

# Exhibiting Reforms in the Drama of Bernard Shaw

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## Abstract

Shaw's development towards the full-blown myth of creative evolution during his life. Shaw's own religious and philosophical development and also considers that of his contemporaries and a review of the literary context in which Shaw's plays were written. Shaw's philosophical religious ideas appear are critically examined especially by comparing the relationship of each character to the main action of the play and to the main theme or idea of the play. Shaw dramatizes the purpose of the life force, in order to make clear what humanity can do to aid its progress. This is because the life force is the central fact of Shaw's creative evolution. The life force provides the impetus for evolutionary progress as the basic structural element of Shaw's plays.

**Keywords:** *Theatrical, Life, Novelist.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

George Bernard Shaw (26 July 1856 – 2 November 1950), known at his insistence simply as Bernard Shaw, was an Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist. His influence on Western theatre, culture and politics extended from the 1880s to his death and beyond. He wrote more than sixty plays, including major works such as *Man and Superman* (1902), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923). With a range incorporating both contemporary satire and historical allegory, Shaw became the leading dramatist of his generation, and in 1925 was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Born in Dublin, Shaw moved to London in 1876, where he struggled to establish himself as a writer and novelist, and embarked on a rigorous process of self-education. By the mid-1880s he had become a respected theatre and music critic. Following a political awakening, he joined the gradualist Fabian Society and became its most prominent pamphleteer. Shaw had been writing plays for years before his first public success, *Arms and the Man* in 1894. Influenced by Henrik Ibsen, he sought to introduce a new realism into English-language drama, using his plays as vehicles to disseminate his political, social and religious ideas. By the early twentieth century his reputation as a dramatist was secured with a series of critical and popular successes that included *Major Barbara*, *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

Shaw's expressed views were often contentious; he promoted eugenics and alphabet reform, and opposed vaccination and organised religion. He courted unpopularity by denouncing both sides in the First World War as equally culpable, and although not a republican, castigated British policy on Ireland in the postwar period. These stances had no lasting effect on his standing or productivity as a dramatist; the inter-war years saw a series of often ambitious plays, which achieved varying degrees of popular success. In 1938 he provided the screenplay for a filmed version of *Pygmalion* for which he received an Academy Award. His appetite for politics and controversy remained undiminished; by the late 1920s he had largely renounced Fabian Society gradualism and often wrote and spoke favourably of dictatorships of the right and left—he expressed admiration for both Mussolini and Stalin. In the final decade of his life he made fewer public statements, but continued to write prolifically until shortly before his death, aged ninety-four, having refused all state honours, including the Order of Merit in 1946.

Since Shaw's death scholarly and critical opinion about his works has varied, but he has regularly been rated among British dramatists as second only to Shakespeare; analysts recognise his extensive influence on generations of

English-language playwrights. The word Shavian has entered the language as encapsulating Shaw's ideas and his means of expressing them.

## 2. LIFE

### Early years

Shaw was born at 3 Upper Synge Street[n 1] in Portobello, a lower-middle-class part of Dublin.[2] He was the youngest child and only son of George Carr Shaw (1814–1885) and Lucinda Elizabeth (Bessie) Shaw (née Gurly; 1830–1913). His elder siblings were Lucinda (Lucy) Frances (1853–1920) and Elinor Agnes (1855–1876). The Shaw family was of English descent and belonged to the dominant Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland;[n 2] George Carr Shaw, an ineffectual alcoholic, was among the family's less successful members.[3] His relatives secured him a sinecure in the civil service, from which he was pensioned off in the early 1850s; thereafter he worked irregularly as a corn merchant.[2] In 1852 he married Bessie Gurly; in the view of Shaw's biographer Michael Holroyd she married to escape a tyrannical great-aunt.[4] If, as Holroyd and others surmise, George's motives were mercenary, then he was disappointed, as Bessie brought him little of her family's money.[5] She came to despise her ineffectual and often drunken husband, with whom she shared what their son later described as a life of "shabby-genteel poverty".[4]

