

SHAW'S MAN OF GENIUS: THE SOLITARY VISIONARY

THESIS

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By

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For John--who made my dreams a reality.

## PREFACE

In the Preface to Saint Joan, one of George Bernard Shaw's last plays, we find his interpretation of a genius:

A genius is a person, who seeing farther and probing deeper than other people, has a different set of ethical valuations from theirs, and has energy enough to give effect to this extra vision and its valuations in whatever manner best suits his or her specific talents.<sup>1</sup>

Such a definition gave me a clue to Shaw's attitude toward the genius. Surprisingly, Shaw, who can be a master of ambiguity, remains consistent in his admiration for creativity and intelligence. After a comprehensive study of Shaw's plays, I have selected twelve in which the genius is a prominent character.

For the purpose of clarification, I have, in each chapter, grouped the various characters of genius according to similar personality traits. All of the characters, despite their differences in temperament, are visionaries unjustly criticized as either imposters or lunatics. The plays, however, are not discussed in chronological order, for it is almost impossible to restrict Shaw's unpredictable variances of thought to any particular pattern. For example, Shaw introduces the concept of the Life Force in Man and Superman; but not until Back to Methuselah, several plays later, does he explain his theory completely.

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<sup>1</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Saint Joan (New York: Brentano's, 1924), p. xii.

As I traced the genius character in his plays, I realized that some of the characters lack the maturity and seriousness of intent that is so apparent in his later characters like Saint Joan and Father Keegan. In The Devil's Disciple, The Doctor's Dilemma, and Candida, the geniuses are flippant, immoral artists whose primary goal is to challenge conventional mores. In Caesar and Cleopatra, Major Barbara, and Heartbreak House, the geniuses not only oppose conventional mores but also propose drastic and violent methods to destroy what they consider to be an intolerable society. In Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah, and Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Shaw minimizes the hostility evidenced in other plays by devising a societal scheme based on Creative Evolution. In John Bull's Other Island, Saint Joan, and Androcles and the Lion, the geniuses approach the realm of tragedy as they renounce all hope of reconciliation with society and stoically await a world that will welcome the geniuses.

Thus, in this thesis I have provided not only an approach to the study of Shaw's geniuses in these twelve plays but also a means of interpreting Shaw as a person and a philosopher. In his own time Shaw, the eccentric crusader, must have been at constant war with society. At times Shaw must have felt like a lonely dissenter as he participated in government councils and the Socialist movement in a campaign

against corruption. As he cautiously watched the growth of an industrial society in the late nineteenth century, he must have feared that the creative qualities of man would be threatened. Shaw, like the fictional characters of genius in his plays, rejected the standards of the industrial society. In many ways, Shaw, like his fictional characters, was an exile committed to a set of social principles that differed from those of the society in which he lived. He was the exile who wanted to see the system changed--so that in the end he could come home.

I am indebted to the members of my committee for their helpful criticisms of the manuscript. Special thanks are due Dr. Vernon Lynch, my chairman, whose patient counsel and invaluable supervision made the completion of this thesis possible. I am also grateful to Dr. Thomas Brasher and Dr. Bill Brunson for their helpful suggestions and encouragement during the final stages of my paper.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW--THE FIRST GENIUS . . . . .	1
II. THE MEANING OF GENIUS . . . . .	25
III. THE GENIUS IN REBELLION . . . . .	48
IV. TO DESTROY SOCIETY: MAKE WAY FOR THE GENIUS . . . . .	64
V. A WHOLE NEW SYSTEM: THE GENIUS IN FUTURISTIC SOCIETY . . . . .	87
VI. THE RELIGIOUS PASSIVE: THE GENIUS IN WAITING . . . . .	110
VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS . . . . .	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	136

## CHAPTER I

### GEORGE BERNARD SHAW--THE FIRST GENIUS

One of George Bernard's friends, Robert Loraine, describes his first impression of the gifted playwright as a combination of the following:

Archangel Michael, with whirling sword; Moses who had communed with the Lord and was destined to lead Israel out of captivity; St. Joan of Arc consumed by a single purpose that was not her own, and a few others. Shaw topped them all . . . he has sharp, bright-blue penetrating seer's eyes with the impish twinkle of a school-boy and a transparent, delicate alabaster skin, which gives him the appearance of being not at all of common clay, but having the minimum of earth and maximum of fire in his composition. . . . I was never free from the impression when Shaw was speaking to me that he might at any moment ascend to heaven like Elijah on a chariot of fire.<sup>1</sup>

Such descriptions immortalized Shaw as a genius and a great dramatist, but the prestige of his later years was a long step from the unhappy and disreputable Irish Protestant family into which he was born in July of 1856. Most of the influences of his childhood were colored by the stifling conventionalities of his strict Puritan upbringing, for Shaw belonged to that Irish group, which according to Catholicism, had hardened its head.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Matthews Gibbs, Shaw (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 3.

To the great indignation of his relatives, Shaw always insisted that he was tragically neglected in his childhood by his father and mother. His father, George Carr Shaw, had been a civil servant and a somewhat unsuccessful businessman. Shaw never forgot the bitterness with which he regarded his father, whose addiction to drink led to severe social ostracization in the small community. One vivid recollection recorded by Shaw reveals his impression with stoic resignation: ". . . the drunkenness was so humiliating that it would have been unendurable if we had not taken refuge in laughter. . . ." <sup>3</sup> There is, then, no doubt that Shaw sums up the tragedy of his origin and upbringing and the irony of his social status in his statement:

Let who will preen himself on his Mother Hubbard's bare cupboard, and play for sympathy as an upstart: I was a downstart and the son of a downstart. <sup>4</sup>

His father's drunkenness and lowly social position seem to have affected the young boy permanently. In his own life, Shaw remained a total abstainer almost to the point of fanaticism. Too late to salvage his relationship with his son and his wife, George Carr did come to a point of reform when he almost killed himself by falling in a fit of

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 9. Hereinafter referred to as Man of the Century.



drunkenness on his own doorstep.<sup>5</sup> After the family broke up in 1872, the young Shaw became painfully aware that he could depend on very little but his own authority.<sup>6</sup>

Although Shaw found little understanding from his parents, his isolation was enhanced by the rejection of his peers. To Shaw, the only stimulating points in his environment were the scenery of Dublin Bay and the pictures in the National Gallery of Dublin. His tastes made him seem effeminate, but such criticism would have astonished him. "The truth is," as his biographer, Archibald Henderson relates, "he was unfit for boy and girl society."<sup>7</sup> It is no wonder that Shaw felt some ostracism from children his own age, for he was able to read without effort and he was mature far beyond his years. Perhaps he did not realize the powers of his imagination, as he assumed that he was no different than any other person. Because he underestimated his ability, he often made many miscalculations and may have felt at times like Einstein: that he had wandered into a strange and alien world. His biographer, Henderson, describes him in the following passage:

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Garfield Du Cann, The Loves of George Bernard Shaw (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, Inc., 1963), p. 18. Hereinafter referred to as Loves of Shaw.

<sup>6</sup>Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

He never thought of himself as an impudent and voluble boy, deplorably careless of his dress and person, which is how he must have struck other people. He was uncontrolled and unquestioned and uncounseled and uninstructed to a very unusual extent, learning how to live by, as he says, 'breaking my shins over everything.' He was frightfully sensitive to trifling rebuffs and failures, and yet so strong-minded that he often produced an impression of being extremely unfeeling.<sup>8</sup>

With his air of quiet superiority and his mental agility, he made up for his lack of formal education by the incredible reading which provided his informal education. Rather than boast of the distinction of formal schooling, he could boast of his remarkable knowledge of what genuinely appealed to him: music, art, and literature.<sup>9</sup>

The loneliness of his early years was further advanced when his mother, born Lucinda Gurly, sacrificed her unhappy marriage and went to London in 1872. Four long years elapsed before Shaw could join his mother and sisters.<sup>10</sup> Shaw recalls those four years of being left with his father as a lonely period in his life: "I am afraid the fact that nobody cared for me particularly which gave me a frightful self-sufficiency, or rather a power of starving on imaginary feasts."<sup>11</sup> Later he writes of this period in Dublin as a torture, his school a prison, and his menial job in the land office as an unrelenting monotony of a treadmill. His reason for fleeing to join his mother in London in 1876 is recorded as follows:

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Du Cann, Loves of Shaw, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 22.

. . . I left Ireland because I realized there was no future for me there. Dublin was a desert. London was the center of literature, art, and music.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, London certainly did prove to be a training ground for the varied talents of the young Shaw. Arriving in London at the age of twenty, Shaw made an unsuccessful start in his literary career with the writing of five unsuccessful novels. In the 1880's he began to interest himself in political and social affairs. In 1884, he became a founding member of the Fabian Society and a reputable crusader for political and social causes.

The most vivid and permanently influencing memories of his years in London center around his years with his mother. During his first years in London, he recalls his mother as a woman who never seemed to hold any affection for him. This lack of affection combined with the unharmonious household before the family was divided created lasting impressions: "My mother and I lived together, but there was hardly a word between us."<sup>13</sup> "Technically speaking," the son wrote of his mother, "I should say she was the worst mother conceivable"; he later said that she was incapable of kindness and devoid of any deep personal emotions.<sup>14</sup> Shaw probably never recovered from the feelings that he

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>Du Cann, Loves of Shaw, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

developed in those formative years, for he wrote of her when he was an old man: "I have a mother: I haven't seen her for years; and I don't care if I never see her. It was through her that I came to be what I am."<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not Mrs. Shaw seriously and consciously rejected her child is only conjecture. Indeed, her son was not particularly personally appealing, for he has been described as the following:

. . . tall, thin, almost to emaciation, with flaming red hair, abnormally shy, nervous and uncertain of himself in company; he was decidedly unattractive to the stranger observing him.<sup>16</sup>

The salvaging point of his mother's influence, however, may have been her musical interests. In the bitterness of her unhappy marriage, she withdrew into a world of music where she pursued her talent as an accomplished singer under the direction of George Vandaleur Lee. Lee, leader of a Dublin orchestra and a teacher of music, soon came to be a permanent resident of the Shaw household.<sup>17</sup> Continual rehearsals were held in the Shaw home, for Mrs. Shaw was given parts to play in the local operas. This important exposure to music inspired the young Shaw, and he could be heard whistling and singing the musical classics that he had picked up by ear.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gibbs, Shaw, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Du Cann, Loves of Shaw, p. 19.

Another person who contributed to the formation of the young Shaw was Mrs. Shaw's brother, a ship's doctor who joined the household during Shaw's stay in London. Already Shaw was beginning to question some of his early religious training, and the irreverence of his uncle did much to stifle the boy's instinctive spirituality. Even Mrs. Shaw, professing temporary atheism, persuaded Shaw to give up the detestable Puritanical habit of enforced church attendance. Shaw's father had called the Bible "the damndest parcel of lies."<sup>19</sup> In recalling the preaching of renowned pastors, Shaw writes, "I was wholly unmoved by their eloquence, and felt bound to inform the public that I was, on the whole, an atheist."<sup>20</sup> His letter was solemnly printed in Public Opinion, to the extreme horror of his numerous aunts and uncles.

Although his family played a significant role in Shaw's development, the literary career which brought him lasting public acclaim was slow in developing. In the decade after his arrival in London, he tried several literary forms--novels, short stories, poetry, essays, and finally drama. All early writing attempts were discouraging, for all seemed to result in failures. The first of his novels he called

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert K. Chesterton, George Bernard Shaw (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1956), p. 40.

Immaturity, a title almost indicative of his writing style. In 1881 he completed the Irrational Knot, which met rejection by six publishers. In the following year, Love Among the Artists met with the same failure as did Cashel Byron's Profession in 1883 and An Unsocial Socialist in 1884.<sup>21</sup>

Desperate for some money, he slipped into a literary form known as "paid journalism." The money that he gleaned from this endeavor was hardly adequate, for most of his output was journalistic hackwork: book reviews, notes on plays, concerts, and picture exhibitions, and occasionally reports of current events.<sup>22</sup>

Although Shaw's first literary attempts were discouraging, he first appeared successfully before the public not as a novelist or playwright, but as a critic of painting, music, and drama. In 1886 and 1887 he was an art critic for The World; in 1888 and 1890 he was a music critic for The Star; and in 1895-98 he was a drama critic for the Saturday Review. Some of his major contributions during this period as a critic were the books titled The Quintessence of Ibsenism and The Perfect Wagnerite--works both written during the nineties.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Joseph Percy Smith, The Unrepentant Pilgrim (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 38.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>23</sup>Julian Bertram Kaye, Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 153. Hereinafter referred to as Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition.

While he was successfully reviewing art exhibitions, concerts, and plays, Shaw also became a member of the Fabian Society and an interested participant in the political aspects of society. In September of 1882, Shaw met Henry George;<sup>24</sup> in 1933 he stated that George's speech "changed the whole current of my life."<sup>25</sup> Another influential event was his attendance at a meeting of the Democratic Federation, where he was favorably introduced to the ideas of Karl Marx. So impressed was Shaw with Marxian philosophy that he checked out the French translation of Das Kapital from the British Museum, since at this time no English translation had been published. The readings sparked in Shaw a passion not previously realized: he felt ". . . the hatred in the more generous souls among the respectable and educated sections for the middle-class institutions that had starved, thwarted, misled and corrupted them spiritually from their cradles."<sup>26</sup> Once when Shaw was asked to evaluate his early life, he wrote: "I was a coward until Marx made a Communist of me and gave me faith: Marx made a man of me."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Edward Shanks, Bernard Shaw (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

His involvement in other aspects of society is worth noting. In 1903 he resigned from St. Pancras Borough Council, on which he had served for six years. Also coloring his service to society was membership on the following committees: Public Health, Parliamentary, Electricity, and Housing and Drainage. Membership in such organizations of public service gave him the reputation as a spokesman for the rights of man. His zeal for the freedom of man led him to participate in such unusual campaigns as gaining public lavatories for the women in England.<sup>28</sup>

The literary mode which gave Shaw lasting distinction as a playwright was slowly evolving in his mind while he was a music, art, and drama critic and while he was assiduously involved in the political stirrings of socialism. His first play, Widowers' Houses, was begun in 1885, but seven years elapsed before he ever finished it. When the play was performed at the Royalty Theatre in 1892, Shaw, now thirty-six, realized that drama was an interest he would continue to pursue. After his first successful play, he produced a steady flow of plays--fifty dramatic works, thirty of which are full-length plays. The printed plays are always accompanied with lengthy prefaces which many times are as informative and entertaining as the plays themselves.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbs, Shaw, p. 2.



If one delves into the theme of his plays, however, there appears to be at first an undeveloped scheme for the formation of a genius character. Some of the early plays that touch on this type of personality are as follows: The Devil's Disciple, The Doctor's Dilemma, and Candida. There is a transition period in which Caesar and Cleopatra, Heartbreak House, and Major Barbara portray a genius character adverse to the existence of society at all. Without a doubt, in Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah, and Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Shaw supplies an answer to the question of how a man can become an intellectual and maintain his status in society. In his final plays, however, he seems to have abandoned all hope of reforming present civilization, for he portrays in John Bull's Other Island, Androcles and the Lion, and Saint Joan, passive religious personages whose only satisfaction lies in the hope of a new world to come.

That Shaw would be concerned with the future of the genius or the superior man trying to exist in a contemptible society provides a revealing insight into Shaw's personality. As he grew older, he began to make constant references to his imagination as that of a genius. He firmly insisted that his friends maintain an equal evaluation of him. Perhaps his frequent references to himself as a genius allowed him to maintain some of his eccentric tastes with a little less criticism, for he knew that such a rationale would excuse him from having to appear normal in a conformist society.

No doubt, Shaw needed all the rationales he could get to explain some of his eccentric behavior. All of his life he was an outspoken vegetarian and he boasted, "Vegetarianism is the diet of saints and heroes."<sup>30</sup> His wife, Charlotte, allowed him to maintain some of his habits, for she kept him in a paradise of praise. She referred to him with breathless reverence as The Master or The Genius; she implicitly required guests to do likewise.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Shaw came to regard himself as a philosopher-dramatist who could comprehend the lives and purposes of many men because he felt he had an understanding of the universe that was above and beyond the comprehension of the common man. At times his references to himself were self-assured and almost snobbish; but when in 1925 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, he was puzzled by the award. He spoke of his honor by saying that he presumed the prize was given to him in 1925 as a token of gratitude for earlier works--as he had published nothing in 1925.<sup>32</sup>

The paradox of Shaw's personality is unfathomable, but the modesty and the self-assurance, the insecurity and loneliness were all a part of Shaw. He never exposed any side of his nature to the public for too long. As G. K. Chesterton points out:

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<sup>30</sup> Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 783.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 838.

