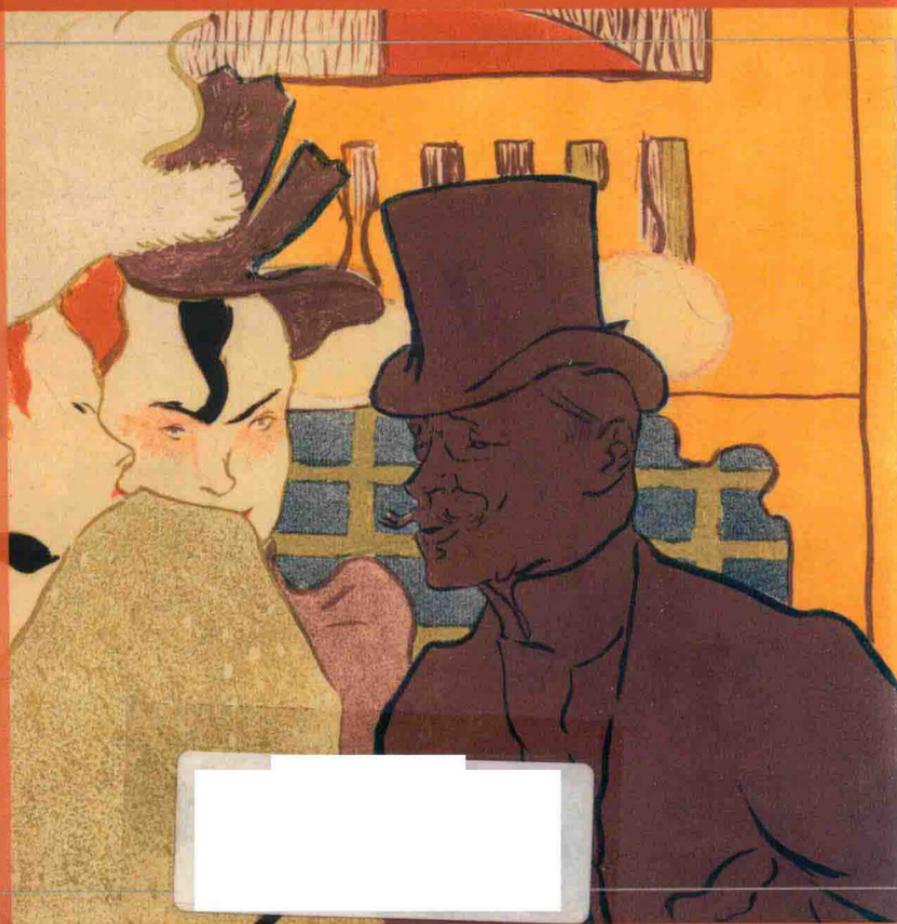


MAN AND SUPERMAN
and THREE OTHER PLAYS
George Bernard Shaw



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Introduction and Notes by John A. Bertolini

*Man and Superman and
Three Other Plays*

GEORGE BERNARD
SHAW

*With an Introduction and Notes
by JOHN A. BERTOLINI*

George Stade

Consulting Editorial Director



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FROM THE PAGES OF
MAN AND SUPERMAN AND
THREE OTHER PLAYS

“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can’t find them, make them.”

(*Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, page 62)

“What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man’s fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?—as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing!”

(*Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, page 65)

“Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are any less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about?”

(*Candida*, page 144)

“God has given us a world that nothing but our own folly keeps from being a paradise.”

(*Candida*, page 145)

“All the love in the world is longing to speak; only it dare not, because it is shy, shy, shy. That is the world’s tragedy.”

(*Candida*, page 150)

“Man can climb to the highest summits; but he cannot dwell there long.”

(*Candida*, page 176)

“I’m only a beer teetotaller, not a champagne teetotaller. I don’t like beer.”

(*Candida*, page 182)

“The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that’s the essence of inhumanity.”