By the time of Shaw's birth, his mother had become close to George John Lee, a flamboyant figure well known in Dublin's musical circles. Shaw retained a lifelong obsession that Lee might have been his biological father; [6] there is no consensus among Shavian scholars on the likelihood of this.[7][8][9][10] The young Shaw suffered no harshness from his mother, but he later recalled that her indifference and lack of affection hurt him deeply. [11] He found solace in the music that abounded in the house. Lee was a conductor and teacher of singing; Bessie had a fine mezzo-soprano voice and was much influenced by Lee's unorthodox method of vocal production. The Shaws' house was often filled with music, with frequent gatherings of singers and players.[2]

In 1862, Lee and the Shaws agreed to share a house, No. 1 Hatch Street, in an affluent part of Dublin, and a country cottage on Dalkey Hill, overlooking Killiney Bay.[12] Shaw, a sensitive boy, found the less salubrious parts of Dublin shocking and distressing, and was happier at the cottage. Lee's students often gave him books, which the young Shaw read avidly; [13] thus, as well as gaining a thorough musical knowledge of choral and operatic works, he became familiar with a wide spectrum of literature.[14]

Between 1865 and 1871, Shaw attended four schools, all of which he hated.[15][n 3] His experiences as a schoolboy left him disillusioned with formal education: "Schools and schoolmasters", he later wrote, were "prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents." [16] In October 1871 he left school to become a junior clerk in a Dublin firm of land agents, where he worked hard, and quickly rose to become head cashier.[6] During this period, Shaw was known as "George Shaw"; after 1876, he dropped the "George" and styled himself "Bernard Shaw".[n 4]

In June 1873, Lee left Dublin for London and never returned. A fortnight later, Bessie followed him; the two girls joined her.[6][n 5] Shaw's explanation of why his mother followed Lee was that without the latter's financial contribution the joint household had to be broken up.[20] Left in Dublin with his father, Shaw compensated for the absence of music in the house by teaching himself to play the piano.[6]

### LONDON

Early in 1876 Shaw learned from his mother that Agnes was dying of tuberculosis. He resigned from the land agents, and in March travelled to England to join his mother and Lucy at Agnes's funeral. He never again lived in Ireland, and did not visit it for twenty-nine years.[2]

Initially, Shaw refused to seek clerical employment in London. His mother allowed him to live free of charge in her house in South Kensington, but he nevertheless needed an income. He had abandoned a teenage ambition to become a painter, and had no thought yet of writing for a living, but Lee found a little work for him, ghost-writing a musical column printed under Lee's name in a satirical weekly, *The Hornet*. [2] Lee's relations with Bessie deteriorated after their move to London.[n 6] Shaw maintained contact with Lee, who found him work as a rehearsal pianist and occasional singer.[21][n 7]

Eventually Shaw was driven to applying for office jobs. In the interim he secured a reader's pass for the British Museum Reading Room (the forerunner of the British Library) and spent most weekdays there, reading and writing.[25] His first attempt at drama, begun in 1878, was a blank-verse satirical piece on a religious theme. It was abandoned unfinished, as was his first try at a novel. His first completed novel, *Immaturity* (1879), was too grim to appeal to publishers and did not appear until the 1930s.[6] He was employed briefly by the newly formed Edison Telephone Company in 1879–80, and as in Dublin achieved rapid promotion. Nonetheless, when the Edison firm merged with the rival Bell Telephone Company, Shaw chose not to seek a place in the new organisation.[26] Thereafter he pursued a full-time career as an author.

For the next four years Shaw made a negligible income from writing, and was subsidised by his mother.[28] In 1881, for the sake of economy, and increasingly as a matter of principle, he became a vegetarian.[6] He grew a beard to hide a facial scar left by smallpox. In rapid succession he wrote two more novels: *The Irrational Knot* (1880) and *Love Among the Artists* (1881), but neither found a publisher; each was serialised a few years later in the socialist magazine *Our Corner*. [n 9]

In 1880 Shaw began attending meetings of the Zetetical Society, whose objective was to "search for truth in all matters affecting the interests of the human race". Here he met Sidney Webb, a junior civil servant who, like Shaw, was busy educating himself. Despite difference of style and temperament, the two quickly recognised qualities in each other and developed a lifelong friendship. Shaw later reflected: "You knew everything that I didn't know and I knew everything you didn't know ... We had everything to learn from one another and brains enough to do it".

