

## Introduction to the Works of Bernard Shaw

Dr. Mohammed Jalal Outhman\*  
Bushra Al-Ali\*\*

(Accepted 17/8/2003)

### □ ABSTRACT □

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed immense events covering social, political, philosophical, and economic spheres. Scientific discoveries contradicted religious beliefs, and a lot of reformist movements and revolutionary theories were formulated. In such an eventful atmosphere, Bernard Shaw came to play his role as a sage of a social message.

After joining the Fabian Society, Shaw started to shape his own conceptions about reforming society, and about the art of a vital and provocative drama through which he could preach his ideas. His task as a dramatist was to uncover the reality of social injustice, religious misconception and political farce. Thus, his plays dealt with serious themes that hardly left any aspect of life untouched. He wrote plays about real human problems such as war, religious intolerance, revenge, middle-class morality, in addition to calling for a new religion of “Creative Evolution” motivated by the “Life Force” to pave the way for the coming of the “Superman”.

Finally, Shaw’s skilful handling of aestheticism and ambivalence in many of his plays was perfectly employed in order to produce very satisfying and interesting dramatic art.

---

\* Professor In English Department—Faculty Of Letters—Tishreen University—Lattakia—Syria.

\*\* Student Of Master Degree In English Department—Faculty Of Letters—Tishreen University—Lattakia—Syria.

## مدخل إلى أعمال برنارد شو

الدكتور محمد جلال عثمان

بشرى العلي \*\*

( قبل للنشر في 2003/8/17 )

### □ الملخص □

شهد القرن التاسع عشر أحداثاً هائلة شملت مجالات اجتماعية وسياسية وفلسفية واقتصادية. وقد تضاربت المكتشفات العلمية مع المعتقدات الدينية وتشكلت العديد من الحركات الإصلاحية والنظريات الثورية. جاء برنارد شو إلى هذا الجو المليء بالأحداث لكي يقوم بدوره كرسول للإصلاح الاجتماعي. بعد انضمامه إلى " المجتمع الفابي " بدأ شو يكون مفاهيمه حول إصلاح المجتمع وحول فن الدراما الحيوية والمحرضة والتي يستطيع من خلالها أن يبشر بأفكاره. كانت مهمته بوصفه مسرحياً تقوم على كشف واقع الظلم الاجتماعي والمفاهيم الدينية الخاطئة والخداع السياسي. لذا عالجت مسرحياته المواضيع الجادة التي لم تترك مظهراً من مظاهر الحياة إلا وتناولته.

كتب شو مسرحيات حول المشاكل الإنسانية كالحرب واللاتسامح الديني والانتقام وأخلاق الطبقة الوسطى. فضلاً عن ذلك دعا شو إلى الدين الجديد المسمى بـ " : التطور الخلاق " الذي تدفعه " قوة الحياة " من أجل تمهيد الطريق لقدوم " الإنسان المتفوق " .

وأخيراً فإن تناول شو الحاذق لعلم الجمال ومبدأ تضارب الأضداد في العديد من مسرحياته قد وظف بعناية فائقة من أجل الخروج بفن درامي مرضي وممتع في آن واحد.

---

\* أستاذ قسم اللغة الإنكليزية - كلية الآداب - جامعة تشرين - اللاذقية - سورية.  
\*\* طالبة ماجستير في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية - كلية الآداب - جامعة تشرين - اللاذقية - سورية.

To undertake the task of writing about George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) is, simply, to run the risk of entering a labyrinth called “the Shaw Phenomenon”. Shaw’s literary productivity expands over almost 70 years during which he has written plays, novels, critical essays, letters, correspondences and speeches that rarely left any aspect of life—political, social, religious, economical—untackled.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the number of studies written about Shaw extends over a period of time that reaches our present day—and certainly the future. Amid such a bulk of writings by and about Shaw, one expects to face some troubles while trying to introduce something new.

What makes the task even more difficult is that the attempts made by writers and critics to draw a full portrait that best reflects the true nature of Shaw have been hindered by the G. B. S. persona.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, one might encounter contradictory estimation concerning Shaw the dramatist, the thinker, the critic, the propagandist, the reformer and the philosopher.<sup>3</sup> However, the motivation to be one of those adventurers, who have tried to frame Shaw within the confines of a suitable label, will endure as long as Shaw’s plays are still read, and some of them are still performed all over the world.

