

CHAPTER I : SAINT JOAN

I

This account of Shaw's vision of the Superman closes my discussion of his main social themes, but I feel that in any account of Shaw's drama some mention of his greatest plays should not be excluded.

It is widely accepted that Man and Superman, Heartbreak House, Back to Methuselah and Saint Joan are Shaw's masterpieces. But opinions on which of these is his best vary. For Shaw himself, Back to Methuselah surpassed all the rest, presumably because it was the outcome of his ambitious attempt to let his imagination range back into the past and far into the future.

But of the four plays mentioned, it is Saint Joan that will probably live the longest. The play is great because it reveals in magnificent terms the spirit of the individual uncrushed by authorities. It stirs rich emotion because a great and inspiring figure from history emerges from it : Joan of Arc, the young girl of eighteen who, inspired by God, rose from the muddy field of France and saved her country from defeat, yet who was left to be burnt for heresy while her party scarcely lifted a finger to save her.

Joan represents the individualist who often suffers in this world. She was great because she was true to herself and bold in her belief in the divine origin of her "voices" and

"visions." But the fact that these voices and visions came directly through her, and not through the Church, so disturbed the Church's authority that it accused her of being a heretic; and she was burnt alive.

Joan's struggle with the Church and the politicians is a typical Shavian theme: the confrontation of two standards of human values, that of the saint's against that of the world's. The mental conflict of the two types provides highly entertaining dramatic material in several of Shaw's plays as in John Bull's Other Island where Father Keegan's saintlike views compete with those of Tom Broadbent; and in Major Barbara where Barbara's salvationist ideal clashes with Mr. Undershaft's practical and merciless realism.

Shaw's message in Saint Joan was that we do not like saints even when we worship them; and that the prospect of their return to life fills us with fear and apprehension. So, in the Epilogue, when Joan asks, "Shall I rise from the dead, and come back a living woman?", the Bishop of Beauvais answers, "Mortal eyes cannot distinguish the saint from the heretic" and "The heretic is always better dead." Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans, also tells her that "We are not yet good enough for you." And everyone disperses in consternation, leaving Joan alone to cry out:

"O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"¹

The noblest of Joan's utterances is the great speech on

1 Saint Joan, Epilogue

solitude with which the fifth scene ends. She has been abjured to submit to the authority of the priests and the politicians. If she refuses to do so, she will stand alone; and no one can save her from the fires to which the English wish her to be condemned. This is what she says:

"There is no help, no counsel in any of you. Yes: I am alone on earth: I have always been alone. My father told my brothers to drown me if I would not stay to mind his sheep while France was bleeding to death: France might perish if only our lambs were safe. I thought France would have friends at the court of the king of France; and I find only wolves fighting for pieces of her poor torn body. I thought God would have friends everywhere, because He is the friend of everyone; and in my innocence I believed that you who now cast me out would be like strong towers to keep harm from me. But I am wiser now; and nobody is any the worse for being wiser. Do not think you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone. France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God? I see now that the loneliness of God is His strength: what would He be if He listened to your jealous little counsels? Well, my loneliness, shall be my strength too; it is better to be alone with God: His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare, and dare, until I die. I will go out now to the common people, and let the love in their eyes comfort me for the hate in yours. You will all be glad to see me burnt; but if I go through the fire I shall go through it to their hearts for ever and ever. And so, God be with me!"¹

1. Ibid., Scene 5

When Joan, temporarily overcome by the Court, agrees to sign a recantation, and then is told that she will be sentenced to spend the rest of her life in solitary confinement in the prison, her great heart protests. She tears up her recantation and affirms her faith.

