

AL – Mustansiriyah University
College of Education

Political Theatre and its Influence on the Writings of George Bernard Shaw

By

Ikhlas Sabah Abdullah

Abstract

Many political theorists have noted that the twentieth century was a time of an “eclipse of the public sphere” and a “sublimation of politics.” Partly due to the traumas of world war, totalitarianism, and genocide, and partly due to the absorptive capacities of instrumental reason and mass consumerism, mid- twentieth century Europe experienced an exhaustion of radical energy and a hollowing out of political discourse. This research aims at the narration of these developments by offering an account of the influence of political theatre in twentieth century Europe. By profiling one of the most important, brilliant, and influential playwrights of the century George Bernard Shaw, this research has two primary goals: to contribute to the remembrance of a “world we have lost” and through such remembrance to incite contemporary political theorists to revisit and rethink the political potential of the theatre.

المسرح السياسي واثره في كتابات جورج برنارد شو

م. اخلاص صباح عبدالله

منذ عهد الاغريق القدامى كان المسرح وسيلة مهمة لنقل الافكار السياسية والتواصل وبالتالي اعتبر فئة مهمة لطرح النظريات السياسية. ومع حلول منتصف القرن العشرين اصبح المسرح وسيلة للامتاع الجماهيري بدون طرح للطموحات السياسية. حاول جورج برنارد شو ان يقدم تحديات عصره في المسرح بطرق تعزز من التغييرات الجذرية للمجتمع. كان شو احد ابرز المفكرين في عصره واعماله عبارة عن تكامل النظرية العلمية، الفعالية السياسية، ما وراء الطبيعة والفن، ولكونه كذلك فقد قدم اعماله من خلال وسائل متنوعة تشمل المقالات الافتتاحية في الجرائد، النقد، الخطب العامة، الكراسات السياسية، المسرحيات ومقالات مطولة توضح معاني مسرحياته.

احتل شو مكانا متميزا في العالم الاجتماعي اذ كان شخصا ارستقراطيا يعيش في مجتمع ديمقراطي متطور كانت فيه للارستقراطية سلطة سياسية واستمر شو بالبحث عن مكان له في عين العامة واتخذ موقفا سياسيا عاما عقد بسببه جلسات نقاشية متعددة من خلال الصحافة مع مفكرين اخرين وايضا من خلال مسرحياته كان قادرا على تحويل افكاره الاجتماعية والسياسية ليقدم فنا ممتعا وثنقيفيا في نفس الوقت اضافة لكونه مثيرا للجدل وفاضحا للطبقة البرجوازية في احيانا اخرى. يعتبر شو احد اخر كتاب المسرحية العظماء في العالم في وقت اعتبر فيه المسرح فنا عاما وجد من اجل التنقيف وتعزيز فكر الرؤية السياسية وتحفيز العمل السياسي المثمر.

كان اهتمام شو في بداية حياته منصبا على كتابة المسرحيات الاجتماعية ونظرا لكونه كاتب مسرحية برجوازي تركز اهتمامه على نقد القيم، المعايير والبناء الاجتماعي للطبقة الارستقراطية من خلال تصوير واقعي للحياة غير ان انلاع الحرب العالمية غير مجرى حياته للابد، اذ بدا يتساءل عن جدوى اشتراك بريطانيا في الحرب مما تسبب في عزله عن اقرانه في المسرح، حيث راي ان الحرب تتطلب نوعا جديدا من المسرح يتعامل مع مواضيع جديدة تلائم ذلك الوقت مثل القومية، الاستغلال، الشك الوجودي والخبرات الشخصية. يتناول هذا البحث ثلاثا من مسرحيات شو وهي (مهنة السيدة وارن) و (المنزل المحطم) و (العودة الى مئوسال). تعتبر المسرحية الاولى مثالا لنقد شو الاجتماعي في افضل حالاته حيث فضح نفاق معايير الطبقة الارستقراطية في العهد الفكتوري. اما المسرحية الثانية فهي وصف لفشل الطبقة الارستقراطية في الحؤول دون زوالها. المسرحية الثالثة هي رحلة غامضة الى المستقبل بعيدا عن الواقع السياسي والاجتماعي للحياة المعاصرة وهي تمثل انسحاب شو عن السياسة الى عالمه الخيالي.

Introduction

Since the ancient Greeks theatre had been an important medium of political reflection and communication, and thus an important genre of political theorizing. By the middle of the 20th century theatre became a medium of mass entertainment deprived of political aspiration. George Bernard Shaw sought to dramatize the challenges of his time in ways that could promote radical change. He was one of the most prominent intellectual and cultural icons of his day. His work was an integration of scientific theory, political activism, metaphysics, and art; as such, it was presented through various media including newspaper editorials and reviews, public speeches, political pamphlets, plays and lengthy essays explaining the meaning within his plays.

Shaw held an ecological conception of the social world at a time when doing so was still socially acceptable. He was a well- rounded aristocratic intellectual living in fully developed democracy, in which the aristocracy still had political power.¹ Shaw continually sought his place in the public eye and took a public position on every issue he could, utilizing different media to share his views. He had grand debates through the press with other public intellectuals, and through his drama was able to transform his political and social commentary into art that was entertaining and educational, as well as thought provoking and sometimes scandalous to the bourgeois public.

Shaw was one of the last great playwrights of the world- the world in which theatre was a public art form created for civic education, for the cultivation of insight, and for the motivation to political action. Already in his day, however, Shaw was an exception: the typical process of play

production involved an actor- manager who contracted with the owner of a theatre. Operating under the profit- motive, the owners demanded high prices for the use of their places, putting pressure on the actor- managers to produce plays that would appeal to the greatest number of audience members. The culture industry's foothold in the English theatre made production difficult for Shaw, whose plays were often too high- concept to appeal to the lowest-common denominator. What they wanted to see, comedies and melodramas, were often quite different from what he wanted to show them. Shaw's situation was made further complicated by the censorship powers of the English government, which banned one of his plays for several years due to its depiction of its subject matter. Caught between the censorship of his pseudo-monarchical government on the one hand and the purchasing power of his bourgeois on the other, Shaw had a difficult time succeeding in the theatre. Indeed, it took him more than a decade to solidify his prominence as a playwright of the English stage.²

Though it took years and required the careful packaging of his ideas into the commercialized theatrical genres of his day, Shaw achieved his goal of becoming a renowned playwright. However, his heyday was short- the same year his most successful play, Pygmalion, premiered, World War I began, and Shaw's world was forever shattered. The moment he publicly questioned the motives and the strategy behind Britain's involvement in the war, Shaw became a pariah. The more he attempted to clarify his criticism and his own motives- that he was speaking out because he was trying to prevent catastrophe; that he was not anti-war or even against this particular war; that he was merely stating facts and asking questions; that he ultimately would support the government's decisions- the worse the public's opinion of him grew.³ Shaw released no new plays during the war. Instead, he published two political pamphlets on the war which were poorly received, in spite of the fact that his cautions were more than reasonable and his concerns proved to be prophetic with time.