The diversity of Shaw’s interests might be attributed, partially, to the age in which he was born, the Victorian (1837-1901), which witnessed very important events. It would be appropriate to make a quick review of the major events in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to fully understand the atmosphere, which has embraced and contributed to the development of Shaw’s character, until it has reached the status of world celebrity.

The last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed two important events: the fall of the Bastille in 1789, igniting the French Revolution, and the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in 1798, which was a key year for English Romanticism.<sup>4</sup> When the 19<sup>th</sup> century started, the French Revolution’s mottoes of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” were still in the air. Those principles became a platform for liberal and democratic reforms not merely in France, but in Europe.<sup>5</sup> In England, the effect of the Revolution on literary life were of great importance. Writers and poets were filled with enthusiasm and motivation for the war against established stagnant, even corrupt, institutions.

English thinkers and politicians were agitated, taking sides, preaching for and against the new violent movements, and a good deal of the prose . . . [was] concerned with such watchwords as Liberty, Anarchy, Justice.<sup>6</sup>

However, the Revolution lasted for ten years during which France was gradually turning into a land of terror and blood spilling. Thus, “the country that had inspired classicism and fired the romantic spirit ceased to have any influence on English literature.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Shaw tried to cover all aspects of the bourgeoisie life. One hardly finds any social idea or status that has not been of interest to Shaw to write about.

<sup>2</sup> G.B.S. is the name under which Shaw used to write his essays, reviews, and articles.

<sup>3</sup> Shaw is one of the most controversial playwrights in the history of drama.

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth’s *Preface* to the second and third edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 is considered the official beginning of the Romantic Movement in England.

<sup>5</sup> The French Revolution abolished absolute monarchy and feudal privileges, and established equal liability to taxation. It also began reforms in the fields of education and law, and separated between the State and the Church.

<sup>6</sup> Antony Burgess. *English Literature*. p.161.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.166.

In addition to that, the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution, with its *Laissez-faire* principle,<sup>8</sup> which brought with it large-scale production, more quantity, and better quality. However, this revolution did not improve the lot of common people. Instead of leading to prosperity, it brought poverty to a great number of people. The Industrialists had all the wealth in their hands, leaving the majority of people little belongings that hardly sustain them. The literary effect of the Industrial Revolution was that it made romantic writers of the Victorian age sympathize with the desperate and poor people and suggest theories for reforming the life and social conditions of the masses.

Actually, many romantics believed that it was better to escape from the ills of the Industrial Revolution, and to look for peace in nature. Wordsworth, for instance, was concerned with nature and the life of the common people. Others revolted against the capitalist standards of their time, and advocated the principle of liberty. Byron<sup>9</sup>, for example, aspired liberty and devoted his poetry, his money and his life to the cause of liberty. His poem, “Childe Harold”, is a self-portrait that reflects his cynicism and revolt against society.

Later on in the century, more reformist movements and revolutionary social theories were formed. Marxism came to advocate a total upheaval against capitalism—not to forget the Fabian Society of which Bernard Shaw was an active member. In his book, *The Capital*, Marx<sup>10</sup> developed his own outlook about society and the distribution of wealth. Many advances in science were also made of which industrialism was the main result. Darwin<sup>11</sup> introduced his evolution theory that, in some of its aspects, contradicted religious beliefs. Many inventions were achieved in almost every field—photography, medical surgery, and communication.

However, some of the scientific theories shook Orthodox religious beliefs, and many people longed to return to the Medieval Church. Institutional Christianity, on the other hand, did not preach against a mentally and morally defective social order. It did not play its role to improve the social conditions of the poor class. In this respect, Laurence Housman, in his treatise “G. B. S. and the Victorian”, says, “Institutional Christianity . . . was losing its hold on conscience and conduct and church-going was no longer the accepted mark of respectability.”<sup>12</sup>

In short, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of immense versatile activities, covering social, political, philosophical and economic spheres. Thus, there was a large number of problems to face reformers and theorists. There was too much poverty, too much injustice and too little certainty about faith and morals. To this chaotic atmosphere with its numerous prominent and versatile writers, scientists, and philosophers, Bernard Shaw came to play his role and encounter the challenge.