"My voices were right.... they told me you were fools, and that I was not to listen to your fine words nor trust to your charity. You promised me my life; but you lied. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread; when have I asked for more? It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep from me everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times. I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature,

"I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God."¹

This is impressive and poetic. Joan's outlook on freedom is one of passion and simplicity. To her, life without freedom means no more than death. If living means lifelong imprisonment she unhesitatingly chooses death. It is not because she fears to live on bread and water. She does not fear simplicity because she is simplicity itself. But to live while Nature, that seems to her to be the mediator of God, is denied is altogether unbearable. The feeling she has for the sound of the church bells that comes to her in the open air confirms her conviction that physical and spiritual freedom must go closely together. Without the one or the other it is better to die. The replacement of death by perpetual imprisonment, which appears worse to her, does not make her mistrust her voices and visions. On the contrary, she is the stronger in her faith and becomes so confident in God that she accuses the Church of being the instrument of the devil. Yet her assumption only springs from a rather weak reason that God cannot will any mortal to be in prison. So this is Joan: simple but firm and bold in her faith. Her last words to the Court before she is taken to the stake reveal her fearless spirit — that of a saint: "He wills that I go through the fire to his honor; for I am His child, and you are not fit that I should live among you."

The finest example of Shaw's ability to write long speeches that are at once classic and colloquial in form is the great speech on heresy delivered by the Inquisitor in the sixth scene that never

1 Ibid, Scene 6

loses its hold on us. It is written with such skill that it appears to be an impromptu speech, spoken by a man of wide experience and great wisdom, and not a set oration. It is spoken only because it has been provoked by a remark made by Brother Martin Ladvenu, a remark of which the Inquisitor could not have had any prevision.

LADVENU. Is there any great harm in the girl's heresy? Is it not merely her simplicity? Many saints have said as much as Joan.

THE INQUISITOR. Brother Martin: if you had seen what I have seen of heresy, you would not think it a light thing even in its most apparently harmless and even lovable and pious origins. Heresy begins with people who are to all appearance better than their neighbors. A gentle and pious girl, or a young man who has obeyed the command of our Lord by giving all his riches to the poor, and putting on the garb of poverty, the life of austerity, and the rule of humility and charity, may be the founder of a heresy that will wreck both Church and Empire if not ruthlessly stamped out in time. The records of the holy Inquisition are full of histories we dare not give to the world, because they are beyond the belief of honest men and innocent women; yet they all began with saintly simpletons. I have seen this again and again. Mark what I say: the woman who quarrels with her clothes, and puts on the dress of a man, is like the man who throws off his fur gown and dresses like John the Baptist: they are followed, as surely as the night follows the day, by bands of wild women and men who refuse to wear any clothes at all. When maids will neither marry nor take regular

vows, and men reject marriage and exalt their lusts into divine inspirations, then, as surely as the summer follows the spring, they begin with polygamy and end by incest. Heresy at first seems innocent and even laudable; but it ends in such a monstrous horror of unnatural wickedness that the most tender-hearted among you, if you saw it at work as I have seen it, would clamour against the mercy of the Church in dealing with it. For two hundred years the Holy Office has striven with these diabolical madnesses; and it knows that they begin always by vain and ignorant persons setting up their own judgment against the church, and taking it upon themselves to be the interpreters of God's will. You must not fall into the common error of mistaking these simpletons for liars and hypocrites. They believe honestly and sincerely that their diabolical inspiration is divine. Therefore you must be on your guard against your natural compassion. You are all, I hope, merciful men: how else could you have devoted your lives to the service of your gentle Saviour? You are going to see before you a young girl, pious and chaste; for I must tell you, gentlemen, that the things said to her by our English friends are supported by no evidence, whilst there is abundant testimony that her excesses have been excesses of religion and charity and not of worldliness and wantonness. This girl is not one of those whose hard features are the signs of hard hearts, and whose brazen looks the low demeanour condemn them before they are accused. The devilish pride that has led her into her present peril has left no mark on her countenance. Strange as it may seem to you, it has even left

