George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. Although his first profitable writing was music and literary criticism, in which capacity he wrote many highly articulate pieces of journalism, his main talent was for drama, and he wrote more than 60 plays. Nearly all his writings address prevailing social problems, but have a vein of comedy which makes their stark themes more palatable. Shaw examined education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege.

He was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class.

Patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it.
Pastebread pies and paper flowers are being banished from the stage by the growth of that power of 
accurate observation which is commonly called cynicism by those who have not got it â€”.


My method is to take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then to say it with the utmost 
levity."

Answers to Nine Questions (September 1896), answers to nine questions submitted by Clarence Rook, who had interviewed him in 1895.

We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without 
producing it."

Candida, Act I (1898)

I'm only a beer teetotaler, not a champagne teetotaler. I don't like beer."

Candida, Act III

We don't bother much about dress and manners in England, because as a nation we don't dress well 
and we've no manners."

You Never Can Tell, Act I (1898)

The great advantage of a hotel is that it's a refuge from home life."

You Never Can Tell, Act II

My specialty is being right when other people are wrong."

You Never Can Tell, Act IV

There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it."

Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, Vol. II, preface (1898)

You're not a man, you're a machine."

Arms and the Man, Act III (1898)

George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright and a co-founder of the London School of Economics. Although his first profitable writing was music and literary criticism, in which capacity he wrote many highly articulate pieces of journalism, his main talent was for drama, and he wrote more than 60 plays. Nearly all his writings address prevailing social problems, but have a vein of comedy which makes their stark themes more palatable. Shaw examined education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class privilege.

He was most angered by what he perceived as the exploitation of the working class. An ardent socialist, Shaw wrote many brochures and speeches for the Fabian Society. He became an accomplished orator in the furtherance of its causes, which included gaining equal rights for men and women, alleviating abuses of the working class, rescinding private ownership of productive land, and promoting healthy lifestyles. For a short time he was active in local politics, serving on the London County Council.

In 1898, Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a fellow Fabian, whom he survived. They settled in Ayot St. Lawrence in a house now called Shaw's Corner. Shaw died there, aged 94, from chronic problems exacerbated by injuries he incurred by falling from a ladder.
He is the only person to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize for Literature (1925) and an Oscar (1938), for his contributions to literature and for his work on the film Pygmalion (adaptation of his play of the same name), respectively. Shaw wanted to refuse his Nobel Prize outright because he had no desire for public honours, but accepted it at his wife's behest: she considered it a tribute to Ireland. He did reject the monetary award, requesting it be used to finance translation of Swedish books to English.

Early years and family

George Bernard Shaw was born in Synge Street, Dublin, on 26 July 1856 to George Carr Shaw (1814–85), an unsuccessful grain merchant and sometime civil servant, and Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw, née Gurly (1830–1913), a professional singer. He had two sisters, Lucinda Frances (1853–1920), a singer of musical comedy and light opera, and Elinor Agnes (1855–76).

Education

Shaw briefly attended the Wesley College, Dublin, a grammar school operated by the Methodist Church in Ireland, before moving to a private school near Dalkey and then transferring to Dublin's Central Model School. He ended his formal education at the Dublin English Scientific and Commercial Day School. He harboured a lifelong animosity toward schools and teachers, saying: "Schools and schoolmasters, as we have them today, are not popular as places of education and teachers, but rather prisons and turnkeys in which children are kept to prevent them disturbing and chaperoning their parents". In the astringent prologue to Cashel Byron's Profession young Byron's educational experience is a fictionalized description of Shaw's own schooldays. Later, he painstakingly detailed the reasons for his aversion to formal education in his Treatise on Parents and Children.

In brief, he considered the standardized curricula useless, deadening to the spirit and stifling to the intellect. He particularly deplored the use of corporal punishment, which was prevalent in his time.

When his mother left home and followed her voice teacher, George Vandeleur Lee, to London, Shaw was almost sixteen years old. His sisters accompanied their mother but Shaw remained in Dublin with his father, first as a reluctant pupil, then as a clerk in an estate office. He worked efficiently, albeit discontentedly, for several years. In 1876, Shaw joined his mother's London household. She, Vandeleur Lee, and his sister Lucy, provided him with a pound a week while he frequented public libraries and the British Museum reading room where he studied earnestly and began writing novels. He earned his allowance by ghostwriting Vandeleur Lee's music column, which appeared in the London Hornet. His novels were rejected, however, so his literary earnings remained negligible until 1885, when he became self-supporting as a critic of the arts.

Personal life and political activism

Influenced by his reading, he became a dedicated Socialist and a charter member of the Fabian Society, a middle class organization established in 1884 to promote the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means. In the course of his political activities he met Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress and fellow Fabian; they married in 1898. The marriage was never consummated, at Charlotte's insistence, though he had had a number of affairs with married women; Shaw declined to stand as an MP, but in 1897 he was elected as a local councillor to the London County Council as a Progressive.

In 1906 the Shaws moved into a house, now called Shaw's Corner, in Ayot St. Lawrence, a small village in Hertfordshire, England; it was to be their home for the remainder of their lives, although they also maintained a residence at 29 Fitzroy Square in London.

