

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",¹ that his plays "are really dialogues in which revolutionary views are developed."² 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.³

He disdained to be a mere artist like Shakespeare and never tired of repeating his credo that "all great Art and Literature is propaganda"⁴ 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.⁵

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".⁶ 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,⁷ 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. Hamon⁸ separated the body of Shaw's art from its soul as he detached the edifying thought from the brilliant manner, Collis⁹ spoke of the philosopher under the garb of the poet,

Burton¹⁰ discovered the mystic speaking through the vehicle of the drama. Joad¹¹ was more forthright in explicating his philosophical system by slight touch-ups where necessary; Chesterton,¹² 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,¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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 ..."¹⁵ F.R. Leavis discovered in him only emptiness and irreverence and labelled him "boring and cheap".¹⁶ Shaw's shrill denunciation of poetry had earlier provoked Eliot to comment: "Shaw is dramatically precocious, and poetically less than immature."¹⁷

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 Kaye¹⁸ attempted to dispel the mystique about Shaw by giving him a firm footing in the nineteenth century tradition. Similarly Martin Meisel¹⁹ 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 Crompton²⁰ made a scholarly study of the intellectual background of his major plays, while critics such as Charles Berst,²¹ Charles Carpenter,²² Margery Morgan,²³ Maurice Valency²⁴ and J.L. Wisenthal²⁵ 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,²⁶ or on the significance of his childhood experience.²⁷ Whole books were written on particular elements of Shaw's thought.²⁸ The process of specialization was pushed further by a corresponding narrowing down of the focus in Elsie Adams²⁹ and Keith May.³⁰

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 Shakespeare³¹ would seem to induce general agreement with G. Wilson Knight that Shaw's "humour is bright, kindly and exciting".³² 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”³³ 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.”³⁴

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",³⁵ one stumbles over the fact that the same Shaw almost hero-worshipped Stalin and championed Hitler and Mussolini. Shaw supported Mussolini's bombing of Abyssinia³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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,³⁸ whose capacious tome makes a niggardly mention of the last dozen plays. S.C.Sengupta's work,³⁹ revised in 1974, takes almost no notice of these plays. While Margery Morgan's book⁴⁰ 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 study⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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 Crompton⁴³ 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,⁴⁴ 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,⁴⁵ 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 Nickson⁴⁶ and H.M.Geduld,⁴⁷ 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 Gatch⁴⁸ 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,⁴⁹ 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."⁵⁰

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 ".⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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

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— 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"⁵³ 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,⁵⁴ Edmund Fuller⁵⁵ and Robert Brustein⁵⁶ 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 Ingarden⁵⁷ 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*.