.<sup>13</sup>

The cycle explores the contrast between the two imaginations, the creative imagination allied to life, and the destructive imagination allied to death . In Part II, the Barnabas brothers take the place of Eve and the Serpent; Barge and Lubin step into Cain's shoes and talk of politics and government, elections and stunts without realizing for a moment that their hands are red with the blood of thousands of men. The same theme, appearing briefly in part III in the encounter between the Archbishop and Mrs. Lutestring on the

one hand and the Accountant General on the other, returns in a big way in Part IV in the meeting between the Emperor of Turania and the Oracle; when it becomes a modified reenactment of the cave scene described in the *Republic* of Plato. But though Shaw follows Plato at many places—in his conception of reality as the materialization of prior idea, in the separation between idea and matter, in the conflict between the appetitive and the rational faculties—he makes a significant departure. For Plato all visible forms of creation are a reflection of a transcendental Idea; the original Idea existing as immutable Form being the author of all creation. Shaw, on the other hand, provides us with a metaphysics of evil. In *Back to Methuselah* the transcendental Idea — the Evolutionary Appetite — is not all powerful. Lilith's imagination, the imagination of the Serpent and that of Eve follow the Platonic paradigm, but Cain's imagination is not Platonic, it is not a weak reflection of the divine Idea; his imagination has sovereignty of its own, like Lilith he can will what he imagines and create what he wills, but he wills conflict, death and destruction. His imagination differs from the Serpent's as anti-matter differs from matter. He does not fail to see a thing as it really is, for he accurately foresees the consequences of his imagination, but he sets himself up as a rival of Creative Evolution. Shavian theology in this respect resembles Gnosticism, Manichaeism

and Zoroastrianism. Just as Ahur Mazda is not the author of Ahriman, nor the controller of the latter's destiny ( or as in Gnosticism, God is not the creator of Satan, nor therefore, the author of evil) so the two imaginations as conceived by Shaw are not cognate in nature.

As Shaw is not propounding a rigorous philosophic system, he shuffles his terms : we are not told how, if the Life Force is not the author of Cain's imagination and if the power of the Life Force is not unlimited, the supersession of Cain can be a foregone conclusion.<sup>14</sup> In Shaw's mind Cain and Napoleon are identical, yet actually they are similar only in what they do, not in what they are, for unlike Cain, the Emperor of Turania is not a potent author of evil, he is plainly incapable of facing naked truth, and his life is a melodrama because he can only perceive reality when it is perverted in a mummy and presented melodramatically.

Margery Morgan<sup>15</sup> notes the close resemblance between Plato's cave and the Oracle's temple but omits a fundamental difference. In Plato's cave reality is perceived dimly through a shadow, it is like a faded photograph. In Shaw's play Napoleon sees a thing precisely as it is not, he sees the perversion of reality. The difference between the two is the difference between a weak-visioned man and one seeing hallucinations. Shaw is much more pessimistic than Plato, for in his play the difference of degree has been changed into a difference of kind. *Considering the fact that knowledge is*

virtue, Plato's scale is graded along different degrees of virtue, Shaw's binary scale has merely two points; virtue and vice. The encounter of Napoleon with the oracle encapsulates the history of man on this planet, and Shaw's unambiguous verdict is that man is no more fit for survival than Napoleon.

The process sketched out in the play seeks to trace the development of old Adam into the Perfect Adam. As the compass moves from myth to history the tone shifts from the Biblically grave to the satirical. The paradox of *Back to Methuselah* is that in the most religious of Shaw's works the nature of the satire produces the impression that the caricature, instead of gripping the crisis of civilization, is merely flirting with it in the manner of farce. Shaw undoubtedly tries to show their criminal dereliction of duty, but Burge and Lubin are so ridiculous that it is extremely difficult to relate them to historical figures; consequently it is equally difficult to accept them as authors, or part authors, of such a terrible tragedy as the First World War. Shaw's art finds its most trying test in this section, for he tests the limits of the power of burlesque. The study of Burge and Lubin is made in the same mode as the study of Ramsden and Broadbent, but the style here is the means to a different end, it is the vehicle of a deep pessimism that descended on Shaw during the War, an attitude that permeated the entire atmosphere of *Heartbreak*

*House*, the play that preceded *Back to Methuselah*.

There can be little doubt that Shaw intended the audience of "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas" ( only once was the entire cycle presented together, on all other occasions the impact of each part of the cycle on the audience was that of a separate and complete play ) to experience something analogous to what they feel while reading *The Waste Land* of Eliot — the promise, or the possibility, of deliverance contrasted with the curse that has blighted the world. To serve Shaw's purpose Burge and Lubin must also justify the despair of the Elderly Gentleman, whose death is virtually self-immolation brought about by the horror that Burge and Lubin, reincarnated as Burge-Lubin, inspire. In *Back to Methuselah* Shaw attempts to seize upon Ramsdenism and blow it up until the laughter of the audience hardens into intense moral revulsion. To do so the satire of the play must touch humanity profoundly, not jig around it in circles.

One is not sure whether Shaw succeeds, for neither the enormity of the catastrophe nor the full measure of the statesmen's responsibility is depicted as Shaw works indirectly, assuming the contemporary audience's knowledge of recent history. The audience witness the smugness of the two men, their unscrupulous jockeying for power, with each playing dirty games behind the other's back, complete unawareness that there is blood on their hands, and their

refusal to learn anything from the disaster. This must have added salt to the raw wounds of the audience, most of whom still remembered vividly how Europe had become a huge slaughter-house in the recent past, and must have been troubled by the memory of a son, a husband or a brother sacrificed to the callous political machinations of Burge and Lubin ( whether Lloyd George and Asquith were actually like Burge and Lubin is not important, the first condition of appreciating "The Gospel of the Brothers Bannabas" is the suspension of personal bias and looking at the world through the Shavian eyepiece. That such suspension is often not possible is an unavoidable risk of an artistic mode that has to depend heavily on the burlesque of contemporary themes ). The antics of Burge and Lubin seem macabre when they are measured against a norm that each member of the audience has in his mind. A serious limitation of the play is that an audience removed in time and space from the incidents burlesqued in the second part of the cycle can hardly relate it to a shattering experience that can justify the supersession of the human race. The experience is too slight for such a spiritual convulsion, and consequently Shaw's drastic remedy seems far from unavoidable.

Shaw wants his audience to believe that as a world classic, the cycle traces the path of man's upward evolution, and thus points to the similarity in scope and aim between *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*.<sup>16</sup> Part

III ("The Thing Happens") attempts to show the movement from one state of humanity to another, but in Part IV Shaw introduces a sea change : instead of showing the possibility of human evolution, he virtually drops man and announces a new creature which, though it has developed from man, is growing into a new species altogether. This species calls man "shortliver" and itself "longliver". Unlike dogmatic Christians, Shaw does not believe in the special theory of creation ; so the difference between the Guardians and men at this twilight Zone does not seem greater than the one between the Homo Erectus and the ape it was destined to supersede, but the common ancestry should not obscure the fact that the Guardians or longlivers are the early specimens of a distinctly non-human race, a distinction hinted at by Conrad Barnabas :

CONRAD Well, some authorities hold that the human race is a failure, and that a new form of life, better adapted to high civilization, will supersede us as we have superseded the ape and the elephant.

BURGE The Superman : eh ?

CONRAD No, some being quite different from us.

LUBIN Is that altogether desirable ?

FRANKLYN I fear so... You and I are not God's last word : God can still create. If you cannot do his work He will produce some being who can.<sup>17</sup>

Had the implication of this passage not been generally overlooked, it would have proved fruitful in removing certain misunderstandings. When Shaw shows his wise beings to be three centuries old he does something he does not admit in the preface : he creates a form of life which, inspite of his professed aim, is instinctively recongnized by the audience as non-human. No logical extremism about the power of the human will can bend the audience's faith enough to make it accept the fact that the tertiaries are men, for the audience instinctively feels their strangeness and their unnaturalness.

As an artist Shaw has to take into account the human impulse of the audience, without that commonality of feeling he cannot transmit his experience to the audience, since there can be no sharing of experience when the sharer refuses to accept that experience. That Shaw was keenly aware of the problem is clear from the words of the Elderly Gentleman :

I think that a man who is sane as long as he looks at the world through his own eyes is very likely to become a dangerous madman if he takes to looking at the world through telescopes and microscopes. Even when he is telling fairy stories about giants and dwarfs, the giants had better not be too big nor the dwarfs too small and too malicious.<sup>18</sup>

The Elderly Gentleman avoided the fate of a madman by insisting on looking at the world through his own, i.e. human, eyes though he had to pay the highest price for it. Had Shaw himself looked at the world through the eyes of the giants—the Ancients—*Back to Methuselah* would have been a dehumanized piece of science fiction, of which we have no dearth in the age of cheap faith in the divinity of technology. The true artist, even when his faith in man is shaken and despair stares him in the face, cannot forsake humanity, and is entirely dependent on it even for an experience that reveals its serious limitations. Thus "The Thing Happens" ostensibly shows the possibility of man's transformation, but actually portrays the gradual distancing of some of the characters from humanity. In Part IV the longlivers have carried the process still further, they are convinced that they are a different race from the shortlivers and stand in the same relation to them as man stands vis-a-vis the mastodon and the ape.

We receive a shock when Zoo threatens to kill the Elderly Gentleman for disturbing her mental poise. Our shocked moral sense soon realizes that Zoo is not making a moral or an immoral decision, she is treating man as a pest, a creature living outside the moral consideration of the longlivers. It is not the presence of evil in the Elderly Gentleman that tempts Zoo to take such a step, it is his power to vex her. It is a purely utilitarian decision like a

person's decision to kill a wasp because it stings. The following is not a conversation between two members of the same species, however differently constituted from each other, but between two beings who could just as well have belonged to two different planets :

The ELDERLY GENTLEMAN Am I to infer that you deny my right to live because I allowed myself——perhaps injudiciously—— to give you a slight scolding ?

ZOO Is it worth living for so short a time ? Are you any good to yourself ?

THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN [Stupent] well, upon my soul !

ZOO It is such a very little soul. You only encourage the sin of pride in us, and keep us looking down at you instead of up to something higher than ourselves.<sup>19</sup> ☺

This is probably what a normal girl would say to a sandfly in one of the fables if the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* were to write in the manner of Aesop. The race to which Iddy Toodles belongs is "incapable of being helped by us",<sup>20</sup> she submits: "We who live three hundred years can be of no use to you who live less than a hundred." She adds that the destiny of her race "is not to advise and govern you, but to supplant and supersede you. In that faith I now declare myself Colonizer and Exterminator."<sup>21</sup>

To avoid serious misunderstanding and concomitant misjudgment about the play, it is important to grasp that

though Zoo has not yet completely developed into a non-human being, she realizes that it is her destiny to be something entirely different from Joseph Popham Bolge Bluebin and when that destiny is realized Iddy Toodles must be exterminated along with the Envoy — the sheep must go along with the goat. As Zoo says: "what is the use of prolonging the agony? You would perish slowly in our presence, no matter what we did to preserve you."<sup>22</sup>

This distancing has gone much further in "As Far As thought Can Reach". The division between matter and spirit is absolute, and in seeking to live as pure spirits the Ancients have completely disowned their human inheritance. A horrified Strephon observes that the Ancients never touch one another because of their abhorrence of the human body. They have even ceased to be mammals: the breasts of the female of the species are flat and without milk. Though the words "man" and "woman" have not gone out of currency, the meaning of these terms certainly has. Our method of reproduction is referred to as pre-historic by Pygmalion, our ingestion of food as "horrible prehistoric methods of feeding", meat and grains and vegetables become "all sorts of unnatural and hideous foods"<sup>23</sup>, human excretion becomes as abhorrent as in *Gulliver's Travels*. The race has become oviparous. Their direct sense of life is so intolerant of all symbolic forms that the supreme masterpieces of art are equated with rag dolls.

Shaw seems to be in agreement with his critics that the fifth part of the cycle is the Shavian Utopia. It has been construed as Shaw's "Ode to Joy" which takes the reader "through the Valley of shadow to a Pisgah view beyond".<sup>24</sup> To St. John Ervine, who refused to be convinced, Shaw wrote :

Do you seriously think that you enjoyed that very clever letter in *The Times* the other day so little that you cannot conceive the Ancients living in a permanent ecstasy of the sort of enjoyment raised to powers of which we have no experience ? I can understand an Englishman being depressed by the Ancients, because the religion of the Englishman today, as the reviews of Methuselah show, is simply phallism, but you ought to know better.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Shaw the artist could possibly believe neither in his own rhetoric nor in the boast of the Ancient : " Infant: one moment of the ecstasy of life as we live it would strike you dead "<sup>26</sup> because like his audience Shaw lived on one side of the divide, the Ancients on the other. No common ground of experience and sympathy could exist between Shaw and the Ancients, and without this common ground all rhetoric sounds hollow.

It is useful in this connection to contrast the Ancients with Don Juan, the Shavian superman in *Man and Superman*. Juan reminded Anna that progress could be founded only on

Nature :

DON JUAN Nature, my dear lady, is what you call immoral. I blush for it, but I cannot help it. Nature is a pander, Time a wrecker, and Death a murderer. I have always preferred to stand up to those facts and build institutions on their recognition. <sup>27</sup>

We are also reminded of the Devil's warning against the pursuit of the superman to whom "men and women are a mere species... outside the moral world."<sup>28</sup> It is impossible not to recall the fact that while portraying Julius Caesar, who was for him the greatest man ever born, Shaw stressed those aspects of Caesar's character with which the audience could sympathize because he knew that as an artist "I can only imitate humanity as I know it."<sup>29</sup>

The man who knew that in "the first syllable of recorded time" we could find "Newton and Bushmen unable to count eleven, all alive and contemporaneous"<sup>30</sup> could not have seriously believed that much before we reach time's last syllable, the superman will in some respects resemble the fanatic anchorite fond of torturing the flesh, and in other respects will be like the common bird; for the Ancients in *Back to Methuselah* have chosen the egg shell instead of the mother's womb as their primeval resting place. It is difficult to believe that the pitiable creatures that are nearly deaf, dumb and blind—the Ancients are bored by

music and sculpture and have almost forgotten to talk— and are afraid to live lest life should interfere with their contemplation of the Absolute are Shaw's ideal beings. And though Shaw suggested to Ervine that the difference between an Ancient and a shortliver was the difference between Einstein and Reggie de Veulle carried a little further,<sup>31</sup> Einstein, who could live on Mozart and marvel at Gandhi, would have shuddered at the suggestion that he was a model of those desiccated creatures who have emptied their hearts of brotherhood and their breasts of the milk of human kindness.

All the talk about *Back to Methuselah* being a world classic is Shaw's red herring. As self-criticism the play is ruthless, for the Shavian impulse to run away from the fever of human emotions has come in for some savage treatment. Shaw's dream of the superman has ended in the nightmare of the anti-man, and yet Shaw shares the anti-man's perception of man, who is now symbolised by the automata manufactured by Pygmalion, who says that his dolls have all the reflexes and can respond to every stimulus. They can make love because their love is such a reflex. The male figure sees himself as Ozymandias, king of kings; the female sees herself as Cleopatra-Semiramis. With their reflexes they love and bite and posture tragically yet they are mischievous and deadly. The Life Force's experiment with man is like Pygmalion's with the automata. The automata behave

like Frankenstein's monster and kill Pygmalion. As the analogue of these creatures, mankind, which stands in the same relationship to the Life Force as the dolls to Pygmalion, is explicitly recognised by Shaw for the first time as evil. The following dialogue starts as parody but reveals the full measure of Shaw's existential despair :

THE MALE FIGURE Do you blame us for our human nature ?

THE FEMALE FIGURE We are flesh and blood and not angels.

THE MALE FIGURE Have you no hearts ?

ARJILLAX They are mad as well as mischievous May we not destroy them ?

STREPHON We abhor them.

THE NEWLY BORN We loathe them.

ECRASIA They are noisome.<sup>32</sup>

The history of Cain, Napoleon , Burge and Burge-Lubin —— the history of human society until the twentieth century —— is epitomized in the two automata. Yet Shaw finds no consolation in the creatures that supersede them. He uses the microscope and the telescope, they reveal one monstrous shape after another. But in order to be convincing Shaw's art must provide a normal image against which these distortions are measured, a screen where these random and broken images can be integrated. It is then that we realize that what holds the cycle together and keeps Shaw's

pessimism rooted to humanity is the fourth part, "The Tragedy of the Elderly Gentleman". It is this part which shows that the author of *Back to Methuselah* is the same man who once wrote : " The old demand for the incredible, the impossible, the superhuman...has fallen off, and the demand now is for heroes in whom we can recognize our own humanity ; and who... are heroic in the true human fashion ".<sup>33</sup> In the fourth part it is evident that Shaw knew as well as anyone else did that a Yahoo cannot write a book in which the Houyhnhnm is the hero.

The last part of the cycle cannot be understood without a proper understanding of "The Tragedy of the Elderly Gentleman." The fourth part explains why, inspite of Shaw's adulatory comments on the Ancients, the latter are so plainly repulsive. While a part of Shaw wanted to escape the human condition and find solace in pure abstractions, the artist in him rebelled against such a tendency. While the philosopher wanted to create a utopia in "As Far As Thought Can Reach", the artist, revolted by the cowardly flight from human emotions, subverted the philosopher's aim by creating a dystopia. Written at a time when *Heartbreak House* was being composed, *Back to Methuselah* was as much a reaction to the former as its development. In the last act of *Heartbreak House* Hector prophesied that either a new creation would come to supplant man or the heavens would fall and wipe mankind out. In *Back to Methuselah* the

distinction between the two possibilities has narrowed down : a new race has supplanted man and heaven has chosen the longlivers to wipe mankind out.

The play would have been much less shocking had the Ancients really been supermen, for in that case the inherent optimism would gloss over Shaw's moral horror at unregenerate man. Instead Shaw follows a strategy not very different from Swift's. Had Swift really believed that the horse is by nature's design superior to man, then *Gulliver's Travels* would have induced in his readers a mild religious exaltation instead of existential horror. Swift's tale is gripping because the Houyhnhnm represents the simple human principles that the Yahoo has forsaken. Similarly, in Shaw's play it is the incongruity between the destiny of the Ancients to replace men and their true nature which is so disturbing. In "The Tragedy of the Elderly Gentleman" the encounter between Iddy Toodles and Zoo replicates the one between Higgins and Eliza. Man's flawed and organic nature is posited against the diabolic efficiency of a completely mind-dominated creature. It also resembles the quarrel between Keeagan and Doyle in *John Bull's other Island*. Like the two earlier plays the present one moves towards the conclusion that efficiency and victory are always granted to the spiritually stunted.

There is nothing nobler in the whole cycle than the words of the Elderly Gentleman in the face of certain

extermination : "Humanly I pity you. Intellectually I despise you."<sup>34</sup> As we realize how richly the longlivers, who are now mere hyphens between the human and the non-human forms of life, deserve both, in a flash it dawns on us that the only point of view available to the author and his audience is the human point of view. ©

This part follows the paradigm of Greek tragedy. The Guardians play the part of the Greek Gods ( even the visit to the Delphic oracle is parodied ), the huge asymmetry of power between the longlivers and the shortlivers virtually keeps the former beyond the pale of human judgement. The Elderly Gentleman challenges the superiority of the longlivers as Prometheus challenges the basis of authority of the tyrannical Zeus, but it is man ( the shortliver ) who is called upon to justify his existence and it is he who, like the Titan, occupies the foreground of our attention—— we are told that the conflict between the two scales of value will lead to the annihilation of the human race. Iddy Toodles, like Prometheus, must pay for the impingement of the principle of the longlivers. What is important here is that the best of the race must pay for the sins of others. The Envoy, like his predecessor, goes back to his country to lie about the oracle and the bloodthirsty emperor of Turania gets away with a few genuflections : it is the Elderly Gentleman who dies. His death is the result of his free choice, it is an end he chooses in an attempt to uphold

his integrity. With a rude shock the Eldery Gentleman learns that all these years he has been living among Yahoos. In contrast the supplanting race suddenly appears Godlike to him, yet his last action calls for a brief explanation. Unlike Gulliver he does not consider himself a Yahoo or beg the Houyhnhnms to keep him as their servant ; he has not yet abandoned the idea that man is a living soul, the temple of the Holy Ghost. His death becomes a sacerdotal rite to purify the temple that the Envoy and his party have defiled. He thus takes upon himself the responsibility of proving that man is more than incinerable hydrocarbon. Constantly reminded by his tormentor that death reduces his very brief life to a few meaningless syllables he replies what an old and blind Oedipus waiting for his end would have replied to the powerful and immortal gods, had they, in a comparable act of peevishness, stepped out of their Olympian heights to pester him :

I accept my threescore and ten years. If they are filled with usefulness, with justice, with mercy, with good-will : if they are the life-time of a soul that never loses its honor and a brain that never loses its eagerness, they are enough for me, because these things are infinite and eternal, and can make ten of my years as long as thirty of yours.<sup>35</sup>

That is all that a man can hope for. His hours on earth are

a brief spell of infirm glory. He cannot last for ever like a god or a stone, and his richest triumphs — his justice, his mercy, his good-will——go to his grave with him. But during their all-too-brief reign these qualities enable him to pity, as the Elderly Gentleman pities, a god or a stone or even a vortex.

Among the things satirized in the play must surely be included Shaw's own endless optimism. Writing during the war with so much devastation behind him and the possibility of the ice age ahead, he must have smiled wryly at a lecture he had delivered just a few years ago in which he had said: "By higher and higher organization man must become superman and super-superman and so on." In the same speech he continued :

There need be no end. There is no reason why the process should ever stop, since it has proceeded so far. But it must achieve on its infinite way the production of some being, some person if you like, who will be strong and wise, with a mind capable of comprehending the whole universe and with powers capable of executing its entire will —— in other words, an omnipotent and benevolent God. <sup>36</sup>

What could be a more telling evidence of the souring of that dream than the fact that the "gods" compete with the men in noxiousness ?

Whatever may be said of the preface, the play is not the work of a timid sentimentalist. The truth is that in the ultimate analysis Shaw finds the human condition absurd in the existential sense, since man fails to play the role of the hero in the magnificent cosmic comedy stretching over eons, but as a human being and artist Shaw cannot pin his faith on the beings who are going to lord it over in the post-human universe. The play may have begun as a quest for hope but the hope remains elusive to the end; the fact that the play ends with a dreariness that can be recognized by the audience as death-in-life apparently tends to justify the conclusion that Shaw's despair is bottomless. Yet the absurd situation can be saved from despair by investing it with human as opposed to teleological significance. The only kind of action that goes beyond despair depends on man's keen awareness of his finiteness and the relative vastness of the cosmic forces, and his knowledge that the triumph of the former over the latter can only be symbolic. *Back to Methuselah* contains a glimmer of hope, for it is witness to the artist's faith that in an indifferent universe man can rescue his fate from absurd inconsequentiality and himself from despair through suffering. The alternative to despair is the freedom to choose the tragic.<sup>37</sup>

Chapter 12 : Notes and References

1. G.K Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, p.286.
2. CP V , p.703.
3. CP V , p.692.
4. Maurice Valency dismisses the play as "an illustrated lecture on Creative Evolution." Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet*, p.354. He sees the Ancients as Shaw's ideal beings. Ibid., p.358. A.M.Gibbs is in broad agreement with him. Gibbs , *The Art and Mind of Shaw*, p.214. Lawrence Langner says, " I feel that G.B.S. may have overreached himself by placing too much faith in the power of the mind and too little in the power of human intuition and emotion." Lawrence Langner, *G.B.S and the Lunatic*, p.33. For similar response see T.F. Evans (ed.), *Shaw : the Critical Heritage*, pp. 259-273.
5. Chesterton , op. cit., p. 290. Chesterton aptly comments that "the philosopher is not trying to get rid of the troubles of men, he is trying to get rid of men because they are the troubles of the philosopher." Ibid.
6. CP V, pp. 307-308.
7. Ibid., p. 260.
8. Ibid., p. 269.
9. Ibid., p. 267.
10. Ibid., p. 294.
11. Ibid., p. 333.

12. Ibid., p. 348.

13. Ibid., p. 363. Although Shaw evidently sees Cain as the prototype of Napoleon, Burge and Lubin, he is significantly different from them and cannot be easily fitted into the Platonic scheme. See *infra*.

14. It is possible to extricate Shaw from the difficulty by arguing that Cain is not the sovereign author of evil, he himself is the mistake of his author, the Life Force. That does not seem to me a satisfactory explanation because Shaw's theory of the Life Force compels him to assume that evil is the result of accident or folly. Thus the croup in *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet* is an accident, the burning of Joan in *Saint Joan* is the result of the stupidity of men who are well-intentioned. Even the Emperor of Turania's power of mischief is created by his romanticism, which is the inability to understand reality. Cain is fundamentally different, he is a Nietzschean before Nietzsche, but he sees through the consequences of his actions. To say that he is an error of the Life Force is tantamount to pushing the prime term further up instead of facing it.

15. Margey M. Morgan, "*Back to Methuselah* : The Poet and the city", R.J.Kauffman ed. *G.B. Shaw : a Collection of Critical Essays* , p. 140.

16. CP V , p. 338.

17. Ibid., p. 430.

18. Ibid., p. 515.

19. Ibid., p. 525.
20. Ibid., p. 526.
21. Ibid., p. 527.
22. Ibid., p. 528.
23. Ibid., p. 597.
24. Louis Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p 186, p. 190.
25. Letter to St. John Ervine, quoted in St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw : His Life, Works and Friends*, p. 491.
26. CP V , p. 567.
27. CP II , p. 677.
28. Ibid., p. 687.
29. Ibid., p. 298.
30. Ibid., p. 297.
31. Op.Cit.
32. CP V , p. 607.
33. CP II, p. 307.
34. CP V , p. 512.
35. Ibid., p. 551.
36. quoted in Stanley Weintraub , *Journey to Heartbreak* p. 294.
37. It is important to distinguish the artist's faith from that of the philosopher. The anti-humanism which Shaw perceives in himself and fights is not absent in the play. That is why it is so uneven artistically. Shaw never succeeded in overcoming his ambivalence and *The life of the Ancients* is idealised in *Farfetched Fables*. I have tried to

show that although Shaw meant the play to be the keystone of his cosmic comedy, his artistic integrity revolted against his design. In the concluding chapter I shall try to show the other side of *Back to Methuselah*, the side that Shaw found conducive to his intellectual aspirations.

## Chapter 13

### *The Vision of Judgement : The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*

"My present business is rather to reveal the importance of killing as a necessary department of political and personal activity..."

Shaw, *Everybody's Political What's What* ?

There is not even a tiny ray of hope to break the darkness descending upon Shaw's last plays. The fate of man is sealed. As a doomed animal he is destined to follow the mastodon and the dinosaur. Though the picture painted in Shaw's tracts and essays is more hopeful<sup>1</sup> and man's fallen state is attributed to his circumstances, the unmistakable picture that we have of him in the plays is that of Frankenstein's monster : he is a hideous experimental error of the Life Force, which, after wiping man out, must start with a clean slate.

Superficially *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* is a far cry from such despair : it seems to be a formless and focusless fantasy, an inconsequential exercise in silliness<sup>2</sup>, even the work of "a dignified old monkey throwing coco-nuts at the public in pure devilment".<sup>3</sup> That such remarks could be made about a vision as terrible as the one found in the last part of the *Methuselah* cycle is vindication of Shaw's choice of the form of the extravaganza, for he could not have been unaware that the extreme anti-humanistic stand taken in the play would have been

unbearable to an audience composed entirely of the human species.

The play is essentially as pessimistic as *On the Rocks*, of which it is the logical culmination, and the solution offered — for unlike *On the Rocks* it does offer a solution — is much more terrifying than Old Hipney's praise of dictators.

In this play Shaw stretches the limit of traditional extravaganza. From Expressionism, and from Strindberg, the greatest of the Expressionists, he derived the form — a form that could objectify and give substance to thoughts, dreams, desires and fantasies. A realistic portrayal of the action, about which he is in dead earnest, would make the play look like a Gothic horror story with the scale of horror magnified to the utmost degree by the morbidity of imagination. Only the freewheeling nature of fantasy could liberate the action from an emotive association which is inseparable from it in life or in a life-like presentation of the action. In dispensing with verisimilitude, in introducing characters who are ideas and abstractions, in mixing the profane and the sacred in his treatment of divine personages, and in representing an action which is immediately recognized as impossible in a realistic sense, Shaw is following Strindberg, who said of *A Dream Play* :

Anything can happen, everything is possible and plausible. Time and space do not exist. Upon an insignificant background of real life events the imagination spins, and weaves new patterns : a blend of memories, experiences, pure inventions, absurdities and improvisations...The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense,

fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all : that of the dreamer.<sup>4</sup> 3

Shaw owes more than the dramatic technique to Shindberg's play. *A Dream Play* depends for its plot on an ancient Indian fable.<sup>5</sup> Though *The Simpleton* does not go so far, it creates an Indian ambience, and the Indian names of the characters, as we shall shortly see, are significant. Shaw probably borrowed the name Maya from *A Dream Play* rather than directly from an Indian source.<sup>6</sup> Even the mode of execution on the Day of Judgement is almost certainly borrowed from *The Ghost Sonata*.<sup>7</sup>

*Man and Superman*, the first play to reveal Shaw's disillusionment with the human race, was written during the Boer War, *Heartbreak House* was written during the First World War, the pessimism of *Back to Methuselah* was also the fruit of the same war. In *The Simpleton* Shaw attempts to overcome his pessimism in a novel way. To understand that attempt one must understand Shaw's compulsions behind the choice of an exotic setting and his use of oriental characters in the play.

What has passed as the history of the world has largely been the record of the exploits of the acquisitive and power-hungry men produced by the culture of the West. If man has been perverted by circumstances — i.e. if he is not basically evil, as Shaw argues in *Everybody's Political What's What?*<sup>8</sup> — then the alternative and unrealized history must begin with an alternative culture, a different kind of education, and a different set of circumstances. The fact that in his later works the positive characters are women or non-Western men stems not

from an inverted sexism or racism, but from a genuine attempt to separate the basic nature of man from the accretions of a culture that has proved disastrous. The building blocks of the new civilization are people who have been at the receiving end of the culture of domination. The marriage of East and West and Pra's "dream of founding a millennial world culture"<sup>9</sup> has to be seen in this light. *On the Rocks* had ended despairingly, but Shaw was not yet prepared to abandon his dream. *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* is another quest for the consoling belief that all is not lost for the human race.

And yet Shaw can find no hope. Joan and Prola, products of two entirely different cultures, face a startlingly similar fate. As an artist Shaw can evidently not believe that the failure of man is merely the function of the failure of his culture.

