

## Ireland, Drama, and Social Decline: G. B. Shaw's *Man and Superman*

Michael McAteer

Although one of the most influential playwrights of the early twentieth century, and certainly the dominant intellectual figure in London theatre up to the Second World War, George Bernard Shaw has never acquired the same canonical status in the repertoire of Irish drama that was afforded his contemporaries John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey. The sheer enormity of Shaw's output from the 1880s to his death in 1956 offers a partial explanation for this, dwarfing as it does the well-meaning industrious efforts of those dedicated to the Literary Revival in Ireland from the 1890s. Shaw himself amplified the view that the movement from which the Abbey Theatre grew in 1904 was a provincial affair, of little consequence in the much wider social transformations that had given rise to socialism as the new radical political philosophy to which his work was dedicated.

In Shaw's preface to the 1906 edition of *John Bull's Other Island*, the Irish Literary Renaissance is patronized even as the essay makes a decidedly articulate case for Home Rule. In the process, the literary movement is characterized primarily in relation to Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League—with its objective of reviving Irish as a living vernacular—while also reduced to a local instance of a more serious artistic movement in England: “Only a quaint little offshoot of English pre-Raphaelitism called the Gaelic movement has got a footing by using Nationalism as a stalking-horse, and popularizing itself as an attack on the native language of the Irish people, which is most fortunately also the native language of half the world, including England” (Shaw, “Preface” 31). Thus the energies that Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, Edward Martyn and John Millington Synge brought to the creation of an Irish cultural movement are presented here as a provincial imitation of a more serious metropolitan endeavour, and further, one that had dressed itself in a cloak of woven Celtic fabric to achieve popular appeal within Ireland. More sharply still, Shaw ridicules the language revival movement as symptomatic of nationalist insularity in placing Irish above the English language that connected Irish people to the wide spectrum of global society from the United States of America to South Africa and Australia. There is, of course, the added fact that *John Bull's Other Island* is the only work in Shaw's vast *œuvre* dedicated entirely to Ireland's relation to England in the shadow of Charles Stuart Parnell and the Home Rule question. And even here, as Nicholas Grene has pointed out, the evidence available strongly suggests that Shaw composed the play for the Court Theatre in London, with a production by Granville Barker, despite the fact that he claimed to have written it at the request of Yeats as a patriotic contribution to the repertory of the Irish Literary Theatre (Shaw, “Preface” 7; Grene 18-19).

Michael Holroyd's biographical account of Shaw's family background and the environment in which he grew up in Dublin is a story of financial and status loss, a

loveless parental marriage, closet alcoholism and bad educational experience. The decisive move to London in 1876 is set against this background, the narrative of which, as Holroyd himself has conceded, has as much to do with Shaw's retrospective self-inventions of his childhood experience in an environment influenced by characters such as Vandeleur Lee—a completely artistic fabrication of a personality exercising a Rasputin-like influence on the young Shaw's mother, Lucinda (1:6-36). Bearing in mind what Shaw experienced as a stifling insularity of culture particular as much to his own immediate Protestant caste as to the wider Dublin Catholic petty bourgeoisie class of shopkeepers and clerks, coupled with the abject poverty of the inner city tenements, Holroyd nevertheless recognizes the importance of the figure of the Irish exile to an understanding of Shaw's life subsequently:

Having spent the first twenty years in Ireland, Shaw felt “a foreigner in every other country”. He always took an interest in Ireland, married an Irishwoman, was given the freedom of the city of Dublin, and left much of his money to the property of Eire. But though he pronounced himself to be a “XVII century Irishman” it was only outside Ireland that he was recognised as Irish. (I:5)

Hubert Butler has suggested that the cosmopolitanism of Shaw was as much a consequence of the failure of Irish society to accommodate a person of his talent, as it was a specific rejection of Irish cultural and political concerns on Shaw's part:

I suppose it is idle to wonder what would have happened to Shaw had he never left Ireland. No doubt his genius would have been suffocated or cruelly cramped. And yet he carried to the end some of the stigmata of the *déraciné*, and latterly he suffered badly from the pseudo-cosmic disease. That crusade for reformed spelling, for example, has surely a rootless, expatriated sound, like Joyce's learned gibberish, O'Casey's staccato Stalinism and Yeats's intercourse with yogis. (236)