Bernard Shaw occupied much of his life in trying to elude his followers. . . . If you agree with Shaw, he is very likely to contradict you. . . . His critics have accused him of vulgar self-advertisement: in his relation to his followers he seems rather marked with a mad modesty. . . .<sup>33</sup>

Chesterton compares him to Socrates as well as Christ:

He differs from that divine and human prototype in the fact that like most modern people he does to some extent talk in order to find out what he thinks; whereas they knew it beforehand. . . . He offered himself to the world with only one great qualification, that he could talk earnestly and well. He did not speak; he talked to a crowd. He did not write; he talked to a typewriter. He did not really construct a play; he talked through ten mouths or masks instead of one.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, he lived a long life working on his plays until he died in 1950 at the age of 94.<sup>35</sup> It is indefensibly foolish when such an analysis is attempted in a brief chapter to explain a man whose whole object in life had been to explain himself. As his biographer, Archibald Henderson, came to write of him: "He was the true genius, inexplicable, untraceable, unmanageable, unpredictable, incalculable."<sup>36</sup>

Not only was Shaw influenced by the isolation and misunderstanding of his early years but he was also aware of philosophical trends that were developed in the nineteenth

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<sup>33</sup>Chesterton, George Bernard Shaw, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>35</sup>Gibbs, Shaw, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 10.

century. A true introduction to Shaw, then, would not be complete without at least including some of the philosophical thoughts that appealed to him, for many of the philosophical theories of his era seem to be a basis for his creation of a genius character and the idea of creative evolution in his plays. His early life was spent in reading and re-reading some of the classics--Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Shelley; such authors continued to influence him for the rest of his life. Through the operas of Victor Hugo, Schiller, Verdi, Beethoven, and Schumann, he got to know foreign literature.<sup>37</sup> In his home, he had access to books on painting which inspired him to attend the Irish National Gallery, where he studied pictures. He wrote:

I have been mainly influenced by works of art in my artificial culture and have always been more consciously susceptible to music and painting than to literature; so that Mozart and Michelangelo count for a good deal in the making of my mind.<sup>38</sup>

As a child, Shaw had wished to be a painter like Michelangelo; later in his plays he continued to patronize the creative artist-geniuses by characterizing them repeatedly in his plays. In his art criticism, Shaw emphasizes the worth of some whom he regarded as geniuses by pointing out that he always liked to include such unordinary people in his work. He emphasizes also his worship of Michelangelo's accuracy so that the artist

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<sup>37</sup> Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

becomes one of the prototypes for the idea of the genius character.<sup>39</sup>

The man of genius, however, was not a wholly unwelcome figure in a society that was beginning to harbor a respect for creativity. In the later part of the nineteenth century, the word new had taken on a new significance. There was the new Wagner and the new journalism, the new art of photography, and the new sport of bicycling. There was a new enthusiasm and development in anticipation of the new century that was about to break out on the world. Traditional beliefs were being questioned and those that were no longer functional were being discarded. Shaw, too, was analyzing and re-evaluating some of the hallowed beliefs of his childhood.<sup>40</sup>

At this time, he began to regard Protestantism, not as a religion, but more as a political faction and a class that showed its prejudice by condemning all other religions to hell. From the time he adopted an irreverence for religious groups he began to make his own opinion known.<sup>41</sup> In 1876, Shaw wrote the satirical article "On Going to Church," in which he indicts all churches of worship as houses of Satan:

I hasten to claim honorable exemption as atheist and socialist, from any such complicity. But if I had been turned loose in a real Church and allowed to wander and stare about to hear noble music there. . . .<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>40</sup>Shanks, Bernard Shaw, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>42</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 110.

Such outspoken criticism of established religion does not necessarily mean that Shaw was not religious; he was mainly disillusioned with some of the hypocritical practices in the churches of his day: "Show me where within the Cathedral, I may find the way to the Cathedral in me."<sup>43</sup>

The subject of the ideal man and his spiritual development, however, was always a concern for Shaw. In some of his later plays he portrays geniuses who, although deeply religious, cannot cope with the religious institutions of their society. Exemplifying this opinion are the characters of Lavinia in Androcles and the Lion, Father Keegan in John Bull's Other Island, Jesus as Shaw portrays him in the Preface to Androcles and the Lion, and the country maid in Saint Joan. In 1896, in a letter to Ellen Terry, Shaw wrote that people were always talking of religion as if it were one of the commonest things in the world; but he stressed that a great religious passion was as rare as a man of genius.<sup>44</sup>

Having lost faith in religious institutions and the future of man in an industrial society, Shaw began to play with the ideas that contained the germ of endless development. Most of the heroes in his plays are intrigued with the idea of improving man. Julius Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra, Captain Shotover in Heartbreak House, and Undershaft in Major

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

Barbara all want to see man improved; but they conclude that the old society must be destroyed even if it involves violence. In Back to Methuselah, Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, and Man and Superman, Shaw formulates a plan for creative evolution which will result in a society of intellectuals that will welcome the character of genius.

Being exposed to the Darwinist theory of evolution, Shaw selectively borrowed only those tenets that supported his own theories. He cherished evolution because it allowed him something to hope for by giving him faith in a society better and greater than the life-forms already developed. Man, he felt, is only at a stage in the scale of evolution. To his biographer Archibald Henderson, he once wrote:

The tragedy of man's life, as at present constituted, is its brevity. Just when judgment, discretion, and wisdom are attained, man passes from the scene of his endeavors.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Shaw, who had rejected the precepts of traditional religion, substituted in its place his own belief in the idea of creative evolution and called it the religion of the twentieth century.

His adoption of a belief in creative evolution and the superior man, however, is philosophically oriented in the theories traceable to Goethe and Shelley, Samuel Butler, Henri

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<sup>45</sup>Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 772.

Bergson, Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold.<sup>46</sup> Although it cannot be proven whether or not Shaw ever did any thoroughgoing study of the philosophy of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, some similarities in their thought can be attributed to the fact that these ideas were part of the common stock of modern European advanced thought. In a letter to Henderson on September 5, 1905, Shaw wrote the following:

The truth is that I am rather an imposter and pundit on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Another time he is reputed to have further criticized Nietzsche's views:

. . . Nietzsche's notions of art, his admiration of the Romans, etc., are very much unlike any views of mine; and his erudition I believe to be all nonsense: I think he was academic in the sense of having a great deal of second-hand book learning about him, and don't care for him except when he is perfectly original. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Whether or not Shaw acknowledged his own theories as being influenced by the philosophers in his era, the fact remains that some of his social theories are similar to the patterns of thought of the philosophers known in the nineteenth century. Shaw was definitely formulating a respect for the philosophic man:

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<sup>46</sup>Kaye, Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 164.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.



. . . He who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by so-discovered means.<sup>49</sup>

Shaw, like Plato or Leonardo da Vinci or Einstein (who claimed that only an artist can be a higher mathematician), was beginning to make his own contributions by becoming an artist-philosopher.

Another philosopher that particularly impressed Shaw was Auguste Comte, who like Shaw was concerned with social problems. Comte, like Shaw, also admired noble men and spoke worshipfully of Julius Caesar. Shaw's admiration for Caesar inspired one of his best plays, Caesar and Cleopatra.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to speculate exactly how much of Comte's social theories, especially his Religion of Humanity, directly influenced Shaw's Life-Force religion; but some of the elements of creative evolution are unquestionably in the theories of both men.<sup>51</sup> The priests in Comte's Religion of Humanity are similar to the Ancients in Shaw's Back to Methuselah. Both the priests and the Ancients are the teachers, scholars, and scientists of their community. Their role is to transmit all the cultural acquisitions of the past, regulate the temporal life of the present, and provide for the future by advancing

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<sup>49</sup>Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 762.

<sup>50</sup>Kaye, Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

knowledge of the positive laws of the universe or improving the moral standards of the race. The ideal state and the religion of Father Keegan in Shaw's John Bull's Other Island are also similar to the precepts of Comte's futuristic religion.

Although it was chiefly Samuel Butler's theory of evolution that influenced Shaw, Henri Bergson's epistemology was another important contribution to the backlog of philosophy that interested Shaw. Bergson realized, as had Samuel Butler before him, that a theory of life can be validated only by a corroborating theory of knowledge. Yet Butler remains the key to understanding Shaw's use of creative evolution in Back to Methuselah, Man and Superman, and Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles.<sup>52</sup> Shaw, who had crusaded against the Darwinian theory of evolution, was overjoyed when in 1887 he reviewed a work that was also in hearty disagreement with the theories of Darwinian evolution. The tract was a work by Samuel Butler entitled "Darwin Denounced," in which Butler vigorously asserted that it would take years to get evolution out of the mess in which Mr. Darwin had left it.<sup>53</sup>

In any case, Shaw's interest in Butler led him to formulate what may be called the philosophy of the Life Force.

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<sup>52</sup>Henderson, Man of the Century, p. 786.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

Besides his interest in new social systems, Shaw was also beginning to consider seriously the kind of person that would be able to evolve to a state of pure intelligence and thus populate his new social structure. The philosophies of Nietzsche and Thomas Carlyle posit a theory that provides the answers Shaw was seeking: a new society based on the evolvment of superior human beings. Nietzsche and Carlyle are philosophically widely dissimilar; nevertheless, they are alike in their attitude towards a celebration of the heroic. Both praised the existence of a special person who could transcend ethical codes and the limitations of common human beings. While Nietzsche provided a philosophy grounded in the idea of the superman, Carlyle was formulating a special legacy in his preference for the noble hero of history. Characteristic of the Carlylean hero is his possession of the highest point of consciousness in his race, his ability to perceive with "a clear-seeing eye, and an instinctive ineradicable feeling for reality."<sup>54</sup>

While Carlyle used the hero as the way out of the dilemma presented by the difficulty of spiritual improvement in an unjust society, Shaw uses the superman, who for him is probably more the offspring of Carlyle than of Nietzsche. To Carlyle, the romantic individualist, the spiritual perfection

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<sup>54</sup>Gibbs, Shaw, p. 29.

of the individual, especially as embodied in the great man, is necessary to organize chaos; to Shaw, the post-Marxian, man can not be better than his society, and therefore social change must precede individual perfection.<sup>55</sup>

That Shaw hoped to reform society is brought out in his plays. In some of his last plays--John Bull's Other Island, Androcles and the Lion, and Saint Joan--there is a shadow of tragedy as each hero seems to have abandoned any desire to transform his present world. In fact, Father Keegan, Lavinia, and Saint Joan develop a passivity that allows them to wait stoically for the new world of the future. Although Shaw seems to have realized the suffering that a genius must accept, he adopted forever such a person as his ideal. In his second novel, The Irrational Knot, he writes of the transition from the life of instinct to conscious life, in which the object is to heighten the quality of life. As long as his heroes could unselfishly crusade for such beliefs, Shaw could never have had any other person as an ideal.<sup>56</sup>

As this study progresses, the parade of these frustrated heroes will pass before the reader for analysis. In The Devil's Disciple, The Doctor's Dilemma, and Candida, there appear the first undeveloped genius characters, hopelessly

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<sup>55</sup>Kaye, Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 35.

rebellious and attacking the conventions of their society. In Major Barbara, Julius Caesar and Heartbreak House, there is the disillusioned hero who sees hope only in clearing away and destroying, even by violence, the waste of society. The violence of the former plays is replaced by a plan for a new society that will form when creative evolution is realized in Man and Superman, Back to Methuselah, and Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles. The last plays--John Bull's Other Island, Androcles and the Lion, and Saint Joan--are more tragically oriented, for the hero seems to have abandoned any hope of reforming his society. Instead the heroes who are cast in the aura of great spirituality decide to wait for a new and better world to come.

As one analyzes the plays, it becomes evident that Shaw has, indeed, portrayed the spirit and character of the genius who attempts to reform his society. His idea of genius implies a degree of human tragedy, of suffering, and of sacrifice. In his characters Shaw has captured the essence of the visionary that retells in fiction the suffering of actual historical heroes. He is picturing again the knotted muscles of Tolstoy, bearing up the full burden of morality; of Strindberg, suffering a martyr's death in hell; of Jesus, enduring crucifixion because he brought a message of hope; and of Nietzsche, dying on the cross of thought. It is Shaw's

portrayal of his genius characters that inspires the reader with reverence for such beings and invokes an anticipation of that race of superior men to come.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANING OF GENIUS

That Shaw first regarded himself as a genius is revealed in the documented letter of December 2, 1894, to Henry Arthur Jones:

Now here you will detect an enormous assumption on my part that I am a man of genius. . . .

. . . My passion, like that of all artists, is for efficiency, which means intensity of life, and breadth and variety of experience.

Do you now begin to understand, Henry Arthur Jones, that you have to deal with a man who habitually thinks of himself as one of the great geniuses of all time?<sup>1</sup>

In realizing that Shaw acknowledged himself to be a genius, one does not find it unusual that many of the heroes presented in his plays are strangely fashioned after a self-image that he maintained. While Shaw believed that there is a Holy Spirit in Nature, he was constantly burdened by an effort to find a man who could obey this spirit. The man who could envision the "higher calling" of his life would be the true superman, but his plight is the disregard accorded him by society.<sup>2</sup>

In Man and Superman, Shaw stresses the qualities of this noble man: ". . . I sing not arms and the hero, but

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

the philosophic man, he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world. . . ." <sup>3</sup> Shaw consistently stresses in his plays that man must conceive of something better than himself: ". . . I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it." <sup>4</sup>

Although Shaw stresses the merits of the artist and genius, he seems at times to echo some of the precepts found in the writings of Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, and Matthew Arnold--writers who had first stressed a new aesthetic movement in England. Walter Pater in The Renaissance writes that the end of life is not action but contemplation--"being" as distinct from "doing"--a certain disposition of the mind is, in some shape or other, the principle of all higher morality. <sup>5</sup> Both the general thoughts and philosophical influences of Edmund Burke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle are evident in the trends of Shaw's writing: the central word in all of these ideas is the "perfection" of man.

Further aspects of the philosophies known in the 1880's and 1890's are provided by Raymond Williams' Culture and Society, 1780-1950. Williams includes in his book a reliable

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 166. Hereinafter referred to as Culture and Society.



interpretation of the trends of thought prevalent in English society during the period that corresponds with Shaw's early writing career. In this period, there was an emphasis on the special nature of art--as a means to imaginative truth and an emphasis on the artist as a special kind of person. Romanticism, although a general European movement, also had an influence in this mode of thought, but the idea of the artist as a special kind of person and the idea of the "wild" genius is also evident as far back as the Socratic definition of a Poet in Plato's Ion.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1880's and 1890's, art signified a particular group of skills of the "imaginative" or creative arts. The artist had originally been a skilled person, but "artist" now referred to a person who dealt with the imaginative. A new name for understanding and judging the arts came to be "aesthetics." The arts--literature, music, painting, sculpture, theatre--were now grouped together as distinguished from other skills.<sup>7</sup> "Genius," which originally meant a characteristic disposition, came to mean "exalted ability"; consequently, "aesthetics" came to portray a meaning for genius as a special kind of person.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

While these meanings were slowly evolving, there also appeared a dispute contrasting the spontaneous work of genius with the formal imitative work bound by a set of rules. The tendency of Romanticism, however, is toward a rejection of any established rules in the methods of art. The claim for spontaneity came to signify that the artists' business is to "read the open secret of the universe."<sup>9</sup> The artist perceives and represents Essential Reality, which is controlled by the faculty of imagination.<sup>10</sup> The claim, however, that the artist could perceive a higher kind of truth was not new in the Romantic period. What should be remembered is that the qualities of the creative artist received a significant revived emphasis and the substantive element of the artist was his genius.<sup>11</sup>

After it is established that the concept of genius was recognized as part of the philosophical theories of Shaw's era, perhaps it is also helpful to reveal some of the formative origins of the word itself. The word "genio" came about in 1550 in the hands of the painter-engineers Leonardo da Vinci, Vasari, and Telesio. At this time the word was given the connotations of "creative and newly creative." In the 1700's the word began to have the broader meaning of the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

incomprehensible and mysterious creative force animating certain human beings.<sup>12</sup> When the word became "ingenious," and "ingenio," there was a further aura of the religious notion of the inspiration of the seer and the prophet added to the word. For this reason the word "genius," in its common European inheritance, never lost its religious sub-flavor.<sup>13</sup>

Other writers, then, by the twentieth century were beginning to stress additional qualities of the genius. Voronoff wrote in 1941: "The man of genius is a visionary,"<sup>14</sup> and "Is not genius the highest degree which a human faculty can attain?"<sup>15</sup> The man of genius as typified in this writing is at most a creator in every field: art, literature, and science. Tsanoff, another modern writer concerned about the psychology of the genius, comments:

Although genius embraces many fields, it is philosophical in that irrespective of the special field in which it may be active, it fans out to embrace a whole new horizon.<sup>16</sup>

Other poets and philosophers have added their ideas to the conception of genius. Wordsworth, more than any other

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<sup>12</sup>Milton C. Nahm, Genius and Creativity (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 128.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>14</sup>Serge Voronoff, From Cretin to Genius (Binghamton, New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1941), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>16</sup>Radoslav Andrea Tsanoff, The Ways of Genius (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 8.

English poet, sought to probe the processes and the growth of the creative imagination:<sup>17</sup>

. . . which, in truth  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.<sup>18</sup>

Even Schopenhauer, whom Shaw read, writes:

To compare useful people with men of genius is like comparing building stone with diamonds. . . . Genius is animating and productive intelligence.<sup>19</sup>

In a commentary on art, Shaw writes that the essential meaning of life is truly enhanced by the message of art and the artists:

. . . Further, art should refine our sense of character and conduct, of justice and sympathy, greatly heightening our self-knowledge, self-control, precision of action, and considerateness, and making us intolerant of baseness, cruelty, injustice, and intellectual superficiality, or vulgarity.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, there is a plea for the artist to be valued as one who, by use of imagination, creates another nature out of the material that actual nature supplies. "The first requisite for the creative artist," Immanuel Kant argues, is "originality; . . . the free artist is, however, the genius compact not alone of imagination but of understanding as well."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup>Nahm, Genius and Creativity, p. 12.