Shaw's plays were first performed in the 1890s. By the end of the decade he was an established playwright. He wrote sixty-three plays and his output as novelist, critic, pamphleteer, essayist and private correspondent was prodigious. He is known to have written more than 250,000 letters. Along with Fabian Society members Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Graham Wallas, Shaw founded the
London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895 with funding provided by private philanthropy, including a bequest of £20,000 from Henry Hunt Hutchinson to the Fabian Society. One of the libraries at the LSE is named in Shaw’s honor; it contains collections of his papers and photographs. Shaw helped to found the left-wing magazine \textit{New Statesman} in 1913 with the Webbs and other prominent members of the Fabian Society.

\textbf{Final years}

During his later years, Shaw enjoyed attending to the grounds at Shaw’s Corner. He died at the age of 94, of renal failure precipitated by injuries incurred by falling while pruning a tree. His ashes, mixed with those of his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, were scattered along footpaths and around the statue of Saint Joan in their garden.

\textbf{Writings}

See \textit{Works by George Bernard Shaw} for listings of his novels and plays, with links to their electronic texts, if those exist.

\textit{The International Shaw Society} provides a detailed chronological listing of Shaw’s writings. See also George Bernard Shaw, Unity Theatre.

\textbf{Criticism}

Shaw became a critic of the arts when, sponsored by William Archer, he joined the reviewing staff of the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} in 1885. There he wrote under the pseudonym “Corno di Bassetto” (“basset horn”) chosen because it sounded European and nobody knew what a corno di bassetto was. In a miscellany of other periodicals, including \textit{Dramatic Review} (1885â€“86), \textit{Our Corner} (1885â€“86), and the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} (1885â€“88) his byline was “GBS”. From 1895 to 1898, Shaw was the drama critic for his friend Frank Harris’ \textit{Saturday Review}, in which position he campaigned brilliantly to displace the artificialities and hypocrisies of the Victorian stage with a theatre of actuality and thought. His earnings as a critic made him self-supporting as an author and his articles for the \textit{Saturday Review} made his name well-known.

George Bernard Shaw was highly critical of productions of Shakespeare, and specifically denounced the dramatic practice of editing Shakespeare’s plays, whose scenes tended to be cut in order to create “acting versions”. He notably held famous 19th-century actor Sir Henry Irving in contempt for this practice, as he expressed in one of his reviews:

“In a true republic of art, Sir Henry Irving would ere this have expiated his acting versions on the scaffold. He does not merely cut plays; he disembowels them. In \textit{Cymbeline} he has quite surpassed himself by extirpating the antiphonal third verse of the famous dirge. A man who would do that would do anything â€“ cut the coda out of the first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, or shorten one of \textit{Velázquez}’s Philips into a kitcat to make it fit over his drawing room mantelpiece.”

Shavian scholar John F. Matthews credits him, as a result, with the disappearance of the two-hundred-year-old tradition of editing Shakespeare into “acting versions”.

He had a very high regard for both Irish stage actor Barry Sullivan’s and Johnston Forbes-Robertson’s \textit{Hamlets}, but despised John Barrymore’s. Barrymore invited him to see a performance of his celebrated \textit{Hamlet}, and Shaw graciously accepted, but wrote Barrymore a withering letter in which he all but tore the performance to shreds. Even worse, Shaw had seen the play in the company of Barrymore’s then wife, but did not dare voice his true feelings about the performance aloud to her.

Much of Shaw’s music criticism, ranging from short comments to the book-length essay \textit{The Perfect Wagnerite}, extols the work of the German composer Richard Wagner. Wagner worked 25 years composing \textit{Der Ring des Nibelungen}, a massive four-part musical dramatization drawn from the Teutonic mythology of gods, giants, dwarves and Rhine maidens; Shaw considered it a work of genius and reviewed it in detail. Beyond the music, he saw it as an allegory of social evolution where workers, driven by “the invisible whip of
hunger”, seek freedom from their wealthy masters. Wagner did have socialistic sympathies, as Shaw carefully points out, but made no such claim about his opus. Conversely, Shaw disparaged Brahms, deriding A German Requiem by saying “it could only have come from the establishment of a first-class undertaker”. Although he found Brahms lacking in intellect, he praised his musicality, saying “…nobody can listen to Brahms’ natural utterance of the richest absolute music, especially in his chamber compositions, without rejoicing in his natural gift”. In the 1920s, he recanted, calling his earlier animosity towards Brahms “my only mistake”.

Shaw’s writings about music gained great popularity because they were understandable to the average well-read audience member of the day, thus contrasting starkly with the dourly pretentious pedantry of most critiques in that era. All of his music critiques have been collected in Shaw’s Music. As a drama critic for the Saturday Review, a post he held from 1895 to 1898, Shaw championed Henrik Ibsen whose realistic plays scandalized the Victorian public. His influential Quintessence of Ibsenism was written in 1891.