The question that Holroyd and Butler have raised here in different ways is whether Shaw left Ireland out of aspiration or exasperation; whether Ireland simply didn't interest him that much, or whether mainstream Irish society simply thought of his likes as pretentious fools climbing above their station. As Ben Levitas has pointed out, Shaw's success as a playwright on the London stage begins just as the impetus for a new Irish literary movement is coming onto the horizon. The 1894 performance of *Arms and the Man* at the Avenue Theatre alongside Yeats's Maeterlinckian fairy play *The Land of Heart's Desire* was more a parting of ways than a clever combination of two Irish dramatists temperamentally at odds with one another who were seeking to make names for themselves in the theatre scene. Supported through the finances of Annie Horniman, the Golden Dawn member who would later supply the finances for the purchase of the Abbey Theatre, Levitas reads Yeats's fairy play as an early

signal in the direction of Dublin and the possibilities for an Irish dramatic movement taking hold there to offer some serious alternative to the Theatre Royal season on Hawkins Street. Resolutely European in its Bulgarian setting, Shaw's play addresses themes and contexts that paint too large a canvas for an embryonic Irish theatre movement in Dublin. Yet Levitas gives credence to George Moore's declaration in his autobiographical volume *Ave* that "the sceptre of intelligence" was passing from London to Dublin by the end of the nineties, with the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1898 confirming this momentum: "Shaw, it seemed, had been exiled from Ireland, twice: once when he left it, and again when it left him" (17).

Apart from extensive discussions of *John Bull's Other Island*—and with the notable exception of the work of Nicholas Grene—the paucity of critical reflection upon Shaw's place in the evolution of Irish literary culture in the early twentieth century is rather striking, particularly when considered against the copious study of Yeats, Synge and Joyce. This is all the more curious since the growth of post-colonial and revisionist critical evaluations of the period of the Irish Literary Revival, with their emphasis upon the political and historical contexts as fundamental points of reference. In his crucial intervention of 1985, *Celtic Revivals*, Seamus Deane argues for the seminal importance of Shaw to O'Casey's treatment of women, but only to confine Shaw to an English *milieu* in the process, and to argue that O'Casey got it wrong because Irish circumstances were so markedly different from the English society and those values it carried that Shaw undertook to critique: "But Shaw's men and women, in their inverted roles, were successful in an English setting. O'Casey's were doomed to be unsuccessful in the very different Irish one" (110). However accurate a summation this might be, it automatically disavows the possibility that Shaw's plays bore quite strongly upon the Irish political situation from 1916 considered in the wider imperial context. In Edna Longley's equally important account of literary revisionism in Ireland, *The Living Stream*, Shaw is sidelined—somewhat surprisingly—given the extent to which he was important to Yeats precisely for the deep concerns Yeats held for intellectual culture in the Irish Free State as well as the complex profile of political ideology among the Anglo-Irish into the thirties.<sup>1</sup>

Declan Kiberd and Colin Graham offer deeply engaging, though highly contrasting post-colonial readings of *John Bull's Other Island*. Indeed, Kiberd's comments on the play open up very important questions about performance and shared identity between Ireland and England that Irish Studies itself has not taken up in any sustained or systematic manner without becoming sucked into the Northern Ireland question. Commenting on the performative strategies of Patsy Farrell and Tom Broadbent in the play, Kiberd notes how this strategic performativity of an Irishman and an Englishman adopting Romantic guises for ruthlessly utilitarian purposes, brings them close together in terms of character and mutual interest: "In other words, at root the English and Irish are rather similar peoples, who have nonetheless decided to

---

1 Shaw appears once as a single line quotation from Louis MacNeice writing on Yeats (see Longley 135).

perform versions of Englishness and Irishness to one another, in the attempt to wrest a material advantage from the unsuspecting audience of each performance” (54).<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Kiberd’s observation of the utilitarian benefit of Romantic performance as shared features of the Irish and English national character throws the whole post-colonial argument on its head, since Empire-building proves every bit as much a matter of performativity as Empire-subversion by this account. Nonetheless, there still remains the impression within studies such as Kiberd’s that in *John Bull’s Other Island* Shaw was simply settling his accounts with an Ireland the subsequent political direction of which would carry minor relevance for his own work.

