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SHAW'S NOVELS

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS for a discussion of Shaw's novels. There is the possibility that Shaw's early work in the novel may throw light on his later and more significant work in the drama. There is the fact that no work by a writer like Shaw is without interest. And there is the curious fact that Shaw, who was so certain—in public at least—about so many things, was uncertain and wavering in his own estimate of his novels.

On the one hand he describes the novels as the work of his "professional apprenticeship", "the novels of my nonage", "these silly novels"; he describes one as "called, with merciless fitness, *Immaturity*", says of another, "people who will read *An Unsocial Socialist* will read anything", and comments on *The Irrational Knot*, "For my own part I cannot stand it. It is to me only one of the heaps of spoiled material that all apprenticeship involves". Yet he can say later of the same *The Irrational Knot*, "it is fiction of the first order. By this I do not mean that it is a masterpiece in that order, or even a pleasant example of it, but simply that, such as it is, it is one of those fictions in which the morality is original and not ready-made". And of the five novels he writes, "They prove too that, like Goethe, I knew all along, and have added more to my power of handling, illustrating, and addressing my material than to the material itself." When Shaw himself can see his novels as "silly" and "fiction of the first order", the novels deserve some examination.

Shaw wrote his first novel, *Immaturity*, in 1879 (when he was twenty-three), *The Irrational Knot* in 1880, *Love Among the Artists* in 1881, *Cashel Byron's Profession* in 1882, and his last novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, in 1883. All five were rejected by publishers; all but *Immaturity* were serially published in socialist magazines between 1884 and 1888. *Cashel Byron's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist* were published in book form in the eighteen-eighties, the remaining three after 1900.

The novels, as one might expect, are long on talk, short on plot. *Immaturity* is the story of Robert Smith, who rises from a position as clerk to one as private secretary to an Irish M.P., then to one in the civil service; the novel has a happy ending in which Smith escapes marriage by realizing that he is not in love but merely lonely. *The Irrational Knot* is the story of Edward Conolly, whose invention of an electric motor raises him from workman to capitalist. He marries a girl of the upper middle class who leaves him to go to New York with an aristocratic wastrel and becomes pregnant by him; they tire of each other and separate; Conolly abandons his penitent wife without regret. Conolly's sister, an actress, enters into an illicit relationship with a man of the upper middle class, becomes an alcoholic, abandons her child, and dies sordidly in New York. *Love Among the Artists* relates the adventures of a number of musicians and painters, adventures which consist largely of escapes into or from marriage. *Cashel Byron's Profession* tells of a young man who runs away from school, goes to sea, learns to box in Melbourne, and becomes a world champion. He aspires to the hand of Lydia Carew, a wealthy and cultured heiress, who struggles to allow herself to accept him and decides finally to mate brawn and brains for the sake of the offspring. Cashel settles down to a country estate and a seat in parliament. *An Unsocial Socialist* is the story of Sidney Trefusis, Jewish, young, wealthy, and socialist. He escapes from his wife to a rural retreat near a girls' school and meets the clever student Agatha Wylie. When his wife dies he moves to a country house, converts his aristocratic neighbour to socialism, and becomes engaged to Agatha.

Though these stories are thin, there are vital and interesting people and situations in Shaw's novels; there are ideas which must have been novel and startling in 1880—some are still novel in 1961; and there is a great deal of good talk. It remains a mystery why the novels could find no publishers in the early 1880's. The reader for Macmillan's—probably John Morley—reported that the novels were the work of a humorist and realist who knew how to write, and had a "certain originality and courage of mind", and whose characters were unconventional; yet he rejected them.

If the English novel had been flourishing in the early 'eighties, there would be less mystery about the rejection of Shaw's novels. But Thackeray had died in 1863, Dickens in 1870, George Eliot in 1880; and fiction, with few exceptions, declined in quality if not in quantity. Trollope published a dozen novels between 1879 and 1883, and Hardy four, including *The Return of the Native*; Stevenson published *Treasure Island* in 1883; Meredith *The Egoist* in 1879. Among the lesser novelists George Moore and George Gissing published their first novels in the early

'eighties; but the period was also marked by the publication of several novels by Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Walter Besant, Grant Allen, Blackmore, Ainsworth, and many others.