Shaw dramatises through an allegory the three-fold Platonic division of the soul. In the *Republic* Plato sees virtue as the function of true knowledge, which is accessible only to the rational part of the soul. Like Shaw Plato saw the ship of the State being driven to the rocks by a deaf and shortsighted captain and ignorant sailors. He had seen Athens kissing the dust under the onslaught of Sparta in 405 B.C. and later he saw Athens under the restored democracy executing, in its terrible ignorance, its noblest citizen, Socrates.<sup>10</sup> In a just society, i.e. in a society not foundering on the rocks, true knowledge must reign over illusion, and this is only possible if the persons in whom the spirited or the appetitive elements dominate voluntarily submit to the rule of the guardians, in whom alone the rational faculty is

predominant.<sup>11</sup>

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In Shaw's play Prola is the worthy servant of the Life Force; she becomes almost indistinguishable from the Lilith of *Back to Methuselah*: her passion for world betterment springs from true knowledge, which enables her to make the aims of the Life Force her own. Maya is the embodiment of illusion.<sup>12</sup> How closely Shaw follows the Platonic schemata can be judged from the fact that Maya, Vashti, Janga and Kanchin, after they vanish, are called "Love, Pride, Heroism and Empire", qualities that correspond exactly to the appetitive and spirited elements of the soul according to the *Republic*, but the relationship between these elements and the rational element in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* is exactly the reverse of that which is to be expected in the ideal State of Plato.<sup>13</sup>

In a passage of bitter irony that echoes the fate of Joan (though in the reverse order), Vashti, Maya, Kanchin and Janga seek to make a goddess of Prola, and when she protests, they seek to kill her :

VASHTI Prola is she who decides.

MAYA Prola is she who unites.

VASHTI Prola is she who knows.

MAYA No one can withstand Prola.

PROLA Be quiet, you two. You shall not make an idol of me.

KANCHIN We shall - make you Empress of the Isles.

JANGA Prola the First.

VASHTI Homage, Prola.

KANCHIN Obedience, Prola.

JANGA Absolute rule, Prola.<sup>14</sup>

We are thus reminded that the burning of Joan and her canonization were not two acts but one : the epilogue of *Saint Joan* robbed us of the comfort of catharsis to remind us that those who knelt before the maid to worship her would not hesitate to burn her again if she were to commit the indiscretion of returning to life. Time, place and culture change, but history repeats the story of medieval France in a timeless pacific island. All visionaries are destined to die with the cry : "O God that madest this beautiful world , when will it be ready to receive thy saints ? How long, O Lord, how long ?"

There was a time when Shaw believed that the exceptional man was *avant-garde*, that in his revolt against conventionality he stayed ahead of his time and his ideas were a tow that pulled the sluggish world in his direction. The relation between the advanced person and the conventional one was the relationship between the teacher and the pupil and Shaw's comedy hinged on the conversion of the latter. But in *Man and Superman* he realised for the first time that the lifeline between the advanced person and the average man might have snapped; with the epilogue of *Saint Joan* comes the despairing awareness that there is no necessary connexion between the servant of the Life Force and progress. The last plays show that in the actual world the ideal world is inverted. In Plato's language one can say that the power of illusion triumphs, the appetitive and the spirited elements thwart the reign of rationality and knowledge. At the end of *The Simpleton* Prola can

only hope, whereas Maya can ensure that the hope remains empty.

Thus *The Simpleton* repeats the pattern of *Saint Joan* and *On the Rocks*, but it seeks to go beyond the baffled pessimism of *On the Rocks* with a terrible programme couched in a tone of deceptive frivolity.

Perhaps it is Shaw's bathetic treatment of the Judgement Day theme that has provoked the colourful description of him as a venerable monkey. Nothing is less conducive to awe than the vision of Judgement depicted in the play. The exterminating angel of the Revelation only produces the deflating illusion of a curiosity and a mechanical contraption (an albatross and an aeroplane). Some fun is extracted by the not very original device of bringing about an encounter between the angel and the British Parliament, and making ministers and Members of Parliament resort to Privilege Motions on the tacit assumption that even God and the angels are not immune from laws relating to the contempt of Parliament.

On the whole the charge of frivolity or foolishness shows that Shaw succeeds in his strategy of warding off the audience's emotional revulsion and in disguising the most sinister overtones behind apparently irresponsible jokes. The annihilation of the unfit, instead of striking terror in the hearts of the audience, provides them with the experience of witnessing a conjurer doing a disappearance trick.<sup>15</sup>

This enables Shaw to present a highly emotive issue with the impersonality of a mathematical theorem : dodging past the audience's resistance he presents the extreme solution to bring to heel the recalcitrant human race. His success is a triumph of

style over substance. A serious presentation of the solution would certainly rouse the audience's hostility, for however funnily the thing happens in the play, Shaw is seriously arguing a singularly unfunny case — a case for the liquidation of people he considers unsuitable for life. Thus he can preface *On the Rocks* with the following remarks :

That killing is a necessity is beyond question by any thoughtful person. Unless rabbits and deer and rats and foxes are killed, or "kept down" as we put it, mankind must perish...Killing can be cruelly or kindly done; and the deliberate choice of cruel ways, and their organisation as popular pleasures is sinful, but the sin is in the cruelty and the enjoyment of it not in the killing.<sup>16</sup>

The law that applies to rats and foxes also applies to the man who is a drag on civilization : "The political necessity of killing him is precisely like that for killing the cobra or the tiger : he is so ferocious and unscrupulous that if his neighbours do not kill him he will kill or ruin his neighbours..."<sup>17</sup>

Shaw argues in the preface that every society has to marginalise or eliminate dangerous non-conformists, that every system is armed to prevent its own liquidation. But the all-important point that he does not mention is the fact that the disagreement about killing is not so much on general principles, as on their application. Who is to decide whether a person is unsuitable for life ? Outside a few obvious cases which are not controversial, is it possible to judge a man's fitness for life ?

Human reason cannot objectively determine whether a person is a dangerous pest or a genius, for as Jesus tells Pilate in the preface to *On the Rocks* :

Opinion is a dead thing and impulse a live thing...If it is your will to crucify me, I can find you a dozen reasons for doing so; and your police can supply you with a hundred facts to support the reason. If it is your will to spare me I can find you just as many reasons for that; and my disciples will supply you with more facts than you will have time or patience to listen to. That is why your lawyers can plead as well for one side as another...<sup>18</sup>

Yet neither the knowledge that the subjective will treacherously takes on the disguise of objective reason nor the consideration that in their choice of persons to be liquidated men are liable to be more fallible than God held Shaw back from proposing the final solution. Of course there is a substantial difference between comically liquidating people in a farcical piece and seriously pressing for a programme of butchery, but the difference was not very great in Shaw's case, for it is clear from the introduction to the play that he did not use farce as a substitute for action but to make the programme of the Tcheka, the dreaded Soviet secret police, look reasonable and moral; and he persisted with his preference for such dangerous solutions : "Probably we do not persecute half enough either at home or abroad. Our toleration of idleness and parasitism is indefensible."<sup>19</sup>

He looked forward to the destruction of idlers and parasites, and the list of persons belonging to this class, according to the play, is quite long and includes husbands and fathers, popular leaders of fashion, famous beauties, novel-readers, Parliamentarians and a substantial part of the Cabinet. The import of a fantasy in which divine judgement comes down heavily on the heads of millions is less than funny when we realise that when Hitler and Stalin were playing the parts of the exterminating angels in real life, Shaw was not only unfazed but came out in support of the liquidation programmes.<sup>20</sup> His play is kept strictly within comic bounds through technical devices, but what it stands for is far from comic. In spite of his distaste for the tribal morality Shaw returns in this play to the world of the Old Testament — his God, the Life Force, created the human race to realise a certain ideal, but things have come to such a pass that the aim cannot be realised without destroying a large part, perhaps the majority, of mankind. The world as seen through Shaw's eyes needed another deluge with only the deserving few sheltered in Noah's Ark, and Shaw approved of the deluge that was being let loose by Hitler and Stalin even as the play was being written. The garden needed weeding, and at the end of such weeding a few trees would be left standing amidst the desolation. Shaw's play established a psychic bond between art and history, a bond that bound him together, at that moment of history at least, with the great dictators.

## Chapter 13 : Notes and References

1. For instance, even during this period of unmitigated despair Shaw takes the Duke of Wellington to task for lacking "foresight and faith in the possibility of changing human nature, by improving its circumstances." *Everybody's Political What's What ?*, p. 323.
2. Edmund Wilson says that it is the only play of Shaw's that can be called silly. See Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers*, p. 186.
3. These were the comments of a New York critic as reported by Shaw. See CP VI, p. 745.
4. August Strindberg, *Five Plays*. Translated by Harry G. Carlson, p. 205.
5. Strindberg, of course, does not stick to Indian mythology but freely improvises to create a private myth.
6. Shaw was one of the earliest British admirers of Strindberg, a fact made explicit in the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman*. He donated the entire sum of the Nobel Prize to finance the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation. The first task of the Foundation was the translation into English four of Strindberg's plays. See St. John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw : His Life, Work and Friends*. p. 505.
7. See note 15.
8. Op. cit.
9. CP VI, p.807 Margery Morgan suggests that the cross-fertilization of cultures in the Unexpected Isles may be related

to the career of Shaw's friend and former fellow-socialist; Annie Besant, who went to India to found the Theosophical Society. Iddy must have been modelled, at least partly, after C.W. Leadbeater, an English curate who left the curacy to join the Society. Jiddu Krishnamurthy, whom the Society projected as the reincarnated Christ, had visited Shaw on board the ship in Bombay in January 1933, a few months before the play was written. See Margery Morgan, *The Shawian Playground*, pp. 293-94.

10. The image of the ship, the implicit metaphor in almost all of Shaw's political plays and the explicit central metaphor in *Heartbreak House* and *On the Rocks*, is borrowed from Plato. See the *Republic*, Translated by B. Jowett, Book VI, 396 b.

11. Plato does not use the word "reason" in the modern sense, Plato's "reason" is not opposed to "passion", but includes the passion of intellect. This is important in grasping Shaw's Platonism, because we have seen that early in his career Shaw eschewed faith in reason, as the term is understood today.

12. Shaw juggles with the various connotations of Maya. In sanskrit "Maya" means phenomenon or illusion. According to the Vedanta, the diversity of the world is an illusion; once the veil of illusion is removed, the distinction between the Self and the Absolute vanishes. Shaw was probably not unaware of this since Maya says to Iddy : "Vashti and Maya are one : you cannot love me if you do not love Vashti : you cannot die for me without dying for Vashti." CP VI, p. 802.

The non-dualism of the Vedantic philosophy, however, does

not fit into Shaw's scheme, and soon he settles for the other meaning of the word. "Maya" is also "unreal" or "false". Iddy thinks that Maya is a goddess, or an idol. When Maya is annihilated towards the end of the play, the etymology of her name along with her fate assumes a strong Biblical overtone, for the destruction of false gods is a cardinal injunction in Mosaic law.

13. Even in his pessimism Shaw approximates Plato, for whom the gap between the ideal State and possible ones keeps on increasing through the pages of the *Republic*. In book V he is hopeful of its realization in Greece. The hope weakens a little in book VI until in Book IX it exists only in heaven and on earth it can only be found in men's hearts.

14. CP VI, p. B15.

15. The manner in which Maya, Vashti, Kanchin and Janga vanish is so strongly reminiscent of Strindberg that it seems almost certain that Shaw has consciously borrowed the incident from *The Ghost Sonata* in which Iddy says : " I held Maya in my arms. She promised to endure for ever; and suddenly there was nothing in my arms." CP VI, p. 382.

Cf. the following passage from *The Ghost Sonata* :

STUDENT Then I noticed a crack in the wall, and heard the floorboards breaking. I ran forward and snatched up a child who was walking under the wall...The next moment the house collapsed...I was rescued, but in my arms, where I thought I held the child, there was nothing...

August Strindberg, *Five Plays*. Translated by Harry G. Carlson,

pp. 271-72.

16. CP VI, pp. 574-75.

17. Ibid., p. 576.

18. Ibid., pp. 618-19.

19. *Everybody's Political What's What*?, p. 151.

20. The subject is discussed in the next chapter.

**Comedy as Upology : Geneva**

"A very remarkable, very able man... and on most subjects very sane"      Shaw on Hitler

*Geneva* is as close to an artist's recantation for past acts of heresy as we are likely to see. The fact that it was probably written in response to Gilbert Murray's *Aristophanes*, published in 1933 and dedicated to Shaw, merely makes Shaw's self-betrayal more pathetic.<sup>1</sup>

In the introduction to his study Murray expressed his longing for the return of the spirit of Aristophanes : he thought that Aristophanes would have acted as the much needed antidote to the jingoistic nationalism, xenophobia and illiberalism of Europe that had shot up to fever pitch. In 1933 it was still possible , though difficult , to pin one's hopes on sanity, to trust the curative, or rather prophylactic, quality of laughter, to believe that Hitler and Mussolini were Bergsonian monsters whom the bludgeon of laughter could beat back into natural human shape. A world that had not heard of Auschwitz could well have been excused for conceiving Hitler as an upstart rabble-rouser and the Jew as the bee in his bonnet. Such a world could conceivably see Mussolini as an actor of melodrama continually spewing

out half-digested chunks of Hegel and Nietzsche : according to such an optimistic vision an encounter between the two could logically end in only one possible manner, as it did in Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, with each hurling a chockful of pudding at the other's face. The years between 1933 and 1945, or even between 1938 ——— when the play was first presented at the Malvern Festival——— and 1945 have made nonsense of the calendar, because twelve thousand years rather than merely twelve accurately expresses the spiritual gap between the two ages. Surely the nature of man either changed during this period, or a different species came into existence at this time.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment may have served to mould the opinions of all subsequent evolutionists from Comte to Bergson and may have even survived the trauma of the First World War without being wholly discredited, but the moment the members of a certain race, for the mere crime of being born into it, became a raw material, a quantity of lard, that went into the manufacture of soap to be used by a "superior race", all the metaphysical theories regarding human nature that had sprung up in the last two centuries were exposed as woefully inadequate, if not outright delusions. It is significant that when Chaplin made his film, Hitler was perceived as an upstart in Europe. It is unlikely that as a Jew Chaplin could have made *The Great Dictator* had he known of the death camps.

The most important thing about Geneva is that it was as late as 1947 when the play received its final form. An additional act was furnished during the final revision for the Standard Edition. The great popularity of the play during the 1938-39 run in London has best been explained by Margery Morgan.<sup>2</sup> Civilized men are not unlike primitive savages in their faith in the efficacy of magic. In the absence of effective power of intervention, people in all ages have sought to ward off danger by burning the effigy of the adversary.

People knew even before Bergson that in farce and lampoon the characters stalking the stage are but effigies of their real selves and laughter is the fire. When comedy centres on a historical situation that evokes terror rather than laughter ( as it does in Aristophanes and in Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* ) the treatment may be the artist's route of escape :the only weapon left to a man of talent otherwise powerless is his imagination with which he can turn reality over and give it a less threatening shape, but when the work precedes the climax ——— or nadir ——— of a historical catastrophe ( as Chaplin's film or the earlier versions of Shaw's play did ) probably it is also prompted by the artist's faith that comedy can act as a prophylactic against the ultimate brutalization of society. When Gilbert Murray longed for the return of Aristophanes, he hoped that the pacifist Greek would succeed in purging people's overheated

passions and in restoring their sanity.

In 1938 , when all the facts were not known, Geneva was not hopelessly out of date, though it was evident that Shaw, then an old and tired man, had chosen to put up the shutters to escape his disturbing vision. The author of *Man and Superman*, the man who had seen more clearly than anyone else the hollowness of the naive faith of Watsonian behaviourists in the panacea of education, now chose to be a repentant sinner. After the war had ended and the facts came to light, the alibi of such touching simplicity became untenable. The world, or that part of it which was not drowned in the bloodbath, came to learn of insults that no tongue could utter, of elaborately engineered horrors that would make the febrile imagination of an Edgar Allan Poe seem phlegmatic in comparison. And yet in Shaw's play the Battlers and the Bombardones remain frozen in their postures. Every character is a caricature, and the good-humoured Shavian chuckle can almost be heard through the even-handed satire that makes no qualitative difference between different shades of folly. The widow of the late President of the Republic of Earthly Paradise approaching the League to save her country from blood-feuds and obligatory revenge, while asserting in the same breath that she is honour-bound to seek revenge, is not more absurd than the hysterical English bishop who, like the Bergsonian puppet, repeatedly slides on the floor at the culture shock

he receives from the Russian Commissar. And Begonia Brown, for whom Camberwell is the centre of the universe, and her light-headed Billikins suffer from the same kind of deficiency as the rather tender-hearted Battler whose one bee in the bonnet is the Jewish question—they all lack the right kind of education. The ambience and the flavour bring to mind the sportive world of J.M. Barrie and P.G. Wodehouse and Shaw's own potboiler, *Fanny's First Play*. The treatment of the dictators also remind us of Roman comedy—the petulant Battler who begins to sob at the first sign of crisis, the conceited Bombardone and the snobbish Flanco are little more than so many examples of the *miles gloriosus*.

Shaw's ambivalence was exposed by Lawrence Langner's letter to him in which Langner accused Shaw of whitewashing the dictators and portraying the Jew as a noxious character: "I do not believe that you will want future generations of Jew-baiters to quote you as part authority for a program of torturing, starving and driving to suicide of Jews all over the world."<sup>3</sup>

In Shaw's defence it can be argued that in much of modern drama the aggressor and the victim are not separated by the clearly demarcated line of morality. For example Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and John Arden's *Live Like Pigs* tantalise the reader with possibilities of simple moral choices but end up by making such choices impossible even between victim and aggressor. The process goes even

further in the plays of Peter Barnes, since plays like *Bewitched* and *Laughter* reveal a symbiotic relationship between the predator and his prey and reveal that tyranny is made possible by the collusion of the sufferer.<sup>4</sup>

These plays are a part of a dramatic tradition that dates back to *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*, plays in which melodramatic moral patterns are created only to expose their inadequacy. Though *Geneva* superficially seems to belong to the same tradition, it is actually the very opposite of such plays, because Pinter, Arden, Barnes and the Shaw of *Mrs Warren's Profession* first present a facade of reality, then explore it further and discover unexpected angles, forcing the audience, in the process, to discard stock responses in order to get attuned to a more complex reality. They assault simplistic moral positions, not morality itself. If these plays show that the apparently level ground is full of unexpected bumps and diversions, *Geneva* starts by levelling the moral ground.

To understand Shaw's compulsions one must go behind *Geneva* and examine the politics behind the play. Shaw's faith in democracy was always questionable, for the faith in democracy presupposes the faith in the judgment of the common man. We have the evidence of the novels that the common man is only marginally more intelligent than the common sheep, and the earliest of the Shavian messiahs, Sidney Trefusis, is unable to decide what is more

desirable—the redemption or the extinction of the common man. The gains of democracy are laughed at in the non-dramatic portion of *Man and Superman* and *Undershaft* is closer to the spirit of Fascism than to that of democracy.

However the messianic strain is restrained by conflicting tendencies in the plays. The internal check weakened considerably in the years following the First World War, and Shaw's position came closer to that of Trefusis. In *On the Rocks* the voice of the author becomes indistinguishable from that of old Hipney when the latter says:

I am for every Napoleon or Mussolini or Lenin that has the stuff in him to take both the people and the spoilers and oppressors by the scruffs of their silly necks and just sling them into the way they should go with as many kicks as may be needful to make a thorough job of it.<sup>5</sup>

How is this increasing stridency of tone to be explained? I believe that the cause should not be sought in any single factor. The Boer war, during which he wrote *Man and Superman*, apparently corroborated Shaw's lack of faith in mankind. The First World War left him completely shaken, for he saw that no one who really mattered did anything to prevent an entirely avoidable bloodbath. He was also unnerved by the fact that his own sensible suggestions

provoked vituperation even from people he considered his friends, and his critics unashamedly chose the occasion to bare their fangs on him. The treaty of Versailles convinced him that no horror and no debauchery were enough to dissuade politicians from petty politicking in the name of statecraft.

It is also possible that Shaw nursed an unconscious desire to be proved right as a prophet of doom to get even with his critics. But while the horrific experience of the war was probably responsible for the hardening of his attitudes, it did not spawn these attitudes, since his mistrust of the common man's sanity, his scepticism of democracy and even a sense of paranoia were clearly evident in the works of his nonage — his novels.<sup>6</sup>

When Mussolini and Hitler seemed to go from strength to strength and Stalin completed his stranglehold on Soviet Russia, Shaw, far from being apprehensive, decided to celebrate such occasions. The admiration for dictatorship and denunciation of democracy became such a regular feature of his speeches and articles that one feels that Edmund Wilson was entirely justified in proclaiming: "In his political utterances since the war, it is hardly too much to say that Bernard Shaw has behaved like a jackass."<sup>7</sup> Shaw wholeheartedly agreed with "Signor Mussolini that liberty... is a sham; that oppositions as such cannot be tolerated in modern public business any more than they would in a private

business."<sup>8</sup> "With inspired precision," shaw exclaimed, "he [Mussolini] denounced liberty as a putrefying corpse."<sup>9</sup> The suppression of the constitution in Italy and Spain earned his unstinted praise :

These repudiations of constitutionalism in Spain and Italy have been made, not to effect any definite social change, but because the Spanish and Italian governments had become so unbearably inefficient that the handiest way to restore public order was for some sufficiently energetic individuals to take the law in their own hands and just break people's heads if they could not behave themselves.<sup>10</sup>

When the dictators broke people's heads Shaw generally blamed the people for failing to behave themselves and heaped ridicule on democrats while praising the dictators for suppressing the doctrinaires of liberty :

Mussolini , now Il Duce, never even looked round : he was busy sweeping up the elected municipalities, and replacing them with efficient commissioners of his own choice, who had to do their job or get out.<sup>11</sup>

The suppression of elected bodies became highly desirable acts because Shaw, the champion of efficiency, believed that only by humbugging [ the common man ] to the top of his

bent can he be governed at all. It has therefore always been necessary to humbug him more or less ; but to the extent to which he has been able to make Parliament really representative of him his enfranchisement has made democracy impossible.<sup>12</sup>

The dictators of course were willing to oblige Shaw with various forms of "democracy" in which the common people would be humbugged, robbed of their franchise, and have their heads broken for their own good but those obtuse people who were so dull as not to see that "adult suffrage kills [ democracy ] dead"<sup>13</sup> and insisted on civil and political rights got a considerably smaller portion of Shaw's sympathy. For instance when Dr Friedrich Adler, a leader of the Austrian Labour Party, disputed Shaw's claim that Mussolini kicked constitutional rights out of his way "to get public business done diligently for the public benefit",<sup>14</sup> Shaw replied :

Are we to give [ Mussolini ] credit for his work and admit its necessity and the hopeless failure of our soi-disant Socialists, Syndicalists, Communists, Anarchists... to achieve it or even to understand it or are we to go on shrieking that the murder of liberty and Matteotti is trampling Italy underfoot....?<sup>15</sup>

Shaw felt that it was unwise to shriek over the murder of Matteotti, the rape of liberty, the administration of castor

oil to political opponents or the invasion of Abyssinia because Mussolini was doing what he was doing for the benefit of the public. Nauseated at the defence of the dictator, the famous Italian historian Gaetano Salvemini wrote in the *Manchester Guardian* on 19th September, 1927, that "Kate has at long last met her Petruchio" :

I do not reproach Mr Shaw with his ignorance of Italian affairs. I only intend to point out his levity in delivering judgment about matters of which he is wholly ignorant, and his callous ridicule of hardships and sufferings which his intelligence ought to understand even if his moral sensitivity is unequal to appreciating them.<sup>16</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* commented in its editorial:

What is odd to us is that he should seem to make light of the destruction of free speech, of perjury and illegality in law courts, of personal violence and unchecked cruelty. One may readily conclude the need of controlling the right of private property in the interests of the community and still regard it as a high duty to safeguard these personal rights for which men of many parties and many nationalities have struggled in the past and still must struggle today.<sup>17</sup>

To anyone following the argument dispassionately today

it is obvious that both Salvemini and the editorial of the *Manchester Guardian* were unanswerable, and Richard Nickson's attempt to absolve Shaw does not quite succeed.<sup>18</sup> The fact remains that though Shaw may have been ignorant of many gory details, in broad outlines he knew the nature of the Fascist regime, its naked attack on life and liberty. He did not challenge the evidence provided by Adler, Salvemini and others, he accepted them as par for the course because he was convinced that men could not be governed without brutality : "Benevolence is not a qualification for rulership at all. Capable rulers have often been infernal scoundrels, and benevolent monarchs hopelessly incapable rulers."<sup>19</sup>

Shaw's aversion to democracy had so overwhelmed him that he permitted his fantasy to synthesize a superman out of every available dictator, and the more insane the drivel of such a dictator, the greater was the proof of his wisdom in Shaw's eyes. Thus he did not fail to be impressed by Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>20</sup> In 1934 he excused Hitler's violence and brutality in newspaper columns and in the next year he demanded a Fascist salute from his friends and ended articles with 'Heil Hitler'.<sup>21</sup>

When Hitler overran Austria in 1938, Shaw rejoiced over such "a highly desirable event."<sup>22</sup> When Hitler and Stalin divided Poland between themselves, Shaw blamed not them but England and cautioned the world of "the present complete

despotism of Chamberlain's War Cabinet and its innumerable Gestapos."<sup>23</sup>

In the face of such overwhelming evidence, it is difficult to agree with Margery Morgan and Kingsley Martin when they argue that *On the Rocks* is not a pro-Fascist play, that it was written merely with the intention of shaking people out of their complacency.<sup>24</sup> Shaw's sympathy was unmistakably with Mussolini and this was embarrassingly demonstrated when he refused to sign the protest against the arrest of Unamuno, failed to condemn the murder of Matteotti and refused to play any part in supporting the victims of Fascism, which included Matteotti's wife and children, but did not hesitate to condemn the lynching of Mussolini in Milan.<sup>25</sup>

Shaw called himself "a Totalitarian Democrat" who believed that the division of the human race into men and supermen corresponded to the division between rulers and the ruled, which was the law of nature.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, therefore, he found Hitler "a very remarkable, very able man,"<sup>27</sup> and Hitler's views "on most subjects very sane."<sup>28</sup> While disapproving of the Nazis' anti-Semitism he believed that there was no logical connection between racism and Nazism or Fascism.<sup>29</sup> As a "Totalitarian Democrat" he thought that Mussolini, "being a good psychologist and a man of the people to boot, was a true organ of democracy."<sup>30</sup>

How completely Shaw's fantasy succeeded in subduing

reason can be gauged not only from his support of the bombing of Abyssinia<sup>31</sup> and the condonation of Mussolini's torture of political prisoners<sup>32</sup> but also, and chiefly, from his attempt to convince himself that the dissidents in Stalin's Soviet Union enjoyed being tortured.<sup>33</sup>

Even death camps ceased to bother him. He submitted that not only dangerous lunatics and criminals but also idiots should be slain.<sup>34</sup> A man who believes that idiots should be killed is easily convinced, especially if he is the author of *Back to Methuselah*, that the majority of the world's inhabitants are idiots. The comments of Desmond MacCarthy on the liquidation of the unsuitables in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* are worth recalling in this connexion because they shed invaluable light on the nature of the victims :

I am writing in the parlour of a pleasant public-house beside a small fire. Four jolly tars have just come in, their caps pushed back from the healthy, shiny, vacant, handsome faces. They have ordered pints and are presently going into the next room to play pool. A heavy commercial gent on a high stool leans across the bar drowsily reading an evening paper. So, counting the plump, prompt, bored barmaid herself, there are seven of us here; and a glance within and a glance around tells me for certain sure that we ought to be liquidated ! From the point of view of establishing a

Communist Utopia we are one and all useless.<sup>35</sup>

The preface to *The Simpleton* proves Maccarthy right, for there Shaw supports Djerjinsky, the founder of the Tcheka and one of the masterminds behind the Soviet purges. Shaw's approval of mass murder becomes chilling: "There should be an inquisition always available to consider whether these human nuisances should not be put out of their pain, or out of their joys as the case may be."<sup>36</sup>

This background of Geneva is indispensable in order to understand Shaw's evasiveness in the treatment of his subject. After the consistent championing of the dictators in effusive terms, after overlooking, even supporting on occasions, their abominations, after turning a blind eye to persecution, torture and murder, after divining wisdom in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* Shaw was faced with a situation where the dictators having sowed the wind were reaping the whirlwind.

To the credit of the dictators it must be said that they made no bones about the real nature of their ideology : Hitler made no effort to play down his racism, his glorification of domination, his xenophobia and his contempt for the weak; Mussolini sang paeans to the State and burnt incense at the altar of "Bellona's bridegroom", Nietzsche could not have rhapsodised more eloquently on the virtues of war and imperialism than these two spiritual heirs of his. If Shaw remained grossly deluded about them it was

because he wished to deceive himself. Whenever his gaze fell on the dictators it became intensely antiseptic and washed away every stain of their crime. As long as the suffering countries were Poland, Finland, Austria and Abyssinia, Shaw could argue that Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini were obliging these countries by gobbling them up, but when two of Shaw's icons, Stalin and Hitler, fell out with each other and the resulting war led to the death of millions it was no longer possible to keep alive the hope that the policies that led to such consequences were progressive .

As Hitler and Stalin got sucked into the war not as allies but as enemies, Shaw had to surrender his faith that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was a beacon of light. Since it was impossible to argue that Western capitalism was responsible for the war between Soviet Russia and Germany, Shaw had to confront the fact that the politics on which he had showered his accolades had reached its logical conclusion. There was no way of mistaking the monstrous columns of smoke generated by the fires of hell for smoking incense. What stood condemned was not the bee in Hitler's bonnet but Hitler himself.

The war forced Shaw to face the fact that he, who had written off the human species as a political failure, had to write himself off as a political failure because he had collaborated in his own way with Hitler and Mussolini (We must only remember that the rigour of Shaw's logic convicted

his audience of collaborating with Sartorius" and Mrs Warren).

It is easier to withdraw behind a fog that obliterates moral distinctions than to subject oneself to the pitiless scan of the inner eye. Incapable of facing the fact that he too had played his part in lending respectability to the most ghastly political figures of the twentieth century, Shaw beat an embarrassed retreat, working out a compromise with his earlier position. If he could no longer paint Hitler and Mussolini as remarkable statesmen, he could at least dilute their guilt by making them ridiculous rather than evil and he took great care to make every other character except the Russian Commissar, who embodies positive values, as ridiculous as Battler and Bombardone.

