

Still waters run deep

Barry Sullivan: The Actor Who Inspired a Boyhood Dream

Frances Hughes gave an expanded version of this talk at the Conway Hall, Holborn, in September

In October 1947 GBS wrote an article about Barry Sullivan for “The Strand” magazine (also published in the States in “The Atlantic Monthly” five months later.) This was just three years before Shaw died and seventy-seven years after he saw Sullivan act for the first time, yet the enthusiasm and admiration are still alive. GBS states ‘He was a great actor’. This is a remarkable statement to come from the genius who scorned Irving.

Shaw first saw Sullivan act at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, in April 1870. Sullivan was then invited back in October 1871 and in September 1872 for twenty plus performances, all dates when GBS was still in his home city. Sullivan is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, and has a handsome memorial - a plinth with the full-size figure of Sullivan as Hamlet on top.

Sullivan, whose first name was actually Thomas, was born in Birmingham on 5th July, 1821. His father was a soldier and Irishman from County Cork who had fought under Wellington. He left the Army when his son was three and the family moved to Bristol. The small boy at the age of five was sent to a Catholic School in the city where the Headmaster, Martin Bayne, was a severe pedant but an accomplished elocutionist. By the time “Tom” was seven he had distinguished himself in oral exams and learned many passages from Shakespeare. However, within a year both his parents died and “Tom” was sent to a boys’ orphanage that was quite different - a Unitarian school - where he wore dark blue knickerbockers, yellow stockings and a Tam O’Shanter cap with a tassel.

It was at the orphanage that “Tom” established himself as a strong-willed but moral boy, physically adept at sports, somewhat daunting but popular. He kept his predilection for reading and reciting and also developed a strong interest in music and singing - a similarity to GBS’s upbringing. After five years at the Stoke Croft Reformed School, Sullivan left and was apprenticed to an attorney named Burges, whose office was in the Bristol Council House in Corn Street. At first he gave great satisfaction to his employer; for as a teenager he was punctual and industrious. However, he soon recoiled from the sedentary habits of office life and his solitary return to his lodgings above the office each evening, and Sullivan was asked by some fellow workers to go with them one evening to the theatre. Though he loved to recite Shakespeare and was said to know the whole of Richard III by heart “Tom” had never been in a theatre. In January 1835 he went across the portals of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and saw the great ‘Mac’, William Charles Macready, play Macbeth. Macready was to play in Bristol for a fortnight; Sullivan had little money but he managed to see



him as Macbeth, Werner, King Lear and Virginius. At that moment the star-struck Sullivan resolved to be an actor. He was to have the same effect on the boy Shaw 35 years later when GBS was about the same age.

Sullivan haunted the stage door and began to make friends with some of the more serious-minded young men in the company whose main task was to support the “stars” who visited the regional theatres. When he talked to friends and older adults they all painted the profession as a glaring and deceptive evil. Sullivan, however, gathered information about the life of the travelling actor and decided that after getting some amateur experience he would quit the attorney’s office

and cross to Ireland, his father's homeland, where it would be easier for him to get a first professional engagement. In the mean time he induced his fellow clerks and some ex-schoolfriends to set up an amateur dramatic club of which he would be the lead actor. Their stage was in two rooms in a house near their office. They had no scenery and improvised costumes. Their footlights were twelve bottles each holding a single candle arranged across the upper end of one room. Sullivan acted out Shakespearean plays for nearly a year and always gathered round the Bristol theatre when a new troupe arrived on coaches or wagons according to their purse. Early in the spring of 1837, about the time of William IV's death, a few members of a provincial manager's travelling company passed through Bristol on their way to Swansea. They induced Sullivan to join their company and he agreed. He quitted his master's house one evening without telling him of this major decision. After a long and tedious journey the company arrived in Tenby. They embarked on a boat for Swansea and on board Sullivan became ill and was robbed of almost all his funds. In Swansea he wrote to his master and to the guardians he rarely saw. Surprisingly they came up with a little money to enable him to travel across to Cork in the last week of May 1837. He was still under sixteen.

Early acting career

Thomas Sullivan, friendless and almost penniless, obtained lodgings with a Nicholas Stack, a popular amateur actor in Cork, and the next morning was directed to the Theatre Royal, a large building about the size of London's Haymarket, built in 1760 but now in a state of dilapidation. Sullivan was greeted by Frank Seymour, the manager, who eyed the dishevelled youth suspiciously. What did Seymour see? A tall youth, slim but broad in the shoulders, sallow complexioned with white teeth, long black hair, blue piercing eyes, bushy eyebrows and a skin marked by smallpox. There must have been a charisma about the boy not yet sixteen as Seymour expressed doubt as to the availability of a part for someone with no experience, but asked him to return the next morning, which Sullivan duly did. At his audition, he read from a tattered old playbook but, more importantly, sang the Scottish ballad,

Jessie the Flower of Dunblane. Seymour was delighted; what could be more convenient than a youth who could sing, as that evening they were putting on the famous 18th-century ballad opera *Love in a Village* by Isaac Bickerstaff for the benefit of Miss Julia Smith, niece of the major songstress Kitty Stephens. One of the members of the cast called West had absented himself. Seymour offered the part of Jack Eustace to Sullivan and he sang opposite the famous Miss Smith playing Rosetta.

He was not paid nor was his name on that night's playbill but he was engaged as a member of the stock company at fifteen shillings a week. Out of this Sullivan had to find his own stage wigs, hats, boots etc. By the following season Sullivan was firmly established as a prominent member of the stock company and was very popular with the audience. He was rarely out of the theatre even on Sundays and was remarkably swift in learning his lines and becoming letter perfect. Because of this he also stood in as prompter. In his first season, Sullivan mainly played in comedy and musical pieces but in June 1837 Charles Kean, major actor and son of the great tragedian, Edmund Kean, returned to Cork to play Hamlet. Sullivan played his first Shakespearean part, Rosencrantz. In the following fortnight he played Seyton in *Macbeth*, the Duke of Albany in *King Lear* and Brackenbury in *Richard III*. It was the first time Sullivan was able to observe a major British classical actor in Shakespeare and, again, he was quick to assimilate action and nuances in Charles Kean's performances. Nonetheless he was considered merely a useful youth by Seymour and neither his salary, nor the importance of his roles, grew. Another theatre was being opened in Cork by an actor from Dublin called Collins and the young Sullivan bade goodbye to Seymour and joined the new company, stipulating that he wished to be seen as a tragedian rather than a singer, as he felt the methods of producing the voice in these roles was entirely different and could be harmful. His first performances with the new company were in a "fit-up" tent and consisted mostly of melodramas in which Sullivan played sensational parts. Some of the company were jealous of the youth, but an old actor called Stanley taught him the minutiae of stage fencing; a skill he never lost and which enraptured the young Shaw years later. The "armoury",

however, was strictly limited, consisting of two pairs of broadswords, half-a-dozen stout sticks and a rusty lock-pistol. One night Sullivan was on stage and he had a sword of his own which had to be handed to him for a duel. He gave it to a supernumerary who was told to stand in the wings and hand it to Sullivan gracefully, the handle shouldered upwards at the appropriate moment. The young “super”, very anxious to please, stood in the wings for ten minutes waiting to perform his task. At last the cue came; he stepped forward and with a graceful bow put the sword in Tom Sullivan’s hand. There was a loud unrehearsed scream as he dropped it. It was nearly red hot - the unhappy “super” had been standing beneath a naked gas jet over which unconsciously he had kept the sword handle heating up!