In the masterpieces of genius, nature is seen in a new and revealing light. As this state of being is the highest expression of human form possible, Shaw is inclined to esteem it as the heart of reality. Perhaps the ideal of the genius as realist is what Shaw has in mind when he depicts his geniuses such as Julius Caesar, Shotover, Tanner, Dubedat, Father Keegan, Saint Joan, or Lavinia. All of Shaw's geniuses are able to see the shams and hypocrisies of society. Perhaps Shaw held the conviction that in its creative activity the mind somehow reaches the summit of reality--a conviction that marks his poet and sage and saint. Genius, then, comes to mean creative aspiration and achievement, and it contemplates the vision of Creative Reality.

Although the artist was revered, not only by Shaw but by other Romantics of his generation as well, there were certain facets of personality that came to be associated with the genius: a freedom from rules of society, an isolation from society, and an everpresent indictment by the masses that questioned the stability of his sanity. That the creative artist is classified as immoral, ostracized, and called "mad" came to have a special significance to Shaw. The discussion which follows attempts to broaden the concept of genius in the light of these three elements of his character. These general attitudes, however, did not originate entirely with the philosophy of Shaw or with the philosophies of his contemporaries. Some of the

ideas concerning the artist's morals, for instance, have a history of thought traceable to many Platonic notions.

The concept of genius as established by the Romantic philosophers of the eighteenth century maintained the Platonic idea of the inspired artist as one freed from subjection to rules.<sup>22</sup> The Romantics considered genius as "a dynamic spirit that no rules could hem in, one that no analysis or classification could ever fully explain."<sup>23</sup> The genius, then, seems able to make his own rules and laws. Shaw especially seemed to voice this opinion in 1889 when he wrote the following about the artist:

The artist must be at once his own master and everybody's pupil. If he cannot learn from all that he sees and hears, and then teach himself the practical application of what he has learnt, art is not his affair.<sup>24</sup>

Later in that same year he wrote of his idea of a great man: "You cannot be a great man until in living the right way you are doing exactly what you like because you like it."<sup>25</sup> In this way the conception of the poet and the artist shows that by his nature he is not so much immoral as he is indifferent to the crude worldliness of materialism, politics, and

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>23</sup>Alfred Hock, Reason and Genius: Studies in Their Origin (New York: Polyglot Press, 1966), p. 63. Hereinafter referred to as Reason and Genius.

<sup>24</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

social affairs.<sup>26</sup> The question of the "goodness" of the artist is at times ambiguous. At times, he must be good in order to reveal essential Beauty; at other times, he is good because he reveals essential Beauty.<sup>27</sup>

The unconventional behavior of Shaw's geniuses such as Julius Caesar in Caesar and Cleopatra, Tanner in Man and Superman, Dubedat in The Doctor's Dilemma, Marchbanks in Candida, and Dudgeon in The Devil's Disciple shows a disrespect and even a hatred for conventions of society. The religious heroes in his later plays--Father Keegan, Major Barbara, Lavinia, and Saint Joan--seem to suggest that the true prophet-saint has little interest in morals or even the institution of religion. Prophetic insight endows the saint with knowledge which frees him to act without sin. "The Saint," as pictured in St. Augustine's classical statement, "is unable to sin."<sup>28</sup> A poet or a saint does not expound a particular doctrine; in them both is a pervasive power of spiritual mood, insight and activity, which, welling up from the depths of the soul, stirs the whole range of experience to give it unique and original expression.<sup>29</sup> Shaw in 1890 made the following observation:

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<sup>26</sup>Williams, Culture and Society, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>28</sup>Nahm, Genius and Creativity, p. 175.

<sup>29</sup>Tsanoff, The Ways of Genius, p. 238.

One must be able to stand out for conditions and, if these are not forthcoming, go without. When circumstances--for instance, the accident of genius--enable a person to act unconventionally without losing the sort of life he or she values, freedom is acted upon.<sup>30</sup>

Because the genius is expected by every available means to challenge traditional dogma and accepted hypocritical morality, Shaw's heroes can appear as diabolical enemies of society. For example, some of Shaw's characters such as Shotover in Heartbreak House and Dudgeon in The Devil's Disciple declare themselves to be following the will of the Devil;<sup>31</sup> yet Shaw just as easily invites an interpretation of religious inspiration by portraying the prophetic visions of Lavinia, Father Keegan, and Saint Joan in his later plays.

In The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw comments on the idea of the immorality of the genius; such a commentary provides an insight into his own theory of immorality: "Immorality does not necessarily imply mischievous conduct: it implies conduct, mischievous or not, which does not conform to current ideals."<sup>32</sup> Shaw champions in The Quintessence of Ibsenism the prophet whose spirit is constantly outgrowing the conventionalities of men. Thus, one main action of the genius is his preparation to act immorally.

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<sup>30</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup>Joseph Percy Smith, The Unrepentant Pilgrim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>32</sup>George Bernard Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism (New York: Hill and Wang, 1913), p. 152.



Because Ibsen also challenged existing institutions, Shaw found reasons to admire and sympathize with his philosophy. The need for the genius to have freedom was an opinion that both Shaw and Ibsen held in common. For Shaw, the idea that the artist should have freedom of action was further emphasized when he declared the need for freedom of evolution as a basis for toleration. Shaw was aware that a creative man must have freedom and found this need to be "the sole valid argument against Inquisitions and Censorship, the sole reason for not burning heretics and sending every eccentric person to the mad house."<sup>33</sup> Shaw maintains, then, that there is not a golden rule; conduct must justify itself by its effect upon life and not by its conformity to any rule or ideal.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the true artist's variety of freedom of expression is not due to lack of principles but to a vast range and vitality of character.

Not only does the artist appear rebellious against the conventional standards of society, but he is also rejected by the society that he would so prophetically reform. The tradition that presents the artist as essentially misunderstood and alone proceeds from the Romantics coming down through Matthew Arnold with influences of certain phases of Karl Marx. Much of the Marxist writing of the 1830's was in fact the old

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

Romantic protest that there is no place in contemporary society for the artist and the intellectual. The theory of Marx that protested unemployment, poverty, and Fascism is practical, but when he proposed making over the cause of the workers into a fight for a class of intellectuals, his scheme seemed likely to collapse.<sup>35</sup>

Important to the artist's perilous elevation of imagination is his isolation from society. William Wordsworth seems to hold with particular conviction the idea of the persecuted genius, for he writes in The Prelude:

High is our calling, Friend!--Creative Art . . .  
 Demands the service of a mind and heart  
 Though: sensitive, yet in their weakest part  
 Heroically fashioned--to infuse  
 Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse  
 While the whole world seems adverse to desert.<sup>36</sup>

Artists, in this mood, are made aware of their duty; they must come to regard themselves as agents of the revolution for life, in their capacity as bearers of the creative imagination.<sup>37</sup>

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a poet that Shaw particularly admired, claims that with all his creative abilities the poet ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men; but the emphasis falls painfully on the "ought." The poet is separated from other men

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<sup>35</sup>Williams, Culture and Society, p. 271.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

as they become classified into an idealized general person, "Poet" or "Artist."<sup>38</sup>

Other studies, especially that of Voronoff, provide additional emphasis that the genius is a truly isolated being. The genius lives in his sublime thoughts, which place him outside contemporaneous humanity, for his insight provides a vision and a discernment of the future.<sup>39</sup> The genius may also come to be called a superman who transcends his time and his surroundings. In his sphere, as he builds or envisions the future, he remains alien to the existing mentality; consequently, he is often considered an abnormal visionary.<sup>40</sup> Often he is understood only very much later, when hostile, jealous, and odious contemporaries have disappeared and evolving humanity has adopted new ideals. Perhaps Shaw placed so much emphasis on creative evolution because such a process would prepare a world to receive a superior man who could readily accept rather than criticize the creative genius. Until that future time, however, perhaps there is truth in the words of the English satirist, Jonathan Swift: "When a genius appears, you can recognize him by the fact that fools will all band together against him."<sup>41</sup> Because the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>39</sup>Voronoff, From Cretin to Genius, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Williams, Culture and Society, p. 38.

man of genius is rejected, he might be prone to melancholy. Setting out on his path with high ideals, he often finds prejudice among the few who might have comprehended and absolute indifference among the masses who are too ignorant or too absorbed in the daily struggle for bread to comprehend any intellectual spheres.

Whether or not Shaw used some of these philosophical trends to shape his own theory of the artist, it is interesting to examine the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Henrik Ibsen--two writers that Shaw admired and read. The leading principle of all the later social writing of Thomas Carlyle is the idea of the strong leader, the hero. Carlyle's hero sees with terrible clarity the spiritual emptiness of the characteristic social relationships of his day. This perception, as established in traditional philosophy, disqualifies him wholly from having any normal relationships. Such a leader is, therefore, a radical and a reformer. In this role, however, he is isolated and feels himself isolated: the existing framework of relationships, the existing society, is against him necessarily because he is against it. Because of his role and his mission to reform society, he must be alienated from all fruitful social relationships. This hero is conscious not only of the superiority of his insight but also of his inability to exert the power to bring his dreams to reality. Thus, Carlyle creates the image of the hero,

the genius, the strong man who stands alone, the leader possessed by vision, who shall be listened to, but not necessarily obeyed.<sup>42</sup>

Since the larger body of Carlyle's writing is dedicated to praising the imagination of men of noble powers, there is in his presentation the hero who comes to reform a society that is morally inferior to him in every way. The tragedy of the situation is that a genuine insight, a genuine vision, is dragged down by the society that could benefit from such insight.<sup>43</sup>

That Shaw admired Henrik Ibsen is evidenced by the little book written as a commentary on Ibsen's plays--The Quintessence of Ibsenism. One Ibsen play, in particular, may have impressed Shaw, for the hero has a plight similar to the heroes in Carlyle's works. Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People deals with a local majority of middle-class people interested in concealing that their famous town baths are contaminated by sewage. When an honest doctor insists on exposing this danger, the town posing as Society, as The People, as Democracy, and as the Solid Liberal Majority, attempts to banish him. The doctor in attacking them becomes, of course, an enemy of The People, a danger to Society, and a traitor to Democracy. Perhaps there is tragedy as well as

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

safety in the lonely stand Dr. Stockmann takes as the "strongest man in town." As the play ends, the doctor admits to his wife the great truth that he has realized: "This is what I have discovered, you see: the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."<sup>44</sup>

Yet what is presented in the works of Carlyle and Ibsen is the prevailing thought that reappears in the writings of other creative artists. Byron once said: "Society is harmful to any achievement of the mind."<sup>45</sup> Goethe, who fled to Jena because he found solitude there, emphasizes the thought: "Nothing will change the fact that I cannot produce the least thing without absolute loneliness."<sup>46</sup> Richard Wagner, a musician Shaw highly admired, is reputed to have said: "A master needs quiet. Isolation and complete loneliness are my only consolation, and my salvation."<sup>47</sup>

From the previous discussion of Shaw's early years in the introductory chapter, one can see that Shaw was familiar with the personal effects of isolation. In his novel, Love Among the Artists, Shaw wrote of the effects of loneliness:

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<sup>44</sup>Henrik Ibsen, An Enemy of the People, in The Works of Henrik Ibsen, trans. by Mrs. E. Marx-Aveling, VIII (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 216.

<sup>45</sup>Hock, Reason and Genius, p. 108.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

. . . the hard lesson that is inevitably forced on every sensitive but unloveable boy who has his own way to make and who knows that, outside himself, there is no God to help him--the lesson of learning to stand alone in the world.<sup>48</sup>

In 1901, Shaw wrote that the world is not ready to accept the true genius, for he pictured society as the following:

. . . a den of dangerous animals among whom are few accidental supermen, our Shakespeares, Goethes, Shelleys and their like, must live as precariously as lion tamers do, taking the humor of their situation, and the dignity of their superiority, as a set-off to the horror of the one and the loneliness of the other.<sup>49</sup>

Even though Shaw could realize the loneliness involved in being a creative person, he also asserts that geniuses cannot bear agreement, perhaps because it is an assertion of equality. Shaw, in a certain respect, represents the illusive prototype of this genius, for Mr. Winsten in Days with Bernard Shaw has written:

'The moment you agreed with him, he thought there must be something wrong with his argument, and he was prepared to put the case for the other side.'<sup>50</sup>

Although Shaw maintained the illusiveness of his artist, he did so perhaps because of the tragic realization:

Even if supermen do come, every step of their progress must horrify conventional people; and if it were possible for even the most superior man to march ahead all the time, every pioneer of the march towards the Superman would be crucified.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>51</sup>Gilbert K. Chesterton, George Bernard Shaw (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc., 1956), p. 177.

Whatever else the artist-genius may possess in the way of superior powers, his visionary qualities are wasted in his own lifetime. In The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Shaw's words offer a concluding statement on the dilemma of the artists' irrevocable isolation:

When the true prophet speaks, he is proved to be both rascal and idiot, not by those who have never read of how foolishly such learned demonstrations have come off in the past, but by those who themselves have written volumes on the crucifixions, the burnings, the stoning, the beheadings and hangings, the Siberian transportations, the calumny and ostracism which have been the lot of the pioneer....<sup>52</sup>

Along with pressures of isolation and persecution by society, the genius often has to cope with the additional question of his insanity. It is easy to see why the simultaneous occurrence of genius and genuine insanity should provide a basis for serious reflection. Many interpreters of the artist as a creator have categorized his personality by placing the artist in strange company--the magician, the soothsayer, the prophet, and the madman.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps as Wordsworth insists, it is only "Presumption, folly, madness, in the men / Who thrust themselves upon the passive world / As Rulers of the world; . . ." <sup>54</sup>

Yet, the bewilderment of this interpretation is complicated because the poet and seer, in spite of his higher

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<sup>52</sup>Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, p. 43.

<sup>53</sup>Nahm, Genius and Creativity, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in Wordsworth's Prelude, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 459.



visions, often appears to be mad. From early antiquity men have sought to understand this godlike madness, this poetic enthusiasm or divine possession.<sup>55</sup> Shelley speaks of "the praise of poetic madness,"<sup>56</sup> and Plato portrays the soul in the crisis of creative activity, soaring above the heights of its ordinary vision, bewildered by its ecstasy: "pierced and maddened and pained. . . ."<sup>57</sup> Even Shakespeare's words from A Midsummer Night's Dream offer a similar interpretation:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping phantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends,  
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact: . . .  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy railing,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.<sup>58</sup>

Seneca long ago laid down the maxim: "No great genius without a mixture of insanity"; Aristotle also declares, "It is the essence of a great poet to be mad."<sup>59</sup> Another writer, Havelock Ellis in his studies of the British genius described the attitude of the world toward the man of original intellect:

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<sup>55</sup>Tsanoff, The Ways of Genius, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Kate Sanborn, The Vanity and Insanity of Genius (New York: George J. Coombes, 1885), p. 107. Hereinafter referred to as Insanity of Genius.

The man of genius is an abnormal being, thus arousing the instinctive hostility of society, which by every means seeks to put him out of the way.<sup>60</sup>

The insanity and vision of the genius often implies that he is capable of hallucinations. Whether the visions and insight of Lavinia, Saint Joan, and Father Keegan are more a product of a distorted mind than of divine inspiration is an unsolvable problem. However, some writers advocate the idea that hallucinations, although rarely occurring in healthy minds, are a normal occurrence with men of genius.<sup>61</sup> On this subject, Napoleon is credited with saying: "It is the visionary imagination which forges the phantoms of the madman and creates the personages of an artist."<sup>62</sup>

In any case, an analysis of a list of creative geniuses that actually have lived would reveal that the quality of madness is almost a normal expectancy in such minds. Shelley was often considered mad, and Lord Byron recorded his thoughts by writing that his

. . . only companions were these crickets, that used to crawl over him, receive stripes with straws when they misbehaved, and on his death made an exodus in procession from the house.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Havelock Ellis, A Study of British Genius (London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited, 1904), p. 222.

<sup>61</sup>Sanborn, Insanity of Genius, p. 130.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

Whether or not Shaw was familiar with Byron's writing on the subject of crickets, he uses in John Bull's Other Island a similar incident. When Father Keegan is introduced in Act Two, he is conversing quite naturally with a grasshopper about the state of Ireland. Perhaps Shaw uses this method to show Keegan's inability to communicate with people, for the grasshopper appears to be his only friend.