no mark on her character outside those special matters in which she is proud; so that you will see a diabolical pride and natural humility seated side by side in the selfsame soul. Therefore be on your guard. God forbid that I should tell you to harden your hearts; for her punishment if we condemn her will be so cruel that we should forfeit our own hope of divine mercy were there one grain of malice against her in our hearts. But if you hate cruelty — and if any man here does not hate it I command him on his soul's salvation to quit this holy court — I say, if you hate cruelty, remember that nothing is so cruel in its consequences as the toleration of heresy. Remember also that no court of law can be so cruel as the common people are to those whom they suspect of heresy. The heretic in the hands of the Holy Office is safe from violence, is assured of a fair trial, and cannot suffer death, even when guilty, if repentance follows sin. Innumerable lives of heretics have been saved because the Holy Office has taken them out of the hands of the people, and because the people have yielded them up, knowing that the Holy Office would deal with them. Before the Holy Inquisition existed, and even now when its officers are not within reach, the unfortunate wretch suspected of heresy, perhaps quite ignorantly and unjustly, is stoned, torn to pieces, drowned, burned in his house with all his innocent children, without a trial, unshriven, unburied save as a dog is buried; all of them deeds hateful to God and most cruel to man. Gentlemen: I am compassionate by nature as well as by my profession; and though the work I have to do may seem cruel to those who do not know how much more cruel it would be to leave it undone, I would go to the stake myself sooner than do it if I do ~~not know its righteousness, its necessity, its essential mercy.~~ I

not know its righteousness, its necessity, its essential mercy. I ask you to address yourself to this trial in that conviction. Anger is a bad counsellor: cast our anger. Pity is sometimes worse, cast out pity. But do not cast out mercy. Remember only that justice comes first. Have you anything to say, my lord, before we proceed to trial? ¹

From this we see clearly the Church's dread and intolerance of heresy. The speech so effectively defines the vital danger of heresy and the necessity to exterminate it that we are forced to agree with the Inquisitor. It is a valid case. We understand that if heresy were left to progress, the Church would lose its essential point of authority as the mediator of God and become nothing. Yet in spite of our reason we are thrown back on the romantic appeal of the young maid. We sympathize with her and choose her.

II

Although we see that Shaw's aptitude for long speeches attains its highest point of beauty in Saint Joan, yet this side of success is only a part of the greatness of the play. What is very important on Shaw's part is his immense understanding of all the sides of his different characters. He sits in the place of each of them, speaks their very thoughts and shows he knows their innermost being. He does not plead for any particular character,

1 Ibid, Scene 6

but states the true case in impartial sympathy. Reading the play alone, one might suspect that the author was a very devoted Christian, though in fact he was not. So we see that in this play Shaw successfully set himself apart as a superior person and did not condescend to use any of the characters merely as the mouthpiece of his own ideas. This is the quality of the great dramatist; it is what produces the finest works of dramatic art. Shaw possessed it to a high degree; above all it is found in Saint Joan, giving that play a unique beauty and a supreme place in English drama as a whole.

CHAPTER II : THE ESSENCE OF SHAVIANISM

I

The basic formula for drama is conflict. Shaw's drama is, on the whole, the conflict of thought, belief and will of the characters and discussion is, therefore, the essence of all of Shaw's plays.

Most of his plays are dramatic debates interspersed with farcical incidents, filled with lively and brilliant dialogue skilfully worked out. Each of the characters lives on the stage as himself, presenting his own arguments and exposing his own self-justification which are different from or irreconcilable with the other's. And the audience is left to judge for itself which side is right or has more reason. This is not easy to do because Shaw made the arguments of all the sides so balanced and so convincing that we are often carried away by each of them in turn.

Shaw's arguments varied. He did not just depend on the social wrongs, defects, or illusions but also brought out problems of life we are unlikely to meet in practice but which exercise our judgments and make us review our values. For instance, the basic problem in The Doctor's Dilemma is, which is the more valuable life, that of an amoral painter-genius or that of a mediocre doctor who is a good and decent man? Dubedat or Blenkinsop? It is a choice between moral goodness and artistic goodness. Both men have tuberculosis; and an eminent doctor, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, can treat only

one patient with his new cure. So he and his friend, Sir Patrick Cullen, try to solve the problem.

