INTRODUCTION

poetaster' was owed to Arthur Conan Doyle; his 'motor engineer and New Man' was from H. G. Wells. His 'servant who knows more than his masters' he conceded to James Barrie. He took his Octavius 'unaltered from Mozart,' but neglected to note that the same character is also 'Ricky-Ticky-Tavy,' from Rudyard Kipling. After watching a production of the medieval Everyman, he asked himself, 'Why not Everywoman?' — and confessed, 'Ann was the result: every woman is not Ann, but Ann is Everywoman.'

Readers and playgoers will find that the feast of overt and covert sources in *Man and Superman* adds continuing dimensions to the comedy. There are many more. Shaw even mined his own earlier and little-known writings. As a failed novelist in his twenties, Shaw began a satirical novel he intended to call *The Heartless Man* but eventually titled *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). Its hero is an analogue of John Tanner in the later play, and the novel's ineffectual poet-tasting suitor is a precursor to Octavius. Its 'duel of sex' at the conclusion recalls Congreve's elegant comedy of manners *The Way of the World* (1700) and anticipates the witty, ironic last scene of Shaw's play. Even less known is Shaw's 1887 short story 'Don Giovanni Explains', rejected by editors who sensed scandal. In this, his first working out of the Don Juan legend, the narrator — the Don himself — confines that he had been initiated in sex by an amorous widow. Two years before, that had actually happened to Shaw, who noted in his diary that he had celebrated his birthday 'by a new experience.' (Shaw finally published the story in his Collected Edition in 1932, when he was seventy-six.)

Even the four figments of a dream in the almost-independent Interlude that makes up most of Act III are anticipated in 'Don Giovanni Explains,' which opens with a young woman daydreaming on a train about the opera she has just seen, and then observing the Don sitting opposite her in his traditional Mozartian costume. When she startles, he advises her, 'Pray be quiet. You are alone. I am only what you call a ghost, and have not the slightest interest in meddling with you.' At that point the story turns into what
seems to be a preliminary scenario for 'Don Juan in Hell', the dream interlude, with the Lady, an equivalent to Dona Ana, who finds herself at the opening of the interlude face-to-face with an equally ethereal Don Juan.

Even more striking is the resemblance of the concepts of Heaven and Hell in the Shawian short story to those in the Hell Scene. The principals of the Hell Scene — all four are equivalents to characters in the frame-play — learn that the frontier separating Heaven from Hell is 'only the difference between two ways of looking at things,' and Ana is told that they 'see each other as bodies only because we learnt to think about one another under that aspect when we were alive.' The Don of the story had told the Lady, 'If I speak of [Hell] as a place at all, I do so in order to make my narrative comprehensible, just as I express myself to you phenomenally as a gentleman in hat, cloak, and boots, although such things are no part of the category to which I belong.' The Hell of the play is a place for gross satisfaction of the senses, and the Devil is the leader of its best society. The Don acknowledges the Devil's intellectual and debating gifts, but resents his insufferable cordiality. In the story, the Don confides to the Lady, 'I found society there composed chiefly of the vulgar, hysterical, brutal, weak, good-for-nothing people, all well-intentioned, who kept up the reputation of the place by making themselves and each other as unhappy as they were capable of being. They wearied and disgusted me; and I discovered them beyond measure. The Prince of Darkness is not a gentleman. His knowledge and insight are remarkable as far as they go; ... and I was polite to him.' Each Don, in both the early story and the mature play, is a subversive whose austere vision of life is unsuitable for the Shawian Hell.

To integrate play and play-within-the-play, Shaw would identify his hero, John Tanner, as a distant relative of the legendary Don Juan Tenorio — thus his echo of a surname. Throughout the romantic misadventures and misunderstandings with which the play abounds are echoes of dreams and references to dreams, even, in Ann/Ana's words 'an

echo from a former existence which always seems to me such a striking proof that we have immortal souls.' Toward the close, Tanner wonders, 'When did all this happen to me before? Are we two dreaming?'

Shaw calls the phenomenon which disturbs John Tanner the Life Force, and explains it at length in the preface which he dedicated ironically and extravagantly to Arthur Bingham Walkley, the most influential theatre critic of the day. Drama reviewer for The Times, Walkley loathed Shaw's plays and wished none of them well. He failed to appreciate the wry comedy of manners which Shaw had wrapped around his philosophical romp (produced at first without the interlude in Hell), and was at a loss to explain why the play worked. When it was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square in 1904, Walkley began his critique by comparing Shaw to Shakespeare and putting his ambitious contemporary down. 'On the one hand a born dramatist, and that the greatest,' he wrote of the Bard; 'on the other [hand] a man who is no dramatist at all.' Yet Walkley felt forced to confess that there was something peculiar about what he had seen. 'When I venture to say that Mr Shaw is no dramatist I do not mean that he fails to interest and stimulate and amuse us in the theatre. Many of us find him more entertaining than any other living writer for the stage. There are many things in his plays that give us far keener thrills of delight ... than many things in Shakespeare's plays.'