(*The Devil’s Disciple*, page 244)

My conscience is the genuine pulpit article: it annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable; and I insist on making them think in order to bring them to conviction of sin.

(Shaw's Epistle Dedicatory to *Man and Superman*, page 302)

"We live in an atmosphere of shame. We are ashamed of everything that is real about us; ashamed of ourselves, of our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skins. Good Lord, my dear Ramsden, we are ashamed to walk, ashamed to ride in an omnibus, ashamed to hire a hansom instead of keeping a carriage, ashamed of keeping one horse instead of two and a groom-gardener instead of a coachman and footman. The more things a man is ashamed of, the more respectable he is."

(*Man and Superman*, page 345)

"I had become a new person; and those who knew the old person laughed at me. The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor: he took my measure anew every time he saw me, whilst all the rest went on with their old measurements and expected them to fit me."

(*Man and Superman*, page 368)

"In the arts of life man invents nothing; but in the arts of death he outdoes Nature herself, and produces by chemistry and machinery all the slaughter of plague, pestilence and famine."

(*Man and Superman*, page 438)

"It is not death that matters, but the fear of death. It is not killing and dying that degrades us, but base living, and accepting the wages and profits of degradation. Better ten dead men than one live slave or his master."

(*Man and Superman*, page 442)

"Marriage is a mantrap baited with simulated accomplishments and delusive idealizations."

(*Man and Superman*, page 453)

"An epoch is but a swing of the pendulum; and each generation thinks the world is progressing because it is always moving."

(*Man and Superman*, page 464)

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Dramatist, critic, and social reformer George Bernard Shaw was born on July 26, 1856, into a poor yet genteel Dublin household. His diffident and impractical father was an alcoholic disdained by his mother, a professional singer who ingrained in her only son a love of music, art, and literature. Just shy of his seventeenth birthday, Shaw joined his mother and two sisters in London, where they had settled three years earlier.

There he struggled—and failed—to support himself by writing. He first wrote a string of novels, beginning with the semi-autobiographical *Immaturity*, completed in 1879. Though some of his novels were serialized, none met with great success, and Shaw decided to abandon the form in favor of drama. While he struggled artistically, he flourished politically; for some years his greater fame was as a political activist and pamphleteer. A stammering, shy young man, Shaw nevertheless joined in the radical politics of his day. In the late 1880s he became a leading member of the fledgling Fabian Society, a group dedicated to progressive politics, and authored numerous pamphlets on a range of social and political issues. He often mounted a soapbox in Hyde Park and there developed the enthralling oratory style that pervades his dramatic writing.

In the 1890s, deeply influenced by the dramatic writings of Henrik Ibsen, Shaw spurned the conventions of the stage in “unpleasant” plays, such as *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, and in “pleasant” ones like *Arms and the Man* and *Candida*. His drama shifted attention from romantic travails to the great web of society, with its hypocrisies and other ills. The burden of writing seriously strained Shaw’s health; he suffered

from chronic migraine headaches. Shaw married fellow Fabian and Irish heiress Charlotte Payne-Townshend.

By the turn of the century, Shaw had matured as a dramatist with the historical drama *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and his masterpieces *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara*. In all, he wrote more than fifty plays, including his anti-war *Heartbreak House* and the polemical *Saint Joan*, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Equally prolific in his writings about music and theater, Shaw was so popular that he signed his critical pieces with simply the initials GBS. (He disliked his first name, George, and never used it except for the initial.) He remained in the public eye throughout his final years, writing controversial plays until his death. George Bernard Shaw died at his country home on November 2, 1950.