In this exclusive focus on *John Bull’s Other Island*, Irish criticism ignores the fact that the play comes out of a period of intense composition that gave rise to what was undoubtedly Shaw’s most ambitious and challenging play up to that point; *Man and Superman*. The 1903 work raised the bar for its demands on producers, actors and audience with its extraordinary third act that moves from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to Hell itself, an existential nowhere. In its major concerns with anti-intellectualism in British mainstream culture, physical degeneration and the denial of sexual instinct that created social madness, as well as the problem of the intellectual himself/herself, *Man and Superman* reaches far beyond the shores of Ireland’s old story of Romance and Rebellion. Yet these are the very issues that inform Shaw’s Irish play also, in the comic relief it offers through the silly pomposity of Tom Broadbent’s liberal posturing and the equally silly antics of the begorrah brigade in *John Bull’s Other Island*. Shaw undercuts these throughout by a combination of slow rural decay and ruthless commercial exploitation that come up against one another towards the play’s conclusion, following Broadbent’s arrival from London in Roscullen village with his business partner, the returning exile Larry Doyle, to don the mantle of M.P. for the area.

In his dedicatory epistle to Arthur Bingham Walkley for *Man and Superman*, Shaw warned against social degeneration should anti-intellectual attitudes continue to permeate contemporary English society. In the process, he drew explicit reference to his Irish origins and the old idea of English pragmatism standing in contrast to Irish romanticism, the theme that is subject to such close scrutiny in *John Bull’s Other Island* performed the following year in 1904:

From the day I first set foot on this foreign soil I knew the value of the prosaic qualities of which Irishmen teach Englishmen to be ashamed as well as I knew the vanity of the poetic qualities of which Englishmen teach Irishmen to be proud. For the Irishman instinctively disparages the quality which makes the Englishman dangerous to him; and the Englishman instinctively flatters the fault that makes the Irishman harmless or amusing to him. What is wrong with

2 In a quite different vein, Colin Graham (165-66) offers a fascinating observation of the presence of Irish tourism as kitsch in Shaw’s play, drawing on the work of Baudrillard and Derrida in the process.

the prosaic Englishman is what is wrong with the prosaic men of all countries: stupidity. The vitality which places nourishment and children first, heaven and hell a somewhat remote second, and the health of society as an organic whole nowhere, may muddle successfully through the comparatively tribal centuries of gregariousness but in XIX century nations and XX century commonwealths the resolve of every man to be rich at all costs, and of every woman to be married at all costs, must, without a highly scientific social organization, produce a ruinous development of poverty, celibacy, prostitution, infant mortality, adult degeneracy, and everything that wise men most dread. (Shaw, *Man* 16-17)

Coming as it does in 1903 at a point when Yeats's reputation as the major Irish poet is already well established, and as the work of the Irish Literary Theatre was coming into its own, Shaw is keen to distinguish himself here as a critic of English social practices *not* from the traditional vantage point of an Irish romantic nationalist but from the modern one of a scientific-minded socialist. Yet the diagnosis of English social ills here is actually not that far from the tenor of Yeats's critique, however distant it is from Yeatsian romanticism. Writing for the London *literati* in *The Dome* in January 1900, for example, Yeats described the imperial capital as "a place where all civilizations gather to die," one where "men hate a play if they are told it is literature, for they will not endure a spiritual superiority" ("The Irish" 234). After a number of years living there, Shaw described London in a similarly disparaging manner and, furthermore, one that suggested he may have had London in mind in his Hell scene for *Man and Superman*: "Shelley, whose brain was big enough to take a great deal of it in, described Hell as 'a city much like London.'"<sup>3</sup> Shaw's need to defend himself against critics of *Man and Superman* suspecting that its political and theatrical anarchism was the mark of old Irish grievance, may indeed measure the extent of his determination to separate himself from the endeavours of Yeats and the Irish Revivalists in Dublin, but it also demonstrates the effort required on his part to distinguish in the minds of his audiences and critics his version of radical politics from that taking shape in Dublin in the form of the Irish dramatic movement.