It is clear that what we witness in Geneva is Everyman in his humour and Shaw sports with follies, not with crime.<sup>37</sup> To wish off the least malodorous hint of the latter, he makes a fine distinction between the actors and their actions; although the judge does seem despairing when he says: "I give you up as hopeless. Man is a failure as a political animal. The creative forces which produce him must produce something better"<sup>38</sup>; the implication of the statement is not as radical as it seems because all he means is that a better system of education is required to make better men, because men — and this is to include Bombardone and Battler — "are naturally as amiable, as teachable, as

companionable as dogs. "39

In comparison with Shaw's earlier works, the satire in *Geneva* is milk and water. Turning his back on everything he discovered with a pitiless honesty in *Heartbreak House* and *Back to Methuselah*, he manages to synthesize a Panglossian optimism about the nature of man at a time when the bottom was being knocked out of the world before his own eyes. Thus he could say of Hitler :

It is not a change of heart that is needed: our hearts are in the right place. It is a change of head. Teach Herr Hitler that the vigour of his nation and ours is due to the fact that we are nations of arrant mongrels and he will follow my advice and not only invite the Jews back to Germany but make it punishable incest for a Jew to marry anybody but an Aryan.<sup>40</sup>

In *The Devil's Disciple* it is Mrs Dudgeon, the hard-hearted Puritanic woman, who quotes Jeremiah, yet following another route Shaw himself came to the same conclusion. Nothing is wrong with the intellect of Higgins or of the heartbreakers who assemble in Captain Shotover's house, yet in *Pygmalion* and in *Heartbreak House* the truth that triumphs over Shaw's evangelic optimism is the realization that the heart of man is deceitful above all things. In the nineteenth century terminology which replaced the Biblical one, the term 'will' took the place of

'heart'. Almost fifty years before Geneva got its final shape, that erratic genius. Jack Tanner, discovered that the head is completely at the mercy of the will and in the main people learn what they wish to learn.

The play's spurious optimism is the result of Shaw's self-betrayal. Geneva is a pathetic apology for his politics : his mystical affirmation in *Major Barbara* that all power is spiritual and the emergence of Andrew Undershaft as a moral hero led him inexorably towards a commitment to efficient totalitarianism. His moral relativism, based on the ethics of pragmatism, led to his championing of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. In Shaw's hands we witness the reversal of the Biblical question : " For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? " He was willing to put up with the loss of the soul, thinking it to be a temporary loss that could be compensated for at the moment of epiphany when the human world would be transformed into the superhuman. But while the numerous revisions of Geneva were going on, Shaw witnessed the collapse of the only ground on which he had supported the totalitarian systems — the pragmatic ground. In *On the Rocks* Old Hipney was willing to support the dictators because they had delivered the goods; when the final version of Geneva came out Mussolini and Hitler had lost not only their souls but also the world that they had retained for a little while.<sup>41</sup>

History carries on even after the play stops, and the author who knew the fate of the persons whom he had once hailed as heroes was left with no option but that of a half-hearted recantation. The author of *Geneva* had to swallow the fact that history had been less than kind to the author of *On the Rocks*.

Anyone who is able, by an extra-ordinary exercise of will power, to sever the connection between Battler and Hitler, between the play and the facts surrounding it, is likely to find *Geneva* droll and even full of wisdom.<sup>42</sup> That brings us to the knotty question : what is the relationship between comedy and social, that is non-fictional, reality ? Can comedy survive in an inhospitable climate ? When the barber in *The Great Dictator* breaks into a long, rambling and entirely non-comic rhetoric, he proves that faced with a certain kind of reality, the art of comedy must break down. Shaw's comedy does not because it avoids intersection with the reality that lies beyond the play. Given the fact that Shaw, like his Don Juan, always strove to be the master of reality and that the mastery of reality was in his eyes the determinant of abundant life, *Geneva* is, inspite of its numerous revisions, like the English Bishop about whom the Russian Commissar remarked : " Was he ever alive ? To me he was incredible. "<sup>43</sup>

Chapter 14 : Notes and References

1. My attention has been drawn to the connexion between *Geneva* and Murray's *Aristophanes* by Margery Morgan's *The Shavian Playground*.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

3. Lawrence Langner, *G.B.S. and the Lunatic* p. 162. Langner claims that as a result of the animated correspondence between the two, Shaw revised the play, and that the first draft gave such a negative picture of the Jew that it seemed to justify Fascism. Langner, p. 169. The same point is made by Desmond MacCarthy, who remarks that "the case for the Jew ought of course to have been vigorously put. It was not. Nor was the cause of the democrat who was presented as a red-faced, heavy-punched, muddle-headed gaby." MacCarthy, *Shaw*, p. 194.

4. Edward R. Isser cites a number of plays, namely Christopher Hampton's adaptation of George Steiner's novel, *The Portage to San Cristabel of A.H.*, C.P. Taylor's *Good*, Peter Barnes's *Laughter* and Peter Flanney's *Singer*, which deal explicitly with the Nazi-Jew relationship, and in each case the Nazi defends himself, as Battler does in *Geneva*, against the charges of his victims. See Edward R. Isser, "Bernard Shaw and British Holocaust Drama", *Shaw* 12 (1992) : 111-23.

5. CP VI, p. 719.

6. A.M. McBriar argues that Shaw's anti-democratic attitude began in 1896, and attributes it to Shaw's personal disappointments and political disillusionment. A.M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918*, pp. 82-83. Martin Meisel is in broad agreement with him but thinks that the watershed came in 1904. Martin Meisel, "Shaw and Revolution", in Norman Rosenblood (ed.), *Shaw: Seven Critical Essays*, pp. 106-34. Had McBriar and Meisel paid attention to Shaw's novels they would have found that Shaw's antidemocratic stance originates much earlier than they suppose. The disillusionment that McBriar stresses is not so much the cause as the symptom of Shaw's response to society. Most of the important characters in Shaw's novels—Conolly, Elinor, Owen Jack, Trefusis—are anarchists and antidemocrats in a fundamental sense. Richard Ohmann, in his extraordinarily perceptive study of Shaw's non-dramatic prose, discerns signs of mild paranoia in him and remarks that Shaw would rather err than be on the side of the majority. Richard M. Ohmann, *Shaw: the Style and the Man*, p. 82. I think that Ohmann is right in maintaining that throughout his life Shaw wrote as an opponent. Perhaps Bertrand Russell is right when he says that "envy plays a part in [Shaw's] philosophy in this sense, that if he allowed himself to admit the goodness of things which he lacks and others possess, he would feel such intolerable envy that he would find life unendurable". Letter to

- Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson , quoted in T. F. Evans (ed.), *Shaw : the Critical Heritage* , p. 120 . Shaw did have reasons to envy the common man who possessed something he lacked : the precious memory of a secure childhood and parental affection.
7. Edmund Wilson, "Bernard Shaw at Eighty", *The Triple Thinkers* , p. 167.
  8. *The Sunday Referee* . July 21, 1935, p. 12. Quoted in Arnold Silver, *Shaw : the Darker Side*, p. 37.
  9. CP VI , p. 862.
  10. *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism , Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism* , p. 372.
  11. CP VI , pp. 863-64.
  12. *Everybody's Political what's what #*, p. 40.
  13. Ibid.
  14. quoted in Allan Chappelow , *Shaw "the Chucker-Out"*, P.189. Chappelow's book is an excellent source of Shaw's speeches and utterances, much of which remain uncompiled elsewhere.
  15. Ibid., p. 191.
  16. Ibid., p. 194.
  17. Ibid., p. 195.
  18. Richard Nickson, "G.B.S.: British Fascist?", *The Shavian* 16 [1959] : 9-15.
  19. CP VI, p. 387.
  20. ~~New York Times, July 10, 1938, Cited by Silver, op.cit.,~~

20. *New York Times*, July 10, 1938. Cited by Silver, op.cit., p. 37.
21. Chappelow, op.cit., p. 396. For a capable survey of the literature on the subject see Silver, op.cit., pp.308-9. Silver also lists Shaw's innumerable attacks on British democracy and his repeated condonation of Fascist excesses.
22. *New York Times*, July 10, 1938. Quoted in Silver, op.cit., p. 38.
23. Chappelow, op.cit., p. 397.
24. Margery Morgan , op.cit., pp. 273-74 , Kingsley Martin in T.F.Evans, (ed.), *Shaw: The Critical Heritage*, p.337.
25. Silver, op.cit., p. 391.
26. Chappelow., op.cit., p. 322.
27. Ibid., p. 184.
28. Ibid., p. 197.
29. CP VI, p. 869.
30. Ibid., p. 864.
31. Chappelow, op.cit., p. 391.
32. Ibid., p. 187.
33. Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. III, p. 238.
34. Dan H. Laurence. *Bernard Shaw : Bibliography*. p. 844.
35. Desmond Mccarthy. op.cit., p. 207.
36. CP VI , p. 762.
37. Edward R. Isser feels that Shaw "reveals a stubbornness of character and blindness to reality" in dismissing "the evidence about the killing operations", for

though he came to know of the truth in 1945 after the liberation of the concentration camps, he did not express outrage towards Hitler even in the revised editions. Isser, op.cit., p.122. Isser does not grasp the point that it would be impossible for Shaw to "express outrage" towards Hitler without expressing outrage towards himself.

38. CP VII, p. 155.

39. Ibid., p. 106.

40. Undated typescript in British Museum : Add Mss. 50643, reprinted in CP VII pp. 175-76.

41. Shaw consistently praised the efficiency of the dictators and derided the British Parliament as "the most effective engine for preventing progress of any kind that has been devised by the wit of man." Chappelow, op.cit., p.175 Blanche Patch, Shaw's secretary, too, thought that Shaw supported the dictators for the effectiveness of their programmes. Blanche Patch, *Thirty years with G.B.S.*, p. 173. This was another of Shaw's illusions. As Leonard Woolf points out: "The British method of dealing with capitalism and capitalists has led to a far greater increase, both relatively and absolutely, in the welfare of the proletariat of any continental country." Leonard Woolf, "Fabians and Socialism", C.E.M. Joad (ed.), *Shaw and Society*, p. 53. A couple of months before his death, Shaw himself echoed Woolf's views and admitted that Britain's success was spectacular and conceded that had Russia succeeded in doing

what Britain had done, it would have blasted the news all over Europe. Chappelow, *op.cit.*, pp. 207-209.

It is true that Hitler created jobs by increasing state expenditure. But though Sir Arthur Chavender, the Prime Minister in *On The Rocks*, is not allowed by his Cabinet to implement a similar programme, the truth is that both America and England succeeded in ending the Great Depression by implementing the Hitlerite economic programme. See John Kenneth Galbraith, *Money : Whence It Came, Where It Went*, pp. 216-52.

42. Richard Nickson, for example, sees *Geneva* as a fruit of wisdom, a play that warns society. Richard Nickson, "The Art of Shawian Political Drama", *Modern Drama* 14.3 (1971) : 324-30. It is possible to discover wisdom in *Geneva* if one ignores both the background of the play and the fact that even in 1947 Shaw believed that the mastermind behind the holocaust was merely a ridiculous person.

43. CP VII, p. 67.

The Limits of Knowledge Too True to be Good

"You'll say -- the old system is not so obsolete

And men believe still : ay, but who and where ?"

Browning, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*

"All art," Oscar Wilde said in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril."<sup>1</sup> Yet one is driven to embrace this peril while writing on Shaw, because all his plays move in the direction of *Salome* and not in the direction of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He is the most autobiographical of writers even when his imagination finds its habitat in hell (as in *Man and Superman*) or on the earth of a very distant future (as in *Back to Methuselah*).

If Shaw had never written *Too True to be Good* it would be fair to say that he had gone as far as any man could go to abort its birth. Even the monsters that appear in *Back to Methuselah* were brought in to smother *Too True* in its womb. That it survived some fifteen years and such overt hostility of its creator proved yet again that no army can withstand an idea whose time has come. For though Shaw's plays are never simple vehicles of ideas, they are made possible by a spiritual ambience spawned by a cosmology spreading from

Plato through St. Augustine and St. Aquinas to Hegel. *Too True to be Good* is a play on the crumbling of that universe.

What the average modern reader is likely to find repulsive in Shaw is the dogmatic certainty with which the plays seem to end. Even when the action represented in the plays can generate little hope, the choric figures invoke the Life Force with an optimism unwarranted by the plays. Few plays are as permeated with despair as *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and yet the last word is Prola's hollow hope :

Let men despair and become cynics and pessimists because in the *Unexpected Isles* all their little plans fail : women will never let go their hold on life. We are not here to fulfil prophecies and fit ourselves to puzzles, but to wrestle with life as it comes.<sup>2</sup>

What of course goes unstated is that while she speaks of wrestling with life, the author has consigned a majority of the living creatures to their graves. This is the paradox on which Shaw's millennial comedy is founded. The Ancients in *Back to Methuselah* are not monsters by accident, they replace the human race because man's participation in the final event is not possible. Yet the absence of a crescendo in his symphony is more terrifying to Shaw than the subtraction of the living from life. So at the end we are left with creatures who, to paraphrase Rilke, are neither

living nor dead because they shy from the tragic in life.

We have argued in the previous chapters that Shaw was not altogether a stranger to the art of satire against one's own self. But rarely is the satire so biting as it is in *Too True* : in this play Shaw's self-criticism is so severe that it can fairly be described as a play that calls the Shavian bluff, for it is the only play written by Shaw that deals directly with the crisis of his faith. So far the ambivalence was related only to the consequences of the religion sought to be propagated by him : the plays were subversive of the faith they putatively upheld. In *Too True to be Good* the doubt is of another kind. Here Shaw discovers himself in a plight that is worse than Faust's : he had hardened his heart for the sake of knowledge and power, now he is left confronting the truth that the sacrifice of humanism was made for a certainty that now stands exposed as an illusion. In the most ironical of all his plays, comedy, the art of exposure, has exposed the author. Shaw is the last of the Shavian *alazons*. Aubrey is too thin a disguise to hide Shaw's lashing mockery of his own unfazed intellectual posture :

Lucidity is one of the most precious gifts : the gift of the teacher : the gift of explanation. I can explain anything to anybody ; and I love doing it. I feel I must do it if only the doctrine is beautiful and subtle and exquisitely put together. I may feel

instinctively that it is the rottenest nonsense. Still, if I can get a moving dramatic effect of it, and preach a really splendid sermon about it, my gift takes possession of me and obliges me to sail in and do it.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most striking things about the play is that almost all the dramatic situations, intrigues and imbroglios are known by the audience to be false. Sweetie is a false nurse, the patient's physical strength and prowess shows her up as a false patient. While the case of the burglar is more confusing there is no confusion about what follows : we witness the rompings of a fake count, a fake countess and a fake servant. As if that is not enough, we witness the most thrilling action of the play — a battle with the brigands and a sterling performance in the battle resulting in a K.C.B. for its hero, Colonel Tallboys. The show is so impressive that one is almost reluctant to make much of of the caveat that the brigands do not exist and the action is conducted not by Colonel Tallboys but by Private Meek. One of the most memorable situations in the play is the double reversal involving the Colonel, Miss Mopply and Meek :

TALLBOYS           Why did you pretend to be a servant ?

THE PATIENT       One has so much more control of the house as a       servant than as a mistress nowadays, Colonel.

TALLBOYS       Very smart, that. You will tell me next that one controls a regiment much more effectively as a

private than as a colonel, eh ? <sup>4</sup>

Shaw allows us scarcely a fraction of a second to cherish the thought that finally the man of action has got the better of Miss Mopply's pointless witticism ; for what the audience then see in the theatre is indicated by the following stage directions :

The Klaxon sounds stridently. The colonel draws his revolver and makes a dash for the top of the sandhill, but is outraced by Meek, who gets there first and takes the word of command with irresistible authority, leaving him stupent. <sup>5</sup>

Such a passage seems to be a perfect example of what Bergson calls the laughable in his famous essay on laughter, it is also a situation that newspaper reviews call "madly improbable". Such things are the stuff of farce. Pretension, disguise, deflation and exposure constitute the perennial subject of comedy from Aristophanes to Shaw. The ignorance of Menander's or Terence's heroes about their wives' past, the ignorance of Orsino about Viola's identity, the illusions of Raina regarding war and chivalry, the illusions of the Colonel about the patient and the burglar fall into the same comic pattern, for comedy traditionally ridicules the lack of self-knowledge as well as the lack of knowledge of the world. That is why Shaw finds comedy such a congenial medium ; it can be used in the service of his Platonic faith

that there is no evil but illusion, and that illusion dies with the birth of Knowledge.

Knowledge in comedy is not so much a matter of epistemology as of pragmatism. The writer of a comedy does not ask like a philosopher whether objective or "true" Knowledge is possible, he merely supposes that Rosalind or Caesar or Bluntschli possesses it, and by the end of the play Orlando and Cleopatra and Raina become wiser. The entire comic world moves from ignorance to knowledge, leading to better integration.

If the attainment of Knowledge is the pre-requisite of comedy, then *Too True to be Good* is problematic as a play, for although the starting point is that of comedy, the play ends with the kind of confusion about truth that one generally associates with the plays of Pirandello and Beckett.

Some of the contrivements are easy to see through, but not others. Illusion, even when it is recognised as such by the *dramatis personae*, triumphs in the play: far from being ashamed for the undeserved title the Colonel maintains that what has happened constitutes the normal pattern of events. And though it is not very difficult to see that the role of the nurse is a false role for Sweetie, whose mental sickness has made the role of the thief or that of the prostitute more appropriate for her, all certainty, or even a reasonable hypothesis, deserts us when we come to the Elder or to Aubrey. Is the Elder a Charles Bradlaugh—— a heroic

champion of atheism — or is he a follower of pragmatic blackguardism, a creed that teaches him to remain calm and undisturbed while babies are massacred on the specious plea that everything is permitted during the war ? And Shaw certainly hides as much as he reveals when he says that he has given the last word to the blackguard. The most disturbing part of the play, the peroration, is delivered by Aubrey not merely because his figure provides the author with a grotesque mask : more than anyone else, more than even Meek, Aubrey proves the inadequacy of all abstract categories that make knowledge possible. It is not merely the rule of the extravaganza that makes the burglar a chaplain ; if his conduct at the beginning makes a mockery of his calling, at the end the scoundrel emerges as the most agonised soul in the play and challenges his father's deep virtue as well as Miss Mopply's easy salvation. Unlike the Sergeant, he refuses to drown his questioning restlessness in the fleshpots. By rejecting all easy solutions and remaining unconsolable to the end he alone brings into focus the ineluctable fact that the 'wrecked' universe admits of no intellectual tinkering.

Unlike the humanists Shaw does not regard man as valuable in himself. He is a part of the universe, but only a part. Shaw sees in evolution a continuous aspiration towards greater intellectual consciousness, consequently he does not hesitate to sacrifice the man of today <sup>at</sup> the altar

of the superman of tomorrow. According to such a view "As Far As Thought Can Reach" is the revelation of Nature's power and glory ; it is not a nightmare but a happy dream. That the dramatist is generally subversive of his own dogma is another story. The fact remains that in his deductive method Shaw is like the medieval Scholastics ; he can countenance every stupidity or even depravity of man as long as he can cling to the faith that the universe has been created by God for the realisation of His design. That Shaw chooses a different name for God is immaterial so far as his faith in divine purpose is concerned.

Shaw's world thus resembles in many ways the world of St. Augustine and St. Aquinas ; it is the world of the Church which burnt Joan's body to save her soul and in spite of its kindness sought to do the same to Galileo because the anxiety caused by the threatened loss of faith was far more terrible a thing than the loss of any number of individual lives. Most religions seek to conquer death and achieve immortality in one form or another. Shaw sought immortality through emotional participation in the life of the immortal demigod that man, urged by the Evolutionary Appetite, would one day evolve into. Thus he found the ultimate meaning of life in a very distant future. Any threat to that future aroused both his hostility and his anxiety. As we have seen, there could be no better example of such reaction than the section on Darwin in the preface to *Methuselah*.

same self-organization of life still more wonderfully into rare persons who may by comparison be called gods, creatures capable of thought, whose aims extend far beyond the satisfaction of their bodily appetites and personal affections, since they perceive that it is only by the establishment of a social order founded on moral faith that the world can rise from mere savagery.<sup>7</sup>

When Don Juan declared that the only pleasure in his heaven was the pleasure of thought, and the aim of life was to be omniscient and omnipotent, he underlined the dogma that inspired the entire artistic output of his creator . The man who found himself an alien in the world of ordinary men and women had constantly to be fired with the belief that he had completely identified himself with the purpose of the universe :

We want to get back to men with some belief in the purpose of the universe, with determination to identify themselves with it and with courage that comes from that . As for my own position, I am, and always have been, a mystic . I believe that the universe is being driven by a force that we might call the life-force.<sup>B</sup>

Darwin, who had done more than anyone else to destroy man's faith in teleology, opened to Shaw an "unspeakable and frightful prospect"<sup>9</sup> because a universe from which mind had

Thus Shaw was like Count O'Dowda of *Fanny's First Play*. He breathed in the atmosphere of a world that had withered and vanished under the attack of Darwin, Freud and, more recently, Einstein. Darwin showed that Natural Selection is an arbitrary amoral process without divine purpose or design. Freud showed that animal drives play a much larger part in man's life than his mind, and that man's conscious life is often only an unsatisfactory attempt at adjusting his blind animal drives to the demands of civilization, often leading to neurosis. The moral relativism inherent in modernism found its equivalent in physics through the theory of relativity. In Quantum Physics, the theory of indeterminacy propounded by Heisenberg seemed to destroy the idea of a calculable universe.

These upheavals in the intellectual atmosphere threatened to throw the Shavian universe out of gear, therefore they were kept outside his plays. And now suddenly, like a thunder storm, they broke upon Shaw's world, forcing open the doors and windows he had carefully kept shut :

And now — now — what is left of it? The orbit of the electron obeys no law : it chooses one path and rejects another : it is as capricious as the planet Mercury, who wanders from his road to warm his hands at the sun . All is caprice : the calculable world has become incalculable : Purpose and Design... have risen

from the dead to cast down the mighty from their seats and put paper crowns on presumptuous fools . Today I dare not enter an aquarium, because I can see nothing in those grotesque monsters of the deep but the caricatures of some freakish demon artist : some zeus-Mephistopheles with paintbox and plasticine, trying to surpass himself in the production of fantastic and laughable creatures to people a Noah's Ark for his baby . I have to rush from the building lest I go mad, crying... "what must I do to be saved ?" Nothing can save us from the perpetual headlong fall into a bottomless abyss but a solid footing of dogma ; and we no sooner agree to that than we find that the only trustworthy dogma is that there is no dogma . As I stand here I am falling into that abyss, down, down, down.<sup>6</sup>

The actual source of the spiritual terror of the Elder reveals itself when we contrast this passage with another one written at a time when an optimistic dogma was still possible :

The mysterious thing we call life organizes itself into all living shapes, bird, beast, beetle and fish, rising to the human marvel in cunning dwarfs and laborious muscular giants...in the service of higher powers . And these higher powers are called into existence by the

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been banished struck a great terror in Shaw's heart, yet *Too True to be Good* looks straight into the face of the inexorable reality instead of withdrawing into the world of self-hypnosis. In the novels of Dostoyevsky there is no existential terror greater than that of living in a godless world . If God does not exist, then everything is permitted. The "unspeakable and frightful prospect" opened up by Darwin brings out an identical response from Aubrey's father :

My son, whom I brought up to be an incorruptible Godfearing atheist, has become a thief and a scoundrel; and I can say nothing to him but "Go boy : perish in your villainy ; for neither your father nor anyone else can give you a good reason for being a man of honor."<sup>10</sup>

The device of making the Elder a Darwinist and atheist is pathetic in its transparency , for it is evident that the terrified tone of the old man gives a feeling of déjà vu to the audience acquainted with Shaw's religious writings . The Elder and his creator feel alike that everything is permitted in a universe from which mind has been banished .

We have seen that at the two ends of Shaw's spectrum stand the Idealist and the Realist : the latter with his ability to see things as they are sets in motion a dynamic because reality changes faster than ideas, and encrusted ideas produce corresponding institutions that always lag behind changing realities . Since the Realist is in the

minority, he is regarded as a heretic in his time, and a prophet after his death . Knowledge, illusion and conversion are themes that lend themselves easily to comedy ; by marrying these themes to the need for heresy, Shaw was able to change private comic situations into macro-level social comedy linking virtual reality created by the play to the social reality lying outside it . In this he drew sustenance from Plato . As we have already mentioned, knowledge in comedy is ordinarily not a matter of philosophical exactitude but of social acceptability . But Shaw not only shares Plato's views that a thing-in-itself is knowable— a view discarded by most theorists of perception since Kant— but also maintains like the Greek that true knowledge is accessible only to a minority .

The implicit part of Shaw's dogma, which maintains that objective knowledge is possible, is of immense importance to the life of Shaw's comedy : the microcosm and the macrocosm are inalienably linked : knowledge about the nature of man is impossible without the knowledge of the universe or, to be more precise, the purpose of the universe . In *Too True to be Good* the knowledge of both is severely shaken . We have already seen that the sense of self deserts the characters . Perhaps the most dramatic case is that of Aubrey, for whom the roles change with a violent pace, without any of them proving more true than another . (In this Shaw goes beyond *Heartbreak House* ; Hector knew that he

was playing a false role . There it was the case of the paralysis of the will, here it is the crisis of knowledge.) Aubrey's father is not the only one who has to try to keep himself from going mad; as they lose their foothold on reality, every character— and this has never happened before in any of Shaw's plays— finds himself or herself falling through a void— a point driven home by Aubrey who finds out that "they are all, like my father here, falling, falling, falling endlessly and hopelessly through a void in which they can find no footing."<sup>11</sup>

Shaw could not be more wrong when he remarked that his own favourite, Miss Mopply, "ends with a cheerful conviction that the lost dogs always find their own way home",<sup>12</sup> for at the end of the play she finds herself "utterly miserable"<sup>13</sup> and withdraws from society in order to found a sisterhood . Shaw's prefatory remark that "the main gist and moral of the play"<sup>14</sup> is that our social system is cruel to the rich sounds like a sophomoric joke . If at all we must look for the "main gist and moral of the play" we must turn towards Mrs Mopply, ordinarily not the cleverest of women, who discovers it for us when she finds that the world "is not a bit like what they said it was."<sup>15</sup>

Though the world is not a bit like what they said it was, this significant discovery does not prevent Mrs Mopply from falling through the void, for the world can henceforth be understood only in negative terms : the only thing that

Aubrey and the Elder and Mrs Mopply and everyone else know is that they cannot know either themselves or the world .

All of a sudden Shaw finds himself realising that the world which he claimed to have understood so well in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* and in the Epistle Dedicatory of *Man and Superman* has evaporated before his eyes, having succeeded by the world of Pirandello and Beckett, for every character of the play would be qualified to say like Signora Ponza, the veiled lady in Pirandello's *Right You Are If You Think You Are*, that he or she does not know what anything or who anyone is. The mad and incredible happenings involving Aubrey, Sweetie, Miss Mopply, Colonel Talboys and Private Meek, the capriciousness of the electrons and of the planet Mercury, the grotesqueness of "Zeus - Mephistopheles", and the failure of nerve of an intimidated Aubrey bemoaning his ignorance are all symptoms of a single dysfunction — the breakdown of Shavo-Platonism.

Faced with the collapse of certainty the characters of Pirandello accept role-playing as an ethical obligation ; in the world of the Italian pity for human suffering has precedence over knowledge. Ironically, the characters in *Too True to be Good* attain the knowledge that all that was previously accepted as certain knowledge was mere delusion, but no positive knowledge takes its place and in this state of "dreadful new nakedness"<sup>16</sup> the tattered illusions are suddenly revealed as the only protective cover of the soul.

The author of *Man and Superman* completes his U-turn in *Too True to be Good*.

The failure of Platonism is most acutely symbolised by the incident in the grotto, which immediately reminds the audience, especially in the overall Platonic context of the play, of the famous cave image used by Plato in the *Republic*.<sup>17</sup> Like Plato Shaw associates illusion with the appetitive faculty and truth with the rational faculty. And yet in the cave on the wall of which is scribbled 'Agapemone' — the abode of divine love — the Sergeant, who seems to possess the rational faculty more than anyone else in the play, succumbs with a grotesque profanity to Sweetie's "lower centres", her carnal appetite. Plato's parable is enacted in the reverse (since Shaw's prisoner, unlike Plato's, does not move from illusion to knowledge; he begins with a quest for knowledge and ends with giving up that quest) and the Sergeant's traumatic vision of London, Paris and Rome as Cities of Destruction only underline the impotence of intelligence — Plato's Reason, Shaw's Evolutionary Appetite — as a saving power.

Aubrey's contention that in all great literature the higher centres speak reads like the justification by Shaw of his early and middle periods. In that case the fog at the end of the play engulfing Aubrey is the author's final act of self-annihilation, and is of a piece with the Sergeant's surrender to Sweetie. Whether the play is an attempt by Shaw

to transcend Shavianism or an admission of supersession by a reality to which he is insufficiently attuned, it is the most honest acknowledgment of the inadequacy of the main current of Shavianism. It is the end of a vision now openly acknowledged by him to be too good to be true. What now replaces that vision is a reality that is too true to be good.

1. *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 376.

Though *Too True to be Good* was written before *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and *Geneva*, I have taken up the play for discussion after the two plays mentioned above because in the evolutionary scale of Shaw's comedy, *Too True* occupies a later position. Chronology does not always co-incide with logical development.

2. CP VI, p. 839.

3. Ibid., pp. 471-72.

4. Ibid., p. 488.

5. Ibid., pp. 488-89.

6. Ibid., pp. 500-501.

7. *Major Critical Essays*. p. 174.

8. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*. Ed. W. Sylvester Smith, p. 16.

9. Ibid.

10. CP VI, p. 501.

11. Ibid., p. 527.

12. Ibid., p. 528.

13. Ibid., p. 482.

14. Ibid., p. 400.

15. Ibid., p. 520.

16. CP VI, p. 526.

17. *Republic*, Book VII, Sec. 514-21.

The Superman's Quest for Comedy

"The apostolic succession from Eschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as ... the apostolic succession of the Christian Church." C

Shaw, "The Author's Apology", *Our Theatre in the Nineties*

"The future of religion is in the mystery of touch."