Novels

Shaw wrote five unsuccessful novels at the start of his career between 1879 and 1883. Eventually all were published. The first to be printed was Cashel Byron's Profession (1886), which was written in 1882. Its eponymous character, Cashel, a rebellious schoolboy with an unsympathetic mother, runs away to Australia where he becomes a famed prizefighter. He returns to England for a boxing match, and falls in love with erudite and wealthy Lydia Carew. Lydia, drawn by sheer animal magnetism, eventually consents to marry despite the disparity of their social positions. This breach of propriety is nullified by the unpresaged discovery that Cashel is of noble lineage and heir to a fortune comparable to Lydia’s. With those barriers to happiness removed, the couple settles down to prosaic family life with Lydia dominant; Cashel attains a seat in Parliament. In this novel Shaw first expresses his conviction that productive land and all other natural resources should belong to everyone in common, rather than being owned and exploited privately. The book was written in the year when Shaw first heard the lectures of Henry George who advocated such reforms.

Written in 1883, An Unsocial Socialist was published in 1887. The tale begins with a hilarious description of student antics at a girl's school then changes focus to a seemingly uncouth laborer who, it soon develops, is really a wealthy gentleman in hiding from his overly affectionate wife. He needs the freedom gained by matrimonial truancy to promote the socialistic cause, to which he is an active convert. Once the subject of socialism emerges, it dominates the story, allowing only space enough in the final chapters to excoriate the idle upper class and allow the erstwhile schoolgirls, in their earliest maturity, to marry suitably.

Love Among the Artists was published in the United States in 1900 and in England in 1914, but it was written in 1881. In the ambiance of chit-chat and frivolity among members of Victorian polite society a youthful Shaw describes his views on the arts, romantic love and the practicalities of matrimony. Dilettantes, he thinks, can love and settle down to marriage, but artists with real genius are too consumed by their work to fit that pattern. The dominant figure in the novel is Owen Jack, a musical genius, somewhat mad and quite bereft of social graces. From an abysmal beginning he rises to great fame and is lionized by socialites despite his unremitting crudity.

The Irrational Knot was written in 1880 and published in 1905. Within a framework of leisure class preoccupations and frivolities Shaw disdains hereditary status and proclaims the nobility of workers. Marriage, as the knot in question, is exemplified by the union of Marian Lind, a lady of the upper class, to Edward Conolly, always a workman but now a magnate, thanks to his invention of an electric motor that makes steam engines obsolete. The marriage soon deteriorates, primarily because Marian fails to rise above the preconceptions and limitations of her social class and is, therefore, unable to share her husband's interests. Eventually she runs away with a man who is her social peer, but he proves himself a scoundrel and abandons her in desperate circumstances. Her husband rescues her and offers to take her back, but she prudishly refuses, convinced she is unworthy and certain that she faces life as a pariah to her family and friends. The preface, written when Shaw was 49, expresses gratitude to his parents for their support during the lean years while he learned to write and includes details of his early life in London.

Shaw’s first novel, Immaturity, was written in 1879 but was the last one to be printed in 1931.
It relates tepid romances, minor misfortunes and subdued successes in the developing career of Robert Smith, an energetic young Londoner and outspoken agnostic. Condemnation of alcoholic behavior is the prime message in the book, and derives from Shaw's familial memories. This is made clear in the book's preface, which was written by the mature Shaw at the time of its belated publication. The preface is a valuable resource because it provides autobiographical details not otherwise available.

Short stories

A collection of Shaw's short stories, The Black Girl in Search of God and Some Lesser Tales, was published in 1934. The Black Girl, an enthusiastic convert to Christianity, goes searching for God. In the story, written as an allegory, somewhat reminiscent of Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, Shaw uses her adventures to expose flaws and fallacies in the religions of the world. At the story's happy ending, the Black Girl quits her searchings in favor of rearing a family with the aid of a red-haired Irishman who has no metaphysical inclination.

One of the Lesser Tales is The Miraculous Revenge (1885), which relates the misadventures of an alcoholic investigator while he probes the mystery of a graveyard filled with saintly corpses that migrates across a stream to escape association with the body of a newly buried sinner.

Plays

The texts of plays by Shaw mentioned in this section, with the dates when they were written and first performed can be found in Complete Plays and Prefaces. Shaw began working on his first play destined for production, Widowers' Houses, in 1885 in collaboration with critic William Archer, who supplied the structure. Archer decided that Shaw could not write a play, so the project was abandoned. Years later, Shaw tried again and, in 1892, completed the play without collaboration. Widowers' Houses, a scathing attack on slumlords, was first performed at London's Royalty Theatre on 9 December 1892. Shaw would later call it one of his worst works, but he had found his medium. His first significant financial success as a playwright came from Richard Mansfield's American production of The Devil's Disciple (1897). He went on to write 63 plays, most of them full-length.

Often his plays succeeded in the United States and Germany before they did in London. Although major London productions of many of his earlier pieces were delayed for years, they are still being performed there. Examples include Mrs. Warren's Profession (1893), Arms and the Man (1894), Candida (1894) and You Never Can Tell (1897).