Still the leads did not come and Sullivan broke away from Cork with a group of friends to become in Shaw’s words “a princely stroller”. In one sense he was to remain thus for the rest of his considerable career - he played virtually every Shakespearean lead in tragedy. He did nothing, GBS said, for significant contemporary literature, his repertoire containing nothing more modern than Bulwer Lytton’s *Richelieu*. Shaw tells how a friend of his (unidentified) called on Sullivan and began their conversation ‘I have written a drama’ to which Barry Sullivan replied “Sir: I do not play drama: I am a tragedian”.

He might have ruined his reputation and shortened his life if he had remained addicted to whisky - a stimulant often necessary for a late teenager coping with the rigours of a player’s life. One night in Clonmel, Sullivan went on as De Welsken, the villain, in *Rory O’Hare*. The drink got so much to his head that he nearly killed his opponent in the stage fight he was meant to lose. Alarmed by his own violence, the next day he sought out the celebrated Father Mathew, considered Apostle of Temperance, and signed the pledge, a promise that Sullivan took unbroken to his grave. Another virtue that GBS, life-long teetotaler, would have admired.

Sullivan was also remarkably brave. In Tralee, passing a house one afternoon he saw it was in flames. Despite admonitions to keep away Sullivan found a ladder, broke into the upstairs bedroom through a window and rescued a Mr Primrose and his daughter. Though

suffering from minor burns and the loss of much of his hair Sullivan went to the theatre that night to play his part. When the news of the rescue was published, people flocked to the theatre to see their hero and there were full houses for the next few days.

Sullivan acted with many of the stars of the 1830s and 40s, amongst whom was Henry Compton, one of whose younger relations was Compton Mackenzie. Compton advised Sullivan to leave Ireland and apply to William Murray, the manager of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. In November 1841 Murray invited the twenty-year-old to Scotland. It took sixty perilous hours to cross the Irish Sea and he then had to take a coach from Glasgow to Edinburgh. Murray had acted in John Philip Kemble's company at Covent Garden and his leading man in Edinburgh in 1841 was John Ryder who was to act Hubert in 1856 to the nine-year-old Ellen Terry's Prince Arthur in King John. Murray was considered the "beau ideal" of managers, but he only offered Sullivan 30 shillings a week. His first roles were as Snake in *The School for Scandal* and the Duke of Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*. He then played a number of secondary, but good, Shakespearean roles, but the major event that took place just before his twenty-first birthday was his engagement to Miss Mary Amory, the daughter of an Army officer. She was only sixteen and naturally her father disapproved, especially at the thought of his daughter marrying a player. They eloped and were married in St Cuthbert's, Princes Street, Edinburgh. That night he played Lodovico in "Othello". The marriage was to last over fifty years. During his time with Murray's company, Sullivan played with many of the rising stars of the theatrical world, including John Sims Reeves, the singer, Sam Cowell, singer and music-hall star and Charles James Mathews and his wife, Madame Vestris. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert came when they were staying at Dalkeith Palace. Sullivan was accepted as the principal "heavy man" of the Company. He played Banquo in *Macbeth* and Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliette*.

Mrs Sullivan almost became a widow when, one night in a play called *The Dumb Man of Manchester*, the timing of a musket went wrong and the 'super' discharged his weapon in Sullivan's face. He was rendered unconscious and on recovering could not see because of the

quantity of powder that had been shot in his face. Three weeks elapsed with no salary before he took the stage again.

After two-plus years Sullivan wanted to play leads, so he moved to Glasgow and then Aberdeen. At twenty-four, he became a manager in Aberdeen and his first step was to establish order and decorum in the gallery. If there was the slightest disturbance, offenders were expelled. By the close of his first season, Sullivan had played everything from the Prince of Denmark to a Vampire, but after two years he had not made money and decided to try his fortune in England. In March 1847 he took an engagement in Wakefield and for the first time appeared on the bills as Barry Sullivan. In the first week he played Hamlet, Macbeth, Shylock and Richelieu, but the turn-out was poor and on the final night the manager refused to pay Sullivan during an interval. Sullivan walked out with the play unfinished, with no salary and leaving some of his costumes behind. Fortunately, a fortnight later he had an offer to go to the Theatre Royal, Liverpool. In the next few weeks, despite an outbreak of cholera, Sullivan played Lear, Shylock, Othello and Macbeth as well as other dramas. In a short time he became a “star” in Liverpool. He stayed for the summer, living with his wife in a comfortable apartment, in his spare time painting watercolour landscapes.

Sullivan plays Hamlet

Sullivan’s approach to playing the Prince of Denmark showed his devotion to his art. He read Hamlet daily for many years, knowing every word and, perhaps more importantly, the pauses. (How Harold Pinter would have admired that!) He treated Hamlet as a new part and played it unbiased by those re-creations that had gone before. He was to startle some Shakespearean scholars by adopting “new” readings. His Hamlet was not mad, he just simulated madness. Instead of saying “I’ll take the ghost’s words for a thousand pounds”, Sullivan substituted, “I’ll take the ghost’s words for all the coin in Denmark”, deeming it more appropriate in monetary terms! Sullivan was probably the first Hamlet to come back at the end of the nunnery scene and kiss Ophelia’s hair. He did not have two miniatures in the closet scene with

Gertrude but two portraits on the walls, probably nearer to the tapestries that hung in the Danish Court at the time the play is set. He was now acting with the best in the theatrical profession. He became friendly with Gustavus Brooke - great actor but alcoholic, who finally drowned in a storm in the Bay of Biscay on his way to Australia - and also in Manchester played Henry VIII to Macready's Wolsey. Macready admired the young man, which was unusual, as he was not fond of rivals, and after they had taken a joint final curtain one night to great applause as Macready led the way through the proscenium door, he shook Barry's hand saying, "Good, very good, Mr Sullivan." Strangely, Sullivan continued in the regions sometimes as manager, sometimes as leading man and did not come to London for the first time until January 1852. He opened, not at Drury Lane or Covent Garden, but at the Theatre Royal Haymarket as Hamlet on Saturday 7th February. The week before he had a bronchial attack and was advised to postpone the opening night, but he stalwartly refused and applied leeches to his throat. He received great critical acclaim in all the London papers. In March he moved nearer to the modern school of playwriting when he played Alfred Evelyn in Bulwer Lytton's Money with Mrs Stirling as Clara Douglas. At the end of the London season Sullivan made his first visit to Stratford-upon-Avon not to act but to visit the spot where his hero was born.

In 1855 Sullivan was engaged for fifty-five nights at Drury Lane but not initially in Shakespeare. There was a new five-act play called Nitocrius by Edward Fitzball, set in ancient Egypt, with Sullivan as the leading man in a part called Tihrak. It was lavishly dressed and mounted but an abject failure and Sullivan quarrelled furiously with the author, the lessee and the stage manager. It ran for a fortnight, lost the Lane £2,000 and has, as far as I know, never been performed again. To make amends Sullivan played Petruchio in a version of Shakespeare's play but he wanted to be away from London and back in his "homelands" of Manchester and Liverpool. He also felt that it was time for him to make the voyage across the Atlantic. He left his wife behind but embarked with his eldest son, Thomas Amory Sullivan, aged fourteen, to go to New York. (It is said that Sullivan did this in order to cure the teenager of his longing to run away to sea inspired by the stories of Captain

Marryat. The voyage was long and tempestuous and at least in this hope Sullivan was successful.)

Sullivan spent seventeen months in the USA. He was well received but was always viewed as 'different'. As the young GBS was to see, it was Richard III that took hold of Sullivan. The American critics often commented on the length of the final fight between Richard and Richmond. Sullivan was a superb swordsman and would fight to the last, almost to the point where his fellow actor, yet opponent, might think that that night the end of the play would have a different denouement!