Heartbreak House, published and produced in 1919, was the last play he wrote that dealt realistically with the social situation of the time. Afterwards, his plays retreated to the other realms - historical, fictional, hypothetical – in which he explored the issues that mattered to him. No longer having to care about the whims of the bourgeoisie, the established Shaw followed his own bliss having realized that his political influence over the public had, at best, been destroyed by the war, and at worst, had never in fact existed.⁴

Shaw's case is of interest here because it contains portents of things to come. Specifically, Shaw's case is that of the playwright as he exists in the 20th century capitalist democracy: expecting his work to matter for it has always done so. The playwright in the 20th century is shocked to discover that his place in society is in fact limited to that of an entertainer. Though he sees his work as contributing to the public debate and intellectual life of his fellow citizens, he soon finds this is not the case; when he raises his voice to speak out, he is reprimanded for not keeping quiet. Stripped of his social position as educator and enricher of culture, the 20th century bourgeois playwright retreats to his own imagination. By the end of the century, there are no longer any playwrights of Shaw's talent who protest their position. It has become so naturalized that the idea of political theatre is inconceivable. The end result is a theatre that competes against other performance art media for a section of the entertainment market share. Political theatre has become redefined as theatre that deals with political themes. And plays such as Shaw's or Shakespeare's are performed for their historical value as relics of another era.

Bernard Shaw: The Last Great Bourgeois Playwright

Born in 1856, George Bernard Shaw grew up in the cultural heart of 19th century Europe, Victorian England. English industry was at that time the most advanced in Europe; the government's censorship laws were the most liberal of their kind; and the overtaking of the aristocracy by the bourgeoisie was well underway. In this politically liberal and intellectually rich milieu, Shaw created a life for himself based on his strongest possessions: his wit, his keen insight into both cultural and political affairs, and his ability to express himself in both written and spoken form. Born into an aristocratic family on the verge of poverty, Shaw became quickly aware of the importance of social class and its related hazards. Though his parents could have made money by turning to speculation or trade, they refused to do so on the grounds that such activities were below their dignity as members of the aristocracy. The decision to value social status over material stability and the fact that these were two separate features of modern society always struck Shaw as bizarre and contributed to his appreciation of the power of social norms to constrain common sense. Unlike his parents, Shaw saw through the veneer of aristocratic superiority and embraced the modernizing world even as he criticized it.⁵

From aristocratic beginnings to a life of intellectual labor; from critic to creator; from a man of the 19th century to a man of the 20th century, Shaw self-consciously developed himself as a man in touch with the times in which he lived. For 94 years, Shaw engaged in a diagnosis and treatment of the social and political ills that plagued both England and Europe. He demonstrated insight into matters others could not penetrate; he understood the implications of the Great War before the war had begun; and he was painfully aware of the possibilities that lay ahead in the later part of the 20th century.

As a bourgeois playwright, he focused his attentions on critiquing and deconstructing the values, norms, and social structures of the aristocracy through realistic portraits. The outbreak of WWI "turned his once powerful social critiques into outdated, superfluous jibes at a class that had, throughout Europe, been surpassed."⁶ The years after WWI required a new kind of theatre that dealt with the new subject matter of the times-war, nationalism, exploitation, existential uncertainty, and subjective experience. Shaw continued to develop his social critiques of the aristocracy through 1919. And while the Great War caused him to see the limits of his earlier critiques, he remained faithful to key principles of bourgeois thinking- the faith in science, a belief in progress, and a deep suspicion of mass politics. Shaw can thus be considered the last great playwright.

Mrs. Warren's Profession, written in 1894, is an example of Shaw's social critique at its best: taking the gender and sexual norms of Victorian England as his target, he compellingly defends the practice of prostitution on rational grounds. In the process, he exposes the hypocrisy of late Victorian aristocratic norms even as he sheds a light on the way that bourgeois society reduces everything to market relations. Heartbreak house, written in the midst of WWI, but not published or performed until 1919, is a searing portrayal of the decay of the cultured aristocracy and their failure to prevent their own demise. It summarizes Shaw's anger towards the segment of the ruling class who should have defended intellectual freedom during the war and who should have taken action to prevent England's role in the war and yet utterly failed to exercise any such responsibility. Fully disillusioned by politics, Shaw retreated into his own world, which centered on the metaphysical concept of the Life Force, and of the perfection of man through evolution. Back to Methuselah, written in 1921, is a mystical, mythical journey into the future and away from the political and social realities of contemporary life. It represents Shaw's retreat away from politics into his own subjective experience and fantasy.

Bernard Shaw was able to appreciate and articulate both the light and the dark aspects of English society. He was a complex figure, in many ways he held an almost naïve belief in the power of progress to ensure social and political change. Yet at the same time, his ability to unmask the power relations in social relationships and to attack instances of inequality that others took for granted was quite scandalous. Like everyone else, Shaw was forever changed by the Great War. Unlike most, however, he both anticipated its occurrence and understood its implications for the progress so many believed would come. The plays he wrote after the Great War are brilliant, both as illustrations of the way political thought changed during that time and as works of art that communicate metaphysical hope in the midst of political desperation.

George Bernard Shaw lived in and for the public. Whether the mode of communication was artistic critique, political pamphlet, stage play, or oration, Shaw always had something to say. He was continually engaged in public conversation on social and political issues, and he never shied away from a debate or controversy. Mastering the dialects of debate Shaw shifted into one of the most brilliant rhetoricians orators of his generation. Indeed, even before the 20th century began, at the age of 44, he claimed with pride to have "addressed more than a thousand audiences, besting his challengers and harassers on practically every occasion."⁷ The stage was one of his preferred public spaces, and he used it to instigate his audience to join him in exercising their rights and duties as citizens. Through his plays he urged them to take politics seriously, to reflect on their own beliefs, to entertain new conceptions of morality and judgment, and to look more carefully at the society that they took for granted.

Shaw began writing plays in the late 1880's while he was working as music critic for *The Star*.⁸ Disgusted with the romanticism that dominated contemporary theatre, he sought to portray life as it really was. In spite of the acceptance of a materialist outlook on issues of economics and evolution (and thus religion), late Victorian society maintained a moral sensibility based in idealizations of social roles and relationships. The superstructure of artistic life remained even while its economic base fell to pieces. In the late 19th century, it seemed that the more economic ground the aristocracy lost to the bourgeoisie, the more adamant they became that their moral and social codes remain.⁹ This discrepancy between economic base and ideological superstructure created a strange and, depending on one's perception, absurd situation. Shaw experienced

this himself as a child in an impoverished aristocratic family whose parents refused to go into business out of pride in their social status.

Shaw was clear that a key condition for progress was facing the truth. The romanticization of the brave soldier, the virtuous maiden, and the Christian martyr- each of these would have to be discredited as the myths they really were. The hypocrisy of the ruling classes would have to be exposed and an alternate conception of the good would have to be suggested. This was Shaw's project. According to Charles Grimes, Shaw presents his political theatre as a dramatic encounter in which he as the author is an accusing, external force attacking that part of our psyches that may doubt that our society is justly organized or beneficent to its members. The indictment of society includes how society oppresses others and how it restricts one from living fully. Shaw's works expose these social problems and the shock of this, the moral intervention a play can enact, alters our minds in the direction of social change,¹⁰ or as Shaw puts this in his own words: "I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion."¹¹

Shaw sought above all to pierce social illusion and hypocrisy and compel his readers and audiences to face the truth of a society in the midst of transition and to look forward. Much of Shaw's philosophy of progress can be traced to his political involvement as a founding member of the Fabian Society. The Fabians were an elite and self-consciously elitist group of British intellectuals who supported the radical social, economic and political reform of English society. As socialists they criticized the inefficiencies and injustices of capitalism, and advocated a range of social democratic reforms, including progressive tax reform, a minimum wage, universal health care, and a national system of public education. They also supported political reforms designed to break the power of the landed aristocracy, including the abolition of hereditary peerage and the strengthening of rational public administration through civil service reform.