As each of Shaw's geniuses is examined, it becomes increasingly clear that this character exhibits a trace of madness, for he either declares himself to be mad or else is criticized as such by his acquaintances. When the artist becomes a creator, his inspiration or "poets' frenzy," as Plato insists, is identical with madness.<sup>64</sup> Aristotle also offers "a strain of madness" as an alternative explanation for the development of poetry. The madness of the genius provides a possible mode of escape from restrictions of rationality and permits a consequent achievement in terms of novelty, originality, and uniqueness.<sup>65</sup> Since the heroes do not follow the precepts of moral laws, their insanity implies that they must follow a life governed by laws that are not of the common masses.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Nahm, Genius and Creativity, p. 153.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

A careful examination of the plays selected for this study reveals that "madness" is, indeed, a requisite for Shaw's heroes. In each play there is that moment when the reader can see at once into the inner motivations, distortions, and dreams of the most nearly mad character. In Candida, Marchbanks will be forever remembered as the painfully sensitive, railing poet declaring himself to be mad. One will never forget Captain Shotover in Heartbreak House with his hideous plan to destroy society, or Tanner in Man and Superman as he proposes a plan for a race of superior men, or Julius Caesar, in his soliloquy at the site of the Sphinx, as he declares that he is alone in the race of men. This "madness" is recalled in the plan of Major Barbara and Undershaft or the guiding visions of Saint Joan, Father Keegan, Lavinia, and Jesus in the Preface of Androcles and the Lion. All of these characters, in daring to speak out passionately, must realize something that the common masses cannot. Although each hero knows that he will suffer persecution, he cannot escape from the power of the mighty vision that relentlessly guides him into all truth. Perhaps in Ecce Homo, Nietzsche, whose own genius was close to madness, explains the inescapable mystical appeal that this vision has for the genius:

. . . something profoundly convulsive and disturbing suddenly becomes visible and audible--with indescribable

definiteness and exactness. One hears--one does not seek; one takes--one does not ask who gives. A thought flashes out like lightning, inevitably, without hesitation. One hears--one does not seek; one takes--one does not ask who gives.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Voronoff, From Cretin to Genius, p. 59.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GENIUS IN REBELLION

. . . Then I said,  
Go to the Poet; they will speak to thee  
More perfectly of purer creatures;--yet....<sup>1</sup>

Although Richard Dudgeon in The Devil's Disciple is not as fully developed as later geniuses in the Shavian Canon, he acts on a moral system that is highly ethical in spite of some of his unscrupulous behavior. His code of ethics stems from a reaction to conventional society and recalls one of the precepts mentioned earlier in "The Meaning of Genius": that the artist can behave immorally is justifiable if he is true to the calling of his own nature. Richard Dudgeon, rebellious and witty, is in actuality a reformer, a negator of the existing social order.

In The Devil's Disciple there is a portrayal of the military-adventure story set in New Hampshire at the time of the American War of Independence. Richard Dudgeon is pitted against the "God-fearing" Christians of his family; but he is, of course, repulsed by the repugnant and hypocritical behavior of his pious mother and bigoted relatives.

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in Wordsworth's Prelude, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 435.

Although Dudgeon is rejected by his relatives, he finds himself risking his life for Anthony Anderson, a shrewd Presbyterian preacher, and Essie, an illegitimate child. The spiritual crux of the play is the reply of the hero when he is asked why he put himself in the position of sacrificing himself for another man:

I had no motive and no interest. . . . I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows.<sup>2</sup>

His concern for Essie also provides an insight into the true nature of his spirituality. In Act I he returns to find the relatives greedily arguing about a property settlement in his father's will, but Richard is appalled at their neglect of the child: "What! Have they forgotten to save your soul in their anxiety about their own bodies?"<sup>3</sup> At one point in the play, Richard is visiting Judith, the preacher's wife, when King George's men come to take Anthony Anderson to trial. Anderson is not there so Dudgeon poses as Judith's husband and calmly goes to trial in place of the preacher. That Richard is truly more unselfish than the minister at this point is revealed when Judith pleads with her husband to rescue Richard. Judith gasps at Anderson's

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<sup>2</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Three Plays for Puritans (New York: Brentano's, 1906), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

blasphemous retort as she tries to inspire him to perform the duties of his profession: "Minister be--faugh!"<sup>4</sup>

Because her husband apparently will do nothing to save Richard, Mrs. Anderson goes to plead for Dudgeon's release. Dudgeon, imprisoned and awaiting trial, is not the least bit alarmed at his impending doom; he defies any assistance and even tries to silence the pleas of Judith, who goes to the British headquarters to disclose the mistaken identity. In fact, Richard employs this imprisonment advantageously, for he rebukes all stations of the government and clergy as corrupt. Even the last words to the Chaplain before his scheduled execution are calculatingly calm:

Answer for your own will sir, and those of your accomplices here: I see little divinity about them or you. You talk to me of Christianity when you are in the act of hanging your enemies.<sup>5</sup>

Just before the hanging is to begin, Anderson returns to save Dudgeon. This time Anderson is attired not as a priest but as a soldier. Anderson explains his behavior by saying that during his hour of trial he discovered that he was really a man of action and not a priest. At the same time, Dudgeon finds that he is not really a misfit; and in being faithful to his principles even unto death, he assumes the role of the priest.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 73.



For all the heroism shown by Dudgeon in the final scene of the play, one can not disregard the underlying tones of loneliness pervading his dialogues. Once in the minister's home, he is moved by the domesticity of Judith and the harmonious atmosphere, but he denies his own right to have such common joys: "I can see the beauty and peace of this home; . . . yet I know quite well I could never live here. It's not my nature, I suppose, to be domesticated."<sup>6</sup> Another instance in the play that provides an understanding of his deep loneliness occurs when Judith pleads with him to give up his plan to save her husband:

Bless you, nobody cares for me. Have you heard my mother is dead? . . .<sup>7</sup>

Then, Richard says that he cannot receive his mother's blessings since her last word to him was her curse.

In this play there are no direct references that state that Richard is actually "mad," but several passages imply that his behavior is less than normal. He tells his shocked relatives:

. . . I knew from the first that the Devil was my natural master and captain and friend; I saw that he was in the right, and that the world cringed to his conqueror only through fear. I prayed secretly to him; and he comforted me, and saved me from having my spirit broken in the house of children's tears.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

When he tells Judith that he had no reason for risking his life, she, with a limited insight into his unselfishness, exclaims, ". . . You mean you do not love me?"<sup>9</sup> Richard, disgusted, replies, "Is that all it means to you?"<sup>10</sup> In another conversation with Judith he says, "You see, men have these strange notions, Mrs. Anderson; and women see the folly of them."<sup>11</sup> In the final scene of the play, Richard remains a free spirit that can not be limited by his family, the soldiers, or Judith. Anderson, however, is the one to call Richard a saint: "It takes all sorts to make a world--saints as well as soldiers."<sup>12</sup> Thus, Dudgeon, whose internalized moral code is not subject to the corruptions of the world, particularly family relationships, takes his place as one of Shaw's crusading characters of genius.

Another artist, Mr. Louis Dubedat, is the hero of The Doctor's Dilemma. Although Dubedat is termed a scoundrel, he has the uncanny ability to see through the shams of the doctors, the corruption of money, and the limitations of legalized marriage. He is also the creative artist that is not understood by his world, for the doctors dismiss his idealistic thoughts as merely the results of a "disabled brain."

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

The first act takes place in the room of a London doctor who has discovered a remedy for consumption, and his friends have gathered to congratulate him. During this party Mrs. Jennifer Dubedat, desperate and disheveled, begs Dr. Ridgeon to save her artist husband from dying of tuberculosis. Having little money for the operation, she offers her husband's works of creative art in payment. Ridgeon is then faced with the choice of saving the life of his friend or the life of an artist who apparently treats money as well as the conventions of marriage with equal disrespect. Jennifer, however, impresses him very much; and he decides to meet the artist to determine the advisability of saving his life.

At the party, Ridgeon is appalled to see that Louis Dubedat, although a great artist, is a man of loose moral principles. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Dubedat's failure to conform to expected standards of behavior is the trait which makes him one of Shaw's heroes. Dubedat is legally married to a maid at the party, although he happily claims to be the husband of Jennifer. He notoriously borrows money from the doctors, but he shows little concern for paying them back. Later, before a group of the doctors come to his house for an interview, he tells Jennifer: ". . . I hate money. I can't keep always bothering you for money, money, money. That's what drives me sometimes to ask other people,

although I hate doing it."<sup>13</sup> When he realizes that the doctors are judging him for his behavior he cries out: "Damn those fellows! They think of nothing and care for nothing but their wretched money."<sup>14</sup> He gets increasingly sarcastic when he finds out that the doctors are appalled at his marriage to the maid:

Why don't you learn to think, instead of bleating and looking like a lot of sheep when you come up against anything you're not accustomed to? . . .<sup>15</sup>

When he explains why he had to leave his first wife, he says simply:

I am an artist and she quite out of art and literature and refined living and everything else. There was no desertion, no misunderstanding, no police court or divorce court sensation for you moral chaps to lick your lips over at breakfast. . . .<sup>16</sup>

The rebellious character of Dubedat hardly makes him appear a welcome candidate for the life-saving treatment of Ridgeon. The doctor's dilemma is revealed in that Ridgeon prefers to save the life of an ordinary man rather than the life of the immoral genius. That Dudgeon is not just an ordinary man is revealed in the pleas of his wife Jennifer as she tells Ridgeon that he must see her husband:

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<sup>13</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Selected Plays, With Prefaces (4 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1948-57), I, 136-137.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

. . . It is not an ordinary case, not like any other case. He is not like anybody else in the world: oh, believe me, he is not. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Even Ridgeon later admits that Louis is not common, ". . .

And there's no mistake about his being a genius. . . ."18

His genius, like that of all other visionaries, is beyond the comprehension of the society in which he lives. One of the doctors interprets his behavior as madness: ". . .

There's something abnormal about his brain. . . ."19 Even

Louis admits to Jennifer that sometimes his dreams seem to alienate him from other men: ". . . Ah, my love, . . . how much it means to me to have you by me to guard me against living too much in the skies."<sup>20</sup>

In another passage he reveals his unorthodox ideals: "Of course, I haven't the ridiculous vanity to set up to be exactly a Superman, but still it's an ideal that I strive towards."<sup>21</sup>

Realizing that the doctors cannot accept her husband or his philosophy, Mrs. Dubedat pitifully tells Dr. Ridgeon, who is undecided about accepting her husband's case: "Why

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

does everybody turn against him? Can you not forgive him for being superior to you . . . for being a great artist?"<sup>22</sup> In spite of her pleadings, Ridgeon declines the case and gives it to Sir Bloomfield Bonington, who is so sloppy in his work that he actually kills Dubedat with blood poisoning.

At the point of Dubedat's death, Mrs. Dubedat, who had once said that her husband's sensitivity would drive him mad, assumes a very tragic position.<sup>23</sup> She realizes that Dr. Ridgeon could have saved her husband's life, but as she watches him slowly dying, she finds that his mind is still active. Dubedat, who has been taken back to his studio to die, assumes the character of the visionary when he warningly tells Ridgeon, "Take care, Ridgeon: my ears hear things that other people's can't."<sup>24</sup> He then defends his moral system by saying: "With all my faults, I don't think I've ever been really selfish. No artist can: Art is too large for that."<sup>25</sup>

Instead of requiring tears and mournful attire, Dubedat tells his wife to be remarried and to be happy for him. He strangely asks to be cremated--a method of disposal that Shaw must favor. In at least one of his plays where death is treated,

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

the martyr is burned. In Saint Joan, the young maid is burned at the stake. In Shaw's own life his mother was cremated. In his will, Shaw asked to be cremated and his ashes mingled with those of his wife. This strange speech of Dubedat, then, seemingly mirrors some of Shaw's own beliefs:

. . . Well, I shall be a flame like that. I'm sorry to disappoint the poor little worms; but the last of me shall be the flame in the burning bush. Whenever you see the flame, Jennifer, that will be me. Promise me that I shall be burnt.<sup>26</sup>

The parallel between Dubedat's unusual wish and the objective account that Shaw gives of his own mother's cremation is notably similar. He wrote the following account in a letter to Mrs. Patrick Campbell:

The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet colored lovely flame, smokeless and eager, like pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in it sprang into flame all over; and my mother became that beautiful fire.<sup>27</sup>

The last thoughts of Dubedat's dying speech show that he has been true to his own nature and can not be ashamed for anything he has done: "I haven't always been able to live up to my ideal. But in my own real world I have never done anything wrong, never denied my faith, never been untrue to myself. . . ."<sup>28</sup> As his breath grows shorter, he is able

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Mathews Gibbs, Shaw (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, Selected Plays, p. 173.

to make one last proclamation, one final valediction that becomes, in reality, praise for all creative geniuses:

. . . I believe in Michaelangelo, Valasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting, and the message of art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen.<sup>29</sup>

In Candida Shaw again portrays the unorthodox actions of another poet-artist who does not belong to this world. Perhaps the character of Marchbanks was inspired by Shaw's admiration for Percy Bysshe Shelley. Several parallels can be noted between the philosophy as well as the temperament of both poets. Marchbanks, the fictional character, represents the "poetic" view of life. That Marchbanks comes from an aristocratic family that does not understand him parallels the situation of Shelley. Just as Shelley was unhappy at Eton and Oxford, so also is Marchbanks, at the opening of the play, portrayed as a vagabond whose father is forcing him to return to school.<sup>30</sup> Eugene Marchbanks is a strange, shy youth of eighteen, who seems to possess a "painful sensitiveness" and "great imaginative eyes." He is young and full of dreams; but he has the insight that is characteristic of the genius, for as Shaw describes him:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Julian Bertram Kaye, Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 129.



He is so entirely uncommon as to be almost unearthly; and to prosaic people there is something noxious in this unearthliness, just as to poetic people there is something angelic in it.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the play, Marchbanks is continually pitted against the Reverend James Morell, a Christian Socialist clergyman of the Church of England. James Morell, the husband of the desirable Candida, is unpardonably vain with his powers and unconsciously pleased with himself. Sometimes he can almost be hypocritical, for he tells Burgess, Candida's father, that he will introduce him to "influential" people if there is a question of industrial gain: ". . . I don't think they'll make me a bishop; but if they do, I'll introduce you to the biggest jobbers I can get to come to my dinner parties."<sup>32</sup>

As the play progresses, Marchbanks reveals that he is in love with Candida, the minister's wife. Marchbanks champions the rights of women by exposing the minister's lack of understanding of Candida by telling him that he has ". . . blindly sacrificed her to minister to your self-sufficiency. . . ."<sup>33</sup> In another scene, he again accuses the clergyman of feeding such a beautiful, creative woman as Candida on

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<sup>31</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant (2 vols.; New York: Brentano's, 1905-06), II, 102.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

". . . metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric"<sup>34</sup>  
 When Morell threatens Marchbanks, the poet says courageously,  
 ". . . I'm not afraid of a clergyman's ideas. I'll fight your  
 ideas. I'll rescue her from her slavery to them. . . ."<sup>35</sup>

However hostile Morell may be to the young artist  
 who professes love for his wife, he is still fascinated with  
 Eugene's boldness:

You will be one of the Makers of the Kingdom of Heaven  
 on earth; . . . for don't think, my boy, that I cannot  
 see in you, young as you are, promise of higher power.  
 . . . I well know that it is in the poet that the holy  
 spirit of man--the god within him--is most godlike.<sup>36</sup>

Although Morell recognizes these qualities in Marchbanks,  
 Proserpine, the pathetic secretary, voices the typical view  
 of the common people: ". . . He's mad. . . . Mad as a March  
 hare."<sup>37</sup> Candida, however, is fascinated with him: "He is  
 always right. He understands you; he understands me; he  
 understands Prossy; and you James--you understand nothing."<sup>38</sup>

For all of the admiration that Marchbanks receives,  
 he is still a lonely person. In the scene with Proserpine,  
 he expounds on his visionary ideas of love, but he tragically  
 realizes that he can not make his dream a reality: "All the  
 love in the world is longing to speak; only it dare not,

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-132.

because it is shy, shy, shy. That is the world's tragedy."<sup>39</sup>  
 As he keeps telling Proserpine that his heart is crying out in hunger, she finally tells him to go talk to himself. In the following quote his loneliness becomes the loneliness of all creative people who are not understood by the world:

That is what all poets do: they talk to themselves out loud; and the world overhears them. But it is horribly lonely not to hear someone else talk sometimes.<sup>40</sup>

Later in an argument with Morell he begins to dream again as he talks of a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from this world to a place where the floors are ". . . washed by the rain and dried by the sun"<sup>41</sup> instead of by the labor of wives and servants.

When Morell, going to make a public speech, leaves his wife and Marchbanks alone, Candida asks the artist if he is happy when he prays. He replies that in simply loving her he has come into heaven, where want is unknown. This spiritual love that Marchbanks professes is similar to the philosophy that Shaw once expressed in a letter to Ellen Terry dated April 6, 1896:

. . . Man's one gift is that at his best he can love--not constantly, nor often, not for long--but for a moment--a few minutes perhaps out of years. It is because I have had a glimpse or two that I am such a hopeless impious person; for when God offers me heaven

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

as the reward of piety, I simply reply 'I know. I've been there. you can do nothing further for me, thank you.'<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Eugene's love for Candida is almost unearthly. When Morell returns, Marchbanks tells him:

. . . I loved her so exquisitely that I wanted nothing more than the happiness of being in such love. And before I had time to come down from the highest summits, you came in.<sup>43</sup>

Once in a verbal warfare with Marchbanks, Morell had said that a man can climb to the summits, but he cannot dwell there long.<sup>44</sup> Marchbanks, who realizes a higher vision and spiritual insight, retorts:

. . . there can he dwell for ever and there only. It's in the other moments that he can find no rest, no sense of the silent glory of life. Where would you have me spend my moments if not on the summits?<sup>45</sup>

In the final scene of the play, Candida is forced to decide between the spiritual love of Marchbanks or the loyalty of her husband. The placidity of the preacher breaks and he cries out to his wife: "You are my wife, my mother, my sisters: you are the sum of all loving care to me. . . ."<sup>46</sup> When Candida sees her husband's grief, she decides to remain

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<sup>42</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 111.