THE WORLD OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND HIS PLAYS

- 1856 George Bernard Shaw is born on July 26, at 33 Upper Synge Street in Dublin, to George Carr Shaw and Lucinda Elizabeth Gurly Shaw.
- 1865 George John Vandeleur Lee, Mrs. Shaw's singing instructor, moves into the Shaw household. Known as Vandeleur Lee, he has a reputation as an unscrupulous character.
- 1869 Embarrassed by controversy and gossip related to his mother's relationship with Vandeleur Lee, young "Sonny," as Shaw was called by his family, leaves school.
- 1871 He begins work in a Dublin land agent's office.
- 1873 Shaw's mother, now a professional singer, follows Vandeleur Lee to London, where they establish a household that includes Shaw's sisters, Elinor Agnes and Lucille Frances (Lucy). Shaw's mother tries to earn a living performing and teaching Vandeleur Lee's singing method.
- 1876 Elinor Agnes dies on March 27. Shaw joins his mother, his sister Lucy, and Vandeleur Lee in London. Although he tries to support himself as a writer, for the next five years Shaw remains financially dependent on his mother.
- 1877 Shaw ghostwrites music reviews that appear under Vandeleur Lee's byline in his column for the *Hornet*, a London newspaper. This first professional writing "job" lasts until the editor discovers the subterfuge.
- 1879 Shaw completes and serializes his first novel, *Immaturity*. He works for the Edison Telephone Company and later will

- record his experience in his second novel, *The Irrational Knot*. Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* premieres.
- 1880 Shaw completes *The Irrational Knot*.
- 1881 He becomes a vegetarian in the hope that the change in his diet will relieve his migraine headaches. He completes *Love Among Artists*. *The Irrational Knot* is serialized in *Our Corner*, a monthly periodical.
- 1882 Shaw hears Henry George's lecture on land nationalization, which inspires some of his socialist ideas. He attends meetings of the Social Democratic Federation and is introduced to the works of Karl Marx.
- 1883 The Fabian Society—a middle-class socialist debating group advocating progressive, nonviolent reform rather than the revolution supported by the Social Democratic Federation—is founded in London. Shaw completes the novel *Cashel Byron's Profession*, drawing on his experience as an amateur boxer. He writes his final novel, *An Unsocial Socialist*.
- 1884 Shaw joins the fledgling Fabian Society; he contributes to many of its pamphlets, including *The Fabian Manifesto* (1884), *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (1893), and *Socialism for Millionaires* (1901), and begins speaking publicly around London on social and political issues. *An Unsocial Socialist* is serialized in the periodical *Today*.
- 1885 The author's father, a longtime alcoholic, dies; neither his estranged wife nor his children attend his funeral. Shaw himself never drinks or smokes. He begins writing criticism of music, art, and literature for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Dramatic Review*, and *Our Corner*. *Cashel Byron's Profession* is serialized in the periodical *Today*.
- 1886 Shaw begins writing art and music criticism for the *World*. *Cashel Byron's Profession* is published.
- 1887 Swedish dramatist and writer August Strindberg's play *The Father* is performed. The Social Democratic Federation's planned march on Trafalgar Square ends in bloodshed as po-

- lice suppress the protesters; Shaw is a speaker at the event. His novel *An Unsocial Socialist* is published in book form.
- 1888 Shaw begins writing music criticism in the *Star* under the pen name Corno di Bassetto ("basset horn," perhaps a reference to the pitch of his voice).
- 1889 He edits the volume *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, to which he contributes "The Economic Basis of Socialism" and "The Transition to Social Democracy."
- 1890 Ibsen completes *Hedda Gabler*.
- 1891 Ibsen's *Ghosts* is performed in London. Shaw publishes *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, a polemical pamphlet that celebrates Ibsen as a rebel for leftist causes.
- 1892 Sidney Webb, a founder and close associate of Shaw, is elected to the London City Council along with five other Fabian Society members. *Widowers' Houses*, Shaw's first "unpleasant" play, is performed on the London stage.
- 1893 Shaw writes *The Philanderer* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, his two other "unpleasant" plays. The latter is refused a license by the royal censor because its subject is prostitution; as a result, the play is not performed until 1902. *Widowers' Houses* is published.
- 1894 Seeking a wider audience, Shaw begins a series of "pleasant" plays with *Arms and the Man*, produced this year, and *Candida*, a successful play about marriage greatly influenced by Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.
- 1895 Shaw writes another "pleasant" play, *The Man of Destiny*, a one-act about Napoleon, and drama criticism for the *Saturday Review*.
- 1896 Shaw completes the fourth "pleasant" play, *You Never Can Tell*. He meets Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a wealthy Irish heiress and fellow Fabian. The Nobel Prizes are established for physics, medicine, chemistry, peace, and literature.
- 1897 *Candida* is produced. *The Devil's Disciple*, a drama set during the American Revolution, is successfully staged in New York.