While social and political radicals, the Fabians were also harsh critics of populist discourse and of revolutionary politics. They sought gradual reform through the progress of reason and the empowerment of the rational. In this sense, they were deeply anti-democratic. Shaw was surely among the most influential of the Fabians, and his skepticism towards democracy was notorious, and perhaps best summed up in his aphorism, in *Maxims of a Revolutionist*, that "Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few."¹² Shaw's view of progress was summed up in his concept of the Life Force: the force in

nature that pushes all life forward through physical and intellectual evolution. Though impressed by Darwin's theory of evolution, Shaw found more inspiration in the evolutionary theories of Lamarck, which attracted the attention of many of his Fabian contemporaries. Both thinkers considered change to be an inherent feature of the universe, and regarded evolution as a natural process. Yet they disagreed fundamentally on the source and meaning of evolution. For Darwin, evolution is a process beyond the subject's control, occurring by accidental, random mutation. Changes in a species occur only when a subset develops a particular characteristic without which it would die: those born without it die off, leaving the more evolved as the only breeders. Thus, evolution occurs only inter-generationally, through a process of natural selection. In contrast Lamarck believed that evolution could occur within one generation through a subconscious will toward self-improvement.

Evolution was thus potentially under the subject's control and could occur at any time. Shaw preferred such a theory of "Creative Evolution" to what he considered the "fatalism" of Darwin's view. In Lamarck's theory Shaw found scientific support for the notion that there is a Life Force driving society forward.¹³

Shaw found economic support for his theory of progress in the economic writings of Marx. Though he became a strong critic of a "fatalism" in Marx similar to that which he saw in Darwinism, Shaw continued to be inspired by Marx's critique of ideology and his belief in the transitory nature of injustice and the existence of historical forces propelling social and economic advancement of human species.¹⁴ The fact that Shaw spent so much time critiquing the moral codes of his society speaks to the fact that these codes were deeply entrenched. Late Victorian and Edwardian notions of propriety, virtue, and respect were enforced with harsh consequences for those who would dare act against them. And so, when George Bernard Shaw presented an unapologetic prostitute named Mrs. Warren, the government banned his play from production. When in Arms and the Man (1894), he ridiculed the romanticized version of war and countenanced the cowardice of soldiers, the critics pounced and the public was scandalized. Shaw's plays unmasked aristocratic morals as hypocrisies and mocked those who would take them seriously. And the exaggerated reaction that they elicited demonstrated the cogency of his critique, for they proved that "respectable society" was more interested in maintaining appearances than in seriously debating political issues of public interest. The controversies surrounding Shaw's theatre revolved around issues that would later seem so petty as to be laughable.

Only in the late-Victorian 19th century could such public scandals arise around the lack of remorse of fictional characters who remain proud of their "sin". Shaw hated such hypocrisy and small-mindedness, and set out to undermine it. What he says about Ibsen in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* could also be read as a statement of his own dramatic intention: "When he [the playwright] can stab people to the heart by showing them the meanness or cruelty of something they did yesterday and intend to do tomorrow, all the old tricks to catch and hold their attention become the silliest of superfluities...Ibsen substituted a terrible art of sharpshooting at the audience, trapping them, fencing with them, aiming always at the sorest spot in their conscience." As Martin Weisel suggests in "Shaw and Revolution: The Politics of the Plays," Shaw's plays "are designed to culminate in a state of feeling, often including uneasiness and unresolved stress, that will effect a permanent change in consciousness bearing on social change."¹⁵

To accomplish this task, Shaw co-opted the standard genres and tropes of the popular theatre—chiefly melodrama, romance, and extravaganza—which he regarded as both superficial and absurd. Each of Shaw's early plays deals with a specific issue of social importance through which Shaw subverts social custom and expresses his Fabian-inspired political viewpoint. For example, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) takes the familiar courtesan play and turns it on its head. At the time such plays reinforced the conventional morality concerning prostitution by forcing a moral ending onto the main character—though she may be beautiful, in the end the courtesan gets what she deserves. Shaw describes the theatrical convention surrounding the courtesan play as follows: members of Mrs. Warren's profession shall be tolerated on the stage only when they are beautiful, exquisitely dressed, and sumptuously lodged and fed; also, that they shall, at the end of the play, die of consumption to the sympathetic tears of the whole audience, or step into the next room to commit suicide, or at least be turned out by their protectors, and passed on to be "redeemed" by old and faithful lovers who adored them in spite of all their levities.¹⁶

In Shaw's version, however, the prostitute, Mrs. Warren, never apologizes for her vocation. In fact, she openly argues that her choice of profession is indicative not only of a high intellect, but of courage and self-respect. When her daughter, Vivie, accuses her of debasing herself, Mrs. Warren responds: "Do you think we [she and her sister] were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks by employing us as shop girls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade in them

ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely."¹⁷ When Vivie replies angrily by asking, "Are you really and truly not one bit doubtful-or-or-ashamed?" Mrs. Warren replies sarcastically, "Well, of course, dearie, its only good manners to be ashamed of it: it's expected from a woman." Later in the same conversation, however, she speaks to the question of shame quite seriously: "No: I was never a bit ashamed really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of."¹⁸ Indeed, Mrs. Warren defends herself with rational and practical arguments, and is devoid of emotionality and repentance. At the end of the play, no terrible fate befalls her.

Her daughter, scandalized by the impropriety of her mother's actions, rejects both her mother's money and her company. Though heartbroken, Mrs. Warren does not beg for forgiveness as the convention dictates, but accepts her daughter's wishes and continues on her own path. The effect produced by this ending is magnified by the fact that Vivie refuses the proposal of the handsome aristocrat, Frank. She does so, not in order to marry or persuade someone else, but simply because "I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband."¹⁹ Vivie breaks from her family to pursue her own life as a career woman. There is no happy ending here, at least in the traditional sense. The sobering ending leaves each character to his or her own sorrows, though it can be said that it also leaves them as self-sufficient, self-aware individuals who govern their own lives. However philosophically interesting that perspective may be, theatrically the lack of kisses and tears was most unsettling to a 19th century audience. Shaw had left them awe-struck. Indeed, it was due to the unsettling portrayal of the life of the prostitute-and her pride, no doubt-that the English censors banned production of the play for 31 years. Though written in 1894 and produced privately in 1902, it was not given a full production in England until 1925.

It was not merely to agitate his audience and the royal censors that Shaw wrote work such as Mrs. Warren's Profession. He had a political axe to grind, and he found that, though he could have a conversation with intellectuals, he could reach the general public more effectively through his plays. Though filled with humor and wit, each of Shaw's plays contained a very serious comment on the social and political issues of the day. In explaining why he termed Mrs. Warren's Profession, Widowers' Houses, and The Philanderer as "Plays Unpleasant," Shaw wrote, "The reason is pretty obvious: their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts." He explained further: here we are

confronted... with those social horrors which arise from the fact that the average homebred Englishman, however horrible and good-natured he may be in his private capacity, is, as a citizen, a wretched creature who, whilst clamoring for a gratuitous millennium, will shut his eyes to the most villainous abuse if the remedy threatens to add another penny in the pound to the rates and taxes which he has to be half cheated, half coerced into paying.²⁰

Indeed, the early Shavian mission had two interconnected elements: the elucidation of the material causes of the social issue at hand and the critique of the antiquated moral codes that hinder effective measures to be taken to solve the problem. In his courtesan play, for example, Shaw allows Mrs. Warren to explain the economic logic behind her choice of profession so reasonably that it is difficult not to accept the logic of her choice. At the same time, Vivie's devastation at her mother's revelation and her subsequent refusal to have any more to do with her is supported by the moral codes of the day. One can't help but feel sympathy for both women, even while it is acknowledged that they cannot be reunited given the current reality. Shaw's unstated position here, as elsewhere, is that the entire fiasco could be avoided if society was open to change. Reason and logic and a moral code that supports such reason are what are required for social progress. Mrs. Warren and her daughter are victims of a society stuck in aristocratic antiquity, but they need not be. It is high time that morals standards catch up with material reality.