Lawrence, *Future of Religion*

The novels of Bernard Shaw were written by a man trying to fill up his loneliness with imaginary men, imaginary words and an imaginary world. The creator of this world could avenge his private suffering by making his heroes inflict more pain than they received. Shaw recreated himself as Smith, as Conolly, as Jack, as Byron and as Trefusis and could trust these figures, all except Byron and to a lesser extent, Smith, to lend a halo to his loneliness, and since all novels are written for readers, real or imagined, he could, above all, reestablish contact with the world by modifying through art both himself and the world. No one can, after all, live up to the Shavian Judas's ideal of being an independent universe.<sup>1</sup>

The parallel universe that Shaw's Judas wanted to build can be maintained in reality only at the expense of frequent contacts

with the original one. Shaw was too sane to forget that no man is an island, so he was thrown back on the paradox of seeking justification for complete self-sufficiency from outside the self. The shocking egoism of the main characters of the novels needed the legitimacy of the readers' approval, since Shaw was yet to discover the metaphysics of the Life Force. As the psychologist Edmund Bergler said: "The writer does not produce his works, as naive people think, because he has something important to convey to his eager listeners, but solely to solve an inner conflict."<sup>2</sup>

If the need to resolve an inner conflict is the primary cause of writing, then Shaw's novels failed to achieve that end. The tone of irony, impartial in its choice of targets, subverts Robert Smith's search for a hard shell into which he can withdraw. The rationalism which is sought to be established in the next novel as a shield against normal human feeling is too feeble an instrument to camouflage the unnaturalness of the protagonist's *Zeitgeist*, and is thrown over in the next novel for vitalism. But vitalism, like rationalism, is another mode of disguise — a conscious invention to accommodate a set of attitudes having no natural connexion with vitalism. In this sense *Cashel Byron's Profession* is Shaw's recantation: it is an artist's confession of the futility of waging war against life with the aid of a ragbag of philosophical nomenclature. In *An Unsocial Socialist* Shaw reverts to his favourite myth but the treatment is quite different as Trefusis doffs his guard and unlike the characters preceding him and unlike the saviours of mankind that follow in the plays he

frankly recognises his charlatantry, his roguishness, and from time to time from behind the screen of noble rhetoric pops out the face of Shakespeare's Richard III or of Aaron of *Titus Andronicus*. Certainly Charteris has nothing to do with their spine-chilling love of evil, yet like them he enjoys his roguery and chuckles at his ingeniousness. The novels show the Shavian superman in *puris naturalibus*, without the dazzling robe of the Evolutionary Appetite or the Life Force.

The novels failed to resolve Shaw's conflict, because by failing to get them published the author failed to receive his readers' implicit endorsement of his adjustment with the world. As an author he needed an appreciative audience to acknowledge the superiority of his unsocial protagonist, but that attempt to transcend his loneliness failed.

An *Unsocial Socialist* may not have led to a satisfactory resolution of his conflict — indeed *Trefusis* is no more than a thwarted messiah — it at least promised Shaw unexplored possibilities of a fruitful alignment with socialism. To the Victorian ethos socialism as a doctrine was sufficiently outrageous to satisfy the subjective needs of the iconoclast in Shaw, but as a philosophy opposed to narrow individualism — a philosophy aiming to serve the whole of society, especially its least privileged sections — it appealed to that part of Shaw which was sick of his own egoism and wanted to discover relationship of harmony with society instead of antagonism.

When Shaw decided to give up literature and embrac

socialism after the failure of the novels, he made an earnest attempt at self-transcendence. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* was the first major attempt by Shaw to reconcile two conflicting tendencies in himself: the inclination towards wilfulness, and a genuine wish to bring about greater contact between the self and the outside world. He had already explored his self in his works of fiction, now he was faced with the greater challenge of testing the adequacy of his constructed self, his persona, in a very different world. He had made his persona triumph in his novels, yet the world of the novels was not only artificial but also built by himself to suit his purpose. Would his axioms, especially the one that accorded centrality to the self, still be valid under very different circumstances? A code broad enough to accommodate not only self-created situations but also "Ibsenism" without compromising its revolutionary sweep would be a seminal triumph for Shaw. If he was right in calling the works of Ibsen the new Bible, then he could fit into the role of John the Baptist. So Shaw made *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* the litmus test of Shavianism. Daniel Dervin had a point when he remarked: "As we know, after a certain point when Shaw scrutinized Ibsen, he began to see what Narcissus saw in the pool; and whose Quintessence Shaw is discovering is a problem all readers have to contend with."<sup>3</sup>

*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is not so much a recapitulation as the revision of the quintessence of Shavianism. The overriding egoism sat loosely on the novels. Lacking sufficient strength to absorb and integrate it his fiction carried

a set of strong *a priori* impulses searching for appropriate receptacles. The reformer finding the whole of society villainous was only as convincing a realist as the knight casting about for windmills to set on with ferocious energy. A major achievement of Shaw in *The Quintessence* is his success in bringing himself closer to the mainstream without sacrificing the assiduously cultivated habit of seeing things differently from the rest of the world. In the novels the minority stood outside society, maladjusted with it; here it stands almost at the same place but is placed at the head of a movement : as the vanguard of a continually changing and progressing world, it is privileged to hold the rest of the world in tow. In Shaw's words "the pioneer is a tiny minority of the force he heads, and so, though it is easy to be in a minority and yet be wrong, it is absolutely impossible to be in the majority and yet be right as to the newest social prospects."<sup>4</sup>

The most significant shift from the earlier position takes place in his choice of target — in the novels the philistinism of the average man raised his ire; his war, though often comic, was against the whole of society and the strategy adopted in this war was the severance of as many ties as possible with the outside world. The completely self-sufficient Shavian hero decided to exile the world either for the sake of rationalism or art or socialism. The Shaw of *The Quintessence* is much more tolerant of the *hoi polloi*, whom he calls Philistines. For the sake of illustration he takes a community of one thousand men, seven hundred of whom are Philistines. They feel quite at home in the

world. The greatest enemies of progress are not these but the two hundred and ninety nine persons who find the world intolerable but deceive themselves with lies and insist that the institutions, which are so hard on them, are holy and beautiful. These people are the Idealists. The only person who is not covered by the group — the only person who possesses both knowledge and the courage to be truthful— is the Realist : The Idealists, who have invented beautiful masks to hide ugly realities will go to any length to smother the voice of the Realist :

They will crucify him, burn him, violate their own ideals of family affection by taking his children away from him, ostracize him, brand him as immoral, profligate, filthy, and appeal against him to the despised Philistines, specially idealised for the occasion as society.<sup>5</sup>

What is remarkable is that the relationship between the Realist and the Philistines is similar to that between the revolutionary vanguard and the people in Marxist literature. Only the vanguard's intellectual superiority allows him to grasp changing conditions of reality faster than others. As others do not yet have the new image of reality, the Realist seems to be shocking at first, but as the changing conditions of reality need flexible and changing responses, the vision of the Realist, in seeing things as they are, and his role as the catalyst of social change ultimately help the whole of society: the Realist actually is the lynx-eyed sentinel jealously guarding the interests of the Philistines.

Thus for the first time a relationship of antagonism is changed into one of co-operation. The instincts of the majority — the Philistines — are healthy. They do not call the family beautiful and holy, but accept it as a matter of course. The Idealists, on the other hand, seek to stultify life by choking up progress and by persecuting the Realist, until the latter "at last loses patience with ideals altogether, and sees in them only something to blind us, something to numb us...something whereby, instead of resisting death, we can disarm it by committing suicide."<sup>6</sup>

In the context of Shaw's brief career up to this point of time, the implication is nothing short of revolutionary when we remember that the Idealists are a minority in society and they secretly hate life as it is lived by the majority. The author of the *Passion Play* and the novels set up abstractions — rationalism, art, socialism — and the abstractions were used to deprecate normal human feelings like love, affection, friendliness and commitment to human as distinct from extra-human values. It is as if Shaw, who had so far been in love with the abstraction called life, suddenly discovered the joy of living. Thus *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is a strong rejoinder to the decadent aestheticism of *Love Among the Artists* that held life and art as antithetical terms and insisted that art can flourish only by appropriating the energies of life and choking life in the process. *The Quintessence* undermines the emerging Shavian tendency of denial without blunting its hard revolutionary edge : it lifts

Shaw from the realm of satire by opening up the possibility of comedy. Almost invariably, the tone of satire is that of hostility towards experience, and Shaw's stress on correcting a world gone wrong, and his choice of the term "comedy" instead of "satire" to denote the process was often no more than a fig leaf on his proneness to disown normal experience. He reverses the process in his study of Ibsen, for the characters he charges with idealism and exposes as the enemies of society are not the characters he damned in his novels, but men of superhuman stature, such as Brand; or men with extraordinarily fastidious conscience, such as Rosmer; or men who, like Solness, sacrifice themselves for their vision. By hailing pragmatism over heroism, Shaw not only cements the bond between the Realist and the Philistine — the bond celebrated later most notably in the marriage between Ann Whitfield and John Tanner in *Man and Superman* — but also joins the mainstream of comedy that has always celebrated the "pure sense of life"<sup>7</sup> instead of moral choices. With *The Quintessence* Shaw moves closer to the archetypal comic credo proclaimed by Falstaff: "Give me life, which if I can save, so; if not honour comes unlook'd for, and there's an end."<sup>B</sup>

What is interesting about *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is that Shaw condemns tragic characters like Brand and Rosmer for failing to be heroes of comedy; this criticism is not directed at Ibsen, who, according to Shaw's reading, exposes the delusions and fundamental inhumanity of their moral postures. In other words, Ibsen's tragedies are changed into comedies — Ibsen the comedist

makes a scathing attack on an ethical system that prevents pragmatic, and therefore comic, resolution of a dramatic action by sacrificing practicable options to an inflexible moral code. Such an interpretation of Ibsen is nothing short of an implicit rejection of tragic action, for the great enemy of tragedy is pragmatism, which reigns over now and here, whereas the kingdom of tragedy is, literally, not of this world, since the almost invariable price that the tragic hero has to pay for his moral choice is death or renunciation of the world. This is unacceptable to Shaw, who equates tragedy with pessimism and defeat.

His novels portray a ceaseless quest for power, and the marriage between socialism and literature is to him no shotgun marriage — both have a common end, which is the furtherance of human evolution. Shaw's obsession with success and progress — when *The Quintessence* was written progress still implied historical rather than biological progress — rules out the legitimacy of a literary form that explores the paradox of man's ultimate splendour revealing itself at the moment of his ultimate worldly defeat. Shaw's aesthetic attitude is informed with an impulse that runs contrary to the spirit of Christianity; to gain one's soul at the cost of losing the world is to him a Faustian error in the reverse direction. In this sense Shaw is Platonic and anti-tragic, and like Plato, he extols the rational faculty over the heroic, which appears to him as pot-valiant rather than valiant. To him the tragic *weltanschauung* is not a legitimate alternative to the comic, it is simply wrong. He is attracted to comedy because of comedy's

practical value. As Ronald Peacock says : "The obvious paradox of comedy [is] that it is both a symptom and an agent of civilization."<sup>9</sup> Shaw would have completely endorsed Schillers's view that the aims of comedy are higher than those of tragedy, and if comedy succeeds in achieving its end, it will make all tragedy superfluous and impossible :

Its end is identical with the highest after which it is man's business to strive, to be free from passion, always to see the world and himself clearly and serenely, to attribute more to chance than to destiny, and rather to laugh at its consequences than to rage or weep at its wickedness.<sup>10</sup>

In a remarkable letter to Gilbert Murray, Shaw argues that it is Sophocles's stupidity that makes *King Oedipus* tragic, and the play is "a driving of somebody to death."<sup>11</sup> He insists in the same letter that "Sophocles had the brains of a ram, the theatrical technique of an agricultural labourer, [and] the reverence for tradition of a bee."<sup>12</sup> Shaw is sure that had Oedipus — and Sophocles — possessed a greater measure of rationality, *King Oedipus* would have ended as a fine comedy of ideas :

Suppose, now, I were to discover suddenly that my mother was not related to me at all, and that Charlotte was my mother. I have not the slightest doubt of what the effect

would be...My affection for Charlotte would be not only intensified but elevated. There would be the addition of the filial feeling and the redemption of sexual feeling from "sin" and stain. Although in my waking senses I could not possibly work up the slightest sexual feeling for my mother or filial feeling for Charlotte, yet if circumstances tricked me into marrying my mother before I knew she was my mother, I should be fonder of her than I could ever be of a mother who was not my wife, or a wife who was not my mother.<sup>13</sup>

Shaw is of course being sweetly reasonable and displaying a level of rationality that would be normal for the most advanced thinkers of the future millenium. This is what lies at the core of Shaw's comedy — the future triumph of man over irrational fears and primitive anxiety — for Sophocles not only revived Oedipus from the hoary past of primitive legends, his hero exhibits in the play a mode of behaviour that is distinctly primitive compared to the normative behaviour formulated by Shaw : tragedy cannot survive in a world where man has completely conquered his primitivism. It is not without significance that as a champion of civilization Shaw contemptuously rejects *Catharsis* : "I do not want there to be any more pity in the world, because I do not want there to be anything to pity, and I want there to be no more terror because I do not want people to have anything to fear."<sup>14</sup>

Having a normative approach to art, Shaw does not pause to

make the difference between "wanting" pity and terror and accepting their existence. Bypassing them as uninteresting he chooses, instead, to "stimulate thought about life and educate people's senses."<sup>15</sup>

Claiming to have been saved by Marx "from becoming a literary man,"<sup>16</sup> he sees socialism and literature pursuing similar aims. Tragedy, because it sets limits to man's power, is not conducive to a teleological view of the universe. One remembers in this connection that Nietzsche called Sophocles's world-view tragic and Euripides's scientific. Shaw, who greatly<sup>7</sup> admired the latter and scoffed at the former, and came to socialism through literature and returned to literature through socialism, explicitly rejected tragedy. The optimism inherent in the dialectic of progress destroys the basis of tragedy. One cannot improve upon Nietzsche when he says :

If ancient tragedy was diverted from its course by the dialectical desire for knowledge and the optimism of science this fact might lead us to believe that there is an eternal conflict between the theoretic and tragic world-view, and only after the spirit of science has been pursued to its limits and its claim to universal validity destroyed by the evidence of these limits may we hope for a rebirth of tragedy...In this contrast, I understand by the spirit of science the belief which first came to light in the person of Socrates — the belief in the explicability of

nature and in knowledge as panacea.<sup>17</sup>

To an actual or even to an aspiring superman tragedy is defeatism. To one believing in unlimited progress, evil is the "survival of errors originally well intended."<sup>18</sup> Such a man, who moreover aspires to incorporate in his art "a really scientific natural history,"<sup>19</sup> is bound to believe that Shakespeare could write *King Lear* or *Timon of Athens* because he lacked Karl Marx's perspective.<sup>20</sup>

The choice of comedy as the only legitimate dramatic form stems from comedy's ability to satisfy a whole range of needs of Bernard Shaw : his need to devalue the actual world, his need to find in the protagonist of comedy a redeemer of this world through the projection of a worthier set of values, and his need to believe that worthier values are realizable in time. The "against" is no longer satisfied to be a mere denier, he takes upon himself the task of providing an alternative. Tragedy cannot be harnessed in the service of progress; comedy, with a drastic change of morphology, probably can.

In ancient Greece and in Shakespeare's England tragedy and comedy existed side by side and presented two patterns of action, two modes of behaviour, neither of which was less valid than the other. To Shaw one is right and the other is wrong because they are more than patterns of action, they are statements of fact, messages in literary form. According to him tragedy shows an inadequate level of knowledge about man, it is an erroneous theory

that fails to comprehend the evolutionary nature of the universe and the emerging strength and power of man. In delineating the limits of his power, tragedy sees man as a limited and finite being unable to master his fate and shape his future on this planet according to his own will.

The extent of Plato's influence on Shaw's poetics can be gauged from the fact that the latter's denunciation of tragedy is based on arguments that are remarkably similar to those used by Plato in his diatribe against poets. Shaw accuses Shakespeare of lacking religion and thus falling "into the bottomless pit of an utterly discouraging pessimism."<sup>21</sup> Similarly Plato accuses Homer of impiety and avers that the conduct of Zeus and Hera, of Ares and Aphrodite are scandalous.<sup>22</sup> Like Plato Shaw maintains that the tragic poets move us greatly, but they move us in the wrong manner. Thus he says :

As to pity and terror, if people's souls could only be set going right by pity and terror, then, the sooner the human race comes to an end the better. You cannot pity unless you have misfortunes to pity. That is the reason, by the way, why I am not a philanthropist, why I do not like Philanthropists — because they love sufferings of all kinds.<sup>23</sup>

This passage can be read as a slightly modified paraphrase of a famous passage of the *Republic* in which Plato argues that pity does not ennoble but merely corrupts human nature.<sup>24</sup> Like

Plato Shaw rejects tragic feelings in favour of knowledge. In fact the eclipse of Shaw's reputation today can be partly explained by the hostility of the modern age towards an aesthetics that claims the status of science for literature. The decline of the artist-philosopher like Shaw has been nicely grasped by I.A.Richards, who argues that after the neutralization of nature and explosion of knowledge it is no longer possible to believe in the truth of much of the explanation of nature, and these 'truths' were the props on which in an earlier age the response to poetry largely rested. Richards maintains that the 'truth' of poetry is completely divorced from the truth of science, and "beliefs...upon which so much drama seems to depend, are not scientific, but are held only for the sake of their dramatic effect."<sup>25</sup>

Shaw would find such a breach between literature and science revolting. To anyone choosing literature to produce "scientific natural history", the poetic use of language, or language that makes no distinction between the medium and the message, must be an encumbrance. *The Misanthrope* and *Hamlet* would be much better, Shaw feels, if they were "written in prose."<sup>26</sup> Even music must have a meaning, a message over and above the form. He is strongly antipathetic to "absolute music"<sup>27</sup> or music that exists "ornamentally for its own sake and [has] no real content at all."<sup>28</sup> If to most modern critics art is significant form, to Shaw it is significant content. If according to Pater all art aspires to the state of music, to Shaw even music is satisfactory when it aspires to the state of prose. He finds Brahms, inspite of his

great virtuosity unsatisfactory as an artist because he does not have "anything particular to say."<sup>29</sup>

Shakespeare is the Brahms of literature, the "ear is the sure clue to him : only a musician can understand the play of feeling which is the real rarity in the early plays."<sup>30</sup> In spite of being splendidly gifted Shakespeare "lacks Ibsen's intellectual force and dramatic insight" and the comparison with the Norwegian "makes Shakespeare ridiculous".<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare fascinated Shaw but it was the fascination of the siren : "I pity the man who cannot enjoy Shakespear. He has outlasted thousands of abler thinkers, and will outlast a thousand more" and his fascination shall remain "until our knowledge and grip of actual life begin to deepen and glow beyond the common".<sup>32</sup>

"In short it is the score and not the libretto [in Shakespeare] that keeps the work alive and fresh."<sup>33</sup> To Shaw the libretto was more important than the score. He loved Shakespeare's word-music but distrusted it because Shakespeare used language as poetry, or, to use the musical analogy used by Shaw himself, his libretto could not be separated from the score, nor his message valued independently of the medium.

Shaw's use of the word "comedy" presupposes the use of language as prose : he reads Ibsen as a prose-writer in this sense, and his distrust of Shakespeare, even of Shakespeare's comedies, is basically his distrust of poetry. Nicholas Grene correctly guesses that Shaw's truth is not poetic truth : "what is worrying in Shaw is his belief that comedy takes us closer to

reality itself, that comic prose is ultimately a greater source of truth than tragic poetry."<sup>34</sup> Similarly writing for the *New York Times* after the Theatre Guild's production of *Saint Joan*, Luigi Pirandello remarked : "There is a great poet in Shaw; but this combative Anglo-Irishman is quite willing to forget that he is a poet, so interested is he in being a citizen of his country or a man of the twentieth century society."<sup>35</sup>

Shaw would reply that the artist-philosopher is superior to the mere poet and one cannot be an artist-philosopher without a "high republican conscience [and] the identificantion of the artist's purpose with the purpose of the universe."<sup>36</sup> To Shaw the theatre was an instrument to discover non-theatrical reality, and he was not happy with the illusion that art deals with. Instead of the virtual reality that the poet creates through illusion, Shaw sought to utilize the stage to discover empirical, testable reality. The theatrical conventions of tragedy constitute the boundary of virtual reality, a boundary that separates the artistic image of truth created through illusion from the empirical world, which lies in the realm of reality of a distinctly different order. That is why Shaw even complained against the 'artificial' elements in Ibsen's plays :

Almost all the sorrow and the weariness which makes his plays so poignant are the sorrow and weariness of the mean dull life in which nothing happens, but nonetheless he provides a final catastrophe of the approved

fifth-act-blank-verse type. Hedvig and Hedda shoot themselves : Rosmer and Rebecca throw themselves into the mill-race : Solness and Rubek are dashed to pieces : Borkman dies of acute stage tragedy without discoverable lesion. I will not again say, as I have said before, that these catastrophes are forced, because a fortunate performance often makes the scene inevitable; but I do submit that the omission of them would leave the plays sadder and more convincing.<sup>37</sup>

Shaw's preference for a theatre that would be indistinguishable from natural history comes out unequivocally in the following lines :

The moment the dramatist gives up accidents and catastrophes, and takes 'slices of life' as his material, he finds himself committed to plays that have no endings. The curtain no longer comes down on a hero slain or married : it comes down when the audience has seen enough of life presented to it to draw the moral, and must either leave the theatre or miss the last train.<sup>38</sup>

We shall later see that this highly idiosyncratic view invests comedy with a character that is substantially different from the great tradition of European comedy. Negatively defined vis-à-vis tragedy the comic, according to this view, is that which is non-tragic. Positively, the one quality it shares with the

is non-tragic. Positively, the one quality it shares with the popular notion of comedy is the happy ending, but then the happy ending is not in the action that constitutes the *mimesis* but outside, at some distant point in the future. The comic resolution has been taken out of the plot and placed in the realm of ideology presented as historical prophecy. Thus Shaw's theory of comedy is as much a theory of history as an aesthetic theory.

## II

*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is one book that articulates most sharply the uniquely Shavian vision of comedy. It provides Shaw's existential rebellion in his novels with the much needed ideological foundation that places a sheer denier on a firm ground of affirmation. It succeeds in promoting the dervish to the status of the prophet. Considering the fact that Shaw's mindset remains substantially unchanged and the intense egoism that blocked any meaningful social intercourse of the protagonists with the outside world still remains untempered, this change wrought by sheer ideology is nothing short of remarkable. Paradoxically the great artist, who is necessarily a comic artist, is both the enemy of the people and their benefactor. He is their enemy because his present relationship with them is that of antagonism: "All the great artists enter into a terrible struggle with the public, often involving bitter poverty and personal humiliation...and because they believe they are apostles doing what used to be

When Shaw discovers in the new school of dramatists "the terrible art of sharp shooting at the audience" he is surely thinking as much of himself as of Ibsen :

Never mislead an audience, was an old rule. But the new school will trick the spectator into forming a meanly false judgement, and then convict him of it in the next act, often to his grievous mortification. When you despise something you ought to take off your hat to, or admire or imitate something you ought to loathe, you cannot resist the dramatist who knows how to touch these morbid spots in you and make you see that they are morbid. The dramatist knows that as long as he is teaching and saving his audience, he is as sure of their strained attention as ...the Angel of Annunciation.<sup>40</sup>

The dramatist causes pain to awaken joy and courage : significantly Shaw uses the language of pathology to describe the relationship between the artist and his audience. The ordinary man is in a diseased state, yet he is not past cure. The artist is unpopular because he lets out the unflattering truth about the audience and forces it to recognise the truth, but by doing so he also holds out the promise of a healthy life. The artist is cruel, but the cruelty is both necessary and salutary. Like Ibsen, a true artist is "both capable of hurting us cruelly and filling us with excited hopes of escape from idealistic tyrannies, and with visions of intenser life in the future."<sup>41</sup>

One can see that Shaw is not very consistent with his metaphor. One must assume that the people the artist hurts to cure are Shaw's Philistines, since they are in the majority in any society. Yet we have seen that he maintains that it is the Idealists, who constitute a minority in society — though they are much more numerous than the Realists — who are diseased, and the Philistines are unthinking, but basically healthy people. Even in *The Quintessence*, not to speak of the plays, the distinction between the Philistines and the Idealists often gets blurred.

What relates the artistic credo of *The Quintessence* to his novels even more strongly than Shaw's critical attitude to the world is the central position of the self in the new schema. The central characters' egoism in the novels stands in the way of the integration of the individual with society, because the novels do not merely stress the value of the individual and the individual's awareness of the intrinsic worth of self-awareness and self-respect, they also set up a gulf between the individual and "the other", and the elevation of the former leads to a corresponding devaluation of the latter until Shaw's heroes become emotionally incapable of comprehending that the world is composed not of the self and the other but of numerous selves. I have argued in the previous chapters that in the absence of a philosophical framework that Shaw finds later, the individualism of the novels often slips into obtuse solipsism.<sup>42</sup> *The Quintessence* relates the individual, who in the novels is often no more than a loose cannon, to a suprapersonal end, foreshadowing

the full-blown philosophy of *Man and Superman* that discovers the convergence of the individual and society in the World Will (Shaw's Creative Evolution) and makes Shavian comedy transcendental in nature.

In *The Quintessence* extreme individualism is no longer anti-social :

There is no hope in Individualism for egotism. When a man is at last brought face to face with himself by a brave Individualism, he finds himself face to face, not with an individual, but with a species, and knows that to save himself, he must save the race. He can have no life except a share in the life of the community; and if that life is unhappy and squalid, nothing he can do to paint and paper and upholster and shut off his little corner of it can really rescue him from it.<sup>43</sup>

What is at issue is not merely socialism: the passage makes a substantial attempt to disown the spirit of the novels, it grasps a simple truth not in evidence in his earlier work, namely, that the life of the individual finds fulfilment by affirming the life of the community. That this life of the community means more than economic or civic life, the sharing of which is the principal occupation of a socialist, becomes clearer in Shaw's comments on the *Emperor and Galilean*. Like Maximus Shaw feels that the future of the human race lies in "the third empire" which is "the empire of Man asserting the eternal validity of his own will."<sup>44</sup> The

tyrant Julian persecutes the Christians and brings about his own downfall because in his egotistical jealousy "Christ appears to him, not as the prototype of himself, as Maximus would have him feel, but as a rival god over whom he must prevail at all costs."<sup>45</sup> In another context Shaw says that the man who is standing alone for his own sake solely is literally an idiot."<sup>46</sup> One is left wondering whether the butt of his ridicule is really Peer Gynt or Sidney Trefusis and, to a lesser extent other Shavian heroes when he observes :

Peer's first boyish notion of the self-realised man is not the saint, but the demigod whose indomitable will is stronger than destiny, the fighter, the master, the man whom no woman can resist, the mighty hunter, the knight of a thousand adventures, the model...Now, no such person exists, or ever did exist, or ever can exist. The man who cultivates an indomitable will and refuses to make way for anything or anybody, soon finds that he cannot hold a street crossing against a tram car, much less, a world against the whole human race. Only by plunging into illusions to which every fact gives the lie can he persuade himself that his will is a force that can overcome all other forces...<sup>47</sup>

The will occupies a central position in Shaw's critical work as well as in his plays. Like Hobbes and Nietzsche he sees the will to power as a universal characteristic, but cannot,

unlike Nietzsche, apotheosize power. Man's animal spirits appeared to the German philosopher the hall-mark of his innate nobility; to Shaw's more complex conscience it is an animal instinct that has to be mitigated not by repression but by making it an instrument of a suprapersonal ethical purpose. That is why he comes down so heavily on the kind of wilfulness that exists for its own sake and values other men and women as a wrestler values the opponent he seeks to floor — the stronger the challenger, the more satisfying the taste of victory.

However, Shaw's own comments on Ibsen's characters is a flash of illumination that does not cover the distance between critical precept and practice, because in his own plays men and women are locked in a fiercer battle of will, and in situations of conflict they hardly fare better than Peer or Julian, who see themselves tragically or, as in the case of Peer, grotesquely consumed in a bootless struggle against other wills. As Norbert F. O'Donnell remarks, Shaw's drama "becomes a portrayal of life in which the will is the Key to human motives and all human relationships are, in one degree of intensity or another, conflicts of will."<sup>48</sup>

Shaw says that in Ibsen's third empire one asserts the eternal validity of one's own will and yet affirms the value of another's will. Such a view sees the will as the active and energetic manifestation of the self, and accepts the possibility of complete self-affirmation even after accepting the worth of another self. It is a startling view to be taken by a man like

Shaw, but it flies in the face of the evidence he produces in his own plays. Caesar, Shaw's Siegfried, has a will that looms over the whole play. He does not interact, he just controls. Like Dick Dudgeon he walks in lonely eminence. When Lady Cicely and Captain Brasbound confront each other they discover that their wills are caught in a conflict and they can face each other only as predator and prey. This conflict they cannot sublimate into a relationship of harmony; therefore they disengage themselves and retreat into loneliness : the prospect of affirming the other person's will fills each with the terror of losing one's own. Human relationship is symbiotic or parasitic, nowhere does it approximate the norm set up in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. In fact the ending of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* clearly parallels the following passage from Strindberg's *The Father* :

LAURA ... Our lovemaking was a joy, but it was followed by the sense that my very blood was ashamed. The mother became the mistress — ugh !

CAPTAIN I saw, but I was misunderstood. I thought you despised my lack of virility, and so I wanted to win you as a woman by proving myself as a man.

LAURA That's where you made your mistake. The mother was your friend, you see, but the woman was your enemy. Love between a man and a woman is war. And don't imagine that I gave myself. I didn't give. I took--whatever it was I wanted.<sup>49</sup>

Even motherhood is not exempt from power play — to be a mother is to triumph, to be a child is to lose and surrender. Laura "loved" her husband, the Captain, when he came to her as a child, but when he came to her as a man she hated him and finished him. Unlike in Strindberg, the seamy underside of the battle of the sexes lurks in the background in Shaw, but it does come out into the open from time to time, as in *Candida* and *Captain Brasbound's Conversion*, and even when it is in the background the plays leave, as I have tried to show earlier, the unmistakable impression that the hostility is lurking in the shadows and has not been completely overcome. The Fabian feminist's affinity with the Scandinavian misogynist is much greater than Shaw would concede.