The sheer excess of ideas expounded in *Man and Superman* displayed Shaw's complex and wide-ranging thesis of social degeneration, contributing significantly to discussion of the subject in the 1900s, under the growing influence of Nietzsche and the more popular impact of Max Nordau. But this very excess also raised the question of intellectual reflection itself and its place in Shaw's diagnosis. Put simply, are we to read the verbal gymnastics of Jack Tanner in *Man and Superman* as a mode of clearing the ground for a revolutionary future, or as part of the problem itself, a mark of the creative self-willed life-force replaced by idle speculation? The matter bears significantly on the development of Irish literary culture from the 1900s. Pursuing poetic drama, Yeats stood accused of replacing the essence of theatre—action—with

3 Holroyd claims that the "dirt, drink, and economics" of London would have turned Shaw, like Leonard Woolf, to socialism (I:70).

symbolic arrangement.<sup>4</sup> Synge proved far more successful in his time in writing dramas that harnessed action to speech, yet he also has left a legacy to modern Irish drama of plays characterized predominantly by lyricism. Moving against the strikingly anti-romantic comic form of Shaw's theatre of ideas, in other words, the Irish Dramatic Movement encountered the same dilemma of speech over action in the theatre. For Shaw, the problem had its seeds in the wider social question of the nature of those transformations visited upon England through the course of the nineteenth century. But *Man and Superman* can well be aligned with the theatrical experiments pursued in Dublin if only on the basis of theatrical form itself becoming implicated in the alternative visions of culture contesting for predominance. Shaw himself saw his play as unactable; for Beatrice Webb, its success lay in the uniqueness of its form: "To me it seems a great work; quite the biggest thing he has done," she wrote. "He has found his form; a play which is not a play; but only a combination of essay, treatise, interlude, lyric – all the different forms illustrating the same central idea" (qtd. in Holroyd II:67). This may be light years from the raucous passion of Synge's drama or the esoteric stylization of Yeats, but it indicates the mutual importance to both Shaw and the new Irish theatre movement of revising the notion of what theatre itself might entail.

Through Jack Tanner in *Man and Superman*, anarchist author of *The Revolutionists Handbook*, Shaw attacks the Puritan anti-intellectualism he discerns in contemporary England. In his cosmopolitan self-confident urbanity, he is light-years from the vagabond romanticism of Synge's Christy Mahon. But they share at least one trait worthy of consideration, if only for the light it sheds on the degenerationist theme beneath the energetic surface of *The Playboy of the Western World*. Like Tanner, Christy Mahon lives through language—the capacity of either character for *action* appears very limited. Indeed, the central comic conceit in both instances is that both Tanner and Mahon are fantasists with reputations for violent action of which neither is capable. In his introduction to *Man and Superman*, Shaw describes Tanner as "a megalomaniac, who would be lost without a sense of humour" (47) and the whole comedy of Synge's play derives from Christy's fantasy of parricide that heightens as his admirers indulge it. No surprise then that Yeats would draw on the image of Don Juan in the poem through which he memorializes the Playboy Riots of 1907, entitled "On Those That Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World'" from 1907 in which by comparing the rioters to eunuchs, Yeats aligns himself with Shaw's attack on Puritanism; the Playboy Christy Mahon a Don Juan of the wild Mayo west, the protesters eunuchs running through Hell (*Collected* 124).

However, the vitality we encounter in Synge's play exists predominantly—if not exclusively—at the level of language in *Man and Superman*. After a long speech denouncing the marriage game of fashionable society as "a horrible procession of

---

4 See, for example, Frank Fay's essay on Yeats's drama published in *The United Irishman* in 1901 (Hogan 50-51). See also, Binyon: "If poets mean to serve the stage, their dramas must be dramatic" (200).

wretched girls,” the conventional Ann Whitefield admires Tanner’s capacity for fine talk, suggesting he might pursue a career in politics. He responds with irritation: “Talk! Talk! It means nothing to you but talk” (Shaw, *Man* 97). Indeed, this is the joke with which the play concludes. After it is revealed that Tanner does indeed love Ann and agrees to marry her despite his strenuous objections to marriage in principle, Tanner launches into a final speech, pleading that their future accord with the ideas he has expounded. The independent Violet, a rather parodic image of the New Woman, is exasperated, calling him a brute. But Ann, recognizing how much a performance it was all along, is unabashed:

ANN. Never mind her, dear. Go on talking.  
TANNER. Talking! (209)

Here at least, *Man and Superman* anticipates, through the medium of speculation, what Synge achieves at the level of colloquial rhythm and local colour—linguistic excess in performance as a vehicle for comedy. As with Ann Whitefield, Pegeen Mike is in love with Christy Mahon as much for his ability to talk—like “the poets of Dingle Bay”—as she is for the outrageous deed he has claimed to have committed (Synge 187). Yet Shaw lends the matter a sharper political resonance in the famous act 3, “Don Juan in Hell.” Here, Ann’s admiration of Tanner’s verbosity is reflected in the talking statue, who tells Don Juan that his “flow of words is simply amazing.” For the Devil, however, it is “mere talk,” having all been said before without making any difference. Don Juan himself agrees, while offering a further reflection as to why it is merely so:

Because, my friend, beauty, purity, respectability, religion, morality, art, patriotism, bravery, and the rest are nothing but words which I or anyone else can turn inside out like a glove. Were they realities, you would have to plead guilty to my indictment; but fortunately for your self-respect, my diabolical friend, they are not realities. As you say, they are mere words, used for duping barbarians into adopting civilization, or the civilized poor into submitting to be robbed and enslaved. (167)

Stanley Weintraub argues that “Don Juan in Hell” from *Man and Superman* exerted a profound impact on twentieth century theatre, paving the way for Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* theatre by presenting figures that are at once self-conscious actors as well as characters. The turmoil the Statue undergoes in listening to Don Juan’s seemingly interminable speeches is clearly intended to be at one with that of the audience, for example. But the figure of Don Juan delivering these speeches should also be seen retrospectively as an extension—to the point of absurdity—of a feature Shaw learned from Ibsen. This is the view that a play should be composed not just of a set of characters experiencing certain events, but also of a conversation in which

these characters seek to understand those events, giving the audience a frame for critically evaluating the play as it bears upon their own experiences. This is precisely what Ibsen gives us in *A Doll's House*. William Archer and Edmund Gosse introduced his drama to London theatres with a view to generating intellectual vitality to what they and others lamented as an appalling state of affairs—music-hall melodramas on the one hand, mock-Elizabethan costume plays on the other. Yet Ibsenite theatre risked replacing action with discourse, and was heavily attacked in certain quarters for this reason. The life-force to which Don Juan has dedicated himself, in other words, appeared to have been replaced by the discussion of it.

Early in act 1 of *Man and Superman* we are introduced to what appear the types of the New Woman and the New Man in the figures of Violet Robinson and Jack Tanner. Whereas Roebeck Ramsden greets news of Violet bearing a child as an occasion of disgrace, Tanner takes it as an opportunity to denounce Victorian hypocrisy. When Violet enters the scene, Tanner makes a grand gesture of congratulation to mark him out against the embarrassment of the others present. But Tanner is completely mistaken. Violet has already married Hector Malone in secret and she regards as gross insult Tanner's adulation of what he presumed her unmarried state as a new mother. Her humiliation is only exceeded by Tanner himself, who suddenly realizes his big gesture of social tolerance is based on a complete misreading of Violet's circumstances. At this moment he appears a complete fool and tries unconvincingly to recover some degree of moral equilibrium with Violet: "We seem to have made fools of ourselves; but really it was you who made fools of us" (83). Two things happen at once here. Violet's cold and forceful presence turns out the complete opposite to that of the New Woman type; it is the steely determination of a woman to secure financial propriety through marriage, precisely what Shaw condemned as legalized prostitution some years earlier in his preface to *Mrs Warren's Profession*. Second, Tanner, the revolutionary iconoclast, is reduced to shame, at which point his preceding conversation with Ann Whitfield on his discovery of moral passion seems sham and bombast. The audience is left with the feeling through the rest of the play that it is all a verbal performance with Tanner.

In the "Don Juan in Hell" scene of act 3, Shaw extends the tension between Tanner's intellectual radicalism and his incapacity for decisive action to the medium of the theatre itself. At this point, the play becomes as much concerned with the figure of the intellectual and drama as a medium for his ideas as it is with the substance of those ideas. An elderly gentlewoman asks Don Juan—emblem of Tanner in the scene—as to their whereabouts. Outraging her sense of social propriety, he stoically informs her that they are in hell. The real terror of the experience is that it is all unreal:

DON JUAN. Nothing is real here. That is the horror of damnation.