Other plays that are part of the early Shavian mission of social progress are Widowers' Houses (1892), which deals with the issue of slum-landlordism; Major Barbara (1905), which comments on the foolishness of private charity; and The Philanderer (1898), which presents marriage as obsolete. In each case Shaw demonstrated that the social ills of contemporary society were due, not to individual vice, but to structural problems in the social order, problems that could be fixed only once they were properly diagnosed. While often the piece would give equal weight to a social problem and the aristocratic moral rules that perpetuated it, sometimes Shaw would focus his attention on the aristocratic sensibility more generally. In these plays Shaw would utilize the already existing theatrical genres and character types in order to twist them to meet his needs. The result was the production of plays that were less formulaic and more distinct. Since the focus was primarily on ideology and less on a specific issue, Shaw was able to imbue these plays with more of his own personal beliefs and his distinct vision of progress. Man and Superman, completed in 1902, is perhaps the best example of a play that embodies

Shaw's early philosophy of progress. But each of the Plays Unpleasant deals with these themes as well.

Shaw released what would become his most popular play, Pygmalion, to the English public on April 11, 1914. It had already been produced in Germany with much success. The play was a skillful combination of Shaw's edgy humor with his philosophy of progress. Eliza Doolittle, a "gutter-snipe" with horrific speech patterns and cockney accent, is transformed by Henry Higgins, an expert in phonetics, into a well-spoken, well-mannered beauty who is at one point mistaken for a princess. Beneath the surface comedy lies Shaw's description of the Life Force in action: class is demonstrated to be, not a natural separation, but an alterable convention that we as a society are better off without. Once the gutter-snipes of the world are elevated to a level of social equality with high society, the Life Force will take its course, and those with superior genes will find each other, as Eliza finds her future husband, Freddy. What can emerge-and will emerge, for progress is unstoppable-is a society in which the best men and women will create a better generation of Superman.

Part of the brilliance of Pygmalion is that, unlike Man and Superman, Shaw's philosophy is not explicitly voiced by anyone in the play: it is the backbone of the play that the audience need not notice in order to benefit from, and as such, it does not take away from the dramatic value of the piece. Upon opening on April 11, the play was showered with public and critical esteem. Shaw had finally created the perfect fusion of dramatic form with political content. Pygmalion permanently elevated him to the status of great English playwright.²¹

As with his other plays, there was of course controversy. In a scene in which the not yet polished Eliza visits Higgins' mother and her high society guests, she accidentally reverts to her old ways by saying "not bloody likely" in a perfect English accent. The use of the profane term "bloody" in the play created a major scandal. As Stanley Weintraub recounts, some members of the audience laughed uproariously while others booed during the curtain call. The critics were similarly torn: in a discussion of the issue, many could not bring themselves to put the profanity in print and instead used asterisk and ellipses to communicate the word. Angry letters to the editor over the word were printed for weeks, and the actor-manager of the production was asked by the Secretary of the Theatrical managers' Association to remove the word from the script for the remainder of the run.²² It is striking that in April of 1914 –only a few months before the war- such public energy could be

focused on the use of a widely used but "impolite" six-letter word in a play.

Late-Victorian English society was highly moralizing and left little room for privacy. Everything was open for public critique, judgment, and debate—not only one's public actions, but one's private behaviors, emotions, and thoughts. Victorian rules of social conduct were so strict and so tightly enforced that they were impossible to ignore, especially for modernist intellectuals who believed in social progress. The public sphere was all encompassing, and the fear of judgment was ever-present.²³ It was in this public world that Shaw rose to prominence—through his attacks on the social system and the obtrusive and penetrating gaze of the judgment eye of the other. His antics were tolerated, though often censored, by a complacent government and a society unthreatened by his mockery. When England's involvement in the war became imminent, however, the stakes changed. England, the most liberal society in Europe, thus promptly villainized its most insightful critic.

Though Shaw offered criticism of the English government's handling of foreign policy in the months leading up to its declaration of war on Germany, he never argued against English involvement in the war. His style, both in the articles he wrote before August 4 and in his political pamphlet *Common Sense About the War*, was to point out the similarities that existed between the German militarists and Junkers and the English militarists and aristocrats. He insisted that "the Junker is by no means peculiar to Prussia,"²⁴ and that the war is not about nationalism or heroism, but about conflicting material interests that exist between two countries with similar socio-economic structures. In a passage that almost anticipates Orwell, Shaw wrote: "Let us have no more nonsense about the Prussians Wolf and the British Lamb, the Prussians Machiavelli and the English Evangelist. We cannot shout for years that we are boys of the bulldog breed, and then suddenly pose as gazelles."²⁵ Shaw's pre-war solution to the impending failure of international relations was to establish a three-country compact between England, Germany and France, such that England would side with the victim in any aggression between Germany and France.²⁶ It was a strategy within the military paradigm of the day: to prevent an imbalance of power between nations, set up a series of unsavory consequences that encourage all parties to maintain the current equilibrium.²⁷

After the war began, Shaw attempted to explain to the public what the war was really about and why romantic sentiment and national propaganda were dangerous to England. Though commonsensical to

Shaw, his words not only infuriated the public and threatened the government, but they scandalized his intellectual friends as well. Passages such as, "No doubt the heroic remedy for this tragic misunderstanding [the war] is that both armies should shoot their officers and go home to gather in their harvest in the villages and make a revolution in the towns,"²⁸ caused his closest Fabian friends, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, to estrange themselves from him. The publications of his writings on the war were leading to negative publicity for their newspaper, the *New Statesman*, and though they wished to be supportive, they did not share his views about the war or his passion on the subject.²⁹ All potential English intellectual opposition to the war had been co-opted by the government, which set up a war propaganda coalition and garnered the support of the most famous intellectuals in the country to write in favor of the war. Completely isolated, Shaw continued to publish his views, and was ridiculed and misquoted by the press both in England and in the United States. Shaw experienced both public defamation and a huge wave of unpopularity. Many of his plays were boycotted, and many of his associates were imprisoned under The Defense of the Realm Act.³⁰ As one commentator writes, The London papers attacked Shaw for having his spiritual home in Germany and, subsequently, warned the audience not to see a play by the author of *Common Sense*. In 1915 he was expelled from the Dramatists' Club. By 1916, he was in a precarious situation; no theatre company in England would include his plays. She goes on, "As the war dragged on and the government tightened its clamp on dissidence, Shaw was publicly castigated, most famously by H.G.Wells, to the point that he became persona non grata, which seriously impaired his literary career."³¹ As Tracy Davis puts it, in *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre*, "By arguing that the welfare of the world was more important than that of a particular nation....he went from being a literary superstar to reviled traitor overnight."³² The public sphere that Shaw had helped to strengthen throughout his life suddenly began to shrink in size: only voices that shouted for English victory in the field were acknowledged as legitimate. All dissenters were villainized as traitorous or insane.