<sup>43</sup>Shaw, Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant, II, 145.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

with him. After Candida has made the choice, Marchbanks says, "I no longer desire happiness: life is nobler than that."<sup>47</sup> He symbolically gives his happiness to Morell, as he departs feeling "as old as the world," but with a better secret in his heart. The secret that is not understood by the couple is his ability to "live on the summits"--the visionary's plateau where he will remain apart from the world.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### TO DESTROY SOCIETY: MAKE WAY FOR THE GENIUS

Thither, uncertain on which road to fix  
My expectation, thither I repaired,  
Scout-like, and gained the summit; twas a day  
Tempestuous, dark, and wild, and on the grass.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of three more plays reveals that there is, for Shaw, an underlying trend of cynicism and destruction in the characters of Julius Caesar, Undershaft, and Captain Shotover. Perhaps Shaw actually went through a period of simply hating a society that he had so enthusiastically offered to reform. That Shaw was possibly seeing the contrast between his own ideals and the baseness of reality is not a completely far-fetched assumption. D. H. Lawrence once made a remark that could perhaps explain the cynicism of Shaw in these plays:

Sometimes, it is even honorable, and necessary, to hate society, as Swift did, or to hate mankind altogether, as often Voltaire did.<sup>2</sup>

In any case, Shaw was living in an era in which material progress was omnipresent and in which the industrial

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in Wordsworth's Prelude, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 435.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Matthews Gibbs, Shaw (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 77.

revolution was bringing new wealth as well as degrading poverty to large masses of laborers. In spite of the new material progress, large numbers of working class people were forced to the point of starvation. New ethics evolved which, instead of heightening the value of life, provided a rationale for a simplified view of life.<sup>3</sup> Although Pygmalion is not included in this study, one passage from that play adequately expresses Shaw's frustration and his view of the new materialistic society:

We have to confess it: Capitalist mankind in the lump is detestable.... Both rich and poor are really hateful in themselves. For my part I hate the poor and look forward eagerly to their extermination. I pity the rich a little, but am equally bent on their extermination. The working classes, the business classes, the ruling classes are each more odious than the other....<sup>4</sup>

Not only was Shaw caught up in this detestation for society but other writers as well were disgusted with the industrial society. D. H. Lawrence comments on the ugliness that was destroying England:

The real tragedy of England, as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lonely: the man-made England is so vile.... It was ugliness which betrayed the spirit of man, in the nineteenth century.... The human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Julian Bertram Kaye, Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. x. Hereinafter referred to as Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition.

<sup>4</sup>Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 180.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

Another writer of that era who reiterates this negative feeling and hatred of society is William Morris:

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization.... What shall I say concerning its mastery of and its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth so poor. . . its eyeless vulgarity which has destroyed art,...<sup>6</sup>

With a host of speakers, moralists and reformers, Shaw, whether he would admit it or not, was certainly included. In the following plays -- Antony and Cleopatra, Major Barbara, and Heartbreak House -- the visionary qualities of the genius character is still there; but included in his personality is an unmistakable hostility for society. Charles Lamb, in his "Essay on the Sanity of True Genius," explains the nature of this character and concludes by saying that in a sort of madness the genius may even hate mankind.<sup>7</sup> In the following discussion of plays, the outline of this character will become increasingly clear.

In Caesar and Cleopatra, Shaw has reduced Cleopatra to age sixteen and portrayed Caesar as rather old. The play is another of Shaw's studies of genius, for Caesar is not only portrayed as an unhappy soldier, but also as a visionary who does not feel at home in this world. In

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>7</sup>Kate Sanborn, The Vanity and Insanity of Genius (New York: George J. Coombes, 1885), p. 113.



Caesar's first entrance in the play, Shaw has captured the loneliness and the spirituality of his character. The first sign of his approach is the slight sound of his footstep in the quiet desert. He comes from the south, ravished by the mystery of the moonlit night and lost in contemplation:

Hail, Sphinx: salutation from Julius Caesar! I have wandered in many lands, seeking the lost regions from which my birth into this world exiled me, and the company of creatures such as I myself. I have found flocks and pastures, men and cities, but no other Caesar, no air native to me, no man kindred to me, none who can do my day's deed, and think my night's thought.<sup>8</sup>

While Caesar is possessed of this insight and his understanding of man, he knows that no one can understand him, "Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of man, . . ."<sup>9</sup> He is a man of genius who tells the Sphinx, ". . . I am he of whose genius you are the symbol: part brute, part woman, and part God -- nothing of man in me at all."<sup>10</sup>

It is after this soliloquy at the Sphinx that Caesar encounters Cleopatra, who has been sleeping in a nest on the flank of the great statue. She, at first, does not realize who he is and attempts to rescue him from Roman soldiers who are seeking her. Caesar is appalled

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<sup>8</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Three Plays for Puritans (New York: Brentano's, 1906), p. 100.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

at the vibrance and yet the immaturity of the Queen of Egypt. He proposes to teach her how to be a dignified woman known for her pride, her courage, her majesty, and her beauty. The effects of his genius are soon felt by Cleopatra, who tells him, "Do you speak with Caesar every day for six months: and you will be changed."<sup>11</sup> She expounds further on the quality of her new personality:

When I was foolish, I did what I liked, except when Ftatateeta beat me.... Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking; I do what must be done, and have not time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness.<sup>12</sup>

Cleopatra praises Caesar by saying that he is kind to all because it is his nature to be magnanimous. Yet even Caesar's kindness can be transformed into contempt when he is challenged with a thought that disturbs him.

Several examples of this unexpected hostility in Caesar's personality occur in the play. He hates the dehumanizing influences of the military life: "Oh, this military life! This tedious, brutal life of action!"<sup>13</sup> Caesar longs for a good talker -- one with wit and imagination to live without continually doing something. Caesar's creative intellect also contrasts sharply with the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

unimaginative mind of Apollodorus, whose motto is "Art for Art's sake." In another instance, Caesar tells Theodotus, who has just accused him of being a barbarous soldier, ". . . I am an author myself; and I tell you it is better that the Egyptians should live their lives than dream them away with the help of books."<sup>14</sup> Theodotus, wildly frantic and tearing his hair, pleads with Caesar to rescue the library of Alexandria from a fire which has spread from the Roman ships. Not in the least bit disturbed, Caesar annoyingly asks, "Is that all?"<sup>15</sup> Finally, Theodotus completely breaks down and makes one last appeal by saying, "What is burning there is the memory of mankind!"<sup>16</sup> Caesar replies that it is a shameful memory: "Let it burn."<sup>17</sup> He then proposes to build a future with the ruins of the past.

At a dinner party with Cleopatra, Caesar's aspirations soar in a burst of imagination:

Shall we leave Rome behind us -- Rome that has achieved greatness only to learn how greatness destroys nations of men who are not great! Shall I make you a new kingdom, and build you a holy city there in the great unknown?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

Apollodorus, also an artist, is impressed with this scheme and says, ". . . Caesar is no longer merely the conquering soldier, but the creative poet-artist."<sup>19</sup> At this same dinner party, Caesar, finding out that Pothinus was slain by order of the Queen of Egypt and that the whole population of the town has become a destructive mob, says, "And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand."<sup>20</sup>

Some of the other passages in the play indicate that Caesar's outlook on life is other than normal; there is even the underlying suggestion that he is "mad." At the meeting with Cleopatra beside the Sphinx, he delivers a speech, but he continually believes that he is really involved in a "magnificent dream."<sup>21</sup> He tells Cleopatra that all is "madness, madness"<sup>22</sup> in the light of the moon. Even Cleopatra is uncertain how she should react to him, for she remarks, "You are old and rather thin and stringy; but you have a nice voice; and I like to have somebody to talk to, though I think you are a little mad."<sup>23</sup> In the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

Notes at the end of the play Shaw adds his own concluding comment:

At all events Caesar might have won his battles without being wiser than Charles XII or Nelson or Joan of Arc, who were, like most modern 'self-made' millionaires, half-witted geniuses, enjoying the worship accorded by all races to certain forms of insanity.<sup>24</sup>

In Major Barbara Shaw again shows some of the complications that an idealist such as Barbara must face in actually putting her ideas into practice. By the end of the play, Barbara's inspiration to save mankind is compromised with Undershaft's realization that poverty is a crime and that people must first have money before they can have "higher thoughts." Major Barbara, then, is a picture of social life in England and the moral of the play is, in a sense, an attempt to combat what Shaw felt was most degrading to society -- poverty. In the Preface to the play, Shaw writes that money helps all beauty, health, strength, and honor to be realized. In Shaw's opinion the church has failed to offer any workable solution to the problem; therefore, Undershaft, with his destruction factory, proposes a successful way to destroy poverty. Undershaft's religion of "Money and Gunpowder" and his reverence for the Life Force which guides him become two interesting aspects of the play. Shaw tries to explain his preference

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

for Undershaft's views by writing in the Preface:

"Once take your eyes from the ends of the earth and fix them on this truth just under your nose; Andrew Undershaft's views will not perplex you in the least...."<sup>25</sup>  
 For Shaw, then, Undershaft's religion ". . . is a nobler and profounder Christianity which affirms the sacred mystery of Equality."<sup>26</sup>

In the first act of the play, the first scene takes place in the library of Lady Britomart Undershaft. Her husband, Andrew, is a cannon manufacturer, but she has not seen him in several years. The children -- Stephen, Sarah, and Barbara -- are awaiting a proposed visit from their father with excited anticipation. When the father arrives, Barbara tells him of the good work done by the Salvation Army shelter and invites him to observe for himself the merits of the system. Undershaft, in turn, invites her to his city to give her an idea of the good work done by the great destruction factory.

In the second act, Barbara and Undershaft are in the West Ham shelter of the Salvation Army, where typical representatives of the impoverished, "wicked" people are gathered. These professed sinners, in order to make

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

their conversions more believable, paint their own characters as black as possible. Actually it is learned that they pose as wicked sinners only to get the handouts that the Salvation Army so piously distributes. In this same act, further weaknesses of the salvationist system are discovered, for Barbara finds out that the army accepts the needed funds from Bodger, a whiskey brewer, and Undershaft, who owns an arms factory. Barbara then decides that she cannot belong to a Salvation Army that accepts money derived from such sources.

After visiting Undershaft's factory, both she and her boyfriend, Cusins, find that their services would be more useful there. The last act pictures the great compromise and further explains the advantageous rewards of Undershaft's system. Because, in Undershaft's opinion, poverty is the root of all evil, his plan to destroy poverty is worth analyzing.

That Undershaft has the characteristics of the genius whose morals do not conform to those of Victorian society is brought out in the play. In the library before he appears, Lady Britomart tells her children, "That is why your father is able to behave as he does. He is above the law...."<sup>27</sup> Later she emphasizes his questionable behavior

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 345-346.

by saying that he really had a sort of religion of wrongness. When Andrew makes his appearance, he explains, in a manner similar to his wife's interpretation, his reasons for adopting such "immoral" behavior. He admits that he is destructive and he tells his children that he devotes his time "to experiments and researches in improved methods of destroying life and property."<sup>28</sup> He goes on to say, "My morality -- my religion -- must have a place for cannons and torpedoes in it.... There is only one true morality for every man; but every man has not the same true morality."<sup>29</sup> In a sense, then, Undershaft also becomes a visionary in purporting that he is only the instrument of a Will or Life Force which uses him for purposes wider than his own. Because he recognizes money as man's first need and poverty as the vilest sin of man and society, he is at first unacceptable to Barbara and Cusins, who think that man can be redeemed by the efforts of the Salvation Army.

In Act II, Undershaft, visiting the Salvation shelter, is appalled to find the poor beggars willing to be converted merely for the sake of food. Cusins, before he accepts Undershaft's doctrine, defends the shelter by saying:

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



Father Undershaft: you are mistaken: . . .  
 You do not understand the Salvation Army. . . It  
 takes the poor professor of Greek, the most artificial  
 and self-suppressed of human creatures, . . . lets  
 loose the rhapsodist in him; reveals the true worship  
 of Dionysos to him....<sup>30</sup>

While Cusins goes on explaining the merits of this system,  
 Undershaft is inspired in a burst of sudden realization:

. . . I shall hand on my torch to my daughter.  
 She shall make my converts and preach my gospel....<sup>31</sup>

Cusins is at first appalled at this compromise: "This  
 is extremely interesting, Mr. Undershaft. Of course you  
 know that you are mad."<sup>32</sup>

As Undershaft criticizes the inability of the Salva-  
 tion Army to help mankind, one realizes that it is the  
 Salvation Army and not Barbara that is being ridiculed.  
 Barbara is, no doubt, another of Shaw's visionaries for  
 at one point she remarks, "There are larger loves and  
 diviner dreams than the fireside ones."<sup>33</sup> Barbara converses  
 with a drunken ruffian and consorts with all types of common  
 people, much in the way that Christ did. When she learns  
 that the Army must accept money from Undershaft and Bodger,  
 she resigns her position. She tragically admits: " I can't  
 pray now. Perhaps I shall never pray again."<sup>34</sup> In her

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 408.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 402.

torment she cries out, much as Christ did: "My God, why has thou forsaken me?"<sup>35</sup> Later she regains her faith when she decides to compromise with her father in his plan to benefit society.

Although the role of the poet-artist has been somewhat modified in this play, Cusins, who makes constant allusions to Euripides, assumes this role. At first Cusins is taken in by the Salvationist ideas partly because he is so devoted to Barbara; but he, too, is later converted to the Undershaft doctrine. In the final scene of the play, he defends his qualities even though they are not of a monetary nature: ". . . Is my access to the subtlest thought, the loftiest poetry yet attained by humanity, no Capital! My character! My intellect! My life!"<sup>36</sup>

By the end of the play, it is clear that Shaw has portrayed not one, but three visionaries, who are apart from the world and in a manner of speaking totally mad. In a conversation between Cusins and Undershaft in Act II, Cusins declares that Undershaft must be mad. He asks Undershaft if a madman can make cannons. To this question Undershaft replies: "Would anyone else than a madman make them? And now question for question. Can a sane man

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 429.

translate Euripides?"<sup>37</sup> Cusins replies that he too is as mad as a hatter. Then Undershaft continues to press this new thought, his voice growing more forceful: "Can a sane woman make a man of a waster or a woman of a worm?"<sup>38</sup> On the brink of his conclusion, he excitedly presses his new-found discovery: "Are there two mad people or three in this Salvation shelter today?"<sup>39</sup> When Cusins asks if Barbara is really mad too, Undershaft draws Cusins and Barbara into association with himself as mad people possessed by some kind of higher purpose: ". . . We three must stand together above the common people: how else can we help their children to climb up beside us?. . ." <sup>40</sup>

Although Undershaft is able to convert Barbara and Cusins to his doctrine, some of his destructive and hostile motives are interesting and deserve some attention. Undershaft, when he rebukes his son Stephen, could very well be speaking for Shaw, who rebuked society:

Be off with you, my boy, and play with your  
caucuses and leading articles and historic parties

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 389.

and great leaders and burning questions and the rest of your toys...."<sup>41</sup>

He finds Cusins a more worthwhile partner and successor to his factory because Stephen thinks that the provision of care will only weaken a worker's independence and sense of responsibility. Undershaft, however, defends his business by saying that he is not afraid to re-organize civilization, even if he must destroy facets of it first. Perhaps here Shaw is actually supporting the boldness of Undershaft's realization that worn-out ideals must simply be destroyed; in one passage Undershaft says:

Well, you have made yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present . . . it won't scrap its old religion and its old political constitutions.<sup>42</sup>

With that statement he turns to Cusins and makes his appeal.

"Come on make explosives with me. Whatever can blow men up can blow society up."<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the extreme measures Undershaft feels are necessary to reform the world can be explained in a motto that defines his faith. ". . .

NOTHING IS EVER DONE IN THIS WORLD UNLESS MEN ARE PREPARED TO KILL ONE ANOTHER IF IT IS NOT DONE...."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

In Act III, there is the conversion of Cusins to the Undershaft doctrine and the discovery by Barbara that her real work as a Salvationist lies in Undershaft's model town. The final aspect of the play is the compromise between the two Salvationists and Undershaft in which the "Dove" must become acquainted with the "Serpent" and borrow its power. Barbara, when she realizes Undershaft's plan, says, "You may be a devil; but God speaks through you sometimes."<sup>45</sup> When Barbara is converted to Undershaft's doctrine, Cusins asks her, "Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?"<sup>46</sup> Barbara answers, "Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of an eternal light in The Valley of the Shadow."<sup>47</sup> Thus, the powers of both Undershaft and Barbara seem to be needed. Undershaft and Cusins want to make power for the world. Barbara also wants to help mankind: "I want to make power for the world too, but it must be spiritual power."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

In Heartbreak House the visionary appears in the form of an eccentric, retired naval officer, Captain Shotover, who seems endowed with the ability to grasp the reality of a situation and yet to see beyond this world. Shotover is an outlet for destructive feelings which are certainly part of the play's meaning. He continually shows contempt for and frustration with contemporary society. More than once, he presents his views as those of an old man who no longer cares so much what happens to the world. Now, in his old age, he is reduced to manufacturing weapons of death so that he can kill fellows like Mangan. Mangan, the industrialist, represents, in Shotover's opinion, the materialistic basis for all moral or spiritual decay in the world.