To exalt Shaw's novels to the level of those of Hardy, Meredith, Trollope, and Stevenson would be folly. Yet they stand up very well alongside the novels of Reade, Besant, Allen, and Ainsworth, which are very bad—in plot, characterization, dialogue, style. The lesser Victorian novelists were unskilful and frequently incompetent. Yet Reade, Besant, Allen, and Ainsworth found publishers with ease; Shaw—who seldom wrote badly—could not find one.

To say that Shaw's novels are better than those of all but a few of his contemporaries is not a very high recommendation. The historical estimate, as Arnold points out, is not very sound. What of the real estimate? Can Shaw's novels stand on their own as interesting and significant?

Three, I think, cannot. Only the scholar will find much profit in reading *Immaturity* and *Love Among the Artists*, the first and third novels. *Immaturity* is far too long, far too painstaking in its details; Shaw's attention wanders from one to another of a half-dozen major characters and focusses too often on the dullest of the lot, his hero Smith. The novel's chief interest lies in the speculation it gives rise to as to how much of the young Shaw there is in the prim and puritanical Smith. *Love Among the Artists*, though it is much shorter than *Immaturity* and though it pays much less attention to realism of setting, suffers from the same lack of a clear aim and focus. Owen Jack, the one very interesting figure of the book, is dropped by Shaw half-way through, in favour of a host of talkers about art. An interest in scholarship or socialism, or both, might send one to the last novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*; but the general reader would find that, although Shaw has in his last novel discovered a unifying theme—Marxian Socialism—and has kept his central character, Trefusis, in clear, sharp focus throughout, he has given up any pretence of writing a novel: he has merely invented a few situations in which Trefusis may deliver monologues on marriage and Marxism.

The Irrational Knot and *Cashel Byron's Profession*, the second and fourth novels, should, however, find readers who are scholars or socialists and many who are neither. *Cashel Byron's Profession* became so popular in the United States in the late 'nineties that Shaw, to preserve the copyright, brought out a stage version of the novel, *The Admirable Bashville*; Gentleman Jim Corbett once played the role of Cashel. In the story of the prizefighter who won the hand of the great lady, though not her heart, there are the first hints of Shaw's later genius for inventing comic situations and for treating serious themes with surface lightness. And in

Shaw's amazing knowledge of boxing there is evidence of his later determination to know thoroughly what he was talking about.

The Irrational Knot is a carefully constructed novel, the one true novel Shaw wrote. The workman Conolly and his actress sister Susanna both rise by talent to marriage or a liaison with the upper middle class—she by her singing, he by his invention and business sense; the unions of both fail, hers because of her alcoholism, his because of the same cold rationality which gained him success in the capitalist world. Shaw allows very little to distract him from chronicling the fortunes of this interesting pair. The novel's only failures are in the often stiff and awkward dialogue, and in the fact that, contrary to Shaw's intentions, the reader's sympathies frequently go out to the weak and alcoholic Susanna while he is repelled by the unfeeling, always right Conolly.

The question arises, could Shaw have become a successful novelist had he received encouragement from publishers in the early 'eighties? I doubt that he could have. One of the most significant trends in the English novel of the 'eighties and 'nineties was toward realism and naturalism. Continental realism and naturalism in the novel began to make an impact on English literature in the 'seventies. The publisher Vizetelly estimated that in the early 'nineties a million copies of French novels were in circulation in England. In the 'eighties the early naturalistic novels of George Gissing and George Moore were published, and in the 'nineties there was a steady stream of naturalistic short stories and novels. With the principles and practices of naturalism Shaw could have had little sympathy. The naturalistic writers, following Zola rather than Balzac and Flaubert, sought to ape the theories and methods of the confident scientific materialists: they saw the world as a laboratory in which to study the species of matter, Man; they endeavoured to report upon the world's facts in endless detail and with complete objectivity, reducing their own intervention in the reports to a minimum—a minimum of selection, interpretation, and comment.