- Shaw is elected as councilor for the borough of St. Pancras, London; he will serve in this position until 1903.
- 1898 Shaw writes *Caesar and Cleopatra* and publishes *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *The Perfect Wagnerite*. His first anthology of plays, *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, is published. He falls ill and, believing his illness fatal, marries his friend and nurse Charlotte Payne-Townshend; his wife's fortune makes Shaw wealthy.
- 1899 *You Never Can Tell* premieres. Shaw writes *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*.
- 1900 The Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party, and the Social Democratic Federation join forces to form the Labour Representation Party, which is politically allied to the trade union movement. The party wins two seats in the House of Commons. *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* is produced. *Three Plays for Puritans* collects *The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*.
- 1901 Strindberg's *Dance of Death* is completed. The Social Revolutionary Party, instrumental in the Bolshevik Revolution, is formed in Russia. Shaw writes about the eternal obstacles in male-female relations in his epic *Man and Superman*, which he subtitles "A Comedy and a Philosophy." He also publishes *The Devil's Disciple* and sees *Caesar and Cleopatra* produced for the first time.
- 1902 A private production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is staged at the New Lyric Theatre in London.
- 1903 Shaw publishes *Man and Superman*. *The Admirable Bashville* is produced.
- 1904 *John Bull's Other Island* premieres in London.
- 1905 Shaw writes the play *Major Barbara*, through which he attempts to communicate many of his moral and economic theories, including the need for a more fair distribution of wealth. It is produced this year, as is *Man and Superman*. In New York City, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is publicly staged for the first time. Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* is published

- posthumously. The Sinn Fein party, dedicated to Irish independence, is founded in Dublin.
- 1906 The Labour Representation Party wins twenty-nine seats and shortens its name to the Labour Party. Henrik Ibsen dies. Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*, a satire on the medical profession, is produced.
- 1909 Shaw writes *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* and the one-act farce *Press Cuttings*, both banned by the royal censor.
- 1910 Shaw writes *Misalliance*, which he compares to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.
- 1912 He publishes *Misalliance*, and his satire *Androcles and the Lion* is staged for the first time.
- 1913 A German language version of *Pygmalion*, another satire Shaw wrote in 1912, premieres in Vienna.
- 1914 With World War I imminent, Shaw publishes a polemical antiwar tract, *Common Sense About the War*, which provokes a popular backlash and public denouncement. *Pygmalion* is produced for the first time in English.
- 1917 Dejected over the war, Shaw writes *Heartbreak House*.
- 1919 *Heartbreak House* is published in New York.
- 1920 The canonization of Joan of Arc gives Shaw the idea for a new play. *Heartbreak House* is produced in New York.
- 1922 Shaw publishes five linked plays begun during the war under the title *Back to Methuselah*, a dramatic work that begins in the Garden of Eden and ends in the year A.D. 31,920.
- 1923 Shaw writes *Saint Joan*, which is produced and hailed as a masterpiece.
- 1924 *Saint Joan* is published.
- 1925 Shaw is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for *Saint Joan*. He donates the prize money to fund an English translation of the works of August Strindberg.
- 1928 Shaw publishes his nonfiction *The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* and writes *The Apple Cart*, a dramatic comedy set in the future.