### III

If we return for a moment from Shaw's practice to his precepts, we shall see that Shaw sees comedy operating at different levels. At the basic level comedy can "throw pity and terror to one side and...stimulate thought" about life. At this level it is the didactic art par excellence, and Shaw sees Aristophanes, Euripides, Shakespeare, Goethe as "intensely didactic" writers.<sup>50</sup> Thus comedy is an instrument used to change opinion and the writers whom he sees doing so, including Euripides, he treats as authors of comedy or tragi-comedy rather than tragedy. It is in this sense that *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*, with all the trappings of melodrama, are

comedies. The archetype of such comedy is *A Doll's House* : "A *Doll's House* will be as flat as ditch water when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will still be as fresh as paint, but it will have done more work in the world; and that is enough for the highest genius, which is intensely utilitarian."<sup>51</sup>

He readily concedes that the superiority of *A Doll's House* over *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not artistic superiority; he elaborates the point by comparing Granville Barker with Congreve — he considers Barker a far greater writer than Congreve and yet unhesitatingly admits that "the stupendous superiority of *The Madras House* to *The Way of The World*, is due wholly to the difference in the subject matter and the mental capacity of the authors."<sup>52</sup> What is to be noted is that *A Doll's House* and *The Madras House* provide Shaw with a paradigm of comedy, but *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not as it does not subserve any social dynamics. This is the basic level of comedy for Shaw, the level at which comedy "stimulates thought" by unmasking, by exposing the worthlessness of things we esteem in our ignorance. Moliere appeals to Shaw at this level :

Moliere destroyed the prestige of the conspiracies against society which we call the professions, and which thrive by the exploitation of idolatry. He unmasked the doctor, the philosopher, the fencing master, the priest. He ridiculed their dupes : the hypochondriac, the academician, the devotee, the gentleman as the butt and creature of his

valet, emphasizing thus the inevitable relation between the man who lives by unearned money and the man who lives by weight of service...<sup>53</sup>

At this level comedy is satirical : it ridicules ugliness, pretensions, iniquities and vanities. This is the level at which Shaw's conception of comedy approximates that of Aristotle, according to whom comedy portrays men as worse than ordinary human beings.<sup>54</sup> Since it stresses the negation of actual experience, this is the level at which comedy appeals to Shaw's instincts, for the entire body of his polemical writings, almost all his novels and the Plays Unpleasant are attuned to this spirit of denial. Yet to Shaw this negation is just one of the features of comedy, not its sufficient condition. One of his complaints against Moliere is that like Shakespeare the Frenchman fails to make the necessary distinction between human institutions and human nature : "Moliere never indicted Society...It is true that Moliere, like Shakespear indicted human nature, which would seem to be a broader attack; but such attacks only make thoughtful men melancholy and hopeless, and practical men cynical or murderous."<sup>55</sup>

At the higher level, therefore, Shaw sees comedy combining denial with affirmation : man must be capable of surviving after all the unmasking on the strength of his nature alone. At this level the vision of comedy becomes more complex : it shows up the useless ideals and institutions that lie on society like a heap of empty shells, but it also shows the intrinsic worth of men and

women, the natural goodness of their action : it also shows that the rubbish has to be swept away as it poses a threat to the hygiene of society.

At the second level Shaw's idea of comedy is no longer Aristotelian. Tired and scared of the nihilistic consequences of his consistent urge to deny normal experience, Shaw builds a second tier into his concept of comedy. The Plays Pleasant represent this second level in an attempt to compensate for the deficiencies of his earlier works. Whether the highest criticism is, as Oscar Wilde thought, autobiographical or not, Shaw's references to Shakespeare and Moliere can be read as self-criticism. If Shakespeare and Moliere picked quarrels with God as Shaw thought, surely they were no match for him, since he carried the quarrel to his grave.

Comedy at the more complex level is the result of Shaw's attempt to patch up this quarrel. In the preface to the Plays Pleasant he professes to see "plenty of good in the world working itself out as fast as the idealists will allow it; and if they would only let it alone and learn to respect reality."<sup>56</sup> His success in depicting human action endowed with "plenty of good" is not unqualified. Through Bluntschili he comes close to the third empire he championed in *The Quintessence*, for the anti-heroic Swiss constitutes the bridge between the world of flesh and that of spirit, and though at times he seems as bizarre as Shakespeare's Don Armado, he succeeds in retrieving his humanity and becoming more than a counterfoil to Sergius's operatic tenor.

The final twist in which the hard-boiled pragmatist reveals himself as a hyper-romantic must be one convincing illustration of humane and necessary illusion in Shaw's plays. But structurally it is Sergius and not he who occupies the play's central position, and Sergius does not come through as a comic Hamlet, because though as a dramatist Shaw stakes his success on the convincingness of Sergius as the kingpin of a moving tragi-comedy, the latter cannot rescue himself from the world of extravaganza. We see Sergius the panjandrum and we see Sergius the cynic, but they are the two sides of the same idealism that does not work. We do not see the Hamlet in Sergius over and above the roles he acts with such self-conscious theatricality. Bluntschli does catapult himself centrestage with his punch lines, but in doing so he runs away with the hero's role, because in the written text, as distinct from the stage, he is at the margin of a complex action. The success of the marginal man is thus directly proportional to Shaw's failure with his comic hero. ©

*Candida* may have been designed by its author as "a modern mystery play of the Madonna and child, the theatre where the Catholic religion of Creative Evolution lives",<sup>57</sup> but it hardly stresses a "balanced, humanitarian view",<sup>58</sup> as Bert Cardullo thinks. Behind *Candida*'s pleasant protective facade lies a dangerous creature; in fact, Shaw gives us a replay, on a subtler scale and a more disguised manner, of Strindberg's *The Father*. *Candida* mollicoddles her husband as long as he is under her thumb, but at the moment of reckoning, when Morell refuses to play the

child and confronts her as the husband she does to him precisely what Laura does to the Captain : the strait-jacket and the physical violence are absent but there is no mistaking that she destroys him intentionally and systematically.

When we remember that *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* is indispensable for an understanding of Shaw's comedy, and read *Candida* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* against the background of the *Quintessence*, it becomes immediately clear that Shaw's heroes and heroines are closer to Julian than to Maximus, and he himself is incapable as a dramatist of realising what he preaches as a philosopher. In spite of *The Quintessence* the encounter between the self and the other in Shaw's plays is not resolved through mutual affirmation.

It is not by sheer chance that the focus of Shaw's comedies moves away from more personal to less personal and from private to public themes. Traditionally comedy depicts society as a civilizing agent and it shows the norms of civilization endangered by deviant individuals who have been insufficiently socialized and are not able to cope satisfactorily with their monomania, gluttony, pretentiousness, avarice, lasciviousness or some other vice. Such threats to society are effectively countered by breaking in the individual or, when that is not possible, by isolating him. The artistic portrayal of individual error is possible only against the background of a stable society that provides a broad consensus regarding the norms to be followed. The journey from folly to wisdom of an individual presupposes a common

standard easily recognized by the audience of the play.

In *Candida*, Shaw's counterblast to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the dramatist not only springs a surprise in his choice of the doll, he subverts his own standard of normalcy by revealing the supposedly normal woman as completely devoid of human qualities. In *Arms and the Man* he allows Bluntschli to provide the norm only by default, but this piece of theatrical coup is not enough to hide the gaping hole at the centre. *You Never Can Tell* oscillates in the eyes of its own creator between repulsive farce and high poetry because Shaw himself oscillates between genuine sympathy and a heartless rejection of family norms and consequently orchestrates the display of feeling in the key of farce in which melodrama is fantasticated and trivialised. Such ambivalence cuts the ground of agreement on which a solid foundation of comedy can be laid. Shaw's overall comic device has been called "suspense of form"<sup>59</sup> by Elder Olson. The device keeps the audience guessing as to the nature of the play : an expectation is roused only to be thwarted and what the audience gets is very different from what it expects. We have seen that this is as true of a melodrama like *The Devil's Disciple* as of a "romance" like *Pygmalion*. The simulation of the structure of the popular thriller for comic purposes has one drawback : it robs the audience of a stable background. The sudden change of figure and ground induces a dizziness in the viewer. It is easier to admire the virtuosity of the author under such circumstances than to be converted; the conviction preceding the conversion gets little substance to fasten on to.

This uneasiness with the tradition of the form, this limited success in dramatising "the lot of good in the world" gives to Shaw's comedy a new turn, in which man does not move from inadequate to adequate adjustment with society. With the new element Shaw may be said to have entered the third stage of comedy, and the new comedy may be called the comedy of deliverance: the significant action does not involve correction and change in man's response to society. The change required is not from inappropriate to appropriate response of an individual or a group of society, it takes the shape of the journey of a highly evolved individual or coalition in the direction of power. Edmund Wilson avers that the principal opposition in Shaw's plays is between the saint and the man of action.<sup>60</sup> At the farthest reach of Don Juan's imagination stands an individual who has absolute power and absolute knowledge. A third ideal that he might have included but does not is love. In the plays *Pleasant*, love was not yet discarded by the dramatist but it proved to be the one feeling that Shaw had difficulty in handling without embarrassment and shamefacedness. Nothing showed the inability better than *Candida* and the embarrassment more acutely than *You Never Can Tell*.

The shift of the paradigm from love to power — and the two are in Shaw's plays mutually exclusive — duplicates the spiritual journey of the author from boyhood to adulthood. As a purely literary activity it is the return of the author of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* to an earlier stage of his career. As an individual he taught himself to replace love with power in order

to deal with the world. As a novelist tentatively working out the idea of the superman through his heroes, he explored the exciting contours of power through various modes of victory of the protagonists over others: the unarmed prophet is not necessarily the prophet of non-violence. For a brief while, as the author of *The Quintessence*, he made an attempt to transcend the duality of self and other but did not grasp the fact that transcendence is not possible without the aid of love.

Changing the world may seem a more difficult task than changing an individual, but Shaw moved from the private sphere to the public one for the opposite reason. Bringing about fundamental changes in the attitude of the marginal man involved a drastic shake-up in his own adjustment with the world; he chose, therefore, what was for him the easier task — the task of changing the world to satisfy the expectations of the individual. This brought him back to the place where he began. The *Plays Pleasant* failed to be a sufficiently strong means of extroversion. The new comedy that followed was thus political comedy in a very obvious sense; politics is the study of organized power, and the central theme of Shaw's new comedy was the alignment of wisdom with power or, more precisely, the search of the man of wisdom for power and his willingness to sacrifice innocence for it.

The new dynamism that is imparted to the plays by their dialectical content takes them further away from the familiar climate of comedy, though structurally they still resemble Europe's most famous comedy, which moves upward from the human

circle to a higher one through redemption. Yet the secular equivalent of the *Divine Comedy* in Shaw's hands proves more problematic because Shaw has nothing like the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the other Scholastics to connect the future with the present. Without the solid core of shared religious belief, the higher circle in which present contradictions are resolved is no more than an airy dream outside the immediate experience of the audience, whereas the present, which is no more than the middle term in Shaw's dialectic, is, in all its terribleness, the only world steeped in reality. The heaven of *Major Barbara* is a dream, the hell of *John Bull's Other Island* is the reality.

Shaw's plays of this period are revolutionary in their departure from tradition. The contrast with Shakespeare can be illuminating. In Shakespeare's plays self-knowledge and individual maturity are enough. It is enough for Benedick and Beatrice or Claudius and Hero to come to terms with one another through mutual accommodation and, as in the case of Benedick and Beatrice, to rise above latent hostilities by forming a lasting sexual alliance that promises to be both biologically and socially productive. It is not necessary for them to appropriate the power of Don John in order to save society. Human society is structured and ordered and the autonomy of one sphere is not encroached upon by the others. It is Fortune rather than Don Pedro that thwarts the villainy of Don John and yet Don Pedro can recede into the background to leave the comic stage to Benedick and Beatrice. In more abstract terms

it means that there is place and scope for every kind of activity, none of which is choked up by the others.

In Shaw's revolutionary world neither the boon of Fortune nor the order of society can be relied upon to deliver the goods. The autonomous spheres are shattered. The innocence of Keegan merely reveals to him that the world he lives in is hell. Barbara can keep herself away from the cynical world of ammunition only by perpetuating the rule of Lazarus and Undershaft. As the critic of the ubiquitous muddle around him Shaw knew that the ideal is not the real, in fact the world revealed in these plays suggests that the Hegelian formula is more appropriate when reversed: society can be redeemed not only by arresting but also by reversing the direction of history. History is wavering between tragedy and farce, it will resolve itself into comedy only when Cusins shoulders Undershaft's responsibilities and discharges Undershaft's duties. In *John Bull's Other Island* the saint's suffering leads not to tragic fulfilment but to bootless heartbreak.

This obsession with success, this trivialization of suffering, this irresistible call of evangelism, this dogmatic faith in the power of polemics to reveal the truth on Shaw's part and the nightmarish experience of the terrible half-century on the part of his readers combine to give a sinister ring to the ethos of these plays. Unprepared to give any quarter to tragedy and counting pessimism among the cardinal sins, Shaw promises deliverance in these plays. *John Bull* seemingly moves out of hell

and *Major Barbara* ends pointing the way to heaven, although with the rider that the road lies through hell. The atmosphere of both *John Bull's Other Island* and *Major Barbara* is that of deep pessimism, as it would be in any tragedy without the cathartic release effected by the ennobling experience of suffering. Both plays deal with the problem of evil and the contagion of evil even though the author is loth to admit it. Situations on the ground seldom approximate metaphysical abstractions and both plays, dealing with concrete reality rather than metaphysical categories, end in a closed universe from which there are no escape routes to higher spheres. But the socialist in Shaw, insisting that every evil is remediable, and the polemicist in him, finding succour in a mechanical reversal of power equations, force happy endings on these plays. What is more disturbing is Shaw identifying himself with the aggressor to save himself from despair.

Shaw's political drama is profoundly Platonic in its aspiration: like Plato Shaw believes that the world can be saved only if the guardians are the rulers. But this is the ideal situation, in the actual world the "ought" and the "is" do not agree. So what is to be done? Shaw's answer seems to be that the "ought" and the "is" must be one some day, and no price is too high to be paid to achieve that end; in fact he goes further by carrying Plato's theory of domination of the lower by the higher faculties to the logical extreme by arguing that the superior person is morally obliged to capture temporal power. As the gunpowder is the ultimate source of temporal power — the ballot

that counts has a bullet wrapped in it — Shaw's new hero is a man who is prepared to kill for the sake of his faith. Shaw is not being a sadist, he is carrying his Platonism to its logical end.

In order to establish spiritual rule the superior man must have political power: in Plato's language, the man possessing the rational faculty should dominate men in whom the appetitive or the spirited faculties predominate, even if the domination of the superior person is carried out through the barrel of the gun.<sup>61</sup> Shaw's consistent espousal of liquidation of the inefficient and the useless stems from the belief originating in Plato that human life has no inherent sacredness and must justify itself by its usefulness to society.<sup>62</sup>

Democracy and faith in the sacredness of human life come from the acceptance of value-relativism and pluralism. Since there is no way of ascertaining objectively that one set of values is better than another (in order to escape the trap of extreme relativism which refuses to judge the relative worth of a Spinoza and a Hitler, we can say that generally life does not provide us with such extreme examples, and a softer relativism has entrenched itself in Europe ever since Locke showed in his *Essay on Human Understanding* that the world cannot be known directly or objectively) we accept that we have no right to impose our beliefs on others. Tolerance becomes a necessity under such circumstances, and hence democracy. Philosophically Shaw does not show the least awareness of the earth-shaking impact of either Locke or Kant. In his dogmatism, too, he is akin to Plato. His Life Force, like

Plato's Idea, appropriates the whole of truth, and he makes the same distinction between knowledge and belief that Plato does.<sup>63</sup>

Thus enthroned by Shaw knowledge rules as a tyrant. Only a tiny minority has access to knowledge. Like those of Plato, Shaw's rightful Guardians — the Realists — form the smallest portion of society. This breeds an extreme form of elitism, for almost everything associated with the majority is dysgenic : the aspirations of common humanity have been discarded by the Life Force. The only joy the Life Force permits Don Juan is the joy of contemplation. Intellect is enshrined in Shaw's sanctum sanctorum and acts as the pole star to the human race. This certainty about the purpose of the universe, the clear knowledge of the path to be traversed by man and the direction to be taken make the Life Force the centre-piece of Shaw's religion. There can be no greater relief than the discovery of a credible dogma in an age in which all dogmas are crumbling, leaving a hole in man's soul.

If Shaw gives man an aim to strive for, he also condemns the strife as hopeless. Knowledge, according to him, is not immanent and evolving in history. Shaw's Nature is transcendental, its aim had been fixed independently of man, much before the human race was created. We live in time and we can hope to realize human aspirations only in time. We can hope to transcend ourselves through our successors only if we believe that from the dawn of civilization our forefathers were trying, however dimly they may have been aware of the fact, to better themselves. But Shaw denies

the fact: "I do not know," he wrote to A.B.Walkley, "whether you have any illusion left on the subject of education, progress and so forth. I have none."<sup>64</sup> In the "Notes to Caesar and Cleopatra" he denies that any progress has taken place in history: "The notion that there has been any such Progress since Caesar's time (less than 20 centuries) is too absurd for discussion."<sup>65</sup> In other words the aims of the Life Force are not immanent, the purpose of Nature is different from the purpose of man, the Life Force does not move forward and upward through human history. The gulf between the past and the present on the one hand and the distant future on the other, between man and superman, cannot be bridged by the history of mankind. On the one hand Shaw believes that the universe can realise its aims only through progress, on the other he maintains that man cannot be the instrument of that progress.

This paradox contains the implicit acknowledgment that Shaw's attempt to connect history to literature through his political comedy is a failure, for Shaw's pessimism implies that he realizes that the transformation of Undershaft's world through Cusins is not possible, but as he is not prepared to recognize Barbara's agony as the ultimate fact of the human condition, he makes his comedy take the last plunge. In leaping over the human condition, *Back to Methuselah* shows the final development of Shavian Comedy.

Readers are likely to find *Back to Methuselah* repulsive, even terrifying, yet it is the supreme triumph of Shavian dialectics, for it ends in the Utopia that Don Juan imagined in

*Man and Superman.* Juan longed for the Platonic norm of civilization, but the Socratic standard keeps the norm hopelessly out of the reach of all but a tiny minority. And yet as a writer of comedies, Shaw cannot completely ignore the idea of comedy as a communion. How can there be any communion without a community? He seeks to get round the difficulty by making adulthood an emerging principle of the Life Force: an intelligent civilization has not yet been created, but life is unmistakably pushing in that direction.

Making brilliant use of his knowledge of biological evolution Shaw seeks to replace the species with a principle as the source of abiding value. Not man but intelligence forms the background against which everything is judged. Life has moved upwards over millions of years and its path of ascent has been marked by the expansion of consciousness and the dominance of intelligence. The cerebral cortex of man is of recent origin — birds and lower animals are dominated by feeling. The hypothalamus and the lower brain — parts of the human brain over which the cerebrum's painstakingly slow but unmistakable ascendance has earned man the place in which he finds himself today — still determines almost completely the behaviour of lower animals. Shaw reminds us of the sobering fact that evolution has not come to an end, nor are we, therefore, its ultimate product. If intelligence and consciousness set us apart from other animals, a time is bound to come when the dominance of mind over other faculties will be so impressive that today's man will seem a

pitiabile creature in comparison with the living beings of the future — the being whom we must call superman for want of a better name — intelligence will play such an overwhelming role that the superman will be almost pure intelligence. Such a being is bound to be vastly different from us. The superman will be Platonism made flesh : in him the appetitive and spirited elements will dwindle so much in comparison with the rational, that they will seem practically non-existent.<sup>66</sup> In him feeling and emotion will revolve around that dazzling sun, intelligence, and the proclamation of the effulgent glory of intelligence will be the *raison d'être* of emotion.

The last two parts of *Back to Methuselah* have shocked many readers with their forbidding portraits of men and women, but from the very beginning Shaw's intellectual aspirations were directed to this end. He did not believe in the timelessness of art. As a believer in evolution he knew that a fundamental change in human nature was bound to be reflected in literature — evolution would lead not only to the obsolescence of man but also of art, a human creation. This change had been anticipated by Shaw many years before he wrote his metabiological Pentateuch:

Fashions change more quickly than manners, manners more quickly than morals, morals more quickly than passions, and in general, the conscious, reasonable, intellectual life more quickly than the instinctive, wilful, affectionate one. The dramatist who deals with the irony and humour of

the relatively durable sides of life, or with their pity and terror, is the one whose comedies and tragedies last longest.<sup>67</sup>

The comedies preceding *Back to Methuselah* deal "with the irony and humour" of changing manners and morals. The final society of comedy is reached in *Back to Methuselah*; in fact the play goes beyond the portrayal of that society, for the last part of the play depicts a world where comedy and all other forms of art are obsolete. Shaw foresaw this end many years ago when he insisted that our greatest works of art would be discarded by the future : "Not until the change has reached our instincts and passions will the stories begin to "date" again for the last time before their final obsolescence."<sup>68</sup>

*Back to Methuselah* is the highest stage of Shavian comedy, and yet, paradoxically, in the final society depicted in the play neither comedy nor any other form of art or literature is possible. The play provides us with a glimpse of "men" whose passions and instincts have changed completely. To a dramatist who puts his work at the service of evolution the obsolescence of his own work, indeed, of all drama, is not a disaster, just as the prospect of martyrdom is not terrible to a heroic person. The obsolescence of his own plays is the ultimate triumph of the Shavianism of Shaw's comedies.

*Back to Methuselah* is the still point on which the different lines pursued by Shaw converge. His unresolved

contradictions are finally reconciled ; the outsider, the critic, the champion of vital science and the prophet of a new religion--the various roles jostling inside him -- are finally at peace with one another as they merge into this grand comedy. The end depicted by the cycle is Shaw's equivalent of Hegel's Absolute contemplating itself; it is the point beyond which dialectic cannot move, for the play goes as far as thought can reach.

If "As Far as Thought Can Reach", the last part of *Back To Methuselah*, is the ultimate point of Shavian comedy, the cycle as a whole is the matrix of all the separate comedies that precede it as well as of those that follow :

My plays are interludes, as it were, between two greater realities. And the meaning of them lies in what has preceded them and in what follows them. The beginning of one of my plays takes place exactly where an unknown play ended. It is the two unwritten plays [the critics] should consider in order to get light upon the one that lies between.<sup>69</sup>

A written play moves onward until its momentum pushes it beyond its confines into the realm of an unwritten play, which in turn flows into another written play. Thus Shaw's separate plays do not remain separate, they combine to form one great comedy. The action moves not only onward but also upward until the collective aspiration of the species is embodied in some greater species that reaches towards the infinite through the conquest of death. Seen

in this way, the play is the final act of a great comedy of which plays like *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara* are the earlier acts. *Back to Methuselah* presupposes the aspiration as well as the incomplete resolution of the earlier plays.

In Shaw's *Divine Comedy* exclusion thus becomes transformed into transcendence. The killing of the shortlivers, anticipating the activity of the angel in *The Simpleton* and adding a gloss on Shaw's support of similar activities by dictators, becomes euthanasia and a religious obligation. The killing of the ghastly monster created by *Pygmalion* becomes not only an obligation, but also an act of compassion to the monster itself. That seems also to be Shaw's final statement on the majority, who are seen as eugenic failures.

For the poet of the post-humanist era, the charge of anti-humanism signifies nothing more than a semantic confusion on the part of his critics and their attachment to certain shibboleths that must be outgrown before humanity transcends itself. Since in this transcendence lies the religion of the future, it was Shaw's manifest destiny to be the first writer in the modern age to redeem comedy from the irreligiousness of Shakespeare and Molière and restore to it the glory it was invested with by Dante. As the poet of the future communion Shaw cannot but indict man for betraying the Life Force. The Paradise of the *Divine Comedy* can be reached only after the supersession — or destruction, as the fate of *Pygmalion's* experiment suggests — of man.<sup>70</sup>

#### IV

We have seen that for Shaw human history is a part of the cosmic comedy, but it is founded on despair because Shaw cannot see history delivering the goods. Man stands condemned. But on what evidence is this condemnation based ? Shaw's argument, in its most elaborate form, is to be found in the Epistle Dedicatory preceding *Man and Superman* as well as in *The Revolutionist's Handbook*. The latter concedes that the superman is not a necessity :

Any Socialist can convince us easily that the difference between Man as he is and Man as he might become, without further evolution...is enormous...It need not be denied that if we all struggle bravely to the end of the reformers' paths we should improve the world prodigiously. But there is no more hope in that than in the equally plausible assurance that if the sky falls we shall all catch larks...We do not desire the end enough : indeed in most cases we do not effectively desire it at all.<sup>71</sup>

The Handbook finds Fabian methods "fundamentally futile"<sup>72</sup> because the nation will never be converted to Fabianism. Shaw sees in history the regular recurrence of the same stupidity, the same

bursts of savagery that threatened past ages and previous civilizations. He cannot escape the conclusion that

after all, the dog will return to his vomit and the sow...to her wallowing in the mire; and we may as well make up our minds that Man will return to his idols and cupidities, inspite of all "movements" and all revolutions, until his nature is changed.<sup>73</sup>

The small gains accumulating over many generations are wiped out by atavistic retrogressions, and progress is no more than an illusion because it never recovers more than a fraction of the lost ground. By a careful selection of events Shaw seeks to establish almost an exact correspondence between horrors and cruelties committed in the past and those being perpetuated now. The conclusion is inescapable :

Unless we are replaced by a more highly evolved animal — in short, by the Superman — the world must remain a den of dangerous animals among whom our few accidental supermen, our Shakespears, Goethes, Shelleys and their like, must live as precariously as lion tamers do...<sup>74</sup>

In reply to this one can say that the world would have been vastly better had it been composed entirely of Shakespeares, Goethes and Shelleys, but is it not easier to visualise a country where the majority understand and accept Fabian principles than "an England in which every man is a Cromwell, a France in which every man is a

Napoleon, a Rome in which every man is a Caesar, a Germany in which every man is a Luther plus a Goethe..."<sup>75</sup> According to the Handbook either of the two possibilities can save civilization, but Shaw gives up the first possibility as a pipe dream, yet trenchantly demands a nation of supermen !

Shaw sees history as a conglomeration of random events without any significant meaning. At best it is like the Minotaur's maze, anyone wending his way through it crosses and recrosses the same junction endlessly without reaching anywhere. This indictment of human civilization undoubtedly has some substance, and Shaw's refusal to equate technical innovation with real progress is quite justifiable. When the First World War was fought it surpassed all previous wars in history in the extent of its devastation: that war was succeeded by Buchenwald and Auschwitz, which revealed a new nadir of human cruelty. As if that was not enough, the discovery and the dropping of the nuclear bomb revealed the ultimate paradox of progress — man can, in a few hours, or even minutes, bring history to an end in a breath-taking display of advanced technology. Few thinking men have the confidence to hope that the world has no "leader" sufficiently insane to attempt such a thing. Those of us who have lived through an age dominated by the doctrine of the Balance of Terror will agree that after all the revolutions, both scientific and political, life in the twentieth century has become more and not less precarious. The survival of the human race was not at stake during the Dark and the Middle Ages; it is in our times.

How are we to cope with this crisis ? One answer, the Shavian answer, is to breed supermen. One can hope that one day Nature will people the earth with only Goethes and Shelleys and mankind will be saved. The other answer is to learn sobriety, if not through spiritual transformation, then through sheer necessity. This is the less glorious way. This way teaches unremarkable men to realize the danger of their own situations and find new solutions through mutual tolerance, co-existence and detente. It teaches them to carry tolerance further through newer forms of co-operation. Experience teaches France and Germany to build bridges of co-operation after centuries of mutual hatred. Experience teaches the United States to help the reconstruction of Russia years after they came close to annihilating each other over the Cuban Missile Crisis. Experience and self-interest. Experience teaches men and nations to learn from the past, to use the past in a creative manner. To learn from past mistakes is the same thing as learning from history; and to make a creative use of the past is the same thing as the vindication of historical progress.

Shaw will not grant that any progress has taken place or can take place in history. He wants a Greece in which every man is an Aristotle, a Rome in which every man is a Julius Caesar. It is quite unlikely that such a day will come within a thousand years, but in another sense an average Greek of today is an improvement on Aristotle, an average Italian superior to Caesar. An average Greek today finds slavery abhorrent, he does not believe that a crystal sphere encloses the universe; an ordinary Italian's moral

sense would be outraged today by gladiatorial contests, or imperialism or a circus in which hungry lions are fed with religious dissenters.

While biologically we are almost identical with our ancestors who lived two thousand years ago, the central tendency of co-ordinated human activities, and this must be distinguished from the activity of individuals with prodigious capacity for either good or evil, is moving in a forward direction. Even an ordinary man today looks taller than Aristotle not because he is a giant like Aristotle but because he is standing on the latter's shoulders.

To one who believes that literary truth is limited and ultimately assimilated by social reality, the reality of historical progress should be nothing less than the sign of salvation. Moreover, historians have not failed to discern such signs. From history Gibbon reached "the pleasing conclusion that every age of the world has increased, and still increases, the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge, and perhaps the virtue, of the human race."<sup>76</sup> Lord Acton called history "a progressive science" and asserted in the introduction to the first volume of *Cambridge Modern History* that "we are bound to assume, as the scientific hypothesis on which history is written, a progress in human affairs."<sup>77</sup> Elaborating further he added in his *Lectures in Modern History* :

It is by the combined effort of the weak, made under

compulsion, to resist the reign of force and constant wrong, that, in the rapid change but slow progress of four hundred years, liberty has been preserved, and secured, and extended and finally understood.<sup>78</sup>

We need not, of course, take Gibbon or Acton to mean that at every moment we are making the best use of our historical knowledge, that progress takes place in a smooth, unbroken line. There may be bursts of brutality, moments of insanity (in history a moment may last for many years) and areas of darkness. It is quite possible that people who monopolise newspaper headlines — the newsmakers, the rulers, the power-brokers — betray history by refusing to learn from it. But when we speak of the spirit of the age, we do not necessarily mean the most conspicuous men, we mean the broad tendencies of the age, and we mean the collective wisdom of the age, a wisdom that has been gleaned from previous ages and expanded by the present. In this sense history is not a random recurrence of meaningless events, it is a continuously evolving process. Historical evolution is as real as biological evolution, but such sobering thought is not conducive to Shaw's messianism. The biological superman is a necessity because in Shaw's view the civilization created by history is teetering on the verge of disaster. In plays like *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Saint Joan* Shaw seeks to establish the thesis that there is no significant difference between the past and the present. The epilogue of *Saint Joan* was written to drive home the point that

Joan's troubles began, not ended, with her death and to show that the modern age has not advanced even one step beyond the Middle Ages.

Joan elicits the same response in the twentieth century as she did at the time of Cauchon and Warwick. In an eloquent acquittal of the Inquisition Shaw argues that if Joan were to come back to life today, we would consign her to the flames again.

