

is the real Shavian revolution—the age playgoer, represents that thoughtless, complacent, sentimental society audience. For the audience, the aver-which, for Shaw, was responsible for so much distortion of vision and so much evil and suffering. Readers of detective stories have sometimes wondered whether a detective story could ever be written where the murderer turns out to be the reader. Shaw comes near to that in making his audience the true villain of his dramas.

How good a dramatist was Shaw? Is it true that he revitalized the moribund English theatre? Where does he stand among modern playwrights?

Beyond doubt he was an important dramatist. But his importance is not as a great dramatic innovator. The “new drama” fostered by J. T. Gerin’s Independent Theatre and so warmly cheered on by William Archer, the Ibsenite translator of Ibsen, was not so new as drama as it considered itself to be. Shaw’s comedy of ideas was full of life and full of

fun, but the life and the fun came from the sparkle of Shaw’s mind, not from a fully realized dramatic projection of a complex vision. Of Shaw’s later plays, “Back to Methusaleh” shows a most undramatic desire to reduce all human life to disembodied speculation and only “Saint Joan” remains popular. “Saint Joan” is not a tragedy, nor was it meant to be. Shaw called it a “chronicle play,” and in fact it is mostly a comedy, the comic effect being achieved by the device of interpreting the events of Joan’s life with a brisk modernity, a refusal to be awed by historical or religious formulas and a determination to interpret everything as his own common sense suggests. This is not such a crude or obvious a procedure as it may seem; it does mean that the author must seize on the reality of his subject vividly and independently, and the best moments in “Saint Joan” come when Shaw is doing precisely that. It gives the play humor and vitality and conviction. It might be argued that a man who believed with incorrigible optimism in

a Life Force working out all things for the best, a man who could write as Shaw did, that “I am prepared to back human society against any idea positive or negative, that can be brought into the field against it,” was bound to be incapable of tragedy. But many of Shaw’s social plays will remain both entertaining and provocative. Though they are dated in theme and situation, their datedness is spontaneous and natural, springing from Shaw’s observation of and concern for his own society and its future. And the same can be said of much of Shaw’s brilliant prose argument. Sometimes he played to the gallery and said deliberately exasperating, preposterous or even disturbingly cruel things, but that was part of his shock tactics. Some of the points he made concerned purely ephemeral matters. But the relation between convention and reality, between social custom and true morality, between habit and vitality between tradition and progress, will surely remain so long as any kind of human society endures; and this fact I think, will guarantee Shaw’s survival

SHAW AS WELLS SAW HIM



—Culver.

By H. G. WELLS, who wrote this “obituary” during Shaw’s lifetime for the London Daily Express.

THROUGH the years GBS and I came to a very close friendly antagonism, an endless bickering of essentially antagonistic natures. I was a biologist first and foremost, and Shaw had a physiological disgust at vital activities. This repulsion was mixed up with a passionate hatred of vivisection, so that he would and did misrepresent the work by Pavlov—to whom he had a very strong personal resemblance, bright blue eyes instead of bright brown—quite recklessly. Underlying it all was an impulse to opposition and provocation.

He got his excitement by rousing a fury of antagonism and then overcoming and defeating it. At that game, which covered a large part of his life, he was unsurpassable.

And now for his most estranging fault. Shaw was fantastically vain. He was ruled by a naked, unqualified, ego-centered, devouring vanity such as one rarely meets in life. And I find myself asking: Was this egotistical vanity something innate, or did it creep into an essentially combative nature and take possession of it? Apparently he could not think of any other human being, and particularly of any outstanding and famous human being, without immediately referring him directly to himself.

One method of his self-assertion was portraiture. The number of pictures, busts, and portraits that encumbered Shaw’s establishment was extraordinary.

That was one method of self-assertion peculiar to Shaw. Another, more general, has been practised since *homo sapiens* began his career, and that is to inflict pain. Shaw let himself do

that to me, in spite of the protests of that most lovable of women, his wife

I was suddenly recalled to England which I had just left, by an urgent message from my sons. My wife was suffering from secondary cancer which would end inevitably in her death in six months. I had always expected to die before my wife, and the shock I got was terrific. On the return boat to England, fearing the chance inquiries of friends who might be aboard, I took refuge in a private cabin and there I blubbered like a baby. But this event released a queer accumulation of impulses in Shaw. He was impelled to write that this was a stuff and nonsense on the part of my wife and imply that she would be much to blame if she died. There was no such thing as cancer, and so forth and so on.

This foolish bit of ruthlessness came to hand, and with it came a letter from Charlotte Shaw, his wife. I was not to mind what he had said, wrote Charlotte. I must not let it hurt either him or myself. He had to do these things. She tried to prevent them and that was more and more her role as life went on. She had married this perplexing being in a passion of admiration. Her money made the production of his plays good business so that he was speedily independent of her, and she found she had launched that incalculable, lopsided *enfant terrible*, a man of genius, upon the world.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

GBS Between Covers

Here is a listing, by no means complete or definitive, of books now in print by and about GBS.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW. By Edmund Fuller. Scribner's. \$2.50. For scholars already immersed in Shaviana this book is superfluous; but the uninitiated will find a cogent discussion of the more important ideas.