Sir Patrick seems to choose Blenkinsop, saying that, "To me, it's a plain choice between a man and a lot of pictures."¹ This is reasonable and we tend to agree with him that it is no problem at all. But Sir Ridgeon's retort — "It's easier to replace a dead man than a good picture"¹ — appeals to our judgment all the same. We feel now that it is not such an easy problem as it seems to Sir Patrick. Here Shaw cleverly put the opposite yet equally convincing arguments into the mouths of the two doctors in a very few words.

When Sir Ridgeon declares that "It would be simpler if Blenkinsop could paint Dubedat's pictures"¹, Sir Patrick readily turns it the other way round by saying that "It would be simpler still if Dubedat had some of Blenkinsop's honesty!"¹ This is one of Shaw's dramatic techniques. He likes his characters to turn the speech of the other characters upside down to add life and vivacity to the plays. This technique is seen throughout his plays. In John Bull's Other Island, Broadbent is impressed by Tim Haffigan's pretended honorable spirit about money, saying that "I believe he would share his last shilling with a friend,"² and Doyle who knows Haffigan well retorts by turning Broadbent's words round the other way: "No doubt he would share his friend's last shilling if his friend was fool enough to let him."² In Man and Superman, Tanner

1 The Doctor's Dilemma, Act II

2 John Bull's Other Island, Act I

is intercepted by a group of brigands under the command of Mendoza. "I am a brigand. I live by robbing the rich,"¹ says Mendoza grandly. And Tanner retorts: "I am a gentleman. I live by robbing the poor."¹ The last example illustrates Shaw's ability to combine dramatic effect with satire.

II

Because his plays are full of arguments Shaw used several devices to lighten them. He introduced insects and animal onto the stage as in John Bull's Other Island and Androcles and the Lion. He personified the measles microbe as the Monster in Too True to be Good. In Back to Methuselah he used a supernatural appearance for the Oracle; and in The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles he made an angel appear to announce the Day of Judgment. But these are mere decorations. Shaw's most successful dramatic technique lies in the wit and fun with which he adorned his solemn or dull arguments — the wit and fun of which he was a born master. It is his wit, both in single speeches and repartee, that gives his plays the exclusive beauty of the Shavian drama.

Here are some instances of Shavian wit:

¹ Man and Superman, Act III, Scene 1

In The Doctor's Dilemma, Sir Ridgeon says: "Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh."¹

In Too True to be Good, Sweetie tells the Elder that he is mad to think that the universe is wrecked, and the Elder retorts:

"I am sane in a world of lunatics."²

In The Man of Destiny, a one-act play, Napoleon is conversing with a strange lady:

NAPCLEON. We must not live for ourselves alone, little one. Never forget that we should always think of others, and work for others, and lead and govern them for their own good. Self-sacrifice is the foundation of all true nobility of character.

LADY. Oh, it is easy to see that you have never tried it, General.

NAPCLEON. What do you mean by that speech, madam ?

LADY. Haven't you noticed that people always exaggerate the value of things they haven't got? The poor think they need nothing but riches to be quite happy and good. Everybody worships truth, purity, unselfishness, for the same reason--because they have no experience of them. Oh, if they only knew!

In Heartbreak House, Mr. Mangan says to Ellie: "I thought you were rather particular about people's characters".³

1.

. . . Act V

2

. . . Act III

3.

. . . Act II

Ellie retorts: "If we women were particular about men's characters, we should never get married at all, Mr. Mangan." ¹

Some dialogues are cleverly worked out as a trap for truth. For instance, in Great Catherine where the English Captain Edstaston, who has just returned from an audience with the Empress, meets his fiancée, Claire.

CLAIRE (pausing thoughtfully). Is she (Catherine) — is she good-looking when you see her close?

EDSTASTON. Not a patch on you, dearest.

CLAIRE (jealous). Then you did see her close? ²

Shaw sometimes created fun by playing on words. In Augustus Does His Bit, Lord Augustus Highcastle's clerk comes to tell him that there is a lady who wants to see him.

THE CLERK. Are you engaged?