Shaw's next attempt at drama was a one-act playlet in French, *Un Petit Drame*, written in 1884 but not published in his lifetime.[37] In the same year the critic William Archer suggested a collaboration, with a plot by Archer and dialogue by Shaw. The project foundered, but Shaw returned to the draft as the basis of *Widowers' Houses* in 1892, and the connection with Archer proved of immense value to Shaw's career.

### 3. POLITICAL AWAKENING

On 5 September 1882 Shaw attended a meeting at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon, addressed by the political economist Henry George. Shaw then read George's book *Progress and Poverty*, which awakened his interest in economics. He began attending meetings of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), where he discovered the writings of Karl Marx, and thereafter spent much of 1883 reading *Das Kapital*. He was not impressed by the SDF's founder, H. M. Hyndman, whom he found autocratic, ill-tempered and lacking leadership qualities. Shaw doubted the ability of the SDF to harness the working classes into an effective radical movement and did not join it—he preferred, he said, to work with his intellectual equals.[43]

After reading a tract, *Why Are The Many Poor?*, issued by the recently formed Fabian Society,[n 10] Shaw went to the society's next advertised meeting, on 16 May 1884. He became a member in September,[45] and before the year's end had provided the society with its first manifesto, published as *Fabian Tract No. 2*. He joined the society's executive committee in January 1885, and later that year recruited Webb and also Annie Besant, a fine orator. From 1885 to 1889 Shaw attended the fortnightly meetings of the British Economic Association; it was, Holroyd observes, "the closest Shaw had ever come to university education." This experience changed his political ideas; he moved away from Marxism and became an apostle of gradualism.[48] When in 1886–87 the Fabians debated whether to embrace anarchism, as advocated by Charlotte Wilson, Besant and others, Shaw joined the majority in rejecting this approach. After a rally in Trafalgar Square addressed by Besant was violently broken up by the authorities on 13 November 1887 ("Bloody Sunday"), Shaw became convinced of the folly of attempting to challenge police power. Thereafter he largely accepted the principle of "permeation" as advocated by Webb: the notion whereby socialism could best be achieved by infiltration of people and ideas into existing political parties.

Throughout the 1880s the Fabian Society remained small, its message of moderation frequently unheard among more strident voices. Its profile was raised in 1889 with the publication of *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, edited by Shaw who also provided two of the essays. The second of these, "Transition", details the case for gradualism and permeation, asserting that "the necessity for cautious and gradual change must be obvious to everyone". In 1890 Shaw produced *Tract No. 13, What Socialism Is*, a revision of an earlier tract in which Charlotte Wilson had defined socialism in anarchistic terms.[53] In Shaw's new version, readers were assured that "socialism can be brought about in a perfectly constitutional manner by democratic institutions".

#### 4. NOVELIST AND CRITIC

The mid-1880s marked a turning point in Shaw's life, both personally and professionally: he lost his virginity, had two novels published, and began a career as a critic. He had been celibate until his twenty-ninth birthday, when his shyness was overcome by Jane (Jenny) Patterson, a widow some years his senior. Their affair continued, not always smoothly, for eight years. Shaw's sex life has caused much speculation and debate among his biographers, but there is a consensus that the relationship with Patterson was one of his few non-platonic romantic liaisons.[n 11]

The published novels, neither commercially successful, were his two final efforts in this genre: *Cashel Byron's Profession* written in 1882–83, and *An Unsocial Socialist*, begun and finished in 1883. The latter was published as a serial in *ToDay* magazine in 1884, although it did not appear in book form until 1887. *Cashel Byron* appeared in magazine and book form in 1886.[6]

In 1884 and 1885, through the influence of Archer, Shaw was engaged to write book and music criticism for London papers. When Archer resigned as art critic of *The World* in 1886 he secured the succession for Shaw. The two figures in the contemporary art world whose views Shaw most admired were William Morris and John Ruskin, and he sought to follow their precepts in his criticisms. Their emphasis on morality appealed to Shaw, who rejected the idea of art for art's sake, and insisted that all great art must be didactic.

