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SHAW'S EXPOSURE OF ILLUSIONS
IN CONVENTIONAL MORALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Readers who do not appreciate ideas in works of art, especially when these are for the most part explicitly expressed, will most probably be disappointed after a visit to Shaw's spacious gallery of drama. For Shaw, indeed, has built his fame on writing "problem" or "idea" plays. Each one of his pieces is centered around a main problem. In one of them he discusses the problem of poverty, showing it to be the cause of every social evil; in another he explains from his point of view the relations between the sexes; in a third one romantic drama is exposed as a worthless genre because it diverts people's attention from their real problems; in a fourth one romantic war heroism is ridiculed, and so on.

Shaw makes no apologies for not following the example of the nineteenth-century unrealistic playwrights, and for dealing in his plays with contemporary problems. In one of his famous pre-faces he clearly states what he takes to be his mission as a playwright:

I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretic plays. My reputation has been gained by my persisted struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. In particular, I regard much current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England today with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters.

Here, indeed, lies the quintessence of Shaw's philosophy as playwright. Plays should be didactic, "art for art's sake" is worthless, lessons should be so clearly stated that no

mistake may be made about them, the theatre is a school in which serious education may be acquired. In short, English drama in Shaw's hands has entered a new phase of its life. Entertainment, which has always been the main incentive for people to frequent the theatre, has become a secondary issue in Shaw's theory. The playwright, as he sees him, should primarily be a teacher, not only an entertainer. It is only as a teacher that he is worthy of the title.

But lessons may be taught without necessarily altering man's previous knowledge; they can add new things to this knowledge. Shaw's kind of teaching is different. For the most part, he does not invent new ideas; he only sheds light on the side of old ones which has for a long time been obscured from the people's eyes by thick layers of conventional morality. The light he sheds on the other side of each problem is often so strong that it either removes these layers completely, or at least penetrates them in such a way as to make what lies under them relatively clear. Once people are enabled to see this other side, they may therefore convince themselves that the side which has always been clear to them is not the brightest one. In such a way only they may begin gradually to "reconsider" their position regarding every problem that may interfere in their welfare.

In the following pages we shall try to see how Shaw managed to do this shedding of light, to investigate some of the problems he shed light on, and to determine how artistically successful he was in carrying out this task.

SHAW'S EXPOSURE OF ILLUSIONS IN
CONVENTIONAL MORALITY

Early Attacks

Born in Dublin in 1856, George Bernard Shaw moved twenty years later to London where he became hack journalist, book reviewer, art critic, political pamphleteer, member of many social societies, and lecturer on social problems. During this period he also tried his hand at novel-writing. Between 1879 and 1883 he wrote five novels,¹ none of which was published until some years later when the author achieved some success as a playwright. His novels were "unprintable," to use Shaw's adjective, "not because they were slimy, but because they lacked the quality of popularity and were instructive rather than divertive. Their satire, sharp and penetrative, was resented. They aroused antagonism by the author's outspoken 'hostility to respectable Victorian thought and society,'"² The importance of such criticism of Shaw's novels is that it gives us a clue to understanding the attitude of the public of late nineteenth-century England towards life in general and literature in particular.

The wealth that the Industrial Revolution poured into the hands of the upper and middle classes made them complacent, self-

¹Immaturity, The Irrational Knot, Love Among the Artists, Cashel Byron's Profession, and The Unsocial Socialist.

²Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York, 1956), p. 112.

satisfied and optimistic. They believed that they were living in some kind of utopia. They viewed the future with the most complacent attitude. The middle class, which was to profit from the new wealth much more than the other two classes, was for the most part ignorant. Its members did not realize that they were living in a rapidly changing era. We, therefore, find that this class was severely and justly attacked by eminent intellectuals like Matthew Arnold who called its members philistines, and entreated by Carlyle to make their peace with the working classes. But whereas men like Arnold and Carlyle did not depend in earning their bread on the direct likes and dislikes of the public, the playwrights did. They did not, therefore, find it wise to displease their audiences. Thus, they kept producing their divertive, romantic plays.

This will, perhaps, account, at least partly, for the fact that between Sheridan and Bernard Shaw none of the playwrights rose to any striking eminence. After Sheridan, very striking changes took place in almost every aspect of life. Man's attitude towards life underwent profound alterations through the writings of such people as Bentham and Mill, the geological discoveries of Charles Lyell, and the scientific theories of Darwin. It was, therefore, unavailing to keep feeding the public on romantic plays in such an age of scientific, rational and philosophical changes. To do so was only to divert the audience from coming face to face with the realities of the new life. A new type of drama was needed to keep pace with the new

changes and thus raise it to the eminence which it had lost for more than a century of stagnation.

The new type made its appearance in the form of a "problem" play written by a foreign hand. In 1889, Ibsen's A Doll's House was produced on the English stage for the first time by Charles Charrington and Janet Achurch.³ The play proved to be a great success; it ran three weeks instead of one week, as planned; and then the run was cut short only by the prearranged departure of Charrington and Miss Achurch with their company on a world tour. It also created a storm of criticism and controversy among the critics and audience. Ibsen was praised by a few critics and condemned by the majority of them. This, in its turn, created an immense interest in the Norwegian playwright. A year later (1890) the Fabian Society (which, incidentally, had been founded by Shaw and others in 1883) invited Shaw to give lectures on Ibsen. Shaw accepted the invitation because he had seen and admired the play, had been engaged in a vigorous defense of Ibsen at the outcry that arose, had published a sequel of it in the form of a short story, and, more important, he had listened a lot to William Archer, the translator and admirer of the Scandinavian dramatist. The lectures were later published under the title of The Quintessence of Ibsenism, the first English critical work on Ibsen.

Shaw's interest in Ibsen can be considered as a turning

³B. Shaw, The Collected Works of Bernard Shaw, Vol. VII (New York, 1930), p. xii. Henceforth Works.

point in his career as a man of letters. Although it did not initiate his aspiration for playwriting, it turned his attention to the drama as an effective means of expression of the ideas crowding his mind.⁴ Thus, when the Independent Theatre was about to begin its career, Shaw proposed to its manager, J. T. Grein, that he "should boldly announce" a play by him. Then, in his words, he quickly "raked out, from my dustiest pile of discarded and rejected manuscripts, two acts of a play I had begun in 1885, shortly after the close of my novel writing period, in collaboration with my friend William Archer." These two acts, which had been meant to constitute a part of a "sympathetic romantic 'well-made play' of the Parisian type then in vogue," were thoroughly "distorted . . . into a grotesque realistic exposure of slum landlordism, municipal jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between them and the pleasant people with 'independent' income who imagined that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives." When this first play, Widowers' Houses, was staged by Grein in 1892, it immediately made Shaw "infamous" as a playwright.⁵ The attack was mainly levelled on the complacency of the middle class which fattened "on the poverty of the slums as flies fattened on filth," as Shaw put it. Severe criticism followed immediately. The play was described as "silly," "despicable," "revolting," "fractious,"

⁴C. B. Purdom, A Guide to the Plays of Bernard Shaw, (London, 1963), p. 14.

⁵Works, Vol. VII, p. xii. Italics are mine.

"sordid," and "in no sense a drama."⁶ This is understandable, for to attack the respectability of the middle class, as Shaw had done, was to strike at the heart of Victorian England; and to present on the stage an unladylike heroine like Blanche, was to blow up the foundations of Victorian drama.

Shaw was not discouraged by these attacks. He came to believe that "only in the problem play is [there] any real drama." He did not mind shocking his audience. On the contrary, his purpose was, indeed, to cause a "sudden earthquake shock to the foundation of [the] morality"⁷ of his fellow citizens. As an apology for entitling his first works unpleasant plays, he tells us that "no doubt all plays which deal sincerely with humanity must wound the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter."⁸ He had found the proper literary means for expressing his ideas, and from Widowers' Houses of 1892 until Why She Would Not of 1950 he attacked in one play after another what he believed to be false illusions. The problems he tackles in his fifty-three pieces are, therefore, numerous. Out of them I shall deal with what seems to me to be pertinent to this report, and will begin with poverty and other social ills.

⁶Quoted from Purdom, p. 14.

⁷Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession, pp. 19, 5.

⁸Preface to Unpleasant Plays, p. xxv.

POVERTY AND OTHER SOCIAL ILLS

To show how he differs from his contemporaries in seeing things, Shaw relates to us the following anecdote:

(A specialist in) ophthalmic surgery . . . tested my eyesight one evening, and informed me that it was quite interesting to him because it was normal. I naturally took this to mean that that it was like everybody else's; but he rejected this construction as paradoxical, and hastened to explain to me that I was an exceptional and highly fortunate person optically, normal sight conferring the power of seeing things accurately, and being enjoyed by only about ten per cent of the population, the remaining ninety per cent being abnormal. I immediately perceived the explanation of my want of success in fiction. My mind's eye, like my body's, was 'normal': it saw things differently from other people's eyes, and saw them better.⁹

In other words, Shaw believed that he saw things as they really were, whereas others saw them from behind false illusions and questionable conventions. He, therefore, considered it his vocation to remove these illusions so as to enable people to see things as they really were.