He came back to London a wealthy man and now decided that he would visit Australia. He opened in Melbourne and his fellow actor was Joe Jefferson, the great American actor and, of course, grandfather of Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon. Jefferson was to write in a letter after Sullivan's death that he was "an intellectual actor". He said, "Great actors cannot imitate and I consider the highest branch of acting to be intellectual and poetic." Barry Sullivan was no imitator.

Shaw on Sullivan: 'I never saw great acting until I saw him'

Sullivan was admired so much in Australia that he became the lessee of the Theatre Royal, Melbourne. He had unqualified success from the first night and was to stay at the theatre for three years. By now he had the confidence to play Falstaff in Henry IV Pt I. He was thought of so highly by the citizens of Melbourne that, when the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth was commemorated, it was Sullivan who unveiled a statue of Shakespeare, in preference to Charles Kean who was also acting in the city at that time. In three weeks Sullivan would take £1,000, and this was 1854.

Back home after a holiday in India, Sullivan had enough money to act where he wished. Despite a fall on stage which severely damaged his leg he went in and out of management in London, Liverpool and back to Ireland to act in Belfast. But never yet in Dublin! Finally in 1870 he appeared. As GBS said "For boys like me he was irresistible

and he had classic taste and noble judgment for older critics too.... I never saw great acting until I saw him.” Shaw claims that it was from Sullivan and Salvini that he learned stage technique and what great acting can do.

Later critics were to say of GBS’s first plays that he was ignorant of stage technique and that his plays were not plays at all. Shaw argued that, via the acting of Sullivan, he had been inspired to go back to Shakespeare and the sixteenth century in the way that William Morris had gone back to the twelfth century and the Icelandic myths. GBS also stated that Shakespeare was kept alive by Sullivan in the United Kingdom (which of course included Ireland at that time) at the moment when Shakespeare was said to “spell ruin” and the “cup and saucer” drama of Tom Robertson etc. had taken over the fashionable theatre.

Shaw first saw Sullivan as Hamlet years after his first appearance as Hamlet at the Haymarket in 1852 when his chance of becoming a young student from Wittenburg University had long gone. But he was still taken by his physical presence on the stage. He called Sullivan “a human thunderbolt” - Jude Law recently may have had a vestige of Sullivan’s technique. The boy Shaw remembered Sullivan running up from back stage to the front - the whole depth - to run Claudius through again and again and again. Throughout the play he showed towering contempt for his step-father and had one peculiar reading during the play that Shaw never forgot. Shakespeare gave Hamlet the line “I know a hawk from a handsaw”. Sullivan replaced it with “I know a hawk from a heron. Pshaw!” GBS never minded alterations in Shakespeare’s plays though he resented them in his own!

Writing in his seventies, Shaw said that Sullivan was irresistible to him as a boy. He remembered his Richelieu, long before he saw Irving play it, in his Cardinal’s robes, full of dignity, drawing in the air a divine protective circle of Rome around the head of the heroine and wrote, “I cannot believe any mortal actor ever surpassed it.” Again this seems to me an extraordinary statement from a man who dissected Henry Irving’s performances and who was not given to dramatic critic’s hyperbole. The young Shaw followed every movement, word and gesture on the stage. At fourteen he saw Sullivan as Richard III and

remembered that, when he stabbed King Henry with the words “For this among the rest was I ordained”, he swung his sword one way but his head and eyes the other. A lesser actor would have elicited laughter from the audience at this gesture but not a murmur was heard. Using his martial art skills at the words “Richard’s himself again” Sullivan took up the stance of a fencer on guard. His stage fights in Macbeth were no less exciting because the audience were watching a pre-arranged battery of what was known back-stage as “sixes”.(Again Jude Law’s final bout with Horatio recently seemed fresh and vicious but was immaculately rehearsed - “forty-eights” rather than “sixes”!) Mind you not every great actor can do it and when Gielgud and Richardson fought in Henry IV Pt 1 at the Vic in 1930 RR could be heard saying, “Now you, ducky; now me, ducky”!

Shaw: [In the theatre] ‘terrors are as fascinating as delights; so that ghosts and death, agony and sin, became...phases of an unaccountable ecstasy’

If Shaw admired Sullivan’s physicality he also admired his morality and the lack of sexuality in his portrayal of Hamlet. He admired the respect and affection with which Sullivan’s Hamlet treated Ophelia and said later, “He never dragged in vulgar sex-appeal as Irving did”. (Irving, of course, was playing with Ellen Terry, almost undoubtedly his lover at the time). As for Sullivan showing even a hint of an Oedipus complex in the closet scene with his mother, Gertrude, GBS was certain “that the idea never occurred to him”. Whether these thoughts entered the head of the fourteen-year-old Shaw is doubtful. Packed into the pit or gallery with such a mob of spectators that he came out of the theatre “with all my front buttons down the middle of my back”, Shaw knew that theatre was the place “where existence touches you delicately to the heart, and where mysteriously thrilling people, secretly known to you in dreams of your childhood, enact a life in which terrors are as fascinating as delights; so that ghosts and death, agony and sin, become, like love and victory, phases of an unaccountable ecstasy”.

It was Sullivan who first led him to this world. We all know of the one memorable evening when Barry Sullivan, fighting with all his accomplished skill and physicality, used his specially designed sword so vigorously that two inches of the tip broke off, whizzed over the heads of the cowering pit and buried itself into the front of the dress circle. Sullivan continued with the fight! To Bernard Shaw, for the rest of his long life, Barry Sullivan was the perfection of grace and dignity. Look into Shaw's plays and think how many parts Sullivan would have played to perfection had he been born twenty or thirty years later. 'Google' the name Barry Sullivan on the internet now and you have to trawl through pages of 'hits' before Thomas Barry Sullivan is revealed and the longest of the pieces about him was written back in 1949. Yet what a Dick Dudgeon he could have been, what a Shotover or what a Larry Doyle - "Still Waters Run Deep!" and the depth of Sullivan's acting I am convinced was a far from negligible influence on Bernard Shaw.



Ulica Bernarda Shawa in Dubrovnik in Croatia (Sam Coates)

Bernard Shaw and Conan Doyle

Ivan Wise gave an expanded version of this lecture at the University of Hull on 4th July 2009.

Titanic

On 10th April 1912, the “unsinkable” RMS Titanic left Southampton dock, bound for New York, with 2223 people on board. The ship, run by the White Star Line, was then the world’s largest passenger steamship. Four days later, the ship hit an iceberg and sank. It had on board fourteen regular lifeboats, each with a capacity of 65, two emergency boats and four Englehardt collapsible lifeboats, each with a capacity of forty. In all, therefore, it had room for about 1150 people. However, only 706 people survived.

Early press reports were filled with inaccuracies. The managing director of the White Star, J Bruce Ismay, was on board and the company’s vice-president in New York only learnt of the sinking when a reporter tipped him off. The wireless operator on the Carpathia, the Cunard line boat that rescued some of the passengers, only permitted messages between White Star’s directors and New York. As a result, the newspapers, starved of the facts, invented stories about what happened, reporting tales of romance and heroism that had little basis in fact. Lady Duff Gordon arrived in New York and, that evening, had dinner with the editor of Sunday American. Hearst instructed him to print her story. A reporter constructed the story which Lady Gordon said was “rather inventive”. The Daily Graphic on 20th April wrote, “Sublime in its supreme unselfishness, the death of Captain EJ Smith was the death of an English captain – he perished with his ship. Face to face with certain disaster, he was calm and self-possessed, thinking only of the lives of

those in his charge. He ignored his own peril.” Many of the reports focused on how the band continued to play as the ship sank, including the tune Nearer, My God, To Thee. The London Standard said “It is a great incident of history” and compared it to the sinking of the Birkenhead off South Africa in 1852, where 648 soldiers and sailors lined up in formation on the decks. That sinking was the first time the policy of “women and children first” had been explicitly employed.