The First World War was patriotism's debut as a national weapon in an international crisis. Throughout Europe, states and ruling classes were rallying their publics to join the fight against the enemies of their nation. Pacifists and socialists were given the choices to fight for their communities or be condemned as traitors. The faith that the Second International put in the conviction of the proletariat and the certainty of an international general strike was revealed as naïve. The German Democratic Socialist Party failed to live up to its promise to protest the

war; afterwards, one by one the socialist groups in other countries capitulated to the demands of their governments and their publics.³³ England was no exception to the list of nations caught up in nationalist patriotic fervor. Because he spoke against the nationalist agenda, Shaw's position shifted abruptly from that of esteemed intellectual to social pariah. As he fell from grace, his belief in the progress of the human species fell with him. The amazing technologies of the 19th century were put to use to kill a million men in a single battle. The economic laws of progress laid out by Marx were no match for the imperialist cravings of national leaders bent on destruction. And the pull of the Life Force towards a more advanced species was being overpowered by a nihilistic impulse that no one seemed able to control. The most advanced minds in the most advanced country in Europe were outsmarted by the human drive to belong to something bigger than oneself. Shaw's despair was immensely personal. Yet it was not his alone. The Great War shattered the hopes of an entire continent: in the first weeks, when it was a common belief on both sides that the war would be over by Christmas, only an elite few foresaw the annihilation to come. But once Christmas 1914 came and went, followed by another, and another, and the bloodshed continued, European society came to realize the war's long-term implications. By 1918 Europe lay in ruins, the course of its future altered forever. Bernard Shaw, heartbroken, returned to the theatre.

Shaw produced no new plays during the war. He spent his time and his energy writing political pamphlets and giving speeches. Yet he did begin a play during this time, though it was not finished or published until 1919. Heartbreak House: A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes was to become one of Shaw's most renowned plays. Inspired by Anton Chekhov's unapologetic condemnation of the landed classes in Russia, Shaw painted a portrait of "cultured, leisured Europe before the war."³⁴ Through his depiction of the personal follies of an aristocratic family at their countryside estate, Shaw provided his most critical commentary on the ignorance, irresponsibility, and uselessness of the obsolete social class that would soon be maimed-but not crushed-by the war.

Centered on the romantic plight of Ellie Dunn, visitor to the Hushabye House, Shaw's play is set up like a familiar tale of courtship and proposals, full of melodrama and romance. But the premise is merely a façade for the audience and for Ellie, who comes to the Hushabye home to gain the advice of her friend Hesione as to whether she should choose to marry for love or money. Her two suitors then arrive at the house, setting up the main action of the play. Were this play written before the

war, the situation would have lent itself to both comedy and melodrama, or for Shaw, comedy and social commentary with Ellie eventually having to choose between her love or opt to remain single, as other Shavian heroines have done. Indeed, this kind of action is what Ellie expects to happen. But Heartbreak House is no ordinary play, and as Ellie discovers, the Hushabye home-which she later renames "Heartbreak House"- is not ordinary estate. As Ellie's reality slowly breaks down, she-and the audience with her- comes to see that nothing she has thought or believed about life has ever been true. The man she loves is in fact Mr. Hector Hushabye, her friend's husband, who lied about his identity and exaggerated his noble attributes and civic courage in order to gain her attention. Boss Mangan, the capitalist who seeks to marry her, is in fact broke-he is beholden to investors, and has no assets of his own-and, beyond that, he is also an inept coward when it comes to managing his staff and his own investments. Further, while she thought Mangan to be her father's benefactor, in fact, as she is shocked to learn, Mangan bankrupted him. Lady Utterword, though a seemingly ideal specimen of grace and beauty, is false in every way: even her beautiful hair, which Ellie greatly admires, is "too pretty to be real."³⁵ Shattered by these revelations, Ellie decides at the end of the play to marry Captain Shotover, the elderly patriarch of Heartbreak House, for he is genuine, even if effectively impotent.

In the closing scene, bombs can be heard going off in the distance, arousing excitement and enthusiasm from the group. Mr. Hushabye, one of the many emasculated male figures of Heartbreak House, turns on all the lights and opens all the drapes in the house in an attempt to help the Germans work on the target. Hesione remarks to Ellie: "Did you hear the explosions? And the sound in the sky: it's splendid: it's like an orchestra: it's like Beethoven."³⁶ As the group sits outside enthusiastically awaiting their destruction, one bomb drops, missing the house but hitting the bunker, where only the capitalist and a house burglar-"the two practical men of business"³⁷ - were seeking shelter. Greatly disappointed, the group comforts each other with the hope that the bombers will return tomorrow: in the play's last moment, Mrs. Hushabye turns to Ellie and says' "what a glorious experience! I hope they'll come again tomorrow night." Ellie, described in the stage directions as "radiant at the prospect" replies, "Oh, I hope so."³⁸

Never before had Shaw shown the full extent of his resentment towards the aristocracy. In his commentary on the play, "Heartbreak House and Horseback Hall," Shaw makes clear that there are two types of aristocratic irresponsibility. The first belongs to those who, like the

inhabitants of Heartbreak House, were steeped in culture and art, and clung to romantic ideals of beauty and freedom. These elites, however, were in all practical matters oblivious: "They hated politics. They did not wish to realize Utopia for the common people: they wished to realize their favorite fictions and poems in their own lives; and, when they could, they lived without scruple on incomes which they did nothing to earn."³⁹ The other breed of aristocrats, those who resided in what Shaw referred to as "Horseback Hall," had no interest in art or culture, and lived only for politics, consumption, and hunting. These were the men responsible for the failures of diplomacy that led to WWI; these were the men with "breeding" who should have done all they could to preserve the peace, but who valued their own political careers over the greater good. "In short, power and culture were in separate compartments. The barbarians were not only literally in the saddle but on the front bench in the House of Commons, with nobody to correct their incredible ignorance of modern thought and political science but upstarts from the counting-house, who had spent their lives furnishing their pockets instead of their minds."⁴⁰

Shaw's anger over the reclusiveness of the Heartbreak House inhabitants is revealed throughout the play. The scene in which the family members reveal their awareness that Europe is headed for military catastrophe and in the same breath divert the conversation away from politics, choosing instead to quote Shelley, to discuss Shakespeare, or to talk of love, are especially telling. The character of Ellie, herself a young artist, exemplifies the obtuseness of the group. She declares at one point that, "There seems nothing real in the world except my father and Shakespeare,"⁴¹ yet it becomes crystal clear that she both misunderstands her father's intentions and misinterprets Shakespeare's texts. Shakespeare has a prominent place in Heartbreak House, which is by no means accidental. Shaw once described Shakespeare's characters as "being in the air, without public responsibilities of any kind. All Shakespeare's characters are so: that is why they seem natural to our middle classes, who are comfortable and irresponsible at other people's expense, and are neither ashamed of that condition nor even conscious of it."⁴² Shaw's characters in Heartbreak House are quite Shakespearean in this sense: they spend their time floating through the play, producing no action beyond their fruitless flirtations, abstract discussions of art, and their unconscious choice to comply with the coming apocalypse.

Perhaps the play's most Shakespearean character is Captain Shotover, often described as a Lear-like figure. A retired sea captain who once braved nature and traveled the world, Shotover is now a half-mad drunken old man who flits about throughout the play offering comments

in passing. He combines parody with a kind of prophetic brilliance; and while he articulates the importance of weathering storms, he is completely ineffectual, having no control over his physical house or his household. He spends his days preparing to blow up the world. At the same time, Shotover gives voice to the sense of drift and lack of responsibility or leadership that characterizes Heartbreak House, the ship of state, and the world itself on the brink of war. To Mazzini, who declares that nothing ever happens in politics, Captain Shotover provides this correction: "Nothing but the smash of the drunken skipper's ship on the rocks, the splintering of her rotten timbers, the tearing of her rusty plates, the drowning of the crew like rats in a trap." He advises each man around him to "learn [his] business as an Englishman: navigation."⁴³ Unfortunately, it is a plea that none pay attention to. Shotover's words fall on deaf ears, and the play ends on a note of nihilism. No character effectively represents anything of value, and all embrace their own destruction. As Desmond Harding writes: "The play endures as a remarkable-and even menacing-account of cultural-historical trauma precisely because, paradoxically, 'little occurs except the end of civilization.'"⁴⁴

The utter disconnect between theory and practice, culture and politics, Heartbreak House, created an avoidable situation in which "the prime minister folk had to choose between barbarism and Capua. And of the two atmospheres it is hard to say which was the moral fatal to statesmanship."⁴⁵ And this was true not only in England, but across Europe. Chekhov was a visionary who saw the decline of the cultured aristocracy in Russia; for Shaw, the same pattern existed in France and Germany as well. The crisis of leadership which had pervaded the "half-century of the drift to the abyss,"⁴⁶ was in large part due to the unwillingness of the educated to take control of the helm of the ship of state.