THE OLD WOMAN. Oh, this is madness. This is worse than fire and the worm.  
(128)



The unsettling sense of unreality in the scene can be traced back to the Faust of Marlowe and Goethe. But it is also testament to Shaw's sense of personal failure to influence the course of mainstream British politics over the previous two decades. In particular, it points to the rather pathetic spectacle of the Fabian Society unable to agree a clear response to the jingoism of the Boer War in the first years of the new century, becoming mired in debates on political principle that seemed irrelevant in the circumstances. There is a crucial ambivalence to the theatre itself in the political sermons of the Hell scene. The theatre is the space of the unreal in which Shaw's ideas receive their expression through the Byronic figure of Don Juan. The theatrical ambition of the scene might equally measure the failure to enact the ideas espoused in the society beyond the auditorium. Indeed, there is a direct correspondence between the blissful utopianism of Tanner's ideas and the end of Shaw's own career in local politics. Standing as a Progressive Candidate in spring 1904 for one of the two London County Council seats in South St. Pancras, he campaigned so as to effectively ensure his unelectability—insulting everyone equally all round. He openly declared his atheism, his intention to force every citizen to imbibe a quarter of rum to cure any tendency to drunkenness. He scoffed at the Nonconformist conscience and the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, abused the Liberals and contemptuously patronized the Conservatives. "As a result," Michael Holroyd writes, "Shaw was triumphantly beaten into third place" (II:47). Charlotte was furious. However typical of Shaw's wit, the whole episode represented serious political failure in the two senses that *Man and Superman* addresses political failure—there is the obvious sense of the incapacity of political institutions to accommodate the disciplined libertarianism Shaw personified. But it also shows Shaw as a clown, hardly to be taken seriously, just as Tanner is not taken seriously in *Man and Superman*, nor Matthew Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island*.

There is an odd sense in which this posture on Shaw's part points in the direction of Pearse's doctrine of heroic failure even as Shaw disavowed almost everything Pearse stood for. Pearse identified the inevitable failure of the revolutionary act as the basis for the subsequent political emancipation of Ireland. Pearse was, of course, placing himself in a tradition running from Wolf Tone, Robert Emmet and the Manchester Martyrs as they became known in the Fenian lexicon. Yeats would re-imagine Pearse and his comrades in the Byronic mode in "Easter 1916." Shaw's response was very different: "Let us grieve, not over the fragment of Dublin city that is knocked down, but over at least three-quarters of what has been preserved," he declared after the Easter Rising of 1916. "How I wish I had been in command of the British artillery on that fatal field! How I should have improved my native city!" This, of course, is traceable to a childhood and adolescence disrupted by a parental marriage devoid of tenderness, marred by his father's closet alcoholism and financial insecurity. Shaw hated Dublin and couldn't escape it quickly enough. Yet, by a curious turn, *Man and Superman* takes up the question of political idealism as both a judgement upon the corruption

and squalor of contemporary politics that would lead to mass slaughter, as well as a judgement upon its own incapacity to impact upon present political realities.

More prominence should be accorded the place of Irish history in the degenerationist hypothesis of *Man and Superman*. Hector Malone, to whom Violet Robinson is engaged, is the son of a wealthy American industrialist, himself the son of an Irish emigrant from the era of the Famine. Hector and Violet keep their marriage secret from Hector's father because he will cut off Hector's inheritance if he learns of it. There are two reasons for this—a desire for social advancement of the Malone ancestral line, and a desire for economic retribution against England for the calamity of the Famine. Malone's father will not accept his son's marriage to Violet because she carries no titled wealth, and hence offers no improvement for the social standing of the family. Malone says: "Me father was starved dead; and I was starved out to America in me mother's arms. English rule drove me and mine out of Ireland. Well, you can keep Ireland. Me and me like are coming back to buy England; and we'll buy the best of it. I want no middle class properties and no middle class woman for Hector (184). In a comment on the reliance upon American financial investment for the upkeep of English country estates, Malone tells Violet that he already has the refusal of two of the oldest family mansions in England: "One historic owner cant afford to keep all the rooms dusted: the other cant afford the death duties" (185). In this guise, Malone is the reverse of Larry Doyle from *John Bull's Other Island*. Doyle, Irishman-made-good in London, comes back with his business partner Tim Broadbent to buy up Roscullen.