The following month, on 14th May, George Bernard Shaw wrote an article for the Daily News and Leader called Some Unmentioned Morals. In it, he criticised the press coverage of the sinking, condemning the “explosion of outrageous romantic lying”. He did not believe that women and children were put first, and he did not believe that the officers and first-class passengers showed any gallantry to the third-class passengers. Furthermore, Shaw wrote that Captain Smith, the man in charge of the ship, was incompetent. He called the Titanic disaster a “triumph of British navigation”. He said that the continued playing of the band gave people a false sense of security and discouraged them from hurrying to the lifeboats. Shaw did not deny there was courage: only that it was attributed exclusively to the English. Shaw’s article was regarded not only as unpatriotic but also unfair: he had concentrated on ridiculing only the early press reports and ignored the fact that a US Senate investigation had begun the morning after the sinking.

Shaw called the Titanic disaster a ‘triumph of British navigation’

Conan Doyle wrote a letter to the newspaper on 20th May, in which he said, “I can never remember any production which contained so much that was false within the same compass.” He said that Shaw’s use of statistics was misrepresentative of the truth and his language was full of exaggeration. He ended by saying, “It is a pitiful sight to see a man of undoubted genius using his gifts in order to misrepresent and decry his own people.” Two days later, Shaw responded by saying he had “been driven by an intolerable provocation of disgusting and

dishonourable nonsense”. On 25th May, Conan Doyle concluded the discussion, “The worst I think or say of Mr. Shaw is that his many brilliant gifts do not include the power of weighing evidence; nor has he that quality - call it good taste, humanity, or what you will - which prevents a man from needlessly hurting the feelings of others.”

Conan Doyle said that Shaw did not have that quality ‘which prevents a man from needlessly hurting the feelings of others’

Both men were to an extent right. The band continued to play long after any sense of order had gone but they did stop half an hour before the ship foundered. However, Shaw was wrong about assuming the worst of the musicians, the officers and the men. The musicians did show heroism: none of them survived. As for the officers, only four of them survived. A quarter of women and children on board were lost, while 80% of men were lost. However, 60% of first-class passengers were saved while only 25% of third-class passengers were saved. More first-class men survived than third-class children. Shaw was certainly right that the press treated the two groups differently. Walter Lord later pointed out in *A Night to Remember* that the *New York Times* issue covering *Carpathia*’s arrival in NY contained only two interviews with third-class passengers. The *New York Herald* had 43 survivor accounts, only two of which were steerage. As for Captain Smith, the Titanic Wreck Commissioner, Lord Mersey, who headed the British Board of Trade inquiry, stated in July that Captain Smith was “doing only that which other skilled men would have done in the same position...He made a mistake, a very grievous mistake, but one in which.... negligence cannot be said to have had any part; and in the absence of negligence it is, in my opinion, impossible to fix Captain Smith with blame”. The US Senate inquiry, on the other hand, said: “His indifference to danger was one of the direct and contributing causes of this unnecessary tragedy.”

Fortunately, both participants were not scarred by the experience; Conan Doyle said that the debate “did not in any way

modify our kindly personal relations”. However, the argument did expose their very different natures. Hesketh Pearson wrote that Doyle “could see nothing in the Titanic disaster but the loss and pity and terror of it... [For Shaw] the loss of the ship was a statistical fact”. He added that Shaw was aggrieved by the “venal mendacity and cheap melodrama” of the newspapers. Shaw could not bear public hypocrisy, and had been similarly vitriolic during the extended public mourning period after Queen Victoria’s death. Conan Doyle, on the other hand, wrote a poem called Ragtime about the band, in which he says, “They’ve other thoughts to think tonight, and other things to do, The tinkle of the ragtime may help to see them through.” They both knew one of the victims of the Titanic: former Pall Mall Gazette editor William T Stead, who died in the Titanic. Conan Doyle had once sent Stead a presentation copy (one of only four) of *The White Company* on publication. Shaw, on the other hand, had once called Stead “a complete ignoramus”. The argument was not decisively won by either side, although Pearson wrote that the British public probably sided with the patriot, concluding, “90% of them would rather have been wrong with Conan Doyle than right with Bernard Shaw.”

Shaw and Conan Doyle

Shaw and Conan Doyle were clearly quite different men. It is safe to say that Shaw would not have given a talk to the National League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage in Tunbridge Wells, as Conan Doyle did in 1913. Conan Doyle once wrote, “The great female destiny [is] to become the supplement of a man” while Shaw wrote in *Mrs Warren’s Profession* and *Pygmalion* of the independent New Woman. They viewed themselves differently in relation to the establishment. Conan Doyle, offered a knighthood, wrote, “All my work for the State would seem tainted if I took a so-called reward” and then accepted the knighthood in 1902. Shaw, however, turned down all awards, refusing the Order of Merit by saying that he had already awarded it to himself. He once wrote, “I despise honours. It is enough that I am a Bernard Shaw and that is the highest order of merit.”

However, both were interested in forms of social change: Conan Doyle was the president of the Divorce Law Reform Society, while Shaw was at the forefront of the pioneering Fabian movement. Both were political figures: Conan Doyle stood twice as a Unionist candidate to become an MP while Shaw spent four years as a Vestryman for St Pancras. Both men were interested in boxing: Conan Doyle had boxed at school, university and while on board ship. Both wrote books on the subject: Shaw wrote *Cashel Byron* and Conan Doyle wrote *Rodney Stone*. There were therefore a number of areas of common interest and, indeed, their next public tussle was one of agreement, rather than dissent.

Casement

Roger Casement was a British consul in Boma in the Congo Free State at the turn of the century. Congo had been under the rule of the Belgian King Leopold since 1885. Casement wrote a report in which he confirmed allegations of slavery and was deeply critical of the grab for Africa and said that it was “an act of deliberate theft, and one the wickedness of which I believe will yet be startlingly demonstrated by the retaliation of the natives who have been robbed of their rights”. He called colonial exploitation “a gigantic infamy – a fundamental invasion of primitive humanity and its rights”. He singled out King Leopold particularly for blame; with good ground, as Leopold’s mercenaries in the Congo were issued bullets which they were not supposed to waste. For each bullet they used, they were supposed to bring back a hand. (Adam Hirschfeld’s *King Leopold’s Ghost*). In 1904, Edmund Dene Morel, a shipping agent and journalist, set up the Congo Reform Association (with Conan Doyle’s friend St. Joe Strachey on the executive committee), which led to the Belgian parliament annexing the Congo and taking over the country from Leopold. On Casement’s subsequent posting, he wrote about the Putamayo region of the Upper Amazon in 1910, “The world thinks the slave trade was killed a century ago!” He said that the local enslaved population “is now perishing at the doors of an English Company, under the lash, the chains, the bullet, the machete to give its shareholders a dividend”.

In 1910, Casement returned to London and was knighted the following year. His pioneering anti-slavery work suggested there was little question about his integrity. In February 1913, Conan Doyle wrote an article for *Fortnightly Review* called *Great Britain and The Next War*, about how Britain needed to combat the airship and the submarine. He supported limited Home Rule in Ireland but said that the Irish must stand by Britain, writing, “the British fleet is their one shield.” He sent Casement, whom he had known for several years, proofs of his article. Casement, however, argued in his article: Ireland, Germany and the Next World War, that Ireland needed to free herself from Britain. He wanted to establish an independent Ireland and became increasingly critical of Britain. He said, “God save Ireland is now another form of God save Germany” and routinely referred to Britain as “the Bitch and Harlot of the North Sea”. In 1914, he went to Germany to try and persuade Irish prisoners to form an Irish Brigade under German command. He did a tour of the Limburg an der Lahn prisoner of war camp but convinced only fifty men to change sides. Hearing of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland, he wanted to warn his countrymen that it would fail. He persuaded the Germans to land him in Ireland from a submarine which was escorting a vessel loaded with arms for the insurgents. The vessel was sunk and Casement captured by the police.