Shaw's plays, like those of Oscar Wilde, contained incisive humour, which was exceptional among playwrights of the Victorian era; both authors are remembered for their comedy. However, Shaw's wittiness should not obscure his important role in revolutionizing British drama. In the Victorian Era, the London stage had been regarded as a place for frothy, sentimental entertainment. Shaw made it a forum for considering moral, political and economic issues, possibly his most lasting and important contribution to dramatic art. In this, he considered himself indebted to Henrik Ibsen, who pioneered modern realistic drama, meaning drama designed to heighten awareness of some important social issue. Significantly, Widowers' Houses—an example of the realistic genre—was completed after William Archer, Shaw's friend, had translated some of Ibsen's plays to English and Shaw had written The Quintessence of Ibsenism.

As Shaw's experience and popularity increased, his plays and prefaces became more voluble about reforms he advocated, without diminishing their success as entertainments. Such works, including Caesar and Cleopatra (1898), Man and Superman (1903), Major Barbara (1905) and The Doctor's Dilemma (1906), display Shaw's matured views, for he was approaching 50 when he wrote them. From 1904 to 1907, several of his plays had their London premieres in notable productions at the Court Theatre, managed by Harley Granville-Barker and J. E. Vedrenne. The first of his new plays to be performed at the Court Theatre, John Bull's Other Island (1904), while not especially popular today, made his reputation in London when King Edward VII laughed so hard during a command performance that he broke his chair.

By the 1910s, Shaw was a well-established playwright. New works such as Fanny's First Play (1911) and
Pygmalion (1912), had long runs in front of large London audiences. Shaw had permitted a musical adaptation of Arms and the Man (1894) called The Chocolate Soldier (1908), but he had a low opinion of German operetta. He insisted that none of his dialogue be used, and that all the character names be changed, although the operetta actually follows Shaw's plot quite closely, in particular preserving its anti-war message. The work proved very popular and would have made Shaw rich had he not waived his royalties, but he detested it and for the rest of his life forbade musicalization of his work, including a proposed Franz Lehár operetta based on Pygmalion. Several of his plays formed the basis of musicals after his death—most famously the musical My Fair Lady. It is officially adapted from the screenplay of the film version of Pygmalion rather than the original stage play (keeping the film’s ending), and librettist Alan Jay Lerner kept generous chunks of Shaw’s dialogue, and the characters’ names, unchanged.

Shaw’s outlook was changed by World War I, which he uncompromisingly opposed despite incurring outrage from the public as well as from many friends. His first full-length piece, presented after the War, written mostly during it, was Heartbreak House (1919). A new Shaw had emerged—the wit remained, but his faith in humanity had dwindled. In the preface to Heartbreak House he said:

"It is said that every people has the Government it deserves. It is more to the point that every Government has the electorate it deserves; for the orators of the front bench can edify or debauch an ignorant electorate at will. Thus our democracy moves in a vicious circle of reciprocal worthiness and unworthiness."

Shaw had previously supported gradual democratic change toward socialism, but now he saw more hope in government by benign strong men. This sometimes made him oblivious to the dangers of dictatorships. Near his life’s end that hope failed him too. In the first act of Buoyant Billions (1946–48), his last full-length play, his protagonist asks:

"Why appeal to the mob when ninetyfive per cent of them do not understand politics, and can do nothing but mischief without leaders? And what sort of leaders do they vote for? For Titus Oates and Lord George Gordon with their Popish plots, for Hitlers who call on them to exterminate Jews, for Mussolinis who rally them to nationalist dreams of glory and empire in which all foreigners are enemies to be subjugated."

In 1921, Shaw completed Back to Methuselah, his "Metabiological Pentateuch". The massive, five-play work starts in the Garden of Eden and ends thousands of years in the future; it showcases Shaw’s postulate that a "Life Force" directs evolution toward ultimate perfection by trial and error. Shaw proclaimed the play a masterpiece, but many critics disagreed. The theme of a benign force directing evolution reappears in Geneva (1938), wherein Shaw maintains humans must develop longer lifespans in order to acquire the wisdom needed for self-government.

Methuselah was followed by Saint Joan (1923), which is generally considered to be one of his better works. Shaw had long considered writing about Joan of Arc, and her canonization in 1920 supplied a strong incentive. The play was an international success, and is believed to have led to his Nobel Prize in Literature. The citation praised his work as "...marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty". At this time Prime Minister David Lloyd George was considering recommending to the King Shaw’s admission to the Order of Merit, but the place was instead given to J. M. Barrie. Shaw rejected a knighthood. It was not until 1946 that the government of the day arranged for an informal offer of the Order of Merit to be made: Shaw declined, replying that "merit" in authorship could only be determined by the posthumous verdict of history.

He wrote plays for the rest of his life, but very few of them are as notable as his
earlier work. The Apple Cart (1929) was probably his most popular work of this era. Later full-length plays like Too True to Be Good (1931), On the Rocks (1933), The Millionaireess (1935), and Geneva (1938) have been seen as marking a decline. His last significant play, In Good King Charles Golden Days has, according to St. John Ervine, passages that are equal to Shaw's major works.