BERNARD SHAW. By Eric Bentley. New Directions. \$2. The most damaging of Shaw critics, states Mr. Bentley, was Shaw himself. In an attempt to propagandize (Socialism, vegetarianism, any number of isms), he allowed himself to become notorious. If Shaw failed as a propagandist, he succeeded as an artist and a teacher. The discussion of Shaw as a great modern teacher is the most enlightening section.

BERNARD SHAW: A CHRONICLE. By Robert Rattray. Roy Publishers. \$5. A

compilation of the works and life of GBS, meticulously arranged chronologically from 1865 to 1951.

THIRTY YEARS WITH GBS. By Blanche Patch. Dodd, Mead. \$3. This is a lavish if somewhat helter-skelter account of Shaw's idiosyncrasies, his working habits, his friendships, as recorded by his secretary. Miss Patch is unsmilingly objective as she reports such off-the-record information as the sixty-five-year-old Shaw learning to tango, or enrolling in a correspondence course, hidden behind Miss Patch's name, to learn Spanish. After thirty years with the master Miss Patch became, as Shaw quipped, quite "Shaw-proof."

DAYS WITH BERNARD SHAW. By Stephen Winsten. Vanguard. \$3.75. **SHAW'S CORNER.** By Stephen Winsten. Roy. \$4.50. These "I-Knew-GBS" books, written by his neighbor at Ayot St. Lawrence,

makes one regret that someone who knew Shaw couldn't write more warmly and convincingly about him. In these records of conversations with the man-next-door Mr. Winsten shows Shaw complaining peevishly about English bread, inquiring about the garden flowers, striding down the lane in his long white mackintosh swinging his walking stick, and finally, in a moving sketch, suddenly overcome by loneliness following his wife's death.

MEN AND SUPERMEN. By Arthur H. Nethercot. Harvard University Press. \$5. Here is a scholarly guide to the plays and relatively obscure novels of Shaw. Mr. Nethercot asks some formal and formidable questions about Shaw in an attempt to place him in the proper artistic pigeon-hole. By and large he has succeeded nicely in his academic task.

GBS: A FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT AND A POSTSCRIPT. By Hesketh Pearson. Harper. \$5. This probably comes as close as any to being a definitive autobiography and critical study of Shaw. In writing the "Full-Length Portrait" Pearson asked the questions and Shaw answered. The "Postscript" deals with
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DISCOGRAPHY

GBS on Records



THE SURFACE has hardly been scratched where Shaw recordings are concerned. Yet records suggest themselves as an especially happy medium for his plays, with their polemics and round-tables, heated sermons and long exhortations that roll in or back out like surf and underflow. In matters of rhythm, tempo, and dynamics Shaw is not far behind Professor Henry Higgins or that other Irish master of speech effects, James Joyce; one wishes he had recorded some of his most melodious passages as Joyce did) for, like his Don Juan Shaw possessed an ear "practised on a thousand songs and symphonies."

On the one record where "Bernard Shaw Speaks" (Heritage LP H-0074) he delivers only a rather routine lecture on the horrors of war and the respects for the class struggle. Taken from a short-wave broadcast of 1937,

when Shaw was eighty-one, the speech is liberally peppered with humor, prophecy, and platitude. At any rate it is the doughty old Fabian warrior speaking—unless something more significant turns up Shavians will have to content themselves with this minor memento.

Of the plays only the "Don Juan in Hell" interlude from "Man and Superman" has found its way into the LP catalogue (on Columbia OSL 166, two records). Paul Gregory's all-star First Drama Quartette does all the talking, most of it with a brilliance quite equal to the material at hand. Charles Boyer carries off the lion's share of the honors as the Don, though his accent sometimes hobbles. Charles Laughton, the Devil personified, combines Satanism and gourmandism with a sing-song grandeur; Sir Cedric Hardwicke makes the statuesque Commander come to

life; Agnes Moorehead is a splendidly female Dona Ana. These are four virtuosos and their performance fairly glitters, but one important point is missed. In producing this scene for records Columbia would have done well to follow Shaw's musical directions, drawn chiefly from "Don Giovanni," though at one point "Mozart's music gets grotesquely adulterated with Gounod's" (a prescription that would call for the services of someone like Poulenc). In the course of the proceedings the Commander remarks that one of his lines "sounds rather flat without my trombones." Trombones and the rest of the musical asides that Shaw called for would have added depth and irony to the drama (even if an orchestra would have been prohibitive for the quartette's stage appearances), and eliminated Laughton's rather awkwardly inserted readings of the musical cues. Needless to say, Shaw and music have always mixed well even when both are diluted, as witness "My Fair Lady" (Columbia OL 5090) and "The Chocolate Soldier" (Victor LK 1006). But at best these two are only a kind of Shaw-in-law.

—FRED GRUNFELD.