Casement said, ‘I was not afraid to commit high treason...All I ask you to believe is that I have done nothing dishonourable...I have done nothing treacherous to my country’

Casement said, “I was not afraid to commit high treason...All I ask you to believe is that I have done nothing dishonourable...I have done nothing treacherous to my country”. Basil Thomson at Scotland Yard and Reginald Hall, director of the Intelligence Division at the Admiralty, interrogated him. Casement’s home was searched and his diary discovered. This described his sexual exploits with boys and young men picked up in the streets, often for money. They were

graphic, with the details of the financial transaction and of the appearance of his conquests. Thomson and Hall showed copies of Casement's diaries to journalists. Yeats, one of his supporters along with Shaw and Conan Doyle, said that the fact that the government was prepared to use the material in order to smear Casement suggested that "no unpopular man with a cause will ever be safe". Furthermore, Adler Christensen, a Norwegian sailor with whom Casement had had a relationship, offered to testify against him. Finally, Pemberton Billing asked Asquith in the Commons whether it was true that Casement had been brought to London and whether he could "give the House and the nation an assurance that the traitor will be shot forthwith".

Shaw did not sign Conan Doyle's petition for fear that his name would prejudice the chance of getting certain other signatures

The Cabinet wanted a civil trial for high treason. Thomson and Hall wanted a court-martial. Casement was transferred from Brixton to the Tower of London for a fortnight. He was transferred back to Brixton and then stood trial. After a verdict of guilty was inevitably passed, Casement said, before sentence was pronounced: "I am prouder to stand here today in the traitor's dock to answer this impeachment than to fill the place of my right honourable accusers". Casement's appeal was dismissed. Six petitions were drawn up on behalf of Roger Casement. Clement Shorter drafted a petition, signed by forty men and presented to the Prime Minister by Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle persuaded Chesterton, Galsworthy and Jerome to sign his petition. Shaw did not sign it for fear that his name would prejudice the chance of getting certain other signatures. However, Shaw submitted another petition, which pointed out to the government that if Casement was hanged they would make a martyr of a man who had never been a national hero.

Conan Doyle wrote in the Daily Chronicle that Casement was "a man of fine character, and that he should, in the full possession of his senses, act as a traitor to the country which had employed and

honoured him is inconceivable to anyone who knew him.” That, however, was not the full story. He called pacifists “half-mad cranks whose absurd consciences prevented them from barring the way to the devil”. He thought Casement was mad and tried to have Casement's sentence reduced. He told FE Smith, the Attorney-General, that he did not condone Casement's crime or suggest his punishment was unjust. But he did not want him to become a martyr. He regarded homosexuality “a monstrous development”. He said that Casement was mentally ill and it would therefore be wrong to kill him.

However, their efforts to secure a reprieve were to no avail. Cardinal Bourne refused to allow Father Cary, the Pentonville chaplain where Casement was held, to reconcile Casement to the Catholic church unless he signed an apology “expressing sorrow for any scandal he might have caused by his acts, public or private”. Casement refused to do this and was executed for high treason in August 1916.

Conan Doyle said: Shaw ‘seems subhuman in emotion and superhuman in intellect’

Although he once called Sherlock Holmes “a drug addict without a single amiable trait”, Shaw equally admired Conan Doyle. In the preface to *Man and Superman*, Shaw says he borrowed the character of El Cuchillo in *How the Brigadier Held the King* for his character Mendoza: “The theft of the brigand from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is deliberate”. Conan Doyle also admired Shaw, describing him as a man of “the pleasant silky voice and the biting phrase”. He also praised his “glorious dialogue” but added, “He seems subhuman in emotion and superhuman in intellect”. He wrote in his memoirs, “I have known no literary man who was so ruthless to other people's feelings. And yet to meet him was always to like him. He could not resist the bitter jest or the perverted pleasure of taking up an unpopular attitude.” He added, “There is nothing constructive in him, and he is bound to be in perpetual opposition.” Despite their differences, however, Shaw and Conan Doyle, two of the most notable writers of the early twentieth century, shared a substantial mutual respect.

Overstepping the bounds: a Shaw letter in verse

Maxwell E. Siegel

Shaw's letter of 8 February 1886 to his fellow Fabian Hubert Bland is unusual. The content is straightforward - contributions to the two-year-old Society and gossip - but the format sets it apart.

In *Collected Letters 1874-1897*, Dan Laurence introduces the letter by stating, "Shaw's letter was written 'in rhyme'", according to a note in his diary, but the scansion is so clumsy that no effort has been made to set it (from the shorthand draft) in verse form.

Clumsy scansion? Shaw? This is hard to believe and (I think) rightly so. Studying the letter, I've come to the conclusion that several key words were transcribed incorrectly from Shaw's idiosyncratic Pitman; if they are given alternative readings, the resulting verse is clear, metrical, and clever. Since Shaw, regrettably, cannot defend himself, I should like to suggest that the clumsiness may possibly be in the transcription of his shorthand original rather than in the scansion.

It was a grand time for light verse. Perhaps W.S. Gilbert set the tone for the decade to come in 1880 when he has the Penzance Pirate King declare, "For what, we ask, is life/Without a touch of Poetry in it?" Within a couple of years, a smitten Shaw is filling notebooks with poems to Alice Lockett. There was:

When we speak I say "Miss Lockett";
Now my courtesy I'll pocket
And indulge myself by spelling
"Alice," and not hear her telling
Me to check my mad presumption,
With an exquisite assumption

Of offended dignity
Which endears her more to me.

And, in 1882:

Love lifted to his lips a chalice,
And said, "My power, though many mock it,
Hath triumphed through the charms of Alice,
Here's to the health of Alice Sprockett!"

Clumsy scansion? Shaw?

Here is a metrical setting of Shaw's 1886 letter to Bland. Words in brackets are my armchair reconstruction of the original text. Since the knowledge of shorthand is as distant to me as the British Museum (where the original resides), I make these alterations on the assumption that Shaw followed through with his musical, loosely metrical, Gilbertian jingle right down to the double-iamb signature.

Dear Bland, with respect to the conference and the
needful guarantee,
You may put down my name
On your list for the same
And rely for a share on me.
Kindly say when I must
Come down with the dust
And how much the amount should be.

If every Fabian contributes a quid, it will run to eighty
pounds;
But as everyone wont,
Youll be short if I dont
Somewhat over[step the bounds.]
So book me for three,
Though the offer will be
Not quite so good as it sounds.

For I see very little likelihood of my finding funds to
pay,

And may answer your call -

If I answer at all -

By requesting a brief delay

For my means are such

That I have none too much

To live on from day to day.

Mrs Wilson's tract on collectivism, as I from the first
foresaw,

Seems certain now

To end in a [row.]

I think we must either withdraw

Or allow Mrs Bland

To take it in hand.

Yours ever, G. Bernard Shaw

The emendations (“row” for “ruin” and “overstep the bounds” for “overstretch this point”) remain as faithful, syllabically and phonetically, to the transcription in *Collected Letters* as the rhythm, rhyme, and sense allow, thus making plausible my long-distance alternative reading of Shaw’s Pitman. I think that a review of the original might confirm a text such as the one I have suggested.

Pitman orthography tends to support these alternative readings. For instance, the Pitman strokes for “bound” appear quite similar to the Pitman strokes for “point” apart from “bound” being bolder; a major difference is in their placement relative to the guide line. Shaw, however, used “never a guide line to indicate position”, and so confusion becomes a distinct possibility. (There is a good example of Shaw's Pitman of this period - the first page of the 1883 manuscript of *An Unsocial Socialist* - reproduced in *Collected Letters*. There are no guide lines.)