It is unclear how much weight should be given to Shaw's understanding of the politics that led to the war. His assumption that the inhabitants of Heartbreak House should not have ceded their political power to those intellectually beneath them belies his socialist education and political commitments. Many in the aristocracy were aware that their way of life could not continue much longer. Having lost their economic place as rulers of the economy, there was logic to the way in which they retreated from politics that was sure to impact the materialistic base of society. As a socialist, Shaw should not only have seen this, but been in support of it: the removal of the aristocratic class from political power was conventionally viewed as a sign of healthy progress. Logically, then,

his anger and disappointment should not be directed at the inhabitants of Heartbreak House for ceding power, but to the members of parliament who were in fact responsible for the war, i.e. the members of Horseback Hall, who played the game of imperialist chicken with no regard for the consequences.

This is where Shaw's elitism becomes quite striking. As a Fabian socialist, he believed in economic equality, but not in democracy. His criticism of democracy, though sometimes presented in his drama, is riddled throughout the prefaces to the plays and his other writings. The current electoral system was not conducive to pure democracy and the mass public not yet educated enough to rule itself. The Fabians were socialists not because they did not believe in aristocracy, but because they disagreed with the current ruling aristocracy- the plutocracy of the landed gentry and the wealthy capitalists. Shaw saw it vital that those in power be educated with high intellectual capacity and an appreciation of the culture of all of European civilization. In short, the ruling class ought to be composed of people like Shaw himself and his Fabian friends. And yet, this group utterly failed, both to creatively address the political situation and to defend those, like Shaw, who spoke out against the war. The sudden and complete descent into barbarism left him heartbroken.

In retrospect, the dark belly of the 19th century became clearly visible to Shaw. The fervent belief in scientific progress which gave a death blow to religious morality had devastating consequences. After his initial assessment of the war, Shaw developed a more complex-and less holistic-explanation which viewed the 19th century's obsession with progress as inevitably leading to large-scale destruction. The problem, in Shaw's opinion, was rooted in the popular understanding-or misunderstanding-of evolution. Neo-Darwinism, the popularized version of Darwin's theory of Circumstantial Selection, elevated humankind above (or beyond) the realm of morality: the "survival of the fittest" paved the way for political, economic, and social opportunism at the expense of any moral obligation toward others or toward society as a whole. The result was a godless world in which the European nations- each believing themselves the fittest- did not hesitate to engage one another in a contest of survival: once begun, the conflict was impossible to stop, for there was no logic or belief on which to base a cease fire. Only exhaustion could decrease the momentum of events, which would be played out until German surrender in 1918.

In 1921 Shaw looked ahead to the future of Europe and saw the possibility for either great advancement on the one hand, or utter

annihilation on the other. He was ultimately able to come to terms with the war by re-concentrating his energy on transcendental issues, most importantly the Life Force. Like many intellectuals reeling from the blows of the war, Shaw felt most comfortable retreating away from politics into the realm of possibility and imagination.⁴⁷ There he could revise his theories of human progress to fit a world in which the annihilation of the human species was a real possibility.

Realizing that society could turn to the dark ages of religion as a reaction against the science and technology that led to war, and realizing also the inevitability of further destruction if a sense of moral purpose was not re-instated in society, Shaw decided to try again to share his vision of the Life Force. He had tried once before, in Man and Superman, but admitted himself that, because the religion was buried in a play of fluff, the message was lost.⁴⁸ In Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch, Shaw's opus on the religion of Creative Evolution, would be different. Instead of adapting his message to fit the structure of a whimsical comedic genre, Shaw shrugged off theatrical convention and structured his message as he saw fit. As Maurice Valency writes, "This transition from political economy to theology necessarily put a different complexion on Shaw's work as a dramatist."⁴⁹ Widest in scope of any of Shaw's plays, Back to Methuselah begins with a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve, and traces the development of the human species all the way through to 3000 A.D. In part 1: In the Beginning, Shaw's story of human creation, it is Lilith, not God, who creates Adam and Eve. Lilith imbues Eve with the greatest gift-curiosity-and the snake that comes to Eve in the garden provides her with the secrets of progress and advancement: having become aware of death on their own, Adam and Eve learn from the serpent that death can be overcome by the production of new life. Production will free Adam and Eve from the constant toil of working the fields and protecting themselves from harm-by passing some of that burden on to their children, the couple can develop other faculties and advance their knowledge of the world. The couple takes the serpent's advice and creates many children who have children themselves. When Cain kills Abel, Eve is revolted and confused, for he had violated the Voice that instructs them not to kill. Cain tells her that he hears another Voice which speaks to him of life after death, and he longs for something greater than what they have already achieved. Eve shares his longing, and it is that desire for advancement, for improvement and greatness, which will push the species further.

It is not merely God that is absent from Shaw's tale of the beginnings of humankind, but also the Devil, "original sin," banishment from the

garden of Eden, and the emotion of shame. Shaw's is a tale that highlights the human capacity for adaptation and advancement; that elevates the place of woman to one of high esteem; that sees Cain's act not as evil, but as a rejection of dogma and an embrace of possibility; and that sets up the story to follow as one of fulfilling the glorious potential of humanity.

The parts that follow deal with the evolution of the human species over time: Part 2: The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas is set soon after the Great War, and depicts the human discovery of Creative Evolution by two brother biologists. The tale both celebrates man's capacity for meta-cognition and explains the basics of the science to the audience: humankind advances because it wills own advancement. Even death-a human habit, like any other-can be willed away; people are living increasingly longer lives and they will continue to do so, living for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. The longer they live, the more wisdom they will acquire-men who live to be three hundred years old will outgrow the impulse to war by their hundredth year. As the whole species lives longer, war and famine and all the threats to human life that we in the 20th century struggle over will be overcome.

Parts 3-5 take place at various points in the future and realize the prophecy foretold in part 2. By part 5, which takes place in 3000A.D., people are realizing that the human body is the last hurdle to overcome in order for man to reach his full potentiality. This leads one character to assert that, "The day will come when there will be no people, only thought."⁵⁰ The opus ends with a soliloquy by Lilith, who celebrates her creation, while at the same time providing a warning that the human species must continue to advance if it is to survive-human complacency and stagnation could lead the universe to replace mankind with a new creation.