In his first play, Widowers' Houses, which has already been touched upon, none of the main characters is aware of the injustices inflicted upon the poor slum tenants. The landlord, Sartorius, has no idea that he is doing them injustice when he refuses to improve the slums in which they live. He is a typical complacent middle-class Victorian landlord. His love of money blinds him to all other considerations. He fires his rent collector simply because "this is the third time this year that you have brought me a bill of over a pound for repairs." He believes that as long as he does not step "outside the letter of

⁹Works, VII, p. viii.

the law" he is doing no injustices. Meanwhile, he lives in a spacious mansion, has enough money to make tours of the continent, and spends lavishly on his only daughter. His daughter, too, is completely unaware that the luxury in which she lives has been made possible only by snatching the "bread" from the hands of every "hungry child" that has the misfortune to live in her father's property. When she discovers the truth, she is greatly shocked. The fact that her father is one of the "worst slum landlords in London" makes life disgusting to her, and so she exclaims, "Oh, if only a girl could have no father, no family, just as I have no mother!" Dr. Harry Trench, the young gentleman who falls in love with her while vacationing in Europe, is equally blind to the fact that his 10,000 pounds are really invested in the same slum property. Thus, when Sartorius reveals the truth to him, he is extremely humiliated, the more so because he has already broken up his engagement to Blanche on the grounds that her father is living on the miseries of the poor. Trench now realizes that he, who has aristocratic connections, is no better than Sartorius, the middle-class upstart. Both the aristocratic and the middle-class persons are guilty of the same crime, though they are unaware of this fact.

It is this unawareness of the public in general and the false pride and presumptuous respectability of the middle class in particular that Shaw intended to shed light on in Widowers' Houses.

In his next play on social ills, Shaw takes up the problem

of prostitution. In Victorian England--as well as in many modern societies--women who went astray were considered as deprived by nature. Thus, they were held responsible for the vices they committed. No one was to blame except themselves. Shaw sees the problem in a different light. It is poverty and not natural depravity that drives women away from the right path. "There are people," he says, "who declare that it is feminine vice and not poverty that drives women to the streets, as if vicious women with independent incomes ever went there." To illustrate his point, Shaw, in Mrs. Warren's Profession, contrasts between two women whose poverty has driven them to join the infamous profession, and a young woman whose education, which, of course, has been made possible by the absence of poverty, enables her to become respectable and independent. When Vivie, who has finished Cambridge, knows that her mother, Mrs. Warren, is the head of a syndicate that organizes international brothels under the names of hotels, she, naturally enough, begins to despise and accuse her. Shaw gives the mother her chance to defend herself against her daughter's accusations. "Do you think," she replies, "I was brought up like you? able to pick and choose my own way of life? Do you think I did what I did because I liked it, or thought it right, or wouldn't rather have gone to college and been a lady if I'd had the chance?" This is the lesson which Shaw wanted his audience to realize. When Vivie knows the real circumstances that drove her mother in this way, she answers as a sensible, educated woman that "if I

had been you, mother, I might have done as you did." In his preface to the play, Shaw declares that "the whole aim of Mrs. Warren's Profession is to throw that guilt on the British public itself." He adds that "society and not any individual is the villain of" the play.¹⁰

Poverty, as a source of every evil, is again taken up in Major Barbara, but with a difference. When the play was written in 1905, "it was . . . fully believed that there must always be poor people, for mankind lived in a world of scarcity, and whatever the socialist levellers might say there was hardly enough to go round."¹¹ Shaw wanted the people to do away with this illusion and realize "the silly levity with which we tolerate poverty."¹² To drive this home, Shaw presents us with two pictures, one of Undershaft, an industrialist who has accumulated his millions by manufacturing weapons and selling them to whoever pays more. Undershaft has built a model village for his laborers who are paid well and, thus, live decently. The other picture is that of the Salvation Army where the poor live on less than what keeps body and soul and also on religious talk which is meant to save their souls from fearful damnation. But no sooner has one of these seen the opportunity of stealing a guinea than he seizes it. Religious teachings administered to

¹⁰Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession, pp. 22, 29.

¹¹Purdom, p. 209.

¹²Shaw, Complete Plays with Prefaces, I, (New York, 1962), p. 307.

empty stomachs are efforts done in vain. The very existence of the Salvation Army depends on the contributions of a wine distiller, Lord Saxmundham, and on the death-manufacturer, Undershaft, who is often called the Prince of Darkness. Undershaft's family, especially his daughter Barbara, who is a major in the Army, are quite prejudiced against him on "moral" grounds. But once they see the differences between the decent life of his laborers and the miserable one of the poor of the Salvation Army, they are converted to his religion which "recognizes in money the first need and in poverty the vilest sin of man and society." At last the eyes of the family are opened to the illusive slogans of "poor but honest," "the respectable poor" and the like. "In the millionaire Undershaft," the author declares,

I have represented a man who has become intellectually and spiritually as well as practically conscious of the irresistible natural truth which we all abhor and repudiate: to wit, that the greatest of our evils, and worst of our crimes is poverty, and that our first duty, is not to be poor.¹³

The illusion of the "blessedness" of poverty is attacked in many other plays of Shaw. In Pygmalion, for instance, (though the main theme is phonetics and love) Eliza's filth and vulgarity are caused by nothing but poverty. When she is given the chance, she passes as a duchess in an ambassador's party. The same curse has made her father utterly immoral and even unhuman. Hasn't he sold his daughter for a few pounds? Hasn't he lived out of wedlock with one woman after another, including Eliza's

¹³Complete Plays, pp. 312-313; 305-307.

mother? It is not until Shaw has made him rich that Doolittle begins to feel that he is a human being, and even a moral one. The last time we see him is shortly before he goes to the church to legalize the relationships between himself and the woman with whom he has for a long time been living an illegal life. Richness has also made him quite a respectable lecturer on social problems. In *Eliza and Doolittle*, Shaw again shows us that morality and respectability have no place in the code of the poor. Let societies take care of their poor classes before accusing them of being immoral, vulgar or unhuman. This is Shaw's lesson in the plays in which he tackles poverty.

Another type of social "evil" is exposed in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Here, indeed, the attack on doctors is unduly harsh. But as "the public is full of illusions about doctors,"¹⁴ and as Shaw has none, he found it justifiable to poke biting satire at the profession as a whole. In the preface he sarcastically says that "I hear the voices . . . muttering old phrases about the high character of a noble profession and the honorable conscience of its members. I must reply that the medical profession has not a high character: it has an infamous character." Most of its members have "no honor and no conscience;" they are not scientists, they practice the abominations of "vaccination" and "vivisection" and exhibit man's "specific lust for cruelty."¹⁵ These are very grave and, perhaps, unjust wholesale accusations.

¹⁴Henderson, p. 609.

¹⁵Works, XXI, pp. 4, 30-31.

But, as usual, the severity is tempered by the famous Shavian comical spirit. The play is made tolerable even to doctors by the fact that it is written in the usual comic vein. Shaw picked up the idea of the play when he visited a London hospital. An assistant came to say that a tuberculous patient wanted to be added to the list of those whom a certain doctor had been treating. The prompt question of the doctor was "Is he worth it?"¹⁶ This was the direct impetus that made Shaw write his play.

The villain here is not society as is the case in the plays we have already touched upon; it is an individual, Dr. Colenso Ridgeon. The other five doctors in the play, though not as villainous as Ridgeon, are quite hard-hearted. Dr. Ridgeon spends a very long time receiving those who have come to congratulate him, for he has recently been knighted. But he, at the same time, refuses to admit a woman who has come to consult him about her consumptive husband. He finally allows her to come in, intending to get rid of her as soon as possible. But no sooner has he seen her beauty than he falls in love with her and intends to kill her husband, which scheme he carries out. A few months later he confesses his crime saying, "I did it because I was in love with you." But it is too late now. The young woman, Jennifer Dubedat, has already carried out her late husband's wish and got married. And Sir Colenso realizes that he has "committed a purely disinterested crime."

¹⁶Henderson, p. 607.

Shaw has gone to some trouble to deny that the play is an attack on doctors as such, even issuing a flysheet with the theatre program to the New York audience for that purpose. But such a defense is not quite convincing. Five out of the six doctors presented to us are depicted as villains in one way or another. Shaw, in fact, was "determined to open the eyes of the public to the appalling danger of leaving the control of the profession . . . to bodies like the British General Medical Council, 'a trade union of the very worst type,' on which the public was entirely unrepresented."¹⁷ His remedy for the problem is a public medical service in which doctors are paid to keep people in good health. Forty years later, Shaw's remedy, in theory at least, was carried out in the National Health Service.¹⁸

¹⁷Henderson, p. 609. Italics are mine.