Transcription errors are the bane of the researcher, and the extra degree of difficulty introduced by deciphering Shaw's shorthand-writing only adds to the complexity of Shaw studies. Laurence, for

instance, tells of a Shaw editor who was baffled by a reference to an “Italian” essay, only to discover that the transcription should have been “Fabian”. (If the context had been a letter written in verse, and the rhyming word had been 'Arabian', the error would have been immediately evident!)

For this reason, perhaps, the transcription of Shaw's verse letter to Bland is like the iconic thirteenth stroke of the clock which (in a line credited to everyone from Anonymous to Winston Churchill) casts doubt not only on itself, but on all that has gone before. All copies and reproductions accumulate errors, but Shaw's reprinted 'F' letters (from “shorthand draft or copy”) might well be taken with an extra grain of wariness.

And if the scansion is clumsy, and the words do not rhyme, we should not be too quick to blame Shaw's musical ear.

For endnotes, please see page 40.

Brush Up Your Shaw

Bernie Dukore (with apologies to Cole Porter)

Girls today in society
Go for classical comedy,
So to win their hearts you must quote with ease
Terence and Aristophanes.

But the writer they adore, who will start them simply hummin'
Is the jokester who was born in Ireland's capital, Dublin.

Brush up your Shaw quotes, start saying them now;
Brush up your Shaw quotes, and the women you will wow.

If your girl doesn't think you're too jolly,
Quote her something by twins Phil and Dolly.

If she says you are merely a chatterer,
Tell her what Caesar told Cleopaterer.

Brush up your Shaw quotes, start saying them now;
Brush up your Shaw quotes, and the women you will wow.

If she thinks you're no more than a charlatan,
Have her read what was read by John Tar-le-ton.
Should she chide you for loungin' and loafin',
Tell her what Joan of Arc told the Dauphin.

When you quote a few lines from a Shaw play,
They'll be useful as elegant foreplay,

SO . . .

Brush up your Shaw quotes, and they'll all say, "Wow!"

Lines for Dan

One of the highlights of the Memorial for **Tom Evans** was Tom's wife, Frances, reading a poem Tom had written for Dan Laurence on the occasion of his eightieth birthday

A few of us, I dare to hope,
Have heard of Alexander Pope,
A famous English poet who
Is rarely read by most of you.
Yet Pope comes to our mind today
For anticipating in a way
The tributes that have been invited
The words of praise that are invited.

Long years before our time began,
A.Pope set down Essay on Man
Not too original we fear,
We have adapted Pope's idea,
And thus submit, as best we can
A humble verse, Essay on Dan.
So sound the trumpet, ring the bell:
Today's the day for DHL!

Recall the time, long years ago,
When infant Dan decided so
Early in his life's progress
That he would reach his great success
Not writing poems, novels, plays,
Nor spending long and weary days
As historian, geographer,
But as a bibliographer.
Once said, he set himself to do it,
Much more besides was added to it;
And we congratulate ourselves
In having Dan's work on our shelves.
To all there comes a moment when
We're pushed into the lion's den,
But this, our champion, if you please,
Is certainly no Androcles,
For if the dreaded moment came
He'd beat the lions at their own game.
A thought to freeze the blood of men
Is Daniel in the lion's den;
But turn it round and bring to mind
The terror the poor beast would find
Were his predicament the man's –
A lion in a den of Dans!
So much for praise, and now for blame,
There are two sides in every game.
It must be said that now and then,

Our Dan resembles other men
And when things tend to go awry
He tries to find the reason why.
With standards of the highest, he
Is sometimes short on charity.
He has that someone on the hip.
A fact misplaced, a view misstated
Or other error perpetrated,
The victim of our Daniel's scorn
Will curse the day that he was born.
Yet, if Dan's not among the doves,
He chastens most those whom he loves.
So, as we turn these thoughts about,
We'll grant the benefit of the doubt,
And saying that he's good at heart,
We'll not upset the apple cart.

Rejoice then, as we surely can,
In this our Dan and Superdan.
We welcome all the smiling faces
And words of love from many places:
From bowers of bliss in many a city
A card from Mrs Warren (Kitty),
The warmest wishes from Morell,
Eugene and Candida as well
From Lady Cic and Barbara
(And also from her Ma and Pa).
Despite egocentricity
From Tanner, J., M.I.R.C.
Irish-English love is sent
By Larry Doyle and Tom Broadbent.
Hypatia sends Dan all her best
And Lina Fish - forget the rest!
Eliza, course she bloody would,
And Shotover in kindly mood,
While Joan remembers to salute him

As flames lick round her every limb.

So this great Dan - Is he a Dan?
A Bronx-born boy, now Texas man,
Seeks to assure us, now and then,
He really is as other men,
And so, with such great deeds behind him,
It's taking well-earned rest we'll find him.
We don't believe this far-fetched fable.
He'll work as long as he is able,
Gird up his loins, pull up his socks,
This Dan is never on the rocks.
Now ring the bells again in praise
For Good King Daniel's Golden Days.

Frances tells us that there are still a few copies of the CD recording of Tom's memorial "A FunForAll For TFE" available. Please send a cheque for £5 made out to the Shaw Society to Evelyn Ellis, The Shaw Society, 37 Belsize Park, London NW3 4EB

Too human to be called divine

On Friday 26 June the Shaw Society was treated to a stunning one-woman performance of Ellen Terry's life by Eileen Page entitled "Too human to be called divine", a quotation from Vita Sackville West which reflects the magic of Ellen Terry that has never faded. Eileen Page performs regularly at the Barn Theatre at Smallhythe, Kent, Ellen Terry's last home.

To an enrapt audience at Conway Hall, Eileen became Ellen, and delivered dialogue in Ellen's own voice that captured astonishingly the atmosphere of the theatre of the 1800s. She told Ellen Terry's life

story, from her earliest days in rep with her actor-parents, through her disastrous marriages to GF Watts, Charles Wardell and James Carew and her relationship with Edward Godwin, with whom she had her two children, to the first time she meets Henry Irving and becomes one of the greatest Shakespearean actors of all time. Of her encounters with Shaw, she comments: “Mr Shaw and I frequently corresponded. It began by my writing to ask him, as musical critic of the Saturday



Review, to tell me frankly what he thought the chances of a composer-singer friend of mine. He answered ‘characteristically’ and we developed a perfect fury for writing to each other! Sometimes the letters were on business, sometimes they were not, but always his were entertaining, and mine were, I suppose, ‘good copy’, as he drew the character of Lady Cecily Waynflete in Brassbound entirely from my letters. He never met me until after the play was written.

“The first time I ever saw Mr Shaw in the flesh – I hope he will pardon me such an anti-vegetarian expression – was when he took his call *Eileen Page at The Conway Hall* after the first production of Captain Brassbound’s Conversion by the Stage Society. He was quite unlike what I had imagined from his letters. When at last I was able to play in Captain Brassbound’s Conversion I found Bernard Shaw wonderfully patient at rehearsal. I look upon him as a good, kind, gentle creature whose ‘brain-storms’ are just due to the Irishman’s love of a fight; they never spring from malice or anger. It doesn’t answer to take Bernard Shaw seriously. He is not a man of convictions. That is one of the charms of his plays – to me at least: one never knows how the

cat is really jumping. But it jumps. Bernard Shaw is alive, with nine lives, like that cat!"

In the news

Remembering Shaw

Shaw's Corner India celebrated the anniversary of Shaw's death in November with anecdotes from Shaw's life, obituaries written after his death and readings from his prefaces and other writings.