AUGUSTUS. What business is that of yours? However, if you will take the trouble to read the society papers for this week, you will see that I am engaged to the Honorable Lucy Popham, youngest daughter of —

THE CLERK. That aint what I mean. Can you see a female?

AUGUSTUS. Of course I can see a female as easily as a male. Do you suppose I'm blind?

THE CLERK. You don't seem to follow me, somehow. There's a female downstairs: what you might call a lady. She wants to know can you see her if I let her up.

1

Act II

2.

Scene 3

AUGUSTUS. Oh, you mean am I disengaged.

Again in Great Catherine, Captain Edstaston, before having an audience with the Empress, is interviewed by the Russian Prince Patiomkin, favourite of the Empress.

PATIOVKIN. Have you had a college education, darling?

I have.

EDSTASTON. Certainly, I am a Bachelor of Arts.

PATIOVKIN. It is enough that you are a bachelor, darling: Catherine will supply the arts.¹

Even in one of Shaw's last plays, Buoyant Billions, we still find this same skill. In the play, a father and his son are talking about revolution.

SON. Revolution is dirty work always. Why should it be?

FATHER. Because it is unconstitutional. Why not do things constitutionally?

SON. Because the object of a revolution is to change the constitution; and to change the constitution is unconstitutional.²

Though Shaw seemed to give much importance to the words in his plays, he did not entirely abandon action or "stage business." In several plays Shaw deliberately combined witty or sarcastic dialogue with farcical movement. Great Catherine is a fine example of his skill in this point. A Russian Prince is talking with an English Captain for the first time.

PATIOVKIN (enthusiastically). Call me darling.

1.
Scene 1
- 2
Act I

EDSTASTON. It is not the English custom.

PATIMKIN. You have no hearts, you English! (slapping¹ his right breast) Heart! Heart!

EDSTASTON. Pardon, your Highness: your heart is on the other side.

PATIMKIN (surprised and impressed). Is it? You are learned! You are a doctor! You English are wonderful! We are barbarians, drunken pigs. Catherine does not know it; but we are. Catherine's a German. But I have given her a Russian heart (he is about to slap himself again).

EDSTASTON (delicately). The other side, your Highness.

PATIMKIN (maudlin). Darling: a true Russian has a heart on both sides. ¹

III

Shaw's idiosyncrasies deliberately shock and annoy. He sometimes made his characters say provocative or improbable things to take a rise out of people in order to attract their attention or their laughter. He liked to poke fun at nearly everything, especially the English national character and institutions, and some examples of such attacks will further illustrate what we mean by "Shavian." In Major Barbara he made Cusins say: "Every true Englishman detests the English. We are the wickedest nation on

1.

Scene 1

earth; and our success is a moral horror." ¹ Was this meant to be taken seriously or not? One could choose, according to one's own predisposition or mood. Shew had carte blanche when it came to insulting the English, and it could all be passed off as part of his famous tongue-in-the-cheek attitude.

In John Bull's Other Island, Doyle compares the English to a caterpillar.

"A caterpillar," he explains, "when it gets into a tree, instinctively makes itself look exactly like a leaf; so that both its enemies and its prey may mistake it for one and think it not worth bothering about... The world is as full of fools as a tree is full of leaves. Well, the Englishman does what the caterpillar does. He instinctively makes himself look like a fool, and eats up all the real fools at his ease while his enemies let him alone and laugh at him for being a fool like the rest." ²

In The Man of Destiny, Napoleon asserts that "The English are a nation of shopkeepers." He goes on describing the English:

"Every Englishman is born with a certain miraculous power that makes him master of the world. When he wants a thing, he never tells himself that he wants it. He waits patiently until there comes into his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who have got the thing he wants. Then he becomes irresistible. Like the aristocrat, he does what pleases him and grabs what he covets: like the

1.

Act III

2.

Act I

shopkeeper, he pursues his purpose with the industry and steadfastness, that come from strong religious conviction and a deep sense of moral responsibility. He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude. As the great champion of freedom and national independence, he conquers and annexes half the world, and calls it Colonization ... There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find Englishmen doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong. He does everything on principle..."