¹⁸Purdom, p. 216.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, LOVE AND MARRIAGE

So far we have dealt with some of the social evils from whose illusions Shaw attempted to free his audience. An attempt will now be made to show how the playwright tore down the veils of illusion from the front of domestic relationships and presented the naked picture as he conceived of it.

To begin with parent-children relationships. Children were expected to be quite obedient to their parents, however unjust, cruel and old-fashioned the parents might have been. Parents did not realize that their children existed in a generation different from that of their own childhood and that what had been good for them as children would not necessarily be good for their offspring. Parents were often ignorant as to the right way of dealing with their children, and often cruel too. Shaw tells us that Sir Walter Scott's father, for instance, "when his son incautiously expressed some relish for his porridge, dashed a handful of salt into it with an instinctive sense that it was his duty as a father to prevent his son enjoying himself." Another example is given by Shaw to demonstrate that parents' conception of duty was false. "Ruskin's mother," he tells us, "gratified the sensual side of her matrimonial passion, not by cuddling her son, but by whipping him when he fell downstairs or was slack in learning the Bible off by heart."

As usual, what Shaw states in his prefaces, he "dramatizes" in the plays. One feels that there is at least one character in each play that serves as a mouthpiece of the dramatist. When

Mrs. Warren asks her daughter, Vivie, "to do your duty as a daughter," the enlightened and educated "new" daughter exclaims vehemently, "My duty as a daughter! . . . Now once for all, mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband." There is an echo of Ibsenism here. Shaw wants children to be treated as if they were really grown-up individuals. Their only duty is for themselves, not for their parents. Even giving them pieces of advice is objectionable. Shaw says indignantly that when "I hear some well-meaning person exhort young people to make it a rule to do at least one kind action everyday, I feel very much as I should if I heard them persuade children to get drunk at least once every day."¹⁹ In a long dialogue between Ann and Tanner, alias Shaw himself, in Man and Superman, the relationships between children and parents is given in great details. It runs as follows:

Ann: I love my mother, Jack.

Tanner: . . . Is that any reason why you are not to call your soul your own? Oh, I protest against this vile abjection of youth to age! Look at fashionable society as you know it. What does it pretend to be? An exquisite dance of nymphs. What is it? A horrible procession of witched girls, each in the claws of a cynical, cunning, avaricious, disillusioned, ignorantly experienced, foul-minded old woman whom she calls mother, and whose duty it is to corrupt her mind and sell her to the highest bidder. . . I tell you, the first duty of manhood and womanhood is a Declaration of Independence: the man who pleads his father's authority is no man: the woman who pleads her mother's authority is unfit to bear citizens to a free people.

¹⁹Works, Vol. XII, preface to Getting Married, pp. 197-198.

Then he persuades her to "break your chains and go your way according to your own conscience and not according to your mother's."

In his method of "discussion" Shaw leaves almost nothing to his audience to infer. As he states his ideas in the pre-faces, so does he make his characters echo them, and in many cases they do little more. But of this later. What I want to point out here, however, is that such a speech of Tanner needs no comment, it speaks for itself. Another dialogue of the kind, though with a little more dramatization, takes place in You Never Can Tell. Here we have the old-fashioned father, Crampton, who has separated from his wife for eighteen years because of her "new" ideas about child-upbringing, speaking to his daughter, Gloria:

Crampton: Do you know what is due to me as your father?

Gloria: For instance---?

Crampton: (rising as if to combat a monster) For instance! For instance!! For instance, duty, affection, respect, obedience---

Gloria: (quitting her careless leaning attitude and confronting him promptly and proudly) I obey nothing but my sense of what is right. I respect nothing that is not noble. That is my duty . . . As to affection, it is not within my control. I am not sure that I quite know what affection means. (She turns away with an evident distaste for that part of the subject . . .)

Crampton, thunderstruck by such a lecture which he takes to be a demonstration of abject filial ingratitude and disobedience, asks her if she "really means that." The "new" daughter replies:

Excuse me: that is an uncivil question. I am speaking seriously to you; and I expect you to take me seriously

. . . Can you not discuss this matter coolly and rationally?

Gloria does not tolerate even her mother's interference in her own affairs, although the mother is not a conventional one; she is, in fact, an enthusiastic champion in the "New Woman" movement.

Gloria: (Confronting her mother with deep reproach) Mother: what right had you to do it (i.e., interfere in her affair with Valentine).

Mr. Clandon: I don't think I have said anything I have no right to say, Gloria.

* * * * *

Gloria: I cannot believe that anyone has any right even to think about things that concern me only . . . If a woman cannot protect herself, no one can protect her. No one has any right to try: not even her mother.

Here again one can easily distinguish Shaw's voice.

The differences between parents' attitudes towards life and the influence of such differences on their children is again taken up in Major Barbara. Here it is the mother who is, in some sense, old-fashioned. She separates from her husband because she objects to his being a manufacturer of weapons. She brings up her children according to high moral principles. She makes them prejudiced against their father because of his profession. They feel ashamed to be the children of such an ill-reputed father. Barbara's moral principles make her join the Salvation Army in an attempt to relieve the poor and, perhaps, to prove to the world that she has nothing to do with her father's "immorality." Stephen, the son, does not tolerate to hear his father's name. The mother says about her husband

that he does not only think of bad immoral things, but he also practices them.

But these moral scruples begin to fade away when Lady Britomart and her children are brought face to face with the differences between their own high principles and Undershaft's practicality. Stephen begins to blame his mother for her previous attempts to keep feeding him on impractical moral principles. After seeing his father's establishment, he is so transported that he rapturously exclaims:

Oh, magnificent. A perfect triumph of modern industry. Frankly, my dear father, I have been a fool: I had no idea what it all meant: of the wonderful forethought, the power of organization, the administrative capacity, the financial genius, the colossal capital it represents. I have been repeating to myself as I came through your streets "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than War."

Major Barbara, too, realizing now the differences between her mother's impractical morality and her father's practical "immorality," takes her father's side and lives in his model village. This would enable her to rejoin the Army which she has deserted because of her previous moral scruples.

Shaw's conception of the ideal relationships between parents and children is projected in You Never Can Tell, in one of the few scenes where ideas are presented in action rather than statement. We are shown two young people, Dolly Clandon, "a very pretty woman in miniature," who is hardly eighteen years old, and her twin brother, Philip, the son and daughter of Mrs. Clandon and her husband, Fergus Crampton. Their mother, as has been said, has brought them up according to her principles as a

"new woman." Within the limits of unconventional decency, they do whatever they like. After a few minutes' acquaintance with a dentist, Valentine, they invite him to dinner. They liked him, so why not invite him? They call their father, as well as other elderly people, by their first names. False conventions do not prevent them from talking in whatever subject they want and before whoever might be present. Dolly, quite unconventionally, asks her mother's lawyer, the impressive, conservative, elderly Bohun, to dance with her. "Oh," she exclaims, "now you look quite a human being. Mayn't I have just one dance with you?" The poor old man is shocked to see Dolly behaving in such an unconventional manner, but, as he does not like to be taken as old-fashioned, he consents to dance with her.

Crampton, the father, has often expressed his disapproval of his children's liberal behavior and unconventional dress. So he is scandalized when he hears Philip asking the waiter to "procure a couple of dominos and false noses for my father and Mr. McComas." Philip wants his father and Mr. McComas to take part in a masque which has been going on. Mr. Comas immediately expresses his objection to wearing a domino and a false nose. He does not tolerate any kind of frivolity. But Crampton, who has by now realized that his children's unconventional behavior is in no way harmful, accepts his son's suggestion. This acceptance shocks McComas in such a way that he cries: "Crampton: you are not the same man I took you for." Crampton's conceptions of the right way of treating his children have, indeed, undergone a profound change by the end of You Never Can Tell.

In this way, therefore, should parents deal with their children, or at least this is what Shaw wants to convey. Friendship built on mutual understanding and respect rather than tyranny built on false conceptions of duty and obedience is the basis for parent-child relationships. This notion which may seem nowadays quite commonplace was not so in the 1890's and the first two decades of the twentieth century wheremost of Shaw's important plays were written.

Shaw also believes that it is a false illusion to think that affection between parents and children is instinctive. It is habit that creates such a feeling. Parents love their children only because they are accustomed to seeing them every day. If they are separated from each other for a long time, such feeling may fade away and die. In Heartbreak House Lady Utterword remains abroad for more than twenty years. When she returns after this long time, her father, Captain Shotover, and her sister, Hesione, receive her as if she were quite a stranger. When she expressed her astonishment at such a behavior, her father tells her that parents' love for their children fades away after a separation of six years! This, of course, is not to be taken seriously. It seems that Shaw wants only to attack the kind of affection that keeps a child tied to his mother's apron-strings, and attached to his father in such a way as to hamper the growth of his own personality.