Walkley and most other critics could not make sense of Shaw's coupling of newness and tradition in what was the first great twentieth century English play. It was even more difficult for the London critical fraternity to comprehend it in its book form. 'I decorated it,' Shaw blamed himself later, 'too brilliantly and too lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act, and that act was so completely episodical (it was a dream that did not affect the action of the piece) that the comedy could be detached and played by itself. Also I supplied the published work with an imposing framework consisting of a preface, an appendix called 'The Revolutionist's Handbook' [supposedly written

x
by John Tanner], and a final display of [Tanner's] aphoristic
fireworks.' It was all too much for the critics, who had never
seen anything like it before. They dismissed it. Somehow he
and theatre critic William Archer remained friends despite
Archer's smug dismissal that Shaw 'is not, and never will be,
a great dramatist; but he is something rarer, if not better – a
philosophic humorist, with the art of expressing himself in
dramatic form'. The Daily Telegraph agreed that there was no
play, not even a story, in Man and Superman, but, its reviewer
conceded, 'let us frankly admit that it is one of the most
amusing pieces of work which ... the Court Theatre has ever
put upon the stage.'

Shaw subtitled his pairing of play and dream 'a comedy
and a philosophy.' When the third act, largely John Tanner's
dream, is performed with the frame-play, the performance
can run five hours – no longer than the uncut Hamlet, Shaw
reminded contemporaries. (It was first given in full in 1915.)
In its entirety it is a vivid evocation of his ideas about
male–female relations and the inner forces that dominate
them. Playing it in its Edwardian setting does not diminish
that impact. Performed without the dream interlude, as
audiences first experienced it in 1905, Man and Superman is
buoyant, romantic theatre with a satirical edge. Performed
separately as 'Don Juan in Hell' in 1907, and often, still,
performed independently, the dream-interlude proved to be a
lively conversation, a quartet for voices that aspires to the
condition of music, yet given dramatic tension by a thread of
plot: which alternative, Heaven or Hell, will Juan and Ana
each choose? Whether the characters are only opinions in
costume, or mythic figures brought to near-life, remains
Shaw's challenge to directors, players, audiences – and,
even, readers.

As the play closes, with the heroines having snared their
prey, we realize that Shaw's plays are open-ended, like life.
Is the power of biological purpose, which both Juan and his
Edwardian successor, John Tanner, consider unscrupulous,
enough to keep the sexes together for a lifetime? The 'true
joy of life', Shaw contends in his rhetorical feat of a preface,
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step forward and ask the audience (as in Henry V) to 'entertain conjecture of a time', Shaw created as early as Man and Superman the player who is both actor and character in the same person - the self-conscious character, or actor directly aware of his audience. In 'Don Juan in Hell' he combined two of the most primitive, yet basic, elements of the self-conscious theatre - the platform of the philosopher and the ring of the clown. In post-Shavian refinements the technique would sweep across the century. When the Devil, exasperated by Juan's long speeches, challenges, 'Let us go on for another hour if you like,' and Don Juan agrees, 'Good: let us,' the perceptible groans amid the laughter make it clear that the audience knows it is at a play. When the Statue (of the Commander) carps, 'I begin to doubt whether you will ever finish, my friend. You are extremely fond of hearing yourself talk,' the audience recognizes Shaw's tongue in his cheek, a perception reinforced by Juan's response, 'True; but since you have endured so much, you may as well endure to the end.'

That a playwright can misunderstand the implications of his words has energized critics since the dawn of drama reviewing. Shaw, then, may have been mistaken in his contention, quoted earlier, that the dispensable dream scene does not affect the action of the frame-play. Indeed it seems otherwise. Readers and audiences may find John Tanner's collapse of resistance to betrothal related to his experience as the dreamer, for in the dream scene Don Juan encounters the inevitability of the Life Force, 'the universal creative energy, of which the parties are both the helpless agents, [which] overrides and sweeps away all personal considerations', and which throws potential sexual partners 'into one another's arms at the exchange of a glance.' Whether or not Ann has long plotted her moves, and Tanner has long resisted even the thought of them, his subconsciously, in the grip of his dream, prepares him for the inevitable. Tanner recognizes that he is doomed to happiness and to what Francis Bacon, in his Shakespeare-era essay on marriage, had called 'hostages to fortune'. Despite pages of paradoxes,

Shaw had, in the end, recognized the realities of the box-office, without which there is no theatre. Thus Man and Superman plays on, and on, and on.