Shaw's published plays come with lengthy prefaces. These tend to be more about Shaw's opinions on the issues addressed by the plays than about the plays themselves. Often his prefaces are longer than the plays they introduce. For example, the Penguin Books edition of his one-act The Shewing-up Of Blanco Posnet (1909) has a 67-page preface for the 29-page playscript.

Polemics

In a letter to Henry James dated 17 January 1909, Shaw said:

"I, as a Socialist, have had to preach, as much as anyone, the enormous power of the environment. We can change it; we must change it; there is absolutely no other sense in life than the task of changing it. What is the use of writing plays, what is the use of writing anything, if there is not a will which finally moulds chaos itself into a race of gods."

Thus he viewed writing as a way to further his humanitarian and political agenda. His works were very popular because of their comedic content, but the public tended to disregard his messages and enjoy his work as pure entertainment. He was acutely aware of that. His preface to Heartbreak House (1919) attributes the rejection to the need of post-World War I audiences for frivolities, after four long years of grim privation, more than to their inborn distaste of instruction. His crusading nature led him to adopt and tenaciously hold a variety of causes, which he furthered with fierce intensity, heedless of opposition and ridicule. For example, Common Sense about the War (1914) lays out Shaw's strong objections at the onset of World War I. His stance ran counter to public sentiment and cost him dearly at the box-office, but he never compromised.

Shaw joined in the public opposition to vaccination against smallpox, calling it "a particularly filthy piece of witchcraft", despite having nearly died from the disease when he contracted it in 1881. In the preface to Doctor's Dilemma he made it plain he regarded traditional medical treatment as dangerous quackery that should be replaced with sound public sanitation, good personal hygiene and diets devoid of meat. Shaw became a vegetarian while he was twenty-five, after hearing a lecture by H.F. Lester. In 1901, remembering the experience, he said "I was a cannibal for twenty-five years. For the rest I have been a vegetarian." As a staunch vegetarian, he was a firm anti-vivisectionist and antagonistic to cruel sports for the remainder of his life. The belief in the immorality of eating animals was one of the Fabian causes near his heart and is frequently a topic in his plays and prefaces. His position, succinctly stated, was "A man of my spiritual intensity does not eat corpses."

As well as plays and prefaces, Shaw wrote long political treatises, such as Fabian Essays in Socialism (1889), and The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism (1912), a 495-page book detailing all aspects of socialistic theory as Shaw interpreted it. Excerpts of the latter were republished in 1928 as Socialism and Liberty. Late in his life he wrote another guide to political issues, Everybody's Political What's What (1944).

Correspondence and friends

Shaw corresponded with an array of people, many of them well-known. His letters to and from Mrs. Patrick Campbell were adapted for the stage by Jerome Kilty as Dear Liar: A Comedy of Letters, as was his correspondence with the poet Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas (the intimate friend of Oscar Wilde), into the drama Bernard and Bosie: A Most Unlikely Friendship by Anthony Wynn. His letters to the prominent actress, Ellen Terry, to the boxer Gene Tunney, and to H.G. Wells, have also been published. Eventually the volume of his correspondence became insupportable, as can be inferred from apologetic letters written by assistants.

Shaw campaigned against the executions of the rebel leaders of the Easter Rising, and he became a personal friend of the Cork-born IRA leader Michael Collins, whom he invited to his home for dinner while Collins was negotiating the Anglo-Irish Treaty with Lloyd George in London. After Collins's assassination in 1922, Shaw sent a personal message of condolence to one of Collins's sisters. He had an enduring friendship with G. K. Chesterton, the Roman Catholic-convert British writer. Shaw also enjoyed a personal friendship with T.E.
Lawrence, known most notably for his book Seven Pillars of Wisdom and his role as liaison for the Arab revolt during World War I. Lawrence even used the name “Shaw” as his nom de guerre when he joined the Royal Air Force as an aircraftman in the 1920s.

Another friend was the composer Edward Elgar, whose work Shaw revered. Though Elgar was a Conservative, they had interests, besides music, in common for instance both opposed vivisection. Elgar dedicated one of his late works, Severn Suite, to Shaw, and Shaw exerted himself (eventually with success) to persuade the BBC to commission from Elgar a third symphony, though this piece remained incomplete at Elgar’s death. Shaw's correspondence with the motion picture producer Gabriel Pascal, who was the first to bring Shaw’s plays successfully to the screen and who later tried to put into motion a musical adaptation of Pygmalion, but died before he could realize it, is published in a book titled Bernard Shaw and Gabriel Pascal.

A stage play by Hugh Whitemore, The Best of Friends, provides a window on the friendships of Dame Laurentia McLachlan, OSB (late Abbess of Stanbrook) with Sir Sydney Cockerell and Shaw through adaptations from their letters and writings. A television adaptation of the play, aired on PBS, starred John Gielgud as Cockerell, Wendy Hiller as Laurentia, and Patrick McGoohan as Shaw. It is available on DVD.