Shaw's incursions into history, therefore, often lead to the mythologization of history. He is quick to seize upon the aberrations of modernism and magnify them with his redoubtable power of polemics. As J.M. Robertson remarks : "Always, when he thinks of modern science, Mr Shaw is moved to talk of vaccination and vivisection and astrology and palmistry and psycho-analysis, for purposes of general disparagement of the twentieth century as compared to the Middle Ages or Connemara."<sup>79</sup>

To show that there can be no redemption of man in history, Shaw had to exonerate Richard Cauchon and the Inquisition, maintaining that their role had been honourable in the trial of Joan; and had to prove false Hegel's theory of the unripe historical moment. There is nothing ennobling in Shaw's play in the conflict between Joan and the Church. Hegel's "objective freedom" becomes the dead weight of reaction against the evolutionary principle, but Shaw will not permit us the comfort of believing that the history of the last five hundred years is the record of victory of liberty over tyrannical organizations. If we have not made any progress in so many centuries, if there is

nothing to distinguish the modern age from the Middle Ages, then we are not likely to emerge unscathed out of the new and far more terrifying crisis into which we have embroiled ourselves in the twentieth century. *Saint Joan* was written between the two World Wars and after *Back to Methuselah*. Understandably therefore, *Saint Joan* offers no cathartic release at the end, but an inescapable sense of doom.<sup>80</sup>

In order to obliterate the difference between our age and the Middle Ages Shaw takes unwarranted liberties with historical records. He glosses over the fact that Joan's trial was not fair. The very acts for which she was made out to be a witch were, in thousands of ascetics, counted as proof of sanctity. The judges had made up their minds before the trial began, and even in procedural details they were not scrupulous. Any modern Court of Justice would find the trial scandalous. As G.G. Coulton, a distinguished historian of the Middle Ages says : "It is sometimes argued that Joan's judges acted strictly within the limits of Inquisitorial law and procedure, almost anything was permissible which should tend to bring the accused to confession or proof of guilt."<sup>81</sup> According to the law of the Inquisition, a person's guilt was assumed unless he could prove his innocence. This "goes far to explain why...acquittal was almost unknown to the Inquisition."<sup>82</sup>

When we compare our confused, faltering and baffled age with the purity of the Age of Faith, confusion does not seem certain loss. As Robertson says, the Age of Faith "was an age of

moral horrors wrought in Faith's name. And the doing of them in the name of Faith was the strongest of all checks to moral betterment."<sup>83</sup>

A dispassionate study of history is bound to show that history is not a game of musical chairs. A disinterested review of the Middle Ages by a man of the twentieth century reveals that progress is one incontrovertible law of history.

v

We have seen that to pave the way for the superman, the lynch-pin of his transcendental comedy, Shaw had to reduce history to myth. His dabbling in history led him to the conclusion that he had reached as a young novelist without the aid of history. Projecting his narcissism into the historical process, he came to the conclusion that there was no hope for the world except in a god-like being. Thus his brief attempt in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* to form an alliance between the Realist and the Philistine, between the superior person and the ordinary man, came a cropper. At the beginning of Shaw's career his hero rejected society; for a brief while he was the vanguard. The final version of the superman reverts to the original position, but this could not be done without rejecting history. So Shaw falsifies the evidence of history to deny it a constructive role in the future. That role must be reserved for one who is not a part of history but rises above it.

Even if one puts aside the question of feasibility of such a being, one has to tackle the question : What will the superman be like ? The Revolutionist's Handbook is evasive but it does mention Shakespeare, Goethe and Shelly, who are called "accidental supermen", yet this turns out to be a misleading cue, for these men had human qualities in superabundance : Shakespeare and Goethe celebrated both man's divinity and his animality; Shelley's Prometheus rises above the rest not only because of his unconquerable will to help men, but also because in the midst of unspeakable suffering he does not lose the power to forgive and to love. The men mentioned by Shaw were far above the average, but they owed their greatness to their ability to see with their mind's eye : in that vision the commonest gesture of the common man resonates with eternal grandeur.

If thought begets flesh, and life imitates art, then the poet is also a prophet. His invocation of the superman, who lies in the womb of a dream, is less uncommon than one would suspect, for whether they explicitly state it or not, many if not most poets feel that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for ?"

The black girl in Shaw's pamphlet says to Koheleth : "I have learned from you that to know God is to be God."<sup>84</sup> The redhaired Irishman tells her that in his opinion "He's not properly made and finished yet."<sup>85</sup> If God is not made yet, then it is the duty of man to make Him and this can be done when man himself becomes God. Here Shaw's thought shows strong affinity

with the vision of mystic thinkers and poets not only of the East but also of the West. For example Emerson speaks of man's potential divinity and finds, like Shaw, the answer to our spiritual ailment in our capacity to evolve into God :

If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God : the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God, do enter into that man with justice...For all beings proceed out of this same spirit, which is differently named love, justice, temperance, in its different applications, just as the ocean receives different names on the several shores it washes...<sup>86</sup>

If God and His universe are one, then the only way of becoming God is to identify oneself completely with the universe. Poets and mystics do not seek to attain divinity like Shaw's Don Juan by cracking the coded message of the Universal Mind. Not very different from Shaw, for example, is the Walt Whitman of *Leaves of Grass*, who sees trillions of years of evolution and mutation ahead of him, but unlike Shaw he feels every moment in his pulse the identity of all life. The least creature that ever lived and the highest intelligence ever to come into existence simultaneously participate in God and Whitman feels his identity with all of them through a Dionysian union with the earth, the primeval mother.

Clearly this is the only sense in which terms like the superman or the divinity of man are religiously fruitful; only then can we call Shakespeare and Shelly, with their all-embracing

sympathy, superman without abusing the term. If man and God — or man and superman — are seen as separate categories, then the divinity of man must lead to the solecism of Julian in the *Emperor and the Galilean*.

It is not surprising that Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman — men who really divined the presence of the superconsciousness in the universe — were inclined to democracy in the broadest sense. Whitman, who discovered the immanence of God and foresaw vistas of unimaginable magnificence ahead of mankind, was by necessity the poet of democracy.

The religious streak in Shaw hungered to perceive the unity of the world when he complained against Shakespeare and Dickens for failing to show that unity,<sup>B7</sup> but that unity can be perceived only by one who can discover, both intellectually and spiritually, the oneness that pervades the diversity; in other words, it can be seen only by one who does not set up any antagonism between the visible universe or phenomena and the universal purpose, nor does see the various forms of life as disparate categories.

Poets and mystics understand this intuitively, but even science, traversing the path of systematic knowledge rather than intuition, moves towards a mysticism akin to this. This is what the greatest scientist of our century has to say on the subject :

The individual feels the nothingness of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal

themselves both in nature and the world of thought. He looks upon individual existence as a sort of prison and wants to experience the universe as a significant whole. The religious geniuses of all ages have been distinguished by this kind of religious feeling, which knows no dogma and no god conceived in man's image; so that there can be no church whose central teachings are based on it. Hence it is precisely among the heretics of every age that we find men who are filled with the highest kind of religious feeling and were in many cases regarded by their contemporaries as atheists, sometimes also as saints. Looked at in this light, men like Democritus, Francis of Assisi, and Spinoza are closely akin to one another.<sup>88</sup>

The religious experience, whether in the poet, philosopher, scientist or saint is the mystic experience which seizes at a moment of dazzling inspiration the unity of the whole universe and the identity of all life. Shaw was not incapable of such mystic experience. "I am", he insisted, "and always have been, a mystic."<sup>89</sup> It was this insight which enabled him to discover through Ibsen that "there are no others" and made him reach beyond altruism to accept the "entire identification of 'me' with the 'least of these'."<sup>90</sup> Perhaps his boldest statement on the subject was made in a lecture at Kensington Town Hall in 1907 :

The object of the whole evolutionary process is to realise God...When you are asked, 'Where is God ? Who is God ?'

stand up and say, 'I am God and here is God, not as yet completed, but still advancing towards completion, just in so much as I am working for the purpose of the universe, working for the good of the whole of society and the world, instead of merely looking after any personal ends.'<sup>91</sup>

An intimate relation exists between such a religion and the superman. Surely the latter stands between man as man and man as God. Our generation has been too close to Hitler and Mussolini to take kindly to the superman, since both have claimed like Shaw's <sup>lover</sup> the inheritance of Nietzsche's overman; and also because at the most critical moment of modern history Shaw betrayed both history and himself by attempting to palm them off as modern Siegfrieds. But it seems that our modern indictment of the superman throws away the baby with the bathwater. If we believe in evolution, then there is no reason to believe that life, which has evolved from the amoeba and the paramecium to man, has completed its task and will stop here. To believe that we in our present form are the last word of creation is surely unwarranted arrogance. Belief in Nature's creative genius means faith in its infinite potential, and when we have travelled a considerable distance along that infinitely long path, we will be as different from what we are today as the average man of today is from the Australopithecus. For want of a better name that being of the future can be called superman, just as the Australopithecus, if it were able to visualise us, would call us super-Australopithecus. Mussolini is

only a tinpot superman, the real superman is the product of genuine reverence for Nature.

Though in his inspired moments Shaw understood why Parsifal followed Siegfried as the inheritor of the superman's mantle, he would allow the inspiration to be lost on him, and his answer to the genuine religious cravings in himself was disappointing : he supplied his readers with pitiably stunted beings, men like Charteris and Trefusis, the pale Shavian Caesar and the life-sucking Candida, the almost disembodied Lady Cicely, the clockwork superman Henry Higgins and will-o'-the-wisps of *Back to Methuselah* ultimately dissolving into a ghostly distillation. These supermen were but variations of a single mask, the mask of an unhappy and sensitive young Irishman who had once fought the disintegration of the self by refusing to recognize his unhappiness. The man who penned the religious speeches and wrote the *Quintessence of Ibsenism* knew like Francis of Assisi, Shakespeare, Thoreau and Einstein that the real superman absorbs both the past and the future into himself, he is like God precisely because he is also like "the least of these", but if the creator of Trefusis and the Ancients is so different from the poet of "Song of Myself", it is because Shaw's superman leads the reader back to the author's troubled childhood and youth.

That childhood fed on fantasy, and the product of that fantasy, the superman, became a fantastic parasite that supped on the author's blood, for there is no doubt that it drained Shaw of his natural vitality and humanity. Shaw knew that "every one of us

is not a simple single character but a bundle of characters under one hat."<sup>92</sup> Thus while the poet in him attempted to escape the prison of the self and "experience the universe as a significant whole", his enemy, living under the same hat, identified himself with a superman to whose nostrils love smelt of stinking flesh. The enemy of the poet was a pseudo-mystic who monopolised Shaw's last phase and in *Farfetched Fables* visualised a civilization in which men would live on air and water and talk with unmixed disgust of the food consumed by us. In *Farfetched Fables* Shaw's ideal beings are convulsed with shudders as they contemplate our method of procreation.

The superman who is stricken with horror at the grossness of human food and the coarseness of human love-making leads us to the young man who felt he was disowned by his human environment. His revenge was both terrible and disastrous. Partly in self-defence he developed a hidden animus against the whole of human society, but this animus proved to be far in excess of his requirement — the prevention of loss of self-respect.

## VI

Shaw's superman finds the proper place for love — hell. There "they talk of nothing else but love : its beauty, its holiness, its spirituality."<sup>93</sup> The search for happiness, too, ends in hell. Don Juan says in *Man and Superman* that hell is the home of the unreal and the seekers for happiness."<sup>94</sup> We remember the

young Shaw who thought of himself as a sojourner on earth; our little planet was too small to provide him with a home not because he did not need one but because a feckless father and an unloving mother could at best give him a house. The child is Father of the Man, and in this case the child fathered a man who grew up with a deep suspicion of home and love, with a distrust of the human species itself because men who should have been dear to him let him down badly and robbed him of those dear experiences which must come either in time or not at all. A child cannot be compensated for his deprivation by repayment with interest at a later stage, because childhood once lost is never regained. Shaw's life, like his art, would have provided a classic vindication of the Freudian dictum that one's adult life is spent trying to sort out one's childhood.

Therefore Shaw reserves the Uranian Venus for fledgling adolescents and empty-headed idealists like Octavius. To the adult mind love is purely a sexual adventure capable "of producing a celestial flood of emotion and exaltation", valuable chiefly because the ecstasy may one day "be the normal condition of conscious intellectual activity."<sup>95</sup> It is never more than a gorgeous indulgence, never a necessity of life like air or water.

It is remarkable that though the Greek, Christian and modern world views differ vastly from one another on most subjects, they are all agreed that love is not so much a single relationship as an orientation. The collective evidence is against Shaw, as the ablest exponents of the three world views insist that

not only is love not opposed to virtue, it is necessary for it.

Plato's observations are of additional interest since Shaw, a professed Platonist, repudiates the "illusory" qualities of love in favour of knowledge, for love breeds the illusion of virtue whereas knowledge breeds true virtue.

In the *Symposium* Plato shows that through love alone can human beings transcend themselves, for love "is the intermediate between the divine and the mortal", the "mediator that spans the chasm that divides" men and the gods.<sup>96</sup> In Shaw's eyes Nature is prone to error and she created love and beauty by accident, otherwise she would not "start off on another line and labor at the clumsy elephant and the hideous ape" after producing the beautiful birds.<sup>97</sup> Diotima teaches Socrates a very different lesson. She argues that beauty is the object of love but the restless lover passionately attached to the evanescent beauty of the human body and the philosopher enamoured of the beauty of contemplation grasp two aspects of the same thing, though at different levels.<sup>98</sup>

There is scope for a fairly close analogy between the Caesar and Cleopatra relationship and the one between Socrates and Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. The love of Alcibiades, like that of Cleopatra, is basically concupiscent. In each case passion generates restlessness: both Cleopatra and Alcibiades feel frustrated at the composure of the older men, which appears to them as unresponsiveness. Though Caesar and Socrates resemble each other in self-control, indulgent irony and in the understanding of

the hot-blooded lovers, the difference between the Greek and the Roman is greater than the superficial similarity. Psychologically Caesar is absolutely self-sufficient and inert, Socrates, on the other hand, recognises the fundamental similarity between his love for Alcibiades and Alcibiades's love for him. He knows that his love is more developed and belongs to a higher stage, but he has transcended the stage in which Alcibiades finds himself only after moving through and beyond it. He knows that there can be no transcendence without appropriation. Caesar's self merely overflows into the world, Socrates embraces the world by drawing it into himself. Caesar is unchanging, Socrates is continually moving forward by creating new selves.

Modern findings of humanistic psychology are surprisingly similar to the conclusion of the *Symposium* in some respects. Even though it dispenses with the Platonic metaphysics, it agrees with Plato on the unity of love. Love is not a side show in the theatre of life, nor, as Byron thought, from man's life a thing apart. It is a general outlook : that is what, for instance, Erich Fromm's studies reveal :

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person, it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one 'object' of love...If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, "I love you" I must be

able to say, "I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself."<sup>99</sup>

One of Shaw's many objections to love stems from utilitarian considerations : Octavius will turn the world into the island of the Lotos Eaters, Sergius will turn it into an opera, Hypatia into a hotbed of passion. Love to him means the love between Antony and Cleopatra : destructive, wasteful, perpetually laying snares to divert capable men from worthy aims. So Shaw railed "at...the amoristic superstition of Shelley."<sup>100</sup>

Shaw got love all wrong because he looked for it in the wrong places; to him love was an amoristic attachment because he mistook what Fromm calls "symbiotic attachment" for love.<sup>101</sup> Love, when it is not a semantic confusion, does not separate; it unites one with the rest of the world. It is a bond, but one that binds only free men. If that is so, then "the most fundamental kind of love, which underlies all types of love, is brotherly love."<sup>102</sup>

It is not Octavius, then, but Keegan who knows what it is to love. In other words sexual love is love not because of what it has in common with the passion of Hypatia but because of what it has in common with the passion of Keegan or even the passion of Christ. I have said that Shaw detected love in the wrong place, I should add that he found it and lost it. He found it when he eschewed reason as the prime determinant of human conduct and gave the pride of place to "the will to good",<sup>103</sup> but lost it when he failed to recognise the will to good as the basis of love and love

as the basis of religion. He had a vision of "the whole human race bound together"<sup>104</sup> by a universal religion but if the spirit of religion shone through his plays only in occasional flashes it was because he falteringly grasped the cardinal truth that only universal brotherhood — a synonym for universal love — can inform such a religion. Therefore, though there is a striking resemblance between Fromm seeing self love as a necessary part of universal love and the Shaw of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* seeing the self as inseparable from the other, Shaw's dramatic practice rarely succeeds in realising that vision. Shaw imperfectly understood the fact that conflicting wills can end in mutual affirmation only through love.

To insist that love is one and indivisible one does not have to subscribe to a woolly evangelism of love. One cannot literally love everybody, it is not even easy to love all the persons one knows. There are real impediments : lack of knowledge, indifference, even hatred. Even Fromm cannot mean that one can love an unknown Eskimo, for instance, as much as one's brother, what he means is that everyone is potentially as lovable as one's beloved, and if it were possible to have adequate knowledge about every person in the world, it would be possible to break down the barriers to love. Being a finite being, a single person can have only a limited experience of love, but that does not falsify the statement. One has only to remember that it is one's finiteness rather than the worth of the person loved that makes the experience limited.

Shaw would ask: "Is Croft in *Mrs Warren's Profession* lovable? Was Hitler lovable?" The Croft of the play, the Hitler of history were certainly evil, but Hitler betrayed his potential, hardened his heart and became the author of much evil. He created barricades around himself. But the actual Hitler was an aberration of the potential Hitler. He was spiritually dead, but as Ibsen showed in his great play, it is possible to awaken the dead. One must believe that the conversion of Hitler was theoretically possible. That it did not take place is another thing. It did take place with Saul, who became St. Paul. What can happen once can happen again. Shakespeare understood this when he depicted the abrupt conversion of Oliver and the usurping Duke.

Even Shaw admits that the will is beyond the comprehension of reason. From that position it should have been easy for him to see that love is not a prize to be distributed according to merit or worth, it is itself the creator of worth. No one can, therefore, "deserve" love, one can only get it gratuitously.

The doctrine of love is not sentimental waffle, and it need not exclude resistance, even armed resistance, in discharging one's duties. Shaw's Caesar almost grasped the point when he asserted that evil lay not in killing but in malice; but absence of malice does not imply presence of love, as Caesar's own case shows. For a more authentic example of the paradox we must turn to the Lord's teaching in the *Bhagavat Geeta* and to the conduct of Arjuna vis-a-vis Bhisma and Drona. Even when two people are locked in a deadly battle, they do not have to forfeit the love of

each other. Thus love for the world does not involve the renunciation of one's unpleasant duties.

Both modern humanistic psychologists and Christian thinkers agree with Plato and disagree with Shaw on the relation between love and knowledge : Shaw felt that the true benefactor of man substituted the love of knowledge for the love of man. However he failed to understand that "the only way of full knowledge lies in the act of love : this act transcends thought, it transcends words."<sup>105</sup>

Christianity demands that we love our neighbours as ourselves; a modern Christian theologian makes an even more radical statement that this is more than a moral injunction, it is a necessary condition of knowledge, for the "uniqueness of each individuality can be known in love but not in terms of general knowledge in which the self seeks to subordinate uniqueness in order to fit the 'other' into the general categories of reason."<sup>106</sup>

In other words the great religions perceive that love is the most fundamental and highest need of man, his "real and permanent grandeur."<sup>107</sup> If, as Fromm argues, brotherly love is the archetype of all love, and if it is an indispensable condition of knowledge, then its absence explains both Shaw's failure as a human being during the nineteen-twenties and thirties as well as his failure as an artist to achieve genuine communion through his transcendental comedy.

Shaw was a keen student of history : there is hardly any

other English dramatist in whose works history remains not only in the background but often becomes the central character. The antenna of his mind responded to almost every event of historical importance. Yet even a person completely innocent of history could not have done worse than Shaw in his responses to Fascism and Stalinism. Surely the issue with him was neither ignorance nor naivety but something deeper. He knew the facts of history as well as anyone else did. But facts, even when they are exhaustively documented, do not become history without a framework to give them a meaning. Shaw missed the framework because he lacked the sympathy. It is this sympathy or love that turns information into knowledge. When this sympathy becomes elevated enough to become religious it attains the knowledge hitherto denied to it : it learns that "the tree-toad is a chief d'oeuvre for the highest/ And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven."<sup>108</sup>

The source of this sympathy in poets and saints is the same — religion. Oscar Wilde was right when he said in *De Profundis* that Christ was the quintessential artist,<sup>109</sup> and Rabindranath Tagore was right when he divined the artistic genius as essentially religious.<sup>110</sup> When the spring of sympathy dries up or is thwarted, when the vital links connecting the whole of man with other men and the rest of Nature snap suddenly, the resultant loneliness inevitably gives birth to anxiety, but when one tries to convince oneself that this alienation is for the sake of a tryst with destiny, then the denial of this anxiety is equally inevitable.

The religion of the superman, so eloquently preached by Don Juan in *Man and Superman*, is the symptom of the very opposite of what it is held up to be, for it reveals not the awakening but the extinction of the religious spirit. Niebuhr, who sees love as indivisible and God as the source of all love, says that without perfect faith in God "man is involved in the vicious circle of anxiety and self-sufficiency which inhibits him from genuine concern for the needs of his neighbour."<sup>111</sup> For us the spiritual insight of such a statement is more important than the specific metaphysics : we are concerned with the common element.

The universal religion must base itself on the commonly perceived characteristics of the various faiths whereas belief in eternal Forms, or in a transcendent God constitutes the metaphysical part which is not universal. Even an agnostic, an atheist or a pantheist equating Nature with God can describe the same religious experience in different languages, for the essence of the experience is the realization of the unity of the world and the indispensability of love to such realization.

## VII

The posture of self-sufficiency is as ubiquitous in Shaw's work as the posture of opposition, but inspite of his generally unruffled exterior lending plausibility to his self perception as a latter-day Siegfried, the anxiety often shows through. In his best works he did discover that it was not enough to be a

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Siegfried and it would be a marvel if such awareness did not percolate to his life since his plays are so intensely autobiographical.

Nothing is as destructive of the religious spirit as anxiety : religion effects union, anxiety severs the bonds that unite. The union with the world starts with the integration of the self; to be at peace with oneself is the first condition of a perception of the oneness of all creation. If love is the solvent that dissolves all separateness, then love must begin from self-love; if *a priori* acceptance is the essence of love, then to accept the world one must be able to accept the whole of one's own self. Humility as enjoined by Christianity has no conflict with self-love, which must be distinguished from vanity or egoism. Here is Kierkagaard, for example :

If anyone will not learn from Christianity to love himself in the right way, then neither can he love his neighbour...To love one's self in the right way and to love one's neighbour are absolutely analogous concepts, are at bottom one and the same...Hence the law is ; "You shall love yourself as you love your neighbour when you love him as yourself."<sup>112</sup>

Anxiety, generated by doubt, creates psychic cleavages and splinters the integrated self, the cleavage rendering parts of the self inaccessible to others on the one hand and isolating the self from the rest of the world on the other. This fragmentation of the

self lay at the root of Shaw's strange relationship with women. Like all men he needed to love and to be loved but when love was offered to him by Jenny Patterson or Alice Lockett he was afraid not only to reciprocate but also to receive it, oscillating between a posture of superiority that spurned love and a candid recognition of the emptiness of such a posture. He was capable of enough honesty to perceive this uncertainty in himself when he wrote to Alice Lockett :

There is a detestable, hardheaded, heartless, cynical cool devil, sitting in my chair telling me that all this is insincere lying affection. But I defy him, it is he who lies, I have sold my working hours to him. Hate and mistrust him as much as you will; but believe one too, and help me to snatch a few moments from his withering power.<sup>113</sup>

Ironically, the failure of Shaw's affairs succeeded in proving that one cannot spurn love without despising oneself. Alice accused Shaw of intentionally hurting her and Shaw did not deny the accusation. The urge to inflict pain was the inevitable result of a deep-seated anxiety which needed to be assuaged continually by a feeling of superiority demonstrated by a sense of power over others. Shaw was not a sadist, but this recognition of his power over Alice was the necessary reassurance he needed to sustain himself in his grooves. But if greater integration is the religious need of every person, then the failure to love must be

the result of the failure of self-integration. Only a man who despises himself can despise the world. In other words, the Shavian Caesar, like the Shavian Siegfried, is a Shavian myth.

Although Shaw recognised the conflict, he failed to resolve it and the failure led to further fragmentation of the faculties. This fragmentation was necessary for it helped Shaw to cope better with the unresolved conflict by carrying the conflict out of his consciousness. As he grew older he was assailed less and less by overt doubt.

The compartmentalisation of the self could be seen in his love-affairs but they had, as we shall shortly see, even more far reaching consequences. To Jenny Patterson, Shaw gave only his body, to Ellen Terry he offered long-distance epistolary passion untainted by anything more substantial than flights of fancy, to Janet Achurch the assurance that no one "will buy for two pence a body for which I have no longer any use", the offer to replace the body with "the imagination of a poet and the heart of a child" and the assurance that "it is so simple to become an angel on earth."<sup>114</sup>

Shaw did not have a single relationship in which his whole self participated, nor a consummation that bridged the gulf between love-making and love through the fusion of the body and the mind. Nor was his spiritual love really spiritual because the body was not transcended, it was merely denied.<sup>115</sup>

The fragmentation of Shaw's psychic space induced an opposition between body and mind, between feeling and intellect,

between the self and the world and between Nature and the transcendent purpose of Nature. For anxiety, though it works in the opposite direction, is like religion in one aspect ; it works from the centre of the self and spreads outwards into an ever-expanding circle. At its farthest point it ends in complete loss of contact with the world, just as at its extreme the religious feeling breaks down every barrier to one's complete identification with the world.

Reality is a *gestalt*, it cannot be grasped in fragments, nor is it accessible to the intellect alone. But a mind that fragments reality into opposing categories ends up by making these categories inaccessible to one another. At times the cleavage became so great in Shaw that not only was feeling dissociated completely from thought, but also the contact between the actual world and his self-generated fantasies about it became faint. There is little doubt that this lay at the root of Shaw's shocking indifference to human suffering.

Commenting on the uneasy co-existence of his religion and his politics his biographer remarks : "The Life Force seemed in league with the politics of death. Increasingly, as he grew older. Shaw's imagination flirted pleasurably with death and, in more extreme fantasies, killing."<sup>116</sup> But even more revolting than his espousal of liquidation was his tendency to treat the subject with levity. For example, during his tour of Russia, the reality of persecution was fantasticated enough to enable Shaw to equate the penal colony at Balshevo with Battersea Park and to induce him to

sympathize "with the criminals who will not leave it at the expiration of their sentences." He even went as far as looking "forward to a good performance at the torture chamber of the Tcheka" with a victim ready to enable him to "witness the process."<sup>117</sup>

Shaw hoped that his words were sufficient to change Balshevo into Battersea Park. He imagined that in his hands words became transparent like glass; one just had to peer through them to discover the world objectively. The author who had drafted the conversation between the Elderly Gentleman and the 'longliver' had known what he later allowed himself to forget, namely, that words are mere symbols and the world created with them is only the man-made image of the actual world. Thus what he gave his readers was not a transparent sheet of glass but a dazzling but opaque glasswork which, when it revealed anything, revealed the reflection of the author's mind. Bold and colourful imagination was allowed to supplant reality by the man who wished to make his own art the servant of reality.

Fantasy is not without its advantages, however. It can apply a uniformly high dose of anaesthetic over every aspect of uncomfortable reality that rears its head, it helps the godlike man to believe in man's unconditional victory over pain and death. The germination of such fantasy is only possible in a mind that has ceased to be illuminated by religion. The splintered mind is a mind aligned against itself. The polarised parts of the once-integrated self fasten upon corresponding parts of reality,

but are out of touch with the rest of the self, of which it was once an integral part. When dissociation between feeling and intellect proceeds apace, the symbolic world — that gossamer web of superfine rhetoric — called upon to stand in for the actual one by every user of verbal language moves further away from reality. The fracturing of perception results from cognitive failure : the fractured reality moves in a vicious circle by fracturing reality further to work out a satisfactory relationship with it : under the circumstances it leads to the intensification of fantasy to contain overt anxiety.

Perhaps there cannot be a more telling example of this phenomenon than Shaw's strange behaviour in connexion with the illness and death of Jane Wells. When Jane, the wife of H.G.Wells, was dying of cancer, Shaw insisted, according to Wells, "that she would be much to blame if she died. There was no such thing as cancer..."<sup>118</sup> When Jane died and Shaw attended the cremation his behaviour was grotesque in its inappropriateness as he set on the mourners with joke after joke.

This may be one of the most startling examples of intelligence violently wrenched away from feeling but the incident also encapsulates a trait that has alienated many readers — the fissure between thought and feeling in its turn created a fissure between Shaw's self and reality that his perception failed to bridge. His intelligence saw man as Lamarck's giraffe that had only to will a longer neck to get one. A woman had only to will to get rid of cancer, pain and death and these would vanish. Shaw

could blame Jane for lacking the will to live. When the metaphysics failed to deliver the panacea he could laugh it off as he laughed off his father's drunkenness.

Shaw's responses, however, were not freakish even when they seemed so. His objection to cancer was at bottom the same as his objection to tragedy. An individual's death from cancer may not be tragic in any but a loose journalistic sense, but it clearly reveals man's essential kinship with the tragic, it shows man as a finite being with limited power, it shows him as a suffering being, and it reveals suffering and death as unassailable realities. The spectacle of one's power being overtaken by fate produces pity and terror. Though the mechanism is widely different and artistic necessity is replaced by sheer chance, cancer generates both pity and terror. The fanciful picture of Shaw's shadowy immortals shrivel up and crumble before the force of pain. Shaw had to deny cancer because the suffering that swallowed up Jane's life had jaws large enough to swallow up Lamarck's giraffes. The bonds of pain are even stronger than the bonds of happiness. In the shadow of suffering and death we realize our common fate and our common helplessness before that fate. The basis of religious democracy is the brotherhood of man revealed through the mystery of suffering. Nothing binds men together as pity and terror, and cancer reveals that the age of pity and terror is not past. Shaw had to deny the existence of pain because pain, like love, threatened to deny the reality of his version of the superman.

To rationalise such radical exclusivism, Shaw had to draw on a source beyond himself. History shows that such justification is always sought from extra-human sources — from the doctrine of predestination, from racial destiny, from the white man's burden or from other such exalted sources. In his fight against Nature Shaw sought sustenance from the unrealized aim of Nature. Because it acts through trial and error, Nature often commits errors and reveals many imperfections, yet its aim is immutable, for it seeks to create a God-like being. Thus Nature is like an artist who has a clear idea about the kind of masterpiece he wants to produce, but has not yet mastered the technique to execute his plan.

A metaphysics that not only sees man as the instrument of the Life Force but also insists that the Life Force sees with the eyes of man and thinks with his brains does have the potential to stress both human freedom and human responsibility. But by setting up a dichotomy between Nature's aims and Nature itself, Shaw gives man full freedom with one hand only to take it away with the other. In effect, the only freedom granted to man is to pursue singlemindedly the immutable aim of the Life Force, to stress thought at the cost of emotion, self-sufficiency at the cost of love, the abstract at the cost of the concrete.

It is a remarkable *tour de force*. Once the transcendence of the Life Force and its aims are granted, everything else falls into place. The one split in Nature becomes the mother of all other splits in man and sanctifies them. That is why Shaw was so eager to project the dichotomy between Nature's purpose and

revealed Nature as an objective fact.