Throughout the play, there is a dominant metaphor that portrays the house as a ship full of souls living foolish lives of romance and sentiment and snobbery. The ship metaphor may have been suggested to Shaw as he read the political thoughts of Thomas Carlyle. In his writings, Carlyle uses the metaphor of the ship that must round Cape Horn and stay off the rocks; to do this a special pilot not elected by the crew must be attained. Shaw uses this same metaphor both in Heartbreak House

and On the Rocks.<sup>49</sup>

In Act Three, it is Ellie Dunn who finally gives the house its name when she says, "Yes: this silly house, this strangely happy house, this agonizing house, this house without foundations. I shall call it Heartbreak House."<sup>50</sup> In the interesting nautical language, the captain describes the conditions of the house. In words containing ship imagery he says that when your heart is broken, your boats are burned. Later there is a metaphor that refers to the house as a ship or "This soul's prison we call England."<sup>51</sup>

Through the portrayal of Ellie and Shotover, it becomes plausible that heartbreak may indeed be the beginning of wisdom. Ellie has come to the house on a visit to Hesione, one of Shotover's two daughters. At the beginning of the play we learn that Ellie has "drifted" into an understanding with Mangan, a middle-aged industrialist and business associate of Ellie's father, the mild-mannered, Mazzini Dunn. When Ellie comes to the house, she is joyfully in love with a Marcus Darnley, who tragically turns out to be Hector. Hector, a courageous

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<sup>49</sup>Kaye, Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Tradition, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup>Shaw, Selected Plays, With Prefaces, p. 589.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 594.

man who enjoys creating fiction, is really Hesione's husband. Thus, Ellie experiences a heartbreak which finally leads her to seek comfort from Shotover, who has also had his illusions destroyed.

The focal point of the play, however, is the obnoxious Captain Shotover and his uncanny insight into all of the other characters. He bluntly tells Boss Mangan that he is much too old to marry Ellie. Of course, he avoids all pretense of formality for he says, "Nobody ever quarrels with me."<sup>52</sup> Later he explains his behavior by saying: "Do you suppose that at my age I make distinctions between one fellow creature and another?"<sup>53</sup> His hostility is especially aroused toward the industrial society and he vents his rage upon Mangan, the middle-aged industrialist. Shotover actually keeps a dynamite stockpile in order to kill representatives of the industrial society; in one passage he defends his cause by saying:

What then is to be done? Are we to be kept forever in the mud by these hogs to whom the universe is nothing but a machine for greasing their bristles and filling their snouts?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 515.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 525.



He says that he must invent the means to kill them:

"There is enmity between our seed and their seed.... They believe in themselves. When we believe in ourselves, we shall kill them."<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the captain is justified; nevertheless, he realizes that his thoughts are bent on the destruction of society, for he makes his reasons known:

I sit here working out my old ideas as a means of destroying my fellow creatures. I see my daughters and their men living foolish lives of romance and sentiment and snobbery.<sup>56</sup>

Although the destruction that Shotover is planning for society seems drastic, his ability to predict the future and his insight into the conditions of society are worth noting. In a strange combination of realism and mystery the captain says, "Navigation. Learn it and live; or leave it and be damned."<sup>57</sup> He also comments on the hypocrisy of the church that is ". . . on the rocks, breaking up," because of its failure to head for ". . . God's open sea."<sup>58</sup> This strange old man in the end succeeds in wresting Ellie away from Mangan and Materialism, and he

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 526.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 566-567.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 594.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

enters into a spiritual marriage with her himself in Act III. There are dark secrets about his life, and he has no morals in the conventional definition of them. Unexplainable are his tales of selling his soul to the devil as well as his mysterious marriage to a black woman in Jamaica.<sup>59</sup> At times he seems tragically unhappy; yet he defends his loneliness as a catalyst in his behavior:

. . . Who are the men that do things? The husbands of the shrew and of the drunkard, and the men with the thorn in the flesh....<sup>60</sup>

It is Hector that makes allusions to the captain's madness by calling him "a supernatural man." When Mrs. Hushabye asks why the captain is shouting, Hector calmly answers: "He is madder than usual."<sup>61</sup> When Mrs. Hushabye introduces herself to Ellie's father, she also says:

. . . You don't mind papa do you? He is as mad as a hatter, you know, but quite harmless and extremely clever.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the play, the captain talks of his hope of achieving the "seventh degree of concentration." Although

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 501.

he is already an inventor, he hopes to achieve even more power; "I will discover a ray mightier than any X-ray: a mind ray that will explode the ammunition in the belt of my adversary before he can point his gun at me."<sup>63</sup> When he tries to tell Hector these things he finally says: "I am old. I have no time to waste in talk."<sup>64</sup>

Ellie, however, is especially fascinated by the old man. He tells Ellie that he must run away from her because he can give her nothing but his "ancient wisdom." He tells her that he dreams often: "But when you are old: very, very old like me, the dreams come by themselves."<sup>65</sup> In her affection for the old man she says, "Dream, I like you to dream. You must never be in the real world when we talk together."<sup>66</sup> In the last scene the captain is spared when a bomb explodes in his stockpile; however, a burglar and Mangan are mercilessly killed in the explosion. Shotover then assumes the role of savior of

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

his household and the comforter of Ellie. In pledging her life to him in a spiritual marriage, she says, "Yes, I Ellie Dunn, give my broken heart and strong soul to its natural captain, my spiritual husband and second father."<sup>67</sup> Hector, who overhears Ellie's announcement, offers a concluding testimony to the spiritual marriage as he quotes the following lines from Shelley: "'Their altar the grassy earth outspread, / And their priest the muttering wind.'"<sup>68</sup>

In these three plays, Shaw's geniuses offer only destructive solutions to the problems of society. Caesar calmly lets the library burn as a shameful memory of man. Undershaft, who succeeds in persuading his daughter and her boyfriend to accept the religion of money and gunpowder, is prepared to scrap society if necessary. Shotover, with his dynamite stockpile, is prepared to blow up the industrial society as well as Mangan, the symbol of an industrialist. All of the characters assume no compassion for the world. This religion of money and gunpowder which offers to clear the world of the ignorant masses contrasts sharply with Shaw's theory of creative evolution, which he terms the religion of the twentieth century.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 586.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

### A WHOLE NEW SYSTEM: THE GENIUS IN FUTURISTIC SOCIETY

That in life's everyday appearances  
I seem'd about this period to have sight  
Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit  
To other eyes...."<sup>1</sup>

In the earlier plays, it is evident that Shaw was displeased with the organization and claims of industrial society. Although Caesar, Undershaft, and Shotover are prepared to "blow up" society if it goes too far, a succeeding set of characters seem to propose a different solution. In three plays -- Man and Superman, Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, and Back to Methuselah -- Shaw commits himself to a social principle that involves the creation of a new civilization through the process of creative evolution. Perhaps Shaw resorted to this concept because he had realized that contemporary society could not be reformed. His hope for human improvement, then, became his theory of creative evolution which would provide a society of intelligent supermen.

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude in Wordsworth's Prelude, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 476.

Other writers in the nineteenth century expressed similar theories concerning the perfection of man. A group of Marxist philosophers in the late 1800's proposed the formation of new societies that would be a greater and more perfect combination among individuals; such a proposed guild, however, would be composed of the "leading intellects of the age."<sup>2</sup>

Another writer that particularly could have had an influence on Shaw's philosophy was Samuel Butler, who attacked Darwinism and the scientific movement of the mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Both he and Shaw express belief in a selective evolvement not of a more highly organized species, but of a more creative, intelligent society of beings.<sup>3</sup> As the societal concepts of Shaw are studied, it becomes evident that he recognized intelligence as the ultimate goal in life. He adopts the term "Life Force" to explain this mysterious will that guides man in this process of creative evolution. In Man and Superman Don Juan voices the idea of the evolutionary process:

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<sup>2</sup>Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>Julian Bertram Kaye, Bernard Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Tradition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 71.

Just as Life, after ages of struggle, evolved that wonderful bodily organ the eye, so that the living organism could see where it was going and what was coming to help or threaten it, and thus avoid a thousand dangers that formerly slew it, so it is evolving to-day a mind's eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims at present.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Shaw in this dramatic approach to reform, envisions a complete re-organization of society based on the complexities of creative intelligence and the accumulated treasury of progressive cultural traditions. In order to make way for his genius, a new society would have to evolve from the industrial society of mass production. That Shaw came to adopt creative evolution as a more optimistic approach to reform than his earlier proposals of simply "scrapping society altogether" is believable, as a discussion of the following plays will indicate. In a lecture that Shaw delivered at the New Reform Church on March 21, 1912, he gave a short statement summarizing the fundamentals of his creed:

Your purpose in life is simply to help in the purpose of the universe. By higher and higher organization man must become superman, and superman super-superman and so on.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman; A Comedy and a Philosophy (New York: Brentano's, 1903), p. 115. Hereinafter referred to as Man and Superman.

<sup>5</sup>C.E.M. Joad, ed., Shaw and Society (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1953), p. 205.

With this brief introduction to the vital philosophy with which Shaw shaped his plan for a future civilization, a closer examination of the first play to incorporate this message can be presented. In Man and Superman, Shaw embarks upon a new role as philosopher.<sup>6</sup> In the play Shaw's genius, John Tanner, exhibits some of the traits of Shelley's Prometheus as well as Nietzsche's Superman, but none of these heroes appears to carry the torch of reform that Shaw's character does. Unlike Nietzsche, Shaw does not reserve the attainment of genius for a select few. In Shaw's presentation, the Life Force guides all who are potentially capable of becoming Superman; however, Shaw's man of the future cannot be taught -- he must be bred.

Between 1901 and 1903, Shaw was preparing Man and Superman partially in response to A. B. Walkley's suggestion that he write a play about Don Juan. Other episodes in his life reveal that Shaw was always interested in the character, for in 1887 he wrote "Don Giovanni Explains." This work portrays Don Juan not as the traditional aggressor but as a passive man chased by women.<sup>7</sup>

When Man and Superman: A Comedy and Philosophy was

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<sup>6</sup>Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1956), p. 578.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 145.



completed as a play, Shaw recorded his first attempt to get it produced:

I offered Man and Superman to John Murray. He refused it in a letter which really touched me.... He could not see any intention behind my book but to wound, irritate, and upset all established constitutional opinion, and therefore could not take the responsibility for publishing it.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising that some of Shaw's contemporaries could not accept his stinging criticism, for he publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with society and managed to alienate many. In The Perfect Wagnerite in 1898, Shaw expressed that there was no such thing as just a man. He had already divided the world into two groups: the first included men who were exceptional and progressive; the second included the masses which were stagnant and ignorant. His opinion of the common people is notably expressed in the following statement: ". . . the majority of men at present in Europe have no business to be alive: and it is necessary to breed superior men."<sup>9</sup>

With the completion of Man and Superman, Shaw felt that, at last, he had accomplished the task of putting his philosophy into the form of a play. The play features John Tanner, who is essentially a passive person. Ann

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

Whitefield is the woman who traps him into marriage so that she can obey the will of the Life Force. In some aspects, the play implies that life is tragic, for the woman seems to be hunting a man not out of love, but out of a need to provide a father for her children. Ann Whitefield, a clever girl of the middle or upper class, pursues Tanner as he dashes across Europe in his motor car.

Included in this story of romantic pursuit is the philosophical dream episode of Act Three, in which the Sierra-Nevada is transformed into Hell, Tanner assumes the personality of his Mozartian ancestor Don Juan, Ann Whitefield becomes Dona Anna, and her father becomes a visiting statue. In the dream, Mendoza, who lulls John Tanner to sleep by a comically boring attempt at romantic poetry, becomes the Devil, a suave connoisseur of the arts. All these characters are assembled in a Hell which is filled with hypocrites and pleasure seekers.

Throughout the dream episode, the characters offer satirical remarks about society. For example, Dona Anna realizes that she has been deported to Hell even though she has been a devout Catholic: "Oh! and I might have been so much wickeder! All my good deeds wasted! . . ." <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Shaw, Man and Superman, p. 89.

The devil, although an unmistakable villain, has an uncanny insight into the hypocritical nature of man: "An Englishman thinks he is moral when he is only uncomfortable."<sup>11</sup>

Don Juan, however, is not happy in Hell, for he finds that the people there are insincere, extremely ignorant, and doomed to a tedious and vulgar pursuit of happiness. Heaven, in Don Juan's opinion, is a more inviting place even though the inhabitants of Hell regard its environment as extremely angelic and dull. The reward of contemplation for Don Juan is the appeal which Heaven offers:

. . . I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things: namely, Life: the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself.<sup>12</sup>

Only in Heaven can Don Juan experience the joy of contemplation:

In the Heaven I seek, no other joy. But there is the work of helping Life in its struggle upward.... Here is the highest miracle of organization . . . and yet, how wretched are his brains!<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

As the visionary exponent of the Life Force, Tanner-Juan tells the Devil that Life should be devoted to more noble or higher purposes outside the concern for self. As a philosopher, Juan envisions himself assisting Life in its "aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intense self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding."<sup>14</sup> When the Devil doubts his ability to organize man, who he points out is greedy, slothful, and destructive, Juan optimistically retorts:

. . . I sing, not arms and the hero, but the philosophic man: he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world....<sup>15</sup>

He tells the statue of the Commander that the Life Force is the intellect that directs his proposal for a superior breed of man: "The ultimate goal of the Life Force will be achieved by the breeding of this new creature: The great central purpose of breeding the race, ay, breeding it to heights now deemed superhuman...."<sup>16</sup>

The sexual agents who do the will of this Life Force are in harmony with the forces of universal creative

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

energy which overrides and sweeps away all personal considerations. This force directs the woman in creating a child that might possibly be the origin of the Superman. It is this mysterious force that agonizes its helpless followers and leads them mercilessly to fulfill the quest for the creation of this superior being. The urgency of this fulfillment causes Ana to cry out when she realizes that this superior human has yet to be born: "Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done. I believe in the Life to come."<sup>17</sup> She goes off crying to the universe: "A father--a father for the Superman!"<sup>18</sup>

Not only does this powerful Life Force guide the actions of the woman, but it also directs the inner motives of the man. Don Juan explains what the powerful Life Force says to him:

'I have done a thousand wonderful things unconsciously by merely willing to live and following the line of least resistance: now I want to know myself and my destination, and choose my path; so I have made a special brain--a philosopher's brain--to grasp this knowledge for me as the husbandman's hand grasps the plough for me.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

With the voicing of this philosophy by Juan, Shaw is showing that the overseer of this important mission will be a philosophical genius, whose intellect has evolved to such a state that in him the will of the Life Force can be clearly discerned and obeyed.

After stating his theory concerning the purpose of life, Juan prepares to leave Hell; but the Devil persists in taunting his idealistic philosophy: ". . . Beware of the pursuit of the Superman: it leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the Human."<sup>20</sup> Such criticism from the Devil could adequately express the disdain that Shaw experienced in his own life. Shaw's unending quest for a superman and a more civilized society seems to be sparked by his contempt for the masses of common and ordinary humans. In his life, Shaw adopted a concept that featured man as basically ignorant, depraved, and hypocritical. Using Juan as simply a mouthpiece for his personal convictions, Shaw resolves never to let himself be designated as a common person:

I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

the working within me of life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding.<sup>21</sup>

When the dream episode ends, John Tanner is no longer Don Juan. All of the characters assume their original roles, and the play resumes the comic story of Ann's pursuit of Tanner. After John Tanner finally agrees to marry Ann, the play ends happily but abruptly. The message of the play, however, is contained in the visionary thoughts of Juan Tanner in the dream episode of Act Three. Perhaps it is fitting that such thoughts appear in a dream, for sometimes that is what such visions are -- a great dream.

A brief summary of the play, then, reveals that John Tanner, the genius and philosopher, is comically exposed to the realities of his surrounding society, without altogether losing his dignity and significance as a philosopher. His Life Force theory shows the possibility of the self-redemption of man by intelligence. Specifically, Shaw places his hope in the possible evolution of more perfect human beings.