Stanley Weintraub

LIFE

1856 Born in Dublin on 26 July
1876 After only short periods of schooling, started work as an office boy in a Dublin firm of land agents
1876 Mother and sisters moved to London
1876 Joined mother in London; she taught singing and his sister Lucy sang professionally in musical plays
1879 While working for the Edison Telephone Company began to meet the earliest British socialists, including, in 1880, Sidney Webb and Beatrice Potter (later Mrs Webb), who became lifelong friends
1879-81 Wrote five novels, four published serially in magazines
1884 Joined the Fabian Society, which advocated gradual progress towards socialism, and began giving lectures both to the Fabians and on their behalf. At about the same time, met the hugely influential theatre critic William Archer, who helped Shaw to find work as a critic. First meeting with William Morris whose disciple he became
1885 Appointed as a book reviewer for the Pall Mall Gazette and music critic for the new Dramatic Review
1886-9 Art critic for The World
1888-90 Music critic for The Star (under the pseudonym 'Corso di Bassett')
1889 Attended English première of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House
1890-94 Music critic for The World (writing as GBS)
1891 Published The Quintessence of Ibsenism
1892 Widowers' Houses (his first published play) given a private performance by the Independent Theatre in London
1894 Arms and the Man produced at the Avenue Theatre in London; then by actor-manager Richard Mansfield in New York
1895-8 Drama critic for The Saturday Review
1897 Encouraged by the success of The Devil's Disciple in New York, gave up most of his work as a critic
1897-1903 Elected borough councillor for the London borough of St Pancras
1898 Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant published. Married Charlotte Payne-Townshend. Began concentrating on his writing as playwright and essayist
1899 The newly founded Stage Society produced You Never Can Tell, followed by Candida and Captain Brassbound's Conversion in 1900
1904-7 Granville Barker and Vedrenne take over the (Royal) Court Theatre in a challenge to the commercial West End theatre system. Eleven Shaw plays produced at the Court, including the newly written Man and Superman, John Bull's Other Island, Major Barbara and The Doctor's Dilemma

1905 Bought a country home at Ayot St Lawrence, approximately 25 miles north of London (retaining an apartment in Adelphi Terrace, off the Strand)

1910 Misalliance produced at the Duke of York's Theatre

1913 Androcles and the Lion at St James's Theatre. World première of Pygmalion in Vienna (in German), followed by a production in Berlin

1914 Pygmalion produced by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, at His Majesty's Theatre. Common Sense about the War published

1920 Heartbreak House produced at the Royal Court. Completed Back to Methuselah, a five-part cycle of plays, transforming the biblical version of creation and human destiny into post-Darwinian science fiction

1924 Saint Joan produced at the New Theatre

1925 Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. First English public performance of Mrs Warren's Profession (banned by the censor since 1898)

1928 Published The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism

1929 The Apple Cart, produced at the first Malvern Festival, organized by Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre with Shaw as its figurehead

1931 Visited Moscow, and met Stanislavski, Gorki and Stalin

1932 Too True to be Good produced at Malvern. Published fable of The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God, following a visit to South Africa

1933 Travelled to India, Hong Kong, China, Japan and the USA

1936 Celebrated 80th birthday. Gave up driving

1938 Awarded Oscar for the best screenplay for Gabriel Pascal's film of Pygmalion. Geneva (featuring caricatures of Hitler and Mussolini called before the International Court of Justice at the Hague) transferred from Malvern to Saville Theatre, and then to St James's Theatre

1939 Ceremonially presented with the deeds of a site (in South Kensington) for the National Theatre of Great Britain

1943 Death of Charlotte Shaw

1944 Published Everybody's Political What's What?, an instant best-seller

1946 On his 80th birthday, honoured with the freedom of both Dublin and the borough of St Pancras

1950 Died on 2 November

PRINCIPAL WORKS OF
BERNARD SHAW

PLAYS

Widowers' Houses (1893)

Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant (1898) (including Mrs Warren's Profession; Arms and the Man; Candida; You Never Can Tell)

Three Plays for Puritans (1901) (including The Devil's Disciple; Caesar and Cleopatra)

Man and Superman (1903)

John Bull's Other Island (1907)

Major Barbara (1907)

The Doctor's Dilemma (1911)

Getting Married (1911)

Misalliance (1914)

Androcles and the Lion (1916)

Pygmalion (1916)

Heartbreak House (1919)

Back to Methuselah (1921)

Saint Joan (1924)

The Apple Cart (1930)

Too True to be Good (1934)

On the Rocks (1934)

The Millionaire (1936)

In Good King Charles's Golden Days (1939)

NOVELS AND OTHER FICTION

An Unsocial Socialist (1884)

Cathedral Byron's Profession (1885-6)

The Irrational Knot (1885-7)

Love among the Artists (1887-8)

Immutability (1890)

The Black Girl in Search of God (1932)

CRITICISM

Major Critical Essays (1930) (including The Quintessence of Ibsenism, 1891; The Sanity of Art, 1895 and 1908; The Perfect Wagnerite, 1898)

Music in London (1931; from serialization 1890-94)

Our Theatres in the Nineties (1931; from serialization 1895-98)

POLITICAL WRITINGS

Fabian Essays in Socialism (edited, 1893)

Common Sense about the War (1914)

The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism (1928)

Everybody's Political What's What? (1944)

*Dates are of first English-language publication.