In a similar manner, Shaw set forth to expose what he took to be false illusions about the wife-husband relationships. In

the period that has already been referred to, a wife was expected to be womanly, to use Shaw's term. That is, she was supposed to be faithful to her husband, good to her children, skilful in managing her household affairs, know nothing about what was going on in the outside world, know nothing about her husband's dealings outside his home, spend her leisure time in idle gossip with her equally womanly visitors. In short, she was a doll created for the amusement of her husband and for nothing else. If she refused to sacrifice herself for husband and home, she would be branded as unwomanly and therefore worthless and abnormal. "I had too often heard men speak of women as if they were mere personal conveniences," says Shaw.²⁰ This is exactly Helmer's conception of his wife, Nora, in A Doll's House. It is also Morell's conception in Candida. He finds nothing better to offer his wife in return for her services than "my strength for your defence, my honesty for your surety, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity." It does not occur to Morell that his wife is as independent a human being as he is. In fact she is much more superior to him in many ways. The poet, Marchbanks, who understands Candida better than the chivalrous husband, tells him that "she does not ask [for] these silly" things. Frank Harris in his biography of Shaw says that Morell "hasn't the least inkling that Candida possesses a soul . . . So little conception, indeed, has her husband of his wife's mind and heart, that he closes his

²⁰Works, Vol. XII, p. 251.

offer, self-confident in his manly philistinism 'that is all it becomes a man to offer a woman'."²¹

It is this ignorance of the husbands that Shaw attacks. On the one hand, he wants them to become conscious that their wives "possess" independent souls, and on the other hand he wants to awaken wives to their abject status as regards their relationships with them. Injustice may not be realized unless somebody makes it felt. Shaw wants wronged wives to revolt against their husbands' tyranny and realize that they really have "souls" of their own. This is because wives with conventional ideas are "graceless, ignorant and narrow-minded to a quite appalling degree," as Shaw puts it. They are in no way fit "for civilized intercourse."²²

What is it that may make them fit for such intercourse then? In one word it is work. From his first play and throughout his career, Shaw maintains that it is economic independence of wives in particular and women in general that "humanizes" them. Vivie, in Mrs. Warren's Profession, would have followed her mother's example but for her economic independence. In Getting Married, Lesbia Grantham's similar independence enables her not to marry at all, marriage being hateful to her. In You Never Can Tell, Mrs. Clandon, an author of several books on the "woman" question, is enabled to desert her old-fashioned husband for eighteen years. Work would help a wife to acquire

²¹Quoted from Purdom, p. 165.

²²Works, Vol. VII, p. xviii.

experience, and her knowledge of the outside world would enable her to better her ways of bringing her children up. Without such experience it is useless to talk "of honor, virtue, purity, and the wholesome, sweet, clean English home lives." Again, a wife who is "entirely preoccupied with affection for her husband . . . entirely preoccupied with her affection for her children is a nuisance."²³

Even sexual relationships between a husband and a wife who is unqualified for work will not be much more decent than a similar relationship between man and a street woman. "Make the sexual relations between man and woman decent and honorable," Shaw exhorts his readers, "by making woman economically independent of men."

Equality in rights should be established between husband and wife. If the husband has the right to divorce his wife when she goes astray, she must have an equal right to divorce him if she suspects his fidelity to her. In Getting Married the bride and bridegroom refuse to conclude the marriage contract before stipulating in it that the misdemeanor of any party will have no consequences on the other party. If Cecil Sykes, the bridegroom, commits a crime that makes him spend years in prison, Edith, the bride, will have the right to divorce him. She is in no way willing to tolerate any foolish conventional self-sacrifice. The marriage contract itself is considered "wicked." Both Cecil and Edith have read enlightening pamphlets on marriage problems

²³Works, Vol. XII, pp. 194-196.

shortly before the wedding ceremony!

In his desire to create controversy and to shock his audience, Shaw goes even one more step forward. He wants the husband to be "allowed to discard his wife when he gets tired of her, and the wife the husband when another man strikes her fancy"! This rather fantastic advanced idea is stated in the preface to Getting Married. In the play itself, Reginald adopts Shaw's point of view. He asks, "Why should we be held together whether we like it or not?" In Candida he gives the heroine the right to choose between husband and lover. In Heartbreak House Mrs. Hushabye is in no way indignant at knowing that her husband has been courting Ellie. The husband himself shows no jealousy when he sees his wife making love to Mazzini Dunn. Randall Utterword has spent a long time flirting with his sister-in-law, Lady Utterword. In short, every character in the play has someone to make love to. Whether Shaw really approves of this kind of liberty in love as shown in this last play is questionable. What is clear in the other plays, however, is Shaw's intention to shock the "thoughtlessly conventional" people and make them "reconsider" their marital relations.²⁴

Closely connected with husband-wife relationships is the question of love. Shaw's attitude towards this question can be made clear only if we remember his attitude towards all romantic aspects of life. It is no secret that throughout his life Shaw was engaged in relentless attacks on romanticism. Everything that

²⁴Works, Vol. XII, pp. 258; 238.

was not rational and not materialistically based disgusted the dramatist. He considered peoples' notion of love as irrational and therefore romantic. If a couple were to get married on an amorous basis, the result might turn out to be complete unhappiness, for in their romantic infatuation with one another they might overlook rational facts upon which their life ought to be based. Love, therefore, is an irrational passion. What people call love, Shaw tells us, is no more than a romantic notion. And if healthy marriages are to be concluded, the real thing that causes attraction between man and woman should be explained on a realistic or scientific basis. "It would be far better for everyone, as well as far honester," Shaw says scientifically, "if young people were taught that what they call love is an appetite which, like all other appetites, is destroyed for the moment by its gratification."²⁵ Shaw here is an absolute rationalist and materialist. The reader is to understand that there is absolutely no difference between man and other creatures regarding this question.

In the plays this doctrine is illustrated. In You Never Can Tell, when Valentine tells Gloria about his feelings towards her, she cries

I hope you are not going to be so foolish--so vulgar-- as to say love.

And Valentine hastens to repudiate the accusation:

No, no, no, no, no. Not love: we know better than that. Let's call it chemistry . . . you are attracting me

²⁵Works, Vol. XII, p. 220.

irresistibly. Chemically.

Now it is doubtful whether Shaw is serious about this chemical explanation or not. What is undoubtful, however, is his insistence on explaining love on scientific material basis. Candida, trying to make the romantic poet, Marchbanks, think in scientific terms, advises him to consider the fact that "when I am thirty, she will be forty-five. When I am sixty, she will be seventy-five." Here there is no romantic infatuation where an old man of sixty falls in love with a young woman of twenty and elopes with her to a fairy land. Judith, in The Devil's Disciple, falls in love with Dick because she thinks that his heroic action of taking her husband's place has been motivated by his love to her. Hence her extreme disappointment when Dick, who has no illusions about love or romance, explains to her that "If I said--to please you--that I did what I did ever so little for your sake, I lied as men always lie to women . . . I had no motive and no interest."

All Shaw's romantic lovers end unsuccessfully. It is the rationalistic ones who win the day. Marchbanks' romantic passion towards Candida could not persuade her to desert husband and children and fly away with him. Again, Judith's love of Dick in The Devil's Disciple, aroused by a seemingly romantic self-sacrifice, could not win Dick's heart. In You Never Can Tell, Valentine's rationalistic explanation of love ultimately conquers Gloria's resistance. In Man and Superman the romantic lover, Octavius Robinson, loses the battle over Ann Whitefield

to Don Juan, alias John Tanner, who has been transformed in Shaw's hands into a rationalist and a philosopher. As philanderers usually win young women's hearts by sweet romantic promises, Grace Tranfield, the experienced widow of about thirty-two, advises people in The Philanderer "Never make a hero of a philanderer." In Heartbreak House, Boss Mangan's proposal to Ellie is finally rejected because he is over fifty and she is probably less than twenty. Higgins tries hard to dissuade the heroine of Pygmalion from falling in love with him. Eliza's passion is romantic, so it is not allowed to flourish. One feels that had not the lovers in Major Barbara been able to overcome material difficulties, love between them might not have ended successfully.

If the love that has from the beginning of the world been praised as an ennobling passion does not exist in Shaw's code of things, what is it then that attracts men and women to each other? As usual, the answer is given us by Shaw on the basis of science and natural history. It is the Life Force that creates such an attraction between the sexes. "Sexually," Don Juan in Man and Superman says, "Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way." Thus, Don Juan, or Tanner, who does not love Ann and actually flies away from her, succumbs at last to the behest of the Life Force and marries the heroine. So does Cherteris in The Philanderer. Cherteris has done his best to flee from Julia,

but at last the Life Force forces him to admit that he is attracted to her, and we are to understand that he will marry her.