\* \* \*

When Shaw was still young, he became aware of the eventfulness of his age, of the advantages and disadvantages of the Industrial Revolution, of the scientific progress,

---

<sup>8</sup>The term is borrowed from French, meaning, “let things alone”. This doctrine favours capitalist self-interest and competition. However, with the tremendous growth of industry, *Laissez-faire* policies led to abuses, especially in the use of child labour.

<sup>9</sup>George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), English poet.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Marx (1818-1883) German philosopher.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) English scientist.

<sup>12</sup>*G. B. S. 90*. “G.B.S. and the Victorian”. P.47.

and of all the 19<sup>th</sup> century inventions. Then, he started to formulate his own concepts about reforming society, and about the art of a vital drama that would challenge the established moral traditions of his time.

Shaw's long life of 94 years can be divided, roughly speaking, into three major phases. The first extends over the first two decades, starting with an early boyhood in an Irish setting that left a notable stamp on Shaw's character. His formative years were with an extraordinary family who provided such an atmosphere of extremely untraditional relationships among its members. His father held no proper responsibility towards his wife or his three children, but enjoyed a sense of humour—something which Shaw might have picked up later on—and had “a taste for the bottle”, something that might have caused the family to be dropped socially. His mother—she believed—was involved in a disappointing marriage, and found her only way out in singing and playing the piano. That was done at the expense of taking good care of her children and attempting to fill the gap left by her husband. And to make the matter even more extraordinary, she allowed her music teacher, Lee, to live with the family for a while, before the latter bought a cottage for her and the children, in which they used to spend summer time. Such a relationship between a married woman and a stranger was regarded with a rather unsympathetic eye from the relatives. However, that music teacher is considered to be the most dominant figure in Shaw's life at that early stage, for he has been the main motive behind the mother's decision to move to London, and Shaw's following her, later on.

This brings us to the second phase of Shaw's life starting with his arrival in London, to live with his mother and sister Lucy—for whom he never had any affection what so ever. In London, he began a long-term apprenticeship, during which he spent most of his time in the British Museum reading excessively and trying his first hand at writing novels, which did not receive any success or approval for printing. At that stage of his life, Shaw was after a purpose that could organize the energy and various talents kept inside unable to surface or breathe. Shaw was aware of his genuine talents, and wanted to translate them into action, hoping to place himself among the influential figures whose voice was heard and taken seriously. Only when he discovered socialism—after reading Marx's *The Capital*, and after attending a lecture by the American economist, Henry George<sup>13</sup>—did Shaw find the track that he had been long searching for. He joined the Fabian Society,<sup>14</sup> and had the chance to make acquaintance with people and to enter into long arguments out of which he usually came out leaving impressions that entailed other arguments.

The third phase, and the one of utmost importance regarding the subject of this dissertation, is the longest. It started around Shaw's mid thirties, when he became a drama critic, and began contemplating the possibility of writing plays himself. His dramatic theory began to mature and evolve till it won a distinct acknowledgement. Shaw's first play was *Widowers' House*, a play that brought its writer the attention he mostly needed, as he was about to launch a life-long career as a dramatist. Later, King Edward VII attended a performance of *John Bull's Other Island*, at the Royal Court Theatre in London. The Royal Court Theatre season lasted three years—from 1904 to

---

<sup>13</sup> Henry George (1839-97), an American economist and social reformer. He is known for his theory of the single tax on land. His writings include *Progress and Poverty* (1879), *Social Problems* (1884) and *The Science of Political Economy* (1897).

<sup>14</sup> An organized group of sophisticated people, who believed in gradual and evolutionary changes rather than revolutionary ones with regards to introducing socialism into a country such as England.

1907— during which eleven of Shaw's plays were repeatedly performed. His masterpiece *Man and Superman* was among them along with other major plays, such as *Arms and The Man*, *Major Barbara* and others.

Those plays, produced during the Royal Court Theatre season, led the London theatre-going public to accept and become familiar with the discussion of serious subjects, like politics, religion and various aspects of social life, with naturalistic stage décor. In this respect, A.C. Ward, in his general introduction on Bernard Shaw's works, says:

. . . until then, the British theatre had been dominated by unreality both in the topics and in the language of the plays as well as in the acting and scenery. The standards of the theatre throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> C. had caused the world "theatrical" to be applied to behaviour and surroundings bearing no resemblance to ordinary peoples' experience of life.<sup>15</sup>

In such plays, Shaw became matured enough to exert a determined and successful effort to close the gap between life and the theatre, in a way that the British stage did not entirely drift back into former artificial ways.