Shaw frequently referred to himself as fundamentally a journalist in literature. But he was a journalist, not a reporter. His genius lay in his power to select, interpret, and comment, not in an ability to accumulate details. In *Immaturity* Shaw had accumulated more than enough detail about the lower middle-class existence of the clerk Smith and of his landladies, but because of his failure to draw any interesting conclusions from the details, the novel is merely wearying. There are powerful naturalistic passages in *The Irrational Knot*, particularly the descriptions of Susanna's alcoholism. Shaw himself comments that in writing the novel he frequently grew tired of the "sordid realism" of his hero.

In the naturalistic novel Shaw could not have succeeded. His own conception of the novelist's function makes that clear: "The business of a novelist is largely to provide working models of improved types of humanity . . ." By his third novel he had abandoned any attempt at naturalism. In his plays he would achieve realism in presenting characters whose minds and lives are shaped by their occupations and their class; but the shaping is revealed by the speeches and actions of the characters, not by the inferior "realism" of the naturalistic writer—the piling up of details about environment.

Whether Shaw could have become a successful novelist is, of course, an academic question; and whatever appraisal one makes of Shaw's novels as novels, their chief significance is that they provide a valuable means of studying Shaw as a young man and as a developing writer. The novels prove that Shaw was quite accurate in his judgment that in later years he added more to his handling of his material than to the material itself; a great many of the ideas of Shaw's later plays and prefaces appear in the novels.

There are, for example, the ideas about love and marriage. Trefusis explains to a friend in *An Unsocial Socialist* his proposal of marriage to Agatha Wylie:

Although my first marriage was a silly love match and a failure, I have always admitted to myself that I should marry again. A bachelor is a man who shirks responsibilities and duties; I seek them . . . Then came the usual difficulty about the lady. I did not want a helpmeet; I can help myself. Nor did I expect to be loved devotedly, for the race has not yet evolved a man lovable on thorough acquaintance; even my self-love is neither thorough nor constant. I wanted a genial partner for domestic business, and Agatha struck me quite suddenly as being the nearest approach to what I desired that I was likely to find in the marriage market . . . I admire Agatha's courage and capability and believe I shall be able to make her like me, and that the attachment so begun may turn into as close a union as is either healthy or necessary between two separate individuals.

There are in the novels the Shavian ideas about the raising of children, expressed by Shaw with as much confidence when he was unmarried as when, in writing the plays, he was married and childless. A wife in *Immaturity* explains why she and her husband Cyril spoil their two children:

Cyril was a spoiled child, and is so still, in some ways. I was a spoiled child too: at least my father never crossed me in anything. If Henry turns out as well as Cyril I shall be very satisfied with him; so I am not afraid to spoil him a little. Cyril spoils Mattie on the same principle . . . They are both, in their different ways, very precocious, very bold, and prodigiously selfish, as all healthy children of their age ought to be; but they are much funnier and better able to shift for themselves than if they were kept

down. In the end they are most likely less troublesome as well. I hate to see children, or indeed anybody, *afraid*.

There are the Shavian ideas about Christianity and the church. Conolly, explaining his religious opinions to the girl he wishes to marry in *The Irrational Knot*, writes to her:

I should never interfere in any way with your liberty as far as your actions concerned yourself only. But, frankly, I should not permit my wife to teach my children to know Christianity in any other way than that in which an educated Englishman knows Buddhism The Church has made itself the natural enemy of the theatre; and I was brought up in the theatre until I became a poor workman earning wages, when I found the Church always taking part against me and my comrades with the rich who did no work.

Trefusis remarks in *An Unsocial Socialist*, "With my egotism, my charlatanry, my tongue and my habit of having my own way, I am fit for no calling but that of saviour of mankind."