Attraction between the sexes, therefore, is purposive; it is for the perpetuation and advancement of the species. Thus, "sexual unions eugenically capable of producing promising offspring might . . . bring together temperaments that could never live together beneath one roof. Yet the Life Force will fling them at each other, physically."²⁶ In such an explanation there is no romance. But is it true that real, unchemical, impurposive love does not really exist? Is it only on such scientific basis that it is to be conceived of? One often sees a very attractive young woman married to a very unhandsome man. Should it therefore be inferred that such a young woman has been attracted to such a man by her desire to perpetuate and improve the species of human beings? This is hardly conceivable. Is it really the Life Force that makes Shaw's heroines the aggressive party and the chasers of those to whom they are attracted, or is it something quite different that makes them do so? Such questions may better be left to psychologists to answer. What concerns us here, however, is the fact that what persuades Shaw to make his "lovers test each other's will rather than each other's heart"²⁷ is probably his desire to make those who worship the

²⁶Edmund Fuller, George Bernard Shaw, Critic of Western Moral (New York, London, 1950), p. 43.

²⁷V.S. Pritchett, "G.B.S. 1856-1950," in Louis Kronenberger's George Bernard Shaw, (New York, 1953), p. 243. (First published in Time, November 13, 1950).

persons of other human beings aware that in doing so they may overlook the realities of life.

REVOLT AGAINST POPULAR IDEALS AND ROMANCE

Anything that may prevent the public from being realistic in its outlook to life Shaw calls either false morality, deceptive idealism, or illusive romance. In the last two sections the discussion has mainly been confined to social ills and domestic relationships. This section will deal with other problems such as, war, religion and romantic literature as conceived by Shaw.

Most literature, before Shaw, praised war and its heroes. Othello has captivated Desdemona's heart by narrating to her his romantic adventures in war. Antony's fame has been built on heroic adventures in love and war. Duncan heaps praise and confers titles on Macbeth because he has achieved many a decisive victory in the battle field. Henry V is presented as an admirable patriot because of his subjection of the French. Almost all Dryden's fantastic heroes have attained glory by killing as many people as Almanzor's victims. In the Greek literature war-heroes have godlike halos about them.

In this respect, Shaw differs profoundly from his predecessors. In some respect he is like Tolstoy. Both writers shed the light on the atrocities of war rather than on its heroism and glories. This is as clear in Arms and the Man as it is in War and Peace. Bluntschli, the hero of Arms and the Man is prosaic, crass, professional soldier. He is realistic and despises romance and romantic heroes who build their fame on their disregard for the lives of those whose misfortune places them under their command. His down-to-earth realism eclipses the shining rays of

romance that encircle both the romantic war hero, Sergius, and the romantic ideal heroine, Raina. Gradually, but not deliberately, Bluntschli begins to shatter the ideal images of heroism which fill the imagination of Raina whom he describes to Sergius as "rich, young, beautiful, with her imagination full of fairy princes and noble natures and cavalry charges and goodness knows what!" He tells Raina that Sergius is no better than a Don Quixote. Sergius deserves the title because he has foolishly stormed a machine gun post which happened, fortunately for his cavalry at least, to have been out of ammunition. Shortly before her lover has been described as Don Quixote, Raina ecstatically exclaims, "Oh, to think that it was all true! that Sergius is just as splendid and noble as he looks! that the world is really a Glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance! What happens! What unspeakable fulfillment!" With this image of heroism in her mind, the following dialogue takes place between her and Bluntschli:

Bluntschli: I don't intend to get killed, if I can help it.

Raina: I suppose not . . . Some soldiers, I know, are afraid to die.

Bluntschli: All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can.

This, indeed, is a very shocking admission to a romantic lady like Raina. Has any soldier before Bluntschli admitted his fear of death unless he is unashamed of being branded as cowardly? But Bluntschli is no coward; he is a realist, as realistic, indeed, as his creator. He has for a long time had

his illusions about the glories of war. Finally experience has taught him to face reality. And he begins to describe himself as "a commonplace Swiss soldier who hardly knows what a decent life is after fifteen years of barracks and battles: a vagabond, a man who has spoiled all his chances in life through an incurably romantic disposition." He goes on to admit more unromantic soldierly behavior, to the utter dismay of Raina.

Bluntschli: I have no ammunition. What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolate instead . . .

Raina: (outraged in her most cherished ideals of manhood) Chocolate! Do you stuff your pockets with sweets--like a schoolboy--even in the field?

Bluntschli: (grinning) Yes: isn't it contemptible?
(Hungrily) I wish I had some now.

Raina: Allow me (she sails away scornfully to the chest of drawers, and returns with the box of confectionary in her hand). I am sorry I have eaten them all except these. (She offers him the box).

Obviously her last sentence implies that he is no more courageous than she is. A little later, she actually calls him "a chocolate cream soldier." But he knows better. And by the end of Arms and the Man, she is so completely disillusioned that she deserts her romantic hero and falls in love with this "chocolate cream soldier," and marries him.

Sergius, on the other hand, is clearly described by Shaw as a typical Byronic hero:

. . . 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; by his wincings and mockeries under the sting of the petty

disillusions which every hour spent among men brings to his sensitive observation, 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. It is clear that here or nowhere is Raina's hero.

Such a romantic hero is no longer fit to live in an age that has begun to worship realism. And as he cannot now marry the disillusioned Raina, he forces himself to come down to earth and marry the girl servant, Louka, who is indeed his natural mate. The romantic war hero has completely been humiliated, or should we say, rather, humanized?

Sergius's foolish heroism and Raina's ideal romanticism are no less ridiculous to Shaw's mind than the old conventions of Raina's father about cleanliness. When the father, Major Petkoff, is asked by his wife, Catherine, to wash off the dirt which has accumulated on his body after a long absence in the front, he answers with deep conviction that,

I don't believe in going too far with these modern customs. All this washing can't be good for the health: it is not natural. There was an Englishman at Philippopolis who used to wet himself all over with cold water every morning when he got up. Disgusting! It all comes from the English: their climate makes them so dirty that they have to be perpetually washing themselves. Look at my father! he never had a bath in his life; and he lived to be ninety-eight, the healthiest man in Bulgaria. I don't mind a good wash once a week to keep up my position; but once a day is carrying the thing to a ridiculous extreme.

Old conventions, Shaw means to tell us here, have always found as great arguers and enthusiastic logicians as Petkoff is in this passage.

When Arms and the Man was produced, Shaw was accused of

striking a "wanton blow at the cause of liberty in the Balkans" by presenting such an unsuitable picture of the defenders of liberty. Such criticism misses Shaw's intention completely. The onslaught, Shaw tells his critics, is not on the "liberal revolution," but on "idealism which is implicit, and indeed explicit, in Arms and the Man." Chivalrous characters such as Sergius are not to be admired, because "chivalry," says Shaw, "is at bottom only romantic suicide."²⁸ Again, in The Devil's Disciple, Shaw demonstrates that the onslaught is not on the defenders of liberty. In this latter play, he, indeed, gives quite an ugly picture of those who refuse to partake in the efforts made for liberating their country. But the refusal here has more to do with Shaw's concept of religion than that of romance.

Again and again Shaw tells us that he had "no belief in popular religion,"²⁹ Popular religion, as he conceives of it, is one of the factors that prevent people from seeing these things as they really are. Sometimes it leads man to practice cruelty, believing that he is doing the right religious thing, and some other times it leads to a kind of submission that Shaw does not approve of. If man in such cases uses his reason rather than using religion as an excuse, he will behave in a different way, a sounder one. In The Devil's Disciple Mrs.

²⁸Nine Plays by B. Shaw with Prefaces and Notes, (New York, 1946), pp. 120; 494.

²⁹Works, Vol. VII, p. vii.

Dudgeon is seemingly the most pious character. But she is also the cruelest one. She does not tolerate any kind of frivolity. She takes religion as an excuse for hating everyone. She tells the minister, Anderson, that he has lost his influence over her from the very moment he "married for love." She extremely maltreats Essie, a sixteen-year-old orphan, for no reason except that the poor girl has been born to unmarried parents. All Mrs. Dudgeon's relatives maltreat the girl for the same reason. The only one that does not share in their cruelty is Dick, the devil's disciple. He has put off all that he considers to be false pretense, has revolted against all the puritanical laws that govern his society, has indulged in gambling, drinking, smuggling and all the other vices, has declared himself the devil's disciple. As such, he is despised by everyone in his society, everyone avoids any contacts with him. But the final impression is that Dick is much better than any of those who surround him. It is he who encourages his community to revolt against the British army and defend their town. It is he who tells his relatives that "you haven't damned King George up hill and down dale as I have; but you've prayed for his defeat." It is he who challenges those who abhor him on religious grounds to go with him and "run up the American flag on the devil's house; and make a fight for freedom." And it is the religious people who, when hearing this challenge, "scramble out . . . hustling one another in their haste."

Dick is a devil's disciple, but also a practical man. His

practicality is catching especially for those who are willing to use their minds. The Rev. Anthony Anderson is one of them. From the beginning we are told that he has sold his family Bible to buy a pair of pistols. The seeds of practicality and patriotism are there in him from the outset. He interprets religion on practical grounds. When he sees that Dick is willing to replace him on the gallows, this practicality reaches its climax. He decides to join the national army and at the same time try to save the devil's disciple. Between him and his pious wife, Judith, the following dialogue takes place:

Judith: Is it of any use to pray, do you think Tony?