When Shaw wrote Back to Methuselah in 1921, he hoped that this play would serve as an expansion of his ideas originally presented in Man and Superman. The

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

first statement of his philosophy that appeared in Man and Superman could easily be overlooked, for the play included so many other ideas as well. Shaw, too, realized that his dramatic philosophy had been masked by the other activities in the play, for he includes a critical estimate of Man and Superman in the Preface to Back to Methuselah:

But being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it too brilliantly and lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act, and that act was so completely episodic (it was a dream which did not affect the action of the piece) that the comedy could be detached and played by itself.... The effect was so vertiginous, apparently, that nobody noticed the new religion in the center of the intellectual whirlpool.<sup>22</sup>

In realizing that he needed to make a play which would not only state the philosophy of creative evolution, but also portray the effects of it as well, Shaw decided to write Back to Methuselah. His motives for creating the play are carefully explained in his Preface:

I now find myself inspired to make a second legend of Creative Evolution without distractions and embellishments. My sands are running out; the exuberance of 1901 has aged into the garrulity of 1920.... I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic associations, and go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden.... My powers are waning; but

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<sup>22</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Back to Methuselah (London: Constable and Company, 1921), p. lxxxvi.



so much the better for those who found me unbearably brilliant when I was in my prime.<sup>23</sup>

With the intention of his play succinctly stated in the Preface, Shaw submits the lengthy five-part play, ranging in time from B.C. 4004 to A.D. 31,920. As the play opens in the Garden of Eden, the reader learns that Adam and Eve were created by Lilith, the supreme woman whose imagination is so great that she willed offspring into existence. Adam is at first almost maddened by the intolerable prospect of immortality. When the Serpent tells Adam that they can reproduce themselves, he and Eve decide to settle down to a quiet life of domestication for about one thousand years. Before they can peacefully pass from the earth, however, Cain invents the weapons and philosophy of murder which reduces the span of human life to its present brevity. Before the action of the play moves to another century, Eve foresees a time in which man will be reunited with the imaginative thought by which he was first created:

Man need not always live by bread alone. There is something else. We do not yet know what it is; but some day we shall find out; and then we will live on that alone; and there shall be no more digging nor spinning, nor fighting nor killing.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. lxxxvii.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

In Part Two, the action shifts to the present and a group of clerical gentlemen are theorizing a plan for man's extended survival. They decide to increase man's life span to three hundred years, because the political and social problems ". . . cannot be solved by mere human mushrooms who decay and die when they are just beginning to have a glimmer of the wisdom and knowledge needed for their own government."<sup>25</sup> After the gentlemen arrive at their conclusion, one of them cries out excitedly:

Poetry has been converging on it: philosophy has been converging on it: religion has been converging on it. It is going to be the religion of the twentieth century....<sup>26</sup>

In Part Three many centuries have passed, and only certain people have been designated to receive the gift of long life. One particular problem is that the gifted ones do not realize that they are different from all the other people who die after a normal life span. In the succeeding parts the "long-livers" discover each other and decide to organize a civilization in a remote section of the earth. Their civilization is visited by an elderly gentleman who does not possess the gift of long life. Before he perishes, he observes the ageless people and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

reaches a startling conclusion: "You seem to credit every advance in civilization to your inordinately long lives."<sup>27</sup>

After spanning an elaborate panorama of time in the first four parts, Shaw presents in the last part of the play the essence of his philosophy. The year is now A.D. 31,920 or in Shaw's terms, "as far as thought can reach." In this section he portrays the Ancients, who express a Platonic aspiration towards the goal of redemption from the flesh. The ideal genius is featured as coming about by a process of creative evolution. The creative poet-artist becomes in this play the "pure-intellect." Decay and old age have been overcome because the people will themselves to live far beyond the ordinary span of life.

Whether or not this unique concept was derived from the Bible, nineteenth-century evolutionary theory, romantic poetry, or Shaw's own imagination, the Ancients express a degree of intelligence that borders on the realm of pure thought. Living to be at least seven hundred, possessing the fountains of all wisdom, and immune to disease and decay, the Ancients are an eerie transition

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

from the concept of a normal human. In the Preface to the play Shaw wrote that men do not live long enough. The Ancients are the carriers of the Life Force and they are well-preserved because they have risen above and overcome the pleasures of the senses to become now -- incarnate mind.

A further advance in the civilization of the Ancients is their asexual reproduction. There are no children, for that stage has been by-passed in the early development in the egg. When first hatched from the egg, the "children" may have beards and possess the intelligence of twenty-year-olds. The "infants," as the hairless Ancients call them, dance and enjoy the pleasures of life until physical appearance or sex no longer interests them. The transition from the world of pleasure to a quest to achieve "pure intelligence" takes place at the age of four. The Ancients until that time must be tolerant of the "youth," for one Ancient condescendingly explains to an impatient boy: "Infant: one moment of the ecstasy of life as we live it would strike you dead."<sup>28</sup> The Ancients are just as disgusting to the "children," for Strephon complains in one part: "What is the use of being

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

born if we have to decay into unnatural, heartless, loveless, joyless, monsters in four short years?"<sup>29</sup>

Another conversation between a He-Ancient and an infant gives some vague history of the people that preceded their generation:

There was a time when children were given the world to play with because they promised to improve it. They did not improve it; and they would have wrecked it....<sup>30</sup>

Thus, this new generation anticipates a world directed by intelligent people that will improve the world. So dedicated are the sexless, hairless Ancients to redemption from the flesh that Martellus, an aspiring Ancient, remarks, "The body always ends by being a bore. Nothing remains beautiful and interesting except thought, because the thought is life."<sup>31</sup>

In the final scene of the play, the ghosts of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent return to make a judgment of this new civilization. Lilith, who created man and woman from her own will, also returns to judge mankind. She explains her unselfish sacrifice in forming the human as she says, "I suffered unspeakably; I tore myself asunder, I lost

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

my life to make my flesh these twain, man and woman." <sup>32</sup>  
As she observes the present advances of man, she voices her hope that he will continue to press on to seek redemption from the flesh and proceed to the whirlpool of pure intelligence. Until that uncertain future time, however, Lilith is resolved to wait in patience.

Such a world exhibits in fiction the futuristic plan of life that Shaw envisioned. One of the She-Ancients expresses what Shaw hoped would be the ultimate result of creative evolution: "The day will come when there will be no people, only thought."<sup>33</sup> The key, then, to Shaw's philosophy is the force of genius or creative intellect that guides man in his agonizing struggle to discard the body.

In his previously described grandiose societal schemes, Shaw optimistically assumes that the Life Force or creative intellect would guide man in choosing the proper sexual partner as it does in Man and Superman or guide him in reaching an ultimate plateau of intelligence as it does in Back to Methuselah. By the time that Shaw wrote Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles in 1934, however,

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

traces of the old contempt and hostility that he earlier maintained for ignorant and undesirable people appears to be returning. Up to this time, he maintained that creative evolution would provide a means of bypassing all useless people; but in Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Shaw portrays a selective Day of Judgment in which all undesirables disappear at once.

The play is set in the tropics and the culture of this civilization is an experiment in the founding of a millennial world culture. When the angel of doom appears to rid the earth of all the useless, mischievous people, Shaw presents an obvious satire upon Christian legends. Covered with bird feathers and without any mystical attributes whatsoever, the angel arrives to announce that the Day of Judgement is at hand. With his mission completed, the angel takes off, making the sound of a large vacuum cleaner. His words are a warning to the inhabitants of the Unexpected Isles: "Then you will simply disappear: that is all. You will no longer exist."<sup>34</sup> The angel expands this warning in another passage: "The

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<sup>34</sup>George Bernard Shaw, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, in Complete Plays, With Prefaces, VI (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1962), 595.

lives which have no use, no meaning, no purpose, will fade out. You will have to justify your existence or perish. Only the elect shall survive."<sup>35</sup>

In the first scene of the play, the first disturbance is created by the visitation of a clergyman. He is shocked to find life on this island; and he is equally surprised to meet Pra and Prola, the Priest and Priestess of the civilization. Pra, the Priestess, and Prola, the Priest, are the two geniuses; but they are married so that they can teach their followers within the scope of a completed human experience. An extension of their family group is their children whom they call Love, Pride, Heroism, and Empire. Realizing that the clergyman is astounded at this strange civilization, Pra briefly explains their reasons for having a separate existence:

What you have arrived at is that we cannot live in a world of political facts, because we shall not know the political facts for years to come. We must therefore live in a world of original ideas, created by ourselves out of our own nature.<sup>36</sup>

The clergyman resides with them for a while, is forced to marry two of their daughters, and receives the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 598.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 590-591.



nickname "Iddy" for "Idiot". He soon becomes such a bore that his wives plot his destruction. Before his wives can destroy him, they disappear in the Day of Judgement. After the clergyman leaves, Pra and Prola are left alone on their island. The angel's prophecy has been fulfilled, because their children who were vain, beautiful, and unproductive have simply disappeared.

As Pra and Prola try to decide what course to take, the Priest tells his wife: "But I knew that nobody but a fool would be frivolous enough to join me in doing all the mad things I wanted to do."<sup>37</sup> They now stand together facing the future and their own Judgment: ". . . as a union of a madwoman with a fool."<sup>38</sup> As a study of Shaw reveals, however, it is usually the madwoman who is one of Shaw's wisest characters. Pra tells her husband as they prepare to face their future, "The coming race will not be like them."<sup>39</sup> Finally they come to the realization that theirs is no longer a country of the Expected, with the threat of judgment and possible annihilation. They conclude that the Unexpected Isles are the region of the whole world. Even though they admit their failure in

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 609.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 610.

forming a successful civilization in the past, Prola optimistically decides to build a better race: "Yes, if our fools only had vision enough to see that. I tell you this is a world of miracles...."<sup>40</sup> In another passage Prola asserts his new idea: "We shall plan commonwealths when our empires have brought us to the brink of destruction; but our plans will still lead us to the Unexpected Isles."<sup>41</sup>

As the play ends, Pra and Prola face the future by discarding the failures of the past civilization. They decide that life needs both of them. While they are striving to do the will of the Life Force, there is no reason for them to fear destruction. As they pat hands Eastern fashion, Pra makes a joyous announcement of their commitment to create a new civilization: "All hail, then, the life to come!"<sup>42</sup>

The resounding optimism of Pra and Prola as they joyfully await the future significantly describes the tone of optimism evident in Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles as well as Man and Superman and Back to Methuselah. Because Shaw sincerely believes that society would eventually benefit from his theory of creative evolution,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 611.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

he skillfully presents his philosophy in these three plays. Unfortunately Shaw's optimistic approach is apparent in only a few plays; but that optimism, however brief, is a refreshing divergence from his usual witty and stringent criticism.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RELIGIOUS PASSIVE: THE GENIUS IN WAITING

Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power,  
The thought, the image, and the silent joy;  
And that the genius of the Poet hence  
May boldly take his way among mankind....<sup>1</sup>

In this final chapter, the plays to be discussed are the following: John Bull's Other Island, Androcles and the Lion, and Saint Joan. In the previous chapters, the stages in the development of Shaw's genius characters have been presented. The first set of plays focus on the undeveloped, somewhat immature genius who simply ignores the conventions of society. The second phase of the genius characters is represented by Undershaft, Major Barbara, Captain Shotover, and Julius Caesar. These genuises, unlike previous characters, actually formulate a new reforming approach to the problems of society; unfortunately their solution calls for the "scrapping" and destruction of society altogether. In revising his cynical approach to reform, Shaw moved to a philosophical plan to improve society through the working of creative

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<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude, in Wordsworth's Prelude, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 470.

evolution. In his last group of geniuses, however, there is neither the hostility nor the optimism that characterized the previous protagonists. With the dramatization of Father Keegan, Lavinia, and Saint Joan, Shaw has abandoned comic sentimentality and approached the realm of tragedy. The geniuses in these plays no longer seek to destroy or even rebuild society. Since they look forward to another world in which they will be rewarded, they appear almost as saints, passively enduring the criticism of society and sincerely caring for the ignorant masses. Their fortitude and endurance seems to come from a depth of insight that inspires them to seek the kingdom of Heaven rather than the transient pleasures of earth.

In John Bull's Other Island, Father Keegan is an ex-priest who supplies the visionary ideas. Father Keegan, the patriotic Irishman, is the mad saint who converses as easily with a grasshopper as with a human; but he does not even pretend to believe that his visionary ideas will be accepted. Giving up his plans to reform society, he dismisses his ideals as the dream of a madman. When he first appears, he ". . . is standing near a stone in a trance of intense melancholy, looking over the hills as if by mere intensity of gaze, he could pierce the glories

of the sunset and see into the streets of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the play continual references are made to Keegan's being a madman. In one scene he tells the poor peasant, Patsy, that the Church took away his papers and called him ". . . only a poor madman, unfit and unworthy to take charge of the souls of the people."<sup>3</sup> He explains in another passage that he came to Ireland and settled down as a parish priest until he went mad. His explanation of his madness has similarities to Shotover's mysterious tale in Heartbreak House. While Shotover claims that he went mad when he married a Negress with supernatural powers, Keegan claims that in giving a black man absolution, he received a spell which drove him mad. Father Keegan, however, maintains that he is not destructive, for he tells the young Irishwoman, Nora: ". . . You see I'm quite cracked; but never mind: I'm harmless."<sup>4</sup> In Act IV, he tells Tom Broadbent, the pragmatic English businessman, that he is mad; but the unperceptive Englishman responds by calling the priest a humorous, whimsical Irishman.

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<sup>2</sup>George Bernard Shaw, John Bull's Other Island (New York: Brentano's, 1916), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

With a tone of bitter realism, Larry Doyle, the efficient Irishman, scorns the dreaming of Keegan as the root cause of Ireland's agony: "Aye, that's it! There you are! dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming."<sup>5</sup>

It is Father Keegan, however, who finally states the Irish dream in religious terms. The conflict of the play centers around Keegan's scorn for Broadbent, who is a man "efficient in the service of Mammon" and destructive of the hopes of Ireland, for he "comes to browse . . . without knowing that the soil his hoof touches is holy ground."<sup>6</sup> Continuing to defend the sanctity of the Ireland, Keegan says that it is the saints that the ground produces who sanctify and make meaningful the dreaming.

In the bulk of Keegan's passages, then, he is criticizing Broadbent, who tries to seduce Nora, exploit Ireland's culture, and remake Ireland into a commercial paradise of hotels and golf courses. Keegan mercilessly taunts the businessman in a burst of emotion:

Within 24 hours of your arrival you have carried off our only heiress, and practically secured the parliamentary seat. And you have promised me that when I come here in the evenings to meditate on my madness; . . . you will comfort me with the bustle

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

of a great hotel, and the sight of little children carrying golf clubs....<sup>7</sup>

Although Keegan chides Broadbent for not doing the will of Heaven that is in himself, Broadbent responds by dismissing Keegan as no serious threat: "Ah, you are a poet, Mr. Keegan, not a man of business."<sup>8</sup>

Realizing that his thoughts will not be accepted, Keegan tells Larry Doyle and Broadbent: "This world sir is very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes and where the good and wise are hated and persecuted...."<sup>9</sup> Later Keegan asks if Broadbent feels at home in the world. Broadbent replies, "Of course. Don't you?"<sup>10</sup> From the very depths of his soul, Keegan answers, "No."<sup>11</sup> After Larry Doyle, the pragmatic Irish realist, criticizes the dreaming of the priest as only idle and wasted time, Keegan says simply, "Every dream is a prophecy...."<sup>12</sup> Instead of defending his ideas, however, Keegan remains a lonely and passive figure:

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 125.



You see, Mr. Broadbent, I only make the hearts of my countrymen harder when I preach to them: the gates of hell still prevail against me. I shall wish you good evening. I am better alone, at the round tower, dreaming of heaven.<sup>13</sup>

Before departing Keegan gives a memorable last speech:

In my dreams it [heaven] is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life. . . It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped.... It is a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine.... It is, in short, the dream of a madman.<sup>14</sup>

After this speech, Keegan departs over the hill. From a distance, he is a solitary, retreating figure, not at all understood by the Englishman or Doyle.

Immediately following Keegan's departure, Broadbent remarks: "What a regular old Church and State Tory he is!"<sup>15</sup> For some reason, Broadbent knows that Keegan's speech was meaningful, for he says "I feel sincerely obligated to Keegan: he has made me feel a better man: distinctly better."<sup>16</sup> The intelligent idealism of Keegan,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. The brackets are my insertion.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

however, is lost on the pragmatic Broadbent, who says to Doyle with sincere elation, "Come along and help me to choose the site for the hotel."<sup>17</sup>

Another play in which Shaw insists on a mystical view of religion is Androcles and the Lion. Perhaps Shaw, impressed by the suffragette movements from 1911 to 1912, drew a parallel between the way suffragettes were accepted by conventional people in his own time and the way the early Christians were accepted by the rules of the Roman Empire. Shaw's interest in the suffragette movement may have impressed him enough to create a story of a humanitarian who is rewarded for showing concern for a lion. Shaw's portrayal of the lion on the stage represented to him "a religious pantomime."<sup>18</sup> He draws the story from an original tale called "Arelus Gellius." In this story the hero is called Androclus, who is ". . . neither a Greek nor a tailor nor a Christian, but a Roman slave who ran away from the cruelties of his master and was later captured and condemned to be devoured by

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 182.

wild beasts in the arena."<sup>19</sup> In his play Shaw changes the hero's name to Androcles and portrays him as a Christian who is sentenced to be devoured by a lion. Fortunately Androcles had removed a thorn from the lion's paw in a earlier scene, for when they meet again in the arena, the lion acts timid and affectionate towards Androcles. The comedy of the situation arises from this conflict, for the Emperor decides to free all the Christians and to force his Roman soldiers to accept the Christian faith as well.