Of Shaw's various reviewing activities in the 1880s and 1890s it was as a music critic that he was best known. After serving as deputy in 1888, he became musical critic of *The Star* in February 1889, writing under the pen-name *Corno di Bassetto*. In May 1890 he moved back to *The World*, where he wrote a weekly column as "G.B.S." for more than four years. In the 2016 version of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Robert Anderson writes, "Shaw's collected writings on music stand alone in their mastery of English and compulsive readability." Shaw ceased to be a salaried music critic in August 1894, but published occasional articles on the subject throughout his career, his last in 1950.

From 1895 to 1898, Shaw was the theatre critic for *The Saturday Review*, edited by his friend Frank Harris. As at *The World*, he used the by-line "G.B.S." He campaigned against the artificial conventions and hypocrisies of the Victorian theatre and called for plays of real ideas and true characters. By this time he had embarked in earnest on a career as a playwright: "I had rashly taken up the case; and rather than let it collapse I manufactured the evidence".[6]

#### 5. PLAYWRIGHT AND POLITICIAN: 1890S

After using the plot of the aborted 1884 collaboration with Archer to complete *Widowers' Houses* (it was staged twice in London, in December 1892), Shaw continued writing plays. At first he made slow progress; *The Philanderer*, written in 1893 but not published until 1898, had to wait until 1905 for a stage production. Similarly, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893) was written five years before publication and nine years before reaching the stage.[n 13]

Shaw's first play to bring him financial success was *Arms and the Man* (1894), a mock-Ruritanian comedy satirising conventions of love, military honour and class.[6] The press found the play overlong, and accused Shaw of mediocrity, sneering at heroism and patriotism, heartless cleverness,[71] and copying W. S. Gilbert's style. [n 14] The public took a different view, and the management of the theatre staged extra *matinée* performances to meet the demand. The play ran from April to July, toured the provinces and was staged in New York. It earned him £341 in royalties in its first year, a sufficient sum to enable him to give up his salaried post as a music critic.[74] Among the cast of the London production was Florence Farr, with whom Shaw had a romantic relationship between 1890 and 1894, much resented by Jenny Patterson.

The success of *Arms and the Man* was not immediately replicated. *Candida*, which presented a young woman making a conventional romantic choice for unconventional reasons, received a single performance in South Shields in 1895; in 1897 a playlet about Napoleon called *The Man of Destiny* had a single staging at Croydon. In the 1890s Shaw's plays were better known in print than on the West End stage; his biggest success of the decade was in



New York in 1897, when Richard Mansfield's production of the historical melodrama *The Devil's Disciple* earned the author more than £2,000 in royalties.[2]

In January 1893, as a Fabian delegate, Shaw attended the Bradford conference which led to the foundation of the Independent Labour Party.[78] He was sceptical about the new party,[79] and scorned the likelihood that it could switch the allegiance of the working class from sport to politics. He persuaded the conference to adopt resolutions abolishing indirect taxation, and taxing unearned income "to extinction". Back in London, Shaw produced what Margaret Cole, in her Fabian history, terms a "grand philippic" against the minority Liberal administration that had taken power in 1892. *To Your Tents, O Israel* excoriated the government for ignoring social issues and concentrating solely on Irish Home Rule, a matter Shaw declared of no relevance to socialism. [n 15] In 1894 the Fabian Society received a substantial bequest from a sympathiser, Henry Hunt Hutchinson—Holroyd mentions £10,000. Webb, who chaired the board of trustees appointed to supervise the legacy, proposed to use most of it to found a school of economics and politics. Shaw demurred; he thought such a venture was contrary to the specified purpose of the legacy. He was eventually persuaded to support the proposal, and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) opened in the summer of 1895.