Malone, Irishman-made-good in America, is coming back to buy up the estates of England whose upkeep originally forced his parents onto the emigrant ship. What are we to make of Malone in relation to the larger question of social degeneration in *Man and Superman*? The description Shaw gives of his accent at the start of act 4 is instructive:

At the first word that falls from him it is clear that he is an Irishman whose native intonation has clung to him through many changes of place and rank. One can only guess that the original material of his speech was perhaps the surly Kerry brogue; but the degradation of speech that occurs in London, Glasgow, Dublin, and big cities generally has been at work on it so long that nobody but an errant cockney would dream of calling it a brogue. (179)

For someone as interested in language reform as Shaw, it is significant that the influence of urban surroundings on speech is characterized here as degrading. There is a surprising congruence in this regard with the ideals and endeavours with Irish Revivalists in Dublin. In distinctive ways, Yeats, Gregory and Synge sought to recover patterns of speech in rural Irish society; for Yeats in particular, the contrast was London. Shaw, of course, saw this as foolish attempt by a sub-section of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement to imagine Irish folk culture after its own image. He thought

it all a sham, an attitude he shared with the Irish Irelander D.P. Moran it should be noted, a man whose disgust with Irish culture of the time is close to that of Shaw even if Shaw could only have regarded Moran's call for the recovery of Gaeldom as a debased imitation of Kiplingesque jingoism.<sup>5</sup> Malone's father, we should bear in mind, is central to the plot of *Man and Superman*. His attitude forces his son's marriage to Violet into secrecy. Violet is thereby doubly humiliated—first, in taking for a husband a man of common Irish stock, second, in being forced to conceal the marriage to retain access to her husband's inheritance. Furthermore, choosing the wealth Malone promises over the “moral passion” for social transformation that Tanner espouses, Violet effectively destroys the prospect of Tanner's ideas taking hold in that social *milieu* the play describes. The sense of disappointment and frustration Tanner's alter-ego articulates in the Hell scene, in other words, can be traced in real life circumstances to Malone and the ancestral memory of victimhood that motivates his father's pursuit of social improvement. If Tanner's prospective marriage to Ann at the play's conclusion is a cynical admission that his ideas have little hope of realization in the modern world, Hector Malone's marriage to Violet Robinson demonstrates the economic realities that determine this cynicism. In the process of eroding those ideals of romance, national pride, and even the utopian aspirations of the anarchist, Shaw discreetly points to historical trauma as a species of the return of the repressed in setting up the conditions for the degenerationist hypothesis of *Man and Superman*. In this manner, he positions modern Irish history at a crucial juncture in the general critique of contemporary civilization that his play addresses.

## Works Cited

- Binyon, Laurence. “Mr Bridges ‘Prometheus’ and Poetic Drama.” *The Dome: An Illustrated Magazine and Review of Literature, Music, Architecture, and the Graphic Arts* 2 (Jan/Feb/March 1899): 199-206. Print.
- Butler, Hubert. *In the Land of Nod*. Dublin: Lilliput, 1996. Print.
- Deane, Seamus. *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980*. London: Faber, 1985. Print.
- Graham, Colin. *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory, Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001. Print.
- Greene, Nicholas. *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.

---

5 Note in particular Moran's insistent call for Irish manhood in his essay “The Battle of Two Civilisations,” regarding as insipid the Anglo-Irish predilection for style and mannerism (38-39). Shaw would have found an opponent here, but one with whom he could have agreed tactically.

- Hogan, Robert, ed. *Towards a National Theatre: The Dramatic Criticism of Frank J. Fay*. Dublin: Dolmen, 1970. Print.
- Holroyd, Michael. *Bernard Shaw. Vol. 1. 1865-1898. The Search for Love*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1988. Print.
- . *Bernard Shaw. Vol. 2. 1898-1918. The Pursuit of Power*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1989. Print.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Irish Nation*. London: Cape, 1995. Print.
- Levitas, Ben. “‘These Islands Others’: John Bull, the Abbey and the Royal Court.” *Irish Theatre in England. Irish Theatre Diaspora*. Ed. Richard Cave and Ben Levitas. Dublin: Carysfort, 2007. 15-34. Print.
- Longley, Edna. *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994. Print.
- Moran, D. P. “The Philosophy of Irish Ireland.” *Ideals in Ireland*. Ed. Lady Augusta Gregory. London: At the Unicorn P, 1901. 23-41. Print.
- Shaw, George Bernard. *Man and Superman*. London: Penguin, 2004. Print.
- . “Preface for Politicians.” *John Bull’s Other Island*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin, 1984. 7-51. Print.
- Synge, J. M. *The Complete Plays*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1981. Print.
- Yeats, W. B. *Collected Poems*. Second edn. London: Macmillan, 1950. Print.
- . “The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900.” *The Dome: An Illustrated Magazine and Review of Literature, Music, Architecture, and the Graphic Arts* 5 (Nov/Dec 1899, Jan 1900). 234-36. Print.