However, Shaw added another thing to his naturalism. Though his plays treated serious themes, deeply rooted in living-human experience, they became more appealing through that acute aesthetic sensibility—which he inherited from his mother whose life was given up to music. His sense of aesthetism was also promoted by the circumstances of his upbringing. Two main factors were behind that. First, early in his literary life, Shaw was able to develop a gift of superb rhetoric. Second, he became very fond of music.<sup>16</sup> Both of these factors, along with his abounding wit, enriched his aesthetic sensibility and helped lift his plays in spirit and temper from the "plane of naturalism to that of high comedy . . . a comedy which is an illuminating commentary on life, not simply a naturalistic mirrored reflection of it."<sup>17</sup>

Shaw's strong inclination to music along with his own efforts to widen his musical experience and culture were all instrumental in qualifying him to do music criticism for *The Star*—a London evening newspaper—and, later on, for *The World Daily*.<sup>18</sup> His delicate taste for music has its own print on his plays. *Major Barbara*, for example, is a musical play with its songs of praise and the musical marching of the Salvation Army with tambourines and drums. So is *Pygmalion*, which was turned into a musical film retitled as *My Fair Lady*, later on. Then, there is the third act of *Man and Superman* with its orchestral and operatic quality. In this act, Shaw, with the ear of musician, listened to every word he set down to be spoken by the actors. Thus, the sentences spoken by the characters ran with a rhythmical smoothness that made them pleasant to speak and hear. A. C. Ward assures that "the sounds of Mozart's music were in Bernard Shaw's ear while he was writing the many extremely long speeches for the scene in Hell."<sup>19</sup>

Then in 1895, Shaw was appointed dramatic critic to the *Saturday Review*—a weekly periodical—where he provided abundant essays, very rich in their dramatic and critical ideas, hiding behind the personality of G. B. S. The critical articles on drama

---

<sup>15</sup> A. C. Ward. *Bernard Shaw*. p.6.

<sup>16</sup> Shaw had a keen and sensitive ear to music when listening to great musical composers as Strauss, Mozart, Beethoven and others.

<sup>17</sup> A. C. Ward. *Bernard Shaw*. p.7.

<sup>18</sup> In 1931, Shaw's critical articles were reprinted in three volumes under the title *Music in London from 1890-1894*.

<sup>19</sup> A. C. Ward. "General Introduction to the plays of Bernard Shaw" in *Major Barbara*. p.147

written by Shaw under the signature of G. B. S. from 1895 to 1898 were one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of journalism. They were “. . . the most remarkable series of articles that any writer has produced on plays and players in the London theatre.”<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

Shaw hardly left any subject untouched by him, whether social, political, religious, economical or philosophical. His first contribution to the world of art, in general, and to stagecraft, in particular, was the naturalistic comedy, *Widowers' House*, which exposed the social maladies of slum conditions and the exploitation of the poor by mercenary landlords. In 1898, he wrote his second play, *Mrs. Warrens' Profession*, a relentless exposure of the economic basis of prostitution with the serious human problems resulting from that, and the hypocrisy of upper-class society. In 1905, *Major Barbara* was a strong condemnation of a profit-minded society, which cunningly employs the Church, with its Orthodox Christian faith, fostering philanthropic morality to protect millionaires—and financial tycoons—and help the corrupt social system hide its crimes and exploitations of the toiling poor. Another successful play was *John Bulls' Other Island*, which was written on the interesting ideas of politics and statecraft.

Shaw went on writing other plays in which he proved to be a leader in the realm of new thoughts and a champion of intellectual freedom. Plays, dealing with subjects on genuine social evils, were something entirely new in the English theatre. For example, he produced to the stage plays about real human problems of war, as in *Arms and The Man*; religious intolerance, as in *The Devils' Disciple*; revenge, as in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. One of his most popular plays, *Pygmalion*, was a courageous denunciation of middle-class morality, and the economic social order that unfairly divided the needy into “the deserving poor” and “the undeserving poor”. *Saint Joan* reflected Shaw's continuous belief in the right of individual judgment based on the voice of conscience. Joan of Arc refused to do what the priests and princes wanted her to do; and so, she was martyred for defending her strong conviction of what she believed to be right.