In Major Barbara, Undershaft insults the English government and politicians when he discusses his son's, Stephen's, future: "He knows nothing; and he thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career."¹ And Undershaft continues: "Get him an Under Secretaryship; and then leave him alone. He will find his natural and proper place in the end on the treasury bench."¹

In this way Shaw points out that some work is carried on simply in the name of the one in authority. This idea is expanded in Too True to be Good where Private Meek does everything that Colonel Tallboys is supposed to do, yet recognition for the achievement goes to the Colonel.

In The Apple Cart, Proteus the Prime Minister confesses that: "I am Prime Minister for the same reason that all Prime Ministers have been Prime Ministers: because I am good for nothing else!"²

1. Act III

2. Act I

There is a passage in Buoyant Billions where Shaw makes fun of English educational institutions with this same attitude.

JUNIUS is talking with the native of Panama:

JUNIUS. I would have you to know that I am a Master of Arts of the University of Oxford, the centre of all the learning in the universe. The possession of such a degree places the graduate on the highest mental plane attainable by humanity.

THE NATIVE. How did you obtain that degree, sir, may I respectfully ask?

JUNIUS. By paying a solid twenty pounds for it.

THE NATIVE. It is impossible. Knowledge and wisdom cannot be purchased like fashionable garments.

JUNIUS. In England they can. A sage teaches us all the questions our examiners are likely to ask us, and the answers they expect from us.

THE NATIVE. One answers questions truthfully only out of one's own wisdom and knowledge.

JUNIUS. Not at Oxford. Unless you are a hundred years behindhand in science and seven hundred in history you cannot hope for a degree there.

THE NATIVE. Can it be true that the doctrine of your teachers are less than a thousand years old?

JUNIUS. The most advanced of them would have felt quite at home with Richard the Third. I should like to have heard them discussing Columbus with him. ¹

. I

. Act II

In In Good King Charles's Golden Days the Portuguese-born Queen Catherine of Braganza tells King Charles that, "No one can govern the English: that is why they will never come to any good. In Portugal there is the holy Church: we know what we believe; and we all believe the same things. But here the church itself is a heresy; and there are a thousand other heresies: almost as many heresies as there are people. And if you ask any of them what his sect believes he does not know: all he can say is that the men of the other sects should be hanged and their women whipped through the town at the cart's tail. But they are all against the true church. I do not understand the English. And I do not want to govern them."¹

And in Back to Methuselah Shaw exploited the technique of introducing wild yet in their context rational improbabilities. He made the English import educated negresses and chinese to govern England; and he shifted the capital of the British Commonwealth to Bagdad. By a similar stretch of the imagination in The Apple Cart the American Ambassador declares that the United States have decided to rejoin the British Empire. These unlikely happenings were chiefly intended to surprise, and Shaw liked to shock his audience by his ideas as well as by the dialogue itself. The following passage from Too True to be Good is an example for this.

Sweetie is expressing her view about men to Aubrey and

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Scene 3

the Patient:

SWEETIE. Men are awfully nice for the first few days,... You get the best out of men by having them always new. What I say is that a love affair should always be a honeymoon. And the only way to make sure of that is to keep changing the man; for the same man can never keep it up. In all my life I have known only one man that kept it up till he died.

THE PATIENT (interested). And then the thing is possible?

SWEETIE. Yes: it was a man that married my sister: that was how I came to know about it.

AUBREY. And his ardor never palled? Day in and day out, until death did them part, he was the same as on the wedding day? Is that really true, Sweetie ?

SWEETIE. It is. But then he beat her on their wedding day; and he beat her just as hard everyday afterwards. ¹ And, at a deeper level of meaning, in Candida, when Candida says: "I choose the weaker of the two," and means Morell, we are at first somewhat surprised because from the beginning of the play up to the moment she speaks thus, Shaw has kept on emphasizing the physical weakness of Eugene. It is then on second thoughts that we come to realize that Shaw has well-prepared his conclusion that Morell is weaker than Eugene. Here surprise is developed into paradox, and a paradox that holds within it a truth (poetic imagination gives the weakling a superiority over the man of

physical strength and moral worth) which in turn enlightens and broadens the whole meaning of the play.