- 1929 *The Apple Cart* is produced.
- 1931 Shaw visits Russia, where he meets Josef Stalin and Maxim Gorky. He completes the play *Too True to Be Good*, which explores how war can undermine established morals.
- 1932 *Too True to Be Good* is staged for the first time.
- 1933 An international celebrity, Shaw makes his first trip to America. *On the Rocks* and *Village Wooing* are produced.
- 1934 Shaw writes the plays *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*, *The Six of Calais*, and the first draft of *The Millionairess* during a cruise to New Zealand. *Simpleton* is produced this year.
- 1938 *Geneva*, a play that imagines a successful League of Nations, premieres.
- 1939 Shaw writes *Good King Charles's Golden Days*, which is produced this year. He wins an Academy Award for the screenplay for *Pygmalion*, over which he exercised tight control.
- 1943 His wife, Charlotte, dies after a long illness.
- 1947 Shaw completes the play *The Buoyant Billions*.
- 1948 *The Buoyant Billions* is produced in Zurich.
- 1949 Shaw's puppet play, *Shakes Versus Shav*, is produced.
- 1950 George Bernard Shaw dies on November 2 from complications related to a fall from a ladder. He bequeaths funds for a competition to create a new English alphabet based on phonetics rather than Roman letters. The competition, won in 1958 by Kingsley Read, results in the Shavian alphabet.

INTRODUCTION

THE HIDDEN SHAW

Bernard Shaw's reputation as a writer was controversial in the last decade of the nineteenth century and remains controversial in the first decade of the twenty-first. No writer, however, would want to carry the current state of Shaw's literary reputation. It is, at least for the moment, at as low an ebb as Poin's linen shirts were according to Prince Hal. Shaw's plays were at one time revived regularly in London and New York, but they have now become rarities. Worse, star-actors do not push to play the lead roles. Hollywood types may take a break from receiving multimillion-dollar salaries for playing whatever the public wants to see in order to rededicate themselves to the Art of the Theater by appearing comparatively gratis in an O'Neill or Chekhov revival, but they seem uninterested in Shaw. Whether their shyness with Shaw proceeds from an inability to speak the sculpted rhetoric of his longer sentences or from discomfort with the politeness of his language, the effect is the same: They do not play him and he does not get played. Even the wonderful Shaw Festival in Canada has cut the number of Shaw plays it produces each season from three or four to two. There has not been a film of a Shaw play since *Great Catherine* in 1970. Nor has American television shown a Shaw play since the Rex Harrison *Heartbreak House* (1986), preceded by the Peter O'Toole *Pygmalion* (1983).

In academe, the situation is bleaker still. Most of the commonly used anthologies of drama that once automatically included Shaw in the modern canon have dropped him (while retaining Ibsen) in order to include multicultural contemporary plays, or have replaced Shaw

with Oscar Wilde, as if the two were interchangeable. Fewer colleges offer seminars in Shaw; indeed, some English departments do not even bother to include his plays in their drama courses—that is, when they deign to teach dramatic literature besides Shakespeare at all. Yet he seems still to be read, if the major bookstore chains are any indication, for on the ever-dwindling number of shelves they devote to plays other than those by Shakespeare, Shaw continues to jostle in among the twenty-or-so other playwrights for a respectable number of inches of shelf-space.

The decline in Shaw's literary reputation and theatrical popularity proceeds from varied causes, but there are three major ones. Contemporary audiences and readers are used to explicit treatments of sexuality, so that Shaw's reticence in this regard makes him seem outdated, suitable only for the graying crowd. Not that Shaw's plays do not quake with sexual subtext and symbolism—they do—but nothing is explicit, nothing denoted, and all the sex receives ferocious comic treatment instead of the usual transgressive representation in so much contemporary drama. The worldwide failure of communism in the late 1980s, and the revelations of the murderous and massive abuses of human rights it produced, makes Shaw's life-long devotion to socialism—and especially his naive acceptance of the rosy picture of itself the Soviet Union presented to him during his trip to Russia with Lady Astor in 1934—seem somehow corrupt, or at least stupendously idiotic. But Shaw was not the first, nor will he be the last writer with a huge public profile to look at political situations and see more what he wants to see than what is actually there.