Earlier in the summer, the Shaw Society of India, under the direction of Professor Vinod Sharma, celebrated Shaw's birthday in July with an exhibition of photographs, ranging from his birthplace in Dublin up to the time of just before his death at Ayot St Lawrence. Entitled GBS - A Ready Reckoner, the exhibition included photographs of his family, his women, his friends - the people he influenced and was influenced by. The exhibition was followed by a performance of The Man of Destiny by Indian actors. Comments Professor Sharma: "The hall was overflowing with people. It was an enormous success. The Irish Embassy collaborated and held a reception at the end of the event. They seemed very happy and satisfied."

Well known to Shavians throughout the world, Professor Vinod Sharma travelled to the UK this September to gather material for the second exhibition in Delhi, to commemorate Shaw's death in November. She found a wealth of material at the Local Studies and Archives Centre at the Holborn Library in London, recently under threat of budget cuts (see below). Among the many treasures they have preserved from the Richard Hughes collection of Shaviana, she found newspaper headlines from the day Shaw died, together with tributes written by luminaries of his day, including Sybil Thorndike, Hesketh Pearson and St John Irving.

Professor Sharma also went to Dublin, to visit Shaw's Synge Street birthplace, but was disappointed to find that it had closed at the end of August. She was not alone, there was a party of Finnish academics standing outside the house, and at least three other groups arrived, hoping to visit while she was there. She also went to the Yeats exhibition and the Dublin Writers Museum; she saw the house where Wilde was brought up and the James Joyce statue off O'Connell Street, as well as Shaw's statue at the National Gallery of Ireland. She then set off for the Aran Islands to research a book she is planning to write about the magical elements of Irish mythology that inspired another of her favourite Irish authors, J.M. Synge. Synge wrote a beautiful account of his visits to the Aran Islands and the stories that inspired many of his plays. Professor Sharma is planning to translate his most famous work, *Playboy of the Western World*, into Hindi. Whilst she can find no Hindi



equivalent to the word “Playboy”, she was struck by the similarity

of many Irish traditions and myths with those of India, and hopes to make the Irish writers easier for her students to understand by including some of these stories and explaining how they are woven into the plays of J. M. Synge and his contemporaries.

above: Professor Sharma(left) with a local 'jarvey' in the Aran Islands, just off Galway in Ireland.

Threat to Shavian archives

Local Camden newspapers have raised fears that parts of the Holborn Library, where important Shaw Society archives are being preserved by the Camden Local Studies Centre, are to be sold off and that the Council has yet to decide on a new home for the Centre. A number of staff members will be made redundant, including many of the people who helped restore - and now enable visiting academics, such as Professor Sharma from the Indian Shaw Society - to access rare archival material.

When Richard Hughes, an engineer with the Water Board and a committee member of the Shaw Society, died in 1978, he requested that his extensive collection of rare books, figurines, memorabilia and a lifetime of research material be passed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, with the exception of anything relating to Bernard Shaw. This was to go to the Local Studies and Archive Centre at the Holborn Library for conservation and safe-keeping. Richard Hughes had been a fanatical follower of Bernard Shaw for at least 30 years, and his collection certainly bears testimony to the effort and dedication which he put into the subject.

Richard Knight and Malcolm Holmes, archivists at Holborn, took on the task of rescuing as much of the collection as they could, in sharp competition with experts from the V&A. Shaw was everywhere - there were pictures on the walls, books in piles waiting to be sorted, rare first editions tucked under cushions and unlabelled press clippings mixed in with the cutlery in the kitchen drawer. Richard Hughes' wife, Kitty, had died some years before he did, and their Barnstable Mansions

flat near Sadlers Wells in London was not as orderly as it had been in her time. Memorabilia turned up in the unlikeliest places, and all the archivists could do was fill box after box with a firm resolve to sort it all out later. The collection was ferried back to Holborn.

More than 300 books were found a home in the security of the archive room, and boxes of unsorted treasures were stowed away in the conservation area. Thirty years later a member of the Shaw Society took on the task of sorting, cataloguing and conserving the collection, with the help and collaboration of conservator, Maryte Medelis.

Around a hundred A3 pages of press cuttings have been washed in cold water, deacidified with magnesium bicarbonate, then mounted on acid-free card and filed in transparent sleeves in a box ring binder. The cuttings date from 1889 to 1971 - with most of the emphasis on the period leading up to and following Bernard Shaw's death in 1950. The collection is easy to access with a contents list, and press clippings can be photocopied through the sleeve without risking their condition. Magazines with major interviews with Shaw have been preserved intact, together with around 40 pamphlets on subjects ranging from *The Dying Tongue of Great Elizabeth* to Irish Nationalism - all filed in subject order in acid-free envelopes plus some 60 theatre programmes recalling productions of Shaw plays from the early half of the century.

There is a collection of caricatures and cartoons and some photos, including a picture of Shaw on stage with Barry Jackson and the full cast of *Back to Methuselah*, dated 1923. There are also some photos of Hughes himself in his home in happier days. Many members of the Shaw Society remember Richard Hughes as a highly colourful member of the committee whose greatest claim to fame was to have been talent spotted by world-famous film-producer, Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was working on a film version of *Canterbury Tales*. Hughes had a very prominent aquiline nose, and was chosen to play the part of a dead monk - not a part that enhanced his much wished for ambition to become an actor, but he and Kitty were given the full VIP treatment and thoroughly enjoyed a taste of the glittering life-style of Hollywood. He actually worked for the Water Board most of his life, but spent every moment of his leisure time studying Shaw and building

up his collection of memorabilia.

Thanks to the efforts of the staff at the Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, one man's unique collection of Shavian memories has been preserved and made accessible. Now it is important that the Shaw Society adds its voice to the many protests being raised locally. Local members are urged to write to the Leader of Camden Council, Councillor Keith Moffitt, or Councillor Flick Rea, Chair of Culture, to protest against the loss of this most valuable amenity.

In the theatre

Edited by **Alan Knight**

Though GBS has figured this year neither in the West End, nor at the Royal Shakespeare or Royal National companies, the fringe has flown his banner boldly: very much to the fore was the Pentameters in Hampstead, which selected the very early Mrs. Warren's Profession, then Heartbreak House and on to one of the last works, On the Rocks. Working closely with Pentameters, Michael Friend was also responsible for the two Ayot plays, Saint Joan and Arms and the Man, both of which played to full 'gardens' and then went on tour around the country. Here is a selection of reviews of this season's plays.

Pygmalion

Bridewell Theatre, London – June 2009

Reviewed by **Alan Knight**

The production of Pygmalion at the Bridewell in June had been preceded, as reported in the last Shavian, by a visit from the Tower Theatre Group to one of the Society's meetings, demonstrating five different endings Shaw had, at different times, devised for the play. This enquiring approach made it no surprise to find at the Bridewell an intelligent and disciplined ensemble, bringing the freshness and meaning necessary to a revival of a play that is practically in the nation's blood-stream. An

innovation was the comparatively young Colonel Pickering, whose good-mannered treatment of Eliza - she acknowledges it as the basis of her social transformation - was a mere glottal stop from romantic involvement; it was he, not Higgins, who made Freddy seem an unworthy suitor.

Heartbreak House

Pentameters Theatre, Hampstead - June 2009

Reviewed by **Alan Knight**

In an interview covering his theatre work, a former Shotover, Orson Welles, once said: “Who knows what Heartbreak House is all about?” At Hampstead Pentameters Theatre in June, another strong cast elaborated clear narrative lines among the shifting moods and nuances of a piece which, in a narcotic, dream-like atmosphere, can mix discussion of workforce management, art and industry, the transience of love and domestic finances with a black sorceress from Zanzibar. The three stations of Ellie's romantic maturation, Hesione's strategies and manipulations, the collapse of Mangan's ego in the face of ethical opposition and emotional candour, the unravelling of amorous posturings from Hector and Randall – all were developed with variety and wit by the players and held attention fully for over two-and-a-half hours. Only Shotover's place in the proceedings seemed uncertain, perhaps because he is commentator rather than participant (even in the hands of the great Paul Schofield, this role remained marginal).