It would indeed be surprising if Shaw were to succeed in flogging a dead horse back to life. That the epistemology is obsolete by nearly two centuries following the Kantian revolution would not be remarkable in the case of an ordinary dramatist, but with an artist-philosopher of encyclopaedic erudition such solecism provokes a suspicion that it is not philosophical naivety that is at issue but the age-old strategy of combating unassailable doubt with loud reiteration of dogmatic faith.

Shaw's simple faith that Nature has a purpose and that purpose can be objectively known was wilting in his own time under the onslaught of Einstein and the even more radical impact of Quantum Physics. Shaw's generation reeled under the impact of the revelations made by Physics that profoundly changed men's orientation to reality — one more proof that Shaw's confidence, bordering on cocksureness, was a posture that he himself did not find convincing.

In what depth of anxiety the new science plunged Shaw's generation can be guessed from Beatrice Webb's diary :

It is a most disconcerting conclusion, that there is no absolute truth; and that the thoughts of the man are no more or no less valid than the analogous brain activities of the dog or the bee! What becomes of existing standards of morality or capacity? ...like so many other poor souls I have the consciousness of being a spiritual outcast. I have

no home for my religious faculty. I wander about  
disconsolate...<sup>119</sup>

The Elder in *Too True to be Good* wails that certainty has gone out of the universe: "Here was my faith : here I found my dogma of infallibility."<sup>120</sup> To his horror he discovers that "the calculable world has become incalculable".<sup>121</sup> The only thing that stood between him and "a perpetual headlong fall into a bottomless abyss" was "a solid footing of dogma"<sup>122</sup> and now the dogma has been put out of court. He even makes the unsettling discovery that "the orbit of the electron obeys no law."<sup>123</sup>

Shaw was possibly the only reader of the play to discover in it exuberant optimism.<sup>124</sup> By publicly equating the Elder with Darwinian determinism he hoped to keep the spotlight away from himself, for even when an exasperated St. John Ervine exclaimed, "What right has an old man to throw up his hands and surrender every belief he holds ?"<sup>125</sup> he could not have suspected that the Elder was no one but Shaw himself and that he had not surrendered his beliefs, but their tenability had been annihilated by the modern age.

*Too True to be Good* is a play about cataclysmic convulsions going on in Shaw's mind, for the determinism that Bohr, Heisenberg and Schrödinger destroyed was not only Darwinian but also Shavian. By undermining the objective reality of a transcendental Life Force — an unrevealed purpose of Life over and above the purpose of the living — it also subverted the tyranny of the Life Force,

its right to dictate the ends to be pursued by man. It is no longer possible to justify the belief, as Don Juan does with a mere reference to the Life Force's authority, that love is a trifle, for what has become doubtful is not only the Life Force's authority but also as the possibility of the knowledge of such authority.

The play snatches away "the solid footing of dogma"; but does the unpredictability of the sub-atomic particle, with all its implications, necessarily induce despair? Modern science has moved closer to the religious point of view with its findings which reveal the limitations of traditional science with its tendency to separate the subjective from the objective and its propensity to promote the analytic method over the synthetic. In its tendency to abstract, separate and objectify, traditional science has sought complete impersonality whereas religion has always stressed the subjective, underscored the centrality of consciousness and hailed the synthetic and the integrative over the abstract, the objective and the impersonal.

All this has changed with Quantum Mechanics. Borrowing the metaphor of the theatre, Bohr said that in the drama of existence we are both players and spectators; in other words the distinction between subject and object is no longer tenable. Eugene Wigner, another distinguished physicist, suggested that "human consciousness might have to be explicitly included as an essential feature of the future theories of matter."<sup>126</sup>

The discovery that subject and object are inextricably

linked to each other deals a severe blow to the Shavian version of Platonism that is responsible for the rule of the Life Force; but if God or Nature or the Life Force ceases to rule from the sky, the consequence need not be chaos on earth. If pathetic fallacy is to be allowed at all, there is no reason why one should see, like the Elder, caprice and not freedom in the unpredictable behaviour of the electron. Even after the impersonal law of Nature has lost its sheen, the personal aspirations of millions of men and women remain. In fact, a despairing Shaw fails to notice that the devaluation of objectivity by modern science leads to a corresponding gain of the human element. The essence of science was possibly never as close to the essence of religion as it is today. *Too True to be Good* might have been a cathartic experience for Shaw — an opportunity to turn the corner. At any rate it made it impossible for him to continue his old faith in the Life Force without drastically modifying the nature of the latter. However, he proceeded in the direction of *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and *Farfetched Fables* as if *Too True* was no more than a dream during a brief afternoon siesta.

#### VIII

The discussion preceding this section will help us to see why Shaw failed to reveal the final society of comedy; for comedy, when it is more than satire, burlesque, farce or irony — when it is high comedy ending in a kind of communion — begins by

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challenging the feasibility of love in the actual or non-idealised world but ends by overcoming its own challenge. It ends by reconciling opposites through the transcendence of reason. We shall see that this transcendence affirms love in the sense we have used the term. The best way of studying this transcendence is to focus on the psycho-technical aspect of comedy with special reference to Shaw.

Whatever else his readers may disagree about, they all agree that Shaw was a great jester, perhaps the greatest of his time. An identical view of Shaw was possibly the only opinion that Churchill and Gandhi held in common. To Churchill, Shaw was a "brilliant intellectual clown."<sup>127</sup> To Gandhi he was "the Arch Jester of Europe."<sup>128</sup> Shaw himself was in complete agreement. He claimed for himself a place in the apostolic succession that ran from the Bible through Ibsen to the infinite future, but saw himself as a jesting apostle in whose hands laughter became an instrument of conversion. According to him pity and fear lead to the tumescence of feeling and the sinking of the heart respectively. Such manipulation of feeling is the prerogative of the magician and the hypnotist and cannot therefore reveal the untrammelled and dispassionate face of truth. Only laughter can purify the mind, cleanse it of turgidity, "destroy evil without malice and affirm good fellowship without mawkishness."<sup>129</sup>

Thus Shaw is in implicit agreement with Henri Bergson that laughter is the natural response of intelligence to the inappropriate and the mechanical. As Bergson said: "Any

arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of mechanical arrangements."<sup>130</sup> In Shaw's Geneva, the death of the Bishop extracts howls of laughter from the audience because no one can believe that he was ever alive. It also explains why the Shavian laughter does not give way to tears or even sighs at the mass liquidation of "unsuitables" by Hitler and Stalin or at the playful representation of such liquidation in his own plays. To the superman most men are like Pygmalion's dolls as they are presented in *Back to Methuselah* : though they talk and behave like men they are only ill-made machines.

There is no doubt that Shaw wished to harness laughter to high seriousness. As a cure for folly laughter is indispensable because nothing else has a comparable medicinal effect :

If I make you laugh at yourself, remember that my business as a classic writer of comedies is to "chasten morals with ridicule", and if I sometimes make you feel like a fool, remember that I have by the same action cured your folly; just as the dentist cures your toothache by pulling out your tooth. And I never do it without giving you plenty of laughing gas.<sup>131</sup>

One ~~one~~ finds Moliere expressing remarkably similar views on the aims of comedy and laughter :

If the function of comedy is to correct man's vices, I do

not see why any should be exempt. Such a condition in our society would be much more dangerous than the thing itself, and we have seen that the theatre is admirably suited to provide correction. The most forceful lines of a serious moral statement are usually less powerful than those of satire; and nothing will reform most men better than the depiction of their faults. Criticism is taken lightly, but men will not tolerate satire. They are quite willing to be mean, but they never like to be ridiculous.<sup>132</sup>

As for Shaw, he did not abandon laughter even after he had ceased to believe that human character is capable of reformation, but the laughter at the killing of Ozymandias and Cleopatra in "As Far As Thought Can Reach", or at the liquidation of men in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* is still Bergsonian. Bergson reminds us that laughter presupposes the absence of sympathy.<sup>133</sup> By inducing laughter in the audience at the dramatic representation of the destruction of fellow humans, Shaw hopes to make men wish, even if unconsciously, their own supersession by the coming race. Thus the intellectual aims of Shaw's comedy are serious and moral even when the action is bizarre. As Chesterton remarks :

Bernard Shaw is never frivolous...He has no nonsensical second self which he can get into...his wit is never his weakness; therefore it is never a sense of humour...Humour is akin to agnosticism, which is only the negative side of

mysticism. But pure wit is akin to Puritanism; to the perfect and powerful consciousness of the final fact in the Universe.<sup>134</sup>

This picture is consistent not only with Shaw's self-perception but also with the public posture of most other comic artists. Moliere professing to satirize his characters in the hope of making them change their ways, Ben Jonson sporting with "humane follies" to cure men of the excess of some "humour", Shaw playing the dentist to extract the bad tooth and restore his patients's health, Chaplin telling his viewers "the plain truth of things"<sup>135</sup> are kindred spirits, because for all of them the laughter of comedy is the laughter of wit and the mind that sets off this laughter is privileged to have a clear and dispassionate view of truth. The only difference between a pure satirist and such a comic writer is that the latter's soul is not darkened with despair, and he still possesses the elan and the optimism of the social reformer. Both use shock therapy, but while the pain he inflicts on his victims is the satirist's compensation for his frustration, in the case of the comic writer it is the cost of the cure. The ends differ, the means are the same.

If we remember that the laughter of intelligence at stupidity is essentially the response of maturity at prolonged infancy we shall grasp the close relationship between Bergsonian laughter and Shaw's stress on adult values. It is well to remember that a child of five is a miracle of vitality but a 'child' of

fifty is utterly ridiculous because he is an example of the victory of the mechanical over the vital.

For Shaw, normalcy is synonymous with adulthood. Among Ibsen's plays, his favourite is the *Emperor and Galilean*, in which Maximus compares the growth of civilization with the transformation of childhood into maturity. Shaw's perennial butt is the Englishman, who is like a child in being "wholly at the mercy of his imagination, having no sense of reality to check it."<sup>136</sup> For an analogy of an adult Englishman's life, he has only to delve into his own childhood, which was unfettered by reality and filled with "duels, battles, love affairs with queens and all."<sup>137</sup> He is dismissive of romanticism since he believes that romanticism is the extension of childhood beyond its legitimate tenure and thus is responsible for all our woes.<sup>138</sup>

The teacher-pupil relationship, so common in Shaw, is essentially a variation of the adult-child relationship. Candida is the Virgin Mother and both Morell and Marchbanks become, or Shaw intends to make them, her symbolic children. Bluntschli takes charge of Raina to knock romanticism out of her girlish head. Julius Caesar calls Britannus his son and the historical love affair between Caesar and Cleopatra is changed by Shaw into a relationship between a wise fatherly figure and an impetuous child. Cicely rejects the role of the lover in order to remain the nurse, teacher as well as Virgin Mother of the rest of the characters. Higgins is intended to be the creator of a new Eliza, hence he is conceived as her teacher as well as father. Barbara is

the biological daughter of Undershaft at the beginning of the play, at the end she becomes his spiritual daughter too, and Cusins, in spite of his irreverence, becomes more than his son-in-law. Both Barbara and Cusins are seen by Shaw as mere children, they become adults under Undershaft's tutelage. King Magnus manages his Cabinet as a teacher manages a group of noisy preparatory school children. The childish ignorance of Harry Trench is destroyed by the cynical wisdom of Sartorius, the ignorance of Vivie Warren is dispelled by the realism of her level-headed mother. Shotover weans Ellie away from Boss Mangan and becomes not only her spiritual husband, but spiritual father as well, replacing Mazzini, who turns out to be another child in adult guise.

The equation of childhood with folly becomes most pronounced in *Back to Methuselah*, in which the contrast between the longlivers and the shortlivers becomes further magnified in the contrast between the Ancients and the newborn baby. In the third part of the cycle *Confucius*, who governs Englishmen, tells Burge-Lubin that the English face is not an adult face and the English mind is not an adult mind. The entire cycle seeks to trace evil to man's immaturity, contending that the tragedy of our civilization lies in the fact that we die just when we are about to outgrow our intellectual infancy. Even a man as completely given over to hedonistic pleasures as Burge-Lubin begins to act responsibly the moment he suspects that he may be destined to

live a few hundred years.

In *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* the parents start the eugenic experiment involving the marriage of the East with the West, hoping that this marriage will be the marriage between the flesh and the spirit, but the prospect of the third empire is ruined by the children succumbing to the lure of romance in its various forms. But even when the children have gone to seed, it is Prola, the archetypal mother, who keeps alive the hopes of civilization by refusing to lose heart. As the critic of a society that appears to him to be based on notions and directed to ends that are thoroughly childish, Shaw sees society's only chance of survival in the adoption of a set of adult values in place of the puerile ones.

Temperamentally Shaw is as fond of seeing himself as an adult as of viewing the rest of the world as a nursery. Thus his natural response is that of a wit. The superman is so vastly superior to the average man that he can only look down upon him with the same amusement with which a Brobdingnagian would have looked down upon Gulliver had he found him less vicious. Shaw's favourite device is Socratic irony rather than Swiftian indignation, he is a Brobdingnagian who never loses his equanimity. The emotional distance between Shaw — or that image of himself which he has foisted on the public — and the average man is great enough to rule out the involvement of feeling. Thus he confronts the world with the kind of laughter made famous by

Bergson's essay. Shavian characters may suffer from dearth of love, Shaw's audience does not suffer for want of laughter.

Once we understand the aims of Shaw's comedy and his use of comic laughter we shall not be intrigued to find the highest point of Shaw's comedy--the point reached by "As Far As Thought Can Reach"--mirthless. Since laughter is a weapon to fight stupidity, it is bound to vanish in a world ruled by intelligence. Similarly Shavian comedy, with its accent on adulthood, intelligence and the scientific status of truth, reaches its highest point when it supersedes itself in a dialectic transcendence of art. Shaw's comedy here resembles Wagner's Wotan, who wills his own supersession. Here Shaw's grasp of truth is sure, for as a writer of comedies which are enacted by men who pose to be different from themselves, and as a dramatist heartily applauded by the very audience he laughs at, he knows that the theatre represents the very principle of primitivism that he seeks to destroy. Richard Sterba, an expert psychologist, confirms that "the pleasure of acting and looking on at a theatrical performance is a very narcissistic one, through regression to the early childhood stage of magic world creation."<sup>139</sup> If comedy and comic laughter are adult art and adult response respectively, then their success must lead to their obsolescence.

Thus we see that Shaw, like the other great practitioners of the art of comedy, lays stress on normalcy and adulthood and professes to use satire and laughter as instruments of conversion. Yet the writer is not the best judge of his work. The unambiguous

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moral function that Shaw and the others claim for comedy no doubt carries a high prestige. To be chosen by Nature to wage a ceaseless battle for truth and civilization against barbarism and error is an enviable lot. The knight in shining armour placed on a high pedestal is not likely to give away the show by probing deeper into his own soul. Thus great writers of comedy are content to reduce their complex art, while pontificating on it, into a simple moral statement, an instrument of apple-pie-and-motherhood virtue.

Shaw had more than his share of such simplification. He often forgot that "every one of us is not a single character but a bundle of characters under one hat",<sup>140</sup> and while his comments on the use of laughter did justice to the character that elbowed his way through the crowd to the centre of the stage, it remained conspicuously silent about the others that huddled together in the shadows, taking care to avoid the public glare. And yet laughter had something to offer, something quite different, to those characters who shared the common hat with G.B.S.

We have already seen that laughter was the young Shaw's last defence against shame and the fear of disintegration. It was not always the sign of amusement of a god-like being at the contretemps of ridiculous creatures, nor was it the response of the adult mind to people clinging like children to the world of make-believe, it was precisely the opposite — the bid to assail reality when it became unbearably painful. Shaw's collaboration with his father and Uncle Walter in turning everything, however

sacred, into a joke was his method of survival, and in this struggle for survival he often found himself aligned with wild fancy against sober reality. The shame-stricken child who laughed at his drunken father's *faux pas* never left Shaw. In a letter to Janet Achurch, referring to her alcoholism, he wrote :

When I was a child of less than Nora's age, I saw the process [of alcoholism] in my father, and I have never felt anything since. I learnt soon to laugh at it, and I have laughed at everything since. Presently, no doubt, I shall learn to laugh at you. What else can I do ?<sup>141</sup>

It is a surprising confession from the greatest wit of the twentieth century, especially because the more familiar view — a view he took great care to nurture — is presented in *John Bull's Other Island*, in which Keegan says : "My way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world."<sup>142</sup>

Perhaps the most glaring example of the breach between the professed aim of laughter and the actual use to which it had been put by Shaw was an incident that was as absurd as it was pathetic. Matthew Edward McNulty, a boyhood friend, wrote to Shaw about the fate of his comrades who were all elderly men like him and formed Dublin's Reserve Guards. During a training session they were marching with rifles that had no ammunition and were sprayed with bullets by the rebel forces of the Rising, of which the marchers were unaware. Shaw's reaction was typical : "McN's letter made me shriek with laughter...One has to learn to laugh at such things in

war or else go mad."<sup>143</sup>

In intimate talks and letters Shaw would from time to time let out the truth about laughter, but these remained isolated remarks, never quite integrated into the main body of his works, never quite grasped by Shaw in their entire significance.

Historically, the study of comedy has too often faced the danger of being reduced to a study of laughter. Perhaps nothing is more indicative of the unsure status of the study of comedy than the fact that the two most influential works on the subject, by Bergson and Freud, are both treatises on laughter. The question, "What is comedy?" has been modified into "How does comedy affect its audience?". Instead of judging laughter as a concomitant of comedy, critics have viewed it as its direct product. From there it is just another step to reverse the relationship between cause and effect and to let the study of comedy be shaped by the study of laughter. It is salutary to remember that the proper sphere of the study of laughter is psychology and perhaps neurology, for laughter can be induced by a wide range of things from a physical tickle to nitrous oxide, and most of these have nothing to do even remotely with comedy.

Having said this one must add that the historical relationship between comedy and laughter has not been totally unfruitful because comic laughter (as distinct from laughter which is merely a nervous tic) has a duality that lies at the base of comedy itself, and the understanding of its dual nature illuminates our understanding of comedy.

Shaw's major sin against comedy was that in seeking to highlight its adult character, he completely ignored its primitivism. Like Jonson, Moliere, Meredith and Bergson he stressed the moral and social characters of comedy and of laughter, its main instrument. We have seen that in Shaw's plays adulthood provides the standard by which the value of an action is judged. However, in his psychoanalytic studies Freud made the startling discovery that the anchor of the comic is the infantile mind. He found the closest resemblance between the comic process and dreams:

[The comic accomplishes] the same effect by plunging thought into the unconscious. For the infantile is the source of the unconscious and the unconscious thought-processes are none other than those...produced in early childhood. The thought which, with the intention of constructing a joke, plunges into the unconscious is merely seeking these for the ancient dwelling place of its former play with words.<sup>144</sup>

In comic laughter thought "is put back for a moment to the ancient stage of childhood so as once more to gain possession of the childish source of pleasure."<sup>145</sup>

The findings of Freud were corroborated by Ernst Kris, who, more than anyone else, brought an expert knowledge of psychoanalysis to bear upon art. As Kris contended :

If we consider its frequency in psychic life the most important or rather the clearest relation of the comic to childhood is what we might call the regressive character of the comic. Under the influence of the comic, we return to the happiness of childhood. We can throw off the fetters of logical thought and revel in a long-forgotten freedom.<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps no other division of comedy brings out its regressive character more prominently than farce, where events and characters are completely free from all fetters of adult behaviour. Very few dramatists use farcical situations more extensively than Shaw. Henry Straker dropping his 'h's not because of his inability to pronounce the words correctly but because of his cockney snobbery, Tanner telling him that between employer and engineer he will know his place (*Man and Superman*), the white race being governed by the Chinese Confucius (*Back to Methuselah*), Epifania throwing her husband down the stairs (*The Millionairess*), the female patient knocking out the hard-bitten burglar and the nurse (*Too True to be Good*), the veteran soldier distinguishing himself from a greenhorn by carrying chocolate instead of ammunition during the war (*Arms and the Man*), a terrified O'Flaherty running away from his home to the trenches for the sake of peace and quietness (*O'Flaherty, V.C.*), Ermyntrude, the overbearing maid, ordering about the princess and giving permission to the Inca or Kaiser to sit down and humbugging him completely (*The Inca of Perusalem*), a drunken Patiomkin

carrying the English Captain off on his back and dumping him on the bed of Empress Catherine (*Great Catherine*), the charwoman condescendingly accepting the hand of the General, the Prime Minister entering the chamber of the General in a woman's dress, a member of the army being thrown down the stairs by Mrs Banger (*Press Cuttings*), Reginald having a secret longing since childhood to be mercilessly beaten by a strong, beautiful woman (*The Music Cure*), Gateways, the Zulu King, despising Englishmen for the colour of their skin (*The Admirable Basheville*), the rascally Alfred Doolittle winning a prestigious award for his original morality (*Pygmalion*) — all these are parts of a large farcical pattern that is almost ubiquitous in Shaw. Clearly the pleasure that such scenes afford is the pleasure of throwing off the yoke of responsibility, the pleasure of taking a holiday from all pressures of reality. Farce would not be farce without its kinship with nonsense.

There is an interesting passage in Shaw that expresses a strong revulsion against farce :

To laugh without sympathy is a ruinous abuse of a noble function; and the degradation of any race may be measured by the degree of their addiction to it. In subtler forms it is dying very hard; for instance, we find people who would not join in the laughter of a crowd of peasants at a village idiot, or tolerate the public flogging or pillorying of a criminal, booking seats to shout with

laughter at a farcical comedy, which is at bottom the same thing — namely, the deliberate indulgence of that horrible, derisive joy in humiliation and suffering which is the beastliest element in human nature...To produce high art in the theatre the author must create persons whose fortunes we can follow as those of a friend or enemy : to produce base laughter it is only necessary to turn human beings on the stage as rats are turned into a pit, that they may be worried for the entertainment of the spectators.<sup>147</sup>

The unmistakable presence of the puritan with a very demanding moral standard is evident here. Shaw's conscience does not allow him to be at peace with "galvanic substitutes for genuine vivacity",<sup>148</sup> and he is right in maintaining that the joy that farce generates is a "horrible derisive joy in humiliation and suffering", for there is no denying the fact that farce, and the farcical element in serious literature, feeds on the cruelty and destructiveness that is an undeniable part of human nature. The laughter of Aristophanes at the humiliation of Socrates and the burning down of the Academy in the *Clouds*, the laughter of the audience as Dionysus subjects himself to whipping in the *Frogs* to prove his divinity by his insensitivity to pain, Shakespeare indulging in his audience's pleasure in Jew-baiting in *The Merchant of Venice*, Moliere's audience roaring with laughter at the ruin that Orgon brings upon himself by his blind trust of

Tartuffe, the Restoration audience laughing alike at syphilis, the seducer, the seduced and the cuckold, and today's audience, confronted with their own world, guffawing at the fossilization of language and the alienation of man from man in Ionesco's *The Bald Prima Donna* provide some of the innumerable instances that reveal the seamy underside of the comic element in literature.

One of the functions of laughter is to blunt the edge of naked aggressiveness by giving it a presentable guise. In the language of psychoanalysis it is the result of the conflict between the id and the superego, that is, between instinct and conscience :

[It] originates in the conflict between instinctual trends and the superego's repudiation of them, and to grasp its position midway between pleasure and unpleasure. These are the roots of its double-edged character...The claims of instinctual life are satisfied by its content, the objections of the superego by the manner of its disguise.<sup>149</sup>

One does not have to go the whole length with the psychoanalysts, and Freud probably erred in insisting that all laughter is tendentious. However, our own experience of comedy tells us that though it is the most social of all art forms, a significant part of it comprises the amoral, even anti-social tendencies of man. The first thing a child would notice in the films of Chaplin and the Marx Brothers is their extreme violence,

made bearable by its ingeniousness and the comic context. The first thing one notices in Congreve or Wycherley or Labiche is the theme of adultery. And yet even the most faithful spouse intensely enjoys the infraction of the sexual code depicted in these plays. Shaw himself, despite denouncing farce as "an unsympathetic enjoyment, and therefore an abuse of nature",<sup>150</sup> was capable of being less squeamish and enjoying "that fantastic atmosphere of moral irresponsibility in which alone the hero of farcical comedy...can realize himself fully."<sup>151</sup> ☺

We look into the comic mirror and discover the image of an ape, but the discovery leads to laughter because we not only tolerate the ape but also enjoy its company. That is the paradox of comedy. That is also the paradox of comic laughter. Baudelaire, who compared the child's laughter to the blossoming of a flower, also knew that man's laughter rises from pride and consciousness of evil, that it is "one of the clearest tokens of the Satanic in man."<sup>152</sup> The same sentiment is echoed by Shaw when he says that without the "proximity of emotion...laughter...is destructive and sinister."<sup>153</sup> It is left to comedy to narrow the gap between the laughter of the child and the proud laughter of sinful man, to transform the Satanic into the human.

One suspects that Shaw was so upset by low comedy because it revealed the inadequacy of his concept of comedy. Were it capable of producing nothing but galvanic laughter, farce would be no more than a minor irritant. What is more disturbing is its power to capture the sympathy of the audience. The audience is not

tortured into laughing, as Shaw suggests, it suddenly finds an exhilarating release from the restrictive power of society. Farce is deeply satisfying because it gratifies one's unmentionable desires without forcing one to pay a heavy price for it. In farce, as in a dream, one can live briefly in a world not yet invaded by the thought police.

It is well to remember that it is only the comic climate that makes the world of farce risible and innocuous. A mere change of climate would reveal its destructiveness and its power to threaten civilization, for the forces depicted therein are far from innocuous. It is not surprising then that in Shaw's plays the comic climate disguises the "destructive and sinister" elements that he is so critical of. Not only are such elements abundant in farcical pieces like *Great Catherine*, *Press Cuttings*, *O'Flaherty V.C.* or *The Six of Calais* but more important plays such as *Misalliance*, *Too True to be Good*, *On the Rocks*, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and *The Millionairess* are also seething with just the kind of destructiveness denounced by Shaw. Quick to spot this inconsistency, Vivien Mercier speaks of the Janus-faced Shaw, who exploits macabre humour in *John Bull's Other Island* and gallows humour in the trial scene of *The Devil's Disciple* while denouncing such humour through several characters, as a part of the Irish comic tradition stretching from Dion Boucicault to J.M.Synge that excels in exploiting macabre humour.<sup>154</sup> But surely the double-facedness of comedy, the co-existence of the moral tone with the amoral enjoyment of forbidden pleasures is found in all

comic writers.

Ideologically Shaw is an evangelist and revolutionary whose aim is the complete transformation of man's character and his metamorphosis into the superman. He maintains that man's need to surpass himself is not a subjective spiritual aspiration on man's part, but a bare necessity for survival. The animal nature of man fills him with unconcealed disgust. Low comedy and farce, on the other hand, depicts that side of man which is akin to the fox or the crow, the wolf or the ape. Expectedly then, the tone of Shaw's comedy is as moralistic as that of Jonson or Moliere. Thus when low life is presented it is done with the intention of depicting it as ridiculous. Yet Shaw had the disconcerting habit of occasionally shooting from the hip and coming out with statements that strike at the root of the familiar moral posture. For example, he wrote to William Archer :

You cannot absolve Shakespear from all complicity with Falstaff : he wallowed in Thersites. The elegant remark of Lucio [in Measure for Measure] when he meets the lady of the pavement : "How now which of your hips has the most profound sciatica ?" must have amused Shakespear or he couldnt have written it ; he was Lucio when he wrote it. I believe that to people with no sense of humour & strong & refined conscientiousness, there must be something hideous in the derision of "the comic spirit." When I wallow in that serious point of view I feel the horror myself. So

stick to your guns as to wallowing : it may be the biggest part of your critical function to challenge the lawfulness of the ecstasy of derisory blackguardism which makes comedy so enormously amusing.<sup>155</sup>

It is a pity that he did not follow up such inspired pieces of observation, for such insight would break new grounds that would expose the naivety and crudeness of the familiar moral approach to comedy, of which most comedists, including Shaw, were so enamoured. For here the artist in Shaw directly confronts and defies the high-minded critic in him who deprecates "the ecstasy of derisory blackguardism" in the strongest possible language. Here he frankly admits that the forbidden pleasures of dark by-lanes are among the main attractions of comedy, and that the spirit of comedy is close to the spirit of saturnalian orgies.

If Shaw is right here, then there is a considerable gap between comedy's ostensible aims and its real spirit, and laughter, with similar discrepancy between its stated objective and actual function, provides the paradigm of comedy. Just as laughter, even while discharging a social function, must satisfy man's primitive impulses, so comedy, even when its aims are moral, must satisfy the very urges in us that we publicly condemn.

This duality is at the heart of all comedies and lies at the root of the Shavian ambivalence, and the imperfect perception of comedy's dual nature had a baleful effect on Shaw's idea of the religious nature of comedy.

In insisting that comedy must be religious,<sup>156</sup> Shaw was belatedly making a claim that had already been granted by history. Comedy has been intimately connected with religion since its beginning and we learn from Francis MacDonald Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* that the relation is so intimate that the central dogma of Christianity, that of the Resurrection, has been derived from the pagan fertility rituals from which comedy began. The relationship is not limited merely to the origin. The historical association of vaudeville, farce and frivolity with comedy sometimes obscures the fact that its main aim, like that of religion, has been to come to terms with the duality of human nature. We do not readily grasp this because in common discourse the "higher" side of religion is stressed at the expense of the "lower" whereas in the case of comedy the opposite is done : its immediate association in popular perception is with an action that lacks seriousness.

Great religions have understood, however, that they must deal with men as they are and not with ideal beings. Thus though the social function of religion is much less discussed than its spiritual function, it is the organic bond between the two that alone lends vitality to religion. The Sanskrit word for religion, *Dharma*, explicitly recognises this, since it is derived from the root *dhri*, which means "to hold together", but all vital religions implicitly recognise this. They recognise, though not necessarily explicitly, that the destructiveness of human nature, man's animal inheritance, must be satisfied or this animal energy will pull

down the magnificent spiritual edifice of religion. However repulsive simple-minded puritans find the orgies and witchcrafts of primitive religions, they still survive among us in modified form because they are necessary for our health. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Roman saturnalia and the pagan carnival were by and large tolerated by the Church in the heyday of its power. The carnival still survives in Munich, in Brazil and in parts of India, it survives much more extensively today outside the sphere of religion in cocktail parties, bashes and get-togethers. When the influence of religion was all pervading the saturnalian spirit was accommodated by religious rituals. in the Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages the Devil was frequently portrayed as a jolly good fellow and the paradox of the Passion Plays was that they portrayed Mary as a shrew and Joseph as a feckless husband, and yet fortified instead of undermining people's piety. The Letter of Indulgence has fallen into disrepute since Luther but along with the Confession it was an invention of genius in its shrewd assessment of both human limitations and the human need of constant spiritual regeneration through the laying down of the burden of sin.