By the later 1890s Shaw's political activities lessened as he concentrated on making his name as a dramatist. In 1897 he was persuaded to fill an uncontested vacancy for a "vestryman" (parish councillor) in London's St Pancras district. At least initially, Shaw took to his municipal responsibilities seriously;[n 16] when London government was reformed in 1899 and the St Pancras vestry became the Metropolitan Borough of St Pancras, he was elected to the newly formed borough council.

In 1898, as a result of overwork, Shaw's health broke down. He was nursed by Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a rich Anglo-Irish woman whom he had met through the Webbs. The previous year she had proposed that she and Shaw should marry. He had declined, but when she insisted on nursing him in a house in the country, Shaw, concerned that this might cause scandal, agreed to their marriage.[2] The ceremony took place on 1 June 1898, in the register office in Covent Garden. The bride and bridegroom were both aged forty-one. In the view of the biographer and critic St John Ervine, "their life together was entirely felicitous".[2] There were no children of the marriage, which it is generally believed was never consummated; whether this was wholly at Charlotte's wish, as Shaw liked to suggest, is less widely credited.

## PLAYS

Shaw published a collected edition of his plays in 1934, comprising forty-two works. He wrote a further twelve in the remaining sixteen years of his life, mostly one-act pieces. Including eight earlier plays that he chose to omit from his published works, the total is sixty-two.

## 6. MUSIC AND DRAMA REVIEWS

### MUSIC

Shaw's collected musical criticism, published in three volumes, runs to more than 2,700 pages. It covers the British musical scene from 1876 to 1950, but the core of the collection dates from his six years as music critic of *The Star* and *The World* in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In his view music criticism should be interesting to everyone rather than just the musical élite, and he wrote for the non-specialist, avoiding technical jargon—"Mesopotamian words like 'the dominant of D major'". He was fiercely partisan in his columns, promoting the music of Wagner and decrying that of Brahms and those British composers such as Stanford and Parry whom he saw as Brahmsian. He campaigned against the prevailing fashion for performances of Handel oratorios with huge amateur choirs and inflated orchestration, calling for "a chorus of twenty capable artists". He railed against opera productions unrealistically staged or sung in languages the audience did not speak.

### Drama

In Shaw's view, the London theatres of the 1890s presented too many revivals of old plays and not enough new work. He campaigned against "melodrama, sentimentality, stereotypes and worn-out conventions". As a music critic he had frequently been able to concentrate on analysing new works, but in the theatre he was often obliged to fall back on discussing how various performers tackled well-known plays. In a study of Shaw's work as a theatre critic,

E. J. West writes that Shaw "ceaselessly compared and contrasted artists in interpretation and in technique". Shaw contributed more than 150 articles as theatre critic for *The Saturday Review*, in which he assessed more than 212 productions. He championed Ibsen's plays when many theatregoers regarded them as outrageous, and his 1891 book *Quintessence of Ibsenism* remained a classic throughout the twentieth century. Of contemporary dramatists writing for the West End stage he rated Oscar Wilde above the rest: "... our only thorough playwright. He plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience, with the whole theatre". Shaw's collected criticisms were published as *Our Theatres in the Nineties* in 1932.

Shaw maintained a provocative and frequently self-contradictory attitude to Shakespeare (whose name he insisted on spelling "Shakespear"). Many found him difficult to take seriously on the subject; Duff Cooper observed that by attacking Shakespeare, "it is Shaw who appears a ridiculous pigmy shaking his fist at a mountain." Shaw was, nevertheless, a knowledgeable Shakespearian, and in an article in which he wrote, "With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespear when I measure my mind against his," he also said, "But I am bound to add that I pity the man who cannot enjoy Shakespear. He has outlasted thousands of abler thinkers, and will outlast a thousand more". Shaw had two regular targets for his more extreme comments about Shakespeare: indiscriminating "Bardolaters", and actors and directors who presented insensitively cut texts in over-elaborate productions. He was continually drawn back to Shakespeare, and wrote three plays with Shakespearian themes: *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, *Cymbeline Refinished* and *Shakes versus Shav*. In a 2001 analysis of Shaw's Shakespearian criticisms, Robert Pierce concludes that Shaw, who was no academic, saw Shakespeare's plays—like all theatre—from an author's practical point of view: "Shaw helps us to get away from the Romantics' picture of Shakespeare as a titanic genius, one whose art cannot be analyzed or connected with the mundane considerations of theatrical conditions and profit and loss, or with a specific staging and cast of actors."