Shaw wrote Back to Methuselah at the age of 63, when he was ill and assumed his remaining time on earth would be brief. Hence, it is the most all-encompassing work in his collection-what he hoped would be his best received gift for the next generation, his legacy. He closes the preface to the play with this charge: "It is my hope that a hundred parables by younger hands will soon leave mine as far behind as the religious pictures of the fifteenth century left behind the first attempts of the early Christians at iconography. In that hope I withdraw and ring up the curtain."⁵¹ It is significant that Shaw wrote his Methuselah cycle assuming it would never be produced on a stage in his lifetime. Cycle plays were, at that time and place, prohibitively expensive to produce, and were it not for the willingness of the professional manager, Barry

Jackson, to take a risk on the piece, Shaw's assumption would have proved true. Shaw was content with having *Methuselah* published—an indicator of his growing estrangement from the medium of theatre as his favored mode of expression.⁵² It is also indicative of a major shift in the type of audience for whom he was writing. His pre-war plays were all aimed at the general audience, which ranged from petty bourgeoisie to the high aristocrat. Though his plays always contained an educational message expressed through clever dialogue and sharp satire, the acceptance or even the comprehension of the message, was not essential to the enterprise, as *Man and Superman* clearly shows. With *Heartbreak House*, Shaw bid both the contemporary and the conventional trope adieu, breaking with his own conventions to write pieces more appropriate to his current state of mind. The world as it was offered Shaw no solace, and the public who had supported the war no longer seemed to interest him. He wrote for himself and for the future public of the generations that would follow him. As an established playwright, he could afford this luxury. As a disillusioned and heartbroken member of the war generation, he needed the change.

Performed in Birmingham in 1921, *The Methuselah* cycle was not well received by the public.⁵³ The meaning behind the cycle was grossly misunderstood and there was even speculation that Shaw had written the plays as a joke. As Margery M. Morgan says, "None of Shaw's plays has been strongly disliked than *Back to Methuselah*." She cites negative criticism from G.K. Chesterton, who "wrote of 'those bloodless extravagances, which Bernard Shaw meant to make attractive,'" and Eric Bentley, who wrote that Shaw "at his worst as a playwright" in the *Methuselah* cycle.⁵⁴ Even for those who took Shaw seriously, the future presented in the plays that results from creative evolution was not seen as enticing. Yet the fact that the public did not receive his gospel of Creative Evolution, the religion of the 20th century, as intended did not change Shaw's opinion of his own work.

As in so many other respects, Shaw was not alone in attempting to resurrect some sense of purpose and meaning after the War. He saw that "our will to live depends on hope; for we die of despair"⁵⁵ and he offered Creative Evolution as an alternative to "the bottomless pit of an utterly discouraging pessimism"⁵⁶ that threatened human survival. Shaw's religion was a blend of science and metaphysical that substituted the human will for God. It was a version of Nietzsche's vision of the Superman because it spoke of the will of the species rather than that of the individual and because profound progress will occur only gradually over the course of centuries. Shaw's was a sensible religion, logical and

backed up by complicated scientific theories that lent it the air of credibility. Yet it did not catch on as well as other attempts at the creation of hope and optimism created by his contemporaries.

Perhaps it was too abstract, or too removed from the common person's experience of the world. One had to be somewhat of an intellectual to appreciate the nuance of Shaw's argument and to understand the difference between Darwinian evolution, neo-Darwinian evolution, and Creative Evolution. More importantly, Creative Evolution was a doctrine devoid of conflict with no force to oppose and a future that was guaranteed, if offered no opportunity for its supporters to do anything. And a religion without ritual, without sacrifice, and without prayer, in short, a religion in which human individuals are insignificant is hardly attractive to those desperate to reclaim their sense of self and to experience salvation. Lamarck's biological works on evolution are a poor substitute for the Christian bible, and Shaw's *Methuselah*, however impressive when staged, is as obtuse a gospel as ever was written.

Shaw was an elitist intellectual aristocrat to the end. His sincere belief that Creative Evolution was "the genuinely scientific religion for which all wise men are now anxiously looking"⁵⁷ speaks to his inability to understand the psychological needs of the common man. If it ever occurred to him that there were other, more seductive and far more dangerous contenders for the crown of secular religion, he did not say so. If he ever considered nationalism to be a threat to the peace established after the Great War, he did not write about it in his typical manner. He was blind to the fact that the 20th century, built on the wreckage of European civilization, had created a situation of desperation in which what mattered to people was not scientific truth, but comfort and solace, and retribution and revenge. Perhaps some of his intellectual friends were swayed by his logical argumentations, but for the rest of the population, there was another truth: humans do not choose to die for things they understand, but rather, for things they love. There was no love, no place for affect at all in Shaw's religion of metaphysical-biology. It was a religion suited to an ever-decreasing number of intellectuals who could afford the luxury of science.

In 1945, 25 years after the cycle was originally published, Shaw proudly wrote that he still regarded the preface to *Methuselah* as "one of my most important writings," and that the new postscript "enforces [the doctrine of Creative Evolution] much more confidently as the religion of the forthcoming century."⁵⁸ In the new postscript, Shaw goes so far as to say that *Methuselah* "came straight from the Life Force operating as an

élan vital through myself and Barry Jackson."⁵⁹ It is shocking that a man who bore witness to both world wars, the holocaust, and Stalin's acts of genocide could become even more confident over time in his scientific religion as revealing the path to enlightenment for the 20th century. Shaw wrote Methuselah as "a contribution to the modern bible" and referred to himself as a prophet, a revelator of the truth of science as a liberating force. Hubris-the force that condemned his statesmen back in 1914 to commit to the devastation of Europe-took hold of Shaw in his later years, as he himself became increasingly disconnected from reality.

Conclusion

At the age of 91, in his concluding entry in his autobiography, Shaw had this to say: "I am not at all dashed by the fact that my preachings and prophetisings, like those of the many sagas who have said the same things before me, seem to have produced no political change-that...the world has been going from bad to worse since I gave tongue and pen."⁶⁰ He saw himself as an educator who gave his all to enlighten the average citizen as to the facts of political and social life, and was content with his efforts, for he believed that the wisdom he had imparted would be recognized in time.

As one who "lived through two 'world wars' without missing a meal or a night's sleep in my bed," largely untroubled by the possibility of being struck from the sky by a bomb, knowing that "the risk of being run over by a motor bus...is greater,"⁶¹ Shaw's psychological distance from the horrors of the 20th century is perhaps understandable. He lived a life of great privilege on the island of England: few of those who had survived the same events on the continent could say as he did that they never feared for their lives. It makes sense also that one who had come of age in 19th century Europe and flourished in the culture of the 20th century would find himself at a terrible loss when faced with the annihilation of all he understood and held dear. Even a brilliant man like Shaw could not be expected to mentally adapt to life in the 20th century; some amount of denial was necessary for his psychological survival. There was no 19th century dramatic trope that could be used as a framework for the expression of Shaw's experience, and no theory of social progress that survived the wars intact. Shaw did his best to pick up the pieces where

they had been left in 1914, and he convinced himself that his theories were true than ever before. Yet political reality belied his claims of progress and possibility.

In the end, Shaw lost his grip as a politically relevant thinker. Though prolific and socially revered until his death in 1950, there was no longer any political blow to his work after Heartbreak House. After WWI, he was out of his element, clinging to the past while believing he was looking to the future. Like many intellectuals, he existed in denial and confusion and slowly faded out in a world he could no longer understand and that no longer understood him.

Notes

- 1- Arthur Ganz, George Bernard Shaw (Grove Press, Inc., 1983), p.82.
- 2- Martin Meisel, Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theatre (Princeton University Press, 1963), p.27.
- 3- Stanley Weintraub, Journey to Heartbreak: The Crucible Years of Bernard Shaw, 1914-18 (Weybright and Talley, 1971), p.67.
- 4- Ibid., p.91.
- 5- Ganz, p.43.
- 6- Michael Holyrod, Bernard Shaw: Volume 1, The Search for Love (Random House, 1988), p.87.
- 7- Dan H. Laurence and James Rambeau, ed., Bernard Shaw, Agitation: Letters to the Press, 1875-1950 (Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1985), p.,xi.
- 8- Ganz, P.18.
- 9- Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (Columbia University Press, 1983), p.54.
- 10- Charles Grimes, "Bernard Shaw's Theory of Political Theatre: Difficulties from the Vantages of Postmodern and Modern Types of the Self." Shaw The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, Vol.22 (2001), p.118.
- 11- Ibid., p.120.
- 12- Gareth Griffith, On Socialism Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw (Routledge, 1995), p.76-77.
- 13- Eric Bentley, Bernard Shaw (Robert Hale Ltd, 1950), p.67-71.
- 14- Shaw once wrote, "I was a coward until Marx made a Communist of me and gave me a faith: Marx made a man of me." Quoted in Ganz, p.16.
- 15- Both quotes are cited in Grimes, PP.119-20.