His masterpiece, *Man and Superman*, called by Shaw himself “a comedy and a philosophy”, was full of ideas which were then new and startling. Indeed, its brilliance is due to the successful interaction between comedy and philosophy. In this play, Shaw expounded his philosophy based on “Creative Evolution”, motivated by the “Life Force” to pave the way for the coming of the “Superman”, who would save mankind from annihilation, caused by moral and political confusions, injustice and corruption. Shaw's belief in the “Life Force” and “Creative Evolution” continued to be the main substance of his literary works, most notably, in *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*.

In *Heartbreak House*, Colin Wilson says that “Shaw had faced some of the practical problems of a civilization midway between a moribund Christianity and the new evolutionism that must be the religion of the future.”<sup>21</sup> The evolutionary process had been slow. However, Shaw believed that man, through the assiduous use of his intellect and his imagination would broaden his enquiry and his scientific advance to become the master of abundant fields of knowledge.

---

<sup>20</sup> A. C. Ward. *Bernard Shaw*. Pp.23-4.

<sup>21</sup> Colin Wilson. *Bernard Shaw, A Reassessment*. p.245.

In *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw advanced a fantastic idea that man's life could be extended to three centuries. It is man's relatively short life that does not provide enough time and room for "Creative Evolution" to take proper action. This limited span of man's life will not enable him to achieve the lofty aims of the life-giving force. But a life of three centuries is likely to avail man the opportunity to work for his salvation, naturally seized by a "moral passion". This "moral passion" is supposed to strengthen and inspire man's will to desire superb things. He should be persistent in his desire till these superb things are realized. Shaw strongly believed "that Creative Evolution is the only possible means of remedying the twentieth century plight of man and his civilization."<sup>22</sup>

However, among Shaw's various plays, only four are going to be the subject of study in this dissertation. These plays are *Major Barbara*, *Pygmalion*, *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methuselah*.

\* \* \*

Generally speaking, Shaw's plays are problem-discussing plays; plays of ideas about his philosophy of "Creative Evolution" and about his political, economical and social views. He is the first Irish-British dramatist who started writing plays discussing public affairs that touched the lives of the majority of people. A. C. Ward asserts, "until Bernard Shaw began to write for the theatre, there had been no modern British dramatist who took current social, political and religious problems as subjects for plays."<sup>23</sup>

Like Ibsen,<sup>24</sup> Shaw opposed the romantic attitude of the Victorian Age. Ibsen's plays are believed to have ended the romantic and artificial melodramas which were popular in the nineteenth century. His plays were championed by Shaw because they shocked contemporary audiences. Nicholas Grene notes, "For Shaw, Ibsen was the realist who at last enabled the theatre to escape from vapid and meaningless ideals which had dominated it for so long."<sup>25</sup> A. M. Gibbs also writes: "In *Arms and The Man*, and *Man and Superman* comic structure is affected by Shaw's critical treatment of the nineteenth century romantic stereotypes."<sup>26</sup> Shaw's opposition to the Victorian social order, its political and economic foundations and its code of conduct, in general, "had significant implications for the formal characteristic of the plays he wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."<sup>27</sup>

The realism with which Shaw was primarily concerned, was not a realism of dialogue or the realism of play construction, but the realism of intellect and the realism of mental action replacing that of emotional conflict. Unlike his contemporaries, Shaw had no inclination to the "well-made" play. His basic interest was in the plays which were provocative and constituted drama of ideas. The arguments that take place between the characters, particularly the main characters, are highly intellectual and didactic, but, adroitly interwoven with wit and humour. This artistic technique, which Shaw employs in writing his plays, is of dual interest and usefulness. First, it makes his

---

<sup>22</sup> A. C. Ward. *Bernard Shaw*. p.35.

<sup>23</sup> A. C. Ward. "General Introduction to the plays of Bernard Shaw" in *Major Barbara*. P.146.

<sup>24</sup> Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906), a Norwegian dramatist who is considered as the father of modern drama, because of his realistic portrayal of psychological and social problems. His major works include *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881).

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Grene. *Bernard Shaw, A Critical View*. p.7.