## 7. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL WRITINGS

Shaw's political and social commentaries were published variously in Fabian tracts, in essays, in two full-length books, in innumerable newspaper and journal articles and in prefaces to his plays. The majority of Shaw's Fabian tracts were published anonymously, representing the voice of the society rather than of Shaw, although the society's secretary Edward Pease later confirmed Shaw's authorship. According to Holroyd, the business of the early Fabians, mainly under the influence of Shaw, was to "alter history by rewriting it". Shaw's talent as a pamphleteer was put to immediate use in the production of the society's manifesto—after which, says Holroyd, he was never again so succinct.

After the turn of the twentieth century, Shaw increasingly propagated his ideas through the medium of his plays. An early critic, writing in 1904, observed that Shaw's dramas provided "a pleasant means" of proselytising his socialism, adding that "Mr Shaw's views are to be sought especially in the prefaces to his plays". After loosening his ties with the Fabian movement in 1911, Shaw's writings were more personal and often provocative; his response to the furore following the issue of *Common Sense About the War* in 1914, was to prepare a sequel, *More Common Sense About the War*. In this, he denounced the pacifist line espoused by Ramsay MacDonald and other socialist leaders, and proclaimed his readiness to shoot all pacifists rather than cede them power and influence. On the advice of Beatrice Webb, this pamphlet remained unpublished.

*The Intelligent Woman's Guide*, Shaw's main political treatise of the 1920s, attracted both admiration and criticism. MacDonald considered it the world's most important book since the Bible; Harold Laski thought its arguments outdated and lacking in concern for individual freedoms. Shaw's increasing flirtation with dictatorial methods is evident in many of his subsequent pronouncements. A *New York Times* report dated 10 December 1933 quoted a recent Fabian Society lecture in which Shaw had praised Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin: "[T]hey are trying to get something done, [and] are adopting methods by which it is possible to get something done". As late as the Second World War, in *Everybody's Political What's What*, Shaw blamed the Allies' "abuse" of their 1918 victory for the rise of Hitler, and hoped that, after defeat, the Führer would escape retribution "to enjoy a comfortable retirement in Ireland or some other neutral country". These sentiments, according to the Irish philosopher-poet Thomas Duddy, "rendered much of the Shawian outlook passé and contemptible".

"Creative evolution", Shaw's version of the new science of eugenics, became an increasing theme in his political writing after 1900. He introduced his theories in *The Revolutionist's Handbook* (1903), an appendix to *Man and Superman*, and developed them further during the 1920s in *Back to Methuselah*. A 1946 *Life* magazine article

observed that Shaw had "always tended to look at people more as a biologist than as an artist". By 1933, in the preface to *On the Rocks*, he was writing that "if we desire a certain type of civilization and culture we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit into it". critical opinion is divided on whether this was intended as irony. In an article in the American magazine *Liberty* in September 1938, Shaw included the statement: "There are many people in the world who ought to be liquidated". Many commentators assumed that such comments were intended as a joke, although in the worst possible taste. Otherwise, *Lifemagazine* concluded, "this silliness can be classed with his more innocent bad guesses".

## 8. THEATRICAL

Shaw did not found a school of dramatists as such, but Crawford asserts that today "we recognise [him] as second only to Shakespeare in the British theatrical tradition ... the proponent of the theater of ideas" who struck a death-blow to 19th-century melodrama. According to Laurence, Shaw pioneered "intelligent" theatre, in which the audience was required to think, thereby paving the way for the new breeds of twentieth-century playwrights from Galsworthy to Pinter.