The third cause for the decline in Shaw's popularity is the explicitness of his stage directions. In our era, when the director and the production concept—meaning the director's and actors' "creative" reinterpretation of the play's meaning to fit their view of the world, morality, and politics, as opposed to the author's views—have dominion, Shaw's elaborate stage directions are inhibiting. Shaw believed that directors and actors who wanted to convey ideas and views that differed from the author's should feel perfectly welcome

to write their own plays, but not to undermine his carefully wrought way of dramatizing his ideas: There is a difference between finding new things in the text and putting them there yourself with your own hands. In truth, though, anyone who has rehearsed and performed Shaw's plays knows well the practical value of his stage directions, based as they usually were on Shaw's own experience of directing the first performances of the plays, working out the stage business, seeing what needed to be made clear to an audience. His stage directions are rather like a film director's use of the camera to tell the story. Shaw uses the stage and everything on it, including the actors' bodies, faces, movements, and clothing, to tell his story. The adverbial indications as to how lines should be delivered ("aggressively," "gallantly") are not as ubiquitous as they seem; they mainly aid readers who are not actors themselves, but they also rescue actors from the danger of misinterpretation.

Theatrical fashions change; new generations of actors appear; discredited ideas gain currency again—and Shaw too may yet rise from his present supine condition. He certainly should because he is worth reading and seeing and hearing. Arthur Miller, who in his twenties read a lot of Shaw, was once asked what attracted him to the playwright. Miller replied: "Laughs. The irony of his plays. Terrific style and stylishness. And his ability to handle ideas—which I think is unapproachable" (*Conversations with Arthur Miller*, 1987, edited by Matthew C. Roudane, p. 274). One can see why a playwright like Miller, who by his own confession could write pathos easily, would admire precisely these qualities of Shaw's writing for the theater: humor, comic irony, stylishness, and the interplay of ideas.

Along with the best comic playwrights, Shaw has a gift for stage humor. He is a master of the running gag, as in *Candida*, where Burgess successively finds every other character to be mad. Shaw can turn anything to wit, including gallows humor, as in *The Devil's Disciple*, in which General Burgoyne presides over Dick Dudgeon's trial for treason and their exchanges turn into a duel as to who can be more wittily urbane and "gentlemanly" about the execution of the

latter. The result is one of the most genuinely hilarious discussions of capital punishment.

Above all, Shaw has an uncanny instinct for how much discussion of ideas an audience can take before it needs comic relief. The debate on the purpose of Life in *Man and Superman* (in the third act, "Don Juan in Hell") shows that instinct working at its peak. The Commander, in the midst of refuting Don Juan's criticism of the Devil, takes the latter's name in vain, and then suddenly stops with the thought that he may have inadvertently offended the Devil. His sincere concern elicits from the Devil a most deferential exhibition of largesse in allowing the Commander to use his name whenever he needs it. The Devil, man of the world that he is, even turns the Commander's moment of embarrassment into an opportunity to display his devilish good manners by suggesting that he regards the use of his name "to secure additional emphasis" as "a high compliment to me." When people apply the term "high comedy" to Shaw, this is the sort of thing they mean, and they are quite right. But behind the "high comedy" lies the substantial implication that good manners can be used by the Devil as well as by anyone, perhaps even more cleverly, and for not such innocent ends.

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

Mrs. Warren's Profession was written in 1893, published in 1898, but not performed until 1902, and even then privately. Its first public production in New York in 1905 resulted in the actors' being arrested, for one of the play's two main protagonists was a prostitute and a procuress, and therefore in violation of stage censorship. It was Shaw's third play, his last play written after the pattern of Ibsen's plays, and his first masterpiece. The two plays that preceded it, *Widowers' Houses* (1892) and *The Philanderer* (1893), paid special homage to Ibsen: the former by imitating Ibsen's dramatic structure (one based on the gradual revelation of a hidden transgression from the past that has been poisoning the characters' present lives), the latter