Anderson: Pray! Can we pray Swindon's rope off Richard's neck?

Judith: God may soften Major Swindon's heart.

Anderson: (Contemptuously ...) Let him, then. I am not God, I must go to work another way. (Judith gasps at the blasphemy ...)

Judith: Have you forgotten even that you are a minister?

Anderson: Minister--faugh! My hat: Where's my hat.

It is this sense of practicality that Shaw obviously admires.

Judith at the beginning of the play is also prejudiced against Dick on religious and moral grounds. Listen to her advising Essie not to mention Dick's name any more:

You must never mention the name of Richard Dudgeon--never even think about him. He is a bad man.

Essie: What has he done?

Judith: You must not ask questions about him, Essie. You are too young to know what it is to be a bad man. But he is a smuggler; and he lives with the gypsies; and he has no love for his mother and his family; and wrestles and

plays games on Sunday instead of going to Church. Never let him into your presence, if you can help it, Essie; and try to keep yourself and all womanhood unspotted by contact with such men.

It is this same Judith who falls in love with Dick when she thinks that out of his love for her he has taken her husband's place on the gallows, and when she thinks also that her husband has flown away to save his own neck. But as Shew is writing to attack romantic heroes rather than to praise them, he makes Dick declare to her that what he did was done out of no special regard either for her or her husband. It is simply because

. . . when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows . . . I should have done the same for any man in the town, or any other man's wife . . . Do you understand me?

Dick, as it is clear in this speech, is a naturally virtuous man, of pity and humanity, who has become "like all genuinely" religious men, a reprobate and an outcast."³⁰ His "goodness" has not been attained by adherence to the pretensions of such characters as his mother, it has rather been acquired by his revolt against them. This revolt, of course, is meant to be quite plausible, especially when we remember that Dick is supposed to have lived in puritanical New Hampshire of 1777, where the least deviation of anybody from what was considered the right way, was prone to incur an accusation of witchcraft and

³⁰ Fuller, p. 32.

a consequent punishment on the pyre. It is no wonder, therefore, to know that this play in particular has been quite popular in this country ever since it was written.

The question of "popular religion" versus practicality is there also in Major Barbara and Saint Joan. The Salvation Army in the former play can be taken to represent religious sentiment, and Undershaft's death factory may stand for practicality. Saint Joan's practicality in the latter play was incurred upon her the severest punishment. Those who condemned her to death imagined that in doing so they were really following the right teachings of religion. In The Devil's Disciple, Major Barbara and Saint Joan the conflict between religious sentiment and practicality ends in the interest of the latter virtue. If Saint Joan could not save her body, her practical spirit was able to liberate her country.

The main lesson in these plays is that people condemned on moral and religious grounds may turn out to be much better and much more useful to humanity than their accusers. The most important thing is that one should always use his mind, because it is man's reason that always leads him to do the right thing.

The last topic to be discussed in this section is Shaw's attitude towards literature and his efforts to disillusion people as to the validity of romantic drama in particular.

Romantic drama, as it has already been said, is considered by Shaw as a means of diverting people from facing their real problems. The conflict in such a genre, Shaw tells us, is not

"with real circumstances, but with a set of conventions and assumptions half of which do not exist off the stage." He adds that when a writer, who has no opinions to express "declares that art should not be didactic, all the people who have nothing to teach and all the people who don't want to learn agree with him emphatically." Shaw, therefore, considers his "problem" plays superior to romantic ones, because they contain preaching and propaganda. He writes to Arthur Bingham Walkley that "If you don't like my preaching, you must lump it. I really cannot help it."³¹ Romantic drama is by no means relished by him, because it simply presents "fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity, and all the commonplace of civilization which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretense that such things are progress, science, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness." To critics who condemn his plays as pieces of propaganda, he says that the difference is "between the romantic morality of the critics and the natural morality of the plays."³²

As for writing "for art's sake," he declares, "I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence." And even when he writes a seemingly romantic play, he deliberately turns its hero inside out as he did with the hero of The Devil's Disciple. A

³¹Nine Plays, pp. 19; 515; 486.

³²Nine Plays, pp. 120, 121; 119.

nineteenth-century playwright would have depicted Dick's heroic self-sacrifice as motivated by his love for Judith. Such a writer would have also ended Pygmalion with a wedding celebration. He would have also married the twenty-year-old Ellie to the fifty-five-year-old Mangan in Heartbreak House. Candida also would have been allowed to be as romantic as Marchbanks.

It is against such unrealistic, romantic treatments in drama that Shaw revolted. He maintained this attitude throughout his life. No romantic element is allowed to enter his plays. What he wanted to show in his plays is that "the conflict of individuals with law and convention can be dramatized like other human conflicts."³³ This, he believed, would free people from false conventional illusion, and consequently help them to lead a more realistic, more happy life.

³³Nine Plays, pp. 513-514; 488.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SHAW'S STYLE

In spite of the fact that Shaw's attacks on conventional morality are often carried out by means of lively, witty and humorous dialogues, yet one still feels that such attacks would probably have been more effective had he chosen to observe certain dramatic considerations. For the most part, talk in his plays often substitutes for action. Talk on the stage is far less effective than action. A problem that is revealed through action is much more convincing than one stated by mere talk or discussion. Long speeches and discussions presented on the stage are in many ways similar to sermonizing. I have often seen people fall asleep while hearing a sermon. This is because sermons, however good they may be, are still given as pieces of advice. A grown up person is usually averse to all kinds of advice. But he is still willing to be taught if you can show him aspects of life enacted on the stage rather than stated. It is action which makes people sometimes get out of a theatre with their eyes full of tears, or with broad smiles on their faces. This difference in effect between action and statement shows why the Church in the middle ages preferred to have some biblical stories enacted rather than merely narrated. It gradually came to realize that putting such stories in a kind of action was much more attractive to the congregation and thus much more effective and instructive.

Had Shaw followed a similar way in a play like Getting

Married, for instance, his ideas on marriage problems would most certainly have been more effective. Instead of ideas projected in real action, this play presents us with a group of people gathered together in one room for the sake of discussing everything that pertains to this social institution. Before the wedding day, the bridegroom Cecil and the bride Edith seem to know nothing about marriage laws. An hour or so before the wedding ceremony, both receive pamphlets from an unknown benefactor opening their eyes to the injustices of current marriage laws. Their eyes have now been opened; they marry only after they have agreed that the misbehavior of either of them will not have any consequences on the innocent party. Lesbia Grantham, a handsome woman in her prime, refuses to marry anyone, least of all General Bridgenorth who is in love with her, because she tells us that marriage will interfere with her independence. Reginald Bridgenorth and his wife Leo, narrate to us their difficulties. We are told that Leo has recently fallen in love with another man, and in order to help her get her divorce, her husband says that he has beaten her! The complaint here, of course, is against marriage laws. The Bishop of Chelsea says that he has often tried to persuade the government to improve the marriage laws, but that he has not been successful because none of the prime ministers has been willing to anger the public and consequently lose their votes. The lesson here is that politicians sacrifice the public's interests for their own ends. In short, everything is talk;

there is no central figure, no suspense, no expectation, no action whatsoever. The play is not even divided into acts and scenes.

The effect of Getting Married would have been greater if Edith, for instance, had been shown really suffering from the consequences of a crime committed by her husband. Lesbia's aversion to marriage would have been more convincing had she been shown suffering from the results of an earlier marriage. The Bishop of Chelsea's complaint against the politicians' self-interestedness would have been more salutary had such self-interestedness been represented in action.

This lack of action, though in varying degrees, is indeed observable in almost all Shaw's plays. In Man and Superman, though there is some action at the beginning and end of the play, the middle part is as actionless as Getting Married. In the edition I read, this middle part, Act III, which takes place in hell, consists of some seventy pages all of which are full of nothing but talk between Ana, Don Juan, the Devil, and the Statue. They talk about marriage, the Life Force, the duel between the sexes and many other topics. It often takes more than one page for one of these characters to finish his monologue. In Mrs. Warren's Profession, again, there is little more than talk between Mrs. Warren and her daughter, Vivie. The mother tells her daughter that she has been driven to the street, not by depravity of character, but by poverty. She adds that had she been economically independent, she would have lived a virtuous life. Mrs. Warren's problem would have been more effective

had the audience been in action shown how poverty actually led some women astray. Anyone of the audience may say that Mrs. Warren's defense is false, and that if she had really been a virtuous woman, she would have preferred to stay in her humble job to allowing temptation to lead her to follow her sister's example. But the audience would have no such doubts if the problem had really been revealed in action rather than by the defense of a sinful woman.