- 16- Shaw, "Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession" in Plays Unpleasant: Widower's Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs. Warren's Profession (Penguin Books, 1946), p.186.
- 17- Ibid., p.249.
- 18- Ibid., p.251.
- 19- Ibid., 284.
- 20- Shaw, "Preface to Plays Unpleasant," pp.25-26.
- 21- Weintraub, pp.312-313.
- 22- Ibid., p.228-229.
- 23- Gertrude Himmelfarb, The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values (Vintage Books, 1996), pp.113-115.
- 24- Shaw, What I Really Wrote About the War (Constable and Co.Ltd., 1931), p.26.
- 25- Ibid., p.30.
- 26- Ibid., p.11.
- 27- Daniel O'Leary, "Censored and Embedded Shaw: Culture and Shavian Analysis of Wartime Media," Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol., 28(2008), pp.181-185.
- 28- Shaw, What I Really Wrote About the War, p.24.
- 29- Weintraub, pp.29-33.
- 30- Christa Zorn, "Cosmopolitan Shaw and the Transformation of the Public Sphere.", Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol.28 (2008), p.189.
- 31- Ibid., pp.194-197
- 32- Tracy Davis, George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre (Praeger, 1994), p.104.
- 33- Stephen Eric Bronner, Socialism Unbound, 2nd Edition (Westview Press, 2001), p.108.
- 34- Shaw, "Preface to Heartbreak House," in Selected Plays (Dodd, Mead and Company, 1981), p.614.
- 35- Shaw, Heartbreak House, in Selected Plays, p.724.
- 36- Ibid., p.733.
- 37- Ibid., p.735.
- 38- Ibid., p.735.
- 39- Ibid., p.615.
- 40- Ibid., p.616.
- 41- Ibid., p.724.
- 42- As quoted in Sonya Freeman Loftis, "Shakespeare, Shotover, Surrogation: 'Blaming the Bard' in Heartbreak House.", Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol., 29(2009), pp.50-65.
- 43- Shaw, Heartbreak House, in Selected Plays, p.731-32.

- 44- Desmond Harding, "Bearing Witness: Heartbreak House and the Poetics of Trauma.", Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol.26 (2006), quoting Alfred Turco, p.6.
- 45- Shaw, Selected Plays, "Preface to Heartbreak House," p.616.
- 46- Ibid., p.620.
- 47- A classical account of the subjective turn that took place in the inter-war years is Eric Bronner's, Ideas in Action: Political Tradition in the Twentieth Century (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), especially Chapter 10: "The Liberation of Subjectivity."
- 48- In the preface to Back to Methuselah, Shaw wrote of Man and Superman: "I took the legend of Don Juan in its Mozartian form and made it a dramatic parable of Creative Evolution. But being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act, and that act was so completely episodic (it was a dream which did not affect the action of the piece) that the comedy could be detached and played by itself." Shaw: Collected plays with their Prefaces, Volume V (The Bodley Head, 1972), p.338.
- 49- Stephen Valency, Shaw: The Contemporary Legacy (Yale University Press, 1986), p.354.
- 50- Shaw, Back to Methuselah, as quoted in Michael and Molie Hardwick, The Bernard Shaw Companion (John Murray Ltd., 1973), p.62.
- 51- Shaw, "Preface to Back to Methuselah," p.339.
- 52- Stanley Weintraub, ed., Shaw, An Autobiography: 1898-1950, The Playwright Years (Cambridge University press, 1993), p.182.
- 53- Peter Gahan, "The Achievement of Shaw's Later Play's, 1920-1939," Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol., 23(2003), pp.27-35.
- 54- Margery M. Morgan, "Back to Methuselah: The Poet and the City.", G.B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays (prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), pp.130-142.
- 55- Shaw, "Postscript: After Twenty Five Years" in Collected Plays with their Prefaces, Volume V, P.696.
- 56- Ibid., p.702.
- 57- Shaw, "Preface to Back to Methuselah," p.269.
- 58- From "Shaw Has Become a Prophet" in Shaw, Collected plays and Their Prefaces, Volume V, p.714.
- 59- Bernard Shaw, "Postscript: After Twenty Five Years" in Collected Plays with their Prefaces, Volume V, p.692.
- 60- Shaw, Shaw: An Autobiography, The Playwright Years, 1898-1950, p.221.
- 61- Ibid., p.216.

References

- 1- Bronner, Eric Stephen. Socialism Unbound. 2nd Edition Westview Press, 2001.
- 2- Bentley, Eric. Bernard Shaw. Robert Hale Ltd, 1950.
- 3- Davis, Tracy. George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre .Praeger, 1994.
- 4- Gahan, Peter. "The Achievement of Shaw's Later Play's, 1920-1939." Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies. vol., 23(2003).
- 5- Ganz, Arthur. George Bernard Shaw. Grove Press, Inc., 1983.
- 6- Griffith, Gareth. On Socialism Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw. Routledge, 1995.
- 7- Grimes, Charles. "Bernard Shaw's Theory of Political Theatre: Difficulties from the Vantages of Postmodern and Modern Types of the Self." Shaw The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies. Vol.22 (2001).
- 8- Harding, Desmond. "Bearing Witness: Heartbreak House and the Poetics of Trauma." Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol.26 (2006).
- 9- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values. Vintage Books, 1996.
- 10- Holyrod, Michael. Bernard Shaw: Volume 1, The Search for Love. Random House, 1988.
- 11- Meisel, Martin. Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theatre. Princeton University Press, 1963.
- 12- Morgan, Margery M. "Back to Methuselah: The Poet and the City." G.B. Shaw: A Collection of Critical Essays. prentice-Hall Inc., 1965.

- 13- O'Leary, Daniel. Censored and Embedded Shaw: Culture and Shavian Analysis of Wartime Media." Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies. vol., 28(2008).
- 14- Rambeau, James and Laurence, Dan H. Bernard Shaw, Agitation: Letters to the Press, 1875-1950. Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1985.
- 15- Shaw. Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession" in Plays Unpleasant: Widower's Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs. Warren's Profession. Penguin Books, 1946.
- 16- Shaw. What I Really Wrote About the War. Constable and Co.Ltd., 1931.
- 17- Shaw. Preface to Heartbreak House," in Selected Plays. Dodd, Mead and Company, 1981.
- 18- Shaw. Postscript: After Twenty Five Years" in Collected Plays with their Prefaces. Volume V.
- 19- Shaw. Shaw: An Autobiography, The Playwright Years, 1898-1950.
- 20- Valency, Stephen. Shaw: The Contemporary Legacy. Yale University Press, 1986.
- 21- Weintraub, Stanley. Journey to Heartbreak: The Crucible Years of Bernard Shaw, 1914-18. Weybright and Talley, 1971.
- 22- Weintraub, Stanley. ed. Shaw, An Autobiography: 1898-1950, The Playwright Years. Cambridge University press, 1993.
- 23- Zorn, Christa. "Cosmopolitan Shaw and the Transformation of the Public Sphere." Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies, vol.28 (2008).