<sup>26</sup> A. M. Gibbs. *The Art and Mind of Shaw: Essays in Criticism*. p.34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*. p.34.

plays educatory to both the reader and the audience. Second, it helps to alleviate the intensity of the intellectually minded subjects of discussion—such as those one read in *back to Methuselah* and *Man and Superman*.

Shaw's aestheticism is reflected in his writings. Actually, it is the significance of Shaw's aestheticism that beautifies his preaching, his drama, and makes his philosophy eagerly accepted. His aestheticism was entirely different from his contemporaries, in rejecting the principle of "art for art's sake". For Shaw, art was an act of liberation from the materialistic interests, a release of the spirit, and a revolt against Victorian philistinism in general. Shaw's originality is apparent in his incessant attempts to choose subjects that raise interesting social issues, highly controversial, but always in opposition with social, political and industrial *status-quo*. His aestheticism springs out of his optimism that life, through the evolutionary process, is advancing for the better, and paving the way for the coming of the "Superman". In *Man and Superman*, Don Juan's dialogues are a case in point. The Devil's hell is full of physical pleasures that kill creativity. While Don Juan's heaven is a visionary refuge. He says: thither I go to spend my eons in contemplation...

Shaw believes that a true artist should be equipped with a keen and sensitive ear to music to purify his aesthetic susceptibility. "A true artist", for Shaw, "is unusually strong and independent, supremely healthy individual, even behind a mask of frailty and a cloud of alienation and loneliness."<sup>28</sup> Shaw stuck firmly to his conviction against all the temptations and pressures exercised on him to give a romantic happy ending to *Pygmalion*. Shaw could never betray his sense of aestheticism that recognizes a more significant moral message in Eliza's spiritual redemption, than having her marry Higgins in a traditional setting of orthodox popular appeal. "The consistent aesthetic direction of Shaw's entire playwriting career was towards the creation of a drama of impassioned thought, a heroic drama of ideas."<sup>29</sup> Here, it seems that Shaw the optimist and the aesthetic intends to remind both the skeptical materialist as well as the romantic idealist that, "Every dream is a promise in the womb of time."<sup>30</sup>

Shaw's aestheticism is observed in the detailed and articulated descriptions, here and there, in many of his plays. Shaw's focus on phonetics, "The Science of Speech", as Higgins defines it in *Pygmalion*, raises the aesthetic significance of intonated spoken English. It even enhances one's social position. Higgins says that Eliza's "kerbstone English ... will keep her [Eliza] in the gutter for the end of her days". But with "better English", Higgins could pass her off "as the Queen of Sheba".<sup>31</sup>

Another remarkable Shavian trait is Shaw's ambivalence. Shaw shapes his main characters in such a way as to make them able to reconcile their intellectual preaching and ironical attitudes, which, eventually, leads to presenting a lively drama. This is an achievement that embodies Shaw's virtuosity as a literary and dramatic genius.

The ambivalent character of Undershaft adds more dramatic charm to *Major Barbara*. His diatribe against poverty and its catastrophic consequences, and at the same time, the ruthless measures he follows to accumulate his wealth in order not to be poor, make his character more arresting. His capitalistic policy contradicts with his humanitarian direction of his workers. These ironically contradictory elements render

---

<sup>28</sup> A. M. Gibbs. *The Art and Mind of Shaw: Essays in Criticism*. p.71.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.p.34.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.74.

<sup>31</sup> *Pygmalion*. P.27.

more liveliness to the character of Undershaft, who is one of the most brilliant figures in the Shavian characterization.

In *Pygmalion*, if we consider more deeply the ambivalent attitude of Higgins and his mother concerning Eliza's future, we find that the contrast becomes dramatically more sensational. Aesthetically, Eliza's fight for freedom, towards the end of the play, is more impressive in its indication to the Shavian values of will power and self-control. The same applies to the paradoxical situation of Doolittle's bitter attack on "middle class morality", on account of their refusal to give him financial aid because he belongs to the "undeserving" category of poor people. But at the same time he is annoyed with his newly improved social position, within an economically and politically traditional Victorian order.