There is the Shavian scorn of the conspiracies among professional men. Of a medical specialist in *An Unsocial Socialist* who has failed to prevent the death of Trefusis' first wife, Shaw writes:

He believed that the general practitioner who attended the family, and had called him in when the case grew serious, had handled Henrietta unskilfully, but professional etiquette bound him so strongly that, sooner than betray his colleague's inefficiency, he would have allowed him to decimate London.

There is, of course, the Shavian socialism. It is a socialism which objects to the failure of our artificial inequality to correspond to the natural inequality of man; equality of income would give natural inequalities full freedom of expression. It is a socialism with a puritan reverence for work. Trefusis, son of a Manchester capitalist, defines his life's purpose:

I am helping to liberate those Manchester laborers who were my father's slaves. To bring that about, their fellow slaves all over the world must unite in a vast international association of men pledged to share the world's work justly; to share the produce of the work justly; to yield not a farthing—charity apart—to any full-grown and able-bodied idler or malingerer, and to treat as vermin in the commonwealth persons attempting to get more than their share of wealth or give less than their share of work.

It is a socialism that has no illusions about the working class. Trefusis explains what happened to one of his workers' associations, to which he contributed £4500, the workers £22: "The British workmen showed their sense of my efforts to emancipate them by accusing me of making a good thing out of the Association for my

own pocket, and by mobbing and stoning me twice. I now help them only when they show some disposition to help themselves. I occupy myself partly in . . . attacking my own class"

There is in the novels, finally, the Shavian admiration of the efficient organizer. Trefusis, whose life is dedicated to the overthrow of the society in which his entrepreneur father was so successful, can nevertheless say of his father:

He was the man with power to buy, to build, to choose, to endow, to sit on committees and adjudicate upon designs, to make his own terms for placing anything on a sound business footing The landlord could do nothing with his acres except let them to him; the capitalist's hoard rotted and dwindled until it was lent to him; the worker's muscles and brain were impotent until sold to him Industrial kingship, the only real kingship of our century, was his by divine right of his turn for business.

Not only do the novels contain many of the ideas of the later plays; they contain suggestions for many of the characters: Undershaft of *Major Barbara* is foreshadowed by Conolly of *The Irrational Knot* and by Trefusis' father in *An Unsocial Socialist*; Candida and the many other practical managing Shaw heroines by Harriet Russell of *Immaturity*, Eleanor McQuinch of *The Irrational Knot*, Lydia Carew of *Cashel Byron's Profession*; Dubedat of *The Doctor's Dilemma* by Owen Jack of *Love Among the Artists*.

Provocative ideas and interesting characters did not make Shaw's novels successful; the same ideas and similar characters contribute to the success of his plays. It is usually assumed that the important difference between Shaw, the novelist of the early 'eighties, and Shaw, the dramatist of the 'nineties, was that the latter had become a Socialist. Much is made of his own statement that after reading Marx's *Das Kapital* he "became a man with some business in the world". Dr. Bissell, for example, in his valuable essay on Shaw's novels, argues that the two novels written by Shaw after his reading of Marx—*Cashel Byron's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist*—are greatly superior to the three earlier novels. Shaw did not read Marx, however, until after the writing of *Cashel Byron's Profession*, in which there is no mention of socialism, and *An Unsocial Socialist* is scarcely a novel at all. Dr. Bissell writes that "Shaw found in *Das Kapital* what Butler, twenty-five years before, had found in *The Origin of Species*—a new and exhilarating explanation of the mystery of experience, and a wealth of fascinating ideas that provided both the inspiration and the materials for literary expression."¹

1. C. T. Bissell, "The Novels of George Bernard Shaw," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. XVII (October, 1947), p. 51.

The important point is that Shaw does not say that Marx and socialism made a writer of him; he does say they made a man of him. They did so, I think, by emancipating him from Britain's class structure and from worry about it. What blights so many Victorian and modern English novels is the obsession with class: the endless attempts to define the meaning of the term "gentleman"; the tedious chronicling of the attempts of heroes and heroines to rise from one class to another. Shaw's novels are slightly blighted. Robert Smith of *Immaturity* rises from office clerk to M.P.'s secretary; Conolly of *The Irrational Knot* from worker to company director; Cashel Byron, snubbed as a prizefighter, is accepted when it is belatedly discovered that his ancestry is quite distinguished. Arguments about who is and who is not a gentleman crop up in almost every chapter.