Shaw was skilful in manipulating plot and characters. In Androcles and the Lion he picked up from Aulus Gellius's Attic Nights the story of the encounter between the hurt lion and Androcles and linked this to an imaginary episode from the Roman persecution of the Christians; thus he combined comic nonsense with a serious commentary on religion. He then set out several types of characters as a means of illustrating the strength and weakness of the Christians: Androcles who is simple, kind to animals and brave in his own way; Lavinia, clever and fearless; Ferrovius, stupid, violent-tempered and conscience-ridden; Spintho, cowardly and weak-minded.

In Pygmalion Shaw transformed the science of speech into an entertaining drama in which he chose a rough Cockney flower-girl to be trained in phonetics and in the manners of high society. Though very interested in the speech problems involved, Shaw did not neglect to make his central figure into a lively credible living person. His Eliza possesses an inward grace that enables her to behave almost like a perfect lady after a short time. The transition is effected with much humour, and the end is not without sadness, for the new Eliza has more problems than the old. Where is her place in society now? The phonetician who has changed her was concerned only with scientific, not human, problems. It is easy to change a person's speech, milieu and habits, but it is not so easy for that person to be perfectly happy afterwards.

Shaw was also skilful in making all the characters of his plays distinctive, so that even where they fall into groups, such as the six doctors in The Doctor's Dilemma, they all bear the stamp of individual creation and come fully and independently alive; and each character appeals to our imagination as a separate personality without even our having to see him on the stage. This ability indicates Shaw's sense of notability in people. All his characters are remarkable people; they all stand out prominently and attract our attention. Commonplace men and women did not seem to interest Shaw. In this respect he resembles Dickens. Henry Straker, the chauffeur in Man and Superman is not a routine chauffeur but has the characteristics of "the New Man" who is interested in mechanics. Shaw's secondary parts are as well etched as the principal ones. The part of Henry Straker is so finely drawn that any actor must be pleased with it. We could draw up a long list of such "minor" notables: Mr. Dolittle in Pygmalion, the Sergeant and The Elder in Too True to be Good, Adolphus Cosins in Major Barbara, and many others.

The characteristics mentioned distinguish Shaw from other dramatists and place him in an exclusively high rank among English dramatists.

Shaw's art declined, however, as he became older. His later plays were less dramatic and therefore lessactable. Shaw over-estimated an audience's power of continuous attention and so packed his plays with his wisdom and ideas that the characters seem to be bursting with talk. Action was sacrificed to intellectual

discussion, so that some of his plays more nearly resemble conversation pieces than plays for the conventional theatre. Back to Methuselah and Geneva are examples of this development in Shaw's art.

Yet nearly all Shaw's plays conquered the public. They were revived again and again. The longest run for a revival was that of The Doctor's Dilemma at the Haymarket Theatre during 1942 - 1943 (474 performances), followed by You Never Can Tell at Wyndham's Theatre, 1947 - 1948 (312 performances) and Heartbreak House at the Cambridge Theatre, 1943 (236 performances). The following plays have been filmed: How He Lied to Her Husband, Arms and the Man, Pygmalion, Major Barbara, Caesar and Cleopatra, Androcles and the Lion, Saint Joan, The Devil's Disciple and The Doctor's Dilemma. This is a proof of Shaw's continuing popularity. In the present year we are to see a film of The Millionairess, and it seems from this evidence that there is no end to the process. Radio, and of course television, add frequently to the number of productions presented to a wide public, and the musical version of Pygmalion, My Fair Lady, which have temporarily banished the original from the professional stage are only serving to popularise it the more in the amateur theatre.

It is true that as a dramatist Shaw had several weaknesses. But his flaws are outweighed by his great achievement. The supreme fact about Shaw's plays is that they are so much richer in good sense; they are much more amusing and interesting; and, above all, more stimulating than any other plays of their period and of ours.