Photography

Shaw bought his first camera in 1898 and was an active amateur photographer until his death in 1950. Before 1898 Shaw had been an early supporter of photography as a serious art form. His non-fiction writing includes many reviews of photographic exhibitions such as those by his friend Alvin Langdon Coburn.

The photographs document a prolific literary and political life “Shaw’s friends, travels, politics, plays, films and home life. It also records his experiments with photography over 50 years and for the photographic historian provides a record of the development of the photographic and printing techniques available to the amateur photographer between 1898 and 1950.

The collection is currently the subject of a major project, Man & Cameraman which will allow online access to thousands of photos taken by Shaw.

Politics

Shaw asserted that each social class strove to serve its own ends, and that the upper and middle classes won in the struggle while the working class lost. He condemned the democratic system of his time, saying that workers, ruthlessly exploited by greedy employers, lived in abject poverty and were too ignorant and apathetic to vote intelligently.

He believed this deficiency would ultimately be corrected by the emergence of long-lived supermen with experience and intelligence enough to govern properly. He called the developmental process elective breeding but it is sometimes referred to as shavian eugenics, largely because he thought it was driven by a "Life Force" that led women subconsciously to select the mates most likely to give them superior children.

The outcome Shaw envisioned is dramatised in Back to Methuselah, a monumental play depicting human development from its beginning in the Garden of Eden until the distant future.

In 1882, influenced by Henry George's views on land nationalization, Shaw concluded that private ownership of land and its exploitation for personal profit was a form of theft, and advocated equitable distribution of land and natural resources and their control by governments intent on promoting the commonwealth. Shaw believed that income for individuals should come solely from the sale of their own labour and that poverty could be eliminated by giving equal pay to everyone. These concepts led Shaw to apply for membership of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), led by H. M. Hyndman who introduced him to the works of Karl Marx.

Shaw never joined the SDF, which favoured forcible reforms. Instead, in 1884, he joined the newly formed Fabian Society, which accorded with his belief that reform should be gradual and induced by peaceful means rather than by outright revolution.

Shaw was an active Fabian. He wrote many of their pamphlets, lectured tirelessly on behalf of their causes and provided money to set up The New Age, an independent socialist journal. As a Fabian, he participated in the formation of the Labour Party.

The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism provides a clear statement of his socialistic views. As evinced in plays like Major Barbara and Pygmalion, class struggle is a motif in much of Shaw's writing.
Oscar Wilde was the sole literary signatory of Shaw's petition for a pardon of the anarchists arrested (and later executed) after the Haymarket massacre in Chicago in 1886.

Shaw opposed the execution of Sir Roger Casement in 1916. He wrote a letter "as an Irishman" to The Times, which they rejected, but it was subsequently printed by both the Manchester Guardian on 22 July 1916, and by the New York American on 13 August 1916.

In a newsreel interview released on 5 March 1931, dealing with alternatives to the imprisonment of criminals, Shaw says:

Shaw, however, often used satiric irony in order to mock those who took eugenics to inhumane extremes and commentators have sometimes failed to take this into account. Similarly, in the 18th century, Jonathan Swift had made his modest proposal that babies of the poor could be used as food.

Shaw was not necessarily better informed about actual conditions in other countries than other people were at the time, and tended to believe the best of people who professed similar principles to those he held himself. This led to him taking some positions that now seem grotesque.

After visiting the USSR in the 1930s where he met Stalin, Shaw became a supporter of the Stalinist USSR. On 11 October 1931 he broadcast a lecture on American national radio telling his audience that any ‘skilled workman…of suitable age and good character’ would be welcomed and given work in the Soviet Union. Tim Tzouliadis asserts that hundreds of Americans responded to his suggestion and left for the USSR.

Shaw continued this support for Soviet communism in the preface to his play On the Rocks (1933) writing:

Yet, Shaw also maintained that the killing should be humane. In the preface to On the Rocks, Shaw includes a criticism of the pogroms conducted by the State Political Directorate (OGPU). He compares their logic to that of other societies throughout human history, and writes:
The preface concludes:

In an open letter to the Manchester Guardian in 1933, he dismissed stories ‘which were later determined to be largely substantiated’ of a Soviet famine as slanderous, and contrasts them with the hardships then current in the West during the Great Depression:

In the preface to On The Rocks he wrote:

Despite Shaw's scepticism about the creation of the Irish Free State, he was supportive of Éamon de Valera's stance on the Second World War, including his policy of refusing to fall in line with the Allies' demand towards neutral countries on refusing to provide asylum to Axis refugees during the war. According to Shaw "The voice of the Irish gentleman and Spanish grandee was a welcome relief from the chorus of retaliatory rancor and self-righteousness then deafening us".

**Eugenics**

Shaw delivered speeches on and the theory of eugenics and he became a noted figure in the movement in England.