Crawford lists numerous playwrights whose work owes something to that of Shaw. Among those active in Shaw's lifetime he includes Noël Coward, who based his early comedy *The Young Idea on You Never Can Tell* and continued to draw on the older man's works in later plays. T. S. Eliot, by no means an admirer of Shaw, admitted that the epilogue of *Murder in the Cathedral*, in which Becket's slayers explain their actions to the audience, might have been influenced by Saint Joan. The critic Eric Bentley comments that Eliot's later play *The Confidential Clerk* "had all the earmarks of Shavianism ... without the merits of the real Bernard Shaw". Among more recent British dramatists, Crawford marks Tom Stoppard as "the most Shavian of contemporary playwrights"; Shaw's "serious farce" is continued in the works of Stoppard's contemporaries Alan Ayckbourn, Henry Livings and Peter Nichols. Shaw's influence crossed the Atlantic at an early stage. Bernard Dukore notes that he was successful as a dramatist in America ten years before achieving comparable success in Britain. Among many American writers professing a direct debt to Shaw, Eugene O'Neill became an admirer at the age of seventeen, after reading *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Other Shaw-influenced American playwrights mentioned by Dukore are Elmer Rice, for whom Shaw "opened doors, turned on lights, and expanded horizons"; William Saroyan, who empathised with Shaw as "the embattled individualist against the philistines"; and S. N. Behrman, who was inspired to write for the theatre after attending a performance of *Caesar and Cleopatra*: "I thought it would be agreeable to write plays like that".

Assessing Shaw's reputation in a 1976 critical study, T. F. Evans described Shaw as unchallenged in his lifetime and since as the leading English-language dramatist of the (twentieth) century, and as a master of prose style. The following year, in a contrary assessment, the playwright John Osborne castigated *The Guardian's* theatre critic Michael Billington for referring to Shaw as "the greatest British dramatist since Shakespeare". Osborne responded that Shaw "is the most fraudulent, inept writer of Victorian melodramas ever to gull a timid critic or fool a dull public". Despite this hostility, Crawford sees the influence of Shaw in some of Osborne's plays, and concludes that though the latter's work is neither imitative nor derivative, these affinities are sufficient to classify Osborne as an inheritor of Shaw.

In a 1983 study, R. J. Kaufmann suggests that Shaw was a key forerunner—"godfather, if not actually finicky paterfamilias"—of the Theatre of the Absurd. Two further aspects of Shaw's theatrical legacy are noted by Crawford: his opposition to stage censorship, which was finally ended in 1968, and his efforts which extended over many years to establish a National Theatre. Shaw's short 1910 play *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, in which Shakespeare pleads with Queen Elizabeth I for the endowment of a state theatre, was part of this campaign.

Writing in *The New Statesman* in 2012 Daniel Janes commented that Shaw's reputation had declined by the time of his 150th anniversary in 2006 but had recovered considerably. In Janes's view, the many current revivals of Shaw's major works showed the playwright's "almost unlimited relevance to our times". In the same year, Mark Lawson wrote in *The Guardian* that Shaw's moral concerns engaged present-day audiences, and made him—like his model, Ibsen—one of the most popular playwrights in contemporary British theatre.

The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada is the second largest repertory theatre company in North America. It produces plays by or written during the lifetime of Shaw as well as some contemporary works. The Gingold Theatrical Group, founded in 2006, presents works by Shaw and others in New York City that

feature the humanitarian ideals that his work promoted. It became the first theatre group to present all of Shaw's stage work through its monthly concert series Project Shaw.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Shaw's unorthodox views on religious matters are widely spread over many of his prefaces, lectures and portions of the dialogue of his plays. In most cases, the plays are distinguished for their intellectual or societal themes based on religious beliefs. Shaw insisted that his concern is educating the public; " 'for art's sake' alone, I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence" . 1 As Weales notes: [Shaw] never doubted that the theater was a place in which to preach and teach, but he complicated the simplicity of thesis drama by consistently writing plays in which the characters have human validity and vitality, which means that they cannot be expected to act simply as mouthpieces for ideas, but except for the fantastic and caricatured plays of the thirties... the ideas always take form in relation to human beings.

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