All this clearly reflects Shaw's uncertainty about his own position in society. Like Smith, he had been an office clerk; like the inventor Conolly and the composer Owen Jack and the prizefighter Cashel Byron, he felt himself superior to aristocratic and plutocratic society, but was not certain of his superiority. He describes himself in this period as follows:

When I had to come out of the realm of imagination into that of actuality I was still uncomfortable. I was outside society, outside politics, outside sport, outside the Church. If the term had been invented then I should have been called The Complete Outsider. But the epithet would have been appropriate only within the limits of British barbarism. The moment music, painting, literature, or science came into question the positions were reversed: it was I who was the Insider.

Marx, in revealing the economic origins of Britain's class structure, ended forever Shaw's concern about class, about rising in class, about gentility: "I was a born Communist—without knowing it; and I never got on easy terms with plutocracy and snobbery until I took to the study of economics, beginning with Henry George and Karl Marx." Such a born Communist as himself, Shaw says, when he is led to "investigate the economic structure of our society—now knows where he is, and where the society which has so intimidated him is. He is cured of his *mauvaise honte*, . . ."

Once he had clearly seen the economic basis of the social, political, and artistic life of Britain, Shaw was in a position to understand the insistence by his mentor, Samuel Butler, on the value of money and on the direct relationship between money and morality. Shaw attributed the failure of his novels in part to the fact that "as I had no money, I had to blind myself to its enormous importance, with the result that I missed the point of view, and with it the whole moral basis, of the class [the aristocracy] which rightly values money, and plenty of it, as the first condition of a

bearable life". An older Shaw, emancipated by Marx and Butler, could write: "Money is indeed the most important thing in the world; and all sound and successful personal and national morality should have this fact for its basis. Every teacher or twaddler who denies it or suppresses it, is an enemy of life."

Marx's important gift to Shaw, then, was not economic theory, since Shaw spent several years refuting Marxian economics, and particularly the concept of surplus value, basing his own economic theory on the work of the non-socialist economists Jevons and Wicksteed. It was not an interpretation of history, since Shaw could never have accepted a vision of the future as an inevitable triumph of the working class: Shaw's insistence that great ideas and great men have power to shape historical change places him much closer to Carlyle than to Marx. Marx's gift to Shaw was a healthy and intelligent respect for Mammon. Armed with it he could abandon the writing of novels, by which he could not make money, for music and painting and drama criticism and the writing of plays, by which he could. With money *and* talent he gained for himself after 1885 a bearable life in the capitalist world; he had a position in society and confidence in himself: he "became a man"

He became a man "with some business in the world": the business of overthrowing the capitalist world. Not by vain talk, in the manner of Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold and their twentieth-century descendants, about higher spiritual values and the necessity of spiritual reform in society; but by insisting on the provision of decent material conditions of life equally to all men in order that their spirits might grow freely. It is this hard-headed mammonism which marks Shaw as a revolutionary when many of his contemporaries are mere reformers.

One by-product of Marx's gift of mammonism to Shaw was Shaw's new conception of the place of art and the artist in society. The first novels are filled with pre-Raphaelite people who see art as a refuge from the harsh realities of industrial Britain. The artist-hero of *Immaturity*, Cyril Scott, exclaims: "I am not a hanger-on to society. I have no occasion to court it. I am an artist; and society can't do without me." But Trefusis, in *An Unsocial Socialist*, thunders:

A day's work is a day's work, neither more nor less, and the man who does it needs a day's sustenance, a night's repose, and due leisure, whether he be a painter or a ploughman. . . Artists are the high priests of the modern Moloch. Nine out of ten of them are diseased creatures, just sane enough to trade on their own neuroses. The only quality of theirs which extorts my respect is a certain sublime selfishness which makes them willing to starve and let their families starve sooner than do any work they don't like.