Sin does not play as central a part in classical Hinduism as it does in Christianity. Yet its polymorphousness easily accommodates the concept of atonement through ritualistic *Yajnas*: In folk-Hinduism, practised by the vast majority, holy dips and ritualistic cleansing play the same role as the confession. The spirit of the carnival has found itself comfortably ensconced in

popular religious festivals like Holi and Dussera.

What is interesting in these examples is that religion does not refuse to recognize the frequent bouts of impiety in men, on the contrary it regulates them through an inbuilt system of rites that provides scope for controlled indulgence of the impulses that would otherwise threaten religion. Its function is cathartic, it accepts impiety to prevent it from getting out of hand. It does so not because it is not particular about ethical and spiritual values but because it believes that the health of a single sheep can take care of itself if the health of the flock is taken care of. It recognizes that only the greatest minds — saints, poets and philosophers — can remain in constant contact with their spiritual aspirations: others, who cannot claim such exaltation as their habitual state of experience, come into intermittent contact with it — a large part of their existence stands between them and the epiphany point. Man has the divine breath in him but God has put this breath in a mould of clay. Evil, like good, is not alien to man, it is an essential part of him. Evil and aggressiveness must be resolved without letting them blow man to pieces. Evil must be recognized as a permanent part of man, but if it cannot be rooted out, it must be tamed and its energies harnessed and made to serve a force higher than itself. Religion recognizes that man's quest for perfection is as evident as his inability to attain that perfection. It must therefore allow the occasional infraction of its own code, nay, must make provisions for the discharge of dangerous impulses and stave off

neurosis by occasional letting-off of pent-up steam.

Comedy is the celebration of the same duality of human nature. We have seen that laughter is double-faced in actually indulging in the same qualities that it sets out to criticize. The avowed aims of comedy are in general moralistic; it is merciless towards the freak and the deviant, yet its great paradox is that it celebrates at the same time the life that defies the norms of civilization. Shakespeare's Falstaff and Parolles would make any civilization despair, but though Falstaff defies every standard of civilized behaviour, he is the meat of comedy not its scum. This is true inspite of the fact that of all art forms comedy is the most distinctly social, and most intimately connected with the norms of society.

Then why is Falstaff beaten in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and why do we encounter in comedy a strong undercurrent of violence often reflected in obscenity, satire, or in the abuse and humiliation of certain characters? It is so because comedy still retains the spirit of carnival, with its simultaneous invocation of darkness and light without which the marriage of heaven and hell is not consummated.

This becomes clearer if one harks back to the primitive religious rituals for a parallel process. The compulsions behind these rituals were much greater than the mere invocation of the power of fertility; one of the compulsions, the reconciliation of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac impulses in each of us, has survived the period separating us from our primitive ancestors.

Cornford says that in these rituals the new year spirit was welcomed and the spirit of fertility invoked, but the rites had a darker counterpart in which men representing scapegoats or *pharmakoi* were driven out of the city and ceremonially beaten on the genital organs, and abused.<sup>157</sup>

One of the advantages that these people enjoyed over us was that they could frankly satisfy their basic needs without recourse to rational discourse. Our comparative disadvantage becomes evident when the tyranny of rationality compels us to justify the action of comedy in terms of contemporary morality even when we know that magic and not rationality comes nearer to the understanding of its mystery. The mystery of evil that comedy deals with becomes clearer with reference to the magical processions from which comedy originated :

Besides the distribution of benign influence...these processions have also the converse magical intent of defeating and driving away bad influences of every kind. The phallus itself is no less a negative charm against evil spirits than a positive agent of fertilization. But the simplest of all methods expelling such malign influences of any kind is to abuse them with the most violent language. No distinction is drawn between this and the custom of abusing, and even beating, the person or thing which are to be rid of them, as a carpet is beaten for no fault of its own but to get the dust out of it.<sup>158</sup>

It does not take an expert psychologist to see that in such elaborately organized rites of expulsion, the evil that is expelled does not merely lie in the object but also in the subject, not only in the abused but also in the abuser. The chorus of Greek drama had its origin in the violently abusive and obscene Attic processions celebrating the carnival, and it is not at all surprising that the violent slanging matches ended in conviviality. Nor should a modern reader capable of grasping the spirit of comedy wonder at the evidence of Plato's *Symposium* that Socrates, so savagely attacked by Aristophanes in the *Clouds*, was a close associate of the dramatist.

If the fertility rituals did not ignore evil, they also demonstrated the remarkable ability of the ancients to grasp the abstract quality of evil, which was not confused with the person tainted with it. The person afflicted with evil was abused to rid him of the taint. This was related to the resurrection theme. The candidate for tribal initiation enacted the theme of rejuvenation central to both religion and comedy through mock-death and resurrection. In one variation of the ritual it was the good principle that was slain so that it could be resurrected through the conquest of death. Similarly, evil was driven out like death and just as the candidate undergoing initiation was first "killed" and then "resurrected" and readmitted to the fold, so also a person was readmitted after the evil in him had been ritually exorcised. The proximity between good and evil and the need to forge a non-antagonistic bond between the two comes out in the

following passage :

In the dying representative of fertility and life, who bears upon his head, as a Scapegoat, the sins and evils of his people, we have throughout had before us the same fundamental combination of ideas — induction of good and expulsion of evil — that lie at the root of comedy with its two elements of invocation and invective, already implicit in the phallic song.<sup>159</sup>

It is useful to remember that it is the representative of life and not death who is slain, and the fact that he dies for the sin of others makes his death auspicious, since in the wake of his resurrection follows the revival of the entire society. The parallel with Jesus is too obvious to need elaboration, but it should be noted that the passion of Christ loses none of its significance even when transported into an entirely different context. The analogue of Jesus undergoes the same fate and for the same reasons. Even outside the context of Christianity, Good Friday — or its equivalent — is auspicious because the act of martyrdom — actual or symbolic — drains men's destructive energy that led them in the first place to slay the *pharmakos*. In other words society recognizes that from time to time it needs to enact, even if only symbolically, the dark deed in order to be rejuvenated. It also recognizes that the deed is not prompted by considerations of justice, and the action has nothing to do with the *pharmakos* deserving the fate. The deed is done to expel sin.

In other words, it is done to placate the Dionysiac forces within oneself.

The recognition of the destructive, recalcitrant forces in oneself is tied intimately to the theme of resurrection. The stain being washed away, the aggressor and the victim — both transformed — can reunite in a rejuvenated society. This is what sets the society of comedy apart from the society of satire : in the latter ridicule is a weapon to hurt and exclude, in the former aggression may be a weapon to hurt, but not to exclude. The process of resurrection is witnessed in comedy when the characters, reviled and punished, and shown to be worthless by our criterion of rationality, are suddenly resurrected by an act of grace. Northrop Frye finds this fundamental process of comedy most clearly enunciated in Shakespeare :

When we find Falstaff invited to the final feast in *The Merry Wives*, Caliban reprieved, attempts made to mollify Malvolio, and Angelo and Parolles allowed to live down their disgrace, we are seeing a fundamental principle of comedy at work. The tendency of the comic society to include rather than exclude is the reason for the traditional importance of the parasite, who has no business to be at the final festival but is nevertheless there. The word "grace" with all its Renaissance overtones from the graceful courtier of Castiglione to the gracious God of Christianity, is a most important thematic word in

Shakespearean comedy.<sup>160</sup>

Frye finds the theme of redemption even in the crudest Plautine comedy in which the son appeases the wrath of the father and redeems the bride.<sup>161</sup>

Shaw's theatrical diatribe against Shakespeare has the effect of concealing the similarity between the two men. Shakespeare could not have agreed more with Shaw's reasoned judgement on love. Helena says in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* :

Things base and vile, holding no quality  
Love can transpose to form and dignity.  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;  
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.  
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste;  
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste;  
And therefore is Love said to be a child  
Because in choice he is so oft beguil'd.<sup>162</sup>

No amount of philosophising about the aims of the Life Force succeeds more than these lines in showing love to be a ridiculously irrational passion. Titania falling in love with Bottom's ass-head is qualitatively not different from Demetrius falling alternately in and out of love with Helena and Hermia with equal alacrity. Shakespeare's equation of the madman, the lover and the poet has been endlessly quoted by all serious-minded people throughout the world, but what is often overlooked is that

Shakespeare the poet finds both himself and the lover in the grip of a common daemonic power that is far more potent than reason, and he also knows that this power, which manifests itself not only in love but also in war, can undermine reason from below but it can also lift reason from above. The first principle is seen in tragedy, the second in all great comedies.

We can now connect our observations about love with the religious mystery of comedy. Comedy grapples with the obstacles to love, obstacles lying both in the self and outside, but in the end upholds love — not necessarily in the romantic sense but in the sense Eric Fromm uses the word — because it realises that love is the only solvent that dissolves all contradictions and that society is bound to disintegrate under the pressure of its own contradictions unless it is rejuvenated through love.

The sudden change of heart of Oliver in *As You Like It*, the conversion of the Duke in *The Tempest*, or the transformation of Angelo in *Measure for Measure* are not evidences of Shakespeare's slipshod workmanship, but the signs of his profound understanding of both grace and resurrection. That is why Shaw's assertion that Shakespeare lacked religion was a serious mistake.<sup>163</sup> Few people understood the mystery of religion and its transcendence of reason better than Shakespeare.

This fundamental religious principle is equally evident in Moliere's greatest play, *The Misanthrope*. The similarity between Alceste and Timon or Lear is almost obvious : in his compulsive sincerity, capacity for suffering and inability to compromise

Alceste shows almost tragic grandeur. Yet in the larger comic pattern of the play it is Philinte, the compromising worldling not averse to occasional chicanery and simulation, who embodies the spirit of comedy and is rewarded with the hand of Eliante, while Alceste is isolated and becomes the equivalent of the *pharmakos* of the ancient carnival, because in spite of being more virtuous than others he lacks the supreme virtue — charity. Lack of charity makes Alceste resist integration, so he is pushed out of the final comic society.

Precisely because they possess the very qualities that Alceste lacks, Mirabell and Millamant fashion in *The Way of The World* a genuine comic world out of the raw material of dreary satire. They learn to outgrow not only barren philandering, but also fashionable cynicism by forging an alliance of mutual sympathy and tolerance. Their somewhat disreputable past is not merely lived down, it becomes transmuted as the lovers build their wisdom on their experience of gallantry.

Even in the sterner vision of Jonson social grace scores higher than moral rectitude. Volpone deserves punishment not because of his vice but because his vice makes him so pathological that he disrupts social integration. Volpone is a rascal, Morose is not, but both are left to stew in their own juice because both are incapable of understanding the most fundamental principle of society — the principle of fellowship. The one thing that *Measure for Measure*, *The Misanthrope*, *The Way of the World*, *A Sleep of Prisoners* and *The Rose Tattoo* have in common is that they stress

the transformation of an antagonistic relationship into a symbiotic one.

This process of transformation is often embedded in the plot, but even when it is not as obvious as in the plays of Shakespeare or Moliere, it is an essential part of the audience's understanding of comedy since the aesthetic experience of comedy plainly contradicts the explicit moral concern. Both farce and satire are free from this contradiction because the first repudiates every moral design and the second sets up a gulf between the audience and the subject that cannot be bridged because of the absence of sympathy. Comedy, on the other hand, has to resolve the contradiction lying at its heart and this it does by a new synthesis. This synthesis being the essence of religion, comedy reveals even more clearly than tragedy the living link between primitive man and modern man. With the dwindling influence of institutional religion in our age, it has fallen to the lot of art to bear the primary responsibility of keeping alive the universal and non-dogmatic element of religion.

Shaw himself felt that art is a dead thing without religion. He also knew that the religion of art must not be parochial. He had no use for a "religion that is not universal" and said that the truly religious person "must not nationalize [the creative factor] as Jehovah or Allah, Buddha or Brahma."<sup>164</sup> Yet Shaw allowed himself to forget that a truly universal religion must be capable of integrating the world not only horizontally but also vertically. This aspect of the universal religion comes out

most clearly in the words of Vivekananda, an Indian contemporary of Shaw. Speaking in Chicago at the World's Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda

repeated...his thesis of a universal religion without limit of time or space uniting the whole credo of the human spirit, from the enslaved fetishism of the savage to the most liberal creative affirmations of modern science. He harmonized them into a magnificent synthesis, which far from extinguishing the hope of a single one, helped all hopes to grow and flourish according to their own proper nature. There was to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and the capacity for indefinite evolution.<sup>165</sup>

To pin one's faith on the potential divinity of man and his capacity for endless evolution is not enough — this was done by Shaw in a remarkably similar language — one must insist on the power of religion to simultaneously accommodate the "enslaved fetishism" and the "most liberal creative affirmation of modern science", and to reserve a place for the savage in us as well as for the abstract thinker in us. Obviously Shaw's Creative Evolution, in which the spirit exists independently of matter and the mind is divorced from the body, does not meet the requirement of the universal religion.

I have argued that the spirit of comedy is deeply religious and like religion comedy seeks an equilibrium between the

conflicting forces in man. Comedy demands the marriage between heaven and hell, but it is a marriage that has to be renewed every moment. This is possible when the forces symbolised by heaven and those symbolised by hell are in constant contact. This is much more difficult than a one time transcendence in which heaven and hell interact momentarily and then lose contact with each other.

Unlike in tragedy, the whole of society and not an individual person is the hero of comedy. The chronology of events unfolded during enactment produces in a sense an illusory image of time, for just as the whole of the comic society is the protagonist of comedy, so also the whole of the action is simultaneous : Prospero and Caliban, the first act and the fifth act are frozen in a single frame of time. This is another way of saying that Prospero's victory over Caliban is not a one-time victory; his spirit must transcend Caliban now and again, but never lose touch with him. This is not to say that the sense of linearity produced in the theatre is totally false. Comedy coming to an end in the final act is symbolic of the cardinal fact that the liberation of society through an act of grace is the final truth of the world. Not that it is easy. The final religious act, that of forgiveness, is made challenging by the fact that forgiving an Angelo or a Caliban is difficult. There is nothing in mere justice that can compel us to love them. Calling comedy "a narrow escape into faith" a distinguished writer points to this difficulty :

Somehow the characters have to unmortify themselves : to affirm life and assimilate death and preserve in joy. Their hearts must be as determined as the phoenix; what burns must also light and renew : not by a vulnerable optimism but by a hard-won maturity of delight, by the intuition of comedy, an active patience declaring the solvency of good.<sup>166</sup>

But why is this escape narrow in the first place ? Why must their hearts be like the phoenix unless from time to time these hearts are burnt to ashes ? That is the mystery of comedy. It recognizes the angry ape in man, is fully aware of the angry ape's capacity for mischief, even disaster, and yet expects man to respond to the call of divinity. This difficulty is compounded by comedy's insistence that the ape in man be given elbow room. If comedy ends with deliverance, it does not fail to note that the deliverance is a miracle.

In his last years Shaw's equation of man with the ape and his reasoned judgment that the ape was not worth preserving was not totally unconvincing as an intellectual feat but it was artistically unsatisfactory because he allowed himself to forget the truth to which Jesus draws Pilate's attention in the preface to *On the Rocks*, namely that a matter of faith cannot be solved by reason and that reason is often a self-serving deceiver in the hands of the reasoner, it is what Coleridge called "the hired advocate of the passions."<sup>167</sup>

As a young man Shaw discovered that he was born in a prison and that his imagination was the only window through which he could escape. By an unhappy paradox the road to freedom ended in a prison of his own making, for the artist found it hard to break free from the role of the messiah. Occasionally, when he succeeded in seeing through his own messianism, he was able to peep out of his new prison and realize the poverty of his disintegrative philosophy. Much as he would like to become a loveless messiah, he was not, as we have seen, incapable of calling his own bluff.

In Shaw's last phase, the Dionysian energy in him became separated from the embrace of life. The destructive energy, not being allowed to wear itself out in the service of the pleasure principle, and denied outlet through ritualised expression of lawlessness, wreaked vengeance on life as it assumed the disguise of spirituality.

In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw approvingly quotes Maximus that the third empire "will be ruled by the God-Emperor, by Logos in Pan, Pan in Logos."<sup>168</sup> Yet he himself moved comedy out of the realm of Pan, who, being part god and part animal, embodies the true spirit of comedy. Comedy is created by the intersection of the animal world with the divine order because in spite of the Dionysiac orgies that lie at its core — orgies that reveal man's naked animality — comedy generally ends by affirming the principle of grace.

All his life Shaw hungered for a life with a blessing, but he could not believe that living men and women could be worthy of

that blessing. I have argued that in the final analysis comedy is the victory of faith over experience and reason. Because this faith failed him in the final phase, Shaw's cosmic comedy had no place for man in it. Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra he saw man as a bridge that had to be crossed and in a number of plays his imagination crossed that bridge but unlike Zarathustra he not only crossed the bridge but burnt it as well, foreclosing the return to humanity. Thus as the architect of his transcendental comedy he could find no human material to build upon. In this he resembled the hero of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Like Solness he resolved to build his magnificent castle in the air and though he himself was spared Solness's tragedy, his vision met the fate of the master builder as the cosmic comedy came crashing down on earth. That is the price he had to pay for failing to learn Prospero's secret that the superman must break his staff, "bury it certain fathoms in the earth", before he can enter the final society of comedy. The alternative to the renunciation of magic invulnerability is permanent exclusion from that society.

1. The first literary work attempted by Shaw, at the age of twenty, was an unfinished Passion Play. Not unexpectedly, the hero of the Passion Play is not Jesus but Judas Iscariot. Judas is Jesus's guru, trying to teach him both atheism and the virtue of self-sufficiency. To this end he tells him :

Then must thou  
Learn to stand absolutely by thyself,  
Leaning on nothing, satisfied that thou  
Canst nothing know, responsible to nothing  
Fearing no power and being within thyself  
A little independent universe.

CP VII, p. 504.

2. Edmund Bergler, quoted in Leonard Feinberg, *The Satirist : His Temperament, Motivation and Influence*, p. 200.
3. Daniel Dervin, *Bernard Shaw : a Psychological Study*, p. 184.
4. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 75.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
7. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 327.
8. Henry IV, Part I, Act 5, Scene 3, lines 58-60.
9. Ronald Peacock, *The Poet in The Theatre*, p. 151.
10. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 152.
11. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, p. 17.

12. Ibid., p. 14.
13. Ibid., p. 18.
14. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 197.
15. Ibid., p. 198.
16. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 50.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy", *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, pp. 1041-42.
18. *Everybody's Political What's What?*, p. 329.
19. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xiii.
20. *Everybody's Political What's What?*, p. 1.
21. CP V, p. 702.
22. *Republic*, Book III, Sec. 390-92.
23. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 197.
24. *Republic*, Book X, Sec. 606.
25. I.A.Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 278.
26. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xviii.
27. *How to Become a Musical Critic*, p. 199.
28. Ibid., p. 219.
29. Ibid., p. 201.
30. *Our Theatre in The Nineties*, vol. I, p. 241.
31. Ibid., vol. III, p. 344.
32. Ibid., vol. II, p. 196.
33. Ibid., vol. I, p. 24.
34. Nicholas Grene, *Bernard Shaw : a Critical View*, pp. 12-13.
35. Quoted in Bruce Park, "A Note in the Critic's Eye : Bernard

Shaw and Comedy", R.J. Kaufmann (ed.), *G.B. Shaw : A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 54.

36. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xxii.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii. C

38. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

39. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xxi.

40. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 145.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

42. Alfred J. Turco gives almost an exhaustive list of the numerous references to selfishness, self-esteem, and self-reliance in the novels. Shaw' tone is almost always that of approval. The number of such references is strikingly large. See Turco's chapter, "The Dialectic and the Self" in *Shaw's Moral Vision : the Self and Salvation*.

43. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 102.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

48. Norbert F. O'Donnell, "The Conflict of Wills in Shaw's Tragicomedy" in R.J. Kauffmann (ed.), *G.B. Shaw : A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 77.

O'Donnell thinks that this drama is a tragicomedy, because the intensity of feeling reveals the conflict as tragic to the characters involved, but inasmuch as impersonal historical forces

come into the plays, the same conflict moves towards the end of comedy. I think that he takes Shaw at face value. In the novels and the early plays the impersonal forces are hardly in evidence, and even in his later plays, the construction is not quite satisfactory.

49. August Strindberg, *Five Plays*, Tr. Harry Carlson, p. 48.

50. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 294.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

53. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xviii.

54. *Aristotle on Poetics*, p. 33.

55. *Three Plays by Brieux*, Preface, p. xviii.

56. CP I, p. 385.

57. Elsie B. Adams, "Bernard Shaw's Pre-Raphaelite Drama", *PMLA*, 81 (1966) : 437.

58. Bert Cardullo, *Shaw* 6 (1992) : 91.

59. Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy*, p. 122.

60. Edmund Wilson, *The Triple Thinkers*, p. 177.

61. *Republic*, Book V, Sec. 462.

62. Socrates praises Asclepius in Book III of the *Republic* for not curing, and hence ensuring the death of useless lives, maintaining that "a cure would have been no use either to himself, or to the state." *Ibid.*, Sec. 407.

63. In Book V of the *Republic* Plato distinguishes between knowledge and belief. The non-philosopher has belief but no

knowledge, the philosopher alone can comprehend the truth because the non-philosopher has access only to appearances, whereas the philosopher has access to reality. Appearances are related to belief, reality is related to knowledge. Book V, Sec. 475-80. This corresponds to Shaw's distinction between the Realist's ability to see things as they are (knowledge) and the Idealist's fondness for illusions (mere belief).

64. CP II, p. 514.

65. CP II, p. 295.

66. The rationalism of Plato is quite different from the modern meaning of the term that has become popular since Hume. We have seen that Shaw was not a rationalist in the modern sense, but Plato's "reason" is broad enough to cover Shaw's understanding of intelligence as passion. ○

67. *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. II, p. 29.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

69. Paul Green, *Dramatic Heritage*, pp. 125-26.

70. When I say that *Back to Methuselah* is the final model of Shavian comedy, I do not use the word "final" in the chronological sense. *Methuselah* is indeed followed by plays like *The Apple Cart*, *Geneva* and *The Millionairess* — plays that approximate earlier models of Shaw's comedy. "Final" is used in the logical sense. The comedies that follow *Methuselah* are like streams that merge into its oceanic body. Thus, in using the word "final" I do not even indicate my views regarding the artistic merit of the

play.

It may also be recalled that in my analysis of the play I have remarked that inspite of itself, the play affirms the significance of tragic values; whereas now I maintain that it ends by trivialising the human condition. This indicates no self contradiction on my part because *Methuselah* is the ultimate development of Shaw's conscious aspirations, which are essentially anti-tragic, but the pattern is subverted at places by the poet in Shaw who does not believe in the post-humanistic values of G.B.S. If Shaw's plays are the result of his quarrel with himself, it will be difficult to find a more dramatic instance of this quarrel than "The Tragedy of the Elderly Gentleman". I have tried to show that this quarrel could not always be patched up satisfactorily, as a result the plays sometimes lack artistic unity. Indeed "The Tragedy of the Elderly Gentleman" seems to me a more satisfactory play than the entire cycle taken as a whole, for the cycle fails to unite Shaw's conflicting tendencies.

71. CP II, pp. 758-59.

72. Ibid., p. 761.

73. Ibid., p. 763.

74. Ibid., p. 772.

75. Ibid., p. 751.

76. Quoted in E.H. Carr, *What is History ?*, p. 111.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., p. 115.

79. J.M. Robertson, *Mr Shaw and the Maid*, p. 105.

80. Critics like Louis Crompton argue that *Saint Joan* is a Hegelian tragedy. Crompton says that Shaw "wants to substitute for a tragedy of despair a tragedy of faith with a radically different aesthetic ." Thus he sees the play as "anti-Aristotelian, anti-Shakespearian". Crompton, *Shaw the Dramatist*, p. 206.

I feel that Shaw resembles Hegel only superficially. There is a certain resemblance : Hegel finds the most famous example of tragedy not in literature but in history : in the trial of Socrates. This intimate relation between literature and history is congenial to Shaw. But Hegel makes a most important distinction between the sad and the tragic; tragedy depicts a collision between two opposed rights, between objective freedom or established order and subjective freedom, represented by consciousness and reason. Both the forces are equally justifiable and out of the dialectic that destroys both, the synthesis emerges, embodying definite progress. History is the progressive realization of the spirit and the ideal is the real. All history is, therefore, the history of progress.

Shaw's exoneration of Cauchon, on the other hand, leads to the opposite conclusion. Cauchon is merely the stick with which Shaw beats our notions of progress. His tone is, contrary to what Crompton thinks, deeply pessimistic. The burning of Joan was an act of stupendous stupidity, an act of impeding the Life Force, but an act not confined to the Middle Ages alone, for we still

live amidst such stupidity. We are all Cauchons. Shaw sees no salvation in history. It is the epilogue which makes *Saint Joan* a dark comedy exploiting bitter irony, rather than a tragedy. For Hegel's views on tragedy see his *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, tr. F.P.B. Osmaston, p. 317. His observations on the trial of Socrates are found in *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Part I, Sec. I, Chapter 2.

81. G.G. Coulton, *Inquisition and Liberty*, p. 335.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

83. *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

84. *The Black Girl in Search of God*, p. 33.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

86. Address in Divinity College, Cambridge, quoted in Romain Rolland. *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 48.

87. CP II, p. 520.

88. Albert Einstein in H. Gordon Garbedian, *Albert Einstein*, quoted in S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, p. 47.

89. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*, p. 33.

90. *Major Critical Essays*, pp. 101-102.

91. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*, pp. 18-19.

92. *Everybody's Political What's What?*, p. 334.

93. CP II, p. 640.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

95. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 115.

96. *The Anange Ranga of Kalyana Malla and The Symposium of Plato*,

p. 68.

97. CP II, p. 662.

98. Op. cit., pp. 78-79.

99. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 46.

100. CP II, p. 525.

101. Op. cit. p. 46.

102. Ibid., p. 47.

103. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*, p 35. On another occasion he insisted that the "final conflict is not...between the excuses in their logical disguise of scientific arguments, but between the cruel will and the humane will." Quoted in Bentley, *Bernard Shaw*, p. 58.

104. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*, p. 329. C

105. Fromm, op. cit., p. 31.

106. Reinhold Neibuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, p. 312.

107. Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanock", *Leaves of Grass*, p. 17.

108. "Song of Myself" in Ibid., p. 49.

109. *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 796.

110. Rabindranath Tagore, "The Religion of An Artist", in Sisirkumar Ghose (ed.), *Four Indian Critical Essays*, pp. 45-59.

111. Neibuhr, op. cit., p. 311.

112. Quoted in Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself*, p. 101.

113. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 73.

114. Ibid., pp. 591-92.

115. While recognising that in Shaw's plays body, mind and spirit are seldom in harmony with one another, Margot Peters holds the Puritan's ambivalence towards the human body responsible for this. See Margot Peters, "As Lonely as God", in Michael Holroyd (ed.), *The Genius of Shaw : Symposium*, pp. 188-199. It seems to me that Shaw's uneasiness about the physicality of love is only the symptom of a deeper cause. He can accept Caesar's philandering with a light heart; Candida, Shaw's "Virgin Mother", has borne more than one child and there is no suggestion from the author that she suffers from any sense of guilt on account of the conceptions not being parthenogenetic. What frightens Candida is love, not sex. Brassbound and Lady Cicely pass up the opportunity of marriage because both see in love a threat to freedom. In his own life Shaw "valued sexual experience". *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 115. But he objected to the Christian precept, "love one another." Ibid, p.77. Still if Shaw is ambivalent about sex in his plays it is because a purely sexual relationship is a rarity. In a human relationship involving sex, one may push love out through the door, but it keeps coming back at the window.

116. Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. III, p. 253.

117. Ibid, p. 238.

118. Ibid, p. 208.

119. Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie (ed.), *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, vol. IV, p. 34. Holroyd relates the despair of the Elder in *Too*

True to that of Beatrice Webb. Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. III, p. 263. But like his friend Shaw was surely aware of the implications of Einstein's theory. He would have to be extraordinarily obtuse not to grasp its consequences on his own philosophy.

120. CP VI, p. 500.

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid., p. 501.

123. Ibid., p. 500.

124. See CP VI, pp. 529-30.

125. Quoted in Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. III, p. 27.

126. Quoted in Amalendu Dasgupta, "Science, Reality and Religion", *The Statesman*, Festival '92, p. 30.

127. Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, vol. III, p. 227.

128. Ibid., p. 286.

129. *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. I, p. xxiii.

130. Henri Bergson, "Laughter", in Wylie Sypher (ed.), *Comedy*, p. 105.

131. "A Warning from the Author", *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw*, p. VI.

132. Moliere, *Tartuffe*, Preface. Reprinted in Robert Willoughby Corrigan (ed.), *Comedy : Meaning and Form*, p. 308.

133. Bergson in Sypher, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

134. G.K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, pp. 36-37.

135. Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter*, p. 27.

136. CP II, p. 814.

137. *Sixteen Self Sketches*, p. 52.
138. *Ibid*, pp. 54-55.
139. Richard Sterba, "The Significance of Theatrical Performance", *Psychological Quarterly*, 1939, quoted in Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, p. 163.
140. *Everybody's Political What's What ?*, p. 334.
141. *Collected Letters*, vol. I, p. 828.
142. CP II, p. 930.
143. *Collected Letters*, vol. III, pp. 400-401.
144. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Tr. James Strachey, p. 130. In the original German text Freud uses the word "witz", which has been rendered by most translators as "wit". Perhaps Strachey's choice of "Jokes" is not very happy. In English "wit" is traditionally understood to be different from humour. That is why Strachey chooses the word "joke". Perhaps "the comic" would be less ambiguous than "wit" and yet more precise than "joke".
145. *Ibid*, pp. 227-28.
146. Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, p. 205.
147. *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol. II, pp. 118-19.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
149. Kris, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-85.
150. *Our Theatre in the Nineties*, vol. II, pp. 229-30.
151. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
152. Charles Baudelaire, "On the Essence of Laughter", in Corrigan,

op. cit., p. 317.

153. *Pen Portraits and Sketches*, p. 287.

154. Vivien Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition*, pp. 68-69.

155. *Collected Letters*, vol. II, p. 276.

156. CP V, p. 333.

157. F.M Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, pp. 10-11.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

159. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

160. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 165-66.

161. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

162. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, Scene I, lines 232-239.

163. In the Postscript to *Back to Methuselah* Shaw wrote : "The history of modern thought now teaches us that ... we must either embrace Creative Evolution or fall into the bottomless pit of an utterly discouraging pessimism. This happened ... in our own era to Shakespear and Swift." CP V, p. 702.

164. *The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw*, p. 329.

165. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, pp. 42-43.

166. Cristopher Fry, "Comedy", in Corrigan, op. cit., p. 18.

167. Coleridge, quoted in Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p. 243.

168. *Major Critical Essays*, p. 56.

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