Even in the famous plays such as Saint Joan, Candida, You Never Can Tell, Pygmalion, and The Devil's Disciple, the ideas which the playwright wants to convey are often stated rather than dramatized. In Saint Joan, though there is enough action to make it one of Shaw's best action plays, the main lesson is, partly at least, conveyed in conversations between Joan, King Charles, Cauchon, the Chaplain, Warwick, Dunois, and others. When towards the end of the play Saint Joan asks if she will rise from the dead and come back to live in the twentieth century, she is made to understand that even the twentieth century still holds prejudices similar to those of the middle ages. Dunois tells her that "we are not yet good enough for you." The lesson is that twentieth-century people are no better than their predecessors of the fifteenth century. If Saint Joan returns to live in our era, she may still find those who will burn her or at least maltreat her in one way or another.

Similarly, the lesson in Candida is produced through conversation. Candida is given the right to choose between lover and husband by means of discussion. Marchbanks asks the husband

to let his wife make her choice between the two of them. Morell offers his manly strength and protection, Marchbanks his weakness and heart's need. Candida chooses the weaker side. All this is given with little action. Any theatre manager with some romantic tendencies may make the heroine of this play choose the poet without making his audience feel that Candida has behaved in a way contrary to her own nature. If she is in love with mothering Morell, she may well be made to fall in love with mothering Marchbanks. Such a change in the heroine's role, if it is at all possible, shows the difference between characters revealed through action, and others revealed by mere talk.

In You Never Can Tell the main idea is, again, conveyed by discussion between Gloria and Valentine. When the heroine expresses her abhorrence of what she takes to be love, Valentine hastens to explain his feelings towards her on biological grounds. He declares that the attraction between them is no more than a chemical process. In Promalio part at least of the lesson, or lessons, is produced by conversations between the flower girl, Higgins, Colonel Pickering, Doolittle and others. In Arms and the Man the first act is magnificently given in action. But the rest of the play contains little more than talk. Bluntschli ridicules romantic war heroism in conversations held between himself, Sergius, Petkoff, Catherine, and Raina. Petkoff is shown as a conventional moralist when he talks about the foolishness of the habit of washing oneself everyday.

The paradoxical fact is that Shaw's most successful plays are those which contain romantic elements. Transforming a poor,

dirty flower girl, is as romantic as the transformation of the poor girl into Cinderella. The first act in Arms and the Man is as romantic as the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet. The spirit of The Devil's Disciple is romance. There are soldiers, clergyman, hero, heroine, deserted orphan, comic man, villain, sacrifice, trial and execution, with, of course, a happy ending. That Shaw in this play distorts everything to the disadvantage of romance does not concern us here. The fact is that all the above elements are there in the play. Though Saint Joan has its roots in history, yet it is romantic in the sense that a young woman is made to lead armies to victory, and consequently liberate her country from the dominating enemy. Probably one of the most interesting things in Candida is the introduction of the romantic poet and his romantic secret.

As we have seen, action in Shaw's plays is often substituted by talk. This fact, it seems to me, lessens the effectiveness of his plays. This becomes more serious when one remembers that Shaw was always after having his plays produce one "moral" lesson or another.

In Ibsen's "problem" plays, for instance, we find that action is uppermost. In his A Doll's House we find the "woman question," so important in the nineteenth-century thought, dramatized in quite a magnificent manner. Here we don't have a group of people sitting together for the purpose of discussing the said problem. What we have is a wife who at the beginning of the play is quite happy because she is quite unaware of the injustices

inflicted upon her by father and later by husband. It is in action that Nora acquires knowledge of her real position. When we first see her she is quite happily decorating the Christmas tree, playing hide-and-seek with her children, is several times called by her husband as his "doll," his "little thing," his "poor child," and many other names of endearment. Through action and hints Nora's childish innocence is thus established. The process of gradual disillusionment and education is realized by many things. The contrast between her, who knows nothing about the outside world, and experienced women, is brought home by the introduction of her woman-of-the-world friend. Another lesson is provided by the forged bill and later by the doctor's declaration of love. Her desperate attempts to prevent her husband from reading the villain's letter produces the climax of the action in the play. Her decision to commit suicide as a further act of self-sacrifice for her husband, and the tarantula dance add yet more action and more suspense. Even the last brief discussion between her and Helmer comes as a kind of inevitable consequence to every preceding incident. And when she finally slams the door and leaves husband and children, she leaves the audience quite convinced that this is probably the only alternative left to her. She deserves our pity and sympathy. Her dilemma affects us because it is made clear through action rather than statements.

In A Doll's House there are still other things which make the play more effective and more poetic than many of Shaw's plays.

There is to begin with what may be called suggestiveness. When Nora first comes home, Ibsen in the stage direction indicates that the Christmas tree should be placed in the middle of the stage. As the Christmas tree is a symbol of happiness, it is therefore important to make it the centre of the audience's attention. It reflects the happy mood of the heroine. But when clouds begin to gather, the Christmas tree, stripped of its decoration, is to be placed in the corner of the stage. In this state, it again reflects Nora's inner mind. Again there is the tarantula dance which Nora resorts to towards the end of the play. Why the tarantula dance in particular and not the Charleston, for instance, or any other kind of dancing? And why is it that she begins to practice it after she has decided to kill herself? The insect's dance, we are told, represents death, or at least the death of its victims. Hence the importance of this particular kind of dance in Nora's desperate situation. This and many other simple, but effective, devices in Ibsen's play reveal the sensitiveness of the Norwegian poet, and also show us how careful he is in producing nothing that is irrelevant to his main purpose.

In his eagerness to deal with as many problems as possible, Shaw often crowds his plays with characters and incidents that are for the most part irrelevant to his main theme. This often mars the total effect which the play is supposed to produce, because instead of concentrating on one problem, the audience's attention is divided between many issues. In Candida, one of

Shaw's most skilfully constructed plays, we find at least one character that has little, if anything, to do with the main theme. If the main theme in Cañida is the conflict between the poet and commonsense, or if it is the "woman question," what is the use then of Burgess in the play? There seems to be no justification for his presence except that Shaw wants to produce a vulgar, money-loving, hypocritical middle-class person. And this has nothing to do with the theme of the play. Or what does the endless discussion in Man and Superman on all aspects of life have to do with the central theme, assuming that there is a central theme, of the duel between the sexes? Or what does the presence of the Reverend Samuel Gardner add to the total effect of Mrs. Warren's Profession? Can't we get rid of at least half of the characters in Getting Married by having their opinions on marriage expressed by other characters and still keep the discussion going on? The same thing applies to The Doctor's Dilemma. Wouldn't such plays be more effective if such superfluous incidents and characters are done away with?

In A Doll's House one can in no way omit anything without distorting the whole play. Nora's friend is mainly there to produce a sharp contrast between the woman who, through mixing with the outside world, has acquired experience, knowledge and wisdom, and Nora who has so far acquired none of these virtues. The doctor's presence enhances, beside other things, the inheritance question in the play. There can be no action, no play without the money-lender. Everything here contributes to the

total effect which the playwright wants to produce. The epilogue of Saint Joan, interesting as it certainly is, in which the action is transferred from the fifteenth century to the twentieth for the sake of producing the play's moral, can be omitted without harming the play. Similarly, all, or most, of the "hell" scene in Man and Superman can be omitted or summarized without feeling that the effectiveness of the play has been lessened.

What seems to lessen the effectiveness of Shaw's plays still more is the fact that most of the leading characters seem to be manipulated for the sake of expressing Shaw's own point of view. One can hardly fail to recognize the dramatist's voice speaking through characters such as Tanner in Man and Superman, Dick the iconoclast in The Devil's Disciple, Gloria in You Never Can Tell, Candida in the play given her name, Louis Dubedat in The Doctor's Dilemma, Vivie in Mrs. Warren's Profession, Andrew Undershaft in Major Barbara, Bluntschli in Arms and the Man, and sometimes Saint Joan in her play. What is there in Tanner's real nature to convince us that his rejection of Ann at the beginning is logical? If he hates her, why does he then marry her at the end? He encourages her to revolt against her mother's authority and to go with him to Europe. When she consents and he feels that she is in love with him, he alone flies away to the continent. Contrary to all commonsense, Ann follows him. Then quite dramatically he declares that the Life Force has triumphed over him, and marries the heroine. Do people of real flesh and blood behave as Tanner and Ann? Or is the play, characters and all, no more than a

"dramatization" of the Life Force theory? One feels, indeed, that the characters are subjects to this theory; none of them behaves according to his or her own nature.

One is also obliged to ask what made Dick, the hero of The Devil's Disciple, not fall in love with Judith? He is gambler, smuggler, follower of the "gypsies" and completely unscrupulous about religion or conventions. If such a character is incapable of falling in love, he could, according to his intrinsic qualities, at least pretend to do so. But the play, again, is a "dramatization" of Shaw's idea that "there is something in the nature of every man, which, when put to the test, responds to the highest demands made upon him."³⁴ So Dick is made to disinterestedly sacrifice himself, and he himself is unable to account for such a heroic deed. He only repeats the above theory of Shaw's. Again, cannot any theatre manager motivate Dick's heroic action by love and at the same time feel safe that his audiences will not feel that Dick in doing so has behaved out of character?