Thus emancipated from romanticism about art, Shaw could dedicate his own artistic talent to teaching, to furthering the creation of a world in which, as Trefusis

says, every artist will be an amateur. Shaw became a mature man with some business in the world, and ceased to be a merely clever young man seeking fame in the literary world through the writing of novels. As he remarks, "Marx made me a Socialist and saved me from becoming a literary man."

A further by-product of Shaw's realization, with the aid of Marx and Butler, of the importance of money and of the occupations by which men earn money has been noted by the poet Auden. He writes that "no playwright has ever equalled Shaw in his insight into the effect of occupation upon character—he is the only writer who has read Karl Marx with real profit". It is because of this insight into the effects of occupation upon character, effects which he can reveal by speech and action, that Shaw in his plays need not waste his time with the naturalistic writer's piling up of details about environment or the playwright of manners' trifling with surface details. He is free to deal with ideas. Here, I think, is the explanation of Shaw's remark, "for every play I have written I have made hundreds of speeches and published big books on Fabian Socialism. There is behind my plays a thought-out sociology", a remark which might lead to Dr. Bissell's thesis that Marxism explains the difference between Shaw the novelist and Shaw the playwright. But the sociology is behind the plays; the study of economics served Shaw, as he said, as the study of anatomy served Michelangelo. It gave him an insight into the structure of society and of individual character. With that insight he was able to give point and consistency to his attacks on society, attacks which in his early novels had been, like the attacks of Oscar Wilde, clever but aimless.

Now, while Marx emancipated Shaw from class consciousness and from romantic notions about the role of the artist in society, and gave him a frame of reference, he did not make him a successful writer. The reading of economic theory rarely produces great writers. Shaw's final novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*, is proof enough that a knowledge of economics and socialism will not guarantee artistic success.

I quoted Shaw earlier to the effect that in his plays he added little to the material already established in his novels, but that he did add greatly to his "power of handling, illustrating, and addressing" his material. I think the key to the difference in artistic skill between Shaw the novelist and Shaw the playwright is biology, not economics. Shaw describes himself as an "artist-biologist".

In the passage in which Shaw speaks of being, as a young novelist, outside politics and society but inside music, painting, literature, and science, he goes on:

I had the intellectual habit; and my natural combination of critical faculty with literary resource needed only a clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligible theory:

in short, a religion, to set it in triumphant operation. It was the lack of this last qualification that lamed me in those early days. . . .

The religion, the intelligible theory, which gave Shaw a clear comprehension of life (as Marxism had given him a comprehension of the structure of nineteenth-century society) was Creative Evolution. Creative Evolution first appeared in a Shaw play in *Man and Superman* in 1903; it is known that Shaw reviewed Samuel Butler's *Luck or Cunning?* in 1887, but apart from that fact it is difficult to date his first acquaintanceship with the doctrines of Creative Evolution. It is very unlikely that he was familiar with those doctrines in his novel-writing days, when he was filled with the theories of Tyndall and Huxley.

Shaw's concept of Creative Evolution meant belief in a Life Force which is attempting an evolution toward a better world—that is, a world of free, rational, conscious beings; a Life Force which uses individuals of genius—persons who see farther and probe deeper than other people and who have “a different set of ethical valuations from theirs”—as its instruments to fight for change, and pits them against the necessary guardians of authority, order, and stability in a continuing conflict, as a result of which conflict, alone, does human society evolve.

Thus, while Shaw received from Marx a healthy mammonism which saved him from becoming just another spiritual reformer, he received from Samuel Butler a religion which saved him from the sterility of Marx's nineteenth-century materialism and mechanism: from the thesis that the minds of men are conditioned largely by economic factors; from the thesis that the class struggle and the resulting triumph of the working class are inevitable. Shaw was aware of the power of ideas and ideals in the achievement of human progress, and aware also that that progress was not inevitable: aware that the forces of authority and order could on occasion so effectively persecute persons of genius, so repress the evolutionary forces within them, as to produce stagnation in human society; aware also that the Life Force might despair entirely of Man as an instrument of evolution. Creative Evolution was not, for Shaw, an automatic and inevitable process which would end with the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it was an unending process which welcomed and demanded continuing conflict, which posed for society the exhilarating challenge of simultaneously defending the liberty guarded by its institutions of order and stability and tolerating attacks on those institutions by persons of genius demanding greater liberty—the Life Force's instruments of change.