In *Man and Superman*, Jack Tanner, enthusiastically, defends Violet's unmarried pregnancy; but she scornfully rejects his defense, because she has not violated the traditions in this respect. She kept her marriage secret in compliance with her husband's desire. Shaw employs this ambivalent situation to ridicule "the traditional attitude toward illicit sexuality."<sup>32</sup>

It is this remarkable Shavian device of making of his ambivalence, his wit and humour, and his penetrating insight and aestheticism, a solid unity that gives him the capacity to reform by ridicule and cogent logic more than by any appeal to emotions. All this enabled Shaw to compel people to see things, which they did want, or were reluctant to see.

With respect to Shaw's characterization, he is accused that his characters are "mouthpieces" and personified attitudes or ideas of his own. Nicholas Grene mentions that Shaw's "characters are little more than walking ideas manipulated by a preacher propagandist."<sup>33</sup> But this accusation is not commonly accepted. It is an oversimplification of Shaw's characterization technique. Although his characters, in essence, personify his opinions and represent his attitudes, they are more than puppets and mouthpieces of Shaw. A. C. Ward disputes this charge saying, "but this cannot be true, because in each of his plays the various characters put forward opinions which conflict with each other."<sup>34</sup> These opinions may not be always Shaw's typical ideas.

Finally, it is appropriate to refer to Shaw's approach to religion. Shaw is a fervid believer of creative religion. His understanding of religion is a real salvation to humanity from its present religious controversies and disputes. Obviously, if one reads any of his plays—namely, *Man and Superman*, *Major Barbara*, *Back to Methuselah*—he will immediately find out that Shaw deals with the subject of religion in an irreverent way. Shaw was accused of being faithless because he called for the new religion of "Creative Evolution" and considered it the religion of the twentieth century. Therefore, such irreligiousness may insult the faithfully strong believer, and the normal man of faith will most likely take to heart Shaw's frivolous tackling with traditional religious matters. A. C. Ward explains Shaw's case with religion as follows: ". . . Shaw had abandoned the Christian religion as it was practiced by the churches which, he believed, had strayed from the [proper] teaching of Christ."<sup>35</sup> This is absolutely true, because Shaw's strongest convictions, his humanitarianism, his life in general and his kindness

---

<sup>32</sup>Nicholas Grene. *Bernard Shaw, A Critical View*. P.57.

<sup>33</sup>Nicholas Grene. *Bernard Shaw, A Critical View*. p.IX.

<sup>34</sup>A.C. Ward. "General Introduction to the Plays of Bernard Shaw" in *Major Barbara*. p.147.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. p.147.

and generosity to his fellows, all these virtues are qualities of a really good religious man.

To conclude, it would be fair to say that the contributions of Bernard Shaw to the theatre are great. His skilful handling of ambivalence and aesthetism, in many of his plays is a gift which he perfectly employed in order to produce very satisfying dramatic art. Nicholas Grene notes, "Shaw is a playwright of quite extraordinary gifts—nothing in my view could be more mistaken than the old charge that he is not really a dramatist."<sup>36</sup> However, his success is still in its momentum because most of his plays are widely circulated and performed on stage, stimulating no less interest than they were first performed.

---

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Grene. *Bernard Shaw, A Critical View*. p.X.

## REFERENCE:

.....

- \_ Burgess, Antony, *English Literature*. (London: Longman, 1958).
- \_ Gibbs, A.M., *The Art And Mind Of Shaw, Essays In Criticism*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1983).
- \_ Grene, Nicolas, *Bernard Shaw, A Critical View*. (Macmillan Press, 1984).
- \_ Paradis, James and Thomas Postlewait, (eds.), *Victorian Science and Victorian Values*. (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1981).
- \_ Ross, David, *George Bernard Shaw*. (Scotland: Geddes&Grosset, 2001).
- \_ Shaw, George Bernard, *Back To Methuselah*.
- \_ \_\_\_\_\_ *Major Barbara*. (London: Longman, 1985)
- \_ \_\_\_\_\_ *Man And Superman*. (London: Peguin, 1946)
- \_ \_\_\_\_\_ *Pygmalion*. (London: Peguin, 1941)
- \_ Ward, A.C., *Bernard Shaw*. (Longman, 1950).
- \_ Wilson, Colin, *Bernard Shaw, A Reassessment*. (London: Hutchinson&Co, 1969).
- \_ Winsten, S., Ed., *G.B.S. 90*. (London: Hutchinson&Co, 1946).