

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.¹

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.²

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."³

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. ⁴

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. ⁵

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."⁶ 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. ⁷

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."⁸ 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"⁹ 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",¹⁰ 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."¹¹ 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."¹² 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."¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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."¹⁵

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."¹⁶

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."¹⁷ 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 barbarous² 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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."²² 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 ." ²³ 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."²⁴ 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",²⁵ 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.²⁶

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."²⁷

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."²⁸

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.²⁹ He was sometimes candid enough to admit that his emotional deprivation had turned him into "a treacherous brute in matters of pure affection"³⁰ but in the same breath he argued that the overall influence had been beneficial, giving him a "fearful self-sufficiency".³¹ 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.³² 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."³³ 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.³⁴

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."³⁵

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.³⁶ 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 up⁰ 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."³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.

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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.