While Shaw was discovering a religion in Creative Evolution in the 'nineties, he was discovering through his drama criticism a church:

The theatre is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages and much more important than the Church in London now. It is a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of conduct, an armoury against despair and dullness, and a temple of the Ascent of Man.

If Creative Evolution saved Shaw from nineteenth-century and Marxian materialism and mechanism, it saved him too from peevish Marxian snarling at the bourgeois, the upholders of authority and order. Shaw could see the bourgeois as one very necessary side of the conflict out of which evolution proceeds. He speaks in the Preface to *Saint Joan* of the purpose of the bourgeois: to keep "alive and prosperous and respectable and safe and happy in the middle station of life"; and of the "force at work which uses individuals for purposes far transcending" those of the bourgeois—"the driving force that is behind evolution". He later quotes with approval the comment of a Catholic priest on *Saint Joan*:

"In your play I see the dramatic presentation of the conflict of the Regal, Sacerdotal, and Prophetic powers, in which Joan was crushed. To me it is not the victory of any one of them over the others that will bring peace and the Reign of Saints in the Kingdom of God, but their fruitful interaction in a costly but noble state of tension."

Shaw goes on, "We must accept the tension, and maintain it nobly without letting ourselves be tempted to relieve it by burning the thread".

In this noble acceptance of tension and conflict as the necessary and welcome catalysts of change lies the key, it seems to me, to Shaw's artistic maturing. In the novels and, to a lesser extent, in the music and drama criticism which succeeded the novels, and in the plays of his final years, Shaw did burn the thread of tension. The characters who speak for him in the novels about love and marriage, art and socialism, are permitted to do so at length, and their arguments are either not answered at all or are answered by obvious fools. There is no real conflict of ideas or of personalities; there is little room for excitement, suspense, or surprise. What a vast difference in the plays of the period 1900-1930! Here Shaw demonstrates that a conflict of ideas between able opponents is much more exciting than the easy triumph of an author's mouthpiece over fools. The plays force us to think through a problem; the novels leave us content to oppose our prejudices to Shaw's.

Shaw's supreme demonstration of the suspense that can be generated by a conflict between forces representing opposed ideas is the trial scene of *Saint Joan*: audiences who know the fate of Joan as they enter the theatre are made to forget that knowledge, and hope that Joan will be acquitted by the court. The measure of Shaw's maturity as an artist is that, while the long speeches of Trefusis in favour of Shaw's socialism in *An Unsocial Socialist* bore us, the long speech by the Inquisitor

in *Saint Joan* arguing the case against such heretics as Joan—and Shaw—grips us. As Barzun has pointed out, “the scenes of pure talk are triumphs of dramatic characterization: everybody . . . is in the right”. This, I think, is the answer to the frequent criticism that all Shaw’s characters are mouthpieces of Shaw. A great many are not; they may talk like Shaw—with logic and clarity and precision—because Shaw saw it as part of his business to give the devil his due. As he explains, “my sort of play would be impossible unless I endowed my characters with powers of self-consciousness and self-expression which they would not possess in real life”.

What Shaw’s detractors mean to argue, I think, is not that Shaw’s characters are mouthpieces for Shaw, but that, because they possess powers of self-consciousness and self-expression they lack complexity, the complexity we admire in the great figures of Shakespeare’s plays. But Shakespeare’s heroes through a conflict of thought and passion grow into self-consciousness; Shaw’s characters, on the other hand, already possess self-consciousness, and the conflict is a conflict of passionately held ideas alone, not within individuals but between individuals: the play is complex, though the characters are not.