Masked in all the comedy of the lion dancing on the stage and the antics of Androcles in the end, there is a portrayal of a truly religious visionary. When Lavinia, the heroine, is asked what she is prepared to die for, she replies, "I don't know. If it were anything small enough to know, it would be too small to die for. I think I'm going to die for God. Nothing else is real enough to die for."<sup>20</sup> When Lavinia is then asked to define God, she can only reply, "When we know that, Captain, we shall be gods ourselves."<sup>21</sup> Lavinia, the female visionary in

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Selected Plays, With Prefaces (4 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1948-57), I, 885.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

this play, is unafraid of persecution by the Romans:

"They cannot violate my soul. I alone can do that by sacrificing to false gods."<sup>22</sup> It does seem unfair to her that her tormentors are men who ". . . neither believe in my god, nor in their own -- men who do not know the meaning of the word religion--...."<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt that the band of Christians imprisoned by the Romans are passive and unafraid of death. Even though they could arm themselves and fight, such a passion is not provoked in them. Androcles' statement of passivity represents the feelings of all the Christians: "No, really: I can't fight: I never could: I can't bring myself to dislike anyone enough."<sup>24</sup> Even Lavinia views death fearlessly: "It is since all the stories and dreams have gone that I now have no doubt at all that I must die for something greater than dreams or stories."<sup>25</sup>

When the hour of trial comes, however, Ferrovius, unable to remain faithful to the Christian precepts, re-enters the service of Mars by slaying a number of gladiators. Ferrovius, who is a powerful, choleric man

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 861.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 881.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 885.

in the prime of his life, sheds his passivity and admits to the other Christians:

. . . today the Christian god forsook me; and Mars overcame me and took back his own. The Christian god is not yet. He will come when Mars and I are dust; but meanwhile I must serve the gods that are, not the God that will be....<sup>26</sup>

Even though Ferrovius has been unable to live up to the principles of the Christians, the Emperor is so amazed at his physical prowess that he gives him a commission in the Roman army. So impressed is the Emperor with Ferrovius that he orders all of his soldiers to become Christians if they can learn to fight like the "Christian."

Following the betrayal of Ferrovius to the band of Christians, Spintho professes his cowardice. Spintho, terrified at the realities of martyrdom, dashes into the jaws of the lion as he is attempting to declare his apostasy. Only Lavinia remains unyielding, for her faith is declared in her decision "to strive for the coming of the God who is not yet."<sup>27</sup>

In the notes that Shaw includes at the end of the play, he explains that he is not questioning the theology of Christianity, but merely presenting religious persecution

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 829.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 892.

and the threat involved to established law and order. He defines Androcles as a humanitarian naturalist, whose views surprise everybody and Lavinia as a clever and fearless freethinker.<sup>28</sup> He goes on to point out that a Christian, in accepting a creed different from that of leaders of society, will be persecuted for his views: "In short a Christian martyr was thrown to the lions not because he was a Christian, but because he was a crank: that is, an unusual sort of person."<sup>29</sup>

In the Preface of Androcles and the Lion, Shaw develops in depth an interesting interpretation of Jesus as a persecuted martyr who suffers like the visionaries and geniuses presented in the plays. Although Shaw never creates a play in which Jesus is an actual character, it is not totally unbelievable that he used the personality traits of Jesus as a model from which he fashioned his other geniuses. Although Shaw never professes to be a Christian, he does say in the Preface,

I see no way out of the world's misery but the way which would have been found by Christ's will if he had undertaken the work of a modern practical statesman.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 894.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 897.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 749.

He goes on to write,

. . . Christ, though rejected by his posterity as an impractical dreamer and executed by his contemporaries as a dangerous anarchist and blasphemous madman, was greater than his judges.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps Jesus invoked Shaw's respect because Jesus followed the precepts of his idealism even to the point of death. Shaw writes, "If Jesus had been indicted in a modern court, he would have been examined by two doctors; found to be obsessed by a delusion; declared incapable of pleading; and sent to an asylum."<sup>32</sup> Shaw can understand the High Priest's motives for treating Christ as an imposter, but today ". . . we should have treated him as a madman."<sup>33</sup>

Further proof that Shaw respects Jesus is revealed in the discussion of his simple habits and political views. Shaw, a vegetarian himself, probably respected the personal habits of Jesus, who was an ascetic, clothed in skins and living on locusts and wild honey. Shaw remarked that, when reproached for teaching the people in parables of fiction, Jesus justified himself on the grounds that ". . . art is the only way in which people can be taught."<sup>34</sup> Shaw

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 751.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 754.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 769.

further points out that Jesus once said that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. That idea impressed Shaw so much that he recommended that money should cease to be a treasure, and that we should take steps to make ourselves utterly reckless of it, setting our minds free for higher uses. Another trait that Shaw particularly admired in Jesus was his celibacy. Shaw salutes those who do not marry and makes this comment in the Preface to Androcles and the Lion:

. . . The unmarried Jesus and the unmarried Beethoven, the unmarried Joan of Arc, Clare, Teresa, Florence Nightingale seem as they should be; and the saying that there is always something ridiculous about a married philosopher becomes inevitable.<sup>35</sup>

After a thorough study of the Bible, Shaw also concludes that we should have recognized Jesus as a Communist who rejected money and consorted with the common people. Shaw also brings attention to the idea that Jesus thought ". . . domestic ties a snare for the soul; that he agreed with the proverb 'The nearer the Church, the farther from God.'" <sup>36</sup> More than the political and domestic characteristics of Jesus, Shaw appears to have found in this visionary the combination of the practical and the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 818.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 777.



tragic. Jesus' insight and inner strength enlist Shaw's praise, for he writes:

. . . they scourge him, work him, torment him, and finally crucify him between two thieves. His prolonged agony of thirst and pain on the cross at last breaks his spirit and he dies with a cry of 'My God: why hast thou forsaken me?'<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in the character and life of Jesus, Shaw is able to find the culmination of all his characters of genius. The power of Jesus to see through vulgar illusions and his capacity to strive for a higher morality, together with his ability to suffer persecution give him the priority of a superior being while ". . . we stand exposed as the fools, the blunderers...."<sup>38</sup>

In Saint Joan, Shaw again focuses on a religious passive who must suffer persecution because of her beliefs. That society cannot accept the insight of spiritual visionaries proposed a perplexing and confusing question in Shaw's mind. In his Preface to Saint Joan, he wrote this comment: "Fear will drive men to any extreme; and the fear inspired by a superior being is a mystery that cannot be reasoned away."<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately Shaw finds

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 775.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 803.

<sup>39</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Saint Joan (New York: Brentano's, 1924), p. ix.

that the Church does not believe that there is any genuine soul outside the institution of the church, but Shaw has a special criticism to make about that belief:

. . . it follows that the law of God is a law of change, and that when the Churches set themselves against change as such, they are setting themselves against the law of God.<sup>40</sup>

An important aspect of the play is the treatment of imagination and miracles in the life of Saint Joan. A miracle is defined in the play as an event which creates faith. When Joan is told that the voices of the saints in the sounds of the bells are only her imagination, she replies, "Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us."<sup>41</sup>

In this play Shaw emphasizes, more emphatically than in some of his other plays, moral responsibility to contemporary representatives of the type symbolized by Saint Joan. In the Preface to this play, he writes that he can appreciate the qualities of the visionary; but the world hates and despises the highest when they see it--Socrates, Jesus, Joan of Arc. Joan's mission is to lead France to victory and to assist in getting King Charles the Seventh crowned. Her mission, however, is directed by her mysterious "voices" which society and, in particular,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. lvii.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

the Church cannot accept.

When the play begins, the time is 1429 A.D. Joan, a young maid of approximately seventeen years of age, goes to the castle of Vaucouleurs between Lorraine and Champagne to enlist the aid of Captain Robert de Baudricourt, a military squire and his friend Poulengey. One of the first comments made after Joan pleads with Robert and Poulengey is that she is probably demented. Poulengey is impressed with her and says, "Her words and her ardent faith in God have put fire into me."<sup>42</sup> Robert is simply dismayed and replies, "You are as mad as she is."<sup>43</sup> Poulengey defends her lunacy: "We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us!"<sup>44</sup>

Poulengey is not the only one she impresses, for she also encourages Charles to become a great king and Dunois the Bastard to fight the English at Orleans. Joan warns the childish king by saying; ". . . thou must face what God puts on thee...."<sup>45</sup> When Charles shows little courage, she scolds him: "I tell thee it is God's business

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

we are here to do: not our own."<sup>46</sup> In a similar manner, she tells Dunois the Bastard of Orleans: "My heart is full of courage, not of anger. I will lead; and your men will follow: that is all I can do. But I must do it: you shall not stop me."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, her military strategy inspired by her supernatural voices enables her to lead the French soldiers against the English. Her courage and faith never waver and she succeeds in crowning Charles at Rheims.

Because Joan obeys her supernatural voices, the Church officials become alarmed and fear that she is no longer under their supervision. Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvois, decides that she is a heretic and makes plans for taking Church discipline against her. The English chaplain decides that she is simply an errant witch, and Warwick volunteers to act as the secular arm of the Church in carrying out Joan's punishment. Warwick volunteers to carry out the plan to burn her at the stake: "Well my lords, hand over your dead branch; and I will see that the fire is ready...."<sup>48</sup> Cauchon will have nothing less than her submission, for he vows to make her repent:

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

I have fought it all my life; and I will fight it to the end. . . if she does not recant in the dust before the world, and submit herself to the last inch of her soul to her Church to the fire she shall go if she once falls into my hands.<sup>49</sup>

Warwick, however, explains that her protest is simply that of the ". . . individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God."<sup>50</sup>

So adamant is Cauchon in seeking Joan's persecution that he devises a plan to buy her from the French camp. The tragedy at this point is that the French willingly capture and sell her even though she courageously devoted her life to the French military cause. Because she will not deny her visions, the Church officials charge her with the crime of heresy and sentence her to be burned. It seems that there is only rejection everywhere that she goes, and she asks Dunois innocently: "Why do all these courtiers and knights and churchmen hate me? What have I done to them?"<sup>51</sup> Dunois gives her a realistic answer expressive of Shaw's own view: "Do you expect stupid people to love you for showing them up?"<sup>52</sup> When Joan finally

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

realizes that she is truly alone, she gives a speech that faintly echoes the loneliness of Keegan and other visionaries:

There is no help, no counsel, in any of you. Yes: I am alone on earth: I have always been alone.... France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God? I see now that the loneliness of God is His strength: what would He be if He listened to your jealous little counsels? Well, my loneliness shall be my strength too: it is better to be alone with God...."<sup>53</sup>

At her inquisition Joan's courage almost breaks under the pressure of the cruel accusations. In a tragic cry of anguish, similar in tone to the cry of Jesus at His crucifixion, she submits in agony: ". . . my voices have deceived me. I have been marked by devils: My faith is broken."<sup>54</sup> When she learns that her repentance only reduces the death sentence to a life of perpetual confinement, she decides that she would rather burn at the stake. With a reinstatement of her faith she accepts the death sentence: ". . . you are not fit that I should live among you."<sup>55</sup>

Her death, however, has an interesting effect on her persecutors. When the chaplain realizes what he has

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

done he cries in torment:

. . . Oh God, take away this sight from me! O Christ, deliver me from this fire that is consuming me! She cried to Thee in the midst of it: Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! She is in Thy bosom; and I am in hell for evermore.<sup>56</sup>

Ladvenu, another church official who held the cross for her as she was burning, remarks, "When I had to snatch the cross from her sight, she looked up to heaven. And I do not believe that the heavens were empty."<sup>57</sup>

In the closing scene of the play, Joan's ghost returns after twenty-five years to the bedroom of Charles the Seventh, who is at this time quite old. Soon there is a gathering of all the spirits of those who had persecuted her. Ironically she finds that her name has been cleared and that she has been declared a saint. Cauchon, the chief advocate of her persecution, has been disgraced and thrown out of the church. His new interpretation of the world is gleaned from his failures; but his conclusions are, nevertheless, valuable. He finally admits in this scene that ". . . the world is saved neither by its priests nor its soldiers, but by God and

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

His Saints."<sup>58</sup> The depth of his conclusions poses a question that Shaw attempted to answer throughout his own lifetime: "Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?"<sup>59</sup>

Each of the spirits of Joan's persecutors vows a poetic allegiance to her name. So impressive is their praise that she offers to come back: "And now tell me: shall I rise from the dead, and come back to you a living woman?"<sup>60</sup> All of the spirits discourage her plan to return, and all find hasty excuses for leaving. As the ghosts fade in the remaining rays of light before daybreak, Joan realizes that neither the spirits of her persecutors nor the world is yet ready to accept her.

What Joan comes to realize is that she must suffer for her creativity and her genius. Her peace will not be found in this world. Like Father Keegan, who rejects the commercialization of an industrial society; Lavinia, who serves the God that is not yet; and Jesus, who manifests the archetypal qualities of Shaw's genius, Joan must wait for a time when the world will not reject the superior person.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 160.



In the Preface to Androcles and the Lion, Shaw provides a possible reason for the world's lack of acceptance of the creative mind:

When the religion of the high mind is offered to the lower mind, the lower mind, feeling its fascination without understanding it, and being incapable of rising to it, drags it down to its level by degrading it.<sup>61</sup>

Because Shaw realizes that the common man will always feel threatened by a person of superior intelligence, he concludes that he will have to wait for a race of man superior enough to receive the geniuses of any age. In the end, Shaw looked to the historian whose objective interpretation of the course of events would give the genius a just account: "Only the historian must understand that visionaries are neither imposters or lunatics."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Shaw, Selected Plays, With Prefaces, I, 822.

<sup>62</sup>Shaw, Saint Joan, p. xxii.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion it seems that Shaw's visionaries cannot find acceptance in this world. Some of the geniuses, such as John Tanner and Major Barbara, have had to compromise their ideals with the realities of a social or economic situation. Still others like Richard Dudgeon, Marchbanks, Dubedat, Father Keegan, Lavinia, and Saint Joan remain faithful to a vision which in no way can be reconciled to this world. For the most part Shaw's genius remains alone, but if he does love, it is on a spiritual plane like the relationships of Marchbanks and Candida, Caesar and Cleopatra, or the spiritual marriage of Captain Shotover and Essie.

Shaw's concern for the genius involves not only a lasting admiration but also a preoccupation with the role of the genius in a future society. Shaw hoped that a time would come when pure intelligence could exist without the body. In 1944, Shaw, aging and yet mentally alert, wrote the following autobiographical passage:

Physically I am failing: my senses, my locomotive powers, my memory are decaying at a rate which threatens to make a Struldbrug of me if I persist in living; yet my mind still feels capable of growth; for my curiosity

is keener than ever. My soul goes marching on; and  
 if the Life Force would give me a body durable as  
 my mind; . . .<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately only the Ancients in Back to Methuselah represent the ultimate achievement in the power of the mind over the body. The hairless, sexless Ancients, who spend an eternity engaging in the mysterious realm of pure thought, do not offer a very appealing product of creative evolution. If Shaw seriously projected such a civilization as the highest organization of mankind, it is no wonder that many readers dismiss his theories as a threat to their credulity. Indeed, it is not difficult to miss the vital message couched in the apparent comedy of his plays.

In his plays, Shaw prefers the visions of the genius to the vulgar realities of a corrupted society. His concern for the man of vision brings out the poet and the mystic in his writings. The mystical qualities are first apparent in *Marchbanks*, and vocal in *Caesar*, in his apostrophe to the Sphinx. *Dubedat*, in his artistic creed, sounds the vision of the poet and artist. The tragic despair of Major Barbara in the crash of her religion all about her, the inner torment of Joan and Father Keegan, who have been rejected

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Fleming Rattray, Bernard Shaw; A Chronicle (New York: Roy Publishers, 1951), p. 276.

by the Church; the wild vaticinations of Captain Shotover; the clairvoyant insight of Ellie Dunn: these are the utterances of a poet, mystic, and humanist.

More lasting than Shaw's interpretation of the mystic, however, is his portrayal of the genius as a social reformer. In his plays there is a passionate protest that inspires us to re-evaluate our lives. In an address given in 1930, Archibald Henderson, Shaw's biographer, offers the following comment on the importance of the reformer:

In every age the world demands some passionate protestant, to compel us to justify our beliefs and to evaluate our lives. Cervantes and Moliere, Swift and Voltaire, Ibsen and Carlyle, Ruskin and Shaw. Each fought the battle for individual liberty, a finer art, a purer life, nobler race.<sup>2</sup>

In his own time, Shaw offers that passionate protest. In his plays, he portrays geniuses who strive to improve society. The tragedy of the genius, however, is that he must suffer isolation and rejection because he possesses a higher vision. Shaw sympathized with the character of the genius; yet he could never understand why the genius was not recognized as the true savior of mankind. The last words of Saint Joan offer a fitting conclusion, for she poses the question that Shaw, in all of his genius, could not answer:

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<sup>2</sup> Archibald Henderson, George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, Inc., 1956), p. 831.

O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it  
be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how  
long?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>George Bernard Shaw, Saint Joan (New York:  
Brentano's, 1924), p. 163.

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