Shaw's play Man and Superman (1903) has been said to be "invested with eugenic doctrines" and "an ironic reworking" of Nietzsche's concept of Übermensch. The main character in the play, John Tanner, is the author of "The Revolutionist's Handbook and Pocket Companion", which Shaw published along with his play. The Revolutionist's Handbook includes chapters on "Good Breeding" and "Property and Marriage". In the "Property and Marriage" section Tanner writes:

"To cut humanity up into small cliques, and effectively limit the selection of the individual to his own clique, is to postpone the Superman for eons, if not for ever. Not only should everyone be nourished and trained as a possible parent, but there should be no possibility of such an
obstacle to natural selection as the objection of a countess to a navvy or of a duke to a charwoman. Equality is essential to good breeding; and equality, as all economists know, is incompatible with property."

In this Shaw was managing to synthesize eugenics with socialism, his best-loved political doctrine. This was a popular concept at the time.

When, in 1910, Shaw wrote that natural attraction rather than wealth or social class should govern selection of marriage partners, the concept of eugenics did not have the negative connotations it later acquired after having been adopted by the National Socialists of Germany. Shaw sometimes treated the topic in a light-hearted way, pointing out that if eugenics had been thought about some generations previously, he himself may not have been born, so depriving humanity of his great contributions. He seems to have maintained his opinion throughout his life.

As with many of the topics which Shaw addressed, but particularly so in his examination of the "social purity" movement, he used irony, misdirection and satire to make his point. At a meeting of the Eugenics Education Society of 3 March 1910 he suggested the need to use a "lethal chamber" to solve their problem. Shaw said: "We should find ourselves committed to killing a great many people whom we now leave living, and to leave living a great many people whom we at present kill. We should have to get rid of all ideas about capital punishment ..." Shaw also called for the development of a "deadly" but "humane" gas for the purpose of killing, many at a time, those unfit to live. Some noticed that this was an example of Shaw satirically employing the reductio ad absurdum argument against the eugenicists' wilder aspirations: The Globe and The Evening News recognised it as a skit on the dreams of the eugenicists, though many others in the press took his words out of their satirical context. Dan Stone of Liverpool University writes: "Either the press believed Shaw to be serious, and vilified him, or recognised the tongue-in-cheek nature of his lecture".

Religion

In his will, Shaw stated that his "religious convictions and scientific views cannot at present be more specifically defined than as those of a believer in creative revolution." He requested that no one should imply that he accepted the beliefs of any specific religious organization, and that no memorial to him should "take the form of a cross or any other instrument of torture or symbol of blood sacrifice."

Legacy

In his old age, Shaw was a household name both in Britain and Ireland, and was famed throughout the world. His ironic wit endowed English with the adjective "Shavian", used to characterize observations such as: "My way of joking is to tell the truth. It's the funniest joke in the world." Concerned about the vagaries of English spelling, Shaw willed a portion of his wealth (probated at £367,233 13s) to fund the creation of a new phonemic alphabet for the English language. However, the money available was insufficient to support the project, so it was neglected for a time. This changed when his estate began earning significant royalties from the rights to Pygmalion after My Fair Lady â€“ the musical adapted from Pygmalion by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe â€“ became a hit. However, the Public Trustee found the intended trust to be invalid because its intent was to serve a private interest instead of a charitable purpose, and as a non-charitable purpose trust, it could not be enforced because it failed to satisfy the beneficiary principle. In the end an out-of-court settlement granted only £8600 for promoting the new alphabet, which is now called the Shavian alphabet. The National Gallery of Ireland, RADA and the British Museum all received substantial bequests.

Shaw's home, now called Shaw's Corner, in the small village of Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire is a National Trust property, open to the public. The Shaw Theatre, Euston Road, London, opened in 1971, was named in his honour. Near its entrance, opposite the new British Library, a contemporary statue of Saint Joan commemorates Shaw as author of that play.

The Shaw Festival, an annual theater festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada began as an eight
week run of Don Juan in Hell (as the long third act dream sequence of Man And Superman is called when staged alone) and Candida in 1962, and has grown into an annual festival with over 800 performances a year, dedicated to producing the works of Shaw and his contemporaries. The portrait of George Bernard Shaw located at Niagara-on-the-Lake was commissioned by hotelier Si Wai Lai and sculpted by Dr. Elizabeth Bradford Holbrook, CM (1913â€“2009).

He is also remembered as one of the pivotal founders of the London School of Economics, whose library is now called the British Library of Political and Economic Science. The Fabian Window, designed by Shaw, hangs in the Shaw Library in the main building of the LSE.