In The Doctor's Dilemma Shaw's purpose, we know, is to give an ugly picture of doctors. A doctor must, therefore, commit a capital crime. So, Shaw chooses Dr. Ridgeon to carry out the task. Contrary to all Shaw's codes, Ridgeon is made to fall in very strong romantic love from the first moment he sees the heroine. How could romantic love be ridiculed in one play as impossible, and in another be made the only motive behind an ugly crime? If one is to believe that romantic love does not

³⁴Purdom, p. 178.

really exist, one will therefore be led to think that Ridgeon's crime has no motive at all. And if one is to believe that it does exist, one will consequently be forced to conclude that the behaviors of such characters as Tanner, Dick, Valentine and others are not true to their own nature. The result in both cases will be that such characters are made of things other than flesh and blood, they are carriers of ideas or, if you like, "walking ideas."

Characters can be convincing only when they demonstrate that their actions have been inevitable. When Saint Joan tears into pieces the recantation document signed by her a few moments earlier, the audience is convinced that such a deed is logical, in character and quite inevitable. A brave girl like Joan, who has done all she could to liberate her country, will in no way tolerate the loss of her personal freedom. Immediate death on the pyre is certainly preferable for such a character to life imprisonment. The actions of other Shavian characters do not strike us as being inevitable. Dick's willingness to replace Anderson on the gallows doesn't convince us as an inevitable action; it does not seem to be in character. Nor is Gloria's rejection and ultimate acceptance of Valentine's proposal in You Never Can Tell seem to be inevitable. Had Shaw, for instance, shown that Gloria had had a very disappointing experience in love, her rejection of Valentine would have been much more convincing. The same thing may also be said of Tanner, Ann and Lesbia. In fact this question of inevitability is lacking in

many of Shaw's characters.

In A Doll's House the forgery, the friend's example, the doctor's declaration, and above all the husband's presumptuousness, make Nora's final decision of leaving home and trying to seek knowledge and experience in the outside world quite inevitable. Any woman in Nora's circumstances would probably do the same thing. But not any woman can allow an eighteen-year-old effeminate lad like Marchbanks in Candida plead his love to her before her husband. Nor do all women, for the sake of perpetuating the species of human beings, follow men from one country to another and entreat them to accept their hands, unless, of course, they intend to show how vigorous the Life Force is.

If the lack of action and suggestiveness, and the not very convincing delineation of character in Shaw's plays may to a certain extent mar the playwright's purpose of disillusioning his audience as to the validity of conventional morality, it does not necessarily follow that his plays lack in qualities of entertainment. Witty dialogues, comic characters, funny situations, lively themes and the like are often quite entertaining in Shaw's works. No one can help enjoying the fun produced in such scenes as that of Bluntschli and Raina at the beginning of Arms and the Man, or the intelligence and considerateness of the waiter in You Never Can Tell, or the wit of the greengrocer in Getting Married, or Ann's eagerness to entangle Tanner in her web in Man and Superman, or the funny and intricate situation between Cherteris, Grace and Julia in The Philanderer, or Liza's

cockney speech and her passing for duchess at the end of Pyomalion, or Doolittle's crude frankness and final transformation into a lecturer on social problems. No one can help being excited when he sees Dick's neck encircled by the noose of the executioner in The Devil's Disciple, or help being terrified when he witnesses Joan's trial and final horrible burning, or help pitying Mrs. Warren and admiring her daughter Vivie in Mrs. Warren's Profession. In short, inspite of what may be taken as artistic faults in Shaw's plays, many of these plays can still be very amusing, very entertaining, but perhaps not very instructing.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Shaw poses throughout his plays and their famous prefaces as socialist, realist, humanitarian, rationalist, materialist, "immoral," philosopher, and comic writer. As socialist he wanted to break down the barriers between classes and make it possible for a "chauffeur to marry the duchess, the daughter of a dustman to marry the professor of phonetics."³⁵ As a realist he vehemently attacked romantic drama as a harmful means of diverting people from their real problems. As a humanitarian, he pitied the oppressed and encouraged him to revolt against his oppressor. As a rationalist, he put man's reason above all other considerations, believing that reason alone could lead him to better life. As materialist and ardent believer in natural history, he tried to explain such things as the relationships between the sexes on material and natural history basis. As an "immoral" playwright, he opposed current morals and manners and challenged beliefs he wished to transform. As a philosopher, he tried through the Life Force theory to make people believe that if they would just follow their own nature, which is after all a part of Nature, and rid themselves of "unnatural" inherited conventions, they would evolve into better men, Supermen. And finally as a comic writer, the majority of his plays fall into the categories of comedy, farce and sometimes melodrama.

³⁵Henderson, p. 616.

Shaw's keen wit and ability to create engaging comic characters, his lively dialogues and lovely sense of humor, his sincerity and enthusiasm in projecting his ideas, his love of his fellow human beings and his sincere efforts to better their life, and above all, the lack in his plays of satire and sarcasm--all these qualities make his plays quite enjoyable and entertaining.

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A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF SHAW'S LIFE AND PLAYS

(plays are dated by the year Shaw finished writing them.)

- 1856 Born July 26, in Dublin.
- 1876 Moves to London.
- 1892 Writes first play, Widowers' Houses.
- 1893 The Philanderer; Mrs. Warren's Profession.
- 1894 Arms and the Man; Candida.
- 1895 The Man of Destiny; You Never Can Tell.
- 1896 The Devil's Disciple.
- 1898 Caesar and Cleopatra.
- 1899 Captain Brassbound's Conversion.
- 1901 The Admirable Bashville.
- 1903 Man and Superman.
- 1904 John Bull's Other Island; How He Lied to Her Husband.
- 1905 Major Barbara; Passion, Poison and Petrification.
- 1906 The Doctor's Dilemma.
- 1908 Getting Married.
- 1909 Press Sketch; The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet; The Fascinating Foundling; The Glimpse of Reality.
- 1910 Misalliance; The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.
- 1911 Fanny's First Play.
- 1912 Androcles and the Lion; Overruled; Pymmalion.
- 1913 Great Catherine.
- 1914 The Music Cure.
- 1915 O'Flaherty, VC.

- 1916 Augustus Does His Bit; The Inca of Perusalem; Heartbreak House.
- 1917 Annaïanska: The Volshevik Empress.
- 1921 Back to Methuselah.
- 1923 Saint Joan.
- 1929 The Apple Cart.
- 1931 Too True to Be Good.
- 1933 Village Wooing; On the Rocks; The Six of Calais.
- 1934 The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles.
- 1936 The Millionairess.
- 1938 Geneva.
- 1939 In Good King Charles's Golden Days.
- 1947 Buoyant Billions.
- 1949 Shakes versus Shav.
- 1950 Why She Would Not.
- 1950 Shaw dies, November 13, at 94.

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SHAW'S EXPOSURE OF ILLUSIONS
IN CONVENTIONAL MORALITY

by

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B. A., Cairo University, 1960

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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Each one of Shaw's plays represents a link in a long chain of attacks launched for the purpose of exposing the falsity and harmfulness of conventional morality. In some of his plays, Shaw demonstrates that poverty is behind every social evil. It is poverty and not natural depravity that leads women astray and drives men to be thieves and dishonest. In others he attacks the respectability of the complacent middle class, showing that there is nothing about this class to be proud of, since its members build their respectability on the miseries of the poor. Doctors who have always been held in high esteem are exposed by Shaw as men who care more for their own interests than for their patients' lives.

In family relationships, the dramatist shows that conventional ways of child-upbringing are futile and harmful. Children should be treated as if they were grown-up independent individuals. The traditional idea that home is the most healthy sphere for women is despised by the playwright, because without knowing the outside world and being economically independent, women can never be good mothers and worthy wives.

Shaw considers love as mere romantic passion that prevents people from coming face to face with the realities of life. What causes attraction between the sexes is only the Life Force whose purpose is the perpetuation and improvement of the human species.

War heroism is seen by Shaw as nothing more than romantic foolishness. In praising such a kind of heroism, writers often overlook the miseries it brings on ordinary soldiers. As for

"popular" religion, Shaw says that he has no belief in it. People often take religion as an excuse to practice cruelty. It also prevents pious people from being practical. Shaw considers romantic drama as one of the harmful factors that hypnotize people and make them live in an imaginary world.

The way in which Shaw projects his disillusioning ideas depends for the most part on discussion rather than on dramatization. One also feels that there is at least one character in each play that adopts Shaw's points of view. This can be realized after a comparison between each play and its preface. But in spite of the fact that the effectiveness of Shaw's plays is often lessened by a lack in action and a somewhat faulty delineation of character, many of them are still quite enjoyable and entertaining. This is made possible by the fact that they often contain keen wit, lively dialogues, engaging comic characters, funny situations, and intelligent ideas.