Sad to report, a fine evening in terms of acting and interpretation was let down in the area of production values in a way that “fringe conditions” cannot be allowed to excuse. Crossing the stage, actors walked through three exact circles of green, red and amber light; a rickety couch in the first two acts

could barely hold Ellie and Shotover and became, by the disposal of an unappealing throw, the hammock for Act III; Judi Bowker's excellent Hesione, steely and bewitching in turn, wore two neopyjama suits in uneasy pink (this in 1918?) which said nothing about the character as sophisticate, bohemian, domestic manager or emotional tactician. In an admirable account of the play, it was a pity that much of what we looked at was distractingly not up to standard.

Mrs Warren's Profession

Pentameters Theatre, Hampstead – May 2009

The Camden New Journal wrote on 21st May 2009, "The two female leads are particularly strong in this excellent production with Emily Holden outstanding as the daughter. Dot Smith is convincing as a self-made woman, refusing to be ashamed of who she is; her quiet dignity is moving ... In Ms Holden there is a talented young actress who could grace any stage in the land."



Saint Joan

Shaw's Corner, Ayot St Lawrence – June 2009

Reviewed by **Mark Egerton**

This was my first encounter with Saint Joan, and I confess to being new enough to Shaw not to know the geography too well. Would this be heavy tragedy? – the heroine is burned to death at the end. Or would it be a real surprise like the Heartbreak House that I had enjoyed, but not really followed, at the Pentameters about a month before? (I recognised the bulk of the actors from the productions of Mrs Warren and Heartbreak at that venue).

This play was something else altogether. The scenes effortlessly segued through history, keeping dramatic tension going whilst discussing all the events that basically happen off-stage. I was really impressed by rich, deep material that could so easily be dull but for the pure genius of the writing. The dialogue runs like water in a thoroughly entertaining way, leaving a sensation which, though created by wit and intellect, remains visceral. It's what I took with me from the production.

I was not the only person to comment that the story was helped by the French and British uniforms, which made clear who was on what side. I was transported for the duration and distracted only by one trifle: a first-aider, presumably present at health-and-safety insistence, was visibly reading a book for the entire performance. I do hope it was worth missing the play for.

Arms and the Man

Ayot St Lawrence – Birthday Tribute July 2009

Reviewed by **Evelyn Ellis**

The first of Shaw's Plays Pleasant, this wonderful depiction of the pointlessness and stupidity of war, made a fitting production for the Birthday Weekend at Ayot. Michael Friend has long mastered the difficulties of interpreting Shaw's detailed directions for the stage settings – "the room is half rich Bulgarian, half cheap Viennese" using the long terrace in front of Shaw's drawing room as a stage. The tousled double bed under the drawing room and handsome Turkish ottoman outside the scullery door were quite enough to fire the imagination of the packed audience, surrounded by picnic paraphernalia, distracted by looming black clouds ever threatening, but happy to follow the complicated plot and catch every word that the actors managed to project to the very corners of the lawn.

The Apple Cart

Theatre Royal, Bath – July 2009

The Guardian of 16th July wrote: “Politics is thankless drudgery that attracts only second-raters. Britain precariously survives as a clearing house for international capital. Such are some of the ideas that reverberate through Shaw’s *The Apple Cart*; which, given that it was written in 1929 and is set in the future, proves that Shaw was nothing if not prophetic. But, as Peter Hall’s rare and excellent revival shows, Shaw’s extravaganza endures through its use of Mozartian musicality and liberating wit to express its uncannily accurate vision.”

Too True To Be Good

Finborough Theatre, September 2009

Reviewed by **Phillip Riley**

Shaw’s rarely performed *Too True To Be Good* appeared at London’s Finborough Theatre recently, capably directed by Sarah Norman. No major production of it had been seen in the capital since the Royal Shakespeare Company’s in 1975. Its theme, however, is topical and concerns a life where luxury and conspicuous consumption are the norm. The first Act is easily the most dramatic: a young woman is on the verge of being killed by an over-solicitous mother - she is kept in her sick room and inundated with unnecessary cures and treatments that will soon see the end of her. However, burglars come in and try to steal the girl’s jewellery. She is on the point of calling the police when an idea is put to her – why not join forces with the burglars, steal her own jewellery and run away with them?

Thus the three characters are able to enjoy a luxurious life in the sun. There is a lot of discussion (Shaw described it as “a torrent of sermons”) on the moral vacuity of luxury. The play was written in 1932, during the last great economic collapse, and moralising over how wealth is acquired and whether too much of it is morally corrupting is also of course pertinent to the present time – as is the theme that much of economic life is a hopeless muddle, but no one seems capable of re-organising society along more meaningful lines.

Sir Michael Holroyd, Shaw's biographer, described *Too True To Be Good* as his favourite play: "a revelation to many who think they know all about GBS and believe he belongs to the past."

The *Sunday Times* described it as "Shaw's most intellectually exciting play" and the reviewer on *The Times* said "It makes a critic glad to be alive."

On the Rocks

Pentameters Theatre, Hampstead – November 2009

Reviewed by **Evelyn Ellis**

Members of the Belsize Library reading group opted to read Shaw for both October and November and chose the two rarely performed Shaw plays showing in London at the time: *Too True to be Good* and *On The Rocks*. After a mixed bag of reading matter supplied by the library, discovering Shaw at his most topical and discursive was a relief. His beautifully crafted dialogue and witty plots ensured that the discussion of preface, plays and performances was almost as amusing as the plays themselves.



Of the two, it was *On the Rocks* (*left*) that proved the more popular, mainly because of its immediate relevance to the state of the economy today. The story, set in the 1930s, revolves around the unrest among working people due to unemployment and the manner in which the government of the day goes

about tackling the problem. At the time of writing, Shaw was convinced that the solution lay in Soviet-style reforms, but his caricatures of the various strata of society, ranging from extreme right-wing racists, aristocrats sitting on the fence ready to go along with whichever faction came out on top, querulous trade unionists and self-interested politicians, rang as true today as it did then. The Michael

Friend Productions team performed a very difficult play with enormous vigour and held the audience entranced. The costumes were disappointing, depicting neither the style of the 1930s nor that of today, but the cast played their parts with humour and were rewarded by laughs in the right places, and well deserved rapturous applause at the end.

Mrs Warren's Profession

Richmond Theatre, November

Apart from the Michael Friend production (see over-page) Mrs Warren has also been in the West End, in a fringe theatre and on a major tour earlier this decade, and this latest production adds testimony to the appeal of a once "Unpleasant" play. The Guardian said of it: "If there is one Bernard Shaw work that deserves repeated views, it's this slippery and engaging drama of morality... Even today the conundrum at its heart holds true" - which seems fine for Mrs Warren but seems ambiguously disposed to some engaging dramas of morality elsewhere in the canon.

Endnotes

Overstepping the bounds: a Shaw letter in verse by Maxwell E. Siegel, p21-24

¹Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897* (p. 149)

Barbara Smoker noted in 1961 that Shaw's Pitman shorthand was "often written with leaky pens" and showed "flagrant inconsistencies . . . with such aberrations as hooks facing the wrong way and strokes running in the opposite direction to that intended."

Ervine, St John. *Bernard Shaw: His Life, Work and Friends*. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1956 (p. 115)

Pitman 2000 Shorthand: Pocket Dictionary (Second Edition). Harlow: Pearson Longman, 1983

Barbara Smoker. Qtd. in Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897* (p. xiii)