Novels

- Immaturity
- Cashel Byron's Profession
- An Unsocial Socialist
- The Irrational Knot
- Love Among the Artists

Drama

- Plays Unpleasant (published 1898)
  - Widowers' Houses (1892)
  - The Philanderer (1898)
  - Mrs Warren's Profession (1893)
- Plays Pleasant (published 1898):
  - Arms and the Man (1894)
  - Candida (1894)
  - The Man of Destiny (1895)
  - You Never Can Tell (1897)
- Three Plays for Puritans (published 1901)
  - The Devil's Disciple (1897)
  - Caesar and Cleopatra (1898)
  - Captain Brassbound's Conversion (1899)
- The Admirable Bashville (1901)
- Man and Superman (1902â€“03)
- John Bull's Other Island (1904)
- How He Lied to Her Husband (1904)
- Major Barbara (1905)
- The Doctor's Dilemma (1906)
- Getting Married (1908)
- The Glimpse of Reality (1909)
- The Fascinating Foundling (1909)
- Press Cuttings (1909)
- Misalliance (1910)
- Annajanska, the Bolshevik Empress (1917)
- The Dark Lady of the Sonnets (1910)
- Fanny's First Play (1911)
- Overruled (1912)
- Androcles and the Lion (1912)
- Pygmalion (1912â€“13)
- The Great Catherine (1913)
- The Inca of Perusalem (1915)
- O'Flaherty VC (1915)
- Augustus Does His Bit (1916)
Essays

- Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891)
- The Perfect Wagnerite, Commentary on the Ring (1898)
- Maxims for Revolutionists (1903)
- Preface to Major Barbara (1905)
- "On Going to Church" (1905)
- How to Write a Popular Play (1909)
- Treatise on Parents and Children (1910)
- Common Sense about the War (1914)
- The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism (1928)
- Major Critical Essays (1930). Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891), The Perfect Wagnerite (1898) and The Sanity of Art in one volume.
- Our Theatres in the Nineties (1932). Collected drama criticism.
- Dictators & Let Us Have More of Them (1938)
- Everybody's Political What's What? (1944)
- Sixteen Self Sketches (1949)
- Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings (1961)

Musical Criticism

- London Music in 1888â€“89 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto (later known as Bernard Shaw) with Some
Further Autobiographical Particulars, 1937. Contains important, some 30 pages long, preface by Shaw.


  
  Note. First published in hardback in 1981. The Second Revised Edition was published only in paperback and it differs from the earlier one by only four short pieces [Dan H. Laurence, 'Editor's Note to the Second Edition'].


Debate

  
  - Do We Agree, a debate between G. B. Shaw and G. K. Chesterton with Hilaire Belloc as chairman (1928)

External links

- George Bernard Shaw at IBDb.com
- George Bernard Shaw 1937 color portrait by Madame Yevonde
- Works of George Bernard Shaw at Project Gutenberg
- Bernard Shaw papers at LSE Archives
- Man & Cameraman, the photographic collection of GB Shaw at LSE Archives
- George Bernard Shaw blog photographs featured from the Man and Cameraman project at LSE Archives
- 1927 film made in Phonofilm at SilentEra
- 1928 film made in Movietone at SilentEra
- International Shaw Society, includes a chronology of Shaw's works
- The Shaw Society, UK, established in 1941
- The Bernard Shaw Society, New York
- Shaw Chicago Theater A theater dedicated to the works of Shaw & his contemporaries.
- Shaw Festival Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada theatre that specializes in plays by Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries and plays about his era (1856â€“1950)
- Dan H. Laurence/Shaw Collection in the University of Guelph Library, Archival and Special Collections, holds more than 3,000 items related to his writings and career
- George Bernard Shaw Timeline
- George Bernard Shaw's collection at the Harry Ransom Center at The University of Texas at Austin

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George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, literary critic and a fervent socialist who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. Previous Next. Quick Facts. Birthday: July 26, 1856. Nationality: Irish. Famous: Quotes By George Bernard Shaw Atheists. Sun Sign: Leo. Died At Age: 94. Spouse/Ex: Charlotte Payne-Townshend. father: George Carr Shaw. mother: Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw. siblings: Elinor Agnes Shaw, Lucinda Frances Shaw. Died on: November 2, 1950. place of death: Ayot St Lawrence. George Bernard Shaw's theater extended to his personal life. He considered himself a cultural miracle, and a partisan conflict among his readers and playgoers provoked a massive body of literature for and against him and his work. Much recent criticism concludes that he ranks as the greatest English dramatist since William Shakespeare. Shaw was born in Dublin, Ireland, on July 16, 1856. At an
George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on July 26, 1856. His father, George Carr Shaw was in the wholesale grain trading business and his mother, Lucinda Elisabeth Shaw was the daughter of an impoverished landowner. A young George led a distressed childhood. His alcoholic father remained drunk most of the time. It was due to this that Shaw abstained from alcohol throughout his lifetime. George Bernard Shaw was an Irish playwright, literary critic and a fervent socialist who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. Quick Facts. Birthday: July 26, 1856. Nationality: Irish. Famous: Quotes By George Bernard Shaw Atheists. Died At Age: 94. Sun Sign: Leo. Spouse/Ex-: Charlotte Payne-Townshend. father: George Carr Shaw. mother: Lucinda Elizabeth Shaw. siblings: Elinor Agnes Shaw, Lucinda Frances Shaw. Died on: November 2, 1950, place of death: Ayot St Lawrence. George Bernard Shaw, Writer: My Fair Lady. The Anglo-Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925, acquired a reputation as the greatest dramatist in the English language during the first half of the 20th Century for the plays he had written at the height of his creativity from "Mrs. Warren's Profession" in 1893 to "The Apple Cart".